

SPEECHES IN THE ACTS – JOHN CARTER

STUDY 4 – STEPHEN'S DEFENCE

STEPHEN'S SPEECH BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN ACTS 7

It is evident dear brethren and sisters from the length of the speech (which has been read) that it must occupy an important place in the scheme of Luke's history. He has told us of the beginning of Christian life at Pentecost. He traces for us the Jerusalem ministry, the opposition of the Jewish authorities; the arrest of Peter and John; he narrates Peter's defence and then tells us of the origin of internal difficulties in the case of Ananias and Sapphira. At the same time great progress was made and many that heard these things were added to the Lord. He then has told us, in his history, how Jewish toleration was established after the imprisonment of the apostles - firstly, by their dismissal and secondly, through the counsel which was accepted, which was given unto them by Gamaliel and yet, those who knew anything about Christian life in its relation to Judaism during the first century knew that there was a sharp antagonism existing. What was the origin of that antagonism? We shall see before we are through with this book of Acts, the reason why Luke traces out this antagonism. It has a particular bearing upon the legal questions that he will discuss in the book. This speech begins really the important legal issues. For a question was being decided by the Jewish authorities whether the distinctively characteristic teaching of the apostles concerning Jesus Christ with all its implications should be tolerated by them. And it happened that Stephen, who was a man mighty in the Word as is very evident, who had a power of presentation in his defence, was the one who was arraigned before them. They were visiting the synagogues, of which there were many in Jerusalem, generally devoted to the men from particular districts who visited Jerusalem, a city of those from the province of Asia or from Achaia as the case may be, or from Egypt. And Stephen in one of these defences had been disputing and arguing concerning the Christian faith. So he was brought before the Jewish authorities with certain charges preferred against him.

Now we must try and see as fairly as we can, what the charges were that were made against him. For it is only by seeing the charges that were made, that we shall see in turn how Stephen presented his 'apologia' - his defence. Let us look then at the charges which are given at the close of chapter 6. Verse 10 of chapter 6, "They were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake". Then they suborned men which said, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God". And they stirred up the people and the elders, and the scribes and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council, and set up false witnesses. And here there is a remarkable parallel between what happened to the Master and to the servant - they set up false witnesses which said, "This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, (that is, the temple) and the law."

So the basis of the charge against Stephen was that he had been uttering things which to them were derogatory to temple and to law. They explained how his contentions were such by saying, "we have heard him say, that this same Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and change the customs which Moses delivered us". "We've heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place and change the customs".

So it is quite evident that Stephen had been contending that the practices of the Mosaic Law and the worship at the temple, were not essential to be acceptable to God. But the time had

now come when these things were becoming obsolete. He was in fact putting forward what Jesus had said to the woman of Samaria when she asked him to decide the issue as to whether Gerizim or Zion was the place where men ought to worship. Jesus indicated that historically the answer was in favour of the Jews and of Zion, but the hour is coming when neither here nor there, but wherever men may be, those who worship God in spirit and in truth would be acceptable to Him. For God seeketh such to worship Him.

The charge against Jesus that he said he would destroy this temple and raise it up in three days was a perversion of his teaching. He had indeed said, "you destroy this temple and I will raise it up in three days", but he spake of the temple of his body. But it would appear that the Jews in their opposition to Jesus somehow fused the two statements. For we find there was a haunting fear about them concerning something that would happen in three days. For they went to Pilate and said, "This man said, three days – in three days I will rise again, therefore make the tomb secure". And with the same sensitiveness the Jewish authorities saw a danger to the practices in which they had such vested interests. Even though they put aside their vested interests, to a patriotic Jew, it would seem indeed that the man who was putting forward such a case as Stephen, could only be classed as a renegade and must therefore be arraigned before the authorities.

They must have related these charges to the law of blasphemy, so serious did they treat them. But the man must have recognised that just as they had manifested the bitterness and the hatred toward Jesus which had brought him to the cross, so he in his turn must be prepared for a similar manifestation of evil spirit toward him. So he too, must be prepared for a like perversion of the application of justice as he stood before these authorities, and therefore, he must present such a case that it is put with all power and cogency in defence of the position that he had maintained so that he might show that if it were indeed God's purpose that he had been setting forth in his contentions, it might be put before for them in such a way that it couldn't be gainsaid. For the man who had such spirit of wisdom and of power, had also the quiet confidence and radiance that comes from utter conviction in the truth of what he believed. And they looked upon his face and saw as it were, the face of an angel and with such wonder and bewilderment they must sit and listen for so long a time while Stephen presented his defence.

