

loud voice, *g* Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he *A* fell asleep.

g Matt. 5. 44; Luke 6. 28; 23. 34.—*A* 1 Thess. 4. 13; Rev. 14. 13.

1 And *i* Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they *j* were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

i Chap. 7. 58.—*j* chap. 11. 19.

2 And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and *k* made great lamentation over him.

k 2 Sam. 3. 31.

3 As for Saul, *l* he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women, committed them to prison.

l 1 Cor. 15. 9; Gal. 1. 13; Phil. 3. 6; 1 Tim. 1. 13.

4 Therefore *m* they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word.

m Matt. 10. 23; chap. 11. 19; 1 Cor. 14. 31.

GENERAL STATEMENT.

Stephen, with his radiant face, stands in the council hall, while before him sit in array the seventy-two elders who are to pass judgment upon him. The witnesses have presented their testimony, false in spirit rather than in word, and the accused man rises to reply. In the throng of listeners stands one young man of earnest purpose, who presses down his convictions, fights against the Spirit, and hears Stephen's speech with anger all the greater because it is unanswerable. The address of Stephen, his only recorded public utterance, a fragment, spoken without preparation from a full heart, is reported more fully than any other in this book of the Acts. Its aim was to show that God's plan was larger than the limits of Palestine, embracing all the world; that from the beginning it had been opposed by the unbelief and perverseness of his people, and that Jesus was the fulfilment of a line of divine indications. He is interrupted by the wrath of his hearers, but turns his eyes upward from the circle of scowling faces, and sees above the glory of the Shechinah, and beside it the form of his Saviour standing to welcome him. With such a vision beaming upon his sight, the martyr is not moved in spirit by the angry throng, who drag him unresisting without the gate, and without even the forms of trial prepare for their bloody deed. The witnesses strip off their garments, and cast them at the feet of a young man who, now a leader in the persecution, soon shall become a leader in preaching, and in his turn a sufferer for the truth. The stones fall, mingling with the sound of Stephen's dying prayer for his enemies, and the noblest soul of the pentecostal Church ascends to his rest, while young Saul looks on in misguided satisfaction. The persecution thus inaugurated is pursued with vigour. While devout men in horror at the murder lay the mangled body of Stephen to rest with sorrow, Saul pursues his bloody work, scattering the assemblies of disciples, scourging the believers in the very synagogue, dragging blameless men and delicate women to prison, striving to root out the very name of Jesus. The dispersed disciples find refuge in other cities and pro-

vinces, but wherever they go the word goes with them, and the light quenched in Jerusalem for a time soon appears shining from new centres in other lands.

EXPLANATORY AND PRACTICAL NOTES.

Verse 54. When they. The Jewish council or Sanhedrin, before which Stephen was standing on trial. **These things.** Both the severe denunciation of Stephen's final words and the logical drift of the entire speech. **Cut to the heart.** Literally, "sawn through and through," an expression indicating anger and frenzy without repentance. **Gnashed on him.** Their faces showed their uncontrollable hate and murderous determination.

55, 56. Full of the Holy Ghost. Contrast the scowling faces of the crowd and the shining face of Stephen; the spirit of Satan in one, and the fullness of the Holy Spirit in the other. **Looked up steadfastly.** The vision was in the heart of Stephen, not seen with the outward eye, yet it was none the less real. **Saw the glory of God.** The visible manifestation of the presence of God, known as the Shechinah in the tabernacle. 1. So God still sometimes reveals his glory to the dying spirit of his first martyr. **On the right hand.** The place of power and honour. 2. See here the tokens of a living and a divine Saviour. 3. What Stephen saw in that hour we too may see in the hereafter. **Son of man.** He gives his dying testimony to the truth of the Gospel message, that Jesus is the Son of God; and he uses the term which Jesus had himself used, "Son of man," in reference to his office as mediator; a term which is not again used by others in speaking of him.

57. They cried out. Both the council of the rulers, and probably, also, the rabble in attendance. **Stopped their ears.** As if refusing to listen to such blasphemy. **Ran upon him.** This was the wild act of a mob, not the fulfilment of a sentence by a tribunal. The forms of trial were not observed as in the condemnation of Jesus, probably because the Roman governor was not at that time in the city to enforce order.

58. Cast him out of the city. The Jewish custom was to execute death sentences outside the wall of the city. The place of Stephen's death has been variously assigned to a point near what is now known as the Damascus Gate, on the north of the city; and to a gate north of the temple area, leading into the valley of Jehoshaphat, called St. Stephen's Gate. **Stoned him.** This was a common form of execution among the Jews, especially upon those guilty of blasphemy. All the details of the execution were prescribed in the law, and even in the murder of Stephen the forms were carefully observed. **The witnesses.** Those who had given the testimony in chap. 6. 13, 14, and were required to cast the first stone upon the condemned man. **Laid down their clothes.** Their loose outer garments, which