



Book of Acts

Chapter 7

Stephen's Address and Martyrdom

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Theme: Stephen's address and martyrdom

Stephen is a new Christian, and yet his insights and background are staggering. He is going up against the Sanhedrin, the elite ruling ecclesiastical people of Israel. The Sadducees dominate this group. Stephen has been accused of espousing a separation from the law of Moses, and he is going to answer his accusations in such a way that shows he is more Jewish than they are! He is not a martyr because he died, rather he died because he was a martyr, which actually means witness. Stephen's presentation gives a summary of the whole Old Testament. Acts 7 is a favorite Old Testament Commentary.

New Testament preachers looked on Old Testament history as the arena in which God revealed Himself to His people and prepared for Jesus Christ. They knew that history through the Old Testament, which they accepted as inspired, authoritative Scripture. At least the Law had been revealed through angels as mediators (vv. 38, 53). History was rejection as well as revelation, for Israel repeatedly rejected the Spirit's revelation and direction. To have authoritative Scripture is not enough. God expects His people to live the life called for by the Scripture.

McGee Introduction: In this chapter we find Stephen's defense before the council—which is really not a defense. Rather it is a rehearsal of the history of the nation Israel and of their resistance and rebellion against God. He charges the council of being betrayers and murderers of Jesus. That, of course, engenders their bitterest hatred and leads to the stoning of Stephen.

In his inspired survey of the history of the nation, Stephen makes it very clear that there never was a time when the entire nation worshiped God. Yet there was always the believing remnant, a small remnant of true believers—even as there is in our day.¹

InDepth—Stephen the Martyr

In the Book of Acts, the infant church faced opposition from Jew and Gentile alike. But with every successive wave of persecution, the church grew more and more. In hardships and trials, Christians depended increasingly on the Lord for strength and guidance. In so doing, they demonstrated their faith to others.

Stephen, one of the seven men chosen to minister to the needs of the neglected in the early church, became the first martyr of the Christian faith, but he certainly was not the last. Although falsely accused of blaspheming Moses and God, his unfair treatment and violent death would serve as an example to persecuted believers throughout the centuries who would face similar trials for upholding the name of Christ.

The Book of Acts tells us that right after the stoning of Stephen, a zealous young Pharisee named Saul continued the persecution of the new faith by hunting its members down and imprisoning them to face similar charges and similar fates. Although Saul was trying to stop the spread of the Christian faith, other eventual persecutors such as the Roman Emperor Nero (A.D. 37–68) cared little about the blaspheming of a Jewish deity. Nero

¹McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:537). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

was merely looking for scapegoats to take the blame for the great fire that destroyed most of Rome in A.D. 64.

Later Christian martyrs would face death at the hands of their so-called fellow believers. William Tyndale (1494–1536) was burned at the stake for heresy because he dared to translate the Bible into the English language, thus making it more accessible to the common person. Others have traveled into remote areas fully aware of the dangers of retribution from pagans. In 1956, five American missionaries were murdered in the jungles of Ecuador by headhunters called the Aucas. This same tribe was eventually converted to Christianity through the persistence of missionaries, who emulated the perseverance of the martyred missionaries who had gone before them.

Since Stephen's death, countless Christians have died for their witness to the truth of the gospel. They set their eyes on Jesus instead of on this world. They did not value the approval of people over the approval of their Savior. Therefore, they refused to disown Jesus. For their courage to stand up for the truth, Jesus promises to acknowledge them before His Father in heaven (see Matt. 10:32, 33).

ESV Introduction: Stephen's Address before the Sanhedrin. Stephen's defense is the longest discourse in Acts. It is a selective recital of OT history, including sections on Abraham (vv. 2–8), Joseph (vv. 9–16), Moses (vv. 17–34), and Israel's apostasy (vv. 35–50). It was cut short when Stephen applied his history lesson to Israel's present rejection of the Messiah (vv. 51–53). Stephen responded to the charges by turning them on his accusers: *they* were the ones who were really disobeying God because they rejected his appointed leaders.²

Stephen's speech before the Sanhedrin (7:2-53)

Stephen's response is the longest speech in Acts. His speech can be divided into segments that cover different aspects of Israel's history:

- Abraham's calling (7:2-8);
- the Patriarchs in Egypt (7:9-16);
- life of Moses (7:17-36);
- Moses and Israel in the wilderness (7:37-43);
- and the Tabernacle of Testimony (7:44-50).

Stephen concludes with a stinging rebuke of the Sanhedrin (7:51-53). As good debaters often do, Stephen avoids answering the high priest's question. He does not even directly address the accusation that he had slandered Moses and God.

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. (Longenecker, page 337)

² ESV Study Bible, Crossway

Stephen does respond to the underlying charge that he is a renegade Jew, and by extension, that the Messianic church is composed of apostate Jews. He does this by asserting that Israelite history (from the call of Abraham to the building of Solomon's temple) proves that his listeners are the real defectors from God. Stephen is on the offense, not trying to win any favors!

Stephen points out that throughout Jewish history, God raised up leaders to deliver the people, but the Israelites rejected them, including Moses (7:35). They erroneously believed that they were in God's presence as long as they worshiped in the temple. But God's presence in the original moveable "temple," the tabernacle, did not keep the Israelites from idolatry (7:39-42). Thus, the Jews are mistaken if they think that God dwells in the midst of the nation simply because the temple is in Jerusalem (7:44-50).

Stephen turns his accusation on its head. It is not he, but the Jewish leaders, who are violating Moses and his law. Stephen makes his point by mentioning Abraham as the progenitor of God's nation. He is asking: Who really represents Abraham's people? Certainly it is not his listeners, the descendants of Israel, a nation that continually rejects Moses and God. Rather, God's (Abraham's) people are those who accept "the Righteous One" and follow the Holy Spirit (7:51-52).

Luke wants to show that far from "blaspheming God and Moses" (6:11), the Messianists are actually far more faithful than are their opponents to the genuine story of God and his prophets, above all the prophet Moses. He does this, in short, by reading the biblical story in terms not of commandments and shrines, but in terms of promise and fulfillment, of prophetic sendings, and the challenge to obedience. (Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, page 135)

The facts of Israel's history that Stephen recites were familiar to his listeners. Jewish rabbis, pundits and teachers often recite elements of the story of Israel to support some particular understanding of it. Thus, Stephen's listeners are quite aware of his point in retelling the biblical story. What is radically different about the content of Stephen's speech is its insistence that the Jews are *not* truly obedient to God! He is swimming in dangerous waters, for this accusation goes against the popular Jewish understanding of themselves as God's people.

Stephen speech drills home one main point: those who claim to be the people of God have never obeyed in faith. His listeners always reject the saving message of God. Stephen's speech differs sharply from previous speeches in Acts. He is the first Christian speaker to challenge Jewish institutions, the law and the temple. In this speech he also challenges the Jews, not only as those who rejected their Messiah, but as a people who have failed to respond to God throughout their history. In short, those who think they are a people of God, are not his people.

Commentators also see Stephen as "the first to challenge Christianity's dependence on Jewish institutions (William Neil, *The Acts of the Apostles*, page 116). Before Stephen, the church assumed itself to be merely an extension of the Jewish nation, a kind of righteous remnant within it, to bring Israel *back* to a worship of God. Stephen shocks his listeners by saying Israel, as a whole, had never truly worshiped God to begin with.³

³ <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts7.htm>

Acts 7:1

Then said the high priest, Are these things so?

This is question 19 in the Book of Acts. The next question will be in Acts 7:26.

Stephen did not deny that he had said certain things they accused him of saying, but he proceeded to make clear what he had said to convince them, if possible, and bring them to repentance to avert judgment. He clearly showed that his accusers were the ones who were breaking the law and dishonoring God and the temple worship.

Clarke: Are these things so?—Hast thou predicted the destruction of the temple? And hast thou said that Jesus of Nazareth shall change our customs, abolish our religious rites and temple service? Hast thou spoken these blasphemous things against Moses, and against God? Here was some color of justice; for Stephen was permitted to defend himself. And, in order to do this he thought it best to enter into a detail of their history from the commencement of their nation; and thus show how kindly God had dealt with them, and how ungraciously they and their fathers had requited Him. And all this naturally led him to the conclusion, that God could no longer bear with a people the cup of whose iniquity had been long overflowing; and therefore they might expect to find wrath, without mixture of mercy.

But how could St. Luke get all this circumstantial account? He might have been present, and heard the whole; or, more probably, he had the account from St. Paul, whose companion he was, and who was certainly present when St. Stephen was judged and stoned, for he was consenting to his death, and kept the clothes of them who stoned him. See Acts 7:58; 8:1; 22:20.⁴

This high priest was probably Caiaphas, the same man who had earlier questioned and condemned Jesus (John 18:24).

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,

[God of glory] Chapter 7 begins and ends with. His first words refute the charge that he has “spoken blasphemously ... against God” (6:11). His regard for the one God is demonstrated consistently throughout his speech.⁵

Was in Mesopotamia—In that part of it where Ur of the Chaldees was situated, near to Babel, and among the rivers, (Tigris and Euphrates), which gave the name of Mesopotamia to the country. See the note on Genesis 11:31.

⁴ Adam Clarke’s Commentary on the New Testament

⁵ Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Ac 7:2). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

Ten titles of God: (Dake)

1. The God of Glory (Acts 7:2)
2. The God of patience (Romans 15:5)
3. The God of hope (Romans 15:13)
4. The God of peace (Romans 15:33)
5. The God of all comfort (2 Cor. 1:3)
6. Father of mercies (2 Cor. 1:3)
7. The God of love (2 Cor. 13:11)
8. The God of all grace (1 Peter 5:10)
9. The God of truth (Deut. 32:4)
10. God the Judge of all (Hebrews 12:23)⁶

[**Mesopotamia**] The country between rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates (Acts 7:4).

[**Charran**] Haran (Genesis 11:31).

Who is on trial? It appears to be more like the Sanhedrin!

No direct defense: Key points:

- 1) Appropriate flow of their history - God's persistent purpose;
- 2) Moses' himself foretold the coming of Christ;
- 3) History characterized by rejection first time, acceptance the second time...

Stephen clearly understands grace as opposed to the Law, and that line of teaching could give rise to their accusations. Stephen starts with Abraham as he in a sense was the first Jew.⁷

Stephen launched into a long speech about Israel's relationship with God. From Old Testament history he showed that the Jews had constantly rejected God's message and his prophets, and that this council had rejected the Messiah, God's Son. He made three main points: (1) Israel's history is the history of God's acts in the world; (2) people worshiped God long before there was a temple, because God does not live in a temple; (3) Jesus' death was just one more example of Israel's rebellion against and rejection of God.

Stephen didn't really defend himself. Instead, he took the offensive, seizing the opportunity to summarize his teaching about Jesus. Stephen was accusing these religious leaders of failing to obey God's laws—the laws they prided themselves in following so meticulously. This was the same accusation that Jesus had leveled against them. When we witness for Christ, we don't need to be on the defensive. Instead we can simply share our faith.

Clarke: Men, brethren, and fathers—Rather, brethren and fathers, for men should not be translated separately from brothers. Literally it is men-brethren, a very usual form in Greek; other occasions for similar translations are when it is translated men-Athenians and men-Persians, but simply Athenians and Persians. See Acts 17:22. So, in Luke 2:15,

⁶ Dake Study Notes, Dake Study Bible

⁷ Chuck Missler, Notes of the Book of Acts, khouse.org

By translating as we do, men, brethren, and fathers, and putting a comma after men, we make Stephen address three classes, when in fact there were but two: the elders and scribes, whom he addressed as fathers; and the common people, whom he calls brethren. See Bp. Pearce, and see Acts 8:27.

Clarke: The God of glory appeared, etc.—As Stephen was now vindicating himself from the false charges brought against him, he shows that he had uttered no blasphemy, either against God, Moses, or the temple; but states that his accusers, and the Jews in general, were guilty of the faults with which they charged him: that they had from the beginning rejected and despised Moses, and had always violated his laws. He proceeds to state that there is no blasphemy in saying that the temple shall be destroyed: they had been without a temple till the days of David; nor does God ever confine himself to temples built by hands, seeing he fills both heaven and earth; that Jesus is the prophet of whom Moses spoke, and whom they had persecuted, condemned, and at last put to death; that they were wicked and uncircumcised in heart and in ears, and always resisted the Holy Ghost as their fathers did. This is the substance of St. Stephen's defense as far as he was permitted to make it: a defense which they could not confute; containing charges which they most glaringly illustrated and confirmed, by adding the murder of this faithful disciple to that of his all-glorious Master.

Barnes: The God of glory. This is a Hebrew form of expression denoting *the glorious God*. It properly denotes his majesty, or splendour, or magnificence; and the word glory is often applied to the splendid appearances in which God has manifested himself to men, Deuteronomy 5:24; Exodus 33:18, 16:7,10, Leviticus 9:23, Numbers 14:10. Perhaps Stephen meant to affirm that God appeared to Abraham in some such glorious or splendid manifestation, by which he would know that he was addressed by God. Stephen, moreover, evidently uses the word *glory* to repel the charge of *blasphemy* against God, and to show that he regarded him as worthy of honour and praise.⁸

Unto our father. The Jews valued themselves much on being the children of Abraham, Matthew 3:9. This expression was therefore well calculated to conciliate their minds.

McGee: They have made an accusation against him. He is questioned as to the truth of the charges. In his response he makes no attempt to clear himself. In fact, he doesn't even mention the charges they have made against him. What a marvelous beginning. He calls them *brethren*. They are his brethren in the flesh. He calls the older men *fathers*. He is a younger man and shows them this respect. This young man is to become the first martyr in the church.

We sometimes hear it said that Christianity at the beginning was actually a youth movement. It is not altogether inaccurate to state that it was a youth movement. Two men who held as prominent a place as any were Stephen and Saul of Tarsus, whom we will meet soon. These two men had a great deal to do with the shaping of the course of the early church. Both of them were remarkable young men. Both of them were gifted and used by the Holy Spirit. Yet the only time these two young men ever met, they were

⁸ Barnes' Notes on the New Testament

enemies. The cross divided Stephen and Saul of Tarsus just as truly as it divided the two thieves who were crucified with Jesus. Paul knew what he was saying in 1 Corinthians 1:18: “For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.” When Saul saw Stephen, he thought Stephen was very foolish.

This address of Stephen is a master stroke. He reviews the history of the nation beginning with Abraham. That is where the history of the nation Israel began. They did not go back any farther. You will find the same thing in the Gospel of Matthew. This book, written to the nation Israel, traces the genealogy of Jesus Christ back to Abraham. If you want to trace it all the way back to Adam, you must turn to the Gospel of Luke. Stephen starts with Abraham, a man of faith.

Even though he traces the resistance and rebellion against God by the nation, still there was always a believing remnant.

This is true today, too. In the organized church, in the visible church which you and I can see, there is a remnant of believers. Not every one in the visible church is a true believer. People may ask, “Do you think So-and-So is a Christian?” The answer is that even though he goes to church and is a church officer, he may not be a Christian. Just as in the nation Israel there was the believing remnant, so in the visible church there is the little remnant of true believers.

Abraham was a man of faith. He believed God, and he obeyed God. Faith always leads to obedience. Stephen starts his narrative with Abraham in Mesopotamia, down in the Tigris-Euphrates valley. That was the place of Abraham’s hometown. It was there that God called him.⁹

Avraham avinu, “Abraham, our father,” a phrase common in Jewish discourse.¹⁰

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 show thee.

The Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 12:1).

God called Abraham away from his home because it was a home of idolatry.

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.

Genesis 11:31-32; Genesis 12:1,4-5.

⁹McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:537). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

¹⁰Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Ac 7:2). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

The call of Abraham was in Ur, not Haran (Haran was only 50 miles up river); Cf. Gen 12:1-3. Abraham was called in Ur and he moved to Haran, and did not move again until 25 years later when his father died! He didn't really do what God called him to do, until his father died. 25 years of disobedience? (Gen 11:31). His sin is blotted out (Heb 11:8).

Discrepancy about ages occurs only if Abram is Terah's firstborn; listing first (Gen 11:27) does not imply order of birth, but rather importance:

Shem, Ham and Japeth

Ham was youngest (Gen 9:24)

Japeth was oldest (Gen 10:2, 21)

Jacob & Esau

Esau was older

Moses and Aaron (Ex 5:20)

Aaron was older (1 Chr 6:3)

Ephraim & Manasseh

Manasseh was eldest (Gen 48:1)

There also may have been other sons of Terah:

Nahor: because Rebekah was his Granddaughter (Gen 24:25,24).

And Rachel was his great-granddaughter

Haran: because he was father of Lot.

So Stephen's point is that there was a lapse of faith on Abraham's part.¹¹

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 [Acts 7:4-5].