In Smith's Bible Dictionary, now a hundred years old or so, Dean Stanley says that there are twelve mistakes in Stephen's defence. Rackham, to whose book we referred in our first address, a book in so many respects excellent, charges Stephen with fifteen mistakes. Now this is serious. We might think indeed that it doesn't impugn the inspiration of scripture or the accuracy of the record but under such circumstances mistakes might be possible, but we needn't fall back upon that, for every one of these supposed mistakes can be satisfactorily explained, but not only so, in the very explanation of them by the application of the key upon which we have insisted in previous addresses what appears to be a mistake is seen to have a marked relevance to Stephen's argument and is indeed vital to it.

Now let me sketch to you first of all briefly his argument, (so that we might get it outlined in our minds, so that the outline is not lost in the multitudes of details of which we shall have to look).

They said then, Stephen is speaking against the Law and against the temple, clearly indicating that they were not vital, that they hadn't the place now in the purpose of God, attached to them by the Jews. How does he meet it? Well, this broadly is his argument:

- Abraham, was called of God, but he was called before the law was given, and since Abraham worshipped God acceptably the Law was not essential in Abraham's case.
- Joseph and Moses were both rejected and yet, in each case, the man was raised up by God as the deliverer of His people. Therefore their rejection of Jesus, was only an extension of the same attitude to God's work that had been manifested by their fathers. And there were all the elements of a similar mistake having been made on their part in the rejection of Jesus.
- He shows that worship was offered to God in the wilderness before the tabernacle was made - then the tabernacle was not essential for acceptable worship.
- He shows that before the temple was built David offered acceptable service to God, neither, therefore, was the temple necessary for acceptable service.
- He reminds them that their fathers had persecuted the prophets and therefore warns them that their attitude was a persistence in the evil of their father's ways.
- He reminds them finally, that the law which they acknowledged, had not been kept by them, and therefore this persistence on their part was but an exhibition of what was a national trait - their refusal to accept him and his message - their refusal to accept Jesus and his message, was not strange.

So we can see that this speech of Stephen has, as we would expect it to have, a marked relevance to the charges that were made. Just as a lawyer in court making a defence on behalf of a prisoner must needs deal with the charges that were made against the prisoner, otherwise the judge would not permit him to continue, so also Stephen in making his defence must present a case that is strictly related to the charges that were made. And we suggest that the very length of it, extended as it must have been, in keeping with what has been said about the previous speeches recorded here, it says something of the impassioned power and the ability of the man as he reveals their history and he makes no mistake. He builds up his argument with unerring skill and traverses the whole range of Old Testament history. We will then try and follow and we shall have to be a little hurried and a little compressed in what is said and we shall have to ask you to attend closely. Let us try then and follow Stephen in a little more detail. Let us take account of the objections that have been made concerning the accuracy of his words and see how, following Luke's method, those objections really become boomerangs against the critical attack.

To the second verse then,

"Men, brethren, and fathers hearken; The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran,"

"the God of Glory", what's the significance of that? The glory was the mark of the manifestation of God and the token of His presence in the midst of His people. When then, Stephen describes God as the God of glory, he is saying that the God who revealed Himself as living in the midst of His people by His glory, was the One who called Abraham; but he lived in Mesopotamia and it was before even he came to Charran that the call was made to him. So God evidently can call men, independently of either residence in the land of

Palestine or of worship at the temple. He had said to Abraham, "get thee out of this land unto a country that I will show thee."

And here we come to the first two objections that are raised against the accuracy of Stephen. We quote the words of Rackham he says, 'Stephen makes God appear to Abraham for the first time in the land of the Chaldeans, that is Ur of the Chaldees which was sometimes reckoned by the Greeks in Mesopotamia. Genesis is silent about this appearance and makes the first call, the words of which are quoted by Stephen, at Haran. Philo and Jesus, however, agree with Stephen and the earlier appearance is supported by Joshua.' But this difficulty is created by making the appearance of God to Abraham recorded in Genesis 12, to have occurred after Terah's death. Accepting the A.V. of Genesis 12:1, "Now the Lord had said to Abram", we are thrown back to the days of Abram in Ur. What was it that made Terah and Abram leave Ur unless there was some Divine message? That God had given them a Divine message is evident from the fact that it is said through Joshua later, that "the fathers of Israel were called from beyond the flood", from beyond the Euphrates. And "he came into this land, says Stephen, wherein ye now dwell, and dwelt in Charran and from thence, when his father was dead, He removed him unto this land" (v4).

