

Acts Chapter 7

- Steven's "witness" - the Greek word for witness is "martus" the word from which we get the word "martyr." Many of the early Christians died for their faith, as faithful witnesses or martyrs of the faith, witnesses of the faith.
- This describes those who believe so strongly in their faith that they would give their life for what they believed, this describes Steven.
- Stephen's response to the charges laid against him is the longest chapter in the book of Acts. He cites examples from all of the most important historical figures in Jewish history.
- Chapter 6 has Stephen simply testifying about Jesus when some from the synagogue of the Libertines / Freedmen arose to dispute with him.
- Unable to resist the wisdom of the Holy Spirit they secretly induce men to bring false accusations of blasphemy against Moses, God, the Temple, and the Law.
- Having been brought before the counsel (Sanhedrin, 70+1), they see Stephen's face glowing as that of an angel.
- Knowing the accusations to be false their first question to Stephen is: "Are these things so?"
- This isn't just a refutation of the charges, but it is a review of their own national history and sin which Stephen uses to point out that the Jewish nation is guilty of greater sins than those that they are accusing him of.

Outline:

1. V: 1 The Council's question.
2. V:2-50 Stephens response
 - a. V:2-7 Abraham & Mesopotamia
 - b. V:8-16 Circumcision & patriarchs – didn't stop them from sin.
 - c. V:17-36 Egypt & Moses. Affliction & deliverer rejected, then accepted.
 - d. V:37-43 Disobedience to their own law.
 - e. V: 44-50 Jews despise their own Temple, which is not needed to worship God.
3. V:51-53 Stephen's accusation.
4. V:54-59a The Council's response – compared to Stephen's.
5. V:59b-60 Stephen's last words.

I – Council's question:

V: 1-53 Stephen is about to assert that the Temple is not necessary for worshipping the true and living God.

- Israel was favored by God before possessing either the Tabernacle or the Temple.

V: 1 The high priest: Caiaphas, the official high priest and son in law to Annas the “former” high priest, deposed by the Romans but still recognized by the Jews and the power behind Caiaphas.

- Caiaphas was the high priest who brought Jesus before Pilate.
- Caiaphas addresses Stephen, asking if the charges laid against him are true, knowing just as he did with Jesus, that they were not true.
- This is a pretense of seeking the truth, but not really.

2 Timothy 3:5 “Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.”

“... *are these things so?*” - Now there’s an open door!

Luke 12:11-12 “¹¹And when they bring you unto the synagogues, and unto magistrates, and powers, take ye no thought how or what thing ye shall answer, or what ye shall say: ¹²For the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say.”

Jesus also said:

Luke 21:12-13 “¹²... they shall lay their hands on you, and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for My name’s sake. ¹³And it shall turn to you for a testimony.”

- So here is Steven, full of the Holy Spirit, standing before the council, and they’ve just opened the door for him to speak.

II – Stephen’s response: (V: 2-50)

a. V: 2-7 Abraham / Mesopotamia:

V: 2 Men, brethren & fathers, respectful & inclusive.

Proverbs 15:1 “A soft answer turneth away wrath, but grievous words / a harsh word stirs up anger.”

- Stephens last words match his first words, he is responding in love.

- Stephen's response is a history lesson about "the" God of glory, and their common faith, not some pagan deity. (Signs and wonders)
- Israel's history is all about the glory of God, which is what separated her from all the nations around her.
- It is interesting to note that as Stephen speaks about the history of Israel his face shines with that same glory.

The Glory of God had departed from the Tabernacle:

1 Samuel 4:19-22 "19And his daughter in law, Phineahas' wife, was with child, near to be delivered: and when she heard the tidings that the ark of God was taken, and that her father in law and her husband were dead, she bowed herself and travailed; for her pains came upon her. 20And about the time of her death the women that stood by her said unto her, fear not; for thou hast borne a son. But she answered not, neither did she regard it. 21And she named the child Ichabod, saying, the glory is departed from Israel: because the ark of God was taken and because of her father in law and her husband. 22And she said, the glory is departed from Israel: for the ark of God is taken."

- The Glory of God had later departed from the Temple:

Ezekiel 10:4, 18 "4Then the glory of the Lord went up from the cherub, and paused over the threshold of the temple; and the house was filled with the cloud, and the court was full of the brightness of the Lord's glory." 18Then the glory of the Lord departed from the threshold of the temple and stood over the cherubim."

