

In Acts 6 Stephen was brought before the Jewish ruling council on false charges of blaspheming God, Moses (particularly the law of Moses), and the temple. One could hardly imagine more serious accusations; if he was found guilty he would be executed. He was on trial for his life.

Chapter 7 is Stephen's response to these accusations. If length is anything to go by, then this speech is one of the most important sections in Acts (Marshall, 139). Although it may appear that he is meandering through Jewish history, in reality, he is demonstrating that he honors God, upholds the biblical understanding of the temple, and that they, not he, were the ones disregarding the law.

The speech has two themes that are intermingled all the way through. First, it shows that throughout Israel's history, God raised up deliverers but the people always rejected them. The stories of Joseph and Moses are used to illustrate this truth. Secondly, though the Jews had the temple, they were prone to idolatry (7:39-43), and started to act as if God was a local deity (7:44-50).

In the flow of Luke's history of the church in the Book of Acts, this is the turning point when Christianity would no longer be considered a Jewish sect. In addition, Luke is highlighting for us the model confession; a confession that does not vacillate or compromise even though Stephen knew that his testimony could lead to his death.

Marshall summarizes:

It follows that the speech accomplishes at least three purposes: (1) it is a defense to the charges brought against Stephen. He implicitly denies that he has spoken against the Law of Moses, and makes himself out to be a defender of the law. He justifies his attitude of criticism of the temple and its worship. (2) It is an attack on the Jews for their failure to obey the revelation given to them in the Old Testament and for their rejection of the Messiah and the new way of worship which He brought. (3) Consequently, the speech has its part in the total story of Acts in showing that the Jews, to whom the gospel was first preached, had rejected it, and thus clearing the way for the church to turn away from Jerusalem and the temple and to evangelize further afield, and ultimately among the Gentiles (Marshall, 140-141).

7:1 Then the high priest asked him, "Are these charges true?"

The question asked by the high priest is simple. He wants to know if the charges of speaking against God, Moses, the law, and the temple are true. Stephen replies with a speech that begins with Abraham and the glory of God.

7:2 To this he replied: "Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran.

***7:3 'Leave your country and your people,' God said, 'and go to the land I will show you.'* (Gen. 12:1).**

Even though Abraham was an important figure in Judaism, the key to Israel's history is the glory of God, not Abraham. Abraham's blessings were contingent upon the God of glory. God is the true hope of Israel.

Stephen does not blaspheme God; he holds Him to be the God of glory. The rest of what he says confirms this. In verses 5 and 17 God is spoken of as the God who is faithful to His promises. He is the One who preserved the line of Jacob (7:10-14). He preserved Moses when the other babies were killed (7:20), and prepared him for leadership (7:22) to deliver His people from bondage in Egypt (7:25). He is the Holy One who spoke to Moses in the desert (7:33), and the God who is compassionate and hears the cries of His people (7:34). He is a glorious God!

7:4 "So he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. After the death of his father, God sent him to this land where you are now living.

7:5 He gave him no inheritance here, not even a foot of ground. But God promised him that he and his descendants after him would possess the land, even though at that time Abraham had no child.

Before Abraham entered into the land of Canaan, he hadn't received even a foot of ground as an inheritance although he received repeated promises of it. The key to the promises is that it applies to his descendants; God was faithful to Abraham, as his descendants can testify, for they were living in the land that was promised to Abraham.

Although this theme isn't clearly developed, it is interesting to note that the three major promises given to Abraham in the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 12:1-3) were (1) that Abraham's descendants would become a nation, (2) that God would give Abraham's descendants land, and (3) all the nations of the earth would be blessed through him. Acts 7:1-7 mentions the land; Acts 7:8-17 speaks of the increase of his descendants to the size of a nation. Notice that when Abraham's descendants went to Egypt they numbered only about 75 people (7:14), but verse 17 states, "As the time drew near for God to fulfill his promise to Abraham, the number of our people in Egypt greatly increased;" that is, they became the size of a nation in Egypt. Lastly, Acts 7:37 speaks of the prophet who would come who would be like Moses. When John the Baptist's actions were being questioned he was asked, "Why then are you baptizing, if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, *nor the Prophet?*" (Jn. 1:25). Many Jews understood this to be a reference to Messiah. Through Him all the nations of the earth would be blessed, making all three promises of the Abrahamic Covenant complete.

7:6 God spoke to him in this way: 'Your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own (Gen. 15:13), and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years.

