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Stephen's Testimony to the Sanhedrin

6:8 to 7:53

31-33 AD

The events of Acts 3-8 transpire with mounting concern on the part of the Jews, and especially the Jewish authorities in Yerushalayim. The rising tension resulted in vigilante action taken against Stephen, and then an authorized effort under Rabbi Sha'ul to disrupt and destroy that new Messianic movement, involving persecution and even death of the believers. The persecution led various believers such as Philip to go to Samaria and bear witness of Yeshua.

Stephen's testimony to the Sanhedrin DIG: From 6:13-14, how would you write up the formal charges against Stephen? What does Stephen's defense (in effect a history lesson) reveal about his respect for the Torah? Why did Stephen spend the bulk of his defense speaking about Moshe? What parallels did he make between Moshe and Yeshua? How did that relate to the charges against him in 6:13-14? How does the quote in verse 37 begin to turn the tables on his accusers regarding who was really rejecting Moses? From verses 44-50, what is Stephen's point about the Temple and God's presence? How is he turning the tables against his accusers once again? Look at Deuteronomy 10:16 and 30:4. What does Stephen mean by the phrase uncircumcised hearts and ears? In this context, what is Stephen really saying about the Great Sanhedrin's regard for Moshe and the Torah? Of what does he accuse them in verses 51-53? Therefore, considering the circumstances, what type of a person was Stephen?

REFLECT: Since the Great Sanhedrin knew their history every bit as well as Stephen, how do you account for the radically different response to Jesus? What is needed in your life besides knowledge to fully understand Messiah? In what ways do people hold on to religious rituals and heroes today, while missing the whole point of what those ceremonies and people represent? How does this tendency affect you? In what ways could the

charges that Stephen makes against the Jewish leadership be made against you? How might you be feeling “stiff-necked” this week? How will you begin to bow to YHVH in that area now? Would you say that the TaNaKh is more like a stranger or a close friend to you? When Yeshua was brought to trial, He was basically quiet before the Great Sanhedrin; yet Stephen spoke very boldly here. How do you decide when to speak boldly and when to be quiet before your opposition?

This passage marks a transition in the book of **Acts**. Up to this point, **Peter** has been the dominating figure, fulfilling **his** calling by taking the gospel **to the Jews first (Romans 1:16)**. But another major figure looms on the horizon: **Rabbi Sha’ul**, who is also called **Paul (to see link click [Bm](#) - Paul’s First Missionary Journey)**, who is introduced at the end of **Chapter 7**. Bridging the gap between those two giants is **Stephen**. **Peter** ministered primarily to the **Jewish** people, and **Paul** primarily to the Gentiles. **Peter** ministered in Yerushalayim, **Paul** throughout the Roman Empire. But **Stephen’s** ministry was the catalyst that catapulted the Messianic community out of **Judea, Samaria, to the ends of the earth (1:8)**.¹³⁷

As **Chapter 7** opens, **Stephen’s** trial begins. While the main thrust of **Stephen’s** speech was to answer the charges of blasphemy, three other ideas are interwoven throughout. First, **he** knew **he** must capture and hold **his** audience’s attention. **He** did that by reciting **Isra’el’s** history as the groundwork for **his** defense. Since **the Sanhedrin** was fiercely proud of **their** ancestry that was a topic **they** never got tired of hearing about.

Secondly, **Stephen’s** speech was to indict **his** hearers for rejecting **the Messiah**. Throughout **his** speech, that indictment slowly builds until it reaches a devastating climax (see **An - Peter Speaks to the Shavu’ot Crowd: Speeches in Acts**). **He** shows **them** that by rejecting **the Messiah**, **they** were imitating **their** apostate descendants, who rejected **Joseph**, **Moshe**, and even **God Himself**. **Stephen** was not the blasphemer, **they** were!