- God's glory had returned to the Temple in His Son:

John 1:14 "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

John 2:12b-16 "12b... and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, 14and found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting."

- Technically when Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the Temple for His dedication, and later when He was about 12 He was found in the Temple sitting with the doctors of the Law... both of these were events where the glory had returned to the temple.

Hebrews 1:3 "Who being the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the Word of His power..."

- But in the end, the nation rejected Him.
- The Glory of God is back in the Temple, now in the countenance of Stephen (Ch 6:15)

- Now the glory is back – in His witnesses, in His servants – but that too is rejected.
- **Where is the Glory of God today?** In His people – as they / we are filled with the Spirit, seeking to do His will.
- Stephen starts out by pointing out that the God of glory appeared to Abraham in the pagan city of Mesopotamia, not the holy city of Jerusalem.
- God had graciously appeared to him and called him out of heathen darkness into the light of salvation, and Abraham had responded by faith.

1 Peter 2:9 “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light:”

- Abraham was saved the same way that we are, by grace, through faith, not because he was circumcised, not because kept the law, or because he worshiped in a temple. All these things came later.

Galatians 3:6 “Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.”

Ephesians 2:8-9 “⁸For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: ⁹Not of works, lest any man should boast.”

- The Jews prided themselves on being physical descendants of Abraham, but had lost sight of being “spiritual descendants”, they had lost sight of personal faith.
- The Jews had cluttered their relationship with God with man made traditions that had made salvation a matter of works as opposed to personal faith.
- The Jews prided themselves in their circumcision, failing to understand that this rite was symbolic of an inner spiritual relationship with God.
- We can easily do the same thing today: Oh I’ve been baptized! Oh I’m in the choir! I can recite the Apostle’s creed!
- Also by inference noting that Abram having received the command of God was only partially obedient, meaning he was disobedient.
- Describing a man of faith, who not only stumbled, but had his faith perfected.

V: 3 God’s word, His specific commandment to Abram / Abraham. The beginning of Abraham’s pilgrimage, his journey of faith.

- Examples of God speaking to Abraham, the patriarchs, and Moses.

V: 4 Essentially Abraham got started, then stalled in Haran. Ten years passed until his father died, then he got going again.

Genesis 12:1 “Now the Lord had said unto Abram, get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee:”

- Abram was partially obedient. He left Mesopotamia, but he took his father and nephew with him as opposed to separating from them.

V: 5 Abraham wasn’t given any land, he owned no land except the cave in which to bury his wife. All that he “owned” was a promise from God.

- We are pretty much in the same boat, all that we own is a promise from God.
- All the other things we think we own can be taken away, or controlled by someone else.

V: 6-7 Stephen is pointing out that the “place” isn’t the most important thing. The nation of Israel grew, prospered, and was blessed in Egypt, not in Israel itself.

- What’s important are the promises of God, the Word of God, that is what is important.

b. V:8-16 Circumcision & patriarchs – didn’t stop them from sin.

V: 8-10 The covenant of circumcision indicated that they were to be a spiritual nation, not living after the flesh. Circumcision symbolized the cutting off of the flesh dominated life and living instead after the Spirit - as a way of identifying themselves as God’s people.

Later Paul wrote concerning circumcision:

Romans 2:25-29 Describing that the physical ritual will not make you a spiritual person and that the real circumcision is that of the heart.

Moses affirms this:

Deuteronomy 10:16 “Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiff necked / rebellious.”

- Abraham was given the rite and covenant of circumcision which he passed down to his descendants - but that didn’t keep them from sinning either. The children of Israel moved with envy against their brother.
- The Jews believed that they were automatically saved just because they were Jews. They believed that God created the Gentiles to fuel the fires of hell and you had to become a Jew to be saved.

- Just as Jesus had done earlier, Stephen will show them how flawed their fathers were, and prove that their circumcision was of no real value because they lived after the flesh and rebelled against God.
- When was God with Joseph? In Egypt, God blessed Joseph.
- The patriarchs becoming jealous sold the one who would some day deliver them into bondage / death for the price of a slave. Sound familiar?
- The story of Joseph and the “patriarchs” doesn’t present them in a very good light. Jealousy, envy, deceit.
- “*9but*” shows the contrast between the brothers and the deliverer.