7:7 But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves,' God said, 'and afterward they will come out of that country and worship me in this place.' (Exo. 3:12).

The remarks foretell when the nation would be plunged into slavery in Egypt and delivered by Moses during the Exodus, but the emphasis is on the land; it could well be that the land is noted because it

provides the backdrop for the presence of God in the temple. The Jews' presence in the land was evidence of God's fulfilled promises.

7:8 Then he gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision (Gen. 17:10). And Abraham became the father of Isaac and circumcised him eight days after his birth (Gen. 21:4). Later Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob became the father of the twelve patriarchs.

The relationship that God initiated with Abraham included circumcision, which was an intimate sign and a reminder of the Jews' commitment to God.

7:9 "Because the patriarchs were jealous of Joseph (Gen. 37:11), they sold him as a slave into Egypt (Gen. 37:28; 45:4). But God was with him

Stephen moves from Abraham to the 12 patriarchs with Joseph as the focus. Although his brothers' jealousy led Joseph into slavery, God was with him.

"The contrast is important. God was with the one whom the other eleven sons of Jacob rejected, a note introducing the nation's pattern of failure to recognize the one chosen by God. This pattern began even among those who are responsible for Israel's name and for its being known as the people of twelve tribes. The additional note of jealousy as the cause of Joseph's brothers' actions is raised. Is such jealousy implied also here in the reaction against Jesus? One can sense a parallel to Jesus in Stephen's view" (Bock, 286-287).

7:10 and rescued him from all his troubles (Gen. 39:2, 21). He gave Joseph wisdom and enabled him to gain the goodwill of Pharaoh king of Egypt (Gen. 41:38f., 41; Psa. 105:16-22); so he made him ruler over Egypt and all his palace.

In verse 10 the story about Joseph continues. Stephen points out that God rescued Joseph, gave him wisdom and favor with Pharaoh, and made him governor over Egypt and of Pharaoh's household.

It should also be noted that Luke had also attributed wisdom to Stephen (6:3, 10) and to Jesus (Lk. 2:40, 52). They were in a category of men who were set apart as men through whom God was working.

7:11 "Then a famine struck all Egypt and Canaan (Gen. 41:57; 42:5), bringing great suffering, and our fathers could not find food.

The situation in Canaan seemed desperate when famine hit the land, but in spite of his brothers' rejection, God had strategically placed Joseph in a position where he could help to care for Abraham's descendants.

7:12 When Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our fathers on their first visit (Gen. 42:1-5).

7:13 On their second visit, Joseph told his brothers who he was (Gen. 45:3), and Pharaoh learned about Joseph's family.

God's care for the nation extended to Jacob and his sons by allowing them to obtain the grain in Egypt. After the first visit, Joseph recognized his brothers, but they didn't recognize him.

Does this theme of ignorance parallel the nation's ignorance of Jesus?

"God protected Jacob and the sons despite the latter's rejecting God's messenger and leaving him for dead. A reconciliation resulted. History shows God's grace to Israel and God's constant effort to reach out to the nation" (Bock, 288).

7:14 After this, Joseph sent for his father Jacob and his whole family, seventy-five in all.

7:15 Then Jacob went down to Egypt, where he and our fathers died.

7:16 Their bodies were brought back to Shechem and placed in the tomb that Abraham had bought from the sons of Hamor at Shechem for a certain sum of money.

The overview of Joseph's life concludes with the salvation of Jacob and his family in Egypt.

At this point in Stephen's speech, he still calls the council members who are listening to him "our fathers;" he still identifies himself with them as part of Israel's history.

The story of Jacob and his sons ends with their burial.

7:17 "As the time drew near for God to fulfill his promise to Abraham, the number of our people in Egypt greatly increased (Exo. 1:7).

7:18 Then another king, who knew nothing about Joseph, became ruler of Egypt (Exo. 1:8).

7:19 He dealt treacherously with our people and oppressed our forefathers by forcing them to throw out their newborn babies so that they would die (Exo. 1:10f., 22).

The story moves on to Moses and tells of the growth of Jacob's descendants in Egypt as they reach the size of the nation. This is the third and longest section of Stephen's speech.

Events in Moses' life are discussed from verse 18 to verse 44. Stephen speaks of Pharaoh's plan to destroy the nation through infanticide (Exo. 1:10–11, 17, 22).

7:20 "At that time Moses was born, and he was no ordinary child (literally, a "beautiful" [ESV] or "lovely" [NAS] child; Exo. 2:2; Heb. 11:23). For three months he was cared for in his father's house.

