

## **“Stephen, the first Christian Martyr”** **Acts 6:8-7:60**

**The Man: 6:6-15**

**His Message: 7:1-53**

**His Martyrdom: 7:54-60**

### **Introduction:**

In seminary, we learned a doctrine that really changed my way of interpreting scripture. It's called **“Progressive Revelation.”** You will see it in the message that Stephen preached. His message is a long history lesson of God's revelation to Israel as He builds a nation to reach the nations. Judaism is not Christianity. Jesus is the final and only revelation for salvation. The last section of Stephen's sermon will deal with the destruction of the Temple and God's real Tabernacle.

**“Progressive Revelation”** is not active today because the Canon of Scripture is closed. But we interpret scripture based on progressive revelation. If you do not understand progressive revelation, you will not interpret scripture correctly.

### **Examples of Progressive Revelation**

- a. Hebrews 1:1-4- God spoke in the past by prophets but now speaks through Christ. Jesus is better. Jesus came to fulfill the law, not destroy it. You must understand this to be saved.

#### **Heb 1:1-4**

1 In the **past** God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, 2 **but in these last days** he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. 3 The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

4 So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.

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b. Hebrews 10:19 *ff*—A new & living way.

**Heb 10:19-22**

19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

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c. Galatians 1:11-12 – “Revelation.”

**Gal 1:11-12**

11 I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. 12 I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by **revelation** from Jesus Christ.

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d. Galatians 2:15 – Justified by Faith in Christ – not keeping the law.

**Gal 2:15-16**

15 "We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' 16 know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, **too**, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by

observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.

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e. Romans 4:1-4 – Never were justified by keeping the Law.

### **Rom 4:1-8**

What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? 2 If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about – but not before God. 3 What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."

4 Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. 5 However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. 6 David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:

7 "Blessed are they  
whose transgressions are forgiven,  
whose sins are covered.

8 Blessed is the man  
whose sin the Lord will never count against him."

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### **Rom 8:1-4**

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, 2 because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. 3 For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, 4 in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.

## **Context - Tradition vs. Truth**

Truth is what this chapter is all about. The church was in transition and growing fast. Truth, change, and progressive revelation all got Stephen killed, yet God's sovereign hand was right there guiding all of history. When the leadership grew, the persecution grew. Stephen will be called to account for his preaching and what he was ascribing. There's nothing different today. The more truth I preach, the more angry people with whom I have to deal.

We're going to look at who Stephen was and the content of his message. Stephen's message is the entire 7th chapter of Acts. The last part of chapter 6 tells us what drew so much attention to Stephen. Then we will look at his death.

- Don't forget these important facts: The key to Acts.
- 2 Races- Jew to Gentile
- 2 Places- Jerusalem to Rome
- 2 People-Peter to Paul
  
- We could literally call this chapter "The Unpardonable Sin of Israel."

\* They rejected Abraham, Moses, Joseph, the Patriarchs, the Law, and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Through the examples listed in Chapter 7, we see how God had continually reached out to Israel. Even through many means, prophets, and circumstances, the grace of God was rejected. The gospel will now go to the Gentiles.

### **I. Read 6:8-15: Stephen the Man**

These unbelievers treated Stephen as poorly as they treated Jesus. I think Stephen is a great example of Jesus and a chosen vessel to magnify the church.

Stephen was arrested on false charges by false witnesses. Stephen experienced the fellowship of Christ's sufferings and the power of His resurrection. Some accusations were actually true, but were also truths that had to be preached. The truth is never blasphemous. The truth will cost you, but it is well worth it. In Stephen's case, it cost him his life, but his Lord was more important to him.

### **Quote Wiersbe:**

*"They accused Stephen of being **unorthodox** in his beliefs, and he was (6:13), but yesterday's orthodoxy had become today's heresy, and the council was behind the times. The law was nailed to the cross (Col. 2:14), and the veil of the temple had been torn in two. Within a few years, both the city and the temple would be gone, and Hosea 3:4 would be fulfilled."*

### **Col 2:13-15**

13 When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, 14 having **canceled** the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.

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### **Acts 6:13-14**

13 They produced false witnesses, who testified, "This fellow never stops speaking against this **holy place** and against the **law**."

NIV

### **Hosea 3:4-5**

4 For the Israelites will live many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones, without ephod or

idols. <sup>5</sup> Afterward the Israelites will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They will come trembling to the LORD and to his blessings in the last days.

NIV

\*Will we live by tradition or truth? Many denominations hold the traditions of men with higher standards than the truth. The reformed church and Catholic theology hold the traditions of the church in higher regard than the Word itself.

### **Matt 12:1-8**

At that time Jesus went on the Sabbath day through the corn; and his disciples were an hungred, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat.

2 But when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto him, Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day.

3 But he said unto them, Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungred, and they that were with him;

4 How he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shewbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests?

5 Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless?

6 But I say unto you, that **in this place** is one greater than the temple.

7 But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless.

8 For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath day.

KJV

### **Stephen The Man**

**Verse 8:** Stephen was full of grace, power, and was performing great signs and wonders among the people. Why in the world would anyone be against that? Because people are jealous of other

people's success, especially in spiritual matters. Traditions are made by religious people for several reasons- they want to be responsible for their own salvation. People cannot accept the fact that they cannot do anything worthy of salvation. People think rituals will remove their guilt.

**Stephen's Characteristics:** Stephen was full of these virtues. Luke uses the word **full** three times in these verses. Verses 3, 5, and 8 all have this word **pleres** in them. This is the word for *complete, replete, and covered*. The root refers to being imbued, furnished, and filled. How would you like the Word of God to describe you this way?

