SMITH FOR CHRIST

TEACHING THE WORD · WATCHING THE TIMES



DEEP DIVE

Acts

Chapter Seven, Verses 1–60

The Son of Man Standing — Stephen tells Israel's story to the Council, and heaven opens over the first martyr

NASB 1995 | VERSE BY VERSE | FOUR VOICES | WITH DIAGRAMS

Charged with speaking against the temple and the Law, Stephen walks the Council from Abraham to Solomon: God met His people far from any temple, and Israel always rejected the deliverers He sent. Then he names the Righteous One, sees Jesus standing at God's right hand, and dies with a prayer for the men who stone him. Read through four teachers — **David Guzik**, **R.C. Sproul**, **C.H. Spurgeon** and **Matthew Henry** — with the Greek behind Luke's key words.

THE PASSAGE

Acts 7:1–60

Abraham · Joseph · Moses · temple · martyr

THE METHOD

Verse by Verse

Color-coded by teacher

WHAT'S INSIDE

Contents

Five movements from the high priest's question to Stephen's last prayer

—	**How to Read This Study** · *the four voices & their colors*	3
—	**Before the Passage** · *from false witnesses in Acts 6 to the Council's court*	3
I	**The God of Glory Appeared** · *Acts 7:1–16 · Abraham and Joseph*	5
II	**This Moses Whom They Disowned** · *Acts 7:17–36 · Moses rejected and sent*	7
III	**A Prophet Like Me — and a House Not Made with Hands** · *Acts 7:37–50 · the Prophet and the temple*	9
IV	**Always Resisting the Holy Spirit** · *Acts 7:51–53 · the indictment*	11
V	**Lord Jesus, Receive My Spirit** · *Acts 7:54–60 · the first martyr*	13
VI	**The Passage in the Whole Bible** · *cross-references*	15
†	**At a Glance** · *the four voices side by side*	17
†	**Key Insights & Questions for the Table** · *discussion*	17
†	**Sources** · *where each voice comes from*	19



"Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" — Acts 7:60

SECTION I · THE PASSAGE

Acts 7:1–60

The Son of Man Standing — a deacon on trial retells two thousand years of God's ways, names the pattern, and dies praying for his killers

† How to Read This Study

This study walks Acts 7 in 5 movements, in Luke's own order. Each movement opens with the full NASB 1995 text of those verses, marked with the Berean colors and shapes; then the Greek behind the key words; then the teachers, each in his own color — **David Guzik**, the pastor who walks the text verse by verse; **R.C. Sproul**, the theologian who presses every word for its doctrine; **C.H. Spurgeon**, the preacher who turns the doctrine into a call to the heart; and **Matthew Henry**, the Puritan commentator who gathers it into plain, practical counsel. The figures draw the passage so you can see where Luke is going. Read the Scripture first; then let each voice add its angle.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word — R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier · St. Andrew's
C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle — MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary on the Whole Bible

HOW THIS STUDY IS MARKED — God — His character & actions; Command / instruction; Key repeated word; Sin / warning; Promise / blessing; Time / place / contrast

KEY VERSE · ACTS 7:56

"and he said, 'Behold, I see △the heavens opened up and △the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.'"

† Before the Passage

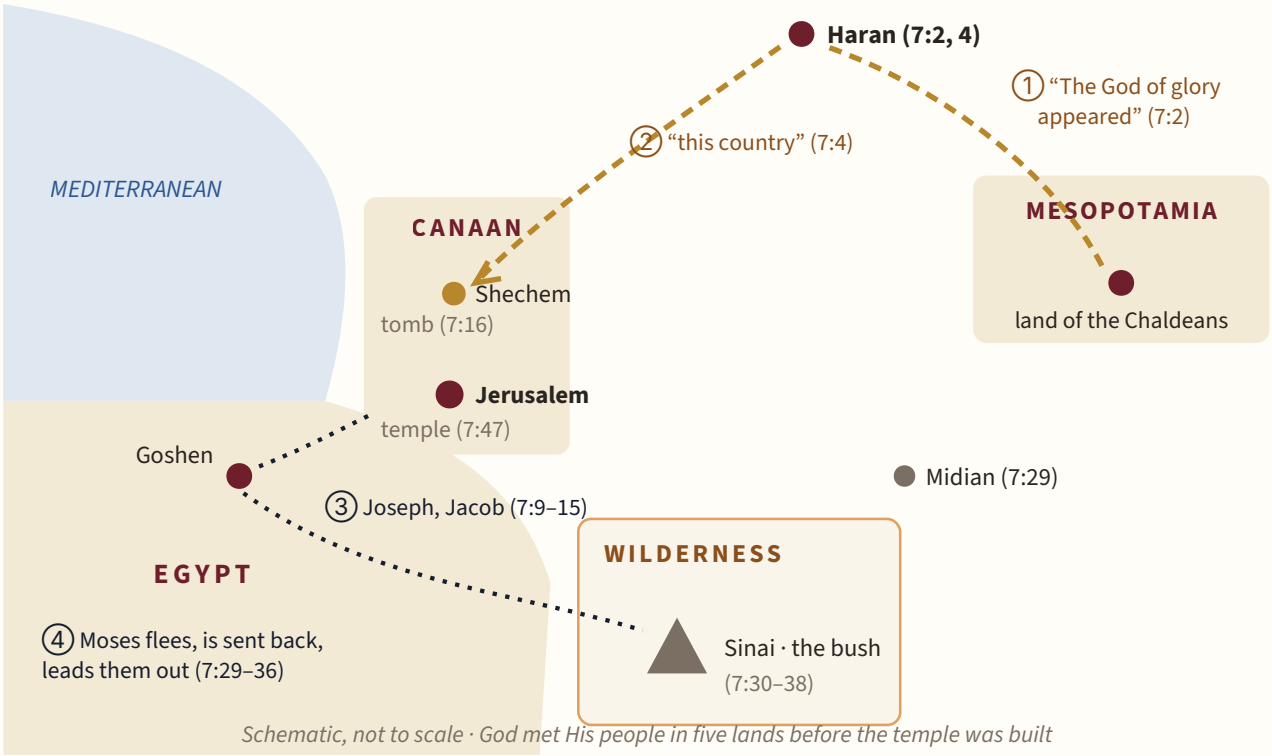
Acts 6 introduced Stephen as one of the seven chosen to serve the widows: "a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit" (6:5), "full of grace and power," who "was performing great wonders and signs among the people" (6:8). Men from the Synagogue of the Freedmen argued with him and lost — "they were unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking" (6:10) — so they put forward false witnesses: "This man incessantly speaks against this holy place and the Law" (6:13). Chapter 7 is his answer, the longest speech in Acts.

