



ACTS CHAPTER 7

STEPHEN'S RESPONSE TO THE COUNCIL

A. The story of Israel from the time of Abraham.

1. ([Acts 7:1](#)) The High Priest invites Stephen to speak.

Then the high priest said, "Are these things so?"

a. **Then the high priest said:** The **high priest** mentioned here was probably still Caiaphas, the same one who presided over the trial of Jesus ([Matthew 26:57](#)).

b. **Are these things so?** The high priest invited Stephen to explain himself in light of the accusations recorded in [Acts 6:11-14](#). Stephen

was accused to speaking *blasphemous words against Moses and God*, and *against this holy place* [the temple] *and the law*. Additionally, they accused him of saying that Jesus would destroy both the temple and the customs delivered by Moses.

i. In his response Stephen gave a panorama of Old Testament history. We shouldn't think Stephen instructed the Sanhedrin on points of Jewish history they were ignorant of. Instead, Stephen emphasized some things in Jewish history they may not have considered: That God never confined Himself to one place (like the temple), and that the Jewish people had a habit of rejecting those God sends to them.

ii. This really was not a *defense*. Stephen wasn't interested in defending himself. He simply wanted to proclaim the truth about Jesus in a way people could understand.

iii. "Stephen seems to have perceived...that the old order of things was passing away and a new order was coming. This becomes particularly clear when he talks about the temple. It was cherished by the Jews. But it was destined to pass away, and Stephen seemed to have sensed that. His speech is a transition speech that

paves the way for presenting the gospel to the Gentiles, which begins in the very next chapter of Acts.”

iv. “Such a speech as this was by no means calculated to secure an acquittal before the Sanhedrin. It is rather a defense of pure Christianity as God’s appointed way of worship.”

2. (Acts 7:2-5) God’s promise to Abraham.

And he said, “Brethren and fathers, listen: The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, and said to him, ‘Get out of your country and from your relatives, and come to a land that I will show you.’ Then he came out of the land of the Chaldeans and dwelt in Haran. And from there, when his father was dead, He moved him to this land in which you now dwell. And God gave him no inheritance in it, not even *enough* to set his foot on. But even when *Abraham* had no child, He promised to give it to him for a possession, and to his descendants after him.”

a. **The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia:** At the very beginning, Stephen emphasized that the **God of glory appeared to** Abraham *before he even came into the Promised Land.*

i. Not only was the temple unnecessary for this revelation of **the God of glory**; the Promised Land itself was not necessary. God was greater than either, and this explained how Stephen was falsely accused of speaking against the temple. Stephen wasn't defending; he simply explained.

ii. "A single thread runs right through the first part of his defense. It is that the God of Israel is a pilgrim God, who is not restricted to any one place...If he has any home on earth, it is with his people that he lives."

iii. "So it is not as if Abraham was in Mesopotamia and God, perhaps from Mount Zion many hundreds of miles away, shouted to him, 'Abraham, come over here. I want you to come to Palestine.' Rather God appeared to him right there in Mesopotamia in all his glory."

b. **Get out of your country and from your relatives and come to a land that I will show you:** God said this to Abraham when **he was in Mesopotamia**. Yet Stephen explained that Abraham did not immediately go to Canaan (he **dwelt in Haran**) and he did not immediately leave his relatives (his father came with him to **Haran**).

i. Abraham's partial obedience did not take God's promise away.

Instead, it meant the promise was on hold until Abram was ready to do what the Lord said. The fulfillment of the promise didn't progress until Abraham left Haran and his father behind and went to the place God wanted him to go.

ii. Abraham will certainly become a giant of faith, even being the father of the believing ([Galatians 3:7](#)); yet he did not start there.

Abraham is an example of one who *grew* in faith and obedience.

c. **God gave him no inheritance... no child:** 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.

i. With this, Stephen emphasized a relationship with God on the basis of faith and not outward evidences like a temple or the structure of institutional religion and its customs.

ii. Even when Abraham was in the land, he was a pilgrim. He didn't make an idol out of the blessings God had either given or promised. This was a rebuke to the religious leaders Stephen spoke to because many among them had stopped being pilgrims and they made idols out of the blessings of the temple and the land.

