Acts 7 Commentary

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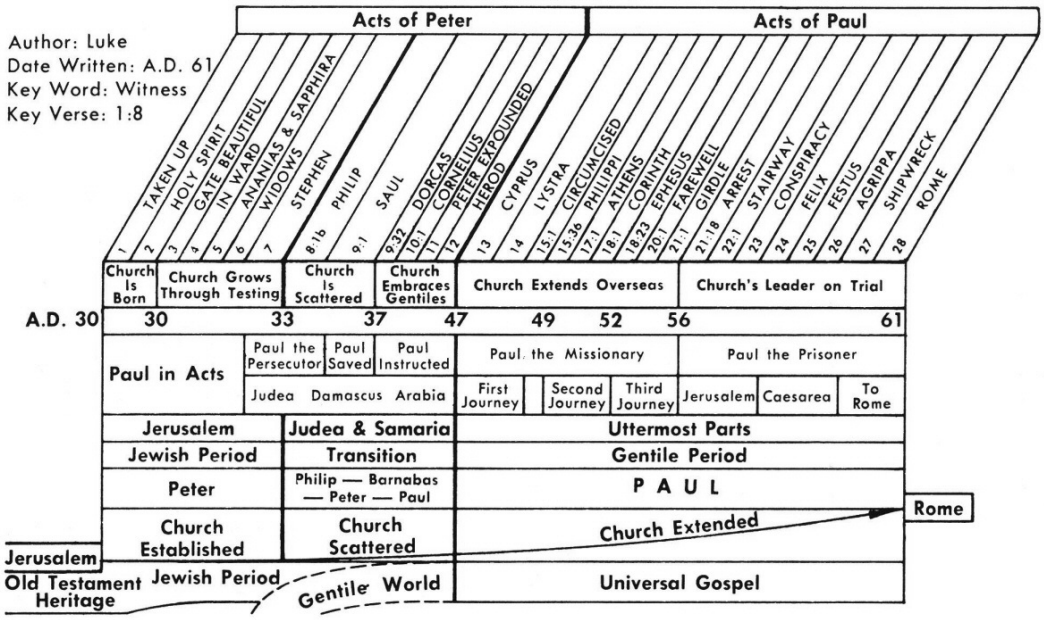

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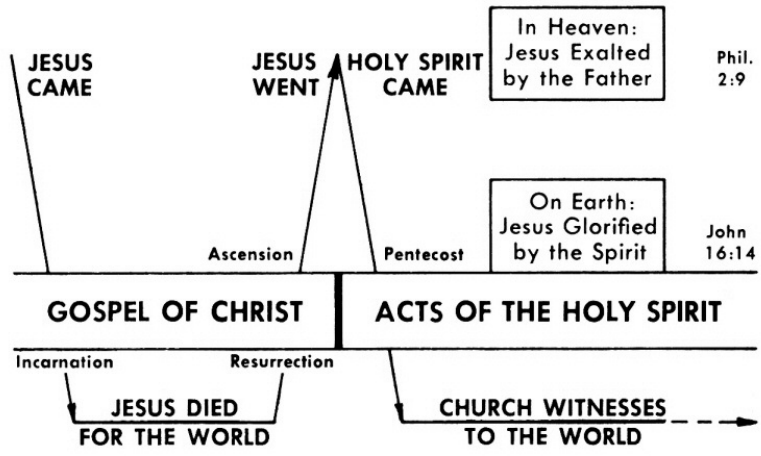
Chart from Jensen's Survey of the NT - used by permission

THE EXPANDING WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT-EMPOWERED CHURCH



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Acts 7:1 The high priest said, "Are these things so?" (NASB: Lockman)

KJV Acts 7:1 Then said the high priest, Are these things so?

- **Are** Acts 6:13,14; Mt 26:61,62; Mark 14:58-60; John 18:19-21,33-35
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

STEPHEN'S SERMON:
A WITNESS BECOMES A MARTYR

Stephen became the first martyr for the cause of Christ and His Gospel leaving a powerful example for all of us to follow in his steps. Stephen's name mean "victor's crown" and what follows is his "victory speech!" Whether he realizes it or not, he will soon be stoned, but as a Spirit filled man he is impelled to speak forth boldly. He was faithful to Jesus' call to "**be My witnesses**" (Acts 1:8+), so **witness** he did and **martyr** he did become. **Witness** is the Greek word martus or martys and is the root for our English word **martyr**.

Someone has entitled their messages on Acts 7 "A Sermon to Die For!"

Bob Deffinbaugh entitled his sermon "The First Martyr or Taking God for Granite!"

MacArthur comments that Stephen first seeks to gain his Jewish listener's interest - He knows that if they are going to hear what he says, they are going to have to want to hear it. They are going to have to have a desire to listen. And so he talks about their favorite subject. He builds his whole sermon on their own history, and that was their favorite subject.

Remember that Stephen is standing against Satanically motivated men in the **Hall of Hewn Stone** in center of 70 (plus 1 high priest) in front of the religious leaders composing the Jewish Supreme court. These men were sitting in a semi-circle (see picture and depiction above) on elevated chairs glaring down at Stephen in the center of the hall, face aglow like that of an angel! You have to wonder who was the fearful party? And who had reason to fear? Yes, it was 71 against 1 but that 1 was actually 1 + the invisible God which equates to an overwhelming, victorious "majority!" No wonder Stephen was fearless!

William Barclay's description of the **Hall of Hewn Stone** - The High Priest presided over the court. **The court sat in a semi-circle in such a way that any member could see any other member**. Facing it sat the students of the Rabbis. They were allowed to speak on behalf of the person on trial but not against him. The official meeting place of the Sanhedrin was the **Hall of Hewn Stone** (watch this computer animation) which was within the Temple precincts, and the decisions of the Sanhedrin were not valid unless reached at a meeting held in that place. The court could not meet at night, nor could it meet at any of the great feasts. When evidence was taken, witnesses were examined separately and their evidence to be valid must agree in every detail. Each individual member of the Sanhedrin must give his verdict separately, beginning from the youngest and going on to the eldest. If the verdict was a verdict of death, a night must elapse before it was carried out, so that the court might have a chance to change its mind and its decision towards mercy. One of the functions of the Sanhedrin was to deal with any man who was suspected of being a false prophet. (from his commentary on Jesus' trial in Mark 14)

Boice notes that Stephen's "speech is a transition speech that paves the way for presenting the gospel to the Gentiles, which begins in the very next chapter of Acts."

Baxter - We see, then, that the outrage against Stephen is, in a fourfold way, a pivotal event in the Acts. It marks (1) the final trial of the nation at the capital, (2) the official Jewish rejection of the renewed offer of the kingdom, (3) the first outward movement of evangelism, (4) the emerging of a new strategic centre.

George Ladd - The purpose of this speech was to show from Israel's history that the possession of the Temple had been neither a necessity for nor a guarantee of the true worship of God. And this served to substantiate Stephen's main point that now that Messiah had come the Jewish worship in the Temple in Jerusalem was superseded.

Warren Wiersbe summarizes Stephen's "accusations" against his accusers in Acts 7

(Acts 7:1-8) They misunderstood their own spiritual roots
(Acts 7:9-36) They rejected their God-sent deliverers
(Acts 7:37-43) They disobeyed their law
(Acts 7:44-50) They despised their temple
(Acts 7:51-53) They stubbornly resisted their God and His truth

Paul Apple gives us the background to this long chapter...

> What are the chances you will miss Christmas this year? Saturday will come and go and you will somehow just miss it? The Sanhedrin had not only missed the coming of Christ, but after His resurrection they continued to cover up and deny the historical reality of His appearing. The account of Stephen appearing before the angry Sanhedrin in Acts chapter 7 marks a pivotal watershed in God's dispensational dealings with His people. You

know what a watershed is. You see the sign on the highway: marks a great divide between the waters flowing in one direction or the other. We have seen how Peter attempted to re-offer the kingdom to the Jewish nation if they would only repent and trust in the risen Lord Jesus. But they persisted in their rejection and rebellion. So at this point Stephen -- rather than defending himself against the false charges of speaking blasphemy against Moses and God, and trying to tear down the Law and the temple and the Jewish traditions – actually presents God's final indictment against the nation of Israel. God is now going to switch directions and take this new gospel message directly to the despised Gentiles. The Jews could not abide this change in approach and the loss of their favored status – even though God was not permanently setting them aside.

They have proven by their actions that they follow in the footsteps of their OT brethren who consistently resisted the work of the Holy Spirit and persecuted God's appointed messengers. As Stephen faced death himself, his mind was not spinning out of control in panic; instead he calmly reviews with these Jewish religious leaders the history of their stubborn arrogance and self righteousness. They had failed to respond in faith to God's gracious initiation. They thought they could confine God to a box of a physical connection to the temple in Jerusalem.

So Stephen gives a brief historical theology of four different epochs of God's interactions with His chosen nation. Acts 7:1-8 – dealing with God's sovereign election and effectual calling with respect to Abraham and the patriarchs. [Good opportunity for us to get back into the OT some.] The Sanhedrin wrongly took confidence in their spiritual lineage – thinking that God was limited to dealing with the physical descendants of Abraham and those who would become proselytes of their pattern of temple worship centered in the holy city of Jerusalem. But they proved to be ignorant of God's intentions of bringing about the fulfillment of the law and the OT types in the person of His Son Jesus Christ who came to fully reveal grace and truth. (The Spread of the Gospel)

Many followers of Christ today are effectively "functionally" ignorant of much of the Old Testament which is very sad. They might go to the Psalms and Proverbs for devotionals but generally spend little time in this treasure chest of inspired truth which is the foundation for the NT.

John MacArthur adds that "Some people have said, and it's nothing new, it's rather old, "Forget about the Old Testament. All we really need is the New Testament." And there are many people who carry around a New Testament who know very little about the Old Testament. Some people would say, "Well, Abraham and Moses have very little to do with us. All we need to do is stick to the things that are revealed at the coming of Christ and afterwards."And some people would cut off the New Testament from the Old, Christ from Israel. **Martin Luther** faced it in his own day, and he made this statement: "*The Old Testament is the cradle in which the Christ child is laid*." It is not irrelevant to study the Old Testament, for the New Testament finds its birth in the Old. The Old Testament heritage supports the New Testament and explains it. And that is exactly Stephen's point as he preaches in Acts 7. He builds everything he says on the Old Testament. And our faith in Jesus Christ is rooted upon the fact of the Old Testament, that He is the Redeemer promised to Israel, the one who fulfills all of the Old Testament types, patterns and prophecies. And this is the way Stephen directs his attention, and the attention of his hearers, in chapter 7. (Stephen's Powerful Sermon - 2)

John Stott adds "What Stephen did was to pick out four major epochs of Israel's history, dominated by four major characters. First he highlighted Abraham and the patriarchal age (Acts 7:2-8); then Joseph and the Egyptian exile (Acts 7:9-19); thirdly Moses, the Exodus and the wilderness wanderings (Acts 7:20-44); and lastly David and Solomon, and the establishment of the monarchy (Acts 7:45-50). The connecting feature of these four epochs is that in none of them was God's presence limited to any particular place. On the contrary, the God of the Old Testament was the living God, a God on the move and on the march, who was always calling his people out to fresh adventures, and always accompanying and directing them as they went." (Message of Acts)

David Guzik - In his response Stephen gave a panorama of Old Testament history. We shouldn't think Stephen instructed the Sanhedrin on points of Jewish history they were ignorant of. Instead, Stephen emphasized some things in Jewish history they may not have considered: That God never confined Himself to one place (like the temple), and that the Jewish people had a habit of rejecting those God sends to them. (Acts 7 Commentary)

The **NET, KJV, NIV, NRSV and NLT** all begin this verse with "**Then**" (omitted by NAS). The **ESV** begins with "**and**." All of these versions (except NAS) are translating the Greek article is "**de**" which **Friberg** says "most commonly to denote continuation and further thought development, taking its specific sense from the context." (Analytical Lexicon) This conjunction links this passage with Acts 6:14 (Acts 6:15 being a description of what Stephen's accusers beheld!).

The high priest - The head of the Jewish Supreme court addresses Stephen. The legal high priest was Caiaphas (Kaiaphas high priest from A.D. 18–36), but Annas still had power (and Jews considered high priest a lifetime position so they still called him by that title) and so functioned as a high priest (See notes on Acts 4:6). Both were involved in the illegal nocturnal trials of Jesus and were

instrumental in bringing about His crucifixion. Now they add to their sins by being "accomplices" in the illegal stoning of Stephen. Presumably the one addressed here is Caiaphas. He had "blood on his hands" already so what was a little more blood to his conscience?

High priest (749)(**archiereus** from **arche** = first in a series, the leader or ruler, idea of rank or degree +**hiereus** = priest - **hieros** is that which is determined, filled or consecrated by divine power) refers to the priest that was chief over all the other priests in Israel. This office was established by God through Moses instructions in the Pentateuch. The high priest functioned as the mediator between Jehovah and Israel (cp new order under the New Covenant - 1 Ti 2:5) performing sacrifices and rituals like other priests, but in addition acting to expiate the sins of the nation on the annual Day of Atonement (another source) (Read Lev 16:1-34+)

Are these things so ("Are these accusations true?" = NLT; "Are these charges true?"= NIV) - Are then these things so, as the witnesses testify? It reminds us somewhat of our phrase "Do you plead guilty or non-guilty?" The scene is similar to how the high priest interrogated our Lord Jesus before He was crucified (cf Mt 26:62; Mk 14:60; Jn 18:19).

S Lewis Johnson points out that this question was a "trap" - The stock question in logic books, if you want to illustrate a question that will incriminate the person that you want to defeat in an argument, the stock question is have you stopped beating your wife? And, of course, if you answer that, yes, you've stopped, you have in a sense admitted that you have been beating your wife. If you say, no, well, you're still beating your wife. So if you in an argument can ask a question that has a buried assumption and get your opponent to answer it, that's the way to win arguments. You may not necessarily be right; but you will win the argument! Well, Stephen doesn't fall for that. He gives a rather lengthy answer to the question, "**Are these things so?**" (Acts 7)

Below are **these things**, the accusations leveled against Stephen. The fifth one could be viewed as related to accusations #3 and #4.

1. Blasphemous words against Moses (Acts 6:11+)
2. Blasphemous words against God (Acts 6:11+)
3. Speaks against the holy place (Acts 6:13+)
4. Speaks against the Law (Acts 6:13+)
5. Says that Jesus would destroy the Temple and alter the customs which Moses handed down (Acts 6:14+)

> Some commentators lump these 5 items together into two basic accusations of against the Law and against the Temple (e.g., see Larkin). **Derek Thomas** adds "two quite distinct charges were brought against Stephen. One was that he was subverting Moses and the law (Acts 6:11,13)....The other charge...was that he had shown disrespect to the sanctity of the temple—where God resided (Acts 6:11, 13)." (Reformed Expository Commentary - Acts)

Acts 7 is the longest speech/sermon in the book of Acts. Here is a outline with relationship to the charges against Stephen...

- The Patriarchs (Acts 7:2-16) - Refutes the Charge of blaspheming God (Acts 6:11+)
- Moses and the Law (Acts 7:17-43) - Response to the Charge of blaspheming Moses (Acts 6:11+) and Speaking against the Law (Acts 6:13+)
- The Tabernacle and Temple (Acts 7:44-50) - Response to speaking against the Temple (Acts 6:13+)
- The Indictment the Jews (Acts 7:51-53) -

Notice how God turns the tables, so that Stephen the defendant becomes Stephen the prosecutor and the prosecuting Jews and Sanhedrin become the defendants. The **irony** is that the original defendant is not guilty while the original prosecutors are guilty. The **tragedy** is that the not-guilty one is punished and the guilty one's are "set free." Of course, their unfair verdict had an effect for only for a moment in time, whereas the righteous rewards for Stephen and the righteous retribution for his Jewish murderers both endure throughout eternity, the former in eternal bliss, the latter in eternal torment!

Many have criticized Stephen's speech for number of reasons. For example,**John Stott** notes that "**George Bernard Shaw** in his preface to Androcles and the Lion. Calling Stephen 'a quite intolerable young speaker' and 'a tactless and conceited bore', he describes him as having 'delivered an oration to the council, in which he … inflicted on them a tedious sketch of the history of Israel, with which they were presumably as well acquainted as he'" From the note below it is highly unlikely Shaw was a genuine believer in Jesus Christ which would explain why an otherwise intelligent man would make such an **inane** statement against words inspired by the Holy Spirit!

> **Note on Shaw's beliefs** - In his will, Shaw stated that his "religious convictions and scientific views cannot at present be more specifically defined than as those of a believer in creative revolution".[303] He requested that no one should imply that he accepted the beliefs of any specific religious organisation, and that no memorial to

him should "take the form of a cross or any other instrument of torture or symbol of blood sacrifice".[303]

Martyn Lloyd-Jones must have thought Acts 7 be of great significance as he preached 38 sermons on this single chapter!

Henry Alford - In order to understand this wonderful and somewhat difficult speech, it will be well to bear in mind, (1) that the general character of it is apologetic, referring to the charge made against him: but (2) that in this apology, forgetting himself in the vast subject which he is vindicating, he every where mixes in the polemic and didactic element.

David Thompson writes - The purpose of Stephen selecting the data is to show these religious leaders two key truths: (1) The presence of God has never been restricted to one place like the Temple; (2) Religious leaders have a history of rejecting God's truth and those who communicate it. These religious Jews put all of their salvific emphasis on the Temple and the Torah. They told people that to have any relationship with God they must go into the Temple because the presence of God was in the Temple. They also taught that the people needed to keep the O.T. Law. Stephen has been toppling their theology with the grace message. He has been exalting the name of Jesus Christ above the land, the Law and the Temple...Now why is it brought up that God appeared to Abraham in Mesopotamia? (Acts 7:2) Because Stephen is proving that the God of Israel is not a God limited to their specific geographical spot in the Temple of Jerusalem, but He is a God of the whole world. (Sermon)

Derek Thomas - The sermon is longer than any other recorded in Acts, but the problem is not so much its length as its logic. Indeed, even Calvin appears to balk at it: "Stephen's answer may at first seem silly. He began at the beginning, then went on and on making almost no mention of the matter in hand; there can be no greater fault than to say a lot but wander from the subject." And Calvin adds: "But whoever studies this long speech carefully will find nothing superfluous in it. He was accused of trying to overthrow religion; therefore, he strenuously insisted that he was still true to the God their fathers always worshiped....Stephen was facing a charge of "speaking words against this holy place and the law" (Acts 6:13). He was facing a charge of denigrating the holy temple in Jerusalem and the traditions that went along with it—traditions that the governing authority, the Sanhedrin, viewed as "the law" and "the customs that Moses delivered to us" (Acts 6:14). Crucially, Stephen was charged with suggesting that the temple would be destroyed—something that they had heard Jesus himself say: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). **What function, then, did the temple have in a post-Calvary world?**Now that Jesus had offered up his own life as a sacrifice for sins, did the physical temple in Jerusalem, along with its rituals and ceremonies and priests, have any significance at all, other than to point to something that had now been fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus Christ (cf Ro 10:4, Col 2:17)? So far, at least, Christians were still attending some of the rituals of the temple in Jerusalem (the morning and evening prayers, for example), though they were unlikely now to be taking part in the sacrificial ceremonies. **This passage helps us understand the growing tension between the church's roots in the temple and its emerging independence from it**." (Reformed Expository Commentary - Acts)

S Lewis Johnson has an interesting observation on the importance of Stephen and this sermon**-** "Theologically, (Stephen) is very important because he was the first great Christian apologist, the most enlightened teacher of his time perhaps, because it appears that in his understanding of the divine revelation, he had outstripped the pillars of the Church, James and Peter and John. Paul, in one of his messages, latter on, comments upon the fact that he sat at the feet of Gamaliel, as if Gamaliel was his master in spiritual things. I really think that it was Stephen who was Paul's master in spiritual things. Of course, he was not a willing person at the feet of Stephen at those debates in the Hellenistic synagogue (cf "they were unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking." Acts 6:10+)....It was there that he (Paul) learned his message....Stephen illustrates the fact that many gifted young men are often cut-off, before they reach the prime of their contribution to our life (ED: OR AT LEAST WHAT WE PERCEIVE THEIR "PRIME" FROM A HUMAN PERSPECTIVE.). Stephen is one of those but he's remembered; he's a man of great promise, cut-off before he reached the fullness of what apparently he could have. But often in God's ways, these things do happen. We cannot understand them. They are puzzles to us. But, nevertheless, they are part of the providence of God.... I can imagine Paul going in, and I can imagine also that Paul, too, was defeated by this man, Stephen... The charge (AGAINST STEPHEN) is very simple. You have blasphemed Moses and you have blasphemed God. He had, evidently, told them that the temple was no longer the place where God is worshipped. God is worshipped in spirit and in truth, and while the temple may have been the proper place for a time, now that Christ has come, we worship God not through the Levitical ceremonies of the Mosaic system; but we worship him in spirit and in truth (Jn 4:24)." (Acts 7)

Jonathan Teram - We must note a few things about his defense right away.**First**, as we know, Stephen goes through a very long review about Israel's history. **Second**, it seems like Stephen hardly defends himself. For this reason, some skeptics have said that this defense is not genuine but rather is just Luke inserting another argument for Christianity. What those skeptics fail to note is that though Stephen does not defend himself per say, he does answer his accusations and prove that they are false. At that brings us to the **third** thing about Stephen's defense---why does Stephen give this long speech about Israel's history to learned rabbis who already knew Israel's history? The answer is that Stephen emphasizes two aspects of Israel's history that were relevant to the problem at hand. 1) The Israelite people had "a habit" of rejecting God's chosen leaders. 2) The temple or any other "place" could not contain God's glory. When we look at Stephen's defense with those two points in mind, we realize that this is an extraordinarily powerful sermon!

Chris Vogel: The trouble was the people loved the symbol of God's affection for them so much that they missed the substance of his love for them. The hung on the illustration and missed out on the reality. Rather than allowing the Law to point them to their need of a Savior, Jesus Christ, they used the law unlawfully to encourage their own law keeping as good enough to please God. Rather than the temple sacrifices pointing them to Christ's death, the presence of God in the temple reminding them of God's presence on the basis of Jesus our High Priest, they saw the temple as a badge of honor, of God's special love for them. Keeping the Law and temple, but missing Christ is a tragedy. . .God is not imprisoned in the walls of his temple, he is not a caged animal for the enjoyment of his people. He is boundless in calling whomever he will. In v2 – his call goes out to one who lived in Mesopotamia. You don't get much more outside the box than that. The way Stephen describes God's work shows his grace. God does not just call out to Abraham from the comfort and safety of Mt. Zion, "Abram, come over here, I want you!" Rather God appears, in all his glory, in the pagan land of Mesopotamia. The idea of God doing this would be repulsive to the Jews. Remember, in Genesis this is the land of rebellion against God as the tower of Babel is built. Throughout the Old Testament this land is the capital of idolatry. But God goes into that unlikely place to call a people

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Joseph Addison Alexander introduces Acts 7 -

> His defence is drawn entirely from the Old Testament history, and is designed to show, that all God's dealings with the Chosen People pointed to those very changes which Stephen was accused of having threatened. This he proves by showing, that the outward organization and condition of (Israel) had undergone repeated change, under Abraham (Acts 7:2–8), Joseph (Acts 7:9–16), Moses (Acts 7:17–44), David (Acts 7:45–46); that the actual state of things had no existence before Solomon (Acts 7:47); that even this was intended from the beginning to be temporary (Acts 7:48–50); and lastly, that the Israelites of every age had been unfaithful to their trust (Acts 7:9, 25, 27, 35, 39–43, 51–53.) The remainder of the chapter describes the effect of this discourse upon the council (Acts 7:54), Stephen's heavenly vision (Acts 7:55, 56), and his death by stoning (Acts 7:57–60). (Acts 7 Commentary)

Peloubet (reference) feels Stephen's sermon/speech has three major aims...

> **(1) It was an answer to the accusations brought against him, interwoven with the whole history, implicitly rather than directly repudiating the charge of blasphemy against God, and contempt for the law.** This was a defence of the Christian cause even more than of himself. His use of the Bible was itself a refutation. He knows the Scriptures; he reverently repeats their history. He shows that he accepts Moses as a prophet, and that even his preaching of Jesus as the Messiah was simply the proclamation that Moses' prophecy had been fulfilled, and Moses himself bade them, "Hear ye him." "One of the marked characteristics of the address," says McGiffert, "is the emphasis which is put upon the sacredness both of the Promised Land and of the Mosaic law." It was like taking the oath of allegiance to his religion and his country.
>
> **(2) In like manner interwoven with the history was an argument in proof of the Messiahship of Jesus** the prophet whom Moses foretold and in whom the promise to Abraham was fulfilled, as against "those who appealed to the authority of Moses, and saw in Jesus a twofold cause of offence: (1) that he was rejected by his people and crucified; (2) that he had treated with impiety that which they held most sacred, the law and the temple," —points which "must have been discussed in every synagogue, and which the infant church must have been obliged to face from the first, especially as it took its stand upon the proof that Jesus was the Christ."' He showed that Jesus was the goal of Hebrew history, the fulfilment and culmination of all the past which the Sanhedrim revered.
>
> **(3) The history as related by Stephen was a mirror in which the Sanhedrim could see their own conduct in their treatment of Jesus**, paralleled by the conduct of their ancestors in opposing and seeking to destroy those whom God had sent to save them; that not himself, but they, are the criminals ; that they are doing to Jesus just what their fathers did to Moses and the prophets, whom they now revere. The people rejected Moses, but he became their deliverer, and brought them to the Promised Land. The rulers were now rejecting Jesus ; they had betrayed and murdered him, but still God would make him their deliverer, and he would bring the Messianic kingdom they hoped for. So God delivered Joseph, as he has now delivered Christ. **Even in the earliest times there were suggestions of a wider worship than tabernacle or temple, and that vision was now being realized.**

Acts 7:2 And he said, "Hear me, brethren and fathers! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, (NASB: Lockman)

> KJV Acts 7:2 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,

- **Hear me, brethren and fathers** Acts 22:1; 23:7
- **The God of glory** Ps 24:7,10; 29:3; Isa 6:3; Mt 6:13; Luke 2:14; John 1:14; 12:41; 2 Cor 4:4-6; Titus 2:13; Heb 1:3; Rev 4:11; 5:12,13
- **appeared** Ge 12:1; Neh 9:7; Isa 51:2
- **when** Joshua 24:2
- **Harran** Ge 11:31; 12:5; 29:4
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

STEPHEN'S SCRIPTURE SATURATED APOLOGETIC

In this first section Acts 7:2-16 Stephen description of God is completely orthodox and serves to refute the accusation that he had spoken blasphemous words against God (Acts 6:11+). He was doing so not so much to acquit himself but to defend the Gospel. As he moves through the OT history, he cleverly shows how Jews had treated and repeatedly rejected their leaders (Abraham, Joseph, Moses) and how they treated and rejected their Messiah. Notice that Acts 7:2-50 serves as an illustration of his indictment to the Sanhedrin that "**you are doing just as your fathers did**."

Paul Apple notes that God's pattern shown in this section is "God Initiates by Grace / Man Responds by Faith....God of Glory Graciously Appears – Revelation is the key – God appears to man – Amazing; Immanuel – God actually comes and dwells with man -- Amazing. “ophthalmology” – from Greek word for “appeared.”

> 1. Eternal Perspective of God of Glory – sees the end from the beginning - Stephen condemning the Jewish leaders for their limited perspective
>
> 2. Universal Scope of God’s Program for Man – not just about the nation Israel Stephen condemning the Jewish leaders for their nationalistic prejudice and arrogance; God not limited by geography to one special holy land; God was with Abraham wherever he went – not tied to the land or the temple (Acts Commentary)
>
> At the time Abraham and his family were worshipping other gods (Joshua 24:2); call in Haran was a confirmation of earlier call when he was in Ur (Gen. 12:1) Abraham was a very unlikely choice – just as David was not the obvious choice for Samuel when he came looking for the man God wanted anointed as king; family of idolaters living in a pagan land (The Spread of the Gospel)

Warren Wiersbe adds that "Abraham was the founder of the Hebrew nations, and his relationship to God was one of grace and faith. God had graciously appeared to him and called him out of heathen darkness into the light of salvation, and Abraham had responded by faith. Abraham was saved by grace, through faith, and not because he was circumcised, kept a law, or worshipped in a temple. All of those things came afterward (see Ro 4; Gal. 3). He believed the promises of God and it was this faith that saved him." (Bible Exposition Commentary)

Neil writes that "On the surface it appears to be a rather tedious recital of Jewish history which has little relevance to the charges on which Stephen has been brought to trial; on closer study, however, it reveals itself as a subtile and skilful proclamation of the Gospel which, in its criticism of Jewish institutions, marks the beginning of the break between Judaism and Christianity, and points forward to the more trenchant exposition of the difference between the old faith and the new as expressed by Paul and the author of the Letter to the Hebrews." (The Acts of the Apostles - New Century Bible Commentary)

Stephen's presentation illustrates an important principle for all Christ followers - "Stephen was a faithful servant before he became a martyr. Thus, when this moment arrived, he was ready. What steps have you taken to defend your faith? Could you be as faithful as Stephen under such criticism and scrutiny?" (Bruce Barton)

William Larkin makes an interesting introductory statement that "Human religious effort is a fact of life in almost every culture. Yet Stephen declares it is such effort that has kept Israel from knowing the righteous Savior and true worship. Stephen's opponents see in his preaching a challenge to first-century Judaism's twin pillars of piety: the law and the temple (Acts 6:11, Acts 6:13-14). Stephen now proceeds to answer these charges, not as one defending himself but as a witness to the gospel (Lk 21:13). He exposes the falseness of the charges as he affirms his loyalty to God's law and true worship. But more important, he reveals how religious effort, in this case first-century Judaism, is an obstacle to the true knowledge of God's saving provision, the Messiah. The words of historian John MacMurray about Jesus may be appropriately applied to Stephen: “The great contribution of the Hebrew to religion

was that he did away with it."" (Acts 7:1-53 Stephen's Speech)

Stanley Touissaint explains that Stephen gave far more than an OT lesson in history noting that while he "touched on the accusations made against him, **Stephen** did not give a legal defense of himself. Rather, he set forth Israel's past history and God's past workings in order to vindicate Christianity. In this discourse three ideas run like cords through its fabric: (1) There is progress and change in God's program. God was creative and innovative in His dealings with humans and particularly with Israel....(2) The blessings of God are not limited to the land of Israel and the temple area. Some of Israel's greatest favors were bestowed apart from the temple and the land....(3) Israel in its past always evidenced a pattern of opposition to God's plans and His men." (Bible Knowledge Commentary)

Warren Wiersbe feels that the illustration of Abraham (Acts 7:2-8) demonstrates that "they misunderstood their own spiritual roots."

Stephen (4736)(**stephanos** from **stepho** = to encircle, twine or wreathe) means crown. It was "the victor's crown," a symbol of triumph in the Grecian athletic games. How fitting that it is the name of this godly saint who paid the highest price when he was stoned to death for speaking the truth of the Gospel!

Hear me (Listen to me! Give me your attention now!, cf Acts 2:22) - Stephen was filled with faith, filled with the Spirit (Acts 6:5+), filled with grace, filled with power (Acts 6:8+). He had to be bold in order to issue this command in the **aorist imperative** (Just do it! Speaks of urgency!) to "**Hear**!" or "**Listen**!" He is calling for the high priest's full attention (as well as the entire Sanhedrin) with the further implication that hearing is most truly "hearing" when it is united with heeding or obedience.

While it may be unintended (I think it was intentional!), it is fascinating that Stephen's first word is the command to **hear** which mimics the greatly revered words of the Jewish "**Shema**" (cf shama, What is the Shema?)

> "**Hear** (Lxx has same verb **akouo** as Stephen uses but in present imperative), O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! 5 "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. (Dt 6:4-5)
>
> **Comment**: Can we not hear at least a faint allusion or echo of Moses in Stephen's opening words in Acts 7:2!
>
> **Gilbrant** writes that "In the Septuagint akouein translates the Hebrew shama', which became a virtual trademark of the Jewish religion and was recited throughout the day ("Hear O Israel," Deuteronomy 6:4).

Keep in mind that this is the third time the Sanhedrin have received a Spirit filled presentation of the Gospel (First - Acts 4:7-15+, Second - Acts 5:27-28, 29-33+). How longsuffering and mercy filled is our God! In the second Gospel presentation by all 12 apostles the Sanhedrin reacted with venom as they were "cut to the quick and intended to kill them" (Acts 5:33+) There is a saying that the "*third time is the charm*" but in this case is functioned not as a "charm" to convince them to receive the Gospel, but more like a "curse" causing them to kill the Gospel messenger!

A major theme of Stephen's speech is that Israel had always rejected those He has sent, and the murder of Christ was the climax of their rejection.

Furneaux says "Stephen read the history of the Old Testament with new eyes in the light of the life and death of Jesus"

Kent puts it this way saying that Stephen was seeking "to show how the Christian message was fully consistent with and the culmination of OT revelation."

R C H Lenski feels that Stephen was "Apparently not making a special defense at all or with one syllable referring to his accusers and their false witnesses, he is yet utterly refuting them and **making the most effective defense**."

In other words he is not seeking to defend himself per se but to give a Scriptural defense of the Gospel and of Jesus.

Richard Longenecker - The defense of Stephen before the Sanhedrin is hardly a defense in the sense of an explanation or apology calculated to win an acquittal. Rather, it is a proclamation of the Christian message in terms of the popular Judaism of the day and an indictment of the Jewish leaders for their failure to recognize Jesus of Nazareth as their Messiah or to appreciate the salvation provided in him. (Expositor's Bible Commentary)

Constable - His address was not a personal defense designed to secure his acquittal by the Sanhedrin. It was instead an apologetic for the new way of worship that Jesus taught and His followers embraced. Luke evidently recorded this speech, the longest one in Acts, to explain and defend this new way of worship quite fully. He showed that the disciples of Jesus were carrying on God's plan whereas the unbelieving Jews had committed themselves to beliefs and behavior that God had left behind and disapproved. (Acts 7 Commentary)

F F Bruce agrees commenting that "Such a speech as this was by no means calculated to secure an acquittal before the Sanhedrin. It is rather a defense of pure Christianity as God's appointed way of worship." (NICNT-Acts)

James Montgomery Boice gives us the background for this speech - "Stephen seems to have perceived **ED**: RECALL STEPHEN IS BEING LED BY THE SPIRIT AND REALIZES HE IS NO LONGER UNDER THE LAW - Gal 5:18+)…that the old order of things was passing away and a new order was coming. This becomes particularly clear when he talks about the temple. It was cherished by the Jews. But it was destined to pass away, and Stephen seemed to have sensed that. His speech is a transition speech that paves the way for presenting the gospel to the Gentiles, which begins in the very next chapter of Acts."

Stanley Toussaint observes that in Stephen's "discourse three ideas run like cords through its fabric - (1) There is progress and change in God's program... (2) The blessings of God are not limited to the land of Israel and the temple area... (3) Israel in its past always evidenced a pattern of opposition to God's plans and His men." (Bible Knowledge Commentary)

Brethren and fathers - The Septuagint adds "**Men**" to brethren and fathers. **Brethren** (adelphos ~ "from same womb") speaks of his Jewish brothers from the same line of Abraham and the Patriarchs and may describe spectators distinguished from the Sanhedrin judges. He begins by saying they are on the same (ethnic) team! **Fathers** (pater) speaks of the older individuals, including the religious leaders and would be a way to show his respect for their positions (cf "with gentleness and reverence" in 1 Peter 3:15).

Paul began the same way in Acts 22:1

> "Brethren and fathers (as here in Acts 7:2), **hear** (**aorist imperative**) my defense which I now offer to you."
>
> **Defense** (627) **apologia** from **apo** = from + **logos** = speech which literally means, "to talk one's self off from". **Apologia** was a technical word used in the Greek law courts and was used of an attorney who talked his client off from a charge preferred against him. In short it refers to a speech given in defense. While the word is not used in Acts 7 clearly Stephen is also implying "Hear my apologia!" Although **apologia** may have the idea of a judicial interrogation in which one is called to answer for the manner in which he has exercised his responsibility, the word can also mean an informal explanation or defense of one's position (1 Cor 9:3, 2 Cor 7:11) and the word would aptly describe giving an answer to the skeptical, abusive or derisive inquiries of ill-disposed neighbors.

Stephen demonstrates he is filled with the Spirit of the Living God. He gives us a living illustration of the Peter's words

> but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; (1 Peter 3:15+)
>
> **F F Bruce** comments that "This speech is commonly called Stephen's defense, or apology, but it is obviously not a speech for the defense in the forensic sense of the term. Such a speech as this was by no means calculated to secure an acquittal before the Sanhedrin. It is rather a defense of pure Christianity as God's appointed way of worship." (NICNT-Acts)

Stephen was a Scripture saturated soul, a man of the Book who was...

> holding fast (present tense - as his lifestyle. Everyready! Are you doing this?) the faithful (trustworthy) word which is in accordance with the teaching (doctrine - doctrine is not dull! It is critical!), so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict. (Titus 1:9+)

THE GOD OF GLORY

Stephen begins his message with a description of God that clearly indicates he is not a blasphemer of God. A blasphemer takes that which is sacred and calls it worthless, without value, worth nothing. Stephen's description refutes their charge. In fact Stephen uses the name "God" 18 times in his speech, but never in a demeaning or denigrating way.

William Larkin - God's glory, pointing to his transcendence, begins and ends this episode (7:55; compare Lk 2:14; 19:38). God's appearance outside Palestine and apart from a tabernacle (contrast Ex 40:34–38) and temple (contrast Ezek 43:5) makes it clear that God's presence is not tied exclusively to a particular land or building....Free of all human roots, he became totally dependent on God to provide his future, his inheritance....Stephen holds up Abraham as a model of faith in God's promise alone over against religious effort that finds security in the tangible. **And today we too must be willing to say no to our dependence on religious effort and say yes to the God Who calls us to follow Him alone**. (Acts 7:1-53 Stephen's Speech)

John Stott comments that "It is no accident that Stephen describes Yahweh as the **God of glory**, for his '**glory**' is his self-manifestation, and Stephen is about to give details of how He made Himself known to Abraham." (The Message of Acts)

The God of glory - God revealed Himself in glory and will again reveal Himself in great glory (cf Isa 6:1-3+, Mt 24:30+, Rev 4:2-11+) and is glorious in all that He is and all that He does. Stephen begins by showing that God revealed Himself to a man who at that time was a pagan and who was not in Israel.

Warren Wiersbe comments that "Stephen's address opens with **the God of glory** and closes with the **glory of God** (Acts 7:55); and all the time he spoke, his face radiated that same glory! Why? Because Israel was the only nation privileged to have the glory of God as a part of its inheritance (Ro. 9:4). Alas, the glory of God had departed, first from the tabernacle (1 Sa 4:19-22) and then from the Temple (Ezek 10:4, 18)(**Ed**: See Glory of God). God's glory had come in His Son (John 1:14), but the nation had rejected Him." (Bible Exposition Commentary – Be Dynamic).

Glory (1391) (**doxa** from **dokeo** = to think) in simple terms means to give a proper opinion or estimate of something.**Glory** is something that is a source of honor, fame, or admiration.**Doxa** conveys ideas of weight (OT word for glory is **kabod** = "heavy"), worth, wealth, splendor, and dignity. The **glory** of God expresses all that He is in His Being and in His nature, character, power and acts. He is glorified when He is allowed to be seen as He really is. To be where God is, is glory, which is every believer's reward! To be what God intended will be glory (cf 1 Jn 3:2). To do what God purposed will be glory.

Charles Ryrie says that the **glory of God "**is the manifestation of any or all of His attributes. In other words, it is the displaying of God to the world. Thus, things which glorify God are things which show the characteristics of His being to the world."

I like the way Puritan writer **Thomas Watson** described the **glory** of God - Glory is the sparkling of the Deity…We may see God's glory blazing in the sun and twinkling in the stars (Ps 19:1)… A sight of God's glory humbles. The stars vanish when the sun appears."

In summary, in the present context glory describes the essential character of God

God of glory is a very significant name of God. Why? See below...

First note that **God of glory** is used only one other place in the Scripture.

> The voice of the LORD is upon the waters; **The God of glory** thunders, The LORD is over many waters. (Ps 29:3).
>
> > **Spurgeon** - It seems to be the general opinion of modern annotators, that this Psalm is meant to express the **glory of God** as heard in the pealing thunder, and seen in the equinoctial tornado. Just as the eighth Psalm is to be read by moonlight, when the stars are bright, as the nineteenth needs the rays of the rising sun to bring out its beauty, so this can be best rehearsed beneath the black wing of tempest, by the glare of the lightning, or amid that dubious dusk which heralds the war of elements. The verses march to the tune of thunderbolts. God is everywhere conspicuous, and all the earth is hushed by the majesty of his presence. The word of God in the law and gospel is here also depicted in its majesty of power. True ministers are sons of thunder, and the voice of God in Christ Jesus is full of majesty. Thus we have God's works and God's word joined together: let no man put them asunder by a false idea that theology and science can by any possibility oppose each other. We may, perhaps, by a prophetic glance, behold in this Psalm the dread tempests of the latter days, and the security of the elect people.
> >
> > Play God of Glory, Lord of love (magnificent! Will stir your heart to worship the God of Glory!), God of Glory, God of Glory, Isaac Watts God of Glory

Hackett feels that the idea of **glory** speaks of "the light or visible splendor amid which Jehovah revealed himself; the symbol, therefore, of his presence. (Cp. Ex. 25:22; 40:34; Lev. 9:6; Ezek. 1:28; 3:23; Heb. 9:5, etc)" (Acts 7 Commentary)

Some (like Henry Alford) suggest in using the phrase **God of glory**, he is in part referring to the **Shekinah Glory of God**

Related Resources:

- Glory of God
- Shekinah glory cloud
- What is the Shekinah glory?)

John MacArthur on the significance of the name **God of glory** - **Glory** is the fullness of the manifestation of all that God is. The

glory of God is the composite of all of His attributes, when it is talking about the nature of God. We can talk about the God of love or the God of justice or the God of grace or the God of wisdom or the God of righteousness or the God of wrath or the God of power or the God of presence or anything we want. But we can just say the **God of glory**, and that encompasses every single thing that God ever is. That's the most comprehensive term....He's saying, "I believe in God in the fullest possible conceivable sense." (MacArthur NT Commentary - Acts)

Marshall suggests that Stephen used the name **God of glory** "perhaps to emphasize at the outset the transcendence of the God Who does not live in a Temple made with hands." (TNTC-Acts) In other words Marshall's thought is that Stephen's description of the **God of glory** appearing to Abraham in Mesopotamia, clearly not the location of His Temple, would buttress his later direct remark that "the Most High does not dwell in houses (TEMPLES OR SANCTUARIES) made by human hands." (Acts 7:48).

The other fascinating aspect of then Name **God of glory** is that Luke has just described Stephen's face '**like the face of an angel**." (Acts 6:15+) It is as if his face shone with a reflection of the glory of God! Even as he is speaking his face was glowing with glory! Filled with the Spirit and boldness and glowing with the glory of God -- can you imagine the reaction of these religious leaders! Not only did Stephen give a visual reminder of God, but he gave off an aroma of Jesus! Paul writes...

> But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place (HERE STEPHEN IN THE MIDDLE OF THE **Hall of Hewn Stone**!). 15 For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing (SADLY THE SANHEDRIN!); 16 to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for these things? (WE AREN'T BUT HE IS - cf 2 Cor 3:5-6+) (2 Cor 2:14-16)

Stephen was obeying Jesus' exhortation to be His witness (Acts 1:8+) and His command to...

> "**Let your light shine** (aorist imperative - the only way to obey this is by being filled with the Spirit as Stephen was!) before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify (STEPHEN WAS WITH HIS FACE AND HIS SPEECH!) your Father Who is in heaven. (Mt 5:16+)
>
> > **Comment** - To **glorify** (doxazo) means to give a proper opinion of or to "paint" an accurate picture of something, in this case of the invisible (supernatural) God, our Father, doing do by allowing His Spirit to enable our visible (supernatural) words and deeds. Even these stiff-necked, hard-hearted men must have grasp that there is no way a natural man could stand before them with such supernatural presence, poise and power. But as we see in this chapter, they were dug in, so to speak, to their love of sin and and power and prestige, and were not about to acknowledge Stephen as representative of the Most High God! Such is the all encompassing power of sin on our hearts and minds! "**Do not be deceived** (present imperative with a negative), my beloved brethren!" (James 1:16+)

THE GOD OF GLORY
REVEALS HIMSELF TO ABRAHAM

The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran- Locate **Ur** in the south and and **Haran** in the north on this **Map**. Stephen does not mention Ur but the implication that the God of glory appeared to Abraham in Ur of the Chaldees. First note that an actual (visible) appearance of Jehovah to Abraham is not described in the Old Testament account, but Stephen used the verb **appeared** (horao) which clearly signifies Abraham saw a visible manifestation of the God of glory. This is not a discrepancy but is progressive revelation, Stephen's account giving additional detail.

See **map of Abraham's travels from Ur to Haran to Canaan - this map is fascinating as it is dynamic!**(**Here is a static map**)

Now we come to what at first glance appears to be a discrepancy by Stephen when compared to the parallel OT account. Stephen implies God appeared to Abraham in Ur. Genesis 12:1,4 records that "the LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your country....(4) So Abram went forth as the LORD had spoken to him; and Lot went with him. Now Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran." So the Genesis passage would indicate that God revealed Himself to Abraham at Haran. In addition, Ge 11:32 mentions the location of Haran in the context immediately before God gives the call to Abraham in Ge 12:1 to "Go forth." The implication is "Go forth" from Haran.

Comparing Genesis 15:7 we read that God says "I am the LORD Who brought you **out of Ur** of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess it" so clearly Abraham had some revelation of God in Ur as Stephen's version implies. Nehemiah 9:7 records that God "chose Abram and brought him out from **Ur** of the Chaldees." Thus Nehemiah's version implies God had revealed Himself to Abraham in Ur.

So which is correct? Moses' account in Genesis 12:1,4 that says God appeared to Abraham in Harran or Stephen's account in Acts 7:2 (supported by Ge 15:7 and Neh 9:7) which says God appeared to Abraham in Ur? Stated another way, did Abraham have one or two encounters with God before he departed for Canaan?

John Stott - We cannot miss Stephen's emphasis on the divine initiative. It was God who appeared, spoke, sent, promised, punished and rescued. From Ur to Haran, from Haran to Canaan, from Canaan to Egypt, from Egypt back to Canaan again, God was directing each stage of his people's pilgrimage. . .Change is painful to us all, especially when it affects our cherished buildings and customs, and we should not seek change merely for the sake of change. Yet true Christian radicalism is open to change. It knows that God has bound himself to his church (promising that he will never leave it) and to his word (promising that it will never pass away). But God's church means people not buildings, and God's word means Scripture not traditions. So long as these essentials are preserved, the buildings and the traditions can if necessary go. We must not allow them to imprison the living God or to impede his mission in the world.

MacArthur answers that "There is an apparent historical discrepancy here. Abraham was originally from the city of **Ur** (Ge 11:31). Stephen places his call while he still lived in that city before he lived in **Haran**. (Acts 7:3-4) Genesis 12:1–4, however, appears to place God's call after Abraham had left Ur and settled in Haran. Since Stephen was fully controlled by the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:5, 15; 7:55) his facts must be correct and can be harmonized with other Scripture. Evidently, God originally called Abraham in **Ur** (Ge 15:7; Neh. 9:7), then repeated that call in **Haran**. Both ancient writers Philo and Josephus give that obvious interpretation (F. F. Bruce, The Book of the Acts [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971], 146)." (MNTC - Acts) (See also Table below)

Derek Thomas - It takes courage, even as a fellow Jew, to say that Jews living in Jerusalem have utterly misunderstood the significance of Abraham! Yet that was what Stephen evidently did (Acts 7:2–8). **John the Baptist** had encountered a similar audience. When crowds went out to hear him preaching, and there were Pharisees among them, John turned to them and said, "Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. **And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father**.' For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham" (Luke 3:8). (ED: AND OF COURSE WHAT WAS JOHN'S FATE IN BEING SO BOLD? Mt 14:8-12) Genetic association with Abraham does not guarantee membership in the kingdom of God any more than ritual participation in temple worship. **These people were drawing the conclusion that just because they had genetic ties with Abraham—because they could proudly trace their roots all the way back to the Patriarch—they were therefore blessed by God no matter what. They believed that their very Jewishness was sufficient to ensure their protection and blessing**. How wrong they were! (Reformed Expository Commentary - Acts)

Our father Abraham - Note that Stephen does not say "your father" but "**our father Abraham**." Stephen is affirming that he shares a common origin with his Jewish hearers. He is not denying his roots or origin. He still considered himself an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the chosen nation. Stephen begins with "**father Abraham**" who lived a life of faith and whose revelation from God was independent of the Law or the Temple. Stephen's point is that the transcendent God can reveal Himself to whom He wants and whenever He wants. He is not restricted to the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem (remember they had accused him of speaking against the Temple - Acts 6:13).

Stephen called him not just Abraham but father Abraham undoubtedly because he knew the Sanhedrin greatly revered him and were proud to be Abraham's "children." Of course the Sanhedrin had made a fatal mistake of confusing their physical origin (which was from Abraham) with the more important spiritual origin (which was by faith in Messiah like Abraham). And so instead of believing the promise of God as Abraham did in Genesis 15:6, they choose to trust in their Jewish lineage. Both John the Baptist and Jesus Christ sought to correct their faulty understanding...

> John the Baptist said - But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 "Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance; 9 and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, '**We have Abraham for our father**'; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to **Abraham**. 10 "The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 11 "As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 12" His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." (Mt 3:7-12)
>
> Jesus addressed Jews who *professed* belief (Jn 8:30) but did not genuinely believe in Him - So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; 32 and you will know the truth, and **the truth will make you free**." 33 "They answered Him , "**We are Abraham's descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, 'You will become free'?"** (OF COURSE THEY CONVENIENTLY FORGOT ABOUT 400 YEARS OF ENSLAVEMENT

> IN EGYPT!) 34 Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin (present tense = a lifestyle, habitually) is **the slave of sin**. 35 "The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever. 36 "S**o if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed**. 37 "**I know that you are Abraham's descendants** (PHYSICAL DESCENDANTS - LIKE THE SANDHEDRIN); yet you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you. 38 "I speak the things which I have seen with My Father; therefore you also do the things which you heard from your father." 39 They answered and said to Him, "**Abraham is our father.**" (HERE IS THEIR SELF-DECEPTION, THEIR FATAL MISUNDERSTANDING) Jesus said to them, '**If you are Abraham's children, do the deeds of Abraham**. (ABRAHAM OBEYED AS STEPHEN RECOUNTS) 40 "But as it is, you are seeking to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth, which I heard from God; this **Abraham did not do.** 41 "You are doing the deeds of your father." They said to Him, "We were not born of fornication; **we have one Father:** God (AGAIN THEY ARE DECEIVED)." 42 Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me. 43 "Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word. 44 "You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. 45 "But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me. 46 "Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I speak truth, why do you not believe Me? 47 "He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear them, because **you are not of God.**" 48 The Jews answered and said to Him, "Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?" (NOW THEY TRY TO SLANDER JESUS - HE IS GETTING TOO CLOSE TO HOME!) 49 Jesus answered, "I do not have a demon; but I honor My Father, and you dishonor Me. 50 "But I do not seek My glory; there is One who seeks and judges. 51 "Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he will never see death." 52 The Jews said to Him, "Now we know that You have a demon. **Abraham** died, and the prophets also; and You say, 'If anyone keeps My word, he will never taste of death.' 53 **"Surely You are not greater than our father Abraham, who died?** The prophets died too; whom do You make Yourself out to be?" 54 Jesus answered, "If I glorify Myself, My glory is nothing; it is My Father who glorifies Me, of whom you say, 'He is our God'; 55 and you have not come to know Him, but I know Him; and if I say that I do not know Him, I will be a liar like you, but I do know Him and keep His word. 56 "**Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad**." 57 So the Jews said to Him, "**You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?**" 58 Jesus said to them, "**Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.**" 59 Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple. (Jn 8:31-59)

Wiersbe - **Abraham** was the founder of the Hebrew nation, and his relationship to God was one of *grace* and *faith*. (**ED**: NOT LIKE THAT OF THE SANHEDRIN WHICH WAS BASED ON LAW AND WORKS!) God had graciously appeared to him and called him out of heathen darkness into the light of salvation, and **Abraham** had responded by faith (Hebrews 11:8-9, 17-19). Abraham was saved by grace, through faith, and not because he was circumcised, kept a law, or worshiped in a temple. All of those things came afterward (see Ro 4; Gal. 3). He believed the promises of God and it was this faith that saved him....The Jews were blind to the simple faith of Abraham and the patriarchs, and they had cluttered it with man-made traditions that made salvation a matter of good works, not faith. God has no grandchildren. Each of us must be born into the family of God through personal faith in Jesus Christ (John 1:11-13). (Ibid)

As an aside not only does Stephen refer to Abraham as **OUR** father, but he uses this same plural possessive pronoun (**OUR**) 11 times in 9 verses - **our fathers** (Acts 7:11, 12, 15, 19, 38, 39, 44, 45-twice) and **our race** (Acts 7:19). Clearly he is identifying himself with his Jewish brethren. However, it is interesting that he switches pronouns after reviewing Israel's OT history, and refers to "**your fathers**" (twice) in his indictment of the Sanhedrin in Acts 7:51, 52+.

