

ACTS CHAPTER 7

Stephen is a new Christian, and yet his insights and background are staggering.

He is going up against the Sanhedrin, the elite ruling ecclesiastical people of Israel.

The Sadducees dominate this group.

He is not a martyr because he died, rather he died because he was a martyr, which actually means witness.

The charges brought against Stephen in Acts 6:11, 13:

(1) he spoke blasphemous words against Moses, the law, and Jewish customs; of espousing a separation from the law of Moses,

(2) he spoke blasphemous words against God and God's dwelling place, the temple.

He is going to answer his accusations in such a way that shows he is more Jewish than they are!

He emphasizes some things from Jewish history they may not have considered:

- The men who played a really great part in the history of Israel were the men who heard God's command, "Get thee out," and were not afraid to obey it.
Stephen contrasted that attitude and their actions with the spirit of the Jews of his own day,
desiring to keep things as they were
regarding Jesus and his followers as dangerous innovators.
- Men had worshipped God long before there ever was a Temple.
To the Jews the Temple was the most sacred of all places, but God does not dwell exclusively in any temple made with hands
- When the Jews crucified Jesus they were only setting the corner stone on a policy they had always followed;
all through the ages they had persecuted the prophets and abandoned the leaders whom God had raised up.

Hard truths for men who believed themselves to be leaders of the chosen people

Little wonder that they were infuriated when they heard them.

Stephen didn't and doesn't say anything that the Sanhedrin didn't already know.

This isn't a defense; like Peter's sermons, it's a statement of the condemning facts. A proclamation of the truth about Jesus in a way people could understand.

Rather than a defense of Stephen, it is a defense of Christianity as God's appointed way of worship and plan to relate to Him.

God's promise to Abraham

1) Then the high priest asked him, "Are these charges true?"

2) To this he replied: "Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran. 3) 'Leave your country and your people,' God said, 'and go to the land I will show you.'

4) "So he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. After the death of his father, God sent him to this land where you are now living. 5) He gave him no inheritance here, not even a foot of ground. But God promised him that he and his descendants after him would possess the land, even though at that time Abraham had no child. 6) God spoke to him in this way: 'Your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. 7) But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves,' God said, 'and afterward they will come out of that country and worship me in this place.' 8) Then he gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision. And Abraham became the father of Isaac and circumcised him eight days after his birth. Later Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob became the father of the twelve patriarchs

Acts 7:1-3 Then said the high priest, Are these things so? [2] And he said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran, [3] And said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall shew thee.

The high priest would be Caiaphas, the one who 'presided' over the condemnation of Jesus.

"God of glory" - Chapter 7 begins and ends with it.

It appears the Sanhedrin that is on trial!

Stephen clearly understands grace as opposed to the Law, and that line of teaching could give rise to their accusations.

Stephen starts with Abraham as he in a sense was the first Jew.

Acts 7:4 Then came he out of the land of the Chaldeans, and dwelt in Charran: and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell.

To Stephen every person and event symbolized something.

- Abraham was a man who answered God's summons.

As the writer to the Hebrews put it, Abraham left home without knowing where he was to go (Heb. 11:8).

He was a man of adventurous spirit.

For Stephen the man of God was one who obeyed God's command even when he had no idea what the consequences might be.

Stephen recounts Abraham's journey from Ur of the Chaldees to Haran to Canaan,

Which was a roundabout, delayed act of obedience to God's command as stated in verse three.

"Abraham" - call was received in Ur, not Haran

(Haran was only 50 miles up river);

Cf. Gen 12:1-3.

Abraham was called in Ur and he moved to Haran, and did not move again til 25 years later when his father died!

He didn't really do what God called him to do, until his father died.

25 years of disobedience? (Gen 11:31).

His sin is blotted out (Heb 11:8).

Discrepancy about ages occurs only if Abram is Terah's firstborn;

listing first (Gen 11:27) does not imply order of birth, but rather importance:

Shem, Ham and Japeth

Ham was youngest (Gen 9:24)

Japeth was oldest (Gen 10:2, 21)

Jacob & Esau = Esau was older

Moses and Aaron (Ex 5:20) = Aaron was older (1 Chr 6:3)

Ephraim & Manasseh = Manasseh was eldest (Gen 48:1)

There also may have been other sons of Terah:

Nahor: because Rebekah was his Granddaughter (Gen 24:25,24).
And Rachel was his great-granddaughter

Haran: because he was father of Lot.

- Abraham was a man of faith.

He did not know where he was going but he believed that, under God's guidance, the best was yet to be.