Objection Two: Stephen, and Philo agrees that Terah died before Abram had left Haran, the figures given in Genesis 11:26,32; 12:4, would imply that Terah had yet 60 years to live but that is to mistake the record in Genesis, for Abram's name comes first, in keeping with the method of Moses (and that is another story just as we are examining Luke). But in keeping with the method of Moses, Abram's name is given first, before those of his two brothers but it doesn't say that he was the oldest. And we've a perfect right to take the figures and say that Terah lived to 230 and Abram was 'so old', when Terah died therefore Abram was born when Terah was, ... (subtracting one figure from the other). There is nothing in scripture to forbid that, and that Terah therefore had Abram long after the others, in fact, those of you who have read Blunts, "Undesigned Scriptural Coincidences" will know that the disparity in the ages of the generations led to the marriage of one in one generation to the wife in the next - all of which fits in with the differences in the birth of the children.

The fifth verse which we so often quote, as showing that the Abrahamic promises were not fulfilled, was not spoken in the first instance for the same purpose that we use it, although our use of it is quite legitimate.

"He gave him none inheritance in it, no not so much as to set his foot on, yet He promised that he would give it to him for a possession and to his seed after him when as yet he had no child."

In other words, that while Abram came into the land, the covenant of God with Abraham cannot fail, and therefore God has a purpose with Abraham which is yet future. And the covenant with Abraham was given before the law and therefore there is a purpose of God to be developed upon the basis of the Abrahamic covenant which is not yet realised. Now, you'll observe, that Luke records the argument but he never gives the inference. His space required compression and he leaves it to the wit of the reader whom he expects to think after him to make the inference at every point where it is required,

V6, "and God spake on this wise, that his seed should sojourn in a strange land: and that they should bring them into bondage, and intreat them evil four hundred years."

And Rackham says here's our third mistake. Stephen and Philo with Genesis 15:13, gave 400 years to the time of Israel's bondage. Exodus 12:40 says 430 years, Paul gives the number 430 years. How do we reconcile the 400 and the 430. Quite simply, "Thy seed", God said to Abram, "shall sojourn 400 years". The purpose thus indicated couldn't begin **till the** seed was born. The length of time from the giving of the promises to the giving of the law was 430 years and therefore the promise was given to Abraham 30 years before Isaac was born, and the difficulty is resolved.

"The seventh verse says,

"And the nation to whom they shall be in bondage will I judge, said God: and after that shall they come forth, and serve me in this place."

Rackham says, "Stephen adds to Genesis 15:13-14, 'and serve me in this place', words taken from Exodus 3:12 and so understands by the place Palestine - and not Mt Sinai as is meant in Exodus". A criticism which is perfectly gratuitous. But let us apply the method that we've already observed. God says to Abram, 'the nation to whom they shall be in bondage will I judge and then I'll bring them forth', and then, and then Stephen deliberately quotes from the words of God to Moses at Horeb, when Moses was told to go down and bring out My people and bring them to this place, and they shall serve Me in this place. But why does Stephen quote that reference? His point is that the people, in fulfilment of the Abrahamic promise about their sojourn, were brought out at the time indicated and in **fulfilment** of the words to Moses were led to Sinai and there served God. But **that** was before the law was given! So even the nation of God, says Stephen, offered acceptable service to God before ever the law was given. How then can the law, and how then can the tabernacle or the temple be, in themselves, of such essential purpose in God's arrangement. There can be worshippers establishing independently of those things.

Going on in verse eight and nine,

"and He gave him the covenant of circumcision: and so Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat the twelve tribes, and the patriarchs moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: "

So Abraham had the covenant and even the rite of circumcision before ever the law. So it is quite evident just as Jesus had used the argument before in contention with the Jews, that the rite was vital not because it was of Moses but because it was of **the fathers**, and so Stephen says, even this essential aspect has its real roots in the fact of something anterior to the law.

