# Stephen’s Defense and Martyrdom (6:6-8:4)

### “The narrative about Stephen constitutes a major turning point in Acts. It ends a series of three trials before the Sanhedrin. The first ended in a warning (4:21), the second in a flogging (5:40), and Stephen’s in his death. The Stephen episode is the culmination in the witness to the Jews of Jerusalem, which has been the major subject of Acts 2–5. To this point a growing opposition toward the Christians from the Jewish leaders had been thwarted by the favor of the people toward the young movement. Then the picture changed. The people joined in the resistance to Stephen. With the death of Stephen and the dispersal of his fellow Hellenists, the focus would no longer be on Jerusalem but on Samaria and all of Palestine and, finally, with Paul on the further reaches of the Roman Empire. Stephen is thus a key figure in the narrative of the wider Christian mission, and the lengthy treatment of his martyrdom is no coincidence. The account begins with his arrest and trial (6:8–7:1). There follows a lengthy speech of Stephen (7:2–53), which, though set in the context of his defense before the Sanhedrin, was more a critique of his contemporary fellow Jews than a defense. As a result, he was stoned to death by his enraged audience (7:54–8:1a). Stephen thus set the scene for Philip’s work in Samaria.”[[1]](#footnote-2)

# Day One

## Stephen’s Arrest and Questioning (6:8-7:1)

### Stephen’s Ministry (6:8)

v. 8 “And Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people.”

* Our introduction to Stephen happens in the beginning of chapter 6 where the apostles find “brethren of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom,” to care for the widows. Verse 5 tells that they chose “Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit.” This serves as an introduction to who will be the main protagonist of the next several verses.
* v. 8 says that Stephen was “full of grace and power.” Luke does more than just describe Stephen, the author is linking him to the apostles referring to what he wrote in 4:33 (**33** And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all.)
* Stephen was also “performing great wonders and signs among the people.” Further linking him to the apostles work and ministry.

### Stephen vs. the Synagogue (6:9-10)

* While Stephen is ministering to the people, the opposition starts and it comes from a Synagogue of men who were very similar to him (Hellenists).[[2]](#footnote-3)
* Luke says that these men who opposed Stephen are from the “Synagogue of the Freedmen,” The title *the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)* suggests that members of the congregation were characteristically Jews who had either been enslaved for one reason or another and then been emancipated, or were the sons of such persons (the Greek word *Libertinos* is a loanword from the Latin *Libertinus*, ‘freedman’).[[3]](#footnote-4)
* These men were from Cyrene and Alexandria this is what is now North Africa and Cilicia and Asia present day Turkey.
	+ These men “**rose up**[[4]](#footnote-5) and “**argued**” with Stephen. – The word argued could be also translated as “debated.” The active participle of the verb “debate”[[5]](#footnote-6) indicates that these debates continued over a period of time, which suggests that these were (initially) not heated discussions but debates in which the pros and cons of the significance of Jesus for the Jewish people were considered.[[6]](#footnote-7)
* Verse 10 tells us that these men could not keep up with Stephen’s arguments. Literally, they were not able “to withstand” the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking.
* “Luke had written this on his first volume, the gospel. Jesus had promised the help of *the Spirit* (Luke 12:12) and *wisdom* (Luke 21:15) to his disciples when they were called upon to defend themselves. The early church proved the truth of this promise. Its members were able to put up a case for their faith which could not be knocked down by argument.”[[7]](#footnote-8)

### False Allegations and Trial (6:11-7:1)

### V. 11- Since they are not able “cope with the wisdom and Spirit” with which Stephen was speaking, these men resort to a corrupt way to win an argument: contract false witnesses to discredit their opponent.

* The accusation is blasphemy- “we have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God.” According to Leviticus 24:11-16, blasphemy was punishable by death. These charges were similar as the ones against Jesus (Matt. 26:61; Mark 14:58; see also. John 2:19–22)
* V.12- The accusation and employment of false witnesses fulfill its purpose. Luke tells us that the people were “stirred up”- This verb could mean “to stir up hostility on someone.”[[8]](#footnote-9)
* Stephen's accusers stirred up the Jewish people, the Jewish elders (family and tribal leaders), and the scribes (Pharisees) against Stephen. He is then arrested and brought before the Council (Sanhedrin), like they had done to Jesus, Peter, John, and the other apostles (4:15; 5:27; cf. 22:30). Until now we have read in Acts that Jewish persecution focused on the apostles, but now we read that other Christians began to experience this persecution as well.[[9]](#footnote-10)
* V.13-14 – As Stephen is being dragged away in front of the Sanhedrin, the false witnesses appear once more. By restating what they had alleged before, they stand their ground and label the two charges against Stephen: 1) the temple, and 2) the law.
	+ These false witnesses were telling half-truths or half lies.[[10]](#footnote-11)
* In verse 14, Luke explains the charges given in v. 13, with what it seems are directs quotes from Stephen’s statements.
* The testimony of witnesses who repeated what they had heard a defendant say was part of Jewish court procedure in a trial for blasphemy., Certainly, Stephen preached Christ and spoke of the fact that He was the long-awaited Messiah. He also preached about how Jesus was the fulfillment of the Mosaic Law, just like Jesus did (e.g., Mark 2:23–28; 3:1–6, 7:14–15; 10:5–9). However, Stephen was not promoting the destruction of the temple or the changing of the law. “The falseness lay not so much in its wholesale fabrication but in its subtle and deadly misrepresentation of what was intended.”[[11]](#footnote-12)
* V.15, “And fixing their gaze on him, all who were sitting in the Council saw his face like the face of an angel” – Luke uses a participle that could be translated, “looking intently” This is fixing their eyes with intensity. The charges that were brought before the court were very serious, but Luke says that instead of seeing a blasphemer, the Sanhedrin “saw his face like the face of an angel.”
	+ Much has been written as to what this phrase means- Does this mean that Stephen’s face shone like Moses did in Exodus 34:29-35? Or possibly that Stephen being a ‘messenger’ is an angel of sorts? Or perhaps this emphasized the presence of God in Stephen’s witness?[[12]](#footnote-13) There is a possibility that there are elements of all these things, but I agree with Schnabel that writes, “It implies that Stephen is filled with God’s Holy Spirit (cf. 4:8), and that his speech (7:2–53) should be regarded as that of an authoritative witness of God inspired by the Spirit.”[[13]](#footnote-14)
* 7:1- After witnessing Stephen’s change in appearance, the high priest continues with the legal proceedings.
	+ He asks whether the charges of speaking against God, Moses, the Law, and the temple (Acts 6:11, 13–14) are true. “In effect, the query is whether Stephen is unfaithful to the basic tenets of the faith and is encouraging others in Israel to think likewise. To lead Israel into apostasy is a major crime (Deut. 13:1–5).”[[14]](#footnote-15)

**Day One- Questions**

1. Describe Stephen’s ministry. What was he doing?
2. Why were the men from the Synagogue not able to refute Stephen? What does that tell us about Stephen’s arguments?
3. Why were the charges against Stephen so serious?

