



Portion:

Title:

SCRIPTURES

- Acts 6-7; John 21:1-6
- Matthew 26
- Mark 13:9-11
- Luke 9:23-24; 14:25-35

ALL USED UP FOR GOD

- Closed: Gone Fishing?
- False Indictments
- Stellar Defense
- The Price of Purpose

One moment you're being selected as one of the few men, hand-picked to serve. It's a complete honor and you humbly accept. Your reputation is without blemish and your commitment to God is obvious. The next moment God is working great miracles through you. A tick later, they are lying about you and you're being publicly accused of things that could never be true, but you are indicted anyway. Blink your eyes and you're standing at trial, the charges levied are beyond the pale, outside the limits of acceptable behavior or the judgment of any civilized person. These accusations are only possible because they are being corroborated by false testimony, lying witnesses who have no conscience, and obviously no fear of the Lord. How did you go from being picked for a grand purpose to standing accused before this council so quickly?

Maybe this nightmare will end. The man in charge inquires, "Are these things true?" Ah, finally! Someone wants to know the truth. Does he? At this point, you don't even need to speak on your own. God promised that when you get arrested and brought to trial because of Him, you need not worry beforehand about what to say; the Spirit will assemble your words. And it happens. For ten solid minutes you give the most lucid defense imaginable. You're testimony is exculpatory; it's clear that nothing they've said about you is true—you're acquittal is imminent. You've presented everything the man in charge needs to hear to exonerate you.

You could rest your defense in that instant, but you don't. Rather, you seize the opportunity; you look at your accusers, and all the members of the should-be-honorable court; and you tell them without hesitation, "You are the guilty ones. You have committed the crimes I've been accused of here, and worse. You murdered the Just One who the prophets said would come. You missed the Messiah because you resist the very Spirit that has inspired my defense today. You are all guilty."

That does not go over well. What started as a good day is about to end in tragedy. What began as a moment of honor is about to be terminated with an execution. You are dragged out of the court and you are executed in a brutal onslaught. You are smashed with stones until your skull is crushed, your bones are broken, and

your blood has spattered over the surrounding dust. And even then, with your last dying words, you ask your dear Lord, the very Messiah these murderers rejected, to let it pass. “Don’t hold this against them; they are just ignorant religious people.” And then you breathe your last breath.

There are moments in life when you must come face-to-face with the purpose for which you were placed here on earth. You have an assignment and you can’t go back to what you were doing before. It’s true, even if in one moment you feel honored to have been selected for such a purpose, and in the next you are being stoned to death. You can’t control everything that happens between the bookends of your life, the dash on your gravestone, be it a few days or many years. But you can control this... Will you say yes!

PROPHETIC SEED:

“Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, **“It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables.** Therefore, brethren, **seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint** over this business; but **we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”** And the saying pleased the whole multitude. **And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit...”** Acts 6:2-5 NKJV

“Then they **secretly induced men** to say, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.”” Acts 6:11
NKJV

“**They also set up false witnesses** who said, “This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law;” Acts 6:13 NKJV

“Then the high priest said, “**Are these things so?**”” Acts 7:1
NKJV

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

PROPHETIC FRUIT:

“Then they cried out with a loud voice, **stopped their ears,** and ran at him with one accord; 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.** And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” 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.” Acts 7:57-60 NKJV

Let's Set the Scene: Portion in a blurb

Introduction

Last week in [Disruptive Technology](#) we began with the topic of voluntary giving, the personal volition to sell a possession in order to bring the proceeds to the apostles, so they could steward distribution. Unfortunately, for one particular couple, they were less than completely honest in their giving. It was tragic, as they were not forced nor compelled to give anything—they chose to do so of their own volition, and they chose to be dishonest for no reason! This led to one of the most shocking events in the New Testament. They both dropped dead where they stood the moment the lie was exposed. The verdict, obviously handed down by God, was that they had not lied to man, but to the Holy Spirit. That clearly fell into the category of blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, which according to Y'shua Himself is an unforgivable sin that leads to death. The outcome was that all those who witnessed the tragedy, as well as all those who heard about it, gained greater reverence for God.

The miracles through the work of the apostles continued and they went back up onto the Temple Mount. The specific apostles were not named, but we might consider it is again Peter and John (and at least one other as the account unfolds) since they already had the experience and the narrative records that, “none of the rest

dared join them.” The people listening and watching the miracles esteemed the “preachers” highly, and the witness brought more and more people into the church. And, the miracles were not limited to the temple area; the sick were brought out into the streets and even the “shadow” of Peter passing by healed the multitudes.

And there we were again. The religious elite were not happy that these rebels, who had disobeyed their last “order,” were getting all the attention again! So, they arrested the apostles (we have to assume it was Peter and John again). However, this time an angel came overnight and opened the prison doors and freed them. The angel instructed them to go back to the temple the next morning to preach again, and so they did! That morning the high priest sent for them to stand trial, but of course the officers found the prison empty, even though the guards were standing watch as if nothing happened! This certainly painted an uncertain future for the religious leaders as yet another unexplainable event had occurred.

Then at the height their of “confusion,” it is brought to their attention that their missing prisoners were preaching in the temple again. The apostles were again taken into custody. It was a peaceful arrest, as the captain feared the throngs of people who supported them. They were brought before the council and reminded that they were commanded to stop teaching in the name of Y’shua. They were reprimanded for spreading the doctrine of Christ and accused

of hoping that the religious leaders would be blamed for the crucifixion. Peter and the others offered these religious hypocrites the same rebuttal they had in their last trial. *“We will obey God and NOT you! He is the one who raised Y’shua from the grave, the one you murdered. We are the witnesses and so is the Holy Spirit who God gives as a gift to those who obey him.”*

The religious elite were furious and wanted to put an end to the constant threat of their profitable religious system being exposed. *“Let’s just kill these guys.”* Fortunately, a highly regarded sober minded teacher of the Torah, Gamaliel, asked the court to put the apostles outside while he presented his thoughts on the matter. His take was that they had seen many movements, like this, rise and fall in the past, and that the movements always naturally dispersed shortly after the ring leader was dead. He suggested they stand back and let this thing implode on its own; it certainly would if it is just empowered by men. Gamaliel’s rationale is that if God is behind it they can’t stop it anyway, unless they think fighting against the very God they claim to worship is a good idea. The reasoning seemed sound to the court and they decided to release the apostles, but not before they were beaten and again ordered to stop spreading Y’shua’s name. Y’shua’s ambassadors were set free and rejoiced for the honor to suffer for His name. No, they didn’t stop; they went

right back to preaching in the temple every day and spreading the message of Christ to every house in the city!

