

Stephen's Speech

1. The challenge
2. Stephen and the accusations against him
3. Observation and exposition of Acts 7
4. The take-away for us?

The challenge

1. How to handle **Acts 7**?
 - a. Ed's recurring question - "How are you going to teach Acts 7?"
 - b. No more avoiding or postponing it...!
 - c. Spend weeks exploring and unpacking all the nuances, OT quotes and allusions, details and intricacies?
 - d. Or tackle it in one comprehensive hour, trying to capture the flow and thought of Stephen's argument?

Stephen and the accusations against him

1. Stephen
 - a. "a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit" (**6:5**)
 - b. "full of grace and power" (**6:8**)
 - c. "the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking" (**6:10**)
2. The (false?) accusations against him?
 - a. **6:11**
 - i. Blasphemy against Moses and God
 - b. **6:13**
 - i. Speaking against this holy place and the law
 - c. **6:14**
 - i. "Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us"

Observation and exposition of Acts 7

1. General observations
 - a. Timeline?
 - i. Depending on who you read, still the same year as Jesus' death and resurrection, to one or two years later
 - b. Stephen does not defend himself
 - c. Themes

- i. God is not restricted to any one place on earth, such as the Jerusalem temple, the city of Jerusalem, or the land of Israel (Palestine)
- ii. Joseph, Moses, the prophets, and Jesus were all rejected and/or persecuted
 - 1. Joseph and Moses are “types” or “foreshadows” of Jesus
 - 2. Though rejected, Joseph, Moses, and Jesus still redeemed their people
- d. Pay attention to Stephen’s use of pronouns as the speech progresses
- e. “Stephen’s ultimate aim is to glorify the exalted Lord Jesus and to convict those who have denied him.” Peterson, 244
- f. “Stephen’s speech was not so much a self-defence as a testimony to Christ. His main theme was positive, that Jesus the Messiah had come to replace the temple and fulfil the law, which both bore witness to him.” Stott, 141
- g. “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; Stephen here shows himself to be the precursor of the later Christian apologists, especially those who defended Christianity against Judaism.” Bruce, 130

2. Can we identify the structure of Stephen’s speech?

- a. 4 major epochs (Stott)
 - i. (Dates are from ESV Study Bible OT Timeline, 1446 date for Exodus)
 - ii. Abraham (2166-1991)
 - iii. Joseph (1915-1805)
 - iv. Moses (1526-1406)
 - v. David (1010-971) and Solomon (971-931)
- b. Rhetorical character and structure (Peterson)
 - i. **(2-34)** Narration, establishing common ground with the audience
 - ii. **(35-50)** Argument (challenge!)
 - iii. **(51-53)** Appeal to (accusation or charge about) their spiritual condition
- c. The three great pillars of popular Jewish piety (Peterson)
 - i. **(2-36)** the land
 - ii. **(37-43)** the law
 - iii. **(44-50)** the temple
- d. Literary or theological structure (Peterson)
 - i. **(2-8)** Foundational promises to Abraham
 - 1. Land, offspring, worship, covenant of circumcision
 - ii. **(9-16)** Joseph blessed with grace and wisdom for the salvation of God’s people

1. Compare with Stephen's grace and wisdom
 - iii. **(17-38)** Moses blessed with wisdom and power, in words and deeds, for the salvation of God's people
 1. Compare with Stephen's wisdom and power
 - iv. **(39-53)** Jesus rejected as part of a continuing pattern of disobedience to God
 - v. **(54-56)** Jesus as the glorified Son of Man
 1. This is the climax and conclusion of Stephen's speech!
3. Read **Acts 7** and discuss, paragraph by paragraph

The take-away for us

1. Read Stott, page 143

Resources

1. *The Acts of the Apostles*, F. F. Bruce
2. *The Book of the Acts*, F. F. Bruce
3. *The Acts of the Apostles*, David G. Peterson
4. *The Message of Acts*, John Stott
5. *The Acts of the Apostles*, Ben Witherington III