Even when he had no children and when, humanly speaking, it seemed impossible that he ever should have any, he believed that some day his descendants would inherit the land God had promised to them.

As Abraham went from Mesopotamia to Haran to Canaan, God was with him all the time

His relationship to God was unhindered by the fact there was no temple.

Abraham didn't need the temple to be close to God; there was a lapse of faith on Abraham's part.

Acts 7:5 And he gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child.

- Abraham was a man of hope.

To the end of the day he never saw the promise fully fulfilled but he never doubted that it would be.

Recognize that the land was promised to Abram's seed, when both he and Sarai were beyond childbearing age.

Abraham owned no land — only a Promise.

At the end of his life, the only portion of the land Abraham actually owned was the cave he purchased to bury his wife (Genesis 23:9).

Stephen presents the Jews with the picture of an adventurous life, ever ready to answer God's summons in contrast to their desire to cling to the past.

Acts 7:6 And God spake on this wise, That his seed should sojourn in a strange land; and that they should bring them into bondage, and entreat them evil four hundred years.

430 year total (Ex 12:40,41; Gal 3:17).

Stephen always quoted from the Septuagint.

Why is there a discrepancy?

Three answers:

- 1) round numbers. As is Gen 15:13 were it mentions 400 years.
- 2) the last 400 of the 430 were the ill treatment.
- 3) if you count from the recognition of Isaac in Gen 21:12 it turns out to be 400 years.

Acts 7:7-8 And the nation to whom they shall be in bondage will I judge, said God: and after that shall they come forth, and serve me in this place. [8] And he gave him the covenant of circumcision: and so Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs.

Jacob's 12 sons become the head of the 12 tribes, the Patriarchs.

There were 13 tribes

– 2 from Joseph – Ephriam and Manassa

Often when the 12 tribes are listed 1 is omitted

Not always the same one

Always for a reason...

God's faithfulness through Joseph

9) "Because the patriarchs were jealous of Joseph, they sold him as a slave into Egypt. But God was with him 10and rescued him from all his troubles. He gave Joseph wisdom and enabled him to gain the goodwill of Pharaoh King of Egypt; so he made him ruler over Egypt and his entire palace.

11) "Then a famine struck all Egypt and Canaan, bringing great suffering, and our fathers could not find food. 12) When Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our fathers on their first visit. 13) On their second visit, Joseph told his brothers who he was, and Pharaoh learned about Joseph's family. 14) After this, Joseph sent for his father Jacob and his whole family, seventy-five in all. 15) Then Jacob went down to Egypt, where he and our fathers died. 16) Their bodies were brought back to Shechem and placed in the tomb that Abraham had bought from the sons of Hamor at Shechem for a certain sum of money.

Stephen presents Joseph as a picture of Jesus,

The sons of Israel rejected Joseph, who later became a "savior" (and the only savior) for them.

The message: "you people have a habit of rejecting the saviors God sends to you. Why don't you wake up and stop rejecting Jesus?"

The key to Joseph's life is summed up in his own saying in Gen.50:20.

At that time his brothers were afraid that, after the death of Jacob, Joseph would take vengeance on them for what they had done to him.

Joseph's answer was, "As for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good."

Joseph was the man for whom seeming disaster turned to triumph.

Sold into Egypt as a slave, wrongfully imprisoned, forgotten by the men he had helped, the day yet came when he became prime minister of Egypt.

Stephen sums up the characteristics of Joseph in two words--grace and wisdom.

- Grace is a lovely word.

It means beauty in the physical sense;

Then it came to mean the beauty of character which all men love.

Its nearest English equivalent is charm.

Joseph possessed the character andt charm which is always on a really good man.

It would have been extremely easy for him to become embittered.

But he dealt faithfully with each duty as it emerged, serving with equal devotion as slave or as prime minister.

- There is no word more difficult to define than wisdom.

It means much more than cleverness.

Wisdom is the ability to see things as God sees them.

Once again the contrast is there.

The Jews were lost in the contemplation of their own past and imprisoned in the mazes of their own Law.

But Joseph welcomed each new task, even if it was a rebuff, and adopted God's view of life.

Acts 7:9 And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him,

Joseph was hated by his brothers.

Stephen is going to point out, again and again, that the very guy which God sent, their forefathers beat up!

Here Joseph was hated by his brothers and they sold him into slavery.

Yet, this was in God's plan all along. God's plan was executed in spite of, or in anticipation of, the reaction of his brethren.

Israel's misapprehension of God's purposes and their opposition to them, God used as the means by which those plans were accomplished.

