

THE REST OF THE STORY

Studies in the Book of Acts

***“We will move the world not by criticism of it, nor conformity to it –
but by combustion within it of lives ignited by the Spirit of God”***

Vance Havner

Text

Acts 7:1-60

Topic

When Stephen tells the Jewish leadership that they are resisting the Holy Spirit they respond by stoning him to death

Title

Resistance Is Fatal

Introduction

You'd have to call Stephen a history buff. He was able to summarize two-thousand years of Jewish history in one chapter. The talk he gave can be read aloud in just about five minutes. Starting with Abraham, the father of the Hebrew nation, he follows Israel through the time of the patriarchs, to settlement and slavery in Egypt, to the Exodus with Moses, into the Promised Land, to King Solomon building the Temple at Jerusalem.

It was more than just a quick overview. Stephen had been seized by the Jewish ruling council, the Sanhedrin, and was accused of undermining God's leaders, God's law, and God's land. His history lesson highlighted all three of those topics.

In the end what Stephen said was not so much a defense as it was an accusation. Looking ahead for a moment to his conclusion we read,

[Acts 7:48](#) "However, the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands, as the prophet says:

Acts 7:49 'HEAVEN IS MY THRONE, AND EARTH IS MY FOOTSTOOL. WHAT HOUSE WILL YOU BUILD FOR ME? SAYS THE LORD, OR WHAT IS THE PLACE OF MY REST?

Acts 7:50 HAS MY HAND NOT MADE ALL THESE THINGS?'

Acts 7:51 "*You* stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers *did*, so *do* you.

Acts 7:52 Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers,

Acts 7:53 who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept *it*."

Stephen was accusing them with regard to the land, their leaders, and the Law:

1. In verses forty-eight through fifty he touched upon the land. The Jews were so concerned about the land and the physical Temple in the land that they were forgetting that God could not be confined to a place or a building.
2. In verses fifty-one and fifty-two he touched upon their leaders. Throughout their history the Jews had persecuted and killed their leaders! The Sanhedrin had just done the same to Jesus.
3. In verse fifty-three he touched upon the Law of Moses. It was they who were breaking God's Law, not him.

History hurts! Dragging him outside the city they took up large stones and pelted his body until he was dead.

No matter to Stephen. He had shown them that their land and their leaders and their Law were all things that prefigured the coming of their Lord, Jesus Christ. His earthly ministry was over and he was received into Heaven by the Lord Himself.

Stephen was able to find Jesus all the way through the Scriptures. In the end he was enabled to follow Jesus all the way through suffering. We'll organize our thoughts around those two points as we analyze Stephen's arguments and accusations.

#1 You Are Able To Find
Jesus All The Way Through Scripture
(v1-48)

Stephen had been engaging in spiritual dialogs and debates in the Jewish synagogues. He was proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the promised Messiah of Israel and Savior of the world. Unable to refute the wisdom and power of his words the Jews falsely accused him and put him on trial for blasphemy. It was a capital offense.

Stephen's defense seems unorthodox until you realize that it was more an accusation than a defense. He turned the accusations against his accusers. They had accused him of speaking against Moses, a most revered leader. He began insightfully with their very first 'leader,' Abraham, in verses one through eight.

Acts 7:1 Then the high priest said, "Are these things so?"

Acts 7:2 And he said, "Brethren and fathers, listen: The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran,

Acts 7:3 and said to him, 'GET OUT OF YOUR COUNTRY AND FROM YOUR RELATIVES, AND COME TO A LAND THAT I WILL SHOW YOU.'

Acts 7:4 Then he came out of the land of the Chaldeans and dwelt in Haran. And from there, when his father was dead, He moved him to this land in which you now dwell.

Acts 7:5 And *God* gave him no inheritance in it, not even *enough* to set his foot on. But even when *Abraham* had no child, He promised to give it to him for a possession, and to his descendants after him.

Acts 7:6 But God spoke in this way: that his descendants would dwell in a foreign land, and that they would bring them into bondage and oppress *them* four hundred years.

