

LIVING WITH PURPOSE

STEADFAST



YOUR TOP FEARS



THE STORY OF STEPHEN

1. STEPHEN'S DEBATE WITH THE FREEDMEN 6:8-10
2. CHARGES AGAINST STEPHEN 6:11 - 7:1
3. STEPHEN'S DEFENCE 7:2-53
4. STEPHEN'S MARTYRDOM 7:54-60



1. STEPHEN'S DEBATE WITH THE FREEDMEN 6:8-10

THE FREEDMEN

- ^{NIV} **ACTS 6:9** OPPOSITION AROSE, HOWEVER, FROM MEMBERS OF THE SYNAGOGUE OF THE FREEDMEN (AS IT WAS CALLED)-- JEWS OF CYRENE AND ALEXANDRIA AS WELL AS THE PROVINCES OF CILICIA AND ASIA. THESE MEN BEGAN TO ARGUE WITH STEPHEN
- VINCENT – FREEDMEN ARE “JEWS OR THEIR DESCENDANTS WHO HAD BEEN TAKEN AS SLAVES TO ROME, AND HAD THERE RECEIVED THEIR LIBERTY; AND WHO, IN CONSEQUENCE OF THE DECREE OF TIBERIUS, ABOUT 19 A.D., EXPELLING THEM FROM ROME, HAD RETURNED IN GREAT NUMBERS TO JERUSALEM.”

STEPHEN

- ^{NIV} **ACTS 6:8** NOW STEPHEN, A MAN FULL OF GOD'S GRACE AND POWER ...
- ^{ESV} **ACTS 6:3** THEREFORE, BROTHERS, PICK OUT FROM AMONG YOU SEVEN MEN OF GOOD REPUTE, FULL OF THE SPIRIT AND OF WISDOM...

STEPHEN

- ^{NIV} **ACTS 6:8** NOW STEPHEN, ...DID GREAT WONDERS AND MIRACULOUS SIGNS AMONG THE PEOPLE. **10** BUT THEY COULD NOT STAND UP AGAINST HIS WISDOM OR THE SPIRIT BY WHOM HE SPOKE.
- ^{NIV} **ACTS 4:29** NOW, LORD, CONSIDER THEIR THREATS AND ENABLE YOUR SERVANTS TO SPEAK YOUR WORD WITH GREAT BOLDNESS. ³⁰ STRETCH OUT YOUR HAND TO HEAL AND PERFORM MIRACULOUS SIGNS AND WONDERS THROUGH THE NAME OF YOUR HOLY SERVANT JESUS."



- 2. CHARGES AGAINST STEPHEN 6:11 - 7:1

THE COURT

- ^{NIV} **ACTS 6:12** SO THEY STIRRED UP THE PEOPLE AND THE ELDERS AND THE TEACHERS OF THE LAW. THEY SEIZED STEPHEN AND BROUGHT HIM BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN.

THE CHARGES

- ^{NIV} **ACTS 6:11** THEN THEY SECRETLY PERSUADED SOME MEN TO SAY, "WE HAVE HEARD STEPHEN SPEAK WORDS OF BLASPHEMY AGAINST MOSES AND AGAINST GOD."...
¹³ THEY PRODUCED FALSE WITNESSES, WHO TESTIFIED, "THIS FELLOW NEVER STOPS SPEAKING AGAINST THIS HOLY PLACE AND AGAINST THE LAW.

GOOD COMPANY

- ^{NIV} **MATTHEW 26:59** THE CHIEF PRIESTS AND THE WHOLE SANHEDRIN WERE LOOKING FOR FALSE EVIDENCE AGAINST JESUS SO THAT THEY COULD PUT HIM TO DEATH. ⁶⁰ BUT THEY DID NOT FIND ANY, THOUGH MANY FALSE WITNESSES CAME FORWARD. FINALLY TWO CAME FORWARD ... ⁶⁵ THEN THE HIGH PRIEST TORE HIS CLOTHES AND SAID, "HE HAS SPOKEN BLASPHEMY! WHY DO WE NEED ANY MORE WITNESSES? LOOK, NOW YOU HAVE HEARD THE BLASPHEMY.