3. (Acts 7:6-8) God warned Abraham and gave him the covenant.

“But God spoke in this way: that his descendants would dwell in a foreign land, and that they would bring them into bondage and oppress *them* four hundred years. ‘And the nation to whom they will be in bondage I will judge,’ said God, ‘and after that they shall come out and serve Me in this place.’ Then He gave him the covenant of circumcision; and so *Abraham* begot Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day; and Isaac *begot* Jacob, and Jacob *begot* the twelve patriarchs.”

a. **His descendants would dwell in a foreign land...into bondage:**

The promise would not be easy or light for Abraham or his descendants. Yet, God promised to judge the nation that put Israel into bondage.

i. Stephen here suggested the idea that *God knows how to take care of and protect His people*. He rested in that assurance himself and challenged the council to have the same assurance.

b. **He gave him the covenant of circumcision...Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot the twelve patriarchs:** Circumcision became the sign of the covenant for Israel, and the covenant was passed down through these descendants of Abraham.

4. (Acts 7:9-16) God's faithfulness through Joseph.

“And the patriarchs, becoming envious, sold Joseph into Egypt.

But God was with him and delivered him out of all his troubles, and gave him favor and wisdom in the presence of Pharaoh, king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house.

Now a famine and great trouble came over all the land of Egypt and Canaan, and our fathers found no sustenance. But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first.

And the second *time* Joseph was made known to his brothers, and Joseph's family became known to the Pharaoh. Then Joseph sent and called his father Jacob and all his relatives to *him*, seventy-five people. So Jacob went down to Egypt; and he died, he and our fathers. And they were carried back to Shechem and laid in the tomb that Abraham bought for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor, *the father of Shechem.*”

- a. **God was with him:** Again, Stephen emphasized the *spiritual* presence of God with Joseph all the time. Joseph did not need to go to the temple to be close to God — there was no temple. Instead, **God was with him** all the time.
- b. **Becoming envious, sold Joseph:** Stephen mentioned the story of Joseph because he is a picture of Jesus, in that the sons of Israel

rejected Joseph, who later became a savior to them (and the *only possible* savior).

c. **Seventy-five people:** [Genesis 46:27](#) says there were 70 altogether of the family of Israel, when Stephen in [Acts 7:14](#) said it was 75.

Stephen quoted from the Septuagint version of the Old Testament, which says 75. The number in the Septuagint is not wrong, just arrived at in a different way, specifically adding five more sons (or grandsons) of Joseph born in Egypt.

d. **The tomb that Abraham bought:** The only land that Abraham ever actually possessed in Canaan was this burial plot. The rest was received only by faith.

B. The story of Israel from the time of Moses.

1. ([Acts 7:17-22](#)) The early life of Moses.

“But when the time of the promise drew near which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt till another king arose who did not know Joseph. This man dealt treacherously with our people, and oppressed our forefathers, making them expose their babies, so that they might not live. At this time Moses was born and was well pleasing to God; and he was brought up in his father’s house for three months. But when he was set out,

Pharaoh's daughter took him away and brought him up as her own son. And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was mighty in words and deeds."

a. **At this time Moses was born and was well pleasing to God:**

Moses was also like Jesus in that he was favored by God from birth and preserved in childhood. As well, he was **well pleasing to God** without the temple or the customs of institutional religion.

b. **Was mighty in words and deeds:** Moses was also like Jesus who would come after him, in that he was wise, skillful with words, and a man of **mighty... deeds**.

