

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Acts Chapter 7 — Stephen's Speech and Martyrdom

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

Acts Chapter 7 contains the longest recorded speech in the book of Acts and one of the most powerful defenses of the Christian faith in the New Testament.

Stephen stands before the Sanhedrin accused of speaking against:

Moses.

The law.

The temple.

Instead of merely defending himself, Stephen walks the council through Israel's history.

He speaks about:

- Abraham.
- Isaac.
- Jacob.
- Joseph.
- Moses.
- Israel in the wilderness.
- The tabernacle.
- David.
- Solomon.
- The prophets.

Stephen's argument is not random.

He is demonstrating several major truths.

First:

God's presence has never been confined to one location.

God appeared to Abraham in Mesopotamia.

God was with Joseph in Egypt.

God appeared to Moses in the wilderness.

God led Israel through the desert.

Therefore the religious leaders were wrong to think God's presence could be restricted to the temple.

Second:

Israel repeatedly rejected the very servants God sent to deliver them.

Joseph was rejected by his brothers.

Moses was rejected by his own people.

The prophets were persecuted.

Now the leaders had rejected Jesus Christ.

Third:

Religious privilege does not guarantee spiritual obedience.

Israel possessed:

The covenant.

Circumcision.

The law.

The tabernacle.

The temple.

The prophets.

Yet again and again the people resisted God.

Finally Stephen turns directly toward the council and says:

“You always resist the Holy Spirit—just as your ancestors did.”

The council becomes furious.

Stephen, however, remains full of the Holy Spirit.

He looks into heaven and sees:

The glory of God.

And:

Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

The council drags Stephen outside the city and stones him.

As he dies, Stephen prays two prayers remarkably similar to the prayers of Jesus from the cross.

First:

“Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”

Then:

“Lord, do not hold this sin against them.”

Stephen becomes the first recorded Christian martyr in Acts.

Yet his death is not the end of the story.

Standing nearby is a young man named:

Saul.

The man who watches Stephen die will eventually become Paul the apostle and carry the gospel across the Roman world.

Acts 7 therefore teaches:

God's purposes continue even when His servants are rejected, persecuted, and killed, because His presence is not confined to buildings and His truth cannot be destroyed by human opposition.

I. STEPHEN IS QUESTIONED

Acts 7:1 — “Are These Things True?”

“Then the high priest asked Stephen, ‘Are these things true?’”

Stephen has been accused of speaking against Moses, the law, and the temple.

Now he is given an opportunity to answer.

Cross References

John 18:19

The high priest questioned Jesus about His disciples and His teaching.

Matthew 26:62

The high priest stood up and said to Jesus, “Are You going to answer? What do You say about these accusations against You?”

Mark 14:60

The high priest stood before them and asked Jesus, “Are You not going to answer the accusations these men are bringing against You?”

Spiritual Principle

False accusation can become an opportunity for faithful testimony.

Stephen does not panic.

He does not respond with insults.

He begins with Scripture.

II. THE GOD OF GLORY APPEARS TO ABRAHAM

Acts 7:2

“Stephen replied, ‘Brothers and fathers, listen to me. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran.’”

Stephen begins before the temple.

Before Moses.

Before Israel possessed the promised land.

God appeared to Abraham in Mesopotamia.

Cross References

Genesis 11:31

Terah took Abram, Lot, and Sarai and left Ur of the Chaldeans intending to go toward Canaan. They traveled as far as Haran and settled there.

Genesis 15:7

The Lord told Abram, “I am the Lord who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land as your possession.”

Nehemiah 9:7

You are the Lord God who chose Abram, brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans, and gave him the name Abraham.

Key Truth

God's presence was active before there was a temple in Jerusalem.

Stephen is already challenging the idea that God can be confined to one building.

III. GOD CALLS ABRAHAM TO LEAVE

Acts 7:3

“God said, ‘Leave your country and your relatives, and go to the land I will show you.’”

Abraham's journey began with a divine command.

Cross References

Genesis 12:1

The Lord told Abram, “Leave your country, your relatives, and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.”

Hebrews 11:8

By faith Abraham obeyed when God called him to go to a place he would later receive as an inheritance. He went out even though he did not know where he was going.

Genesis 12:4

Abram went as the Lord had told him, and Lot went with him.

Spiritual Principle

Faith obeys God before it sees the entire path.

Abraham did not receive every detail.

He received enough truth to obey.

IV. ABRAHAM MOVES TOWARD THE PROMISE

Acts 7:4

“So Abraham left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. After his father died, God brought him to this land where you now live.”

God progressively led Abraham toward the land of promise.

Cross References

Genesis 11:32

Terah lived 205 years and died in Haran.

Genesis 12:5

Abram took Sarai, Lot, all their possessions, and the people connected with their household, and they set out for the land of Canaan.

Genesis 13:12

Abram lived in the land of Canaan while Lot settled near the cities of the plain.

Spiritual Principle

God's promises often unfold through stages rather than all at once.

V. ABRAHAM LIVES BY PROMISE

Acts 7:5

“God gave him no inheritance here, not even enough ground to put his foot on. But He promised to give it to him and to his descendants, even though Abraham had no child at the time.”

Abraham lived in the land but did not possess it as an inheritance during most of his life.

He lived by promise.

Cross References

Genesis 12:7

The Lord appeared to Abram and said, “I will give this land to your descendants.”

Genesis 15:3

Abram said, “You have given me no child, so someone born in my household will become my heir.”

Genesis 17:8

God told Abraham, “I will give you and your descendants the land where you now live as foreigners, all the land of Canaan, as a permanent possession, and I will be their God.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Faith sometimes lives on a promise long before it possesses the fulfillment.

VI. GOD FORETELLS ISRAEL'S SUFFERING

Acts 7:6

“God told him, ‘Your descendants will be strangers in a foreign land, where they will be enslaved and mistreated for four hundred years.’”

Israel's suffering in Egypt did not surprise God.

Cross References

Genesis 15:13

God told Abram, “Know for certain that your descendants will live as foreigners in a land that is not theirs. They will be enslaved and oppressed for four hundred years.”

Exodus 1:14

The Egyptians made the Israelites' lives bitter with hard labor involving mortar, bricks, and every kind of field work.

Galatians 3:17

Paul explains that the law came 430 years after God's covenant promise and did not cancel the promise God had already established.

Spiritual Principle

God's foreknowledge of suffering does not mean God has lost control during suffering.

VII. GOD WILL JUDGE THE OPPRESSOR

Acts 7:7

“But I will judge the nation that enslaves them, and afterward they will come out and worship Me in this place.”

