**ADVANCING THROUGH ADVERSITY**

Acts 6:3-4Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them **4**and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.”

A LOOK AT STEPHEN

* Nothing is known about the personal life of Stephen—his parents, his siblings, or whether he had a wife or children; however, what IS known about him is what is truly important. He was faithful, even when he was faced with certain death.
* Stephen was one of the seven men chosen to be responsible over the distribution of food to widows in the early church after a dispute arose and the apostles recognized they needed help.
* He was also "full of God's grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people" Opposition arose, but the men who argued with Stephen were no match for the wisdom given him by the Holy Spirit. So, the men decided to falsely accuse Stephen, labeling him a blasphemer and having him arrested.
* Acts 7 is the record of Stephen’s testimony, which is perhaps the most detailed and concise history of Israel and their relationship to God of any in Scripture.
* In his speech, Stephen gave a detailed teaching about God’s intervention and messages to His people Israel and how they rejected Him every time. He even accused those standing before him of being betrayers and murders for killing Jesus.

**Acts 7:54-60**

**54**When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. **55**But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. **56**“Look,” he said, “I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”

**57**At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, **58**dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.

**59**While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”**60**Then he fell on his knees and cried out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he fell asleep.

Acts 8:1 On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. **2**Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. **3**But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison.

ACTS 9:31

**31**Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.

*Gen. 50:20 “you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people”*

 “What is meant for evil, God uses for His good”

**Romans 5:3-4** “we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, **4**and endurance produces character, and character produces hope”

**James 1:2-4** Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, **3**because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.**4**Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

**2 Cor. 4:17-18**

**17**For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. **18**So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.