7:21 When he was placed outside, Pharaoh's daughter took him and brought him up as her own son (Exo. 2:1-10).

7:22 Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action.

Verses 20 to 22 relate the story of Exodus 2:2–10. “At that time” (7:20), that is, at the time when the nation’s existence was again being threatened, Moses was born. He was a lovely child (NAS). “Lovely” does not refer as much to his looks as it does to his breeding: “Moses was well formed or of favored status before God” (Bock, 290).

Moses, who was raised by the Egyptians, was educated and received the wisdom of the Egyptians; he was providentially well equipped and trained to be a leader.

7:23 "When Moses was forty years old (cf. Exo. 2:11), he decided to visit his fellow Israelites (perhaps assumed in Exo. 2:11 by the expression “his people”).

7:24 He saw one of them being mistreated by an Egyptian, so he went to his defense and avenged him by killing the Egyptian (Exo. 2:12).

7:25 Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not.

Exodus 2:11-13 tells the story of an Egyptian striking a Hebrew and the oppression the Jews were experiencing. Moses acted on behalf of the Hebrew by coming to his defense. He is portrayed as a defender of his brothers.

According to Stephen, Moses assumed that through his action, his brothers would understand that God had given them salvation through his hands. “The Jews of Moses time, however, lacked understanding about a divine call to Moses.”

Here is the beginning of a charge that the fathers missed their deliverer (7:52) and failed to understand what God was doing in saving them. This second example of rejection of God's messenger expands on the earlier action against Joseph. There, they judged wrongly and God delivered. Here, they do not respond to their God-ordained deliverer either. These remarks anticipate 7:33–38 and form a typology to Jesus. Just as the Jews failed to recognize Moses, they failed to see Jesus as Savior as well.

7:26 The next day Moses came upon two Israelites who were fighting. He tried to reconcile them by saying, 'Men, you are brothers; why do you want to hurt each other?' (Exo. 2:13)

7:27 "But the man who was mistreating the other pushed Moses aside and said, 'Who made you ruler and judge over us? (Exo. 2:14)

7:28 Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?'

7:29 When Moses heard this, he fled to Midian (Exo. 2:15), where he settled as a foreigner and had two sons (Exo. 2:22f.; 18:3f.).

The attention turns to Exodus 2:13 where two Hebrews were fighting after the day that Moses had struck down the Egyptian. Moses sought to reconcile them in peace, but when he did, they resisted him.

The contrast is between Moses defending a fellow Jew against an Egyptian and the Jews fighting among themselves.

The belief that Jews should be reconciled to each other is what motivated Stephen to preach Jesus to the nation. The unrighteous people rejected Moses' attempt to help in reconciliation with the rebuke, "Who made you a ruler and judge over us? You do not mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday, do you?" Whoever knew the story of Moses would know that God had prepared and protected him for the role as leader and judge of the nation.

Acts 7:35-37 suggests a similar link between Moses and Jesus, as the same combination of "ruler" and "judge" appears with the mention of Moses' promise to raise up a prophet like him. In other words, Moses is a type or pattern for what Jesus was to do and be.

7:30 "After forty years had passed (deduced from Exo. 7:7), an angel appeared to Moses in the flames of a burning bush in the desert near Mount Sinai.

7:31 When he saw this, he was amazed at the sight (Exo. 3:2f.). As he went over to look more closely, he heard the Lord's voice:

7:32 'I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.' Moses trembled with fear and did not dare to look.

7:33 "Then the Lord said to him, 'Take off your sandals; the place where you are standing is holy ground.

7:34 I have indeed seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their groaning and have come down to set them free. Now come, I will send you back to Egypt.' (Exo. 3:7-10)

Stephen turns next to the appearance of an angel as God's messenger at the burning bush in Exodus 3.

The Jews traditionally divided Moses' life into three 40-year segments (See verse 23 for mention of the first 40). Exodus 7:7 says Moses was 80 years old when he approached Pharaoh, and Deuteronomy 34:5-7 has Moses at 120 years when he died, which may have created this division of his life into these three periods.

The burning bush recalls Moses' call to serve God and demonstrates the divine roots of the call.

Underlying the story is the theme that God faithfully sends people to the nation of Israel, yet the nation of Israel consistently rejects those whom God sends.

7:35 "This is the same Moses whom they had rejected with the words, 'Who made you ruler and judge?' He was sent to be their ruler and deliverer by God himself, through the angel who appeared to him in the bush.

