

# The Old-Time Evangelistic News

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Volume 10, Issue 6

November 2014

Stephen: The Man who was Faithful to the End (Part 7)

Acts 6-7

We concluded last month with Stephen declaring, *“Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost.”* What Stephen was saying to these individuals could very well be applied to the nation of Israel as a whole. Many had been saved, but many more had rejected the preaching of the apostles. They were continuing to do so at that moment. The word resist means “to fall against; to be adverse; and to strive against.” These men were fighting against the truth of the Holy Ghost as preached by Stephen, and possibly were fighting against the convicting power of the Holy Ghost in their lives. As we saw back in chapter 6, these men were endeavoring to resist Stephen’s preaching. There the word carries the idea of being successful, but they were not able to stop what Stephen was doing. In Acts 7:51, Stephen talks about the very act of resisting. Though unsuccessful, they still tried to stop what God the Holy Ghost was doing. But their power and ability was limited. They could not do anything against God’s work. They should have listened to what Gamaliel advised in Acts 5:39. There Gamaliel said that if the work was of God, they could not overthrow it. But their hatred of Christ and of Stephen became so intense that they would not listen to reason this time.

Stephen said that the people were resisting the Holy Ghost. Sinners must be told that they must yield themselves to the Holy Ghost. One cannot be saved unless the Holy Ghost convicts them, but there must be a surrender to what the Holy Ghost is doing. The Holy Ghost will not just regenerate a person without them responding to His convicting power. The Holy Ghost uses the Word of God that is preached, read, or testified about, and begins to show the sinner that he is lost and must repent of his sin and believe in Jesus as his

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Savior. If the sinner does not give in to the Holy Ghost, the sinner is resisting (fighting against) the Holy Ghost. He is rejecting what the Holy Ghost is wanting him to do. Continual resistance and rejection of the Holy Ghost will result in eternal damnation. The Bible never says how often or how many times the Holy Ghost will convict a sinner. There is no guarantee that He will convict a second time. In God’s mercy, no doubt, He will convict and draw the sinner several times. But there is no guarantee it will happen that way. The Bible says in II Corinthians 6:2, *“Now is the day of salvation.”* There is no guarantee of tomorrow. The sinner must stop resisting the Holy Ghost; he must respond when the Holy Ghost is working.

Stephen’s application was direct, disturbing, and it was also *Detailed*. After confronting them directly and plainly stating that they were stiffnecked, uncircumcised, and resisting the Holy Ghost, Stephen goes further and details three actions that they and their forefathers were responsible for. He first asks a question, *“Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?”* This was a rhetorical question by Stephen to his audience. It was to grab their attention and make them think. He was not expecting them to answer verbally. But we can mention a few of the persecuted prophets. Read through the Old Testament and see how the people in that day responded to the truth of God. It would not take a very long reading to find out that God’s men were persecuted in one way or another.

I will briefly mention three prophets who were persecuted for boldly declaring God’s truth. The first was Hanani. In II Chronicles 16, Asa, king of Judah, had taken gold and silver out of the temple to pay Benhadad, king of Syria, to help fight against the king of Israel. Benhadad was successful and defeated Israel, but God was not pleased with the action of Asa. He sends Hanani, His prophet, to rebuke Asa. Hanani says, *“Because thou hast relied on the king of Syria, and not relied on the Lord thy God, therefore is the host of the king of Syria escaped out of thine hand.”* Hanani goes on to say that the Lord had delivered Judah from a bigger problem earlier and could have done the same now. He concludes by saying, *“Herein thou hast*

*done foolishly: therefore from henceforth thou shalt have wars.”*

Asa should have acknowledged his sin and asked forgiveness. Instead, II Chronicles 16:10 says, “He was *in a rage*.” Because of his anger, he imprisoned Hanani. Asa is classified as a good king, so it is possible for a saved person to respond wrongly to the truth of God’s Word. We must be careful at all times to resist pride and accept God’s truth from God’s man.