Sproul sets the scene: "Stephen was on trial for his life before the highest earthly court of Israel." The charge was blasphemy against Moses and God, and in particular that Jesus would "destroy this place and alter the customs which Moses handed down to us" (6:14). Sproul notes that "not a single word of what these witnesses said was true, except that Jesus did indeed say He would destroy the temple." Guzik reads the speech as "not so much a legal defense" as an explanation, and Henry agrees that its first aim is to show that God "had a church in the world many ages before that holy place was founded and the ceremonial law given."

The speech has two threads running side by side. First, God meets His people everywhere: in Mesopotamia, in Egypt, in Midian, at a bush in the wilderness, in a portable tent — long before Solomon's house. Second, Israel always rejects God's deliverers at first: Joseph's brothers sold him, Moses' brothers pushed him away, the fathers persecuted the prophets, and now this Council has betrayed and murdered "the Righteous One" (v. 52). Stephen calls them "brethren and fathers" (v. 2) — this is a family quarrel inside Israel, not a Gentile writing Israel off.

Stephen quotes mostly from the Greek Old Testament, which explains a few details that differ from our Hebrew-based Bibles — the "seventy-five persons" of verse 14 (Genesis 46:27 has seventy). He also compresses well-known stories, as preachers do: two burials and two land purchases (Genesis 23; 33:19; 50:13; Joshua 24:32) are folded into verse 16. Luke reports accurately what Stephen said. At the end of the chapter, a young man named Saul is holding the coats, and the next chapter belongs to him and to the church he scatters.

FIGURE · WHERE GOD MET HIS PEOPLE



Trace Stephen's story across the map: God appeared in Mesopotamia, Canaan, Egypt, Midian and Sinai — all of it before anyone built a house for Him in Jerusalem.

I
MOVEMENT

ACTS 7:1–16

The God of Glory Appeared

Abraham without a foot of ground, Joseph sold and raised up — God at work far from any temple

1 *The high priest said, "Are these things so?"* 2 *And he said, "Hear me, brethren and fathers! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran,* 3 *and said to him, 'LEAVE YOUR COUNTRY AND YOUR RELATIVES, AND COME INTO THE LAND THAT I WILL SHOW YOU.'* 4 *"Then he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. From there, after his father died, God had him move to this country in which you are now living.* 5 *"But He gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot of ground, and yet, even when he had no child, He promised that HE WOULD GIVE IT TO HIM AS A POSSESSION, AND TO HIS DESCENDANTS AFTER HIM.* 6 *"But God spoke to this effect, that his DESCENDANTS WOULD BE ALIENS IN A FOREIGN LAND, AND THAT THEY WOULD BE ENSLAVED AND MISTREATED FOR FOUR HUNDRED YEARS.* 7 *" 'AND WHATEVER NATION TO WHICH THEY WILL BE IN BONDAGE I MYSELF WILL JUDGE,' said God, 'AND AFTER THAT THEY WILL COME OUT AND SERVE ME IN THIS PLACE.'* 8 *"And He gave him the covenant of circumcision; and so Abraham became the father of Isaac, and circumcised him on the eighth day; and Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob of the twelve patriarchs.* 9 *"The patriarchs became jealous of Joseph and sold him into Egypt. Yet God was with him,* 10 *and rescued him from all his afflictions, and granted him favor and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and he made him governor over Egypt and all his household.* 11 *"Now a famine came over all Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction with it, and our fathers could find no food.* 12 *"But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our fathers there the first time.* 13 *"On the second visit Joseph made himself known to his brothers, and Joseph's family was disclosed to Pharaoh.* 14 *"Then Joseph sent word and invited Jacob his father and all his relatives to come to him, seventy-five persons in all.* 15 *"And Jacob went down to Egypt and there he and our fathers died.* 16 *"From there they were removed to Shechem and laid in the tomb which Abraham had purchased for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor in Shechem.*

ACTS 7:1–16

"By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God."