He is relating the story of Abraham. This shows the faith of Abraham. God had promised him a child, and God had promised him the land. Although Abraham had neither one, he believed God.¹²

JNTC: After his father died. Was Stephen biblically uninformed? Genesis 11:26 seems to say that Terach, Avraham's father, was 70 when Avraham was born; and Genesis 12:4 clearly says that Avraham was 75 when he left Charan; these data imply that Terach was 145 at the time. But Genesis 11:32 says that Terach died at 205, sixty years later. Two explanations of the inconsistency have been offered:

- (1) Genesis 11:26 may mean Terach was 70 not when Avraham was born but when his brother Nachor was born. It is not implausible that Nachor was considerably older than Avraham, since his granddaughter Rivkah married Avraham's son Yitzchak.
- (2) Stephen was using a text of the Pentateuch in which Terach's age was given as 145, not 205. The Samaritan text of the Pentateuch does say 145, so we are not dealing with a *deus ex machina*. Moreover, there are scholars, Avraham Spero and Jakob Jervell among them, who believe Stephen himself was a Samaritan. This would also explain v. 16, which says that Avraham was buried in Sh'khem, since this too

¹¹ Chuck Missler, Notes on the Book of Acts, khouse.org

¹² McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:537). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

follows Samaritan tradition. It explains a possible anti-Temple tendency in vv. 47–50 (compare Yn 4:20–22&NN) and gives logic to placing the story of the spread of the Gospel to Shomron in the immediately following passage (8:4–26). At worst, if under pressure Stephen erred, his errors would be what are known in Judaism as *ta'uyot b'tom-lev*, honest mistakes.¹³

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.

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

Clarke: Gave him none inheritance—Both Abraham and Jacob had small parcels of land in Canaan; but they had them by purchase, not by God's gift; for, as Abraham was obliged to buy a burying-place in Canaan, Genesis 23:3-18, it seems he had no inheritance there.

Barnes: And he gave him none inheritance. Abraham led a wandering life; and this passage means, that he did not himself receive a permanent possession or residence in that land. The only land which he owned was the field which he *purchased* of the children of Heth, for a burial-place, Genesis 23. As this was obtained by *purchase*, and not by the direct gift of God, and as it was not designed for a *residence*, it is said that God gave him no *inheritance*. It is mentioned as a strong instance of his faith, that he should remain there without a permanent residence himself, with only the prospect that his children, at some distant period, would inherit it.

Not so much as to set his foot on. This is a proverbial expression, denoting in an emphatic manner that he had *no land*, Deuteronomy 2:5.

Barnes: When as yet he had no child. When there was no human probability that he would have any posterity. Comp. Genesis 15:2,3, 18:11,12. This is mentioned as a strong instance of his faith: "Who against hope believed in hope," Romans 4:18.

Acts 7:6

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

430 year total (Ex 12:40,41; Gal 3:17). Stephen always quoted from the Septuagint. Why is there a discrepancy?

¹³Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Ac 7:4). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

Three answers:

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

[That his seed ...] This is the 11th Old Testament prophecy in Acts (Acts 7:6-7; Genesis 15:13-14; it has been fulfilled). The next prophecy is in Acts 7:37.

[sojourn] Greek: *paroikos* (GSN-3941), a stranger or sojourner (Acts 7:6,29; Ephes. 2:19; 1 Peter 2:11). The whole length of the sojourn in Canaan, Philistia, Egypt, and other countries, fulfilled 400 years from the time God spoke to Abraham in Genesis 15:13, or 430 years from the departure from Haran of Genesis 12:1-4. They were in the land of Egypt only 215 years or exactly half the period of the Dispensation of Promise. See Sojourn of Abraham's Seed.

[strange land] See Exodus 12:40 and being 400 years, Acts 7:6. Greek: *allogrios* (GSN-245), foreign (Genesis 15:13-14).

[bring] Greek: *douloo* (GSN-1402), enslave them.

[entreat] Greek: *kakoo* (GSN-2559), wrong them (Acts 7:6,19; Acts 12:1; Acts 14:2; Acts 18:10; 1 Peter 3:13).

[four hundred years] The whole length of the Dispensation of Promise—Abraham to Moses—was 430 years (Exodus 12:40; Galatians 3:14-17). The 400 years of Genesis 15:13; Acts 7:6 are to be reckoned from the confirmation of Isaac as the seed when Ishmael was cast out (Genesis 21:12; Galatians 4:30). This was 5 years after the birth of Isaac. The 430 years are reckoned from the departure of Abraham from Haran at the age of 75 years, 25 years before Isaac was born or 30 years before Isaac was confirmed and Ishmael cast out. See note on sojourn above, Acts 7:6. See Sojourn of Abraham's Seed.

Clarke: Four hundred years—MOSES says, Exodus 12:40, that the sojourning of the children of Israel in Egypt—was 430 years. See the note there. St. PAUL has the same number, Galatians 3:17; and so has Josephus, Ant. lib. ii. cap. 1, sect. 9; in Bell. lib. v. cap. 9, sect. 4. St. Stephen uses the round number of 400, leaving out the odd tens, a thing very common, not only in the sacred writers, but in all others, those alone excepted who write professedly on chronological matters.

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.

[nation to whom they shall be in bondage] The Egyptians (Exodus 1:1-14:31).

[judge] Literally, punish (Exodus 5:1-14:31).

[after that shall they come forth, and serve me in this place] After the 400 and 430 years of notes on Acts 7:6, above, and after the Egyptians are punished, Israel will inherit Canaan.

Barnes: Will I judge. The word judge, in the Bible, often means to *execute judgment*, as well as to pronounce it; that is, *to punish*. See John 18:31, 3:17, 8:50, 12:47, Acts 24:6, 1 Corinthians 5:13, etc. It has this meaning here. God regarded their oppressive acts as *deserving* his indignation, and he evinced it in the *plagues* with which he visited them, and in their overthrow in the Red Sea.

ESV: Combining Gen. 15:13–14 with Ex. 3:12, Stephen spoke of God's assurances to Abraham that even after a long exile his descendants would come to Canaan and worship God **in this place**. Stephen's emphasis was on how God revealed himself outside the holy land and how he promised a place of true worship to come.

Before Stephen, the church thought of Jesus simply as the Jewish Messiah. After Stephen, it became clearer that he is the Savior of all peoples, not just of the Jews. The implications are staggering. Stephen's speech suggests a world mission not just to scattered Jews, but to all ethnic groups. In the words of David J. Williams, Stephen was

a pioneer and in some ways an exemplar of the new direction that the church was to take. He was, so to speak, the connecting link between Peter and Paul—a link indispensable to the chain of salvation history that God was forging. (*Acts*, pages 130-131)

Stephen's speech indicates that the church should think about turning away from Jerusalem and the temple. It is time to evangelize other places besides Jerusalem — and this is exactly what will soon be done (8:1). Stephen's speech implies that Jewish institutions are of no value in themselves. They need to be left behind or seen in a new spiritual light. Most of all, the church is not just an extension of a righteous remnant *within* Judaism. It actually forms a new people of the Spirit.

There is an interesting aspect to Stephen's speech that implies that evangelization and theology must move beyond Jerusalem. He takes great pains to show that God's activity in saving Israel occurred *outside* of Jerusalem and Judea. God appeared to Abraham while he was in Mesopotamia and Haran (7:2,4). God rescued Joseph while he was in Egypt (7:10). Moses was called in Midian, near Mount Sinai (7:30). Israel was saved while in Egypt and protected in the wilderness (7:36).

Clearly, said Stephen, God's work and calling took place outside of Palestine. He met his people, not just in a temple in Jerusalem, but anywhere he pleased. From this it can be surmised that God is an international God interested in all people. The point is that God's presence and calling are not restricted to the land of Israel, or to one ethnic group, or a temple.

Stephen is arguing against a superstitious veneration of the temple and of Jerusalem. God's saving activity can take place anywhere. Thus, the church should be looking for a

people (wherever they may be) who are willing to be submissive to the lead of the Holy Spirit.

Stephen's speech must be seen against the backdrop of then currently esteemed institutions in Judaism. Richard Longenecker points out that "before the Fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, the three great pillars of popular Jewish piety were (1) the land, (2) the law, and (3) the temple ("Acts," page 337). Stephen's speech alerts his hearers to a deception about these venerated institutions. The Jews believe that God is present with them—with their group—because he is present in their land, their law and their temple. Yet, they were neglecting to look at themselves—that God needs to be present in their thoughts and actions, wherever they are.

Stephen is not denouncing the law or the land, not even the temple. (He argues that the ancient Israelites were wrong to reject Moses.) Rather, Stephen is chastising his hearers for missing the obvious: they are sinners (as their fathers were) and need a Savior. By discussing Israel's sinful history, Stephen demonstrates that the Jews need a Savior. There's a great message in Stephen's sermon for all generations. As Christians we must not put undue faith in our group, our beliefs or institutions. Otherwise, we may forget that, as sinners, we also need a living Savior. Nor should we assume that God is only with us, and is not working anywhere else. Stephen is pointing out that we all need to put our faith in the Righteous One.

However, it is curious that Stephen does not mention the name of Christ in his speech, nor his resurrection (but we should also note that Stephen did not get a chance to finish his speech). This is in contrast to previous speeches in Acts, which focus on a glorified Jesus. Just before his speech was cut short by the angry mob, he condemned his listeners for betraying and murdering "the Righteous One," foretold in their own Scriptures (7:52)—a clear reference to the death of the Messiah.

Perhaps if Stephen could continue talking, he would focus on the resurrected and ascended Christ. But even without this emphasis, it is still clear where Stephen is going. Jewish faith in itself—and its institutions—as defining the people of God needs to be radically altered to make Jesus the center of worship.¹⁴

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.

[**patriarchs**] Jacob's 12 sons become the head of the 12 tribes, the Patriarchs. Occurs in Acts 2:29; Occurs 7:8-9; Hebrews 7:4. Used of Abraham and Jacob's sons as founders of the nation, and of David as founder of the monarchy.

[**covenant of circumcision**] This was the Abrahamic Covenant of Genesis 12:1-3; Genesis 17:9-27, not the Mosaic covenant which continued circumcision but did not originate it.

¹⁴ <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts7.htm>

[begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs] Abraham begat Isaac under the covenant of circumcision; Isaac begat Jacob and Jacob begat the 12 heads of the tribes of Israel under the same covenant of circumcision. Thus, all of them were true sons and heirs of that covenant and of the promised land and all secular and spiritual blessings of it.

The twelve patriarchs. The word *patriarch* properly denotes the father and ruler of a family. But it is commonly applied, by way of eminence, to the progenitors of the Jewish race, particularly to the twelve sons of Jacob. Acts 2:29.

Barnes: The covenant. The word *covenant* denotes, properly, a compact or agreement between two or more persons, usually attended with seals, or pledges, or sanctions. In Genesis 17:7, and elsewhere: it is said that God would establish his covenant with Abraham; that is, he made him certain definite promises, attended with pledges and seals, etc. The idea of a strict compact or agreement between God and man, as between *equal parties*, is not found in the Bible. It is commonly used, as here, to denote a promise on the part of God, attended with pledges, and demanding, on the part of man, in order to avail himself of its benefits, a stipulated course of conduct. The *covenant* is therefore another name for denoting two things on the part of God:

(1.) A *command*, which man is not at liberty to reject, as he *would be* if a literal covenant; and,

(2.) a *promise*, which is to be fulfilled only on the condition of obedience. The covenant with Abraham was simply a *promise* to give him the land, and to make him a great nation, etc. It was never proposed to Abraham with the supposition that he was at liberty to *reject* it, or to *refuse* to comply with its conditions. Circumcision was appointed as the mark or indication that Abraham and those thus designated were the persons included in the gracious purpose and promise. It served to *separate* them as a peculiar people; a people whose peculiar characteristic it was, that they obeyed and served the God who had made the promise to Abraham. The phrase, "covenant of circumcision," means, therefore, the covenant or promise which God made to Abraham, of which circumcision was the distinguishing *mark* or *sign*.

Circumcision was a sign of the promise or covenant made between God, Abraham, and the entire nation of Israel (Genesis 17:9-13). Because Stephen's speech summarized Israel's history, he summarized how this covenant fared during that time. Stephen pointed out that God always had kept his side of the promise, but Israel had failed again and again to uphold its end. Although the Jews in Stephen's day still circumcised their baby boys, they failed to obey God. The people's hearts were far from God. Their lack of faith and lack of obedience meant that they had failed to keep their part of the covenant.

Stephen goes from Abraham to the patriarchal period. He speaks of the brethren of Joseph, motivated by envy and hatred who sold Joseph into Egypt. But God overruled and used Joseph to save them. What we have here is really the Spirit's interpretation of the Old Testament. That makes this a remarkable section.

Abraham (7:2-8)

Stephen begins his history of Israel at its most fundamental place, with God's call of Abraham. One of Stephen's objectives is to show that God does not live in the Jerusalem temple (7:48). So here he says that the "God of glory" appeared to Abraham not in Jerusalem, but in pagan Mesopotamia (modern Iraq and northeastern Syria).

The Jews associate the glory of God—the Shekinah—with the moveable tabernacle in the wilderness (Exodus 25:8; 40:34-38), and later the temple (Ezekiel 43:2, 4). So right at the beginning of his speech Stephen establishes that God needs neither tent nor temple to work with human beings. God's self-revelation is not limited to the land of the Jews, certainly not to Jerusalem and the temple. Stephen draws his listeners to the important actor in the story — God.

God is the first subject mentioned (7:2) and his are all the main actions: God appears (7:3), speaks (7:3, 6), moves (7:4), gives an inheritance (7:5), promises (7:5), judges (7:7), gives a covenant (7:8). Luke does not emphasize Abraham's faith, indeed does not even mention it. Abraham merely goes and dwells (7:4), begets and circumcises (7:8). The focus is on God's promise and the way it will reach fulfillment in a time beyond Abraham. God appears where and when he wishes, directs and moves people, and issues promises that are open-ended, to be fulfilled in often surprising ways (Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, page 121)

Stephen respectfully calls the Sanhedrin members "brothers and fathers" (7:2). He also refers to Abraham as "our father." For the moment, Stephen is framing the debate in the context of a family quarrel. Stephen places himself at one with the Sanhedrin throughout the speech by using this terminology (7:11, 12, 19, 38, 44, 45). Not until the end of his speech, when he delivers a final stinging rebuke, does he say "*your* fathers," this time referring to Israelites throughout the ages, not the patriarchs.¹⁵

Some questions (7:2-8)

Commentators note some problems with the biblical quotations, numbers and chronology in Stephen's speech. The difficulties are technical and do not affect the main thrust of the speech, or its important points. We will consider briefly some of the questions. These can point to a possible solution of the others.

One of these seeming contradictions concerns the place of Abraham's calling. Stephen states that God's glory appeared to Abraham in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran (7:2). (Abraham's family originally came from the Mesopotamian city of Ur.) The original story of Abraham's call, in Genesis 11:27-5, seems to contradict Acts and implies that God's call was given in Haran, not in Mesopotamia.

There is no discrepancy. Abraham's calling occurred in Ur as much as it did in Haran, and other Old Testament passages verify this (Genesis 15:7; Joshua 24:3; Nehemiah 9:7). Jewish tradition also agreed on this (Philo, *On Abraham* 70-72; Josephus, *Antiquities* 1:154-157). Abraham's original call came in the city of Ur. After he moved to Haran, Abraham received a similar divine message.¹⁶

¹⁵ <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts7.htm>

¹⁶ <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts7.htm>

Another difficulty in Stephen's speech concerns numbers. In his speech, Stephen says that the Israelites were mistreated and enslaved in Egypt for 400 years (7:6). His phraseology seems to be taken from Genesis 15:14, which concurs on the number as being 400 years. However, according to Exodus 12:40, Israel's sojourning in Egypt lasted 430 years.

Both Genesis and Stephen are using 400 as a round number, not a precise span. For the purpose of Stephen's speech, a round number is all that is needed. The period Israel spent in Egypt was actually shorter. Galatians 3:16-17 says that 430 years ran from the original covenant with Abraham (Genesis 12:3, 7; 13:15) to the giving of the law after the Exodus. Abraham and his descendants were strangers in the land for 430 years, and most of that time period was characterized by mistreatment.

Acts 7:9

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

Joseph was hated by his brothers. Stephen is going to point out, again and again, that the very guy which God sent, their forefathers beat up! Here Joseph was hated by his brothers and they sold him into slavery. Yet, this was in God's plan all along. God's plan was executed in spite of, or in anticipation of, the reaction of his brethren.

Israel's misapprehension of God's purposes and opposition to them, in spite of which, and by means of which, they were accomplished.

