

Lesson VIII.

THE ARREST OF STEPHEN

February 23, 1902

Acts 6: 7-15. Study Acts 6: 1-15. Commit to memory vs. 7, 8.

7 And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.

8 And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.

9 Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen.

10 And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.

11 Then they suborned men, which said, We have

Revised Version—1 Exceedingly; 2 Grace; 3 Wrought; 4 Signs; 5 But; 6 Of them that were; 7 Of the; 8 Omit of; 9 Withstand; 10 Spirit; 11 Seized; 12 Into; 13 Omit blasphemous; 14 Unto; 15 Fastening their eyes.

heard him speak blasphemous words against Mo'ses, and against God.

12 And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council.

13 And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law:

14 For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Mo'ses delivered us.

15 And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.

EXPLANATION

Connection—The disciples now had rest for a time from their enemies, and their numbers grew (ch. 6: 1). There was some internal disturbance, which was happily settled, but a third persecution soon followed. We study these facts to-day.

There were two classes of Jews at Jerusalem, the native Jews, speaking Hebrew, and called (v. 1) "Hebrews," and the foreign-born Jews speaking Greek, and known as "Grecians" or Hellenists, which was the Greek name for the Greeks. These latter complained that their poor widows did not get their fair share of food in the daily administration from the common fund (2: 44, 45). The apostles called a meeting of the members of the Church, and appointed seven men of good character, and spiritually qualified, to attend to this part of the work of the Church, while they gave their time to preaching (vs. 1-6). Stephen the martyr was one of the number of these "deacons" ("ministrants" it means), as they came to be called (Phil. 1: 1).

7, 8. The word of God increased. It was a time of great spiritual prosperity in the Church. The preaching of the word made a great impression upon the minds and hearts of the people. The disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly, and some, a great company, were gained from the priestly class. Stephen; full of grace and power. (Rev. Ver.) "Grace" is God's love working in us. "Power" is the result of such grace. Great wonders; miracles that excited surprise and astonishment.

9. Then there arose certain; in opposition to Stephen's teaching. The synagogue; the meeting place of the Jews. There were many synagogues in Jerusalem, and the congregations seem to have followed national lines. Libertines. These were likely Jews who had been slaves at Rome, but being liberated had returned to Jerusalem. Cyrenians; from Cyrene, in Libya, Africa. Alexandrians; from Alexandria, the capital of Egypt. Of Cilicia and Asia; Roman provinces in Asia Minor. From the Greek some scholars think there are only two synagogues here, the one including the Libertines, Cyrenians and Alexandrians, the other the remainder. Saul of Tarsus in Asia Minor was likely in this latter group.

10, 11. Not able to resist; to oppose success-

fully. The wisdom; denoting skill, insight, penetration (Luke 21: 15). The spirit; the influence of the Holy Spirit. Then they; these Greek speaking Jews who were opposing him. Suborned men;



Ancient Prison Key
(People's Bib. Encyc.)

procured men to swear falsely. Blasphemous words; evil, hostile, railing words. Against Moses; the great legislator, and, therefore against God, by and for whom Moses had spoken. It was on the charge of blasphemy that Christ was condemned (Matt. 26: 65, 66).

12. They stirred up the people; by such false accusations. The elders and the scribes; the lay members of the Sanhedrim, or Council. The "scribes" were the lawyers, or interpreters of the law.

13, 14. False witnesses. See on v. 11. This holy place; the Temple. The law; the Jewish religious system. This Jesus of Nazareth; spoken in contempt. Shall destroy this place; the charge brought against Christ (Matt. 26: 61).

Stephen may have said some thing of the kind, for he was in advance of the apostles in this matter (7: 48, 49). But there is no doubt that his meaning was twisted, as was Christ's. (Compare John 2: 19-21 with Matt. 26: 61.) The customs; the religious usages and rites established by Moses.

15. Fastening their eyes on him (Rev. Ver.) eagerly watching him to see what reply he would make. As . . . the face of an angel; reflecting a heavenly light, the outward expression of the joy and peace within. Here was calm amid storm, and peace, blessed peace, amid the bitterness of strife.

The illumination of Stephen's face was God's answer to his foes, even before Stephen had spoken. "It is said of the aged Polycarp, as he faced a martyr's death, that he caught, in his closing hours, some rays of the glory of transfiguration."