Thirdly, **Stephen** sought to present to them **Yeshua** as **the Messiah**, using **Joseph** and **Moshe** as types of **Christ**. This passage presents **Stephen’s** fourfold defense against the false charges of blasphemy brought against **him**. It is best not to get lost in the details of the references in the TaNaKh that **Stephen** cites, but instead, to concentrate on the dramatic themes and flow of **his** masterful message. **Stephen’s** purpose was not to recite history, but to establish that **he** was not guilty of blaspheming **ADONAI**, **Moshe**, **the Torah**, or **the Temple**. **His** accusers were,

however, guilty of blasphemy because **they** had rejected **the Messiah**.¹³⁸

Whatever **the Jewish leaders** thought, they must have been surprised at what they got next. **Stephen** stood accused. **His** life literally hung in the balance. But instead of placating **his** accusers or defending **himself**, **Stephen** preached one of the most classic sermons in history.¹³⁹

ADONAI

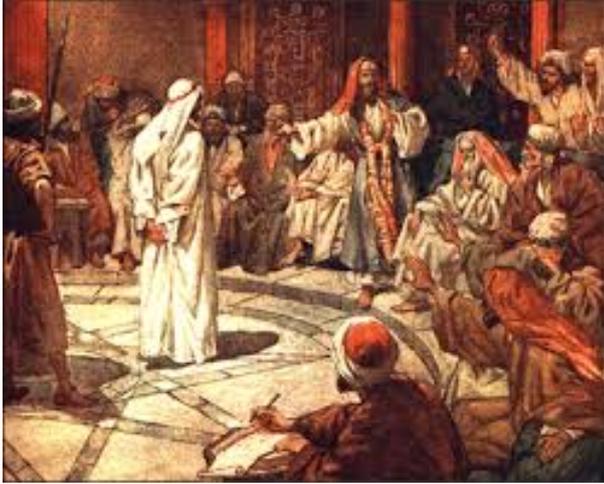
Now Stephen addressed the most serious allegation first, accusing **him** of **blasphemy** against **ADONAI**. Being filled with **the Spirit of God**, **Stephen** was **full of grace and power, was continually doing great signs and wonders among the people**. The more **Stephen** poured out **his** life for **Messiah**, the more **Messiah** poured **His** life into **Stephen**. It is important to understand that **his** authority to perform **great signs and wonders** only came after **he** was appointed one of **the seven deacons** (see [Av - Deacons Anointed for Service](#)); in other words, it came only with the authority given to **him** by **the apostles** by the laying on of hands. This process will continue throughout the book of **Acts**. The ability to perform **signs and wonders** was not common among all the believers, but were only performed either by **the apostles** or those to whom **they** delegated, as was the case of **Stephen**. The Messianic community was not a miracle-working community. Rather, it was a Messianic community with miracle-working **apostles**.

But some men from what was called the Synagogue of the Freedmen - both Cyrenians and Alexandrians, as well as some from Cilicia and the province of Asia - were stirred to action and began arguing with Stephen that Yeshua was the Messiah (6:8-9). These **men** were probably Diaspora **Jews** who had been captured and enslaved by the Romans. General Pompey, who captured Jerusalem in 63 BC took a number of **Jews** prisoner and released them in Rome. **Some**, however may have been Gentile converts to Judaism. The phenomenon of proselyte zeal is familiar in all religious communities. **But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Ruach by whom he was speaking (6:10)**. When **Stephen's** opponents could not get the best of **him** in a fair debate, **they** changed tactics.

Then, with evil intent, **they secretly instigated men into** saying: **We have heard him speaking blasphemous words against Moses and against God**. This was the same tactic used at **Messiah's** trial (**Mattityahu 26:59-61; Mark 14:55-59**). Even the trumped-up charges of **blasphemy** and speaking

against **the Temple** were the same as those against **the Lord**. The fact that **they** also charged **Stephen** of **blaspheming Moshe** suggests **he** was denying the ability of **the Torah** to save. **They** charged **him** of **blaspheming** against **God** by speaking against **the Temple** by saying you could worship **God** anywhere. That accusation no doubt reflected **Stephen's** presentation of **Messiah** as the embodiment of **ADONAI**. But that charge of **blasphemy** violated the laws of **the Sanhedrin** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Lh - The Laws of the Great Sanhedrin Regarding Trials**), because the Oral Law said that unless someone specifically pronounced the personal name of **God - YHVH** - they could not be accused of **blasphemy**. Since those same lies had worked so well against **Yeshua**, **they** were quick to use them against **Stephen**.

