

AM Acts 6:8-8:1

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Date: 05 October 2025

Preacher: Rev Duncan Peters

[0 : 0 0] They're from the book of Acts in the Holy Bible, Acts chapter 6 from verse 8, and it's on page 1101 of the church Bible.

It's on page 1101 of the church Bible, Acts chapter 8, and it's long because it's really just one unit in the book of Acts, and I think it's helpful to deal with it as one whole unit rather than to sort of break it up.

But just for those of you who are maybe new here today or just visiting, in the times I've been here, we've been looking at the book of Acts, which is about the time after Jesus Christ has died and risen from the dead and then ascended into heaven, been taken up into heaven.

And then it's about the Holy Spirit coming on the disciples of Jesus and what the Lord Jesus does through those disciples in the following years.

It covers a period of about 30 years after the ascension of Jesus. And this is still pretty early in that period, maybe just a year or two after Jesus' ascension into heaven.

[1 : 3 2] And it's taking place in Jerusalem, the original center of the church. So let's read from Acts 6, verse 8.

And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people. Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the freedmen, as it was called, and of the Cyrenians and of the Alexandrians and of those from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and disputed with Stephen.

Then they secretly instigated men who said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.

And they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes. And they came upon him and seized him and brought him before the council. And they set up false witnesses who said, This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law.

For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us. And gazing at him, all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

[3 : 0 6] And the high priest said, Are these things so? 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, and said to him, Go out from your land and from your kindred, and go into the land that I will show you.

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.

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.

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 400 years.

But I will judge the nation that they serve, said God. And after that, they shall come out and worship me in this place. And he gave him the covenant of circumcision.

[4 : 22] 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.

And the patriarchs, jealous of Joseph, sold him into Egypt. But God was with him, and rescued him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favour and wisdom.

Before Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who made him ruler over Egypt, and over all his household. Now there came a famine throughout all Egypt, and Canaan, and great affliction.

And our fathers could find no food. But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent out our fathers on their first visit. And on the second visit, Joseph made himself known to his brothers, and Joseph's family became known to Pharaoh.

And Joseph sent and summoned Jacob, his father, and all his kindred, 75 persons in all. And Jacob went down into Egypt, and he died, he and our fathers.

[5 : 32] And they were carried back to Shechem, and laid in the tomb that Abraham had bought, had bought for a sum of silver, from the sons of Hamor, from the sons of Hamor, in Shechem.

But as the time of the promise drew near, which God had granted to Abraham, the people increased, and multiplied in Egypt, until there arose over Egypt, another king, who did not know Joseph.

He dealt shrewdly with our race, and forced our fathers to expose their infants, so that they would not be kept alive. 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. And when he was exposed, Pharaoh's daughter adopted him, and brought him up as her own son. And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in his words and deeds.

When he was 40 years old, it came into his heart to visit his brothers, the children of Israel. And seeing one of them being wronged, he defended the oppressed man, and avenged him by striking down the Egyptian.

[6 : 46] He supposed that his brothers would understand that God was giving them salvation by his hand, but they did not understand. 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? But the man who was wronging his neighbor, thrust him aside, saying, Who made you a ruler and a judge over us? Do you want to kill me, as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?

At this retort, Moses fled, and became an exile in the land of Midian, where he became the father of two sons. Now when 40 years had passed, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in a flame of fire in a bush.

When Moses saw it, he was amazed at the sight, and as he drew near to look, there came the voice of the Lord. 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. Then the Lord said to him, Take off the sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. 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.

[8 : 05] And now come, I will send you to Egypt. 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.

This man led them out, performing wonders and signs in Egypt, and at the Red Sea, and in the wilderness for forty years. This is the Moses, who said to the Israelites, God will raise up for you, a prophet like me, from your brothers.

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.

Our fathers refused to obey him, but thrust him aside, and in their hearts, they turned to Egypt, 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.

And they made a calf in those days, and offered a sacrifice to the idol, and were rejoicing in the works of their hands. But God turned away, and gave them over to worship, the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the prophets.

