

ACTS

Chapter 7

Stephen's Speech

And the high priest said, “Are these things so?” 2 And Stephen said: “Brothers and fathers, hear me. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, 3 and said to him, ‘Go out from your land and from your kindred and go into the land that I will show you.’ 4 Then he went out from the land of the Chaldeans and lived in Haran. And after his father died, God removed him from there into this land in which you are now living. 5 Yet he gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot's length, but promised to give it to him as a possession and to his offspring after him, though he had no child. 6 And God spoke to this effect—that his offspring would be sojourners in a land belonging to others, who would enslave them and afflict them four hundred years. 7 ‘But I will judge the nation that they serve,’ said God, ‘and after that they shall come out and worship me in this place.’ 8 And he gave him the covenant of circumcision. And so Abraham became the father of Isaac, and circumcised him on the eighth day, and Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob of the twelve patriarchs. 9 “And the patriarchs, jealous of Joseph, sold him into Egypt; but God was with him 10 and rescued him out of all his afflictions and gave him favor and wisdom before Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who made him ruler over Egypt and over all his household. 11 Now there came a famine throughout all Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction, and our fathers could find no food. 12 But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent out our fathers on their first visit. 13 And on the second visit Joseph made himself known to his brothers, and Joseph's family became known to Pharaoh. 14 And Joseph sent and summoned Jacob his father and all his kindred, seventy-five persons in all. 15 And Jacob went down into Egypt, and he died, he and our fathers, 16 and they were carried back to Shechem and laid in the tomb that Abraham had bought for a sum of silver from the sons of Hamor in Shechem. 17 “But as the time of the promise drew near, which God had granted to Abraham, the people increased and multiplied in Egypt 18 until there arose over Egypt another king who did not know Joseph. 19 He dealt shrewdly with our race and forced our fathers to expose their infants, so that they would not be kept alive. 20 At this time Moses was born; and he was beautiful in God's sight. And he was brought up for three months in his father's house, 21 and when he was exposed, Pharaoh's daughter adopted him and brought him up as her own son. 22 And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in his words and deeds. 23 “When he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brothers, the children of Israel. 24 And seeing one of them being wronged, he defended the oppressed man and avenged him by striking down the Egyptian. 25 He supposed that his brothers would understand that God was giving them salvation by his hand, but they did not understand. 26 And on the following day he appeared to them as they were quarreling and tried to reconcile them, saying, ‘Men, you are brothers. Why do you wrong each other?’ 27 But the man who was wronging his neighbor thrust him aside, saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge over us? 28 Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?’ 29 At this retort Moses fled and became an exile in the land of Midian, where he became the father of two sons. 30 “Now when forty years had passed, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in a flame of

fire in a bush. 31 When Moses saw it, he was amazed at the sight, and as he drew near to look, there came the voice of the Lord: 32 ‘I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob.’ And Moses trembled and did not dare to look. 33 Then the Lord said to him, ‘Take off the sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. 34 I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their groaning, and I have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt.’ 35 “This Moses, whom they rejected, saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge?’—this man God sent as both ruler and redeemer by the hand of the angel who appeared to him in the bush. 36 This man led them out, performing wonders and signs in Egypt and at the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years. 37 This is the Moses who said to the Israelites, ‘God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers.’ 38 This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our fathers. He received living oracles to give to us. 39 Our fathers refused to obey him, but thrust him aside, and in their hearts they turned to Egypt, 40 saying to Aaron, ‘Make for us gods who will go before us. As for this Moses who led us out from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.’ 41 And they made a calf in those days, and offered a sacrifice to the idol and were rejoicing in the works of their hands. 42 But God turned away and gave them over to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the prophets: “‘Did you bring to me slain beasts and sacrifices, during the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? 43 You took up the tent of Moloch and the star of your god Rephan, the images that you made to worship; and I will send you into exile beyond Babylon.’ 44 “Our fathers had the tent of witness in the wilderness, just as he who spoke to Moses directed him to make it, according to the pattern that he had seen. 45 Our fathers in turn brought it in with Joshua when they dispossessed the nations that God drove out before our fathers. So it was until the days of David, 46 who found favor in the sight of God and asked to find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob.[a] 47 But it was Solomon who built a house for him. 48 Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands, as the prophet says, 49 “‘Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest? 50 Did not my hand make all these things?’ 51 “You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. 52 Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, 53 you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it.”