They also incited the people, members of the Sanhedrin, the elders, and the Torah scholars; and they rushed at Stephen as a mob, seized him, and forcefully led him away to the Sanhedrin. They set up two or three false witnesses who said: This man never stops speaking words against this Holy Place (which would appeal to the Sadducees) **and the Torah** (which would appeal to the Pharisees). **For we have heard him saying that this Yeshua ha-Natzrati will destroy this place** (once again angering the Sadducees) **and change the customs that Moses handed down to us** (once again angering the Pharisees), so they both had a reason to be angry against **Stephen (6:11-14)**. By changing the customs, they meant disregarding **the Oral Law** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Ei - The Oral Law**). **Because the rabbis taught that Moshe brought down the Oral Law from Mt Sinai at the same time, he brought down the Ten Commandments, an attack on the Oral Law** was, in effect, tantamount to an attack on **the Torah** as a whole. **Stephen** had the utmost respect for **Moshe** and **the Torah**. **Their** choice of words, however, made **him** out to be a revolutionary, seeking to overthrow the established divine order. **They** turned **his** positive proclamation into a negative attack.



What happened next presented a striking contrast. **Stephen** stood before **the Sanhedrin** accused of being an evil **blasphemer** of **ADONAI, Moshe, the Torah** and **the Temple**. However, **watching him intently, everyone who was sitting in the Sanhedrin saw that his face was like the face of an angel (6:15)**. Far from being evil, **Stephen** radiated the holiness and Sh'khinah **glory of God**, something no one else in history had experienced except for **Moshe (Exodus 34:27-35)**. By putting **His** Sh'khinah on **Stephen's face, ADONAI** showed **His** approval of the B'rit Chadashah and its messenger.¹⁴⁰

The Pharisees instigated this third persecution of believers in **Acts**. It was no longer merely the Sadducees who were in opposition to the Messianic Community as had been during the first **five chapters** because the issue now being raised is no longer merely about the resurrection. The issue now is a new order, a new **Way** in opposition to Pharisaic Judaism.¹⁴¹

Having been charged, **Stephen** had the right to defend **himself**, therefore, a **the cohen gadol** (probably Caiaphas, who was in office until 36 AD) said: **Are these things so (7:1)?** In effect, **he** was asking, "How do you plead to the charges against you, guilty or not guilty?" But **Stephen's** defense was hardly a defense in the sense of an explanation trying to win an acquittal. Rather, it was a proclamation of the Good News and an indictment of **the Jewish leaders** for **their** failure to recognize **Yeshua** as **the Messiah**, or to appreciate the salvation offered by **Him**.¹⁴²

As **Stephen** begins his defense, critics of the inerrancy of the Scriptures, or opponents of messianic Judaism, like to point to several quotes from **Acts 7** as

proof texts. They try to show a sharp contradiction of what it says in the TaNaKh and **Acts 7**. They quote from **Acts 7**, and then they say, “Where in the TaNaKh does it say this?” **There are two reasons for these seeming discrepancies: First, is the use of different texts.** The TaNaKh that we now have is called the Masoretic Text. It is the oldest complete copy that we have of the TaNaKh compiled about 1,250 AD. Being a Hellenist, when **Stephen** quotes the TaNaKh **he** uses the Septuagint, or the Greek translation of the TaNaKh, compiled about 250 BC. The Hebrew text, which is the basis of the Septuagint is at least as old as that. However, the Masoretic Text only dates to 1,250 AD. So the question becomes, “Which text is more accurate? The Hebrew text behind the Septuagint, or the Masoretic Text?” If we go by what is closest to the original time of writing, the Septuagint is using a Hebrew text that is far older than the Masoretic Text. So one reason the verses in the **Acts 7** don’t match the quotes in the TaNaKh is that **Stephen** used the Septuagint.