[9 : 23] Did you bring to me slain beasts and sacrifices, during the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? 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.

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.

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, who found favor in the sight of God, and asked to find a dwelling place, for the God of Jacob.

But it was Solomon, who built a house for him. Yet the Most High, does not dwell in houses, made by hands.

As the prophet says, Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me? Says the Lord. What is the place of my rest?

[10 : 31] Did not my hand make all these things? You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears. You always resist the Holy Spirit.

As your fathers did, so do you. 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.

You who received the law, as delivered by angels, and did not keep it. Now when they heard these things, they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him.

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. And he said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.

But they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and rushed together at him. 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.

[11 : 51] And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, Lord, Jesus, receive my spirit. 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. And Saul, approved of his execution. Well, may God bless to us that reading of his word.

Back this morning to the passage that we read, that's from Acts chapter 6, verse 8, through to the whole of chapter 7. Over the past 2,000 years, there have been many martyrs, who have given their lives, for their faith, in the Lord Jesus Christ, and their witness, about the Lord Jesus Christ.

Of course, anyone who, experiences that, is following in the footsteps, of their Lord, of Jesus Christ, who was crucified, by his own people, and the Roman authorities.

And since the earliest days, of the church, the church, the church has, very often, experienced, opposition, and persecution, and some have, given their lives, because of their, their faith, in Christ.

[13 : 23] Well, the first martyr, to follow in the steps, of his Lord, is Stephen, and in the account, that we, looked at. And, the book of Acts, records this, at considerable length.

It was a long reading, we read today. And so, it views it, as a very important event, in the life, of those earliest disciples, that it records.

And, Luke, who is the writer of Acts, records this, for a number, of reasons, in the flow, of the storyline, of the book of Acts. And we'll, we'll look at some of those, we'll come to some of those, those reasons.

But, martyrdom, raises, a question. And it's, the question, why was Stephen, prepared, to give his, life, for, Jesus Christ, and for the cause, of, the gospel?

Well, I think we can, mention at least, two reasons, why he was, prepared, to do that. The first is, that those who, encounter, Jesus Christ, as, the saviour.

[14 : 41] They receive his, his love, his forgiveness, his salvation, that the joy, the peace, that Jesus Christ, gives. And they find that, Jesus Christ, is worth, living for, and even that he is worth, dying for.

So, simply that, Jesus Christ is, is worth it. But there's a second reason, I mean, there may be more reasons, than this, but a second, really prominent reason, is, the hope, of, eternal, life.

A far more recent, martyr, was a man called, Jim Elliot, in the middle of the, 20th century. He, was one of five, who gave their lives, attempting to take, the gospel, of Jesus Christ, to the, the aukers, of, Ecuador.

And, they, all five, were killed, in trying to do that. But Jim, sometime before that, and I think, Jim Elliot, knew, and his comrades, knew the, the risk, that they took, in this endeavor, of taking the gospel, to the aukers.

But Jim Elliot, wrote in his diary, that he is no fool, who gives, what he cannot keep, to gain, what he cannot lose. He is no fool, who gives, what he cannot keep, to gain, what he cannot lose.

[16 : 09] Now of course, we can't keep this life, it's achievements, it's, you know, the things that we, we do, the things that we attain, we can't keep those things.

They only last, for a short time. We cannot keep this life. And yet, the gospel, promises us, eternal life, a life that will, never end.

A life, that is, that is resurrection life, with, the Lord, with God forever. And that is something, that no one can take away, from us. And it is, a life that is, everlasting life.

And so, Jim Elliot's words, he is no fool, who gives, what he cannot keep. This present life, with all that goes with it, to gain, what he cannot lose, eternal life.

That person is no fool, they are a wise person. And that, although, Stephen might not have put it, in exactly those words, that was the, the spirit, that was what he, he knew himself.

[17 : 11] So, I want to look at this passage, under three headings. First of all, the man. Second, the message. And third, the martyrdom. So, first of all, the man.

And, in chapter six, we are, given some description, of him. Just, we are given a, bit of a glimpse, into Stephen's character. In fact, in the, just before, where we took up the reading, in verse five, it is talking about them, choosing the seven helpers, for the church.