7:1 *high priest*. Probably Caiaphas (see Mt 26:57–66). (CSB)

Perhaps Annas. Cf 4:6; Mt.26:57-68; Mk. 14:53-65; Lk. 22:66-71; Jn. 18:12-14. (TLSB)

7:2-8 “brothers and fathers,” “our father Abraham,” “the covenant of circumcision”: Stephen’s lengthy review of Old Testament history, is intended to convince his fellow members of God’s chosen people that they had killed the Messiah, whom Stephen identifies as “the Righteous One” (v 52). (See Acts 3:14; 22:14; 1 Pet 3:18.) (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 1)

7:2 *Stephen said* – Accused of speaking against Moses, God, the temple, and the law and customs, Stephen spoke to them in great order and at some length. He revealed his thorough knowledge of the Scripture in each case, providing that he spoke only the Word of God. (LL)

God of glory - Stephen asserted that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is both the subject and source of his message. (TLSB)

Glory of the Lord - Hebrew *kebod yahweh*. The term *kebod* refers to the “weight” or “weightiness” of something and thereby its impressive appearance or “honor.” Moses introduces the expression during the exodus (Ex. 16:7) to contrast the Lord’s majesty with that of Pharaoh and Egypt. It comes to describe the visible manifestation of God’s presence in the cloud and fire of the exodus. It is the splendor of God’s presence that belongs now to believers in the promise, and that by His advanced preparation will be revealed to them and in them. (TLSB pp. 6-7)

Abraham ... in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran. Abraham’s call came in Ur, not Haran (cf. Ge 15:7; Ne 9:7). Or perhaps he was called first in Ur, and then later his call was renewed in Haran. (CSB)

7:4 *land of the Chaldeans.* A district in southern Babylonia, the name was later applied to a region that included all Babylonia. (CSB)

After his father died. Ge 11:26 does not mean that all three sons—Abraham, Nahor and Haran—were born to Terah in the same year when he was 70 years old. See Ge 11:26–12:1. It may be that Haran was Terah’s firstborn and that Abraham was born 60 years later. Thus the death of Terah at 205 years of age could have occurred just before Abraham, at 75, left Haran. (CSB)

into this land in which you are now living - An essential element of the old covenant was the Promised Land (cf. Gen. 12:1-9; 15:18-21; 17:1-14). (TLSB)

7:5 *no inheritance* - Abraham held title to the Promised Land only by faith. After God called him, he became a sojourner. His nomadic existence in obedience to the Lord is further emphasized by the need to purchase Sarah’s burial site (Gn. 23). He lived in tents, despite God’s promise that the land would be his and belong to his descendants. He built altars as part of the covenant’s purpose for the land. God intended His chosen people to occupy the Promised Land as a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex. 19:6). The inheritance of land was inseparable from God’s covenant of grace. (TLSB)

Portion - The tribes of Israel were each given a portion of the Promised Land, though the priestly clan of the Levites was given God Himself, not land, as their inheritance (Dt. 10:9). Inheritance is an important expression of God’s graciousness in the OT. He gives lovingly and freely to His people as a father lovingly provides for his children. God’s chosen people are His portion and treasured possession (Dt. 32:9). (TLSB p. 7)

a foot’s length - Measurement; also, ownership was demonstrated by stepping onto one’s property. (TLSB)

7:6 *four hundred years.* A round number for the length of Israel’s stay in Egypt (Ex 12:40–41 has 430 years. That four generations would represent considerably less than 400 years is not a necessary conclusion. Ex 6:16–20 makes Moses the great-grandson of Levi, son of Jacob and brother of Joseph. This would make four generations from Levi to Moses. But in 1Ch 7:22–27 a list of ten names represents the generations between Ephraim, the son of Joseph, and Joshua. The ten generations at 40 years each would equal 400 years, the same period of time noted as four generations. But one list is abbreviated and the other gives a full genealogy. (CSB)

In God's covenant with Abraham, He foresaw the 400 years of slavery in Egypt, a land they would fill and build but not possess. Their hopes were to be in His Promised Land. (TLSB)

7:7 *worship me in this place* - The purpose of the land was not merely possession, but worship and service to the Lord (cf Dt. 4:1-8). (TLSB)

7:8 *covenant of circumcision*. The essential conditions for the religion of Israel were already fulfilled long before the temple was built and their present religious customs began. (CSB)

twelve patriarchs. See Ge 35:23–26. (CSB)