Acts 7:7 'AND THE NATION TO WHOM THEY WILL BE IN BONDAGE I WILL JUDGE,' said God, 'AND AFTER THAT THEY SHALL COME OUT AND SERVE ME IN THIS PLACE.'

Acts 7:8 Then He gave him the covenant of circumcision; and so *Abraham* begot Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day; and Isaac *begot* Jacob, and Jacob *begot* the twelve patriarchs.

Stephen skipped rapidly through Jewish history. *So will we!* If you want to get the whole back story you'd have to read most of the Old Testament.

Abraham was the father of the Hebrew nation. He was a Gentile who was called by God to follow Him by faith to a land of promise. Through him God would raise up a new nation, Israel, His chosen people. Abraham's son Isaac would have a son, Jacob, who would

have the sons who became the twelve patriarchs or leaders of the twelve tribes that were the nation of Israel.

Stephen establishes his first point. Though Abraham was their father, patriarch, and leader, **he never had any land and he never had the Law:**

1. Stephen used the word **land** four times and the word **place** once. He made it clear that Abraham never had the land as his inheritance. He was not given the Tabernacle nor did he worship in any Temple.
2. Obviously Abraham did not have the Law of Moses! He was way before Moses. Instead God gave Him promises.

The Jews accusing Stephen were all about the land and the Law. **Their original leader, father Abraham, had neither!** Without them Abraham was able to have such close fellowship with God that Scripture calls him the friend of God (James 2:23). As important as the land was and is, and as important as the Law was and is, they were never ends in and of themselves. They were means to an end. They were means to bring a person to Jesus Christ. They pointed to Jesus.

In seven verses Stephen summarized Genesis chapters twelve through thirty-six. Stephen next described the typical treatment of their leaders by the Jews, beginning with Joseph, found in Genesis chapters thirty-seven through fifty.

Acts 7:9 "And the patriarchs, becoming envious, sold Joseph into Egypt. But God was with him

Acts 7:10 and delivered him out of all his troubles, and gave him favor and wisdom in the presence of Pharaoh, king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house.

Acts 7:11 Now a famine and great trouble came over all the land of Egypt and Canaan, and our fathers found no sustenance.

Acts 7:12 But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first.

Acts 7:13 And the second *time* Joseph was made known to his brothers, and Joseph's family became known to the Pharaoh.

Acts 7:14 Then Joseph sent and called his father Jacob and all his relatives to *him*, seventy-five people.

Acts 7:15 So Jacob went down to Egypt; and he died, he and our fathers.

Acts 7:16 And they were carried back to Shechem and laid in the tomb that Abraham bought for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor, *the father* of Shechem.

It's an amazing story! What Stephen focused on was their persecution of Joseph. The very person God had raised up to lead them was despised and rejected by them.

You could read between the lines as Stephen spoke. Joseph was not just a leader of the Jews; he was a type of Jesus Christ. The way he was treated by his own brothers was a type or a picture of how Jesus would be treated, and was treated, by His own brothers – the Jews:

1. Joseph's brothers were **moved with envy**. Pilate **knew that for envy** they delivered Jesus unto him (see Matthew 27:18).
2. Joseph was sold for twenty pieces of silver. Jesus was sold for thirty pieces of silver.
3. Joseph was punished for sins he did not commit. Jesus, the sinless One, was punished for our sins.
4. Joseph was cast into prison. Jesus descended into the prison of the earth (see Ephesians 4:9).
5. Joseph became ruler of the prison. Jesus preached in hell and led captivity captive (Ephesians 4:8).
6. Joseph miraculously was freed from prison. Jesus miraculously arose from the grave.

One of my favorite types is how Joseph prefigures the Second Coming of Jesus back to the nation of Israel. During a time of famine Joseph's brothers went to Egypt for help. They stood before the Prime Minister of Egypt, not recognizing him to be their own brother. As Joseph began to question them when they appeared before him a second time they admitted that they had sinned greatly against their brother. Then, in that powerful emotional scene, Joseph said, **I am Joseph** (Genesis 45:4). It wasn't until the second time they saw him that Joseph's brothers realized who he was. So, too, after going through a time of extreme suffering – the Great Tribulation - Israel will finally recognize Jesus in His Second Coming (Romans 11:26).