God promised both:

Judgment.

And deliverance.

Cross References

Genesis 15:14

God said, “I will judge the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with many possessions.”

Exodus 3:12

God told Moses, “I will certainly be with you. When you bring the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.”

Exodus 7:4

The Lord said, “Pharaoh will not listen to you, so I will lay My hand upon Egypt and bring My people out by great acts of judgment.”

Key Truth

God sees oppression, remembers His covenant, and acts according to His timing.

VIII. THE COVENANT OF CIRCUMCISION

Acts 7:8

“Then God gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision. So Abraham became the father of Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day. Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of the twelve patriarchs.”

Stephen acknowledges Israel's covenant heritage.

He is not rejecting Israel's history.

He is demonstrating that he understands it.

Cross References

Genesis 17:10

God told Abraham, “This is My covenant with you and your descendants: every male among you must be circumcised.”

Genesis 21:4

Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, just as God commanded.

Genesis 49:28

These are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father Jacob said when he blessed them.

Spiritual Principle

Religious signs are meaningful, but outward covenant signs never replace inward obedience to God.

That becomes central later in Stephen's sermon.

IX. THE PATRIARCHS REJECT JOSEPH

Acts 7:9

“The patriarchs were jealous of Joseph, so they sold him into slavery in Egypt. But God was with him.”

This begins one of Stephen's major patterns.

The brothers rejected Joseph.

But God was with Joseph.

Cross References

Genesis 37:11

Joseph's brothers became jealous of him, but his father kept thinking about what Joseph had said.

Genesis 37:28

When the Midianite traders came by, Joseph's brothers pulled him from the pit and sold him for twenty pieces of silver. The traders took Joseph to Egypt.

Genesis 39:2

The Lord was with Joseph, and he became successful while serving in the house of his Egyptian master.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Human rejection does not cancel divine presence.

Joseph was rejected by his brothers.

But:

“God was with him.”

X. GOD EXALTS THE REJECTED JOSEPH

Acts 7:10

“And rescued him from all his troubles. God gave Joseph wisdom and favor before Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who made him governor over Egypt and all his household.”

The rejected brother becomes the ruler who will later save the family.

Cross References

Genesis 41:40

Pharaoh told Joseph, “You will be over my household, and all my people will obey your commands. Only in the throne itself will I be greater than you.”

Psalm 105:21

Pharaoh made Joseph master over his household and ruler over everything he possessed.

Genesis 41:39

Pharaoh told Joseph, “Since God has revealed all this to you, there is no one as wise and discerning as you.”

Spiritual Principle

God can use rejection as part of the path toward His greater purpose.

Joseph becomes an important picture in Stephen's argument.

The one rejected by his own people later becomes their deliverer.

XI. FAMINE BRINGS THE BROTHERS TO JOSEPH

Acts 7:11–12

“Then a famine struck Egypt and Canaan, bringing great suffering. Our fathers could find no food. But when Jacob heard there was grain in Egypt, he sent our fathers there the first time.”

Cross References

Genesis 41:54

The seven years of famine began, just as Joseph had predicted. The famine spread throughout the lands, but there was food in Egypt.

Genesis 42:5

Jacob's sons went to Egypt to buy grain because the famine had reached Canaan.

Genesis 41:57

People from many lands came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph because the famine was severe everywhere.

Genesis 42:2

Jacob told his sons, “I have heard there is grain in Egypt. Go down there and buy some so we may live and not die.”

Genesis 42:3

Ten of Joseph's brothers went down to Egypt to buy grain.

Genesis 43:1

The famine continued to be severe in the land.

Spiritual Principle

God can use circumstances people fear to bring them toward the very provision He has prepared.

XII. JOSEPH REVEALS HIMSELF

Acts 7:13

“On their second visit, Joseph revealed himself to his brothers, and Pharaoh came to know Joseph’s family.”

The rejected brother is finally recognized.

Cross References

Genesis 45:1

Joseph could no longer control his emotions. He ordered everyone except his brothers to leave, and then he revealed himself to them.

Genesis 45:3

Joseph told his brothers, “I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?” His brothers were terrified and could not answer him.

Genesis 45:16

News reached Pharaoh's palace that Joseph's brothers had arrived, and Pharaoh and his officials were pleased.

Spiritual Principle

Recognition sometimes comes after rejection.

Stephen is building toward Jesus.

Israel had rejected Christ.

But rejection did not change His true identity.

XIII. JACOB'S FAMILY COMES TO EGYPT

Acts 7:14–16

“Joseph sent for his father Jacob and his whole family—seventy-five in all. Jacob went down to Egypt, where he and our fathers died. Their bodies were later carried back to Shechem and laid in the tomb Abraham had bought.”

Cross References

Genesis 45:9

Joseph told his brothers, “Go quickly to my father and tell him that God has made me ruler over all Egypt. Come down to me without delay.”

Genesis 46:27

Jacob's entire household connected with the move into Egypt numbered seventy according to the Hebrew family reckoning recorded in Genesis.

Deuteronomy 10:22

Your ancestors went down to Egypt as seventy persons, but now the Lord your God has made you as numerous as the stars.

Genesis 46:6

Jacob and his family took their livestock and possessions and went to Egypt.

Genesis 49:33

When Jacob finished giving instructions to his sons, he drew his feet into the bed, breathed his last, and was gathered to his people.

Genesis 50:26

Joseph died at the age of 110. His body was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt.

Genesis 33:19

Jacob purchased a piece of land near Shechem from the sons of Hamor.

Joshua 24:32

Joseph's bones, which the Israelites had brought from Egypt, were buried at Shechem in the land Jacob had purchased.

Genesis 50:13

Jacob's sons carried his body to Canaan and buried him in the cave of the field at Machpelah.

Important Observation

Stephen is summarizing patriarchal burial traditions in compressed form as part of a speech whose central purpose is theological, not to provide a detailed land-title chronology.

His main point remains:

God was directing Israel's history long before the temple existed.

XIV. GOD'S PROMISE DRAWS NEAR

Acts 7:17

“As the time for God’s promise to Abraham drew near, the people increased greatly in Egypt.”

God's promise was moving toward fulfillment.

Cross References

Exodus 1:7

The Israelites were fruitful, multiplied greatly, increased in number, and became extremely strong, so the land was filled with them.

Genesis 47:27

Israel settled in Egypt, acquired property, became fruitful, and multiplied greatly.

Exodus 1:20

God was good to the midwives, and the people continued increasing and became very strong.