# Day Two

## Stephen’s Speech before the Council (7:2-53)

* Stephen’s speech in Acts 7:2-53 is the longest of all the speeches/sermons in Acts.
* There are main themes that run through this masterful speech: (1) God gave them the tabernacle in the wilderness and later Solomon’s temple as a testimony; however, Israel thought of God’s presence as tied to the land or a place of worship. (2) God in His faithfulness had raised deliverers to minister to the children of Israel; however, these deliverers were rejected and disowned by the people as they scorned and disobeyed God’s law. In the end, Stephen’s argument is not a defense on his charges, but rather a narration of Israel’s past history that serves as an indictment against these leaders. It also shows a pattern of rejection of God and His servants.

### Israel’s History: Abraham’s Promises (7:2-8)

* Vs. 2-3 – Stephen focuses on Abraham’s calling and recounts the story of the Abrahamic covenant. Notice a couple of very important aspects of verses 2 and 3: (1) God is called “the God of glory” (Psalm 29:3; Eph 1:17) “it is a majestic description of God which may echo the glorious theophanies during Israel’s desert wanderings (Referencing Exodus 16:10; 24:16-17). The God of glory is the God of Israel, whom Israel does, and must, worship.”[[15]](#footnote-16) Stephen was accused of blaspheming God, but he sees God as glorious. Also, (2) Abraham was called when he was living in Mesopotamia, outside the ‘promised land.’
* Vs. 4-5 -Abraham, obeying God’s call, leaves his homeland and settles temporarily in Haran until his father died. After this life-altering event, God has him move again, now to Canaan, the land that Jews were occupying in Stephen’s day. However, even though the Jews lived in the land, in v.5, Stephen says that Abraham was not given an inheritance by God, only the promise of one.
* Vs. 6-7 – In these two verses, Stephen quotes Genesis 15:13 and Exodus 3:12 to make a point. Abraham’s descendants would be sojourners in a foreign land, they would be enslaved for 400 years, yet God will deliver them so that they would in turn come to worship him back “in this place.” The “place” that Stephen is referring to is the land where God was going to engage with His people.[[16]](#footnote-17)
* V. 8 – Now Stephen speaks of the promises of God to Abraham as a covenant, circumcision being its outward sign of the covenant between God and Abraham. *Circumcision* for following generations of males then became a claim to ‘inclusion within the Abrahamic relationship’ (cf. Gn. 17:9–14).[[17]](#footnote-18) The rest of the verse outlines how the covenant promises of God began to be fulfilled with respect to Abraham’s offspring.[[18]](#footnote-19)
* So, in this way, this chapter in Israel's history ends with emphasis on God's faithfulness to His promises to Abraham. The Sanhedrin needed to rethink these promises in the light of how God was working in their day.[[19]](#footnote-20)
* To recap, Stephen so far affirms that the God of glory made a covenant with Abraham where He promised a land (vs. 2-4), seed (v. 5), and blessing (vs. 6-7). The sign of the covenant was circumcision (v. 8).

### Israel’s History: God delivers His people through Joseph (7:9-16)

* In the next section of his speech, Stephen focuses on Joseph and his family. He does this by talking about God’s faithfulness to the Abrahamic covenant as he protects his people and how Joseph’s story seems to mimic what had happened to Jesus.
* Vs.9-10—Now Stephen switches his attention to Joseph, one of the twelve patriarchs, the great grandson of Abraham. The story of Joseph is an amazing story of the providence and faithfulness of God in the lives of the children of Israel.
* Stephen tells the story from the lows of being sold into slavery to the highs of being made governor over all Egypt.
* Notice the contrast between Joseph and his brothers. While his brothers are characterized by jealousy and cruelty, Joseph is characterized by “favor and wisdom.”
* One can’t help but see that there might be a subliminal message from Stephen: while one person (Jesus) had God with him, his brothers (the religious leaders) were jealous and callous toward him.
* Vs. 11-12 –While the sons of Israel were in the “promised land,” they were suffering great affliction because of a famine, but Jacob, hearing that there was grain in Egypt sent his sons to procure food.
* Vs. 13-15—Stephen fast-forwards to the second visit that the patriarchs make, now with Benjamin, to buy food. In this visit, Joseph makes himself known and the family is invited to emigrate to Egypt to assure their survival. (fulfilling Genesis 15:13-14 that Abraham’s descendants would be “strangers in a country not their own.”\_
* V. 16—Stephen concludes the Joseph narrative highlighting that even though they lived and died in Egypt, the patriarchs were buried in the Promised Land.[[20]](#footnote-21)
	+ It is important to see that he uses the word Shechem as the place where the patriarchs were buried. In Stephen’s day, Shechem was part of the Samaritan territory, a place the Jews hated and would avoid at all costs. “This was yet another instance of helping them understand that they should not think the only place that God worked was in the Promised Land. Stephen had previously referred to Mesopotamia as the place where God had revealed Himself to Abraham (v. 2).”[[21]](#footnote-22)

**Day Two- Questions**

1. Why is Stephen starting his defense with Abraham’s call? Why is it so significant?
2. Why is he quoting Genesis 15:13 and Exodus 3:12? How do these verses relate to what Stephen is saying?
3. Look at what he says about Joseph and his brothers. How does he contrast and compare them? What is he trying to communicate?