“*9b... but God was with him.*”

- There are many similarities between Joseph & Jesus:
- Joseph’s brother’s were moved with envy.

Matthew 27:18 “For he (Pilate) new that for envy they had delivered Him (Jesus).”

- Joseph was sold for 20 pieces of silver – Jesus was sold for 30, both the price of a slave at that time.
- Joseph was punished for sins that he did not commit.
- Jesus, the sinless, spotless Lamb died for our sins – which He did not commit.
- Joseph was cast into prison, Jesus descended into prison.
- Joseph became the ruler of the prison, Jesus led captivity free.
- Joseph was miraculously freed from prison, Jesus miraculously rose from the grave defying death.

1 Corinthians 15:55 “O Death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?”

V: 11-16 Synopsizing the events from Genesis: events being driven by the famine in both Egypt and Canaan.

V: 13 It wasn’t until the second appearance that Joseph’s brothers realized who he was, and it will be the same for the Jews – at His second coming they will see who Jesus is.

Zechariah 12:10 “And I will pour on the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon Me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.”

Revelation 1:7 “Behold, He cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him. Even so, Amen.”

Steven will continue in his history lesson next week...

- Steven is going over key points of the history of the nation of Israel, demonstrating in a sense that the good old days are not necessarily the good old days, they had a “romanticized” view of things - and had gotten very prideful about being Jewish, as opposed to being obedient to the Word of God.

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c. V:17-36 Egypt & Moses. Affliction & deliverer rejected, then accepted.

V: 17 The people grew and multiplied in Egypt, not Israel.

- “The time of promise” – God had told Abraham that the children of Israel would be in the land of Egypt for 430 years, 400 of which would be in bondage.

Genesis 15:13, Exodus 12:40

- Stephen starts out talking about the place, that they started out in the land of the Chaldeans, then went into Egypt - so the place wasn’t all that important. Now he shifts to a person, Moses who will be compared to Jesus.

V: 18-19 Seeing the prosperity of the nation of Israel in their midst, and their growth, the Pharaoh feared that unless they were checked they would overwhelm the nation of Egypt in their blessing.

- Very similar to the birth rate of the Muslims today, they are re-producing at such an high rate that they stand to take over Europe & Israel within the next couple of decades.
- The same thing was happening in reverse in Egypt with the Jews.
- So Pharaoh developed a plan to counteract this situation' taking a page from Margaret Sanger, they decided to start killing to Jewish babies.
- Sadly most people don't see the racist connection within the abortion industry, how that the vast majority of children that are aborted are from minority women, like over 75%.

V: 20 *“At this time Moses was born, and was well pleasing to God;...”* NKJV

Hebrews 11:23 “By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper / beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king’s commandment.”

1 Samuel 16:7 “But the Lord said unto Samuel, look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.”

- The Lord was already looking into Moses’ heart, seeing that even at this age he had a heart for the things of the Lord, the capacity to love God and serve Him.

V: 21 *“When he was set out”* – summarizing the event.

Exodus 2:3 “But when she could no longer hide him, she took an ark of bulrushes for him, daubed it with asphalt and pitch, put the child in it, and laid it in the reeds by the river’s bank.”

- Where do you think she got the idea of an “ark” covered with “pitch”? Noah
- In a way, she was relying on God’s word for salvation – and it worked!

V: 22 Moses was raised up in the wisdom of Egypt wherein he excelled and was accomplished. He wasn’t an ignorant man, but God would later send him to finishing school in Sinai.

1 Corinthians 3:19 "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God..."

- Moses grew up in the house of Pharaoh and had at his disposal all that Egypt had to offer, including a first rate education.
- Exodus tells us that his mother was hired to nurse him when he was a baby, and we don't know how long she was involved in his life - but in some way he never lost his sense of identity with the Hebrews.

Hebrews 11:24-26 "²⁴By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; ²⁵choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; ²⁶Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasure in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward."

- Though he had all that Egypt / world could offer him, he made a deliberate choice to identify with God's people.
- Moses had enough sense to realize that the life of sin ends in death.

Hebrews 11:27 "By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing Him who is invisible."