- Grace- **charis**, God's favor
- Power- **dunamis**, God's power
- Signs- **semeion**, supernatural miracles
- Wonders- **teras**, a prodigy or wonder. A prodigy is an extraordinary event or rare occurrence that inspires wonder. Something that is monstrous or abnormal that causes great amazement. ***Our common use of this word refers to an extraordinary individual.***

**Verse 9:** Who were the Freedman and what was their problem? Notice the word **some (tis)** in the text. For me, this is a great description and a group of people of whom I've had enough. There's always **somebody** who has a problem with **something** that they don't like. I'm so tired of dealing with these kinds of people it makes me want to go home and stay there until Jesus returns.

In this particular case, the "some" or "someones" that had the problem were the men from the Freedman (Libertines) Synagogue that was composed of Cyrenians and Alexandrians and a few more troublemakers from Sicily and Asia. These folks were not good for much kingdom work, but they did have a great skill. They did like to **dispute**. The

Greek word is **suzeteo**. **Sun-**with and **zeteo-** enquire, cavil, question, or dispute. They liked to *dispute with* other people.

These men may be responsible for the death of Stephen. We must always be careful when we dispute for unimportant reasons. Always remember this, disputers don't really solve any problems, they just create drama. Anybody can tear things down, it takes a real spiritual person to build things up.

## What was the Synagogue of the Freedmen? (GotQuestions.com)

The Synagogue of the Freedmen is mentioned only once in the Bible: “Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)—Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia—who began to argue with Stephen” ([Acts 6:8–9](#)). The Synagogue of the Freedmen is called the Synagogue of the Libertines in the KJV. The word *libertine* is from the Latin and originally referred to a man who had been a slave but had been set at liberty. Some **scholars believe that these persons were slaves of the Romans who had been freed**, became proselytes of the Jewish religion, and had a synagogue in Jerusalem. The NLT calls this group the Synagogue of Freed Slaves.

Other scholars contend that **these freedmen were not Jewish proselytes but Jews by birth who had been taken into captivity by the Romans and then set free and subsequently called *liberti* or *libertini***. There were many such Jews. Some have speculated that among these zealous members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen was **Saul of Tarsus**, who would have been more than capable of disputing with Stephen in matters of religion.

Whoever the Freedmen were, one thing is clear: **Stephen's** proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the miracles he performed caused great animosity. Try as they might, the Freedmen “could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke” ([Acts 6:10](#)). Unable to answer his arguments or discount his miracles, they brought false witnesses against him and “stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law” ([Acts 6:12](#)). Members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen and the others opposing Stephen accused him of blasphemy, a deadly charge. Just as evil men had accused Jesus of blasphemy ([Matthew 9:1–3](#)), so the same spirit of evil in the hearts of the Synagogue of the Freedmen spoke against Stephen.

It is ironic that the Synagogue of the Freedmen should call themselves that. They

may have been freed from one type of slavery, but they were slaves nonetheless. Jesus said, "Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin" ([John 8:34](#)). The Jews to whom He was speaking had objected to the idea they were slaves, but Jesus showed them the path to true freedom: "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. . . . If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (verses 31–32, 36). Despite their freedom-loving name, the Synagogue of the Freemen were in desperate bondage to sin. In their slavery, they plotted to lie and murder, and they rejected the Truth that would have set them free.

**Verse 10:** What name or names come to mind when you read verse 10? I think of people like Charlie Kirk, Greg Gutfeld, Laura Ingraham, Sean Hannity, Rush Limbaugh, and many others with great debating skills. Think of all the apologists and pastors from history we have had that answered the call for biblical apologetics and defended the faith from heresy and apostasy. The Christian church has had thousands of great defenders of the faith: Calvin, Spurgeon, Moody, Hovin, Ankerberg, MacArthur, Rogers, Zacharias, Sproul, Stanley, R. G. Lee, Vines.

The disputers could not stand up against the landside of wisdom and the Spirit that was obviously speaking through him. I have told you hundreds of times right here from this pulpit that the most challenging time of your spiritual journey is between 10:45 and 12 noon on Sunday. When you hear the preaching of God's Word or an admonition from your pastor, you must determine if it's for you and then act on that Word. Will you obey or blame the messenger?

**Verse 11:** What do convicted people do when they can't get away from the truth? They blame the messenger and recruit others to take their side. They start chattering. In the midst of all the embellishing, lies will be told.

**Greek:** **hupoballo**- to throw stealthily. To introduce by collusion. Does that sound familiar? To suborn (bribe, corrupt, *persuade*, win over).

- They lied about Stephens' words. He spoke blasphemy against Moses and God, they said. He did not. He spoke of the progressive revelation of Jesus Christ. Stephen brought a message of truth and revelation about the patriarchs, the temple, and Jesus.
- **Verse 12-** “Stirred up” - this is **sugkineo** from **sparasso** and **kineo**. This means to move together or stir up as in putting together a crowd. **Sugkineo** is formed with **Sparasso** which means to strengthen by spasm or spasmodic reaction (to mangle or convulse), and **kineo** which means to stir. You get the idea. This was a crowd of spasmodic protestors flexing their muscles. They were agitated by the Freedmen so as to start a fight. This is Minnesota in 2026.
- They stirred up the people. Well, that’s not that hard to do. The simple-minded masses of the world are easy to influence. I would expect more from the Scribes and the Presbuteros (elders). Just when you think you have healthy people in your flock, they fool you by getting in cahoots with the Freedman synagogue. Then they get dragged away by the wolf. They take Stephen to the Sanhedrin. I have always been amazed at how quickly that people can turn on the folks that really love them and helped them. We lead folks to Christ and disciple them only to watch them follow the Freedman’s synagogue. Who’s persuading you?

**Verse 13:** The first important word is **histemi**- presented, produced, or set up pseudo witnesses. When you cannot be overcome by the truth because you speak the truth, you will be accosted with lies and false witnesses. The Sanhedrin set these people up. This is a display of ungodliness that takes place every day in Washington D.C.

In a sense, what was said had some truth in it. The lie was that the words were blasphemy. Stephen does address, in the latter parts of his sermon, the uselessness of earthly tabernacles and temples. We are now the temple of the living God. In fact, Jesus and Stephen both spoke of the destruction of the Temple. We will look at this later in this message, vv. 48-50.