7:9 *jealous* - The twelve sons of Jacob came from four different wives. Jacob's favoring of Rachel and their son Joseph fostered conflict (Gen. 37:3-4). (TLSB)

they sold him. Israel consistently rejected God's favored individuals. Stephen builds his case about Jesus' rejection by noting Joseph's rejection by his brothers (Ge 37:12–36). (CSB)

7:10 Despite slavery, false accusations, and prison, Joseph was in God's care. Eventually, Pharaoh released Joseph from prison and elevated him to second in command over Egypt. (TLSB)

7:11-13 Joseph saw the power of God, which both harnessed and overcame his brother's evil plans. Working through famine, the Lord preserved Jacob's family and kept His covenant with Abraham. (TLSB)

7:14 *Jacob his father and all his kindred*. Although the Hebrew Bible uses the number 70 (Ge 46:27; Ex 1:5; Dt 10:22), the Greek translation of the OT (the Septuagint) adds at Ge 46:20 the names of two sons of Manasseh, two of Ephraim, and one grandson of the latter. This makes the number 75 and is the number that Stephen uses. (CSB)

Stephen may have arrived at this total by adding the five sons of Manasseh and Ephraim mentioned in Nu 26:28–37. (TLSB)

7:16 Stephen greatly compresses OT accounts of two land purchases (by Abraham and Jacob) and two burial places (at Hebron and Shechem). According to the OT, Abraham purchased land at Hebron (Ge 23:17–18), where he (Ge 25:9–11), Isaac (Ge 35:29) and Jacob (Ge 50:13) were buried. Jacob bought land at Shechem (Ge 33:19), where Joseph was later buried (Jos 24:32). Josephus preserves a tradition that Joseph's brothers were buried at Hebron. Stephen's rhetorical device (by which he recalls that Jacob and the 12 patriarchs were not buried in Egypt but in Canaan) is strange to modern ears but would have been well understood by his hearers. (CSB)

7:17-18 *time of the promise* - Within the Lord's framework of eternity, He made certain that events and situations served His plan of deliverance. Although the new pharaoh did not recognize Joseph or his contribution, this actually signaled a crucial step in the Lord's plan of deliverance. (TLSB)

7:22 *Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians*. Not explicitly stated in the OT but to be expected if he grew up in the household of Pharaoh's daughter. Both Philo and Josephus speak of Moses' great learning. (CSB)

Moses had the educational benefits of a royal upbringing. (TLSB)

mighty in his words and deeds – In Exodus 4:10 we read that Moses said, “O Lord, I have never been eloquent...I am slow of speech and tongue.” In verse 12 of Exodus 4 God promised: “I will help you speak and teach you what to say.” The content of what Moses said and the way in which he led Israel were from God, and they were, as Stephen said, powerful. (PBC)

7:23 *Moses was forty.* Moses was 80 years old when sent to speak before Pharaoh (Ex 7:7) and 120 years old when he died (Dt 34:7). Stephen’s words agree with a tradition that at his first departure from Egypt he was 40 years of age. (CSB)

it came into his heart – This suggests that Moses, though he enjoyed the advantages of living among the Egyptian royalty, was aware of his identity as an Israelite and the plight of his fellow Israelites. Cf Hebrews 11:24-25. (TLSB)

7:24 *striking down the Egyptian* – God had not yet called him to act on behalf of Israel, and God never called him to take justice into his own hands. (PBC)

7:27 *thrust him aside* – This undergirds the theme for Stephen’s speech. Moses, thrust aside by the very person whom he saved, would be rejected (v. 39) by the people God called him to deliver. Likewise, Christ, the Anointed One, would be denied by the people He came to save. On the cross, Christ was not only rejected by those who mocked Him (Mt. 27:39-44) but also forsaken by the Father (Mt. 27:46), that His mission as the sacrifice for our sins. (TLSB)

7:29 *fled...to Midian.* Rejected by his own people, Moses feared that they would inform the Egyptians, and this led to his flight to Midian (Ex 2:15), the land flanking the Gulf of Aqaba on both sides. (CSB)

father of two sons. Gershom and Eliezer (Ex 2:22; 18:3–4; 1Ch 23:15). (CSB)

7:30 *when forty years had passed.* Plus the 40 years of v. 23, making the 80 years of Ex 7:7. (CSB)