And in verse five, it says that, they chose Stephen, a man full of faith, and, the Holy Spirit. So, he was a man of, of deep, profound faith, in God.

And, and, his life was marked, by the Holy Spirit, filling him. He was a, a godly, spiritual man. In verse eight, of chapter six, he's described as, full of grace, and, power.

Of course, we, in this world, we, we, we can think of, powerful people. And so often, powerful people, they, they throw their weight around. Uh, it's not attractive, it's not nice.

[18 : 21] But Stephen has, power, and it's balanced by grace, by graciousness, uh, that reflects the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the grace of God. And, he was able to, he was, by the grace of God, being able to do wonders, and signs, among the people.

Um, in verse nine, we told about, people wanting to, to argue with him. But, they could not withstand, the wisdom, by which he spoke, or the spirit, by which, uh, he, spoke.

So again, um, a man who relied, on the Holy Spirit, for what he said, and who spoke with such wisdom, that his opponents, uh, just couldn't, they couldn't get the better of him.

And so, in, um, verse 11, they, they, they, resort to slander. It says, they secretly instigated men, who said, we've heard him speak blasphemous words, against Moses, and against God.

They couldn't find any, any proper reason, to accuse him, so they resort to, to slander, to, to, to lying about him. And, um, then in verse 15, just as, as he's brought before the, the Sanhedrin, that's the Jewish ruling council.

[19 : 37] Um, in verse 15, we read, gazing at him, all who sat in the council, saw that his face, was like the face, of an angel. And, I think there's maybe a suggestion there, that he is actually, a Moses-like figure.

Moses, um, in the book of Exodus, we read, read of Moses, going into the tent of meeting, to meet with God. And when he, came out, his face was, was shining, so much that he had to, um, to veil his face.

And, this is perhaps just a, a kind of an echo of that. So, Moses who, they say he's slandering, well, Stephen is a kind of, Moses-like figure here. So, that's just a, something about the man, Stephen.

Second then, the message, and it's, it's a long message, it runs from, 7 verse 2, to 53. And, it's by far the longest message, in, in the book of Acts.

Acts, one of the, the great features about Acts, is it has lots of, speeches, or messages, or sermons, preached by, the early, disciples, and the apostles. And, this is by far the longest, it's twice as long, as the next longest.

[20 : 45] So, again, that shows that Luke, the writer, sees this as a really significant, uh, message. And, it's, it's a defense speech.

He's, he's asked to defend himself, against the charges that are made. So, in verse 1, the high priest, who's the sort of chair, of the, of the council, he says to Stephen, are these things, so?

Are these accusations, true? And, that's, that's the occasion, for Stephen's speech. It's a defense speech. And, the charges against him, are in chapter 6, verse 13 and 14.

Um, this man, never ceases to speak words, against this holy place, that's the temple, in Jerusalem, uh, which will be nearby. And, against the law, the Torah, um, that was given to, to Moses.

For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth, will destroy this place, and will change the customs, that Moses delivered to us. Now, these are, um, these are false witnesses, they are false accusations, distortions of the truth.

[21 : 57] Now, of course, we don't have, any record of Stephen's, prior, um, prior speaking. Um, but we have, we have this record, and we also have the record, of other disciples, and of Jesus himself, upon, which would have, been like, what Stephen said.

And, on the temple, Jesus had said, that the temple, would be destroyed. But not that he himself, would destroy it.

Uh, in fact, in John 2, um, Jesus describes himself, as the new temple. The place where God, dwells, among his people. And also, that he said, that he was greater, than the temple.

But he never said, that he would destroy, he himself, would destroy the temple. And then, the law. Jesus had said, that he had not come, to abolish the law, but to fulfill, the law.

Now, of course, Jesus did, challenge, some of the interpretations, of the law, that the current scribes, and leaders, gave. Challenged it, on many points. But he never spoke, against, the law, the Torah.

[23 : 12] So, Stephen speaks, in response, to these charges. And he does so, by retelling, the story, of, the Israelites. A long, long story.