HEBREWS 11:9–10

δόξα

DOXA · "GLORY" · G1391

Stephen opens with "The God of glory appeared" (v. 2) and his last sight on earth is "the glory of God" (v. 55). The word frames the whole chapter. In the Old Testament the glory of God filled the tabernacle and the temple; Stephen's point is that the same glory appeared to Abraham in pagan Mesopotamia, before there was a land, a law or a temple — and that it now surrounds the risen Jesus.

πάροικος

PAROIKOS · "ALIEN, SOJOURNER" · G3941

From *para* (beside) and *oikos* (house): one who lives beside, not as an owner but as a resident foreigner. God told Abraham his descendants would be "aliens in a foreign land" (v. 6), and Moses later "became an alien in the land of Midian" (v. 29). Peter uses the same word for Christians: "aliens and strangers" (1 Peter 2:11). God's people have always been at home with Him before they were at home anywhere on earth.

θλῖψις

THLIPSIS · "AFFLICTION" · G2347

Pressure, crushing distress — the same word translated "tribulation" elsewhere. God "rescued him from all his afflictions" (v. 10), and then "great affliction" came on Egypt and Canaan in the famine (v. 11). The afflicted brother became the rescuer of the brothers who had sold him.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik says Stephen's speech was "not so much a legal defense" as an explanation of how God had always worked. God appeared to Abraham before he ever reached the land, so God was never confined to a temple. Abraham lived by promise alone: "Abraham was promised both the land and descendants, but had no outward proof of either." "He could only trust God for the fulfillment of these things." Guzik notes that "The only land that Abraham ever actually possessed in Canaan was this burial plot," explains the seventy-five of verse 14 from the Septuagint — "not wrong, just arrived at in a different way" — and adds: "Stephen mentioned the story of Joseph because he is a picture of Jesus."

R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier · St. Andrew's

Sproul's "Stephen on Trial" (14 March 2004) stresses the stakes: "Stephen was on trial for his life before the highest earthly court of Israel." Asked "Are these things so?" Stephen does not plead; "He began to give them a lesson in redemptive history." Sproul enjoys the irony — "Stephen took them back to Sunday school" — walking the nation's rulers through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and the move to Egypt as if they were children. He hears in it the lesson Jesus gave on the Emmaus road, when He explained Himself from Moses and all the prophets.

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary on the Whole Bible

Henry reads the opening as Stephen's quiet answer to the charge: God "had a church in the world many ages before that holy place was founded and the ceremonial law given." Abraham's call teaches "That in all our ways we must acknowledge God, and attend the directions of his providence." And the long wait — no inheritance, no child, four hundred years of bondage foretold — teaches that "God's promises, though they are slow, are sure in the operation of them." For Henry the whole section answers the charge of blasphemy: God's dealings with Israel began long before the temple.

II
MOVEMENT

ACTS 7:17–36

This Moses Whom They Disowned

Born in the hottest persecution, pushed away by his brothers, sent back as ruler and deliverer

17 *"But as the time of the promise was approaching which God had assured to Abraham, the people increased*
and multiplied in Egypt, 18 *until* THERE AROSE ANOTHER KING OVER EGYPT WHO KNEW NOTHING ABOUT
JOSEPH. 19 *"It was he who took shrewd advantage of our race and mistreated our fathers so that they would*
expose their infants and they would not survive. 20 *"It was at this time that Moses was born; and he was lovely*
in the sight of God, and he was nurtured three months in his father's home. 21 *"And after he had been set outside,*
Pharaoh's daughter took him away and nurtured him as her own son. 22 *"Moses was educated in all the*
learning of the Egyptians, and he was a man of power in words and deeds. 23 *"But when he was approaching the*
age of forty, it entered his mind to visit his brethren, the sons of Israel. 24 *"And when he saw one of them being*
treated unjustly, he defended him and took vengeance for the oppressed by striking down the Egyptian. 25 *"And he*
supposed that his brethren understood that God was granting them deliverance through him, but they did not
understand. 26 *"On the following day he appeared to them as they were fighting together, and he tried to*
reconcile them in peace, saying, 'Men, you are brethren, why do you injure one another?' 27 *"But the one who*
was injuring his neighbor pushed him away, saying, 'WHO MADE YOU A RULER AND JUDGE OVER US? 28 *'YOU DO*
NOT MEAN TO KILL ME AS YOU KILLED THE EGYPTIAN YESTERDAY, DO YOU?' 29 *"At this remark, MOSES FLED*
AND BECAME AN ALIEN IN THE LAND OF MIDIAN, where he became the father of two sons. 30 *"After forty years*
had passed, AN ANGEL APPEARED TO HIM IN THE WILDERNESS OF MOUNT Sinai, IN THE FLAME OF A BURNING
THORN BUSH. 31 *"When Moses saw it, he marveled at the sight; and as he approached to look more closely,*
there came the voice of the Lord: 32 *'I AM THE GOD OF YOUR FATHERS, THE GOD OF ABRAHAM AND ISAAC*
AND JACOB.' Moses shook with fear and would not venture to look. 33 *"BUT THE LORD SAID TO HIM, 'TAKE OFF*
THE SANDALS FROM YOUR FEET, FOR THE PLACE ON WHICH YOU ARE STANDING IS HOLY GROUND. 34 *'I HAVE*
CERTAINLY SEEN THE OPPRESSION OF MY PEOPLE IN EGYPT AND HAVE HEARD THEIR GROANS, AND I HAVE
COME DOWN TO RESCUE THEM; COME NOW, AND I WILL SEND YOU TO EGYPT.' 35 *"This Moses whom they*
disowned, saying, 'WHO MADE YOU A RULER AND A JUDGE?' is the one whom
God sent to be both a ruler and a deliverer with the help of the angel who appeared to him in the thorn bush.
36 *"This man led them out, performing wonders and signs in the land of Egypt and in the Red Sea and in the*
wilderness for forty years.

