

THE DEATH OF STEPHEN

Acts 7:59-8:4

Introduction:

- A. Death is man's great enemy
 - 1) It is every man's appointment
 - 2) It is every man's conquerer

- B. Death is man's benefactor
 - 1) It is a door which places us beyond the reach of life
 - 2) It ends that which must end
 - 3) Life lived for God must end
 - 4) Life lived without God must end

- C. The strange thing about death is the many ways in which God may use it
 - 1) Psalm 116:15 - "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints"
 - 2) "precious" = yodar = "dear", "rare", "valuable"
 - 3) The death of a saint is a valuable tool in the hand of almighty God. It should only on the rarest of occasions taken from God's hand.
 - 4) The death of Stephen is a valuable tool

- I. It Opened Heaven For All To See Vs. 55-56
 - A. We see through the eyes of Stephen
 - 1) "saw the glory of God"
 - 2) "Jesus standing on the right hand of God"
 - 3) "I see the heavens opened"

 - B. These needed to know, "where is Jesus?"
 - 1) He had always been there!

II. It Set an Example for all to Follow 59-60

A. His death ended in prayer

- 1) "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit"
- 2) "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge"

B. His death ended pleasantly

- 1) "And when he had said this, he fell asleep"
- 2) I Thess. 4:13 - "them which are asleep"
Vs. 15 - "which are asleep"
Vs. 16 - "the dead in Christ shall rise first"
- 3) II Cor. 5:8 - "We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord"

III. It Revealed the Soul of False Religion 8:1

A. "And Saul was consenting unto his death,"

- 1) Saul had presided at his death" 7:58

Ston'ing.

The ordinary mode of capital punishment prescribed by Hebrew law (Lev.xx.2); see PUNISHMENT. It was an ancient method; and it was not confined to the Hebrews, but was practiced by the Macedonians and Persians as well. The execution took place outside the city (Lev.xxiv.14; I Kin.xxj.10,13; Acts vii.58). The witnesses placed their hands on the head of the criminal in token that the guilt rested on him (Lev.xxiv.14). They laid aside any clothing that might impede them in their solemn duty (Acts vii.58). In cases of idolatry, and apparently in other cases also, the witnesses hurled the first stones (Deut.xiii.9; xvii.7; cp.John viii.7; Acts vii.58). The rabbins state that the culprit was stripped of all clothing except a cloth about the loins, and was thrown to the ground from a scaffold about 10 feet high by the first witness, the first stone was cast by the second witness, on the chest over the heart of the criminal, and if it failed to cause death, the bystanders completed the execution. Sometimes the body was afterwards suspended until sundown or burnt (Deut.xxi.23; Josh.vii.25; Antiq.iv. 8,24), and according to late Jewish law was not buried in the family grave.