And, of course, it's selective, he can't tell everything, but he selects, certain things, out of it. And, he's answering, the two charges.

So, let's look at the, how he answers, these two charges. First of all, the charge, that he's speaking, against, the holy place, or the temple. The temple, was the, center, of, Jewish, religion, Jewish worship, in, Jerusalem.

It had originally, been built, by Solomon, around about, 1000 BC. And, it was viewed, as the house, of God. Where God, was present, in the midst, of his people.

It had been destroyed, by the Babylonians, in, 587, BC. But then, rebuilt again, under, under the Persian Empire.

[24 : 19] The Persian, king gave permission, for the temple, to be rebuilt. And, roughly, 515, BC, or so, it was, rebuilt. So, this was the second temple, that was there, in Jerusalem.

But, it seems that, some Jews, at least, and maybe these leaders, had a virtual, idolatry, of the temple.

They, they idolized, the temple, rather than the God, it represented, as the, as the house, of, that God. And, Stephen's speech, speech, it's actually, a very geographical speech.

It's a kind of, a lesson, in theological, geography. Because, he ranges, all over the place, geographically, about where God, has acted, and where God, has been present, with his people, through their history.

So, he starts off, in verse 2, that, the God of glory, appeared to our father, Abraham, when he was in, Mesopotamia.

[25 : 28] So, that's, far away from the temple, in, Jerusalem. In, verse 4 to 7, it mentions the land, of promise, in which, Abraham didn't even have, own a foot's length.

But, of course, the land, itself, was a broad place. It's not just the temple, it's a much broader area, than, just where the temple, was in Jerusalem. And then, moving on, in verses 9 to 15, he speaks about, how God was with, Joseph, in the land of Egypt.

So, Joseph was sold there, by his brothers, but God was with him. Not, in Jerusalem, not in, the promised land, but far away, in, in the land of Egypt.

God was with, Joseph there. And in verse 16, it talks about, being buried, in, in Shechem. That's, Jacob, was buried in Shechem.

Now, Shechem was, at that time, part of Samaria, not, under Samaritan, sort of, occupation, or, under there, where, it was where they lived.

[26 : 38] And then, God speaks to, to Moses, near Mount Sinai. Again, it's far from the land, in, in the, in the land of Sinai, the Mount Sinai.

In, verse 33, he, he recounts, how the Lord said to Moses, take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing, is holy ground.

So, there's this holy ground, it's made holy by the presence of God, but it's far away from, the temple, in Jerusalem. Verse 38, he speaks about the wilderness, and about, again, about Mount Sinai, and God's, presence there.

And then, God's presence in the, in the tabernacle, verses 44, 45, God giving instructions, to build this tabernacle, this tent-like structure, which, became the, the house of God, where God, dwelt, among his people.

And then, how, David had the idea, and Solomon actually, himself, built, the temple, in Jerusalem. And that's just, mentioned, briefly, that, Solomon, built the temple.

[27 : 54] And then, that's immediately, qualified in verse 48. Yet, the most high, does not dwell in houses, made by hands. As the prophet says, heaven is my throne, and the earth, is my footstool.

What kind of a house, will you build for me, says the Lord? Or what, is the place of my rest? Did not my hand, make, all, these things. So that's, it's kind of getting the temple, into, perspective.

God cannot really dwell there. Heaven is God's dwelling place. God is, everywhere present. He is the, the transcendent, God. He cannot be contained, in, a building.

What kind of a house, can contain, this God? In fact, Solomon himself, recognized that, when he built the temple. In 1 Kings chapter 8, this is, when Solomon is dedicating the temple, to the Lord, as the place of, of worship.

And, we've already, it's spoken of, of, the glory of the Lord, and the cloud, filling the temple, so that, the, the priests couldn't officiate there.

[29 : 03] But then, Solomon in his prayer, in verse 27, of 1 Kings 8, says, But will God, really, dwell on earth? The heaven, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you, how much less, this temple, I have built.

