God’s church in Jerusalem grew as more and more people became believers in Jesus. Soon the church became so large that the twelve apostles could not keep up with all the work that needed to be done. So they called a meeting of all the believers and said, “We really should be using our time to preach and teach the Word of God. But we also have been taking care of many other things, such as making sure that all the poor people have food and clothing. Choose seven men who are known to be full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. Put them in charge of handing out food to the poor people. Then we can spend our time praying and teaching the Word of God.”

So the believers chose seven men to help the apostles. One of these seven was a man named Stephen. God blessed Stephen with special gifts. He gave him the power to do miracles, as the apostles did. And the Holy Spirit gave Stephen the power to speak God’s Word with great wisdom and boldness.

Some Jews who hated Jesus did not like what Stephen said and did. They tried to stop Stephen from preaching. First they tried to prove he was wrong in saying that Jesus was the promised Savior. They arrested Stephen and brought him to trial before the high priest and the other Jewish leaders. There Stephen’s enemies got men to tell more lies about him. The men said, “We have heard this man say that Jesus will tear down the temple and will change the laws that Moses gave us!”

When the leaders looked at Stephen, they saw that his face was shining like the face of an angel! The high priest asked him, “Are these things true?”

Stephen answered the leaders by reminding them how God had guided and blessed the people of Israel since the time of Abraham. But again and again they had sinned by refusing to listen to the prophets God had sent to them. Then Stephen said to the Jewish leaders, “You stubborn people! You are just like the people of Israel who lived long ago! They persecuted God’s prophets and killed those who talked about the coming Savior. And now you have betrayed and murdered the Savior himself!”

When the leaders heard these words, they became so angry that they ground their teeth together. At that moment God let Stephen look
up into heaven. “Look!” Stephen said. “I can see into heaven! There is Jesus, standing at the right hand of God!”

The Jewish leaders couldn’t stand to hear more. They shouted at the top of their voices and covered their ears with their hands so that they couldn’t hear another word Stephen said. Then they grabbed him and dragged him out of the city. There they picked up large stones and began to throw them at Stephen as hard as they could. As the stones hit Stephen, he prayed, “Lord Jesus, take my soul to heaven with you.” Then he fell to his knees and cried out, “Lord, forgive these men for this sin.” After he said this prayer for his enemies, Stephen died.

Some friends of Stephen took his body and buried it. They were very sad that he was dead. But a man named Saul was not sad about Stephen’s death. Saul had watched as Stephen was stoned. He thought that the leaders had done the right thing in putting Stephen to death. Now he tried to stop God’s church from growing. He went from house to house, searching for believers and having them thrown into prison.

The persecution against God’s church by Saul and others grew. Soon it was not safe for believers to live in Jerusalem. So they moved to cities throughout Judea and Samaria. But wherever they went, they told people the good news about Jesus.

God turned the persecution of the church into a chance to spread his saving Word. Even today, God’s Word will be spread in spite of persecution.

1. Discuss with your child what might keep Christians from telling others about Jesus. Then discuss how, with the Holy Spirit’s help, fearful and shy Christians can become bold in telling others about Jesus, even when faced with persecution.

2. Read with your family Luke 11:28. Together make a list of the many blessings your family has because the Holy Spirit has used God’s Word to give you faith in Jesus. Talk about why you want to share God’s Word with those around you. Point out that even if the people you talk to about Jesus don’t realize it at first, you are trying to do something wonderful for them by inviting them to share in the blessings you’ve listed.

Pray Together

Almighty God, help us spread your Word even when this work is hard. Fill our hearts with courage so that we boldly tell everyone around us about Jesus, our Savior. Amen.

Parents and Kids

1 Peter 5:8

* Matthew 28:20b

1 Peter 5:8

* The Third Petition of the Lord’s Prayer

Your will be done on earth as in heaven.

Hymn 200:1,3