When he was in Mesopotamia ("between the rivers" - area of the "Fertile Crescent" the presumed site of the Garden of Eden -note) - **Mesopotamia** designates the area between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers and more generally to the entire Tigris-Euphrates valley where Babylon would later be located and location of modern day Iraq. See **Map**. Abram was originally from **Ur** of the Chaldeans in southern Mesopotamia and journeyed to **Haran**, in northern Mesopotamia, .

> Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife; and they went out together from **Ur of the Chaldeans** (Chaldea in Wikipedia) in order to enter the land of Canaan; and they went as far as Haran, and settled there. (Ge 11:31)

See **map of Abraham's travels from Ur to Haran to Canaan**

Before he lived in Haran - Haran was about 500 miles NW of Ur (See **Ur** and **Haran** on this **Map**). Genesis 29:4-5 confirms that

Haran remained the permanent residence of Abraham's relatives even in the days of Jacob.

Bruce Barton - Stephen's point seems to be that the glory of God came to Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia. These religious leaders were too Jerusalem focused, too temple obsessed. They had better get their eyes open, Stephen was saying, or they would miss what God was doing. It was happening, not in the temple recesses, in the Holy Place, or Holy of Holies, but rather in the temple courtyard and in the streets of Jerusalem. There the gospel of Jesus Christ was being preached and confirmed with powerful exhibitions of God's power working through the apostles. (Life Application Bible Commentary – Acts)

Most commentaries note that Stephen's speech has several differences from related passages in the Old Testament. While there are some differences, I believe that both records are inspired and inerrant and therefore both are God's Word. Because it would be unwieldy to discuss all of the allegations in detail, below is a summary of alleged "discrepancies" and suggested resolutions. This table is modified from a table in Believer's Study Bible.

I appreciate John MacArthur's advice regarding our approach to these alleged discrepancies between Acts 7 and the Old Testament - To charge either Luke or Stephen with an error has serious implications for the doctrine of inspiration. To do so is either to affirm that the Spirit of Truth inspired error, or to deny that all the Bible is inspired. The former is absurd to the point of blasphemy; the latter contradicts 2 Timothy 3:16. And if all of Scripture is not inspired, who decides what is and is not inspired? Fallible human reason is certainly not qualified to sit in judgment on the Word of God. The problem, then, lies with the veracity of neither Stephen nor Luke, but only with our lack of complete information. (MacArthur New Testament Commentary – Acts)

Related Resources:

- Stephen's Speech: A Theology of Errors? - Rex A Koivisto - Grace Theological Journal. 8.1 (1987). Pages 101-114

RESOLUTION OF ACCOUNTS: STEPHEN'S IN ACTS 7 & RELATED OLD TESTAMENT PASSAGES		
Stephen's Statement	**Alleged Discrepancy**	**Resolution of Acts 7 and Old Testament Description**
Acts 7:2–4 Appearance of God to Abraham in Ur	God calls Abraham in Haran (Ge 12:1–4)	(1) God spoke to Abram in Ur (from Ge 15:7, Neh 9:7) but then again in Haran, thus the accounts are complementary. (2) Ge 11:27–32 may be a parenthetical background to Ge 12:1–4 and the call did come in Ur.
Acts 7:4 Abraham leaves Haran after the death of his father.	Abram leaves Haran 60 years before the death of his father (Ge 11:26, 32; 12:4)	Abram is listed first in Ge 11:26 which some assume indicates he was firstborn. However, it is more probable that he is mentioned first because of his prominence, not because of his priority in time (Ge 5:32, 10:1 first son listed is clearly not eldest). Therefore there is no indication of Terah's age when Abram was born. (See Kent's and Larkin's analyses)
Acts 7:6 400 years in a foreign country (Ge 15:13)	430 years in Egypt (Ex. 12:40, Gal 3:17).	Note also 450 yrs = Acts 13:19-20. Acts & Ge 15:13 are examples of rounding off numbers. See Chart Comparing 400 years to 430 years.
Acts 7:7 Is "this place" (word to Abraham in Gen. 15:13) Mt. Gerizim or Mt. Horeb? [Note that neither Mt. Gerizim nor Mt. Horeb is actually named.]	"This mountain" (word to Moses in Ex. 3:12) is Mt. Horeb.	Stephen apparently conflates or "telescopes" two separate texts (later in v. 16, he will telescope or conflate two separate incidents). This was a popular method of recounting history in Stephen's day. The statement is true as we recognize that in one breath Stephen alludes to two different texts. Further, the fact is that they did worship God both in "this place" (Canaan, Gen. 15:13–15) and on Mt. Horeb (Ex. 3:12).

Acts 7:14 75 people went to Egypt.	70 people went to Egypt (Gen. 46:27; Ex. 1:5; Deut. 10:22).	The LXX was the text Stephen followed, and at Gen. 46:20 it adds two sons of manasseh, two sons of Ephraim, and one grandson of Ephraim, making the total 75.
Acts 7:16 Abraham bought a tomb in Shechem.	Abraham bought a tomb in Machpelah (cave/field) near Mamre, which is Hebron; Jacob bought a field in Shechem (Ge 23:17, 18; 33:19; Josh. 24:32).	(1) It is possible that Abraham made the original purchase from sons of Hamor (the owners) in Shechem. He built an altar there (Ge 12:6-7) and quite likely purchased the plot of ground on which he built it. Abraham did not settle there and over time the site may have reverted to the occupying people of Hamor, thus necessitating Jacob's repurchase of it (2) The use of the plural in Acts 7:16 (“they”) tips us off that Stephen is conflating or telescoping several familiar accounts into a summary statement. Thus Stephen telescopes accounts of Abraham's purchase of Machpelah site and Jacob's acquisition of Shechem site which would be consistent with his telescoping of the two calls of Abraham in Acts 7:2 (3) Some argue that Jacob bought Shechem burial ground in the name of Abraham.
Acts 7:16 Jacob and his sons (including Joseph) were buried in Shechem, but nothing is said about the burial of Abraham	Abraham and Jacob were buried in Shechem, but nothing is said about the burial of Jacob’s other sons (Ge 23:9–20; 25:8–10; 33:19; 49:30, 31; 50:13; Josh. 24:32).	See above, resolution (2). That argument holds for this point also, though the complementary nature of the accounts, and the possibility of Stephen’s utilizing extra-biblical tradition, is clearly evident. Interestingly, Josephus informs us of a tradition that says the brothers of Joseph were buried at Hebron.
Acts 7:22 Moses “a man in mighty words”	Moses a man “not eloquent” in speech (Ex. 4:10–16)	Exodus 4 reveals Moses’ self-evaluation early in his ministry. With the help of Aaron, and ultimately, through training on the hob, Moses became a man “might in words and deeds” (Acts 7:22)
Acts 7:26 Moses tried to make peace between two Israelites who were fighting.	Moses took the side of one of the quarreling parties (Ex. 2:13).	Exodus 2:13 gives a more detailed analysis. That Moses sided with one in no way negates his attempt to make peace between the two. Thus, both statements are true, Stephen again providing a general or summary statement.
Acts 7:29 Moses fled because he was rejected by his people.	Moses fled because of the king of Egypt (Ex. 2:15)	both are correct and again complementary; Ex. 2:15ff. also affirms that Moses fled for fear and because of the rejection of his people.
Acts 7:32, 33 God reveals Himself to Moses before He tells him to take off his sandals.	God reveals Himself to Moses after He tells him to take off his sandals (Ex. 3:5, 6).	Stephen simply reverses the chronological order out of theological/topical concerns, so that the initial emphasis is that it is the god of Moses’ ancestors (i.e., Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) who is revealing Himself. This is in Keeping with Stephen’s overall purpose in his speech, Furthermore, the opening phrase of Acts 7:33 (eipen de, Gk. “and” or “but he said”) does not require temporal or chronological sequence.

Acts 7:38 An angel speaks to Moses (see also Acts 7:53; Gal 3:19; Heb. 2:2)	YAHWEH/the Lord/God speaks to Moses (Ex. 19)	Two solutions are possible: (1) Stephen simply supplements the Exodus account, noting that the means whereby god spoke to Moses was an angel. (2) Numerous biblical students note that "the angel of YAHWEH" may very well be God Himself via a Christopahny, i.e., a preincarnate appearance of the Son of God.
Acts 7:42, 43 Israel's time in the wilderness was one of apostasy.	Israel's time in the wilderness is exemplary. (Amos 5:25)	Some misread or misinterpret the Amos text. Amos is also denouncing Israel.
Acts 7:43 "tabernacle… Moloch…Remphan."	"Sikkuth you king and Chiun" (Amos 5:26, see notes in center column there).	Stephen follows the LXX, which has paraphrased a very difficult Hebrew reading. This particular difficulty is best resolved by understanding that Stephen is following the LXX in its paraphrase of the Hebrew text of Amos 5:25–27, giving the text a different emphasis or application. The complexity of these texts really goes beyond the limits of these study notes.
Acts 7:43 "away beyond Babylon"	"captivity beyond Damascus" (Amos 5:27)	Stephen, wishing to show that idolatry and disobedience to the Lord brought both Israel (by the Assyrians, capital Damascus) and Judah (by the Babylonians, capital Babylon) into captivity, broadens or expands upon the prophecy of Amos to include both exiles. This was a purposeful change to include all in the Exile(s). His audience would have clearly understood his application of the Amos text, though they no doubt did not appreciate it!

Acts 7:3 and said to him, 'LEAVE YOUR COUNTRY AND YOUR RELATIVES, AND COME INTO THE LAND THAT I WILL SHOW YOU.' (NASB: Lockman)

> KJV Acts 7:3 And said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall shew thee.

- **LEAVE YOUR COUNTRY** Ge 12:1; Mt 10:37; Luke 14:33; 2 Cor 6:17; Heb 11:8
- **COME INTO THE LAND** Ge 13:14-17; 15:7; Joshua 24:3; Neh 9:8
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

LEAVE AND COME!

Thomas calls us to remember that "Stephen's point now was to prove that God's presence had never been limited to a geographical zip code, not even Mount Zion where the temple was built, the very place where Abraham offered his son Isaac as a sacrifice. Thus, Stephen traced the history of Abraham." (Ibid)

See **map of Abraham's travels from Ur to Haran to Canaan**

LEAVE YOUR COUNTRY AND YOUR RELATIVES AND COME INTO THE LAND THAT I WILL SHOW YOU- This sentence is from Genesis 12:1+ and is virtually a word for word translation of theSeptuagint rather than from the Hebrew text. In fact all of Stephen's quotes from the Old Testament come from the Septuagint and account for some differences between the NT quote and the original OT verse (which is based on the Hebrew text).

Alexander - A beautiful comment is afforded by the last clause of the parallel passage in Heb. 11:8, "he went out, not knowing where he was going."

Leave is aorist imperative, a command to do this now. This is amazing as Abraham is still not a believer (Ge 15:6+) and yet he obeyed God.

Apple comments that "God of Sovereign Direction Graciously Commands (1) Based on Divine Election, (2) Based on Effectual Calling and (3) Based on Providential Leading/Pushing." (The Spread of the Gospel)

Will show (1166) (**deiknuo**) means to show and has the sense of to draw attention to, to point out, to show, to make known, to exhibit something (by visual, auditory, gestural, or linguistic means) so that it can be apprehended by the senses, to cause to see. As when the devil **showed** Jesus all the kingdoms of the world (Mt 4:8, Lk 4:5)

F F Bruce comments - Beginning with the patriarchal age, then, he (Stephen) reminds his hearers that **it was in Mesopotamia, far from the promised land, that God first revealed himself to Abraham.** One might well ask what could have persuaded Abraham to uproot himself as he did from the land of his birth and set out on a journey whose goal he did not know in advance. By all the prudential canons of ordinary life, it was a mad adventure; but as related in the biblical narrative it was an act of true wisdom. It was the **God of glory** who appeared to him and summoned him to embark on the path of faith, and the use of that title implies that God manifested himself to Abraham in glory so compelling (**ED**: cf Shekinah glory) that Abraham had no option but to obey. **Those who are obedient to the heavenly vision, Stephen seems to suggest, will always live loose to any particular earthly spot, will always be ready to get out and go wherever God may guide.** (NICNT- Acts) (Bold added)

Acts 7:4 "Then he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. From there, after his father died, God had him move to this country in which you are now living. (NASB: Lockman)

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

- **Then he left the land of the Chaldeans** Ge 11:31,32; 12:4,5; Isa 41:2,9
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

ABRAHAM'S OBEDIENCE
GOD'S "DIVINE PUSH"

Then he left - Why did he leave? He had seen and heard God Who gave him a command. And so he obeyed. Here's the point - Abraham obedience was based on his faith in God. So at the very outset Stephen is showing the Sanhedrin that a relationship with God is not based on works or keeping the Law which was the "religion" of the Sanhedrin. Abraham's obeyed because he believed God. Stated another way his relationship with God was based on faith. Furthermore, he actually saw God and heard God, something that none of the Sanhedrin had ever done (of course they had seen Jesus but refused to recognize Him as God). And one other point is that God initiated a relationship with Abraham when he was a pagan, living in an idolatrous land. These "religious" leaders were living in the Holy Land and had no relationship with the living God as had Abraham. While Stephen did not specifically point out these distinctions between Abraham and the religious leaders, his recital of the journey of the man they held in high esteem as their "spiritual" father would remind that their approach to God was radically different than Abraham's approach.

Apple - The key to obedience is obeying when you cannot see what the consequences will be.(The Spread of the Gospel)

Maples - Abraham came to God through faith, not through the temple.

The land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran - **Haran** was about 500 miles NW of Ur (See **Ur** and **Haran** on this **Map**) and know for its moon worship.

> Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife; and they went out together from Ur of **the Chaldeans** (Chaldea in Wikipedia) in order to enter the land of Canaan; and they went as far as **Haran**, and settled there. (Ge 11:31)

From there, after his father died, God had him move to this country in which you are now living - **NET** says God "made him move" indicating God was the active force. ESV says "God removed him from there." This verb emphasizes God's sovereign hand in leading Abraham to move from Haran to Canaan on the death of his father.

In Ge 12:1 we read "the LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your country" and in Ge 12:4 we read "So Abram went forth as the LORD had spoken to him." As MacArthur says "**Abraham's obedience** (Ge 12:1) under **God's sovereignty** accomplished God's

purpose for his life."

Had him move (3352)(**metoikizo** from **meta** = change of place or condition + **oikizo** = to cause to dwell) means to cause to change one's habitation. This verb has the idea of resetting someone in Acts 7:4 where God made Abraham move or resettled him. It is the technical word for planting a colony. In the only other NT use in Acts 7:43 metoikizo takes on a more negative connotation and speaks of forcible removal or deportation, sending into, for God says "I also will remove you beyond Babylon."

Metoikizo - 9x in Septuagint - Jdg. 2:3; 1 Chr. 5:6; 1 Chr. 5:26; 1 Chr. 8:6; Jer. 20:4; Jer. 22:12; Lam. 1:3; Hos. 10:5; Amos 5:27

John Piper elaborates on "had him move" - "According to verse 4, Abraham makes it half way to the promised land and settles in Haran. But God is merciful and does more than merely tell Abraham to go on to the promised land; **He actually moves him**—exerts some special power on Abraham...So God's mercy begins with choosing Abraham out of all the peoples on the earth to inherit the promised land; and God's patience begins by giving Abraham an extra push to get all the way to the promised land when he had settled half way in Haran.." (The Story of a Stiff Necked People)

Homer Kent comments on an apparent age discrepancy in Abraham's father Terah - The death of Abraham's father Terah is placed before Abraham's departure from Haran. A comparison of the data in Genesis (Ge 11:26, 32; 12:4) seems to indicate that Terah lived another 60 years after Abraham left. Genesis states that Terah was 70 when he fathered his oldest son, presumably Abraham (Ge 11:26). Since Abraham was 75 when he left Haran (Ge 12:4), Terah would have been 145. Yet Terah did not die till he was 205 (Ge 11:32). The best solution seems to be that Abraham was not the oldest son of Terah, but was named first because he was the most prominent (Ge 11:26). If Abraham was born when Terah was 130, the figures are harmonized." (Jerusalem to Rome)

William Larkin has a similar explanation - If Terah was seventy years old when Abraham was born (Gen 11:26) and Abraham was seventy-five when he left Haran for Canaan (Acts 12:4), and this occurred after Terah's death (Acts 7:4), Terah must have been 145 when he died. But Genesis 11:32 says he was 205. How do we account for the sixty years? It is not necessary to see the discrepancy as due to Luke's dependence on a variant textual tradition (as Marshall 1980:135; compare Samaritan Pentateuch Gen 11:32) or as an example of the natural reading of the text by an ordinary reader (Lake and Cadbury 1979:70), what Longenecker labels the conflation practice and inexactitude of popular Judaism (1981:340). Gleason Archer's (1982:378) solution overcomes the difficulty. If we take Abraham not as Terah's eldest but as his youngest son, though he is mentioned first because of his prominence in the narrative, it is possible to propose that he was born some time after Terah was seventy, even sixty years later—that is, when he was 130. This would account for the missing sixty years and harmonize the passages. (Acts 7:1-53 Stephen's Speech)

A T Robertson says essentially the same thing as Kent - It is possible (Hackett, Felten) that Abraham is mentioned first in Gen. 11:26 because he became the most prominent and was really younger than Haran his brother who died before the first migration who was really sixty years older than Abraham. According to this view Terah was 130 years old at the birth of Abraham, leaving Abraham 75 at the death of Terah (205).

Thomas Constable applies Abraham's example of faith to move to a country he had never seen based solely on God's Word of promise - The father of Judaism was willing to depart from where he was to follow God into unknown territory on the word of God alone. The Jews in Stephen's day were not willing to depart from where they were in their thinking even though God's word was leading them to do so, as Stephen would point out. Stephen wanted them to follow Abraham's good example of faith and courage. (Acts 7 Commentary)

Acts 7:5 "But He gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot of ground, and yet, even when he had no child, He promised that HE WOULD GIVE IT TO HIM AS A POSSESSION, AND TO HIS DESCENDANTS AFTER HIM. (NASB: Lockman)

> KJV 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.

- **he gave** Ge 23:4; Ps 105:11,12; Heb 11:9,10,13-16
- **not** Dt 2:5
- **yet** Ge 12:7; 13:15; 15:3,18; 17:8; 26:3; 28:13-15; Ex 6:7,8; Dt 6:10,11; 9:5; 10:11; 11:9; 34:4; Neh 9:8; Ps 105:8-11
- **when** Ge 15:2-5; 16:2; 17:16-19
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

ABRAHAM'S FAITH IN GOD'S PROMISES

This verse could be subtitled fulfillment deferred "for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God....All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth." (Heb 11:10,13) All who follow Christ in the footsteps of Abraham, should daily seek to live with this Spirit enabled heart attitude of "fulfillment deferred" until we reach our home in heaven. As David wrote "You will make known to me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; In Your right hand there are pleasures forever." (Ps 16:11) The toys of this passing earth will never fulfill our deepest, God given longings to be in the presence of Jesus for only there will will experience fullness of joy and pleasures forever. Lord God enable us to live with a fulfillment deferred mentality, with our eyes fixed on Jesus. Amen.

But He gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot of ground(cf Dt 2:5)**, and yet, even when he had no child, He promised that HE WOULD GIVE IT TO HIM AS A POSSESSION, AND TO HIS DESCENDANTS AFTER HIM** - While God gave Abraham no plot (of land), He did give him a promise of a life, legacy and later land. And standing on the promises of God Abraham remained a pilgrim not a permanent settler. The words of the writer of Hebrews come to mind - "And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence (AS ABRAHAM) so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises." (Heb 6:11-12+)

Recalling that "**faith** comes by **hearing** and **hearing** by the **Word of God**," (Ro 10:17KJV+) notice that God in His mercy and grace repeatedly fortified Abraham's faith by reiterating His covenant promises (Ge 12:7; 13:15; 15:2-5, 18; Ge 17:8; 24:7).

James Montgomery Boice observes that "This statement [that Abraham remained a pilgrim in Canaan] must have been meant as a rebuke to these settled leaders of the people. They were in the land God had given. It was a blessing. But they were too much at home in the land. They had forgotten that, wonderful as possession of the land of promise was, they were nevertheless only to be pilgrims in it as Abraham had been. Without this orientation, they lacked the spiritual depth that characterized their ancestor. Abraham, we are told in Hebrews, was not looking for an earthly city, but “to the city with foundations [the heavenly city], whose architect and builder is God” (Heb. 11:10). These rulers had ceased to look forward. They were looking back, and they had taken the things of the world and the blessings of the world to be permanent. They had allowed God’s temporal blessings to eclipse their sense of God’s presence."

Phillips - Stephen was still undermining the notion that the Temple was a permanent institution. Abraham had no tangible possession even in Canaan. His faith was exercised along purely spiritual lines. He had the promise but not the place... Stephen was underlining the purely spiritual roots of the Hebrew faith and pointing to the purely spiritual nature of New Testament Christianity, which takes little or no account of sacred shrines and holy places. (Exploring Acts)

We read about this in Genesis 15

> Abram said, “O Lord GOD, what will You give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” 3And Abram said, “Since You have given no offspring to me, one born in my house is my heir.” 4Then behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, “This man will not be your heir; but one who will come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir.” 5And He took him outside and said, “Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” And He said to him, “So shall your descendants be.”(Ge 15:2-5)

And what was Abraham's response to God's promise?

> Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness. (Ge 15:6)

What is Stephen's point in this description of Abraham? He is describing Abraham's faith. The writer of Hebrews put it this way...

> **By faith** he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; for (term of explanation - what is he explaining?) he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. (Hebrews 11:9-10+)

As **David Thomson** observes that "Abraham, who was the Father of the Jews, whom they could not deny had a special relationship with God, never had a specific spot to live in. God’s hand of blessing was on Abraham even though he didn’t own any of the land and was just a pilgrim with no inheritance."

Note that in Ge 23:13-18 we see that Abraham purchased a cave at Machpelah to bury Sarah, but it was not **given** to him as a gift from God.

Toussaint makes the point that what Stephen is doing here is showing from Israel's own history that the blessings of God were "not limited to the land of Israel and the Temple area. Some of Israel's greatest favors were bestowed apart from the temple and the land." And here in Acts 7:5 we see that Abraham was called out of Mesopotamia and received God's promise of the Land (promised land, the land of Palestine, the land of Israel) for himself and his descendants before he was actually in the land.

Inheritance (2817)(**kleronomia** from **kleros** = lot + **némo** = give or distribute) is literally that which is distributed by lot. Literally kleronomia refers to what is received as a gift from someone who has died and figuratively in a religious sense as God's promised gifts.

David Guzik explains that "Abraham was promised both the land and descendants, but had no outward proof of either. He could only trust God for the fulfillment of these things. With this, **Stephen emphasized a relationship with God on the basis of faith and not outward evidences like a temple or the structure of institutional religion and its customs.**. Even when Abraham was in the land, he was a pilgrim. He didn't make an idol out of the blessings God had either given or promised. This was a rebuke to the religious leaders Stephen spoke to, because many among them had stopped being pilgrims and they made idols out of the blessings of the temple and the land. (Acts 7 Commentary)

Corrie Ten Boom has an apt description of Abraham's faith - Faith is like radar that sees through the fog the reality of things at a distance that the human eye cannot see.

Derek Thomas comments that "As though to emphasize the association of God's presence with geography in the minds of his hearers, Stephen reminded the members of the Sanhedrin that Abraham—the great father-figure of the Jews—did not possess so much as one square inch of soil in Israel, let alone Jerusalem (Acts 7:5). God was present with Abraham, even though he was a migrant with nowhere to call "home."" (Ibid)

Horton - God—while Abraham still "had no child"—promised to give it to him and to his descendants for "'an everlasting possession'" (Gen. 17:8). So Abraham trusted God's word, accepted the promise, and put his life in God's hand. (Acts: A Logion Press Commentary)

Rex A Koivisto summarizes what he feels to be Stephen's main theological point regarding his review of the life of Abraham --

> The theological point of this section is clear: **the God of Israel is not tied to the land (upon which the Temple rests). The land must not be given the overriding significance that the Jewish contemporaries of Stephen were giving to it.** It certainly has importance as the gift of God to the descendants of Abraham in the fulfillment of promise (Acts 7:6–7), but to require that the God of the promise be limited in his revelation and/or worship to one place is to reduce that God to a localized deity unworthy of proper respect. That this consideration should be important to Luke in his theology and structure of Acts is clear. To this point the Church itself had been localized in Jerusalem, impeding progress on the fulfillment of the Great Commission (Acts 1:8). It is only after Stephen's speech and martyrdom that the Word of God is finally extended beyond Judea. In view of this connection, it is difficult to deny that the theology of Stephen was central to the theology of Luke as he composed Acts. (Stephen's Speech: A Theology of Errors? - Grace Theological Journal. 8.1 1987. 101-114)

Life Application - Stephen used his knowledge that all Jews were well acquainted with the story of Abraham to prod his listeners into going beneath the mere facts of the patriarch's existence. Stephen pointed to spiritual lessons from Abraham's life. Abraham trusted God in situations where common sense would have led most people to doubt. Similarly, human reason had convinced the Jewish leaders that a simple carpenter from Nazareth could not possibly be the promised Messiah. Using the life of Abraham, Stephen reminded his audience that God seldom acts in an expected manner. Don't let your familiarity with Bible stories blind you to God's working behind the scenes. Learn the lessons of faith that are gained from reflecting on the lives of biblical saints. (Life Application Bible Commentary – Acts)

Acts 7:6 "But God spoke to this effect, that his DESCENDANTS WOULD BE ALIENS IN A FOREIGN LAND, AND THAT THEY WOULD BE ENSLAVED AND MISTREATED FOR FOUR HUNDRED YEARS. (NASB: Lockman)

> KJV 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.

- **that his DESCENDANTS WOULD BE ALIENS** Ge 15:13,16

- **four hundred years** Ex 12:40,41; Gal 3:17
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

MISTREATED FOR 400 YEARS

Mistreated but not forgotten. Perhaps you need to hear and receive that truth if you are a follower of Christ and have been mistreated and feel as if your Covenant keeping God has forgotten you and your plight! His Name is still Immanuel, God with us! His Word is still "I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU," (5 negatives in that passage!) (Heb 13:5+)

But God spoke to this effect - Stephen was accused of blaspheming God (Acts 6:11), but here is speaking of God's omniscience to be able to predict the future.

That his DESCENDANTS WOULD BE ALIENS IN A FOREIGN LAND - Israel would be living in a foreign country (Egypt) but would never become citizens of Egypt. Like Abraham they would have no permanent land in Egypt. They would retain their identity as Israelites.

Stephen is quoting in part from Genesis 15

> God said to Abram, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years...."Then in the fourth generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete." (Ge 15:13,16)

David Thompson - Here were God's people not even living in the land and they were enslaved in a foreign nation until God would deliver them. Israel could not save themselves; God would save them, but they were still God's people even though they weren't even in the Land.

Aliens (3941)(**paroikos** from **para** = beside + **oikos** = dwelling, home) means literally to dwell near and thus to have a home alongside of. It refers to a person living in a foreign land *alongside* of people who are not of his kind or to a period spent in a foreign land without taking out or being granted rights of citizenship. Paroikos is also used in Acts 7:29.

AND THAT THEY WOULD BE ENSLAVED AND MISTREATED FOR FOUR HUNDRED YEARS - As noted above, Stephen is quoting from Genesis 15:13. Note that Ex 12:40 says "the time that the sons of Israel lived in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years." Galatians 3:17 says "the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later." Most commentators (e.g., John Calvin) feel that Stephen was rounding off the number but there are other suggestions. See Chart Comparing 400 years to 430 years.

Enslaved (1402)(**douloo** related to **doulos**) means that the Israelites who had been free under Joseph's reign were to be in a state of absolute obedience and bondage as slaves to Pharaoh and the Egyptians.

Mistreated (2559)(**kakoo** from **kakos** = bad, evil) means to harm or do evil to - physically to mistreat (Acts 7:6) or morally to embitter or poison one's mind causing them to think badly about another (Acts 14:2). This same verb is used in the Septuagint of Ex 1:11 which describes Israel's mistreatment in Egypt. In Nu 20:15 Moses records "the Egyptians treated us and our fathers badly (Lxx = kakoo)."

Kakoo - 6x - Acts 7:6; Acts 7:19; Acts 12:1; Acts 14:2; Acts 18:10; 1 Pet. 3:13

Kakoo - 54x in the Septuagint -

> Ge 15:13 (Quoted by Stephen); Ge 16:6; Ge 19:9; Ex 1:11; Ex 5:22; Ex 5:23; Ex 22:21; Ex 22:22; Ex 22:23; Nu 11:11; Nu 16:15; Nu 20:15; Num. 24:24; Num. 29:7; Num. 30:13; Deut. 8:2; Deut. 8:3; Deut. 8:16; Deut. 26:6; Jos. 24:5; Jos. 24:20; Jdg. 2:18; Ruth 1:21 "the Almighty has **afflicted** - kakoo"); 1 Ki. 17:20; Job 20:26; Job 22:9; Job 24:24; Job 30:11; Job 31:30; Ps. 27:2; Ps. 38:8; Ps. 44:2; Ps. 89:22; Ps. 94:5; Ps. 106:32; Ps. 107:39; Eccl. 7:22; Eccl. 8:9; Isa. 41:23; Isa. 50:9; Isa. 53:7; Jer. 25:6; Jer. 25:29; Jer. 31:28; Jer. 44:27; Ezek. 33:12; Dan. 10:12; Hos. 9:7; Zeph. 1:12; Zech. 8:14; Zech. 10:2;

Phillips comments that Israel's 400 years of enslavement in Egypt "was an implied rebuke, too, to those who thought that biblical belief had to be tied to a Temple. At the very beginning of Jewish national life, and for four long centuries, the chosen people were not even in the Promised Land!...The high priest and his party could hardly escape the drift of Stephen's argument." (Exploring Acts)

Acts 7:7 "AND WHATEVER NATION TO WHICH THEY WILL BE IN BONDAGE I MYSELF WILL JUDGE,' said God, 'AND AFTER THAT THEY WILL COME OUT AND SERVE ME IN THIS PLACE.' (NASB: Lockman)

> KJV Acts 7:7 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.

- **the nation** Ge 15:14-16; Ex 7:1-14; Neh 9:9-11; Ps 74:12-14; 78:43-51; Ps 105:27-36; 135:8,9; 136:10-15; Isa 51:9,10
- **and serve** Ex 3:12
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

GOD SAFEGUARDS HIS PROMISE TO ABRAHAM

AND WHATEVER NATION TO WHICH THEY WILL BE IN BONDAGE I MYSELF WILL JUDGE,' said God - "Whatever nation" is clearly Egypt but it is stated in this somewhat obtuse manner because Stephen is quoting from the Septuagint of Ge 15:14 which has "And the nation whomsoever they shall serve I will judge."

Will be in bondage (1398)(**douleuo** from **doulos**) means that Israel was in the position as servants, in bondage, subjected to and serving the Egyptians. In contrast to douloo above this verb specifically includes the idea of serving while douloo means to make one a slave without necessarily conveying the idea of serving.

Will judge (2919)(krino) is described in Exodus in the 10 plagues on Egypt. In (Ex 7:1-14) we read

> Then the LORD said to Moses, “See, I make you as God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet. 2 “You shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall speak to Pharaoh that he let the sons of Israel go out of his land. 3 “But I will harden Pharaoh’s heart that I may multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt. 4 “When Pharaoh does not listen to you, then I will lay My hand on Egypt and bring out My hosts, My people the sons of Israel, from the land of Egypt by great judgments. 5 “The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the sons of Israel from their midst.”

AND AFTER THAT THEY WILL COME OUT AND SERVE (WORSHIP) **ME IN THIS PLACE** - Ex 3:12 says "when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship (Lxx = latreuo) God at this mountain.” Stephen changes it to "this place," but seems to still indicate that the Israelites will worship at Mount Sinai.

God would deliver them from bondage as he says later using a man named Moses. Although Stephen never uses the specific Name of Jesus in this lengthy message, one cannot help but think that he was recalling this prophecy of Israel's deliverance from bondage as a picture of the Deliverer (the Messiah) who came to deliver men from enslavement to sin. As Jesus told the Jews who ostensibly had believed in Him (they had made a profession) ""If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” (Jn 8:31-32)

Paul Apple gives us some application questions based on this passage - Do we grasp the depth of our bondage – what **original sin** and **total depravity** mean in our own situation? Have we appreciated the precious value of our **redemption**? Do we live as those delivered from the **power of sin**? How are we serving God in the place where He has put us right now? (The Spread of the Gospel)

Will serve ("will worship" - ESV, CSB, NLT)(3000)(**latreuo** from **latris** = one hired or **latron** = reward, wages) means to work for reward, for hire or for pay, to be in servitude, render cultic service. **Latreuo** was used literally for bodily service (e.g., workers on the land, or slaves), and figuratively for “to cherish.” Hear Stephen uses this verb to convey the idea of rendering service to God, including worship, performance of sacred services.

This place - What place? We have alluded to this above. The place appears to be Mount Sinai (Horeb). This is clearly a "jab" at the Sanhedrin who hold that the only place to worship God is in the Temple in Jerusalem.

Note also that while Stephen says Abraham and his offspring will serve (worship) God they do so without the benefit of either the Tabernacle or the Temple. Stephen's is reminding the Sanhedrin that the everlasting covenant supersedes the temple and that worship of God does not require one to be at the Temple in Jerusalem.

Bob Utley says "In the context of the quote from Ex 3:12, this refers to Mt. Sinai, which is also outside the Promised Land."

Chris Vogel adds that "Stephen then makes a play on words in Acts 7:7. Quoting from Exodus 3:12 he refers to **this place**.” Up to this point “this place” in the discussion of Acts refers to the temple on Mt. Zion, but the context of Exodus refers to Mt. Sinai. The goal of God’s promise was not the land, but the relationship. The place that is important to God is the place where God meets his people.

Acts 7:8 "And He gave him the covenant of circumcision; and so Abraham became the father of Isaac, and circumcised him on the eighth day; and Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob of the twelve patriarchs. (NASB: Lockman)

> KJV Acts 7:8 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.

- **the covenant of circumcision** Ge 17:9-14; John 7:22; Ro 4:10; Gal 3:15,17
- **and so Abraham became the father of Isaac** Ge 17:12; 21:1-4
- **and Isaac became the father of Jacob** Ge 25:21-26; 1 Chr 1:34; Mt 1:2; Ro 9:9-13
- **and Jacob of the twelve patriarchs** Ge 29:31-35; 30:1-24; 35:16,23-26; Ex 1:1-4; 1 Chr 2:1,2
- **patriarchs** Acts 2:29; Heb 7:4
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

THE SIGN OF THE COVENANT
EXTERNAL CIRCUMCISION

Circumcision was a token or reminder of the promise God had given to Abraham and the implication was that it was passed on to his son **Isaac**, then to **Jacob** and then to the 12 sons of Jacob. But it was a promise which was based on faith, faith just as Abraham had manifested in leaving his home and going to Canaan. It was not based on works nor on keeping the Mosaic Law (as the Sanhedrin taught would gain righteousness) because there was no Mosaic Law in existence for Abraham to keep.

And He gave him the covenant of circumcision - Why does Stephen review this OT teaching? What is the **covenant of circumcision** a sign of? If one reads the immediate preceding context (in Genesis 17) of God's command to Abraham to circumcise himself and his offspring, it is clear that the covenant referred to is God's promises in the Abrahamic Covenant.

Genesis 17 recounts the Abrahamic covenant and its relation to the covenant of circumcision (note the repetition of "I will")

> **I** (JEHOVAH) **will** make you (ABRAHAM) exceedingly fruitful, and **I will** make nations of you, and kings will come forth from you. 7 "**I will** establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you. 8 "**I will** give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and **I will** be their God." (NOTE SWITCH FROM "I WILL" GOD'S PROVISION TO "YOU SHALL" MAN'S RESPONSIBILITY) 9 God said further to Abraham, "Now as for you, **you shall** keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. 10 "This is My covenant, which **you shall** keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: every male among **you shall** be circumcised. (Ge 17:6-10)
>
> > **Criswell** comments that "Circumcision, i.e., the removal of the foreskin from the male sexual organ, had several purposes. It distinguished the seed of Abraham from the Gentiles, reminded Israel of their covenant with God, and represented purification and putting away of evil (cf. Deut. 10:16; Jer. 4:4; Rom. 2:26; Col. 2:11, 12). Thus, the **Abrahamic covenant,** although conveying unconditional promises to Abraham, also included obligations by which individual descendants would express their faith and enjoy the blessings. Circumcision was an act of obedience and faith."

Paul elaborates on this foundational truth in Romans 4

> What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? 2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. 3 For what does the Scripture say? "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS." (Ge 15:6+)...10 How then was it credited? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised; 11 and he received the sign of circumcision, **a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised**, so that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be credited to them, 12 and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised (THIS WOULD APPLY TO ACTS 7:8 - ISAAC, JACOB, THE 12 PATRIARCHS). 13 For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith. (Ro 4:1-3, 10-13+)

The Nelson Study Bible on **covenant of circumcision** - The **covenant of circumcision** was the symbol given to Abraham that he might never forget that God had promised to bless him. The sign of this promise was transmitted from generation to generation, from Genesis 17 to the time of Stephen's confrontation with the Sanhedrin. Abraham was saved by faith (Ge 15:6+), and the symbol of **circumcision** was an outward sign demonstrating the genuineness of his faith. Similarly, God would bless Stephen's audience not because of their **circumcision**, but because of their faith (like Abraham).

Bruce Barton on **covenant of circumcision** - Stephen pointed out that God always had kept his side of the promise (**ED**: SEE THE "I WILL'S IN Ge 17:6-10), but Israel had failed, again and again, to keep its side. Although the Jews in Stephen's day still circumcised their baby boys, they failed to obey God. The people's hearts were far from him. Their lack of faith and lack of obedience meant that they had failed to keep their part of the covenant (ED: SEE Ro 2:28, 29+). (Life Application Commentary)

Simon Kistemaker - Stephen's purpose for introducing the concept **covenant** at this juncture is to show that it precedes the Temple and Law and therefore is basic to Israel's religion. Thus he clears himself of the accusation that he has blasphemed against the Law and against God. By establishing a covenant with Abraham and his descendants, God declares His enduring love toward His people. In the historical account of God confirming His covenant with Abraham, God calls this covenant "My covenant" nine times (Ge 17:2–21). God initiates and maintains it throughout the generations as an everlasting covenant.

Related Resources:

- Abrahamic versus Mosaic
- Covenant: Abrahamic vs Old vs New
- What is the Abrahamic Covenant?

Although this does not seem to be Stephen's main emphasis, it is still worth noting that another point his statement in Acts 7:8 would make with the Sanhedrin is that God had many dealings with Abraham before the commanding the **covenant of circumcision**. To the Jew it was the rite of **circumcision** what made a man acceptable to God. They had distorted the clear teaching of Scripture. How? They they failed to read that God gave **circumcision** only as a sign of the covenant (Ge 17:11). In other words, **circumcision** was always meant to be an external sign of an internal work of grace by faith. Recall that sometime between age **75-86** (Cannot date from Scripture) Abraham believed God's promise and was justified (declared righteous) before God (Ge 15:5,6+). But he was not circumcised until 10 to 20 years later at the age 99! What the Sanhedrin and the majority of Jews had failed to understand was that the circumcision that God was interested in was Circumcision of their Heart.

Paul Apple notes that "Jewish leaders loved everything that their **circumcision** represented – their connection to Abraham and the patriarchs; their connection to Moses and the law; their connection to Jerusalem and the temple – Circumcision was a badge of great honor; spoke of God's loyal covenant love to His chosen people; but they missed the point of all of God's revelation which pointed to the fulfillment of everything in the person of the promised Messiah Jesus Christ. No individual blessing apart from faith in God and His promises. (The Spread of the Gospel)

And so Abraham became the father of Isaac, and circumcised him on the eighth day; and Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob of the twelve patriarchs - Why does Stephen mention Isaac and Jacob and then the 12 **patriarchs** (not 12 sons but 12 patriarchs)? Yes all of Stephen's hearers had been circumcised like Isaac and Jacob and the 12 patriarchs, but covenant of circumcision had a different meaning to the Sanhedrin then it did to their esteemed patriarchs. To the patriarchs circumcision was a sign of their faith in the Abrahamic Covenant. To the Sanhedrin it was a sign of their being chosen by God for heaven, and no longer was a marker of their faith in the Abrahamic Covenant. They put their faith (so to speak) in the sign, the physical circumcision, not in the unconditional covenant of grace that the sign was meant to point to. Such is the danger of ritual, which may have at one time had a valid meaning pointing to a spiritual reality, but over time losing that meaning and no longer pointing to the spiritual reality. The danger of ritual is to replace the relationship to which the ritual was meant to point. That is exactly what happened to the Jews and their understanding of the covenant of circumcision. It was no longer about their covenant relationship to Jehovah.

It is notable that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were the "founding fathers" of the nation of Israel and so it is fitting that God is often referred to as "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (see Exodus 3:16).

Circumcised him on the eighth day - As a side note - I have a background in the medical field of blood coagulation and the Biblical charge to circumcise on the 8th day is scientifically accurate. It is based on the fact that prothombin levels are low in the first 8 days of an infant's life and circumcision could potentially result in exsanguination because of inability to clot.

Derek Thomas on **circumcision** - The Sanhedrin felt safe and secure because they had the outward symbols (CIRCUMCISION). Abraham lived sub specie aeternitatis—in the light of eternity. Having the outward symbols of church membership is no guarantee whatsoever of eternal life and the forgiveness of sins. Only faith alone in Jesus Christ alone can assure us of that.

Warren Wiersbe comments "The Jews prided themselves in their circumcision, failing to understand that the rite was symbolic of an inner spiritual relationship with God (Dt. 10:16; Jer. 4:4; 6:10; Acts 7:51; Gal. 5:1-6; Php 3:3; Col. 2:11-12+). Over the years, the fulfilling of ritual had taken the place of the enjoyment of reality. This happens in churches even today. (Bible Exposition Commentary).

Thomas Constable sums up Stephen's first section of teaching on Abraham noting that "Throughout his speech Stephen made many statements that had revolutionary implications for traditional Jewish thinking of his day. He did not expound these implications, but they are clear in view of what the disciples of Jesus were preaching. As such his speech is a masterpiece of understatement, or rather non-statement. That the Sanhedrin saw these implications and rejected them becomes clear at the end of the speech when they reacted as negatively as possible." (Acts 7 Commentary)

Polhill - This was not just a matter of covenant obedience....It was a matter of God's covenant faithfulness. Stephen is no blasphemer. He approves of God's covenant ways. (NAC-Acts)

John Stott - We cannot miss Stephen's emphasis on the divine initiative. It was God who appeared, spoke, sent, promised, punished and rescued. From Ur to Haran, from Haran to Canaan, from Canaan to Egypt, from Egypt back to Canaan again, God was directing each stage of his people's pilgrimage. Although the whole fertile crescent from the River Euphrates to the River Nile was the scene of their migrations, God was with them. Why was this? It was because he gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision (8), that is, made a solemn promise to Abraham to bless him and his posterity, and gave him circumcision to signify and seal this covenant. So, long before there was a holy place, there was a holy people, to whom God had pledged himself. He then renewed the promise he had made to Abraham, first to his son Isaac, then to his grandson Jacob, and then to his great-grandsons the twelve patriarchs (8b). Thus Stephen makes the transition from Abraham to Joseph, the second great figure of the Old Testament he singles out (9–16). (Message of Acts)

Ray Stedman writes "I will never forget the young man who came into my study one day, Bible in hand, and announced that he had been reading the Bible. He didn't know a lot about it, but he said, "Would you circumcise me?" I blinked three or four times, then said, "Why?" He said, "I've been reading in this Bible that if you want to know God you have to be circumcised. I want to know God, so I want to be circumcised." I had the joy of telling him what circumcision meant, that it was simply a sign of something that was already true by faith. That boy became a Christian and is still in our congregation and growing in the Lord." (Read full sermon text **The Father of Faith**)

Here are some examples of the false belief of the Jews regarding circumcision -

> The Jewish apocryphal **Book of Jubilees** declares: This law is for all generations for ever, and there is no circumcision of the time, and no passing over one day out of the eight days; for it is an eternal ordinance, ordained and written on the heavenly tables. And every one that is born, the flesh of whose foreskin is not circumcised on the eighth day, belongs not to the children of the covenant which the Lord made with Abraham, for he belongs to the children of destruction; nor is there moreover any sign on him that he is the Lord's but (he is destined) to be destroyed and slain from the earth.
>
> Many Jews believed that salvation was based on their obedience to God in being circumcised, and that, therefore, their eternal security rested in that rite. In his commentary on the Book of Moses, Rabbi Menachem wrote, "Our Rabbins [rabbis] have said that no circumcised man will ever see hell" Circumcision was considered such a mark of God's favor that it was taught that if a Jew had practiced idolatry his circumcision must first be removed before he could go down to hell. Since it is humanly impossible to remove circumcision, presumably that would be accomplished by a direct act of God.
>
> The Jalkut Rubem taught that "Circumcision saves from hell" (num. 1), and the Midrash Millim that "God swore to Abraham that no one who was circumcised should be sent to hell" (fol. 7, col. 2).
>
> The book Akedath Jizehak taught that "Abraham sits before the gate of hell, and does not allow that any circumcised Israelite should enter there" (fol. 54, col. 2).

LIFE APPLICATION - THE PROBLEM WITH RITUAL - The Jewish rite of circumcision, like Israel's regular sacrifices and annual feasts, was intended to be a very meaningful event. As with all religious rituals, circumcision was designed to serve as an outer symbol of an inner reality. Those who participated thoughtfully would be reminded of profound spiritual truths. But we know from our own experiences of repeating the church creeds, saying the Lord's Prayer, or celebrating ordinances like baptism and the Lord's Supper that it is difficult to avoid merely going through the motions. We are often guilty of participating passively and mindlessly in religious exercises. Make it your goal to give God your full attention (body, soul, and spirit) the next time you pray, take Communion, or take part in a church ceremony. (Life Application Bible Commentary – Acts)

- Are there supposed to be any rituals in Christianity?

Acts 7:9 "The patriarchs became jealous of Joseph and sold him into Egypt. Yet God was with him, (NASB: Lockman)

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

- **patriarchs became jealous of Joseph** Ge 37:4-11; 49:23; Mt 27:18
- **sold** Ge 37:18-29; 45:4; 50:15-20; Ps 105:17
- **yet** Ge 39:2,5,21-23; 49:24; Isa 41:10; 43:2
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

THE EFFECT OF
BEING FILLED WITH JEALOUSY

The depiction above is "Joseph's Coat Brought to Jacob" by Giovanni Andrea de Ferrari (1640).

The patriarchs became jealous of Joseph and sold him into Egypt - Acts 7:8 ends with "the twelve patriarchs" which is interesting in that he did not call them 12 sons. Why call them **patriarchs**? (patriarches only Acts 2:29, 7:8, 9, Heb 7:4) What do they do? They reject their brother because of jealousy (Read Ge 37:11, 28). The Sanhedrin esteemed these men as their patriarchs and yet here Stephen says they mistreated their brother. As you consider this story, the parallels between Joseph and Jesus become very clear. Jesus was rejected by His brethren the Jews.

MacArthur - "You know," he says, "you're always revering the **patriarchs**. 'Ah, wonderful **patriarchs**. We love and esteem the **patriarchs**.' You know what your wonderful **patriarchs** did? They sold Joseph. God had given Joseph the birthright. God had proclaimed him as the progenitor, or as the right of primogenitor (1 Chr 5:1). He had the one who had the birthright. And God was with him, but you were against him." And here comes the beginning of the indictment. "God exalted Joseph. You debased him (Sermon)....Joseph's brothers rejected the very one God had set apart for special blessing (Ge 37:5ff.; 1 Chr 5:1). They were a graphic illustration of the nation's spiritual blindness manifested in the case of Jesus. (MacArthur New Testament Commentary – Acts)

John Phillips - Their unbelief had begun with their treatment of Joseph, one of the great types of Christ in the Old Testament. As the Sanhedrin had rejected Jesus, so the patriarchs rejected Joseph, and for the same reason-envy. (Exploring Acts)

Became jealous (2206)(**zeloo** from **zelos** = zeal from **zeo** = boil; English word "zeal") means to be fervent, to "boil" with envy or jealousy. This description of the patriarchs (held in high esteem by the Sanhedrin) must have caused a stir as the Sadducees themselves had been filled with jealousy of the apostles (Acts 5:17) and ultimately "were cut to the quick" by the teaching of the apostles and were "intending to slay them," until Gamaliel stepped in for the rescue. The point is that the members of the Sanhedrin had reacted with jealously just as had the jealous patriarchs so that the implications and intent of Stephen's story would have been unmistakable. Sadducees were surely squirming in their seats!

This same verb **zeloo** is used in the Septuagint in Ge 37:11 "His brothers **were jealous** (Lxx = zeloo) of him, but his father kept the saying in mind." Zeloo was also used in the Septuagint to describe the jealousy against Moses (Nu 11:29), again Jews being jealous of the one God had chosen to be their deliverer!

Yet - Term of contrast. In this case Stephen presents a strong contrast between the way Joseph's brothers treated him and the way God treated him.

Horton comments that "Stephen is leading also to a comparison with the way the Jewish leaders treated Jesus and the way God exalted Him. (Acts: A Logion Press Commentary)

God was with him - Despite being rejected, God was faithful and protected Joseph, even as he did Jesus. Note the

Warren Wiersbe points out that in Acts 7:9-36 Israel "rejected their God-sent deliverers." This would certainly prepare them for Stephen's accusation that just like their fathers the Sanhedrin had rejected their Deliverer the **Righteous One** (Acts 7:51-53)

MacArthur - Stephen makes inescapably clear that the twelve patriarchs were guilty of opposing God and His purpose. They sold Joseph, but God rescued him. The nation's rebellion against God thus began with the patriarchs themselves. (MacArthur New Testament Commentary – Acts)

David Thompson summarizes Stephen's use of the illustration of Joseph's life - Joseph was hated by his brothers because he received a revelatory dream from God and was the favorite of his father. **Stephen is using this illustration** because Jesus was hated, rejected, and mistreated by these religious leaders because He is the revelation of God and He is the only begotten Son of God. Eight facts are brought out:

- (Fact #1) - God was with Joseph. Acts 7:9b
- (Fact #2) - God rescued Joseph and blessed Joseph. Acts 7:10
- (Fact #3) - God caused a famine to hit and the Jews were running out of food. Acts 7:11
- (Fact #4) - Jacob sent the patriarchs to Egypt to buy food. Acts 7:12
- (Fact #5) - Joseph revealed himself to his brothers on their second visit. Acts 7:13
- (Fact #6) - Joseph sent word to Jacob and all his seventy-five relatives came to live with him. Acts 7:14
- (Fact #7) - Jacob went down to Egypt and died. Acts 7:15
- (Fact #8) - Jacob was taken from Egypt back to Shechem to be buried. Acts 7:16

God was working outside of Israel. His hand was on Joseph outside of the Promised Land and the only land they had was a burial tomb. Joseph was hated by his family, just like Jesus. **You cannot limit God's work with people to a Temple because God saves people from all over the world; He did it with Israel when they were in Egypt.** (Sermon)

Related Resources:

- What can we learn from the life of Joseph?
- What is the story of Joseph and his brothers?
- What is the story of Joseph and Potiphar?

Acts 7:10 and rescued him from all his afflictions, and granted him favor and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and he made him governor over Egypt and all his household. (NASB: Lockman)

> KJV 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.

- **rescued** Ge 48:16; Ps 22:24; 34:17-19; 37:40; 40:1-3; 2 Ti 4:18; James 5:11; Rev 7:14
- **granted** Ge 41:12-46; 42:6; 44:18; 45:8,9; Ps 105:19-22; Pr 2:6; 3:4; 16:7

THE FUTURE DELIVERER
RESCUED BY GOD

The picture above is "Joseph Interprets the Dream of Pharaoh" by Jean-Adrien Guignet (19th century). God granted Joseph favor and he was made governor over Egypt.

And rescued him - "Snatched him out" is the picture. This is a clear manifestation of the fact that God was indeed "**with him**." The verb **rescued** is **exaireo** which literally means to take out. So what God did was take Joseph out, delivering him from perilous circumstances. Stephen uses this same verb in Acts 7:34 to describe God's coming down to rescue His chosen people from oppression in Egypt, using Moses as His instrument to bring about their deliverance (Acts 7:35).

From all his afflictions - Stephen **afflictions** plural because Joseph had more than one affliction, but God was ready and able every time and **rescued** him. And beloved He is the same God. You may currently be in a trial, just coming out of a trial or (yes) getting ready to enter a trial (unbeknownst to you), but "since (JESUS) Himself was tempted (tested) in that which He has suffered, **He is able** to come to the aid (boetheo - come to your aid on hearing a cry for help! So cry out!) of those who are tempted (being tested)." (Heb 2:18+)

Afflictions (2347)(**thlipsis** from **thlibo** = to crush, press together) is a strong term which originally expressed physical pressure on

Joseph. He did not experience a few minor inconveniences, but real hardships. Thlipsis is used here of Joseph's severe tribulations, but in Acts 7:11 of the great affliction (thlipsis) that came upon Israel because of the famine.