3. STEPHEN'S DEFENCE 7:2-53

TURNING THE TABLES

- CHARGES AGAINST STEPHEN:
 - BLASPHEMY AGAINST MOSES, GOD, THE TEMPLE, THE LAW
- STEPHEN'S DEFENCE:
 - DEMONSTRATES HE IS FAITHFUL TO MOSES, GOD, THE TEMPLE, THE LAW
 - DEMONSTRATES THAT IT IS HIS ACCUSERS WHO ARE THE ONES GUILTY OF BLASPHEMY AGAINST MOSES, GOD, THE TEMPLE, THE LAW

- ^{NIV} **ACTS 7:51** "YOU STIFF-NECKED PEOPLE, WITH UNCIRCUMCISED HEARTS AND EARS! YOU ARE JUST LIKE YOUR FATHERS: YOU ALWAYS RESIST THE HOLY SPIRIT! ⁵² WAS THERE EVER A PROPHET YOUR FATHERS DID NOT PERSECUTE? THEY EVEN KILLED THOSE WHO PREDICTED THE COMING OF THE RIGHTEOUS ONE. AND NOW YOU HAVE BETRAYED AND MURDERED HIM-- ⁵³ YOU WHO HAVE RECEIVED THE LAW THAT WAS PUT INTO EFFECT THROUGH ANGELS BUT HAVE NOT OBEYED IT."

Table 1.
Paired Positive and Negative Exempla in Stephen's Speech
 (Reich 2005)

Encomium for Those Accepting God's Message and Messengers	Invective against Those Rejecting God's Message and Messengers
7:2–8 Abraham (obeys God; receives promise)	7:2–8 Egyptians (unnamed but represent nation who enslaved and ill-treated Abraham's seed for four hundred years)
7:9 Joseph (God was with him)	7:9–10 Joseph's brothers (patriarchs who were jealous and thus sold Joseph, rejecting God's representative)
7:30–39 Moses (God sends him to liberate Jewish slaves; raised up as a prophet; received living oracles)	7:35–41 Israelites in wilderness (reject Moses; in disobedience, make a golden calf to worship; reject worship of God)
7:52 Prophets (prophesied the coming of the Righteous One)	7:52 Ancestors (killed the prophets, thus rejecting God's representatives)
7:52 The Righteous One (God's appointed one)	7:52 Stephen's audience (betrayed and murdered the Righteous One, God's representative)
7:54–60 Stephen (representing the church; full of faith and Spirit [6:5]; sees vision of God; martyr's death)	7:54–60 Stephen's audience (kills Stephen, God's representative)

THE CHURCH AS THE TRUE ISRAEL

Reading the speech through the lens of *synkrisis*, however, yields a different conclusion. Stephen is not pitting Christianity over against Judaism; rather, he is aligning himself and his group with what he considers to be the “best” in Jewish history. And throughout this argument, the Lukan Stephen appeals constantly to Israel’s scripture and story. Luke’s use of the OT, especially in constructing the argument of Acts 7, must be understood within a larger rhetorical and theological framework. There are in his version of Israel’s history two Jewish groups: those who accept God’s message and messengers and those who reject. The *synkrisis* Stephen develops in Acts 7 aligns Stephen and the church with Abraham, Joseph, the prophets, and Jesus. His opponents are aligned with the Egyptians, Joseph’s brothers, the rebellious in the wilderness who disobeyed Moses, and the ancestors who killed the prophets. For Luke, rather than rejecting God’s house or God’s law, the church is in line with the faithful in Jewish history who have sought to keep covenant with God.