Acts 7:10 And delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favour and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house.

"...made governor": "

The Stone which the builders rejected has become the head stone of the corner."

Arthur W. Pink, Gleanings in Genesis, lists 101 ways that Joseph is a type of Christ

Acts 7:13-15 And at the second time Joseph was made known to his brethren; and Joseph's kindred was made known unto Pharaoh. [14] Then sent Joseph, and called his father Jacob to him, and all his kindred, threescore and fifteen souls. [15] So Jacob went down into Egypt, and died, he, and our fathers,

Stephen's point is that again Israel does not recognize him til the second time.

If history is their guide, then Israel will not recognize their Messiah until the second time!

"Threescore and fifteen souls"

Stephen was quoting from the Septuagint which has 75 souls.

The Hebrew Bible says 70.

All the scholars believe that the 5 difference is additional kindred of the 70 that went there, but they can't agree on which are the 5.

Acts 7:16 And were carried over into Sychem, and laid in the sepulchre that Abraham bought for a sum of money of the sons of Emmor the father of Sychem.

Confusion over burial sites!

Most commentators say that Stephen made a mistake.

But it turns out that there are 2 different burial sites in Genesis, one bought by Abraham and one bought by Jacob:

| | | |
|------------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| Bought by: | Abraham | Jacob |
| Where: | Machpelah | Shechem |
| From whom: | Ephron, Hittite | Sons of Hamor, |
| Shechem's father | Gen 23:17 | Gen 33:19 |
| Who buried: | Abraham & Sarah | Joseph (Jos 24:32) |
| | Isaac & Rebekah | 12 Patriarchs? |
| | Jacob & Leah | |

[No mention of the 12 patriarchs burial by Hebrew writers since it is in Samaria. Jerome and others record...]

Alternatives:

- 1) Error? I don't think so...
- 2) Abraham originally purchased (Gen 12:6) and Jacob repurchased. His altercation with the sons of Hamor over property bequeathed to Joseph: Gen 49:22.

Don't be too quick to accept some commentator's view that there is an error, not that there aren't occasional textual problems.

Praise God for apparent contradictions, as behind the resolution will be a discovery.

The only land that Abraham ever actually "possessed" in Canaan was this tomb for burial; the rest was received by faith.

Moses is rejected by Israel at his "first coming"

17) "As the time drew near for God to fulfill his promise to Abraham, the number of our people in Egypt greatly increased. 18) Then another king, who knew nothing about Joseph, became ruler of Egypt. 19) He dealt treacherously with our people and oppressed our forefathers by forcing them to throw out their newborn babies so that they would die.

20) "At that time Moses was born, and he was no ordinary child. For three months he was cared for in his father's house. 21) When he was placed outside, Pharaoh's daughter took him and brought him up as her own son. 22) Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action.

23) "When Moses was forty years old, he decided to visit his fellow Israelites. 24) He saw one of them being mistreated by an Egyptian, so he went to his defense and avenged him by killing the Egyptian. 25) Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not. 26) The next day Moses came upon two Israelites who were fighting. He tried to reconcile them by saying, 'Men, you are brothers; why do you want to hurt each other?'

27) "But the man who was mistreating the other pushed Moses aside and said, 'Who made you ruler and judge over us? 28) Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?' 29) When Moses heard this, he fled to Midian, where he settled as a foreigner and had two sons.

Moses is the next picture of Jesus Stephen uses.

Moses was favored by God from birth, and miraculously preserved in childhood, and was mighty in words and deeds.

Yet, when Moses offered deliverance to Israel, he was rejected, and rejected with spite, with Israel denying that he had any right to be ruler and a judge over them.

For the Jew, Moses was above all the man who answered God's command to go out.

He was quite literally the man who gave up a kingdom to answer God's summons to be the leader of his people.

We can see what Moses gave up.

He actually gave up a kingdom in order to lead his people out into the desert on a great adventure for God.

So once again Stephen is making the same point.

The great man is not the man who, like the Jews, is tied to the past and jealous of his privileges;

He is the man who is ready to answer God's summons and leave the comfort and the ease he might have had.

The message: "you have rejected Jesus, who was like Moses yet greater than him, and you deny that Jesus has any right to be a ruler and a judge over you."

Acts 7:17-18 But when the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt, [18] Till another king arose, which knew not Joseph.

Some significant period of time occurs between Joseph and Pharaoh of the exodus.

"Another who knew not Joseph"-

Greek heteros = different; not allos = same kind.

