

But now I return unto Stephen's accusation, the principal point whereof is this, that he blasphemed God and Moses. They do, for good considerations, make the injury common to God and to Moses, because Moses had nothing in his doctrine which was his own or separated from God. They prove this, because he spake blasphemously against the temple and the law; furthermore, they make this the blasphemy, because he said that the coming of Christ had made an end of the temple and the ceremonies. It is not credible that Stephen spake thus as they report; but they maliciously wrest those things which were spoken well and godly, that they may color their false accusation; but although they had changed nothing in the words, yet Stephen was so far from doing any injury to the law and the temple, that he could no way better and more truly praise the same. The Jews did suppose that the temple was quite dishonored, unless the shadowy estate thereof should endure for ever, that the law of Moses was frustrate and nothing worth, unless the ceremonies should be continually in force. But the excellency of the temple and the profit of the ceremonies consist rather in this, whilst that they are referred unto Christ as unto their principal pattern. Therefore, howsoever the accusation hath some color, yet is it unjust and wicked. And although the fact come in question, that is, whether the matter be so as the adversaries lay to his charge, notwithstanding the state [of the question] is properly [one] of quality, for they accuse Stephen, because he taught that the form of the worship of God which was then used should be changed; and they interpret this to be blasphemy against God and Moses; therefore the controversy is rather concerning right (as they say) than the fact itself; for the question is, Whether he be injurious and wicked against God and Moses, who saith, that the visible temple is an image of a more excellent sanctuary, wherein dwelleth the fullness of the Godhead, and who teacheth that the shadows of the law are temporal? (Calvin Commentary on Acts 6:14)

The fundamental differences between Stephen and his opponents, as is evident from the whole tone and drift and purpose of his speech, lay in that he judged Old Testament history from the prophetic point of view, to which Jesus had also allied Himself, while his opponents represented the legalistic point of view, so characteristic of the Jewish thought of that day. The significance of this difference is borne out by the fact upon which Stephen's refutation hinges, namely, the fact, proved by the history of the past, that the development of the divine revelation and the development of the Jewish nation, so far from combining, move in divergent lines, due to a disposition of obstinate disobedience on the part of their fathers, and that therefore not he but they were disobedient to the divine revelation. Thus in a masterful way Stephen converts the charge of Antinomianism and anti-Mosaism brought against him into a countercharge of disobedience to the divine revelation, of which his hearers stood guilty in the present as their fathers had in the past. In this sense the speech of Stephen is a grand apology for the Christian cause which he represented, inasmuch as it shows clearly that the new religion was only the divinely-ordered development of the old, and not in opposition to it. (James Orr, International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, Stephen)

Acts 6:6 – 7:60: Stephen’s Apology before the Sanhedrin

1. The Charges against Stephen.
 - a. The Synagogue of the Freedmen (*Libertinos*)
 - i. Pompey’s slaves, 63 BC.
 - ii. Tacitus - Senate of Rome in AD 19 forced a number of Jewish Libertines to Sardinia, and told the remaining Jewish Libertines to renounce their faith or leave Rome. Many fled to Jerusalem.
 - iii. Cyrene, North Africa and Cilicia, a province of Asia Minor, Tarsus one of the chief cities.
 - iv. Rabbinic tradition: perhaps as many as 480 synagogues in Jerusalem.
 - b. The Holy Spirit had already overcome all objections to Christ and the Gospel; Sherlock Holmes – “eliminate the impossible...” Jesus Christ: It is impossible for you to believe the truth because you are not of God (John 8:37-47).
 - c. To Suborn: *hupoballo*: *throw in stealthily*, that is, *introduce* by collusion: - suborn. In law, to procure a person to take such a false oath as constitutes perjury (Webster 1828). Who was suborned and by whom?
 - d. “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.”
 - i. What group is added to the opposition that was not complicit with previous accusers against Peter & John and the apostles?
 - ii. Who else is stirred up?
 - iii. Does this indicate a spontaneous reaction or premeditation?
 - iv. *Sunarpazo*: to seize by force; to catch or lay hold (one so that he is no longer his own master); to seize by force and carry away.
 - e. “This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law; for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us.”
 - i. Who puts forth the false witnesses?
 - f. Are the two accusations the same?
 - g. Was there actually contradiction between the position of Jesus and the Old Testament order of things?
2. Stephen’s Apology
 - a. Steven follows the historical line, and gives a thorough review of the history from Abraham over Moses and David to Christ.
 - b. Stephen traces: (Homer C. Hoeksema, Discussion Outlines on the Book of Acts)