This week we witness the rapid expansion of the Church and the need to raise up new leaders who can handle other parts of the ministry, especially the daily distribution of resources to take care of the poor, the needy, and the widows.

Seven men are assigned leadership roles, Stephen being one of them. His effectiveness places a target on his back and he soon becomes the subject of false accusations in an attempt to indict Him. It is yet another example of the vitriol of the religious elite, desperate to maintain control of their religious system. The growing popularity of those who claim Y'shua is the Messiah represents an existential threat to their ability to stay in power and maintain control over the Jewish population. But, despite their best attempts the religious hypocrites are losing their grip and even many members of the priesthood are converted. The testimony of the apostles and the miracles is just undeniable and they too come to acknowledge that Y'shua is indeed the Messiah.

Stephen is dragged before yet another kangaroo court overrun by a high priest and priesthood who have become despotic, corrupt, and have descended to such depths of depraved leadership that they will resort to anything to stop these Y'shua-followers. Nevertheless Stephen, with the demeanor of angel and the

knowledge of a Torah scholar, defends his position. They claim he is speaking against Moses and God, that he is spreading blasphemy against the temple, the priesthood, Judaism and the law, and that Y'shua, who he claims is the Messiah, wants to destroy the temple and disregard the customs of Moses. Remember, these are false accusations brought by lying witnesses. After listening to his defense, it's undeniable; he is clearly innocent of all charges. And ironically, he uses his expertise in the Torah and Prophets, the very things they claim he is violating, to demand his own acquittal. He is not only innocent of all charges, but he has demonstrated by use of Torah that Y'shua is truly the Messiah!

But they don't care. They are not in search of truth, only to eliminate any opposition that threatens their grip on power. As a result Stephen is stoned to death, all while he displays Christlike forgiveness of his enemies, right up to the very moment of his last breath. And then we are introduced to the main character whose life and story will dominate the rest of the Book of Acts—Paul. But we meet him first as Saul, a Pharisee of Pharisees, a man who has such a visceral hate for “Christians” that prior to his conversion he becomes their greatest enemy. His first public display of such takes place here as he serves as the overseer of Stephens execution.

Acts 6

The Ministry Grows and Help is Needed

1. The church was growing rapidly and so was the generosity of God's people.
 - (a) As the people continued to sell their possessions and bring the proceeds to the apostles, they were in tasked with the distribution of those resources to meet the needs of those less fortunate.
 - (b) However, it was becoming increasingly difficult for the twelve apostles to manage all the logistics of getting the resources into the hands of those in need.
 - (c) In particular, it seems that some local widows were missing out on the daily distribution.
2. In response to this logistical difficulty the twelve summoned a group of disciples to present a plan that could correct the problem.
 - (a) They recognized that in the critical time of rapid growth of the church it would not be wise for them to distract from what they were commissioned by Christ to do.
 - (b) They were to spread the good news and pray (to make disciples, baptize, and teach).
 - (c) Others could certainly do things like handle benevolence and oversee the feeding ministry.

- (d) It was time to assign other Spirit-filled men, who were established and trustworthy, to take over the distribution part of the ministry.
 - (e) Everyone agreed this was a good idea and they chose seven men, laid hands on them, and launched them into ministry.
 - (f) Stephen was one of them and he is the subject of the rest of this story.
3. As such the ministry grew, more and more people became disciples of Y'shua, and even many priests were converted.

Stephen becomes the Next Target of the Religious Elite

4. Stephen displays such an anointing and God uses him mightily to perform great miracles.
- (a) A certain sect of Jews from Synagogue of the Freedmen argue with Stephen against his claims.
 - (b) These are men from various cultural backgrounds, who have likely converted to Judaism from past pagan beliefs, so for them to hear they are still missing something is very offensive.
 - (c) However, they find it impossible to refute Stephen's Spirit-inspired wisdom. You'd think that would result in their own acknowledgment that Stephen is correct, but as we've seen so often, the religious spirit has a tight grip on some!

- (d) Instead, they hatch a diabolical plan; they convince some men to come forward and falsely claim they've heard Stephen teach blasphemous things against Moses and God.
- (e) The false claims are spewed publicly, so the common people, elders, and scribes can hear the accusations.
- (f) Naturally this causes those who hear the claims to apprehend Stephen, indict him, and drag him before the council.
- (g) In addition to those who had no problem vomiting lies publicly to get an indictment, these Jews from the Synagogue of the Freedmen convince false witnesses to testify in a trial against Stephen.
- (h) It is unclear if they are the same false witnesses who spoke out publicly, as it is one thing to spew things out in the open and altogether different to make claims under oath.
- (i) Nevertheless, everyone who sat in the council witnessed the same thing; the man sitting before them looked as innocent as an angel.

Acts 7

Stephen's Brilliant Defense

- 5. The high priest asks Stephen if the accusations are true.
 - (a) Stephen, showing honor and reverence (although underserved, from what we've previously witnessed about

the conduct and operation of this council), addresses his defense to his “brothers and fathers.”

- (b) Notice that his entire rebuttal against the false claim that he teaches blasphemous things against Moses and God, that he is speaking against the temple, the priesthood, Judaism and the law, is to use the Torah and Prophets as his defense.

Abraham’s Legacy

6. Stephen begins with the story of Abraham and his descendants, which encompasses Genesis 12-36.

- (a) God called Abraham to leave his country and relatives and go to a land He would show him. (Genesis 12:1)
- (b) Eventually they would come to this land in which we now live.
- (c) But God gave him no permanent inheritance in the land because the real promise would be to his innumerable descendants who would inhabit the land.
- (d) But, those descendants would not inherit the land before they would live in a foreign land and before they would face oppression and bondage. (Genesis 15:14)
- (e) The nation that oppressed them in bondage would be judged by God; then His people would leave that land and serve God in this land.

- (f) Then Abraham began having children and he was given the covenant of circumcision as a sign, which took place for all males on the eighth day after birth. (Genesis 17:11-12)
- (g) The seed of promise went through Isaac, then Jacob, and then Jacob's twelve sons who became our patriarchs.