# Day Three

### Israel’s History: God delivers His people through Moses (7:17-34)

The longest part of Stephen’s speech is reserved for the story of Moses. He divides his historical sketch in three sections; (1) the first 40 years in Egypt, [10-28] (2) the second 40 years in the land of Midian [29-34], and (3) Moses’s call and the period of the exodus in the wilderness wanderings [35-43]. Stephen shows that, though Moses was God’s chosen man to deliver Israel, he was disowned and rejected- much like Jesus was by the religious elite. There are unmistakable comparisons between Moses and Jesus’ life.

* V. 17-19—verse 17 picks up in Exodus 1:1-7, with Israel suffering in slavery. Yet, Stephen says that this is “the time of the promise… which God had assured to Abraham” was approaching. This time is characterized by the multiplication of Abraham’s descendants, just as the Lord had predicted.
	+ Just at that time, “there arose a king over Egypt that did not know Joseph.” 400 years had elapsed since Joseph was the governor/savior of Egypt, so either the Pharaoh did not know of Joseph’s exploits, or chose to not remember in view of the threat that this growing ethnic group posed for the Egyptian Empire.[[22]](#footnote-23)
	+ In view of this growing threat this Pharaoh chose to take “shrewd advantage” of and “mistreated” Israel. This refers to enslaving or forced labor that the king of Egypt had inflicted on the sons of Israel. However, another way they were mistreated, according to Stephen, was the they were forced or compelled to abandon or expose their infants to ensure they would not survive.[[23]](#footnote-24)
	+ There is a serious threat to the seed promise here. If all the infants born are left to die, surely the seed promise would die with the rest of those offspring.
* Vs. 20-22— “It was at this time…” this phrase has a double purpose. It was at the time of the enslavement and oppression of Israel and it was at the very time when the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promised was drawing near, that “Moses was born.”
* Stephen tells the story that Moses was born. He was **chosen** by God; he was lovely in the sight of God. He was **protected** by God; was nurtured three months in his father’s home. He was **preserved** by God; he was adopted by Pharaoh’s daughter. He was **prepared** by God; he was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians. And he was **gifted** by God; he was a man of power in word and deeds.
	+ So far, we see that Stephen is following the Moses’ narrative and he seems to be alluding to Jesus’ narrative.[[24]](#footnote-25)
* Vs. 23-25—At God’s appointed time, Moses, although was educated in all the learnings of the Egyptians, as he was approaching the age of forty, “it entered his mind to visit his brethren, the sons of Israel.” This was more than a wishful desire or a spur of the moment visit, this was a premeditated decision. According to Exodus 2:11, he “saw their burdens.” While he was raised by Pharaoh’s daughter, he knew that his brethren were being oppressed and this is what leads to his reaction when he observed that one of his brethren was being beaten: he killed the Egyptian. Taking his role of deliverer, he avenged this abuse.
* This leads to verse 25, where we get a glimpse as to what Moses was thinking as he was killing this Egyptian. “…God was granting them deliverance through him…” Somehow, Moses knew that this was the reason why he was chosen, protected, preserved, prepared and gifted by God; he was Israel’s deliverer or savior. Sadly, even though he supposed that they understood who he was *supposed* to be, “they did not understand.”
* V. 26-29—The event following Stephen’s words is a validation that the sons of Israel did not understand Moses’ role. When Moses sees two of them fighting, he acts a judge and peacemaker, (v.27) but is rejected, “pushed aside,” when the aggressor accuses Moses of setting himself up to be “as a ruler and a judge over them.” (Exodus 2:14).
* Moses’ rejection by the Israelite brother causes his flight to Midian. Stephen shortens Exodus 2:14–15, where Moses flees Egypt because his killing of the Egyptian man has come to the attention of Pharaoh, who wants to take action against Moses. “Here it is the word of the Israelite that prompts Moses to abandon, for the time being, his rescue mission in support of the people of Israel.”[[25]](#footnote-26) Stephen shows that Moses has been rejected by his own people and forced to live in a strange land in exile.
* Vs. 30-33—in these verses we see the second 40-period of Moses’ life; when he was a sojourner in the land of Midian. Moses fast-forwards 40 years to Moses’ encounter with God that is recorded in Exodus; the narrative of the burning bush.
* The God who revealed himself to Abraham in Mesopotamia and gave Joseph the assurance of his presence in Egypt now communicated with Moses by vision and voice in Midian, far from the frontiers of the holy land. That spot of Gentile territory was “holy ground” for the sole reason that God manifested himself to Moses there. [[26]](#footnote-27)
	+ “The removal of the shoes was a mark of reverence in the divine presence, as it was a mark of respect to one’s host when paying a visit.”[[27]](#footnote-28)
* Vs. 34 is a summary of Exodus 3:7-10 where God speaks to Moses and tells them that He had seen their oppression and heard their groans. God is a faithful God, His faithfulness to the Abrahamic Promise makes him “come down to rescue them.” How is He going to rescue Israel? How is God going to show his faithfulness to the children of Jacob? By sending leaders to rescue and save His nation. There was someone else that was sent to save and to deliver, Jesus.

**Day Three- Questions**

1. Why did Stephen recount Moses’ first 40 years? What did he say about him?
2. Look at the episode when Moses tried to act as a peacemaker. What does this tell us about Moses and about the Israelites?
3. List some ways that Moses’ story parallels Jesus’. What is Stephen saying here?

# Day Four

### Israel’s History: Their Apostasy (7:35-50)

“The style of Stephen’s speech changes at v. 35. The treatment of Israel’s history becomes more direct; the themes are applied with less subtlety. Even though continuing his survey in a more or less straight chronological fashion, the lessons of Israel’s history are more explicitly drawn. Verses 35–38 treat the Exodus and wilderness period, with the emphasis not on the history but the person of Moses. Verses 39–43 deal with the apostasy in the wilderness, with the emphasis on the judgment of God. Verses 44–50 deal with the entrance into the promised land and lead up to the time of Solomon and concentrate on the *temple* as an example of Israel’s apostasy.”[[28]](#footnote-29)

