

THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION
Acts: The Continuing Earthly Ministry Of Our Lord Jesus Christ
Part V: The Ministry Of The First Local And Universal Church, Acts 3:1-8:3
G. Christ's Work To SUSTAIN His Witnesses During TRIALS
(Acts 7:1-60)

I. Introduction

- A. Christ's call for believers to go into all the world and make disciples, a humanly impossible task, is qualified by the phrase in Matthew 28:20b that "lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."
- B. In its context, Stephen's sermon under intense pressure illustrates this truth of Christ's help (as follows):

II. Christ's Work To SUSTAIN His Witnesses During TRIALS, Acts 7:1-60.

- A. Stephen was arrested and sent to the Sanhedrin, charged for opposing Moses' law and the temple, 6:8-14.
- B. Facing such charges before that ruling religious body in Israel would have been humanly intimidating as it would have been a life-threatening event, Acts 6:1, 5; Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978 ed., fn. to Acts 6:5.
- C. However, Stephen was sustained by the heavenly Christ as is evidenced as follows, Acts 7:1-60 et al.:
 - 1. Stephen was sustained by Christ in answering his foes' charges with great force, Acts 7:1-54:
 - a. Stephen's message developed the idea that all through Israel's history, there had been progress and change in God's program, so the nation should not be opposed to God's establishment of the Church, Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 369. God changed from working with all humanity to minister to one man, Abraham (Acts 7:2-8), He moved Jacob's offspring from Canaan to Egypt (Acts 7:9-16) and He used Moses to take them from Egypt back to Canaan, Acts 7:17-43. Even the tabernacle was made for moving from place to place as a temporary place of worship (Acts 7:44-46), so the temple was a only a place of worship rather than God's actual dwelling [that was heaven], Acts 7:47-50.
 - b. Stephen also claimed God's blessings were not limited to the land of Israel and the temple area throughout the nation's history, *Ibid.* Stephen related how Abraham, Joseph and Moses were called of God outside the land of Canaan, and the Law was given in the Sinai desert.
 - c. Stephen also held that Israel had always initially opposed God's plans, *Ibid.* Abraham tarried in Haran versus going directly to Canaan from Ur, and Joseph and Moses were both initially rejected by Israel, *Ibid.* Stephen applied this precedent to Israel's rejection of Christ, Acts 7:51-53.
 - 2. Stephen was sustained by Christ in giving his sermon, Acts 7:55-56: when the Sanhedrin heard it, they gnashed their teeth at him! Nevertheless, he witnessed he then was seeing the heavens opened, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God in sustaining him, Acts 7:55-56; *Ibid.*, Ryrie, fn. to Acts 7:55.
 - 3. Stephen was sustained by Christ in dying with the gracious attitude of His Lord's death, Acts 7:57-60:
 - a. When the Sanhedrin was stoning him to death, Stephen asked the Lord to receive his spirit like Jesus had asked the Father to receive His spirit as He died on the cross, Acts 7:57-59; Luke 23:46.
 - b. Then, like Christ on the cross, Stephen asked God to forgive his opponents, Acts 7:60; Luke 23:34.
 - 4. Stephen's sermon greatly affected the spread of the Gospel, evidence of Christ's involvement:
 - a. Stephen's sermon was influential, being the longest sermon in Acts, *Ibid.*, Ryrie, fn. to Acts 7:2-53.
 - b. It set the precedent for Paul's watershed ministry move away from Jews who rejected his Gospel in Acts 13:46a like Stephen had critiqued the fathers' rejection of Moses (Acts 7:27, 39), the basis of Paul's turning from Jews to disciple the Gentiles, Acts 13:46b-48! (*Ibid.*, Ryrie, fn. to Acts 13:48) [The New Testament Greek word *apothéo* ("push aside; reject") is used in Acts **only** in Acts 7:27 and 39 by Stephen to describe Israel's rejection of Moses, and by Paul in Acts 13:46 of the Jew's rejection of his Gospel, Arndt & Gingrich, A Greek-Engl. Lex. of the N. T., 1967, p. 102-103; the word *strepho* ("turn away") is used in Acts **only** by Stephen in Acts 7:39 and 42 first of Israel's turning back to Egypt with God's resultant turn from blessing Israel, and by Paul in Acts 13:46 where he said he turned from the unbelieving Jews to minister to Gentiles, *Ibid.*, p. 778-779.]
 - c. Paul's ministry accordingly greatly expanded God's work to include Gentiles in the Church, a huge move in the book of Acts as the Church expanded far beyond its initial Holy Land boundary!

Lesson: *Christ in heaven amply sustained the witness and influence of Stephen before great opposition.*

Application: *May we trust our Lord's intercessory work to help us, and heed Him in all circumstances.*