Spiritual Principle

God may fulfill His promise during circumstances that look increasingly dangerous.

XV. A NEW KING OPPRESSES ISRAEL

Acts 7:18–19

“Then another king arose who did not know Joseph. He treated our ancestors harshly, forcing them to abandon their newborn babies so they would die.”

Cross References

Exodus 1:8

A new king arose over Egypt who did not recognize Joseph's importance.

Exodus 1:9

Pharaoh said, “Look, the Israelites have become too numerous and powerful for us.”

Exodus 1:10

Pharaoh said, “Come, we must deal wisely with them before they multiply further.”

Exodus 1:16

Pharaoh commanded the Hebrew midwives to kill the male babies at birth.

Exodus 1:22

Pharaoh commanded his people to throw every Hebrew baby boy into the Nile.

Exodus 1:11

The Egyptians appointed slave masters over the Israelites to oppress them with forced labor.

Spiritual Principle

God's covenant people may experience severe oppression without being abandoned by God.

XVI. MOSES IS BORN

Acts 7:20

“At that time Moses was born, and he was no ordinary child. For three months he was cared for in his father’s house.”

At the height of danger, God prepares a deliverer.

Cross References

Exodus 2:2

Moses' mother gave birth to a son and saw that he was a beautiful child, so she hid him for three months.

Hebrews 11:23

By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months because they saw he was a special child and were not afraid of the king's command.

Exodus 2:3

When Moses' mother could no longer hide him, she placed him in a waterproof basket among the reeds along the Nile.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God can begin preparing deliverance while oppression still appears to be winning.

XVII. MOSES IS RAISED IN PHARAOH'S HOUSE

Acts 7:21–22

“When he was left outside, Pharaoh’s daughter took him and raised him as her own son. Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action.”

Cross References

Exodus 2:5

Pharaoh's daughter came down to bathe at the Nile and saw the basket among the reeds.

Exodus 2:10

When the child grew older, Moses' mother brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son.

Exodus 2:3

Moses had been placed in a basket among the reeds along the river.

1 Kings 4:30

Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of the people of the East and all the wisdom of Egypt.

Exodus 4:10

Moses later told the Lord that he did not consider himself an eloquent speaker and felt slow in speech.

Luke 24:19

Jesus was described as a prophet powerful in word and deed before God and all the people.

Spiritual Principle

God can use education and preparation, but ability alone does not create God's timing.

XVIII. MOSES TRIES TO DEFEND HIS PEOPLE

Acts 7:23–24

“When Moses was forty years old, he decided to visit his fellow Israelites. He saw one of them being mistreated, so he defended him and killed the Egyptian.”

Cross References

Exodus 2:11

After Moses had grown up, he went out to his own people and saw their forced labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew.

Hebrews 11:24

By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known merely as the son of Pharaoh's daughter.

Hebrews 11:25

He chose to suffer with God's people rather than enjoy the temporary pleasures of sin.

Exodus 2:12

Moses looked around, saw no one, killed the Egyptian, and hid the body in the sand.

Deuteronomy 32:35

The Lord says, “Vengeance belongs to Me, and repayment is Mine.”

Psalms 82:3

Defend the weak and the fatherless. Uphold the rights of the poor and oppressed.

Spiritual Principle

A right concern carried out in the wrong way can still produce serious consequences.

XIX. MOSES EXPECTS HIS PEOPLE TO UNDERSTAND

Acts 7:25

“Moses thought his people would realize God was using him to rescue them, but they did not understand.”

This verse is central to Stephen's argument.

A deliverer appears.

His own people do not recognize him.

Cross References

Exodus 2:14

The Hebrew man said to Moses, “Who made you ruler and judge over us?”

John 1:11

Jesus came to His own people, but His own did not receive Him.

Isaiah 53:3

The Servant was despised and rejected by people, a man of sorrows who knew suffering.

Spiritual Principle

God's chosen deliverer may be rejected before being recognized.

Joseph was rejected.

Moses was rejected.

Jesus was rejected.

XX. MOSES TRIES TO MAKE PEACE

Acts 7:26

“The next day he came upon two Israelites fighting. He tried to make peace between them, saying, ‘Men, you are brothers; why do you hurt each other?’”

Cross References

Exodus 2:13

The next day Moses saw two Hebrew men fighting and asked the one in the wrong, “Why are you striking your fellow Hebrew?”

Matthew 5:9

Blessed are those who make peace, because they will be called children of God.

Genesis 13:8

Abram told Lot, “There should not be strife between you and me or between our herdsmen, because we are relatives.”

Spiritual Principle

Sin can create conflict even among people who should recognize their shared identity.

XXI. MOSES IS REJECTED

Acts 7:27–28

“But the man who was mistreating the other pushed Moses aside and said, ‘Who made you ruler and judge over us? Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?’”

Cross References

Exodus 2:14

The man replied to Moses, “Who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you planning to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?”

Luke 12:14

Jesus answered, “Man, who appointed Me judge or arbitrator over you?”

Matthew 21:23

The religious leaders asked Jesus, “By what authority are You doing these things?”

Exodus 2:15

When Pharaoh heard what Moses had done, he tried to kill him, but Moses fled from Pharaoh.

John 8:37

Jesus told His opponents, “You are looking for a way to kill Me because My Word has no place in you.”

Key Truth

The rejected Moses becomes the deliverer God later sends back.

This strongly anticipates Stephen's charge concerning Jesus.

XXII. MOSES FLEES TO MIDIAN

Acts 7:29

“When Moses heard this, he fled to Midian, where he lived as a foreigner and had two sons.”

Cross References

Exodus 2:15

Moses fled from Pharaoh and settled in the land of Midian.

Exodus 2:22

Moses named his son Gershom because he said, “I have become a foreigner in a foreign land.”

Exodus 18:4

Moses' other son was named Eliezer because Moses said, “The God of my father was my helper and saved me from Pharaoh's sword.”

Spiritual Principle

God may use long seasons of obscurity to prepare His servants.

Moses spends forty years away from Egypt.

XXIII. THE BURNING BUSH

Acts 7:30

“After forty years, an angel appeared to Moses in the flames of a burning bush in the desert near Mount Sinai.”

Forty years earlier Moses had acted.

Now God calls him.

Cross References

Exodus 3:1

Moses was shepherding the flock of Jethro and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.

Exodus 3:2

The angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in a flame of fire from within a bush that burned without being consumed.

Exodus 19:11

Israel was told to prepare for the Lord's descent upon Mount Sinai.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God's timing may seem slow, but preparation is not wasted time.