Mount Sinai. Called Horeb in Ex 3:1. (CSB)

7:32 *did not dare to look* – Exodus 3:6 recounts how Moses hid his face out of fear of God. Later, Moses spoke face-to-face with God (Ex. 33:11), but he was not allowed to see God’s unveiled glory. Cf Ex. 34:29. (TLSB)

7:33-35 God selected whom man rejected. (TLSB)

7:35 *this Moses ... sent as both ruler and redeemer.* Israel rejected Moses, their deliverer, just as the Jews of Stephen’s day were rejecting Jesus, their deliverer. Yet both were sent by God. (CSB)

The Lord called Moses to be His instrument of Israel’s deliverance, a redeemer, and to be His mouthpiece to Israel (Ex. 3:18). Dt. 34:10-12 testifies to Moses’ service. (TLSB)

angel who appeared to him in the bush. God called Moses and designated an angel to support him in the work of deliverance. Cf Ps. 91:11. (TLSB)

7:37 *prophet like me.* This is pointing to Christ. Christ is the stone the builders rejected (Lk. 20:17), the one “of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote” (John 1:45). (TLSB)

7:38 *angel who spoke to him.* According to Jewish interpretation at that time, the law was given to Moses by angel mediation—after the manner of the original call of Moses (see Ex 3:2; see also v. 53; Gal 3:19; Heb 2:2). (CSB)

It was the Angel of the Lord, the second person of the Trinity before his incarnation, who appeared to Moses at the burning bush. (PBC)

he received living oracles to give to us. Moses was the mediator between God and man on Mount Sinai. (CSB)

The living God (Rev. 7:2) is the author of the living words from which believers receive strength and refreshment. (TLSB)

7:39-41 In thrusting Moses aside, they also rejected God and committed idolatry. Israel’s pattern of apostasy, begun under the leadership of Moses (Nu. 11), continued under the leadership of Joshua (Joshua 7), the judges (Judges 2), and kings (1 Kings 11). (TLSB)

7:39 *refused to obey him.* Another rejection of God’s representative and his commands. (CSB)

7:40 *Make us gods.* While Moses was on Sinai receiving the law, the people made the golden calf, rejecting God and his representative (Ex 32:1). The people had not traveled far from the idolatry of Egypt. (CSB)

7:43 Stephen quotes Am 5:25–27 as translated in the Septuagint, except that he replaces Damascus with Babylon in view of the fact that the final exile of Israel from the promised land was carried out by the Babylonians (Amos was speaking first of the Assyrian exile of the northern kingdom). (CSB)

7:44–50 Because he had been accused of “speaking against the holy place” (6:13), Stephen concludes his recital with a word about the sanctuary. Presumably, he had been preaching that the risen Christ had now replaced the temple as the mediation of God’s saving presence among his people and as the one (the “place”) through whom they (and “all nations,” Mk 11:17) could come to God in prayer. (CSB)

7:44 *tent of witness.* So called by Stephen because the primary contents of the desert tabernacle were the ark of the covenant and the two covenant tablets it contained, which were called “the Testimony.” (CSB)

On Mount Sinai, the Lord gave Moses the pattern for the tabernacle (Ex. 26), which the builders followed (Ex. 36:1; 40). (TLSB)

7:45-48 The tabernacle represented the wanderings in the wilderness, where the Israelites camped by tribe in relationship to the tabernacle (Nu. 2). Although David wanted to build a permanent house of worship, the Lord planned for Solomon to build the temple (2 Sa. 7). (TLSB)

7:49-50 God intended His people to worship Him in spirit and in truth, without focus on their rituals or places of worship apart from Him. Cf Am. 5:21-25; Mi 6:6-8; John 4:23). (TLSB)

7:49 Isaiah reminded Israel that all creation is the temple that God himself had made. Stephen recalls that word to remind his hearers that ultimately God builds his own temple.