- ^{NIV} **GALATIANS 6:15** NEITHER CIRCUMCISION NOR UNCIRCUMCISION MEANS ANYTHING; WHAT COUNTS IS A NEW CREATION. ¹⁶ PEACE AND MERCY TO ALL WHO FOLLOW THIS RULE, EVEN TO THE ISRAEL OF GOD.
- ^{NIV} **GALATIANS 3:29** IF YOU BELONG TO CHRIST, THEN YOU ARE ABRAHAM'S SEED, AND HEIRS ACCORDING TO THE PROMISE.
- ^{NAS} **ROMANS 2:28** FOR HE IS NOT A JEW WHO IS ONE OUTWARDLY; NEITHER IS CIRCUMCISION THAT WHICH IS OUTWARD IN THE FLESH. ²⁹ BUT HE IS A JEW WHO IS ONE INWARDLY; AND CIRCUMCISION IS THAT WHICH IS OF THE HEART, BY THE SPIRIT, NOT BY THE LETTER ...



4. STEPHEN'S MARTYRDOM 7:54-60

THE FIRST MARTYR

- ^{NAS} **ACTS 7:54** NOW WHEN THEY HEARD THIS, THEY WERE CUT TO THE QUICK, AND THEY *BEGAN* GNASHING THEIR TEETH AT HIM ... ⁵⁷ BUT THEY CRIED OUT WITH A LOUD VOICE, AND COVERED THEIR EARS, AND THEY RUSHED UPON HIM WITH ONE IMPULSE. ⁵⁸ AND WHEN THEY HAD DRIVEN HIM OUT OF THE CITY, THEY *BEGAN* STONING *HIM*, AND THE WITNESSES LAID ASIDE THEIR ROBES AT THE FEET OF A YOUNG MAN NAMED SAUL. ⁵⁹ AND THEY WENT ON STONING STEPHEN ...⁶⁰ AND FALLING ON HIS KNEES, HE CRIED OUT WITH A LOUD VOICE ... AND ... HE FELL ASLEEP.

LAST WORDS

- ^{NIV} **ACTS 7:59** WHILE THEY WERE STONING HIM, STEPHEN PRAYED, "LORD JESUS, RECEIVE MY SPIRIT."
- ^{NIV} **LUKE 23:46** JESUS CALLED OUT WITH A LOUD VOICE, "FATHER, INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMIT MY SPIRIT." ...
- ^{NIV} **ACTS 7:60** THEN HE FELL ON HIS KNEES AND CRIED OUT, "LORD, DO NOT HOLD THIS SIN AGAINST THEM." ...
- ^{NIV} **LUKE 23:34** JESUS SAID, "FATHER, FORGIVE THEM, FOR THEY DO NOT KNOW WHAT THEY ARE DOING." ...

STEPHEN'S COURAGE

- ^{NAS} **ACTS 7:55** BUT BEING FULL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, HE GAZED INTENTLY INTO HEAVEN AND SAW THE GLORY OF GOD, AND JESUS STANDING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD; ⁵⁶ AND HE SAID, "BEHOLD, I SEE THE HEAVENS OPENED UP AND THE SON OF MAN STANDING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD."
 - TO FIX ONE'S EYES ON SOME OBJECT CONTINUALLY AND INTENSELY - 'TO LOOK STRAIGHT AT, TO STARE AT, TO KEEP ONE'S EYES FIXED ON.'

RIGHT HAND OF GOD

- ^{NAS} **LUKE 22:69** "BUT FROM NOW ON THE SON OF MAN WILL BE SEATED AT THE RIGHT HAND OF THE POWER OF GOD."
- ^{ESV} **MARK 16:19** SO THEN THE LORD JESUS, AFTER HE HAD SPOKEN TO THEM, WAS TAKEN UP INTO HEAVEN AND SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD.
- ^{NAS} **COLOSSIANS 3:1** IF THEN YOU HAVE BEEN RAISED UP WITH CHRIST, KEEP SEEKING THE THINGS ABOVE, WHERE CHRIST IS, SEATED AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD.
- ^{ESV} **HEBREWS 10:12** BUT WHEN CHRIST HAD OFFERED FOR ALL TIME A SINGLE SACRIFICE FOR SINS, HE SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD,

BUT ...