**Verse 14:** This was a true statement, but the truth was put in a worldly context and misrepresented. The Temple was destroyed, and we are now filled with the Holy Spirit. The Ark of the Covenant has been lost, and in 70 A.D. Titus the Roman destroyed the Temple. Jesus spoke of His body. “If you destroy this Temple (His body), God will raise it in three days.

**Verse 15:** This verse is enough alone to condemn the Sanhedrin. Stephen was seen as if he were an angel. The God of glory was upon this man. The glory was seen as if it were a transfiguration. I am amazed that this is recorded for us to read and experience. Not many people in the scripture have had such a great experience with the Lord. Stephen looked like an angel. How could you not see the glory of God resting on a man’s life, unless you were incapable of recognizing God at all? The glory of God was on Stephen, but not in the Temple. Ichabod!

#### **1 Sam 4:21**

21 And she named the child **Ichabod**, saying, *The glory is departed* from Israel; because the ark of God was taken, and because of her father-in-law and her husband.

ASV

## **II. The Message of Stephen: 7:1-53 (Salvation History)**

As Boice says in his commentary on Acts, this is a history lesson on salvation history. Stephen’s message will differ from a sermon like Peter preached or Paul would preach. This is the

longest narrative in Acts. Stephen will walk us through some great history and, in the process, bring heavy conviction to the Jewish leaders about their total failure from Abraham to the fall of Jerusalem after the death of Christ.

The message will be laid out beautifully and with great significance. Stephen will be retelling the OT story of God's people and their disobedience. The religious rulers missed the truth and were rebellious right up to the moment they killed Jesus. At the end of this history, Stephen references Amos 5 and Isaiah 66 to drive his points home. God fulfilled all his promises, but God's people did not.

### **Stephen's Sermon Outline:**

- Abraham- 2-8
- Joseph- 9-16
- Moses 17-43
- The Tabernacle and The Temple- 44-50
- Convicting Summation- 51-53
- The death of Stephen- 54-60

The section on Moses will answer the first charge that was levied against Stephen. The second charge is answered in his discussion about the temple.

- **“We heard him speaking blasphemous words against Moses and God.**
- **“This man does not stop speaking words against the holy place and the law.**

### **Abraham 2-8**

**Verse 1:** The question, “Are these things true?” starts the history sermon.

**Verse 2: Abraham-** Boice summarizes this speech beautifully and sets the context correctly, as I have already taught you. This is *progressive revelation*.

**Boice, p.120ff:** *“Stephen was from the Greek speaking portion of the early church. That is perhaps why he spoke so differently from Peter, who was a Jew. Stephen seems to have perceived, with a brilliance that surpasses that of the apostles and anticipates the keen insight that was later given to the apostle Paul, the old order of things was passing away and the new order was coming. This becomes particularly clear when he talks about the temple. It was cherished by the Jews. But it was destined to pass away, and Stephen seemed to have sensed that. His speech is a transition speech that paves the way for presenting the gospel to the Gentiles, which begins in the very next chapter of Acts.”*

I would like to note that it is interesting that Stephen was a Gentile. The entire book of Acts reveals to us that the gospel has gone to the Gentiles and the Jews will be blinded until the number of Gentiles comes in (are saved). This is reflected in the outline I gave you at the beginning of this study. The gospel message is now leaving Jerusalem and going to the Gentiles. This is reflected in many places in the NT, but none more telling than in Romans.

### **Outline of Acts**

1. The church in **Jerusalem**- Acts 1-7
2. The church in **Judea and Samaria**- Acts 8-10
  - a. Peter is given the keys to the kingdom
  - b. 2 races merge
3. The church goes to the **entire world**- Acts 11-28
  - a. Phase 1- First convert ... Cornelius
  - b. Phase 2- Acts 11:26- Antioch, first Gentile church. Disciples are called Christians there first.
  - c. Phase 3- The missionary travels of Paul

Paul puts churches in the Gentile world, 3 missionary Trips.

**Rom 11:7-12**

7 What then? What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain, but the elect did. The others were hardened, 8 as it is written:

“God gave them a spirit of stupor,  
eyes so that they could not see  
and ears so that they could not hear,  
to this very day.” 9 And David says:

“May their table become a snare and a trap,  
a stumbling block and a retribution for them.

10 May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see,  
and their backs be bent forever.”

11 Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles **to make Israel envious**. 12 But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring!

NIV

**Caution:** You may not understand this, but do not question God. This was done so that more Jews will come to Christ in the end. The Jewish nation has had 6 thousand years to establish a relationship with God. They rejected their Messiah. God, by His grace, is using the Gentiles to draw them to God. Romans 11:11 tells us why and how. **This is reflected right here in our text.**

If you have ever watched any historical documentaries on the horrific treatment of the Jews by the Germans, you may emotionally have a lot of difficulty understanding that our Father is a God of love. I watched the documentary about 3 miracle babies that were born to three Jewish women in Auschwitz. The atrocities and depravity that I witnessed made me cry and wonder

how God could have allowed these terrible cruelties to happen to His chosen people. What the Jewish people have endured throughout history is unthinkable. Only when we see these documentaries and pictures are we confronted with the cruelty of humanity. These things can shake our faith and cause us to question God's benevolent heart. We must remember that the scriptures do speak to this, and God does have a plan for greater outcomes.

The first word of importance that Stephen mentions is ***appeared, v.2***. Stephen makes it clear that God appeared to Abraham while he was in Mesopotamia. The Jews and history hold Haran as a sacred place. Yet, Stephen says God spoke to Abraham before he went anywhere. The point that Stephen is making is that although there are many places, including the Holy Land, that are held in high regard, God is not limited to a geographical area. And that He would soon be spreading that geographical area to the entire world (The Great Commission).