Medically **thlipsis** was used of the pulse (pressure). It descirbes a pressing together as of grapes and conveys the idea of being squeezed or placed under pressure, crushed beneath a weight. According to the ancient law of England those who willfully refused to plead guilty had heavy weights placed on their breasts, and were pressed and crushed to death, depicting literally the idea of **thlipsis**.

Vincent on **thlipsis** - **Tribulation** is perhaps as accurate a rendering as is possible, being derived from *tribulum,* the threshing-roller of the Romans. In both the idea *of pressure* is dominant, though θλ ψιμ, does not convey the idea of *separation* (as of corn from husk) which is implied in *tribulatio.* Trench cites, in illustration of θλ ψις, *pressure,* the provision of the old English law, by which those who wilfully refused to plead had heavy weights placed on their breasts, and so were pressed and crushed to death ("Synonyms of the New Testament"). (Word Studies in the New Testament.)

And granted him favor - Even as He had granted Stephen (Acts 6:3) who like Joseph was about to be rejected! God gave (giving is a manifestation of His grace) **favor** (grace) to Joseph.

Grace (favor) (5485)(**charis**) for Joseph was God's unmerited favor along with enablement and empowerment. As someone said grace is needed for every service, mercy for every failure and peace for every circumstance.

And wisdom (sophia) **in the sight of Pharaoh, king of Egypt** - Along with **favor**, God gave Joseph **wisdom** and he was able to make predictions to which preserved crops and saved Egypt from the regional famine.

Robertson - Pharaoh is not a name, but a title, the Egyptian perāā meaning great house.

And he made him governor (hegeomai) **over Egypt and all his household** - The result of God's favor and Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's divinely inspired dreams resulted in promotion to governor over Egypt.

Governor (hegeomai) means leader, leading man.

Acts 7:11 "Now a famine came over all Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction with it, and our fathers could find no food. (NASB: Lockman)

> KJV Acts 7:11 Now there came a dearth over all the land of Egypt and Chanaan, and great affliction: and our fathers found no sustenance.

- Ge 41:54-57; 43:1; 45:5,6,11; 47:13-15; Ps 105:16
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY BRINGS FAMINE

Now a famine (limos) **came over all Egypt and Canaan** - Yes the famine "came over" but it was not "Mother Nature," but "Father God!" This is a clear manifestation of the sovereign hand of God orchestrating events to ultimately cause all things to work together for good

And great affliction (see thlipsis above) **with it and our fathers could find no food** - Stephen uses "**Our fathers**" (not "your" fathers) identifying with his Jewish brethren. **Food** is **chortasma** (from **chortazo** - to feed with grass; used only here) which is sustenance, nourishment, food for people and fodder for flocks (used in the Lxx of fodder for the brother's donkeys in Gen 42:27, 43:24).

Could find (2147) (**heurisko**) means to find after searching or seeking. **Heurisko** is in the dramatic imperfect tense picturing them as looking for food here and there, over and over but absolutely no success. The covenant promises were on the verge of dying out with the death of the covenant people. But God was backing them up against the wall so to speak to force them out of the promised land and into the pagan land of Egypt. Although it did not look like it, clearly God was showing His faithfulness to the Abrahamic covenant, as Jacob and his sons would soon discover. Famine did not signal failure of the covenant!

NET Note on **our fathers** - Stephen spoke of "**our**" ancestors (Greek "fathers") in an inclusive sense throughout the speech until his rebuke in Acts 7:51+, where the nation does what "your" ancestors did, at which point an exclusive pronoun is used. This serves to

emphasize the rebuke.

Acts 7:12 "But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our fathers there the first time. (NASB: Lockman)

KJV Acts 7:12 But when Jacob heard that there was corn in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first.

- Ge 42:1-24; 43:2
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

THE DELIVERER IS VEILED TO HIS BRETHREN

But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt (see Ge 41:54, 57; 42:2, 5) - It was no accident that **Jacob** heard **there was grain in Egypt,** just as it was no accident that there was grain in Egypt!

Lenski - Egypt was the great wheat country of the world, in later times the granary of Rome (Acts 27:38). Why Egypt had wheat throughout the seven years of famine is not stated, but it was due to Joseph. (The Interpretation of The Acts of the Apostles)

He sent our fathers there the first time - The first visit Joseph recognized them but they did not recognize him. Notice that he does not tell us that the first time they went they did not recognize Joseph but he did recognize them.

Acts 7:13 "On the second visit Joseph made himself known to his brothers, and Joseph's family was disclosed to Pharaoh. (NASB: Lockman)

KJV Acts 7:13 And at the second time Joseph was made known to his brethren; and Joseph's kindred was made known unto Pharaoh.

- Joseph Ge 45:1-18; 46:31-34; 47:1-10
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

THE DELIVERER RECOGNIZED ON THE SECOND VISIT

The picture above is "Joseph recognized by his brothers" by Léon Pierre Urbain Bourgeois, 1863 oil on canvas.

On the second visit Joseph made himself known to his brothers (read the dramatic reunion in Ge 45:1-16) - The verb **anagnorizo** (only here) means Joseph made himself known again, caused himself to be recognized and became reacquainted with those who had rejected him.

MacArthur - It is only just before Christ's second coming that Israel will recognize Him for who He is (cf. Zech. 12:10-13:1; 14). (Ibid)

And Joseph's family was disclosed to Pharaoh - **Disclosed** is the adjective **phanerós** means Joseph's family was made evident, openly known to Pharaoh. **Family** is **genos** (race, stock, nation).

After Joseph had revealed himself to his brothers...

> Then Joseph said to his brothers, “Please come closer to me.” And they came closer. And he said, “I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. (45:7) “God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance.(Ge 45:4, 7)
>
> As for you (JOSEPH'S JEALOUS BROTHERS), you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive. (Ge 50:20).

John Phillips - It is only with the full light of the New Testament thus shining upon the Old Testament page that we can appreciate

to the full the cleverness of Stephen's speech. For what had happened in Joseph's day will all be repeated, on a grander scale, to drive the Jews at last to Jesus.

Acts 7:14 "Then Joseph sent word and invited Jacob his father and all his relatives to come to him, seventy-five persons in all. (NASB: Lockman)

> KJV Acts 7:14 Then sent Joseph, and called his father Jacob to him, and all his kindred, threescore and fifteen souls.

- **sent** Ge 45:9-11; Ps 105:23
- **seventy-five** Ge 46:12,26,27; Dt 10:22; 1 Chr 2:5,6
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Then Joseph sent word and invited Jacob his father and all his relatives to come to him - "It was this knowledge, brought to Pharaoh, that enabled Joseph to transfer his father and his entire relationship from Canaan to Egypt and to take them out of the famine-stricken land to one that was well supplied with food, with one of the family serving as vice-ruler. But this move was a fulfillment of the word spoken to Abraham in Acts 7:6. Here in Egypt God intended to let Jacob's family grow into a nation." (Lenski)

Seventy-five persons in all - The Hebrew version (Masoretic Text) of Ge 46:26-27; Ex 1:5; and Dt 10:22 all record 70 people came down to Joseph in Egypt, while the Septuagint version of Ge 46:27 says 75. As we have stated earlier, Stephen quotes are all from the Septuagint (possibly reflecting his Hellenistic background - which would be more familiar with Greek in the Septuagint). Opponents of the Bible cry "Foul" (Discrepancy)! But they are not correct.

Gleason Archer explains this alleged discrepancy concluding "that both totals are correct, though they were calculated differently. Jacob's own sons numbered twelve; his grandsons by them numbered fifty-two; there were already four great-grandsons born in Canaan by the time of the migration, for a total of sixty-six. Manasseh and Ephraim, born in Egypt, increased the total to sixty-eight; Jacob and his wife (whichever she was) brought it up to seventy. But the Septuagint added the seven grandsons of the prime minister [Joseph] and omitted Jacob and his wife from the tally. This brings us to the result that Stephen correctly reported the number seventy-five, according to the Septuagint in Genesis 46:27 and Exodus 1:5. Likewise, Genesis 46:27, Exodus 1:5, and Deuteronomy 10:22 in the Masoretic text are correct with their total of seventy. Either figure is correct, depending on whether Joseph's grandchildren are included. (Four great-grandchildren of Jacob were included even in the Masoretic text tally of seventy.) (Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982], 379)

Acts 7:15 "And Jacob went down to Egypt and there he and our fathers died. (NASB: Lockman)

> KJV Acts 7:15 So Jacob went down into Egypt, and died, he, and our fathers,

- **Jacob** Ge 46:3-7; Nu 20:15; Dt 10:22; 26:5; Joshua 24:4
- **died** Ge 49:33; Ex 1:6; Heb 11:21,22
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

And Jacob went down to Egypt and there he and our fathers died - The patriarch died but not the nation of Israel. All the 12 patriarchs died far from the land of promise.

Here the story becomes somewhat confusing as is discussed in notes on the next verse.

Stephen's presentation of Joseph's life in many ways parallels Jesus' life and prepares the Sanhedrin for his summation of their murder of the **Righteous One** (Acts 7:52)

1. Jesus and Joseph were both beloved by their fathers.
2. Jesus and Joseph were both Jews from Israel.
3. Jesus and Joseph were delivered up because of envy or jealousy (Acts 7:9;. Mk 15:10).
4. Both were rejected by their Jewish brethren (cf Jn 1:9-11)
5. Jesus was condemned to death by the testimony of false witnesses while Joseph was imprisoned because of the false

accusations of Potiphar's wife.

6. Jesus was resurrected, freed from the "prison of death" and exalted, even as Joseph was freed from prison and exalted to high office.
7. Joseph was able to deliver his sinful brothers from physical death, even as Jesus provided deliverance for His sinful brethren from spiritual death.
8. Jesus was not recognized on His first visit by His Jewish brethren, even as Joseph was not recognized on the first visit of his brethren.
9. Jesus will reveal Himself and be recognized by His Jewish brethren at His Second Coming (Zech 12:10-14), even as Joseph revealed himself to his brethren on their second visit.

Acts 7:16 "From there they were removed to Shechem and laid in the tomb which Abraham had purchased for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor in Shechem. (NASB: Lockman)

> KJV 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.

- Ex 13:19; Joshua 24:32
- **the tomb** Ge 33:9-20; 35:19; 49:29-32
- **Hamor** Ge 34:2-31
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

BURIAL IN THE PROMISED LAND

This paragraph will allude to the Scriptures that are recorded below for reference. First note that while Stephen does not specifically say, the implication of the specific requests of Jacob and Joseph to be buried in the promised land is a manifestation of faith in the Abrahamic covenant. Genesis 49 (see Ge 49:29-32 below) records the request of Jacob to be buried in Mamre which is in **Hebron** (MAP OF HEBRON) in the cave where the other two patriarchs, Abraham and Isaac, were buried. Joseph also requested to be buried in the land promised to Abraham (see below - Ge 50:24-26), but he did not specify burial in the same place as the three patriarchs. Joshua 24:32 records that Joseph was in fact buried at **Shechem**. Now here in Acts 7:16 Stephen says "**from there they were removed to Shechem**" (MAP OF SHECHEM = NORTH OF HEBRON) to be buried. Now think about this for a moment. First, Stephen says nothing about Jacob being buried in the cave facing Mamre in **Hebron**. Second, there is also nothing said about Joseph's brothers. But what Stephen does say is **THEY** were buried in **Shechem**. So by deduction who is **THEY**? Clearly, THEY would include Joseph (based on Josh 24:32) but by default must also include his 11 brothers who also died in Egypt. In summary, Jacob is buried in Mamre in **Hebron** (the promised land) and Joseph and his 10 brothers are buried in **Shechem**(also the promised land).

That's the "easy part" -- now the problem that arises is Stephen's statement that it was Abraham who purchased the burial plot in **Shechem** but Joshua 24:32 describes the burial plot that "Jacob had bought from the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem." So who is correct -- Joshua or Stephen? The short answer is BOTH!

Gleason Archer has one of the best explanations**...**

> "In this entire discourse Stephen evidences a thorough knowledge of the Old Testament. How could he have been ignorant of Joshua 24:32, which indicates that the coffin of Joseph was finally laid to rest in a plot of ground that "**Jacob had bought from the sons of Hamor.**" At first glance it looks as if we have a clear contradiction between these two statements. **Yet there is a good possibility that what Jacob did when he made that purchase was to obtain once again for his family that which had originally been bought by Abraham**. Quite similar is the case of the well of Beersheba. Originally that well was dug by Abraham's workmen, and he paid for the rights to that property by offering seven lambs to Abimelech, king of Gerar (Ge. 21:27–30). But later on, owing to the nomadic habits of Abraham and his family, the property rights he had legally acquired became ignored; and the tract on which the well was located fell back into the possession of the local inhabitants. It was not until many years later that Isaac, having reopened the well to care for his livestock, found it expedient to secure the ownership by paying for it once more, rather than to assert his legal title to it by means of a range war. He therefore gave an oath of friendship and nonaggression to King Abimelech (probably a son or grandson of the same name as the Abimelech with whom Abraham had dealt many years before) and held a covenant-sealing sacrifice and banquet (Gen. 26:28–31) with him. Here then

was a case where both Abraham and his descendant purchased the same ground."

Genesis 49:29-32 records **Jacob's** desire to be buried in the promised land --

> Then he (JACOB) charged them and said to them, “I am about to be gathered to my people; bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite, 30 in the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, which is before Mamre (the cave before or facing Mamre is in **Hebron** - Ge 13:18; 23:19), in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought along with the field from Ephron the Hittite for a burial site. 31 “There they buried Abraham and his wife Sarah, there they buried Isaac and his wife Rebekah, and there I buried Leah– 32 the field and the cave that is in it, purchased from the sons of Heth.”

Genesis 50:12-14 records Jacob's dying instructions which were fully carried out...

> Thus his (JACOB'S) sons did for him as he had charged them; 13 for his sons carried him to the land of Canaan and buried him in the cave of the field of Machpelah before Mamre (WHICH IS IN **HEBRON**), which Abraham had bought along with the field for a burial site from Ephron the Hittite. 14 After he had buried his father, Joseph returned to Egypt, he and his brothers, and all who had gone up with him to bury his father.

Genesis 50:24-26 records Joseph's desire to be buried in the promised land...

> Joseph said to his brothers, “I am about to die, but God will surely take care of you and bring you up from this land to the land which He promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob.” 25 Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, “God will surely take care of you, and you shall carry my bones up from here.” 26 So Joseph died at the age of one hundred and ten years; and he was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt.

Joshua 24:32 records that Joseph was buried in the promised land as he had requested

> Now they buried the bones of Joseph, which the sons of Israel brought up from Egypt, at**Shechem**, in the piece of ground which Jacob had bought from the sons of Hamor the father of **Shechem** for one hundred pieces of money; and they became the inheritance of Joseph’s sons.

Lenski notes that "The Old Testament reports nothing in regard to the brothers of Joseph. It is Stephen who here tells us that they, too, were buried in Shechem together with Joseph."

E. F. Harrison adds that “Stephen’s mention of **Shechem** was probably not casual but deliberate...A rigid Jew (LIKE THE THOSE IN STEPHEN'S AUDIENCE) might want to forget the patriarchal contacts with **Shechem**, but Stephen would not permit that. To mention **Shechem** was almost the equivalent of calling attention to Samaria."

Rex A. Koivisto elaborates on why Stephen may have mentioned Abraham's purchase at Shechem

> **Shechem** certainly held theological significance in the Abrahamic narrative of the OT, for it was there that Abraham first exhibited his relationship to the land of promise by building an altar to Yahweh (Ge 12:6,7). A reference to an Abrahamic tomb purchase (Acts 7:16), however, would have most likely brought to the minds of Stephen’s listeners the sacred and revered tomb at Hebron. Stephen asserts that Abraham purchased a tomb not at revered Hebron, but at despised **Shechem**. Certainly this reference to what was Samaritan territory in Stephen’s day, particularly in the context of the Temple and worship motifs in his speech, would have had significant theological overtones, especially since the Samaritans were for all practical purposes considered outside the land. It is thus not without significance that Luke follows this speech with a narrative of the evangelization of that same Samaritan territory (Acts 8:4–25). In view of the conscious theological selection of the term “**Shechem**” on Stephen’s part, and the significant Lucan use of this element in his narrative, one must again conclude that the use of this “error” (**ED**: AS EXPLAINED ABOVE IT IS NOT AN ERROR!) is a conscious one loaded with theological import. (Grace Theological Journal 8:1 1987 - Stephen’s Speech: A Theology of Errors?)

Shechem in the NAS Bible - 66x in 57v -

> Gen. 12:6; Gen. 33:18; Gen. 34:2; Gen. 34:4; Gen. 34:6; Gen. 34:8; Gen. 34:11; Gen. 34:13; Gen. 34:18; Gen. 34:20; Gen. 34:24; Gen. 34:26; Gen. 35:4; Gen. 37:12; Gen. 37:13; Gen. 37:14; Num. 26:31; Jos. 17:2; Jos. 17:7; Jos. 20:7; Jos. 21:21; Jos. 24:1; Jos. 24:25; Jos. 24:32; Jdg. 8:31; Jdg. 9:1; Jdg. 9:2; Jdg. 9:3; Jdg. 9:6; Jdg. 9:7; Jdg. 9:18; Jdg. 9:20; Jdg. 9:23; Jdg. 9:24; Jdg. 9:25; Jdg. 9:26; Jdg. 9:28; Jdg. 9:31; Jdg. 9:34; Jdg. 9:39; Jdg. 9:41; Jdg. 9:46; Jdg. 9:47; Jdg. 9:49; Jdg. 9:57; Jdg. 21:19; 1 Ki. 12:1; 1 Ki. 12:25; 1 Chr. 6:67; 1 Chr. 7:19; 1 Chr. 7:28; 2 Chr. 10:1; Ps. 60:6; Ps. 108:7; Jer. 41:5; Hos. 6:9; Acts 7:16

Acts 7:17 "But as the time of the promise was approaching which God had assured to Abraham, the people increased and multiplied in Egypt, (NASB: Lockman)

> KJV Acts 7:17 But when the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt,

- **as the time of the promise was approaching** Acts 7:6; Ge 15:13-16; 2 Peter 3:8,9
- **the people** Acts 13:17; Ex 1:7-12,20; Ps 105:24,25
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

GOD IS THE COVENANT KEEPING GOD

In Acts 7:17-43 Stephen describes God's deliverance under Moses and demonstrates in so doing that he clearly is not guilty of the charge of blasphemy against Moses (Acts 6:11). Remember that Stephen's goal is less about defending himself, and more about accusing his accusers of rejecting the Righteous One (Acts 7:52).

But as the time of the promise (epaggelia) **was approaching** (eggizo) **which God had assured** (homologeo) **to Abraham, the people increased** (auxano) **and multiplied** (plethuno) **in Egypt** - Note Stephen's continued emphasis on God and His faithfulness to keep covenant promises. The Israelites had become content in Egypt and showed no interest of claiming God's **promise** to Abraham

> God said to Abram, “Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. (Acts 7:6-7+) 14 “But I will also judge the nation (EGYPT) whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions. 15 “As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you will be buried at a good old age. 16“Then in the fourth generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete.” (Genesis 15:13-16+)

So God begins to move and in His sovereignty, He uses their growth to cause them to return to the land that had been promised to Abraham.

John Phillips adds - God's eye is ever on the clock. He does things according to set times and never forgets a date or misses an appointment. There are set times, predetermined in heaven, at which God acts. The Scriptures may be studied profitably from that standpoint. A vast wealth of evidence proves it so. (Exploring Acts) (Ed: Beloved have you not had this same experience in your life? You thought something should have occurred at a certain time and it did not, even though you prayed for it. But later, as you look back on that time you can see that God had allowed it to be that way to achieve His purposes in your life.)

Stephen is alluding to the fact that the fourth generation of Israel would return (to the promised land), for the iniquity of the Amorite was now complete. (Ge 15:16+).

This is the third time Luke has used the word**promise** or epaggelia/epangelia in Acts. In Acts 1:4 and Acts 2:33, 39 it refers to the **promise** of the Holy Spirit. Luke uses it again in Acts 13:23 when Paul said that “From the descendants of this man (DAVID), according to **promise**, God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus." In (Acts 13:32) “And we preach to you the good news of the **promise** made to the fathers. In (Acts 26:6) Paul declares “And now I am standing trial for the hope of the**promise** made by God to our fathers." (this promise could refer to the Messiah or the hope of resurrection).

David Thompson summarizes Stephen's illustration using the life of Moses . Acts 7:17-43

Now Stephen has been charged with speaking against the O.T. Law, so he devotes the most verses to Moses. There are six facts brought out from the book of Exodus:

- **(Fact #1) - A new Egyptian king arose who did not know Joseph**. Acts 7:17-19 Many believe that this king was Rameses II. If this is the one, then when he died Moses would have been next in line to be Pharoah because Rameses did not have any sons of his own. This sets the stage for God raising up a new leader.
- **(Fact #2) - Moses was born and grew and defended Israel .** Acts 7:20-29 Moses was born and was only in his Israeli home for three months (Acts 7:20). They exposed him in a basket to Pharoah’s daughter who took him and raised him as her own son (Acts 7:21). According to Josephus, her name was “Thermutis”. Moses was educated in Egypt for forty years and he became a man of power in words and deeds (Acts 7:21-22). Moses never forgot that he was Jewish and he decided to visit his

people and he saw one of the Jewish people being beaten by an Egyptian so Moses struck down the Egyptian and he assumed that the Israelites would realize that God was going to grant deliverance to the nation through Moses (Acts 7:23-25). He was Israel's deliverer, but the next day when he went to Israel, instead of accepting the deliverer they said "who made you our ruler and judge" (Acts 7:26-28), so Moses fled to Midian for the next forty years (Acts 7:29).

The reason Moses had to leave the area was because he was rejected by his own brothers. Jesus had left Israel and ascended back up into heaven and the reason why He left is because He was rejected by His own brothers; "He came unto His own and His own received Him not."

- **(Fact #3) - God appeared to Moses and selected Him to deliver Israel even though Israel had rejected Moses.** Acts 7:30-36 God calls Moses to do his great work when he is 80 years old. God appears to Moses in a wilderness at Mt. Sinai in an area God called "holy ground" (Acts 7:30-33). Think of this. **There is no tabernacle, there is no temple, but it is holy ground.** Why? Because the presence of God is there. God saw the pathetic condition of His people and out of pure grace He decided to save them. He did the same with us. The Grace of God Gospel clearly reestablishes this point. You do not have to be in the Temple of Jerusalem to be holy. You do not have to be in church to be holy. Your body is the Temple of the Holy Spirit and therefore you are holy because you have the presence of God in you and the religious leaders did not like that. In Acts 7:34-36, Stephen said God sent Moses back to you in pure grace to deliver you. This was the one you disowned but Moses was God's chosen deliverer.
- **(Fact #4) - Moses told Israel God would raise up a prophet like him from Israel.** Acts 7:37-39 Moses spoke of another Person, another Prophet, a Divine Person who would come to Israel. He would be Jewish, but He also would be a God/man Redeemer (Acts 7:37-38/ Deut. 18:15). He was there at Mt. Sinai when Moses received the Law, but when Moses told them this they rejected him and they rejected his message. They would rather go back to Egypt than have a relationship with the true God.
- **(Fact #5) - Moses delivered the Word of God to Israel who rejected grace.** Acts 7:40-41 Notice they did not want to worship the God of Grace, they rejoiced in their own works. (Acts 7:41) False religion hates the Grace of God. It always has and always will. It loves works. (Fact #6) - God turned away from Israel and gave them over to idolatry . Acts 7:42-43 Not only did they reject the truth, they turned to idol worship. Stephen is proving to Israel that they are not interested in a relationship with the true God; they are arrogant and rebellious. They made idols with their hands and worshipped them and God turned from them and gave them up.

Acts 7:18 until THERE AROSE ANOTHER KING OVER EGYPT WHO KNEW NOTHING ABOUT JOSEPH. (NASB: Lockman)

KJV Acts 7:18 Till another king arose, which knew not Joseph.

- Ex 1:8
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

ANOTHER KING RAISED UP
BY THE SOVEREIGN GOD

God can take evil and use it for good (Ro 8:28+, Ge 50:20) and that is exactly what He did when He raised up "**another king over Egypt**." (cf Da 2:21+)

Until THERE AROSE ANOTHER KING OVER EGYPT WHO KNEW NOTHING ABOUT JOSEPH- Stephen is quoting the Septuagint version of Exodus 1:8. Stephen had memorized Scripture giving all of us an excellent example to emulate.

Related Resources:

- Memorizing His Word
- Memory Verses by Topic

Another is heteros which means another king of a different kind, a new anti-Semitic sovereign!

Robertson on **knew nothing about Joseph** - Joseph's history and services meant nothing to the new king.

Knobel - The previous dynasty had been that of the **Hyksos**; the new king was **Ahmes** who drove out the **Hyksos**."

Barnes - National ingratitude and forgetfulness of favours have not been uncommon in the world; and a change of dynasty or

succession has often obliterated all memory of former obligations and compacts.

God allowed this change of dynasty for a reason. One is reminded once again that the Sovereign God is in control of History, for indeed History is "His Story!" Scripture amply attests to God's rule over His Creation

> Da 2:20+ Daniel said, "Let the name of God be blessed forever and ever, For wisdom and power belong to Him. 21 "It is He who changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings and establishes kings; He gives wisdom to wise men And knowledge to men of understanding.
>
> Pr 21:1 The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes.

Acts 7:19 "It was he who took shrewd advantage of our race and mistreated our fathers so that they would expose their infants and they would not survive. (NASB: Lockman)

> KJV Acts 7:19 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.

- Ex 1:9-22; Ps 83:4,5; 105:25; 129:1-3; Rev 12:4,5
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

PHARAOH'S SOLUTION TO "THE JEWISH QUESTION"

It was he who took shrewd advantage of our race and mistreated our fathers so that they would expose their infants and they would not survive - As others have tried over the centuries, Pharaoh tried to snuff out the Jewish race using **infanticide**! We see a parallel in the life of Jesus for "when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and all its vicinity, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the magi." (Mt 2:16+)

Took shrewd advantage (2686) is **katasophizomai** which means this new king took advantage of the Israelites by cunning, trickery or subtlety. The idea also includes using false arguments. The idea is shrewdly where shrewd means disposed to or marked by artful and cunning practices (this reminds us of their father Satan Jn 8:44, Rev 12:9).

> **Gilbrant** adds that **katasophizomai** "is formed by **kata** and **sophizō** "to cleverly devise"; hence it means "**to deceitfully circumvent or take advantage of.**" **Katasophizomai** appears late in classical Greek (First Century B.C.). It occurs in the Septuagint three times, only one of which is in the canonical portion of Scripture. It is from that occurrence in **Exodus 1:10**+ that the only New Testament usage gets its meaning (Acts 7:19). In his sermon Stephen described Pharaoh as dealing "craftily" (RSV) or "subtilly" (KJV) and duping the Israelites into cooperating with his program of infanticide (cf. Exodus 1:10+).

Mistreated (2559)see **kakoo**

So that - Term of purpose. **So that** they would be cast out. This was the purpose of his evil treatment, like Hitler's "final solution" in Nazi Germany.

Barnes suggests that this new Pharaoh "dealt with them in this cruel manner, hoping that the Israelites themselves would destroy their own sons, that they might not grow up to experience the same sufferings as their fathers had. The cunning or subtlety of Pharaoh extended to everything that he did to oppress, to keep under, and to destroy the children of Israel."

Vincent on **they would expose** - Lit., make exposed. The verb κτ θημι, to set out, or place outside, is not uncommon in classical Greek for the exposure of a new-born child. Thus Herodotus, of Cyrus, exposed in infancy: "The herdsman's wife entreated him not to expose (κθε ναι) the babe" (i., 112).

Robertson - Pharaoh required the Israelites to expose their children to death, a possible practice done voluntarily in heathen China and by heathen in so-called Christian lands. But the Israelites fought against such an iniquity.

Exodus records Pharaoh's solution to the "the Jewish question" - drown the male babies in he Nile (where there were also crocodiles!) which functioned much like Hitler's gas chambers...

> 15Then the king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other

was named Puah; 16 and he said, “When you are helping the Hebrew women to give birth and see them upon the birthstool, if it is a son, then you shall put him to death; but if it is a daughter, then she shall live.” 17 But the midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt had commanded them, but let the boys live. 18So the king of Egypt called for the midwives and said to them, “Why have you done this thing, and let the boys live?” 19 The midwives said to Pharaoh, “Because the Hebrew women are not as the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife can get to them.” 20So God was good to the midwives, and the people multiplied, and became very mighty. 21 Because the midwives feared God, He established households for them. 22 Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, saying, “Every son who is born you are to cast into the Nile, and every daughter you are to keep alive.”

Would (not) survive (2225)(**zoogoneo** compare **zoogonos** = life giving. From **zoos** = living + **gegesthai** = aorist middle infinitive of ginomai = to become, to come into existence) means to make alive or keep alive, to preserve alive. In short

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Acts 7:20 "It was at this time that Moses was born; and he was lovely in the sight of God, and he was nurtured three months in his father's home. (NASB: Lockman)

KJV Acts 7:20 In which time Moses was born, and was exceeding fair, and nourished up in his father's house three months:

- **Moses** Ex 2:2-10
- **and was** 1 Samuel 16:12; Heb 11:23
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD
IN SAVING THE NATION

Recall that one of the accusations against Stephen is that "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses" (Acts 6:11). He is speaking no blasphemous words in this section but is telling the truth, including the truth about how Israel rejected Moses. Stephen is setting the stage to remind the Sanhedrin of another rejection of one of Israel's saviors! His modus operandi is surely becoming clear to some of his Jewish hearers for he will culminate his story with rejection of their ultimate Savior.

It was at this time that Moses was born; and he was lovely in the sight of God- God gives children and at this time created Moses who would be His instrument by which Israel would be delivered. It is interesting to note that Jewish writers embellished Moses’ beauty, even with such non-Biblical descriptions that the glory of this baby filled the entire room at birth! God is raising up His deliverer. God was with Moses from the very beginning.

Time (2540)(**kairos**) means a point of time or period of time, frequently with the implication of being especially fit for something. It means a moment or period as especially appropriate. In context this was a dangerous time, a terrible "season," for if all male infants had been killed, the lineage of Israel would have died.

This **time** sensitive description of Moses reminds me of Paul's word "in the fullness of time (chronos not kairos)" God sent His Son." (Gal 4:4) So at the right time in Exodus Moses was born, the deliver of Israel, the giver of the Law. In the NT Jesus was born, the Deliver of sinners, the Giver of grace, John writing "For of His (JESUS) fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace.For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. (John 1:16-17)

Lovely (791)(**asteios** from **astu** = city) means means "of the city," ("citified") with city manners and polish. Refined beauty. Here it means beautiful, well-formed, acceptable. Used in Acts 7:20 and Hebrews 11:23 and 3x in the Septuagint - Ex 2:2 (Hebrew tôv, "goodly, fair, beautiful,"; Lxx - asteios), Nu 22:32, Jdg 3:17.

Zodhiates says that asteios refers to "One who dwells in a city and by consequence is well-bred, polite, eloquent, as the inhabitants of cities may be in comparison with those of the country. Used only of Moses, meaning elegant in external form (Acts 7:20; Heb. 11:23). The Greeks used to call the opposite of asteíos, the urban person, the agroíkos, the one who comes from agrós, field or country-side. Therefore, asteíos came to be assumed as one who is fair to look on and attractive, a suggestion of beauty but not generally of a high character. Asteíos may mean the same thing as hōraíos, fair or beautiful, but they reach that beauty by paths which are entirely different, resting as they do on different images. Asteíos belongs to art and to it are attributed the notions of neatness, symmetry, and elegance. Hōraíos receives its hour of beauty by nature which may be brief but which constitutes the season of highest perfection. (Complete Word Study Dictionary – New Testament)

Gilbrant on **asteios** in Classical Greek - Asteios comes from the word astu, “town,” and means “that which pertains to the town”; however, this literal sense is conveyed by another term, astikos, in classical Greek (Liddell-Scott). **Asteios** functions in a sense other than literal. Since the “city” represents culture, asteios denotes that which is “refined” and hence “beautiful, pleasing, acceptable.” This can apply to people, words, objects, or ideas and can describe physical appearance or conduct. (Complete Biblical Library Greek-English Dictionary)

Vincent on **lovely in the sight of God** - Literally, *fair unto God*: a Hebrew superlative. Compare Jonah 3:3: *great unto God*; A. V., *exceeding great*. Genesis 10:9, of Nimrod: *a mighty hunter before the Lord*. 2 Corinthians 10:4: *mighty unto God*; i.e., in God's sight. Asteios, fair (only here and Hebrews 11:23), is from στυ, a town, and means originally town-bred; hence refined, elegant, comely. The word is used in the Septuagint of Moses (Exodus 2:2), and rendered goodly. The Jewish traditions extol Moses' beauty. **Josephus says that those who met him, as he was carried along the streets, forgot their business and stood still to gaze at him.** (Word Studies in the New Testament)

And he was nurtured three months in his father's home - **Gilbrant** remarks that "The Bible shows God is always with those He plans to give opportunities for unusual service and God prepares them even from birth. God told Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in (your mother's) body, I knew you, and before you came out of (her) womb I sanctified you (set you apart for my service) and ordained you as a prophet to the nations" (Jeremiah 1:5, author's translation). John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb (Luke 1:15).The parents of Moses were sensitive to God's will and carefully nourished him, keeping him hidden for 3 months. (Complete Biblical Library – Acts)

The writer of Hebrews records

> By faith (THIS REFERS TO HIS MOTHER JOCHEBED'S FAITH) Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw he was a **beautiful** (**asteios**) child; and they were not afraid of the king’s edict. (Hebrews 11:23+)

Stephen is summarizing Exodus 2 recounting a story every member of the Sanhedrin would have known, as he prepares to show them how their very own ancestors had rejected Moses, not once but twice....

> Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a daughter of Levi (**JOCHEBED** - Ex 6:20, Nu 26:59). The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that **he was beautiful**, (Heb tob/tov = pleasant, agreeable, good; Lxx = asteios) she hid him for three months. 3 But when she could hide him no longer, she got him a wicker **basket** (Heb = tebah = SAME WORD USED FOR NOAH'S ARK) and covered it over with tar and pitch. Then she put the child into it and set it among the reeds (pix) by the bank of the Nile (LIKE A MINIATURE ARK). 4 His sister stood at a distance to find out what would happen to him. 5 The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the Nile, with her maidens walking alongside the Nile; and she saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid, and she brought it to her. 6 When she opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the boy was crying. And she had pity on him and said, “This is one of the Hebrews’ children.” 7 Then his sister said to Pharaoh’s daughter, “Shall I go and call a nurse for you from the Hebrew women that she may nurse the child for you?” (**GOD'S PROVIDENCE**) 8 Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Go ahead.” So the girl went and called the child’s mother. 9 Then Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Take this child away and nurse him for me and I will give you your wages.” So the woman took the child and nursed him. 10 The child grew, and she brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter and he became her son. And she named him Moses, and said, “Because I drew him out of the water.” (Ex 2:1-10)

Acts 7:21 "And after he had been set outside, Pharaoh's daughter took him away and nurtured him as her own son. (NASB: Lockman)

> KJV Acts 7:21 And when he was cast out, Pharaoh's daughter took him up, and nourished him for her own son.
>
> NET Acts 7:21 and when he had been abandoned, Pharaoh's daughter adopted him and brought him up as her own son.

- **after he had been set outside** Ex 2:2-10; Dt 32:26
- **as her own son** Heb 11:24
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

GOD'S PROVIDENTIAL
PRESERVATION OF A PATRIARCH

And after he had been set outside - That is after Moses had been abandoned in the Nile River among the reeds (Ex 2:3-4). Moses means "drawn out" and here we see that Israel's future delivered was himself delivered from the clutches of death.

Pharaoh's daughter took him away and nurtured him as her own son (Ex 2:5-10) - Thus **Pharaoh's daughter** made Moses her **own son.** Josephus Antiquites 2, 9, 7 reports, that Pharaoh's daughter called him “a lad divine in form" (πα ς μορφ θε ος).

Who was Pharaoh's daughter? The Bible does not say but there is good historical evidence that her name was**Hatshepsut**, who eventually took the throne and reigned as Pharaoh over Egypt for almost 21 years (Wikipedia). Phillips comments that "She stands out on the pages of history as one of the most remarkable women of all time—the daughter of a Pharaoh, the wife of another, the stepmother of a third, and a Pharaoh herself for some twenty years." It is fascinating that she had no sons and thus Moses her "adopted" son stood in line to become the most powerful ruler in the world! This background makes even more poignant the words of the writer of Hebrews who records that

> "By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter." (Heb 11:24)

NET Note on **as her own son** (cf Ex 2:10), which NET translates as **adopted** - In this instance both the immediate context and the OT account (Exod 2:3–10) do support the normal sense of the English word "adopt," although it should not be understood to refer to a technical, legal event.

Robertson on **anaireo**, common in the N.T. in the sense of take up and make away with, to kill as in Acts 7:28, but here only in the N.T. in the original sense of taking up from the ground and with the middle voice (for oneself). Quoted here from Exodus 2:5. The word was used of old for picking up exposed children as here. Vincent quotes Aristophanes (Clouds, 531): "I exposed (the child), and some other women, having taken it, adopted (aneileto) it." Vulgate has sustulit. "Adopted" is the idea here. (Word Pictures in the New Testament)

Luke uses **anaireo** meaning to kill in Lk. 22:2; Lk. 23:32; Acts 2:23; Acts 5:33; Acts 5:36; Acts 7:28; Acts 9:23; Acts 9:24; Acts 9:29; Acts 10:39; Acts 12:2; Acts 13:28; Acts 16:27; Acts 22:20; Acts 23:15; Acts 23:21; Acts 23:27; Acts 25:3; Acts 26:10; 2 Thess. 2:8; Heb. 10:9

Robertson on her own son - The tradition is that she designed Moses for the throne as the Pharaoh had no son (Josephus, *Ant.* ii. 9, 7).

Acts 7:22 "Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians, and he was a man of power in words and deeds. (NASB: Lockman)

> KJV Acts 7:22 And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds.

- **was educated** 1 Kings 4:29; 2 Chr 9:22; Isa 19:11; Da 1:4,17-20
- **was** Luke 24:19
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

FORTY YEARS IN A
PAGAN PLACE

Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians - He would have been a prince in Egypt. **Educated** is paideuo which speaks of child rearing, guiding him toward maturity. **Learning** is sophia which means wisdom which describes the ability to use knowledge to for correct behavior. At this time the Egyptians had already made great advances in science, engineering, mathematics, astronomy, and medicine (See The New Kingdom).

Barnes comments - The learning of the Egyptians was confined chiefly to astrology, to the interpretation of dreams, to medicine, to mathematics, and to their sacred science or traditionary doctrines about religion, which were concealed chiefly under their hieroglyphics. Their learning is not unfrequently spoken of in the Scriptures, 1 Kings 4:30; Comp. Isaiah 19:11,12. And their

knowledge is equally celebrated in the heathen world. It is known that science was carried from Egypt to Phenicia, and thence to Greece; and not a few of the Grecian philosophers travelled to Egypt in pursuit of knowledge. (Barnes' Notes on the New Testament)

A T Robertson - The priestly caste in Egypt was noted for their knowledge of science, astronomy, medicine, and mathematics. This reputation was proverbial (1 Kings 4:30). Modern discoveries have thrown much light on the ancient civilization of Egypt. Moses, like Paul, was a man of the schools. (Word Pictures in the New Testament)

And he was a man of power in words and deeds- A man of powerful words and works. **NET** has "was powerful in his words and deeds." How interesting to read the contrasting description of Moses in Exodus 4:10 when he said "Please, Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither recently nor in time past, nor since You have spoken to Your servant; for I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." Perhaps Moses addressed Pharaoh through his brother Aaron, who was appointed to deliver the message (cf Ex 4:11-16).

Stephen could hardly be accused of blaspheming Moses! (cf Acts 6:11+).

One has to wonder whether this description by Stephen was an intentional allusion to Jesus. Why? Because in Luke 24:19 we read an identical description of Jesus - "And He said to them, “What things?” And they said to Him, “The things about Jesus the Nazarene, who was **a prophet mighty in deed and word** in the sight of God and all the people." Surely the Sanhedrin were aware of Jesus' reputation.

Of power (mighty) (1415)(**dunatos** from **dunamai** = referring to power one has by virtue of inherent ability and resources; see study of **dunamis**) means powerful, able, strong. Luke uses **dunatos** in Acts 25:5 to describe "influential (dunatos) men." **Dunatos** is used of a Name of God "the Mighty One" (Lk 1:49). Paul used **dunatos** in 2 Cor 12:10 when he said "when I am weak then I am strong (dunatos)."

Acts 7:23 "But when he was approaching the age of forty, it entered his mind to visit his brethren, the sons of Israel. (NASB: Lockman)

> KJV Acts 7:23 And when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel.

- **when** Ex 2:11,12; Heb 11:24-26
- **it entered** Ex 35:21,29; 1 Chr 29:17-19; 2 Chr 30:12; Ezra 1:1,5; 7:27; Pr 21:1; 2 Cor 8:16; Php 2:12,13; James 1:17; Rev 17:17
- **to visit** Acts 15:36; Ex 4:18
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

A DIVINE THOUGHT
IN A PAGAN MIND

But when he was approaching the age of forty, it enteredhis mind to visit his brethren, the sons of Israel - **His mind** is more literally his heart (Greek is kardia = the "control center" of our being).

Entered is anabaino literally speaks of upward movement, coming up, ascending and here is used figuratively of a thought "arising." Luke uses anabaino numerous times in Acts, most with the literal sense - Acts 1:13; Acts 2:34; Acts 3:1; Acts 7:23; Acts 8:31; Acts 8:39; Acts 10:4; Acts 10:9; Acts 11:2; Acts 15:2; Acts 18:22; Acts 20:11; Acts 21:12; Acts 21:15; Acts 21:31; Acts 24:11; Acts 25:1; Acts 25:9.

This was certainly not a chance or random thought, but one placed in Moses' mind by God, the God who is behind the scenes and controls the scenes He is behind (sovereignty), at the same time mysteriously not violating the human will. It was time for his second 40 years of education, but this time not in a palace but a desert!

Jewish tradition says that Moses took part in some of Egypt's military campaigns, going up the Nile into Cush.

While Moses had lived 40 years as an Egyptian prince, he seems to have never forgot that he was an Israelite. In God'sprovidential provision of having his Jewish mother to serve as his nurse, even though he was just a child, she had him long enough to instill in his heart the promises that God had given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. .

To Visit (1980)(**episkeptomai** from **epí** = upon or intensifying already existing idea in verb + **skopeo** = regard, give attention

to) literally means to look upon, to go to see, to examine closely, to inspect, to examine the state of affairs of something, to look after or to oversee. Moses' idea of visiting was more than just making a social call. **Hiebert** writes "In classical Greek, **episkeptomai** was commonly used of visiting the sick, whether by a doctor or a friend.' In Jewish usage, it commonly denoted to visit with the aim of caring for and supplying the needs of those visited (Job 2:11; Jer. 23:2; Ezek. 34:11; Zech. 11:16; Mt. 25:36, 43). The term implies concern and personal contact with the needy; it involves more than a matter of charity by proxy."

Acts 7:24 "And when he saw one of them being treated unjustly, he defended him and took vengeance for the oppressed by striking down the Egyptian. (NASB: Lockman)

> KJV Acts 7:24 And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian:

- Acts 7:28; John 18:10,11,25-27
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

MOSES THE DEFENDER

And when he saw one of them being treated unjustly, he defended him and took vengeance for the oppressed by striking down the Egyptian - Defended is found only here and means Moses warded off or repel the attack.**Oppressed** is kataponeo which describes one worn out by toil or suffering, which suggest the Egyptian master was mistreating his Hebrew slave and the present tense speaks of continuous action.

NET Note on **treated unjustly** says "**Hurt unfairly** conveys a better sense of the seriousness of the offense against the Israelite than "treated unfairly," which can sometimes refer to slight offenses, or "wronged," which can refer to offenses that do not involve personal violence, as this one probably did."

Treated unjustly (91)(**adikeo** from **adikos** = unjust) means do wrong Col 3:25; the evildoer Rev 22:11. Be in the wrong Acts 25:11. Do wrong to someone, cheat someone Mt 20:13; Ac 7:26; Gal 4:12; 2 Pt 2:13. Injure, harm, damage, spoil Rev 9:4, 10, 19; if he has caused you any loss Philemon 1:18. Note 3 uses of adikeo in Acts 7:24, 26, 27 and two more in Acts 25:10; Acts 25:11.

Friberg - (1) intransitively, of acting unjustly be in the wrong (Rev 22.11); as violating law do wrong (Col 3.25); (2) transitively, with the accusative of a person do wrong to, act unjustly toward, injure (Acts 7.26); passive suffer wrong or injustice (1 Co 6.7); with the accusative of the thing harm, damage, hurt (Rev 7.2); passive be harmed by, suffer damage (2 Pe 2.13). (Analytical Lexicon)

Gilbrant - In classical Greek literature, adikeō's usage includes "to do wrong," "to injure or harm," "to violate law or custom," "to be in the wrong," and "to be mistaken.In the Septuagint approximately 25 Hebrew words are translated using adikeō. The wrongdoing in view may be a sin only against God, as in 2 Sa 24:17. On the other hand, the word most often translated by adikeō is 'āshaq, which generally applies to the social realm, and which means "to oppress, extort, or exploit." While adikeō is thus used of person-to-person relationships, the commands of God are never far away: injustice is not merely a matter between two people. (Ibid)

Adikeo - 28x in 24v - am a wrongdoer(1), damage(1), do harm(1), do wrong(1), does wrong(2), doing...wrong(1), done...wrong(2), harm(4), hurt(3), injure(2), injuring(1), offended(1), offender(1), treated unjustly(1), wrong(2), wrong...done(1), wronged(3).

> Matt. 20:13; Lk. 10:19; Acts 7:24; Acts 7:26; Acts 7:27; Acts 25:10; Acts 25:11; 1 Co. 6:7; 1 Co. 6:8; 2 Co. 7:2; 2 Co. 7:12; Gal. 4:12; Col. 3:25; Phlm. 1:18; 2 Pet. 2:13; Rev. 2:11; Rev. 6:6; Rev. 7:2; Rev. 7:3; Rev. 9:4; Rev. 9:10; Rev. 9:19; Rev. 11:5; Rev. 22:11

Adikeo - 77v in the Septuagint

> Gen. 16:5; Gen. 21:23; Gen. 26:20; Gen. 42:22; Exod. 2:13; Exod. 5:16; Lev. 6:2; Lev. 6:4; Lev. 19:13; Deut. 28:29; Deut. 28:33; Jos. 2:19; 1 Sam. 12:4; 2 Sam. 19:19; 2 Sam. 24:17; 1 Ki. 8:47; 2 Chr. 6:37; 2 Chr. 26:16; Ezr. 10:13; Est. 1:16; Est. 4:1; Job 8:3; Job 10:3; Ps. 10:3; Ps. 35:1; Ps. 44:17; Ps. 62:9; Ps. 71:4; Ps. 89:33; Ps. 103:6; Ps. 105:14; Ps. 106:6; Ps. 119:121; Ps. 146:7; Prov. 1:32; Prov. 24:29; Isa. 1:17; Isa. 3:15; Isa. 10:20; Isa. 21:3; Isa. 23:12; Isa. 25:3; Isa. 25:4; Isa. 51:23; Isa. 65:25; Jer. 3:21; Jer. 9:5; Jer. 21:12; Jer. 22:3; Jer. 37:18; Ezek. 39:26; Dan. 9:5; Hab. 1:2

Striking down (3960)(**patasso**) means to strike or hit whether violently or lightly - (1) It speaks of a violent blow intended to wound, slay or kill (Acts 7:24, Mt 26:31, Mk 14:27, Acts 12:23 Ex. 21:12, 18; Ex 12:23 = smite the Egyptians on Passover). Of Peter striking

the slave of the high priest and cutting off his ear (Mt 26:51, cf Lk 22:49, 50) The most dramatic use in the Bible describes the return of Jesus when "from His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may **strike down** the nations." (Rev 19:15+) (2) In contrast **potasso** in can refer to giving a light or gentle blow (Acts 12:7). It is interesting that**potasso** describes Moses striking down and killing the Egyptian, is used in the Septuagint to describe Moses striking the Nile (Ex 7:20, 25) and it turned to blood. Potasso is used in a more figuratively sense in describing striking or smiting with disease, evil, judgment, etc (Rev. 11:6 = strike the earth with plague; Ge 19:11 = angels struck the men with blindness; Nu 14:12 = smite them with pestilence ; Mal. 4:6 = smite the land with a curse).

Patasso is used only 10x in the NT (over 400 in the Septuagint) - strike(2), strike down(3), striking down(1), struck(4).

> Matt. 26:31; Matt. 26:51; Mk. 14:27; Lk. 22:49; Lk. 22:50; Acts 7:24; Acts 12:7; Acts 12:23; Rev. 11:6; Rev. 19:15

Gilbrant writes "In the Septuagint **patassō** is common, usually translating Hebrew nākhâh, with the sense “to hit, to strike,” sometimes fatally. It is often used of God smiting with judgment or destruction (Dt 32:39; Jer 2:30).

Acts 7:25 "And he supposed that his brethren understood that God was granting them deliverance through him, but they did not understand. (NASB: Lockman)

> KJV Acts 7:25 For he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not.

- **God was granting**. Acts 14:27; 15:4,7; 21:19; 1 Samuel 14:45; 19:5; 2 Kings 5:1; Ro 15:18; 1 Cor 3:9; 1 Cor 15:10; 2 Cor 6:1; Colossians 1:29
- **but** Ps 106:7; Mark 9:32; Luke 9:45; 18:34
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

MOSES THE REJECTED DELIVERER

Ironside - They rejected him and he had to leave Egypt and go to the far side of the desert, where he remained for forty years. In the meantime his people were enduring greater and greater suffering, all because they had rejected their redeemer. What a picture of Israel down through the centuries! (ED: THE GREAT SUFFERING OF THE HOLOCAUST, POGROMS, ETC).

And he supposed that his brethren understood that God was granting them deliverance through him, but they did not understand - **Supposed** is nomizo in the imperfect tense indicating that Moses was supposing (again and again). Moses in his mind supposed that his act would depict national deliverance for Israel. This fact was not mentioned in the Old Testament account but is new revelation.

Understood is suniemi which means in essence to "put the pieces together" so that one now comprehends that Moses' killing of the Egyptian was a piece of the puzzle entitled national deliverance for Israel. But the Israelites did not "put the pieces together."

Note that Stephen's repetition of suniemi is surely meant to put in his listener's minds the thought that just as the ancient Israelites did not understand Moses was to be their deliverer, Stephen's hearers are just like them in not understanding that God had granted a Deliverer! And remember he is accused of blaspheming Moses (Acts 6:11+) but in this section he clearly demonstrates that is doing essentially just the opposite.

NET Note explains **they did not understand** comments that here is the theme of Stephen's speech - The people (THE SANHEDRIN HEARERS IN THIS CASE) did not understand what God was doing through those He chose. They made the same mistake with Joseph at first. See Acts 3:17; Acts 13:27. There is good precedent for this kind of challenging review of history in the ancient scriptures: Ps 106:6–46; Ezek 20:1-49; and Neh 9:6–38.

Gilbrant comments "Moses not only must have had faith in God's promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but he was sensitive to those promises, and probably remembered the way God had prepared Joseph to bring a great deliverance from the famine. He saw that God's hand had been guiding and preparing him to deliver his people. But though Moses understood this and thought his people would see it too, they did not. Stephen's emphasis here shows he was making a clear parallel to the way the Jewish leaders failed to understand what God had done through Jesus to provide salvation." (Complete Biblical Library – Acts)

God granting - This is a great phrase for it clearly demonstrates Stephen's appreciation for God's grace. Israel did not deserve

deliverance but Moses was correct that God would grant deliverance to them. His timing was just off by 40 years!

Through him - This is more literally "by or through his hand." It emphasizes that Moses was the human instrument by which God would accomplish deliverance of His people from Egypt.

Deliverance (4991)(**soteria** from **soter** = Savior in turn from **sozo** = save, rescue, deliver) describes the rescue or deliverance from danger, destruction and peril. It is notable that Caiaphas, Annas and the rest of the Sanhedrin had heard this same word from the lips of Peter when he told them plainly ""And there is **salvation** (soteria) in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12+). Soteria is the very word Paul used in his description of the Good News

> For I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for **salvation** to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. (Ro 1:16+, cf uses in Ro 10:1, Ro 10:10)

Acts 7:26 "On the following day he appeared to them as they were fighting together, and he tried to reconcile them in peace, saying, 'Men, you are brethren, why do you injure one another?' (NASB: Lockman)

> KJV Acts 7:26 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?

- **On the following day** Ex 2:13-15
- **you are brethren** Ge 13:8; 45:24; Ps 133:1; Pr 18:19; John 15:17,18; 1 Cor 6:6-8; Php 2:1,3; 1 John 3:11-15
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

MOSES
THE RECONCILER

On the following day He appeared to them as they were fighting together - Now it is not Egyptians mistreating Israelites but both are Israelites. The idea of **appeared** in this context is that Moses came on the scene suddenly or unexpectedly.