The Patriarchs in Egypt and the Life of Joseph

7. Stephen goes on to explain the life of Joseph from Genesis 37-50.
 - (a) *Ten of those patriarchs, the sons of Jacob, became jealous of Joseph and sold him into slavery and he eventually landed in Egypt. (Genesis 35:23-26; 37:12-36) (*Ten because Joseph is one and Benjamin had not been born yet.)
 - (b) Joseph went through severe challenges as a servant slave in Egypt, and then as a prisoner, but eventually God showed him favor and gave him a revelation that made him a favorite of the Pharaoh of that time.
 - (c) Pharaoh put him in charge of his household and second in command over all of Egypt to deal with the coming double portion harvest and ensuing famine. (Genesis 41:41-43)
 - (d) When the famine came over Egypt and Canaan, as Joseph predicted, and his father Jacob and his *brothers, who sold him into slavery, could no longer feed themselves, they

became aware that Egypt had food stored and for sale.

(*Now eleven brothers as Benjamin was born by then.)

- (e) Jacob sends his sons to Egypt to buy grains and that is when they encountered Joseph, whom they do not recognize.
- (f) They returned home, but must revisit Egypt a second time and that is when Joseph reveals his true identity and introduces them to Pharaoh.
- (g) Joseph sends for his father and other surviving relatives to come live in Egypt.
- (h) Eventually Jacob died in Egypt and later is brought back to be buried in the same tomb as Abraham. (Genesis 49:29-32)

The Life of Moses

- 8. Then Stephen moves on to outline the substantive events in the life of Moses from Exodus 1-40.
 - (a) As Jacob's sons multiplied in Egypt, it was time for what God had promised to come true.
 - (b) A Pharaoh who did not know Joseph was now king and he grew afraid of the rapidly increasing masses of Israelites living in Goshen. (Exodus 1:8)
 - (c) This king wanted to control the Hebrew population, so he commanded that newborns be murdered. (Exodus 1:22)
 - (d) When Moses was born God spared him for three months and he was able to live at home. (Exodus 2:1-3)

- (e) But then he was placed in the guardianship of Pharaoh's daughter, who raised him as her own son in Egypt. (Exodus 2:5-10)
- (f) Moses was literally raised as an Egyptian and learned all their ways and he was quite good at it!
- (g) But when he was forty years old he was inspired to connect with his blood relatives who had been in bondage to Pharaoh since his birth (40 years).
- (h) As he visited the work camp he witnessed an Egyptian overseer abuse an Israelite slave and when he stepped in to defend, he killed the Egyptian. (Exodus 2:11-12)
- (i) He assumed his Hebrew relatives would see it for what it was, a sign that he would deliver them from bondage one day, but they did not see it that way.
- (j) Instead, the next day when he visited again, and he attempted to settle a dispute between two Israelites, their reaction was to reject his leadership and to call attention to how he murdered the Egyptian, worrying he would use the same "technique" with them. (Exodus 2:13-14)
- (k) It frightened Moses that they might expose him, so much so that he fled Egypt to Midian. (Exodus 2:15)

- (l) Forty years later, Moses is now eighty years old; Israel has been in bondage that long; and God appears to Moses as a fire in a bush near Mount Sinai.
- (m) Moses was stunned that the fire had not consumed the bush and his desire to know more drew him closer. God tells him to take off his shoes; this is holy ground. (Exodus 3:2-5)
- (n) That's when God spoke to him and identified Himself. (Exodus 3:5)
- (o) Yahweh informs Moses that He knows of the oppression, and that He is going to send Moses on an assignment to deliver the people from Egyptian slavery. (Exodus 3:7-10)
- (p) Moses is stunned, as expected, and has many questions.
- (q) God tells him to remind the people that he, Moses, is the one they rejected forty years earlier, and that God spoke to him from a bush.
- (r) To make a very long story very short, God did deliver His people by using Moses, and with many supernatural signs and disastrous punishments of Egypt. (Exodus 7-12)
- (s) In the end Israel crossed the Red Sea with yet another miracle and they lived in the wilderness for forty years, until Moses was one-hundred-twenty years old.

Stephen Continues by Recounting Israel's Rebellion

9. Stephen then rewinds a bit and reminds his accusers of a few things about Moses and Israel.
 - (a) *“The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me [Moses] from your brethren. Him you shall hear.”*
(Deuteronomy 18:15)
 - (b) Moses led the people in the wilderness and received the law on Mt. Sinai, the commands, which by their actions our forefathers ultimately rejected.
 - (c) They wanted to go back to Egypt because, in their opinion, Moses took too long on the mountain. (Exodus 32:1, 23)
 - (d) These rebels convinced Aaron to make a golden calf so they could worship and celebrate while Moses was gone. (Exodus 32)
 - (e) Then God turned them over to their own rebellion, just as the prophet Amos prophesied. They neglected the sacrifices and connected to pagan gods. (Amos 5:25-27)

Stephen Continues with a Lesson about the True Tabernacle

10. If exposing a history of rebellion was not convicting enough for Stephen's accusers, here is where his defense really begins to uncover the deep things they've missed. God was meant to dwell within mankind, not in a tent or a building.

- (a) Many times throughout Exodus, Moses was instructed to build the tabernacle precisely according to the pattern shown him on the mountain.
- (b) They did so and then moved it around the wilderness all the way until Joshua brought it into the promised land. (Joshua 3)
- (c) That tabernacle was in use for hundreds of years until David conceived to build a temple for the Lord (II Samuel 7) and Solomon built it (I Kings 5-6).
- (d) But Solomon knew no manmade structures could contain God (I Kings 8:27), so he built it with this in mind from Isaiah 66:1-2!
- (e) *'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? Has My hand not made all these things?*

Stephen's Rebuke: Israel Resists the Holy Spirit

11. This is no way to get the verdict you hope for. And honestly, we all know he had no shot of a fair trial anyway, especially when you consider the history of the characters overseeing it.

- (a) He called them hard-headed, stubborn, and deaf men, with darkened hearts.
- (b) He tells them they are resistant to the Spirit of God.

- (c) He reminds them that they have the same DNA of those who tortured the prophets, the ones who foretold of the coming Messiah.
- (d) And then he seals his fate...
- (e) You betrayed the true Messiah and murdered Him.
- (f) You received the law and all you did was break the law!