* Vs. 35-36— “This Moses whom they disowned,” This very man that they had rejected as their ruler and judge (v.27), God recommissioned, after a period of 40 years, to fulfill his original role (Ex. 3:13-15). He even performed miracles in Egypt, at the Red Sea, and in the wilderness for forty years!
* This is the third reference to 40 years. This time Moses is leading his people out of Egypt with the help of the angel who appeared to him at the thorn bush.
	+ The parallels to Jesus are inevitable. Jesus too was called out of Egypt, passed through waters in his baptism and was tempted in the wilderness.[[29]](#footnote-30)
* Vs. 37-38—Stephen moves rather quickly from the events in the Exodus to the end of Moses’ life where he prophesied in Deuteronomy 18:15 that there would be another prophet coming that would be *like him*, who would also be a ruler and a redeemer and who would do wonders and signs.
* v. 38 shows Moses as the mediator of a law given at Mount Sinai. He was “in the congregation in the wilderness” this is where he received the “living oracles,” the Law that was passed onto the people. These living words of God were not made up by Moses, rather they were given by “the angel that was speaking to him on Mount Sinai” meaning these were divine words that needed to be heeded.
* vs. 39-41—However, the sons of Israel in the wilderness refused to listen "were unwilling to be obedient" to Moses, and rejected his leadership of them (Num. 14:3-4; Exod. 32:1, 23). They “repudiated him.” Literally, they pushed him away.[[30]](#footnote-31) The Israelites refused to follow Moses, pushed him away and they preferred to go back to their former place of slavery than to obey Moses, and by extension, the law.
	+ This is exactly what was happening in Stephen’s time. The religious leaders had rejected and pushed Jesus aside, and now they were doing the same with the apostles and those who proclaim Christ as the leader and redeemer of the people.
* Stephen continues with Israel’s history and in verses 40-41, where he explains that this willingness to go back to their slave masters in Egypt in their hearts leads them to idolatry.
	+ “Stephen directly quoted Exodus 32:1, where the people asked Aaron to make them gods. As for Moses, they did not know what happened to him (v. 40). Compare v. 25, where the Israelites are said not to have understood that God was using Moses to rescue them. They committed the same sin of ignorance in the wilderness: To reject God’s messenger is to reject God. It was ultimately a lack of faith. So, they made a golden calf, offered a sacrifice to the idol, and rejoiced in this work of their own hands.”[[31]](#footnote-32)
	+ “They… brought a sacrifice to the idol, and were rejoicing in the works of their hands.” The sons of Israel deliberately transgressed God’s law that states not to have other gods before Him, not to make an idol of anything, and not to bow down and worship it (Exod. 20:1–4; Deut. 5:7–8). They brought burnt offerings and fellowship offerings to this idol and then indulged in a time of eating, drinking, and carousing (Exod. 32:6). “In the Greek, the verb *rejoiced* indicates that their festivities lasted for some time.”[[32]](#footnote-33) Peterson writes, “Sacrifice and celebration before such an idol indicated that Israel was no different from the nations (cf. Pss. 115:4–8; 135:15–18; Is. 44:6–20; Hos. 8:4–6), and that as a people they had abandoned God’s holy calling (Ex. 19:5–6).”[[33]](#footnote-34)
* Vs. 42-43- While Israel turned their back on God, God turned on them.[[34]](#footnote-35) Despite the wonders and signs that Moses performed during and after the exodus, and despite the giving the law at Mount Sinai, the forty years that Israel wandered in the desert are fundamentally a time of apostasy and of divine judgment. God allowed the people of Israel “to become captive to the consequences of their own evil choices.” Stephen asserts that Israel worshiped not only the golden calf but “the host of heaven” i.e., sun, moon, and stars.[[35]](#footnote-36)
	+ As a result of this, God “delivered them up” to worship worthless things and to illustrate this, Stephen quotes Amos 5:25-27 to support the declaration that Israel’s idolatry caused God to give them over.[[36]](#footnote-37) The rebuke from Amos points to the ignominious history of the wilderness wanderings. Sacrifices were not offered to God but to others. This language of rebuke recalls Israel’s repeated rejection and unfaithfulness to God’s revelation. Here is the ultimate source of Stephen’s defense; in the end, Israel’s own Scripture condemns Israel.[[37]](#footnote-38)

In verses 44 to 50, Stephen addresses the second charge against him—that he claimed that Jesus would destroy “this place” (i.e., the temple). Stephen had effectively refuted the general charges that he had blasphemed God and Moses (6:11; cf. vv. 2-16) and had spoken against the Law (6:13; cf. vv. 17-43). Now, he needs to address the issue that he had spoken against the temple (6:13).

The Jewish leaders of Stephen's day attached inordinate importance to the temple, as they did to the Mosaic Law and the Promised Land. They had distorted God's view of the temple, as they had distorted His meaning in the Law. Instruction concerning both the Law, which specified Israel's walk before people, and the tabernacle, which specified her worship of God, came to Moses when he was not in the Promised Land but at Mt. Sinai.[[38]](#footnote-39)

* V.44-45—Stephen begins with a review of Israel’s history in their holy places: First, he talks the about the “tabernacle of testimony.” This was the place where God would meet with Moses, this was a place that was made up to the guidelines and patterns that God Himself laid down for Moses. That tabernacle remained in Israel throughout the time in the wilderness, even in the conquest of the Promised Land under Joshua (v. 45) Everything seemed to be going fine until the time of David; however, something happened during David’s reign.
* V. 46—David has a desire to build a “dwelling place for the God of Jacob.” Some manuscripts say “a dwelling place for the house of Jacob”[[39]](#footnote-40) This should not be a problem, most likely, what Stephen means is a dwelling place within the house of Jacob.
	+ Stephen is referring to the story found in 2 Samuel 7, where David wants to build a house for the Lord, yet the Lord was going to build a house for David through the Davidic covenant.
* V. 47—The story continues and even though David found favor in the sight of God; and even though God made a covenant with him, it would be Solomon who would build a “house for Him.”
* V. 48-50-- The building of the temple by Solomon would seem to be the culmination of the promises. Stephen undermines this milestone by citing the prophet Isaiah: God does not dwell in houses “made by human hands.” This phrase is used to condemn pagan idols (7:41). [Cf. Lev. 26:1; Pss. 115:4; 135:15; Isa. 2:8; 37:19; 46:6; Mic. 5:12; Acts 17:23–24.] The temple is likened to an idol and could not be the fulfillment of God’s promise.[[40]](#footnote-41) God cannot and will not be sequestered in some human structure.[[41]](#footnote-42)
	+ The rhetorical question in verse 50 is in fact a statement. God has made all these things, and so a human temple cannot contain God. This is not a statement against the temple; rather, it places the temple in its proper perspective.[[42]](#footnote-43)

### Israel’s History: Their rejection of Messiah (7:51-53)

Verses 51 to 53 are Stephen’s closing arguments. And just like any other closing argument, these verses are filled with pathos. This is a big departure from Peter’s sermons, so far, Stephen has answered the charges leveled against him by recounting Israel’s history of sin, rebellion and rejection of God’s mercy.