ACTS 7:17–36

"Then He said, "Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." He said also, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God."

EXODUS 3:5–6

σημεῖα

SĒMEIA · "SIGNS" · G4592

Moses led the people out "performing wonders and signs" (v. 36). Luke has already used the same pair of Stephen: he "was performing great wonders and signs among the people" (6:8). The man accused of speaking against Moses was doing the works of Moses — and pointing, as Moses did, to the Prophet who would come after him (v. 37).

ἁγία

HAGIA · "HOLY" · G40

The only ground the whole speech calls holy is a patch of desert in Sinai: "THE PLACE ON WHICH YOU ARE STANDING IS HOLY GROUND" (v. 33; Greek *gē hagia*). Stephen had been charged with speaking against "this holy place" (6:13), the temple. His answer: ground is holy wherever God is present and speaking — even outside the land, even before Israel had a sanctuary.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik draws out the parallels between Moses and Jesus that Stephen is building: "Moses was also like Jesus in that he was favored by God from birth and preserved in childhood." Like Jesus, Moses came to his own and was not received; he was rejected the first time and accepted only when he came again in power. And the setting matters for the charge against Stephen: "God appeared to Moses in the wilderness, before there ever was a temple." The deliverer was hidden in Midian for forty years, then sent back by God to rescue the very people who had pushed him away.

C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle

In the expositions collected as Spurgeon's Bible Commentary (vv. 14–43), Spurgeon sees God's timing: "In the darkest night of Israel's bondage in Egypt, her star of hope arose." Moses' education in Egypt was not wasted — "He was well qualified for the work to which God had called him" — yet he ran ahead of God at forty and had to wait: "So that he was eighty years of age when he really began his great lifework." On verse 25 he grieves, "Alas! it is just the same with Israel now." And at the bush he draws a rule for every worker: "Ask to be sent of God, and pray your Master to go with you."

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary on the Whole Bible

Henry notes that "Moses was born when the persecution of Israel was at the hottest," and he finds a pattern in it: "God is preparing for his people's deliverance, when their way is darkest, and their distress deepest." Israel grew under Pharaoh's hand: "Suffering times have often been growing times with the church." Henry reads Moses' first rejection as Stephen's mirror for the Council: the brothers who asked "Who made you a ruler and judge?" were refusing the deliverer God had chosen, just as the rulers of Stephen's day refused Christ.

III
MOVEMENT

ACTS 7:37–50

A Prophet Like Me — and a House Not Made with Hands

The Prophet promised, the calf preferred, the tent, the temple, and the Most High who cannot be housed

37 *"This is the Moses who said to the sons of Israel, 'GOD WILL RAISE UP FOR YOU A PROPHET LIKE ME FROM YOUR BRETHREN.'* 38 *"This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness together with the angel who was speaking to him on Mount Sinai, and who was with our fathers; and he received living oracles to pass on to you.* 39 *"Our fathers were unwilling to be obedient to him, but repudiated him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt,* 40 *SAYING TO AARON, 'MAKE FOR US GODS WHO WILL GO BEFORE US; FOR THIS MOSES WHO LED US OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT—WE DO NOT KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM.'* 41 *"At that time they made a calf and brought a sacrifice to the idol, and were rejoicing in the works of their hands.* 42 *"But God turned away and delivered them up to serve the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets, 'IT WAS NOT TO ME THAT YOU OFFERED VICTIMS AND SACRIFICES FORTY YEARS IN THE WILDERNESS, WAS IT, O HOUSE OF ISRAEL?* 43 *'YOU ALSO TOOK ALONG THE TABERNACLE OF MOLOCH AND THE STAR OF THE GOD ROMPHA, THE IMAGES WHICH YOU MADE TO WORSHIP. I ALSO WILL REMOVE YOU BEYOND BABYLON.'* 44 *"Our fathers had the tabernacle of testimony in the wilderness, just as He who spoke to Moses directed him to make it according to the pattern which he had seen.* 45 *"And having received it in their turn, our fathers brought it in with Joshua upon dispossessing the nations whom God drove out before our fathers, until the time of David.* 46 *"David found favor in God's sight, and asked that he might find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob.* 47 *"But it was Solomon who built a house for Him.* 48 *"However, the Most High does not dwell in houses made by human hands; as the prophet says:* 49 *'HEAVEN IS MY THRONE, AND EARTH IS THE FOOTSTOOL OF MY FEET; WHAT KIND OF HOUSE WILL YOU BUILD FOR ME?' says the Lord, 'OR WHAT PLACE IS THERE FOR MY REPOSE?* 50 *'WAS IT NOT MY HAND WHICH MADE ALL THESE THINGS?'*