Stephen is Convicted and Executed

12. The end result of this kangaroo court is that Stephen becomes the first Martyr in the Church.

- (a) These religious hypocrites are convicted to the core.
- (b) Stephen is filled with the Spirit and he feels only the glory of God, as he sees Y'shua at the right hand of the Father.
- (c) They never intended care what he has to say—his perfect defense was meaningless to them from the start.
- (d) They dragged him out of the court and stoned him to death.
- (e) And to keep his blood from spattering all over their clothes, they left their outer garments with Saul (Paul) who was overseeing the execution.
- (f) Stephen simply called on the Lord to receive his spirit as he neared death.
- (g) Then he did the most outrageous thing imaginable. Just as Christ, he forgave His executioners as he breathed his last breath.

CLOSED: GONE FISHING?

1. The Ministry Grows and Help is Needed

A. Purpose and Calling

(1) Open: Serving Tables?

(a) We have a problem. Fix it! But How?

1. “Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because **their widows were neglected in the daily distribution.** Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, **“It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables.** Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, **full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom,** whom **we may appoint over this business;** but we **will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”** And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose **Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit,** and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, whom they set before the apostles; and when they had **prayed, they laid hands on them.** Then the word of God spread, and the number of the

disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, **and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.**" Acts 6:1-7 NKJV

- a) The apostles had a problem brought to their attention. Do they just add the burden to the load they are already carrying?
 - b) It would seem that if they could have handled it the problem would not have arisen in the first place.
 - c) What is the solution?
 - 1) Start serving tables along with everything else they do?
 - 2) Assign someone else to do the task?
 - 3) Hint: if you've already left your fishing profession, don't go back to it!
- (2) The church was growing rapidly and so was the generosity of God's people.
- (a) As the people continued to sell their possessions and bring the proceeds to the apostles, they were tasked with the distribution of those resources to meet the needs of those less fortunate.
 1. "Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and **sold their possessions and**

goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.” Acts 2:44-45 NKJV

2. “Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, **but they had all things in common.**” Acts 4:32 NKJV

3. “Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and **brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles’ feet;** and they **distributed to each as anyone had need.**” Acts 4:34-35 NKJV

a) However, it was becoming increasingly difficult for the twelve apostles to manage all the logistics of getting the resources into the hands of those in need.

b) In particular, it seems that some local widows were missing out on the daily distribution.

(b) The Hellenists vs. The Hebrews

1. “...there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists...” Acts 6:1 NKJV

- a) Hellenistic Judaism was a form of Judaism in classical antiquity that combined Jewish religious tradition with elements of Greek culture.
 - b) The Hebrews were Jewish Christians who spoke almost exclusively Aramaic, and the Hellenists were also Jewish Christians, but whose mother tongue was Greek.
- (3) In response to this logistical difficulty the twelve summoned a group of disciples to propose a solution and present a plan that could correct the problem. I think it is safe to say that Peter is their spokesperson here. Why? Because in every scene since Pentecost, Peter is the one who spoke up.
- (a) They recognized that in the critical time of rapid growth of the church it would not be wise for them to distract from what they were commissioned by Christ to do.
 - 1. They were to spread the good news and pray (to make disciples, baptize, and teach).
 - a) Should they add serving food and distributing resources to the widows?
 - b) A life in ministry is challenging and one of those challenges is the temptation to take on duties or

the mistake of going back to duties that are not yours to do!

- c) Here, Peter and the other apostles make the right choice!
- d) Note: Peter is often the first to speak and the one to lead, but he does not always make the right choice! In fact, he has a history of choosing incorrectly.

(b) Peter was called away from his old life as a fisherman...

1. **The Call:** “And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; **for they were fishermen.** Then He said to them, **“Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.” They immediately left their nets and followed Him.**” Matthew 4:18-20
NKJV

a) But later he went back to fishing and dragged others with him into his error. And the fruit of going back to his old “profession.” NOTHING!

- 1) “Simon Peter said to them, **“I am going fishing.”** They said to him, “We are going with you also.” They went out and immediately got into the

boat, and that night **they caught nothing.**" John 21:3 NKJV

b) But, Y'shua has a way of turning around, even our silly mistakes. Cast your net in the OTHER DIRECTION Peter! Remember, you are no longer a fishermen but a fisher of men—that's the "other side" of the boat!

1) "But when the morning had now come, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Then **Jesus said to them, "Children, have you any food?"** They answered Him, "No." And He said to them, "**Cast the net on the right side of the boat,** and you will find some." So they cast, and now they were not able to draw it in because of the **multitude of fish.**" John 21:4-6 NKJV

c) Shortly after this course correction, Y'shua restores Peter three times, a prophetic restoration of Peter's three denials of the Lord.

1) **Predicted Denial:** "Jesus answered him, "Will you lay down your life for My sake? Most assuredly, I say to you, the rooster shall not crow till you have denied Me three times." (John

13:38) Peter's three denials (John 18:15-18; 25-27).

- 2) **The Restoration:** (John 21:15-19) (1) Feed my Lambs (2) Tend My sheep (3) Feed My sheep. Feed the young ones; tend the old ones; feed the old ones!
- 3) **Count the Cost:** And then at the end of that passage Y'shua hints at the cost... *"signifying by what death he would glorify God."* (John 21:19)

2. Read the events of Matthew 16:13-28, and you will see how Peter can go from prophetic insight in one moment to blowing it in the next moment.

- a) (Matthew 16:13-20) "Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven; *I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven...*" **to...**
- b) (Matthew 16:21-23) "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, *you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.*" **because...**
- c) (Matthew 16:24-28) "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. *For whoever desires to save*

his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.”

- (c) But this time Peter and the eleven make the right choice. Others could certainly do things like handle benevolence and oversee the feeding ministry.
- (d) It was time to assign other Spirit-filled men, who were established and trustworthy, to take over the distribution part of the ministry.
- (e) Everyone agreed this was a good idea and they chose seven men, laid hands on them, and launched them into ministry.
 1. The laying on of hands was common practice in the Old Testament and in Judaism. It was done to accompany the conferring of a blessing or authority. Moses ordained Joshua by the laying on of hands and he was “filled with the spirit of wisdom.” (Numbers 27:15–23, Deuteronomy 34:9).
 2. Moses also ordained the 70 elders in (Numbers 11:16–25). And later those elders ordained their successors in the same way. It is historically likely these ordinations included the laying on of hands.
- (f) Stephen was one of the men chosen and he is the subject of the rest of this story.