The next leader mistreated by the Jews was Moses.

Acts 7:17 "But when the time of the promise drew near which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt

Acts 7:18 till another king arose who did not know Joseph.

Acts 7:19 This man dealt treacherously with our people, and oppressed our forefathers, making them expose their babies, so that they might not live.

Acts 7:20 At this time Moses was born, and was well pleasing to God; and he was brought up in his father's house for three months.

Acts 7:21 But when he was set out, Pharaoh's daughter took him away and brought him up as her own son.

Acts 7:22 And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds.

Acts 7:23 "Now when he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the children of Israel.

Acts 7:24 And seeing one of *them* suffer wrong, he defended and avenged him who was oppressed, and struck down the Egyptian.

Acts 7:25 For he supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand.

Acts 7:26 And the next day he appeared to two of them as they were fighting, and *tried to* reconcile them, saying, 'Men, you are brethren; why do you wrong one another?'

Acts 7:27 But he who did his neighbor wrong pushed him away, saying, 'WHO MADE YOU A RULER AND A JUDGE OVER US?'

Acts 7:28 DO YOU WANT TO KILL ME AS YOU DID THE EGYPTIAN YESTERDAY?'

Acts 7:29 Then, at this saying, Moses fled and became a dweller in the land of Midian, where he had two sons.

Acts 7:30 "And when forty years had passed, an Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire in a bush, in the wilderness of Mount Sinai.

Acts 7:31 When Moses saw *it*, he marveled at the sight; and as he drew near to observe, the voice of the Lord came to him,

Acts 7:32 saying, 'I AM THE GOD OF YOUR FATHERS - THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, THE GOD OF ISAAC, AND THE GOD OF JACOB.' And Moses trembled and dared not look.

Acts 7:33 'Then the LORD said to him, "TAKE YOUR SANDALS OFF YOUR FEET, FOR THE PLACE WHERE YOU STAND IS HOLY GROUND.

Acts 7:34 I HAVE SURELY SEEN THE OPPRESSION OF MY PEOPLE WHO ARE IN EGYPT; I HAVE HEARD THEIR GROANING AND HAVE COME DOWN TO DELIVER THEM. AND NOW COME, I WILL SEND YOU TO EGYPT." ' '

Acts 7:35 "This Moses whom they rejected, saying, 'WHO MADE YOU A RULER AND A JUDGE?' is the one God sent *to be* a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the Angel who appeared to him in the bush.

Acts 7:36 He brought them out, after he had shown wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red Sea, and in the wilderness forty years.

Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers were just summarized for you. *Stephen was a walking Cliff's Notes!* He's the guy you'd want to sit next to when taking a history test.

Like Joseph, Moses was rejected by the Jews as their leader on more than one occasion.

Again reading between the lines you can see Moses as a type of Jesus. For example:

1. Moses was raised in a great palace but left it to live among and deliver his people. So Jesus, eternally in Heaven as God, left it to live among and deliver His people when He took upon Himself a body and came to earth.
2. After he was rejected Moses went into the land of the Gentiles and took for himself a Gentile bride and had sons. So, too, after He was rejected Jesus went to the Gentile nations and is taking a Gentile bride – His Church – with many sons and daughters.

The Jews historically had a very bad track record of how they treated their leaders. Joseph and Moses were just the tip of the persecution iceberg. In a moment Stephen would accuse his accusers of mistreating Jesus – the One leader whom Joseph and Moses prefigured.

He sets up his conclusion by reminding the Jews that Moses himself, who they claimed to revere, spoke of the coming of a greater One than himself:

Acts 7:37 "This is that Moses who said to the children of Israel, 'THE LORD YOUR GOD WILL RAISE UP FOR YOU A PROPHET LIKE ME FROM YOUR BRETHREN. HIM YOU SHALL HEAR.'

