

## The Acts and Torah of the Apostles Study Guide

### Chapter 7

#### 7:1-53

In the previous chapter, charges were brought against Stephen at the Sanhedrin, with specific accusations that he spoke against Moses, God (v. 11), the temple and the *Torah* (v. 13). Chapter 7 begins with his defense against those charges that is based on a recounting of the history of the Jewish people.

Since blasphemy means speaking evil against someone or something, the antidote to blasphemy is speaking good about someone. In that way, Stephen refutes the charge that he blasphemed God by calling Him “the God of Glory” (v. 2). The phrase “*El hakavod*—the God of Glory” appears only one place in the *Tanakh*. It is found in Psalm 29:3. So it is reasonable to conclude that it was intentional and it would be used as a *remez* (the Hebraic interpretive method using a hint) of a fuller concept that only someone familiar with that Psalm would recognize. In this *remez* Stephen is letting David the Psalmist speak good about God for him. The phrasing of the Psalm accentuates the voice of God affirming His own might. Thus it is as if God Himself is indirectly testifying on behalf of Stephen, which strongly disproves the accusation of blasphemy against God by Stephen.

He defended the charge of blasphemy against Moses in this manner:

- v. 20 – He called Moses “lovely in the sight of God.”
- v. 22 – He said that Moses “was a man of power and deeds.”
- v. 35 – He agreed that “God sent him to be both a ruler and a deliverer.”

He defended the charge of blasphemy against the Torah by stating his affirmation of it.

- v. 38 – He called it the “living oracles.”
- v. 44 – He said the portion of the Torah that is related to the tabernacle was spoken by God.
- v. 53 – He called the Torah ordained by angels. This statement is based on Deuteronomy 33:2 which gives the sense of “ten thousand holy ones” accompanying Adonai when the Torah was given. That fact is also confirmed in Galatians 3:19.

He defended the charge of blasphemy against the temple by giving a clear biblical position on it.

- v. 46 – He called it a “dwelling place for the God of Jacob.”
- v. 49 – He quoted Isaiah 66:1 in which God declared that His dwelling place is not limited to a building but encompasses heaven and earth.

In the midst of refuting the various charges of blasphemy, Stephen gave attention to those times in history when the people rejected persons whom God had raised up for His purposes:

- v. 9 – Joseph was rejected by his brothers.
- v. 25 – The people during the time of Moses did not understand that he was their deliverer.
- v. 35 – They disowned Moses
- v. 39 – They were unwilling to be obedient to Moses
- v. 52 – The people during the time of the prophets persecuted them for their message, including the one who “announced the coming of the righteous one” (Messiah Yeshua).

In this way, Stephen was connecting his accusers to those past times of rebellion. In the end, he made two charges of his own:

- v. 52 – They were responsible for killing the Messiah.
- v. 53 – They did not keep the Torah.

This is what leads to his death, not the charges that were originally brought by false witnesses and refuted by his defense.

### 7:54-60

It is not coincidental that Stephen, who called Adonai the God of Glory at the beginning, of this chapter is allowed to behold the glory of God in the end, just prior to his death. In verses 55-56, his vision is consistent with the prophecy in Psalm 110:1 that the Messiah would be exalted to the right hand of Adonai, which is a picture of royal power. That Psalm goes on to depict Him both as a king and a priest according to the order of Melchizedek. It is an incredible passage that cannot be explained away in a natural manner, and Yeshua proved that point in Matthew 22:43-46. So this vision in verses 55-56 was a great privilege for Stephen to behold, which can be seen as a special blessing for Him in acknowledge of his faithfulness, even unto death. In verse 57, his opponents did not want to hear his description of the vision, so they covered their ears as they came upon him.

Verse 58 shows that the witnesses participated in the act of stoning Stephen. According to Deuteronomy 17:7, the witnesses to a capital offense were required to begin the act of stoning. The reason for this requirement was to give a false accuser a second thought about what he was doing. Because if it was discovered that he made a false accusation, now he would be guilty of murder, and that was a capital offense. But these accusers were so enraged and determined to punish Stephen, that they did it anyway.

In addition, this was an illegal act in Rome's eyes, because they had taken away the right of the Jews to carry out capital punishment about three decades earlier. That is why the leaders of Israel didn't stone Yeshua, and they manipulated the Romans into crucifying Him instead. So, again, that makes this an act based on rage, not a proper response to what began as a legal case.

This is also the first mention of Saul and the beginning of a key story that would continue through the end of the book. The witnesses laying their coats at the feet of Saul is an acknowledgment of his influence in the community.

The character of Stephen and those who opposed him can be contrasted in this way:

- They were filled with anger (gnashing their teeth) – He was filled with the Holy Spirit.
- They took His life – He released his life to God.
- They accused him of being a sinner – He forgave them of their sin.