- That is the secret of endurance - seeing what others do not see, the hand of God behind the scenes.

2 Corinthians 4:18 "While we look not at the things which are seen but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."

V: 23 Moses was 40 years old and "... *It came into his heart...*" Gee how did that get there?

Proverbs 21:1 "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes."

Philippians 2:13 "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure."

V: 24 Moses, seeing the people suffer, sought to deliver them. He got ahead of God's plan, trying to do the will of God in his own strength.

- Moses sought to do in the flesh what God intended to do in the Spirit, and it didn't work.

Romans 8:8 “So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.”

V: 25 “*For he supposed his brethren would have understood...*”

- There was an assumption on Moses’ part that the people were looking for a deliverer.
- They were crying out, praying, but not necessarily expecting.

Illustration: Back in the 30’s in the south there had been a drought. As it got worse this one church decided to have a special prayer meeting dedicated to praying for rain. As the meeting got started the Pastor rebuked the congregation for not bringing any umbrella’s or rain gear.

Philippians 4:6 “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made to God;”

Matthew 21:22 “And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.”

V:26-27 Moses, attempting to reconcile God’s people. In both instances we see a process of Moses’ heart being prepared to do the will of God, his heart being changed or transformed.

- Often times God puts His desire into our hearts, then we desire to do what is in God’s heart to do.

Psalms 37:4 “Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart.”

- It was in God’s heart to deliver His people, to reconcile His people, not just to each other, but to Himself. The people rejected their deliverer.
- Jesus came to deliver, to reconcile, and to save – but He too was rejected.

V: 28 In his own strength he couldn’t successfully even bury one Egyptian, later though being empowered by the Spirit he would bury the whole Egyptian army.

Zechariah 4:6 “... Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord of hosts.”

V: 29 After Moses was rejected he left Egypt and went into the desert and took a Gentile bride, and produced sons. After Jesus was rejected by His own people, he too left Israel and took a Gentile bride, and produced many sons.

V: 30 God reveals Himself to Moses, and He identifies Himself.

V: 31 As Moses drew near – the voice of the Lord came to him.

James 4:8 “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.”

- As Moses drew near to God he began to hear God’s voice more clearly.

V: 32-34 God identifies Himself to Moses, He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

- Rightly so, Moses trembled before God and could not look upon Him.
- God then declares to Moses words of comfort:
 1. I have seen...
 2. I have heard...
 3. I have come...
 4. I will send...
- The children of Israel had probably thought they’d been abandoned by God, but they had not - God was working all the time, preparing a place for them.
- He has seen our hardships and sufferings, He has heard the cry of our hearts, and He is come to save us – His name is Jesus!

Hebrews 4:15 “For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.”

- God now commissions Moses, not to go out by himself and do these things, but to “come” with Him – just like Noah and the ark, God told Noah to “come” into the ark, not just to go in.
- When? Now! “Now come...” the best time to be obedient to God is now.

V: 35-36 Just as they rejected Joseph until he was recognized on their second visit, they also rejected Moses who had been sent to deliver them.

- The same pattern displayed between Joseph & Moses came into play as they rejected Jesus when He came to them.

John 1:11 “He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.”

- This is all so much like the Romans road to salvation. He is showing them that they are not so Holy as they think and that they need a savior and redeemer.
- Moses’ ministry was validated by God through signs and wonders - the Pharisees et al had seen and acknowledged the same thing in Jesus and He performed many miraculous signs and wonders before them.
- Following the same pattern, they’ve rejected their Redeemer once; now they have a second chance - don’t blow it!
- Stephen is basically telling the council, “You guys are just like your fathers. God sent His Son, Jesus, to you, but you didn’t recognize Him. You refused His reign the first time, but He’s coming back again. And this time He will establish His kingdom, the kingdom of God.

Zechariah 12:10 “And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon Me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for Him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.”

V: 37-38 Moses being a prophet told them way ahead of time to expect a prophet like himself that they needed to listen too.

Deuteronomy 18:15 “The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto Him ye shall hearken.”

- A Prophet – “that prophet”
- 7 Qualifications described:
 1. Prophet: One who speaks God’s Word.
 2. From your midst: Human.
 3. Brethren: An Israelite.
 4. Like me: As Moses was, raised up – called of God.
 5. Put words into His mouth: Inspiration of God.
 6. He shall speak unto them all that I shall command Him: fullness of revelation.
 7. Authority: whoever doesn’t listen, it will be required of them.