Stephen will tell them that the **Prophet** Moses mentioned, their future Messiah, was none other than Jesus. First he turned his attention to the Jewish attitude toward the Law of Moses.

Acts 7:38 "This is he who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the Angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and *with* our fathers, the one who received the living oracles to give to us,

Acts 7:39 whom our fathers would not obey, but rejected. And in their hearts they turned back to Egypt,

Acts 7:40 saying to Aaron, 'MAKE US GODS TO GO BEFORE US; AS FOR THIS MOSES WHO BROUGHT US OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT, WE DO NOT KNOW WHAT HAS BECOME OF HIM.'

Acts 7:41 And they made a calf in those days, offered sacrifices to the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands.

Acts 7:42 Then God turned and gave them up to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the Prophets: 'DID YOU OFFER ME SLAUGHTERED ANIMALS AND SACRIFICES DURING FORTY YEARS IN THE WILDERNESS, O HOUSE OF ISRAEL?

Acts 7:43 YOU ALSO TOOK UP THE TABERNACLE OF MOLOCH, AND THE STAR OF YOUR GOD REMPHAN, IMAGES WHICH YOU MADE TO WORSHIP; AND I WILL CARRY YOU AWAY BEYOND BABYLON.'

The Jews got tired of waiting while Moses was up on Mount Sinai receiving the Law. They had Moses' brother, Aaron, mold a golden calf. They 'worshipped' the golden calf in a drunken orgy.

So much for their respect for the Law. What about the land?

Acts 7:44 "Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as He appointed, instructing Moses to make it according to the pattern that he had seen,

Acts 7:45 which our fathers, having received it in turn, also brought with Joshua into the land possessed by the Gentiles, whom God drove out before the face of our fathers until the days of David,

Acts 7:46 who found favor before God and asked to find a dwelling for the God of Jacob.

Acts 7:47 But Solomon built Him a house.

God had given them a Tabernacle in the wilderness. It was essentially a portable system of worship. It was a **pattern**, or a copy, of what Heaven looked like. As important as their land was and is, they did not need to be in the land to worship God.

After they settled the land and David became king over Israel at Jerusalem he desired to build God a permanent Sanctuary – the Temple. David planned and prepared for it and then his son, Solomon, built it.

But God never asked for it! The Jews were revering the Temple in the land as if it were God's only dwelling place and not simply a

model of heavenly things to come. They were putting too much emphasis on the physical Temple when, all along, God wanted to dwell within them and make them His temple.

Stephen had breezed through two-thousand years of Jewish history at breakneck speed. Along the way he answered the accusations against him by showing that it was the Jews themselves who undermined their leaders, their Law, and the land. For his part he had a clear understanding of how God was working in and through history to prepare them to receive their ultimate Leader, Jesus Christ, Who would fulfill the Law and open up for them the way into the heavenly Sanctuary while dwelling within them as His temple on earth.

Before moving on to Stephen's application and accusation I have to note something. **Stephen saw Jesus on every page of Scripture.** He could follow Him through the entire Bible.

1. Philip will do the same thing in just a little while. While waiting along the road he encounters an Ethiopian on his way back home from Jerusalem. After contacting the man and seeing that he was reading from the Book of Isaiah, you're told that **beginning at [that very] Scripture preached Jesus to him** (Acts 8:35).
2. On the road to Emmaus the resurrected Jesus met two disciples who did not recognize Him. As they walked along you're told that **beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself** (Luke 24:27).

Focus on Jesus when you read and study the Bible and you will be able to find and follow Him all the way through its pages.

Stephen's argument was over. It wasn't a defense. It was an accusation.

#2 You Are Enabled To Follow
Jesus All The Way Through Suffering
(v49-60)

Stephen applied his history lesson. First, as to the land in which their Temple stood:

Acts 7:48 "However, the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands, as the prophet says:

Acts 7:49 'HEAVEN IS MY THRONE, AND EARTH IS MY FOOTSTOOL. WHAT HOUSE WILL YOU BUILD FOR ME? SAYS THE LORD, OR WHAT IS THE PLACE OF MY REST?