1. If you become an important person in an organization that threatens the status quo, be careful.
 2. We just saw what happened to Peter and company in Chapter 5 and if it was not for Gamaliel, Peter and some of the other apostles would have already been executed.
 3. Now, Stephen is in the crosshairs! Why? He is very effective, TOO EFFECTIVE in the ministry.
- (4) As such the ministry grew, more and more people became disciples of Y'shua, and even many priests were converted.
- (a) Note: not all Jewish leaders were obstinate hypocrites; many were converted along the way.

FALSE INDICTMENTS

2. Stephen becomes the Next Target of the Religious Elite

A. False Witnesses vs. Wisdom of the Spirit

(1) Oppositional Indictments

- (a) Targeting the opposition is not a new strategy in the 21st century.

1. "And **Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people.** Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from

Cilicia and Asia), **disputing with Stephen**. And they were **not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke**. Then they **secretly induced men to say, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.”** And they **stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; and they came upon him, seized him, and brought him to the council**. They also **set up false witnesses who said, “This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law; for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us.”** And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw **his face as the face of an angel.”** Acts 6:8-15 NKJV

- a) Stephen is the Oppositional Target of an Indictment...
- 1) **Oppositional:** relating to or denoting a group of opponents, characterized by resistance or dissent.
 - 2) **Target:** a person, object, or place selected as the aim of an attack; mark, bullseye, prey; a person

or thing against whom criticism or abuse is or may be directed.

3) **Indictment:** charge or accusation of a serious crime: a thing that serves to illustrate that a system or situation is bad and deserves to be condemned; charge, accusation, arraignment, allegation, imputation; ANTONYM acquittal

(2) Stephen displays such an anointing and God uses him mightily to perform great miracles.

(a) A certain sect of Jews from Synagogue of the Freedmen argue with Stephen against his claims.

1. These are men from various cultural backgrounds, who have likely converted to Judaism from past pagan beliefs, so for them to hear they are still missing something is very offensive.

(b) The Synagogue of the *Freedmen [Libertines KJV]

1. **libertine* [Latin] a man who was a slave but has been set at liberty (set free).

a) In the Roman world this was a reference to one's social status, usually for the purpose of differentiating one from someone who was never a slave.

2. Only a handful of historical references provide clues to the nature and composition of this Synagogue of Freedmen in Jerusalem, producing multiple scholarly theories and speculations.
 - a) Some scholars believe that these persons were slaves of the Romans (who were not Jewish by birth) who had been freed, became proselytes of the Jewish religion (converted to Judaism), and had a synagogue in Jerusalem. Some English Translations call this group the Synagogue of Freed Slaves.
 - b) Ancient sources mention thousands of slaves who embraced Jewish beliefs. If set free, these slaves who were proselytes, enslaved non-Jews, who came to embrace the Jewish way of life were called *Freedmen [Libertines].
 - c) The names of the synagogue from which they came can refer to the makeup of the language of the congregation, such as “synagogue of the Hebrews”
 - d) Other scholars contend that these freedmen were not Jewish proselytes but Jews by birth who had been taken into captivity by the Romans and then

set free and subsequently called *Freedmen [Libertines]. There were many such Jews.

e) It has never been fully established just who these men of the Libertines were and just where their synagogue was.

(c) They find it impossible to refute Stephen's Spirit-inspired wisdom.

1. You'd think that would result in their own acknowledgment that Stephen is correct, but as we've seen so often, the religious spirit has a tight grip on some!

(d) Instead, they hatch a diabolical plan; they convince some men to come forward and falsely claim they've heard Stephen teach blasphemous things against Moses and God.

1. "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. **In the world you will have tribulation;** but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."" John 16:33 NKJV

a) Y'shua was clear that trials are part of following Him.

- b) The false claims against Stephen are spewed publicly, so the common people, elders, and scribes can hear the accusations.
- (e) Naturally this causes those who hear the claims to apprehend Stephen, indict him, and drag him before the council. This is something Y'shua told us was coming!
 1. **“Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say.** Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, **but the Holy Spirit.**” Mark 13:11 NIV
 - a) What will Stephen say? As we will soon see it is completely Holy Spirit Inspired!
 - 1) **Remember:** “...they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit...” Acts 6:5
 - 2) **And...** “they were not able to resist the wisdom **and the Spirit** by which he spoke.” Acts 6:10
 - 3) **Then...** “all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face **as the face of an angel.**” Acts 6:15
 - 4) **When he was done his Spirit led defense...** “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 7:55

(f) In addition to those who had no problem vomiting lies publicly to get an indictment, these Jews from Synagogue of the Freedmen convince false witnesses to testify in a trial against Stephen.

1. It is unclear if they are the same false witnesses who spoke out publicly, as it is one thing to spew things out in the open and altogether different to make claims under oath.

(g) False Witnesses

1. “And the judges shall make careful inquiry, and indeed, **if the witness is a false witness**, who has testified falsely against his brother, then **you shall do to him as he thought to have done to his brother**; so you shall put away the evil from among you.”

Deuteronomy 19:18-19 NKJV

- a) There are many instances in the Bible that speak about the violation of bearing False Witness.
 - b) It is even in the Top 10 (Exodus 20:12).
 - c) But none is more damning than this. Whatever the punishment would be fitting according to law, for the one being accused, is the punishment the false witness will receive!
2. The Lies

- a) “ we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth **will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us.”” Acts 6:14 NKJV**
- 1) As we will see in Section 4, Paul will face the same accusations as did Y’shua and Stephen, a consequence of the poisoned fruit of his involvement with what happened to Stephen.
3. Nothing New Under the Sun: This is the same bogus council we saw Y’shua stand before in Matthew 26 (with a different high priest), and the council Peter, John and other apostles faced, both in Acts 4 and 5.
- a) “Now the chief priests, the elders, **and all the council sought false testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, but found none. Even though many false witnesses came forward, they found none. But at last two false witnesses came forward and said, “This fellow said, **‘I am able to destroy the temple** of God and to build it in three days.’ ””
Matthew 26:59-61 NKJV**
- b) They’d rather release a murderer than Y’shua: “**the chief priests and elders persuaded** the multitudes that **they should ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus.**” Matthew 27:20 NKJV

- c) In Acts 4:1-22 Peter and John were arrested and put on trial (See [A Profound Challenge](#)).
 - d) In Acts 5:17-21 the apostles were imprisoned and in Acts 5:22-32 they stood trial again. Gamaliel's advice helped them get released after being beaten in Acts 5:33-42 (See [Disruptive Technology](#)).
4. God Hates Injustice—It's an abomination!
- a) “**Dishonest scales are an abomination** to the Lord, But a just weight is His delight.” Pro. 11:1 NKJV
 - b) “**Lying lips are an abomination** to the Lord, But those who deal truthfully are His delight.” Proverbs 12:22 NKJV
 - c) “He who justifies the wicked, and **he who condemns the just**, Both of them alike **are an abomination** to the Lord.” Proverbs 17:15 NKJV
- (h) Nevertheless, everyone who sat in the council witnessed the same thing; Stephen looked innocent and his defense was Spirit-inspired.
- 1. “...not able to resist the wisdom and **the Spirit** by which he spoke.” Acts 6:10 NKJV
 - 2. “...it is not you speaking, **but the Holy Spirit.**” Mark 13:11

STELLAR DEFENSE

3. Stephen's Brilliant Defense

A. Abraham's Legacy

(1) "Are these things so?"