Verse 35 makes the rejection of Moses that was noted earlier in verse 27 explicit. It was not just any man that they rejected; they rejected the one to whom God had spoken to directly in the burning bush. They

rejected the one whom God had sent to “be their ruler and deliverer.” They weren’t rejecting a man, they were rejecting God!

In Acts 7:27 Stephen calls Moses a ruler and judge. Now he repeats the description here and adds that he is also a deliverer through supernatural means.

Once more the emphasis is on the Jews’ rejection of Moses who was to be to them both ruler and deliverer. We find here a typological parallel with the Jews’ rejection of Jesus. “Ruler” is a term applied to Jesus in Revelation 1:5 and very similar terminology is used of Him in 5:31. The word translated as “deliverer” is the verb which means to redeem. “Surprising as it may seem, it is only Moses who is given the actual title of redeemer in the New Testament, and not Jesus. Since, however, the task of delivering Israel is assigned elsewhere to Jesus (Lk. 2:38; 24:21; cf. 1:68), Christian readers would detect the typological allusion here” (Marshall, 151).

Moses delivered the people from Egypt with the accompaniment of miraculous signs wrought by God. “The phraseology is drawn from the Old Testament, but again the Christian reader would recollect that the same language was used of Jesus and the apostles (2: 22, 43; cf. 6:8 of Stephen himself)” (Marshall, 151).

7:36 He led them out of Egypt and did wonders and miraculous signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea and for forty years in the desert.

7:37 "This is that Moses who told the Israelites, 'God will send you a prophet like me from your own people.'

In these two verses Stephen covers the entire deliverance of Israel from Egypt at the Exodus, at which time Moses was attested to be a man from God with the signs and wonders that he performed.

Verse 37 is climactic. Anyone familiar with the Old Testament could see the potential typology. Moses was a prophet who expected another to come and be like him (Deut. 18:15-19).

ESV Deuteronomy 18:

15 "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers (cf. Heb. 2:14, 17; Phil. 2:7) - it is to him you shall listen-

16 just as you desired of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.'

17 And the LORD said to me, 'They are right in what they have spoken.

18 I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.

19 And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him.

Christ and Moses were alike in that they both:

- (1) were men who became rulers of God's people
- (2) were men who were accompanied by signs and wonders
- (3) were mediators between God and man
- (4) received words from God and gave the words of life
- (5) were rejected by their people (from Barrett, 362-363).

So Stephen believed Moses. He believed what Moses had written in the law. He believed that the Prophet like Moses had come just as Moses had said He would. If anyone blasphemed Moses and the law it wasn't Stephen but his accusers; they rejected the words of Moses just as their forefathers had!

7:38 He was in the assembly in the desert, with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers; and he received living words to pass on to us.

7:39 "But our fathers refused to obey him. Instead, they rejected him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt (Num. 14:3f.).

Moses had delivered his people from bondage. He did so with signs and wonders. He received the word of God *from God*. The allusion here is to Exodus 19 and Moses receiving the Commandments on Mount Sinai.

Stephen is doing more than defending himself. He is proclaiming that although Moses was the mediator of the law, the one who received divine revelations at Mount Sinai, the people refused to obey him. They ignored his words, and longed to return to Egypt (Neh. 9:17; Ezek. 20:8, 13). Those to whom Stephen was addressing were no different than their ancestors; they also rejected his words (in the law) in denying the Prophet whom Moses had predicted would come and speak the words of God (7:37).

In these verses he still refers to "our fathers," considering himself part of the Jewish people.

7:40 They told Aaron, 'Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who led us out of Egypt-- we don't know what has happened to him!' (Exo. 32:1)

7:41 That was the time they made an idol in the form of a calf. They brought sacrifices to it and held a celebration in honor of what their hands had made. (Exo. 32:4)

7:42 But God turned away and gave them over to the worship of the heavenly bodies. This agrees with what is written in the book of the prophets: "'Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings forty years in the desert, O house of Israel?'" (Amos 5:25-27)

7:43 You have lifted up the shrine of Molech and the star of your god Rephan, the idols you made to worship. Therefore I will send you into exile' beyond Babylon. (Amos 5:25-27)

Israel's making of the golden calf was one of the most significant incidents in the Old Testament demonstrating Israel's rejection of God.