7:51-53 Stephen, having reviewed the history of the Jews in their manner of dealing with the Lord, rises to a culmination of indignation at their treatment. Boldly he tells his judges that they are *sklērotrachēloi kai apēritmētoi kardiais kai tois ōsin*, “stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears” (v 51). He continues to tell them that “you always resist the Holy Spirit.” These are serious charges. He further points out their persecution of the prophets. Stephen, with great eloquence, proclaims the thundering Law to these hardened hypocrites in order to show them their sin clearly so that they might be led to repentance and faith. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

7:51 *uncircumcised hearts and ears*. Though physically circumcised, they were acting like the uncircumcised pagan nations around them. They were not truly consecrated to the Lord. (CSB)

Uncircumcised means, in religious terms, pagan or heathen. Their hearts were not with God. (PBC)

“stiff-necked” refers to an unbending neck, which is a sign of haughty pride. “Uncircumcised hearts and ears”: Although they were physically identified as God’s children, their hearts and ears denied that identification. They “resist[ed] the Holy Spirit” by refusing to believe. Jesus referred to this as “blasphemy against the Spirit” (Mt 12:31) and lamented it in today’s Gospel. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 1)

Resist the Holy Spirit – The Holy Spirit works through the Word to turn a heart of stone into one of faith (Ezk. 36:26-27). “God does not force a person to become goldy. (Those who always resist the Holy Spirit and persistently oppose the known truth are not converted)” (FC SD II 60). (TLSB)

7:53 *law as delivered by angels*. The Lord assigned an angel to guard the children of Israel on the way out of Egypt (Ex. 23:20). The commander of the Lord’s army appeared to Joshua. (TLSB)

7:1–53 Stephen’s message recounts how God’s chosen people, by rejecting Moses, rejected God. Israel’s refusal to follow God ended in their dismissal of God’s Son. However, Jesus took upon Himself the sins of the world, that we would be reconciled to God the Father. In Holy Baptism, He gives us new hearts and pours out His Spirit for us. • Father, for Jesus’ sake, forgive my sins. Circumcise my heart, that I trust in You above all things. Amen. (TLSB)

The Stoning of Stephen

54 Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. **55** But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed 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, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” **57** But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. **58** Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. **59** And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” **60** And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

7:54-60 Stephen probably did not intend to stop at this point. But they had heard enough! *dieprionto tais kardiais autōn kai ebruchon tous odontas ep’ auton*, they were cut to the heart, that is, “they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him.” They would not listen any more.

Full of the Holy Spirit, Stephen is allowed to gaze with his mortal eyes right into heaven and is given a wondrous view of the glory and majesty of “the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God” (v 56). However, his announcement of the vision raises the Jews’ anger to an even higher level, and they attempt to drown out his voice. Stephen’s stoning goes against all the rules of Jewish criminal law; it is murder. Stephen dies the death of a true martyr. But his death is not without one final witness as Stephen boldly prays to his Lord two requests: first, that his Lord Jesus would receive his spirit; second, that his Lord would not hold this sin against them. The words of Stephen in his dying moments, *kurie Iēsou, dexai to pneuma mou*, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit” (v 59), and *kurie, mē stēsēis autois tautēn tēn hamartian*, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them” (v 60), cannot but draw our attention back to the events and words of Good Friday. Stephen’s prayer for forgiveness has at least one notable fulfillment: Saul. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 2)

7:54 *ground their teeth*. The “grinding the teeth” was a sign of hostility and rage, especially of the wicked against the righteous. The phrase is also used for those excluded from the kingdom in Mt. 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30 and Luke 13:28. (Sacra)

7:55 *gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God* – The Holy Spirit gave this ability of sight to Stephen’s eyes without blinding him. This is a special sight given to him, not as though it were intended for him and his strengthening alone, but through him for all of them as they near death. The Savior stands ready to receive them. (LL)

In the O.T., the visible sign of God’s glory was the Shekinah, the pillar of cloud or of fire that went before the Israelites in the wilderness (Exodus 13:21-22). That cloud was an assurance of God’s saving presence and his gracious intentions. What Stephen saw gave him the same assurance: Jesus at God’s right hand, powerful to sustain Stephen’s witness. In the presence of and with the help of the triune God Stephen completed his testimony. (PBC)

7:55-56 Stephen’s vision confirmed Christ’s prophecy that He would send the Holy Spirit, who would teach His disciples what to say when persecuted (Luke 12:11-12; John 14:15-26). Luther: “When you are baptized, partake of Holy Communion, receive the absolution, or listen to a sermon, heaven is open, and we hear the voice of the Heavenly Father;...Heaven is open, as St. Stephen saw it open; and we hear God when He addresses us in Baptism, in Holy Communion, in confession, and in His Word as it proceeds from the mouth of the men who proclaim His message” (AE 22:202). (TLSB)