- i. The positive line of the covenant and the great wonderworks of God.
 - ii. The negative line of those who always rebelled and disobeyed and resisted the Holy Ghost – the fathers of his accusers, who killed the prophets.
 - c. He does not ignore the accusation brought against him, but also traces the idea of the true worship of God; the idea of the tabernacle and the temple, the apostasy of their fathers from that tabernacle and the temple, and lays much emphasis on Moses and the history connected with him, showing at once that he does not oppose, but honors Moses.
3. Abraham, verses 2-8
- a. God calls Abraham. Genesis 15: 7; Joshua 24: 2-4, 14-23; Nehemiah 9:6-8.
 - b. Where was Abraham when he was called by God?
 - c. When was the covenant of circumcision given? To whom was it given?
 - d. Romans 4:11 – Is circumcision the cause of righteousness, or does God declare Abraham righteous before circumcision?
 - e. How are the promise of God and the faith of Abraham emphasized in this passage?
 - f. What has this to do with Stephen’s defense against the accusations made?
4. The Patriarchs and Joseph, verses 9-16
- a. Why the emphasis on the envy of the patriarchs? What did they do? Where were they when they did it?
 - b. What did God do to and for Joseph? What did this show in contrast to the patriarchs? Where was Joseph when God blessed him?
 - c. What was the purpose of relating the burial places in regard to the land? (Jacob was actually buried with Abraham & Sarah at the cave of Machpelah in Hebron (Gen. 50:13), Joseph was buried in the cave Jacob purchased from the sons of Hamor in Shechem by Joshua (Joshua 24:32)).
 - d. What spiritual quality was demonstrated by Jacob and Joseph?
5. Moses, verses 17-43
- a. Does this passage indicate anything as to Stephen’s own attitude toward Moses?
 - b. Where is Moses when he first acts as deliverer (a ruler and a judge) of his people?
 - c. Where is Moses when God calls him?
 - d. How does God identify Himself? What made the ground holy?
 - e. How does Moses emphasize the disobedience of the fathers to Moses?

- f. Why does Stephen include Moses' prophecy of The Prophet?
 - g. Did God view the golden calf incident as an isolated lapse of idolatry, or as a principal departure from the service of God that haunted Israel all through their history?
 - i. See Nehemiah 9:7-15, 19-25 recounts all that God did for their ancestors; Nehemiah 9:16-18, 26-36 recounts all the rebellion committed by their ancestors to the time of Nehemiah.
 - ii. Psalm 78 recounts the rebellion of the people up to the time of David.
 - iii. Psalm 106 recounts the rebellion of the people through the dispersion.
 - h. What is the horrifying significance of verse 42? Similar to Romans 1:24, 28?
 - i. Why does the Holy Spirit insert Babylon for Damascus in vs. 43? See Amos 5:27.
6. The Tabernacle, verses 44-50
- a. What did God instruct Moses regarding the tabernacle? V. 44
 - i. How does this relate to Hebrews 8:1-6?
 - b. What does a tabernacle signify in comparison with a temple?
 - c. Is Stephen emphasizing the function of the tabernacle, or the One who dwells not in temples made with hands?
 - d. Did Jesus acknowledge the legitimacy of Herod's temple for worship, or did He yearn for the time when there would be true worship apart from the temple?
7. The Prosecution rests its case, verses 51-53.
- a. Where is the first reference to Jesus? What is the title given by Stephen?
 - b. How was the rebellion and murder of their father's linked to the rebellion of the Sanhedrin and accusers? See 2 Chronicles 36:16-17.
 - c. Regarding the Holy Spirit, for what are they indicted?
 - d. To what does Stephen testify by the Holy Spirit regarding the Son of Man?
 - e. How does Stephen die? What are his last words? To whom does he commit his spirit?

Jealousy, or envy, had motivated the patriarchs to reject Joseph, had motivated the rebellions against Moses and Aaron, had motivated the slaying of the prophets, Jesus, and eventually the apostles (see also Mark 15:10; Acts 13:45; Acts 17:5). "...[Jealousy] is symptomatic of a heart that rejects God's sovereignty and resists His Spirit, and it lay behind the Israelites subsequent rejection of Moses, the prophets, and finally the Righteous One whom the prophets foretold." (Let's Study Acts, Dennis E. Johnson, p. 77)