2. **(Acts 7:23-29) Israel rejects Moses.**

"Now when he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the children of Israel. And seeing one of *them* suffer wrong, he defended and avenged him who was oppressed, and struck down the Egyptian. For he supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand. And the next day he appeared to two of them as they were fighting, and *tried to* reconcile them, saying, 'Men, you are brethren; why do you wrong one another?' But he who did his neighbor wrong pushed him away, saying, 'Who made you a ruler

and a judge over us? Do you want to kill me as you did the Egyptian yesterday?’ Then, at this saying, Moses fled and became a dweller in the land of Midian, where he had two sons.”

a. **When he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his**

brethren: At an appointed time, Moses came down from his royal throne out of care and concern for **his brethren**. This was another way that Moses was like Jesus who would come after him.

b. **He supposed that his brethren would have understood that**

God would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand:

When Moses offered deliverance to Israel, he was rejected and rejected with spite. Israel denied that he had any right to be a **ruler and a judge** over them.

i. Stephen’s message was plain: “You have rejected Jesus, who was like Moses yet greater than him, and you deny that Jesus has any right to be **a ruler and a judge** over you.”

3. **(Acts 7:30-34) God appeared to Moses at Mount Sinai.**

“And when forty years had passed, an Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire in a bush, in the wilderness of Mount Sinai. When Moses saw *it*, he marveled at the sight; and as he drew near to observe, the voice of the Lord came to him, saying, ‘I am the God

of your fathers; the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ And Moses trembled and dared not look. Then the LORD said to him, “Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground. I have surely seen the oppression of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their groaning and have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt.”

- a. **An Angel of the Lord appeared to him... in the wilderness of Mount Sinai:** Stephen again emphasized one of the main points of his reply to the council — that God, His glory, and His work was not confined to the temple. God **appeared** to Moses **in the wilderness** before there ever was a temple.
- b. **I will send you to Egypt:** Stephen emphasized that God both called and commissioned Moses.

4. **(Acts 7:35-36)** Moses was Israel’s deliverer, despite Israel’s previous rejection.

“This Moses whom they rejected, saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge?’ is the one God sent *to be* a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the Angel who appeared to him in the bush. He brought

them out, after he had shown wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red Sea, and in the wilderness forty years.”

- a. **This Moses whom they rejected:** Even though Israel had rejected Moses and his leadership, God appointed Moses with unmistakable signs, including the burning bush in the wilderness.
- b. **He brought them out:** Though Israel rejected Moses at what might be called his “first coming,” he still remained God’s chosen deliverer for Israel.

5. (Acts 7:37-41) Israel’s repeated rejection of Moses.

“This is that Moses who said to the children of Israel, ‘The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear.’ This is he who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the Angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and *with* our fathers, the one who received the living oracles to give to us, whom our fathers would not obey, but rejected. And in their hearts, they turned back to Egypt, saying to Aaron, ‘Make us gods to go before us; *as for* this Moses who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.’ And they made a calf in those days, offered sacrifices to the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands.”

a. **This is that Moses who said to the children of Israel:** Moses promised that there would come after him another **Prophet** and warned that Israel should take special care to listen to this coming **Prophet**. But just like Israel rejected Moses, so they were rejecting Jesus, who is the **Prophet** Moses spoke of.

i. Each individual should consider for themselves how they should *accept* Jesus, and not reject Him. They should receive Him as their Deliverer, the One who can rescue.

b. **This is he who was in the congregation... who received the living oracles:** Moses, like Jesus, led the **congregation** of God's people, enjoyed special intimacy with God and brought forth the revelation of God.

c. **They made a calf in those days... and rejoiced in the works of their own hands:** When ancient Israel rejected Moses and God's work through him, they replaced him with their own man-made religion. Stephen applied the same idea to the council he spoke to.

i. The phrase **and rejoiced in the works of their own hands** is especially meaningful. One of the accusations against Stephen was that he blasphemed the temple. It wasn't that Stephen spoke against the temple, but against the way Israel worshipped the temple of God instead of the God of the temple. Just as Israel

worshipped the calf in the wilderness, so now they were worshipping **the works of their own hands**.

6. (**Acts 7:42-43**) God's response to the repeated rejection of His messengers.

"Then God turned and gave them up to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the Prophets:

'Did you offer Me slaughtered animals and sacrifices *during* forty years in the wilderness,

O house of Israel?