And so, Solomon recognized that, but it seems that these, many of these Jewish leaders, the Jewish ruling council, thought that, somehow they had got God contained, in this building, in the temple, in Jerusalem.

But God cannot be contained, God cannot be confined, you can't put, this God, in a box. God is too big, for that.

And of course, that danger is there, for us today, that we try to, contain God. That we try to, sort of, reduce God, to manageable, proportions. One way of doing that, is, by a kind of, privatized religion.

Where, we might think of, of, God is just a God, for Christians. He's a God, for us, but not for other people. Or, that we have this, sort of, little bit of our lives, that we give to God.

[30 : 14] But God has nothing to do, with the rest of our lives. So, we keep God, out of, out of our work, out of our leisure, out of business, out of politics, out of economics, out of trade, ecology, medicine, education, and the list goes on.

And that, we've got all these parts of life, and then a bit of life, for God. That's the way that, secular, society works. Secular society doesn't say, it doesn't abolish God, it's not atheist, necessarily, but just that, yeah, we keep God, out of public life.

God is, just a compartment, for those who, are into that, kind of thing. Well, God can't be contained, like that. God is, the maker, of all things.

That's what, Stephen says in his quote, from Isaiah, where God says, did not my hand, make, all these things. This God is the maker, of heaven, and earth.

All that we do, every aspect of our lives, everything that we get involved with, our workplaces, our, social life, our community life, our political life, trade, economics, everything, is, made by this God, and it's under his rule, under his soul, sovereign control.

[31 : 29] We can't, contain this God, we can't, try to put him in a box. He is too big for that. He is the king, and ruler, of all. But another way, we can, try and contain God, and it's, in some ways, it's the opposite extreme, it's what, and I, I can't think of a better phrase, for it than this, but, fundamentalist religion.

And that is, where, we might be tempted, to think that, our traditions, our theology, has, all the answers, that we have tied up, all the, all the loose ends, that, it, it, it, basically sums up everything, about God.

It solves the mystery, of God. Now, of course, a tradition, a church tradition, a theological tradition, a creed, a confession, can be, can be a, an excellent tool, a very useful tool, to help us, in understanding God.

But we should never make the mistake, of thinking that it can contain, this God, that it sums him up, in some way. Because, it's, because this God, is far bigger, far greater, than, any human, even the best human minds, can, grasp, or think.

This God has, revealed himself, so that we can know him. And yet, we know him, only in parts. We, we know him partially. We don't know him, fully.

[32 : 56] It's like, if you imagine, someone like Einstein, you know, a great genius. And, imagine a two-year-old, who, you know, family friend, knows Einstein.

But, of course, the two-year-old, can't grasp, Einstein's physics, what he, worked out. But he still has, a true knowledge, of Einstein. And that, well, our knowledge of God, is even less than that.

And so, we should stand in awe, of, this God. Well, Stephen, quoting Isaiah, says that, you know, in verse 48, the most high, the most high, does not, dwell, in houses, made by hands.

As the prophet says, heaven is my throne, and earth, is, my footstool. And then, the way things turn out, it's highly significant, that, Stephen, later says, I see heaven, opened.

Heaven, which is, God's, dwelling place. And in the opened heaven, he sees Jesus, the son of man, standing, at God's, right side.

[34 : 05] Steve Walton, in his commentary, says that, the place where heaven, and earth meet, which Stephen's opponents, considered to be the temple, is now, the exalted Jesus, who is not, hand made, and is the one, in whom God, the God of Israel, uniquely dwells.

So Stephen has this, vision, of the true temple, the true house of God, which is Jesus Christ, there, in that opened heaven, the ascended, and, risen, and reigning, Lord Jesus.

Well, the second, um, charge, that Stephen is answering, is that he's speaking, against the law, of Moses, uh, the Torah, and again, in, uh, turn back to chapter 6, verse 13 and 14, this man never ceases, to speak words, against this holy place, and against the law.

And earlier on, the sort of more informal, accusation, was that he speaks blasphemy, against Moses, and against, God. We have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth, will destroy this holy place, and will change the customs, Moses delivered, uh, to us.