XXIV. GOD SPEAKS TO MOSES

Acts 7:31–32

“When Moses saw it, he was amazed, and as he went closer to look, he heard the voice of the Lord: ‘I am the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.’ Moses trembled with fear and did not dare to look.”

Cross References

Exodus 3:3

Moses said, “I will turn aside and see this amazing sight—why the bush is not burning up.”

Exodus 3:4

When the Lord saw Moses coming closer, God called to him from the bush, “Moses! Moses!”

Exodus 3:6

God said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” Moses hid his face because he was afraid to look at God.

Matthew 22:32

Jesus quoted God saying, “I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,” and explained that God is not the God of the dead but of the living.

Exodus 3:15

God told Moses that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had sent him.

Spiritual Principle

God remains faithful to His covenant across generations.

XXV. HOLY GROUND

Acts 7:33

“Then the Lord said to him, ‘Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.’”

The ground was holy because God was present.

Notice where this occurred:

Not Jerusalem.

Not the temple.

The wilderness.

Cross References

Exodus 3:5

God said, “Do not come any closer. Remove your sandals, because the place where you are standing is holy ground.”

Joshua 5:15

The commander of the Lord's army told Joshua, “Remove your sandals from your feet, because the place where you stand is holy.”

Ecclesiastes 5:1

Guard your steps when you approach the house of God. Come ready to listen rather than offering the sacrifice of fools.

Key Truth

God's presence makes a place holy; a place does not contain or control God's presence.

This strikes directly at Stephen's accusers.

XXVI. GOD SEES, HEARS, AND COMES DOWN

Acts 7:34

“I have seen the oppression of My people in Egypt, I have heard their groaning, and I have come down to rescue them. Now go, I am sending you back to Egypt.”

Three phrases reveal God's compassion.

“I have seen.”

“I have heard.”

“I have come down.”

Cross References

Exodus 3:7

The Lord said, “I have certainly seen the suffering of My people in Egypt. I have heard their cries because of their slave masters, and I know their pain.”

Exodus 3:9

God said, “The cry of the Israelites has reached Me, and I have seen how the Egyptians oppress them.”

Exodus 3:10

God told Moses, “Go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring My people Israel out of Egypt.”

Spiritual Principle

God is never indifferent to the suffering of His people.

XXVII. THE REJECTED MOSES BECOMES THE DELIVERER

Acts 7:35

“This same Moses they had rejected with the words, ‘Who made you ruler and judge?’—God sent him to be their ruler and deliverer.”

This is one of Stephen's strongest parallels.

The one Israel rejected:

God sent.

God authorized.

God used.

Cross References

Exodus 2:14

The Israelite said to Moses, “Who made you ruler and judge over us?”

Exodus 3:10

God said, “I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring My people out of Egypt.”

Isaiah 63:9

In all their distress God was distressed, and the messenger of His presence saved them. In His love and mercy He redeemed them.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Human rejection does not determine whom God has chosen.

This same pattern reaches its climax in Jesus Christ.

XXVIII. MOSES LEADS ISRAEL OUT

Acts 7:36

“He led them out of Egypt, performing wonders and signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea, and in the wilderness for forty years.”

Cross References

Exodus 14:21

Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the Lord drove the sea back with a powerful wind, making dry ground through the waters.

Exodus 7:3

God told Moses that He would multiply His signs and wonders in Egypt.

Numbers 14:33

Israel's children would wander in the wilderness for forty years because of the generation's rebellion.

Spiritual Principle

The rejected deliverer became the instrument of undeniable divine power.

XXIX. MOSES POINTED TO A GREATER PROPHET

Acts 7:37

“This is the same Moses who told the Israelites, ‘God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people.’”

Moses himself pointed beyond Moses.

Cross References

Deuteronomy 18:15

Moses said, “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people. You must listen to Him.”

Deuteronomy 18:18

God said, “I will raise up a prophet like you from among their own people. I will put My words in His mouth.”

John 1:21

The religious leaders asked John, “Are you the Prophet?” and John answered, “No.”

Key Truth

Moses' ministry itself pointed forward toward Jesus Christ.

Therefore accepting Moses while rejecting Jesus was ultimately inconsistent with Moses' own testimony.

XXX. MOSES RECEIVES LIVING WORDS

Acts 7:38

“He was with the assembly in the wilderness, with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our ancestors. He received the living words to pass on to us.”

Stephen does not dishonor Moses.

He honors Moses.

He calls God's revelation:

“Living words.”

Cross References

Exodus 19:3

Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain.

Deuteronomy 33:2

Moses described the Lord coming from Sinai in majesty and giving His fiery law to His people.

Galatians 3:19

Paul explains that the law was put into effect through angels and entrusted through a mediator.

Spiritual Principle

The problem was never the law. The problem was Israel's refusal to obey the God who gave it.

XXXI. ISRAEL REJECTS MOSES IN ITS HEART

Acts 7:39

“But our fathers refused to obey him. Instead, they rejected him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt.”

Physically they were outside Egypt.

Spiritually Egypt remained inside them.

Cross References

Numbers 14:4

The Israelites said to one another, “Let us choose a leader and return to Egypt.”

Exodus 16:3

The Israelites complained that they wished they had died in Egypt where they had food rather than being brought into the wilderness.

Psalms 106:21

They forgot God their Savior, who had done great things in Egypt.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A person can leave Egypt physically while still carrying Egypt in the heart.

Deliverance must affect both location and loyalty.

XXXII. ISRAEL DEMANDS OTHER GODS

Acts 7:40–41

“They told Aaron, ‘Make us gods to go before us.’ ... So they made an idol in the form of a calf. They brought sacrifices to it and celebrated what their hands had made.”

Cross References

Exodus 32:1

The people told Aaron, “Make gods for us who will go before us, because we do not know what happened to Moses.”

Exodus 32:23

Aaron repeated that the people had asked him to make gods to lead them.

Exodus 32:8

God said Israel had quickly turned aside from His commands and made a calf to worship.

Exodus 32:4

Aaron fashioned the gold into the form of a calf, and the people declared it to be their god.

Exodus 32:6

The people rose early, offered sacrifices to the calf, ate, drank, and celebrated.

Psalms 106:19

At Horeb they made a calf and worshiped an image made of metal.

Spiritual Principle

Idolatry celebrates what human hands make instead of worshiping the God who made human hands.

XXXIII. GOD GIVES THEM OVER

Acts 7:42–43

Stephen quotes the prophets to demonstrate Israel's persistent idolatry.