And so Joseph was taken into Egypt and God was with him. Stephen isn't just moralising. He has something more important to do than moralise when he's pleading for his life. Just think of the quickening effect of a man with power of speech and the ability to reason as Stephen had.- he has no time merely for moralising. When he says, 'God was with Joseph in Egypt', then God can be with a man outside the land of Palestine. Before law or before temple or before tabernacle, God was with him and all the time Stephen was building up his case that there was evidence of Divine favour for men, independent of law and independent of tabernacle or temple as the place of worship.

V10, "He delivered Joseph out of all his afflictions and gave him favour and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh and made him governor."

A rejected man, exalted by God, in His overruling providence, to favour and to rulership. But rulership where? In the land of Egypt - among the Gentiles! And what if there is a parallel in the case of Jesus? What if Jesus whom they have rejected should be one of whom it could be said equally with Joseph, that God was with him? And what if God had exalted Jesus even to something higher than Pharaoh could exalt Joseph? And what if the Divine purpose in connection with the exaltation of Jesus was bound up with Gentiles, just as it was in the case of Joseph? That's the argument that he's bringing out as he traces out this history.

V11, *"And there came a dearth over all the land of Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction"*

and even when God's people were thus in dire need, where was it that they found sustenance? Where was it that they found the essential nourishment for life? It was in Egypt. And when was it that they came to know of the exaltation of this brother of theirs whom they had sought to destroy?

V13, *"And at the second time Joseph was made known unto his brethren."*

and thus it was in a time of crisis, there was a revelation of the Divine way in the exaltation of Joseph and it may be, says Stephen, that there will be a second time in the history of the nation in a time of crisis when 'Joseph' will be again revealed, (or Jesus), to be seen to be the deliverer, exalted of God. And so he traces the parallel.

And so,

V13-14, *"Joseph's kindred was made known unto Pharaoh. Then sent Joseph and called his father Jacob to him, and all his kindred, three score and fifteen souls."*

And Rackham says, here again, Stephen is making a mistake. He says, seventy five souls, but Genesis 46:26; Exodus 1:5; Deuteronomy 10:22 all say seventy. But another place in the record speaks of sixty six souls. Whatever is this man doing blundering about like that - didn't he know his history although he's trying to draw out such inferences from it? He knew his history, and the very computation that he's presenting to them is a part of his argument - for the sixty six mentioned once in Genesis, includes the 11 sons, Joseph being excepted, and their sons and Joseph and his two sons and Jacob added, makes the seventy; but what about the added five? They're the sons of Ephraim and Manasseh who were **born in Egypt** and God includes even those born in Egypt, in exile, among those who are associated with the purpose of God. And thus what appears to be a mistake on the part of Stephen - and he wasn't content to just say it we may be sure, but to give his reason and his argument as we are trying to draw it out in some sort of a feeble way. And therefore it wasn't these who were thus connected with Palestine and born there, but it was even those who were born outside who were included in the number enumerated in scripture.

"And so Jacob went down into Egypt, and died," Stephen says in v15 and, *"he, and our fathers, v16 and were carried over into Sychem, and laid in the sepulchre that Abraham bought for a sum of money of the sons of Emmor, the father of Sychem"*.

So we get objection six. Joshua tells us that Joseph was buried at Shechem and in adding his brothers, "our fathers" Jacobs' 12 sons, Stephen is probably quoting contemporary tradition.

It is necessary to notice that in v16, "and were carried over" by the very fact that the Greek includes the pronoun as part of the ending of the verb, that we must introduce the plural "and they were carried over" in v16. And that refers to "our fathers' and so Stephen says that 'our fathers' were carried over into Sychem and laid in the sepulchre that Abraham bought. But where was Sychem? In Samaria of all places! - The land of these despised and hated and accursed Samaritans. If there was any virtue at all in connection with the land of Judea then Stephen says don't forget the fathers of the nation were buried in Samaria. There's not the sanctity about the land that you're thinking and those men are still men in the purpose of God although they're buried there even in Samaria. He's got some pungent things to say which must have stunned them as he builds up his case point by point.