Assyrian

Isaiah 52:4 For thus saith the Lord God, My people went down aforetime into Egypt to sojourn there; and the Assyrian oppressed them without cause.

The Pharaoh that oppressed the Hebrews was an Assyrian not an Egyptian as in Joseph's day!

Acts 7:19-20 The same dealt subtilly with our kindred, and evil entreated our fathers, so that they cast out their young children, to the end they might not live. [20] In which time Moses was born, and was exceeding fair, and nourished up in his father's house three months:

"Nourished up" - medical technical term in Greek.

There are 3 or 4 places in this chapter where the term used is one that only a doctor would use, which is interesting in that Acts was written by Luke, a physician.

Acts 7:21-22 And when he was cast out, Pharaoh's daughter took him up, and nourished him for her own son. [22] And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds.

Philo points out that Moses was tutored by the most celebrated foreign schools in arithmetic, geometry, music, philosophy, hieroglyphics, arts and sciences.

Josephus points out that he was mighty in military arts. Moses was groomed for leadership in Egypt.

"Mighty in words" - yet he lied in Ex 4:10.

Acts 7:23-25 And when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel. [24] And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian: [25] For he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not.

"Understood not" - this insight is not clear from the account in Exodus.

Stephen's point is that here again, Israel is slow to apprehend the Divine purposes of love. Again, rejecting their leader.

Acts 7:26-27 *And the next day he shewed himself unto them as they strove, and would have set them at one again, saying, Sirs, ye are brethren; why do ye wrong one to another? [27] But he that did his neighbour wrong thrust him away, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us?*

Cf. Christ: "By what authority..." Matt 21:23.

Acts 7:28-29 *Wilt thou kill me, as thou didest the Egyptian yesterday? [29] Then fled Moses at this saying, and was a stranger in the land of Midian, where he begat two sons.*

Israel had to stay in Egypt 40 years longer because they did not recognize Moses as their deliverer the first time.

The implication here is that if they had accepted Moses then, that God might have delivered them then.

But because they rejected Moses the first time, they were stuck with another 40 years of bondage.

"Who made ye a ruler over us" - echoes from Mt 21:23 and also Hosea 5:15, John 1:11.

God calls Moses, and makes him a ruler and a deliverer for Israel, who previously had rejected him

30) "After forty years had passed, an angel appeared to Moses in the flames of a burning bush in the desert near Mount Sinai. 31) When he saw this, he was amazed at the sight. As he went over to look more closely, he heard the Lord's voice: 32) 'I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.' Moses trembled with fear and did not dare to look.

33) "Then the Lord said to him, 'Take off your sandals; the place where you are standing is holy ground. 34) I have indeed seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their groaning and have come down to set them free. Now come, I will send you back to Egypt.'

35) "This is the same Moses whom they had rejected with the words, 'Who made you ruler and judge?' He was sent to be their ruler and deliverer by God himself, through the angel who appeared to him in the bush. 36) He led them out of Egypt and did wonders and miraculous signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea and for forty years in the desert.

Even though Israel had rejected Moses and his leadership, God appointed Moses with unmistakable signs, including the burning bush in the wilderness.

God's appearing to Moses at the burning bush is important

it shows that God's presence is not limited to the temple.

God is bigger than the temple, and Moses did not need the temple to be close to God.

Acts 7:30 *And when forty years were expired, there appeared to him in the wilderness of mount Sina an angel of the Lord in a flame of fire in a bush.*

Acacia = 'thorn bush of the desert'

The thorns are a symbol of sin, or God's curse on the earth. (Gen 3:18)

Thorns on His brow (Mt 27:29).

The fire is a symbol of God's judgment.

Not consumed: Grace.

And here we have God's judgment not consuming the bush, perhaps a Levitical pun of grace.

What attracted Moses to the bush was not God's holiness, but His Grace!

Acts 7:31-33 *When Moses saw it, he wondered at the sight: and as he drew near to behold it, the voice of the Lord came unto him, [32] Saying, I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Then Moses trembled, and durst not behold. [33] Then said the Lord to him, Put off thy shoes from thy feet: for the place where thou standest is holy ground.*

"Shoes" symbol of: Calling (no shoes in Tabernacle)

Shoes protect the feet from the earth...except when in contact with holy ground...

Divine provision in the wilderness

Boaz' marriage license (Ruth 4)

Symbol of Stature: John the Baptist

Acts 7:34-35 *I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people which is in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send thee into Egypt. [35] This Moses whom they refused, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge? the same did God send to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the angel which appeared to him in the bush.*

Second trip Moses was accepted!