(a) Stephen begins with the one whom the high priest would recognize as the patriarch of his faith.

1. **"Then the high priest said, "Are these things so?"**

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, and said to him, 'Get out of your country and from your relatives, and come to a land that I will show you.'

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. 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.

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. '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.' 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." Acts 7:1-8 NKJV

- a) The high priest asks Stephen if the accusations are true.
 - 1) Stephen, addresses his defense to his "brothers and fathers."
 - 2) He shows honor and reverence (although underserved, from what we've previously witnessed about the conduct and operation of this council).
 - b) Notice the irony of his entire rebuttal...
 - 1) **False Claims:** he teaches blasphemous things against Moses and God; he speaks against the temple, the priesthood, Judaism and the law.
 - 2) **His Defense:** His brilliant application of the Torah and Prophets.
- (b) These accusations and his arrest shouldn't have come as a surprise, nor should his defense!

1. ““But watch out for yourselves, for they will deliver you up to **councils, and you will be beaten in the synagogues.** You will be brought before rulers and kings for My sake, for a testimony to them. And the gospel must first be preached to all the nations. **But when they arrest you and deliver you up, do not worry beforehand, or premeditate what you will speak.** But whatever is given you in that hour, speak that; for it is not you who speak, **but the Holy Spirit.**”
Mark 13:9-11 NKJV

- a) Y’shua warned us this would happen.
- b) It happened to Him in Matthew 26 when He also faced false witnesses, and the Apostles have already been on trial for His name’s sake two times since Pentecost (Acts 4, 5); and they were beaten the last time.
 - 1) “Remember the word that I said to you, ‘**A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you.** If they kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you **for My name’s sake,** because they do not know Him who sent Me.” John 15:20-21 NKJV

c) So, the persecution is no surprise, nor should the presence of the Holy Spirit in Stephen's defense. And that is what we witness with every word he spoke when the high priest asked, "*Are these things so?*"

(2) Stephen begins with the story of Abraham and his descendants, which encompasses Genesis 12-36.

(a) **The Promise:** God called Abraham to leave his country and relatives and go to a land He would show him.

(Genesis 12:1)

(b) Eventually they would come to this land in which we now live.

(c) But, God gave him no permanent inheritance in the land because the real promise would be to his innumerable descendants who would inhabit the land.

(d) And, those descendants would not inherit the land before they would live in a foreign land and before they would face oppression and bondage. (Genesis 15:14)

1. Note: Stephen refers to Genesis 15:13 and the 400 years of being strangers in a land and afflicted.

2. This would be understood by the high priest as the time between Isaac's weaning and the Exodus. Isaac was weaned and Ishmael mocked (Genesis 21:8-9).

3. This was 30 years after God told Abraham to leave Haran. Paul's expertise in Judaism adds clarity to when the persecution began!
 - a) *"Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise. But, as he who was born according to the flesh [Ishmael] **then persecuted him** who was born according to the Spirit [Isaac], even so it is now."*
Galatians 4:28-29 NKJV
4. But, the actual total number of years between the promise (when God told Abraham to leave his home) and the Exodus (the Law on Mt. Sinai) is 430 years as is also later clarified by Paul in Galatians 3:15-18.
5. For additional clarity, it is important to note that although Israel is a stranger for 400 years, they are not in bondage for 400 years. The bondage is only for 80 years (it starts at the time of Moses' birth and the Exodus takes place when he is 80 years old).
6. **Timeline:** it was 64 years from the death of Joseph to the birth of Moses. During those 64 years the people were 'guests' in Egypt and not 'slaves' and were multiplying rapidly in numbers, and it was when the new Pharaoh, who did not know Joseph, took over (Exodus 1:8) that the captivity (hard labor) began. This

was right before the birth of Moses when Pharaoh ordered the death of all newborn boys (that is why Moses was hidden). That would mean the hard labor (affliction) lasted for 80 years, the age Moses was when he was called back to Egypt to free the people. The affliction began right before the birth of Moses and ended at the Exodus when Moses is 80. The Exodus was 144 years after the death of Joseph.

7. Click [here](#) to read more details about the math regarding the number of years of affliction.
- (e) **Stephen Continues...** The nation [Egypt] that oppressed them in bondage would eventually be judged by God; then His people would leave that land and serve God in this land.
- (f) Abraham began having children and he was given the covenant of circumcision as a sign, which took place for all males on the eighth day after birth. (Genesis 17:11-12)
- (g) Abraham's seed of promise went through Isaac, then Jacob, and then Jacob's twelve sons, who became the twelve patriarchs of Israel.
1. Jacob was renamed Israel (see Genesis 32:28 & 35:9) and his twelve sons became the tribes of Israel.

B. The Patriarchs in Egypt and the Life of Joseph

(1) Stephen moves on in history to highlight Joseph.

(a) Those sons of Jacob are a jealous lot...

1. **““And the patriarchs, becoming envious, sold Joseph into Egypt.** But God was with him 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.** Now a famine and great trouble came over all the land of Egypt and Canaan, and our fathers found no sustenance. But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first. And the second time **Joseph was made known to his brothers,** and Joseph’s family became known to the Pharaoh. Then Joseph sent and called his father Jacob and all his relatives to him, seventy-five people. So **Jacob went down to Egypt;** and he died, he and our fathers. 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.” Acts 7:9-16 NKJV

(2) Stephen goes on to explain the life of Joseph from Genesis 37-50.