**Verse 3:** Haran, a significant place mentioned in the Bible, holds deep spiritual and historical significance. This ancient city is located in present-day Turkey, near the Syrian border. It is frequently mentioned in the Old Testament as the place where Abraham's father, Terah, settled with his family after leaving Ur of the Chaldees. Haran's biblical relevance goes beyond its geographical location—it carries profound symbolism tied to faith, obedience, and God's promises.

Haran represents a place of transition and preparation. For Abraham, Haran was a temporary stop on his journey of faith toward the Promised Land. After leaving Ur, Terah, Abraham, and their family stayed in Haran until Terah died. Once Abraham received God's call to go to Canaan, he left Haran, symbolizing the spiritual decision to leave behind what is familiar and trust in God's guidance.

This city is often seen as a metaphor for the periods in our lives where we wait for God's direction. Haran was not the final destination for Abraham, just as it is not for believers who are called to continue on their spiritual journeys (Google search).

Abraham had great faith and a personal relationship with God before he ever left his homeland. When Abraham set out, he didn't know where he was going.

**Verse 4:** In Genesis, we are told that God spoke with Abraham. Here Stephen tells us God **appeared** to him. That's different. God did not call from the Holy Land. God appeared to Abraham. This could have been the preincarnate Christ or God Himself. Nonetheless, God came to see Abraham. *Stephen makes note that the obedience of Abraham gave these Jews their land.*

**Greek: appeared, optanomai.** To show thyself, look, see, appear.

This appearance of God gave Abraham the courage and faith to trust God as he set out on a journey to a place that God would show him.

**Verse 5:** The plot thickens. Abraham was not given one foot of this land. God promised it to him and to his descendants. Abraham didn't even have a son yet. The nation of Israel was not even born yet. What an enormous promise of God. Why did God not give Abraham any of the land as an inheritance? Even the plot he was to be buried in was purchased, not inherited. Abraham's life is one of faith. God promised all this land to his descendants when he was childless and it looked impossible for posterity. Abraham's life and salvation were by faith. The Sanhedrin missed this. Friends, you and I are pilgrims. We do not own anything in this world. We are only passing through. The next life only matters.

**Verse 6:** Our second great word is in verse 6.

**Greek: Strangers- paroikos.** This is the word pilgrim, stranger, sojourner, foreigner, alien resident. The words near, at, and house make up the word **pilgrim**. This is one who lives in or near a foreign house. A temporary dwelling.

The spiritual significance of this is breath-taking. For Stephen to see this spiritual truth is spiritual insight given by God Himself. Peter had a similar revelation when he recognized Jesus as “the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” Jesus told Peter that he could not have known that without Holy Spirit revelation.

The land was given to Abraham and his descendants and has been so important throughout the years. Wars have been fought over this land like no other land in history. This is the land of the Jewish nation of Israel, **but it is not their eternal home**. Abraham, not owning any of this land, pictures the fact that we are all strangers and pilgrims in the world, and it is not our home. Notice what the writer of Hebrews says:

### **Heb 11:8-10**

8 By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. 9 By faith he made his home in the promised land like a **stranger** in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. **10 For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.**

NIV

Here is the rub, and it is a rub that lands squarely in our laps as well. Boice says this:

*“The rulers had ceased to look forward. They were looking back, and they had taken the things of this world and the blessings of*

*the world to be permanent. They had allowed God's temporal blessings to eclipse their sense of God's presence."*

Now, Woodlake, listen to me. This is applicable for you and me in this moment. Think of we have today and how attached we are to our "holy land."

Then God gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision for the generations to follow so that every generation would be reminded of these promises of God. The Jews have never occupied all of their land, but one day they will own it all and occupy the land. If you are an Amillennialist you have a problem. The Lord has promised on oath that one day this will happen. The occupation of the entire land that was promised to Abraham will be literally, historically, and physically fulfilled in the Millennium.

Stephen brought this truth and reality to light straight in the face of the religious leaders. Man! What a condemnation. The spiritual leaders of the Jews were focused on the land and not the God of heaven. What's more important to you right now, this life, or the next?

### **Abraham: Verses 1-8 A few extra points**

- The covenant is in Genesis 13, 15, 17
  - A promise of land and multiplied descendants.
  - The seal of the Covenant and Promise was circumcision. Circumcision was an historical reminder for the ages that the Jews had an eternal dwelling not made by hands. The temporary dwelling should never distract from the eternal home. Why would we want any physical place that is not indwelt with God's presence?
- \* The covenant with Abraham was the foundation of the Jewish nation.
- God has never made this promise to the Gentiles,

Except → Israel

—They were promised a nation, land, and a kingdom. This is one reason I am Pretribulational.

—The Covenant stood then and still does today.

Stephen reminds the High Priest in verse 4 that history records the promises of God as true. They were actually living (that day) in the land promised to them.

### **Illustration:**

\* Today - The Golan Heights, Gaza Strip, and West Bank are the most disputed land areas in the world. They stand as proof of the promises of God.

### **God Illustrated His Promise through Abraham.**

1. He led him to Canaan.
2. Promised his seed would possess Canaan.
3. Sealed the promise with circumcision.
4. Gave Israel an heir of the Covenant.
5. Progenitorship

\* Hear ye well—God reached out to Israel through Abraham. He showed his grace through Abraham.

### **Joseph 9-16**

There is no doubt in my mind that Joseph is a type of Christ in the OT. Many Bible students and scholars may not agree with that, but I believe it to be true. Verse 9 speaks of an oft used word in our previous texts. **Jealousy** was the problem with Joseph and his brothers, and also with the religious rulers. The Sanhedrin and Pharisees were jealous men. The Sadducees were pitiful interpreters of the law. They treated Jesus just as they did Joseph. Joseph was sent to a foreign land, abused, and mistreated. The Jews have a history of persecuting the prophets

and anyone else that criticized them or did a better job than they. The hatred they had for Christ because they could not trick him, overcome him, out-think him, or do what he did, is telling. So they killed him.