Fighting is machomai in the present tense describing them as continually quarreling, disputing or fighting. It was a serious conflict, and the verb can mean either physical or non-physical, but clearly it indicates the contention is intensive and bitter.

Machomai in secular Greek is used to describe a wind of such high intensity that it leveled everything in its path, much like a hurricane.

Moses records "He went out the next day, and behold, two Hebrews were fighting with each other; and he said to the offender, "Why are you striking your companion?" (Ex 2:13)

And he tried to reconcile them in peace, saying, 'Men, you are brethren, why do you injure one another - Stephen in not quoting literally from Exodus but the account is similar.

Reconcile them in peace in the imperfect tense and you can picture the scene -- Moses is trying again and again to change them both into peace, because in the final analysis **are brethren** but it made no difference for each attempt by Moses was unsuccessful.

Injure (91) see **adikeo**

Acts 7:27 "But the one who was injuring his neighbor pushed him away, saying, 'WHO MADE YOU A RULER AND JUDGE OVER US? (NASB: Lockman)

> KJV Acts 7:27 But he that did his neighbour wrong thrust him away, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us?

- **the one who was injuring his neighbor** Acts 7:54; 5:33; Ge 19:19; 1 Samuel 25:14,15; Pr 9:7,8
- **Who** Acts 7:35,39; 3:13-15; 4:7,11,12; Mt 21:23; Luke 12:14; John 18:36,37; John 19:12-15
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

MOSES THE
REJECTED DELIVERER

But the one who was injuring his neighbor pushed him away, saying, 'WHO MADE YOU A RULER AND JUDGE OVER US?- The attacker had no desire for Moses "ministry of reconciliation." (Cf Christ's gift to all believers of the ministry of reconciliation - 2 Cor 5:18+). Later (Acts 7:35+) Stephen describes this episode as Israel disowning Moses, where disowned is the verb **arneomai** (used by Peter to describe the Jews denial of Jesus - Acts 3:13+) which means they denied and renounced him as deliverer at this time.

Stephen quotes words from Exodus that sound eerily like those the Jews uttered against Jesus, John recording...

> So they cried out, “Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him!” Pilate *said to them, “Shall I crucify your King?” The chief priests answered, “**We have no king but Caesar.**” (Jn 19:15)

Moses records

> "But he (ONE OF THE JEWISH MEN INJURING HIS NEIGHBOR) said, “Who made you a prince or a judge over us? Are you intending to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?” Then Moses was afraid and said, “Surely the matter has become known.” 15 When Pharaoh heard of this matter, he tried to kill Moses. But Moses fled from the presence of Pharaoh and settled in the land of Midian, and he sat down by a well. (Ex 2:14-15)

This rejection also recalls a very similar rejection of Joseph by the patriarchs (his brothers) - "Then his brothers said to him, **Are you actually going to reign over us?** Or **are you really going to rule over us**?” So **they hated him even mor**e for his dreams and for his words. (Ge 37:5)

Injuring (91) see **adikeo**

Pushed away (683)(**apotheo/apotheomai** from **apó** = from + **othéo** = push away, thrust, drive) means literally to push aside, thrust way (from) or push off. Figuratively as used here it means to reject, **repudiate**, refuse to listen to, to cast away or to put away (from). Used from Homer onward meaning “to repel,” “to reject,”

Stephen uses this rare verb **apotheomai** (6 NT uses) a second time a few verses later describing a second rejection of Moses...

> “Our fathers were unwilling to be obedient to him, but**repudiated** him (Moses) and in their hearts turned back to Egypt" (Acts 7:39+)

Paul uses **apotheomai** in a context filled with divine mercy, the antithesis of Stephen's uses describing Israel's rejection of Moses...

> I say then, God has not **rejected** (**apotheomai**) His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. 2 God has not **rejected** (**apotheomai**) His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? (Ro 11:1-2+)

Stephen is carefully building his case, one stone upon another, preparing for his crushing culminating indictment of the Sanhedrin and Jewish nation's rejection of their "Corner stone"

> This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, “THE STONE WHICH**THE BUILDERS REJECTED**, THIS BECAME THE VERY CORNER stone,” and, “A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE”; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed. (1 Peter 2:7-8+)

Ruler (official) (758)(**archon**) describes one who is first in rank or power. Uses two more times of Moses in Acts 7:35.

The rare word (also Acts 7:35) for judge (dikastes from dike = justice) one who presides over a court session and pronounces judgment. The offending party is saying who gave you the right to declare a verdict in this personal conflict.

Acts 7:28 'YOU DO NOT MEAN TO KILL ME AS YOU KILLED THE EGYPTIAN YESTERDAY, DO YOU?' (NASB: Lockman)

MOSES THE
MURDERER

Stephen quotes from Exodus 2:14 - "Are you intending to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" Clearly the Israelite did not accept Moses desire to reconcile and bring peace. So just as the Jews did not receive Jesus on His first coming, here the Jews did not receive Moses at his first coming. You can just imagine the proud Jewish religious leaders beginning to squirm in their seats.

It is interesting that the verb **To kill** is **anaireo** which is the same verb used when Moses was saved as a baby in Acts 7:21 (seenote there).

Acts 7:29 "At this remark, MOSES FLED AND BECAME AN ALIEN IN THE LAND OF MIDIAN, where he became the father of two sons. (NASB: Lockman)

> KJV Acts 7:29 Then fled Moses at this saying, and was a stranger in the land of Madian, where he begat two sons.

- Ex 2:14-22; 4:19,20
- **Midian** Ex 18:2-4
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

MOSES THE ALIEN

At this remark - Greek "At this word," which could be translated either "when the man said this" or "when Moses heard this." Since logos refers to the remark made by the Israelite, this translation has followed the first option.

MOSES FLED AND BECAME AN ALIEN IN THE LAND OF MIDIAN - Here is **map** showing the probable location of Midian. As an **alien** (see note on paroikos) Moses was a non-citizen of Midian, a stranger in this foreign land. Believers are to live as aliens in this passing world (1 Peter 2:11).

Where he became the father of two sons - In Exodus we read of his first son " Then she gave birth to a son, and he named him **Gershom**, for he said, “I have been a sojourner in a foreign land.” (Ex 2:22) Gershom's name means "a sojourner there (See Ex 18:3)." In Ex 18:4 we read of the second son "The other was named Eliezer, for he said, “The God of my father was my help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh.”

Holman New Testament Commentary - We cannot bypass the comparison between Moses and Jesus in this segment, both rejected by their own people. The incarnation and life of Jesus cannot be compared with Moses' bumbling attempts to start a slave deliverance campaign, but the reaction was essentially the same. In both cases we see a God-appointed leader driven away from the people he came to help. (Holman New Testament Commentary – Acts)

Acts 7:30 "After forty years had passed, AN ANGEL APPEARED TO HIM IN THE WILDERNESS OF MOUNT Sinai, IN THE FLAME OF A BURNING THORN BUSH. (NASB: Lockman)

> KJV 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.

- **after** 17; Ex 7:7
- **an Angel** Ex 3:1; 19:1,2; 1 Kings 19:8; Gal 4:25
- **Mount Sinai** Acts 7:32,35; Ge 16:7-13; 22:15-18; 32:24-30; 48:15,16; Ex 3:2,6; Isa 63:9; Hos 12:3-5; Mal 3:1
- **in the flame** Dt 4:20; Ps 66:12; Isa 43:2; Da 3:27
- **burning thorn bush** Acts 7:35; Dt 33:16; Mark 12:26; Luke 20:37
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

MOSES' CLOSE ENCOUNTER OF THE GOD KIND

After forty years had passed - This marks the end of the second stage of Moses' preparation and the beginning of his third and final stage, the last 40 year climatic chapter of his life! There is no record that Moses had communion with God during these forty years until the time of the event Stephen quotes. So Moses has been in the desert for 40 years herding sheep. Perhaps you are in the desert now wondering why God has not used you for some significant ministry. Be faithful will He is preparing your character, for the role for which He has been preparing you may soon become evident.

Exodus 3:1-10 gives us the background for Stephen's quotation. Notice that Exodus 3:2 links the Angel of the Lord with the LORD speaking in verse 4, so the Angel of the LORD is in fact the LORD (YHWH, Jehovah).

> 1 Now Moses was pasturing the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to **Horeb, the mountain of God.** 2 The **angel of the LORD** appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed. 3 So Moses said, "I must turn aside now and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up." 4 When the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, **God called to him from the midst of the bush** and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." 5 Then He said, "Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." 6 He said also, "**I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob**" Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. 7 The LORD said, "I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings. 8 "So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite. 9 "Now, behold, the cry of the sons of Israel has come to Me; furthermore, I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians are oppressing them. 10 "Therefore, come now, and I will send you to Pharaoh, so that you may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt."

AN ANGEL (KJV adds "of the Lord") **APPEARED TO HIM IN THE WILDERNESS OF MOUNT Sinai, IN THE FLAME OF A BURNING THORN BUSH** - this is not a created angel but is the Angel of the Lord, who most conservative commentators interpret as a pre-incarnate "Christophany" or visible appearance of the pre-incarnate Christ.

Angel (32)(**aggelos/angelos**) messenger, one who speaks and acts in place of one who has sent him, in this case presumably the pre-incarnate Christ sent by His Father to deliver the covenant people.

Wilderness (2048)(**eremos**) when used as an adjective, normally describes places which are abandoned, desolate, or unpopulated. **Eremos** "is an adjectival form used primarily in the nominal sense of "wilderness," "desert"' (Renn) A **desolate** place. **Eremos** is a "key word" in this section on Moses found in 5 verses - Acts 7:30, 36, 38, 42, 44. **Eremos** is the word used when Philip was directed by an angel that he might lead the Ethiopian eunuch to Christ (Acts 8:26).

Mt Sinai - (wikipedia) (Holman Bible Dictionary with map at bottom) Also called **Mount Horeb** (17x - Exod. 3:1; Exod. 17:6; Exod. 33:6; Deut. 1:2; Deut. 1:6; Deut. 1:19; Deut. 4:10; Deut. 4:15; Deut. 5:2; Deut. 9:8; Deut. 18:16; Deut. 29:1; 1 Ki. 8:9; 1 Ki. 19:8; 2 Chr. 5:10; Ps. 106:19; Mal. 4:4).

Sinai - 39x in 38v in Bible -

> Exod. 16:1; Exod. 19:1; Exod. 19:2; Exod. 19:11; Exod. 19:18; Exod. 19:20; Exod. 19:23; Exod. 24:16; Exod. 31:18; Exod. 34:2; Exod. 34:4; Exod. 34:29; Exod. 34:32; Lev. 7:38; Lev. 25:1; Lev. 26:46; Lev. 27:34; Num. 1:1; Num. 1:19; Num. 3:1; Num. 3:4; Num. 3:14; Num. 9:1; Num. 9:5; Num. 10:12; Num. 26:64; Num. 28:6; Num. 33:15; Num. 33:16; Deut. 33:2; Jdg. 5:5; Neh. 9:13; Ps. 68:8; Ps. 68:17; Acts 7:30; Acts 7:38; Gal. 4:24; Gal. 4:25

Related Resource:

- Angel of the LORD
- Why did God speak to Moses out of the burning bush?
- What is the location of the real Mount Sinai?

Acts 7:31 "When Moses saw it, he marveled at the sight; and as he approached to look more closely, there came the voice of the Lord: (NASB: Lockman)

KJV Acts 7:31 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,

- **and as** Ex 3:3,4
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

THE VOICE OF THE LORD

When Moses saw it - This was not a figment of his imagination but a true to life vision.

He marveled at the sight - **Marveled** is thaumazo which Luke has used in Acts 2:7, 3:12, 4:13 and is in the imperfect tense which speaks of repeated action, astonished over and over. The word describes the response of men when confronted by divine revelation in some form (cf Mt 9:33).

Sight (3705)(**horama** from **horáō** = to see, behold; English - panorama) describes literally that which is seen, as opposed to a figment of one's imagination (Mt 17:9; Ac 7:31; 10:3, 17, 19; 18:9). It is something that is viewed with one's eye. It describes a supernatural vision used to give divine communication and is distinct from a dream. In Matthew's use Jesus refers to His transfiguration commanding Peter, John and James "Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man has risen from the dead." (Mt 17:9) Uses of Jesus appearing to Ananias in a vision and told to go to Saul who had seen Ananias in a vision (Acts 9:10, 12). Of the vision of Cornelius at God begins to open the Gentiles to the Gospel (Acts 10:3) by showing Peter a vision (Acts 10:17, 11:5).

Horama is the word used by Luke to describe the Gospel going from Asia to the European continent

> A **vision** appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." When he had seen the **vision**, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. (Acts 16:9-10+)

Gilbrant - Classical writers understood **horama** to mean "that which is seen, visible," "a sight." It did not usually refer to a supernatural vision, although it could. A "dream" could also be called horama (Liddell-Scott). In the Septuagint the word is used for (1) a "vision" by which God revealed himself to Abraham (Genesis 15:1); (2) a "great sight" of a bush which burned with fire and was not consumed (Exodus 3:3); and (3) "night visions" through which God revealed to Daniel things in the future (Daniel 7:13,15). (Complete Biblical Library Greek-English Dictionary)

Horama - 12x in 12v - sight(1), vision(11).

> Matt. 17:9; Acts 7:31; Acts 9:10; Acts 9:12; Acts 10:3; Acts 10:17; Acts 10:19; Acts 11:5; Acts 12:9; Acts 16:9; Acts 16:10; Acts 18:9

Horama - 37v in the Septuagint

> Gen. 15:1 = "the word of the LORD came to Abram in a **vision**"; Gen. 46:2; Exod. 3:3 = "this marvelous **sight**'; Nu. 12:6 = "shall make Myself known to him in a **vision**"; Deut. 4:34; Deut. 26:8; Deut. 28:34; Deut. 28:67; Job 7:14; Eccl. 6:9; Isa. 21:1; Isa. 21:2; Isa. 21:11; Isa. 23:1; Isa. 30:10; Jer. 32:21; Dan. 1:17; Dan. 2:1; Dan. 2:7; Dan. 2:19; Dan. 2:23; Dan. 2:26; Dan. 2:28; Dan. 2:36; Dan. 2:45; Dan. 4:13; Dan. 4:28; Dan. 7:1 = "Daniel saw a dream and visions in his mind"; Dan. 7:2; Dan. 7:7; Dan. 7:13; Dan. 7:15; Dan. 8:2; Dan. 8:13; Dan. 8:15; Dan. 8:17; Dan. 8:26; Dan. 8:27; Dan. 9:24; Dan. 10:1;

And as he approached to look more closely - This is amazing. He was astonished at the vision of the non-burning bush and yet bold and curious enough to approach it.

There came the voice of the Lord - This is the Angel of the LORD described in Acts 7:30, so that this "Angel" is clearly God. Notice that here Stephen subtly refutes the belief of the Sanhedrin that God's presence and communication was restricted to the Temple in Jerusalem. Here God reveals Himself in Midian , Ex 3:1 recording specifically on "the west side of the wilderness...Horeb (ANOTHER NAME FOR MT SINAI), the mountain of God.

Lord (master, owner)(2962) (**kurios** from **kuros** = might or power) primarily means the possessor, owner, master, the supreme one, one who is sovereign (used this way of Roman emperors - Act 25:26) and possesses absolute authority, absolute ownership and uncontested power. Kurios is used of the one to whom a person or thing belonged, over which he has the power of deciding, the one who is the master or disposer of a thing (Mk 7:28) **Kurios** is used over 9000 times in the Septuagint (LXX) and over 700 times in the NT. Acts 7:31 is the first use of Kurios in Acts 7 by Stephen but is found 4 more times in the last section (Acts 7:33, 49, 59, 60).

Acts 7:32 'I AM THE GOD OF YOUR FATHERS, THE GOD OF ABRAHAM AND ISAAC AND JACOB.' Moses shook with fear and would not venture to look. (NASB: Lockman)

> KJV Acts 7:32 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.

- **I am** Acts 3:13; Ge 50:24; Ex 3:6,15; 4:5; Mt 22:32; Heb 11:16
- **Then** Acts 9:4-6; Ge 28:13-17; Ex 33:20; 1 Kings 19:13; Job 4:14; 37:1,2; 42:5,6; Ps 89:7; Isa 6:1-5; Da 10:7,8; Mt 17:6; Luke 5:8; Rev 1:17
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

GOD IDENTIFIES HIMSELF BY HIS FULL COVENANT NAME

I AM THE GOD OF YOUR FATHERS, THE GOD OF ABRAHAM AND ISAAC AND JACOB - Stephen is quoting from the Septuagint of Exodus "He said also, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. (Ex 3:6)

The mention of the patriarchs **Abraham, Isaac and Jacob** clearly links God with the Abrahamic covenant God had cut with the founding fathers (cf Acts 7:8+). Presumably Moses would have been aware of God's full covenant name used here (having been taught by his mother). The point is that this appearance is in clearly related to the great covenant with Abraham.

NET Note says "The phrase suggests the God of promise, the God of the nation."

Lenski - He appears here on Sinai because here he will renew and advance his covenant with the children of Israel when Moses, through God's mighty hand, has freed them from Pharaoh and brought them to this place. (The Interpretation of The Acts of the Apostles)

One other point - Who is the audience? The religious leaders, predominantly Sadducees, many of whom may well have heard this same quote from the lips of Jesus Christ in His defense of the doctrine of the resurrection and the future life, as He used this passage in which God describes himself as the God of the living not the dead.

> Mark 12:26 "But regarding the fact that the dead rise again, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the burning bush, how God spoke to him, saying, '**I AM THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND THE GOD OF ISAAC, AND THE GOD OF JACOB**'?
>
> Matthew 22:32 **'I AM THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND THE GOD OF ISAAC, AND THE GOD OF JACOB**'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living."
>
> Luke 20:37-38 "But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the burning bush, where he calls the Lord **THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND THE GOD OF ISAAC, AND THE GOD OF JACOB**. 38"Now He is not the God of the dead but of the living; for all live to Him."

OUR GOD IS AN AWESOME GOD

Moses shook with fear and would not venture to look - Literally becoming tremulous or terrified. Notice that Stephen thinks of God as a God to be feared, not blasphemed as they had accused him of doing. Horton is probably correct in his comment that "This shows he knew about God's dealings with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; he knew what a holy God they served. He knew too that God had made covenant promises. No doubt his mother had told him these things (see Exod. 2:8-9)." (Acts: A Logion Press Commentary)

And recall they had accused Stephen of blaspheming God, but here we see how he esteems God. So once again he is in a sense defending himself of the charges of blasphemy (Acts 6:11-14).

Shook (1790)(**entromos** from **en** = in + **tromos** = trembling, quaking, from **tremo** = to quake, to tremble, especially with fear) means trembling with fear (as the Philippian jailer rushing in when Paul and Silas were freed from their prison cells - Acts 16:29). It is a picturesque adjective which refers to "being in a quivering condition because of exposure to an overwhelming or threatening circumstance (IN SOME WAYS BOTH WOULD BE TRUE IN MOSES' CASE)." The last use of entromos recalls that described here

of Moses' reaction "And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, “I AM FULL OF FEAR and trembling.” (Heb 12:21+). Here Moses is speaking of the terrifying sight of God coming down on Mt Sinai (cf Heb 12:18-20).

Venture (5111)(**tolmao** from **tólma** = courage) means to have courage, be bold, dare to do something. **Louw-Nida** - "to be so bold as to challenge or defy possible danger or opposition." **Robertson** adds "Imperfect active, was not daring."

To look (2657)(**katanoeo** from **kata** = down [kata can intensify meaning] + **noéo** = to perceive or think) means literally to put the mind down on something and so to observe or consider carefully and attentively. It means to fix one’s eyes or mind upon and to perceive clearly, looking carefully, cautiously, observantly. This verb also includes the idea is to think about something very carefully or consider closely. This is an interesting verb choice by Luke, because Moses absolutely did not even dare take this kind of studied look, albeit undoubtedly he wanted to as the vision was so marvelous.

Play Hillsong's version of the song **Our God is an Awesome God** as you *TRY* (that's is all we can do given His infinite, transcendent majesty and glory!) to contemplate what Moses saw on this incredible day, and as you do **May God's Holy Spirit stir in our hearts to give us a fresh sense of His awesome nature and His incredible mercy to allow us into His holy presence through our Great High Priest, Jesus Christ, the Lord of Glory**. Amen

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Acts 7:33 "BUT THE LORD SAID TO HIM, 'TAKE OFF THE SANDALS FROM YOUR FEET, FOR THE PLACE ON WHICH YOU ARE STANDING IS HOLY GROUND. (NASB: Lockman)

> KJV Acts 7:33 Then said the Lord to him, Put off thy shoes from thy feet: for the place where thou standest is holy ground.

- **Take off** Ex 3:5; Joshua 5:15; Ecclesiastes 5:1; 2 Peter 1:18
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

YOU ARE STANDING ON HOLY GROUND

As a point of application, now everywhere believers are is in a sense "**holy ground**" because the Holy One of Israel inhabits our bodies, so that we function (so to speak) as "portable tabernacles." Are you careful where you take your "tabernacle?" Do you willfully expose the "holy ground" to unholy grunge?

BUT - Term of contrast - Moses would not look but nevertheless the Holy One condescended to speak to him. Now every day we open His Word, we are able to hear from the Holy One. Do we undervalue the great privilege we have today as New Testament believers? We say how great it would be to hear God speak from a burning bush. Well, beloved, consider your Bible to be a "burning bush," for He still speaks through His living oracles! Are you spending time before the "burning bush" daily? Remember Jesus' admonition in Mt 4:4 that ‘MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD.’”

THE LORD SAID TO HIM, 'TAKE OFF THE SANDALS FROM YOUR FEET, FOR THE PLACE ON WHICH YOU ARE STANDING IS HOLY GROUND - It is interesting that the quote in Acts 7:32 is from Exodus 3:6 and the quote here in Acts 7:33 is from the preceding verse in Exodus, Exodus 3:5 "Then He said, “Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” Clearly Stephen does not feel the exact order of events is important, but what is important is to build his case regarding Israel's second rejection of Moses.

Lenski on **take off the sandals from your feet** - This is an Oriental idea: to remove the sandals in the presence of a superior, to walk in bare feet in any sanctuary. Thus the priests did in the Temple, thus must all who enter Mohammedan mosques do today, thus the Samaritans do on Mt. Gerizim. See how Aaron and his sons were sanctified, Ex. 29:10; Lev. 8:23. Entrance into the mosques, even that on the site of the Temple in Jerusalem, is now compromised. All the author (LENSKI) had to do was to put on huge slippers over his shoes (**ED**: WHEN WE ENTERED THE DOME OF THE ROCK IN THE 1990'S, WE HAD TO REMOVE OUR SHOES TO WALK INSIDE WHICH WAS CARPETED). These were furnished at the doors by an attendant, but these slippers were imperative unless one entered in his stocking feet. (The Interpretation of The Acts of the Apostles)

Robertson - The priests were barefooted when they ministered in the temple. Moslems enter their mosques barefooted today.

Holy ground - Now remember the Sanhedrin had accused Stephen of speaking "against this holy place. (TEMPLE)" (Acts 6:13) And here Stephen in his illustration from the life of Moses, points out that God told Moses he as was **Holy Ground**. And yet there

was no Temple! He was showing the Sanhedrin that it was not the Temple that was holy but it was God that was holy! Where God is, is holy!

We see a similar example of a divine encounter (which I think again was aChristophany) with Joshua before the Israelites entered the land of Canaan to possess their possessions (cf Josh 1:3)...

> The Captain of the LORD'S host said to Joshua, "Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is **holy** (Lxx = hagios)." And Joshua did so. (Joshua 5:15)
>
> > **MacArthur** comments - The Lord Jesus Christ (Joshua 6:2; cf. Josh 5:15 with Ex 3:2, 5) in a pre-incarnate appearance (Christophany). He came as the Angel (Messenger) of the Lord, as if He were a man (cf. the one of 3 "angels," Ge 18:1-5). Joshua fittingly was reverent in worship. The Captain, sword drawn, showed a posture indicating He was set to give Israel victory over the Canaanites (Joshua 6:2; cf.Joshua 1:3). (The MacArthur Study Bible)

Holy (40)(**hagios**) means set apart by God and/or for god, consecrated, dedicated, sacred. "Its fundamental idea is separation, consecration, devotion to the service of Deity, sharing in God's purity and abstaining from earth's defilement." (Zodhiates) The Jews considered their Temple in Jerusalem to be holy (cf Acts 21:28), but surprisingly the phrase "holy temple" is not found in the New Testament. Here Stephen reminds the religious leaders that this patch of ground outside of Israel was referred to by God Himself as "holy ground." Stephen is clearly giving a gentle rebuke to the religious leaders for their "Temple-olatry" (aka "Edifice Complex" a play on "Oedipus Complex") implying that wherever God is present, that place is holy and that God was never restricted to a specific building, even their "glorious" Temple in Jerusalem.

David Thompson says that "The Grace of God Gospel clearly reestablishes this point. You do not have to be in the Temple of Jerusalem to be **holy**. You do not have to be in church to be **holy**. Your body is the Temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 3:16, 1 Cor 6:19-20+) and therefore you are **holy** because you have the presence of (the thrice holy) God in you. (Sermon)

WRONG PRIORITIES - Stephen's words about the tabernacle and later the temple were aimed at a people who had developed an unhealthy view of their place of worship. Through the years the Israelites had come to revere the actual structure and its contents more than God himself. Rather than being a place to meet with God, the temple had become for them a source of religious snobbery. Stephen's words convey the truth that God cannot be confined to a building and suggest that, despite the prideful presuppositions, the temple was *not* the holiest place on earth and had become a mere gathering place for infidels! Be careful not to become so caught up in human religious systems that you forget the God who lives now. Those who replace God or try to confine him are guilty of idolatry. (Life Application Bible Commentary – Acts)

What does the Bible mean when it refers to holy ground?

Answer: The phrase "holy ground" is found only twice in the Bible, once in the Old Testament and once in the New. God Himself first identified the area in which He met with Moses on Mount Horeb (Sinai) as holy ground. It was there that God commanded Moses to go to Pharaoh and demand that he let the people go from bondage to Egypt. At the moment Moses came upon the burning bush out of which God spoke to him, God gave him two commands: don't come near and take off your sandals. Both commands were to impress upon Moses that he was standing on holy ground (Exodus 3:5). Joshua 5:15 describes a similar incident, but the phrase "holy ground" is not used.

It was not that the actual ground on which Moses stood was holy; rather, it was the presence of the holy God that made it holy. The direction to Moses to remove his shoes was in conformity with what was well known to Moses, for, having been brought up in Egypt, he would have known that the Egyptian priests observed the custom in their temples. Today it is observed in all Eastern countries where the people take off their shoes or sandals before entering mosques and synagogues as a confession of personal defilement and conscious unworthiness to stand in the presence of unspotted holiness. Moses responds by not only removing his shoes, but also by hiding his face, a sign that he understood he was in the presence of the glory of the divine Majesty and was conscious of his own sinfulness and unworthiness. In fact, Moses was so aware of God's holiness that he was afraid to look at Him (Exodus 3:6).

In the New Testament, the event described in Exodus is reiterated by Stephen as he was preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ before the Sanhedrin. He recounted the history of the Jews and their dealings with the God of their forefathers (Acts 6—7). He reminded them of the incident of the holy ground on which Moses stood and spoke to God (Acts 7:33). The holy ground was rendered sacred by the presence of God, who is the very essence of holiness. The lesson for us is that we should enter the sanctuary, the place set apart for divine worship, with reverence in our hearts. **Solemn awe and deep seriousness are appropriate for coming into the place set apart for the worship of God, for wherever the Lord is constitutes holy ground.**

Acts 7:34 'I HAVE CERTAINLY SEEN THE OPPRESSION OF MY PEOPLE IN EGYPT AND HAVE HEARD THEIR GROANS, AND I HAVE COME DOWN TO RESCUE THEM; COME NOW, AND I WILL SEND YOU TO EGYPT.' (NASB: Lockman)

> KJV Acts 7:34 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.

- **I have seen** Ex 2:23-25; 3:7,9; 4:31; 6:5,6; Judges 2:18; 10:15,16; Neh 9:9; Ps 106:44; Isa 63:8,9
- **and am** Ge 11:5,7; 18:21; Ex 3:8; Nu 11:17; Ps 144:5; Isa 64:1; John 3:13; John 6:38
- **And now** Ex 3:10,14; Ps 105:26; Hos 12:13; Micah 6:4
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

MOSES DIVINE COMMISSION TO BE ISRAEL'S DELIVERER

Forty years earlier Moses and a sense he was to deliver Israel but it was not to be at that time. The deliverer was rejected. But now Moses has been prepared by herding sheep for 40 years in the wilderness after being rejected by Israel, not knowing that he would be herding these very "sheep" (Israel) another 40 years in the wilderness because of their failure to believe God's call to enter the promised land.

I HAVE CERTAINLY SEEN THE OPPRESSION OF MY PEOPLE IN EGYPT AND HAVE HEARD THEIR GROANS, AND I HAVE COME DOWN TO RESCUE THEM; COME NOW, AND I WILL SEND YOU TO EGYPT - God has both **seen** and **heard**. We read over this so quickly but it is an amazing manifestation of divine condescension as He looks and listens with mercy on His chosen people. This is an example of pure grace, God's unmerited favor to an undeserving people (THEY ARE A PICTURE OF ALL OF US!). The phrase "**I have certainly seen**" is literally "I have seen, I have seen" as the KJV renders it. Clearly this repetition (which is often done in the Hebrew language = a Hebraism) is meant to emphasize the faithfulness of God. And beloved, if you are in the New Covenant with Him, He constantly looks and listens and is aware of your oppressive situation and your groans!

Oppression (2561)(**kakosis**) means mistreatment, that which is distressing or harassing, cruel suffering. (Vulgate = afflictio)

My people - God identifies the Israelites as His possession.

Groans (4726)(**stenagmos** from **stenazo** = to groan) describes groaning, signing both involuntary expressions of great stress in Acts 7:34 (Ex 2:24, 6:5, cf Israel's groaning when enemy raised up against them - Jdg 2:18+). The only other NT use describes the groans of the Holy Spirit in prayer "the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with **groanings** too deep for words." (Ro 8:26+). When Israel returns to Jehovah at the end of this age Isaiah says "sorrow and sighing will flee away." (Isa 51:11, Isa 35:10+ during the Millennium!).

Gilbrant - In Genesis 3:16 it describes the “groanings” of the pain of childbirth that all women experience as a result of Eve’s sin. In Exodus 2:24 God heard the “groaning” of His people enslaved in Egypt. In all of its Septuagint occurrences **stenagmos** is associated with pain or sorrow.

Stenagmos - 21x in 21v in the Septuagint -

> Gen. 3:16; Exod. 2:24; Exod. 6:5; Jdg. 2:18; Job 3:24; Job 23:2; Ps. 6:6; Ps. 12:5; Ps. 31:10; Ps. 38:8; Ps. 38:9; Ps. 79:11; Ps. 102:5; Ps. 102:20; Isa. 35:10; Isa. 51:11; Jer. 4:31; Jer. 45:3; Lam. 1:22; Ezek. 24:17; Mal. 2:13

J Vernon McGee - God told Moses, “I have heard their groaning.” He saw their need. That was the reason He delivered them. It was for the same reason that He provided a Savior for you and me. It wasn’t because we are such wonderful people. He didn’t look down and say, “My, they are so lovely down there. I must go down and save them. They are so sweet, and so kind, and so loving to Me, and so faithful to Me.” No! God looked down and saw nothing but corrupt, rotten sinners. We were all lost in iniquity. He loved us in spite of our unloveliness. That is the explanation. (Thru the Bible)

I have come down to rescue them - Of course Stephen is speaking of Israel in slavery in Egypt, but the implication is that God had sent His Son down to earth to rescue men from enslavement to sin.

The verb **rescue** is **exaireo** (used in Acts 7:10 of rescuing Joseph). It is interesting that Saul may have been in the audience listening to Stephen give his defense of the Gospel of Jesus Christ using the Old Testament Scriptures, for once converted Paul in one of his first epistles used this same verb in the context of salvation writing "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, Who gave Himself for our sins so that He **might rescue** (**exaireo**) us from this present evil age, according to the

will of our God and Father, (Galatians 1:4+).

The idea of God rescuing Israel from slavery would also bring up other thoughts in the minds of his listeners. And so the Sanhedrin must have surely been aware of Jesus' claim in John 8 when the Jews told Him

> "We are Abraham's descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, 'You will become free'?" (Jn 8:33) Jesus responded declaring "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. 35 "The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever. 36 "So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. (John 8:34-36)

John Phillips quips that "And at this point Stephen skillfully dropped his brush and palette and picked up his sword. He had drawn a breath-taking parallel between Joseph and Jesus and Moses and Jesus. Now came the sword-thrust application." (Exploring Acts)

Acts 7:35 "This Moses whom they disowned, saying, 'WHO MADE YOU A RULER AND A JUDGE?' is the one whom God sent to be both a ruler and a deliverer with the help of the Angel who appeared to him in the thorn bush. (NASB: Lockman)

> KJV Acts 7:35 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.

- **This Moses** Acts 7:9-15,27,28,51; 1 Samuel 8:7,8; 10:27; Luke 19:14; John 18:40; 19:15
- **the one whom God sent** Ps 75:7; 113:7,8; 118:22,23
- **a ruler** Acts 2:36; 3:22; 5:31; 1 Samuel 12:8; Neh 9:10-14; Ps 77:20; Isa 63:11,12; Rev 15:3
- **with the help of the Angel** Acts 7:30; Ex 14:19,24; 23:20-23; 32:34; 33:2,12-15; Nu 20:16; Isa 63:9; Colossians 1:15; Heb 2:2
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

THE DELIVERER DISOWNED

This Moses whom they disowned, saying, 'WHO MADE YOU A RULER AND A JUDGE (quoting Ex 2:14)**?'** - Scripture is always the best commentary on Scripture and here Stephen comments on the same phrase quoted in Acts 7:27+. The implication is that Moses would have been their deliverer had they received him at that time.

Looking at this question (**'WHO MADE YOU A RULER AND A JUDGE?'**) from another perspective, the answer is that God made Moses a ruler and a deliverer.

Gilbrant comments that "Stephen had in mind the saying that the stone the builders refused was made the head of the corner (Psalm 118:22). The same God who gave honor and power to Moses gave honor and power to Jesus." (Complete Biblical Library – Acts)

Lenski comments that Acts 7:35-40 "is one chain: five emphatic '**this**" (Acts 7:35, 36, 37, 38, 40) terminating in two "he who (Acts 7:44)(to whom - Acts 7:39KJV)." It is like a grand pyramid, and the capstone is Israel's idolatrous unbelief."

The verb **disowned** is **arneomai** which means the Jews denied and renounced Moses as their deliverer, just like they did with Jesus. You can envision the nostrils of the Sanhedrin beginning to flare!

Arneomai is the same verb used twice by Peter in Acts 3:13-14+ which resulted in thousands of Jews accepting Jesus as their Messiah and Savior...

> "The **God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob**, (SAME PHRASE STEPHEN USED) the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus, the one whom you delivered and **disowned** (arneomai) in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him. 14 "But you **disowned** (**arneomai**) the Holy and **Righteous One** (SAME NAME OF GOD STEPHEN USED IN Acts 7:52+) and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, 15 but put to death the Prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses.

Is the one whom God sent to be both a ruler and a deliverer- Moses was God's appointed messenger and they had rejected him. The result was 40 more years of oppression and slavery! The rejection of their King and Redeemer the first time has already brought 2000 years of affliction to the Jews and sadly the worst is yet to come in the **time of Jacob's trouble** (aka **The Great Tribulation**)!

Sent (649)(**apostello** from **apo** = from, away from + **stello** = to withdraw from, avoid) means to send off, to send forth, to send out. To send out; to commission as a representative, an ambassador, an envoy. The idea is to send forth from one place to another. But the meaning of apostello is more than just to send because it means "to send off on a commission to do something as one's personal representative, with credentials furnished" (Wuest) To send upon some business (Mt. 2:16; 10:5; 20:2). To send away in the sense of to dismiss (Mk 12:3, 4). To send or thrust forth as a sickle among corn (Mk 4:29). Three things are true of the person sent from God. (1) He belongs to God, who has sent him out. (2) He is commissioned to be sent out. (3) He possesses all the authority and power of God, who has sent him out.

It is no coincidence that the verb Stephen uses for **sent** (**apostello**) is repeatedly used of the Father sending the Son on mission and here are just a few of over 30 passages -

> Luke 10:16 "The one who listens to you listens to Me, and the one who rejects you rejects Me; and he who rejects Me rejects the One who **sent** Me."
>
> John 3:17; "For God did not **send** the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him.
>
> John 5:36 "But the witness which I have is greater than that of John; for the works which the Father has given Me to accomplish, the very works that I do, bear witness of Me, that the Father has **sent** Me.
>
> John 6:29 Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has **sent**."

Deliverer (3086)(**lutrotes** from **lutroo** = to release by paying a ransom) is a liberator, a redeemer, one who sets free slaves or captives by payment of a price (the price of redemption). This is the only use in the NT, but there are 4 uses of lutrotes in the Septuagint and two are especially significant for they are used to describe our Redeemer (Christ Jesus), our Goel which makes Stephen's designation of Moses as Israel's lutrotes that much more compelling as he builds toward his climax in Acts 7:51-52!

> Psalm 19:14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart Be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my rock and my **Redeemer** (Hebrew = goel/ga'al; Lxx = lutrotes).
>
> Psalm 78:35 And they remembered that God was their rock, And the Most High God **their Redeemer** (Hebrew = goel/ga'al; Lxx = lutrotes).

John Phillips - Such was Israel's blindness. They had rejected the savior sent to them by God, but God had no other savior. All they had gained by their blind and wicked rejection of Moses was further bondage. In the end the very savior they had spurned was sent back by God to be ruler and deliverer. Encompassed in this forceful summary of the type are the two comings of Christ with Israel's age-long rejection sandwiched in between. The Sanhedrin could hardly miss the point Stephen was driving home. (Exploring Acts)

With the help of the Angel who appeared to him in the thorn bush - Moses was a redeemer of Israel but Stephen says he carried out his role as a redeemer with the help of THE REDEEMER (where **help** is Greek word for *hand*), the **Angel** of the Lord, the pre-incarnate Christ! How so? If a redeemer pays a ransom price to set the captives free, what ransom price did Moses pay to set captive Israel free? Indeed, it was the blood of the perfect male lamb (Ex 12:3-5), the blood representing the price that had to be paid, which was the life of the lamb (Ex 12:7, 13-14). And of course this alludes to one of the most beautiful Old Testament "shadows" of our Redeemer, the **Angel**, the **Lamb of God** Who takes away the sin of the world (Jn 1:29) (setting us free from captivity to sin [see Sin personified] by the price of His precious blood, unblemished and spotless. - 1 Pe 1:18-19+), Paul explaining that "**Christ our Passover** also has been sacrificed." (1 Cor 5:7)

Does the thought of the price paid by our Great Redeemer to set us free not draw your heart to worship Him in spirit and in truth? Play (and sing) these great words and (enabled by the Holy Spirit) take them to heart as you sing them...

DEARLY WE'RE BOUGHT
Listen to this one!

Come, raise your thankful voice,
Ye souls redeemed with blood;
Leave earth and all its toys,
And mix no more with mud.
Dearly we're bought, highly esteemed;
Redeemed, with Jesus' blood redeemed.

With heart, and soul, and mind,

Exalt redeeming love;
Leave worldly cares behind,
And set your minds above.
Dearly we're bought, highly esteemed;
Redeemed, with Jesus' blood redeemed.

Lift up your ravished eyes,
And view the glory given;
All lower things despise,
Ye citizens of heaven.
Dearly we're bought, highly esteemed;
Redeemed, with Jesus' blood redeemed.

Be to this world as dead,
Alive to that to come;
Our life in Christ is hid,
Who soon shall call us home.
Dearly we're bought, highly esteemed;
Redeemed, with Jesus' blood redeemed.

GLORY! HALLELUJAH! AMEN!

Acts 7:36 "This man led them out, performing wonders and signs in the land of Egypt and in the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years. (NASB: Lockman)

> KJV Acts 7:36 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.

- **led them out** Ex 12:41; 33:1
- **performing wonders and signs in the land of Egypt** Ex 7:1-14; Dt 4:33-37; 6:21,22; Neh 9:10; Ps 78:12,13,42-51; Ps 105:27-36; 106:8-11; 135:8-12; 136:9-15
- **in the Red** Ex 14:21,27-29
- **and in the wilderness** Ex 15:23-25; 16:1-17; 19:1-20; Nu 9:15-23; 11:1-35; 14:1-45; Nu 16:1-17; 20:1-21; Dt 2:25-37; 8:4; Neh 9:12-15,18-22; Ps 78:14-33; 105:39-45; 106:17,18; 135:10-12; 136:16-21
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

MIRACLES AT THE HAND OF MOSES

This man led them out - The one they had earlier rejected led them out. The one that they would have delivered to Pharaoh and certain death. Moses did not hold this against them but carried out his God given role as their deliverer.

Moses whose name means "drawn out," led them out of four centuries of oppressive conditions which is a long time to be in bondage! God had raised up Moses to be Israel's deliverer from slavery in Egypt. His leading began on the night of the Passover, Exodus 12:41 stating that "And at the end of four hundred and thirty years, to the very day, all the hosts of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt."

While Moses was their human leader, their ultimate leader was God as we read in Deuteronomy

> then you shall say to your son, 'We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and**the LORD brought us from Egypt with a mighty hand.** 22 'Moreover, the LORD showed great and distressing signs and wonders before our eyes against Egypt, Pharaoh and all his household; (Dt 6:21-22)

> He (JEHOVAH) wrought wonders before their fathers In the land of Egypt, in the field of Zoan. 13 He divided the sea and caused them to pass through, And He made the waters stand up like a heap. 14 Then He led them with the cloud by day And all the night with a light of fire. 15 He split the rocks in the wilderness And gave them abundant drink like the ocean depths. 16 He brought forth streams also from the rock And caused waters to run down like rivers. (Ps 78:12-16)

Note that Israel's rejection of Moses was tantamount to a rejection of God who raised up Moses.

> **Lead out** (1806)(**exago** from **ek** = out + **ago** = lead) lead out, bring out from a place, conduct from an area (Mk 15:20; Acts 5:19; Acts 7:36; 16:37, 39; Acts 21:38). As a shepherd leads his flock (John 10:3).
>
> **NT uses of exago** - 12x in 12v - bring(1), brought(1), lead(1), leads(1), led(7), taking(1). Mk. 15:20; Lk. 24:50; Jn. 10:3; Acts 5:19; Acts 7:36; Acts 7:40; Acts 12:17; Acts 13:17; Acts 16:37; Acts 16:39; Acts 21:38; Heb. 8:9
>
> > **Septuagint** - Gen. 1:20; Gen. 1:21; Gen. 1:24; Gen. 8:17; Gen. 11:31; Gen. 15:5; Gen. 15:7; Gen. 19:5; Gen. 19:8; Gen. 19:12; Gen. 19:17; Gen. 20:13; Gen. 38:24; Gen. 40:14; Gen. 41:14; Gen. 43:23; Gen. 48:12; Exod. 3:8; Exod. 3:10; Exod. 3:11; Exod. 3:12; Exod. 6:6; Exod. 6:7; Exod. 6:26; Exod. 6:27; Exod. 7:4; Exod. 7:5; Exod. 8:18; Exod. 12:17; Exod. 12:42; Exod. 12:51; Exod. 13:3; Exod. 13:9; Exod. 13:14; Exod. 13:16; Exod. 14:11; Exod. 16:3; Exod. 16:6; Exod. 16:32; Exod. 18:1; Exod. 19:17; Exod. 20:2; Exod. 29:46; Exod. 32:1; Exod. 32:7; Exod. 32:11; Exod. 32:12; Exod. 32:23; Exod. 33:1; Lev. 19:36; Lev. 22:33; Lev. 23:43; Lev. 24:14; Lev. 24:23; Lev. 25:38; Lev. 25:42; Lev. 25:55; Lev. 26:13; Lev. 26:45; Num. 15:36; Num. 15:41; Num. 19:3; Num. 20:10; Num. 20:16; Num. 21:5; Num. 23:22; Num. 27:17; Deut. 1:27; Deut. 4:20; Deut. 4:37; Deut. 5:6; Deut. 5:15; Deut. 6:12; Deut. 6:21; Deut. 6:23; Deut. 7:8; Deut. 7:19; Deut. 8:14; Deut. 8:15; Deut. 9:12; Deut. 9:26; Deut. 9:28; Deut. 9:29; Deut. 13:5; Deut. 13:10; Deut. 17:5; Deut. 21:19; Deut. 22:21; Deut. 22:24; Deut. 26:8; Deut. 29:25; Jos. 2:3; Jos. 6:22; Jos. 6:23; Jos. 10:22; Jos. 10:23; Jos. 10:24; Jos. 15:9; Jos. 24:5; Jos. 24:30; Jdg. 2:12; Jdg. 6:8; Jdg. 6:30; Jdg. 19:22; Jdg. 19:24; Jdg. 19:25; 1 Sam. 12:8; 2 Sam. 5:2; 2 Sam. 12:31; 2 Sam. 13:9; 2 Sam. 13:18; 2 Sam. 22:20; 2 Sam. 22:49; 1 Ki. 8:12; 1 Ki. 8:16; 1 Ki. 8:21; 1 Ki. 8:51; 1 Ki. 9:9; 1 Ki. 21:10; 1 Ki. 21:13; 1 Ki. 22:34; 2 Ki. 10:22; 2 Ki. 11:15; 2 Ki. 21:15; 2 Ki. 23:4; 2 Ki. 25:27; 1 Chr. 11:2; 1 Chr. 19:16; 1 Chr. 20:3; 2 Chr. 1:17; 2 Chr. 7:22; 2 Chr. 18:33; 2 Chr. 23:11; 2 Chr. 35:23; 2 Chr. 35:24; Neh. 9:7; Neh. 9:18; Job 8:10; Job 10:18; Job 12:22; Job 15:13; Job 23:7; Ps. 18:19; Ps. 25:17; Ps. 31:4; Ps. 66:12; Ps. 68:6; Ps. 78:16; Ps. 104:14; Ps. 105:37; Ps. 105:43; Ps. 107:14; Ps. 107:28; Ps. 135:7; Ps. 136:11; Ps. 136:16; Ps. 142:7; Ps. 143:11; Isa. 42:7; Isa. 43:8; Isa. 43:17; Isa. 48:21; Isa. 65:9; Jer. 10:13; Jer. 15:19; Jer. 20:3; Jer. 26:23; Jer. 31:32; Jer. 32:21; Jer. 35:3; Jer. 38:22; Jer. 38:23; Jer. 39:14; Jer. 51:16; Jer. 52:31; Ezek. 11:7; Ezek. 11:9; Ezek. 14:22; Ezek. 20:6; Ezek. 20:9; Ezek. 20:10; Ezek. 20:14; Ezek. 20:22; Ezek. 20:34; Ezek. 20:38; Ezek. 20:41; Ezek. 28:18; Ezek. 34:13; Ezek. 37:1; Ezek. 42:1; Ezek. 42:15; Ezek. 43:1; Ezek. 46:21; Ezek. 47:2; Dan. 2:12; Dan. 2:14; Dan. 9:15; Hos. 9:13; Mic. 7:9;

Performing wonders (teras) **and signs** (semeion) **in the land of Egypt and in the Red Sea** - Of course the parallel with Jesus is clear - Moses was acting like Jesus Who performed signs and wonders for 3 years in Israel. Stephen is building his case for he has just said in Acts 7:35 that they disowned him.

Although Stephen does not go into detail regarding the miracles, it is clear that in them all even through Moses was His instrument, ultimately God was revealing Himself. E.g., in plague of frogs Moses said he would intercede to take this plague away and he would do so "that you (PHARAOH) may know that there is no one like the LORD our God." (Ex 8:9-10+, cf the plague of flies - Ex 8:22+ = "in order that you [PHARAOH] may know that I, the LORD, am in the midst of the land."). And after deliverance through what did Moses and Israel do? They sang a song of praise to Jehovah (Ex 15:1-21).

Wonders and signs - Supernatural signs were common in the book of Acts - see Acts 2:19, 22, 43; 4:30; 5:12; 6:8; 7:36; 14:3; 15:12).

And in the wilderness for forty years - Stephen skips over the details of Moses' miracles in the wilderness, but the Sanhedrin would have been familiar with the provision of manna for food and water from a rock, even as Israel grumbled at Moses and ultimately against God (cf Ex 15:24-27, Ex 16:2, 7, 12, 17:3, 6,7, Nu 14:1-2,etc).

Rex A. Koivisto - The implication is that since the place from which Israel was delivered was Egypt, then obviously the God who delivered them cannot be restricted by national boundaries. This is emphasized even further by the following notations: It was in Midian that the divine oracle to Moses took place (v 29); and the divine workings were seen when God “did wonders and miraculous signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea, and for forty years in the desert” (v 36). (GTJ 8:1 (Spr 87) p. 101 Stephen’s Speech: A Theology of Errors?)

Acts 7:37 "This is the Moses who said to the sons of Israel, 'GOD WILL RAISE UP FOR YOU A PROPHET LIKE ME FROM YOUR BRETHREN.' (NASB: Lockman)

> KJV Acts 7:37 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.

- **the Moses** Acts 7:38; 2 Chr 28:22; Da 6:13
- **A prophet** Acts 3:22; Dt 18:15-19
- **like me** Acts 3:23; Mt 17:3-5; Mk 9:7; Luke 9:30,31,35; Jn 8:46,47; 18:37
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

MOSES' MESSIANIC PROPHECY

This is the Moses - We should not miss Stephen's intent - "This Moses," this one you had rejected, this one who delivered you from Egypt. He is the very one who gave us the great Messianic prophecy. Stephen was not even subtle with this declaration because the Sanhedrin knew how the apostles like Peter had already applied this passage to Jesus!

Peter had quoted this same verse preaching on Solomon's portico (Acts 3:22+).

> "Moses said, 'THE LORD GOD WILL RAISE UP FOR YOU A **PROPHET** LIKE ME FROM YOUR BRETHREN; TO HIM YOU SHALL GIVE HEED to everything He says to you.

Constable - Stephen continued dealing with the Mosaic period of Israel's history, but focused more particularly now on Moses' teaching, the Mosaic Law. This is what the Jews of his day professed to venerate and follow exactly, but Stephen showed that they really had rejected what Moses taught.

Who said to the sons of Israel, 'GOD WILL RAISE UP FOR YOU A PROPHET LIKE ME FROM YOUR BRETHREN- Why does Stephen quote from Deut 18:15, a passage his Jewish listeners undoubtedly knew was a Messianic passage? Stephen's point could not have been more pointed. They professed to honor and follow Moses (and had accused Stephen of dishonoring him) and so they should have recognized that Jesus was "the prophet like me" which Moses had predicted. By refusing to believe Moses' prophecy as fulfilled in Jesus, the Sanhedrin "blasphemed" Moses! The accused adroitly accuses his accusers! Remember Stephen was "full of the **Spirit** and of **wisdom**," (Acts 6:3+) and their best debaters had been "unable to cope with the**wisdom** and the **Spirit** with which he was speaking!" (Acts 6:10+)

Lenski on the phrase **like me** - "like me"...more decidedly than ever makes Moses the type of Jesus, each being a mediator, Jesus being the supreme One.

Gilbrant comments that "They knew Stephen was saying that by not listening to Jesus they were disobeying God and treating not only Jesus, but Moses, with contempt. Jesus himself had told them He would not accuse them to the Father (in heaven), Moses, the very one they put their trust in, was the one accusing them. "Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; the one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me. "But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?" (John 5:45-47). Instead of Jesus dishonoring Moses, it was the Jewish leaders who were doing so. In some ways, Stephen was also building a case for the superiority of Jesus, similar to the writer of Hebrews who said, "This man (Jesus) was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who hath builded the house hath more honor than the house" (Hebrews 3:3)." (Complete Biblical Library – Acts)

John Phillips - The studied parallel between Moses and Jesus was now brought into sharp focus by Stephen. Moses had prophesied that there would be just such a parallel (Deut. 18:15). In their own beloved law, in the Torah, Moses and the Messiah were brought together, the one to be a type of the other. "Him shall ye hear," Moses had said. Well, they had heard Him and had deliberately turned a deaf ear to Him. But they had not heard the last of Him by any means.
"Unto him ye shall hearken," (Deut. 18:15), said Moses. "Him shall ye hear," echoed Stephen. And one can well imagine that his voice rang out in that chamber with triumph. Israel has not heard Him yet, but the day is coming when she will. (Exploring Acts)

Note that the **KJV** (following the Textus Receptus manuscript) has the phrase "**him shall ye hear**," which is not in the modern Greek manuscripts which most scholars accept as more accurate than the Textus Receptus. Nevertheless, this phrase is present in the original Masoretic and Septuagint versions of Deut 18:15 and therefore certainly still applicable, as it is a call not just to physically hear but to heed and obey, to respond to the Messianic prophecy that Jesus is the Prophet and that His words need to be heeded!

In the first chapter of John when John the Baptist was beginning his minisry...