[moved with envy] Greek: *zeloo* (GSN-2206), being jealous. For the noun *zelos* (GSN-2205), see note on indignation, Acts 5:17. Hearing the dreams of Joseph and understanding them to predict his future greatness, Joseph's brethren were filled with malice and sold him, hoping to prevent the fulfillment of his dreams. But God, who made the predictions, was with him, and made this enmity the direct means of their fulfillment.¹⁷

[God was with him] Six blessings of God upon Joseph: (Dake)

1. God was with him (Acts 7:9; Genesis 39:2,21,23). This was the crowning blessing of all (Acts 10:38; John 3:2; Psalm 91:15)
2. Delivered him from all his afflictions (Acts 7:10; Genesis 41:37-45)
3. Gave him favor with all Egyptians (Acts 7:10; Genesis 41:37-45)
4. Gave him wisdom in the sight of all the Egyptians (Acts 7:10; Genesis 41:16-45)
5. Made him governor over all of Egypt (Acts 7:10; Genesis 41:37-45)
6. Made him governor over the house of Pharaoh (Acts 7:10; Genesis 41:40-45)

ESV: The **Joseph** history contrasts how the **patriarchs** were blessed by the brother whom they rejected. Israel's rejection of God's chosen leaders is a theme that runs throughout Stephen's speech, culminating in the rejection of Jesus. **God was with him.**

¹⁷ Dake Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

God's presence with Joseph in **Egypt** shows that God can bless those outside the Promised Land, and therefore a physical temple is not crucial for his saving purposes.

Joseph (7:9-16)

Though the patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and his sons—are all mentioned by Stephen, it is really Joseph who is the focus of the story. Joseph's ten older brothers sold him into slavery in Egypt. But later Joseph became the prime minister of the nation. Meanwhile, a famine occurred in Egypt and Canaan. But Joseph had stored enough food during the seven years of bounteous crops to see Egypt through the famine. Canaan was not so fortunate. Jacob and his brothers went to Egypt to buy food.

Joseph is the key to this part of Stephen's story. Earlier, Stephen painted Abraham as a man willing to answer the call of God and go where he was instructed. In the same way, Stephen shows Joseph to be a man of faith. And it is through faith that "God was with him and rescued him from all his troubles" (7:9-10). In the account of Abraham, Stephen shows God acting outside of the Holy Land, in Haran. Now he makes the point that God was with Joseph and his brothers in Egypt, again outside the Promised Land. Indeed, the name "Egypt" is repeated six times for emphasis in verses 9-16. Stephen is trying to make a point.

God did not save Jacob and his sons from famine in their new homeland. Rather, they had to go to Egypt—where Joseph was rescued by God—in order to get food. Then, the entire family settled *outside of* Palestine, in a particularly fruitful part of Egypt. There they all died.

Stephen is continuing to exploit the account of Israel's history to show that God saves people outside of Judea and Jerusalem. The point is that God can work with individuals anywhere he chooses, and in whatever way he chooses.

Commentators also see in the story of Joseph a type of Jesus. Joseph is rejected by his brothers, even as Jesus is being rejected by his own people (John 1:11). Jesus is thrown into a pit (the grave?) but God rescues him out of it. Though he is rejected by his own, strangers receive him (the Gentiles). Finally, Joseph is raised up to be the ruler, even as Christ has been glorified by God with all power over the nations.¹⁸

Acts 7:10

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

“...made governor”: “The Stone which the builders rejected has become the head stone of the corner.”

¹⁸ <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts7.htm>

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.

[dearth over all the land] Drought and famine (Genesis 41:14-57).

[sustenance] Food for nourishment to sustain life.

Acts 7:12

But when Jacob heard that there was corn in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first.

Our fathers. His ten sons; all his sons except Joseph and Benjamin, Genesis 42:2. Stephen here *refers* only to the history, without entering into details. By this *general* reference he sufficiently showed that he believed what Moses had spoken, and did not intend to show him disrespect.

Acts 7:13

And at the second *time* Joseph was made known to his brethren; and Joseph's kindred was made known unto Pharaoh.

Stephen's point is that again, Israel does not recognize him until the second time. If history is their guide, then Israel will not recognize their Messiah until the second time!

[made known to his brethren] Genesis 45:1-28.

The two visits (7:11-13)

Stephen even exploits the double visit of Jacob and his sons to Egypt to buy food to make an important point. The brothers did not recognize Joseph on the first visit, an aspect of the story Stephen's listeners would be aware of. "Although Joseph recognized his brothers, they did not recognize him" (Genesis 42:8).

However "On their second visit, Joseph told his brothers who he was" (7:13). It is only because Joseph made himself known to them—and which made it possible for them to recognize him—could they be saved. Likewise, Jesus was rejected on his "first visit" in the incarnation. But there is an opportunity to recognize and accept him now on his "second visit" through the preaching of the church.

In Stephen's story the inability of Israel to recognize God's servant on the first visit was true for Joseph, Moses and the Righteous One (Jesus). This drives home the point that the Jews have never recognized their saviors.

In the Joseph story...Luke shows the pattern that will be developed even more fully in his description of Moses, and which will structure his portrayal of Jesus as the prophet like Moses: the rejected and rescued

savior, the double visitation with the possibility of further acceptance or rejection. (Johnson, pages 121-122)¹⁹

Acts 7:14

Then sent Joseph, and called his father Jacob to *him*, and all his kindred, threescore and fifteen souls.

[threescore and fifteen souls] Stephen was quoting from the Septuagint which has 75 souls. The Hebrew Bible says 70. All the scholars believe that the 5 difference is additional kindred of the 70 that went there, but they can't agree on which are the 5. Stephen quotes the Septuagint of Genesis 46:20 where Machir, Gilead, Sutelaam, Taham, and Eden, sons of Manasseh and Ephraim are listed, making 75 souls. In Genesis 46:27 and Deut. 10:22 there are 70 without the 5 sons of Manasseh and Ephraim.

Acts 7:15

So Jacob went down into Egypt, and died, he, and our fathers,

He, and our fathers. The time which the Israelites remained in Egypt was two hundred and fifteen years; so that all the sons of Jacob were deceased before the Jews went out to go to the land of Canaan.

Some questions (7:14-15)

As in the Abraham panel, there are some technical difficulties in the Joseph story as well. For one, Stephen says that the number of people who went to Egypt was 75 (7:14). However, the figure in Genesis 46:27 is given as 70—66 individuals plus Jacob, Joseph and Joseph's two sons born in Egypt. Of course, when we say Genesis 46:27 gives the number as 70 (see also Exodus 1:5), we are referring to English translations, which are based on the Hebrew Masoretic textual tradition. (The Masoretes were Jewish scholars who produced and copied the Hebrew Scriptures in the Middle Ages.)

However, the Septuagint *Greek* version of Genesis 46:27 (sometimes called "the Bible of the early Christian church") gives the number of people going down to Egypt as 75. It arrives at this figure by omitting Jacob and Joseph but including *nine* sons of Joseph in the total. Exodus 2:1 in this version also has the number 75. Stephen, a Greek-speaking Hellenist, was almost certainly following the text of the Septuagint version. Naturally, he would have given the number as 75.²⁰

¹⁹ <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts7.htm>

²⁰ <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts7.htm>

Acts 7:16

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

Confusion over burial sites! Most commentators say that Stephen made a mistake. But it turns out that there are 2 different burial sites in Genesis, one bought by Abraham and one bought by Jacob:

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

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

Alternatives:

- 1) Error?
- 2) Abraham originally purchased (Gen 12:6) and Jacob repurchased. His altercation with the sons of Hamor over property bequeathed to Joseph: Gen 49:22.

Don't be too quick to accept some commentator's view that there is an error, not that there aren't occasional textual problems. Praise God for apparent contradictions, as behind the resolution will be a discovery.

[Sychem] Shechem (Genesis 23:6-20; Genesis 33:19; Genesis 47:30; Genesis 49:29; Genesis 50:5; Exodus 13:19; Joshua 24:32). This was a town or village near to Samaria. It was called Sychar, John 4:5,) *Schechem*, and *Sychem*. It is now called *Naplous*, or *Napolose*, and is ten miles from Shiloh, and about forty from Jerusalem, towards the north.

Clarke: And were carried over to Sychem—"It is said, Genesis 50:13, that Jacob was buried in the cave of the field of Machpelah before Mamre. And in Joshua 24:32, and Exodus 13:19, it is said that the bones of Joseph were carried out of Egypt by the Israelites, and buried in Shechem, which Jacob bought from the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem. As for the eleven brethren of Joseph, we are told by Josephus, Ant. lib. ii. cap. 8. sect. 2, that they were buried in Hebron, where their father had been buried. But, since the books of the Old Testament say nothing about this, the authority of Stephen (or of Luke here) for their being buried in Sychem is at least as good as that of Josephus for their being buried in Hebron."—Bp. Pearce.

We have the uniform consent of the Jewish writers that all the patriarchs were brought out of Egypt, and buried in Canaan, but none, except Stephen, mentions their being buried in Sychem. As Sychem belonged to the Samaritans, probably the Jews thought it

too great an honor for that people to possess the bones of the patriarchs; and therefore have carefully avoided making any mention of it. This is Dr. Lightfoot's conjecture; and it is as probable as any other.

Clarke: That Abraham bought for a sum of money—Two accounts seem here to be confounded:

1. The purchase made by Abraham of the cave and field of Ephron, which was in the field of Machpelah: this purchase was made from the children of Heth, Genesis 23:3, 10, 17.
2. The purchase made by Jacob, from the sons of Hamor or Emmor, of a sepulchre in which the bones of Joseph were laid: this was in Sychem or Shechem, Genesis 33:19; Joshua 24:32.

The word Abraham, therefore, in this place, is certainly a mistake; and the word Jacob, which some have supplied, is doubtless more proper. Bp. Pearce supposes that Luke originally wrote, which he bought for a sum of money: i.e. which Jacob bought, who is the last person, of the singular number, spoken of in the preceding verse. Those who saw that the word $\omega\eta\sigma\alpha\tau\omicron$, bought, had no nominative case joined to it, and did not know where to find the proper one, seem to have inserted $A\beta\rho\alpha\alpha\mu$, Abraham, in the text, for that purpose, without sufficiently attending to the different circumstances of his purchase from that of Jacob's.

Barnes: And were carried over. Jacob himself was buried in the field of Machpelah, by Joseph and his brethren, Genesis 1:13. It is expressly said that the bones of Joseph were carried by the Israelites when they went into the land of Canaan, and buried in Shechem, Joshua 24:32. Comp. Genesis 1:25. No mention is made in the Old Testament of their carrying the bones of any of the other patriarchs; but the thing is highly probable in itself. If the descendants of Joseph carried his bones, it would naturally occur to them to take also the bones of each of the patriarchs, and give them an honourable sepulchre together in the land of promise. Josephus (*Antiq. b. ii. chap. viii.* but as to the bones of Joseph, they carried them into the land of Canaan afterward, when the Hebrews went out of Egypt." This is the account which Josephus gives, and it is evidently in accordance with the common opinion of the Jewish writers, that they were buried in Hebron. Yet the tradition is not uniform. Some of the Jews affirm that they were buried in Sychem. (*Kuinel.*) As the Scriptures do not anywhere deny that the fathers were buried in Sychem, it cannot be proved that Stephen was in error. There is one circumstance of strong probability to show that he was correct. At the time this defence was delivered, *Sychem* was in the hands of the Samaritans, between whom and the Jews there was a violent hostility. Of course the Jews would not be willing to concede that the Samaritans had the bones of their ancestors; and hence perhaps the opinion had been maintained that they were buried in Hebron.

Now Stephen comes to another period in the history of these people. He is going to remind them of the deliverance out of Egypt. God made Moses the deliverer. And he

shows that at first the children of Israel refused to follow Moses and that Moses had trouble with them all the way.²¹

JNTC: According to the Hebrew text of the *Tanakh* Avraham bought a burial cave in Hebron (Genesis 23:2–20), in which Ya’akov was buried by Yosef (Genesis 49:29–50:13). Ya’akov bought a field from Chamor in Sh’khem (Genesis 33:18–19), in which the bones of Yosef were placed centuries later (Joshua 24:32). Non-biblical sources (the pseudepigraphical books of Jubilees and Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, the Mekhilta and Josephus’ *Antiquities of the Jews*) say Joseph’s brothers’ bones eventually were removed and buried in Israel; most sources say in Hebron. Either Stephen is telescoping these events in his quick and pressurized review, or he is using something other than the Hebrew text, perhaps the Samaritan one (see v. 4).²²

BEC: Acts 7:16 suggests that Jacob was buried at Shechem, but Genesis 50:13 states that he was buried in the cave of Machpelah at Hebron, along with Abraham, Isaac, and Sarah (Gen. 23:17). It was Joseph who was buried at Shechem (Josh. 24:32). It is likely that the Children of Israel carried out of Egypt the remains of all the sons of Jacob, and not just Joseph alone, and buried them together in Shechem. The “fathers” mentioned in Acts 7:15 would be the twelve sons of Jacob.

But who purchased the burial place in Shechem—Abraham or Jacob? Stephen seems to say that Abraham bought it, but the Old Testament record says that Jacob did (Gen. 33:18–20). Abraham purchased the cave of Machpelah (Gen. 23:14–20). The simplest explanation is that Abraham actually purchased *both* pieces of property and that Jacob later had to purchase the Shechem property again. Abraham moved around quite a bit and it would be very easy for the residents of the land to forget or ignore the transactions he had made.²³

ESV: the tomb that Abraham had bought . . . from the sons of Hamor in Shechem. The OT shows that it was actually Jacob who bought a tomb “from the sons of Hamor” in Shechem (Gen. 33:19) and this is where Joseph was buried (Josh. 24:32). It seems that Stephen is using the name “Abraham” to refer to all of Abraham's family or descendants, including Jacob (cf. Heb. 7:9–10). Another possible explanation is that Abraham had earlier bought the same piece of land when he built an altar in Shechem (Gen. 12:6–7), but Jacob later had to repurchase it just as Isaac had needed to renegotiate his rights to a well that Abraham had earlier bought in Beersheba (cf. Gen. 21:27–31 with Gen. 26:23–33).

²¹McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:538). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

²²Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Ac 7:16). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

²³Wiersbe, W. W. (1996, c1989). *The Bible exposition commentary*. "An exposition of the New Testament comprising the entire 'BE' series"--Jkt. (Ac 7:1). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.

Buried in Abraham's tomb (7:16)

A second problem in this section concerns the place of burial of Abraham and his descendants. Stephen says that Jacob "and our fathers" are buried in a tomb in Shechem, which Abraham purchased from the sons of Hamor (7:16). However, the story is more complicated in the Old Testament.

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were buried in the cave of Machpelah near Hebron, a plot Abraham had purchased from Ephron the Hittite (Genesis 23:1-20; 49:29-32; 50:13), and which is in Judea. Joseph, on the other hand, was buried at Shechem (Joshua 24:32) in a plot Jacob had purchased from the sons of Hamor (Genesis 33:18-20 with Joshua 24:32).

It has been suggested that Stephen is simply condensing the two accounts of burial property purchases, one near Hebron and the other in Shechem. He did a similar thing in describing the two calls of Abraham at Ur and Haran as one. A variant explanation is that Stephen may be following a tradition that makes Shechem the burial place for the entire family.

However, Stephen may have an important purpose in singling out Shechem as the burial place of Abraham's family. He is giving a speech to the leading Jews of Jerusalem, who hold their land in great esteem. But Stephen points out that the venerated patriarchs are buried in Shechem, which is in the territory of the Samaritans. If the patriarchs allowed themselves to be buried in Shechem—and proper burial was important to Jews—it implies again that God can work anywhere.

The point is, one need not be buried on "holy ground" to be resurrected to life. Perhaps we can also see in the mention of Samaritan territory a clue to the coming evangelization of Samaria (8:5-25).

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,

Stephen's review of Jewish history gives a clear testimony of God's faithfulness and sovereignty. Despite the continued failures of his chosen people and the swirling world events, God was working out his plan. When faced by a confusing array of circumstances, remember that: (1) God is in control—nothing surprises him; (2) this world is not all there is—it will pass away, but God is eternal; (3) God is just, and he will make things right—punishing the wicked and rewarding the faithful; (4) God wants to use you (like Joseph, Moses, and Stephen) to make a difference in the world.

Acts 7:18

Till another king arose, which knew not Joseph.

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

“Another who knew not Joseph”- Greek *heteros* = different; not *allos* = same kind. Assyrian (Isa 52:4), the Pharaoh that oppressed the Hebrews was Assyrian!

[another king arose, which knew not Joseph] Exodus 1:8-22; Psalm 105:25. This man was an Assyrian that overthrew the old Egyptian dynasty (Isaiah 52:4).