Many of you have Joseph as your favorite character in scripture. What a man of faith. Joseph and Jesus were both persecuted by their brothers. Stephen addresses the group in verse 1 as “Brothers and Fathers.”

One of the greatest passages in the OT that we should all understand is where Joseph forgives his brothers for selling him into slavery. What a picture we have of the forgiveness of Jesus, who sojourned in a foreign land, who was rejected and killed, and yet this Jesus still receives sinners is astonishing.

### **Joseph—7:9-16 A few last points.**

Joseph is a type of Christ and resembles the Savior.

Joseph bears a wonderful resemblance to Christ in many ways: (1) he was beloved of his father (Gen 37:3; Matt 3:17); (2) he was hated by his brethren (Gen 37:4-8; John 15:25); (3) he was envied by his brethren (Gen 37:11; Mark 15:10); (4) he was sold for the price of a slave (Gen 37:28; Matt 26:15); (5) he was humbled as a servant (Gen 39:1 ff, Phil 2:5 ff); (6) he was falsely accused (Gen 39:16-18; Matt 26:59-60); (7) he was exalted to honor (Gen 41:14 ff, Phil 2:9-10); (8) he was not recognized by his brethren the first time (Gen 42:8; Acts 3:17); (9) he revealed himself to them the second time (Gen 45:1 ff; Acts 7:13; Zech 12:10); (10) while rejected by his brethren, he took a Gentile bride (Gen 41:45; Acts 15:6-18).

**(From Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the New Testament.**

### **Wiersbe Quote:**

\* Stephen's argument here is that the Jews had treated Christ the way the patriarchs treated Joseph, but he did not bring this accusation out until the end. Just as Joseph suffered to save his people, so Christ suffered to save Israel and all humankind; yet the Jews did not receive Him.

God protected, promoted, and provided in the life of Joseph.

### **Moses 17-43**

At this point in his history lesson, the message is getting clearer for the leaders. They are seeing that they are on the hot seat. Stephen uses Moses because he was one of their main points of contention. Moses represented the Law. These men had built their entire lives around keeping the law to perfection and putting heavy yokes of obedience around the necks of God's people. The Pharisees had literally weaponized the law. They became legalists and put heavy burdens on the people, disregarding grace and mercy.

Stephen gives us a brief story of the life of Moses. In verse 20, Moses is born. At the time of the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham, Moses senses it is time for him to be recognized. But what happened was a total rejection of Moses as was the rejection of Jesus. Moses pushes it a bit too far and kills a man. He then fled to Midian. By the way, Midian is a Gentile territory. Stephen, likewise, mentioned that Abraham was in Mesopotamia, remember. The point is obvious what Stephen is doing. God does not live in any one place. God does not visit places that are Holy. They are Holy Because God is there. He sanctifies the land.

After 40 years, God visits Moses via the Angel (The Lord) of the Lord. I believe it was the pre-incarnate Christ. Moses was told to take off his shoes because this Gentile location was holy. What made it holy? God was there, period.

The point of this was getting quite clear. The law is good; the land is good; the blessings are good; but God is greater. The book of Hebrews can be understood with one statement... "Jesus is better."

Again, Boice states the truth well: "Steven was saying: This neat little hold you think you have on God, this little thing that makes God Jewish and not the God of the Gentiles as well is a corrupt thing, and it is corrupting you. If you were faithful to our tradition, if you were guided by what our scriptures tell you, you would know that God is the God of all people and that you, just because you have been given special privileges, have the enormous responsibility of being a witness to them."

*"Stephen's message was that God is everywhere, and that in every nation there are those who seek him" (Boice, p. 123).*

Just as Moses was rejected after doing signs and wonders, so was Jesus rejected after so many miracles. The unbelief is staggering. Who rejected Jesus the most? The Jewish leaders.

### **John 8:39-43**

39 "Abraham is our father," they answered.

"If you were Abraham's children," said Jesus, "then you would do the things Abraham did. 40 As it is, you are determined to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. 41 You are doing the things your own father does."

"We are not illegitimate children," they protested. "The only Father we have is God himself."

42 Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me.

NIV

### **John 8:52-59**

52 At this the Jews exclaimed, "Now we know that you are demon-possessed! Abraham died and so did the prophets, yet you say that if anyone keeps your word, he will never taste death. 53 Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?"

54 Jesus replied, "If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me.

55 Though you do not know him, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and keep his word. 56 Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad." 57 "You are not yet fifty years old," the Jews said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!"

58 "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" 59 At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.

NIV

**Verses: 37-43:** Moses was even rejected after the Exodus. After the greatest miracle in Jewish history by the man God chose, these people rejected the man of God. Like Abraham, Moses told them about Jesus. The Jews thought this prophet in verse 37 was Joshua, but Moses is speaking prophetically about the Messiah. Like John the Baptist, who identified Jesus. This Jesus was with you in the wilderness. Can you imagine the Jewish scribes not understanding Moses' words?

They even disobeyed the law while Moses was receiving the law on the mountain. Then God turned them over to their devices. Stephen uses a passage from Amos 5:25-27 to make his case. This is the first full quotation of scripture used by Stephen.

### **Amos 5:25-27**

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

26 You have lifted up the shrine of your king,  
the pedestal of your idols,  
the star of your god—  
which you made for yourselves.  
27 Therefore I will send you into exile beyond **Damascus**,"  
says the Lord, whose name is God Almighty.  
NIV

What is the significance of this Amos passage, and what made the Sanhedrin so angry about it? There is a footnote in the NIV translation after the word **exile**. The footnote in the NIV translation says this... "Stephen quotes Amos 5:25-27 as translated in the Septuagint (Written from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century to the 1st century BC), except that he replaces **Damascus** with **Babylon** because the final exile of Israel from the promised land was carried out by the Babylonians. Amos was speaking first of the Assyrian exile of the Northern Kingdom."