Citing Amos 5:25–27 in verses 42 and 43, Stephen reviews the prophet's commentary about Israel's defection from God. God gave them over to their own choice. God turned away from them (7:42), just as they had turned from Him (7:39). The same thought is repeated in Romans 1:24, 26, 28 in relation to God's judgment of the unbelieving world. At times, God lets sinful man go his own way. This was written about in the book of the prophets (the Jewish scroll that contained what we call the minor prophets).

"Worship of stars is another allusion to idolatry, as their creation is worshiped and not the Creator" (Bock, 299; Deut. 4:16–19; 17:3; 2 Kings 17:16; Jer. 7:18; 19:13; Neh. 9:6; Ro. 1:18–32). Molech was the god who required child sacrifices, and Rephan was the Egyptian god associated with Saturn.

The message of Amos reminds the Council of Israel's miserable history and rebellion against God. Israel's own Scriptures condemned Israel for the rejection and faithlessness to God's revelation. Implicitly, Stephen is rebuking Israel who stood before him as people who were following the same path as their fathers. These people loved the temple for it represented the presence of God with them, but the harsh reality was that the nation was quick to make idols and love other gods more than they enjoyed Yahweh's invisible presence.

7:44 "Our forefathers had the tabernacle of the Testimony with them in the desert. It had been made as God directed Moses, according to the pattern he had seen.

Stephen has already shown his respect for the law and for God. Now he acknowledges that the tabernacle was designed by God. But he had a biblical perspective of the temple's purpose and design. He calls it the pattern.

7:45 Having received the tabernacle, our fathers under Joshua brought it with them when they took the land from the nations God drove out before them. It remained in the land until the time of David,

7:46 who enjoyed God's favor and asked that he might provide a dwelling place for the God of Jacob.

7:47 But it was Solomon who built the house for him.

7:48 "However, the Most High does not live in houses made by men. As the prophet says:

7:49 "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me? says the Lord. Or where will my resting place be? (Isaiah 66:1)

7:50 Has not my hand made all these things? (Isaiah 66:2)

The tabernacle (and the temple, which was built under Solomon) was the meeting place of God and man. But what had happened over the years is that the people had localized God; they had locked God up inside it.

Although the temple was a holy habitation of God, He is not confined to a place made with human hands (7:48). God had appeared to Abraham in Mesopotamia (7:2) and in then in Egypt (7:9-17). He

appeared to Moses at Sinai and to the assembly in the desert (7:39). Although the Jews had the tabernacle and then the temple as places of worship, God was everywhere.

Verses 49 and 50 are from Isaiah 66:1-2a. The earth is the place where God sets his feet and heaven is his throne (Lk. 20:43; Acts 2:35; Heb. 1:13; 10:13; Psa. 99:5; 110:1; Lam. 2:1). God is an uncontainable God.

If God cannot be confined to a specific location, they should not place so much importance on the temple in Jerusalem. It is simply a building that has been made with hands. Stephen is not really repudiating the temple, but the overrating of its importance.

If Stephen had been preaching that Jesus is the meeting place of God and man, then the Jews may have responded by saying that he was making the temple obsolete. But Stephen's point is that the whole history of Israel has been proof that the temple is not the dwelling of God but is part of Israel's passing history. Stephen honored the temple, but honored it biblically. It had a place in the unfolding purposes of God. The temple pointed to the place where God met with His people. God meets with His people in His Son.

Stephen responded to the charges of blaspheming God, Moses, and the temple; if he had stopped here, probably nothing would have happened to him. "Jewish hearers could understand and appreciate Stephen's point up to here. So far, nothing said about the law or the temple would be objectionable enough to evoke a violent reaction, because the prophets also said what is said up to here. The controversial point comes next" (Bock, 304).

7:51 "You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit!"

7:52 Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him--

7:53 you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it."

"This is the key portion of the speech in that it states the main charge against Stephen's audience and produces their hostile reaction. Here Stephen offers his charge of unfaithfulness as an implied call to repent, an idea he is not able to develop because of the crowd's violent reaction to his charge. Stephen confronts his audience directly with two charges: they are stiff-necked, and they are uncircumcised of heart and ears" (Bock, 304).

The word for "stiff-necked" means stubborn, unable to turn one's head to see (Exo. 33:3, 5; 34:9; Deut. 9:6, 13, 27). To be "uncircumcised in heart" means that they were covenantally unfaithful. They had the outward marks of covenant people in their very flesh, but they were inwardly pagan. Both their hearts and their ears were unresponsive. The present tense verb for "resist" (7:51) means that they oppose or

resist something continually. Even though they had seen the Messiah, they refused to respond. For 2,000 years they had had religion, but many had never known God.