“But God turned away from them and let them worship the sun, moon, and stars.”

Cross References

Deuteronomy 4:19

Moses warned Israel not to look at the sun, moon, and stars and be drawn away to worship what God created.

Amos 5:25

God asked Israel whether their wilderness sacrifices had truly represented faithful worship toward Him.

Jeremiah 19:13

Houses in Jerusalem became defiled because people burned incense on rooftops to the stars and poured offerings to false gods.

Stephen continues:

“You have taken up the tabernacle of Molek and the star of your god Rephan, idols you made to worship. Therefore I will send you into exile beyond Babylon.”

Cross References

Amos 5:26

Israel carried shrines and images connected with false gods they had made for themselves.

2 Kings 17:6

The king of Assyria captured Samaria and carried Israelites into exile.

Leviticus 18:21

Israel was forbidden to sacrifice children to Molek or dishonor the name of God.

Spiritual Principle

Persistent rejection of God can result in God giving people over to the false worship they insist upon.

XXXIV. THE TABERNACLE WAS GOD'S DESIGN

Acts 7:44

“Our ancestors had the tabernacle of the covenant law with them in the wilderness. It had been made as God directed Moses, according to the pattern he had seen.”

Stephen is not against the tabernacle.

He acknowledges its divine origin.

Cross References

Exodus 25:9

God told Moses, “Make the tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly according to the pattern I show you.”

Exodus 25:40

God said, “Be careful to make everything according to the pattern shown to you on the mountain.”

Exodus 38:21

The tabernacle connected with the covenant testimony was made according to the instructions God gave through Moses.

Spiritual Principle

Something can be genuinely ordained by God without being God Himself.

The tabernacle was sacred.

But it was never meant to imprison God's presence.

XXXV. THE TABERNACLE ENTERS THE LAND

Acts 7:45

“After receiving the tabernacle, our ancestors brought it with Joshua when they took the land from the nations God drove out before them. It remained until the time of David.”

Cross References

Joshua 18:1

The whole congregation of Israel gathered at Shiloh and set up the tabernacle there.

2 Samuel 6:17

David brought the ark of the Lord into the tent he had prepared for it.

Joshua 24:8

God reminded Israel that He gave their enemies into their hands and brought them into the promised land.

Spiritual Principle

God's presence accompanied His people before Solomon's temple existed.

XXXVI. DAVID DESIRES A HOUSE FOR GOD

Acts 7:46

“David, who enjoyed God’s favor, asked that he might provide a dwelling place for the God of Jacob.”

Cross References

2 Samuel 7:2

David told Nathan the prophet, “I live in a house of cedar while the ark of God remains in a tent.”

Psalms 132:5

David desired to find a dwelling place associated with the mighty God of Jacob.

1 Chronicles 17:1

David told Nathan, “I live in a cedar house, but the ark of the Lord remains under a tent.”

Spiritual Principle

David's desire honored God.

But God's presence was still greater than any building.

XXXVII. SOLOMON BUILDS THE TEMPLE

Acts 7:47

“But it was Solomon who built a house for Him.”

Cross References

1 Kings 6:1

Solomon began building the temple of the Lord during the fourth year of his reign.

1 Kings 8:20

Solomon declared that the Lord had fulfilled His promise and that he had built the temple for the name of the Lord.

2 Chronicles 3:1

Solomon began building the Lord's temple in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah.

Key Truth

Stephen is not denying that God authorized the temple.

He is denying that God can be confined to it.

XXXVIII. GOD DOES NOT LIVE IN HOUSES MADE BY HUMAN HANDS

Acts 7:48

“However, the Most High does not live in houses made by human hands.”

This directly addresses one of the accusations against Stephen.

Cross References

1 Kings 8:27

Solomon prayed, “Will God truly live upon the earth? Even the heavens and highest heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple I have built!”

Isaiah 66:1

The Lord says, “Heaven is My throne and earth is My footstool. What kind of house could you build for Me?”

Acts 17:24

Paul later preached that the God who made the world does not live in temples made by human hands.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God may meet people in buildings, but no building contains God.

XXXIX. HEAVEN IS GOD'S THRONE

Acts 7:49–50

“Heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool. What kind of house will you build for Me? says the Lord. Or where will My resting place be? Has not My hand made all these things?”

Cross References

Isaiah 66:1

The Lord declares, “Heaven is My throne and earth is My footstool. What house could you build for Me?”

Matthew 5:34

Jesus said not to swear by heaven because it is God's throne.

Matthew 23:22

Jesus said the person who swears by heaven swears by God's throne and by the One seated upon it.

Isaiah 66:2

The Lord says, “My hand made all these things, and so they came into being.”

Psalms 24:1

The earth belongs to the Lord, along with everything in it, the world and all who live within it.

Psalms 89:11

The heavens belong to You, and the earth also belongs to You. You established the world and everything in it.

Spiritual Principle

The Creator cannot be contained by something His creatures build.

XL. STEPHEN TURNS THE ACCUSATION AROUND

Acts 7:51

“You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You always resist the Holy Spirit—just as your ancestors did.”

Until this point Stephen has spoken mainly historically.

Now he speaks directly.

Stiff-Necked

Unwilling to submit.

Uncircumcised Hearts and Ears

They possessed outward religious signs but lacked inward surrender.

Resist the Holy Spirit

They opposed God's message and messengers.

Cross References

Exodus 33:3

God described Israel as a stiff-necked people who repeatedly resisted Him.

Jeremiah 6:10

Jeremiah said the people's ears were closed and they were unable to listen to God's Word.

Isaiah 63:10

Israel rebelled and grieved God's Holy Spirit, and their rebellion brought judgment.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Religious privilege becomes spiritually dangerous when outward identity replaces inward obedience.

XLI. THEY PERSECUTED THE PROPHETS

Acts 7:52

“Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered Him—”

Stephen connects the council directly with Israel's historical pattern.

Cross References

Matthew 23:31

Jesus told the religious leaders that they testified against themselves by admitting they were descendants of those who killed the prophets.

1 Thessalonians 2:15

Paul spoke of those who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and persecuted God's servants.

Acts 3:14

Peter told the people, “You rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer to be released instead.”

Key Truth

Jesus is the climax of God's rejected messengers.

Joseph rejected.

Moses rejected.

Prophets rejected.

Christ rejected.

Now Stephen is being rejected.

XLII. THEY RECEIVED THE LAW BUT DID NOT OBEY IT

Acts 7:53

“You who received the law that was given through angels but have not obeyed it.”