7:55 *full of the Holy Spirit*. This was more than Spirit-created faith. The Holy Spirit filled Stephen so that he was able to see the glory of heaven. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 1)

7:56 *Son of Man*. Jesus used this title of himself (see Mk 2:10) to emphasize his relationship to Messianic prediction (Mt 25:31; Da 7:13–14). It is unusual for someone other than Jesus to apply this term to Christ (see also Rev 1:13). (CSB)

7:57 *stopped their ears* – The physical gesture is wonderfully expressive of Stephen’s charge that they are “uncircumcised in ears.” They do everything to keep from hearing the prophet’s proclamation that Jesus is the one raised to the presence of God. (Sacra)

Cf John 8:44. Those of the devil refuse to hear the truth but rather attack it. (TLSB)

7:58 *cast him out of city* – The person to be stoned should be taken outside the court (city). (Sacra)

stoned him – It was illegal to carry out the death penalty without permission of the Roman governor, but did not seem to matter when a mob action resulted in murder. (PBC)

Stephen's vision and witness guaranteed his condemnation. His witnesses immediately judged him guilty, stoning him outside the city. They did not fear reprisal from the crowds, as they had in their opposition to Jesus. Cf Mt. 21:46; Mk. 11:18; Luke 20:19; 22:2. (TLSB)

laid their clothes at the feet of ... Saul. † Luke's way of introducing the main character of the second section of the book. (CSB)

Saul was old enough to bear public authority (8:3; 9:1-2). Cf Nu 1:3; 4:3. Saul's name reminds one of the OT king Saul, who also came from the tribe of Benjamin and strayed from the God's way. Cf 1 Sam. 1:5. (TLSB)

According to Jewish law, the witnesses had to throw the first stones. They had to take off their outer cloak to do it. (PBC)

7:60 *falling to his knees* – This is the body language of submission and prayer. (Sacra)

The major contrast between the death of Jesus and one of his witness Stephen (apart from the mode of execution) is the fact that Jesus was portrayed as keeping silence in the face of his accusers, whereas Stephen's speech is precisely the sort of response to an accusation a sage would be expected to make. But even this is in fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy: "I will give you speech and wisdom such that all those opposing you will not be able to resist or contradict." (Luke 21:15). (Sacra)

Driven to his knees by the blows from the stones, at the very moment of his death, Stephen made one last attempt to reach his enemies and the crowd. At the top of his voice, so that all in the crowd heard, Stephen prayed his final prayer: "Lord, do not hold this sin against them". This prayer for his enemies he had learned from his Savior. Stephen's prayer had one most notable answer, the young man named Saul. (LL)

The similar responses in a similar situation show that Stephen is a true follower of Jesus. They also emphasize important points in the implied author's understanding of martyrdom. The martyr bears witness to the exalted Lord, ruling with heavenly power, whom the opponents cannot see. The martyr trusts in a divine care reaching beyond death and shows no animosity toward the killers, instead interceding for them. In these ways the martyr follows the example of the Lord Jesus. An impressive picture of a faithful follower of Jesus results, a picture that probably had considerable appeal in the early Christian era. (Tannehill)

do not hold this sin against them. Compare with Jesus' words (Lk 23:34). (CSB)

fell asleep – The death of Stephen, in fact, provides the first major transition in the Acts narrative. The Jerusalem story is effectively ended except for those necessary contacts with the Church there that the narrative will demand. (Sacra)

Because Christ conquered sin, death, and the power of the devil, when believers die, their death leads to everlasting life. Cf Rev. 14:13. (TLSB)

7:54–60 Stephen displays the heart of one touched and changed by Jesus' love. Normally we do not forgive people until they ask for forgiveness. Here we see a second type of forgiveness, spoken and requested from God before a person asks for it (v 60). When betrayal, persecution, or abuse breaks your heart, recall Stephen's words. Pray that the Lord would lead you to this type of forgiveness. Know that the Lord, who forgave the soldiers who crucified Him, can forgive all your sins. He can likewise heal your wounds of body and soul. So great is His mercy. • "Jesus, in Your dying woes, Even while Your lifeblood flows, Craving pardon for Your foes: Hear us, holy Jesus.... Oh, may we, who mercy need, Be like You in heart and deed, When with wrong our spirits bleed: Hear us, holy Jesus." Amen. (*LSB* 447:1, 3) (*TLSB*)