* First, v. 51—Stephen begins with a direct rebuke, “you men who are stiffed-necked.” This is the moniker that God used in Exodus 33:3, 5 to refer to those that were involved in the golden calf incident. In fact, Moses uses that same nickname for them in Deuteronomy 9:6, 27, which teaches that stubborness was an ongoing quality of the second generation as well; their stubborn heart.
* Second, he says, that they are “uncircumcised in heart and ears” “implies that ‘the covenant of circumcision’ (7:8) has not affected their inner disposition (their ‘*hearts*’; cf. Dt. 10:16) or their ability to heed God’s word (their ‘*ears*’; cf. Je. 6:10). They are no more responsive to God than uncircumcised pagans!”[[43]](#footnote-44)
* Thirdly he says, “are always resisting the Holy Spirit” because Jesus, the apostles, and Stephen were filled with the Holy Spirit and they were resisting them. If they had not been resisting the Spirit, they would have accepted them and their teachings by repenting.
* The last phrase is terrible, “you are doing as your fathers did.” It is terrible for one reason, the review of Israel’s history, their resistance, rebellion, from Joseph to Moses, and even after the Exodus and their idolatry is not only part of their heritage, but part of their present DNA. They are still characterized by that behavior and the proof of this is that they rejected Jesus and his followers, the same way that the patriarchs rejected Joseph, the same way Israel rejected Moses, and the same way the wilderness generation rejected God Himself! This is why this phrase if terrible: nothing has changed.

* V.52—Stephen continues his indictment of the Jewish religious leaders with a rhetorical question. “Which one of the prophets did you fathers not persecute?” Note that Stephen had previously associated himself with "our fathers" (vv. 2, 11-12, 15, 19, 39, 44-45), but now he disassociated himself from the Sanhedrin by referring to "your fathers." “Our fathers were the trusting and obeying patriarchs, but "your fathers" were the unresponsive apostates.”[[44]](#footnote-45)
* “Stephen insists that they are still true sons of their fathers, maintaining the same hostility to God’s messengers:if those “fathers” killed those who foretold the advent of the Righteous One, they themselves—and here Stephen’s indictment is directed particularly to his chief-priestly judges—had carried that hostility to its logical conclusion by handing the Righteous One himself over to violent death.”[[45]](#footnote-46)
* v. 53—Their guilt is even more stunning because they had received the law “as ordained by angels,”[[46]](#footnote-47) “and yet did not keep it.” These leaders were not only wrong, but they were guilty of breaking the law which they loved so much. Their hearts were uncircumcised, unable and unwilling to keep the law, and the result was that they rejected the God of glory and crucified Christ.

**Day Four- Questions**

1. Who was the prophet like Moses that God will raise up for the sons of Israel? (v.37)
2. What does the phrase ‘in their hearts the turned back to Egypt mean? What caused this change of heart?
3. Why did God ‘turned away’ from them? What happened?
4. Explain the Stephen’s quotation of Isaiah 66:1-2. What point was he trying to make?

# Day Five

## The Martyrdom of Stephen and its consequences (7:54-8:4)

Stephen's speech caused a revolution in the Sanhedrin's attitude toward the disciples of Jesus, and his martyrdom began the first persecution of the Christians.

“Luke recorded the Sanhedrin's response to Stephen's message in order to document Jesus' continued rejection by Israel's leaders. He did so in order to explain why the gospel spread as it did, and why the Jews responded to it as they did, following this event.”[[47]](#footnote-48)

### Stephen’s Martyrdom (54-60)

* v. 54— “Now, when they heard this, they were cut to the quick and they began gnashing their teeth at him.” As they are listening to Stephen’s defense, their true colors are coming through—they are “cut to the quick” (lit. “sawn through”) The remarks that Stephen was making infuriated them. They are “gnashing their teeth at him” a sign of hostility and rage.
* “The members of the Sanhedrin are outraged about Stephen’s accusations and, presumably, about what they would have regarded as a one-sided account of Israel’s history focusing on the sins, the disobedience, the apostasy, the pushing aside, and the persecution of God’s envoys. They do not interrupt his speech (it is Luke who interrupts his account of Stephen’s speech with the comment in v. 54), but they want Stephen to come to a close.”[[48]](#footnote-49)
* Vs. 55-56—In the midst of such outward display of fury, Stephen remains calm and full of the Holy Spirit,[[49]](#footnote-50) God grants him a special vision as he looks intently into heaven; “and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.” This is a vision of God’s throne room, much like the ones Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and the apostle John saw. He sees the glory of God, the same God of glory that called Abraham and he sees Jesus standing at the right hand of God, denoting his authoritative position as the Messiah.
* In verse 56, Stephen recounts his vision and describes Jesus as “the Son of man.”[[50]](#footnote-51) This is a Messianic title that the prophet Daniel uses in connection to his universal rule.
* What was Stephen asserting by recounting his vision?

