



## The Bible Corner

Cindy Cottone

### Stephen's Story

The marketplace in the center of Jerusalem was crowded with people. Even so, James was aware of the young man who had been following a short distance behind him. James had first noticed him after he had left the prayer service at the Temple.

Was the man who trailed him a friend or an enemy? It was difficult to tell these days. The new Church was growing rapidly, and there was a large community of believers in Jesus Christ. But the chief priests and Jewish elders were also determined. They arrested people daily for preaching about Jesus and brought them to trial before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish court. Yet in spite of these attempts by the Jewish leaders to silence the movement, the new Church continued to grow.

James stopped in front of a merchant's stall and pretended to look over the baskets that were for sale. He glanced out of the corner of his eye. A few yards away, at the next stall, the young man purchased some fruit. James waited for him to make his next move, but the man walked away. After watching the man disappear into the crowd, James continued on his way to his friend's house.

It was one thing to risk his own life, but

James didn't want to bring any harm to the family that he was staying with in Jerusalem. As James rounded the corner of the street that led home, he found the young man standing in his path.

"I mean no trouble," the man began slowly. "My name is Stephen. I want to know more about Jesus."

James eyed him cautiously. Stephen looked sincere, but one could never be certain. "And why do you think that I am the person to help you?" asked James, testing Stephen for the right response.

Stephen looked directly at James. "You were there," he replied. "You lived with Jesus. I believe in Jesus, too. I just know that he is the Messiah."

"Come with me," James answered.

Stephen was sincere in his desire to know all about Jesus. He listened carefully to all that James and the other apostles told him. Sometimes, he even helped James in his preaching and ministering to the sick and poor.

One day the apostles called a meeting of all of the members of the new Church. James stood up and addressed the group. "Friends of Christ," he said, "we have much work to do. Today we would like to elect seven people from among the followers to help with our work of feeding the poor. Then we will have more time to

spend in prayer and teaching people about Jesus."

The assembly elected seven helpers for the apostles, and decided to call them deacons. Stephen was chosen as one of the new deacons. The deacons were presented to the apostles so that they could be blessed for their new duties. When James placed his hands on Stephen to bless him, he smiled and said, "I'm glad that we met. There is much you can do to help me."

Not only did Stephen help with the tasks assigned to the deacons, but he was so filled with faith in Jesus that he performed many miracles, too. When the Jewish leaders heard that Stephen was leading many people to the new Church, they became very jealous and angry. But even when they tried to argue with Stephen, not one of them was able to stand up against his wisdom. So the Jewish leaders paid some men a bribe to lie about Stephen. They went to the Sanhedrin and said that Stephen was speaking against the law of Moses and the Temple. Stephen was brought up on charges before the Sanhedrin.

First, the witnesses that had been paid to lie spoke before the court. "We have heard this man preaching about Jesus of Nazareth," they began. He wants to throw out our laws and destroy the Temple. He must be stopped!"

"And how do you answer these charges?" demanded the high priest.

Stephen stood before the court and told the members how the Jews had been disobedient to God all throughout their history. Even when Moses had tried to lead them out of Egypt to freedom, they had worshipped false gods. As Stephen

spoke, the Jewish elders became angrier and angrier. He ended his long speech to them by saying, "Your ancestors persecuted all of the prophets. And now, you have even betrayed and murdered God's own son, Jesus, the Messiah!"

When the people in the court heard this charge, they were filled with rage. They dragged Stephen to the outskirts of Jerusalem to stone him. Stephen believed in Jesus and was not afraid to die. As the executioners threw rocks at him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. Please don't hold this sin against these men."

Stephen was the first Christian martyr in the new Church. Some of the followers came and buried him. James was among the mourners. The Jewish elders began to persecute more and more of the new Church members. Many of the believers fled to Judea and Samaria. The apostles stayed in Jerusalem. All of the believers kept preaching the good news about Jesus. Despite the persecution, the Church continued to grow and increase in size.

**For discussion:**

1) James was one of the apostles chosen by Jesus to start the new Church. Who were the other 11 apostles that helped James?

2) The apostles asked the Church members to elect seven people to help them in their work. What is the name given to these helpers?

3) Why was Stephen not afraid to die? How did he treat his persecutors?

**For Further Reading:**

Stephen's story is found in the New Testament in Acts, Chapters 6-7.

**'Focus on the Family'**

St. Joseph's Home — School Association of Wayland and St. Mary's Adult Education Committee of Dansville are jointly presenting a new film series by Dr. and Mrs. James C. Dobson. The "Focus on the Family" film series will be shown in Wayland and Dansville on consecutive Sunday and Monday evenings, from May

4-June 16. In Wayland, the films will be shown Sunday evenings from 7:30-9 p.m. at the Wayland Central School, on West Naples Street from May 4-June 15. The series will be shown in the Dansville Jr. High School, 31 Clara Barton Street, on Monday evenings from 7:30-9 p.m., May 5 through June 16. There is no charge for admission.

**Signs for Catholic terminology**

As part of a national effort to document and share signs in current usage, the Technical Signs Project of the National Technical Institute for the Deaf has coordinated the development of four videotapes and an accompanying book of signs for Catholic terminology. These videotapes are available on a free loan basis from Modern

Talking Picture Service (MTPS), 5000 Park St. North, St. Petersburg, Florida, 33709. The accompanying manual is available for purchase from MTPS and the Rochester Institute of Technology Bookstore, One Lomb Drive, Rochester. For more information, call (716)475-6837 or (716)475-6836.

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