Second, is the use of a principal called telescoping, or combining two events into one picture. Critics say that **Acts 7** gets confused between the stories of **Abraham** and **Jacob**, of **Jacob** and **Joseph**. But **Stephen** was under pressure, in the middle of a mob mentality, **they** were gnashing **their** teeth at **him** and he could not go into a verse-by-verse teaching with the 71 members of **the Sanhedrin**. So **he** telescoped them.¹⁴³

Then **Stephen** began the longest speech in **Acts**, and **he** declared: **Brothers**, showing **his** solidarity with **them, and fathers** (not an uncommon name for the members of **the Sanhedrin**), showing **his** respect for **them** as leaders of the **Jewish** people, **listen**. Wasting no time in preliminaries, **he** plunged directly into **his** subject. **The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, or Ur of the Chaldees (Genesis 15:7), before he lived in Haran** (see the commentary on **Genesis Dq – Terah Became the Father of Abram, Nahor and Haran**). The point **Stephen** was trying to make here was that **the divine Presence** was not restricted to the land of **Isra’el** or **the Temple** because **the Sh’khinah glory** appeared long before there was a **Tabernacle** or a **Temple**, even before **Abraham** crossed over into the borders of the Promised Land. As a Diaspora **Jew**, **he** understood certain things that the native-born **Jews** did not.

Stephen repeated the content of the covenant and the call of **Abraham**, saying: **Leave your country and your relatives, and come here to the land that I will show you (7:2-3)**. The context of what **he** is speaking about is **Genesis**

11:31 through **12:3**. **He** also telescopes the events of **Genesis 15:7**. The first stage was that **Abraham left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. From there, after his father died, God moved him to this Land where you now live.** This divine command was, in fact, spoken **in Haran**. Since, however, it is clear from **Genesis 15:7** that **God** called **Abraham** out of Ur, it can be reasonably assumed that the divine call came to **him** there before **he** lived **in Haran**. It would be natural to assume that the content of the divine message given at Ur was the same as that given **in Haran**, and hence, there is no need to speak of **Stephen** being in error.¹⁴⁴

As Paul would do later (**Romans 4** and **Galatians 3**), **Stephen** focused on **Abraham** as a man of faith. Completely obeying **God's** sovereign call and left **his** homeland, not knowing exactly where **he** was going. Even after arriving in **his** new country **God gave him no inheritance in it - not even a foothold - yet He promised "to give it to him as a possession to him and to his descendants after him," even though he had no child (7:4-5).** The closest **Abraham** came to seeing such a grand promise fulfilled was the birth of Isaac. What **he** did receive was a promise of **Egyptian** bondage.

But God spoke in this way, that his "descendants would be foreigners in a land belonging to others, and they would enslave and mistreat them for four hundred years (a rounded number for the sake of brevity, once again **he** was under a lot of pressure). **But I will judge the nation they serve as slaves, God said: and afterward they shall come out and serve Me in this place (7:6-7).** **Luke** quotes the TaNaKh almost always in a form either corresponding to the **LXX** or close to it, and not according to the Hebrew Masoretic Text. Here **Genesis 15:13-14** is quoted close but not exactly corresponding to the **LXX**.¹⁴⁵

Following the flow of salvation history, **Stephen** moved into the patriarchal period. **Then God gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision. So he became the father of Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day, and so Isaac with Jacob, and Jacob with the twelve patriarchs,** the heads of the twelve tribes of **Isra'el**. For the sake of brevity, **Stephen** chose to bypass the stories of **Isaac** and **Jacob** and move directly to **Joseph**. **The patriarchs became jealous of Joseph and sold him into Egypt. Yet God was with him. He rescued him out of all his troubles and granted him favor and wisdom before Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who made him governor over Egypt and all his household (7:8-10).** **Joseph's** revelation also came to **him** outside the Promised Land.