- ^{NAS} **ACTS 7:55** BUT BEING FULL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, HE GAZED INTENTLY INTO HEAVEN AND SAW THE GLORY OF GOD, AND JESUS STANDING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD; ⁵⁶ AND HE SAID, "BEHOLD, I SEE THE HEAVENS OPENED UP AND THE SON OF MAN STANDING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD."
 - INTERCESSION
 - HOSPITALITY

INTERCESSION

- ^{ESV} **ROMANS 8:34** WHO IS TO CONDEMN? CHRIST JESUS IS THE ONE WHO DIED--MORE THAN THAT, WHO WAS RAISED--WHO IS AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD, WHO INDEED IS INTERCEDING FOR US.
- ^{ESV} **HEBREWS 7:25** CONSEQUENTLY, HE IS ABLE TO SAVE TO THE UTMOST THOSE WHO DRAW NEAR TO GOD THROUGH HIM, SINCE HE ALWAYS LIVES TO MAKE INTERCESSION FOR THEM.
- ^{ESV} **JOHN 16:33** I HAVE SAID THESE THINGS TO YOU, THAT IN ME YOU MAY HAVE PEACE. IN THE WORLD YOU WILL HAVE TRIBULATION. BUT TAKE HEART; I HAVE OVERCOME THE WORLD."

HOSPITALITY

- ^{NIV} **JOHN 14:2** IN MY FATHER'S HOUSE ARE MANY ROOMS; IF IT WERE NOT SO, I WOULD HAVE TOLD YOU. I AM GOING THERE TO PREPARE A PLACE FOR YOU. ³ AND IF I GO AND PREPARE A PLACE FOR YOU, I WILL COME BACK AND TAKE YOU TO BE WITH ME THAT YOU ALSO MAY BE WHERE I AM.
- ^{NIV} **HEBREWS 9:28** SO CHRIST WAS SACRIFICED ONCE TO TAKE AWAY THE SINS OF MANY PEOPLE; AND HE WILL APPEAR A SECOND TIME, NOT TO BEAR SIN, BUT TO BRING SALVATION TO THOSE WHO ARE WAITING FOR HIM.
- ^{NIV} **HEBREWS 6:19** WE HAVE THIS HOPE AS AN ANCHOR FOR THE SOUL, FIRM AND SECURE. IT ENTERS THE INNER SANCTUARY BEHIND THE CURTAIN,



CONCLUSIONS

STEADFAST IN THE FACE OF FEAR

- ^{NAS} **ACTS 7:55** BUT BEING FULL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, HE GAZED INTENTLY INTO HEAVEN AND SAW THE GLORY OF GOD, AND JESUS STANDING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD

- ^{NIV} **JOHN 10:28** I GIVE THEM ETERNAL LIFE, AND THEY SHALL NEVER PERISH; NO ONE CAN SNATCH THEM OUT OF MY HAND. ²⁹ MY FATHER, WHO HAS GIVEN THEM TO ME, IS GREATER THAN ALL; NO ONE CAN SNATCH THEM OUT OF MY FATHER'S HAND. ³⁰ I AND THE FATHER ARE ONE.“
- ^{NIV} **HEBREWS 12:2** LET US FIX OUR EYES ON JESUS, THE AUTHOR AND PERFECTER OF OUR FAITH, WHO FOR THE JOY SET BEFORE HIM ENDURED THE CROSS, SCORNING ITS SHAME, AND SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF THE THRONE OF GOD.
- ^{NAS} **PHILIPPIANS 4:13** I CAN DO ALL THINGS THROUGH HIM WHO STRENGTHENS ME.