> "the Jews sent to him (JOHN THE BAPTIST) priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" And he confessed, and did not deny, and he confessed, "I am not the Christ." And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" And he said, "I am not." "**Are you the Prophet?** (REFERRING TO THE

PROPHET OF Deut 18:15) " And he answered, "No." (John 1:19-21)

Some Jews did recognize Jesus as the prophet like Moses. **Philip** alluded to this Messianic prophecy when he said

> Philip found Nathanael and *said to him, “We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law (e.g., Deut 18:15) and also the Prophets wrote–Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” (Jn 1:45).

In John 6 after Jesus had performed the miraculous feeding of the 5000 (Jn 6:10) the people recalled Moses' prediction that a **Prophet** like him would arise (Dt. 18:15).

> Therefore when the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, “This is truly **the Prophet** who is to come into the world.” (John 6:14)
>
> > **Comment** - Moses had fed the people. Moses had led them out of bondage. Jesus had fed the people. Jesus could lead the people out of the hated Roman bondage. The people saw His sign, but they did not perceive its meaning. (BKC)

Stephen is quoting from Deuteronomy (which means he had this memorized - how is your **memory verse** work going?)

> The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him. 16“This is according to all that you asked of the LORD your God in Horeb on the day of the assembly, saying, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, let me not see this great fire anymore, or I will die.’ 17“The LORD said to me, ‘They have spoken well. 18 ‘I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. 19‘It shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him.(Dt 18:15-19)

Jesus Himself had said

> Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; the one who accuses you is **Moses**, in whom you have set your hope.“For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me. “But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?” (Jn 5:45-47)

Related Resources:

- Messianic Prophecy
- How can I identify messianic prophecies in the Old Testament?

Acts 7:38 "This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness together with the Angel Who was speaking to him on Mount Sinai, and who was with our fathers; and he received living oracles to pass on to you. (NASB: Lockman)

> KJV 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:
>
> NLT Acts 7:38 Moses was with our ancestors, the assembly of God's people in the wilderness, when the angel spoke to him at Mount Sinai. And there Moses received life-giving words to pass on to us.

- **This is the one who was in the congregation** Ex 19:3-17; 20:19,20; Nu 16:3-35,41,42
- **with the Angel** Acts 7:30,35,53; Isa 63:9; Gal 3:19; Heb 2:2
- **Who was speaking to him** Ex 21:1-11; Dt 5:27-31; 6:1-3; 33:4; Neh 9:13,14; John 1:17
- **he received living oracles to pass on to you** Dt 30:19,20; 32:46,47; Ps 78:5-9; John 6:63; Ro 3:2; 9:4; 10:6-10; Heb 5:12; 1 Peter 4:11
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

MOSES RECEIVES LIVING ORACLES

This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness- The **congregation** is the called out ones.

As **John Phillips** says "In the wilderness, Israel was "the church," the ecclesia of God, the company of called-out ones. In no way were they the church as we have the concept in the New Testament. That church was as yet unborn when Jesus said to Peter,

"Upon this rock I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18). It was supernaturally injected into history at Pentecost, and it will be supernaturally removed at the rapture. The church as such is a separate entity in God's eternal purpose, something distinct and different from the nation of Israel." (Exploring Acts)

McGee - The word *church* (KJV) here does not mean that there was a church in the Old Testament in the same sense that there is a church in the New Testament. The word for church is **ekklesia** which means "called-out." Even a group called out to mob somebody would be an **ekklesia**, a called-out group. So, Israel in the wilderness was a called-out group. They were called out of Egypt, by God, for a particular purpose.

Sadly some highly respected teachers like Dr Wayne Grudem interpret the **church** as including even OT believers, a view with which I strongly disagree and which is not taught in the New Testament. Grudem refers to Acts 7:38 of Stephen's speech to buttress his argument that the New Testament authors (specifically Stephen or the author Dr Luke) speak of the Old Testament people of Israel as "the church". Think about his logic for a moment -- who encompasses the true church, the body of Christ, believers alone or believers plus non-believers? Clearly the answer is the true church of Christ is composed ONLY of believers. And yet Stephen is referring to Israel in the OT (that is the context of his entire chapter!) and clearly not all of Israel who came out of Egypt were truly saved! And yet Grudem chooses to translate Stephen's words as "church" implying that this is the true Church of Christ! Even the ESV translates it as "the congregation." Clearly Grudem's belief that ekklesia includes all believers is patently absurd. This fact alone should demolish his false teaching that the Body of Christ, the Church began in the Old Testament.

Related Resource:

- What was the first / original church? Is the original / first church the true church?

Congregation (1577)(**ekklesia** from **ek** = out + **klesis** = a calling, verb = **kaleo** = to call) literally means called out and as commonly used in the Greco-Roman vernacular referred to citizens who were *called out* from their homes to be publicly assembled or gathered to discuss or carry out affairs of state. **Wuest** writes that "The word ***assembly*** is a good one-word translation of **ekklesia**." **NET Note** adds that "ekklesia, is a secular use of the term that came to mean "*church*" in the epistles. Here a reference to an *assembly* is all that is intended."

Together with the Angel Who was speaking to him on Mount Sinai - So again Stephen reminds the Sanhedrin that God's revelation has never been restricted solely to the Holy Temple at Jerusalem.

And who was with our fathers - Notice Stephen is still referring to them as "**our fathers**," but that will soon change (Acts 7:51+)! The Angel of the Lord was not only with Moses on Mt Sinai but also with all the fathers (the 12 tribes of Israel in the wilderness). The **Angel** (the LORD) went before the fathers in their wilderness journey (Ex 13:21, 22). Again Stephen's point is that God's manifest presence (and His Shekinah glory) was seen in many other places besides the Temple in Jerusalem!

And he received living oracles to pass on to you - The verb **received** is dechomai which means more than simply "receive" but includes the idea of a welcome reception, picturing Moses putting out the "Welcome" mat (so to speak) for God's oracles. Moses was happy to receive the Ten Commandments from God.

Oracles (3051)(**logion** from **lógios** = an orator) was a saying, a pronouncement, a declaration. In Classical Greek **logion** was used to describe oracular utterances of heathen deities.

John MacArthur writes that "**Logion** (oracles) is a diminutive of **logos** (note), which is most commonly translated word. **Logion** generally referred to important sayings or messages, especially supernatural utterances… In many pagan religions of that day, mediums and seers gave occultic predictions of the future and other messages from the spirit world through supernatural "oracles." By observing the movements of fish in a tank, the formation of snakes in a pit, or listening to the calls of certain birds, fortune-tellers would purport to predict such things as business success or failure, military victory or defeat, and a happy or tragic marriage. Such a connotation could not have been further from Paul's use of logion in this passage." (MacArthur, J: Romans 1-8. Chicago: Moody Press)

Gilbrant on **living** - Here the Ten Commandments are called "**living**" because they provide guidance for the conduct of life, and because they had their source and authorship in the living God. (Complete Biblical Library – Acts)

Living (2198)(**zao**) refers literally to natural physical life (opposite of death, Acts 22:22, 25:24). Zao refers to supernatural, spiritual life (Jn 11:25, 26).

The clear parallel with living oracles is Hebrew 4:12+ which says "the word of God is **living** (zao) and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

Robertson on **living oracles** - Living oracles (logia zōnta). A logion is a little word (diminutive of logos). Common in the old Greek, LXX, Philo, in ecclesiastical writers for sayings of Christ, Papias (for instance) saying that Matthew wrote in Hebrew (Aramaic) "*Logia of Jesus*." Oxyrhynchus papyri fragments called "*Logia of Jesus*" are of much interest though only fragments. The Greeks used it of the "**oracles**" or brief sayings from Delphi. In the NT the word occurs only four times (Acts 7:38; Ro 3:2; Heb 5:12; 1 Pe 4:11). Here the participle zōnta, **living**, is the same used by Peter (1 Peter 2:4f.), stone (lithos) of Christ and Christians. The words from God to Moses are still "**living**" today. In 1 Peter 4:11 the word is applied to one who speaks logia theou (oracles of God). In Ro. 3:2 Paul refers to the substance of the law and of prophecy. In Heb. 5:12 the writer means the substance of the Christian religious teaching.

Note that the Law was given outside the land, making the point that the blessings of God were not limited to the Land of Israel.

Acts 7:39 "Our fathers were unwilling to be obedient to him, but repudiated him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt, (NASB: Lockman)

> KJV Acts 7:39 To whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt,
>
> NLT Acts 7:39 "But our ancestors refused to listen to Moses. They rejected him and wanted to return to Egypt.

- **Our fathers were unwilling to be obedient to him** Acts 7:51,52; Neh 9:16; Ps 106:16,32,33; Ezek 20:6-14
- **but** Acts 7:27; Judges 11:2; 1 Kings 2:27
- **and in their hearts turned back to Egypt** Ex 14:11,12; 16:3; 17:3; Nu 11:5; 14:3,4; 21:5; Neh 9:17
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

THE HEART OF ISRAEL'S PROBLEM
WAS THE PROBLEM WITH THEIR HEART

Now before we are too hard on Egypt, isn't that the problem with all of us? Even those of us to whom God has given a new heart and His Holy Spirit, still have a problem with our old flesh nature, which wants to turn back to Egypt. As the hymnwriter said

Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
Prone to leave the God I love;
Here's my heart, O take and seal it,
Seal it for Thy courts above.
—Robinson
(Devotional)

We now begin to see that the thrust of Stephen's speech has come to a turning point as he builds his case toward his crushing accusation in Acts 7:51-53+!

Our fathers were unwilling to be (or become) **obedient to him** (Moses) - Again Stephen uses the phrase **our fathers**, preparing us for his words in Acts 7:51+. The Greek reads were unwilling to *become* obedient.

Unwilling is the verb **thelo** (which means desire, will) preceded in Greek by the strongest marker (ou, ouk) introducing a negative statement. The point is they were ABSOLUTELY UNWILLING to obey Moses.

This verse presents a striking contrast between Moses and Israel - In Acts 7:38 Moses "welcomed" the living oracles from God, but here we see the fathers (an allusion to the 12 tribes) as a whole had no such longing for the living word of God!

Obedient (5255)(**hupekoos** from **hupo** = under, under the authority, control of someone + **akouo** = hear) is an adjective which means giving ear to, hearkening, attentively listening and thus describes one who is obedient. **Obedient** describes a person who obeys based on the fact that they have paid attention to what was commanded or instructed. In other words, what they heard did not just (as the saying goes) "go in one ear and out the other!" We have all seen the child who, when they are being instructed by their parents, responds by putting their hands over their ears so as to not hear their parent's words! That is a picture of not "giving ear to" (i.e., they are disobedient - I'm sure this doesn't describe your child dear reader!) **That is a picture of Israel in the wilderness** (cf the reaction of the Sanhedrin to Stephen's concluding words and powerful accusation - Acts 7:57)

But - A tragic term of contrast. Not only would the not listen to Moses but they "pushed" him away a second time!

Repudiated him (683)(**apotheo/apotheomai** from **apó** = from + **othéo** = push away, thrust, drive) means literally to push aside, thrust way (from) or push off. Figuratively as used here it means they rejected the living oracles from God through Moses. They **repudiated**, and refused to listen to him just as they had the first time and **pushed him away** (also apotheomai in Acts 7:27+). It was not Stephen who had blasphemed Moses but the fathers of the Sanhedrin!

And in their hearts (kardia - control center of one's being) **turned back to Egypt** - As noted above here is the root issue - the problem was that Israel had a "heart problem!" They had lived for some 400 years in Egypt and even though the conditions were oppressive, their "palates" had become accustomed to Egyptian food, Egyptian culture, Egyptian gods and now they were in a barren wilderness. So even with the oppressive conditions, the thoughts of their heart **turned back to Egypt**.

God made our hearts (speaking of our "control center" not our physical heart which He also made) - but He made them in such a way that if they are not "filled with" and/or satisfied with God Himself, they will be seek to be filled with/satisfied by gods (idols) of our own making. And this is exactly what happened to Israel when they rejected Moses and God's work (and word) through him. They replaced that spiritual vacuum with their own man-made religion. Stephen's implication could not be more clear -- this is exactly what the Sanhedrin and all the other religious hypocrites in Israel had done. They did not just reject Jesus, but they choose "gods" of their own making! This same spiritual dynamic is true of the heart of every person who rejects their Creator and Redeemer Jesus Christ!

Can you see what Israel is doing here? On one hand in the Abrahamic Covenant they have the promises of God, but instead they choose their way over God's. They disobeyed the way of God and opted for the land of Egypt rather than the land of promise. They opted for what they had seen and experienced. They failed to express faith in God's promise, for faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not see (Heb 11:1+). They choose to walk by sight, not by faith (cf 2 Cor 5:7+)

A T Robertson - They yearned after the fleshpots of Egypt and even the gods of Egypt. It is easy now to see why Stephen has patiently led his hearers through this story. He is getting ready for the home-thrust.

Here is an example of Israel's heart desire to turn back. They cried out...

> Why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become plunder; would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?" So they said to one another, "Let us appoint a leader and return to Egypt." (Nu 14:3-4)

Another passage that always comes to mind is from Nu 11:5KJV. Listen to their pathetic whining...

> We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely (Hebrew = chinnam = for free, gratis, devoid of cost; Lxx = dorean = as a gift); the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic: But now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes.

Turned back (returned)(4762) (**strepho**) means to turn, to turn about. The first use is in Mt 5:39 where a literal turning of the cheek signifies an act of non-retaliation. This same verb is used by Luke in Acts 7:42 of God turning away from Israel!

In Acts 7:42 below **strepho** describes God turning away from His rebellious people, even as described in Isaiah.

> But they rebelled And grieved His Holy Spirit; Therefore He turned Himself to become their enemy, He fought against them. (Isaiah 63:10)

Moses was not the only one **repudiated** by the Jews, for later in Acts we read of the Jewish reaction to Paul and Barnabas...

> Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first; since you **repudiate** (**apotheomai**) it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to (**strepho**) the Gentiles. (Act 13:46)

Gilbrant comments on Israel's repudiation of Moses and turning back to Egypt - "This, actually, was an attitude that became habitual among the Israelites. Again and again they remembered the spicy food, the leeks, the garlic, and also the fish they had back in Egypt. But they forgot the whip of the slave drivers. They forgot the bondage, the misery, the oppression that caused their boy babies to be thrown to the crocodiles in the Nile River. It is so easy for people even today to remember the so-called pleasures of the world and to forget the hangovers, the spiritual darkness, the satanic oppression." (Complete Biblical Library – Acts)

Constable draws the parallel with Jesus - The Israelites refused to follow Moses but sought to return to their former place of slavery. So had Israel refused to follow Jesus but turned back instead to her former condition of bondage under the Law (cf. Gal. 5:1).

MOSES A PICTURE

OF JESUS

In what ways was Moses like Jesus? This article is from an excellent resource - Gotquestions.org (Suggestion: Bookmark it)

Answer: In one of Moses' final speeches, he gave this messianic prophecy: "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him" (Deuteronomy 18:15). The prophet whom Mosesforetells bears these qualities: He will be raised up by God, He will come from among the Israelites, He will be like Moses, and He will be worthy of being heard and obeyed. The prophet who fulfills these words is Jesus Christ, the prophet like Moses.

On the banks of the Jordan River, the Jews questioned John the Baptist about who he was and why he was baptizing. Their question "Are you the Prophet?" (John 1:21) shows that they were looking for the fulfillment of Moses' prophecy. John plainly informed them that he was not the Prophet but pointed them to the One who was: "Among you stands one you do not know. He is the one who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie" (verses 26–27). John's description of the Messiah as one "among you" recalls Moses' prediction that God would raise up the Prophet "from among you" in Deuteronomy 18:15. The very next day, John specifically identifies Jesus as the One they were waiting for (John 1:29–31).

In his sermon at the temple, Peter affirms that Jesus is the prophet like Moses (Acts 3:22, quoting Deuteronomy 18:15). Stephen, addressing the Sanhedrin in Acts 7:37, also quotes Moses and applies the prophecy to Jesus Christ.

Jesus is like Moses in several ways. Moses was both a prophet and a lawgiver, and Jesus is, too. Jesus was widely recognized as a prophet who spoke the Word of God (Matthew 21:46), and He gave commandments for His followers to obey (John 13:34; 15:12, 17; Galatians 6:2). Both Moses and Jesus mediated a covenant between God and men—Moses the Old Covenant (Exodus 34:27; Acts 7:44), and Jesus the New (Luke 22:20; Hebrews 9:15). Both Moses and Jesus were born during perilous times, and both narrowly escaped a king bent on murdering babies (Exodus 1:22 and Matthew 2:16–18). Both Moses and Jesus had a connection to Egypt (Exodus 2:1–4 and Matthew 2:13–14).Moses was the (adopted) son of a king (Exodus 2:10), and Jesus is the Son of the Most High (Luke 1:32). Moses spent forty years as a shepherd (Exodus 3:1), and Jesus is the Good Shepherd (John 10:11, 14). Both Moses and Jesus were known for their meekness (Numbers 12:3 and Matthew 11:29).

Moses and Jesus were alike in that they both led God's people out of captivity. With great power, Moses led the Israelites out of physical bondage and slavery in Egypt, and Jesus, with even greater power, led God's elect out of spiritual bondage and slavery to sin. Moses stood before Pharaoh and said, "'Let my people go" (Exodus 5:1). Jesus came "to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and . . . to set the oppressed free" (Luke 4:18). "In Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life has set you free from the law of sin and death" (Romans 8:2).

Moses was also like Jesus in that he performed miracles—not all prophets did. Several of the miracles of Moses bear a resemblance to Jesus' miracles, most notably the provision of bread in the wilderness (Exodus 16:35), which is comparable to Jesus' feeding of the 5,000 (John 6:1–13). In fact, after Jesus multiplied the loaves and fishes, the people's thoughts ran immediately to Moses' prophecy: "After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, 'Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world'" (John 6:14).

Another way that Moses was like Jesus is that he held intimate conversations with God: "The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend" (Exodus 33:11). Jesus also had a special relationship to God: "No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son" (Matthew 11:27); "The Father knows me and I know the Father" (John 10:15). When Moses stood in God's presence, his face shone with a heavenly glory and had to be covered with a veil (Exodus 34:29–35), and this reminds us of Jesus' transfiguration, when "His face shone like the sun" (Matthew 17:2).

Another important way that Moses was like Jesus is that he constantly interceded for his people. When the Israelites sinned, Moses was always standing by, ready to petition God on their behalf and plead for their forgiveness. After the blatant idolatry at the foot of Mt. Sinai involving the golden calf, Moses interceded twice for the people (Exodus 32:11–13, 30–32), and his intercession was needed at other times, too (e.g., Numbers 11:2; 12:13; 21:7). Moses' intercession was temporary, but our Lord's is everlasting. "If anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One" (1 John 2:1). Jesus is right now "at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us" (Romans 8:34). Jesus "always lives to intercede" for us (Hebrews 7:25).

Not only was Moses an intercessor for God's people but, like Jesus, he was willing to die for them. In Exodus 32:32, Moses offers his life in exchange for sinners. "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends," Jesus said (John 15:13), and Jesus proved His love when He "laid down his life for us" (1 John 3:16; cf. John 10:15). (In what ways was Moses like Jesus?)

Acts 7:40 SAYING TO AARON, 'MAKE FOR US GODS WHO WILL GO BEFORE US; FOR THIS MOSES WHO LED US OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT--WE DO NOT KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM.' (NASB: Lockman)

> KJV Acts 7:40 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.

- **saying to Aaron** Ex 32:1
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

ISRAEL'S REQUEST FOR MAN-MADE GODS

SAYING TO AARON, 'MAKE FOR US GODS WHO WILL GO BEFORE US - Israel did not just repudiate Moses, but showed that the desire of their hearts was for idols, which they had become comfortable with in Egypt. Note that the "monotheistic" Jews that were called out by the one true and living God asked for "gods" plural. One living God was not enough. They wanted a plethora of dead gods! And to make it even worse, remember that Israel had experienced a living God Who going before them as described in Exodus 13...

> The LORD was going before them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way, and in a pillar of fire by night to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people. (Ex 13:21-22)
>
> **Comment** - This cloud, the Shekinah glory cloud , as altogether miraculous, giving God's people constant assurance of His presence with them during their long stay in the wilderness
>
> **MacArthur** adds "This was the means by which God led the people. It was a single column, being cloud by day and fire by night (cf. Ex 14:24) and was associated with the Angel of God (Ex 14:19; 23:20-23) or the Angel of God's presence (Isa 63:8, 9). See Ex 3:2. It was the pillar from which the Lord also spoke to Moses (Ex 33:9-11)." (The MacArthur Study Bible)

In Exodus 32:1, 23 we read

> Now when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people assembled about Aaron and said to him, “Come, make us a god who will go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.”
>
> (32:23) “For they said to me, ‘Make a god for us who will go before us; for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.’

John MacArthur comments - Such was the influence of the polytheistic world in which they lived that the Israelites, in a time of panic or impatience, succumbed to a pagan world view. What made it even more alarming was the rapidity with which pagan idolatry swept in despite recent real-life demonstrations of God's greatness and goodness toward them. But they weren't just requesting gods, but gods to lead them forward—"**who will go before us**." The pagan world view had robbed them of seeing God as having led them out of Egypt and instead they scornfully attributed the Exodus to Moses (cf. Ac. 7:40). (The MacArthur Study Bible)

FOR (gar) - A term of explanation! Their logic was flawed by their flesh!

THIS MOSES - This was a derogatory way to refer to Moses showing that they despised him. They were saying in essence "As for *this fellow* Moses." The false witnesses had made a similar derogatory comment about Jesus in Acts 6:14 ("this Nazarene, Jesus")

WHO LED US OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT - How quickly they forgot what Moses had led them out of! They were in bondage. They seem to have forgotten that they had cried out as in Ex 2:23 - "And the sons of Israel **sighed because of the bondage**, and they **cried out;** and their **cry for help** because of their bondage rose up to God."

WE DO NOT KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM - What does this statement express - doubt not faith! They were ready for a new leader and a new god! What did they think -- that the God Who had just performed all the miracles in Egypt and at the Red Sea had forgotten them?!

The **NET Note** adds that their "Doubt expresses itself in unfaithful action. The act is in contrast to God's promise in Ex 23:20.

> “Behold, I am going to send an angel before you to guard you along the way and to bring you into the place

which I have prepared.

Bruce Barton - In one sorry, sinful deed, the children of Israel blatantly, publicly, and corporately defied God. This "invisible" God and "absent" Moses were too much to bear. They wanted something they could see, even if it was the product of their own hands. (Life Application Bible Commentary – Acts)

Acts 7:41 "At that time they made a calf and brought a sacrifice to the idol, and were rejoicing in the works of their hands. (NASB: Lockman)

KJV Acts 7:41 And they made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifice unto the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands.

- **they** Ex 32:2-8,17-20; Dt 9:12-18; Neh 9:18; Ps 106:19-21
- **rejoicing** Isa 2:8,9; 44:9-20; Hos 9:1,10; Hab 2:18-20
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

ISRAEL'S JOY OVER MAN-MADE GODS

At that time they made a calf and brought a sacrifice to the idol - God used Moses to get Israel our of Egypt, but he couldn't get Egypt out of Israel! While in one sense Israel's predilection for idolatry began at Mt Sinai, in another sense it goes back to their time in Egypt and their exposure to the pagan idols in that land.

MacArthur on the **calf** - The young bull, which Aaron caused to be fashioned, was a pagan religious symbol of virile power. A miniature form of the golden calf, although made of bronze and silver, was found at the site of the ancient Philistine city of Ashkelon. Since it dates to about 1550 b.c. it indicates that calf worship was known not only in Egypt, but also in Canaan prior to the time of Moses. In worshiping the calf, the Israelites violated the first 3 commandments (20:3-7). (The MacArthur Study Bible)

Wiersbe - No sooner had the people received the Law than they disobeyed it by asking Aaron to make them an idol (Ex. 32:1-8), and thereby broke the first two of the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:1-6). The Jews had worshiped idols in Egypt Gosh. 24:14; Ezek. 20:7-8), and after their settlement in the Promised Land they gradually adopted the gods of the pagan nations around them. God repeatedly disciplined His people and sent them prophets to warn them, until finally He carried them off to Babylon where they were finally cured of idolatry. (Bible Exposition Commentary – Be Dynamic).

Marvin Vincent has a lengthy on rare verb (moschopoieo) **they made a calf** - Only here in New Testament, and not in Septuagint. Bengel says, "A very notorious crime is denoted by an extraordinary and newly-coined word." This was in imitation of the Egyptian bull-worship. Several of these animals were worshipped at different places in Egypt. *Apis* was worshipped at Memphis. Herodotus says: "Now this Apis, or Epaphus, is the calf of a cow which is never afterward able to bear young. The Egyptians say that fire comes down from heaven upon the cow, which thereupon conceives Apis. The calf which is so called has the following marks: He is black, with a square spot of white upon his forehead, and on his back the figure of an eagle. The hairs in his tail are double, and there is a beetle upon his tongue" (iii., 28). He was regarded by the Egyptians, not merely as an emblem, but as a god. He was lodged in a magnificent court, ornamented with figures twelve cubits high, which he never quitted except on fixed days, when he was led in procession through the streets. His festival lasted seven days, and all came forward from their houses to welcome him as he passed. He was not allowed to reach the natural term of his life. If a natural death did not remove him earlier, he was drowned when he reached the age of twenty-five, and was then embalmed and entombed in one of the sepulchral chambers of the Serapeum, a temple devoted expressly to the burial of these animals. Another sacred bull was maintained at Heliopolis, in the great Temple of the Sun, under the name of *Mnevis*, and was honored with a reverence next to Apis. Wilkinson thinks that it was from this, and not from Apis, that the Israelites borrowed their notions of the golden calf. "The offerings, dancing, and rejoicings practised on the occasion, were doubtless in imitation of a ceremony they had witnessed in honor of Mnevis during their sojourn in Egypt" ("Ancient Egyptians," 2 sen, vol. ii., p. 197). A third sacred bull, called *Bacis,* was maintained at Hermonthis, near Thebes. It was a huge, black animal, and its hairs were said to grow the wrong way. Other bulls and cows did not hold the rank of gods, but were only sacred. (Word Studies in the New Testament)

And were rejoicing in the works of their hands- **Rejoicing** in the imperfect tense describes them as celebrating over and over. Think of this for a moment - They were "happy" in their sin. When you begin to rejoice in your sin, you are very deceived (cf Heb 3:13+). Believers sin and while sin does have passing pleasure (Heb 11:25+), a genuine believer will be miserable (Ps 32:3-4) If you continue to find joy in your sin, then you might want to read Paul's words in 2 Cor 13:5+.

See John Piper's interesting comment on **rejoicing in the works of their hands**

Barton astutely observes that "The Israelites' worship of the golden calf was the beginning of a downward spiral. At times they returned to God, but far more often they were running after the gods of the evil nations surrounding them. (Life Application Bible Commentary)

Rejoicing (2165)(**euphraino** from **eu** = well, good + **phren** = mind, intellect, disposition) speaks in the passive voice (as in this verse) of social and festive enjoyment.

Guzik comments that "The phrase and **rejoiced in the works of their own hands** is especially meaningful. One of the accusations against Stephen was that he blasphemed the temple. It wasn't that Stephen spoke against the temple, but against the way Israel worshipped the temple of God instead of the God of the temple. Just as Israel worshipped the calf in the wilderness, so now they were worshipping the works of their own hands. (Acts 7 Commentary)

Here is a review of Israel's actions in Exodus 32

> Exodus 32:2-8 Aaron said to them, "Tear off the gold rings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." 3 Then all the people tore off the gold rings which were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. 4 He took this from their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool and made it into a molten calf; and they said, "**This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt.**" 5 Now when Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow shall be a feast to the LORD." (NOTE THE SYNCRETISM) 6 So the next day they rose early and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and **rose up to play.** (NLT = "they indulged in pagan revelry") 7 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, "Go down at once, for your people, whom you brought up from the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. 8 "They have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them. They have made for themselves a molten calf, and have worshiped it and have sacrificed to it and said, 'This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!'"
>
> > **Comment** on **rose up to play** - NLT paraphrases it ".and indulged themselves in pagan revelry." GWT is even more direct "which turned into an orgy" and the Int'l Children's Bible the most direct "they got up & sinned sexually" Wow!) The Hebrew verb is tsachaq (06711) which is used in Ge 26:8 ("**caressing** his wife")
> >
> > **NET Note** on **rose up to play** - The form is a Piel infinitive construct, giving the purpose of their rising up after the festal meal. On the surface it would seem that with the festival there would be singing and dancing, so that the people were celebrating even though they did not know the reason. W. C. Kaiser says the word means "drunken immoral orgies and sexual play" ("Exodus," EBC 2:478). That is quite an assumption for this word, but is reflected in some recent English versions (e.g., NCV "got up and sinned sexually"; TEV "an orgy of drinking and sex").
>
> Exodus 32:17-20 Now when Joshua heard the sound of the people as they shouted, he said to Moses, "There is a sound of war in the camp." 18 But he said, "It is not the sound of the cry of triumph, Nor is it the sound of the cry of defeat; But the sound of singing I hear." 19 It came about, as soon as Moses came near the camp, that he saw the calf and the dancing; and Moses' anger burned, and he threw the tablets from his hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain. 20 He took the calf which they had made and burned it with fire, and ground it to powder, and scattered it over the surface of the water and made the sons of Israel drink it.

John Phillips writes "The sacred bull was one of the countless gods of Egypt. At the very moment the written Scriptures were being entrusted to Moses, the Israelites were making a golden calf and were apostatizing from the true and living God. They already had the oral Scriptures in the stories of God's dealings with the patriarchs. They knew that Jehovah was the true and living God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. No insult offered to God could have been greater than to make an Egyptian idol and worship it as the author of their salvation. Such was Israel's initial apostasy. It was deep and dreadful, made all the worse by Aaron's craven compromise and cooperation. (Exploring Acts: An Expository Commentary)

Acts 7:42 "But God turned away and delivered them up to serve the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets, 'IT WAS NOT TO ME THAT YOU OFFERED VICTIMS AND SACRIFICES FORTY YEARS IN THE WILDERNESS, WAS IT, O HOUSE OF ISRAEL? (NASB: Lockman)

> KJV Acts 7:42 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?

- **and delivered** Ps 81:11,12; Isa 66:4; Ezek 14:7-10; 20:25,39; Hos 4:17; Ro 1:24-28; 2 Th 2:10-12
- **the host** Dt 4:19; 17:3; 2 Kings 17:16; 21:3; Job 31:26-28; Jer 19:13; Ezek 8:16
- **O** Amos 5:25,26
- **have** Isa 43:23
- **forty** Ps 95:10; Heb 3:9,15-17
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

ISRAEL'S REJECTION
BRINGS DIVINE ABANDONMENT

But God turned away and delivered them up - In Acts 7:39+ Israel **in their hearts turned back** (**strepho**) to Egypt, and now we see God **turned away** from them! God gave them up to their heart's desire! They received the consequences they deserved because of their unfaithfulness to God.

Turned away (4762) (**strepho**) means to turn, to turn about. Israel turned away from the only true and living God and to dead gods, idols, works of men's hands! What does this say about their hearts? Had they not done the same thing while Christ was with them on earth? Moses performed miracles, met their needs in the wilderness, and gave them the Word of God; Christ also had performed mighty works, fed the people, and had given them God's Word—yet they turned away!

This divine deliverance is also what God did to the Gentiles when they rejected Him even though in His natural revelation He had made Himself known to them

> For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19 because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. 20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. 21 For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. 22 Professing to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures (SEE HORRIBLE PICTURE OF THE GOD OF MOLECH BELOW). (Ro 1:18-23+)

As a result of the Gentiles' rejection of God, Paul used the same verb Luke uses to describe God's giving them oven to their sin!

> (Ro 1:24+) Therefore God **gave them over** (**paradidomi**) in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them.
>
> (Ro 1:26+) For this reason **God gave them over** (**paradidomi**) to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural,
>
> (Ro 1:28+) And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, **God gave them over** (**paradidomi**) to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper,

Just as God had "delivered up" the ancient civilizations when they exchanged His incorruptible glory for form of corruptible man, etc, (false gods) so He gave His chosen people over to the the lusts of their hearts and they worshiped and served the creation rather than the Creator Who is blessed forever.

Delivered them up (gave them over) (3860)(**paradidomi** from **para** = alongside, beside, to the side of, over to +**didomi** = to give) conveys the basic meaning of to give over from one's hand to someone or something, especially to give over to the power of another. Israel was unwilling to submit to the authority of God, so God gave them over to the power of idolatry.

This **divine abandonment** is described in Hosea 4:17NET

> Ephraim has attached (Lxx = metochos) himself to idols; Do not go near him!
>
> > **John MacArthur** comments on this passage in Hosea - As the largest and most influential of the northern 10 tribes, Ephraim's name was often used as representative of the northern nation. This was an expression of God's **wrath of abandonment.** When sinners reject Him and are bent on fulfilling their wicked purposes, God removes restraining grace and turns them over to the results of their own perverse

> choices. This kind of wrath is that in Ro 1:18-32 (cf. Jdg 10:13; 2Ch 15:2; 24:20; Ps 81:11, 12). (The MacArthur Study Bible)

To serve the host of heaven - **Serve** is present tense indicating continually serve their idols. The **host of heaven** was the array of false gods ("fallen angels") believed to dwell in the heavens, associated with the stars and the practice of astrology.

Barton - The reference to heavenly bodies refers to Israel's practice of worshiping deities associated with stars and planets . It was a form of godless worship that became more prevalent in the later years of the kingdom. (Life Application Bible Commentary – Acts)

We see this described by the prophet Jeremiah (notice all the verbs describing Israel's pursuit of the host of heaven)...

> At that time," declares the LORD, "they will bring out the bones of the kings of Judah and the bones of its princes, and the bones of the priests and the bones of the prophets, and the bones of the inhabitants of Jerusalem from their graves. "They will spread them out to **the sun, the moon and to all the host of heaven**, which they have **loved** and which they have **served**, and which they **have gone after** and which they **have sought,** and which they **have worshiped**. They will not be gathered or buried; they will be as dung on the face of the ground.(Jeremiah 8:1-2)

All the uses of the phrase **host of heaven** -

> Deut. 4:19; 1 Ki. 22:19; 2 Ki. 17:16; 2 Ki. 21:3; 2 Ki. 21:5; 2 Ki. 23:4; 2 Ki. 23:5; 2 Chr. 18:18; 2 Chr. 33:3; 2 Chr. 33:5; Isa. 24:21; Isa. 34:4; Jer. 8:2; Jer. 33:22; Dan. 4:35; Dan. 8:10; Zeph. 1:5; Acts 7:42

Serve (3000)(**latreuo** from **latris** = one hired or **latron** = reward, wages) means to work for reward, for hire or for pay, to be in servitude, render cultic service. **Latreuo** was used literally for bodily service (e.g., workers on the land, or slaves), and figuratively for "to cherish."

Robertson notes that "The verb **latreuo** is used of the worship of God (Mt 4:10) as well as of idols as here (from latron = hire, latris = hireling, then to serve). But the worship of the **host of heaven** (Dt. 17:3; 2 Ki 17:16; 2 Ki 21:3; 2 Chr 33:3, 5; Jer 8:2; Jer 19:13) is **Sabaism** or worship of **the host** (stratia) of heaven (sun, moon, and stars) instead of the Lord of hosts. This star-worship greatly injured the Jews." (Word Pictures in the New Testament)

Marvin Vincent on serve (worship) the **host of heaven** - Star-worship, or Sabaeanism, the remnant of the ancient heathenism of Western Asia, which consisted in the worship of the stars, and spread into Syria, though the Chaldaean religion was far from being the simple worship of the host of heaven; the heavenly bodies being regarded as real persons, and not mere metaphorical representations of astronomical phenomena. It is to the Sabaean worship that Job alludes when, in asserting the purity of his life (31:26, 27), he says: "If I beheld the sun when it shined, or the moon walking in brightness, and my heart hath been secretly enticed, or my mouth hath kissed my hands: this also were an iniquity to be punished by the judge: for I should have denied the God that is above." Though not a part of the religion of the Egyptians, Rawlinson thinks it may have been connected with their earlier belief, since prayer is represented in hieroglyphics by a man holding up his hands, accompanied by a star (Herodotus, vol. ii., p. 291). (Word Studies in the New Testament)

This is a frightening verse. If we persist long enough in some willful sin, we are in danger of God turning us over to that sin. And we do not get to decide the time this might happen! Woe!

Hosts (4756)(**stratia** from **strateuo** = to make war, serve as soldier) means army in classical Greek (of Pharaoh's army in Lxx of Ex 14:4, 9, 17). In Luke 2:13 it refers to an army of angels. In Acts 7:42 it refers to an "army" of stars which Israel worshiped.

Friberg has "of heavenly bodies, as the stars, etc. that were worshiped as symbols of celestial powers - supernatural spirit-beings."

Louw-Nida also has "supernatural powers." Used in the Lxx of idol worship - 2 Chr. 33:3, 5; Jer. 7:18, 8:2, 19:13; Zeph. 1:5).

TDNT says the root word is "**stratos**, denoting a camp or army, the first derivative is **strateuo**, "to undertake a campaign," "to serve in the army." We then find **strateia**, meaning "campaign" or "military service.". Also found is **stratia** for "army" or superterrestrial "host."

Stratia - 28v in the Septuagint - most of the uses refer to literal armies, but the use in the 1 Ki. 22:19 has "all the **host** of heaven standing by Him on His right and on His left" which clearly refers to supernatural powers.

> Exod. 14:4; Exod. 14:9; Exod. 14:17; Num. 10:28; Deut. 20:9; Jdg. 8:6; 2 Sam. 3:23; 2 Sam. 8:16; 1 Ki. 11:15; 1 Ki. 11:21; 1 Ki. 16:16; 1 Ki. 20:39; 1 Ki. 22:19; 1 Chr. 12:14; 1 Chr. 12:21; 1 Chr. 12:23; 1 Chr. 18:15; 1 Chr. 19:8; 1 Chr. 20:1; 1 Chr. 28:1; 2 Chr. 32:9; 2 Chr. 33:3; 2 Chr. 33:5; Neh. 9:6; Jer. 7:18; Jer. 8:2; Jer. 19:13; Hos. 13:4; Zeph. 1:5

Israel was warned about the snare of idolatry including the host of heaven (heavenly host)

> Deut 4:19; "And beware not to lift up your eyes to heaven and see the sun and the moon and the stars, **all the host of heaven**, and be drawn away and worship them and serve them, those which the LORD your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven.
>
> Deut 17:2-5 "If there is found in your midst, in any of your towns, which the LORD your God is giving you, a man or a woman who does what is evil in the sight of the LORD your God, by transgressing His covenant, 3and has gone and served other gods and worshiped them, or the sun or the moon or any of **the heavenly host,** (cf Neh 9:6, Jer 19:13) which I have not commanded, 4and if it is told you and you have heard of it, then you shall inquire thoroughly. Behold, if it is true and the thing certain that this detestable thing has been done in Israel, 5then you shall bring out that man or that woman who has done this evil deed to your gates, that is, the man or the woman, and you shall stone them to death.
>
> Ps 106:36-43 **And served their idols, Which became a snare** (Hebrew = moqesh; Lxx = skandalon) to them. 37 They even sacrificed their sons and their daughters to the demons (SEE MOLOCH IN Acts 7:43), 38 And shed innocent blood, The blood of their sons and their daughters, Whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan; And the land was polluted with the blood. 39 Thus they became unclean in their practices, And played the harlot in their deeds. 40 Therefore the anger of the LORD was kindled against His people And He abhorred His inheritance. 41 Then He gave them into (Lxx = **paradidomi** = same verb Luke uses in Acts 7:42!) the hand of the nations, And those who hated them ruled over them (NORTHERN 10 TRIBES TO ASSYRIA IN 722 bc AND THE SOUTHERN 2 TRIBES TO BABYLON IN 586 bc). 42 Their enemies also oppressed them, And they were subdued under their power. 43 Many times He would deliver them; They, however, were rebellious in their counsel, And so sank down in their iniquity.

Related Resources:

- What are the heavenly hosts?
- What does it mean to worship the starry host or the host of the heavens(Zephaniah 1:5)?
- Who is the Queen of Heaven?

As it is written in the book of the prophets- This phrase refers to the 12 Minor Prophets which were written on one scroll in his day and called the Book of the Twelve, or the Book of the Prophets **Robertson** adds "the twelve minor prophets which the Jews counted as one book (cf. Acts 13:40). This quotation is from Amos 5:25-27. The greater prophets were Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel."

Stephen is quoting Amos. Have you ever memorized any passages in Amos? Stephen sets a high bar for us to emulate! In this verse he is quoting Amos 5:25

> Amos 5:25 "Did you present Me with sacrifices and grain offerings in the wilderness for forty years, O house of Israel?

IT WAS NOT TO ME THAT YOU OFFERED VICTIMS AND SACRIFICES FORTY YEARS IN THE WILDERNESS, WAS IT, O HOUSE OF ISRAEL - The form of the question in Acts 7:42 demands a negative reply: "No, you were not offering those sacrifices to the Lord!" "It might be paraphrased, "You didn't offer sacrifices and offerings to Me 40 years in the desert, did you?" They had not offered sacrifices to God alone, nor did they offer them with the love and faith they should have." (Gilbrant)

When Stephen quoted this passage, he revealed what the Jews had been doing for 40 years: in outward form, they were worshiping Jehovah, but in their hearts, they were worshiping foreign gods, idols of their own making! It was basically demon worship, and it opened the way for all kinds of godless living on the part of the Jews.

Had the nation turned totally from the true God and succumbed completely to idolatry, it could have meant the end of the godly remnant and the fulfillment of the promise of the Redeemer. God's Law was given to the Jews to protect them from the pagan influence around them, and to enable them to enjoy the blessings of the land. It was the Law that made them a holy people, different from the other nations. When Israel broke down that wall of distinction by disobeying God's Law, they forfeited the blessing of God and had to be disciplined.

Gilbrant adds that "It is also true that they had neglected the covenant they had accepted, for none of the males who were born in the wilderness were circumcised, and thus they were not brought under the covenant until after they entered the Promised Land at Gilgal (Joshua 5:5). It seems also they may have neglected to keep the Passover during this 40-year period (at least, after the second year). They apparently did go through the forms, but the idolatry that began with the golden calf continued to tempt Israel and did so until they went into exile in Babylonia. (Complete Biblical Library – Acts)

Acts 7:43 'YOU ALSO TOOK ALONG THE TABERNACLE OF MOLOCH AND THE STAR OF THE GOD ROMPHA, THE IMAGES WHICH YOU MADE TO WORSHIP. I ALSO WILL REMOVE YOU BEYOND BABYLON.' (NASB: Lockman)

> KJV 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.

- **you also took** Lev 18:21; 20:2-5; 2 Ki 17:16-18; 21:6
- **images** Ex 20:4,5; Dt 4:16-18; 5:8,9 Amos 5:26
- **and** 2 Kings 17:6; 18:11; Amos 5:27
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

WORSHIP OF ABOMINABLE IDOLS IN AN UNHOLY TABERNACLE

YOU ALSO TOOK (analambano) **ALONG THE TABERNACLE OF MOLOCH AND THE STAR OF THE GOD ROMPHA** - This quote from Amos 5:26 presents some problems because of the differences in the Hebrew and the Septuagint. Stephen is quoting from the Septuagint. Below are the English versions taken from the Hebrew and Greek texts.

> Hebrew text - “You also carried along Sikkuth your king and Kiyyun, your images, the star of your gods which you made for yourselves.
>
> > Comment - "Sikkuth" may mean "booth" (tabernacle) or be an epithet of a Sumerian god ("sikkut"). The Hebrew word for "king" is "melek" but recall that Hebrew had no vowels, so this could also re "Molek." The word "kiyyun" is found only here. The Septuagint version (which was quoted by Stephen and is translated below into English) has the Greek word "astron" for "kiyyun."
>
> Greek text - Yea, ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Raephan (Greek = Raiphan), the images (tupos) of them which ye made for yourselves.

As you can see Stephen uses "**tabernacle of Moloch**" instead of "Sikkuth your king," and "**the star of the God Rompha**" not "Kiyyun, your images, the star of your gods." To attempt any further discussion would be far too technical and detailed to be productive. The point is clear that Israel took along two named idols during their time in the wilderness.

Tabernacle (dwelling, tent) (4633)(**skene**) is a tent, booth, hut, tabernacle, any covered or shaded place. Luke uses **skene** in the next verse in a dramatic contrast - here **skene** refers to the dwelling of the dead idols and in Acts 7:44 **skene** refers to the tabernacle of the living God! Could the contrast be any more striking! Now the question arises did Israel have a second tabernacle in the wilderness or (more likely) did they use God's Tabernacle for the worship of their idols? Jewish pastor Steve Kreloff thinks it was the latter. Now stop for a moment and ponder what Stephen is saying. It makes no difference whether it was one or two tabernacles, because what was clear was that they had divided hearts (cf "did things secretly" - 2 Ki 17:9), worshiping idols and God at the same time. Even worse Kreloff thinks they went into the true Tabernacle but in their hearts actually worshiped their idols! This describes **syncretism** which Wikipedia says "the combining of different beliefs, often while melding practices of various schools of thought. **Syncretism** involves the merger and analogizing of several originally discrete traditions, especially in the theology and mythology of religion." **Syncretism** is the amalgamation or attempted amalgamation of different religions, cultures, or schools of thought. **Syncretism** is the incorporation of idolatrous practices into biblical worship.

Vincent on the **Tabernacle of Moloch** - The portable tent-temple of the god, to be carried in procession. Moloch was an Ammonite idol to whom children were sacrificed. According to Rabbinical tradition, his image was hollow, heated from below, with the head of an ox and outstretched arms, into which children were laid, their cries being stifled by the beating of drums.(Word Studies in the New Testament)

Moloch (3434)(**moloch**) is a transliteration of the Hebrew noun **Molek** (04432) an idol worshiped by the Ammonites with human sacrifices especially young children. According to the description (see the horrid depiction above!) in the Hebrew writings (rabbinical) the idol had the head of a calf with a crown upon it, was made of brass and was set on a brazen throne. The throne and image were hollow, and a raging fire was kindled within it. The flames penetrated into the body and limbs of the idol, and when the arms were red-hot, the victim was thrown into them and almost immediately burned to death while its cries were drowned by the beat of drums. Although warned against this idolatry common to all the Canaanite tribes, though probably not of Canaanite origin, the Jews were repeatedly enticed to adopt it (2 Ki 23:10). In the Valley of Hinnom, they set up a tabernacle to Moloch and there they sacrificed their

children to the idol.

The name **Molech** appears 8 times in the OT - Lev. 18:21; Lev. 20:2; Lev. 20:3; Lev. 20:4; Lev. 20:5; 1 Ki. 11:7; 2 Ki. 23:10; Jer. 32:35. Note that in Leviticus, which was given to Israel after they had been delivered from Egypt, there are 5 verses that describe prohibitions and punishment for worship of Molech. The point is that as Stephen says, Israel was already worshiping Molech after their deliverance from Egypt.

> Leviticus 18:21 'You shall not give any of your offspring to offer them to**Molech**, nor shall you profane the name of your God; I am the LORD.
>
> Leviticus 20:2 "You shall also say to the sons of Israel: 'Any man from the sons of Israel or from the aliens sojourning in Israel who gives any of his offspring to **Molech**, shall surely be put to death; the people of the land shall stone him with stones.
>
> Leviticus 20:3 'I will also set My face against that man and will cut him off from among his people, because he has given some of his offspring to **Molech**, so as to defile My sanctuary and to profane My holy name.
>
> Leviticus 20:4 'If the people of the land, however, should ever disregard that man when he gives any of his offspring to **Molech**, so as not to put him to death,
>
> Leviticus 20:5 then I Myself will set My face against that man and against his family, and I will cut off from among their people both him and all those who play the harlot after him, by playing the harlot after **Molech**.

One other use of Molech that is especially tragic the reference to King Solomon who had built the true Temple of God but whose heart was not wholly devoted to God causing him to marry foreign women who turned his heart to idols. And so we read

> Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the detestable idol of Moab, on the mountain which is east of Jerusalem, and for **Molech** the detestable idol of the sons of Ammon. (1 Ki 11:7 - read 1 Ki 11:1-6, 8-11, for context)

Here are the other 2 OT uses of Molech

> 2 Kings 23:10 He also defiled Topheth, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, that no man might make his son or his daughter pass through the fire for **Molech**.
>
> Jeremiah 32:35 "They built the high places of Baal that are in the valley of Ben-hinnom to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire to **Molech**, which I had not commanded them nor had it entered My mind that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin.

Rompha - most of the modern translations transliterate it as **Rephan** from the Septuagint of Amos 5:26. Only the **NAS** translates it as **Rompha** (an alternative spelling).

NET Note on **Rephan** - Rephan was a pagan deity. The term was a name for Saturn. It was variously spelled in the MSS (BDAG 903 s.v. has Rompha as an alternate spelling). The references cover a range of deities and a history of unfaithfulness.

THE IMAGES WHICH YOU MADE TO WORSHIP - Like the golden calf these idols were the works of their hands. Stephen changes the Septuagint translation slightly as the original Greek text of Amos 5:26 has "*kai to astron tou theou humon Raiphan tous tupous auton ous epoiesate heautois*' which literally reads "and the star the god your Raiphan the image your you made for yourself." Stephen changed "you made for yourself" to "you made to worship." So he interprets the phrase "made for yourself" as to mean they made it for their worship!

Image is **tupos** a figure formed by blows of the hammer or chisel and made to resemble some entity and thus a statue. Moloch was the god of the sky and the sun.

Worship (bow down) (4352)(**proskuneo** from **pros** = before + **kuneo** = kiss or adore) means to prostrate oneself in homage before another in the full sense of worship, not mere reverence or courtesy. When Jesus Christ was born into this world, He was attended and worshipped by angels. (Lu 2:13f). **Proskuneo** represents the most common Near Eastern act of adoration and reverence and also carries the idea of profound awe and respect. This is incredible! Here Israel has just witnessed the mighty miraculous acts of God (e.g., the Red Sea deliverance) and yet their hearts are to tethered to the gods of Egypt that they exhibit profound awe and respect for lifteless images! Talk about deceived! But that is what idols in our heart can do to ANY of us! Beware! Or as John commands us in the very last verse in of his first epistle (he is speaking to believers!) - "Little children, **guard** (phulasso in the aorist imperative = "Don't delay!" "Just do it!" - only one way to obey this - by being continually filled and empowered by the Holy Spirit!!!) from idols." (1 Jn 5:21+, cf 1 Cor 10:14)

The word **proskuneo** literally means to kiss toward someone, to throw a kiss in token of respect or homage, to prostrate oneself in

homage, to do reverence to, to adore and so to worship and show respect. In the ancient Oriental (especially Persia) the mode of salutation between persons of equal rank was to kiss each other on the lips. When the difference of rank was slight, they kissed each other on the cheek. When one was much inferior, he fell upon his knees touched his forehead to the ground or prostrated himself, and as he was bowing down he would be throwing kisses toward the superior. It is this latter mode of salutation that is intended by the Greek writers in the use of the verb **proskuneo**.

Stephen is saying that in the wilderness Israel continually (**proskuneo** is in the present tense!) prostrated themselves before works of their own hands! Beloved, before we are too hard on Israel, we need to take inventory of the idols in our lives that we might be in a manner of speaking be bowing down to continually --job, home, vacation home, cars, people, sports teams, hobbies, and the list is endless. Anything that gets more of our attention than the living God is equivalent to a "dead idol." Idolatry is alive and well in America in the twenty-first century!

Phillips adds that "The worship of the golden calf was formally adopted by Jereboam as the official religion of the Northern Kingdom. It was soon supplemented by the worship of all the false gods of the Canaanites and their neighbors. The worship of Moloch, mentioned by Stephen, was a terrible thing, accompanied by the most horrible form of child sacrifice. The worship of Remphan points to the worship of the planets, a form of idolatry that grew in Israel as the country came under the growing influence of Assyria. (Exploring Acts: An Expository Commentary)

IDOLATRY FROM MT SINAI TO BABYLON

I ALSO WILL REMOVE YOU BEYOND BABYLON (quote from Amos 5:27) - There is a sorry saying that says "What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas." That is a lie. Israel found out that what starts in the wilderness (beginning with their golden calf) did not stay in the wilderness! In fact the **idolatry** initiated by the Golden Calf stuck to the nation like glue and for the next (approximately) 700 to 900 years (Date of Exodus - 1446 bc to Assyrian exile in 722 bc and Babylonian exile in 586 bc). So all the time they were in the wilderness and even once in the promised land idolatry continued to be snare for Israel. God said in effect to Judah "So you want idols. I will give you idols. I will sent you into the center of idolatry in Babylon!"

Note that the original Hebrew of Amos 5:27 say "I will make you go into exile **beyond Damascus**" because Amos was prophesying the Northern Kingdom's exile to Assyria. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit Stephen changes **beyond Damascus** to **beyond Babylon** which is where the Southern Nation of Judah (tribes of Judah and Benjamin) were exiled in 586 bc. In

What Stephen is saying in essence is that from the wilderness wanderings up to the time of the Babylonian exile, Israel was bent on practicing idolatry (cf. Dt. 17:3, 2 Kings 17:16; 21:3; Jer. 8:2; 19:13). Idolatry was a continual snare for the nation. The result was that both the Northern 10 tribes and the Southern 2 tribes were taken into exile (cf "I will remove") by pagan powers.