Stephen makes it extremely clear that **the twelve patriarchs** were guilty of opposing **God** and **His** purpose. They sold **Joseph**, but **God** rescued **him**. The nation's rebellion against **ADONAI** began with **the patriarchs** themselves. **The Sanhedrin** was doing the very same thing that the founding **fathers** of the nation were guilty of doing and what they were falsely accusing **Stephen** of doing. Although **he** waits until the conclusion of **his** speech to openly declare that **Yeshua** is the **Messiah**, even in **his** historical summary, **Stephen** gives snap-shots of **Messiah**. There are eighty ways that the life of **Joseph** prepares us for, or foreshadows, the life of **Christ** (see the commentary on **Genesis [Iw](#) - The Written Account of the Generation of Jacob**).¹⁴⁶

“Famine and great suffering came over all Egypt and Canaan, and our fathers could find no food. But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our fathers there the first time. On the second visit, Joseph made himself known to his brothers, and his family became known to Pharaoh. The one rejected by **his** brothers became the savior. The point Stephen was making, was that this was also true of the Messiah. **So Joseph sent and called for Jacob and all his relatives - seventy-five persons** (see the commentary on **Genesis Km - Jacob's Genealogy**). **Genesis 46:26-27; Exodus 1:5** and **Deut 10:22** all say that **seventy people** went down to **Egypt**. However, the Septuagint text of **Genesis 46:27** reads **seventy-five**. **Stephen**, being a Hellenist, would naturally have used the Septuagint figure. The larger figure was apparently arrived at by including the total of **Joseph's** descendants born in **Egypt**. **Jacob went down to Egypt and died, he and our fathers. They were carried to Shechem and laid in the tomb that Abraham had bought for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor in Shechem (7:11-16)**. Again, for the sake of brevity, **Stephen** telescopes the accounts of **Abraham's** purchase of the Machpelah site and **Jacob's** acquisition of **the Shechem** site. **His** purpose was not to recite history, but to establish that **he** was not guilty of blaspheming **ADONAI**.¹⁴⁷

Moshe

Having successfully defended **himself** against the charge of blaspheming **ADONAI**, **Stephen** then moved to the second accusation, rejecting **Moshe**. **But as the time drew near for God to fulfill His promise to Abraham, the people increased and multiplied in Egypt - until “there arose another king over Egypt who did not acknowledge** (Hebrew: *yada*, which can be translated *acknowledge*) **Joseph (Exodus 1:8).” Dealing with our people with cruel cunning, this king mistreated our fathers and forced them to abandon**

their infants so they would not survive. At this time Moses was born. The details of **Moshe's** life and ministry were well known to **the Sanhedrin**, so **Stephen** merely summarized them to make **his** point. Sensitive to the accusation that **he blasphemed Moshe**, **Stephen** makes the point of praising **him**, describing **him** as **extraordinary before God. For three months he was nurtured in his father's house. And when he was set outside, Pharaoh's daughter took him and raised him as her own son** (see the commentary on [Exodus Ak](#) - **A Man of the House of Levi Married a Levite Woman**). **Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was powerful in his words and deeds (7:17-22).** **Moshe** was a remarkable man. **His** natural leadership abilities, coupled with the most comprehensive education in the ancient world, made **him** uniquely qualified for the task that was ahead of **him**.

God's call came **when he was approaching forty years of age.** At that time, **it came into his heart to visit his brothers, Bnei-Yisrael.** Although raised in **Pharaoh's** household, **Moshe** had never forgotten **his** people. No doubt **his** mother instilled in **him** during the years **ADONAI** had providentially arranged that **she** serve as **his** nurse, that **he** was a **Hebrew.** So when **he approached forty**, **he** decided to help **his** long-suffering **people.** **When he saw one of them being treated unjustly, he went to the defense of the oppressed man and avenged him by striking down the Egyptian.** By taking that murderous action, **he was assuming that his brothers understood that by his hand God was delivering them, but they did not understand** and did not recognize **him** as the deliverer. The point **Stephen** was making was that the same thing would happen to **the Messiah.** **So on the next day he appeared to them as they were fighting. He tried to reconcile them in shalom, saying: Men, you are brothers. Why do you wrong one another? But the one doing wrong to his neighbor pushed him away, saying ominously: Who appointed you ruler and judge over us? You don't want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday, do you (Exodus 2:14).** Realizing the killing of **the Egyptian** had become widely known **Moses fled and became an exile in the land of Midian** (see the commentary on [Exodus Ai](#) - **Moses Fled From Pharaoh and Went to Live in Midian**), **where he became the father of two sons, Gershom and Eliezer (7:23-29).** No doubt viewing **him** as the leader of a **Jewish** rebellion, **Pharaoh** sought to unsuccessfully kill **him (Exodus 2:15).**