A little later, Micaiah is the recipient of a king’s anger. Ahab, king of Israel, is fighting the king of Syria. He asks Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, to help him. Before going to battle, Jehoshaphat recommends that they listen to what God has to say through His prophets. Ahab calls 400 men, and they say that victory is assured. Jehoshaphat senses that they are false prophets and asks specifically for “*a prophet of the LORD*.” Ahab reluctantly calls for Micaiah, whom he says always prophesies evil concerning Ahab. Micaiah prophesies that Israel will be defeated and Ahab will be killed in the battle. Ahab responds by imprisoning Micaiah. He says, “*Feed him with bread of affliction and with water of affliction, until I return in peace.*” Ahab never returns. God’s man, Micaiah, is faithful in declaring God’s truth, but is imprisoned for it.

The final man that I will mention is Jeremiah. He had a long ministry and wrote two books, but suffered greatly for his faithfulness to God. On one occasion, Jeremiah was put into stocks. Later, he was put into a wet dungeon where he sinks in the mire. He was imprisoned and also accused of being a traitor to his nation because he preached that Judah would be defeated by Babylon. Why did Jeremiah suffer all of these things? Because he faithfully preached the truth of God.

There are others throughout the Old Testament, but these are three examples that show what Stephen was talking about. The people of Israel had repeatedly persecuted the prophets that God sent to them.

But Stephen is not finished. He adds a second detail. He says, “*And they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One.*” Not only had the nation persecuted some of the prophets, they had killed others. One prophet that Stephen may have had in mind was Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada. The account is recorded in II Chronicles 24. Joash had been spared by Jehoiada when Athaliah slew all of the royal seed. Jehoiada lived 130 years, and as long as he lived, Joash did right in the sight of the Lord. But when Jehoiada died, the princes of Judah convinced Joash to leave the worship of God and turn to idols. God sent many prophets to call Joash and the people back to him, but they would not return to God. The Spirit of God then moved upon Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada. He said, “*Thus saith God, Why transgress ye the commandments of the LORD, that ye cannot prosper? because ye have forsaken the LORD, he hath also forsaken you.*” What did Zechariah receive for his boldness in declaring what God wanted him to say? He was stoned to death “*at the commandment of the king in the court of the house of the LORD.*”

Another prophet that Stephen had in mind may have been Isaiah. The Bible does not record his death, but secular history does. Manasseh followed a very godly king, Hezekiah. As good as Hezekiah was, Manasseh was the opposite, possibly the worst of all the kings of Judah. Isaiah had found a receptive audience in Hezekiah, but Manasseh did not want to hear what Isaiah preached. It is said that Manasseh ordered Isaiah to be placed into a hollow log, and the log was sawn in half. Isaiah died at the hands of the Jews just like Stephen said. Why was he killed? For preaching the truth of God. If this account of Isaiah is accurate, then he is the one described in Hebrews 11:37 as being sawn asunder. Others in that verse “*were stoned*” (Zechariah) and still others “*were slain with the sword.*” The Jews did not have a great history concerning their response to the words of the Lord, and Stephen is reminding them of that history.

Stephen gives one final detail. After talking about their forefathers and their actions, Stephen calls attention to something more recent. He speaks of the Just One (Jesus) who had been

prophesied about. Their forefathers had killed some of those prophets. But Stephen's audience was not guiltless. He says to them, "*Of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers.*" As we have seen repeatedly throughout this application, Stephen does not shy away from confrontation. As I have mentioned about other preachers as well, Stephen could not but help preach this way. He was filled with the Holy Ghost, and the Holy Ghost always confronts sin. Stephen tells them exactly what they needed to hear even though they did not want to hear it.

Before any of these people could be saved, they had to acknowledge that they had betrayed and murdered Christ. Yes, it was the perfect plan of God that Jesus die upon the cross. Yes, Jesus' death on the cross was and is the only way that salvation could be provided. But these people had to realize that Jesus was the Son of God. Jesus had to die, and it was their sin that put him there. What Stephen is saying to these people is what every sinner must realize—it was my sin that put Jesus on the cross. Those Jews were no more responsible for Christ's death than you and I. We are not more innocent than they. Christ died for our sins. To be saved, you must realize your responsibility for Christ's death. Next month, we will see how the people responded.