- (a) *Ten of those patriarchs, the sons Jacob, became jealous of Joseph and sold him into slavery and he eventually landed in Egypt. (Genesis 35:23-26; 37;12-36)
 - 1. *Ten because Joseph is the eleventh and Benjamin, the twelfth, had not been born yet.
- (b) Joseph went through severe challenges as a servant slave in Egypt, and then as a prisoner, but eventually God showed him favor and gave him a revelation that made him a favorite of the Pharaoh of that time.
- (c) Pharaoh put him in charge of his household and second in command over all of Egypt to deal with the coming double portion harvest and ensuing famine. (Genesis 41:41-43)
- (d) When the famine came over Egypt and Canaan, as Joseph predicted, and his father Jacob and his *brothers, who sold him into slavery, could no longer feed themselves, they became aware that Egypt had food stored and for sale.
 - 1. *Now eleven brothers as Benjamin was born by then.
- (e) Jacob sends his ten sons (not including Benjamin) to Egypt to buy grains and that is when they encountered Joseph, whom they do not recognize.

1. They assumed Joseph was dead, and they could not recognize him in his Egyptian garb and makeup.
 2. Plus, it has been 13 years since they've seen him
- (f) They returned home, but must revisit Egypt a second time and that is when Joseph reveals his true identity and introduces them to Pharaoh.
- (g) Joseph sends for his father and other surviving relatives to come live in Egypt.
- (h) Eventually Jacob died in Egypt and is later brought back to be buried in the same tomb as Abraham. (Genesis 49:29-32)

C. The Life of Moses

- (1) The transition from Joseph to Moses: (Reminder: there are 64 years between Joseph's death and Moses' birth.)
- (a) The time of the promise to Abraham drew near...
1. ““But when **the time of the promise drew near** which God had sworn to Abraham, **the people grew and multiplied in Egypt till another king arose who did not know Joseph.** This man dealt **treacherously** with our people, and oppressed our forefathers, making them **expose their babies, so that they might not live.** 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. But when he was set out, Pharaoh's daughter took him away and brought him up as her own son. And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds. "Now when he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the children of Israel. And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended and avenged him who was oppressed, and struck down the Egyptian. For he supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand. 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?' But he who did his neighbor wrong pushed him away, saying, '**Who made you a ruler and a judge over us? Do you want to kill me as you did the Egyptian yesterday?**' Then, at this saying, Moses fled and became a dweller in the land of Midian, where he had two sons. "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. When Moses saw it, he marveled at the sight; and as

he drew near to observe, the voice of the Lord came to him, 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. 'Then the Lord said to him, **"Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground.** 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."** ' **"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.** 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." Acts 7:17-36 NKJV

- a) What time was promised to Abraham? The time for the affliction and hard labor—and eventually judgment of Egypt!
- (2) Stephen moves on and outlines the substantive events in the life of Moses from Exodus 1-40.

- (a) As Jacob's sons multiplied in Egypt as guests, NOT slaves, it was time for God's promised affliction to come.
- (b) Food for Thought: How long was Israel an invited guest before they became slaves in bondage?
- 1) You already learned that there were 64 years between Joseph's death and Moses' birth.
 - 2) Joseph was 17 years old when he was sold into slavery (Genesis 17:2).
 - 3) Joseph was 30 years old when he was released from prison and placed in charge over Egypt (Genesis 41:46).
 - 4) They were 2 years into the famine when Joseph revealed himself to his brothers (Genesis 45:6). That makes it 9 years after Joseph came to power. (7 years of double portion + 2 years of famine)
 - 5) Joseph is 39 years old when Jacob and his family came to Goshen in Egypt and he was 110 when he died (Genesis 50:26). That means they lived 71 years as guests in Egypt while Joseph was alive.
 - 6) And since we know Moses was not born until 64 years after Joseph's death, and that is when the Pharaoh who did not know Joseph took over and

instituted Israel's hard labor, we can conclude that Israel was an invited guest in Egypt, not slaves, for 135 years.

- (c) **Back to Stephen's Defense:** A Pharaoh who did not know Joseph was now king and he grew afraid of the rapidly increasing masses of Israelites living in Goshen for the past 135 years. (Exodus 1:8)
- (d) This king (a treacherous leader) wanted to control the Hebrew population, so he commanded that newborns be murdered. (Exodus 1:22)
- (e) When Moses was born God spared him for three months and he was able to live at home. (Exodus 2:1-3)
- (f) But then he was placed in the guardianship of Pharaoh's daughter, who raised him as her own son in Egypt. (Exodus 2:5-10)
- (g) Moses was literally raised as an Egyptian and learned all their ways and he was quite good at it!
- (h) But when he was forty years old he was inspired to connect with his blood relatives who had been in bondage to Pharaoh since his birth (40 years).
- (i) As he visited the work camp he witnessed an Egyptian overseer abuse an Israelite slave and when he stepped in to defend, he killed the Egyptian. (Exodus 2:11-12)

- (j) He assumed his Hebrew relatives would see it for what it was, a sign that he would deliver them from bondage one day, but they did not see it that way.
- (k) Furthermore, the next day when he visited again, when he attempted to settle a dispute between two Israelites, their reaction was to reject his leadership and to call attention to how he murdered the Egyptian, worrying he would use the same “technique” with them. (Exodus 2:13-14)
- (l) It frightened Moses that they might expose him, so much that he fled Egypt to Midian. (Exodus 2:15)
- (m) Forty years later, Moses is now eighty years old; Israel has been in bondage that long; and God appears to Moses as a fire in a bush near Mount Sinai.
- (n) Moses was stunned that the fire had not consumed the bush and his desire to know more drew him closer. God tells him to take off his shoes; this is holy ground. (Exodus 3:2-5)
- (o) That’s when God spoke to him and identified Himself. (Exodus 3:5)
 - 1. Yahweh informs Moses that He knows of the oppression, and that He is going to send Moses on an

assignment to deliver the people from Egyptian slavery. (Exodus 3:7-10)

2. Moses is stunned, as expected, and has many questions: “Why me, who are You, why would they listen, what do I say when they don’t?”
3. God tells him to remind the people that he, Moses, is the one they rejected forty years earlier, and that God spoke to him from a bush.
 - a) Israel has a history of rejecting the ones God chooses: *“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.”*
 - (p) To make a very long story very short, God did deliver His people by using Moses, and with many supernatural signs and disastrous punishments of Egypt (the 10 Plagues). (Exodus 7-12)
 - (q) In the end Israel crossed the Red Sea with yet another miracle and they lived in the wilderness for forty years, until Moses was one-hundred-twenty years old.