### **A Summary of Boice's Comments, p.124:**

The significance lies because Amos did not say beyond **Babylon**, but rather beyond **Damascus**. Amos wrote beyond Damascus because he was a prophet to the people of the northern Kingdom and he was prophesying their exile. They were taken beyond Damascus by the Syrians. But Stephen, who quotes the text of the Septuagint, alters it because he's not talking about the people of the Northern Kingdom, but to the leaders of Israel in the South. It's the history of the Southern Kingdom about which Stephen speaks. When they were carried away into captivity, it was not by the Assyrians who took the people of the northernmost Jewish state into exile beyond Damascus in 721 BC, but rather by the Babylonians, who took them beyond Babylon in 586 BC. This is what made the Sanhedrin so angry. Stephen was telling them that the rebellious attitude of Joseph's brothers and the people who came out of Egypt had been characteristic of Jewish people

throughout history. **The Sanhedrin were a part of that history.** They were descendants of those who returned to Canaan from Babylon, **and the spirit that took their ancestors to Babylon was still in them.**

Boice, p. 124: *“You have been breaking the law of Moses all your lives, and because you've been rejecting Moses you have also been rejecting the truth about Jesus. You're going to be judged by him when he returns to judge the living and the dead.”*

**God Showed Grace Through Moses: A few final points:**

**Moses was also like Christ—**

Verses 17-28 First 40 years God **protected** Him.

Verse 29 God **prepared** Him.

Verses 30-46 God **promoted** Him and empowered Him.

**Wiersbe p.293 Expository outlines of the NT**

Like Joseph, Moses was strikingly similar to Christ: (1) he was persecuted and almost slain when a child (Ex 1:22 and 4:19; Matt 2:13-20); (2) he refused the world that he might save his people (Heb 11:24-26; Matt 4:8-10; 2 Cor 8:9); (3) he was rejected the first time he tried to help Israel (Ex 2:11-14; Isa 53:3); (4) he became a shepherd (Ex 3:1; John 10:1); (5) he took a Gentile bride during his rejection (Ex 2:21); (6) he was received by his brethren the second time (Ex 4:29-31; Acts 7:5); (7) he delivered the people from bondage through the blood of the lamb (Ex 12; 1 Peter 2:24). Moses was a prophet (Deut 18:15-19; Acts 3:22), a priest (Ps. 99:6), and a king (Deut 33:4-5).

### **Prophets, Ancestors and Tabernacle vv. 44-50**

In these verses, Stephen refers to Amos 5:25-27 and Isa. 66:1-2. The Jews thought that because they had their temple, they were safe from harm, and God had to bless them. The prophets all warned them that the temple would not assure them of blessing if their hearts were not

right. How can God, who fills all heaven and earth, be confined to a temple made with hands? Israel's religious life was a formality; they had the outward forms of religion, but their hearts were not right with God. They rejected the voice of the prophets, even persecuting and killing them (see Matt 23:29-39); and when The Prophet (Christ) appeared (v. 37), they rejected His Words and crucified Him!

(From Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the New Testament).

### **The Tabernacle and The Temple- 44-50**

The Tabernacle was a temporary temple that the Jews could pick up and move when they relocated. The Tabernacle was active until Solomon built a permanent temple in one place. Verses 44-48 give us the history that Stephen briefly recounts. In 49-50, Stephen quotes from Isa. 66. Stephen's point was clear. He says, I know you love these building but God does not dwell in brick and mortar. God is eternal and omnipresent.

In that day the Jews had the temple that was built by Herod, and it was their pride and joy. To the religious leaders, nothing compared to the temple. Many people today feel the same way about their buildings.

Stephen makes comparisons between the wilderness tabernacle and Herod's great edifice. The tabernacle was homely compared to the grand temple, but God was there. The Shekinah glory rested on the Tabernacle and in it. Many think that Stephen was actually criticizing the temple. Did God live there? There was no Ark, and in my opinion, the glory of God had left too.

Yes, Jesus spoke well of the Temple and worshipped there. Christians worshipped there. That was God's will, and Jesus was obedient to go to church. So, what was the message? Stephen was saying that the days of the temple had passed. In 70 A.D., God had it destroyed. We learn from the book of Hebrews that

Jesus was the new Holy of Holies. The curtain was replaced by His body.

**Matt 27:51-52**

51 At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

NIV

**Heb 9:1-5**

Now the first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary. 2 A tabernacle was set up. In its first room were the lampstand, the table and the consecrated bread; this was called the Holy Place. 3 **Behind the second curtain** was a room called the Most Holy Place, 4 which had the golden altar of incense and the gold-covered Ark of the Covenant. This ark contained the gold jar of manna, Aaron's staff that had budded, and the stone tablets of the covenant. 5 Above the ark were the cherubim of the Glory, overshadowing the atonement cover. But we cannot discuss these things in detail now.

NIV

**Heb 10:19-22**

19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, **that is, his body**, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

NIV

One last awesome thought about the temple. Jesus is the veritable temple. The Holy of Holies is His body. Likewise, you and I have become the dwelling place of God. Jesus dwells in the hearts of His children. We are the temple of the Holy Spirit.

### **1 Cor. 6:19-20**

19 Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; 20 you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

NIV

This section of scripture is very important because it marks the end of the Jewish mission and their opportunity to come to Christ. We will now move to chapter 8, and the gospel will go to the Gentiles. Stephen's message was obvious. God is omnipresent, and everywhere God is, is holy. All people of the world are confronted with their sinfulness and the possibility of salvation, and it's our job, as it was for the Jewish leaders, to reach the world for Jesus Christ.

### **Convicting Summation- 51-63**

**Verse 51:** Verse 51 is the last point of the sermon that Stephen preached before his death. I get amazed when people tell me I preach hard. The modern Christian could never endure the kind of preaching that Stephen delivered to the Sanhedrin. I would get run out of town if I spoke to my sheep this way. Stephen dropped the hammer of truth on these religious legalists. How did Stephen describe this group of spiritual leaders of Israel?