Barnes: Till another king arose. This is quoted from Exodus 1:8. What was the name of this king is not certainly known. The *common* name of all the kings of Egypt was *Pharaoh*, as *Caesar* became the common name of the emperors of Rome after the time of Julius Caesar: thus we say, Augustus Caesar, Tiberius Caesar, etc. It has commonly been supposed to have been the celebrated Rameses, or Ramses Meiamoun, the sixth king of the eighteenth dynasty; and the event is supposed to have occurred about 1559 years before the Christian era. But M. Champollion supposes that his name was Mandonel, whose reign commenced 1585, and ended 1565 years before. Christ. (Essay on the Hieroglyphic System, pp. 94, 95.)

Acts 7:19

The same dealt subtly with our kindred, and evil entreated our fathers, so that they cast out their young children, to the end they might not live.

Acts 7:20

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

[nourished up] *anatrepho*, Greek 397, Strong's *an-at-ref'-o*; from Greek 303 (*ana*) and Greek 5142 (*trepho*); to *rear* (physical or mental) :- bring up, nourish (up). It is a medical technical term in Greek. There are 3 or 4 places in this chapter where the term used is one that only a doctor would use, which is interesting in that Acts was written by Luke, a physician.

[exceeding fair] Fair to God, beautiful (Exodus 2:2). *asteios*, Greek 791, *as-ti'-os*; from *astu* (a city); *urbane*, i.e. (by implication) *handsome* :- fair.

Moses (7:20-43)

Stephen now turns to the story of Moses. This is the longest and most complex of the sections on Israel's history. Moses' life is discussed in three parts, each one totaling 40 years (7:20-29; 30-35; 36-43). What is striking is the disproportionate emphasis on Moses. By comparison there are only two short references to the Messiah, and those only in an indirect way. The Messiah is called the Prophet-like-Moses (from Deuteronomy 18:15) and the Righteous One, but not directly as either Christ or Jesus (7:37; 52).

There is a good reason for Stephen's emphasis on Moses. He was accused of "blasphemy against Moses" and saying that Jesus would "change the customs Moses handed down to us" (6:11, 14). In the speech, Stephen turns the accusation against those who had accused him. It is not he but the nation of Israel that is in rebellion against Moses, and they have been throughout their history (7:9, 35, 39, 51, 52).

Luke alerted us to the theme that a prophet like Moses would one day appear, when he earlier captured a point Peter made in the temple courts (3:22). Peter said that the Jews' appointed Messiah ascended until the time when God would restore all things. At that juncture Peter referred to Moses' statement that God will raise up a prophet like him from among the people—and that he must be listened to. Now, Stephen reminds his hearers that Moses prophesied of the coming of a prophet like himself. Thus, they ought not reject outright the claims that Jesus fulfills the requirements.

As in the case of Joseph, Moses becomes a prototype of Christ in Luke's account. As Moses narrowly escaped death at the hands of Pharaoh (7:21), the infant Jesus was saved from Herod. Moses was "no ordinary child" (7:20). So was Jesus (Luke 2:52). Moses grew in wisdom and stature (7:22). So did Jesus (Luke 2:52). Moses was mighty in word and deed. Luke says the same thing of Jesus (Luke 24:19). Moses urged two fighting Israelites to make peace (7:26). The theme of peace was characteristic of Jesus' ministry (Luke 1:79; 2:14, 29; Acts 10:36). And, most directly, Moses is said to be a type of the Prophet-Messiah (Acts 7:37).

Stephen says that Moses "thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not" (7:25-28). This Moses-rejection theme is strong in Stephen's speech (7:23-29; 35). Like Moses, Jesus was sent to save his own people but they rejected him. Thus, Stephen chastises the Sanhedrin for rejecting the Righteous One (Jesus), in the same way that their ancestors failed to recognize who Moses was (7:52).

Luke would undoubtedly expect his Christian readers to see here a parallel between Moses and Jesus as the saviors of God's people, whether or not Stephen's hearers would catch the point: the behavior of the Jews in refusing to recognize Jesus as Savior was of a piece with their earlier rejection of Moses (7:52). (I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*, page 140) In his speech, Stephen emphasizes Israel's rejection of God, of the law, and especially their Messiah. Thus, he draws a strong parallel between Israel's treatment of Moses and the Jews' treatment of Jesus. Stephen will drive this point home in a final, scathing indictment of the Sanhedrin (7:51-53).

Stephen emphasizes that God's redemptive power was given to his people outside of Palestine. In the Moses section this point is driven home by a repetition of non-Holy Land locations in which God interacted with Moses. God raised up Moses in Egypt (7:17-22); he provided for the rejected Moses in Midian (7:29); he commissioned Moses in the desert near Mount Sinai (7:30-34). God pronounced Mount Sinai to be "holy ground." However, even though it is the most important place of Old Testament revelation, Sinai is outside the Holy Land. It has no sanctity of its own (7:30-34).

Stephen notes that Moses was sent back to Egypt—not Israel—to do God's will. God delivered his people within this pagan nation as well as at the Red Sea and the wilderness (7:35-36).

Contrary to popular piety of the day in its veneration of "the Holy Land"...no place on earth—even though given as an inheritance by God himself—can be claimed to possess such sanctity or be esteemed in such a way as to preempt God's further working on behalf of his people. By this method Stephen was attempting to clear the way for the proclamation of the centrality of Jesus in the nation's worship, life and thought. (Longenecker, pages 341-342)

As Abraham was called out of the world—out of Ur and Haran —Moses had to flee Egypt to Midian. In a second step, he left Midian, and finally was called out of Egypt with the children of Israel. Stephen is making the point that these men were ready to answer the call to come out of their society and follow God. Is Stephen giving the assembled Sanhedrin a hint that they must think about coming out of their Judaistic society?²⁴

Acts 7:21

And when he was cast out, Pharaoh’s daughter took him up, and nourished him for her own son.

And nourished him. Adopted him, and treated him as her son, Exodus 2:10. It is implied in this, that he was *educated* by her. An adopted son in the family of Pharaoh would be favoured with all the advantages which the land could furnish for an education.

Acts 7:22

And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds.

Philo points out that Moses was tutored by the most celebrated foreign schools in arithmetic, geometry, music, philosophy, hieroglyphics, arts and sciences. Josephus points out that he was mighty in military arts. Moses was groomed for leadership in Egypt.

“Mighty in words” - but he lied in Ex 4:10.

[wisdom of the Egyptians] The Egyptians were at that time the most intelligent and best instructed people on earth. This learning consisted of the mysteries of the Egyptian religion, arithmetic, geometry, poetry, music, medicine, and hieroglyphics. He was general of the Egyptian armies and defeated the Ethiopians who had invaded Egypt, according to Josephus.

[mighty in words and in deeds] A worker as well as a talker.

Clarke: In all the wisdom of the Egyptians—Who were, at that time, the most intelligent and best instructed people in the universe. Philo says, Moses was taught arithmetic, geometry, poetry, music, medicine, and the knowledge of hieroglyphics. In Sohar Cadash, fol. 46, it is said, “that, of the ten portions of wisdom which came into the world, the Egyptians had nine, and that all the inhabitants of the earth had only the remaining portion.” Much of the same nature may be seen in the rabbins, though they apply the term wisdom here to magic.

²⁴ <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts7.htm>

Clarke: Was mighty in words and in deeds—This may refer to the glorious doctrines he taught, and the miracles he wrought in Egypt. Josephus Ant. lib. ii. cap. 10, sect. 1, gives an account of his being general of an Egyptian army, defeating the Ethiopians, who had invaded Egypt, driving them back into their own country, and taking Saba their capital, which was afterwards called Meroe. But this, like many other tales of the same writer, is worthy of little credit.

Phoenix says the same of Achilles:—

Not only an orator of words, but a performer of deeds.

Barnes: In all the wisdom, 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: In words. From Exodus 4:10, it seems that Moses was "slow of speech, and of a slow tongue." When it is said that he was mighty in words, it means that he was mighty in his communications to Pharaoh, though they were spoken by his brother Aaron. Aaron was in his place, and Moses addressed Pharaoh through him, who was appointed to deliver the message, Exodus 4:11-16.

McGee: Moses was brought up in the wisdom of the Egyptians. The wisdom of the Egyptians is not despised even in our advanced day when we feel that we know about everything. Too often we do not give the Egyptians full credit for what they did know. They had developed mathematics, chemistry, engineering, architecture, and astronomy to a very fine point. They had developed these fields of study in a way that was really remarkable. Look at the pyramids. Look at the colors we find in the tombs, colors which have stood the test of the centuries. They understood about embalming. They had calculated the distance to the sun. My friend, they had a highly developed culture and were not an ignorant people.

Moses had all the advantages of that day, being raised as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians. He was outstanding. Yet he was not prepared to lead God's people. All the learning of the world of that day did not equip him to lead God's people. All the wisdom that men have today is not enough for them to understand the Word of God. It is too difficult. Why? Because the natural man cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God. These things are foolishness to him and he cannot know them, because they are spiritually discerned (see 1 Cor. 2:14). Although Moses was learned in the wisdom of his day, he was not ready to deliver God's people. So, after forty years of learning in Egypt, God put him out into the desert. There God gave him his B. D. degree, his Backside of the Desert degree, and prepared him to become the deliverer.²⁵

²⁵McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:538). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

ESV: Moses' education in Egyptian wisdom is not mentioned in the OT but was well established in Jewish tradition. Stephen emphasizes that the one who delivered Israel was educated in a secular setting, hence God accomplished salvation in an unexpected way, as he has now done through Jesus of Nazareth.

Acts 7:23

And when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel.

[forty years old] Moses spent 40 years in Pharaoh's court (Acts 7:23), 40 years in Midian (Acts 7:30), and 40 years in Israel (Acts 7:36; cp. Exodus 2:11; Deut. 2:7; Deut. 8:2; Deut. 31:2).

[it came into his heart to visit his brethren] This came about by the Holy Spirit who stirred him up to his call early in life. He already had God's word from which his faith came (cp. Hebrews 11:24 with Romans 10:17).

Clarke: To visit his brethren—Probably on the ground of trying to deliver them from their oppressive bondage. This desire seems to have been early infused into his mind by the Spirit of God; and the effect of this desire to deliver his oppressed countrymen was his refusing to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter—see Hebrews 11:24, and thus renouncing all right to the Egyptian crown, choosing rather to endure addiction with the people of God than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.

Barnes: Full forty years of age. This is not recorded in the Old Testament, but it is a constant tradition of the Jews that Moses was forty years of age when he undertook to deliver them. Thus it is said, "Moses lived in the palace of Pharaoh forty years; he was forty years in Midian; and he ministered to Israel forty years." (*Kuinel*.)

ESV: Stephen highlighted Moses' middle years by relating his avenging of an abused Israelite and the subsequent rejection of his attempt to reconcile two quarreling Israelites (Ex. 2:11–15). The 40-year period was spent primarily in Midian (Acts 7:29), but Stephen chose to emphasize the single incident because it illustrated Israel's constant rejection of its God-sent leaders (see v. 35).

Acts 7:24

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

[avenged] Greek: *ekdikesis* (GSN-1557), took vengeance (Acts 7:24; Luke 18:7-8; Luke 21:22; Romans 12:19; 2 Cor. 7:11; 2 Thes. 1:8; Hebrews 10:30; 1 Peter 2:14).

Acts 7:25

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

[**understood not**] this insight is not clear from the account in Exodus. Stephen's point is that here again, Israel is slow to apprehend the Divine purposes of love. Again, rejecting their leader.

[**he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them**] He imagined that the divine influence upon him calling him to deliver Israel had already made clear to them the same thing, but here is where the human mind failed to understand the time and way of the divine mind. He was now willing to enter upon his call if his people were willing to act but he was to learn much before they became willing to receive him as their deliverer. His education on this line began the next day (Acts 7:26).

Clarke: He supposed his brethren would have understood, etc.—He probably imagined that, as he felt from the Divine influence he was appointed to be their deliverer, they would have his Divine appointment signified to them in a similar way; and the act of justice which he now did in behalf of his oppressed countryman would be sufficient to show them that he was now ready to enter upon his office, if they were willing to concur.

Acts 7:26

And the next day he showed 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?

[**would have set them at one again**] Moses' first lesson was that of learning that people cannot be driven together in unity by force or human effort (Acts 7:26-28).

[**Sirs**] Greek: *aner* (GSN-435), an adult male. Used in the plural 6 times and all in Acts (Acts 7:26; Acts 14:15; Acts 19:25; Acts 27:10,21,25).

[**why do ye wrong one to another?**] This is question 20 in the Book of Acts. The next question is in Acts 7:27.

Barnes: Ye are brethren. You belong not only to the same nation, but you are brethren and companions in affliction, and should not, therefore, contend with each other. One of the most melancholy scenes in this world, is that where those who are poor, and afflicted, and oppressed, add to all their other calamities, altercations and strifes among themselves. Yet it is from this class that contentions and lawsuits usually arise. The address which Moses here makes to the contending Jews, might be applied to the whole human family, in view of the contentions and wars of nations: "Ye are *brethren*, members of the same great family, and why do you contend with each other?"

Acts 7:27

But he that did his neighbour wrong thrust him away, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us?

Cf. Christ: “By what authority...” Matt 21:23.

[**thrust**] Greek: *apotheomai* (GSN-683), to reject. Used in Acts 7:27,39; Acts 13:46; Romans 11:1-2; 1 Tim. 1:19.

[**Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us?**] This is question 21 in the Book of Acts. The next question is in Acts 7:28.

It would be hard for Jews to understand how this man, who was brought up an Egyptian, could have any interest in them.

Acts 7:28

Wilt thou kill me, as thou diddest the Egyptian yesterday?

[**Wilt thou kill me, as thou didst the Egyptian yesterday?**] This is question 22 in the Book of Acts. The next question is in Acts 7:35.

This exposure of his crime made him fear for his life, so he fled the country. He had already renounced the adoption by Pharaoh's daughter and perhaps had no further standing in Egyptian ruling circles (Hebrews 11:24-26). Being rejected by his brethren and having God's word as to what to do, he did not hesitate to flee (Hebrews 11:27).

Wilt thou kill me, How it was known that he had killed the Egyptian does not appear. It was probably communicated by the man who was rescued from the hands of the Egyptian, Exodus 2:11,12.

Acts 7:29

Then fled Moses at this saying, and was a stranger in the land of Madian, where he begat two sons.

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

The implication here is that if they had accepted Moses then, that God might have delivered them then. But because they rejected Moses the first time, they were stuck with another 40 years of bondage.

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

[**stranger in the land**] Became a sojourner (see Acts 7:6).

[Madian] Midian (Exodus 2:15; Exodus 3:1.). This was a part of Arabia. It was situated on the east side of the Red Sea. The city of Midian is placed there by the Arabian geographers; but the Midianites seem to have spread themselves along the desert east of Mount Seir, to the vicinity of the Moabites. To the west they extended also to the neighbourhood of Mount Sinai. This was extensively a desert region, an unknown land; and Moses expected there to be safe from Pharaoh.

[two sons] (Exodus 2:22; Exodus 18:2). He married Zipporah, the daughter of *Reuel*, (Exodus 2:18,) or *Jethro*, (Numbers 10:29, Exodus 3:1,) a *priest* of Midian. The names of the two sons were Gershom and Eliezer, Exodus 18:3,4.

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.

Burning Bush:

Acacia = 'thorn bush of the desert'

Thorns: Symbol of the curse (Gen 3:18);
 Born on His brow (Mt 27:29).

Fire: Symbolizes Judgment.

Not consumed: Grace.

The thorns are a symbol of sin, or God's curse on the earth. The fire is a symbol of God's judgement. And here we have God's judgement not consuming the bush, perhaps a Levitical pun of grace. What attracted Moses to the bush was not God's holiness, but His Grace!

[Sina] Moses says Horeb (Exodus 3:1), but this was the name of the whole mountain range; Sinai was the name of one mountain.

[angel of the Lord] This angel of the Lord was God Himself appearing to man (Acts 7:32-34; Exodus 3:2-4:17).

He is called in Exodus 3-4:

1. The Angel of the Lord (Exodus 3:2)
2. The Lord and God (Exodus 3:4-7; Exodus 4:1-27)
3. The God of thy Father (Amram, Exodus 6:18), the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob (Exodus 3:6,15-16; Exodus 4:5)
4. I AM THAT I AM, I AM (Exodus 3:14)
5. The Lord God of the Hebrews (Exodus 3:18)
6. The Lord our God (Exodus 3:18)

And when forty years, At the age of eighty years. This, however, was known by tradition. It is not expressly mentioned by Moses. It is said, however, to have been after the king of Egypt had died, (Exodus 2:23;) and the tradition is not improbable.

Barnes: In the wilderness of mount Sina. In the desert adjacent to, or that surrounded Mount Sinai. In Exodus 3:1, it is said that this occurred at Mount *Horeb*. But there is no contradiction; Horeb and Sinai are different peaks or elevations of the same mountain. They are represented as springing from the same base, and branching out in different elevations. The mountains, according to Burckhardt, are a prodigious pile, comprehending many peaks, and about thirty miles in diameter. From one part of this mountain, *Sinai*, the law was given to the children of Israel.