Speaking to John the Baptist:

John 1:21 “And they asked him, what then? Are thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, no.”

- The prophet being spoken of is none other than the Messiah.

John 2:45 “Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, we have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”

John 6:14 “Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, this is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world.”

- The Jews today seek to use this very verse (Deuteronomy 18:15) as proof that Jesus is not the one being spoken of. This verse says “that Prophet” will be a man, and Jesus claimed to be the Son of God - not knowing that He was both!

“³⁸... *church in the wilderness*...”

- Ecclesia: called out ones - called out of Egypt.
- The church is not Israel, but she certainly parallels it.
 1. **Israel was fed with bread from heaven.** The church partakes of the bread of Jesus' broken body.
 2. **Israel was delivered by the blood of the Passover lamb.** The church is delivered by the blood of the crucified Lamb.
 3. **Israel came out of Egypt, which is a type of the world.** The church is called from out of the world.
 4. **Israel went through the waters of the Red Sea.** The church goes through the waters of baptism.

“^{38b}... *who received the lively oracles*...”

Hebrews 4:12 “For the Word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”

- They were given the living Word of God! Not only in writing, but in the person of Jesus.

John 1:14 “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

Review:

- Steven is a deacon (servant) in the church, he is distributing food to the widows and poor, he's full of faith, and power, doing great wonders and miracles among the people.
- As he's in the midst of just serving the people the enemy comes against him. Men from the Synagogue of the libertines start arguing with him and cannot resist the wisdom of the Holy Spirit in him, so they bring false accusations against Stephen trying to silence him.
- They hired men to say that he had blasphemed against Moses and God, and against "this holy place" meaning the Temple. Standing before the Sanhedrin, the high council, the high priest asked him plainly if "these things are so?" Knowing as he did with Jesus that these things were not so - they were trumped up charges, false accusations.
- The high priest opens the door for Stephen to speak - and so he takes advantage of it.
- Stephen begins a review of their history which isn't so glorious or spiritual, pointing out that their fathers and ancestors have done everything they are accusing Stephen of and more.
- Stephen points out that they weren't always Jewish, they came from the land of the Chaldeans, then they were slaves in Egypt.
- They had been told to expect another prophet like himself who would speak truth into their lives and that they were to listen to Him - He is the Messiah.
- They were given the lively oracles of God, they'd been given the Law, and the prophets, they had been given the Word of God.

V: 39-41 Not only did they reject Moses the first time, but they again rejected him even after they had once recognized him as their deliverer after he'd been gone for 40 days receiving the commandments of God. They not only rejected Moses, but what he represented; they rejected the Law, and ultimately they rejected the God of Moses.

- Essentially, when Moses went up to get the Law, you build a golden calf, then started dancing naked around it – you spiritual leaders you!
- Stephen's opponents are accusing him of speaking against the Law of Moses, but their history shows that they have repeatedly broken that same law.

- Egypt was a place of idol worship, not just for the Egyptians but through their tolerance and compromise it became a place of idol worship for the Hebrews too.
- Many people think of idol worship, paganism, as simply bowing down to an idol, a figurine of some sort.

Molech (Wealth & power), **Baal** (Intellect), **Ashtoreth** (sex, sensuality), **Pan** (nature), **Bacchus** (wine & alcohol, drunkenness, the party god.) These are all actively worshipped today!

V: 42-43 A rhetorical question, requiring a negative response.

- Stephen is quoting directly from **Amos 5:25-27**
- **Molech** / Moloch was the principal god of the Ammonites which involved human sacrifice, most often children. **Remphan** was the Assyrian god of the heavens, equivalent to the Egyptian god Repa; all of which equated to the worship of Saturn.
- Amongst other things Stephen is pointing out that they are worshipping the structure instead of the One who placed His glory there.
- Their worship of pagan gods didn't end there, they eventually pushed it so far that they brought upon themselves the destruction of their Temple and their deportation to Babylon, a place consistent with their behavior.
- God's Law was given to the Jews to protect them from the pagan influences around them, and to enable them to enjoy the blessings of the land.
- It was the Law that made them a holy people, different from the other nations.
- When Israel broke down that wall of distinction by disobeying God's Law, they forfeited the blessing of God and had to be disciplined, hence Babylon.
- My guess is that the council really isn't enjoying Stephen's history lesson...