Acts 7:50 HAS MY HAND NOT MADE ALL THESE THINGS?'

As important as their promised land was and still is, it wasn't Stephen who was disrespecting it. It was them. God could never be contained by an earthly Temple. It was always a pattern of something so much better. The veil in the Temple, separating the holy place from the holy of holies, had been torn in two, from top to bottom, when Jesus died on the Cross. They all knew this. It signified that the way in to God's presence was now open. It was through Jesus that you could now go directly into the presence of God in Heaven (spiritually speaking). God was done with the Temple. It was they who were disrespecting God by holding on to the ritual and sacrifice of the Temple.

Talk about putting God in a box!

Next Stephen accused them of their mistreatment of their leaders:

Acts 7:51 "*You* stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers *did*, so *do* you.

Acts 7:52 Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers,

They were in the long line of those who persecuted and killed the servants of God. They were the worst in that long line because they killed the One whom Moses and all the prophets and patriarchs pointed to – Jesus Christ, their Messiah and Savior.

Finally Stephen accused them of breaking God's Law:

Acts 7:53 who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept *it*."

God's Law was and is glorious. They had reduced it to a mere outward hypocrisy. They weren't keeping it; they were trampling on it. A good example was their opposition to the Apostles and now Stephen.

The word **resist**, in verse fifty-one, means *to rush against* and *seize*, with the idea of doing harm. They were resisting the Holy Spirit by seizing the Spirit-filled man to harm him.

Resistance was futile!

Acts 7:54 When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with *their* teeth.

How do you **gnash** at someone with your **teeth**? It pictures the desire of their hearts to tear him apart as a wild beast would tear into the flesh of prey. It is 'Exhibit A' in Stephen's defense. Obviously the Scriptures had no real effect in the lives of these men.

'Exhibit B' was Stephen in contrast to them:

Acts 7:55 But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God,
Acts 7:56 and said, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!"

OK, this wasn't going to help him win any points with the crowd! But what a sweet scene. What a perfect way to portray the conflict between the grace of God and the sin of man.

Think again about the key points in the discussion: leader, Law, and land. If there was any doubt that Stephen had been trying to show them Jesus through the Scriptures it was gone now. There He was – their Leader, having fulfilled the righteous requirements of the Law and having opened the way to the real promised land, Heaven.

Their resistance was futile. It would become fatal for Stephen.

Acts 7:57 Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord;

Acts 7:58 and they cast *him* out of the city and stoned *him*. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

Stephen became the first martyr of the Church Age. It's been said, and is a famous saying, that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church. It is no where truer than right at the beginning. **Saul** was there. It's the Saul we know by his Roman name, Paul. The blood of Stephen would plant a seed in Paul's heart. He would be saved and become the greatest Christian on record, planting Churches all over the known world and writing a large portion of the New Testament.

Acts 7:59 And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on *God* and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

Acts 7:60 Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

Sound familiar? Listen to these words of Jesus while He was being crucified:

Luke 23:46 And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, "**Father, INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMIT MY SPIRIT.**"

Luke 23:34 Then Jesus said, "**Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.**"

Stephen was able to find Jesus on every page of Scripture. Now he was enabled to follow His Lord all the way through suffering.

The word martyr is from the word *witness*. If you are a Christian you are already a martyr. You may never have to die for your witness but you will suffer for it. If men do not repent they will resist. If not violently, then in some other manner.

It's no matter to you if you 'see' Jesus. Stephen actually saw Him from the earth. You and I will actually see Him when we leave earth:

1. If you are alive and remain until Jesus comes to Rapture the Church from earth to Heaven then you, too, will see Him standing to receive you!
2. If you fall asleep, that is if you die, the Bible says you are immediately absent from the body and present with the Lord (Second Corinthians 5:8). You will stand before Jesus and He will reward you as His good and faithful servant as you enter into the joy of your Lord forever and ever.