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,

[**sight**] Greek: *horama* (GSN-3705). Used 12 times and only in Acts except Matthew 17:9. It is translated "sight" (Acts 7:31) and "vision" (Matthew 17:9; Acts 9:10-12; Acts 10:3,17,19; Acts 11:5; Acts 12:9; Acts 16:9,10; Acts 18:9). From the same root as *horasis* (GSN-3706), translated "sight" (Rev. 4:3); "to look upon" (Rev. 4:3); and "visions" (Acts 2:17; Rev. 9:17).

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.

[**trembled, and durst not behold**]

Effects of God's Presence (Dake)

1. Deep sleep (Genesis 2:21; Genesis 15:12)
2. Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips (Isaiah 6).
3. I fell on my face (Ezekiel 1:28; Ezekiel 3:23; Ezekiel 43:4; Ezekiel 44:4).
4. I was afraid (Daniel 8:17).
5. A great quaking fell upon them, so that they fled to hide (Daniel 10:7).
6. There remained no strength in me; for my comeliness was turned into corruption ... then was I in a deep sleep on my face ... set me upon my knees and palms of my hands (Daniel 10:8-10).
7. They fell upon their face and were sore afraid (Matthew 17:6).
8. For fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men (Matthew 28:4).
9. Moses trembled, and durst not behold (Acts 7:32).
10. He fell upon the earth ... trembling and astonished (Acts 9:4-9).
11. He fell into a trance (Acts 10:10).
12. Came trembling and fell down (Acts 16:29).
13. I exceedingly fear and quake (Hebrews 12:21).
14. I fell at His feet as dead (Rev. 1:17; Rev. 19:10; Rev. 22:8).
15. Fear came upon me and trembling, which made my bones shake (Job 4:14).

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.

[shoes] symbol of:

- Calling (no shoes in Tabernacle)
- Divine provision in the wilderness
- Boaz' marriage license (Ruth 4)
- Symbol of Stature: John the Baptist

Exodus 3:5; Joshua 5:15.

Put off thy shoes, Exodus 3:5. To put off the shoes, or sandals, was an act of reverence. Especially the ancients were not permitted to enter a temple or holy place with their shoes on. Indeed, it was customary for the Jews to remove their shoes whenever they entered any house, as a mere matter of civility. Comp. John 13:6. See Joshua 5:15.

Barnes: Is holy ground. Is rendered sacred by the symbol of the Divine Presence. We should enter the sanctuary, the place set apart for Divine worship, not only with reverence in our hearts, but with every external indication of veneration. Solemn awe, and deep seriousness, become the place set apart to the service of God.

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.

[affliction of my people] Not sicknesses, but wrongs (Acts 7:6,19).

[groaning] Greek: *stenagmos* (GSN-4726), groanings (Romans 8:26).

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.²⁶

²⁶McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:539). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

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.

Second trip Moses was accepted!

[whom they refused] Moses whom they rejected became their only deliverer and ruler. This he uses to show that Jesus whom they had rejected and crucified was their only present and eternal Savior.

[Who made thee a ruler and a judge?] This is question 23 in the Book of Acts. The next question is in Acts 7:42.

[deliverer] Greek: *lutrotes* (GSN-3086), redeemer. Only here, but compare *lutron* (GSN-3083), ransom (Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45); *lutroo* (GSN-3084), redeemed (Luke 24:21; Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 1:18); and *lutrosis* (GSN-3085), redemption (Luke 1:68; Luke 2:38; Hebrews 9:12).

[by the hand of the angel which appeared to him in the bush] By the hand of God (see Acts 7:30).

McGee: Notice the emphasis that has been placed upon the ministry of the angels in the life of the nation Israel. You will find the ministry of angels prominent throughout Israel's history. God gave the Law to Moses through the ministry of angels.

We hear a lot about the angels at Christmas. Whom were the angels addressing? And for what purpose? They had messages for the people of Israel—for Mary, for Joseph, for Zacharias, and for the shepherds.

God is not sending messages through angels during this period of the church. No angels have appeared around my place. And there have been none appearing to you. If you are seeing angels, you had better make an appointment with a psychiatrist. By contrast, angels did appear and bring messages from God to members of the nation Israel.

Now Stephen goes on to describe the wilderness experience.²⁷

Acts 7:36

He brought them out, after that he had showed wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red sea, and in the wilderness forty years.

Clarke: He brought them out, after that he had showed wonders, etc.—Thus the very person whom they had rejected, and, in effect, delivered up into the hands of Pharaoh that he might be slain, was the person alone by whom they were redeemed from their Egyptian bondage. And does not St. Stephen plainly say by this, that the very person,

²⁷ McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:539). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Jesus Christ, whom they had rejected and delivered up into the hands of Pilate to be crucified, was the person alone by whom they could be delivered out of their spiritual bondage, and made partakers of the inheritance among the saints in light? No doubt they felt that this was the drift of his speech.

They rejected their God-sent deliverers (vv. 9–36). I have combined the sections dealing with Joseph and Moses because these two Jewish heroes have this in common: they were both rejected as deliverers the first time, but were accepted the second time. Joseph’s brethren hated their brother and sold him into servitude, yet later he became their deliverer. They recognized Joseph “at the second time” (Acts 7:13) when they returned to Egypt for more food. Israel rejected Moses when he first tried to deliver them from Egyptian bondage, and he had to flee for his life (Ex. 2:11–22). But when Moses came to them the second time, the nation accepted him and he set them free (Acts 7:35).

These two events illustrate how Israel treated Jesus Christ. Israel rejected their Messiah when He came to them the first time (John 1:11), but when He comes again, they will recognize Him and receive Him (Zech. 12:10; Rev. 1:7). In spite of what they did to His Son, God has not cast away His people (Rom. 11:1–6). Israel today is suffering from a partial spiritual blindness that one day will be taken away (Rom. 11:25–32). Individual Jews are being saved, but the nation as a whole is blind to the truth about Jesus Christ.²⁸

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.

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

Clarke: This is that Moses, which said—A prophet, etc.—This very Moses, so highly esteemed and honored by God, announced that very prophet whom ye have lately put to death. See the observations at Deuteronomy 18:22.

[A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear] The 12th Old Testament prophecy in Acts (Acts 7:37; Deut. 18:15, fulfilled). The next prophecy is in Acts 8:32.

The Jews originally thought this “prophet” was Joshua. But Moses was prophesying about the coming Messiah (Deut. 18:15). Peter also quoted this verse in referring to the Messiah (Acts 3:22).

²⁸Wiersbe, W. W. (1996, c1989). *The Bible exposition commentary*. "An exposition of the New Testament comprising the entire 'BE' series"--Jkt. (Ac 7:1). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.

Acts 7:38

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

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

The Church (Dake)

Greek: *ekklesia* (GSN-1577), called out. Used 115 times and is always translated church except in Acts 19:32-41 where it is assembly. It is used in the Septuagint 70 times for the Hebrew: *qahal* (HSN-6950), to call. *Qahal* is used 123 times of Israel called out from the nations (Genesis 12:3); of a council called from each tribe (Genesis 49:6); of local assemblies of Israel called out to worship (Deut. 18:16; Deut. 31:30; Joshua 8:35; Judges 21:8); and of any congregation of worshipers (Psalm 22:22-25).

The word "church" has the same meanings as above, plus the idea of a particular denomination of Christians as distinct from the world; of the building in which congregations assemble; and of the whole body of Christ (Ephes. 1:22; Col. 1:18,24).

The Word "Church" With Other Terms:

1. Church of God (Acts 20:28; 1 Cor. 1:2; 1 Cor. 10:32; 1 Cor. 15:9; 2 Cor. 1:1; Galatians 1:13)
2. Churches of God (1 Cor. 11:16; 1 Thes. 2:14; 2 Thes. 1:4; 1 Tim. 3:5)
3. Church of the Living God (1 Tim. 3:15)
4. Churches of Christ (Romans 16:16)
5. Church in ... house (Romans 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15; Philemon 1:2)
6. Churches of Gentiles (Romans 16:4)
7. Churches of Galatia (1 Cor. 16:1; Galatians 1:2)
8. Churches of Asia (1 Cor. 16:19)
9. Churches of Macedonia (2 Cor. 8:1)
10. Churches of Judea (Galatians 1:22)
11. Churches of Laodiceans (Col. 4:16)
12. Churches of the Thessalonians (1 Thes. 1:1; 2 Thes. 1:1)
13. Church of the firstborn (Hebrews 12:23)
14. Church of Ephesus, etc. (Rev. 2-3)
15. The churches (Rev. 22:16)

Ekklesia (GSN-1577) Defined:

1. An assembly of citizens summoned by a crier to a place of council to transact business (Acts 19:32,39,41)
2. Any gathering of men assembled by chance or tumultuously (Acts 19:32,41)
3. In the Septuagint any assembly of Israelites gathered together for business (Judges 21:8; 1 Chron. 29:1) or for sacred purposes (Deut. 31:30; Joshua 8:35)
4. The whole congregation of "called out" ones; God's elect of the Old Testament period (Acts 7:38; Hebrews 2:12)

5. An assembly of Christians gathered to worship (1 Cor. 11:18; 1 Cor. 14:4-5,12,19,23,28,35; Hebrews 2:12)
6. The New Testament church of "called out" ones from both Jews and Gentiles (1 Cor. 12:13; Ephes. 2:14-15) and called the body of Christ (Matthew 16:18; 1 Cor. 10:32; 2 Cor. 12:28; 2 Cor. 15:9; Galatians 1:13; Ephes. 1:22; Ephes. 3:10,21; Ephes. 5:23-32; Phil. 3:6; Col. 1:18,24; 1 Tim. 3:5,15)
7. A general assembly of representative believers from many local churches to transact business (Acts 15:22)
8. A local company of Christians who regularly meet for religious services and to transact necessary business for the proper functioning of the local or general Christian work (Matthew 18:17; Acts 2:47; Acts 5:11; Acts 8:1,3; Acts 11:22,26; Acts 12:1,5; Acts 13:1; Acts 14:23,27; Acts 15:3-4; Acts 18:22; Acts 20:17,28; Romans 16:1,5,23; 1 Cor. 1:2; 1 Cor. 4:17; 1 Cor. 6:4; 1 Cor. 11:18,22; 1 Cor. 14:4-5,12,19,23,28,35; 1 Cor. 16:19; 2 Cor. 1:1; Phil. 4:15; Col. 4:15-16; 1 Thes. 1:1; 2 Thes. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:5; 1 Tim. 5:16; Philemon 1:2; James 5:14; 1 Peter 5:13; 3 John 1:6-10; Rev. 2:1,8,12,18; Rev. 3:1,14)
9. The general assembly of Christians in heaven (Hebrews 12:23; Hebrews 2:12)
10. Many local congregations of Christians (Acts 9:31; Acts 15:41; Acts 16:5; Acts 19:37; Romans 16:4,16; 1 Cor. 7:17; 1 Cor. 11:16; 1 Cor. 14:33-34; 1 Cor. 16:1,19; 2 Cor. 8:1,18-24; 2 Cor. 11:8,28; 2 Cor. 12:13; Galatians 1:2,22; 1 Thes. 2:14; 2 Thes. 1:4; Rev. 1:4,11,20; Rev. 2:7,11,17,23,29; Rev. 3:6,13,22; Rev. 22:16)

[wilderness] The church in the wilderness refers to the Israelites "called out" of Egypt to represent God under the Mosaic Covenant until the Messiah should come (Matthew 11:11; Luke 16:16; Galatians 3:19).

[angel which spake to him in the mount Sina] See Acts 7:30. Stephen shows that Moses received the law by the ministry of angels; and that he was only a mediator between the angel of God and them.

[lively oracles] Greek: *logia* (GSN-3051) *zonta* (GSN-2198), living doctrines that produce life upon obedience to them. Here the term applies to Moses' law. In Romans 3:2 oracles refers to the Old Testament in general, and in Hebrews 5:12; 1 Peter 4:11 it refers to the whole of the Old Testament and New Testament.

The lively oracles—The living oracles. The doctrines of life, those doctrines—obedience to which entitled them, by the promise of God, to a long life upon earth, which spoke to them of that spiritual life which every true believer has in union with his God, and promised that eternal life which those who are faithful unto death shall enjoy with him in the realms of glory.

The Greek word, which we translate oracle, signifies a Divine revelation, a communication from God himself, and is here applied to the Mosaic law; to the Old Testament in general, Romans 3:2; Hebrews 5:12; and to Divine revelation in general, 1 Peter 4:11.

Barnes: In the church. The word *church* means, literally, the *people called out*; and is applied with great propriety to the assembly or multitude called out of Egypt, and

separated from the world. It has not, however, of necessity our idea of a church; but means the *assembly*, or people called out of Egypt, and placed under the conduct of Moses,

From Galatians 3:19 and Hebrews 2:2, it appears that God had given the law to Moses through angels. Exodus 31:18 says God wrote the Ten Commandments himself ("inscribed by the finger of God"). Apparently God used angelic messengers as mediators to deliver his law to Moses.

Stephen and the law (7:38-43)

Stephen describes Moses as one to whom an angel spoke on Mount Sinai, and who "received living words to pass on to us" (7:38). Here he counters the charge that he blasphemed Moses and spoke against the law. In effect, he turned the community's Scriptures upon itself.

Stephen speaks in warm tones of Moses as the mediator between God and his people, "the assembly [Greek, *ekklesia*, which usually means "church"] in the desert" (7:38). Christian readers would probably see a parallel between the wandering of Israel in the desert and their own pilgrimage with Jesus through life (Hebrews 12:18-24).

Stephen then points out that Moses "received living words to pass on to us" (7:38). By calling the words "living," he implies that they have relevance for him and his audience. However, since Moses himself pointed to Someone beyond himself who *must* be listened to, God's revelation and work cannot be limited to the law Moses had given the nation (John 1:17). There is additional revelation from God that the people must not reject.

Then comes the turning point in Stephen's speech. He says of Israel's reaction to Moses' teaching and law: "Our fathers refused to obey him" (7:39). Stephen's hearers claimed he had blasphemed the law (and, hence, Moses), claiming it was done away by Jesus. Ironically, Stephen retorted, his hearers belong to a nation that had rejected the law from the beginning, and the Prophet when he came.

Stephen then catalogues a litany of disobedient acts by the nation in the wilderness. They rejected Moses (hence God) and made an idol—the golden calf—and worshipped it. In their hearts they turned back to Egypt. Thus, "God turned away and gave them over to the worship of the heavenly bodies" (7:42). Stephen quotes Amos 5:25-27 to support his assertion that this particularly detestable form of idolatry caused God to, in effect, to hide himself from Israel.

Stephen deals with the question: with whom is God working? The Jews may offer sacrifices and offerings at the temple, and even consider it as the place of God's presence. They may venerate the law and be quite zealous for it. But it may be that the Jews are not really God's people after all. And, if they are not, they like ancient Israel may be sent into "exile beyond Babylon" (7:43).

The lesson, of course, is that those who reject the prophet are themselves rejected. When Moses was rejected the first time, he went into exile. Now, when they reject Moses a second time, they go into exile (Johnson, page 132)

What is it about Moses they reject? Most importantly, they are not listening to the Prophet (Messiah) Moses said *must* be listened to. Both the Hebrew text and the Septuagint have "Damascus" and not "Babylon" in Amos 5:27, a scripture Stephen

quoted in 7:43. Probably the reason Stephen took this liberty with the text is that the Babylonian exile meant more to his hearers, since that is the one the Jews went into and returned from. This use of Scripture reminds us the Bible is a living book, and must be made relevant to the needs of all generations. Babylon was the place "beyond Damascus" that Amos had prophesied.

Stephen is saying that if they do not listen to the Prophet, they will suffer a fate worse than the Babylonian captivity. And as Luke's readers may know, the Jews by and large do reject Jesus, and a worse fate does befall them. After a ravaging four-year war with the Romans, Jerusalem was captured, and the temple destroyed in A.D. 70, never to be rebuilt.²⁹

Acts 7:39

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

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

Clarke: In their hearts turned back again into Egypt—Became idolaters, and preferred their Egyptian bondage and their idolatry to the promised land and the pure worship of God. See the whole of these transactions explained at large in Exodus 32:1-35.

Barnes: In their hearts turned, They wished to return to Egypt. They regretted that they had come out of Egypt, and desired again the things which they had there, as preferable to what they had in the desert, Numbers 11:5. Perhaps, however, the expression means, not that they desired literally to return to Egypt, but that *their hearts inclined to the habits and morals of the Egyptians*. They forsook God, and imitated the idolatries of the Egyptians.

McGee: Israel did not go back to Egypt in a physical, material sense. But in their hearts they went back to Egypt many, many times. In the same way there are many people today who say they deplore certain sins of the world and sins of the flesh. It is always so easy to point the finger at someone else and condemn him for his sin. A question we need to ask ourselves is: Would I *like* to do the same thing? Where is our heart? Israel went back to Egypt in their heart.³⁰

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

²⁹ <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts7.htm>

³⁰ McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:540). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

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.