In verse 52 Stephen shifts pronouns from “our fathers” to “your fathers.” They (your fathers) rejected the prophets, and now the Sanhedrin rejected the prophets who had announced beforehand the coming of the righteous one (Jesus).

Persecution of the prophets was common in the Old Testament. Church tradition held that Jeremiah was stoned to death and Isaiah was sawn in two. The pattern of death moves from the prophets to the murder and betrayal of the work of the Righteous One Himself. As it was with the fathers, so it was with the present generation. Nothing has changed. They should have known better, for they had received a walk through the ages.

"Regarding charges of violating God's will, the roles are reversed, according to Stephen. It is not he who breaks the law, as the Jews have charged. Rather, it is his accusers who have broken the law and covenant by slaying the Righteous One. One could hardly imagine a bolder witness. It has two themes we often see in Acts: (1) the promise of Jesus is in line with the law and hope, and (2) the behavior of Israel has separated it from God's blessing and brought about the distancing of the new community from Judaism" (Bock, 306).

The law revealed man's sin and desperate plight before God, so through the law God provided sacrifices to make atonement for sin. But the need of repeated sacrifices demonstrated that the animal sacrifices could not save. As the writer of Hebrews says, “The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming--not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.” (Heb. 10:1-4). The law was not a ladder to get to God; it was a mirror; it was designed to drive people to see the need of something greater. They needed One who would offer Himself and make full atonement for sin once and for all. That One had come and made access to God available by grace through faith in His name.

We have said that Stephen had responded to the charges of blaspheming God, Moses, and the temple. Had he stopped at verse 50, probably nothing would have happened to him. Why did Stephen feel compelled to keep speaking? If he had spoken in any other way, he would not have been a witness for Jesus Christ. Had he stopped at verse 50, he would have abandoned the cost he was called to in following Christ. He had been called to tell the Sanhedrin who He was and the heinous sin they were committing against God and His Chosen One.

All of this means that we can be vastly privileged; we can have the Word of God; we can have Christian literature, church meetings, and all the other outward signs of religion, but we may not have God. The real test is do we glory in the cross of Christ? Christ is the trajectory of all biblical religion.

"In sum, Stephen defends himself against the charge of being unfaithful to the law and the temple by engaging in a wide-ranging examination of the Jewish scripture. He is, as he makes his case, a 'winsome radical,' able to think differently from those around him but engaged as he does so. Here his citations and allusions to these sacred texts show that (1) the nation looked to the promise of a coming one, (2) it often resisted God's will, (3) it rejected the leaders whom God has chosen, and (4) the temple was never designed to be the single place where God could be found. Deep knowledge of Scripture allows one to have a world view that differentiates what is in the world from what a child of God should think, be, and do. What Stephen says here, their own Scripture regularly had taught and warned them about much earlier. It is a particularly powerful moment when Scripture is applied in such a way that it exposes what is really going on. Stephen did this in his speech. Such confrontation made his audience quite uncomfortable, even though it was spoken and intended for their benefit. God is far greater than any one building or location. He is the God of the world and should be seen as present throughout it. Stephen's most basic point is that the creator is the ruler of all creation and is present in all of it. This is the final point Stephen makes as he turns to exhort them to be responsive to God. The speech ends with the question of how they will respond to a history lesson given from their own sacred tradition. In effect, Stephen asks, "Do you appreciate your own history enough not to repeat its mistakes?"

The pericope explains how Judaism and Christianity began to grow apart. The new faith emphasized a view of the law as promised, a view that pointed to one to come, that is, to Jesus. Here was a view that revitalized the importance of the temple but along lines already set forth in divine disclosures. God was not limited to one locale. Here was a Jew who saw in Israel's past a great deal of unfaithfulness, which served as a basis for suggesting the need for renewal. The new faith was actually being more faithful to the promise and the law than the older faith was! Stephen's audience did not want to hear any of this. They reacted, in all likelihood, before Stephen had any chance to move to a direct discussion of the one to whom this all pointed, Jesus. The martyrdom that emerged out of Stephen's speech was an indicator that the future held a parting of the ways for these two groups. But it was not Jesus' disciples who sought the division. The reaction of most in the nation to the message brought about the separation. The gospel was for all, especially those in Israel, but the rejection by those in the nation made it necessary for the new community to go its own way. (Bock, 306, 307).