When forty years had passed (see the commentary on [Exodus Am](#) - **Moses in Moses**), and the time had come for **Moshe** to lead **the Israelites** to the Promised

Land, **the Angel of ADONAI appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai in the flame of a burning bush** (see the commentary on **Exodus Aq - Flames of fire from within a Burning Bush**). Once again, **Stephen's** point is that **God** revealed **Himself** outside of the Promised Land. **When Moses saw it, he was amazed at the sight. But when he came up to look, there came the voice of Adonai: "I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob."** **Moses trembled in fear and did not dare to look. But Adonai said to him, "Take the sandals off your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground** (even though it was outside of the "**Holy Land**"). So anywhere that **God** appears is an area of holiness. **God's** blessings were not limited to the **Holy Land** or to **the Temple. I have surely seen the oppression of My people in Egypt and have heard their groaning, and I have come down to deliver them. Now come - let Me send you to Egypt"** (7:30-34).

Then **Stephen** reached the climax of **his** defense of blaspheming **Moshe. This Moses - whom they rejected, saying: Who appointed you as ruler and judge? - is the one whom God sent as both ruler and redeemer, by the hand of the Angel of ADONAI who appeared to him in the bush (7:35).** You will notice in the next several verses that **Stephen** keeps emphasizing the word **this. This Moses, or this man** (meaning **Moses**), because **Stephen** wanted to drive the same point home over and over again. The very same person that **Isra'el** rejected, was the one same **person** that **God** used to bring **Isra'el** out of bondage. This is a constant pattern in **Isra'el's** history - spiritual pride coupled with spiritual ignorance (which is a real bad combination) causes **them** to reject the deliverers **God** sends **them**. It has sometimes been pointed out that **Yeshua** could not have been **the Anointed One**, or else **Isra'el** would have recognized **Him**. But as **Stephen** points out, they rejected both **Joseph** and **Moses**. This was the typical response to those **God** sent to deliver **them. Yeshua** spoke of this attitude in **Matthew 21:33-46.**

Moshe accomplished **his** mission and **led them out of Egypt.** But **Isra'el's** further rebellion against **God** and **Moses**, in spite of **the wonders and signs they** had already seen **in the land of Egypt and in the parting of the Sea of Reeds and in the wilderness,** caused **them** another delay. Because of that rebellion, **they** wandered outside the Promised Land **for forty** more **years.** It was obvious from **Stephen's** speech that **he** had the utmost respect for **Moses** and the charge of blaspheming **Moshe** was as false as that of blaspheming **ADONAI.** The **Jewish**

response to **Moses**, like their response to **Joseph**, paralleled their response to **Messiah**. Then **Stephen** reminded them that **Moshe**, in the well-known passage from **Deuteronomy 18:15**, predicted **Messiah** would come, prophesying: **God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your brothers (7:36-37)**. Thus, **they** were doing again what **their fathers** had done - rejecting the **God**-sent deliverer. Only this time it was more serious than all the others combined. This was **the Messiah they** were rejecting.¹⁴⁸

Torah

It was an easy transition from **Moshe** to **the Torah**, since the two are so closely related. While **Moses** was with **the community in the wilderness**, **he** received **the Torah** from **angels who spoke to him on Mount Sinai**, and was **with our fathers**. **He received living words of the Torah to pass on to us (7:38)**. **Stephen** affirmed **the Torah** again, making a "not guilty" plea. **He** declared that **ADONAI** was the author of **the Torah**, that **the angels** were its mediator (**Acts 7:53; Galatians 3:19; Hebrews 2:2**), and **Moses** was the recipient. That certainly was not **blasphemy**, and **the Sanhedrin** knew it.