You also took up the tabernacle of Moloch,

And the star of your god Remphan,

Images which you made to worship;

And I will carry you away beyond Babylon.'

a. **Then God turned and gave them up to worship the host of**

heaven: In their rejection of Moses and the God who sent him, Israel turned instead to corrupt idols, bringing upon themselves the judgment described in the passage quoted from **Amos 5:25-27**.

i. Stephen took the passage from Amos and changed it slightly to bring the point to his listeners. Amos said, "*beyond Damascus*"

(**Amos 5:27**), but Stephen changed it to "**beyond Babylon**."

ii. One commentator explains: “Stephen, who quotes the text, alters it, because he is not talking to the people of the northern kingdom but to the leaders of Israel in the south. It is their history that he has in mind.”

b. **God turned and gave them up to worship the host of heaven:**

The idea here is both important and awesome. Paul later built on the thought of God giving man over to his sinful desires in [Romans 1:24-32](#).

i. It makes each of us consider the question: If we reject Jesus, what will we be given up to?

7. ([Acts 7:44-50](#)) Even as Israel rejected God, they still had the tabernacle, and later the temple.

“Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as He appointed, instructing Moses to make it according to the pattern that he had seen, which our fathers, having received it in turn, also brought with Joshua into the land possessed by the Gentiles, whom God drove out before the face of our fathers until the days of David, who found favor before God and asked to find a dwelling for the God of Jacob. But Solomon built Him a house. However, the

Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands, as the prophet says:

‘Heaven *is* My throne,

And earth *is* My footstool.

What house will you build for Me? says the LORD,

Or what *is* the place of My rest?

Has My hand not made all these things?’

a. **Our fathers had the tabernacle... Solomon built Him a house:**

Stephen’s point was that the presence of the tabernacle or the temple did not keep them from rejecting God and His special messengers.

b. **However, the Most High does not dwell in temples made with**

hands: Stephen confronted their idolatry of the temple. In doing so, they tried to confine God within the temple. Yet God is too big to fit in any temple man could make.

i. On a more subtle level, many Christians do the same thing. It may not be the worship of a church building (though certainly that does take place from time to time), but it is the confinement of God to one place. In other words, the only place they meet God is at the church. As far as they are concerned, God is absent from the rest of their

lives. In the minds and lives of some today, God might as well only live at the church.

8. (Acts 7:51-53) Stephen applies the sermon to his listeners.

“You stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers *did*, so *do* you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept *it*.”

a. You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do

you: One can imagine the angry whispering among the Sanhedrin as Stephen’s history lesson began to make sense. Stephen saw this and knew they were rejecting again the One God sent, just as before.

i. “He takes the sharp knife of the Word and rips up the sins of the people, laying open the inward parts of their hearts, and the secrets of their soul...He could not have delivered that searching address with greater fearlessness had he been assured that they would thank him for the operation; the fact that his death was certain had no other effect upon him than to make him yet more zealous.”

b. **You stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears!** Drawing on concepts from the Old Testament, Stephen rebuked those who rejected Jesus as **stiff-necked** (as Israel is described in passages like [Exodus 32:9](#)), and as **uncircumcised in heart and ears** (as Israel is described in passages like [Jeremiah 9:26](#)).

i. In using the two phrases together, he may have in mind a passage like [Deuteronomy 10:16](#): *Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer.*

ii. Almost 20 times in the Old Testament, God calls Israel **stiff-necked**. These religious leaders were acting just as their forefathers acted.

iii. Israel prided itself on the sign of circumcision because it separated them from the Gentiles. Stephen essentially said, “You are just like the Gentiles in your rejection of the Lord.”

c. **You now have become the betrayers and murderers:** Stephen’s main point was unmistakable: “As Israel was in its history, so you are today. God gave you the law, but you **have not kept it.**”

d. **Who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it:** This accusation must have outraged the members of the council. They prided themselves on their obedience to the law, even as the Apostle Paul would later claim of his pre-Christian

thinking: *concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless* ([Philippians 3:6](#)).

