

**57, 58.** Verse 57 gives us our first intimation that many besides the members of the Sanhedrin heard Stephen's defense. The session broke up in tumult, but the mob that proceeded to stone Stephen was doubtless largely made up of excitable common people. *Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears [that they might hear no further blasphemy], and ran upon him with one accord [as if the great multitude were but one man], and cast him out of the city [according to Hebrew law, Lev. 24, 14], and stoned him [for this was the legal punishment for blasphemy].* Luke now turns to a noteworthy incident. *The witnesses were active in his death.* This also was in accordance with Hebrew law (Deut. 17, 6, 7), and points to an effort through all their sudden rage to preserve the forms of legality. It was the duty of one of the witnesses to throw down the criminal by smiting him with a stone on the breast. If this stroke did not kill him the second was to throw another stone, and if he were still alive all the people about became his executioners, and stoned him, striving to bring death as soon as possible. The body was then hung in a prominent place until sunset. *They laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul.* The phrase "young man" indicates that he was not yet forty-five, and there are other indications that he was at least thirty. Doubtless most contemporary Jews would have stated that this death was inflicted on Stephen as the punishment of blasphemy, but no formal sentence had preceded it, so that, strictly speaking, it was an illegal act. Dr. Alexander recognizes "Saul" as the officer or member of the Sanhedrin charged with the oversight of the stoning.

**59, 60.** *They stoned Stephen, calling upon [invoking] God.* "God" is here printed in italic to indicate that the Greek does not say whom Stephen invoked. The prayer which follows is addressed to Jesus. *He kneeled down [fell on his knees].* Very likely thrown into that attitude by the heavy stone. *Lord, lay not this*

*sin to their charge.* Both prayers are similar to those uttered by Jesus on the cross (Luke 23, 46, 34). *He fell asleep.* The beauty of this phrase becomes more beautiful in proportion to the certainty of faith with which we regard the heavenly world. Precisely where Stephen was stoned is unknown. It was either to the north of Jerusalem, beyond what is now called the Damascus Gate, according to the early tradition, or, as is generally supposed now, to the east of Jerusalem outside of the gate known as St. Stephen's Gate.

**1, 2.** *Saul was consenting unto his death.* This observation connects the account of the stoning of Stephen with that of the consequent persecution. *At that time.* On that day. Within an hour's interval a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem. Apparently "the whole church" was in disfavor, not the Hellenistic part only. There were not yet any Gentile Christians, but the foreign-born Hebrew Christians had apparently been more aggressive in their doctrines, at all events in their arguments, than the Palestinian Christians, and it is notable that while one of the seven has been slain another of the seven immediately becomes one of the most aggressive evangelists in Christendom. While the apostles remain in Jerusalem, protected either by public opinion or more directly by the power of God, the persecuted, flying from Jerusalem, were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria. Devout men were not necessarily Christians. They were Hebrews of notable sanctity and devotion to ritualistic worship. In our lesson on Ananias and Sapphira was noticed the importance attached by Hebrews to burial services. Great lamentation might be modernized into impressive public services, for the wailing was simply an expression of grief; it was hired as singers and carriages are hired in modern funerals, and the emphasis and extent of the mourning gave a sort of relative dignity and impressiveness to the funeral service.

## HOMILETICAL AND PRACTICAL NOTES.

The significant Golden Text of our preceding lesson was, "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul." It might also be the text of this lesson. If there was any emotion by which Stephen was not moved at this trying hour it was fear. How differently men are affected when a crisis comes! What different and sometimes unexpected manifestations appear! A timid and frail woman often

appears to best advantage where strength and fortitude are demanded. The bravest soldiers have been those who most hated war. He who boasts of his courage and brags of his prowess is seldom in at the finish.

And there is a reason for all this. What is wrought in the daily course of one's life will be wrought when a crisis comes. Stephen was a holy man. He was panoplied with truth.