The next objection is that Abraham didn't buy a sepulchre of the sons of Emmor. Now the answer to this is rather involved and I don't know whether I can put it over in the short space available, but we do know that Abraham had an altar there. We do know that Jacob recovered the possession of the land by the use of his bow (Genesis 48:22), and left it as a special inheritance to Joseph; and the word 'portion' that is used by Jacob in allotting that to Joseph is the very word 'Sychem' - and why did Jacob take the land? Probably because there was some title to it already vested in them, for the fathers were sojourners in the land and never attempted marauding raids like that, and so therefore the inference can be drawn that Jacob did think that he had some title to the land and the probabilities are that Abraham did indeed buy the land. So it isn't after all something that cannot be reasonably explained.

V17, *"But when the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt."*

For God blessed the people and the multiplication was in Egypt. God isn't dependent upon the land of Palestine. He isn't dependent upon the set up, upon which the Jews placed such store for the working out of His purpose. Even their fore-fathers multiplied when they were in Egypt.

V18, *Until "another king arose, which knew not Joseph."*

Then came the time of affliction. The time of such oppression, that it was an effort to exterminate the people. Then Moses was born. But where was the leader born? In Egypt. Where was he brought up? In Pharaoh's household. Did they think that all the skill that he had could be used by them when he thought that with all the training that had gone to the making of him, he was their leader? No, says Stephen, they rejected him. An objection is raised, that Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and mighty in words and deeds, but it isn't so serious a difficulty and can so easily be answered,

V23, *"and when he was full forty years old",*

and another objection is raised - that there is no record of him being forty years of age. But there is an expression in Exodus which indicates, so chronologists tell us that he was forty. We say someone is coming of age, and we know at once that they are twenty one. The expression is used in the record concerning Moses that indicates that he was forty.

V24, He saw one of the Israelites suffering and he took an action by which he burned his boats. He'd long time been thinking that he was the deliverer. Why, such remarkable circumstances in his life that he should first of all be preserved and then brought up in

Pharaoh's house, then equipped with all the skill in military arts and political economy. Why, it just seems as though he was the leader.

V25, "He supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by His hand would deliver them: but they understood not."

And Rackham says, in his tenth objection, 'that the deeper motive the desire to give deliverance to his people, which is important in the parallel with the Christ.' You see Rackham catches the argument of Stephen, what he's getting at, but he says, 'the desire to give deliverance to his people which is important to the parallel with Christ, is ascribed to Moses by Philo as well as by Stephen. Exodus is silent on this.' What is the answer?

Exodus tells us as Stephen quotes, that the Israelite who strove with his fellow said to Moses, "who made thee a prince and a judge over us?" This shows that Moses' act in slaying the Egyptian was regarded as an indication on his part that he was willing to lead a revolt of the slave people and it is implicit in that and other statements in the narrative that Moses was contemplating acting as deliverer. And the inference of Stephen is therefore quite legitimate.

When he showed himself to the Israelites the next day and it became evident that what he had done was known, and when it was said, "who made thee a ruler over us? Wilt thou kill me?" That Moses fled into exile. And what if another leader has gone away from them, as Moses was, to come back and be their deliverer? If there is to be a prophet like unto Moses, what's the parallel in Moses' life that has to come in the life of the deliverer?, says Stephen. If one is rejected at his first appearing and yet is sent back by God to achieve the work, what's the corollary which comes from your rejection of Jesus? Will God send him back? That is what Stephen is saying to them.

V30, and then, "when forty years were expired, there appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai an angel of the Lord in a flame of fire in a bush."

So God made of Himself one of the most striking revelations in all of Old Testament history. It was made in and through Moses when he was in exile from his own people! Isn't there a point in that? What is after all, the mightiest manifestation of God, has been revealed through Jesus who has been taken away from them. Rackham's eleventh objection concerns a matter of angiology which we needn't go into.

"So Moses wondered at the sight:", V31-32, "and as he drew near to behold it, the voice of the Lord came unto him, saying I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."