ACTS 7:37–50

"The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him."

DEUTERONOMY 18:15

"Thus says the LORD, "Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool. Where then is a house you could build for Me? And where is a place that I may rest? "For My hand made all these things, Thus all these things came into being," declares the LORD. "But to this one I will look, To him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word."

ISAIAH 66:1–2

FIGURE · REJECTED BY THEIR OWN, VINDICATED BY GOD

THE PATTERN STEPHEN TRACES · REJECTED BY THEIR OWN, VINDICATED BY GOD

	REJECTED	BUT GOD …
JOSEPH	"became jealous … and sold him" (v9)	"Yet God was with him" (v9)
MOSES	"pushed him away" (v27) · "disowned" (v35)	"sent to be … a deliverer" (v35)
THE PROPHETS	"did your fathers not persecute?" (v52)	"announced the coming" (v52)
THE RIGHTEOUS ONE	"betrayers and murderers" (v52)	"standing at the right hand" (v56)
STEPHEN	"they began stoning him" (v58)	"Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" (v59)

"You are doing just as your fathers did" (v51) — and God is doing just as He always did.

Read each row left to right: every deliverer God sent was first refused by his own people, and every time God had the last word.

λόγια ζῶντα

LOGIA ZŌNTA · "LIVING ORACLES" · G3051

Logion is an utterance of God — Paul uses it when he says the Jews "were entrusted with the oracles of God" (Romans 3:2). Stephen calls the Law Moses received "living oracles" (v. 38). The man accused of speaking against the Law calls it alive. His charge is not that the Law was bad but that Israel "did not keep it" (v. 53).

χειροποίητος

CHEIROPOIĒTOS · "MADE BY HUMAN HANDS" · G5499

Literally "hand-made." Verse 41 says the fathers rejoiced "in the works of their hands" — the calf; verse 48 says the Most High does not dwell in houses "made by human hands." The Greek has no noun there, just the adjective (the KJV supplies "temples"). In the Greek Old Testament the word is often used of idols. Stephen is not calling the temple an idol — God commanded the tabernacle and accepted Solomon's house — but warning that a holy building can be treated like one. Paul says the same in Athens (17:24).

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik hears Stephen turn the history into a mirror. Israel rejected Moses and so rejected the Prophet Moses promised; the Council has done the same with Jesus. "Each individual should consider for themselves how they should accept Jesus, and not reject Him." The golden calf was worship of what their own hands made, and Stephen applies it straight to the temple: "Stephen confronted their idolatry of the temple." The tabernacle and temple were God's gifts, but they did not keep Israel from turning away. "Yet God is too big to fit in any temple man could make." Guzik warns that Christians can make the same mistake with buildings.

R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier · St. Andrew's

Sproul isolates the one true thing in the accusation: "not a single word of what these witnesses said was true, except that Jesus did indeed say He would destroy the temple." He does not stop over the temple argument of verses 44–50 in this sermon. Instead he hears the whole speech as the lesson Jesus gave on the Emmaus road — Moses and all the prophets pointing to the Christ — now retold to the court that had condemned Him, with the Prophet like Moses standing at the center.

C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle

Spurgeon, in the same expositions, presses the type: "Now you see that Moses was thus a type of Christ." Israel's problem in the wilderness was not lack of evidence but unbelief: "after all Jesus has done, there is still within so many the evil heart of unbelief." The calf shows how the heart works — "men attempt to make an idol god out of something which they can see" — and the prophets' charge in verses 42–43 shows it never really left: "There was still idolatry in their hearts, and Moses was rejected by them."

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary on the Whole Bible

Henry shows that Stephen's words about the temple were no insult to God, because God Himself had said them first. "They deceive themselves if they think God is confined to places; he can bring his people into a wilderness" and meet them there. Solomon built a house, yet "God had his heart so little upon a temple, or such a holy place as they were so jealous for," that Stephen's words about its end were no insult to Him. "The whole world is his temple, in which he is every where present."