But now comes the turning point. **Stephen** commented how the original recipients of **the Torah** had failed to keep it. **Our fathers**, **he** reminded **them**, **did not want to be obedient to him**. It was not **Stephen** who disobeyed **the Torah**, but **the very fathers** that **the Sanhedrin** revered. **Stephen** did not reject **Moshe**, but those same **fathers shoved him and the Torah aside and in their hearts they turned back to Egypt**. Worse still, while **Moses** was on Mount Sinai receiving **the Torah** from **God**, **the people** turned to idolatry, **saying to Aaron**, **"Make gods for us who will go before us. For this Moses who led us out of the land of Egypt - we have no idea what has happened to him."** Right from the moment when **the Torah** was given, **they** rebelled against it. For all **their** declarations of loyalty to **the Torah** and **the Temple**, and **their** accusations against **Stephen**, **his** hearers belonged to a nation, which right from the start, had rejected **the Torah** and the true worship of **YHVH**.

With this thought the speech takes a new turn, and down to **verse 50** it is concerned with the twin themes of idolatry and **Temple**-worship in **Isra'el**. **And they made a calf in those days, offered a sacrifice to the idol, and they kept on rejoicing in the works of their hands**. That single act of idolatry, led to other acts of idolatry in **the wilderness**. **So** in the next two verses **Stephen** deals with **Isra'el's** long history of idolatry throughout those forty years and beyond.

Ha'Shem's response was to give **them** up to idolatry. So in these two verses **Stephen** summarizes the remainder of **Isra'el's** history and tendency toward idolatry that brought on the Babylonian Captivity (see the commentary on [Jeremiah Gu - Seventy Years of Imperial Babylonian Rule](#)).

So God turned and gave them over to serve the host of heaven, or star worship, **just as it is written in the book of the Prophets (7:39-42a)**, that is, the book of the twelve minor prophets, regarded as a single **book** in the TaNaKh. To prove **his** point, **Stephen** quotes the book of **Amos**.

It was not to Me that you brought sacrifices and offerings, but to idols, **for forty years in the wilderness, was it, O House of Isra'el (7:42b LXX)? You also took up the tent of Moloch**, the Ammonite star god, connected to the planet Venus and similar to the Greek goddess Venus, to whom human sacrifices were offered, **and the star of your god Rephan**, a Babylonian god associated with the planet Saturn, **the images you made to worship**. The sacrifices Isra'el offered were the Levitical sacrifices **God** commanded, but they diverted their sacrifices to these gods. The point Stephen was making was that the idolatry that began with the golden calf, ended up with the worship of **the host of heaven**, the stars. This is verified throughout the Scriptures (**Deuteronomy 17:3; Second Kings 17:6, 21:3 and 5, 23:5; Second Chronicles 23:3 and 5; Jeremiah 13:15**). **And I will deport you beyond Babylon' (7:43 LXX)**. His point is that the prophets had already accused **Isra'el** idolatry, therefore **his** accusation was nothing new.

Luke quotes the TaNaKh almost always in a form either corresponding to the **LXX** or close to it, and not according to the Hebrew Masoretic Text. Here **Amos 5:25-27** is quoted close but not exactly corresponding to the **LXX**.¹⁴⁹

Temple

In response to the accusation that **he** spoke against **the Temple**, **Stephen** traced **its** history to show **his** great respect for **it** because **YHVH** ordained it. **Our fathers had the Tent of Witness (the Tabernacle) in the wilderness**, but this also was outside the Promised Land. Furthermore, **just as the One speaking to Moses had directed him to make it according to the design he had seen**. **The wilderness** generation could not plead ignorance of **God's glory**, since **the Tabernacle** was in **their** midst. Nor could the later **fathers** who, having **received**

it in turn and brought it in with Joshua when they took possession of the land of the nations that God drove out before our fathers. From the time of the conquest **until the days of David, Isra'el had the Tabernacle**, a constant symbol of **God's** holy presence. Yet they persisted in falling into idolatry. After **Ha'Shem** gave **David** victory over all **his** enemies, **he asked to find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob (Psalm 132:3-5 LXX).** **David's** request was denied, however, and it was **Solomon** who **built a house for Him (7:44-47).** **Stephen** makes only a brief reference to **Solomon's Temple**, since **the Sanhedrin** was very familiar with its history. Moreover, the current **Temple** was not **Solomon's**, which had been destroyed by the Babylonians. **The** current **Temple** had been built by the non-Jew Herod. So the transitory nature of **the Tabernacle**, and then **the Temple** lead to **Stephen's** main point, namely that **Elyon does not dwell in man-made houses.** There can be no doubt that **the** Sh'khinah **glory** abided within the most holy place of **the Tabernacle** and later **the Temple**, but still did not limit **Him** in any way.