V: 44-50 Stephen had been accused of seeking to destroy the Temple, but that is exactly what they had done through their vain religious observance of man made traditions and formalities!

- God gave the people the Tabernacle, He never even asked for a Temple, a permanent structure, that was David's idea, Solomon's work. Beautiful, yes; but God cannot be contained in a Temple or any structure however beautiful.
- In other words, bottom line; the Temple cannot be blasphemed!

- Stephen is quoting **Isaiah 66:1**, thus far he has quoted from Exodus, Isaiah, Amos, Deuteronomy, and Zechariah, - he didn't call for the scrolls to read them - he quoted them from memory meaning he was well versed in the scriptures.

Psalm 119:11 “Thy Word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.”

- God prepared him, then he used him.

III – Stephen's Accusation

V: 51-53 The real issue behind all their charges against Stephen, and consistently displayed throughout their history isn't reviling or blaspheming the Temple it is that of resisting or being disobedient to the Holy Spirit – who would truly guide them in righteousness if they allowed Him.

- He is challenging them to name just one prophet that they have received! They didn't receive any of them.

Hebrews 11 describes how they treated the prophets. Some they stoned, others they imprisoned, Isaiah was sawn in half lengthwise...

- They have accused Stephen of speaking against Moses, but their fathers had taken up stones to slay him, they have slain all the prophets who spoke of the coming of the Messiah, and even worse, they killed the Messiah Himself!
- Their history is not complimentary and they don't like hearing it!
- They are hearers of the Law, but not doers of the Law. As Jesus said, they are Hypocrites.

James 1:22 “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.”

1 John 3:18 “My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.”

- The Jews as a whole / the nation still suffers from a spiritual blindness that will one day be removed.

Romans 11:25-32 (Turn to / read)

IV – Council's Response / compared to Stephen's.

V: 54 Once again confronted with the truth, these leaders have a choice, options in how to respond.

Galatians 5:17-21 “¹⁷For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. ¹⁸But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law. ¹⁹Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, ²⁰idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, ²¹envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.”

- There are only two responses to sin; repentance or rationalization, their response is a form of the latter which is to remove / kill who ever raises the issue, and the witnesses if there are any.
- True Spirit filled preaching brings strong conviction. But it is what people do with that conviction that is the most telling - they will either yield to it or they will harden their hearts.

Acts 2:36-37 “³⁶Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. ³⁷Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, men and brethren, what shall we do?”

- Peter rebuked the crowd, their conviction led to their repentance and salvation. Others like the council upon feeling that conviction, harden their hearts and rebel against the Gospel and dive further into the flesh, and in this case it results in murder.

V: 55 “*But*” – contrast, in two points.

1. “...*he being full of the Holy Ghost*” – Stephen was full of the Holy Spirit, as opposed to walking in the flesh.
 2. He could see the real Temple, not made with hands, seeing the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. The religious leaders could see neither, all they could see was the earthly Temple that would soon be gone.
- Stephen’s address started out speaking of the “²glory of God”, now he’s seeing the “glory of God”. It begins and ends the same way.
 - If we will speak of the “glory of God”, and keep speaking – it won’t be long until we too will be seeing the “glory of God”!

- Steven didn't just look toward heaven; he looked into heaven. God opened up his vision that he could see into heaven!
- Isaiah also had a vision of the glory of God, as did Daniel and others in the Bible.

Isaiah 6:1 "In the year that King Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple."

- Isaiah's time was a time of discouragement and uncertainty. King Uzziah was a popular king, it was a time of prosperity and military success, security. He had reigned for 52 years and the nation was blessed. But Uzziah died, the throne had been vacated, which meant there was some uncertainty and fear in the hearts of the people.
- Isaiah's vision came at a time of discouragement, fear, and uncertainty - that vision came at just the right time as an encouragement, a time to re-focus on the Lord.
- Stephen needs that grace now, and what does the Lord do? He gives him a view into heaven and gives him the grace to go through the experience that will bring him there.