i. Though it must have offended the council, Stephen's message was true. First, *God is no respecter of places*; that is, though the temple was a wonderful gift from God, it was wrong to overemphasize it as "the house of God." Second, *Israel at that time was guilty of what they had often been guilty of: rejecting God's messengers*.

ii. Jesus said that it is impossible for old wineskins to hold new wine ([Matthew 9:17](#)). Through Stephen, the Holy Spirit showed how the old traditions of Judaism (especially the over-emphasis on the temple) could not contain the new wine of Christianity.

iii. God used Stephen's coming martyrdom to send the church out into the entire world, but God also used Stephen's message to show that there was no *theological* reason to prevent the gospel from going to the Gentiles.

iv. The whole idea behind a permanent, stationary temple is "you come to me." This is why Israel, though they were a light to the nations, mainly thought in terms of the world coming to *them* for salvation. Through the church, God would show a different heart: "I will come to you," including to the Gentiles.

C. The council's reaction to the sermon of Stephen.

1. (Acts 7:54) They **were cut to the heart** and convicted by the Holy Spirit.

When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with *their* teeth.

a. **They were cut to the heart:** The council was angry, but because Stephen's message had hit the target. They could not dismiss or ignore what he said. The Sanhedrin reacted with rage instead of submission to the Holy Spirit.

b. **They gnashed at him with their teeth:** It is remarkable to think of this response from men who were dignified, respected leaders in Israel. This would be as if a group of senators ground their teeth in anger in response to the testimony of a witness at a hearing.

i. The idea of **gnashed at him with their teeth** can't help but remind us of the imagery of Hell. Seven different times, Jesus described Hell as a place of *weeping and gnashing of teeth* (Matthew 8:12). These men were prominent, successful, and appeared to be religious; yet they were rejecting God and associating themselves with hell, not heaven.

ii. They began grinding their teeth before Stephen finished his speech. “All they could do in their frenzy was to gnash with their teeth. It was not a sudden outburst, but the tense rather shows that it was prolonged.”

2. (Acts 7:55-56) Stephen’s vision of Jesus.

But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, “Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!”

a. **But he, being full of the Holy Spirit:** This was a great contrast to the behavior of the council. The fact that Stephen was **full of the Holy Spirit** shows the source of his courage, wisdom, and power in preaching.

i. Commentator J.B. Phillips’ translation has insight: *Stephen, filled through all his being with the Holy Spirit.* This is how we should be filled with the Holy Spirit.

b. **Saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God:** It is difficult to describe exactly what Stephen saw. We can’t say if this was a personal vision or if some sort of “window to heaven” was

opened but going beyond the plain description of the text is pure speculation.

c. **Jesus standing at the right hand of God:** It is significant to note Jesus is **standing** here, as opposed to the more common description of Him *sitting* in heaven ([Matthew 26:64](#), [Colossians 3:1](#)), at the right hand of God the Father.

i. We can suppose that **Jesus** was **standing** here in solidarity with Stephen at this moment of crisis. He does not react impassionately to the problems of His people.

ii. We might also consider that Jesus stood to give a standing ovation to Stephen, whose fate made him unique among believers. Among all the followers of Jesus, Stephen was the first martyr.

iii. Jesus said, *Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven* ([Matthew 10:32](#)). Jesus may have also stood to plead Stephen's case before God the Father, assuring that though he was found guilty and punished on earth, he was found righteous and rewarded in heaven.

iv. "Stephen has been confessing Christ before men, and now he sees Christ confessing his servant before God."

3. (Acts 7:57-58) The execution of Stephen by stoning.

Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; and they cast *him* out of the city and stoned *him*. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

a. **Then they cried out with a loud voice:** When Stephen declared that he saw Jesus *standing at the right hand of God*, it was too much. The Sanhedrin reacted quickly, violently, and together. When Jesus, before this same body of men, declared that He would sit at the right hand of God, they had the same reaction and sealed his death as a blasphemer (Matthew 26:64-66).

i. “For Stephen to suggest that the crucified Jesus stood in a position of authority at the right hand of God must have ranked as blasphemy in the thinking of those who knew that a crucified man died under the divine curse.”

b. **They cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord:** These were distinguished, older men behaving this way. The reaction of the Sanhedrin seems extreme but is typical of those who reject God and are lost in spiritual insanity. They wailed

in agony and covered their ears at the revelation of God, which they regarded as blasphemy.

i. It is a dangerous thing to be religious apart from a real relationship with Jesus Christ. This fulfills what Jesus warned about in [John 16:2-3](#): *Yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service. And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me.*

c. **Ran at him:** This uses the ancient Greek word *hormao*. This is the same word used to describe the mad rush of the herd of swine into the sea ([Mark 5:13](#)). This was an out-of-control mob rushing at Stephen.

d. **They cast him out of the city and stoned him:** The extent of their rage was shown by their execution of Stephen, which was done without regard for Roman law, and which was performed according to traditional Jewish custom (stoning).

i. The second-century Jewish writing *Mishnah*, described the practice of stoning: “When the trial is finished, the man convicted is brought out to be stoned...When ten cubits from the place of stoning they say to him, ‘Confess, for it is the custom of all about to be put to death to make confession, and everyone who confesses

has a share in the age to come'...Four cubits from the place of stoning the criminal is stripped...The drop from the place of stoning was twice the height of a man. One of the witnesses pushes the criminal from behind, so that he falls face downward. He is then turned over on his back. If he dies from this fall, that is sufficient. If not, the second witness takes the stone and drops it on his heart. If this causes death, that is sufficient; if not, he is stoned by all the congregation of Israel."

e. **And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul:** Saul stood there as the supervisor of the operation. As a member of the Sanhedrin, he had also approved of Stephen's execution.

i. **Young man** literally means, "a man in his prime." It certainly does not mean that Saul wasn't old enough to be a member of the Sanhedrin. In [Acts 26:10](#), Paul says *I cast my vote against them*, and the plain implication was that he had a vote as a member of the Sanhedrin.

4. ([Acts 7:59-60](#)) Stephen's last words.

And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not charge them with this sin.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

a. **They stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”** Stephen’s life ended in the same way it had been lived: In complete trust in God, believing that Jesus would take care of him in the life to come.

i. “The fires... in the olden days never made martyrs; they revealed them. No hurricane of persecution ever creates martyrs; it reveals them. Stephen was a martyr before they stoned him. He was the first martyr to seal his testimony with his blood.”

b. **Lord, do not charge them with this sin:** God answered Stephen’s prayer, and used it to touch the heart of a man who energetically agreed with his stoning — even though the man didn’t know the prayer was being answered. When we get to heaven, we should thank Stephen for every blessing brought through the ministry of Saul of Tarsus.

i. God heard Stephen’s prayer, and Paul is the evidence of it. We have no idea how greatly God can use us in our times of suffering.

ii. Augustine said, “If Stephen had not prayed, the church would not have had Paul.”

c. **Cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not charge them with this sin”**: Stephen displayed the same forgiving attitude that Jesus had on the cross ([Luke 23:34](#)). He asked God to forgive his accusers, and he made the promises loudly and publicly.

i. If the gospels contain that which Jesus *began* to do and to teach, they also only contain that which Jesus *began* to suffer. There was a sense in which Jesus suffered along with Stephen as he was martyred.

d. **He fell asleep**: The text describes the passing of Stephen as tenderly as possible. Instead of saying simply that he died, it says that he merely **fell asleep** — with the idea that he woke up in a much better world.

i. If Stephen **fell asleep**, the church had to wake up. “If there had been any rose-colored optimism about quickly winning the Jewish people to their Messiah, that was gone. The Church could not expect triumph without a bloody battle.”

ii. Stephen wasn't a superman, but he was a man filled through all his being with the Holy Spirit. Many have little idea of how greatly they can be used of God as they walk in the power of the Holy Spirit.