And Stephen, answers that charge. In fact, um, in his, sort of retelling, of the story of the Israelites, uh, 24 out of 52 verses, focus on Moses.

[35 : 30] So almost half the speech, is about, Moses. And, uh, uh, Stephen demonstrates, great respect, for, the law.

He, in verse 38, he describes, the law, as, as living words. And, uh, Moses, is described, in the most respectful terms.

Um, also, he mentions, how Moses, in the law, prophesied, a prophet, like himself. This is, in, verse 37. God will send you, a prophet like me, from your own people.

That's a quote, from Deuteronomy chapter 18. But then, at the end of Stephen's speech, he, he kind of turns, the accusation, on his accusers, upon the Jewish leaders.

They had been accusing him, of speaking against the law, and against Moses. And he turns the table, he turns the accusation, that you are the ones, who, disobey, the law.

[36 : 29] Uh, you are the stiff-necked people, the uncircumcised, in heart and ears, who always resist, the Holy Spirit. You're following in the, footsteps of your fathers, who persecuted the prophets, and now you have, betrayed and killed, the righteous one, the Messiah, about whom they prophesied.

You received the law, but you did not, keep it. You did not, obey it. Again, rejection of, prophets, is one of the, themes, that runs through Stephen's speech.

Uh, that, Joseph's brothers, rejecting him. Moses being rejected. And then, and then, the exile in Babylon, because of the Israelites, rejection of the law.

And then finally, you, you, my, my, my, my, my, who are standing there, accusing me. You, you, you are disobeying the law of God.

Um, and, the supreme, expression of that disobedience, is in betraying, and murdering, the righteous one, Jesus Christ. Well, thirdly, and finally, we come to the martyrdom.

[37 : 37] We've looked at the man, the message, now the martyrdom. So the, the Sanhedrin, the, the Jewish ruling council, do not repent, at Stephen's words.

Rather, they are made, furious, at these words of accusation. Um, they're, they're absolutely enraged. But then we're told about Stephen, that Stephen has, a vision.

He sees, heaven, opened. He gazed into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing, at the right, hand of God. And he said, behold, I see the heavens opened, and the son of man, standing, at the right hand, of, God.

So Stephen has this vision, of this, scene, of heaven opened. A vision that puts, what's happening on earth, into perspective. Jesus, Jesus is standing, at the right hand, of God.

And Stephen says, look, I see heaven opened, and the son of man, standing, at the right hand, of God. And those words, kind of, echo, certain, biblical passages.

[38 : 50] Psalm 110, verse 1, that the Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies, a footstool for your feet. Also echoes, Daniel 7, verses 13 and 14, where Daniel has that vision, of one like a son of man, coming into the presence, of the ancient of days, of God himself.

And have been given, universal rule, and authority. And also, it echoes, the words of Jesus himself, at his trial. When the, again, the same Jewish ruling council, asks, are you the Christ, the Messiah, the son of, the blessed one?

Jesus responds, you will see, the son of man, coming in the clouds of heaven, at the right hand, of God. Now usually, in those passages, the son of man is sitting, at the right hand of God.

Here he is standing. Perhaps that is, he's standing to, to welcome Stephen, that's one suggestion. Or that he's standing, in judgment, on those who are, who are about to put him to death.

And, so, their response is to drag him out, of the city, and to begin, stoning him.

[40 : 12] And we're told that, Saul was there, that they laid their feet, sorry, they laid their cloaks, at the feet, of a young man, named Saul. And, beginning of chapter 8, verse 1, Saul, gave his approval, to his execution.

Now, Saul, is going to feature, a lot, there's a spoiler alert here, Saul's going to feature a lot, later on in Acts. God has, purposes for, this young man, Saul.

But at this moment, he is filled with hatred, against Stephen, against Jesus, and all those, who follow, Jesus. But then we come to, Stephen's last word.

So they're, they're stoning him to death. Um, and, in, verse 59, we read that, as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

And then, and falling to his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, Lord, do not hold this sin, against them. And when he said this, he fell, asleep. And I think, one of the most, striking things, about this, perhaps many striking things, about Stephen's last words, his last prayer, he, he prays, to the Lord Jesus.