I will remove (3352)(**metoikizo** from **meta** = change of place or condition + **oikizo** = to cause to dwell) means to cause to change one's habitation. This verb has the idea of resetting someone in Acts 7:4 where God made Abraham move or resettled him. It is the technical word for planting a colony. In the only other NT use in Acts 7:43 metoikizo takes on a more negative connotation and speaks of forcible removal or deportation, sending into, for God says "I also will remove you beyond Babylon."

Metoikizo is used in Jeremiah's prophecy of Judah's exile to Babylon...

> “For thus says the LORD, ‘Behold, I am going to make you (SPEAKING TO THE SOUTHERN NATION OF JUDAH) a terror to yourself and to all your friends; and while your eyes look on, they will fall by the sword of their enemies. So I will give over all Judah to the hand of the king of Babylon, and he will carry them away (Lxx = **metoikizo**) as exiles to Babylon and will slay them with the sword. (Jer. 20:4)

Before God removed Judah to Babylon he removed the 10 northern tribes into Assyria, and second Kings tells us why God did this to His chosen people (this is a long quote but it behooves us to reread it asking the Spirit to examine our own heart for idols - cf Ps 139:23,24)...

> In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria and carried Israel (THE 10 NORTHERN TRIBES) away into exile to Assyria, and settled them in Halah and Habor, on the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes. Now this came about because the sons of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God, who had brought them up from the land of Egypt from under the hand of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and they had feared other gods (NOTE THIS VERSE LINKS THEIR "FEAR" OF OTHER GODS WITH THEIR DELIVERANCE FROM EGYPT!) 8 and walked in the customs of the nations whom the LORD had driven out before the sons of Israel, and in the customs of the kings of Israel which they had introduced. 9 The sons of Israel did things secretly which were not right against the LORD their God. Moreover, they built for themselves

high places in all their towns, from watchtower to fortified city. 10 They set for themselves sacred pillars and Asherim on every high hill and under every green tree, 11 and there they burned incense on all the high places as the nations did which the LORD had carried away to exile before them; and they did evil things provoking the LORD. 12 They served idols, concerning which the LORD had said to them, "You shall not do this thing." 13 Yet the LORD warned Israel and Judah through all His prophets and every seer, saying, "Turn from your evil ways and keep My commandments, My statutes according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you through My servants the prophets." 14 However, they did not listen, but stiffened their neck like their fathers, who did not believe in the LORD their God. 15 They rejected His statutes and His covenant which He made with their fathers and His warnings with which He warned them. And they followed vanity and became vain, and went after the nations which surrounded them, concerning which the LORD had commanded them not to do like them. 16 They forsook all the commandments of the LORD their God and made for themselves molten images, even two calves, and made an Asherah and worshiped all the host of heaven and served Baal. 17 Then they made their sons and their daughters pass through the fire, and practiced divination and enchantments, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking Him. 18 So the LORD was very angry with Israel and removed them from His sight; none was left except the tribe of Judah. 19 Also Judah did not keep the commandments of the LORD their God, but walked in the customs which Israel had introduced.(2 Ki 17:6-19)

Related Resources:

- Molech, Moloch
- Moloch - Wikipedia

Acts 7:44 "Our fathers had the tabernacle of testimony in the wilderness, just as He who spoke to Moses directed him to make it according to the pattern which he had seen. (NASB: Lockman)

KJV 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.

- **the tabernacle** Ex 38:21; Nu 1:50-53; 9:15; 10:11; 17:7,8; 18:2; Joshua 18:1; 2 Chr 24:6
- **He who spoke to Moses** Ex 25:40; 26:30; 1 Chr 28:11,19; Heb 8:2,5
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

THE WILDERNESS
TABERNACLE OF TESTIMONY

Our fathers had the tabernacle of testimony in the wilderness - **Tabernacle** is first in the Greek sentence for emphasis and presents a striking contrast with the "tabernacle of Molech!" The **tabernacle** was God's plan and it was portable which implied that it was temporary. Furthermore it was called the **Tabernacle of Testimony** because its very presence served as a continual testimony to the Jews of God's presence among them. The **Tabernacle of Testimony** first built just after the exodus from Egypt served as a symbol of God's presence for the next (approximately) **487 years** (Date of Exodus ~ 1446 bc, Date of completion of Solomon's Temple ~ 959 bc - Acts 7:45 says "until the time of David"). All during this time Israel was also carrying on idolatrous worship in some way related to the Tabernacle. Stephen's indictment was stinging to the Sanhedrin! They knew the history, but like all of us, they undoubtedly practiced a little "selective amnesia" preferring not to remember Israel's centuries long propensity for pagan idols!

Stephen in reminding them of the Tabernacle, which was repeatedly taken down and put up in place after place, is showing the Sanhedrin that God is not worshiped in one particular place. The Sanhedrin thought that particular place was the Temple in Jerusalem.

Tabernacle (tent) (4633)(**skene**) is a tent or booth and here refers to the portable divine sanctuary comprising the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies (Heb 9.2-8);. The Tent of Testimony or Tabernacle Acts 7:44; Heb 8:2, 5; 9:11, 21; 13:10; Rev 15:5+. The very point of the Tabernacle was to depict that this was a symbol of only a temporary structure.

Testimony (3142)(**marturion/martyrion**) means evidence, proof or the content of what a witness tells. **Marturion** is the declaration of facts which confirms or makes something known. In a sense the **Tabernacle** was "*personified*" as a "**witness**" for Jehovah. How so? Primarily because it contained "the ark of the testimony" (see Ex 25:21, cf Ex. 30:26; 21:7), which contained the tablets of the Ten Commandments stood as a ***witness*** of the Mosaic Covenant and the entire body of Mosaic Law which Israel came under at

Mount Sinai. In addition, God placed His glory on the Tabernacle, Moses recording that "the cloud covered the **tent of meeting**, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle." (Ex 40:34) The cloud of God's Shekinah glory cloud showed His approval of the completed Tabernacle and led the people by day and by night through the wilderness (Read Nu 9:15-23).

Now think about that for a moment -- the Israelites could actually see a symbol of the living God, and yet what did they still choose to do? They still chose to bow down to these abominable idols which they had made. Is this not mind boggling? Again, we are reminded that our hearts are no less depraved than their hearts were, so we have great need to be continually on high alert lest we are ensnared by and bow down to abominable idols or our own making!

In the Hebrew OT, the phrase "**Tent of Meeting**" is usually translated with the Greek phrase "te skene tou marturion," that is, the "Tabernacle of the Testimony." This Greek phases is found 32x in the Septuagint and once in the NT (Acts 7:44)...

> Exod. 27:21; Exod. 30:36; Exod. 40:26; Lev. 4:7; Lev. 4:18; Lev. 16:16; Lev. 16:17; Lev. 24:3; Num. 1:1; Num. 2:17; Num. 3:25; Num. 4:3; Num. 4:4; Num. 4:15; Num. 4:23; Num. 4:28; Num. 4:31; Num. 4:33; Num. 4:35; Num. 4:37; Num. 4:39; Num. 4:41; Num. 4:47; Num. 8:19; Num. 8:22; Num. 8:24; Num. 8:26; Num. 17:19; Num. 17:22; Num. 18:21; Num. 18:31; 2 Chr. 1:3; Acts 7:44

Just as He who spoke to Moses directed him to make it according to the pattern which he had seen- **Pattern** is tupos, the same word Stephen just used for "**the images**" in Acts 7:43. The Tabernacle was God's idea and He gave Moses the specifications for building it. It was patterned after the Temple of the Tabernacle of Testimony in heaven (See Garland's comparison of earthly and heavenly tabernacles).

What Stephen is doing here is reminding the Sanhedrin that God Himself had given the pattern for the Tabernacle, but he will go on to describe the Temple for which the Sanhedrin were so zealous as a building which had NOT actually been appointed by God.

Moses records God's giving him the pattern

> Exodus 25:8-9 “Let them construct a sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell among them. “According to all that I am going to show you, as the pattern (Lxx = paradeigma = as in an architect's plan, a sculptor or painter's model) of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furniture, just so you shall construct it
>
> Exodus 25:40 “See that you make them after the **pattern** (Lxx = tupos) for them, which was shown to you on the mountain.
>
> Exodus 26:30 “Then you shall erect the tabernacle according to its **plan** (Lxx = eidos = appearance) which you have been shown in the mountain.

Phillips - The Tabernacle was an object of great beauty and cost. Built to divine specification, it was God's tent in the midst of His people. In that tent He took up His abode, sitting between the cherubim upon the mercy seat upon the sacred Ark inside the veil. The Tabernacle was a model, made after a heavenly pattern revealed to Moses in the mount. Every peg and pin, every curtain and color, every board and bar spoke of Christ. Stephen's point was that the Tabernacle, for all its divine origin, appointments, and purpose, was after all only a temporary structure. Built-in obsolescence was part of the plan. (Exploring Acts: An Expository Commentary)

Acts 7:45 "And having received it in their turn, our fathers brought it in with Joshua upon dispossessing the nations whom God drove out before our fathers, until the time of David. (NASB: Lockman)

> KJV Acts 7:45 Which also our fathers that came after brought in with Jesus into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drave out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David;
>
> NLT Acts 7:45 Years later, when Joshua led our ancestors in battle against the nations that God drove out of this land, the Tabernacle was taken with them into their new territory. And it stayed there until the time of King David.

- **our fathers brought it in with Joshua** Joshua 3:11-14; 18:1; Judges 18:31; 1 Samuel 4:4; 1 Kings 8:4; 1 Chr 16:39; 21:29
- **upon dispossessing the nations**. Joshua 3:6,7 Joshua Heb 4:8
- **whom God drove out before our fathers** Acts 13:19; Neh 9:24; Ps 44:2; 78:55
- **until the time of David** 2 Samuel 6:1-23; 1 Chr 15:1-17
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

THE TABERNACLE TRANSPORTED INTO THE PROMISED LAND

And having received it in their turn - The verb **diadechomai** (from dechomai = accept in sense of to welcome) means it was received from Moses and was welcomed by Joshua. When did this occur? After 40 years of wilderness wanderings. So if the Exodus occurred in about 1446 BC, the event Stephen is describing occurred about 1406 BC (The dates are approximations)

Our fathers brought it in with Joshua (Josh 3:14-17; 18:1) - This of course describes the Israelites coming into and possessing the land of Canaan promised to Abraham.

Note the **KJV** has "Which also our fathers that came after brought in with Jesus" but the reference is clearly to Joshua whose name was the Hebrew form of "Jesus" (meaning "Jehovah is Salvation").

Henry Morris suggests that "Possibly Stephen inserted this name here deliberately in order to subtly call attention to the parallel ministries of Joshua, who conquered Canaan, and Jesus, who had come to conquer Satan, sin and death."

Upon dispossessing the nations (ethnos = Gentiles) **whom God drove out before** (literally "away from the face of") **our fathers** (Josh 23:9; 24:18) - This describes God's faithfulness to His covenant. This is amazing because despite the preceding description of Israel's continued abominable idolatry (and unfaithfulness to Jehovah), Jehovah remained faithful.

Dispossessing the nations is literally "into the possession of the nations."

The verb verb **drove out** is **exotheo** (uses only here and Acts 27:29 "run aground") which means He expelled the pagans, forcing them to leave. However, we know from the Book of Judges that God had instructed Israel to do their part to expel and exterminate the vile Canaanites. Sadly, for the most part Israel did not obey God and the nations and their idols/gods became a snare to Israel (Jdg 2:1-3+)

Dispossessing (2697)(**kataschesis** from **katecho** = to take hold of, take possession) in the NT is used only in Acts 7:5 where Stephen reviews how God promised to give the land as a "possession" and here in Acts 7:45 where Stephen told how the Israelites brought the tabernacle with them “into the possession” or “in taking possession” of the nations in Canaan.

The first use of this word in the Septuagint relates to the Abrahamic Covenant

> “I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting **possession** (**kataschesis**); and I will be their God.” (Ge 17:8)

In Psalm 2 the Father is speaking to the Son, Messiah declaring

> Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, And the very ends of the earth as Your (MESSIAH'S) possession (**kataschesis**). (Ps. 2:8)

Gilbrant - In classical Greek kataschesis primarily denotes “something which is held, a holding.” In actual practice, the basic definition is “holding back, restraining” (Bauer). It occurs more than 60 times in the Septuagint where the primary meaning of the word is “a possession, a holding fast.” These occurrences translate five different Hebrew words, all referring to one’s possessions or holdings. The Hebrew word most commonly translated is ’ăchuzzāh meaning “landed property” or simply “property.” (Complete Biblical Library Greek-English Dictionary)

Kataschesis - 66x in 59v in the Septuagint -

> Gen. 17:8; Gen. 47:11; Gen. 48:4; Lev. 25:24; Lev. 25:25; Lev. 25:27; Lev. 25:28; Lev. 25:32; Lev. 25:33; Lev. 25:34; Lev. 25:41; Lev. 25:45; Lev. 27:16; Lev. 27:21; Lev. 27:22; Lev. 27:24; Lev. 27:28; Num. 13:2; Num. 27:4; Num. 27:7; Num. 27:12; Num. 32:5; Num. 32:22; Num. 32:29; Num. 32:32; Num. 33:54; Num. 35:2; Num. 35:8; Num. 35:28; Num. 36:3; Deut. 32:49; Jos. 21:12; Jos. 21:41; Jos. 22:4; Jos. 22:9; Jos. 22:19; 1 Chr. 4:33; 1 Chr. 7:28; 1 Chr. 9:2; 1 Chr. 13:2; 2 Chr. 11:14; Neh. 11:3; Ps. 2:8; Ezek. 33:24; Ezek. 36:2; Ezek. 36:3; Ezek. 36:5; Ezek. 36:12; Ezek. 44:28; Ezek. 45:5; Ezek. 45:6; Ezek. 45:7; Ezek. 45:8; Ezek. 46:16; Ezek. 46:18; Ezek. 48:20; Ezek. 48:21; Ezek. 48:22; Zech. 11:14;

Until the time of David - God drove out the Gentiles until the time of David.

Gilbrant explains that "The Book of Judges shows also that in the days after Joshua the people did not drive out the Canaanites, but instead fell into Canaanite idolatry. They did so again and again, even though God was faithful to raise up judges to deliver them. Not until David's time was Israel fully united and in control of its territory. Stephen's attention, however, was focused on the tabernacle, and he showed it lasted until the time of David. After the capture of the ark of the covenant by the Philistines the

tabernacle was pitched at Nob, a short distance north of Jerusalem, possibly on Mount Scopus. Later, it was at the high place at Gibeon (1 Samuel 21:1; 1 Chronicles 16:39). Finally, Solomon brought to the temple what was left of the nearly 500-year-old tent (1 Kings 8:4; 2 Chronicles 5:5). (Complete Biblical Library – Acts)

Acts 7:46 "David found favor in God's sight, and asked that he might find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. (NASB: Lockman)

KJV Acts 7:46 Who found favour before God, and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob.

- **found** 13:22; 1 Samuel 15:28; 16:1,11-13; 2 Samuel 6:21; 7:1,8,18,19; 1 Chr 28:4,5; Ps 78:68-72; 89:19-37; 132:11
- **sked that he might find** 2 Samuel 7:1-5; 1 Kings 8:17-19; 1 Chr 17:1-4; 22:7,8; 28:2,3; 29:2,3; Ps 132:1-5
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

DAVID'S DESIRE TO BUILD A DIVINE DWELLING

David found favor in God's sight - Or "David found grace." As evidenced by his victories over Israel's enemies and finally establishing a united kingdom of Israel under His rule. The phrase **in God's sight** from **enopion** means in front of, literally "in the face of" God.

All the uses of **enopion** in **Acts** - Acts 2:25; Acts 4:10; Acts 4:19; Acts 6:6; Acts 7:46; Acts 9:15; Acts 10:30; Acts 10:31; Acts 10:33; Acts 19:9; Acts 19:19; Acts 27:35)

Gilbrant - After David brought back the ark to Jerusalem, he placed it in a temporary tent shelter. But he personally desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob.

Second Samuel records...

> Now it came about when the king lived in his house, and the LORD had given him rest on every side from all his enemies, 2 that the king said to Nathan the prophet, “See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells within tent curtains.” 3 Nathan said to the king, “Go, do all that is in your mind, for the LORD is with you.” (2 Sa 7:1-3)

2 Samuel 7:13 is God's answer to David's request to build Him a Temple

> “He (SOLOMON) shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

Note that just as God had given Moses the pattern for the Tabernacle, He also gave David inspired blueprints for the Temple...

> David said, "All of this I put in writing as the LORD directed me and gave me insight regarding the details of the blueprints." (1Ch 28:19NET)

And asked that he might find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob- As alluded to above, while the Tabernacle was built at God's initiative, the idea of the Temple was a desire in the mind of David and was not God's idea.

Henry Morris adds an interesting note that "Although God had accepted and blessed the Temple with His presence, the building itself was not sacred and was not destined to last forever. In fact, the existing temple (IN THE FIRST CENTURY AD) had been built by the Edomite Herod, who, caring nothing for God, had built it for political reasons. Jesus had predicted it would soon be destroyed (Luke 21:5,6)." (Defender's Study Bible).

John Phillips - David, contrasting God's dwelling place on earth with his own palatial residence, made up his mind that he would build a permanent Temple for God. Nathan the prophet at first endorsed the scheme enthusiastically. The very thing! Let God now permanently locate Himself in Jerusalem! But shortly he was back with a message for David from God: God had no need of a house of cedar. Nevertheless, because of the nobleness of David's thought, God would establish David's house forever—an unequivocable prophecy concerning Christ. At the same time, David was told that a Son of his would arise and build a house for God (2 Sam. 7:12-13), an obscure but equally pointed reference to Christ and to the spiritual house He would build. (Exploring Acts: An Expository Commentary)

Dwelling (4638)(**skenoma** from **skenoo**= to pitch a tent [a **skenos**]) describes an encampment, a booth, a pitched tent or a tabernacle (used this way many times in the **Septuagint** eg, Ps 14:1, 25:8, 42:3, 45:5) and in context is a figurative description of

the body as the dwelling place of the soul.

David expressed his desire to build a Temple for God...

> I will not give sleep to my eyes Or slumber to my eyelids, Until I find a place for the LORD, A dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob." (Ps 132:4, 5)

Acts 7:47 "But it was Solomon who built a house for Him. (NASB: Lockman)

> KJV Acts 7:47 But Solomon built him an house.

- 2 Sa 7:13; 1 Kings 5:1-18; 6:1,37,38; 7:13-51; 8:20; 1 Chr 17:1; 2 Chr 2:1-4; Zech 6:12,13
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

But it was Solomon who built a house for Him - David's son built the Temple using materials David had collected.

Read 1 Kings 8:1-21 for the description of the building of the Temple.

MacArthur: Though David had desired to build the Temple, God had other plans, for it was actually David's son whom God allowed to do it. Now, there is an interesting possibility why the mention of Solomon building the Temple is just briefly stated in passing: Stephen could be implying the transitory nature of the Temple that the Jews had so revered. In a sense, it's almost an indictment, because the Temple that Solomon had built had been destroyed. The Jews had essentially put all their eggs in one basket--their security was the Temple. They were guilty of worshiping the building, rather than the God who had chosen to dwell there. In fact, even Zerubbabel's Temple was gone and Stephen's opponents were only familiar with Herod's. It's as if Stephen is saying, "You guys are talking about the Temple that God built, and this isn't even it! If you're accusing me of speaking against this Temple, keep in mind that this isn't the Temple that God built anyway. The one that He ordained was built by Solomon. And even Solomon's Temple was only temporary, because God Himself allowed it to be destroyed as part of His plan. So you can't put God in a box."

David McKay - The Temple not designed to be permanent but a pointer to fulfillment in Jesus Christ (cf Jn 2:19, 20, 21); Temple was place of sacrifice; Jesus offered perfect sacrifice for sins (Heb 9:26); end of whole sacrificial system; priesthood replaced by great High Priest of Jesus Christ (Heb 10:12); not a message the Sanhedrin wanted to hear; temple has fulfilled its purpose and its days are over; God is doing a new thing; Eph. 2:21; our church buildings are not temples;

Keyin Maples - God is not bound to a place.

> a. Abraham was not in Jerusalem when God called him.
> b. Jesus told the woman at the well that Jerusalem would no longer be the central place of worship:
> c. David wrote of the omnipresence of God.
> d. Jonah learned the hard way that God is everywhere–on land, at sea, and under the sea.
> e. Stephen preached in verses 47 and 48:
> f. Does this mean the temple should not have been built? No. It means that the temple had a purpose until the death of Jesus on the cross and at that moment the temple became obsolete.

Acts 7:48 "However, the Most High does not dwell in houses made by human hands; as the prophet says: (NASB: Lockman)

> KJV Acts 7:48 Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet,

- **the Most High** Dt 32:8; Ps 7:17; 46:4; 91:1,9; 92:8; Da 4:17,24,25,34; Hos 7:16
- **dwell** Acts 17:24,25; 1 Kings 8:27; 2 Chr 2:5,6; 6:18
- **as** Isa 66:1,2
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

DON'T PUT GOD
IN A BOX

However - Term of contrast. Stephen is challenging the Sanhedrin idea that God dwelt in the Temple in Jerusalem and no where else. This reminds me of the title of a well-known Christian book entitled "Your God is Too Small." Stephen could justifiably have said that to the Sanhedrin who wanted to confine God to their beloved Temple in Jerusalem.

Robertson on **however** - By contrast with what Solomon did and David planned. Note emphatic position of "**not**" (all' ouch), "*But not does the Most High dwell*." The presence of the **Most High** is not confined in any building, even one so splendid as Solomon's Temple as Solomon himself foresaw and acknowledged in his prayer (1 Kings 8:27; 2 Chr 6:18).

The Most High does not dwell in houses made by human hands- The thought that the uncreated, self-existing, omniscient God could be confined to anything created by finite man is patently absurd. As **Phillips** says "Although God graciously placed the Shekinah glory cloud in Solomon's Temple, a visible token of His presence (as the royal standard flying over Buckingham Palace signals the presence of Britain's sovereign), He Himself was not to be so confined." (Ibid).

In Exodus 25:22 had told Moses "I will meet with you" in the Tabernacle in the place of the mercy seat. But as Stephen has been demonstrating, God's meeting with His people was not confined to one place for He had met with Abraham in a pagan land and Moses in a burning bush on Mt Sinai.

Note that Stephen implied nothing derogatory about the Temple, and in fact the same point had been made by Solomon.**King Solomon** in his prayer of dedication upon the completion of the Temple, acknowledged that God could not be contained by a physical building...

> But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You, how much less this house which I have built! (1 Ki 8:27).
>
> But will God indeed dwell with mankind on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You; how much less this house which I have built. (2 Chr 6:18)

Later in Acts the apostle **Paul** also made the same point to the Athenians who had the famous Parthenon...

> "The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. (Acts 17:24)

As the prophet says - Stephen does not quote Solomon (which could have been quoted) but proceeds to quote the prophet Isaiah.

Derek Thomas has an interesting historical note on the Temple - In the closing years of the seventh century, as Judah's independence came to a close and the nation succumbed to the period of Babylonian exile, Jerusalem's loyal and faithful prophet Jeremiah took his life in his hands and preached against the city's ever-present sins of idolatry and presumption. Despite all the signs and warnings of judgment, the rebellious Judahites continued to believe that so long as they had the temple in Jerusalem, they were safe. In the brief but dark reigns of Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, and Jehoiakin, Jeremiah seemed to mock the mantra he often heard: "**This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD**" (Jer. 7:4). In what is often referred to as "The Temple Sermon," Jeremiah warned the people concerning these "deceptive words" (Jer. 7:8). Dependence on the temple had become a form of ritualism. Ritualism—reliance on outward forms and ceremonies—can be a dangerous and destructive thing. J. C. Ryle warned against it in his own context at the end of the nineteenth century:

> A right view of sin is the best antidote to that sensuous, ceremonial, formal kind of Christianity.… I can well believe that there is much that is attractive in this system of religion, to a certain order of minds, so long as the conscience is not fully enlightened. But when that wonderful part of our condition called conscience is really awake and alive, I find it hard to believe that a sensuous ceremonial Christianity will thoroughly satisfy us. A little child is easily quieted and amused with gaudy toys, and dolls, and rattles, so long as it is not hungry; but once let it feel the cravings of nature within, and we know that nothing will satisfy it but food. Just so it is with man in the matter of his soul. (Holiness)

Thomas continues "Stephen, like Jeremiah, was facing a group of people who were convinced of their right standing and good relationship with God—a relationship based entirely on external things. They were incensed at what they considered criticism of the temple. After all, they believed their entire relationship to God was based on God's promise to "put his name" upon the temple. Thus the Jews came to believe that association with the temple was tantamount to membership in God's family. Stephen's sermon was designed to show that this was never the case. True, Solomon had built the temple "for the name of the LORD" (2 Chron. 2:1). For the Jews, the temple was the only place in the world where God was "present" (in the Holy Place), and to criticize the structure by prophesying its destruction was to violate everything that was deemed sacred. Yet the author of Hebrews made the essential point that it was never the temple or the Old Testament sacrificial system that was the end in itself. Instead, it was what these Old Testament realities were types of (and thus pointed toward) that was important: the person and work of Jesus Christ (cf. Heb. 9). Thus the author of Hebrews insisted that Christ entered "not into a holy place made with hands … but into heaven itself" (Heb. 9:24).

Jesus had entered the ultimate and true cosmic temple of God both as the priest who offered the sacrifice and as the sacrificial offering himself. Therefore, in the words of Chrysostom, “Jesus’ fulfillment of the Old Testament types now ‘sets the whole heaven against the temple’ in Jerusalem.”" (Reformed Expository Commentary - Acts)

Related Resources:

- El Elyon: Most High God - Sovereign Over All
- **Most High** is frequently used to describe God in Scripture - Gen. 14:18; Ge 14:19; Ge 14:20; Ge 14:22; Nu 24:16; Dt. 32:8; 2 Sa. 22:14; Ps. 7:17; Ps. 9:2; Ps. 18:13; Ps. 21:7; Ps. 46:4; Ps. 47:2; Ps. 50:14; Ps. 57:2; Ps. 73:11; Ps. 77:10; Ps. 78:17; Ps. 78:35; Ps. 78:56; Ps. 82:6; Ps. 83:18; Ps. 87:5; Ps. 91:1; Ps. 91:9; Ps. 92:1; Ps. 97:9; Ps. 107:11; Isa. 14:14; Lam. 3:35; Lam. 3:38; Dan. 3:26; Dan. 4:2; Dan. 4:17; Dan. 4:24; Dan. 4:25; Dan. 4:32; Dan. 4:34; Dan. 5:18; Dan. 5:21; Dan. 7:25; Mk. 5:7; Lk. 1:32; Lk. 1:35; Lk. 1:76; Lk. 6:35; Lk. 8:28; Acts 7:48; Acts 16:17; Heb. 7:1

Acts 7:49 'HEAVEN IS MY THRONE, AND EARTH IS THE FOOTSTOOL OF MY FEET; WHAT KIND OF HOUSE WILL YOU BUILD FOR ME?' says the Lord, 'OR WHAT PLACE IS THERE FOR MY REPOSE? (NASB: Lockman)

> KJV Acts 7:49 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?

- **Heaven** 1 Kings 22:19; Ps 11:4; Jer 23:24; Mt 5:34,35; 23:22; Rev 3:21
- **what kind of house** Jer 7:4-11; Mal 1:11; Mt 24:2; John 4:21
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

GOD IS GREATER
THAN THE TEMPLE

HEAVEN IS MY THRONE, AND EARTH IS THE FOOTSTOOL OF MY FEET- This does not require much comment. God is not looking for a temple of stone, since as Creator of all things, the whole universe is His dwelling place. Remember the Sanhedrin have a terminal case of "Temple-olatry." The Sanhedrin had fallen into the same trap the Jews did in Jeremiah's day when he warned them ""Do not trust in deceptive words, saying, ‘This is the **temple** of the LORD, the **temple** of the LORD, the **temple** of the LORD.’ (Jer 7:4). So to correct (and gently rebuke) the deceptive thoughts of the Sanhedrin regarding the Temple in Jerusalem, Stephen describes God's "**Transcendent Temple**" - which is beyond and outside the ordinary range of human experience or understanding.

Jeff Iorg paraphrases Isaiah's words "In other words, why do you think a special house will guarantee My presence?" This Old Testament passage foreshadows an important New Testament reality. God is not housed in things made by humans but in humans themselves."

To the Sanhedrin (and most of the Jews), the Temple had become something like a "lucky charm." They assumed they had a lock on God, thinking "We have God on our side because we have His Temple." Sadly, they thought of Him as their possession, so instead of God possessing them, they "possessed" God (or so they thought).

Stephen's quote from Isaiah 66:1 reminds us of the interchange between Jesus and the Samaritan woman who believed God could only be worshiped in a given place...

> The woman said to Him, “Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. 20 “**Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.**” (THEY ARE BOTH WRONG!) 21 Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. 22 “You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 “But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. 24 “**God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth**.” (John 4:19-24).

Elmer Towns on Isaiah 66:1 - This reference to the localized presence of God is a figurative description, since God is omnipresent, meaning He is everywhere equally present at all times. The heaven where God reigns was thought of by the Jews as “the third heaven” (see 2 Cor. 12:2) - the first heaven being the atmosphere, and the second the stratosphere or the stars. God's throne was

spoken of as being in the third heaven, from whence He rules the universe.

WHAT KIND OF HOUSE WILL YOU BUILD FOR ME?' says the Lord - In light of God's description of His "Transcendent Temple" how can finite man expect to be able to build a structure that would house the infinite, omnipresent God? It is unthinkable! And yet there is one "house" He desires and that is for our bodies to become His temple, by grace through faith in Christ. This is amazing in light of the truth of Isaiah 66:1.

John Phillips - Stephen now turned to Isaiah 66:1-2 for his final word about the inadequacy of the Temple. What need did God have of a temple-God, who was able to create suns and stars, able to make a planet such as Earth and fill it to overflowing with all things man could ever need? What need did such a vast, infinite, eternal God have of a temple, however magnificent? Man might need a temple in the ritual and symbolic picture book stage of his spiritual development, but God certainly had no need of a temple. The very Temple, indeed, of which the Jews were so inordinately proud in Stephen's day was not Solomon's Temple. God had allowed that one to go up in flames. Moreover, within a few decades, the present Temple would be destroyed. It made no difference. The Temple was not necessary to true spiritual faith. Like the Tabernacle before it, it was never intended to be more than a temporary phase in their spiritual education. Their charge that he had blasphemed God by proclaiming Jesus to be greater than the Temple and to have declared the Temple redundant was answered. (Exploring Acts)

OR WHAT PLACE IS THERE FOR MY REPOSE - Answer? He has need of none! The self-existent, the Great I Am does not need a place to rest. Earlier Isaiah had spoke to this in this great description of God...

> Do you not know? Have you not heard?
> The Everlasting God, the LORD,
> The Creator of the ends of the earth
> **Does not become weary or tired**.
> His understanding is inscrutable
> (Isaiah 40:28)
> (Play the beautiful melody
> Scroll Down for "Do You Not Know?")

Repose (2663)(**katapausis** from **katá** = intensifies or "down" conveys sense of permanency +**paúo**= make to cease) describes literally a ceasing from one's work or activity. **Thayer** cites a use in the active sense of a putting to rest as used in the sentence "a calming of the winds".

NET Note - What kind…resting place? The rhetorical questions clearly show that mere human beings cannot build a house to contain God.

Today "God's temple" is our body! (1 Cor 3:16, 1 Cor 6:19+) Think about this! Is God able to "**rest**" in His Temple, your (my) body? Whoa! Are you as convicted as I am? We all have the tendency to think that we worship in church on Sunday. But the truth that God is with us wherever we are should cause us to think more about worshiping Him any time and any place, for when and where we are, He is! Now are you really convicted? Let this truth motivate you to live day to day with a more conscious awareness of God's presence and the unspeakably sublime privilege we as His children to worship Him without limits of time or place! Beloved, it has always been God's will that His people, individually and corporately, be His dwelling, not some man-made stone edifice. God is not looking for stone buildings but for soft hearts in which to dwell even as He says in Isaiah 57:15

> For thus says the high and exalted One (WHOSE THRONE IS HEAVEN!) Who lives forever, Whose Name is Holy, "I **dwell** on a high and holy place, And also with the contrite and lowly of spirit In order to revive the spirit of the lowly And to revive the **heart** of the contrite. (Read also Isaiah 66:2)

Bob Deffinbaugh: The First Martyr – Taking God for Granite - I confess that this is a play on words, but it is one that represents an important truth. The law of Moses was written on stone. The temple, too, was made of stone. In one sense, the Jews had made the law of Moses (as they interpreted it) and the temple an idol. Their "god" was a god of their making, rather than the One who made all things (Acts 4:24). They made stone (granite?) their "god." Thus, they took **God for granite**, or perhaps we should say they took **granite for their god**...Unbelieving Jews could not stand to hear anything about the coming destruction of the temple. As the **Law of Moses** (or rather the traditions the Jews had made up themselves and attributed to Moses) had become an idol to the Hellenistic, Greek-speaking Jews who opposed Stephen, so had the **temple**. They assumed that to have the temple was to have the assurance of God's presence among them and His blessings. . . As our Lord Jesus told the woman at the well, worship is **not** a matter of finding the right place, but of finding the right **Person** (John 4:20-26). They have an exaggerated view of the importance of the temple. (The First Martyr or Taking God for Granite Acts 7:1-60)

Dave Guzik - Stephen confronted their idolatry of the temple. In doing so, they tried to confine God within the temple. Yet God is too big to fit in any temple man could make. On a more subtle level, many Christians do the same thing. It may not be the worship of a

church building (though certainly that does take place from time to time), but it is the confinement of God to one place. In other words, the only place they meet God is at the church. **As far as they are concerned, God is absent from the rest of their lives** In the minds and lives of some today, God might as well only live at the church. (Acts 7 Commentary)

Acts 7:50 'WAS IT NOT MY HAND WHICH MADE ALL THESE THINGS?' (NASB: Lockman)

> KJV Acts 7:50 Hath not my hand made all these things?

- Acts 14:15; Ex 20:11; Ps 33:6-9; 50:9-12; 146:5,6; Isa 40:28; 44:24; Isa 45:7,8,12; Jer 10:11; 32:17
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

WAS IT NOT MY HAND WHICH MADE ALL THESE THINGS? - My Hand is a metaphor for God Himself. The Greek sentence begins with the adverb ouchi which calls for an affirmative answer. So the answer to this question is "Yes" and in context of Acts 7:49 the things He made are "heaven" and "earth," His throne and His footstool.

The point of this quote is that if God made everything in the heavens and the earth, how is it even possible that any man made building, even the cherished Temple, could contain the living God? Surely the Sanhedrin grasp the thrust of Stephen's OT quote and realized the clear implication that their beloved Temple could not contain Him. Stephen is demolishing their thought about one of their most prized institutions. Clearly he has no fear of men, and must surely understand that this type of declaration will bring more cries of speaking against this holy place, the Temple (cf Acts 6:13) and then would be followed in short order by stones on his head.

> Ps 102:25 “Of old You founded the earth, And the heavens are the work of Your hands.

Toussaint makes the point that Stephen was attempting to get across to the Sanhedrin - In God’s workings with the nation from Abraham to Solomon there was innovation and change. The point is clear: If God changed so many things in Israel’s history, who is to say that the Law and the temple were permanent? (BKC)

THE ATTITUDE OF MODERN JEWS TO THE TEMPLE

Here is the statement of principle from **The Temple Institute** in Jerusalem a group which is seeking to rebuild the Jewish Temple -

> The Temple Institute is dedicated to all aspects of the Divine commandment for Israel to build a house for G-d's presence, the Holy Temple, on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem. The range of the Institute's involvement with this concept includes education, research, activism, and actual preparation. Our goal is firstly, to restore Temple consciousness and reactivate these "forgotten" commandments. We hope that by doing our part, we can participate in the process that will lead to the Holy Temple becoming a reality once more. (Temple Institute)

They are doing all they can to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem and they explain why...

> THE TEMPLE INSTITUTE CONSIDERS IT OF PRIMARY IMPORTANCE to educate about the great significance of Mount Moriah, the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, **the only site in the world that is considered holy by the Jewish people, and the only site in the world which G-d chose to rest His presence through the establishment of the Holy Temple**....Sadly, much of our contemporary attitudes regarding the Holy Temple are a reflection of our own spiritual bankruptcy and alienation from the spiritual underpinnings of true Torah knowledge and faith. The Holy Temple was not some magnificent building. **It was the direct arena for our direct relationship with G-d; the unfolding saga of man's greatest spiritual longing. It was a place where heaven and earth met** (**ED**: CONTRAST "HEAVEN IS MY THRONE..."); **a meeting place for man and G-d....At this one place on earth, unlike any other, the one place that the Creator Himself chose to rest His presence** (**ED**: CONTRAST "REPOSE" OR REST IN ACTS 7:50!), **the rectification of man's connection with G-d takes place**. All people were able to come to the Temple to partake in this direct and fulfilling bond; to recharge their spiritual batteries and come away with a renewed sense of purpose and being. (Temple Institute)

Is this not the same deluded mindset which Stephen is seeking to address in Acts 7? Clearly the Jewish leaders of the movement to

rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem espouse beliefs very similar to the Sanhedrin and sadly they are just as misguided as their ancestors! The leaders of the Temple Institute would probably not appreciate Stephen's arguments against this lofty view of the Temple!

> As an aside, I personally do believe the Temple will be rebuilt in Jerusalem. Numerous Bible passages would be very difficult to explain if there is not a future Temple - See the passages and notes on each passage for further explanation. Da 9:27+; Da 12:11+; Mt 24:15+; 2Th 2:4+, Rev 11:1-2+. A **literal** reading/interpretation of Scripture leaves no doubt whatsoever that a Jewish Temple must be rebuilt in Jerusalem and this rebuilt temple will exist during the time of the Daniel's Seventieth Week (often called the "Tribulation."
>
> **Disclaimer** - I am not a dispensationalist! I don't really know what that term means! I am however a "literalist" and if the plain sense of the text in context makes good sense, then an attempt to some other sense will result in nonsense. An example is allegorizing of Rev 11:1-2 -- the ESV Study note says **the temple of God** "suggests that the temple itself symbolizes the saints," and **the holy city** is a "reference to the true church" with **forty-two months**...symbolizing the brevity of the church's suffering, which lasts until Christ comes." Notice the word "**symbolizing**!" Beloved, these literal numbers are repeated by John and Daniel and to interpret them *symbolically* is to end up with an interpretation that borders on nonsense in calling the holy city the true church. (See discussion of **Interpreting Symbols** - Understanding Symbols and Figures; Understanding Numbers.)

Acts 7:51 "You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did. (NASB: Lockman)

- **stiffnecked** : Ex 32:9 33:3,5 34:9 De 9:6,13 31:27 2Ch 30:8 Ne 9:16 Ps 75:5 Ps 78:8 Isa 48:4 Jer 17:23 Eze 2:4 Zec 7:11,12
- **uncircumcised** : Lev 26:41 De 10:16 30:6 Jer 4:4 6:10 9:25,26 Eze 44:7,9 Ro 2:25,28,29 Php 3:3 Col 2:11
- **resist** : Ac 6:10 Ne 9:30 Isa 63:10 Eph 4:30
- **as** : Acts 7:9,27,35,39 Mt 23:31-33
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

> Greek Sklerotracheloi kai aperitmetoi kardiais kai tois osin, humeis aei to pneumati to hagio antipiptete (2PPAI) os oi pateres humon kai humeis.
>
> CSB Acts 7:51 "You stiff-necked people with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are always resisting the Holy Spirit; as your forefathers did, so do you.
>
> ESV Acts 7:51 "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you.
>
> GWN Acts 7:51 "How stubborn can you be? How can you be so heartless and disobedient? You're just like your ancestors. They always opposed the Holy Spirit, and so do you!
>
> KJV Acts 7:51 Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye.
>
> NET Acts 7:51 "You stubborn people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are always resisting the Holy Spirit, like your ancestors did!
>
> NAB Acts 7:51 "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always oppose the holy Spirit; you are just like your ancestors.
>
> NIV Acts 7:51 "You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit!
>
> NLT Acts 7:51 "You stubborn people! You are heathen at heart and deaf to the truth. Must you forever resist the Holy Spirit? That's what your ancestors did, and so do you!
>
> NJB Acts 7:51 'You stubborn people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears. You are always resisting the Holy Spirit, just as your ancestors used to do.
>
> YLT Acts 7:51 'Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and in ears! ye do always the Holy Spirit resist; as your fathers -- also ye;

HARD HEARTS ARE
HARD TO REACH

Stephen, the accused, is now the accuser, and the situation becomes intolerable to the Sanhedrin and will soon turn violent as they pick up stones to stone Stephen, the first Christian martyr of the Church Age.

Stephen Ger makes an interesting observation noting that now Stephen reaches "the passionate climax of his message by directly addressing the Sanhedrin. There is a sudden shift of tenses, from dispassionate **third person** ("**THEY**" - Acts 7:41, cf Acts 7:52) to fervent **second person** (cf "**YOU**" - Acts 7:53), as Stephen pronounced his own verdict over his accusers. " (Twenty-First Century Biblical Commentary - Acts)

One can picture Stephen raising his hand and beginning to **gesticulate** toward the members of the Sanhedrin as he utters this next sentence. (Although pointing at another person with an extended finger is considered rude in many cultures.)

Homer Kent writes "the Jews were fond of historical retrospection, and with good reason. In view of the remarkable dealings of God with their nation in the past, it is small wonder that in times of adversity Jews often found comfort in tracing their history to see God's mercy, and to find encouragement for greater trust. Psalms 78 and 107 are other examples of this practice. Stephen, however, was not trying to find encouragement for himself, but was endeavoring to show how the Christian message was fully consistent with and the culmination of OT revelation. The speech also stressed the fact that historically God had to contend continually with a disobedient people, even among the patriarchs who sold Joseph to Egypt. According to Stephen, the important thing was to see God's purposes, not man's actions which were often sinful and contradictory to God's will. . .Applying these historical precedents to his audience, Stephen accused them of having the same rebellious nature as their fathers. Their ancestors had persecuted the prophets who foretold Christ's coming, and when Christ came this Sanhedrin had killed him. Their hardness of heart showed them to be no better spiritually than uncircumcised gentiles.

This is the climax of Stephen's speech, the personal application that cut his hearers to the heart. Throughout the centuries, Israel had refused to submit to God and obey the truths He had revealed to them. Their ears did not hear the truth (yes, they heard words but that's all), their hearts did not receive the truth, and their necks did not bow to the truth. As a result, they killed their own Messiah!

Spurgeon - He takes the sharp knife of the Word and rips up the sins of the people, laying open the inward parts of their hearts, and the secrets of their soul…He could not have delivered that searching address with greater fearlessness had he been assured that they would thank him for the operation; the fact that his death was certain had no other effect upon him than to make him yet more zealous.

You men who are stiff-necked - **Sklerotrachelos** is first word in the Greek to emphasize their "neck" problem. These Jews were unable to turn their heads to see a different point of view. Think about this picture for a moment -- have you ever seen someone attempting to put a yoke on an unwilling ox or a halter on an unwilling horse? That is the very picture of these Jewish men and of the majority of the nation of Israel! The word that comes to mind is **obstinate** - adhering fixedly to a particular opinion, attitude, course of action, etc; self-willed; headstrong; difficult to subdue; perversely adhering to their opinion and course in spite of reason, arguments, or persuasion. Stephen has presented a brilliant argument, using their beloved Old Testament Scriptures, but they refused to receive the truth he was speaking!

NET Note - Now the critique begins in earnest.

Stiff-necked (4644)(**sklerotrachelos** from **skleros** = hard + + **tráchelos** = the neck) means literally hard or stiff–necked and is used figuratively of resistance against changing one's behavior = **proud** (Having or showing a high or excessively high opinion of oneself or one's importance), **headstrong** (habitually disposed to disobedience and opposition), **stubborn** (tenaciously unwilling or marked by tenacious unwillingness to yield). **Obstinate** describes someone who is fixed and unyielding in course or purpose implying usually an unreasonable persistence; perversely adhering to an opinion, purpose, or course in spite of reason, arguments, or persuasion.

Sklerotrachelos portrays the idea of a stubborn ox that cannot be broken; and a neck so strong the animal is useless, because it cannot be turned right or left.

This is the only NT use of this word, but below are the 6 uses in the **Septuagint** most for the Hebrew word **qasheh** (07186) which means hard, severe, difficult, obstinate, stubborn.

> Ex 33:3 (JEHOVAH IS SPEAKING - Ex 33:1) "Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; for I will not go up in your midst, (WHY WON'T GOD BE IN ISRAEL'S MIDST?) because you are an **obstinate** (**sklerotrachelos**) people, lest I destroy you on the way."

Ex 33:5 For the LORD had said to Moses, "Say to the sons of Israel, You are an **obstinate** (**sklerotrachelos**) people; should I go up in your midst for one moment, I would destroy you. Now therefore, put off your ornaments from you, that I may know what I will do with you. "

Ex 34:9 And he said, "If now I have found favor in Thy sight, O Lord, I pray, let the Lord go along in our midst, even though the people are so **obstinate** (**sklerotrachelos**); and do Thou pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us as Thine own possession."

Deut 9:6 "Know, then, it is not because of your righteousness that the LORD your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a **stubborn** (**sklerotrachelos**) people.

Deut 9:13 "The LORD spoke further to me, saying, I have seen this people, and indeed, it is a **stubborn** (**sklerotrachelos**) people.

Proverbs 29:1 A man who **hardens his neck** after much reproof (English of LXX = "A reprover is better than a stiff-necked man) Will suddenly be broken beyond remedy.

ANOTHER HEART PROBLEM
NOT SPIRITUALLY CIRCUMCISED!

Uncircumcised in heart and ears - Their attitude was like that one would expect with uncircumcised Gentile "dogs!" This phrase signifies that they were spiritually dead, still dead in their trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1+). Had they been spiritually alive they would have been able to recognize Jesus as their Messiah.

A s **F.F. Bruce** says "While they were circumcised in the literal sense, in accordance with the Abrahamic institution, their unresponsiveness and resistance to God's revelation were such as might have been expected from Gentiles to whom he had not made known His will."

The Jews had physical circumcision but they failed to recognize that their circumcision was useless in attaining righteousness with God. The Jews placed great stress on their physical ritual of circumcision, forgetting that it was a sign which was meant to point to their complete dedication to the will and purposes of God. In fact in Genesis 17 it pointed to Abraham's entrance into the unconditional covenant by faith (Ge 15:6). Their hearts were still cold toward God and their ears inattentive to His Word, so that God could not reach them. Do you have any teenagers that model this behavior? Are even closer to home, is this a description of your response to God's gracious and merciful Word?

Gilbrant on **uncircumcised in heart and ears** - Their attitude and their refusal to listen to the gospel put them in the same class as the Gentiles who were outside God's covenant and were rejecting Him. They were hearing, thinking, and planning in the way unbelieving Gentiles did. Their fathers were actually warned against this. Deuteronomy 10:16 and 30:6 calls for a circumcision of the heart lest they become rebellious and be cut off from God's promises. (See also Jeremiah 6:10; 9:26; Ezekiel 44:7.) (Complete Biblical Library – Acts)

Uncircumcised in heart means they did not have a covenant relationship with God and this is the only thing He will accept. Stephen in essence is saying “You are just like the Gentiles in your rejection of the Lord!” These were "fighting words" to the self-righteous Sanhedrin!

Wenham - The phrase “**uncircumcised in heart and ears**” refers to the fact that they were unregenerate or in other words, not born-again and saved. The born again believer is *circumcised* in Christ, Paul states this to the church at Colossae in: Colossians 2:11, “and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ.” The Jew was driven from the land because of his uncircumcised heart as God declares through Moses in Leviticus 26:40-42, “If they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their forefathers, in their unfaithfulness which they committed against Me, and also in their acting with hostility against Me-I also was acting with hostility against them, to bring them into the land of their enemies-or if their uncircumcised heart becomes humbled so that they then make amends for their iniquity, then I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and I will remember also My covenant with Isaac, and My covenant with Abraham as well, and I will remember the land.” God is concerned about the condition of your heart. To reject the Spirit’s witness concerning Christ upon hearing the Gospel is to have an uncircumcised heart before God.

Uncircumcised (564)(**aperitmetos** from **a** = negates + **peritemno** = to cut around, to circumcise) is an adjective (used only in Acts 7:51) which literally describes that which is not cut around. In context **aperitmetos** is used figuratively of those uncircumcised in heart and ears a spiritual condition which resulted in their stubbornness toward God, His Son and His Gospel. In Jeremiah 9:25 the Lxx uses aperitmetos figuratively to refer to gentiles with uncircumcised foreskin.

Robertson on **Uncircumcised in heart** (aperitmētoi kardiais) - Late adjective common in LXX and here only in the N.T. Verbal of **peritemnō**, to cut around and **a** = privative. Both of these epithets are applied to the Jews in the O.T. (Ex 32:9; Ex 33:3, 5; Ex 34:9; Lev 26:41; Dt. 9:6; Jer 6:10)....No epithet could have been more galling to these Pharisees than to be turned "**uncircumcised in heart**" (Ro 2:29). They had only the physical circumcision which was useless.

It is interesting to note that in this verse Stephen says their **heart** is **uncircumcised** but in Acts 7:54 Luke records that when they heard this their heart ("quick" is literally "heart") was **cut**! In other words in their hearts they became furious and refused the Gospel which alone could have wrought spiritual circumcision of their stony hearts!

Related Resources:

- Circumcision of the heart. - Below is an index to discussion of specific passages dealing with circumcision of the heart
    - Romans 2:28 For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh.
    - Colossians 2:11 and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ;
    - Genesis 17:9-14 God said further to Abraham, “Now as for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. 10 “This is My covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: every male among you shall be circumcised. 11 “And you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin, and it shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you. 12 “And every male among you who is eight days old shall be circumcised throughout your generations, a servant who is born in the house or who is bought with money from any foreigner, who is not of your descendants. 13 “A servant who is born in your house or who is bought with your money shall surely be circumcised; thus shall My covenant be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. 14 “But an uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant.”
    - Leviticus 26:41-42 I also was acting with hostility against them, to bring them into the land of their enemies–or **if their uncircumcised heart becomes humbled** so that they then make amends for their iniquity, 42 then I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and I will remember also My covenant with Isaac, and My covenant with Abraham as well, and I will remember the land
    - Deuteronomy 10:16-17 So **circumcise your heart,** and stiffen your neck no longer. 1 7“For the LORD your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality nor take a bribe.
    - Deuteronomy 30:1-6 (see also commentary) So it shall be when all of these things have come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind in all nations where the LORD your God has banished you, 2 and you return to the LORD your God and obey Him with all your heart and soul according to all that I command you today, you and your sons, 3 then the LORD your God will restore you from captivity, and have compassion on you, and will gather you again from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you. 4 “If your outcasts are at the ends of the earth, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you back. 5 “The LORD your God will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it; and He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers. 6 “Moreover **the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live.**
    - Jeremiah 4:4 “**Circumcise yourselves to the LORD And remove the foreskins of your heart,** Men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, Or else My wrath will go forth like fire And burn with none to quench it, Because of the evil of your deeds.”
    - Jeremiah 9:25-26 “Behold, the days are coming,” declares the LORD, “that I will punish **all who are circumcised and yet uncircumcised**– 26 Egypt and Judah, and Edom and the sons of Ammon, and Moab and all those inhabiting the desert who clip the hair on their temples; for **all the nations are uncircumcised,** and **all the house of Israel are uncircumcised of heart**”
    - Ezekiel 44:6-9 You shall say to the rebellious ones, to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “Enough of all your abominations, O house of Israel, 7 when you brought in foreigners, **uncircumcised in heart and uncircumcised in flesh,** to be in My sanctuary to profane it, even My house, when you offered My food, the fat and the blood; for they made My covenant void–this in addition to all your abominations. 8 “And you have not kept charge of My holy things yourselves, but you have set foreigners to keep charge

of My sanctuary." 9 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "No foreigner **uncircumcised in heart and uncircumcised in flesh,** of all the foreigners who are among the sons of Israel, shall enter My sanctuary.

- Acts 7:51

RESISTING THE WIND (SPIRIT)

Are always resisting the Holy Spirit - Continually rushing against the Spirit (so to speak) in a hostile manner.

We see the picture of Israel resisting the Spirit in this passage...

> Neh 9:30 "However, Thou didst bear with them for many years, And admonished them by Thy Spirit through Thy prophets, **Yet they would not give ear. (Ed: They heard -- they just would not obey!)** Therefore Thou didst give them into the hand of the peoples of the lands.

John Phillips explains that "There are three ways in which the Holy Spirit can be opposed. He can be grieved, He can be quenched, and He can be resisted. Only a Spirit-indwelt believer can grieve the Holy Spirit. The word grieve is a love-word. We can grieve only someone who loves us and who stands in a special relationship to us. A church can quench the Holy Spirit by allowing men to usurp His authority, by refusing to follow His leading, or by permitting false doctrine or moral evil to take root. Sinners resist the Holy Spirit. Stephen now dropped his defense and went boldly to the attack, vilifying his listeners for their persistent and continuing opposition to God. Their chief sin was that of resisting the Holy Spirit. Their treatment of the saviors, the Scriptures, and the sanctuaries God had given them, and, above all, their treatment of the Son of God, constituted a persistent sin against the Holy Ghost." (Exploring Acts)

James Smith - Resisted by the unbelief of men. "Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost, as your fathers did" (Acts 7:51). "They could not enter in because of unbelief" (Heb. 3:19). In doubting the Word of God, the Spirit of God is resisted, for the Word is His sword. If the Holy Ghost is to have full possession of the Canaan land of the heart, to make a clear riddance of every evil beast (lust), and all that would pollute the holy mount, then the promises of God must be believed or the Spirit will be resisted. (Handfuls of Purpose)

Always (constantly) (104)(**aei**) means continually, constantly. Robertson adds this note - Emphatic position of humeis (you) and "**always**" looks backward over the history of their forefathers which Stephen had reviewed."