1) He saw the glory of God. (I see the heaven open)

2) Jesus was the Christ. (The son of Man)

3) Jesus was resurrected. (Standing)

4) Jesus’s exalted position (at the right hand of God)

* Vs. 57-58—Stephen, having shared his vision with the Sanhedrin, has sealed his destiny. The reaction of the men tells the story:
	+ “They cried out with a loud voice”.[[51]](#footnote-52)
	+ “and covered their ears” – most likely because they considered what Stephen had just said as blasphemous.[[52]](#footnote-53)
		- “Covering their ears and yelling at the top of their voices was an attempt to stifle Stephen’s testimony to the exalted Christ.”[[53]](#footnote-54)
	+ “and rushed at him with one impulse.” Even in their anger they were doing things in unison. They had yelled at the top of their lungs, they had covered their ears, and now they are rushing rapidly to try to stop him. They had one purpose in their minds and it was to silence Stephen’s testimony.
* V. 58—After rushing at him with mind, they drive him out of the city. This is where the law of Moses said that they needed to punish the person who was guilty of blasphemy, stoning “outside the camp” (Leviticus 24:14) and they began to stone him.
	+ This means that they were throwing stones at him. The verb used here indicates that the throwing of stones went on for some time.[[54]](#footnote-55)
	+ They also laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul. The laying off of their robes means that they are preparing themselves for this activity as executioners by removing any cumbersome clothes that they also didn’t want to get stained with the blood of the victim.
	+ All of the sudden, we get introduced to a minor character in the Stephen saga, Saul, a young man. Here “young man in that time, could be anyone from 20 to 40 years of age. We will see more of Saul or Paul in the coming weeks.
* Vs. 59-60— “They went on stoning Stephen” as he is being bombarded with stones, this suggests it was a process, he “called on the Lord and said.” Someone once said, “It is good to die praying.” This is exactly what happened to Stephen, he calls upon the Lord and says, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!” just like Jesus when he died, Stephen is so sure of what was coming to him that he in faith prays a modified version of Psalm 31:5, “into your hands I commit my spirit.”
* After he fell on his knees he shouted, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them!” Again, just like his prayer before, he recalls Jesus’ crucifixion (Luke 23:34).
* After saying this, “he fell asleep.” An unexpectedly peaceful description for so brutal a death, but one which fits the spirit in which Stephen accepted his martyrdom.[[55]](#footnote-56)

### The Great Persecution, and Introduction of Saul, the Persecutor (8:1-3)

* V.1a- Again, as in 7:58, Luke makes the point that Saul was present at Stephen’s death and approved of it. Saul's active approval of Stephen's execution reveals his commitment to the extermination of Jesus' disciples, which he proceeded to implement zealously. This verse introduces Saul and provides a transition to what follows later concerning Saul's conversion and subsequent ministry[[56]](#footnote-57).
	+ “Paul likely had a deeper involvement with the whole incident than appears in these brief references. He was himself a Greek-speaking Jew, a Cilician, who perhaps had argued with Stephen in the Hellenist synagogue in Jerusalem (6:9f.) We would like to know if he heard the speech. If he did, it would be eloquent testimony that Stephen’s words did not fall only on deaf ears; for ultimately no one carried out more fully the implications of Stephen’s words than did Paul. The incident of Stephen’s martyrdom in any event surely had a profound effect as Paul himself later attested (Acts 22:20).”[[57]](#footnote-58)
* 1b— “On that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem…” - Stephen's execution ignited the first widespread persecution of Christian Jews. Luke showed that the early Jerusalem Christians first received a warning (4:21), then flogging (5:40), then martyrdom (7:58-60), then extensive persecution. Since Stephen was a Hellenistic Jew, the Hellenistic Jewish Christians were probably the main targets of this antagonism. The unbelieving Jews who were living in Jerusalem turned against the believing Jews. “This hostility resulted in many of the believers leaving Jerusalem for more secure places of residence. They took the gospel with them and planted churches in all Judea (cf. 1 Thess. 2:14) as well as in Samaria.”[[58]](#footnote-59)
	+ Luke’s subsequent report indicates that many prominent members of the Jerusalem church, particularly Greek-speaking believers, permanently settled in other regions of the country, e.g., Philip, who moved to Samaria (8:5) and later settled in Caesarea (8:40), and the unnamed believers who settled in Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch (11:19–20). The Twelve, however, remained the leaders of the Jerusalem church, for the time being (see on 12:17) …One can thus conclude that “all that Luke maintains is that the persecution did not bring their leadership of the Jerusalem church to an end.”[[59]](#footnote-60)
* V.2—This verse tells us that Stephen received a proper burial and “they made loud lamentation over him.” This was the same day that Stephen was killed, the current law didn’t allow for a next day burial, which means that these “devout men” took their very lives in their own hands when they claimed the body, prepared it for burial and made loud lamentation over it, especially because it was against the law to mourn the death of a criminal![[60]](#footnote-61)
* V.3, while these godly men are valiantly burying Stephen, “Saul began ravaging the church” this word ravaging means “to destroy,” “to cause the destruction of something or someone.”
	+ “Saul was a leader of the persecution in Jerusalem (9:1-2, 29; 22:4-5; 26:11). Evidently Stephen's execution fueled Saul's hatred for the Christians and encouraged him to be increasingly antagonism toward them. He not only went from house-to-house arresting Christians (cf. 2:46; 5:42) and putting them in prison, but he also carried his purges into the synagogues (cf. 6:9) and tried to force believers to blaspheme (confess Jesus as the God- man) there (22:19; 26:11).”[[61]](#footnote-62)

### The Great Dispersion (8:4)

### V.4- The persecution did not hamper the witness of the Hellenists. If anything, it increased it as they came forth from Jerusalem, preaching the gospel wherever they went.[[62]](#footnote-63)

* + Whereas persecution resulted in the death of some believers, it also dispersed Jesus' disciples over a wider area. “Luke described what they did, as scattered believers, as preaching the word (Gr. euaggelizomenoi ton logon, lit. "proclaiming good news the word"). The gospel message is in view. Sometimes, what appears to be very bad—in this case persecution and dispersion—turns out to be very good (Matt. 16:18).”[[63]](#footnote-64)