Remember how that was used by Peter, as we saw the other day, and what the significance of it was as Luke narrates it. So here, the One who revealed Himself to Moses at Sinai, was the One who had further intentions than the Mosaic Covenant. And Stephen links the Divine claims to be the God of Abraham, with that revelation through Moses, and links the antitype with the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant. So he passes in review a little more fully the things that are concerned with Moses - the sending back of the leader whom they had rejected, by God. And then He brought them out, Moses brought Israel out, after that He had shown them wonders and signs in the land of Egypt and in the Red Sea and in the wilderness - forty years. And if God could preserve His people for 40 years in the wilderness, God's protecting and preserving care was not dependent upon land or upon people. And you notice

how in this recapitulation from their history, there is a constant hammering home of this point, (Stephen isn't basing his case upon one incident), he says, the **whole range of our** history is eloquent of the fact from which I'm stating my case. It's a question of the Divine purpose at any time and if God could do all these things before ever the law was formulated, isn't it within the range of possibility, that the law can have run its course and God introduced another dispensation bound up with the antitype of Moses and therefore because it was the fulfillment of all the typical features of the law - something that is independent of them. But that this is the case, is clear because the argument moves on,

V37 for, *"This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, a prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you."*

and Stephen says, I'm not dreaming dreams or putting over to you mere speculations. Here is the testimony that there has to be a prophet like unto Moses. There has to be one to come in whose life there is a parallel with the life of Moses, in whose experiences there is a parallel with the experiences of Moses. And he points the parallel when in v38 he says,

"This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the Mount Sinai, and with our fathers: who received the living oracles to give unto us."

He was in the ecclesia (that's the greek word) in the wilderness, and the 22nd Psalm says concerning Christ, after his resurrection, "I will declare thy name unto my brethren in the midst of the ecclesia," catch the phrase that he is using here. "In the midst of the **ecclesia** will I give praise unto thee." So as Moses was with the ecclesia there, even the children of Israel, which is called 'the ecclesia', so the Lord Jesus Christ was in the midst of 'the ecclesia' and he is tracing out his parallel. There was a Divine revelation given to Moses at Sinai when he was in the midst of the ecclesia. There's been a Divine revelation which has annulled law, and temple and sacrifice by this prophet like unto Moses in the midst of this ecclesia, this church, which has been established as the result of his work. That, just as Moses received the 'living oracles' to give them unto us, so through the mediator of the new covenant, Jesus, of whom the Psalmist speaks as we have quoted, has given living oracles unto us which are the rule of our life, which are the expression of the Divine will. To regard that message given through Moses, he says, as being the living voice of God - then you admit the possibility of God revealing Himself through a man. Granted, says Stephen and we claim that there's been another revelation through the prophet like unto Moses. And so the basis of the Christian behaviour and its attitude to law and temple is claimed by Stephen, to be based equally with Israel's worship upon Divine sanctions, but sanctions ministered through a higher prophet and a greater mediator than even Moses was. So he has laid his argument on to the fact, that it was through a Divine revelation that the Christian was claiming to follow the way of life that they formulated.

But now he turns to them and says now look at all your history and don't repeat it. In the wilderness your fathers said, v40, "Make us gods" to go back to Egypt. You've always wanted to go back rather than to go forward. Now change your policy and your practices he says, "don't repeat the folly of your fathers". they said, "lets go back", "now don't go back, go forward with the revelation", he says.

Then in v 42, *"Then God turned, and gave them up to worship the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets", (and he quotes from Amos, and here we get objections*

twelve and thirteen of Rackham), "As it is written in the book of the prophet, O ye house of Israel, have ye offered to me slain beasts and sacrifices by the space of forty years."

And that was written of a time long after; but the point of the prophecy is that, throughout their history they had manifested such a character.

V43, "Yea, ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star your God Remphan figures which ye made to worship them: and I will carry you away"

and the passage in Amos says, "beyond Damascus", and Stephen says "beyond Babylon". But remember again what we pointed out so often, that he introduces another quotation and expects us to go to it and he's quoting now from Jeremiah where God said He would send them to Babylon. What's his point in adding the prophecy of Jeremiah to that of Amos? - that they would be sent to Babylon? Why, just this, that God called Abraham out of Babylon and because of the behaviour of their fathers God had sent them back to Babylon, - terrible inditement and a very powerful warning to them. He says look at your history and don't perpetuate the folly of your fathers.