And they made a calf. This was made of the ear-rings and ornaments which they had brought from Egypt, Exodus 32:2-4. Stephen introduces this to remind them how prone the nation had been to reject God, and walk in the ways of sin.

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?

“Gave them up to serve the host of heaven” (Ps 81:12) meaning stars and planets. Idol worship is still in their blood, and these idols are linked to the planets!

[gave them up to worship the host of heaven] See Romans 1:24,28.

[O ye house of Israel] Quoted from Amos 5:25, which, together with other minor prophets, made only one book in the Jewish Scriptures.

[have ye offered to me slain beasts and sacrifices by the space of forty years in the wilderness?] This is question 24 in the Book of Acts. The next question is in Acts 7:49. The answer to this question is no if it be asked whether Israel was upright and free from all idolatry in heart and act (Acts 7:43).

Then God turned, and gave them up, etc.—He left them to themselves, and then they deified and worshipped the sun, moon, planets, and principal stars.

In the book of the prophets—As this quotation is found in Amos, 5:25, by the book of the prophets is meant the twelve minor prophets, which, in the ancient Jewish division of the sacred writings, formed only one book.

Clarke: Have ye offered to me slain beasts—It is certain that the Israelites did offer various sacrifices to God, while in the wilderness; and it is as certain that they scarcely ever did it with an upright heart. They were idolatrous, either in heart or act, in almost all their religious services; these were therefore so very imperfect that they were counted for nothing in the sight of God; for this seems to be strongly implied in the question here asked, Have ye offered to ME (exclusively and with an upright heart) slain beasts and sacrifices by the space of forty years? On the contrary, these forty years were little else than a tissue of rebellion and idolatry.

Barnes: In the book of the Prophets. Amos 5:25,26. The twelve minor prophets were commonly written in one volume, and were called the Book of the Prophets; the book containing these several prophecies, Daniel, Hosea, Micah, etc. They were small *tracts*

separately, and were bound up together to preserve them from being lost. This passage is not quoted literally; it is evidently made from memory; and though in its main spirit it coincides with the passage in Amos, yet in some important respects it varies from it.

Acts 7:43

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

(Amos 5:25-27) ²⁵Have ye offered unto me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel? ²⁶But ye have borne the tabernacle of your Moloch and Chiun your images, the star of your god, which ye made to yourselves. ²⁷Therefore will I cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus, saith the LORD, whose name is The God of hosts.

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

Saturn: associated with the worship of Moloch, idol of the Ammonites and Phoenicians, with the Solar Bull (Taurus); brass statue with human body, bull's head, arms outstretched; worshiped by putting your children in his arms of brass with fire all around, the children would roll off into the fire, child sacrifice!

[Babylonian ideograph for planet = sheep + dead = a dead sheep was a sign of augury, or omen. The planets were viewed as a mechanism of forecasting in the astrological sense, and here it shows up even in the very linguistic structure.]

Five planets + Sun, Moon = 7 days of the week; 7th day = Saturn's day = Saturday. [God ordains as Shabbat.]

Astrology started as Babel. But the idea of a horoscope and that somehow your future and character are determined by the position of the stars at the moment you were born is not an idea that goes back that far. That particular style of astrology turns out to first show up under Ptolemy in 130 A.D. Astrology is a form of deception far broader than that and obviously all mixed up with ancient cultic literature. (Ask someone who is into astrology if they had to redo all the horoscopes since the discovery of Neptune....)

Astrology is prohibited by God in the Old Testament.

[Moloch] The name of the main Ammonite deity to whom children were offered by fire (Deut. 18:10; Leviticus 18:21; Leviticus 20:2; 2 Kings 16:3; 2 Kings 21:6; 2 Kings 23:10; Jeremiah 19:5; Jeremiah 32:35). Supposed to be the sun god. Its image was a hollow brazen figure, with the head of an ox, and outstretched human arms. It was heated red hot by fire within, and the little ones placed in its arms to be slowly burned. To prevent the parents from hearing the dying cries the priests would beat drums.

[Remphan] A Coptic name of Saturn, called Chiun in Amos 5:26, the star god of Babylon. It was customary for idolaters of all nations to carry small images of their gods on their journeys and in war. They were enclosed in miniature temples called tabernacles or shrines (Acts 19:24). Israelites carried these imitating their neighbors, the Moabites, Ammonites, etc. Because they carried these idols God predicted by Amos that they themselves would go into captivity beyond Damascus and Babylon Amos 5:25-27; Acts 7:43).

They were carried into Assyria and Media (2 Kings 17:6), and soon after Stephen's sermon they were carried to all parts of the earth.

Clarke: I will carry you away beyond Babylon—You have carried your idolatrous images about; and I will carry you into captivity, and see if the gods in whom ye have trusted can deliver you from my hands. Instead of beyond Babylon, Amos, from whom the quotation is made, says, I will carry you beyond Damascus. Where they were carried was into Assyria and Media, see 2 Kings 17:6: now, this was not only beyond Damascus, but beyond Babylon itself; and, as Stephen knew this to be the fact, he states it here, and thus more precisely fixes the place of their captivity. The Holy Spirit, in his farther revelations, has undoubted right to extend or illustrate those which he had given before. This case frequently occurs when a former prophecy is quoted in later times.

Barnes: The tabernacle. This word properly means a *tent*; but it is also applied to the small tent or house in which was contained the image of the god; the house, box, or tent, in which the idol was placed. It is customary for idolatrous nations to bear their idols about with them, enclosed in *cases* or boxes of various sizes, usually very small, as their idols are commonly small. Probably they were made in the shape of small *temples* or tabernacles; and such appear to have been the *silver shrines* for Diana, made at Ephesus, Acts 19:24. These shrines, or images, were borne with them as a species of *amulet*, or *charm*, or *talisman*, to defend them from evil. Such images the Jews seem to have borne with them.

Acts 7:44

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

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

Clarke: Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness—That is, the tabernacle in which the two tables of stone written by the finger of God were laid up, as a testimony that he had delivered these laws to the people, and that they had promised to obey them. As one great design of St. Stephen was to show the Jews that they placed too much dependence on outward privileges, and had not used the law, the tabernacle, the temple, nor the temple service, for the purpose of their institution, he labors to bring them

to a due sense of this, that conviction might lead to repentance and conversion. And he farther shows that God did not confine his worship to one place, or form. He was worshipped without any shrine in the times of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, etc. He was worshipped with a tabernacle, or portable temple, in the wilderness. He was worshipped also in the fixed temple projected by David, but built by Solomon. He asserts farther that his infinite majesty cannot be confined to temples, made by human hands; and where there is neither tabernacle nor temple, (in any part of his vast dominions), he may be worshipped acceptably by the upright in heart. Thus he proves that neither tabernacle nor temple are essentially requisite for the true worship of the true God. Concerning the tabernacle to which St. Stephen here refers, the reader is requested to consult the notes on Exodus 25:8, etc., and the subsequent chapters.

Barnes: The tabernacle of witness. The *tent* or *tabernacle* which Moses was commanded to make. It was called a tabernacle of *witness*, or of testimony, because it was the visible witness or proof of God's presence with them; the evidence that he to whom it was devoted was their protector and guide. The name is given either to the *tent*, or to the two tables of stone, or to the ark; all of which were *witnesses* or *evidence*, of God's relation to them as their Lawgiver and Guide, Exodus 16:34, 25:16,21, 27:21, 30:6,36, 31:18 Numbers 1:50,53. The two charges against Stephen were that he had spoken blasphemy against Moses, or his law, and against the temple, Acts 6:13,14. In the previous part of this defence he had shown his respect for Moses and his law. He now proceeds to show that he did not design to speak with disrespect of the temple, or the holy places of their worship. He therefore expresses his belief in the Divine appointment of both the tabernacle Acts 7:44-46 and of the temple, Acts 7:47.

Tabernacle/temple (7:44-45)

In verse 44 Stephen begins to discuss the "tabernacle of Testimony," the movable center of worship the Israelites used in the wilderness. He ends by only briefly mentioning Solomon's temple. The tabernacle was the center and focus of worship in Israel from the time it was made at the beginning of the wilderness wandering until King Solomon's reign. David wanted to provide a permanent dwelling place for the tabernacle's furniture, the ark in particular, in Jerusalem (Psalm 132:5). David expressed his desire to build a temple, and the prophet Nathan thought it a good idea (2 Samuel 7:1-3).

However, the word of the Lord came to Nathan with a different message for David regarding a permanent temple. Nathan was told by God to pass the message on to David that he didn't need a permanent house from which to manifest his glory: "I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought the Israelites up out of Egypt to this day. I have been moving from place to place with a tent as my dwelling" (verse 6).

It would seem that God did not particularly *want* a house built in his honor. Instead, God told David that God would build David a "house" — a dynasty (verse 13).

The point of Stephen's discourse on the tabernacle seems to be that God was better served when his presence was revealed by means of a moveable structure. This would have reduced the tendency to institutionalize worship. It underscores Stephen's contention that the Jews need to reorient their faith from a temple to the Messiah.

Stephen seems to have viewed the epitome of Jewish worship in terms of the tabernacle, not the temple. Very likely this was because he felt the mobility of the tabernacle was a restraint on the status quo mentality that had grown up around the temple. (Longenecker, page 346)

After tacitly praising the tabernacle era, Stephen proceeds to criticize the Jewish idea of the temple as the high point of their religion. He says of the temple, "The Most High does not live in houses made by men" (7:48) To paraphrase his thought, Stephen was saying, "Don't think that God lives in monuments erected by human beings." (Paul said the same thing about pagan temples. In Acts 17:24, he said to his audience in Athens: "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands." Jews frequently criticized pagans for their hand-made idols, and Stephen is using the very same word to point out that their temple is also made by human hands.)

But the Jews made the temple their own private preserve. This had the effect in their minds of making God something of a caged bird, whose working was limited to Jerusalem, its institutions, land and people. That would mean that the only way a person could be saved is to become a Jew. But that effectively halts the advance of God's universal purpose to work with all nations.

There is a lesson here for all churches—with their own temples, churches, basilicas, holy places, systems of worship, theology and credos. God can work outside of established religion. He works wherever and however he pleases, and we must not limit him in our minds.³¹

Acts 7:45

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

“Joshua” is Hebrew for the Greek word Jesus. Stephen here is talking about Joshua, the son of Nun who was the successor to Moses.

[Jesus] Joshua is called Jesus here and in Hebrews 4:8, both words meaning Savior.

[unto the days of David] Gradual possession of the land continued from Joshua to David.

Stephen had been accused of speaking against the temple (Acts 6:13). Although he recognized the importance of the temple, he knew that it was not more important than God. God is not limited; he doesn't live only in a house of worship, but wherever hearts of faith are open to receive him (Isaiah 66:1-2). Solomon knew this when he prayed at the dedication of the temple (2 Chron. 6:18). God wants to live in us. Is he living in you?³²

³¹ <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts7.htm>

³² Life Application Notes

Acts 7:46

Who found favour before God, and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob.

[**tabernacle**] Greek: *skenoma* (GSN-4638), habitation (Acts 7:46; 2 Peter 1:13-14). Not the same as in Acts 7:44.

Clarke: Desired to find a tabernacle—This was in David's heart, and it met with the Divine approbation: see 2 Samuel 7:2, etc., and see the purpose, Psalm 132:2-5; but, as David had been a man of war, and had shed much blood, God would not permit him to build the temple; but he laid the plan and made provision for it, and Solomon executed the design.

Acts 7:47

But Solomon built him an house.

Acts 7:48

Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet,

They originally accused him of desecrating the Temple, and he is not disparaging the Temple, but is pointing out that God does not dwell in a house made with hands (quoting from Isa 66:1-2).

[**most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands**] See Luke 1:32 (cp. Acts 17:34; Mark 14:58; Ephes. 2:11; Hebrews 9:11,24).

Carke: The Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands—Here St. Stephen evidently refers to Solomon's speech, 1 Kings 8:27. But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, the heaven, and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee, how much less this house that I have builded? Both Solomon and St. Stephen mean that the majesty of God could not be contained, not even in the whole vortex of nature; much less in any temple which human hands could erect.

Barnes: Howbeit. But. Why Stephen added this, is not very clear. He was charged with speaking against the temple. He had now shown that he had due veneration for it, by his declaring that it had been built by the command of God. But he *now* adds, that God does not need such a temple. Heaven is his throne; the universe his dwelling-place; and *therefore* this temple might be destroyed. A new, glorious truth was to be revealed to mankind, that God was not *confined* in his worship to any age, or people, or nation. In entire consistency, therefore, with all proper respect for the temple at Jerusalem, it might be maintained that the time would come when that temple would be destroyed, and when God might be worshipped by all nations.

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 is my throne, and earth is my footstool] See Isaiah 66:1-2; 1 Kings 8:27.

[what house will ye build me? ... what is the place of my rest? Hath not my hand made all these things?] This is questions 25-27. The next question is in Acts 7:52.

[rest] Greek: *katapausis* (GSN-2663), a putting down; to depose one from power. Used here; Hebrews 3:11,18; Hebrews 4:1,3,5,10,11. It refers to complete putting down of enemies where one can rest secure from any danger of further uprising, as referred to in Acts 2:35; Matthew 22:44. God's rest from all redemptive work and of using force to put down rebellion will come at the end of the Millennium when Christ has put down all enemies and God becomes all and all (1 Cor. 15:24-28; Ephes. 1:10; Rev. 21:3-7; Rev. 22:3).

Acts 7:50

Hath not my hand made all these things?

Clarke: Hath not my hand made all these things?—Stephen certainly had not finished his discourse, nor drawn his inferences from the facts already stated; but it is likely that, as they perceived he was about to draw conclusions unfavourable to the temple and its ritual, they immediately raised up a clamor against him, which was the cause of the following very cutting address.

Concession or command? (7:44-50)

The prophets long ago warned the people against a false confidence in the temple and the rituals surrounding it. It was a mistake to think that because God "lived" in the temple, a sinning nation would automatically be preserved (Isaiah 1:10-17; Jeremiah 7:1-34).

Stephen seems to imply that building of the temple was more of a concession on God's part to human desire, than his real purpose. This critical attitude toward the temple is new in this early stage of the church. Earlier, Luke had gone out of his way to show the apostles and the church worshipping at the temple.

Stephen adopted a position unlike that of any other writer in the New Testament. Where others saw the temple as having once had a place in the divine economy, though no longer, Stephen saw it as a mistake from the first. In his view, the temple was never intended by God. (David J. Williams, *Acts*, page 130)

A parallel situation to the building of the temple might be Israel's desire to have a king. God allowed it, and he even chose Israel's kings, but he was displeased by the situation (1 Samuel 8:1-21). Once the institution was in place, God worked with it, and even spoke of preserving it. But a king brought all the evils of a state apparatus and bureaucracy. It created a government insensitive to the needs of the people and trusting in itself rather

than God. Humanity's experience with all sorts of governments through the ages underscores the validity of the point.

In the same way, the stationary temple created an ossified religious government in Jerusalem, and gave rise to an inflexible state of mind. The temple became the domain of a political-religious machine that took advantage of its people.

An unpretentious and mobile tabernacle around which worship was based would have made it more difficult to centralize religious power. A tabernacle that moved from place to place would also remind people that God is not limited to one location. Ironically, this was what Solomon himself said when he dedicated the original temple (1 Kings 8:27), and so did the prophet Isaiah later on (66:1). God is too big to be squeezed into a building. But the point was soon forgotten.

Stephen is re-echoing the thought, plainly saying to the Sanhedrin that temple worship can create a narrow view of God's salvation, thus limiting his purpose.

The Temple which should have become their greatest blessing was in fact their greatest curse; they had come to worship it instead of worshipping God. They had finished up with a Jewish God who lived in Jerusalem rather than a God of all men whose dwelling was the whole universe. (William Barclay, *The Acts of the Apostles*, revised edition, page 60)

Yet, the glory of the Lord had been in Solomon's temple (1 Kings 8:10). Had Stephen gone too far in his criticism of the temple? David J. Williams points out that the operative word in Stephen's denunciation of temple worship was the word "live" (7:48). The Jews should not have supposed that God's presence could be found *only* in the temple and nowhere else.

Stephen may well have agreed that God could be found in the temple, but this word [live] would suggest that he was confined there, and as Stephen had maintained throughout, that was simply not so. Had not God been found in Mesopotamia, in Egypt, in the desert? (*Acts*, page 142)

God can be found and worshipped anywhere on the earth, not just in the Jerusalem temple. The logical conclusion is that people of God can be found and have a relationship with him at the "place" where *they* were, not in a restricted "place," such as a temple.