Stephen answers the accusation that he opposes the law.

His answer is essentially:

You possess the law—but you do not obey it.

Cross References

Galatians 3:19

The law was put into effect through angels and entrusted through a mediator.

Hebrews 2:2

The message spoken through angels proved binding, and every violation received a just consequence.

Romans 2:23

Paul asked, “You who boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law?”

Spiritual Principle

Possessing Scripture is not the same as obeying Scripture.

A Bible on the shelf does not transform anyone.

Truth must be believed and obeyed.

XLIII. THE SANHEDRIN BECOMES FURIOUS

Acts 7:54

“When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him.”

Stephen's message exposes their hearts.

Their reaction is rage.

Cross References

Psalm 35:16

Wicked mockers gnashed their teeth against the righteous sufferer.

Matthew 8:12

Jesus described judgment with weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Job 16:9

Job described his enemy tearing at him in anger and grinding his teeth against him.

Spiritual Principle

Conviction can lead either to repentance or resistance.

Acts 2:

People were cut to the heart and asked:

“What should we do?”

Acts 7:

People were cut to the heart and attacked the preacher.

XLIV. STEPHEN LOOKS TOWARD HEAVEN

Acts 7:55

“But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.”

The council looks at Stephen with rage.

Stephen looks toward heaven.

Cross References

John 12:41

Isaiah saw Christ's glory and spoke about Him.

Psalm 110:1

The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool beneath Your feet.”

Luke 22:69

Jesus told the council that the Son of Man would be seated at the right hand of the power of God.

Important Observation

Jesus is commonly described as seated at God's right hand.

Here Stephen sees Him:

Standing.

Many Christian interpreters have understood this as a picture of Christ receiving, honoring, or bearing witness to His faithful martyr.

The text does not explicitly explain why Jesus stands, but the image is deeply powerful.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

When earth rejects the faithful servant, heaven has not forgotten him.

XLV. STEPHEN SEES THE SON OF MAN

Acts 7:56

“Look,’ he said, ‘I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.’”

Stephen uses Jesus' own title:

“Son of Man.”

Cross References

Ezekiel 1:1

Ezekiel said the heavens were opened and he saw visions from God.

Matthew 26:64

Jesus told the Sanhedrin, “You will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power and coming upon the clouds of heaven.”

John 1:51

Jesus said, “You will see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”

Key Truth

Stephen's vision confirms the exaltation of Jesus Christ.

The same council that rejected Jesus now hears Stephen declare that Jesus stands in heavenly glory.

XLVI. THEY REFUSE TO LISTEN

Acts 7:57

“At this they covered their ears and shouted loudly. They all rushed at him.”

The imagery is tragic.

Stephen had just accused them of having uncircumcised ears.

Now they physically cover their ears.

Cross References

Matthew 26:65

The high priest tore his clothing and accused Jesus of blasphemy.

Jeremiah 20:10

Jeremiah said he heard many whispering accusations and threats against him.

Amos 7:10

Amaziah accused Amos before the king because Amos' message was unwelcome.

Spiritual Principle

A person who continually refuses truth may eventually become unwilling even to hear it.

XLVII. STEPHEN IS DRAGGED OUT AND STONED

Acts 7:58

“They dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. The witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.”

Stephen becomes the first Christian martyr recorded in Acts.

Cross References

Leviticus 24:14

A person convicted of blasphemy under Israel's law was to be taken outside the camp, and the witnesses were involved in the execution.

Numbers 15:36

The congregation took the offender outside the camp and carried out the judgment.

Acts 22:20

Paul later confessed, “When the blood of Your witness Stephen was being shed, I stood there approving and guarding the coats of those killing him.”

A Young Man Named Saul

Luke quietly introduces Saul.

At this moment Saul is associated with persecution.

Later:

Saul will meet Jesus.

Saul will become Paul.

Paul will preach the gospel Stephen died proclaiming.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

You never know who may be watching your faithfulness.

Stephen could not see what God would later do with Saul.

XLVIII. “LORD JESUS, RECEIVE MY SPIRIT”

Acts 7:59

“While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’”

Stephen directs his dying prayer to Jesus.

Cross References

Luke 23:46

Jesus cried out, “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.” After saying this, He died.

Psalms 31:5

Into Your hand I commit my spirit. You have redeemed me, Lord, faithful God.

1 Timothy 1:12

Paul thanked Christ Jesus our Lord for strengthening him and appointing him to service.

Key Truth

Stephen trusted Jesus with his final breath.

Spiritual Principle

The believer can entrust both life and death to Christ.

XLIX. STEPHEN FORGIVES HIS MURDERERS

Acts 7:60

“Then he fell on his knees and cried out, ‘Lord, do not hold this sin against them.’ When he had said this, he fell asleep.”

Stephen's final words resemble Jesus' prayer from the cross.

Cross References

Luke 23:34

Jesus prayed, “Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing.”

Matthew 5:44

Jesus said, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”

1 Corinthians 15:6

Paul spoke of believers who had died by using the language of those who had “fallen asleep.”

Spiritual Principle

Stephen did not merely preach Jesus—he died like a man transformed by Jesus.

His final prayer was not:

“Destroy them.”

It was:

“Do not hold this sin against them.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Forgiveness is most clearly revealed when we extend it to people who do not deserve it.

L. STEPHEN'S SPEECH IN ONE GREAT PATTERN

Stephen's sermon repeatedly shows the same pattern.

Joseph

Rejected by his brothers.

Then exalted by God.

Then used to save them.

Moses

Rejected by Israel.

Then sent back by God as ruler and deliverer.

The Prophets

Rejected and persecuted.

Yet they spoke God's truth.

Jesus

Rejected and killed.

Then raised and exalted by God.

Stephen

Rejected and killed.

Yet received into the presence of Christ.

Central Pattern

People may reject God's messenger without defeating God's message.

LI. WHAT STEPHEN TEACHES ABOUT GOD'S PRESENCE

Stephen's speech moves geographically.

Mesopotamia

God appears to Abraham.

Egypt

God is with Joseph.

Midian

God appears to Moses.

Sinai

God speaks.

Wilderness

God leads Israel.

Tabernacle

God dwells among His people.

Jerusalem

The temple is built.

But Stephen concludes:

“The Most High does not live in houses made by human hands.”

Spiritual Principle

God is not geographically imprisoned.

His presence cannot be controlled by buildings.

LII. WHAT STEPHEN TEACHES ABOUT RELIGIOUS TRADITION

The Sanhedrin possessed an extraordinary religious heritage.