IV
MOVEMENT

ACTS 7:51–53

Always Resisting the Holy Spirit

The defendant becomes the prosecutor: stiff necks, deaf ears, and the murder of the Righteous One

51 *"You men who are ⚠ stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are ⚠ always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your ⟳ fathers did.* 52 *"Which one of the prophets did your ⟳ fathers not persecute? They killed those who had previously announced the coming of ⚠ the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become;* 53 *you who received the law as ordained by angels, and yet did not keep it."*

ACTS 7:51–53

"Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; for I will not go up in your midst, because you are an obstinate people, and I might destroy you on the way."

EXODUS 33:3

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling."

MATTHEW 23:37

σκληροτράχηλοι

SKLĒROTRACHĒLOI · "STIFF-NECKED" · G4644

Only here in the New Testament: *sklēros* (hard) + *trachēlos* (neck), the picture of an ox that will not bend to the yoke. It is God's own word for Israel after the golden calf in the Greek Old Testament (Exodus 33:3, 5, where the NASB says "obstinate"). With it Stephen pairs *aperitmētoi* (G564), "uncircumcised" in heart and ears: they carried the sign of the covenant in their bodies but not in their hearts (Jeremiah 9:26).

ἀντιπίπτω

ANTIPIPTŌ · "RESIST" · G496

Literally "to fall against," to throw oneself against something. Only here in the New Testament. "You are always resisting the Holy Spirit" (v. 51) — the Spirit who spoke through Moses and the prophets, and who filled Stephen as he spoke (6:10; 7:55). To resist the messenger was to resist the Spirit who sent him.

Δίκαιος

DIKAIOS · "THE RIGHTEOUS ONE" · G1342

A title for Messiah (Isaiah 53:11, "the Righteous One, My Servant"). Peter used it in Acts 3:14 and Paul will hear it at his conversion (22:14). Stephen does not say "Jesus" until his vision (v. 55); he names Him by His character, and calls the Council His "betrayers and murderers."

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik notes how sharply Stephen turns: he calls the Council "stiffnecked" and "uncircumcised in heart and ears," and charges them with rejecting the Just One and breaking the very Law they claimed he despised. The whole speech has been building to one line, which Guzik paraphrases: "As Israel was in its history, so you are today." Stephen is not attacking Moses, the Law or the temple; he is showing that the men who accuse him stand in the long line of fathers who resisted God's messengers.

R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier · St. Andrew's

Sproul hears the speech land like a verdict. Stephen tells the court they always resist the Holy Spirit, that their fathers killed the prophets who announced the Just One, and that they themselves betrayed and murdered Him. They had received the Law by angels, and Sproul presses the point home: "It never reached your heart." Outward religion — circumcision, temple, Law — had never touched the inside of the men who guarded it.

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary on the Whole Bible

Henry calls the indictment the natural end of the history Stephen has told: "they were like their fathers, inflexible both to the word of God and to his providences." The prophets were persecuted, the Just One was murdered, and the Law was received but not kept. Henry thinks the speech was cut short — "We have reason to think Stephen had a great deal more to say" — but the Council had heard enough, and their rage proved his point: "Rejecters of the gospel and opposers of it are really tormentors to themselves."

V
MOVEMENT

ACTS 7:54-60

Lord Jesus, Receive My Spirit

Heaven opened, the Son of Man standing, a prayer for killers, and a young man named Saul

54 *Now when they heard this, they were cut to the quick, and they began gnashing their teeth at him.* 55 *But ☆ being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and △ saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God;* 56 *and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened up and △ the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."* 57 *But they cried out with a loud voice, and covered their ears and rushed at him with one impulse.* 58 *When they had driven him out of the city, they began stoning him; and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of ◷ a young man named Saul.* 59 *They went on stoning Stephen as he called on the Lord and said, "☆ Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!"* 60 *Then falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, "▤ Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" Having said this, ☆ he fell asleep.*

ACTS 7:54-60

"But Jesus was saying, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves."

LUKE 23:34

"And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, "Father, INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMIT MY SPIRIT." Having said this, He breathed His last."

LUKE 23:46

FIGURE · LIKE MASTER, LIKE SERVANT

LIKE MASTER, LIKE SERVANT · HOW LUKE TELLS TWO DEATHS

	JESUS (LUKE)	STEPHEN (ACTS)
THE CHARGE	false witnesses: “this temple”	false witnesses: “this place” (6:13–14)
THE VISION	Son of Man “SEATED” (Lk 22:69)	Son of Man “standing” (7:56)
THE PLACE	“outside the gate” (Heb 13:12)	“driven him out of the city” (7:58)
HIS SPIRIT	“INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMIT MY SPIRIT”	“Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!” (7:59)
HIS KILLERS	“Father, forgive them” (Lk 23:34)	“do not hold this sin against them!”
THE CRY	“crying out with a loud voice” (23:46)	“cried out with a loud voice” (7:60)

The first martyr dies the way his Lord died — and sees his Lord risen to receive him.

Luke wrote both books; set the two columns side by side and see how closely the first martyr’s death follows his Lord’s.