Jesus stated this principle when he said a time was coming when people would no longer worship the Father in Jerusalem. They would worship him anywhere they happened to be, and do it "in spirit and truth" (John 4:21-22). One does not need to be in a special place at a special time in special circumstances to worship God.

Since the Holy Spirit is given to whomsoever is called and responds to God in faith, there is "a new understanding of 'the holy place' in terms of a community (rather than a physical shrine)" (Williams, page 136).

Thus, it is the people of God themselves who constitute "the temple" where God lives through the Holy Spirit. They are "members of God's household," and in Christ they "become a holy temple" (Ephesians 2:19-21). Paul alludes to this principle on several occasions, and it seems to have been the common understanding of the church that it was "God's temple" (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19; 2 Corinthians 6:16).

Perhaps Stephen was about to go on to describe what was implied by his criticism of the temple. That is, God's presence is not in the temple, but he is "dwelling" among people who put their faith in the Righteous One—Jesus.³³

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.

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

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

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

[stiffnecked] Greek: *sklerotrachelos* (GSN-4644), only here in the New Testament but found in the Septuagint in Exodus 33:3,5; Exodus 34:9; Deut. 9:6,13 (cp. Deut. 31:27; 2 Chron. 30:8; Proverbs 29:1). The idea is taken from a stubborn ox that cannot be broken into the yoke and whose neck is so strong that it is hard to turn him to the right or the left in driving.

[uncircumcised in heart and years]

Four Kinds of Uncircumcision (Dake)

1. Uncircumcised ears (Acts 7:51; Jeremiah 6:10)
2. Uncircumcised lips (Exodus 6:12)
3. Uncircumcised heart (Acts 7:51; Leviticus 26:41; Deut. 10:16; Jeremiah 4:4; Jeremiah 9:26)
4. Uncircumcised flesh (Genesis 17:11)

[resist] Greek: *antipipto* (GSN-496), fall against or pull against like a backsliding heifer that will not be led (Hosea 4:16; Hosea 11:7).

The Holy Ghost Can Be (Dake)

1. Resisted (Acts 7:51)
2. Tempted (Acts 5:9)
3. Lied to (Acts 5:3-4)
4. Grieved (Ephes. 4:30)
5. Blasphemed (Matthew 12:31-32)
6. Insulted (Hebrews 6:4-6; Hebrews 10:26-29)
7. Quenched (1 Thes. 5:19)
8. Vexed (Psalm 78:40; Isaiah 63:10)
9. Quieted (Zech. 6:8)
10. Fellowshiped with (Phil. 2:1)

³³ <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts7.htm>

[as your fathers did, so do ye] Rebellious children of rebellious parents of many generations. The Holy Spirit deals with rational souls and works upon the intellectual and moral faculties in order to enlighten, convince, and persuade. If man closes his mind to light, his will to reproof, his conscience to righteousness, and his emotions to his best good, then he reverts to total rebellion and must face the harvest of eternal hardness.

Clarke: Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost—

1. Because they were uncircumcised in heart, they always resisted the influences of the Holy Spirit, bringing light and conviction to their minds; in consequence of which they became hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, and neither repented at the preaching of John, nor credited the glad tidings told them by Christ and the apostles.
2. Because they were uncircumcised in ears, they would neither hear nor obey Moses, the prophets, Christ, nor the apostles.

Acts 7:52

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

National trait: deadly hostility to the messengers of God.

[Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?] This is question 28. The next question is in Acts 8:30. You have not only resisted the Spirit but also have killed those inspired by Him.

[Just One] Jesus called this here; this Acts 3:14; this Acts 22:14.

Barnes: Which of the prophets, The interrogative form here is a strong mode of saying that they had persecuted all the prophets. It was *the characteristic of the nation* to persecute the messengers of God. This is not to be taken as literally and universally true; but it was a general truth; it was the national characteristic.

Clarke: Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?—Ye have not only resisted the Holy Ghost, but ye have persecuted all those who have spoken to you in his name, nce: thus ye prove your opposition to the Spirit himself, by your opposition to every thing that proceeds from him.

They have slain them, etc.—Isaiah, who showed before of the coming of Christ, the Jews report, was sawn asunder at the command of Manasseh.

Clarke: The coming of the Just One— Meaning Jesus Christ; emphatically called the just or righteous person, not only because of the unspotted integrity of his heart and life, but because of his plenary acquittal, when tried at the tribunal of Pilate: I find no fault at

all in him. The mention of this circumstance served greatly to aggravate their guilt. The character of Just One is applied to our Lord in three other places of Scripture: Acts 3:14; 22:14; and James 5:6.

Clarke: The betrayers and murderers—Ye first delivered him up into the hands of the Romans, hoping they would have put him to death; but, when they acquitted him, then, in opposition to the declaration of his innocence, and in outrage to every form of justice, ye took and murdered him. This was a most terrible charge; and one against which they could set up no sort of defense. No wonder, then, that they were instigated by the spirit of the old destroyer, which they never resisted, to add another murder to that of which they had been so recently guilty.

Indeed many prophets were persecuted and killed: Uriah (Jeremiah 26:20-23); Jeremiah (Jeremiah 38:1-6); Isaiah (tradition says he was killed by King Manasseh; see 2 Kings 21:16); Amos (Amos 7:10-13); Zechariah (not the author of the Bible book, but the son of Jehoiada the priest, 2 Chron. 24:20-22); Elijah (1 Kings 19:1-2). Jesus also told a parable about how the Jews had constantly rejected God's messages and persecuted his messengers (Luke 20:9-19). The Righteous One refers to the Messiah.

Acts 7:53

Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.

Major climax:	Matt 23:37-39
Purpose of all history	v. 37
Tragedy of all history	ye would not, v. 38
Triumph of all history	v. 39

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

[disposition] Greek: *diatage* (GSN-1296), arrangement or ordinance (Romans 13:2). Myriads of angels were present and were used in giving the law (Acts 7:38,53; Psalm 68:17; Galatians 3:19; Hebrews 2:2).

Barnes: By the disposition of angels. There has been much diversity of opinion in regard to this phrase. The word translated *disposition* does not elsewhere occur in the New Testament. It properly means the *constituting* or *arranging* of an army; disposing it into ranks and proper divisions. Hence it has been supposed to mean that the law was given *amidst* the various ranks of angels, being present to witness its promulgation. Others suppose that the angels were employed as agents or instruments to communicate the law. All that the expression fairly implies is the former; that the law was given amidst the attending ranks of angels, as if they were summoned to witness the pomp and ceremony of giving *law* to an entire people, and through them to an entire world. It should be added, moreover, that the Jews applied the word angels to any of the messengers of God; to fire, and tempest, and wind, etc. And all that Stephen means here may be to express the common Jewish opinion, that God was attended on this occasion

by the heavenly hosts; and by the symbols of his presence, the fire, and smoke, and tempest. Comp. Psalms 104:4, 68:17. Other places declare that the law was spoken by *an angel*, one eminent above all attending angels, the peculiar messenger of God. Acts 7:38. It is plain that Stephen spoke only the common sentiment of the Jews, Thus Herod is introduced by Josephus, (*Antiq. b. xv. chap. v. by angels,*" etc. In the eyes of the Jews, it justly gave increased majesty and solemnity to the law, that it had been given in so grand and imposing circumstances. And it greatly aggravated their guilt, that, notwithstanding this, they had not kept it.

McGee: Physically, these men were circumcised, but in their hearts and in their ears, they were uncircumcised. That is, they would not hear God any more than their ancestors down through the years had heard Him.

This is a masterful speech, Stephen reminds them of the deliverance out of Egypt. God made Moses the deliverer, but the children of Israel refused to obey him. The wilderness experience was a series of rebellions against God, brought to a climax in the making of a golden calf. A plague of idolatry broke out again in the land and resulted in the Babylonian captivity. Stephen concludes with Joshua, who led them into the land, and Jesus, who made the way to heaven. He charges that the Law was given to them supernaturally by the ministry of angels, and they did not keep it. Perhaps they knew that the birth of Jesus was announced by angels. Obviously, they have been the betrayers and murderers of Him.³⁴

Stephen's indictment (7:51-53)

Stephen seems to break off suddenly from his cataloguing of Israel's history. He suddenly begins a blistering attack on his hearers. Commentators speculate that Steven's blunt criticism of the temple may have created a violent clamor in the audience. The commotion in the Sanhedrin may have caused Stephen to break off from his speech, and strongly censure his listeners.

If Stephen had continued his speech, he may have made his point about the temple more clear, and further clarified just who God's people are. This would have propelled him forward to the usual appeal: accept the resurrected and glorified Christ as Messiah. But Stephen's speech took a turn into direct denunciation. There is no more talk about the faithful patriarchs being "our fathers." Now, Stephen talks about his hearers' ancestors ("your fathers"), the sinning Israelites (7:51).

Stephen insists that the Sanhedrin's refusal to acknowledge Jesus—and his murder—reflected the council's negative attitude towards God's messengers throughout Israel's history. Though Joseph was to be his brothers' deliverer, they hated him. Moses, who led the emancipation of Israel, was repudiated by the people. The prophets who announced the coming of the Righteous One—and who urged the nation toward faith in God—had been killed by their ancestors (Matthew 23:29-37).

Luke had established this point in his Gospel. Luke Timothy Johnson summarizes:

³⁴McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:541). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

The Pharisees and Lawyers build tombs to the prophets their ancestors killed, and thereby collude in the killing (Luke 11:47-48); they are liable for the blood of all the prophets shed since the creation of the world (11:50); they will kill "the prophets and apostles" the wisdom of God sends to them (11:49); Jerusalem is the "killer of the prophets and stoner of those sent to her" (13:34). (*The Acts of the Apostles*, page 134)

Stephen says that his listeners are like their fathers in every way. Sin, rebellion against God, and rejection of his purpose characterizes Israel's history—and the Sanhedrin's. The council members are stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! (7:51).

The Sanhedrin know exactly what Stephen means by this. Such words were often used by God in characterizing Israel's attitude toward him (Exodus 33:3, 5; 34:9; Leviticus 26:41; Deuteronomy 9:6, 13; 10:16; Jeremiah 4:4; 9:6). The speech is a bitter and abrupt denunciation of the leaders' rebellion. His listeners resist the Holy Spirit. They betrayed and murdered the Righteous One, of whom Moses spoke. They are not keeping the law that came from God through angels.

Paul later notes a similar rejection of God's calling by the Jews. He described the churches in Judea as suffering from the Jews "who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to all men in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at the last" (1 Thessalonians 2:14-16).³⁵

Acts 7:54

When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with *their* teeth.

“Gnashed”- medical terms in Greek.

[**cut to the heart**] Sawn through; note, *Acts 5:33.

Seven Accusations that Cut Them (Dake)

1. Being stiffnecked (Acts 7:51)
2. Being uncircumcised in heart (Acts 7:51)
3. Being uncircumcised in ears (Acts 7:51)
4. Resisting the Holy Ghost (Acts 7:51)
5. Betraying the Messiah (Acts 7:52)
6. Murdering the Messiah (Acts 7:52)
7. Refusing to obey the law (Acts 7:53)

Seven Added Sins because They Were Cut (Dake)

1. Gnashing with their teeth (Acts 7:54)
2. Unrepentance and hardness (Acts 7:54,57)
3. Crying for vengeance (Acts 7:57)
4. Refusing to hear the gospel (Acts 7:57)

³⁵ <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts7.htm>

5. Uniting in rebellion (Acts 7:57)
6. Casting out the preacher (Acts 7:58)
7. Murdering the preacher (Acts 7:58)

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,

“Standing” - Priesthood, is the role of the priest. No chairs in the Tabernacle. Standing used twice in this verse.

[looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God] Four things that Stephen saw (Acts 7:55-56):

1. Heaven opened
2. The glory of God
3. God the Father
4. Jesus standing on God's right hand

[Jesus standing on the right hand of God] This is proof of three separate and distinct persons in the deity. Two were side by side and both were seen by the natural eyes and the third person was filling Stephen, enabling him to see the other two (Acts 7:55-56). In his official character, as Mediator between God and man. Stephen had this revelation while in the Sanhedrin; for as yet he had not been forced out of the city. See Acts 7:58.

Barnes: Looked up stedfastly. Fixed his eyes intently on heaven. Foreseeing his danger, and the effect his speech had produced-seeing that there was no safety in the great council of the nation, and no prospect of justice at their hands-he cast his eyes to heaven and sought protection there. When dangers threaten us, our hope of safety lies in heaven. When men threaten our persons, reputation, or lives, it becomes us to fix our eyes on the heavenly world; and we shall not look in vain.

Acts 7:56

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

They heard this before from Jesus in the trial: “The next time you see me you are going to see me in glory” (Mt 27:64; Mk 14:62; Lk 22:69).

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

[Son of man] The 86th occurrence of this title of 88 times in the New Testament It is used 85 time by the Lord Himself in the 4 gospels. See John 1:51.

[right hand of God] This is His rightful place by virtue of His achievements and exaltation to original glory (John 17:5; Ephes. 1:20-23; Phil. 2:9-11; Hebrews 1:3-4; see note, Acts 2:33).

Acts 7:57

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

Clarke: They—stopped their ears—As a proof that he had uttered blasphemy, because he said, He saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God. This was a fearful proof against them; for if Jesus was at the right hand of God, then they had murdered an innocent person; and they must infer that God’s justice must speedily avenge his death. They were determined not to suffer a man to live any longer who could say he saw the heavens opened and Jesus Christ standing at the right hand of God.

Acts 7:58

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

“Saul” - this isn’t casual, not just a bystander, implies that he was one that did some of the accusing. Saul never forgave himself for this, see Chapter 8. He grieves in his letters of this incident (2 Tim 1:12).

(2 Timothy 1:11-12) ¹¹Whereunto I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles. ¹²For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.

[witnesses laid down their clothes] Witnesses were the first to cast stones (Deut. 17:7). This was to be done outside the city (Leviticus 24:23).

[young] Greek: *neanias* (GSN-3494), used of young men from 20 to 40 years of age (Acts 7:58; Acts 20:9; Acts 23:17,18,22).

[Saul] First mention of Saul. See Summary of Romans.

Barnes: **And cast him out of the city.** This was in accordance with the usual custom. In Leviticus 24:14, it was directed to bring forth him that had cursed without the camp; and it was not usual, the Jewish writers inform us, to stone in the presence, of the sanhedrim. Though this was a popular tumult, and Stephen was condemned without the regular process of trial, yet some of the *forms* of law were observed, and he was stoned in the manner directed in the case of blasphemers.

And the witnesses. That is, the false witnesses who bore testimony against him, Acts 6:13. It was directed in the law Deuteronomy 17:7 that the *witnesses* in the case should be first in executing the sentence of the law. This was done to prevent false accusations by the prospect that they must be employed as executioners. After *they* had commenced the process of execution, all the people joined in it, Deuteronomy 17:7, Leviticus 24:16.

“The place of stoning was as the height of two men. One of the witnesses pushed him down by his hips. If he turned over face downward, he turned him on his back. If he died from the blow and the fall, that was enough. But if not, the second witness took a stone and dropped it on his chest. If he died from this, that was enough. But if not, his stoning had to be carried out by all Israel, as it is said, ‘The hand of the witnesses shall be first upon him to put him to death and afterward the hand of all the people’ (Deuteronomy 17:7).” (Sanhedrin 6:4)³⁶

“When the trial is over, they take him [the condemned person] out to be stoned. The place of stoning was at a distance from the court, as it is said, ‘Take out the one who has cursed’ (Leviticus 24:14). A man stands at the entrance of the court; in his hand is the signalling flag [Hebrew *sudarin* = *sudar*, “scarf, sweater”]. A horseman was stationed far away but within sight of him. If one [of the judges] says, ‘I have something [more] to say in his favor,’ he [the signaller] waves the *sudarin*, and the horseman runs and stops them [from stoning him]. Even if [the condemned person] himself says, ‘I have something to say in my favor,’ they bring him back, even four or five times, only provided that there is some substance to what he is saying.” (Sanhedrin 42b)³⁷

Stephen is stoned (7:54-58)

Stephen places the death of Jesus squarely on the shoulders of the Sanhedrin, the spiritual leaders of the nation (Luke 24:20; Acts 4:10; 5:30). (Peter had been more charitable, saying in Acts 3:17 that the people killed their Savior in ignorance.)

The Sanhedrin’s response to Stephen’s speech is absolute rage. When they hear Stephen’s condemnation, they are "furious and gnashed their teeth at him" (7:54). Then comes the *coup de grace*. At the height of the Sanhedrin’s wrath, Stephen, "full of the Holy Spirit" (7:55), has a vision of the glory of God, and Jesus standing at his right hand.