They had:

Abraham.

Moses.

The covenant.

The law.

The temple.

The prophets.

Yet Stephen says:

“You always resist the Holy Spirit.”

Key Truth

A person can possess an impressive religious heritage while remaining spiritually resistant to God.

Religious history does not substitute for personal faith.

LIII. WHAT STEPHEN TEACHES ABOUT REJECTION

Stephen emphasizes repeated rejection.

Joseph's brothers rejected Joseph.

Israel rejected Moses.

Israel rejected the prophets.

The leaders rejected Christ.

Now they reject Stephen.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Rejecting God's messenger does not change God's truth; it only reveals the condition of the hearer's heart.

LIV. WHAT STEPHEN TEACHES ABOUT COURAGE

Stephen knew his audience was hostile.

He still told the truth.

But biblical courage is not merely speaking harshly.

Stephen first carefully walks through their shared history.

Then he applies it directly.

Spiritual Principle

Courage speaks truth clearly even when truth is costly.

Stephen's sermon cost him his life.

Yet he would not betray Christ to save himself.

LV. WHAT STEPHEN TEACHES ABOUT FORGIVENESS

Stephen's last words may be as powerful as his sermon.

A person can preach about forgiveness.

Stephen practiced it while being murdered.

He prayed:

“Lord, do not hold this sin against them.”

Spiritual Principle

The deepest evidence of gospel transformation may appear in the way a believer treats enemies.

LVI. STEPHEN AND JESUS — IMPORTANT PARALLELS

Stephen's final hours resemble the final hours of Christ.

Jesus Faced False Witnesses

Stephen faced false witnesses.

Jesus Stood Before the Council

Stephen stood before the council.

Jesus Was Accused Regarding the Temple

Stephen was accused regarding the temple.

Jesus Was Taken Outside

Stephen was dragged outside the city.

Jesus Committed His Spirit to the Father

Stephen committed his spirit to Jesus.

Jesus Prayed for His Enemies

Stephen prayed for his enemies.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The goal of discipleship is not merely to believe truths about Jesus but to become increasingly like Jesus.

LVII. SEVEN GREAT LESSONS FROM ACTS

7

1. God's Plan Unfolds Through History

Abraham.

Joseph.

Moses.

The prophets.

Jesus.

Principle:

Biblical history is moving toward God's redemptive purposes in Christ.

2. Human Rejection Does Not Stop God's Purpose

Joseph was rejected.

Moses was rejected.

Jesus was rejected.

Principle:

God's chosen servant may be rejected by people without being rejected by God.

3. God's Presence Is Not Limited to Buildings

God appeared and worked in many places long before the temple.

Principle:

No human structure contains the Most High God.

4. Religious Privilege Does Not Equal Obedience

Israel possessed extraordinary revelation but repeatedly rebelled.

Principle:

Knowing religious truth without obeying it can harden rather than transform the heart.

5. People Can Resist the Holy Spirit

Stephen accused the council of resisting God's Spirit through rejecting His truth.

Principle:

A hardened heart continually pushes away God's call to repentance.

6. Faithfulness May Cost Everything

Stephen remained faithful even when facing death.

Principle:

Christ is worthy of obedience even when obedience becomes costly.

7. Christians Are Called to Forgive Their Enemies

Stephen prayed for the people killing him.

Principle:

The gospel creates a kind of forgiveness the natural heart cannot produce by itself.

LVIII. WHY STEPHEN'S SPEECH MATTERS

Stephen is doing more than retelling Israelite history.

He is putting the Sanhedrin on trial.

They thought Stephen was defending himself.

By the end:

Stephen is confronting them.

The question becomes:

Who is truly rejecting Moses?

Stephen?

Or those who reject the Prophet Moses foretold?

Who is truly dishonoring the temple?

Stephen?

Or those who believe the Creator can be confined to it?

Who is truly disobedient to the law?

Stephen?

Or those who received the law and refused to obey it?

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The Word of God not only answers accusations; it exposes the heart of the accuser.

LIX. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

Why did Stephen spend so much time reviewing Israel's history?

Stephen used Israel's history to demonstrate recurring patterns.

God worked outside Jerusalem.

God's servants were repeatedly rejected.

Israel repeatedly resisted divine revelation.

Stephen showed that the council's rejection of Jesus continued that same pattern.

Question 2

What did Abraham demonstrate about faith?

Abraham obeyed God's call even without knowing the full destination.

He lived by God's promise before he possessed its fulfillment.

His life demonstrates trusting obedience.

Question 3

Why is Joseph important in Stephen's argument?

Joseph was rejected by his own brothers but later exalted and used by God to save them.

That pattern anticipates Jesus, who was rejected by His own people but exalted by God.

Question 4

Why does Stephen emphasize Moses being rejected?

The council accused Stephen of dishonoring Moses.

Stephen shows that Israel's own ancestors rejected Moses.

Even more importantly, Moses foretold a coming Prophet whom God's people were commanded to hear.

Stephen identifies that greater fulfillment with Jesus.

Question 5

What does “they turned back to Egypt in their hearts” mean?

Although Israel had physically left Egypt, their desires still turned toward what Egypt represented.

They longed for their old life and turned from trusting God.

This teaches that outward separation from sin must be accompanied by inward transformation.

Question 6

Was Stephen against the temple?

Stephen was not denying that God had authorized the tabernacle or that Solomon built the temple.

His argument was that:

“The Most High does not live in houses made by human hands.”

God is greater than any building.

Question 7

What does “stiff-necked” mean?

The expression describes stubborn resistance.

It pictures someone unwilling to bow or submit.

Stephen accuses the council of continuing the same rebellious pattern as their ancestors.

Question 8

What does it mean that their hearts and ears were uncircumcised?

They possessed the outward sign of circumcision but lacked inward responsiveness to God.
Their hearts were resistant.
Their ears were unwilling to hear God's truth.

Question 9

How did the council respond to Stephen's message?

They became furious.
They gnashed their teeth.
They covered their ears.
They rushed at him.
They dragged him outside the city.
They stoned him.
Their reaction demonstrated the resistance Stephen had just described.

Question 10

What did Stephen see before he died?

He saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at God's right hand.
This gave Stephen a heavenly perspective while facing earthly violence.

Question 11

Who was Saul in Acts 7:58?

Saul was a young man who stood with those killing Stephen and guarded their coats.
He later became the apostle Paul after encountering the risen Jesus.
Acts will soon show this transformation.