**Day Five- Questions**

1. How did the Sanhedrin respond to Stephen’s defense? What does this imply?
2. Who is the Son of Man? Why does Stephen employ this title? What did it mean to the religious leaders?
3. Who were the “all were scattered throughout?” (8:1b)
4. What effect did the scattering have on the church? Why? Think about the implications of this even today (v.4)
1. Polhill, 183–184. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Though the text does not tell us that Stephen is a Hellenist Jewish believer, there is a pretty wide consensus in commentators that he was indeed. Based on his Greek name, his ministering to the Hellenistic widows, and his ministry in a Hellenist Synagogue. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Peterson, 239–240. – “It may seem strange to modern readers to learn that there were synagogues in Jerusalem, where the temple was clearly the focus of attention and theologically at the centre of Jewish religion (cf. 1 Kings 8; Pss. 26:8; 27:4; 43:3–4; 48:1–3; 132:6–9, 13–14). But there is evidence from archaeology and from Rabbinic writings that at least one synagogue building existed in the city before its destruction in ad 70. Furthermore, synagogues had a different, though related function in Judaism. There was no sacrificial ritual, but the primary object was instruction in the law of God, which meant the study of Scripture, together with the oral law, which, in Talmud and Midrash, finally was written down. An endeavour was made to educate the whole community in its faith, applying the words of God to every area of life, working out the implications of covenant obedience. This was done, not merely through Sabbath gatherings, but through the use of synagogues more generally as places for elementary education and more advanced studies” [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. The verb translated as “came forward” does not necessarily denote hostile initiative; it is probably used here in the sense “to initiate an action” (BDAG, s.v. ἀνίστημι, 10). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. BDAG, s.v. συζητέω 2, “to contend with persistence for a point of view, *dispute, debate, argue*.” [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Schnabel, 346. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Marshall, 138. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Cheng and Stutzman, 181. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Constable, “Acts”, 160. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. “The **false witnesses** were not necessarily outright liars. Stephen had probably said the things they accused him of; however, they misrepresented the intentions and imports of his statements (cf. Matt. 26:61; Mark 14:58; John 2:19). The Lord Himself predicted the destruction of the temple (Matt. 24:1–2; Mark 13:1–2; Luke 21:5–6), though He never said *He* would do it. The other half of the allegation against Stephen involved the temporary nature of the Mosaic system. Undoubtedly, he saw the theological implications of justification by faith and the fulfillment of the Law in Christ. Furthermore, if the gospel was for the whole world (Acts 1:8), the Law had to be a temporary arrangement” Toussaint, 368–369. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. Longenecker, 336. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. Schnabel’s footnote 1622., 351 [Cf. in the Old Testament, particularly Moses returning from Mount Sinai, where he had been in God’s presence, Exod 34:29–35; cf. Gen 33:10; 1 Sam 29:9; 2 Sam 14:17; Dan 3:92 LXX. See also *Jos. Asen.* 5:5–6; 6:1–3; 1Q28b IV, 4–24–27; *Targum* on Song of Songs 1:5; *Rab. Deut*. 11 (207d); *Pirqe R. El*. 2 (“Then Eliezer sat down and expounded. His face shone like the light of the sun and his radiance beamed like that of Moses, so that no one knew whether it was day or night”). In the New Testament cf. the change of the appearance of Jesus’ face during the transfiguration, Luke 9:29.] [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. Schnabel, 351. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. Bock, 281. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. Schnabel, 366–367. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. “Stephen means that the worship of God in the land of Israel and, more particularly, in the temple at Jerusalem can be viewed as the divinely appointed outcome of the exodus redemption. Although Exodus 3:12 actually refers to worship ‘on this mountain’ (Horeb), Exodus 15:13–17 shows how the idea of meeting God on his holy mountain soon merged into that of engaging with God in the promised land and at Jerusalem on the temple mount.” Peterson, 250. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. Dumbrell, *Covenant*, 74. ‘A refusal to accept it is the equivalent of covenant rejection and thus merits excommunication (v. 14).’ [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. Peterson, 250. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. Constable, 168. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. According to Gen 50:12–14 (cf. 49:29–32), Jacob was buried at Machpelah near Hebron in a plot of land that Abraham had purchased (Gen 23) and where Abraham was buried as well (Gen 27:8–10). While the Old Testament does not specify where the sons of Jacob were buried, Jewish tradition asserts that they were buried with their father at Hebron. According to Josh 24:32 Joseph was buried at Shechem on land which Jacob had purchased from the sons of Hemor (Gen 33:18–20). Schnabel, 368. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. Constable, 172. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. Marshall, 148. “The meaning is either that he was ignorant of Joseph and his good deeds for Egypt or (perhaps more likely) that he preferred to forget about him in face of the menace which he saw in the growing might of the Israelites.” [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. Schnabel, 373. “The epexegetical infinitive translated as “by forcing them” (τοῦ ποιεῖν) explains the cunning mistreatment of the Israelites by the Egyptian king in terms of forcing them to “abandon” or “expose” (ἔκθετα) their infants so that they would die, making the parents complicit in the infanticide.” [The construction can also be interpreted as final, expressing the purpose of Pharaoh’s plan which ultimately failed. Cf. Bock, *Acts*, 290.] [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
24. Parsons, 97. “A much “louder” echo is found, however, between this verse and Luke’s earlier description of the childhood of Jesus: “And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in divine and human favor” (Luke 2:52). This parallel in description between Jesus and Moses would also explain the latter part of Acts 7:22, in which Stephen says that Moses was “powerful in his words and deeds.” This phrase is a near-verbatim parallel to Luke’s description of Jesus as “powerful in deed and word” (Luke 24:19; cf. Acts 2:22).” [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. Schnabel, 375–376. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
26. Bruce, 140–141. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
27. Polhill, 197. “God revealed himself to Moses as the God of the patriarchs (v. 32a), and Moses, fearful, diverted his attention from the theophany (v. 32b). God commanded Moses to remove his sandals because he was standing on holy ground (v. 33). Stephen’s inclusion of this detail may have been a subtle reminder to his hearers that there was holy ground elsewhere, far from the temple in Jerusalem.” [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
28. Polhill, 198–199. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
29. Adapted from Constable, 174. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
30. This is a figurative extension of the verb ‘to push away’ and means to no longer pay attention to previous beliefs. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
31. Polhill, 200–201. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
32. Kistemaker and Hendriksen, 264. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
33. Peterson, 260. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
34. Both actions are described with the same verb στρέφω. In v. 39 the term describes a change of mind and direction (BDAG, s.v. στρέφω 1b β), while in v. 42 it describes God turning “the Israelites toward the heavenly bodies, so that they were to serve them as their gods” (στρέφω 1a), or God turning away “so as to dissociate” himself from the Israelites (στρέφω 4). [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