Moses is repeatedly rejected by an obstinate Israel

37) *"This is that Moses who told the Israelites, 'God will send you a prophet like me from your own people.'* **38)** *He was in the assembly in the desert, with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers; and he received living words to pass on to us.*

39) *"But our fathers refused to obey him. Instead, they rejected him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt.* **40)** *They told Aaron, 'Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who led us out of Egypt--we don't know what has happened to him!'* **41)** *That was the time they made an idol in the form of a calf. They brought sacrifices to it and held a celebration in honor of what their hands had made.* **42)** *But God turned away and gave them over to the worship of the heavenly bodies. This agrees with what is written in the book of the prophets:*

"Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings forty years in the desert, O house of Israel?"

43) *You have lifted up the shrine of Molech and the star of your god Rephan, the idols you made to worship.*

Therefore I will send you into exile' beyond Babylon.

Moses promised that another Prophet would come after him.

He warned that Israel should take special care to listen to Him

but just like Israel rejected Moses, so they are rejecting Jesus, who is the Prophet Moses spoke of.

How are you rejecting Jesus Christ?

Have you received Him as your deliverer, as the one who can save you?

Acts 7:36-37 *He brought them out, after that he had shewed wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red sea, and in the wilderness forty years.*

[37] *This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear.*

Moses' prophet (quoting Deut 18:15), where Moses predicts the Messiah.

Acts 7:38 *This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us:*

Stephen's point is that Moses himself predicted the very person whom they are now rejecting. This whole passage is Stephen venerating Moses even more than they do!

Acts 7:39 *To whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt,*

Deepest dishonor from the nation that professes greatest jealousy for his honor.

Acts 7:40-42 *Saying unto Aaron, Make us gods to go before us: for as for this Moses, which brought us out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him. [41] And they made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifice unto the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands. [42] Then God turned, and gave them up to worship the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets, O ye house of Israel, have ye offered to me slain beasts and sacrifices by the space of forty years in the wilderness?*

Gave them up to serve the host of heaven" (Ps 81:12) meaning stars and planets.

Idol worship is still in their blood, and these idols are linked to the planets!

Moloch and the Star of Rephan

Acts 7:43 *Yea, ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, figures which ye made to worship them: and I will carry you away beyond Babylon.*

Amos 5:25-26.

The Canaanites worshipped Molech.

Star of Rephan (LXX for Heb. Chiun), Coptic name for Saturn.

Saturn: associated with the worship of Moloch, idol of the Ammonites and Phoenicians, with the Solar Bull (Taurus);

brass statue with human body, bull's head, arms outstretched;

Moloch was the god of prosperity and success.

worshiped by putting your children in his arms of brass with fire all around,

the children would roll off into the fire, child sacrifice!

He was the god to whom parents would offer their first-born children and watch them die believing their families would be more prosperous and their businesses more successful as a result.

Babylonian ideograph for planet = sheep + dead = a dead sheep was a sign of augury, or omen.

The planets were viewed as a mechanism of forecasting in the astrological sense, and here it shows up even in the very linguistic structure.

Five planets + Sun, Moon = 7 days of the week;

7th day = Saturn's day = Saturday. [God ordains as Shabbat.]

Astrology started as Babel.

But the idea of a horoscope and that somehow your future and character are determined by the position of the stars at the moment you were born is not an idea that goes back that far.

That particular style of astrology turns out to first show up under Ptolemy in 130 A.D.

Astrology is a form of deception far broader than that and obviously all mixed up with ancient cultic literature.

(Ask someone who is into astrology if they had to redo all the horoscopes since the discovery of Neptune....)

Astrology is prohibited by God in the Old Testament.

Molech is still worshipped by many today even in America.

'We'll abort the baby so we can have more success and prosperity. We don't have time for children — we're climbing the corporate ladder.'

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Moses, like Jesus, led the congregation of God's people, enjoyed special intimacy with God and brought forth the revelation of God.

The Church is not Israel, but certainly parallels it:

- Israel was fed with bread from heaven.

The Church partakes of the bread of His broken body.

- Israel was delivered by the blood of the Passover lamb.

The Church is delivered by the blood of the Crucified Lamb.

- Israel came out of Egypt, which is a type of the world.

The Church is called from out of the world.

- Israel went through the waters of the Red Sea.

The Church goes through the waters of baptism.

But Israel continued to reject Moses, even after God had demonstrated that he was their deliverer.

In their rejection of Moses and the God who sent him, Israel turned instead to corrupt idols, bringing upon themselves the judgment described in the passage quoted from Jeremiah.