V: 56 Stephen sees the Lord standing at the right hand of God. Jesus, "standing" preparing to receive His child into eternity. Standing mentioned twice (V: 55 & 56)

Jesus said when He was being questioned by the same council:

Luke 22:69 "Hereafter shall the Son of man sit on the right hand of the power of God."

- Jesus is described as being at the right hand of God the Father, doing what He always does, praying - in this case for us!

Romans 8:34 "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."

V: 57 Cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord – murder.

- Jesus confronted a man in the synagogue who was possessed by an un-clean spirit. Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit who after he had torn the man and cried with a loud voice, left him. (**Mark 1:26**)
- Demoniac at Gadera cried with a loud voice just before being freed from the legion of demons who entered into the swine and ran into the sea and drowned. (**Mark 5**)

Acts 8:7 “For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed;...”

“... *stopping their ears*...” Refusing to listen.

Describing the Messiah:

Isaiah 35:5 “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.”

- That is what Jesus came to do, but they refused...

V: 58 They cast him out of the city, where they stoned him according to the Law, the punishment for blasphemy. They didn't listen, they rejected the message of the Holy Spirit through Stephen.

- They cast him out of the city, much like Jesus was taken out of the city.
- There is a gate near the pool of Bethesda, opposite the Mount of Olives and a short distance away from the Eastern Gate, that they call the *Lion's Gate*, or *Saint Stephens Gate*. This is the gate by tradition that Stephen was dragged out of and stoned.
- This is also where we meet a zealous young Pharisee by the name of Saul who consented unto his death.
- They didn't feel the need to consult with the Roman authorities... they just did what they wanted - demonstrating that their dealing with Jesus were indeed calculated and not at all spontaneous.

V: 59-60a Fruit of the Spirit working in Stephen, calling upon the name of the Lord in prayer and expressing forgiveness to the very end.

- When Stephen's eyes were on the Lord, it didn't seem to matter too much what the people were doing.

V – Stephen's last words:

V: 60b Very much like some of the last words of Jesus. They had no clue what they were doing, but they were proving that they truly didn't have a heart for the things of the Lord.

Luke 23:34 “... Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do...”

- It wasn't that Stephen was simply mimicking the words of Jesus, Stephen had the same Spirit as Jesus, the same heart - hence, the same words.

“... *he fell asleep.*” Christian term for “he died...” - not a reference to “soul sleep”

- Stephen is the first of what would be many martyrs of the faith. It's estimated that from Stephen through the first three centuries of the church that somewhere

around 6 million Christians died for their faith at the hands of either the council initially then the Roman Empire which had declared war on Christianity.

- The world today is still at war with Christ.

John 16:33 “These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”

- For Israel, Stephen's death meant *condemnation*.
- This was their third murder: they had *permitted* John the Baptist to be killed; they had *asked* for Jesus to be killed; and now they were killing Stephen themselves.
- When they allowed Herod to kill John, the Jews sinned against God the Father who had sent John (**Matt. 21:28–32**).
- When they asked Pilate to crucify Jesus, they sinned against God the Son (**Matt. 21:33–46**).
- When they stoned Stephen, Israel sinned against the Holy Spirit who was working in and through the Apostles (**Matt. 10:1–8; Acts 7:51**).
- Jesus said that this sin could never be forgiven (**Matt. 12:31–32**). Judgment finally came in a.d. 70 when Titus and the Roman armies destroyed Jerusalem and the temple.
- For the church in Jerusalem, the death of Stephen meant *liberation*. They had been witnessing “to the Jew first” ever since Pentecost, but now they would be directed to take the message out of Jerusalem to the Samaritans (**Acts 8**) and even to the Gentiles (**Acts 11:19–26**).
- The opposition of the enemy helped prevent the church from becoming a Jewish “sect” and encouraged them to fulfill the commission of **Acts 1:8** and **Matthew 28:18–20**.
- Finally, for Saul (**Acts 7:58**), the death of Stephen eventually meant *salvation*. He never forgot the event (**Acts 22:17–21**), and no doubt Stephen's message, prayers, and glorious death were used of the Spirit to prepare Saul for his own meeting with the Lord (**Acts 9**).

- God never wastes the blood of His saints. Saul would one day see the same glory that Stephen saw and would behold the Son of God and hear Him speak!

Ref.Acts.07