35. Schnabel, 381. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
36. Marshall, 153–154. “Stephen, however, appears to be suggesting that the Israelites did not offer sacrifices to Yahweh in the wilderness, but to other gods. Thus the quotation offers confirmation of verse 41 rather than of verse 42a. The second part of the quotation (verse 43) describes how the Israelites proceeded to take up the *tent* in which *Moloch* was worshipped and the *star* or emblem of *Rephan*; these (gods) were (represented by) images which the Israelites made in order to worship them. *Moloch* is the god who required child-sacrifice, and *Rephan* appears to be the name of an Egyptian god associated with Saturn. The lxx here differs markedly from the Hebrew text of Amos which refers to taking up ‘Sakkuth your king and Kaiwan your star-god’, these probably being the names of Assyrian deities.” [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
37. Bock, 299. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
38. Constable, 178. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
39. The dative phrase “for the house of Jacob” (τῷ οἴκῳ Ἰακώβ, v. 46) has been regarded as difficult; however, the concept of a “habitation” within the “house of Jacob” (i.e., Israel) as a dwelling for God to be used as a temple for the people of Israel is not really ambiguous.David’s desire to provide a permanent sanctuary was initially approved by Nathan, but subsequently denied when the prophet announced that not he but his son would build a house for God’s name (2 Sam 7:3, 4–17). Stephen emphasizes that God was with David and that David’s desire to secure a permanent dwelling place for the worship of the people of Israel had divine sanction. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
40. Polhill writes, “As a Christian he was convinced that Israel would never find its true relationship to God, its true worship, apart from the Messiah, as the following verses (vv. 51–53) make clear. Tragically, his contemporaries heeded neither Stephen’s temple critique nor his witness to the Messiah. The temple became more and more a seedbed of nationalism, the place where revolutionary movements began. Eventually this led to war with their Roman overlords, which resulted in their utter defeat. The Romans reduced the temple to rubble in a.d. 70; not one stone was left on another. The warnings of Jesus and of Stephen had not been heard.” [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
41. Garland, 72. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
42. Bock, 304. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
43. Peterson, 264. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
44. Constable, 181. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
45. Bruce, 152. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
46. Bock, 306. “Again, it is Jewish tradition that developed the idea that the giving of the law involved the angels, something Paul also notes (Gal. 3:19; Heb. 2:2). A rabbinic midrash on Exodus, Mekilta de Rabbi Ishmael (*Baḥodesh* 9) speaks of angels ministering with God to the people as the commandments were given (Le Cornu and Shulam 2003: 368–69). The term διαταγή refers to a command or direction coming from someone (BDAG 237). So the idea is that the law came “by means of the command or direction of angels.” The roots of the idea may go back to Deut. 33:2 LXX, where angels accompany God at Sinai.” [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
47. Constable, 184. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
48. Schnabel, 388. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
49. Remember this is one of his characterizations found in Acts 6:3, 5, 8, and 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
50. Longenecker, 350. [The identification of Jesus as “the Son of Man” is used outside the Gospels only here and at Revelation 1:13; 14:14 (also at Heb 2:6, though as a locution for man in line with Ps 8:4). In the Gospels Jesus alone used “Son of Man” in referring to himself (the apparent exceptions in Luke 24:7 and John 12:34 are in actuality echoes of Jesus’ usage). Jesus used the expression both as a locution for the pronoun “I” and as a title reflecting the usage in Daniel 7:13–28 (esp. vv. 13–14). As a title it carries the ideas of (1) identification with mankind and suffering and (2) vindication by God and glory. The title was generally not attributed to Jesus by the church between the time when his sufferings were completed and when he would assume his full glory. Here, however, an anticipation of Christ’s full glory is set within a martyr context (as also at Rev 1:13; 14:14); and, therefore, “Son of Man” is used as being fully appropriate.] [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
51. Cheng and Stutzman, it means to make a vehement outcry [BDAG] [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
52. Schnabel, 390. “The fact that they cover their ears suggests that in their view a blasphemy has been uttered which, according to Philo, is an insult to the pious “who immediately feel an indescribable and irreconcilable affliction, which enters in at their ears and pervades the whole soul” (Philo, *Decalogue* 63). For Stephen, the fact that the Jewish leaders cover their ears would have confirmed his earlier point that they are uncircumcised in their ears (v. 51)—they refuse to listen to and acknowledge the truth about the revelation of Jesus in the presence of the glory of God. The blasphemous utterance, in their view, is Stephen’s declaration that he sees Jesus, the Son of Man of Daniel’s prophecy, standing at the right hand of God—no one has the right to share the glory of God at God’s right hand.” [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
53. Peterson, 268. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
54. Schnabel, 391. [In the law, stoning was prescribed as the death penalty for the following offenses: worshiping pagan gods (Lev 20:2–5; Deut 17:2–7), prophesying in the name of a pagan god (Deut 13:2–6), divination (Lev 20:27), blasphemy (Lev 24:14–16), violation of the Sabbath (Num 15:32–36), adultery (Deut 22:22), and refusal to submit to one’s parents (Deut 21:18–21). Since Stephen had been accused of uttering blasphemous words against Moses (the law) and God (the temple), he is stoned on account of the perceived blasphemy (6:11, 14; cf. on v. 57).] [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
55. Bruce, 160. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
56. Constable, 189. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
57. Polhill, 210. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
58. Constable, 190. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
59. Schnabel, 394. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
60. Many commentators make this point; especially in the Mishnah (*M. Sanh.* 6:5–6) [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
61. Constable, 191. – FF Bruce writes, “Drastic action was called for: these people, he thought, were not merely misguided enthusiasts whose sincere embracing of error called for patient enlightenment; they were deliberate impostors, proclaiming that God had raised from the tomb to be Lord and Messiah a man whose manner of death was sufficient to show that the divine curse rested on him.” [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
62. Polhill, 214.- Schnabel write “The believers who were impacted by the persecution that the Jewish authorities organized after Stephen’s execution (v. 1) were forced, if they managed to escape imprisonment (v. 3), to leave Jerusalem. The grammatical focus of this summary statement is Luke’s reference to the fact that the believers who were scattered “traveled from place to place” (διῆλθον).1860 The present participle translated as “proclaimed” (εὐαγγελιζόμενοι) is modal, underscoring the fact that as they traveled in the regions of Judea and Samaria from town to town, and from village to village, they kept proclaiming the good news of the word (ὁ λόγος) of God concerning Jesus, the promised Messiah and Savior. It is natural to presuppose that if these believers preached the gospel in towns and villages outside of Jerusalem, they had been actively sharing the message about Jesus in the city” Schnabel, 404. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
63. Constable, 193. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)