The idea of God turning them over to and giving them up to worship the host of heaven is as important as it is awesome;

Paul later builds on the thought of God giving man over to his sinful desires in Romans.

If we reject Jesus, what will we be given over to?

Even while Israel was rejecting God, they still had the tabernacle, and later, the temple

44) "Our forefathers had the tabernacle of the Testimony with them in the desert. It had been made as God directed Moses, according to the pattern he had seen. 45) Having received the tabernacle, our fathers under Joshua brought it with them when they took the land from the nations God drove out before them. It remained in the land until the time of David, 46) who enjoyed God's favor and asked that he might provide a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. 47) But it was Solomon who built the house for him.

48) "However, the Most High does not live in houses made by men. As the prophet says:

***49) "Heaven is my throne,
and the earth is my footstool.***

***What kind of house will you build for me says the Lord?
Or where will my resting place be?***

50) Has not my hand made all these things?'

The presence of the temple did not keep them from rejecting God and His special messengers.

He rightly corrects their attempt to confine God within the temple; God is too big to fit in any temple man could make.

The Temple is the Temple because God is there.
God is not God because He is in the Temple

How are you confining God to one place?

Do you only meet with God here at the church?

Acts 7:44 *Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as he had appointed, speaking unto Moses, that he should make it according to the fashion that he had seen.*

Moses was given, along with the Ten Commandments, detailed information on the Tabernacle. Here Stephen points out that Moses saw it, perhaps in a vision or something.

Acts 7:45 *Which also our fathers that came after brought in with Jesus into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drove out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David;*

“Joshua” is Hebrew for the Greek word Jesus.

Stephen here is talking about Joshua, the son of Nun who was the successor to Moses.

Acts 7:46-48 *Who found favour before God, and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob. [47] But Solomon built him an house. [48] Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet,*

They originally accused him of desecrating the Temple,

He is not disparaging the Temple, but is pointing out that God does not dwell in a house made with hands (quoting from Isa 66:1-2).

Isaiah 66:1-2 Thus saith the Lord, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? [2] For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the Lord: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.

Acts 7:49-50

Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest? [50] Hath not my hand made all these things?

Stephen applies the sermon to his listeners

51) "You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit! 52) Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him—53) you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it."

By implication Stephen's statement has been condemning the attitude of the Jews; now that implicit condemnation becomes explicit.

(i) He insists on the continued disobedience of the people.

In the days of Moses they rebelled by making the golden calf.

In the time of Amos their hearts went after Moloch and the star gods.

What is referred to as the Book of the Prophets is what we call the Minor Prophets.

The quotation is actually from Am.5:27 but Stephen quotes not from the Hebrew version but the Greek.

(ii) He insists that they have had the most amazing privileges.

They have had the succession of the prophets; the tent of witness, so called because the tables of the Law were laid up and kept in it; the Law which was given by angels.

They have had continuous disobedience and continuous privilege.

The more privileges a man has the greater his condemnation if he takes the wrong way.

Stephen is insisting that the condemnation of the Jewish nation is complete because in spite of the fact that they had every chance to know better they continuously rebelled against God.

(iii) He insists that they have wrongly limited God.

The Temple which should have become their greatest blessing was in fact their greatest curse; they had come to worship it instead of worshipping God.

They had finished up with a Jewish God who lived in Jerusalem rather than a God of all men whose dwelling was the whole universe.

(iv) He insists that they have consistently persecuted the prophets; and - the crowning charge -- that they have murdered the Son of God.

Stephen does not excuse them on the plea of ignorance as Peter did.

It is not ignorance but rebellious disobedience which made them commit that crime.

There is anger in Stephen's closing words, but there is sorrow too.

he sees a people who commit the most terrible of crimes; and

he sees a people who have refused the destiny that God offered them.

Acts 7:49-51 *Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest? [50] Hath not my hand made all these things?*

[51] *Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye.*

"You are just like your fathers were..." Uses Moses' very words (Ex 33:3,5).

"Uncircumcised in heart" - from Lev 26:41; Deut 10:16; Jer 9:26; Ex 44:7.

Cf. Paul: Rom 2:28, 29; Phil 3:2,3; Col 2:11.

Drawing on concepts from the Old Testament, Stephen rebukes those who rejected Jesus;

they are stiff-necked (as Israel was) and

uncircumcised in heart and ears (as Israel was).

Almost twenty times in the Old Testament, God calls Israel stiff-necked;

these religious leaders are being just as their fathers were.