ἑστῶτα

HESTŌTA · “STANDING” · G2476

The perfect participle of *histēmi*, used twice (vv. 55, 56). Everywhere else the risen Christ is *seated* at God’s right hand — Jesus said to this same Council, “THE SON OF MAN WILL BE SEATED AT THE RIGHT HAND of the power OF GOD” (Luke 22:69). Our teachers read the standing differently: rising to welcome His servant, standing as Advocate and Judge in Stephen’s defense (Sproul), rising to plead for him (Henry). All agree it is personal: the Lord is not indifferent to His witness’s death.

μάρτυρες

MARTYRES · “WITNESSES” · G3144

The men who threw the stones were the “witnesses” (v. 58; Deuteronomy 17:7 required witnesses to throw first). Jesus had promised, “you shall be My witnesses” (1:8). Paul later calls Stephen “Your witness” (22:20) — the same word. Because witnesses like Stephen sealed their testimony with their lives, *martys* became the English “martyr.”

ἐκοιμήθη

EKOIMĒTHĒ · “HE FELL ASLEEP” · G2837

Koimaō, to sleep — the New Testament’s gentle word for the death of believers (1 Thessalonians 4:13–14; 1 Corinthians 15:51). After the noise of the mob, the stones and the loud cry, Luke ends with three quiet words. Sleep implies waking: the body rests until the resurrection, and the spirit is “at home with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8).

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik weighs why Jesus is standing rather than seated and offers several possibilities: solidarity with His suffering servant, "a standing ovation," or pleading Stephen's case before the Father. "Stephen was a martyr before they stoned him. He was the first martyr to seal his testimony with his blood." On verse 60: "Instead of saying simply that he died, it says that he merely fell asleep." Saul, a man in his prime, "stood there as the supervisor of the operation," and Guzik passes on Augustine's judgment that without Stephen's prayer "the church would not have had Paul."

R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier · St. Andrew's

Sproul pictures the courtroom turned inside out. The Council condemns, but Stephen sees the true Judge rise: "It does not get any better in a trial than to have the judge be your defense attorney." They drag him out and stone him; he commits his spirit to Jesus and prays for his killers. Then Sproul points to the coats: "But here was the first introduction of the Apostle Paul in biblical history." In his next sermon, "Saul of Tarsus" (28 March 2004), he adds that Saul "almost certainly at this time in his life" thought he was doing the right thing.

C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle

Spurgeon's "Stephen's Martyrdom" (No. 740, 17 March 1867) begins with growth: "Stephen the deacon became Stephen the preacher," and then a martyr. His courage was the Holy Spirit's work, so "Trust ye the Holy Spirit: rely firmly upon him, and he will not suffer you to be confounded." His comfort was the living Christ — "Your Lord Jesus Christ has all power in heaven and in earth." Jesus did not stop the stones; He held Stephen up inside, and promises the same to every believer: "Let his death be as painful as that of Stephen, it shall be quite as composed." "He fell asleep."

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary on the Whole Bible

Henry: "Those that are full of the Holy Ghost are fit for any thing, either to act for Christ or to suffer for him." Stephen saw heaven opened as a sight of the happiness he was going to, and Christ standing as risen to plead for His servant: "He sees Christ is for him, and then no matter who is against him." He commits his soul to Christ, prays for his enemies, and dies as calmly as falling asleep. Of Saul, Henry notes, "It is the first time we find mention of his name," and that "This little instance of his agency in Stephen's death he afterwards reflected upon with regret."

VI
THEME

CROSS-REFERENCES

The Passage in the Whole Bible

From Abraham's tents to the Son of Man at God's right hand

> *"By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going."*
>
> HEBREWS 11:8

> *"The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief corner stone."*
>
> PSALM 118:22

> *"But from now on THE SON OF MAN WILL BE SEATED AT THE RIGHT HAND of the power OF GOD."*
>
> LUKE 22:69

> *"Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate. So, let us go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come."*
>
> HEBREWS 13:12–14

> *"And when the blood of Your witness Stephen was being shed, I also was standing by approving, and watching out for the coats of those who were slaying him."*
>
> ACTS 22:20

> *"we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord."*
>
> 2 CORINTHIANS 5:8

> *"For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus."*
>
> 1 THESSALONIANS 4:14

C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle

Spurgeon closes "Stephen's Martyrdom" by pointing past Stephen to the One he saw — the living Christ who would go on "changing Saul the persecutor into Paul the apostle of the crucified Son of God."

SECTION II · STUDY HELPS

At a Glance

Four voices, one chapter

Four teachers, one long speech and a short, terrible scene. Guzik walks the history and the types of Christ; Sproul pictures a trial in which the defendant becomes the prosecutor and the Judge rises for the accused; Spurgeon (through his expositions and one great sermon) finds Christ in Moses and the Spirit in Stephen's calm; Henry shows that God never needed a building. They differ on why Jesus is standing; they agree that He is.