Resisting (496)(**antipipto** from **antí** = against + **pípto** = fall) strictly, fall against, rush against; hence, strive against, oppose: resist by actively opposing pressure or power. To resist by force and violence. The picture is of men who were continually (present tense) rejecting the Holy Spirit's appointed messengers and their Gospel proclamation. (Compare Jesus' sermon in Mt 23:13–39). The present tense which indicates this was not a momentary resistance (all of us sadly have those where we resist Him) but a description of their habitual practice, their "lifestyle" if you will.

Resisting is in the active voice signifying this was their **volitional** choice, the choice of their will -- no one made them do this; they did it because that was what they wanted to do! It was not accidental but intentional! Woe!

Vincent on **antipipto** - It is a very strong expression, implying active resistance. Lit., to fall against or upon. Used of falling upon an enemy. Only here in New Testament.

Griffis writes that "The Greek word here is antipipto, which means "to pull against," like a heifer that pulls backward." (Characters with Character)

Wenham on **resisting the Holy Spirit** - It expresses determined and active resistance to the Holy Spirit's work in common grace.

Antipipto 3v in Lxx: The first two uses below are literal

> Exodus 26:5 "You shall make fifty loops in the one curtain, and you shall make fifty loops on the edge of the curtain that is in the second set; the loops shall be **opposite** each other (Brenton's English of the LXX = "corresponding to each other at each point.").... Ex 26:17 "There shall be two tenons for each board, **fitted** (Antipipto - conveys idea opposite one to the other) to one another; thus you shall do for all the boards of the tabernacle.
>
> Numbers 27:14 for (What is "for" explaining? See context - Nu 27:12-13 - explains why Moses can only see the Promised Land but cannot enter) in the wilderness of Zin, during the strife of the congregation, you (Moses) rebelled (Lxx = Marah = was contentious, disobedient; Lxx = antipipto) against My command to treat Me as holy before their eyes at the water." (These are the waters of Meribah of Kadesh in the wilderness of Zin.)
>
> The English translation of the Septuagint of Nu 27:14 = because you transgressed my word in the wilderness

of Sin, when the congregation **resisted** to sanctify me. You did not sanctify me at the water before them." (This is water of dispute of Kades in the wilderness of Sin.)

Net Note explains it this way - Using the basic meaning of the word qadash, "to be separate, distinct, set apart", we can understand better what Moses failed to do. He was supposed to have acted in a way that would have shown God to be distinct, different, holy. Instead, he gave the impression that God was capricious and hostile – very human. The leader has to be aware of what image he is conveying to the people.

Resisting has the same effect as grieving the Spirit and shutting down His enabling power in one's life...

Isa 63:10 But they **rebelled** And grieved His Holy Spirit; Therefore, He turned Himself to become their enemy, He fought against them (**WOE**!).

Eph 4:30-note And (How? See Eph 4:29-note) **do not grieve** (present imperative with a negative) the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

John Piper - What was the root evil in all this resistance to God's will? Why did they resist the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:51)? I found the key in a parallel phrase in Acts 7:41 and Acts 7:48. In Acts 7:41 Stephen says that they offered sacrifices to the idol and "**rejoiced in the works of their hands**" And in Acts 7:48 he says, "**The Most High does not dwell in houses made with hands**" The root evil in many in Israel was that they derived their joy—their fulfillment, their meaning, their sense of significance—from what they could achieve with **their own hands**. Acts 7:41: "**They rejoiced in the works of their hands**" They wanted a kind of god and a kind of worship in which they could demonstrate their own power and their own wisdom and their own righteousness and their own morality and their own religious zeal. They got their joy from what they could achieve and not from God. Especially not from a God so free and so great and so sovereign and so self-sufficient that he gets all the credit for everything good, and won't let himself be limited or controlled by anybody's man-made temple. The temple in Jerusalem had become for many in Israel a symbol of what they could achieve— the work of their hands. And therefore the worship there had become a subtle form of self-worship—all very religious, using all the right language, but coming from uncircumcised hearts and stiff, unsubmissive, self-exalting necks. (The Story of a Stiff-Necked People) (Bold Added)

LIKE FATHER LIKE SON!

You are doing just as your fathers did - Literally: as your fathers also ye. Stephen was saying "As Israel was in its history, so you are today." Their fathers had made "external worship" a substitute for "internal heart change" that issues in spiritual obedience. Stephen has shown how God had revealed himself gradually, the revelation sloping upward to Christ Jesus. Stephen continues this denunciation in Acts 7:52.

Furneaux - "And as he saw his countrymen repeating the old mistake--clinging to the present and the material, while God was calling them to higher spiritual levels--and still, as ever, resisting the Holy Spirit, treating the Messiah as the patriarchs had treated **Joseph**, and the Hebrews **Moses**--the pity of it overwhelmed him, and his mingled grief and indignation broke out in words of fire, such as burned of old on the lips of the prophets." (**ED**: AND WHICH GOT THE PROPHETS KILLED JUST LIKE IT WOULD STEPHEN!)

EXCURSUS ON ROLE OF HOLY SPIRIT IN OT HEART CIRCUMCISION

Below are notes from Deuteronomy 10:16 (see commentary) where Israel was charged to "circumcise your

So circumcise (mul) **your heart, and stiffen your neck no longer** - While this is not actually a command in the Hebrew, the instruction nevertheless conveys that sense and a parallel passage in Jer 4:4 is definitely a command to the Jews to "**circumcise yourselves**." Clearly the reference to circumcision of one's **heart** signifies that this is a figure of speech and not literal circumcision as described and prescribed in Genesis 17. In short, this passage calls for "spiritual surgery," and of the type that only Yahweh Himself could accomplish. Keep in mind that God had given the Israelites five commandments in Dt 10:12+. However God never gives commandments without providing the means to obey His commandments. To say it another way God's commandments always include His enablements! In Dt 30:6+ we see it is the LORD Who says He will "circumcise" their heart. While this latter passage is a prophecy that will be filled at the end of this age, one can deduce that the call for Israel to circumcise their hearts in Dt 10:16 is a call for them to trust God to carry out this transaction. How does this take place? Look first at Stephen's sermon in Acts 7:51+ addressed to his non-believing Jewish persecutors...

> "You men who are **stiff-necked** and **uncircumcised in heart** and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did.

Notice how Stephen's words parallel the words of Moses in Dt 10:16. Specifically notice that they both passages allude to the **heart**, either **uncircumcised** and or as a call to **circumcise** your heart. Notice also that both passages speak of stiff-necked ("stiffen your neck no longer"). So what can we conclude from Stephen's words that helps explain the charge in Dt 10:16? Note that Stephen states that his hearers were **always resisting the Holy Spirit** and says this is what their **fathers** had also done. In context the phrase "**as your fathers did**" is a reference to their Jewish "**fathers**" in the Old Testament. Compare the continual resistance of the fathers to the Holy Spirit in Nehemiah 9:30 ("You bore with them for many years, and **admonished them by Your Spirit** through Your prophets, yet **they would not give ear**.") and Isaiah 63:10 ("they **rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit**"). Based on these observations, one can deduce that in the Old Testament it was the Holy Spirit Who was active in performing the radical spiritual surgery necessary to circumcise a heart. Paul supports the premise that was the Holy Spirit Who was the active Agent in spiritual circumcision, writing in Romans 2:29+ (cf Col 2:11+)

> "But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and **circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit,** not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God."

And since we know from Genesis 1:2 (among many other OT passages) that the Holy Spirit was active in the OT, it follows that the charge to circumcise their hearts was a charge that only the Holy Spirit could accomplish. Further, it would seem to fair when comparing spiritual circumcision with other Scriptures, that circumcision of the heart is synonymous with genuine salvation. And so if we look at the "salvation" of Abraham in Genesis 15:6+ we read...

> Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.

Abraham was declared righteous by God by faith. It therefore is Biblically logical to say that Abraham had a "circumcised heart" and that the only way the Israelites could "circumcise their hearts" in Dt 10:16 would be by faith, a faith just like Abraham's faith. How many of the Israelites received circumcised hearts? It is difficult to say with certainty but OT history supports that most of the nation had uncircumcised hearts (were not saved, cf Dt 32:20+). One other point that should be made is that while the Spirit was active in the OT and in bringing about "salvation," the Spirit did not permanently indwell OT believers as He does every NT believer. As an aside we know the Spirit did occasionally indwell men in the OT including Joshua of whom God Himself said he was "**a man in whom is the Spirit.**" (Nu 27:18) Did the Spirit indwell Joshua for all or most of his life? The Bible does not say so we will have to wait until we arrive in Heaven to answer questions like that (cf Dt 29:29).

Related Resource:

- What was the role of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament? | GotQuestions.org

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Horatius Bonar - Beware of grieving this Spirit. There is great danger of this. Israel was continually guilty of this crime (Acts 7:51), and so is the church: "Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost." Let us not, by unbelief, or error, or inconsistency or backsliding, or apostasy, grieve or quench this Spirit, whereby we are sealed unto the day of redemption. (Light and Truth)

UNCIRCUMCISED HEARTS: The "uncircumcised heart" pictures religious activity (circumcision being the sign of the covenant with Abraham) with no corresponding internal spiritual reality. Today many religious activities can lull us to sleep. Many will boast of their church attendance, baptism, confirmation, grand building, or large ministry—and yet their hearts have not been "circumcised," that is, touched, changed, *converted* by God himself. Make sure your heart is devoted to God and that your activities reflect that reality. (Life Application Bible Commentary – Acts)

Thomas Watson - Our deplorable condition before we are called....We are in a state of impotency.—"When we were without strength." Rom. 5:6. No strength to resist a temptation, or grapple with a corruption; sin cut the lock where our strength lay. Judg. 16:20 Nay, there is not only impotency, but obstinacy, "Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost." Acts 7:51. Besides indisposition to good, there is opposition. (A Divine Cordial)

A W Tozer - We've Crucified the Holy Spirit - Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. —Acts 7:51

> It is time for us to repent, for our transgressions against the blessed Third Person have been many and much aggravated. We have bitterly mistreated Him in the house of His friends. We have crucified Him in His own temple as they crucified the Eternal Son on the hill above Jerusalem. And the nails we used were not of iron,

but of the finer and more precious stuff of which human life is made. Out of our hearts we took the refined metals of will and feeling and thought, and from them we fashioned the nails of suspicion and rebellion and neglect. By unworthy thoughts about Him and unfriendly attitudes toward Him we grieved and quenched Him days without end.

The truest and most acceptable repentance is to reverse the acts and attitudes of which we repent.…

We can best repent our neglect by neglecting Him no more. Let us begin to think of Him as One to be worshiped and obeyed. Let us throw open every door and invite Him in. Let us surrender to Him every room in the temple of our hearts and insist that He enter and occupy as Lord and Master within His own dwelling. (The Pursuit of Man)

Robert Neighbour - Resist Not the Spirit "Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost" (Acts 7:51).

The Lord Jesus Christ stands outside the life of each individual man, seeking to enter in.
He is willing to save; He is unwilling that any should perish.
To His own people, Israel, Christ said: "How often would I....and ye would not" (Matt. 23:37).
Christ seemed to be saying, "I would, ye would not, I could not."
We are now about to consider the fact that man may refuse the work of the Holy Ghost.
The Spirit of God convicts him of his sin, but he will not hear.

These things may be said.

1. The sinner may resist Christ.

The scene in Acts is a solemn one. Stephen was a man full of faith and power. He preached a plain, positive, pungent message, to Israel, concerning her treatment of the Prophets, and of the Saviour.
Those who heard Stephen were pricked in their hearts. They knew that he spoke of them; they knew that they were a stiffnecked and an uncircumcised people, both in their heart and in their ears.
Stephen told them plainly: "Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye" (Acts 7:51).
Then the men, cut to their heart, gnashed on him with their teeth; stopping their ears and crying with a loud voice, they ran upon him with one accord, "and cast him out of the city, and stoned him" (Acts 7:58).
This is the attitude of many a lost man toward the Lord Jesus Christ.
They will not come unto Him that they might have life; they stubbornly and steadfastly set their hearts against Him; and they will not hear.

2. The sinner may do despite unto the Holy Spirit.

"He that despised Moses' Law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace" (Heb. 10:28, 29).
The passage above seems to speak of "doing despite unto the Spirit of grace," as a climax of sin.
Does "doing despite" mean more than "hardening the heart, and stiffening the neck?"
Does "doing despite" mean more than "neglecting so great salvation," and "refusing Him Who spake?" (see Heb. 2:3).
Is there not carried in the Word "despite" almost the depth of that sin against the Spirit, elsewhere called "blasphemy"?
One thing we know — it is a sin of terrible results. Let no one do despite unto the Spirit of Grace.

Greg Laurie - SIX SINS

The New Testament mentions six offenses that can be committed against the Holy Spirit. Some specifically apply to unbelievers, while others apply to believers. Still others apply to both.

1. We lie to the Holy Spirit.

Acts 5:1–5 tells the story of Ananias and Sapphira, two so-called Christians who tried to cheat the church out of some money. Peter caught them in the act and rebuked them, telling them in lying to the Holy Spirit, they had lied to God. Immediately, Ananias dropped dead.

2. We grieve the Holy Spirit.

This offense applies to believers. Ephesians 4:30–31 tells us, “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.” The phrase “to grieve” means “to make sad or sorrowful.” When we allow bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, slander, and any type of malicious behavior to take place in our lives, we grieve the Holy Spirit. Are you harboring a grudge against someone? Have you been slandering (speaking lies about) anyone lately? Have you been flying into fits of rage? All of this grieves the Holy Spirit.

3. We quench the Holy Spirit.

This, too, applies to believers. The apostle Paul exhorted the Thessalonians, “Do not put out the Spirit’s fire” (1 Thess. 5:19). Unbelief certainly can hinder the working and moving of God’s Holy Spirit. This happened in Jesus’s hometown as the people questioned his authority. We read that “He did not do many mighty miracles there because of their lack of faith” (Matt. 13:58). Quenching the Spirit can occur when the Holy Spirit is leading you to do a certain thing, such as sharing your faith with someone, praying more, or taking a step of faith in a certain area, and you flatly refuse to do it. Has God called you to serve him with your life? Has he led you to do something? Are you doing it? If not, then you’re quenching the Holy Spirit. TURNING OUR BACKS ON GOD The list continues with sins that involve pushing the Spirit away.

4. We resist the Holy Spirit.

Stephen, as he spoke to the unbelieving Sanhedrin, said, “You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit!” (Acts 7:51). The Holy Spirit seeks to speak to the heart of the unbeliever and lead him or her to God. The Holy Spirit is incredibly patient and persistent, but it is possible to resist all the Spirit’s pleadings, as we discover from Genesis 6:3, where God said, “My Spirit will not contend with man forever.” Apparently the spiritual leaders of Israel whom Stephen was addressing had resisted the Holy Spirit. It seems they were convinced of the truth of what Stephen was telling them, yet they would not yield their hearts.

5. We insult the Holy Spirit

When someone refuses to accept Jesus Christ, he is denying the very mission of the Holy Spirit. He’s saying he doesn’t need salvation or doesn’t believe Jesus Christ can save him or that Jesus’s work on the cross was unnecessary. Hebrews warns, “How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?” (Heb.10:29). Therefore, to resist the Holy Spirit’s appeal is to insult God and cut off all hope of salvation. The Bible poses this alarming question: “How shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?” (Heb. 2:3).
THE MOST SERIOUS OFFENSE

6. We blaspheme the Holy Spirit.

This is the unpardonable sin, which can be committed only by unbelievers. In speaking of this sin, Jesus said,

> And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come. Matthew 12:31–32

This is the most serious offense against the Holy Spirit, because there is no forgiveness for the one who commits it. So what is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit? Again, the work of the Holy Spirit is to convict us of sin and bring us to Jesus Christ. To blaspheme the Spirit is similar to insulting the Spirit by resisting the Spirit’s work altogether. This sin should not be the concern of any Christian because it is not a sin a believer can or will commit. But for the person who is playing some silly religious game, there is great cause for concern, because this is a point of no return. Where and when this would occur in an individual’s life, only God could say. So instead of lying to, grieving, quenching, or insulting and resisting the Holy Spirit, we should be open to the Spirit’s work in our lives. The Spirit wants to show us our need for Jesus Christ and then fill and empower us to be the people God wants us to be. (Walking With Jesus)

Robert Neighbour - "Grieve Not, Quench Not, Resist Not"

- The Mission of the Indwelling Spirit (II Cor. 3:18).
- Grieve Not the Spirit (Eph. 4:30).

- The Mission of the Enduing Spirit (Acts 1:8).
- Quench Not the Spirit (I Thess. 5:19).
- The Mission of the Convicting Spirit (John 16:8).
- Resist Not the Spirit (Acts 7:51).

The Holy Spirit has a threefold mission. He is sent to indwell the believer, He is sent to endue the believer, and He is sent to convict the unbeliever.
Individuals may express a threefold attitude toward the Holy Spirit.
Believers may grieve Him, and quench Him; and unbelievers may resist Him.
There is, of course, another attitude which believers and unbelievers also may take toward the Holy Ghost. Instead of grieving Him, they may please Him; instead of quenching Him, they may yield to Him and obey Him; instead of resisting Him, they may open their hearts and receive Him.
The first two divisions will discuss how the Holy Spirit indwells the believer, with the express purpose of transforming his life into the image of Christ, and how the believer may grieve Him.
The third and fourth divisions will discuss how the Holy Spirit desires to serve and magnify Christ through the lives of His children; and how the believer may quench Him.
The fifth and sixth divisions will show how the Spirit deals with the unsaved, seeking to bring to them the knowledge of the crucified and risen Lord, and how the unbeliever may resist Him.

Paul Enns - THE HOLY SPIRIT CAN BE REJECTED
Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. (Ephesians 4.30)

The question of whether the Holy Spirit is a person can be answered by the fact that He can be resisted and rejected. In the much debated statement in Mark 3:29 Jesus says, "Whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin." That warning could only be made about a person. I can stand at an electrical outlet and vehemently ridicule it, but there are no repercussions because I am ridiculing an inanimate object. When I ridicule a per-son, there are repercussions. The unbelieving Jews were attributing to Satan what Christ had done through the power of the Holy Spirit-and that was unforgivable.

Rebellious children resist the admonitions of their parents. A lazy employee resists the exhortation of his employer. A student resists the assignments of the teacher. We resists persons.

The Holy Spirit may be resisted because He is a person Stephen chastened the unbelieving Jews, "You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit" (Acts 7:51). The One who had worked in their history by granting grace and lending leaders to the nation was the very One the people rebelled against-the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit can also be lied to. When Ananias and his wife, Sap-phira, sold their land and deceptively kept back part of the money, Peter told them that they had lied to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3). We do not lie to inanimate things. I cannot lie to a radar beam. A spoken matter becomes a lie when someone has heard and received a false message.

The Holy Spirit can also be grieved (Ephesians 4:30). 1 may express my displeasure concerning a building when I do not appreciate the architecture. But I do not grieve the building. I grieve the person of the Holy Spirit when I sin by speaking unkind and uncharitable words (Eph 4:29). God has graciously provided His Holy Spirit to direct the spiritual path of people. It behooves us to respond to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

LESSON: The Holy Spirit is a person, seen in that He can be blasphemed, resisted, lied to, and grieved. (Approaching God - Reflections for Growing Christians)

ACTS 7:51

READ: Acts 7:51-60

PEOPLE who announce bad news sometimes get blamed for causing it. It is difficult to be the one who bears unwelcome news. The meteorologist can upset people by predicting rain on the Fourth of July. It's not the forecaster's fault, yet he or she still takes the heat for bringing the message. On a much more serious note, when Stephen addressed the religious leaders of Israel, he incurred their wrath because he boldly told them the truth about themselves. He criticized their ancestors and implicated the whole council in the murder of Jesus Christ. Everything he said was true. So what did they do with this indictment? They "gnashed at him with their teeth" (Acts 7:54). They threw him out of the city and killed him. Because he told the truth, Stephen died under a barrage of stones.

When we speak out for purity, righteousness, and godliness in a sinful, pleasure-loving world careening toward destruction, we too

will be criticized. But no matter what happens to us, we belong to God, and ultimately He will vindicate us, if not in this life, in the life to come.—J D Branon

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James Smith - Handfuls of Purpose - APOSTOLIC CHARACTER. Acts 7:51-60

Stephen's defense is a masterpiece of spiritual policy and power. He did not begin his address by saying, "You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart." No; but with these very courteous words—" Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken." He who wins souls is wise. We might observe here:—

1. His Knowledge of Scripture.—This Spirit-filled man had a clear and comprehensive grasp of the doing and purposes of God in Old Testament history. The knowledge of the will of God will always be a mighty weapon in the hand of anyone full of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God will have but little to work on, unless our hearts are filled with the words of God. This is the secret of successful prayer (John 15:7). It is the honest heart which hears the Word and keeps it, that brings forth fruit (Luke 8:15).

2. His Faithfulness. "You stiff-necked... you do always resist the Holy Spirit" (vv. 51-53). A man filled with the Spirit cannot but be courageous, for the Kingdom of God; the truth burns like a fire in his bones, while sin, and the things of eternity, stand out before his anointed eyes in the clear light of Him who sits at the right hand of the Father in Heaven. They are in an awful condition who resist the Holy Spirit by the stiffness of their wills and the hardness of their hearts. They may be "cut to the heart" (v. 54) by a faithful testimony, but unless they are "pricked in the heart" (vv. 11-37) they will "gnash with their teeth," and die in their sins.

3. His Vision. While "they gnashed on him with their teeth," he saw the "glory of God." Our heavenly Father has always rich compensation for His suffering children. Seeing "Jesus standing on the right hand of God" is a wonderful balm for the wounds made by the teeth of the enemy. This revelation to Stephen is the vision that is ever before the mind of those who, like him, are enabled by the power of the Holy Spirit, through faith, to look up "steadfastly into Heaven." It is the work of the Spirit to reveal the things of Christ to the believing heart (John 16:14). To have the vision of the soul filled with the glory of the exalted Redeemer is to have the life consciously "hid with Christ in God."

4. His Martyrdom. "They stoned Stephen, calling upon God and saying. . . Lord, lay not this sin to their charge" (vv. 57-60). This first martyr for Christ was a witness to that overcoming grace of God in the heart which constrains to pray for them "which despitefully use you." If the death of Stephen was but the means in the hand of God of sending the goads of conviction into the soul of that "young man whose name was Saul" (9:5), then it was a death that has helped to open up a channel of life and blessing to the world. The Kingdom of Jesus Christ never suffers defeat through the killing of His followers. The bloodstained prayers of those saints who suffer martyrdom for His name's sake, God in grace will mightily avenge, "The blood of the martyr is the seed of the Church."

5. His Mercifulness. "He kneeled down and cried, Lord lay not this sin to their charge." The love of a merely natural heart never constrained any one so earnestly to seek the highest good of those who were committing the greatest personal wrong. This last cry of the dying martyr is a convincing proof of the transforming power of the love of Christ in the heart. This merciful spirit manifested in Stephen's last breath toward those sin-blinded murders is the spirit Jesus Christ has sent into the world to seek and save it. "This sin" which they were committing was an awful one. They were destroying the temple of the Holy Spirit. If Stephen had not been filled with the Holy Spirit he would not have been stoned. "Inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these, you have done it unto Me."

Acts 7:51 TELL IT LIKE IT IS

You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. --Acts 7:51

It is difficult to be the one who bears unwelcome news. The TV meteorologist can upset people just by predicting that it's going to rain on the Fourth of July. It's not his or her fault, yet the forecaster still takes the heat for bringing the message.

On a much more serious note, when Stephen addressed the religious leaders of Israel, he incurred their wrath because he boldly told them the truth about themselves. He criticized their ancestors and implicated the whole council in the murder of Jesus Christ. Everything he said was true. So what did they do with this indictment? They "gnashed at him with their teeth" (Acts 7:54). They threw him out of the city and put him to death. Because he told the truth, Stephen died under a barrage of stones.

When we speak out for purity, righteousness, and godliness in a sinful, pleasure-loving world that seems destined to self-destruct, we too will be criticized. But no matter what happens to us, we can call on God as Stephen did. We can take comfort in knowing that we belong to Him and that ultimately He will vindicate us.

As God's people, let's pray that we will have the courage to tell it like it is. - J D Brannon

Lord, give us courage to speak out

Against the evils of our day;
For only when the truth is known
Can sinners choose the better way.
--D J De Haan

It's better to declare the truth and be rejected than to withhold it just to be accepted.

Acts 7:52 "Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become; (NASB: Lockman)

> KJV 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:

- **Which one of the prophets** 1 Sa 8:7,8; 1 Ki 19:10,14; 2 Chr 24:19-22; 36:16; Neh 9:26; Jer 2:30; Jer 20:2; 26:15,23; Mt 5:12; Mt 21:35-41; Mt 23:29-39; Lk 11:47-51, 13:33,34; 1 Th 2:15
- **had previously announced the coming** Acts 3:18,24; 1 Peter 1:11; Rev 19:10
- **the Righteous One** Acts 3:14; 22:14; Zech 9:9; 1 John 2:1; Rev 3:7
- **whose betrayers and murderers you have now become** Acts 2:23; 3:15; 4:10; 5:28-30
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

JESUS CHRIST:
THE RIGHTEOUS ONE

Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? - Clearly a **rhetorical question** and the answer is they persecuted them ALL! Notice that Stephen no longer says "**our fathers**" (as in Acts 7:2, 11, 12, 15, 19, 38, 39, 44, 45), but **your fathers** (Acts 7:51, 52). Stephen does not want to be identified with their evil deeds against God's prophets! I like the NLT paraphrase "Name one prophet your ancestors didn't persecute!"

Persecute (1377)(**dioko**) which BDAG says means "to move rapidly and decisively toward an objective," which is an interesting description as this is exactly what the Sanhedrin would do in order to stone Stephen in a few minutes! And then a few days later Saul who was watching Stephen's stoning would hear Jesus ask "Saul, Saul, why are you **persecuting** (**dioko**) Me?...I am Jesus you are **persecuting** (**dioko**)." (Acts 9:4-5+).

Dioko is used by Luke 9 times in Acts - Acts 7:52; Acts 9:4; Acts 9:5; Acts 22:4; Acts 22:7; Acts 22:8; Acts 26:11; Acts 26:14; Acts 26:15

Your fathers - See **your fathers** repeated by Jesus when He issued a similar scathing rebuke (which some of Stephen's hearers may have heard or at least heard about -- and now it was being cast at them!)...

> "Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the **prophets**, and it was **your fathers** who killed them. 48 "So you are witnesses and approve the deeds of **your fathers**; because it was they who killed them, and you build their tombs. 49 "For this reason also the wisdom of God said, 'I will send to them **prophets** and apostles, and some of them they will kill and some they will persecute, 50 so that the blood of all the prophets, shed since the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, 51 from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the house of God; yes, I tell you, it shall be charged against this generation. '(Luke 11:47-51+)

Here is a similar but expanded denunciation by Jesus in which He alluded to how their **fathers** had mistreated the prophets of old...

> "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the **prophets** and adorn the monuments of the righteous, 30 and say, 'If we had been living in the days of our **fathers**, we would not have been partners with them in shedding the blood of the **prophets**.' 31"So you testify against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the **prophets**. 32 "Fill up, then, the measure of the guilt of **your fathers**. 33 "You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell? 34 "Therefore, behold, I am sending you **prophets** and wise men (**STEPHEN WAS A MAN FULL OF WISDOM** - Acts 6:3,10+) and scribes; some of them you will kill (**LIKE THE WERE ABOUT TO DO TO STEPHEN**) and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city, 35 so that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the

> son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. 36 “Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation. 37 “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and **stones those who are sent to her** (**SEE** Acts 7:58+)! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. 38 “Behold, your house is being left to you desolate! 39 “For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me until you say, ‘BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!’” (**ED**: THEY WILL IN ESSENCE DO THIS AT THE END OF THE GREAT TRIBULATION WHEN JESUS RETURNS - SEE Zech 12:10-14+, Zech 13:1+) (Mt 23:29-39)

They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One- Their ancestors had killed the true prophets of God those who predicted the coming of their Messiah.

The **Moody Bible Commentary** notes that this statement "is not an affirmation of the church's long-held Christ-killer charge against the Jewish people as a whole, but rather to identify the Sanhedrin's role (with the Gentiles) in the conspiracy against Jesus."

The Righteous One - This Name of God is found 5 times - Ex 9:27, Isa 24:16, Isa 53:11, Acts 7:52, and Acts 22:14. This Messianic title of Jesus would have grated on the consciences of the Sanhedrin for they very likely had heard it used in Isaiah 53 where God referred to Jesus declaring "by His knowledge the **Righteous One,** My Servant, will justify the many as He will bear their iniquities." (Isaiah 53:11+). In any event this title would have emphasized Jesus' innocence and the seriousness of their crime.

Righteous (Just) (1342)(dikaios)from **dike** = right, just) defines that which is in accordance with high standards ofrectitude. It is that which is in right relation to another and so in reference to persons defines the one who is morally and ethically righteous, upright or just. Stephen is saying that Jesus is rightly related to God and because of His right relationship, His character was always associated with righteous conduct. This statement would have been especially **galling** to these self-righteous hypocrites.

Peter had uttered a similar accusation against his Jewish hearers...

> “But you disowned the **Holy and Righteous One** and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, but put to death the Prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses.(Acts 3:14-15)

Whose betrayers and murderers you have now become - So while their fathers had killed the prophets who predicted the coming of the Righteous One, the prophet like Moses (Acts 7:37+), Stephen's hearers had actually killed the Righteous One! The harsh critique has OT precedent as shown in the following passages...

> 2 Chr 36:15-16 - The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent word to them again and again by His messengers, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place; but (TRAGIC TERM OF CONTRAST!) they continually **mocked the messengers of God, despised His words and scoffed at His prophets**, until the wrath of the LORD arose against His people, until there was no remedy.
>
> Neh 9:26 “(Neh 9::24 “So their sons entered and possessed the land") But (ANOTHER TRAGIC TERM OF CONTRAST!) they became disobedient and rebelled against You, And cast Your law behind their backs And **killed Your prophets who had admonished them** So that they might return to You, And they committed great blasphemies.

Betrayers (4273)(**prodotes** from **prodídomi** = to give away, to betray from **pró** = forth + **dídomi** = give) describes men who who betray another’s trust and confidence or are false to an obligation or duty. This is the man who delivers a person without justification into the control of someone else. These men betray confidence and trust put in them. **Luke** describes the prototypical traitor "Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a **traitor**. (**prodotes**) (Lk 6:16+)

Robertson on **betrayers** - Just like **Judas Iscariot.** He hurled this old biting word at them. In the N.T. only here and Luke 6:16; 2 Ti 3:4+. It cut like a knife. It is blunter than Peter in Acts 3:13.

Murderers (5406)(**phoneus** from **phoneuo** = to kill) means one who takes another person's life. There are no uses in the non-apocryphal Septuagint. Robertson adds "The climax with this sharp word used of Barabbas (Acts 3:14+)."

Wikipedia says **murder** "is the unlawful killing, with malice aforethought, of another human, and generally this premeditated state of mind distinguishes murder from other forms of unlawful homicide."

Phoneus - 7x in 7v - murderer(3), murderers(4). Matt. 22:7; Acts 3:14; Acts 7:52; Acts 28:4; 1 Pet. 4:15; Rev. 21:8; Rev. 22:15

Gilbrant - **Phoneus**, “murderer,” occurs seven times in the New Testament, though other words for “killing” are fairly common. It is apparently distinct from the killing of animal or plant life or even the unavoidable or judicial taking of human life. A murderer is one who deliberately takes the life of another human being for personal and evil reasons. Usually it was used to describe the Jewish

leaders (Matthew 22:7; Acts 7:52; 28:4; 1 Peter 4:15), but it can also be found in general lists of vices (Revelation 21:8; 22:15). (Complete Biblical Library Greek-English Dictionary)

Constable observes that "Stephen's purpose was also to show that Jesus experienced the same things Abraham, Joseph, and Moses had experienced as God's anointed servants. As the Sanhedrin recognized them as men whom God had anointed for the blessing of Israel and the world, so should they recognize Jesus. The people to whom these three patriarchs went as God's representatives all initially rejected them but later accepted them, which was also Jesus' experience." (Acts 7 Commentary)

Acts 7:53 you who received the law as ordained by angels, and yet did not keep it." (NASB: Lockman)

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

- **received** Ex 19:1-20; Dt 33:2; Ps 68:17; Gal 3:19; Heb 2:2
- **yet did not keep it** Ezek 20:18-21; John 7:19; Ro 2:23-25; Gal 6:13
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

STEPHEN TURNS THE TABLES!

To **turn the tables** is an idiomatic phrase which means to change a situation so that you now have an advantage over others who previously had an advantage over you. "Contrary to the charges that he was a renegade Jew, Stephen accused the Sanhedrin of disobedience to the law, the same charge that it made against him (see Acts 6:13+)." (Moody Bible Commentary)

You who received the law as ordained by angels - **You who** = *the very ones who*. What is Stephen's point by bringing up the Law? Recall that he had been accused of blaspheming or speaking against the Law (Acts 6:11, 13+), but now he accuses his accusers of not keeping the Law! While the Law had not given to them to make them righteous or holy, the fact that had possession of the Law increased their condemnation.

Ordained (1296)(**diatage** from **dia** = intensifies + **tasso** = to place in order, arrange, appoint) describes how a matter has been arranged. The related verb **diatasso** means to issue orderly and detailed instructions as to what must be done and is used in Acts 7:44 where God "spoke to Moses directed (diatasso) him to make it according to the pattern which he had seen."

NET Note on **ordained by angels** - According to Jewish traditions in the first century, the law of Moses was mediated through angels.

Ordained by angels - There are several parallel passages

> (Galatians 3:19) - Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, **having been ordained through angels** by the agency of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made.
>
> > **Henry Morris** has an interesting comment: 'The account of the giving of the law through Moses on Mt Sinai (Ex 19:9-25) makes no mention of angels, although it does record the prolonged sounding of a trumpet. Apparently a mighty host of angels was present. [Dt 33:2] mentions "ten thousands of saints" as "the LORD came from Sinai" (Ps 68:17 Acts 7:53)."
>
> (Hebrews 2:2) For if the word **spoken through angels** proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty,
>
> (Deuteronomy 33:2) He said, "The LORD came from Sinai, And dawned on them from Seir; He shone forth from Mount Paran, And He came from the midst of ten thousand holy ones; At His right hand there was flashing lightning for them.

And yet did not keep (phulasso) **it** - They accused Stephen of blaspheming the Law but they themselves did not keep it, that is, they did not watch over it so as to obey it. Robertson adds "Like a whipcracker these words cut to the quick. They gloried in possessing the law and openly violated it."

Luke's use in Acts 16:4 gives us a sense of the meaning of phulasso in this context -

> Now while they were passing through the cities, they were delivering the decrees which had been decided upon by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem, for them to **observe** (phulasso).

Jesus and Paul made similar charges (and two of the passages use the same verb used by Luke -phulasso)...

> John 7:19 "Did not Moses give you the Law, and yet none of you carries out the Law? Why do you seek to kill Me?"
>
> Romans 2:23-26+ You **who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law,** do you dishonor God? 24 For "THE NAME OF GOD IS BLASPHEMED AMONG THE GENTILES BECAUSE OF YOU," just as it is written. 25 For indeed circumcision is of value if you practice the Law; but if you are a transgressor of the Law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. (SEE UNCIRCUMCISED IN HEART - Acts 7:51) 26 So if the uncircumcised man **keeps** (phulasso) the requirements of the Law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision?
>
> Galatians 6:13 For **those who are circumcised do not even keep** (phulasso) the Law themselves, but they desire to have you circumcised so that they may boast in your flesh.

Keep (5442)(**phulasso** means to watch, to carry out the function as a military guard or sentinel (cp Ac 23:35, 28:16), to keep watch, to have one's eye upon lest one escape, to guard a person that he might remain safe (from violence, from another person or thing, from being snatched away, from being lost). The NT uses phulasso of guarding truth (eg, 1Ti 5:21, 6:20, 2Ti 1:14-note) **Phulasso** is the verb used to describe the shepherds "**keeping watch** (phulasso) over their flock by night (Lk 2:8), which congers up the image of savage wolves seeking to devour the helpless sheep. Elsewhere we read of the Good Shepherd, the Great Shepherd Who keeps watch over His sheep.

Think about the phrase **did not keep it** for a moment -- Of what had they accused Stephen in Acts 6:13? They had accused him of incessantly speaking "against...the Law." They are the ultimate hypocrites for they failed to keep the very thing they accused Stephen of. This made them very angry. The truth always hurts, especially if you are a hypocrite!

Boice: This speech has prominence in Acts because it marks the closing of the Jewish mission and is an indication of the opening to the Gentile communities.

Acts 7:54 Now when they heard this, they were cut to the quick, and they began gnashing their teeth at him. (NASB: Lockman)

> KJV Acts 7:54 When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth.

- **they were cut** Acts 5:33; 22:22,23
- **they began gnashing their teeth** Job 16:9; Ps 35:16; 112:10; Lam 2:16; Mt 8:12; 13:42,50; 22:13; 24:51; Mt 25:30; Luke 13:28
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

CUT TO THE HEART
GNASHING THE TEETH

Now when they heard this - Some commentators think that with Stephen's last words about not keeping the Law, it was more than they could bear and so they suddenly interpreted his discourse. Robertson notes "That may be true, but the natural climax is sufficient explanation."

Robertson on **they heard** - Present active participle of akouō, while hearing.

They were cut to the quick (kardia - heart) - More literally "they were cut to their hearts." Stephen's words were like a saw that divided the hearts of his hearers, "cutting them asunder," a figure of speech describing the fact that they were becoming infuriated with him. Note Luke's use of the the imperfect tense for **cut** which signifies this was their reaction over and over, again and again (or since the word diaprio means "saw" one can envision a saw going back and forth, over and over, cutting them in two!) - you can just picture this august group beginning to bristle with rage and seethe with anger! The temperature in the **Hall of Hewn Stones** (watch this computer animation) is rising -- what a play on words in this context for the Sanhedrin's hearts were being '**hewn**" and Stephen would soon be **stoned**!

See **Steve Lawson** describe the effects of being Cut to the Quick - What could/should be the positive effects of being "Cut to the Quick"? (1) Either an Acts 2:37+ response or (2) the antithesis as seen in the violent reaction of these hypocritical

Sanhedrin bigots! **Vincent** notes that "A different word is used to express remorse, Acts 2:37+ (pierced [katanusso] to the heart)."

Cut (1282) (**diaprio** from **dia** = though + **prio** = to saw, cut with a saw) means to saw through, to divide with a saw (used literally in Lxx of 1 Chr 20:3), hence **cut to the quick** meaning infuriated or enraged, cut or torn emotionally. Earlier Luke had used this same verb to describe the Sanhedrin's reaction to the pithy accusation of Peter and the apostles

> "But when they heard this (WHAT? Read Acts 5:30-32+), they were **cut to the quick** and intended to kill them." (Acts 5:33+)

MacArthur adds that **diaprio** "literally refers to cutting something in two—an apt metaphor to describe the power of the Word of God (Heb. 4:12). Instead of yielding to the truth, the authorities hardened their hearts. As they had done to Jesus (cf. Jn 5:16; 7:32; 8:59; 10:31; 11:57) in spite of the abundant evidence, they rejected the (STEPHEN'S) teaching and violently opposed" him. (MacArthur New Testament Commentary)

And they began gnashing their teeth at him - Luke paints an incredible picture of a group of men in a fit of uncontrolled rage and anger! Remember that what fills a person will control that person! The heart's of these men are now like a raging sea one sees with a **CAT 5 hurricane** on the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale! The stage is set for the graphic and **gruesome lynch mob** scene that follows! Destruction and death would soon follow! But the words of Joseph could have been spoken by Stephen to the Sanhedrin "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to...preserve many people alive." (Genesis 50:20) See Acts 7:58+ where God's Spirit was preparing a man named Saul as His chosen instrument "to preserve many people alive" by taking the Gospel of salvation throughout the Roman Empire!

Picture a group of United States Senators grinding their teeth in anger in response to the testimony of a witness at a hearing!

Gaebelein writes that "All they could do in their frenzy was to gnash with their teeth. It was not a sudden outburst but the tense rather shows that it was prolonged." (**Ed**: **gnashing** is imperfect tense = pictures them grinding their teeth over and over!)

Gnashing (1031)(**brucho**) is used only here means to grind, making sounds by striking one's teeth together, grating, bite with a loud noise. Vincent - "Originally to *eat greedily,* with a noise, as wild beasts." Here with the noun teeth (**odous**). The related noun brugmos is used 7x in the Gospels - Mt 8:12, 13:42, 50, Mt 22:13, Mt 24:51, 25:30, Lk 13:28. The Sanhedrin are furious and grinding their teeth together like a pack of snarling, ravenous wolves! Stephen understood what this meant but he calmly (Spirit empowered) stood his ground, while his opponents were out of control (flesh empowered)!

Here is the tragedy of tragedies -- these religious men (if they never repented and believed) are in Hades today (and will thrown into Gehenna in Rev 20:11-15+) and are not repentant! They are not sorry they killed Stephen or His Savior! They are furious and still gnashing their teeth in rage and anger and this is what they will be doing throughout eternity! Woe!

> Jesus was clear when He warned that "the sons of the kingdom (THE HEBREW NATION) will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and **gnashing** (brugmos) of teeth." (Mt 8:12)
>
> > **John MacArthur** comments on the **weeping and gnashing of teeth** - "This expression describes the eternal agonies of those in hell....This speaks of inconsolable grief and unremitting torment. Jesus commonly used the phrases in this verse to describe hell (cf. Mt 13:42, 50; 24:51)." (The MacArthur Study Bible)
> >
> > **ESV Study Bible** note on **weeping and gnashing of teeth** - This description of terrible suffering in hell appears several times in Matthew (cf. Mt. 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30) and in Luke 13:28.

The same verb **brucho** is used in the Septuagint of David's psalm (which would be an accurate "tagline" for the termination of Acts 7)...

> "The wicked plots against the righteous and **gnashes** at him with his teeth. (Ps. 37:12)

Brucho - 6x in 6v in the Septuagint - Job 16:9; Ps. 35:16; Ps. 37:12; Ps. 112:10; Lam. 2:16

> Ps 36:16 Like godless jesters at a feast, They gnashed at me with their teeth.
>
> Ps. 112:10 The wicked will see it (Ps 112:9) and be vexed, He will gnash (Lxx = brucho) his teeth and melt away; The desire of the wicked will perish.

Gilbrant on **brucho** - In the Septuagint the word is used metaphorically to connote anger in Job 16:9; Ps 35:16; 37:12; 112:10, and it probably includes the idea of mocking in Lam 2:16. In secular Greek it refers to biting or eating noisily or greedily as wild beasts (**ED**: **WOW! WHAT A PICTURE OF THE SANHEDRIN'S REACTION**!), as well as the grating or gnashing the teeth in pain or rage. The only reference in the New Testament is in Acts 7:54, where it depicts the angry reaction of the mob to Stephen's

speech. (Complete Biblical Library Greek-English Dictionary)

TDNT on **brucho** - The co-existence of several roots βρυχ- makes it extraordinarily difficult to review the development of the term. To be sure, we already find a perf. βέβρυχα used by Hom. (Il., 13, 393; 16, 486; cf. Od., 12, 242 etc.) to describe the breaking out of sufferers into open lamentation; cf. also Soph. Trach., 1072 (στε παρθένος βέβρυχα κλαίων) etc., and again Ps.-Oppian Cyn., 2, 273 of the cry of pain of a stag mortally wounded by snake-bite. Here, however, we must insert the βρύχειν from which there developed the common post-Homeric βρυχάομαι for loud outcry. As "**to gnash**" it first occurs in the expression βρύχειν (τος δόντας) with which Hippocrates (Mul., 1, 2, 120 [VIII, 16, 262]; Epid., 5, 86 [V, 252, Littré]) characterises especially the **ague**. In the LXX there are 5 instances of βρύχειν (τος δόντας (πί) (Job 16:9, Ps 35:16; Ps 37::12; Ps 112:10; Lam. 2:16) in the sense of "**to gnash with the teeth**," always as an expression of hate (usually that of the → μαρτωλός (sinners) for the → δίκαιος - righteous) and as a translation of חָרַק שִׁנַּיִם עַל or חָרַק בְּשִׁנַּיִם (Job 16:9), in which it is linked with a desire to destroy the opponent; cf. also the Rabb. liter. (Tanch. [Buber] 140 ,15 בלק; j Kil., 32c, 37 f. etc.).

Acts 7:55 But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; (NASB: Lockman)

> KJV Acts 7:55 But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God,

- **full** Acts 2:4; 4:8; Acts 6:3,5,8,10; 13:9,10; Micah 3:8
- **gazed intently** Acts 1:10,11; 2 Cor 12:2-4; Rev 4:1-3
- **and saw** Isa 6:1-3; Ezek 1:26-28; 10:4,18; 11:23; John 12:41; 2 Cor 4:6; 2 Peter 1:17; Rev 21:11
- **standing** Ps 109:31; 110:1; John 14:3; Heb 1:3; 8:1
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

THE VISION OF A MAN
FULL OF THE SPIRIT

But - This is a striking term of contrast! On one hand the Sanhedrin filled with rage and a desire to kill and on the other hand Stephen filled with the Spirit and a desire to forgive. How much more of a radically different contrast could one have of **flesh** controlled lives versus a Spirit controlled life!

Being (huparcho in the present tense = continually) **full of the Holy Spirit** - Stephen was a man *filled with* and therefore *controlled by* the Spirit. Being filled with the Spirit, Stephen was able to stand firm against the members of the Sanhedrin who were filled with rage, anger and **vitriol**! Stephen reminds us it is not how much of the Spirit we have (which is 100%, cf Col 2:10ESV+ = "you have been filled in Him"), but how much of us the Spirit has! Stephen was fully submitted and surrendered to the Spirit of Jesus Christ. What a model for us when we are being persecuted for His Name's sake (and also when we are not being persecuted!)

Being (5225) (**huparcho** from **hupó** = under + **árcho** = begin or **arche** = beginning) means literally to begin under and then to exist, be present or be at hand. It denotes the continuance of a previous state or existence. **Huparcho** involves continuing to be that which one was before (cf translated as "being" and "exist"). It stresses the essence of a person's nature, that which is absolutely unalterable, inalienable, and unchangeable. Stephen in essence "exists" continually as a Spirit filled man. O Lord let that be true of us who read this description of Stephen. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

In Acts Stephen is described as "full of the Spirit and of wisdom (Acts 6:3+), "full of faith and of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 6:5+) , "full of grace and power," (Acts 6:8+), and one who spoke with "wisdom and the Spirit." (Acts 6:10+ - some think this is spirit with a little "S" but at if so it is still a "spirit" enabled by the "Spirit!")

Guzik - J.B. Phillips' translation has insight: *Stephen, filled through all his being with the Holy Spirit.* This is how we should be filled with the Holy Spirit. (Acts 7 Commentary)

He gazed intently (**atenizo** - stare at intently) **into heaven** - What a difference a chapter will make in two uses of the same verb **atenizo** -- (1) in Acts 6:15+ the Sanhedrin were "**gazing intently**" at Stephen's face that had an appearance like an angel and (2) here Stephen is gazing intently at the glory of God!

The verb **atenizo** is used mainly by Luke - Lk. 4:20; Lk. 22:56; Acts 1:10 (apostles); Acts 3:4 (Peter to lame man); Acts 3:12 (men of Israel); Acts 6:15; Acts 7:55; Acts 10:4 (Peter to the angelic vision); Acts 11:6 (Peter at vision of "unclean" animals); Acts 13:9 (Paul at Elymas); Acts 14:9 (lame man looked at Paul); Acts 23:1 (Paul, looking intently at the Council); 2 Co. 3:7; 2 Co. 3:13

And saw the glory of God - Stephen begins with a description of the **God of glory** (Acts 7:2) and now sees the **glory of God.** And not only that, but God's glory has been reflected from the face of Stephen during this entire speech (cf Acts 6:15). And likely the Sadducees (who preferred the Pentateuch) would recall Moses' shining face (Ex. 34:29-30). It was as though God was saying, "This man is not against Moses! To the contrary he is like Moses—he is My friend (cf Ex 33:11)!" And all of this is more than the anti-supernaturalists Sadducees can stomach!

Robertson - Full of the Holy Spirit, gazing steadfastly into heaven, he saw God's glory and Jesus "**standing**" **as if he had risen to cheer the brave Stephen**. Elsewhere (save Acts 7:56 also) he is pictured as sitting at the right hand of God (the Session of Christ) as in Matthew 26:64; Mark 16:19; Acts 2:34; Ephes. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Hebrews 1:3. (Word Pictures in the New Testament)

Vincent on **standing** - Rising from the throne to protect and receive his servant. Usually Jesus is represented in the New Testament as seated at the Father's right hand. See Ephesians 1:20; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 1:3.

And Jesus standing at the right hand of God- While we cannot state with absolute certainly it is very reasonable to conclude that Jesus is standing to receive Stephen, to welcome him home, to honor him for work well-done. It may even relate to his name -- recall that **Stephen** name crown, "the victor's crown," a symbol of triumph in the Grecian athletic games. Of course Jesus at the right hand of God signified to the Sanhedrin (and rightly so) that Jesus had the place of honor but this would have been especially abhorrent to them as they did not believe anyone could share God's place in heaven.

Stephen may have been alluding to Psalm 110:1 "A Psalm of David. The LORD says to my Lord: “Sit at My right hand Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.”

Psalm 109:31 is very appropriate for Stephen "For He stands at the right hand of the needy, To save him from those who judge his soul." Indeed, Stephen's soul would be saved. While the Sanhedrin would see his dead body and think he was finally dead, unbeknownst to them, he was more alive than he had ever been on earth. And that is our glorious future also, so let us take courage as the adversary shoots his fiery missiles of discouragement, doubt, despair, etc. We must remember that we like Stephen are "more than conquerors through Him Who loved us...for...neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Ro 8:37-39+)

Did the Sanhedrin see the same vision Stephen saw? Luke doesn't say, but it is doubtful for they lacked the eyes to recognize Jesus as God on earth, much less in Heaven! But that will all change one day, and it will be a monumental shock to them and to all Christ rejecters, for John writes "BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen." (Rev 1:7+)

F B Meyer - Our Daily Homily - Being full of the Holy Ghost.

The blessed characteristic of Stephen lay in has being perpetually full of the Holy Ghost. It is said of others, even Peter, that they were filled, as though they needed some special and over-mastering inducement for special service. But Stephen is more than once described as full (Acts 6:5), as though he were always kept brimming, like a lake from the hills.

Those who are full of the Holy Spirit are always Looking steadfastly upwards. — They look not at the things which are seen, but at those which are not seen. Across the valleys, they catch sight of the Delectable Mountains, rising like the Himalaya above the plains of India. Whilst others look around for help, they lift up their eyes to the hills whence cometh their help; and to them heaven stands always open.

Those who are full of the Holy Spirit see and are transfigured by the glory of God. — What wonder that those who sat in the Council beheld Stephen’s face, as it had been the face of an angel. The light that shone there was not as when Jesus was transfiguredin that case, the light of the Shechinah broke out from within — but here the glory of God shone from the open door of Heaven. So the sunrise smites the highest peaks.

Those who are full of the Holy Ghost see the Lord Jesus, in his glory, as their Priest. — It is the special work of the Holy Spirit to direct the gaze to Jesus. Those who are full of the Spirit may hardly be aware of his gracious presence, but they are keenly alive to their Lord’s. The Spirit takes of the things of Jesus, and reveals them to the loving and obedient; specially those that concern his priestly work on the cross and in heaven.

Mormons Answered Verse by Verse - Acts 7:55, 56

Some Mormons may use this verse to attack the doctrine of the Trinity as well as try to prove that God the Father has a body like our own.

Their argument against the Trinity goes like this: Since Stephen saw two distinct personages, one standing next to the other, the Father and the Son must be two different Gods and not one divine person as trinitarians believe. The flaw in this argument is, of

course, that it attacks a “straw man” Trinity rather than the concept of deity actually adhered to by orthodox Christianity. The traditional church teaching is that the Father is not the Son, and that the Son is not the Holy Spirit, yet these three distinct persons share the same divine nature and make up the one true God. But the rank-and-file Mormon has not had enough direct exposure to Christian theology to know this. When Mormons assert that trinitarians believe God to be a single person, they are misstating the Trinity doctrine. So when they proceed to disprove this concept by showing the Son to be distinct from the Father, they are actually knocking down a straw man that they themselves have set up-an effective debating technique, but not a sound refutation of Christian belief.