Stephen may even have in mind a passage like Deuteronomy 10:16:

Deut. 10:16 *Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked.*

The message is: "as Israel was, so are you now; you have now become the betrayers and murderers."

Acts 7:52 *Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers:*

National trait: deadly hostility to the messengers of God.

Acts 7:53 *Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.*

Major climax: Matt 23:37-39

Purpose of all history v. 37

Tragedy of all history ye would not, v. 38

Triumph of all history v. 39

Jesus Himself summarizes the exact point that Stephen is making before the Sanhedrin.

Observations:

Stephen's history lesson begins to hit home;

Stephen sees this and knows that they are rejecting the One God sent again, just like before.

"He takes the sharp 'Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God and rips into the sins of the people, laying open the inward parts of their hearts, and the secrets of their souls.

He could not have delivered that searching address with greater fearlessness

The fact that it insured his death had no effect upon him except than to make him yet more zealous."

Twofold message:

- God is no respecter of places, and
- Israel is guilty of what they have always been guilty of - rejecting God's messengers.

Jesus said that it is impossible for old wineskins to hold new wine;

the Holy Spirit is shows how the old traditions of Judaism can't contain the new wine of Christianity.

God used Stephen's martyrdom to send the church out into the entire world;

God also used His message to show that there was no theological reason why the gospel should not go to the Gentiles.

The whole idea behind a permanent, stationary temple is "you come to me";

God's ideal is "I will come to you" - including the Gentiles.

Reaction to the sermon of Stephen

They were cut to the heart, and convicted by the Holy Spirit;

Choice: Repent or Reject the message

the Sanhedrin reacts with rage instead of submission to the Holy Spirit

54) When they heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him.

Stephen is only the messenger;

their real anger is directed against the God they are rejecting.

The idea of gnashing of teeth can't help but remind us of the imagery of Hell;

7 different times, Jesus described Hell as a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth.

These God-rejecting religionists are revealing themselves to be, quite literally, citizens of Hell.

"Gnashed"- medical terms in Greek.

Stephen's vision of Jesus

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."

Stephen was full of the Holy Spirit;

this was the source of his courage, wisdom and power in preaching.

J.B. Phillip's translation has insight:

Stephen filled through all his being with the Holy Spirit

It is difficult to describe exactly what Stephen saw;

Stephen began his sermon by talking about the God of glory (7:2).

At the end of his sermon, he saw the glory of God.

That's the way it always is.

Whenever you start talking to people about some quality of the Lord, by the time you've finished the conversation, you find yourself enjoying and seeing that very quality in your own heart.

Start telling someone how wonderful Jesus is, and by the time you conclude, you'll be totally in wonder of Jesus.

Begin sharing about the God of grace and you'll find yourself receiving the grace of God.

Share your faith — not because it is your job to do so — but because it is a joy to experience.

"Standing" - Priesthood, is the role of the priest.

No chairs in the Tabernacle. Standing used twice in this verse.

Jesus is standing as opposed to the more common description of Him sitting (Matthew 26:64, Colossians 3:1) at the right hand of the Father.

Jesus stands in solidarity with Stephen at this moment of crisis;

He does not impassionedly react to the problems of His people.

Jesus gives Stephen a "standing ovation".

Stephen's fate makes him unique among believers - the first of all martyrs among the followers of Jesus.

The stoning of Stephen

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 clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

Acts 7:56 And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.

They heard this before from Jesus in the trial:

"The next time you see me you are going to see me in glory" (Mt 27:64; Mk 14:62; Lk 22:69).

"Son of Man" - Our Lord's usual designation of Himself, this is the only place where that is used by someone other than Jesus.

Acts 7:57 Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord,

Ran at him = Greek word hormao;

the same word used to describe the mad rush of the herd of swine into the sea (Mark 5:13).

This was an out-of-control mob rushing at Stephen.

The reaction of the Sanhedrin seems extreme,

but is typical of those rejecting God and lost in spiritual insanity

they wail in agony and cover their ears at the revelation of God - which they regard as blasphemy.

What a dangerous thing it is to be religious apart from a real relationship with Jesus Christ!

For Stephen to suggest that the crucified Jesus stood in a position of authority at the right hand of God must have ranked as high blasphemy in the thinking of those who only knew Him as a crucified man who died under the divine curse.

The extent of their rage is shown by their execution of Stephen

It was done without regard for Roman law,

It was performed according to traditional Jewish custom (stoning).

The second-century **Mishnah**, describing the practice of stoning:

"When the trial is finished, the man convicted is brought out to be stoned ...