Just a few years earlier, Jesus stood in front of this same group. The high priest asked Jesus if he were the Messiah. Jesus answered: "I am...and you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Mark 14:62). This image of Jesus at God’s right hand is based on Psalm 110:1, a verse frequently used to support Jesus’ Messiahship, particularly his resurrection and glorification (Luke 20:42; Acts 2:34; 5:31).

In Acts 7:55 Jesus is said to be standing rather than sitting. Both were metaphors for being in the presence of God (Zechariah 3:1-8; Isaiah 6:1). But why is he standing? Elsewhere in the New Testament Jesus is sitting (Acts 2:34; Mark 16:19; Hebrews 1:3,

³⁶Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Ac 7:58). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

³⁷Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Ac 7:58). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

13). "The thought may be that he had risen to receive Stephen into heaven or to plead his case in the heavenly court, as though two trials were in progress: this one, conducted by the Sanhedrin, and another, which alone would determine Stephen's fate [Luke 12:8]" (David J. Williams, *Acts*, page 146).

This is also the only time that the phrase "the son of Man" appears in the New Testament outside the Gospels, the only time it is spoken by a disciple. It has its roots in Daniel 7:13. The title is probably meant to convey the fact that Stephen saw Jesus in his role as the spurned Messiah. He was to suffer and be rejected by the Sanhedrin—the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law (Luke 9:22).

This probably explains why the Son of man was seen standing, rather than sitting at God's right hand (2:34). He is standing as an advocate to plead Stephen's cause before God and to welcome him into God's presence. (I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*, page 149) Stephen's vision confirms Jesus' claim, which the Sanhedrin must have remembered. The Jewish council is being condemned for having rejected their Savior, and having him executed. When Jesus originally told the council that they would see him at God's right hand, it reacted by saying that Jesus had blasphemed and should be put to death (verse 64). Stephen is now making the same claim for Jesus as Jesus had made for himself. This brings the council to a frenzied hatred. Stephen is judged to be blaspheming the Sanhedrin. The penalty for blasphemy was stoning to death (Deuteronomy 13:6).

F.F. Bruce wrote, "Unless the judges were prepared to admit that their former decision was tragically mistaken, they had no option but to find Stephen guilty of blasphemy as well" (*The Book of Acts*, revised edition, page 155). Luke's account indicates that the Sanhedrin is turning into a vicious mob. "Yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him" (7:57-58). Stephen becomes the first martyr to die for the name of Jesus.

There is no formal trial. A Roman form of execution was not used —Stephen is stoned. Even with a trial and guilty verdict, Rome has not given the Sanhedrin any right to put people to death for this offense, and they are supposed to confer with the Roman authority regarding capital punishment cases (John 18:31). This shows the intense anger of the Sanhedrin —they were so angry that they did not follow proper procedures.

Would the Sanhedrin get into difficulty with the Roman authority for overstepping its legal jurisdiction? Perhaps conditions were such in Judea that Roman power was weak or ineffectual at the time. Josephus describes a similar situation in which the high priest Ananus killed James in A.D. 62, the leader of the Jerusalem church congregation (*Antiquities* 20:200-203; and see Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.23.16). This may have occurred after the procurator of Judea, Festus, died and before Albinus arrived to assume his jurisdiction.

In the same way, some commentators conjecture that Stephen's martyrdom may have occurred in the mid-30s, during the final years of Pilate's governorship over Judea, when his power was growing weaker. Whatever the situation or reason, it appears that the Sanhedrin stoned Stephen to death, usurping Roman law, and got away with it.

Many Christians once held a belief that *all* Jews were responsible for killing Christ, and thus were guilty of his death. This is a gross misunderstanding. It could equally be said that the Jews and Romans were representing all humanity, and that *all* humans are guilty

of his death. The martyrdom of Jews in numerous pogroms since Christ—often with the church's complicity—is a blight on Christianity.

While Stephen's speech is "anti-Jewish" in the sense that it condemns the Jewish leaders who were present, it should not be misconstrued as a polemic against all Jews. That is not what Stephen had in mind, as the next verses show. Almost all the early Christians, including Stephen, *were* Jews. When *they* use the term "Jews," it is obvious that they do not mean *all* Jews. But when non-Jewish people use the term "Jews." it is not obvious, and need to be clarified.

Acts 7:59

And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

[Jesus] Here we have prayer to Jesus and proof that He is a member of the Trinity.

[receive my spirit] This proves that the spirit of man at death does not remain in the body (James 2:26; Matthew 10:28; Luke 12:5; 2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:21-24; 1 Peter 3:4; Hebrews 12:23; Rev. 6:9-11).

Clarke: And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God—The word God is not found in any MS. or version, nor in any of the primitive fathers except Chrysostom. It is not genuine, and should not be inserted here: the whole sentence literally reads thus: And they stoned Stephen, invoking and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit! Here is a most manifest proof that prayer is offered to Jesus Christ; and that in the most solemn circumstances in which it could be offered, viz., when a man was breathing his last. This is, properly speaking, one of the highest acts of worship which can be offered to God; and, if Stephen had not conceived Jesus Christ to be GOD, could he have committed his soul into his hands?

We may farther observe that this place affords a full proof of the immateriality of the soul; for he could not have commended his spirit to Christ, had he believed that he had no spirit, or, in other words, that his body and soul were one and the same thing. Allowing this most eminent saint to have had a correct notion of theology, and that, being full of the Holy Ghost, as he was at this time, he could make no mistake in matters of such vast weight and importance, then these two points are satisfactorily stated in this verse:

1. That Jesus Christ is GOD; for Stephen died praying to him.
2. That the soul is immaterial; for Stephen, in dying, commends his departing spirit into the hand of Christ.

The penalty for blasphemy, speaking irreverently about God, was death by stoning (Leviticus 24:14). The religious leaders, who were furious, had Stephen stoned without a trial. They did not understand that Stephen's words were true, because they were not seeking the truth. They only wanted support for their own views.

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.

Jesus

“Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.”

“Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.”

Stephen

“Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.”

“Lord Jesus, Receive my spirit.”

“Stephen” = crown in Greek (*stephanos*).

Turning point in Acts, Saul persecutes the Church, which causes the apostles to move out. Now into phase 2, Samaria. Then later in Chapters 9, 10 and on, we move to “the uttermost parts of the earth.”

[kneeled down] What a wonderful position and spirit in which to die. He died on his knees and without malice toward his murderers.

[death] Compare this prayer with Luke 23:34.

[church which was at Jerusalem] Only the body sleeps at death and knows nothing in the grave. The spirit remains fully conscious after leaving the body whether it goes to hell (Luke 16:19-31; Isaiah 14:9; Rev. 20:11-15) or to heaven (see Scriptures in note on Acts 7:59).

He fell asleep—This was a common expression among the Jews to signify death, and especially the death of good men. But this sleep is, properly speaking, not attributable to the soul, but to the body; for he had commended his spirit to the Lord Jesus, while his body was overwhelmed with the shower of stones cast on him by the mob.

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 church in Antioch in Syria founded (Acts 11:19-26)

McGee: Stephen falls asleep. Jesus puts his body to sleep to await the Rapture. Stephen goes into the presence of Christ who is standing to meet him. Stephen is the first martyr of the church to go to be with his Lord.

The other young man there that day was a Pharisee, and he thought he had everything. He looked up into heaven when Stephen said that he saw the heavens open. I

am sure that Saul looked up longingly and admitted to himself, *I don't see anything, but I'd like to see what he sees. I have an empty heart.* Stephen was a tremendous witness to Saul. Stephen was the one, I believe, who prepared Saul for the appearance of the Lord Jesus on the Damascus road, as we shall see.³⁸

"Lord, please forgive them" (7:59-60)

As he lay dying, Stephen asks that the risen Jesus receive his spirit, and that his killers be forgiven. Stephen is following his Savior, who also asks forgiveness for his executioners (Luke 23:34). Stephen shows the same spirit of faith and forgiveness as characterized Jesus. Stephen accepts Jesus' bid to come and follow him to the ultimate degree.

The way Luke crafts the story of Stephen, he emerges as a type of Christ. Detail after detail in Stephen's sermon and death remind us of the life and particularly the last days and death of Jesus. Luke Timothy Johnson presents a comparative portrait:

As did Jesus, so does Stephen have grace and power, and works wonders and signs among the people (6:8); he enters into dispute with those who challenge him (6:9; see Luke 20:1-7), including those who are sent as spies (6:11; see Luke 20:20). He is arrested (6:12; see Luke 22:54), and brought to trial before the Sanhedrin (6:12-15; see Luke 22:66-71). Stephen has false witnesses accuse him (6:13), an element left out of Luke's passion narrative, though found in the Synoptic parallels of Mark 14:56 and Matthew 26:59. Stephen is taken out of the city to be executed (7:58) as was Jesus (23:32). At his death...Stephen prays that his spirit be accepted (7:59) as did Jesus (Luke 23:46). Stephen asks forgiveness of his murderers (7:60) as did Jesus (23:34). Stephen is buried by pious people (8:2) as was Jesus (Luke 23:50-55). (*The Acts of the Apostles*, page 143)

The same power and prophetic spirit that characterize Jesus is at work in his disciples.

As he was dying on the cross, Jesus said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" (Luke 23:46). But Stephen commits his spirit to Jesus directly. That is a striking difference. Words applied to the Father are now addressed to the Son. For the early church, Jesus was in the role of God, in the sense of being the one who saves us. Even at this early date in its history, the church already had a "high" Christology.³⁹

Final thoughts

When Luke writes the book of Acts, somewhere between A.D. 62 and 85, it is becoming increasingly evident that the Jews will not be converted en masse. In fact, the Jews continue to be the greatest persecutors of the church. If Luke writes after A.D. 70, then the temple no longer exists. Decades had elapsed, but Jesus neither returned to save the Jews (and the world), nor to glorify his church.

No doubt there is great disappointment and wonderment in the church over these matters. The example of Stephen provides a ready case to illustrate the point that the Christian's duty is to serve God and have faith in Christ. Stephen also provides an example of Luke's main thesis in Acts. The growth of the church and the spread of the gospel is not the work

³⁸ McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:541). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

³⁹ <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts7.htm>

of human beings. Rather, both increase because the Holy Spirit is at work among his people.

The apostles and the Jerusalem church thought that Stephen was a good choice to be a widows' helper and to take care of the daily ministrations (i.e., wait on tables). But he ends up doing nothing of the sort, so far as we can tell. Almost by accident and through the enlightening power of the Holy Spirit, Stephen jumps to the fore in understanding the deepest implications of the gospel message. (Meanwhile, another widow's helper—Philip—does some of the most amazing miracles in Jesus' name. He rather than the Twelve pushes the gospel out beyond Jerusalem to Samaria and the coast of Palestine.)

The example of Stephen and Philip is Luke's way of saying that the story is not about the work of super-star favorites, nor of planned programs. The Holy Spirit is leading the way, opening new vistas of spiritual understanding, thrusting the gospel into new geographical areas. At best, God's human servants are struggling to keep up the pace. We see this almost amusing pattern throughout the book of Acts.

Stephen's speech breaks new ground in the church's understanding of the role of Old Testament tradition for the church. Even though Stephen upholds the importance of the Jewish law and worship, he marginalizes it by implying that neither land, law nor the temple are the center of worship. Christ is the center. In fact, Stephen says the Jews have never kept the law (in its real intent) and always resist the Holy Spirit. They did not have the right "mind" to be the people of God, since they lack the Holy Spirit. (Only the *new* congregation of Israel—the church—had been given the Spirit.)

Stephen carries the message of good news to new levels of understanding as far as what makes any people a people of God. His message also contains the seeds for understanding that Israel's forms of worship were just that—passing forms of worship. In Christ, a radical reinterpretation of worship, of God's presence, of his purpose with the human family and so on is needed.

The Twelve have so far not said anything about the worship of the Jews as needing a radical transformation. They go to the temple and make it their center of worship, implying its institutions are to continue. They assume the Jews as Jews are the people of God. The only problem is that they were guilty of rejecting and killing their Messiah.

Stephen's speech presages some dramatic future changes in the worship of God. The book of Hebrews, a fundamental assessment of these changes, is merely a fuller statement of what Stephen pointed to. Ironically, Stephen leaped ahead of the apostles in understanding. Perhaps he did not really foresee all that he pointed to, but we have no way of knowing. Just as the resurrection of Jesus vindicated his message and ministry, the martyrdom of Stephen, and his vision of the risen Jesus, vindicates the accuracy of Stephen's understanding of the law.

The death of Stephen provides Luke with an important literary transition. With Stephen's death and his re-evaluation of Jewish faith, the story of the Jerusalem church is complete. Luke has shown how the apostles and others were witnesses in Jerusalem. Now it is time for Luke to show the gospel radiating out to "Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (1:8).⁴⁰

⁴⁰ <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/acts/acts7.htm>

This lengthy section comprises Stephen’s speech. Though some have accused Stephen of numerous historical inaccuracies, a careful study of the speech in light of the background of the first century will reveal Stephen to be a marvelous student of Hebrew history and a gifted theologian. The chart, “Harmonization of Stephen’s Speech and Its Old Testament References,” will shed light on the development of the speech itself, as well as providing solutions to alleged discrepancies.

Harmonization of Stephen’s Speech and Its Old Testament References		
Acts 7	Alleged O.T. Discrepancy	Resolution of the Texts
7:2-4 Appearance/revelation of God to Abraham in Ur (Gen 15:7; Neh 9:7).	Appearance/revelation of God to Abram in Haran (Gen 12:1-3).	(1) Many hold that God indeed spoke to Abram twice, both in Ur and Haran, thus the accounts are complementary. (2) More probably Gen 11:27-32 is a parenthetical background to 12:1-3, and the call did indeed come in Ur.
7:3 Abraham must leave his family and country.	Abram must leave his country, his relatives and <i>his father’s house</i> (Gen 11:31-12:11).	Stephen simply gives a more abbreviated account.
7:4 Abraham leaves Haran after the death of his father.	Abram leaves Haran 60 years before the death of his father (Gen 11:26, 32; 12:4).	Because Abraham is listed first in Gen. 11:26, some assume he was the firstborn. However, it is more probable that he is mentioned first because of his prominence in salvation history, not because of his priority in time (note Gen 5:32 and 10:1, where the first son listed is clearly not the eldest). Therefore, there is no indication of Terah’s age when Abram was born.
7:6 400 years in a foreign country (also Gen 15:13).	430 years in Egypt (Ex 12:40).	(Note also the 450 years of Acts 13:19, 20) Both Acts reckonings (and Gen. 15:13) are simply examples of rounding off numbers. 430 is precise, 400 and 450 are accurate approximations.

<p>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.)</p>	<p>“This mountain” (word to Moses in Ex 3:12) is Mt. Horeb.</p>	<p>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).</p>
<p>7:14 75 people went to Egypt.</p>	<p>70 people went to Egypt (Gen 46:27; Ex 1:5; Deut 10:22).</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>7:16 Abraham bought a tomb in Shechem.</p>	<p>Abraham bought a tomb in Machpelah (cave/field) near Mamre, which is Hebron; Jacob bought a field in Shechem (Gen 23:17, 18; 33:19; Josh 24:32).</p>	<p>Though this is possibly the most difficult of the alleged discrepancies, a proper understanding of the recounting of tradition by the Semitic people is the key.</p> <p>(1) Some would argue that Jacob bought the Shechem burial ground <i>in the name</i> of Abraham.</p> <p>(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. Though admittedly strange by our standards, this would have been well understood and accepted by Stephen’s hearers as an accurate statement.</p>
<p>7:16 Jacob and his sons (including Joseph) were buried in Shechem, but nothing is said about the burial of Abraham.</p>	<p>Abraham and Jacob were buried in Hebron; Joseph was buried in Shechem, but nothing is said about the burial of Jacob’s other sons (Gen 23:9-20; 25:8-10; 33:19; 49:30, 31; 50:13; Josh 24:32).</p>	<p>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 extrabiblical tradition, is clearly evident. Interestingly, Josephus informs us of a tradition that says the brothers of Joseph were buried at Hebron.</p>

7:22 Moses is “a man mighty in 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 job, Moses became a man “mighty in words and deeds” (Acts 7:22).
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.
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 2:15 ff. also affirms that Moses fled for fear and because of the rejection of his people.
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 (<i>eipen de</i> , Gk., “and” or “but he said”) does not require temporal or chronological sequence.
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 Christophany, i.e. a preincarnate appearance of the Son of God.

<p>7:42, 43 Israel's time in the wilderness was one of <i>apostasy</i>.</p>	<p>Israel's time in the wilderness is <i>exemplary</i> (Amos 5:25).</p>	<p>Some misread or misinterpret the Amos text. Amos is also denouncing Israel.</p>
<p>7:43 "tabernacle...Moloch...Remphan."</p>	<p>"Sikkuth your king and Chiun" (Amos 5:26, see notes there).</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>7:43 "away beyond Babylon"</p>	<p>"captivity beyond Damascus" (Amos 5:27).</p>	<p>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.</p>