- **He called them stiff-necked.** The original is **sklerotrachelos**. There are several English words you might see in this Greek word (**sclerosis and trachea**). These refer to the neck or bones in the neck. These Jews were said to have stiff necks. This is the word hardnaped or obstinate. This is a picture of a mule or dog pulling in the opposite direction in which the owner wants to go.

Stephen brings the accusation of rebellion and disobedience against the leaders who were supposed to be humble and

obedient. God is always working to chisel the pride, arrogance, disobedience, and self-will out of the Christian. We are to be yielding and compliant to our Father.

- **Their hearts and ears were uncircumcised.** Their hearts were fleshly and unclean. To have an uncircumcised heart actually means to be lost and without God. To have fleshly and unredeemed ears means that a person has no chance of hearing and receiving the truth. This is a perfect description of the Jews that Jesus gives us in the book of Matthew. The people were not even capable of hearing the truth or seeing the truth. They could not respond to the truth. Their hearts were uncircumcised and could not even understand the truth. Total depravity blocks truth.

**Matt 13:10-17**

10 The disciples came to him and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?"

11 He replied, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. 12 Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. 13 This is why

I speak to them in parables:

"Though seeing, they do not see;  
though hearing, they do not hear or understand.

14 In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah:

"You will be ever hearing but never understanding;  
you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.

15 For this people's heart has become calloused;  
they hardly hear with their ears,  
and they have closed their eyes.

Otherwise they might see with their eyes,  
hear with their ears,  
understand with their hearts  
and turn, and I would heal them.'

16 But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. 17 For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.

NIV

- **They Resisted the Holy Spirit.** This is the most dangerous practice a person can have. Resisting the Holy Spirit can get you separated from God for eternity. Resisting the Holy Spirit is actually the unpardonable sin. The reason this is so critical is that the Holy Spirit convicts of sin, righteousness, and judgment (wrong, right, and consequences). If you continue to reject the Holy Spirit's prompting, He will leave you alone. Once the Holy Spirit stops drawing you to salvation, you will be lost forever. You will hear, "*depart from me, I never knew you.*" For the Christian, resisting the Holy Spirit will get you disciplined by the Father in the worst sort of way. Don't ask for discipline; you should be disciplined.

The Greek word for **resist** is **antipto**. This means to resist or oppose. This word refers to not only resist but to attack with force. To rush against with violence. This sin is worse than missing the call of the Holy Spirit or not understanding the Holy Spirit; this is hearing, understanding, and then opposing the Lord's call with violence. This is direct and hostile disobedience.

Stephen also says that the ancestors did the same thing. At some point, the cycle needs to be broken. Someone has to break the chain of disobedience. Every man is responsible for what he passes down to his children. Will you pass down obedience or a stiff-necked, uncircumcised heart?

- Verse 52- They persecuted the prophets. Stephen preaches this in the most condemning way possible. Stephen phrases his question in a negative sense. "***Which of the prophets***

***did your forefathers not persecute or kill?”*** They even killed the forerunner of Christ. The prophet who announced prophetically that Christ was coming, and had come, was beheaded.

- **Stephen calls them betrayers and murders.** Wow!  
- **Betray: prodotes**, to give in to the enemy. Traitors! To sell out the ones who love you or care for you. Judas.  
- **Murders: phoneus**, this is a public bandit. The person is a murderer or one who kills on purpose. This is intentional homicide. These are tough accusations.
- **They were given the law.** Not mentioned specifically here, but also the progenitorship and land. The law was everything to the Jews. No other people, in the history of mankind were given the actual Words of God in written form. What a special privilege to have been given the Word of God. You would think that this special privilege would be the incentive for keeping the commandments of God. Jesus had actually told the Jews that if they loved Him, they would keep his commands. The Word of God was delivered by angels.

### **Deut 33:1-4**

This is the blessing that Moses the man of God pronounced on the Israelites before his death. 2 He said:

"The Lord came from Sinai  
and dawned over them from Seir;  
he shone forth from Mount Paran.  
He came with **myriads of holy ones**  
from the south, from his mountain slopes.  
3 Surely it is you who love the people;  
all the holy ones are in your hand.  
At your feet they all bow down,

and from you receive instruction,  
**4 the law that Moses gave us,  
the possession of the assembly of Jacob.**

NIV

### **Gal 3:19-20**

19 What, then, was the purpose of the law? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come. **The law was put into effect through angels by a mediator.**

NIV

### **Heb 2:2-8**

2 For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, 3 how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. 4 God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

5 It is not to angels that he has subjected the world to come, about which we are speaking. 6 But there is a place where someone has testified:

"What is man that you are mindful of him,  
the son of man that you care for him?

7 You made him a little lower than the angels;  
you crowned him with glory and honor  
8 and put everything under his feet."

NIV

Phillips speaks of this in *Exploring Acts* (In Loc)- The Septuagint renders the last clause: "With the myriads of **Kadesh** were angels with him at his right hand." The clear inference is that God brought the law down to Moses, but it was given to him by the

hand of a mediating Angel. We gather the same facts from Galatians 3:19 and Hebrews 2:2.

Steven had not blasphemed the law. The Jews had blasphemed the law and never obeyed it from the very beginning. If there were any charges to be made, it would have been against Israel. From the very beginning, they had broken the law, and they had done it at the exact time Moses was receiving the law from the finger of God. The people were in idolatrous worship of a calf while the angels were handing the law to Moses. They had broken the Old Testament covenant, and Moses broke the tablets on which the very law was written.

**Phillips says**, *“In addition to all their other crimes, they had taken the Son of God, one far superior to the angel mediators of the old covenant, He who was the mediator of a new covenant, and they had murdered him.”*

### **The Response to the Conviction**

**Verse 54:** When this last message was delivered by Stephen, these men were cut to the quick. This Greek word, **diaprio**, means to be cut in two. They were exasperated and cut in their hearts. They gnashed their teeth and became enraged. This is quite a vivid picture of anger that turned into rage.