. . . . When ten cubits from the place of stoning they say to him, 'Confess, for it is the custom of all about to be put to death to make confession, and every one who confesses has a share in the age to come.'

. . . Four cubits from the place of stoning the criminal is stripped.

. . . The drop from the place of stoning was to be twice the height of a man.

One of the witnesses pushes the criminal from behind, so that he falls face downward.

He is then turned over on his back.

If he dies from this fall, that is sufficient.

If not, the second witness takes the stone and drops it on his heart.

If this causes death, that is sufficient; if not, he is stoned by all the congregation of Israel."

First Martyr

Acts 7:58 *And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul.*

"Saul" - this isn't casual, not just a bystander, implies that he was one that did some of the accusing.

Saul never forgave himself for this, see Chapter 8. He grieves in his letters of this incident

2 Tim. 1:12 For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed,

and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.

Saul stood there as the "supervisor" of the operation;

as a member of the Sanhedrin, he had also approved of Stephen's execution.

"Young man" in verse 58 literally means, "a man in his prime."

It does not mean that Saul wasn't old enough to be a member of the Sanhedrin.

Acts 26:10 Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them.

Paul says I cast my vote against them;

He was a voting member of the Sanhedrin.

Stephen's last words

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.

"Stephen" = crown in Greek (stephanos).

His life ends in complete trust in God, believing that Jesus would take care of him in the life to come.

"The fires . . . in the olden days never made martyrs; they revealed them.

No hurricane of persecution ever creates martyrs; it reveals them.

Stephen was a martyr before they stoned him.

He was simply the first martyr to seal his testimony with his blood."

When we get to heaven, make sure to look up Stephen and thank him for every blessing brought through the ministry of Saul of Tarsus.

God heard Stephen's prayer, and Paul is the evidence of it.

God used Stephen suffering to touch the heart of a man who energetically agreed with his stoning, even though the man didn't know the prayer was being answered at the time.

We have no idea how greatly God can use us in our times of suffering.

Stephen displays the same forgiving attitude that Jesus had on the cross,

The text notes that Stephen did not "die";

It says he merely fell asleep - and awoke to a much better world.

How could Stephen be so peaceful — dying, without fighting back, without lashing out; crying, 'O, Lord, don't hold this against these guys'?

He kept his eyes on and saw Jesus.

Revelation 5:6 tells us that when we see Him, we will see Him as a Lamb having been slain.

Therefore, if I'm looking up to heaven and seeing the Lord, I will understand that the scars He still bears were caused by me. My sin, my rebellion, my carnality, my depravity caused Him to be slaughtered on Calvary.

As I look into heaven and see what my sin did, what my sin wrought, I have no other alternative but to say even to those who are gnashing their teeth and throwing stones at me. 'Lord Jesus, forgive them. Don't hold this against them.

When I truly see Jesus, I have no other choice but to be amazed at His grace and to be at peace with others.

It's only when I lower my sight and begin to look at people horizontally that I want to say, 'Who do you think you are to say that about me?'

It's only when I take my eyes off Jesus that I become defensive and antagonistic, uptight and combative, abrasive, callous and critical.

Are you tense?

Nervous?

Uptight?

Losing sleep, hair or teeth unnecessarily?

The solution is so simple:

Don't look at people. Look up into heaven and see the Lord.

Remember how He has forgiven you.

See the grace He has shown to you.

See His mercies extended in your direction.

Stephen wasn't a superman - but he was a man filled through all his being with the Holy Spirit.

You have no idea of how greatly you can be used of God as you walk in the power of the Holy Spirit.

There are in this scene certain notable things about Stephen.

(i) the secret of his courage.

Beyond all that men could do to him he saw awaiting him the welcome of his Lord.

(ii) following his Lord's example.

As Jesus prayed for the forgiveness of his executioners (Lk.23:34) so did Stephen.

The man who follows Christ the whole way will find strength to do things which it seems humanly impossible to do.

(iii) dreadful turmoil finished in a strange peace.

To Stephen came the peace which comes to the man who has done the right thing even if the right thing kills him.

The first half of the first verse of chapter 8 goes with this section.

Saul has entered on the scene.

The man who was to become the apostle to the Gentiles thoroughly agreed with the execution of Stephen.

However hard he tried Saul could never forget the way in which Stephen had died.

This is a turning point in Acts,

Saul persecutes the Church, which causes the apostles to move out.

Now into phase 2, Samaria.

Then later in Chapters 9, 10 and on, to "the uttermost parts of the earth."