As to their second use of Acts 7:55, 56, namely to try to prove that God the Father has a body resembling ours, it should be remembered that “No man hath seen God at any time” (John 1:18). What Stephen saw must have been a vision. And a vision does not necessarily portray someone in an actual physical appearance. This can be seen from the description of Jesus Christ in a vision the apostle John saw: “His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace … and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword; and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength” (Rev. 1:14–16). Just as John’s vision does not necessarily describe what Jesus actually looks like, Stephen’s vision in Acts, chapter 7, does not necessarily portray God the Father as he actually is. (David Reed, John Farkas Mormons Answered Verse by Verse)

G Campbell Morgan - Jesus standing on the right hand of God. Acts 7.55

This attitude of the Lord arrests us. The New Testament references to Him as having entered the heavenlies describe Him as having sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high. Here He was seen by Stephen standing. The two figures of speech remind us of two aspects of His work on behalf of man. When He had made the one offering which provided perfect and plenteous redemption, He sat down. This is the attitude which speaks of the completion of His redemptive work. But that work is being continued in its administration through all His witnesses who have fellowship with Him in the fulness of the Spirit. They are making up that which is behindhand in His afflictions. His having completed His work does not mean that He is in any sense separated from them, or that they endure the Cross in loneliness. He is with them in sympathy and in service. Thus Stephen, having completed the testimony of life and speech, and being about to consummate and crown that witness in agony and death, saw the Lord standing. It was to him the assurance of his Lord's co-operation and fellowship. The result is seen in that Stephen passed as his Lord had passed, commending his spirit to his Lord, and praying for his murderers. For the assurance of my soul as to its salvation, I see Him seated at the Father's right hand. For the assurance of my soul in its service and suffering, I see Him standing. (Life Application from Every Chapter of the Bible).

Acts 7:56 and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." (NASB: Lockman)

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

- **I see** Acts 10:11,16; Ezek 1:1; Mt 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:21; Rev 4:1; 11:19; 19:11
- **Son of Man** Da 7:13,14; Mt 16:27,28; 25:31; 26:64,65; John 5:22-27
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

SPECIAL REVELATION OF THE SAVIOR FOR STEPHEN!

And he said, "Behold - **Behold** is idou is the second person singular aorist imperative **middle voice** Stephen calling on his executioners look for themselves. "Do it now! Don't delay!"

Spurgeon reminds us that "**Behold** is a word of wonder; it is intended to excite admiration. Wherever you see it hung out in Scripture, it is like an ancient sign-board, signifying that there are rich wares within, or like the hands which solid readers have observed in the margin of the older Puritanic books, drawing attention to something particularly worthy of observation." I would add, **behold** is like a divine highlighter, a divine underlining of an especially striking or important text. It says in effect "Listen up, all ye who would be wise in the ways of Jehovah!"

F F Bruce suggests "Stephen has been confessing Christ before men, and now he sees Christ confessing his servant before God." (cf Mt 10:32)

I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God- This has to be one of the most amazing, glorious passages in the entire Bible. Stephen sees into Heaven and sees Jesus, not seated but standing. Luke does not tell us but this certainly looks like Jesus standing up to honor Stephen for a job well done - "Welcome Home!"

See i s theoreo which is in the present tense and means Stephen was continually observing Jesus with sustained attention as a spectator of His supernatural Savior standing!

Opened (perfect tense = standing open) (1272) (**dianoigo**) means the "gates of paradise" were opened wide (standing open) allowing Stephen clear, unhindered, unimpeded vision and full understanding of what he was seeing. This same verb is used figuratively by Luke in Lk 24:45+ = "Then He **opened** their minds to understand the Scriptures." In a sense Stephen's mind was opened to see the Living Word Himself (as the two on the road to Emmaus in Lk 24:31+ when "their eyes **were opened** and they recognized Him (THE RESURRECTED JESUS)"!

The writer of Hebrews describes Jesus' posture in heaven after He had been crucified, buried, resurrected and ascended...

> And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins (IT IS FINISHED!), **He sat down** at the right hand of the Majesty on high, (Heb 1:3+)

The writer of Hebrews tells us that our

> Great "High Priest...has taken His seat at the right hand of the Throne of the Majesty (WHAT A GREAT NAME OF GOD!) in the heavens. (Heb 8:1)

Stephen's use of the clearly Messianic phrase **the Son of Man** must have been like a knife turning in the stomach of the Sanhedrin and especially the high priest Caiaphas. Why? Recall that at Jesus' nocturnal, illegal trial before Caiaphas there was an interchange that he surely would recall for this had taken place only a couple of months earlier.

> But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest (CAIAPHAS) said to Him, "**I adjure** (TO EXACT AS AN OATH OR PUT UNDER OATH) You by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God." Jesus said to him, "You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will see THE **SON OF MAN** SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN." (Mt 26:63-64)

So Jesus answered that He is the Messiah and Caiaphas would see Him some day in the future. What is fascinating is that when Caiaphas does see Him, He will be seated, not standing as He was for Stephen! And while Luke does not say, there is no indication that Caiaphas or any of the other member of the Sanhedrin saw Jesus in Heaven at this time. In any event, this was the final straw for the Sanhedrin who became outraged that Stephen would testify about the One Whom they had murdered telling them He was now alive! This was simply too much for them to bear!

Vincent observes that **Son of Man** is "a title never applied to Christ by any of the apostles or evangelists, except here by Stephen."

In Luke Jesus spoke several beatitudes which would apply to Stephen -

> "Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the sake of the **Son of Man.**"(Luke 6:22+)

> Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. **Rejoice** (chairo - present imperative) and **be glad** (agalliao - present imperative), for your reward in heaven is great (THINK OF STEPHEN'S REWARD OF JESUS STANDING TO RECEIVE HIM); for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Mt 5:10-12+)

Daniel described the **Son of Man** declaring....

> "I kept looking in the night visions, And behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, And He came up to the Ancient of Days And was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion, Glory and a kingdom, That all the peoples, nations and men of every language Might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion Which will not pass away; And His kingdom is one Which will not be destroyed. (Da 7:13,14+)

Gotquestions.org - Jesus is referred to as the "Son of Man" 88 times in the New Testament. A first meaning of the phrase "Son of Man" is as a reference to the prophecy of Daniel 7:13-14, "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed." The description "Son of Man" was a Messianic title. Jesus is the One who was given dominion and glory and a kingdom. When Jesus used this phrase, He was assigning the Son of Man prophecy to Himself. The Jews of that era would have been intimately familiar with the phrase and to whom it referred. Jesus was proclaiming Himself as the Messiah. **A second meaning of the phrase** "Son of Man" is that Jesus was truly a human being (**ED**: AND THIS MEANING MUST HAVE REALLY INCENSED THE SANHEDRIN!). God called the prophet Ezekiel "son of man" 93 times. God was simply calling Ezekiel a human being. A son of a man is a man. Jesus was fully God (John 1:1), but He was also a human being (John 1:14). First John 4:2 tells us, "This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God." Yes, Jesus was the Son of God—He was in His essence God. Yes, Jesus was also the Son of Man—He was in His essence a human being. In summary, the phrase "Son of Man" indicates that Jesus is the Messiah and that He is truly a human being.

John MacDuff - ACTS 7:56. I see the heavens opened and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.

There is a volume of tender meaning here. Thirteen times is Christ spoken of in Scripture as "seated at the right hand of God"; only once is He spoken of as "standing" and that once is here. Why, then, this strange exception? Why has the seated Saviour changed His posture so that He is seen "standing" by His dying saint? Oh, blessed testimony to the deathless sympathy and tenderness of that loving Saviour's heart!—Seated though He be—it is as if He had heard the stir in that court on earth;—as if He heard (as indeed He did) every malicious taunt that was hurled at His holy servant. He cannot remain still. He rises;—(or, if we dare use a human expression to give force to the heavenly vision)—He starts from His seat at the call of His injured disciple—He feels the cruelties inflicted on him as if they were inflicted on Himself. He, the same gentle, tender Shepherd that He ever was, sees one of the choicest sheep of the fold in the fangs of ravening wolves! Roused by these wild beasts who were scattering His flock;—touched with the tender bleat of that holy and innocent victim of their rage,—the good Shepherd stoops down from the hills of glory; and, as Stephen enters the valley of the shadow of death, He comforts and supports him with His rod and staff!

The Loins Girded - The Heavens Opened Acts 7:56

When the first deacon, Stephen, was dragged outside of the city to be stoned to death, the Jews stood around him with bursting hearts and gnashing teeth, the hands filled with the murdering pieces of stone. This was what Stephen saw in his immediate surroundings. However, then he lifted his eyes towards heaven and what he saw there made him witness: "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God." Let it have been for him a vision of a special nature, in essence we also see with the eye of faith the heavens opened since Jesus Christ entered there as herald and as a preparer of the way. Sin closed the heavens for us. However, Jesus reopened them for us again. Where the un-anointed eye sees nothing but a firmament with clouds, the eye of faith beholds the full glory of God and it sees Jesus crowned with honour.

This vision of Stephen is of incalculable value for us,—it teaches us like Stephen to suffer bravely, to pray heartily and to die blessedly.

First of all to suffer bravely for the Name of the Lord for righteousness' sake. It is true, we are no longer stoned to death, but we may profess freely our faith in Jesus Christ. However, although we are spared from brutish violence, painful words and spiteful expressions that are intended to wound us, are not lacking,—we also bear the scars of the thrown stones upon our forehead. How rich it is to know that heaven above us will open and that the Son of man reveals His presence to our heart, oh, not to take away the suffering, but to strengthen us in it.

A single glance upward teaches us to even pray heartily for the forgiveness of our opponents. No, we shall not avenge evil with evil. We shall not return the throw of a stone with a curse, nor with a complaint, nor with a sigh. From the opened heavens and from that Son of man an unspeakable peace descends into our soul, and we receive grace to answer every humiliation with a spontaneous prayer: "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge."

This living under an opened heaven eventually flows into a dying under an opened heaven, into a dying with the eye upon the Son of man, who awaits us in glory and who has prepared there a place for us. It says that Stephen "fell asleep." His death was soft, his passing light, his dying in peace like one who falls asleep even though the stones hurled past his head and rained down upon him. If someone would ask how this was possible, the answer is given in the shout of praise for life and death: "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God!"

Acts 7:57 But they cried out with a loud voice, and covered their ears and rushed at him with one impulse. (NASB: Lockman)

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

- **they cried** Acts 7:54; 21:27-31; 23:27
- **Covered their ears** Ps 58:4; Pr 21:13; Zech 7:11
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

THE SANHEDRIN'S CRY AND "COVER UP"!

But they cried out with a loud voice (megas phone ~ megaphone) - This is the same verb krazo used below for Stephen.

Guzik comments "These were distinguished, older men behaving this way. The reaction of the Sanhedrin seems extreme, but is typical of those who reject God and are lost in spiritual insanity. They wailed in agony and covered their ears at the revelation of God, which they regarded as blasphemy. It is a dangerous thing to be religious apart from a real relationship with Jesus Christ. This fulfills what Jesus warned about in John 16:2-3 - "*Yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service. And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me.*" (Acts 7 Commentary)

Cried out (2896) (**krazo**) refers to a loud cry or vociferation, expressing deep emotion. **Krazo** is one of those onomatopoeic words, the very pronunciation of which imitates the hoarse cry or croak of the raven.

They had heard words very similar to Acts 7:56 from the lips of the Son of Man

> "But from now on THE **SON OF MAN** WILL BE SEATED AT THE RIGHT HAND of the power OF GOD." 70 And they all said, "Are You the Son of God, then?" And He said to them, "Yes, I am." 71 Then they said, "What further need do we have of testimony? For we have heard it ourselves from His own mouth." (Luke 22:69-71+)

With Jesus' declaration that He was the Son of Man and then that He was the Son of God, the Sanhedrin delivered Him to Pilate (Lk 27:1ff) and eventually to His death by crucifixion. Now they respond to Stephen in a similar way, but now in what appears to be riot of raging men, they take the execution of the death penalty into their own hands (literally -- stones in their hands!).

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

And covered their ears - My wife of almost 50 years Marty and I have had four children and we witnessed them cover their ears a number of times when we were disciplining them. In this context they seem to be unable to even bear hearing the Messianic title **Son of Man**!

Covered (4912) (**sunecho/synecho** from **sun** = with + **echo** = hold) literally means hold together (as a unit, metaphorically to sustain). To press together. To close by holding together (stop, shut) - ears = refuse to listen (Acts 7:57), mouth (Is 52:15), heaven (Dt 11:17).

Robertson - They held their ears together with their hands and affected to believe Stephen guilty of blasphemy (cf. Matthew 26:65 = "Then the high priest tore his robes and said, "He has blasphemed! What further need do we have of witnesses? Behold, you have now heard the blasphemy;"). (**ED**: IN OTHER WORDS THEY REFUSED THE TRUTH AND BELIEVED WHAT THEY WANTED TO BELIEVE!)

These Jews were doing just as their fathers had done!

> "But they refused to pay attention and turned a stubborn shoulder and **stopped their ears from hearing**. (Zech 7:11)

Robertson - No vote was taken by the Sanhedrin. No scruple was raised about not having the right to put him to death (John 8:31). It may have taken place after Pilate's recall and before his successor came or Pilate, if there, just connived at such an incident that did not concern Rome. At any rate it was mob violence like modern lynching that took the law into the hands of the Sanhedrin without further formalities.

And rushed at him with one impulse - The word **one impulse** is **homothumadon** which is used most often in a positive sense to describe the body of believers (Acts 1:14; Acts 2:46; Acts 4:24; Acts 5:12) who were "one in the Spirit," in stark contrast with these "religious" men (aka hypocrites) who were "one in the flesh" (and one in their father, the murderer, the devil - John 8:44). What a picture -- imagine the scene -- all at once, they all together rushed headlong at Stephen!

Rushed (3729)(**hormao** from **horme** = violent impulse from **ornumi** = to excite, arouse) means to set out, to rush headlong, violently, impetuously. It describes a "swift and violent forward motion uncontrolled by reason." (Friberg) It is so fitting that while here **hormao** describes a herd of Sanhedrin controlled by their rage rushing at Stephen, in Mt 8:32 (Mk 5:13, Lk 8:33+)**hormao** describes a herd of swine controlled by evil spirits rushing to their death! There is not much difference between these two pictures, because the "religious" mob was also controlled by evil spirits and had destruction on their mind!

Hormao - 5x in 5v - Matt. 8:32; Mk. 5:13; Lk. 8:33; Acts 7:57; Acts 19:29

Hormao - 10x in 10v in the Septuagint - Ge 31:21; Nu 16:42; Jos. 4:18; Jos. 6:5; Jdg. 20:37; 1 Sam. 15:19; Isa. 5:29; Jer. 4:28; Nah. 3:16; Hab. 1:8

Gilbrant - **Hormao** can be found in classical Greek meaning “set in motion, urge on,” and more frequently “start out, rush headlong” (when used intransitively; cf. Liddell-Scott). In the Septuagint **hormaō** translates at least five Hebrew terms, all of which describe the sudden directional movement of someone or something. Frequently this sudden movement was toward someone or something with malcontent (cf. Ge 31:21; Nu 16:42; Josh 4:18; Jdg 20:37); it could also mean “flee away” (cf. Nahum 3:16). “In the few passages where it occurs the (word) denotes violent movement uncontrolled by human reason” (Bertram, “hormē,” Kittel, 5:470). Thus a certain amount of impulsiveness is implicit in its use. (Ibid)

Acts 7:58 When they had driven him out of the city, they began stoning him; and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul. (NASB: Lockman)

> KJV 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.

- **driven him out of the city** Nu 15:35; 1 Kings 21:13; Luke 4:29; Heb 13:12,13
- **stoning** Acts 6:11; Lev 24:14-16; John 10:23-26
- **the witnesses** Acts 6:13; Dt 13:9,10; 17:7
- **their** Acts 8:1; 9:1-19; Acts 22:4,20
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

WITNESSES PREPARE TO STONE STEPHEN
AS SAUL WITNESSES THE SCENE

When they had driven him out of the city - They were in the **Hall of Hewn Stone** (watch this computer animation) and would not dare throw stones there lest the hall be "defiled" (what utter hypocrisy!) So just as Stephen's Lord was crucified outside the city, so too Stephen was crushed by stones outside the Holy City of Jerusalem.

Robertson on **Out of the city** - To keep from defiling the place with blood. But they sought to kill Paul as soon as they got him out of the temple area (Acts 21:30-31 = "they dragged him out of the temple" = LET'S NOT "DEFILE THE TEMPLE! WHAT HYPOCRITES JUST LIKE THESE SANHEDRIN!).

At least they would obey a portion of the Mosaic Law for in Numbers we read...

> Then the LORD said to Moses, “The man shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones **outside the camp.**” (Nu 15:35)

The Jews had attempted to stone Jesus in Luke 4:29-30+

> and they got up and drove Him **out of the city**, and led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city had been built, in order to throw Him down the cliff. But passing through their midst, He went His way.

The writer of Hebrews gives us a related exhortation...

> Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate. So, let us go out to Him **outside the camp**, bearing His reproach.(Heb 13:12,13+)

They began stoning him - You could probably guess the verb tense Luke would use here for stoning. You guessed it - the **imperfect tense** = what a picture of one stone tossed after another. Stephen being hit again and again!

Stoning (3037)(**lithoboleo** from **lithos** = stone + boleo = to throw) means to throw stones (Mt 21:35; Mk 12:4 Acts 14:5) or to stone

to death (Mt 23:37; Lk 13:34; Jn 8:5.; Acts 7:58-59 Heb 12:20) In the New Testament **lithoboleo** is used in reference to the stoning (killing) the prophets (Matthew 23:37; Luke 13:34) and Stephen (Acts 7:58,59). In Iconium both the Jews and the Gentiles sought to kill Paul and Barnabas by stoning (Acts 14:5). In the Septuagint it is the usual term for execution by stoning (Deuteronomy 13:10). Stoning was the Jewish punishment for blasphemy (Leviticus 24:14-16).

Lithoboleo - 7x in 7v - stone(1), stoned(2), stones(2), stoning(1), went on stoning(1). Matt. 21:35; Matt. 23:37; Lk. 13:34; Acts 7:58; Acts 7:59; Acts 14:5; Heb. 12:20

Lithoboleo - 27x in 28v in the Septuagint -

> Exod. 8:26; Exod. 19:13; Exod. 21:28; Exod. 21:29; Exod. 21:32; Lev. 20:2; Lev. 20:27; Lev. 24:14; Lev. 24:16; Lev. 24:23; Num. 15:35; Num. 15:36; Deut. 13:10; Deut. 17:5; Deut. 21:21; Deut. 22:21; Deut. 22:24; Jos. 7:25; 1 Sam. 30:6; 1 Ki. 12:18; 1 Ki. 21:10; 1 Ki. 21:13; 1 Ki. 21:14; 2 Chr. 10:18; 2 Chr. 24:21; Ezek. 16:40; Ezek. 23:47

Vincent on **began stoning** - According to the Rabbis, the scaffold to which the criminal was to be led, with his hands bound, was to be twice the size of a man. One of the witnesses was to smite him with a stone upon the breast, so as to throw him down. If he were not killed, the second witness was to throw another stone at him. Then, if he were yet alive, all the people were to stone him until he was dead. The body was then to be suspended till sunset.

And the witnesses laid aside their robes -They had to take off their robes to be able to make "good throws!" The false witnesses were to the first to stone him, their unlawful, unjustified actions being done (again ironically) according to the OT law which they were breaking (they were committing murder!). Moses recorded that "The **hand of the witnesses shall be first against him to put him to death**, and afterward the hand of all the people. So you shall purge the evil from your midst (WHAT IRONY! THEY WERE THE EVIL IN THE MIDST NOT STEPHEN!)." (Dt 17:7).

Witnesses (3144)(**martus/martys**) are generally the ones who tell the truth about what they have seen or heard. Not so in this case! And what an ironic wordplay here, as the **witnesses** (**martys**) falsely testify against a true **martyr**, the first Christian martyr!

Robertson on **witnesses** - The false testifiers against Stephen **suborned** by the Pharisees (Acts 6:11, 13). These witnesses had the privilege (ED: I WOULD CALL IT THE **IGNOMINIOUS PRIVILEGE**!) of casting the first stones (Dt. 13:10; Dt. 17:7) against the first witness for Christ with death (martyr in our modern sense of the word).

Robertson - Beside (para) the feet. Our first introduction to the man who became the greatest of all followers of Jesus Christ. Evidently he was not one of the "witnesses" against Stephen, for he was throwing no stones at him. But evidently he was already a leader in the group of Pharisees. We know from later hints from Saul (Paul) himself that he had been a pupil of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). Gamaliel, as the Pharisaic leader in the Sanhedrin, was probably on hand to hear the accusations against Stephen by the Pharisees. But, if so, he does not raise his voice against this mob violence. Saul does not seem to be aware that he is going contrary to the views of his master, though pupils often go further than their teachers.

David Guzik - The extent of their rage was shown by their execution of Stephen, which was done without regard for Roman law, and which was performed according to traditional Jewish custom (stoning).

> The second-century Jewish writing Mishnah, described 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 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.” (Cited in Bruce) (Acts 7 Commentary)

At the feet of a young man named Saul - The watershed passage in Acts! Stephen's sermon in essence will mark the shift of the Gospel from the Jews to the Gentiles. This chapter marks the moment when God set Israel as a nation aside. Yes individual Jews would be saved in Acts but the nation as a whole would have wait for the Second Coming of their Messiah to be delivered. Paul describes this future day

> For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery–so that you will not be wise in your own estimation–that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; 26 and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, “THE DELIVERER (MESSIAH) WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB.” 27 “THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS.” 28 From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the

> standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; 29 for the gifts and the calling of God are **irrevocable**. (Ro 11:25-29+)

Saul, now Paul confessed "I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons...(PAUL ADDRESSING JESUS) 'And when the blood of Your witness **Stephen** was being shed, I also was standing by approving, and watching out for the coats of those who were slaying him.'(Acts 22:4,20) So while the Gospel passes on the Gentiles, it is still a Jewish man who catalyzes that transfer.

Vincent says the word **young man** "gives no indication of his age, since it is applied up to the age of forty-five. Thirty years after Stephen's martyrdom, Paul speaks of himself as the aged (Philemon 1:9)."

Acts 7:59 They went on stoning Stephen as he called on the Lord and said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" (NASB: Lockman)

> KJV Acts 7:59 And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

- **called** Acts 2:21; 9:14,21; 22:16; Joel 2:32; Ro 10:12-14; 1 Cor 1:2
- **Lord** Ps 31:5; Luke 23:46
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

THE FIRST OF TWO PRAYERS

They went on stoning Stephen - **Stoning** is lithoboleo still in the the imperfect tense, one stone after another!

Stephen (4736)(**stephanos** from **stepho** = to encircle, twine or wreathe) means crown. It was "the victor's crown," a symbol of triumph in the Grecian athletic games. How fitting that it is the name of this godly saint who paid the highest price when he was stoned for speaking the truth of the Gospel! The related word is **stephanos** (4735) was a wreath made of foliage or designed to resemble foliage and worn by one of high status or held in high regard. The **stephanos** was literally an adornment worn around the head as a crown of victory in the Greek athletic games, this reward being given to the runner who crossed the goal first, to the disc thrower with the longest toss, etc. Apart from recognition of athletes and winners of various kinds of competitions, in the Greco-Roman world, the awarding of a crown or wreath signified appreciation for exceptional contributions to the state or groups within it. The recipients were usually public officials or civic-minded persons serving at their own expense.

As he called on the Lord and said -This is first of two prayers, the last words on the lips of Stephen. What a way to die! Praying! And to think how easily we get distracted in our praying! Try a few stones hitting you in the head! We certainly would not fall asleep, as I have been known to do early in the morning!

He called (present tense)(1941)(**epikaleomai**) is in the middle voice which means Stephen was calling upon Jesus in the sense of praying.

G Campbell Morgan has an interesting comment that ""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 the first martyr to seal his testimony with his blood."

Lord Jesus, receive my spirit! - Normally we think of prayer "in His Name." While Jesus Himself instructed us to pray beginning with "Our Father," (Mt 6:9), we see here that prayer to Jesus Himself is not forbidden.

Receive (1209)(**dechomai** = middle voice) means to be receptive to someone, to welcome, to accept, to show hospitality, to take a favorable attitude toward something. Stephen is asking Jesus to put the "welcome mat" out for him! What a great picture!

Stephen's works recall his Lord's similar words

> And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, "Father, INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMIT MY SPIRIT." Having said this, He breathed His last.(Luke 23:46+)

David's words would be apropos to Stephen...

> Into Your hand I commit my spirit; You have ransomed me, O LORD, God of truth. (Ps 31:5)

As an aside clearly Stephen believes the moment he falls asleep, he will enter into eternal life in the presence of Jesus. He would

have believed Paul's words

> we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. (2 Cor 5:8+)

There was no waiting in queue (a line of people waiting to see Jesus!) In a word, there is no such thing as the non-Biblical teaching of **Purgatory** nor of "Soul Sleep."

Related Resources:

- What does the Bible say about Purgatory?
- What does the Bible say about soul sleep?
- What does it mean to be absent from the body?
- What happens after death?
- What does the Bible say about Limbo?

Blind Chang - The Boxer Rebellion in China was the largest massacre of Protestant missionaries in history, with 188 adults and children being killed. Thirty thousand Chinese Christians also perished during the summer of 1900 at the hands of the Boxers. Among them was Chang Shen, the best known evangelist in Manchuria.

Chang had been a notorious character prior to his conversion—a gambler, thief, and womanizer. At midlife he lost his eyesight, and neighbors considered it a judgment from God. Hearing of a missionary hospital in a distant area, Chang traveled hundreds of miles only to find all the beds full. The hospital chaplain kindly gave him his own bed, and over time, doctors partially restored Chang's vision. In the process they introduced him to Jesus Christ.

When Chang asked for baptism, missionary James Webster told him, "Go home and tell your neighbors you have changed. I'll visit you later, and if you are still following Jesus, I will baptize you." When Webster arrived in Chang's village five months later, he found hundreds of inquirers.

Chang's eyesight didn't last, but his evangelistic zeal did. He traveled from village to village, winning hundreds to Christ. Missionaries followed in his wake, baptizing and organizing churches of the converts he had won.

When he was finally arrested by the Boxers, he was put in an open cart and driven to a nearby graveyard while singing, "Jesus loves me, this I know. …" At the cemetery, he was shoved into a kneeling position. Three times he uttered the words of Stephen, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" Then the sword sliced through his neck like a knife through butter.

The Boxers were so deeply shaken by Chang's quiet authority that they had his body drenched in oil and burned, so as to prevent, they thought, his resurrection. But still apprehensive, they retreated from the area altogether, thus saving other Christians from being butchered to death. (Robert Morgan - From this Verse)

David Reed - Acts 7:59–60

Jehovah's Witnesses never address Jesus in prayer. They have been taught that their prayers must be directed only to the Father and that they must call him "Jehovah." If a Witness were overheard praying to Jesus, he would be put on trial by a judicial committee and would be disfellowshiped unless he repented of his "sin."

But the Scripture passage above clearly shows Stephen praying to Jesus Christ, the risen Lord. (The JW Bible changes "Lord" in v. 60 to "Jehovah," but v. 59 still says "Jesus.")

A Witness may try to claim that Stephen was not praying to Jesus; he was merely speaking to him face to face, because he saw him in a vision. In that case, ask the JW to read the context. The vision in verse 56 took place when Stephen was in Jerusalem, standing trial before the Jewish Sanhedrin court. When he told the Jews that he saw a vision of Christ in heaven at the right hand of the Father, they were filled with fury. They ended the trial, dragged Stephen out of the court chamber, led him through the city streets, took him all the way out of the city (v. 57), and then stoned him. This naturally took a considerable amount of time. There is no indication that Stephen's vision as repeated again outside the city at the time of his stoning. Rather, he was, as the Scripture states, praying to Jesus. (Jehovah's Witnesses Answered Verse by Verse)

Acts 7:60 Then falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" Having said this, he fell asleep. (NASB: Lockman)

> KJV Acts 7:60 And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

- **falling on his knees** Acts 9:40; 20:36; 21:5; Ezra 9:5; Da 6:10; Luke 22:41

- **Lord** Mt 5:44; Luke 6:28; 23:34; Ro 12:14-21
- **fell asleep** Acts 13:36; 1 Cor 11:30; 15:6,18,20,51; 1 Th 4:13,14; 5:10
- Acts 7 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

DYING WITH A FORGIVING SPIRIT

Then falling on his knees - Literally placing his knees on the ground (common idiom by Luke - (Lk 22:41; Acts 7:60; 9:40; 22:36; 21:5). This change of posture suggests Stephen must have been standing, which is surprising and amazing as he is already being pounded with stones!

I like **A T Robertson's** thought that "Jesus was standing at the right hand of God and Stephen knelt before him in worship and called on him in prayer."

He cried out with a loud voice - This small detail is amazing. He is being stoned and yet the Spirit of God empowers him to cry out with a loud voice (megas phones ~ like a "megaphone"!). It is no coincidence that the same verb (krazo) is used of the last words of Jesus from the Cross

> And Jesus cried out (krazo) again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. (Mt 27:50)

Lord, do not hold this sin against them! - Literally "Place not to them or against them this sin." or "fix not this sin upon them."

This is Stephen's second prayer. As an aside it is always worth being at the beside of a godly person when they die as you will likely hear words of utmost wisdom and truth. And here Stephen shows us that he reserves his last breaths for prayer! Does this have any significance in regard to the priority of prayer for us who have more than a last breath left? I'll leave that one for you to answer for yourself!

David Guzik - God answered Stephen's prayer, and used it 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. When we get to heaven, we should thank Stephen for every blessing brought through the ministry of Saul of Tarsus. God heard Stephen's prayer, and Paul is the evidence of it. We have no idea how greatly God can use us in our times of suffering.. Augustine said, "If Stephen had not prayed, the church would not have had Paul." (Acts 7 Commentary)

There was a sense in which Jesus suffered along with Stephen as he was martyred for as Jesus later told Saul "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting." (Acts 9:5). This helps us understand what Paul was saying in Colossians 1:24+ when he wrote

> Now I (PAUL) rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, **in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions**.
>
> **Comment** - Stephen's suffering did his part in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions.
>
> **W A Criswell** - The redemptive suffering of Christ has no deficiency, but He does not exhaust all the suffering to be endured in the redemptive purpose of God. The sufferings of Paul do not add to the finished work of redemption but are incurred in making known the redeeming work of Christ to the Gentiles. The afflictions of every believer supplement those of Christ and lead to maturity (Heb. 2:10+; 1 Pet. 1:6, 7+), patience (James 1:3), and eschatological privilege (2 Ti 2:12+).

Stephen had learned from His Lord who said

> Matthew 5:44+ "But I say to you, **love** (agapao - present imperative) your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,
>
> Luke 6:28+ **Bless** (eulogeo - present imperative) those who curse you, pray (proseuchomai - present imperativ) for those who mistreat you.

Having said this, he fell asleep - When a believer dies, the Bible says he falls asleep. Asleep one moment, but the next moment in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ! Oh, how sweet is the "death" of a Christian, for it marks not the end, but the beginning of endless bliss! Does this not make you sad and confused that the majority of mankind will reject the Gospel of Jesus Christ and instead will choose eternal punishment over eternal pleasure in His presence (cf Ps 16:11)!

Sleep is the common **euphemism** for the death of a believer and always includes the hope (absolute assurance) of resurrection (1 Th 4:13-18+)

Fell asleep (2837)(**koimao** related to **keimai** = to lie outstretched, to lie down) means to cause to sleep, is the word from which we

get our word cemetery which it was the early Christians optimistic name for a graveyard. It meant a sleeping place. It really was a synonym for a dormitory, a place where people sleep. This metaphorical use of the word **sleep** is appropriate because of the similarity in appearance between a sleeping body and a dead body; restfulness and peace normally characterize both. The object of the metaphor is to suggest that as the sleeper does not cease to exist while his body sleeps, so the dead person continues to exist despite his absence from the region in which those who remain can communicate with him, and that, as sleep is known to be temporary, so the death of the body will be found to be. Sleep has its waking, death will have its resurrection. In short, death to the believer is a **sleep** for his body—a period of eternal!

It is notable that the deaths of non-believers is never described as falling asleep (see Vincent's note below), probably because instead of eternal rest, they will experience eternal restlessness!

The early Christians adopted the word **koimeterion** (which was used by the Greeks of a place of rest, room for sleeping or bedroom, a rest house for strangers) for the place of interment of the bodies of their departed; thence the English word "**cemetery**" or "**the sleeping place**," is derived. It was first applied in Christian burials in the Roman catacombs and by the 15th Century, the word cemetery had come into general usage. (Note that this in no way alludes to the false teaching of soul sleep).

Knowling calls **koimao** here "a picture word of rest and calmness which stands in dramatic contrast to the rage and violence of the scene."

Vincent on **fell asleep** - Marking his calm and peaceful death. Though the pagan authors sometimes used sleep to signify death, it was only as a poetic figure. When Christ, on the other hand, said, "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth," (Jn 11:11,12) he used the word, not as a figure, but as the expression of a fact. In that mystery of death, in which the pagan saw only nothingness, Jesus saw continued life, rest, waking—the elements which enter into sleep. And thus, in Christian speech and thought, as the doctrine of the resurrection struck its roots deeper, the word **dead**, with its hopeless finality, gave place to the more gracious and hopeful word **sleep**. The pagan burying-place carried in its name no suggestion of hope or comfort. It was a burying-place, a hiding-place, a **monumentum**, a mere memorial of something gone; a **columbarium**, or dove-cot, with its little pigeon-holes for cinerary urns; but the Christian thought of death as sleep, brought with it into Christian speech the kindred thought of a chamber of rest, and embodied it in the word **cemetery** (koimeterion) —the place to lie down to sleep. (Word Studies in the New Testament)

STEPHEN COMPARED WITH JESUS	
Stephen	**Jesus**
Lord Jesus, receive my spirit	Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit (Luke 23:46+)
Lord, do not hold this sin against them	Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing (Luke 23:34+)
Having said this, he fell asleep	Having said this, He breathed His last (Luke 23:46+)

I love **David Guzik's** closing comments on Acts 7...

> **Stephen wasn't a superman, but he was a man** (supernaturally) **filled through all his being with the Holy Spirit. Many have little idea of how greatly they can be used of God as they walk in the power of the Holy Spirit**. (Acts 7 Commentary)

Life Application Bible Commentary - Stephen's death was not in vain. Below are some of the events that were by-products (either directly or indirectly) of the persecution that began with Stephen's martyrdom.

1. Philip's evangelistic tour (Acts 8:4-40)
2. Paul's (Saul's) conversion (Acts 9:1-30)
3. Peter's missionary tour (Acts 9:32-11:18)
4. The founding of the church in Antioch of Syria (Acts 11:19-26)

Worth The Risk

Read: Acts 7:51–8:2

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. —Ephesians 2:8-9

What would one give in exchange for a new iPad? One 17-year-old boy gave a kidney! Apparently, he couldn't afford an iPad and wanted one so badly that he was willing to risk surgery.

Stephen, in Acts 7, took a serious risk, but it was for proclaiming the good news about Jesus. While performing miracles, he was seized, falsely accused of blasphemy against God and the Mosaic law, and brought before the high priest (6:8-14). In response to a question from the high priest (7:1), Stephen took a risk and preached a sermon he knew his hearers would not like. He said that throughout Israel's history, the nation had repeatedly rejected God's messengers. And now, they had rejected the Messiah.

Stephen's sermon provoked a strong reaction. "They cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; and they cast him out of the city and stoned him" (vv.57-58). Why would Stephen risk his life to preach about Jesus? He desperately wanted his hearers to know that because of Jesus' death and resurrection, they no longer needed to live under the law but could live under grace and forgiveness (6:13-15; Eph. 2:8-9). Jesus died so that we may have eternal life.

Lord, You have done so much for us. You give us
our very breath and blessing upon blessing.
We give ourselves back to You to use
to spread the glorious gospel of Christ. Amen.

A Christian's life is a window through which others can see Jesus.

By Albert Lee

The Courage Of Conviction

Read: Acts 7:54-60

Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. —Acts 6:8

Shortly before the American Civil War, a young lawyer from Vermont settled in Adams County, Pennsylvania. There he witnessed fugitive slaves escaping from bondage, so he devoted himself with all his powers to free those who were in slavery.

When the war broke out, Thaddeus Stephens was a powerful influence in the US government. But at his death years later, he was virtually alone. Written on his tombstone in an obscure cemetery are these words: "Finding that other cemeteries were restricted as to race by charter rights, I have chosen to lie in this humble spot, in order that I may testify, even in my death, to those principles which I have advocated through a long life."

In Acts 6 and 7, we read about a man of God named Stephen. He was full of faith, power, and conviction. He was brought before the Jewish ruling council on trumped-up charges and allowed to make a statement. It turned into a powerful indictment of the religious leaders. They despised him and his message, so they dragged him out of Jerusalem and stoned him. Stephen fell to his knees and prayed for his killers. The way he died spoke as eloquently as his sermon.

As followers of Christ, we must be people of conviction. How far are we willing to go for what we believe?

Convictions forged in pain and loss
Provide the strength that's needed
For those sold out to serving Christ,
Those who His call have heeded. —Sper

It is better by far to die for something than to live for nothing.

By Haddon W. Robinson

In Memory

Read: Acts 7:52-60 | Bible in a Year: 1 Chronicles 28-29; John 9:24-41

Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. —Hebrews 11:35

After a long winter, a local news paper celebrated the first summerlike day with a photo of a young man stretched out under the

warm sun. He was wearing sunglasses, a baseball cap, blue jeans, and a sleeveless shirt. One hand rested on his forehead and the other balanced a radio on his stomach. This was obviously his kind of day.

But there was more to the picture. The man was relaxing lazily on top of a large monument in a veterans' memorial park. On the marker were the names of 225 soldiers who had died for their country. As I looked at that photo, I realized that brave men and women had given their lives so that he could enjoy his.

This reminds me of the many gallant servants of God who willingly made the supreme sacrifice so that we could hear the gospel (Acts 7:59; Heb. 11:35-38). They went from house to house, city to city, and continent to continent with the good news. Their testimony, often sealed in blood, made it possible for us to bask in the warmth of God's love.

Let's pause to remember the great price paid by our spiritual forefathers. Then, let's ask ourselves if we are willing to do the same for our children. May we determine to stand for Christ faithfully in life and in death.

Faith of our fathers, living still
In spite of dungeon, fire, and sword—
O how our hearts beat high with joy
Whene'er we hear that glorious word! —Faber

We may not walk to the martyr's stake, but we must walk in the Master's steps.

By Mart DeHaan

Beyond Calm Acceptance

July 31, 2001

Read: Acts 7:54-60 | Bible in a Year: Psalms 54-56; Romans 3

God . . . has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. —1 Peter 1:3

In a television interview, a prominent Hollywood actress said that she eagerly anticipated her death because this would bring her "oblivion." I could hardly believe my ears! Why would anyone be pleased with passing into oblivion? Are we all nothing but cosmic accidents? Does nothing we think or feel or say or do have any lasting meaning or value?

Some people are able to convince themselves that oblivion is something to look forward to. But it seems to me that most unbelievers either entertain a vague hope of an afterlife, or they avoid thinking about it.

Distressed that the subject of death and dying is becoming taboo in our culture, Bill and Judith Moyers produced a TV series showing that an honest discussion of the subject helps many die with calm acceptance. But no mention was made of faith in Christ or His resurrection. Therefore, it gave no example of anyone dying triumphantly.

When Stephen was being stoned, he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (Acts 7:59). Only those who believe on Jesus are able to die with joy and eager anticipation. Because Jesus died for our sins and rose from the grave, we who believe on Him can die with a living hope. And that goes far beyond a calm acceptance.

When by the gift of His infinite grace
I am accorded in heaven a place,
Just to be there and to look on His face
Will through the ages be glory for me. —Gabriel

Death is the last chapter in time but the first chapter in eternity.

By Herbert Vander Lugt

No Grieving Allowed

Read: Acts 7:59-8:2

Weep with those who weep. —Romans 12:15

The American Hospice Foundation says that bereaved people tend to keep thier grieving a secret in the workplace. Many of us have grown up with the idea that sorrow should be overcome quickly. What often happens is that we deny our pain, bottle it up inside, and try to go it alone. A sign that reads NO GRIEVING ALLOWED might as well be posted on the walls at work.

Unfortunately, this same dangerous attitude can invade our homes and communities of faith as well. Grieving presents a dilemma for many Christians. When we feel the deep pain of loss, we often hide it, believing we should be outwardly joyful no matter what has happened. But notice the words of Acts 8:2. Luke wrote that after Stephen was stoned to death by an angry mob, godly men buried him and “made great lamentation over him.” Godly men crying and mourning deeply may seem contradictory to some, but the Bible states it plainly in all its emotional impact.

The Lord never asks us to ignore the pain in our hearts. Instead, He calls us to “weep with those who weep” (Rom. 12:15). We are to love and support one another as we move together through the process of grieving.

A heartfelt tear can show such love
As words can never do;
It says, "I feel in part your pain,
My heart goes out to you." —DJD

A sorrow shared is a sorrow halved. —Shakespeare

By David C. McCasland

The Witness Of Suffering

Read: Acts 7:54-8:4

Those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the Word. —Acts 8:4

A brilliant philosopher and theologian made this strong statement: “No one was ever saved by apologetics.” He wasn’t downplaying the importance of being ready to give reasons for our faith. But persuasive arguments aren’t enough. People must choose for themselves to believe in Jesus.

How do we lead them to choose Christ? The use of logic is one way. But we will probably get a lot further by demonstrating an active, unwavering faith.

Consider the witness we give when we are faithful through suffering. My mind is drawn to Annie Johnson Flint, author of 6,000 hymns and gospel songs. She was an orphan. She lived with crippling arthritis. She was stricken with cancer. Yet her faith was especially evident in this hymn:

He giveth more grace as the burdens grow greater,
He sendeth more strength when the labors increase;
To added afflictions He addeth His mercy,
To multiplied trials His multiplied peace.

God has a remarkable way of using evil circumstances to bring about good. The persecution of the early church, while intended to stamp out the gospel, actually resulted in its rapid growth (Acts 8:4). And though no one would call the suffering of Annie Johnson Flint a good thing, her faithfulness through trials was a wonderful witness to God’s grace.

May our faithfulness in the midst of suffering be used to deliver a powerful witness for Christ.

Faith often shines brightest when life seems darkest.

By David C. Egner

The Ministry of Mourning

Read: Acts 7:54–8:2

Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. Acts 8:2

In 2002, a few months after my sister Martha and her husband, Jim, died in an accident, a friend invited me to a “Growing Through Grief” workshop at our church. I reluctantly agreed to attend the first session but had no intention of going back. To my surprise, I discovered a caring community of people trying to come to grips with a significant loss in their lives by seeking the help of God and others. It drew me back week after week as I worked toward acceptance and peace through the process of sharing our grief together.

Like the sudden loss of a loved one or friend, the death of Stephen, a dynamic witness for Jesus, brought shock and sorrow to those in the early church (Acts 7:57–60). In the face of persecution, “Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him” (8:2). These men of faith did two things together: They buried Stephen, an act of finality and loss. And they mourned deeply for him, a shared expression of their sorrow.

Father in heaven, help us to grow together in Your healing love.

As followers of Jesus, we need not mourn our losses alone. In sincerity and love we can reach out to others who are hurting, and in humility we can accept the concern of those who stand beside us.

As we grieve together, we can grow in understanding and in the peace that is ours through Jesus Christ, who knows our deepest sorrow.

Father in heaven, help us to “mourn with those who mourn” and grow together in Your healing love.

Read Life After Loss at discoveryseries.org/cb131.

The ministry of mourning with others helps bring healing to our hearts.

By David C. McCasland

A Watching World

Read: Acts 7:51-8:2

He knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin.. —Acts 7:60

We don’t need ideal circumstances to be effective witnesses for Christ. Nor are God’s purposes hindered by our problems.

Stephen was a powerful witness in a situation that was far from ideal. He was falsely accused and arrested (Acts 6:8-15). After he had witnessed at great length to the angry religious leaders, they rejected his words and took him out to be stoned (7:1-53).

That was the end of Stephen’s witness, right? Wrong! His humble surrender to a martyr’s death and his Christlike prayer that God would forgive his killers resulted in the greatest witness of Stephen’s life (7:54-60).

But how does Stephen’s martyrdom relate to our mundane lives? Joseph Aldrich, in his book Life-Style Evangelism, wrote, “When the non-Christian observes a believer responding to pressure and pain with a Spirit-controlled response, he is seeing God at work in human experience. Stephen’s response to stoning caught the attention of a man named Saul!” Later, Saul became a zealous follower of Stephen’s Lord (Acts 9—28).

Instead of praying for fewer difficulties so that we might witness better, let’s pray that we might witness better through our difficulties. Who knows, another “Saul” may be watching.

We often think that if life were smooth
We would a better witness be;
But God knows best—that faith mid trials
Can honor Him more powerfully. —Cetas

We can have our best witness in the worst of times.

By Joanie Yoder

Just Tell The Story

Read: Acts 7:59-8:8

Those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the Word. —Acts 8:4

The main character in the movie Up Close And Personal is a TV newsman who dies trying to get a story in one of the world’s trouble spots. After his death, he is remembered for saying, “I once thought reporting was about glory. But I’m here for only one reason—to tell the story.”

In Acts 8, we read that Jerusalem’s Christians were scattered abroad to escape persecution. Everywhere they went, they preached the message of Christ (v.4). Saul, their persecutor, was later converted and became an apostle. Toward the end of his life, Saul, also

known as Paul, decided to go to Jerusalem, where he knew he would be persecuted. But he remained undeterred, declaring that his purpose was “to testify to the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24).

God still calls people to tell the good news of Jesus to those who don’t know Him. In his book The Conversion Of The Church, Samuel Shoemaker states, “The demand is human heart-hunger. The supply is the grace of God. We are only distributors.” But we don’t work alone or with mere human energy. God is working in us (Philippians 2:13).

When witnessing for Christ, may it be with love and humility—motivated by a desire for His glory, not our own. We’re just here to tell the story.

I love to tell the story,
For some have never heard
The message of salvation
From God's own holy Word. —Hankey

God has left us in the world to witness to the world.

By Joanie Yoder

The Viral Gospel

July 8, 2012

Read: Acts 7:59–8:8

Those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the Word. —Acts 8:4

The term “viral video” refers to a short clip posted on the Internet that spreads rapidly as the link is sent from one person to another. The video may be funny, inspiring, or thought provoking, and it can quickly spread around the world and be seen by millions of people. It’s an advertiser’s dream, but few marketing experts are able to exploit it. Lacy Kemp wrote: “How do you make something spread like wildfire? The answer is that you can’t. It’s not something to plan for or else everyone would be doing it. It has to be awesome enough on its own to get there.”

The gospel of Jesus Christ is “viral” in the way it spreads from one person to another. After Stephen, a leader in the early church, was stoned for his faith, the followers of Jesus in Jerusalem were persecuted and forced to leave their homes (Acts 8:1-3). Instead of fearfully holding back, these Christians told people about Him wherever they went. “Those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the Word” (v.4).

When we truly know Christ we cannot keep the good news about Him to ourselves. Even in the most challenging circumstances, we want to keep on telling others about our Savior and Lord.

Lord, You have been so gracious to save us
and give us eternal life. We love You and want
to tell everyone we can
about Your amazing grace. Lead us, we pray.

Spread the gospel; it’s contagious!

By David C. McCasland

J R Miller - Stephen the First Martyr, 1909
Acts 6:1-8, 7:54-8:2

Stephen is one of the most interesting characters in the New Testament. His story is short--but intense. His work belongs to a few days, and he makes but one speech--but his influence belongs to all after time! He was the first deacon and the first Christian martyr.

Stephen's fiery eloquence touched many hearts--but it also aroused the members of the Jewish synagogues, who set themselves against him. We must not be surprised if our efforts to do good, awaken opposition. The more we try to honor Christ and build up His kingdom, the more opposition we shall encounter. So long as we keep quiet about people's sins and connive at their wrongdoings, they may not seriously oppose us. But when we assault the evil we see in them and openly condemn it--we shall certainly stir up enmity and antagonism and bring upon ourselves opposition and possibly persecution.

Stephen's opponents were no match for him in argument. "They were unable to stand up against the wisdom and the Spirit by whom

he spoke." It was not Stephen with whom they had to contend; there was an unseen One beside him all the while who helped him. The Spirit in Stephen whom his proponents could not resist--was the Holy Spirit. Stephen was an inspired man when he stood before his opponents and declared to them the words of God. He was filled with God, as were the apostles on the day of Pentecost. If we go out in Christ's name to speak for Him, there will always be One with us whom no man can withstand. If only we remembered this, it would make us brave, resistless, in speaking the truth.

False witnesses were brought to testify against Stephen, to try to convict him, as the rulers had tried to convict Jesus. False witnesses are continually testifying against Christianity, in the effort to prove that it is not a divine religion. The world is full of books which seek to cast doubts upon divine revelation. In all life, too, there is a disposition to bear false witness. Reputations are made and unmade, in certain drawing rooms.

In the council before which Stephen was standing, there was intense bitterness. The faces of the men grew dark with rage, as they looked upon him and heard his words, which they could not answer. They were little like honorable judges sitting in a court of justice. Their hearts were full of rage and fury. In contrast with all this, Stephen himself was calm quiet. The peace of God was in his heart. He was sustained and strengthened by the trust, which nothing could disturb.

The record says, "All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel." What is the face of an angel like? We cannot tell--but we know that those who live in God's presence, in the light of God's love, must have shining faces. No doubt Stephen's face shone. The secret of the shining was in his heart. The peace of God was there, and even amid the excitements about him, with enraged enemies glowering upon him, he had no fear--but was kept in perfect quiet. An angel's face must be gentle and loving, for angels never know the feeling of anger or bitterness of hate--and we know that Stephen's heart was full of love. There was no unforgiveness in Stephen--he had learned from his Master the lesson of patience under injustice or wrong--to make dark lines upon his countenance. An angel's face must have marks of strength in it. Stephen was strong. Even with all the people against him, he had no fear. He was strong in God.

The contrast between the members of the Sanhedrin and Stephen is most striking. His quietness and sweetness enraged them the more. "When they heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him." They became like infuriated wild beasts as they listened to Stephen's words. But while the rulers were so furious, Stephen was calm and full of peace. He had found refuge from the strife of tongues in the presence of God. The secret is given in the words, "full of the Holy Spirit." When God is in a man, filling him--there is no room in him for fear or anger, or for any earthly passion.

Stephen "looked up steadfastly into heaven." That was well. If he had not looked up--he would not have seen the vision of glory, which he now beheld. If he had looked down, he would have seen danger and would have been afraid. He looked up and saw not the human rage and fury--but the sweet peace of heaven above him. Like Moses, "he endured, as seeing him who is invisible." We should train our eyes to look up-ward, heaven-ward, God-ward--for there are our blessings, our goal, our home, God Himself, and all fair and beautiful things.

The members of the Sanhedrin lost all self-control, all dignity, and in their rage became an ungoverned mob. They cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and, rushing upon Stephen, dragged him out of the courtroom, through the gate, out of the city, and stoned him! Thus the eloquent voice was hushed, so that no more could it be heard on the earth. His life, cut off so suddenly, so violently, when only beginning its usefulness, seems a failure. But it was not a failure. Someone says that Stephen's mission in this world was to deliver only one speech of half an hour. But if his words had reached or impressed no other life, they fell upon the ears of Saul, the persecutor, and he never forgot them. Stephen died, and Saul was converted. Stephen's preaching was stopped--but Saul was called to take up his unfinished work. We owe Paul to Stephen's martyrdom.

Stephen's dying prayers were like his Master's. He prayed first, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." To Stephen, dying was only breathing out his soul into the hands of Jesus Christ! He knew it was not death--but life, that was before him. His body was being mangled and broken--but his spirit, his real self, could not be harmed. Beyond the strange mystery of death--Jesus waits to receive the departing spirit. Death is only a gateway through which the soul passes, and then life and glory burst upon the vision of the emancipated spirit.

Stephen's other prayer was also like his Master's. Jesus prayed for His murderers, "Father forgive them; for they know not what they do." Stephen, with the same spirit of forgiveness, pleaded for his murderers, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." It is the old lesson of love for enemies taught over again.

Very beautiful is the picture of death which is given here: "He fell asleep." Sleep is death's new, sweet name! What a picture of peace the word suggests, right here in the heart and fury of the mob! In the midst of all the wild scene--Stephen fell asleep!

We think of a tired child creeping into the mother's bosom and falling asleep. Sleep is not a terrible experience; it is nothing to be dreaded. We sleep when we are weary--and we awake refreshed. Sleep is not the cessation of life. We expect to awake, after we have slept. As we part for the night, we do not say, "Farewell," but "Goodnight," for we expect to meet again in the morning.

This beautiful Scriptural designation of death tells us, therefore, of life beyond, of resurrection, of immortality. We shall awake from this sleep of death--and our life shall go on again. We shall awake refreshed, lying down weary--and rising strong; lying down sick, or old, or deformed, or worn-out--and rising well, young and radiant in heavenly beauty!

The last scene in our passage shows us the burial of Stephen. It was quiet--but impressive. He was greatly beloved, and the sorrow over his death was sincere. His body was laid away in the grave--but they could not bury his influence. Martyrdom did not destroy his life. No doubt he did more by dying than he could have done if he had lived on for years, preaching Christ.