**Verse 55:** This is one of the most magnificent verses in all of scripture. We are told that Stephen was filled with the Holy Spirit and was given the privilege of seeing the glory of God as he gazed into heaven. We are also told that he saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and that he saw the heavens open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.

Many have tried to speculate why Jesus was standing, since we are told in Hebrews 10:12 that “this priest” had offered for all-

time one sacrifice for sins and then He sat down at the right hand of God. Several things are certain.

### **Heb 10:11-14**

11 Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. 12 But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.

13 Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, 14 because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

NIV

First, Jesus is exactly where He said He would be, at the right hand of the father making intercession for the Saints. Second, I would say that just because Jesus sat down to signify that his work was complete and obedience was perfectly fulfilled, obviously does not mean that he had to stay seated.

Clearly, Jesus stood to receive a very special martyr in Stephen. We are not told if Christ does this for all believers when they die, and I don't think that he does. Stephen was a special individual and called of God for a special mission. To actually see how many Christians are entering heaven each second of every day would astonish us. Jesus would be continually standing.

Many people have visions and dreams while they are exiting their body or preparing to do so. Charles Spurgeon and D. L. Moody were some of these men who had similar experiences.

**Illustration:** A few hours before entering the “homeland,” D.L. Moody caught a glimpse of the glory awaiting him. Awakening from asleep he said, “Earth recedes, heaven opens before me; If this is death, it is sweet! There is no valley here. God is calling me, and I must go.” His son, who was standing by his side, said, “no father you are just dreaming.” “No said Moody, I'm not dreaming;

I have been within the gates; I have seen the children's faces." A short time elapsed, and then, following what seemed to be to the family the death struggle, he spoke again, "This is my triumph; this is my coronation day; it is glorious! (G. W. Ridout, 7700, 1047)

**Illustration:** The French nurse who was present at the deathbed of Voltaire, the infidel, being asked to attend an Englishman whose case was very critical, said, is the man a Christian? Yes, was the reply; he is a Christian in the highest and best sense of the word, a man who lives in the fear of God; but why do you ask? She answered, I was the nurse who attended Voltaire in his last illness, and for all the wealth of Europe I would never see another infidel die. *The Sunday School Times*.

**Death is different for the Christian. It really is a home-going and a joy beyond all joys to see Jesus.**

**Illustration:** A man whose youth and early manhood had been spent in evil ways was converted, and one night was giving his testimony. During the week he had met an old farmer drinking pal who had chaffed him about turning pious. I'll tell you what I said to him, "Bill, I says, you know what I am (the man was a lamplighter). When I goes round turning out the lights, I looks back, and all the road over which I've been walking is all blackness, and that's what my past life is like. I looks on in front and there's a long row of twinkling lights to guide me, and that's what my future is like since I found Jesus." "Yes," said the friend, but by and by you gets to the last light and turns it out, and where are you then? And then, says I, Why! When the last light goes out, it's dawn, and there ain't no need for lamps when the morning comes (George Jackson 225, Naismith).

Many people reach towards heaven as they're dying, as they sing songs or mumble things about heaven and Jesus. The moment of death is a very special time for the Christian; it is when our faith

becomes sight and, many times, it seems, that Jesus welcomes His Saints into the Kingdom with joy and gladness. With Stephen being the first Christian martyr, he was allowed to see heaven open and the Lord Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father. To God be the glory, and may our home-going be as sweet. What comfort and grace we may acquire from this wonderful passage, knowing that for the Christian at death, heaven is opened for us and we go to be with our Lord. Here is a scriptural confirmation of that. Precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of his Saints. It is my belief that Annette Slaughter's home-going was one such occasion... met with great anticipation and glory.

**Verse 57:** This verse reminds me of the modern-day protesters in our cities. The description is undeniable. These disobedient lawbreakers scream at the top of their voices; they cover their ears when truth is spoken, and they will kill anybody that gets in their way. They resist the Holy Spirit.

It is stunning that the sound of truth hurt their ears so badly and made their hearts sick with pain, but the death of God's Son, the rejection of the Holy Spirit, the blood of Stephen, and the disobedience to the commands of God, bothered them none.

The rioters took Stephen outside of the city, just as they did Jesus, and stoned him. Who was present at this murder? None other than Saul, who would be converted and write 70% of the NT. This gives more weight to the belief that I shared with you that Saul might have been in the Sanhedrin as an understudy of Gamaliel as the Apostles were being tried and interrogated for healing the crippled man.

**Verse 59-60:** Very similar words that Christ spoke as He committed His Spirit to God. The man, Stephen, was like his Lord. He forgave those who took his life. This death signaled the transition of the church as it moved out from Jerusalem to Judea

and Samaria. The Gentiles would soon be coming to Christ in record numbers.

Many people would say that the death of Stephen was a great blow to the early church, but as Phillips says, “Stephen’s death was another grain of wheat that had fallen in the ground.” The influence of Stephen’s death may have been the very thing that propelled Saul to understand who the Lord Jesus was on the road to Damascus. My belief is that is exactly what broke through Saul’s cold Pharisaical heart. Phillips also thinks that Paul may have encountered Stephen in the same synagogues, but could not conquer Stephen in a doctrinal dispute. Maybe that’s why Saul was at the stoning.

#### **Outline of Acts**

1. The church in **Jerusalem**- Acts 1-7
2. **The church in Judea and Samaria- Acts 8-10**
  - a. Peter given the keys to the kingdom
  - b. 2 races merge
3. The church goes to the **entire world**- Acts 11-28
  - a. Phase 1- First convert ... Cornelius
  - b. Phase 2- Acts 11:26- Antioch, first Gentile church.  
Disciples are called Christians there first.
  - c. Phase 3- The missionary travels of Paul  
Paul puts churches in the Gentile world, 3 missionary Trips.