THE MOVEMENT	GUZIK · the text	SPROUL · the doctrine	SPURGEON · the heart	HENRY · the counsel
I · Abraham and Joseph	Not so much a defense; promise without proof; Joseph pictures Jesus.	On trial for his life; a lesson in redemptive history.	— (no Spurgeon page on these verses sourced here)	A church long before the temple; promises slow but sure.
II · Moses rejected	Favored from birth; God appeared before there was a temple.	— (Sproul's sermon summarizes, does not expound, these verses)	A star of hope in the darkest night; eighty before his lifework.	Born when persecution was hottest; suffering times are growing times.
III · The Prophet, the temple	Confronted their idolatry of the temple; God too big for it.	Only one charge was true — Jesus did say He would destroy the temple.	Moses a type of Christ; idols out of what we can see.	God not confined to places; the whole world His temple.
IV · The indictment	As Israel was in its history, so you are today.	It never reached your heart.	— (no Spurgeon page on these verses sourced here)	Inflexible like their fathers; more left unsaid.
V · The first martyr	Standing ovation or Advocate; fell asleep; no Stephen, no Paul.	The Judge became the defense attorney; enter Saul.	Deacon, preacher, martyr — the Spirit's calm and the living Christ.	Christ for him, no matter who is against him.

ACTS 7:1–60 · A COMPARATIVE READING

† Key Insights to Carry

- **The speech is an answer, not an apology.** Charged with speaking against the temple and the Law (6:13), Stephen shows from Israel's own story that God met His people before the temple, gave the Law as "living oracles," and was always resisted by the people who claimed Him. THE TEXT
- **Glory at both ends.** "The God of glory appeared" to Abraham in Mesopotamia (v2); Stephen dies seeing "the glory of God" (v55). The same glory that called Abraham out of a pagan land now surrounds the risen Jesus. THE GREEK
- **Holy ground was in the desert.** The only place the speech calls holy is the bush in Sinai (v33). Henry: "They deceive themselves if they think God is confined to places." HENRY
- **Every deliverer was refused first.** Joseph sold, Moses pushed away and disowned, the prophets persecuted, the Righteous One murdered. Guzik: "As Israel was in its history, so you are today." GUZIK
- **Hand-made religion.** The fathers rejoiced "in the works of their hands" (v41); God does not dwell in houses "made by human hands" (v48). A good gift from God can be turned into an idol. THE GREEK
- **Outward signs, uncircumcised hearts.** Sproul: "It never reached your heart." Circumcision, temple and Law were real gifts; resisting the Spirit made them a cover. SPROUL
- **The Judge stood up.** Christ is seated in Luke 22:69 but standing in Acts 7:56. Sproul: "It does not get any better in a trial than to have the judge be your defense attorney." SPROUL

- **He died the way his Lord died.** Committing his spirit, praying for his killers, crying with a loud voice, outside the city — Luke tells Stephen's death in the colors of Jesus' death. THE TEXT
- **Calm is a gift of the Spirit.** Spurgeon: "Trust ye the Holy Spirit: rely firmly upon him, and he will not suffer you to be confounded." Stephen did not manufacture his peace; he was "full of the Holy Spirit" (v55). SPURGEON
- **The man holding the coats.** Augustine, via Guzik: without Stephen's prayer "the church would not have had Paul." The worst man in the scene was the next one God would save. GUZIK

† Questions for the Table

1 **Abraham received "not even a foot of ground," only a promise (7:5). What promise of God am I being asked to live on without outward proof yet?**

He could only trust God for the fulfillment of these things (Guzik).

7:2-8; Heb 11:8-10

2 **Joseph and Moses were both rejected by their own brothers before God used them. Where have I been rejected — or where have I rejected someone God sent?**

Suffering times have often been growing times (Henry).

7:9-10, 23-35

3 **Stephen's hearers had the temple, the Law and the right family tree, but resisted the Holy Spirit. What religious "good things" could I be hiding behind?**

It never reached your heart (Sproul).

7:48-53

4 **What do I treat as if God lived there — a building, a ministry, a routine, a past experience — instead of meeting Him wherever He speaks?**

God is too big to fit in any temple man could make (Guzik).

7:44-50; Isa 66:1-2

5 **Jesus stood for Stephen. How does knowing Christ is "for me" change the way I face hostility, a parole board, a diagnosis or my own death?**

He sees Christ is for him, and then no matter who is against him (Henry).

7:55-56; Rom 8:31

6 **Who is the person I would least like to forgive — and what would it take for me to pray Stephen's prayer for him this week?**

Without Stephen's prayer, the church would not have had Paul (Guzik).

7:59-60; Luke 23:34

Acts 7 is the story of a God who will not be boxed in and a people who kept refusing the men He sent. Stephen told that story to the men about to kill him, and then saw the Righteous One standing at God's right hand. The same Lord stands for His witnesses today — and the man holding the coats is never beyond His reach.

Teaching the Word. Watching the Times. — Smith For Christ

† Sources

Each teacher's section summarizes the pages below in our own words; short quotations are verbatim from them. Matthew Henry (1662–1714) completed his *Commentary* himself through the Gospels and Acts. Henry's Commentary and C.H. Spurgeon (1834–1892) are in the public domain; Guzik and Sproul are summarized — consult each author's own work.

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