[41 : 30] Now his prayer, very much, echoes, the last prayers of Jesus. In Luke's gospel, we have, two prayers of Jesus, from the cross. The first one is, both in Luke chapter 23, the first one is, Father, forgive them, because they do not know, what they are doing.

And the second prayer, Jesus' last words, are, Father, into your hands, I commit my spirit. And Stephen's prayers, are very similar to those.

He says, do not hold this sin, against them, very similar to, Father, forgive them. And, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. Father, into your hands, I commit my spirit.

Very much, we're seeing here, that Stephen, as the first martyr, is following, in the footsteps, of the Lord Jesus Christ. But also, something that's really striking, is that, whereas Jesus prays to the Father, Father, forgive them, Father, into your hands, I commit my spirit.

Stephen is praying, to the Lord Jesus. And that is, that is really remarkable. And it's, one of the places, in the book of Acts, perhaps, at least as clear, as anywhere else, we see that, for the disciples, their relationship, with Jesus, is parallel, the risen Jesus, is parallel, with the relationship, of devout, Israelites, to God, in the Old Testament.

[43 : 01] So just in the way, that devout Israelites, would relate to, to God, to Yahweh, so we see, the disciples, relating to, the Lord Jesus, in the book of Acts.

And that's very clearly, portrayed here. Stephen prays, to, the Lord Jesus. And also, along with that, he expresses his faith, that, when he says, in verse 58, sorry, 59, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit, that, Jesus is the one, who, has the authority, to receive his soul, receive his spirit, in heaven.

And also, when he prays, do not hold this sin, against them, he's praying to Jesus, as the one, who has the authority, either to forgive sin, or, to hold, people responsible, for their sin.

In other words, that Jesus, is the judge. And the saviour. That is, how Stephen, views, the Lord, Jesus, the arisen, ascended, Lord Jesus.

So, Stephen's last words, are words of, of faith, and words of forgiveness. Stephen himself, wants to, his, his, opponents, those who are, stoning him, to death, in their hatred, against him, he wants them, to be forgiven.

[44 : 22] And, there again, we are seeing him, following, in the footsteps, of the Lord Jesus. Perhaps, the kind of, how this works, is that Stephen, knows that he himself, has been forgiven.

He has, received that forgiveness, from the Lord Jesus. And so, that grace, overflows, to others. He wants others, to be forgiven. Even those, who are, so cruelly, opposing him, in this way, even putting him, to death.

And, the kind of, logic of it is, how can, he not forgive, when he has received, such forgiveness, from the Lord Jesus. And of course, that is an example, for us. When people do things, against us, our response, to that, should be that, we have received, such, enormous forgiveness, from the Lord Jesus.

How can we not, desire that forgiveness, for even those, who may, oppress us. And then also, his faith, that, there is life beyond, that this life, is not all.

That the Lord Jesus, will receive his spirit. And of course, we know that, the spirits, of God's people, go to be with him. And then, at the resurrection, on the last day, they will be reunited, with our bodies, to live, eternally, with the Lord.

[45 : 38] And again, it reminds us, where we started, with Jim Elliot's words. He is no fool, who gives what he cannot keep, to gain, what he cannot lose. Now at the moment, none of us, are called, to die, for the cause, of Jesus Christ.

We're not in that, kind of situation, at the moment. I pray that, we won't be in that situation. But I think, one of the challenges, of this is that, if Jesus Christ, is worth dying for, and that is, that the message of this, it's the message, of the whole of the Bible, that Jesus Christ, is worth, giving your life for, dying for.

If he is worth dying for, he is worth living for. And that, comes to each of us, in our own lives, our own daily lives. In whatever we, whatever path of life, we follow, whatever we, we find to do, in our work, in our families, in our leisure, in our neighborhoods, Jesus Christ, is eminently worthy, of living for.

That our lives, should be lived, devoted, for him. May God, grant us grace, to live, for him. Amen.