Question 12

What were Stephen's final prayers?

Stephen prayed:
“Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”

Then:

“Lord, do not hold this sin against them.”

His final prayers reveal trust in Christ and forgiveness toward his enemies.

LX. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Acts 7 asks several serious questions.

Am I Willing to Follow God Like Abraham?

Even when I do not know every detail?

Do I Believe God Is Present Outside Religious Buildings?

Or have I reduced my view of God to places and traditions?

Am I Resisting Something God Has Clearly Said?

The Sanhedrin possessed Scripture but resisted its fulfillment.

Is There “Egypt” Still in My Heart?

Have I left certain sins outwardly while still longing for them inwardly?

Do I Honor Jesus as the Prophet, Deliverer, Righteous One, and Lord?

How Do I Respond When God's Word Confronts Me?

With repentance?

Or defensiveness?

How Do I Respond to False Accusation?

Like Stephen?

Or with uncontrolled anger?

Could I Forgive Someone Who Seriously harmed me?

Stephen prayed for his killers.

Am I Living with Heaven in View?

Stephen looked upward while others looked at him with hatred.

LXI. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“The Rejected Servant May Still Be the Servant God Has Chosen”

Stephen's sermon repeatedly returns to rejection.

Joseph was rejected.

But God was with him.

Moses was rejected.

But God sent him back as deliverer.

The prophets were rejected.

But their words were God's truth.

Jesus was rejected.

But God raised and exalted Him.

Stephen was rejected.

But heaven opened to receive him.

Principle

Human rejection is not the final verdict on a servant of God.

God's judgment matters more than public opinion.

LXII. ANOTHER CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Do Not Confuse Being Near Holy Things with Being Near God”

The Sanhedrin sat near the temple.

They knew the law.

They knew Moses.

They knew Israel's history.

They possessed religious authority.

Yet Stephen said:

“You always resist the Holy Spirit.”

That warning reaches every generation.

A person can be:

Near a Bible.

Near a church.

Near preaching.

Near Christian people.

Near religious activity.

And still have a heart far from God.

Principle

Spiritual proximity is not spiritual transformation.

God desires the heart.

LXIII. STEPHEN'S FINAL VICTORY

From an earthly perspective:

Stephen lost.

He was killed.

His enemies remained standing.

From heaven's perspective:

Stephen won.

He remained faithful.

He saw Christ.

He entrusted his spirit to Jesus.

He forgave his enemies.

He entered the presence of the Lord.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Christian victory is not always escaping suffering; sometimes victory means remaining faithful through suffering.

LXIV. FINAL APPLICATION

Acts Chapter 7 begins with a courtroom.

It ends with a martyr.

Stephen begins surrounded by accusers.

He ends looking into heaven.

His enemies accuse him of rejecting Moses.

Stephen shows that their ancestors rejected Moses.

They accuse him of dishonoring the temple.

Stephen shows that the Creator cannot be contained by temples.

They accuse him of opposing the law.

Stephen shows that they received the law but refused to obey it.

Then Stephen reaches the heart of the issue:

“You always resist the Holy Spirit.”

That is the tragedy of Acts 7.

These men knew Scripture.

They knew history.

They knew religious tradition.

But when God's truth stood directly in front of them:

They covered their ears.

There may be no more dangerous spiritual condition than continually hearing truth while refusing to receive it.

Stephen demonstrates the opposite response.

He is:

Full of faith.

Full of wisdom.

Full of grace.

Full of power.

Full of the Holy Spirit.

When opposition rises:

He speaks truth.

When lies are told:

He remains faithful.

When the council becomes furious:

He looks toward heaven.

When stones begin falling:

He trusts Jesus.

When enemies kill him:

He forgives them.

Stephen did not merely give a great sermon.

He became the sermon.

His death proclaimed:

Jesus is worth suffering for.

Jesus is worth dying for.

Jesus receives His servants.

Jesus gives strength in persecution.

Jesus transforms hatred into forgiveness.

And while Stephen dies, a young man named Saul watches.

Stephen may never have known what God would eventually do with Saul.

But God knew.

The persecution of Acts 7 will help propel the gospel outward in Acts 8.

Saul the persecutor will become Paul the preacher.

The death of one servant will not stop God's mission.

Therefore Acts 7 leaves us with this great truth:

You may silence a witness, but you cannot silence the truth to which he bears witness.

God's purposes continue.

Christ still reigns.

The gospel still advances.

And faithful servants can face even death with their eyes fixed upon heaven.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for the powerful testimony of Stephen.

Thank You for showing us through Scripture that Your purposes have been unfolding throughout history.

Thank You for calling Abraham.

Thank You for preserving Joseph.

Thank You for sending Moses.

Thank You for speaking through the prophets.

And above all, thank You for sending Jesus Christ.

Keep us from repeating the pattern of those who resisted Your messengers.

Give us soft hearts.

Give us listening ears.

Keep us from becoming stiff-necked and resistant to Your Spirit.

Help us never substitute religious tradition for genuine obedience.

Remind us that You are not confined to buildings.

You are the Creator of heaven and earth.

Teach us to worship You in spirit and truth.

Give us the faith of Abraham.

Give us the perseverance of Joseph.

Give us the courage of Moses.

Give us the boldness of Stephen.

When people falsely accuse us, help us remain truthful.

When opposition rises, fill us with Your Spirit.

When fear comes, turn our eyes toward heaven.

When we are mistreated, give us grace to forgive.

Thank You that Jesus is alive.

Thank You that He is exalted at Your right hand.

Thank You that believers can entrust their lives and deaths to Him.

Help us say with Stephen:

“Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”

And give us enough grace to pray for our enemies:

“Lord, do not hold this sin against them.”

Use our faithfulness in ways we may never see.

There may be a Saul watching.

There may be a future preacher observing.

There may be lives affected long after our own ministry seems finished.

Keep us faithful to the end.

May our lives and our deaths honor Jesus Christ.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

“But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.” — Acts 7:55

Central Truth

Throughout redemptive history people repeatedly rejected God's chosen servants, yet God's purposes continued; Stephen therefore calls his hearers to stop resisting the Holy Spirit, recognize the exalted Jesus Christ, and remain faithful to God even when obedience brings suffering.

Acts 7 in One Sentence

Stephen traces Israel's history from Abraham through Joseph, Moses, the wilderness, and the temple to expose a repeated pattern of resisting God's messengers, boldly identifies Jesus as the rejected Righteous One, and then dies as a Spirit-filled martyr forgiving his enemies while looking toward the exalted Christ in heaven.