V44, "Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness",

and so, before temple there was tabernacle. Then there was a change from tabernacle to temple and therefore there can be another change. And he says in the 45th verse,

"Which also our fathers that came after, brought in the tabernacle, with Jesus"

'Jesus' you know is Joshua ... and in the letter to the Hebrews, written by the man who was listening to Stephen and consenting to his death says that, Jesus didn't give them the inheritance. "I'm sure Paul was feeling the force of this argument and there are stages in men's lives when the force of the argument being seen and it being felt to be unanswerable, the only answer they can give is the throwing of stones. That was where Saul was just now, but the argument of Stephen won with Saul and it is Saul himself who repeats these arguments in his letters, particularly in the letter to the Hebrews. Saul 'the persecutor' became Saul 'the ambassador' then.

"Which also our fathers that came in after brought in with Jesus into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drave out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David;"

But, if **it was Joshua** who led them in, then they didn't receive the inheritance by **Moses**. And therefore, it wasn't on the basis of the law that they'd have the inheritance but by something subsequent to the law. Therefore the law must pass to give place to something else on which the inheritance will be based.

And then after David's day, v47, "Solomon built him a house" but that isn't final because even the prophet contemporary with it says v48 "Howbeit the Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands;" and the citation is from the 66th chapter of Isaiah, where God says,

"Heaven is my throne, the earth is my footstool, where is the house that ye build unto me for all these things of mine hands made?"

How can ye make a house for God out of the materials that he Himself has provided. You can only make a house for God out of what you yourself provide, says the prophet ... v49,

"Howbeit, the Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest?"

and the answer of the prophet is, that none of these things, that God Himself has made will do, "but to this man will I look, that is of a humble and contrite spirit and who trembleth at my word". So Stephen says, even the prophets testify that the dwelling place of God isn't the material edifice, but a structure composed of men and women of the character, who are humble and contrite in heart and who tremble at His word. This is the building **that is the** finality of the Divine purpose and therefore these things to which you're clinging so closely are only the temporal, the transitional, the typical; and clinging to them you are losing sight of the reality and God has laid the foundation in Jesus Christ and by being humble and contrite and trembling at His Word you yourselves can be built in, to what will be the Divine dwelling place. We must at this point postulate a growing murmur of growls and dissentment with looks of venomous hatred on their faces, which made Stephen realise that to pursue his argument was pointless beyond this stage. So he turns to indictment

Vv 51-52, "Ye stiff necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Spirit: as your fathers did, so do ye, which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?"

and Rackham finds this fourteenth objection there. They crucified the Just One of whom the prophets had spoken, they resisted the prophets, they'd resisted the One of whom the prophets had spoken, v53 "they'd received the law of the disposition of angels", and while they'd had great privileges, "they hadn't kept it". Stephen here had a reminiscence of what Jesus had said. On one occasion he'd turned the argument back upon themselves, and Jesus said in effect to them, in one of the speeches recorded in John's gospel, 'how can you go on **to a fuller revelation** when you haven't kept the one you had?' That is what Stephen is saying here, "You've received the law by the disposition of angels and you haven't kept it." How then are your minds and hearts open to go on to a fuller revelation and to receive it?

So Stephen has presented his case which has ended in such a burning charge. Then they burst down all restraints and take him out to the place of stoning, to be stoned to death. Even there this man has a final testimony ...

V56, "Behold I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God".

Well Jacob had seen the heavens opened and the possible way of connection between heaven and men but now Stephen says that heaven is open and the man through whom the link with heaven has been established is there at the right hand of God. Too mighty a claim for them to receive! With fingers in ears they rushed him out, to the place where they stoned him. And Saul, says Luke, with all the significance of his method of writing his history, "and Saul (Chapter 8:1) was consenting unto his death".

So we have the account of how the rupture began between Judaism and Christianity and the grounds upon which Christianity pursued its course, gradually working away from Judaism.

And now I have an apology to make. We do not in general practice repeat from the platform what is available in books. The examination of these objections of Rackham is done in some detail in the little book "The Oracles of God". If you want to study these objections and see the explanation and to see how the key that we have claimed to have been using to unlock Luke's record of these speeches, turns back what are regarded as objections into really vindications of the truth of the record, and make clear the argument of Stephen.

Question: Answer: That is true, in this sense, that my understanding of the Atonement is set out in "God's Way", and the same theme emerges from the readings yesterday. But I followed closely today, what is in the Oracles of God, but the other, as you know was extemporaneously given, and I haven't at all "God's Way" in mind in giving it.