In contrast to this view **Stephen** stresses that **ADONAI** did not currently reside in **the Tziyon Temple, God** dwells in heaven, and furthermore, not only is **God** and **God's** true dwelling not made with human hands, instead all the world and all that is in it is **God-made.** Nothing is wrong with **the Temple** nor with building it, but it is wrong to believe that it (and perhaps it alone) is **God's** dwelling place. Furthermore, allegiance to **a Temple** built with human hands could place **Isra'el** in danger of repeating its earlier **wilderness** sin, for **the golden calf** had also been made by human hands.¹⁵⁰ **As the prophet says (7:48):**

**'Heaven is My throne,
and the earth is the footstool of My feet.
What kind of house will you build for Me, says Adonai,
or what is the place of My rest (7:49)?
Did not My Hand make all these things' (7:50)?**

Luke quotes the TaNaKh almost always in a form either corresponding to the **LXX** or close to it, and not according to the Hebrew Masoretic Text. Here **Isaiah 66:1-1** is quoted verbatim from the **LXX** with a change in the word order.¹⁵¹ **Stephen** was not guilty of **blaspheming the Temple.** **They** were, for confining **Ha'Shem** to it. Instead, with **Isaiah**, **he** argued that **God** was greater than any **Temple.** It was the symbol of **God's** presence; not the prison of **His** essence.

Throughout **Stephen's** speech the tension must have been building. As **he** pointed

out **Isra'el's** rejections and apostasies, **the Sanhedrin** grew increasingly uneasy. **They** must have wondered what point was **he** trying to make? **They** didn't have to wait long. Having laid the historical foundation for it, **he** hit them with a devastating indictment: They were just like their fathers in the days of **Joseph, Moses** and **David**. **They** were **stiff-necked**, or obstinate, **people (7:51a)**! Because **they** prided **themselves** on **their** physical circumcision and ritual behavior. **Stephen's** description of **them** as **uncircumcised of heart (Leviticus 26:41; Deuteronomy 10:16, 30:6; Jeremiah 4:4, 9:26; Ezeki'el 44:7 and 9) and ears (Jeremiah 6:10)** was very pointed! **Their** sin had never been forgiven. **They** were as unclean before **God** as uncircumcised Gentiles. That was the ultimate condemnation.

These are the TaNaKh's characterization of **Isra'el**: **God's** people outwardly bear the sign of the covenant with **Abraham**, but inwardly are impure and rebellious (**Romans 2:17-3:2**). **You always resist the Ruach ha-Kodesh; just as your fathers did (Isaiah 63:10), you do as well. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed the ones who foretold the coming of the Righteous One. Yeshua** made the same accusation (**Matthew 23:29-36**). **Now you have become His betrayers and murderers**, not directly, as **they** were about to do with **Stephen**, but through Pontius Pilate and the Roman government.¹⁵² **You who received the Torah by direction of angels and did not keep it (7:51b-53)**! **They** were without excuse, since **the Torah** pointed to **Messiah (John 5:39)**. **Stephen** once again echoes the words of **his Lord**, who said to those same **leaders: If you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about me (John 5:39)**. There was no offer of salvation, only a declaration of disobedience.

Despite **their** proud boast that **if we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets (Matthew 23:30), they** had done far worse. **Their fathers** had **murdered God's prophets, they**, however, had **murdered His Son, the Righteous One**. Now **they** were about to commit yet another **murder**. **Stephen** would shortly become another in the long line of **ADONAI's** messengers killed by **God's** chosen nation, and the first killed for preaching the name of **Messiah**.¹⁵³