D. Stephen Continues by Recounting Israel’s Rebellion

- (1) The prophet like Moses—you better listen to him.

(a) Stephen shifts the atmosphere as he begins to show how Israel is a rebellious people. His intent is certainly to include the council he is addressing as also rebellious.

1. **““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.’** “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, whom **our fathers would not obey, but rejected.** And in their **hearts they turned back to Egypt,** 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.’** And they **made a calf** in those days, offered sacrifices to the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands. 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? 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.'" Acts 7:37-43 NKJV

(2) Stephen then rewinds a bit and reminds his accusers of a few things about Moses and Israel.

(a) *"The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear."*

(Deuteronomy 18:15)

1. See [A Profound Challenge](#) for a detailed explanation of the prophet like Moses.

(b) Moses led the people in the wilderness and received the law on Mt. Sinai, the commands, which by their actions our forefathers ultimately rejected.

(c) They wanted to go back to Egypt because, in their opinion, Moses took too long on the mountain. (Exodus 32:1, 23)

(d) These rebels convinced Aaron to make a golden calf so they could worship and celebrate while Moses was gone. (Exodus 32)

(e) Then God turned them over to their own rebellion, just as the prophet Amos prophesied. They neglected the sacrifices and connected to pagan gods. (Amos 5:25-27)

E. Stephen Continues with a Lesson about the True Tabernacle

(1) Time to connect the tabernacle the temple and you!

(a) It's all according to a pattern...

1. **““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, 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**, who found favor before God and asked to **find a dwelling for the God of Jacob**. But **Solomon built Him a house**. “However, the **Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands**, as the prophet says: ‘**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? Has My hand not made all these things?’”** Acts 7:44-50 NKJV**

(2) If exposing a history of rebellion was not convicting enough for Stephen's accusers, here is where his defense really begins to uncover the deep things they've missed. God was meant to dwell within mankind, not in a tent or a building.

- (a) Many times throughout Exodus, Moses was instructed to build the tabernacle precisely according to the pattern shown him on the mountain. The prophetic purpose of such instructions is affirmed in the New Testament.
1. “who serve the **copy and shadow of the heavenly things**, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, “**See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.**”” Hebrews 8:5 NKJV
 2. “Do you not know that **you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?**” I Corinthians 3:16 NKJV
 - a) You are the true tabernacle and that is why when Y’shua said, destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up, He was referring to His body. (John 2:19-21)
- (b) They erected the tabernacle and then moved it around in the wilderness all the way until Joshua brought it into the promised land in Joshua 3.
- (c) That tabernacle was in use for hundreds of years (450-500 years) until David conceived to build a temple for the Lord (II Samuel 7) and Solomon built it (I Kings 5-6).

- (d) But, Solomon knew no manmade structures could contain God (I Kings 8:27). The temple was symbolic of man who would one day have God in him. *“Do you not know that you are the temple of God.”*
- (e) Solomon built it with this in mind from Isaiah!
 - 1. ‘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? Has My hand not made all these things? (Isaiah 66:1-2)
- (f) And we learned it from Paul this way...
 - 1. “Or do you not know that **your body is the temple** of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and **you are not your own?** For you were **bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.**” I Corinthians 6:19-20 NKJV

F. The Tipping Point

- (1) Does Stephen rest his case?
 - (a) After the perfect defense—an inarguable testimony and perfect Spirit-led application of the Torah and Prophets that indeed proved the witnesses were false—Stephen could have rested his case with his definitive statement about the tabernacle in the wilderness and the **Temple**

that Solomon built—a perfect rebuttal to the accusation of the, “...**false witnesses** who said, “*This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words **against this holy place and the law;**”* (Acts 6:13)

1. When the high priest asked, “**Are these things so?**”

(Acts 7:1)

- a) The answer is, “Of course not, I know this stuff like the back of my hand—the entire history of our people and the purpose of this temple is in my DNA!”
- b) And my answer was entirely inspired by the Holy Spirit, just as promised by my Messiah. “*for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.*” Matthew 10:20 NKJV
- c) But he does not end there, and we can assume that what came next was also inspired by the Holy Spirit, and it guaranteed his execution!

THE PRICE OF PURPOSE

4. The Moment He Can't Go Back

A. Stephen's Rebuke: Israel Resists the Holy Spirit

(1) The Holy Spirit is speaking through me...

(a) You, however, oppose the Holy Spirit!

1. **““You stiff-necked and 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 foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, who have **received the law** by the direction of angels **and have not kept it.””** Acts 7:51-53 NKJV**

(2) This is no way to get the verdict you hope for. And honestly, we all know he had no shot of a fair trial anyway, especially when you consider the history of the characters overseeing it.

(a) He calls them hard-headed, stubborn, and deaf men, with darkened hearts.

(b) He tells them they are resistant to the Spirit of God.

(c) He reminds them that they have the same DNA of those who tortured the prophets, the ones who foretold of the coming Messiah.

1. Y’shua said the very same thing about them in Matthew 23.

(d) And then he seals his fate...

1. You betrayed the true Messiah and murdered Him.

2. You received the law, but would not keep the law!

B. Stephen is Convicted and Executed

(1) The point of no return!

(a) *“Convict a soft heart and you get repentance; convict a hard heart and you get violence.” DJH*

1. **“When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth. 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, and said, “Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!” Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the [FALSE] witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” 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.” Acts 7:54-60 NKJV**

(2) The end result of this kangaroo court is that Stephen becomes the first Martyr in Church history.

- (a) These religious hypocrites are convicted to the core and they order Stephen's execution.
- (b) Even so, Stephen is filled with the Spirit and he feels only the glory of God, and he sees Y'shua at the right hand of the Father.
- (c) They don't care what he has to say—his perfect defense was meaningless to them from the start; they never intended to care.
- (d) They dragged him out of the court and stoned him to death.

1. **"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake,** For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and **say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.** Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for **great is your reward in heaven,** for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

Matthew 5:10-12 NKJV

- a) Blessed is Stephen for being persecuted for righteousness.
- b) Blessed is Stephen for being lied about for the sake of Y'shua.
- c) Great is his reward in heaven!

- d) Thus far, the other apostles were only beaten for His name's sake...
 - 1) "And they agreed with him, and when they had called for the apostles and **beaten them**, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. So they departed from the presence of the council, **rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.**" Acts 5:40-41 NKJV
- (e) And to keep the blood from spattering all over their clothes, they left their garments with Saul (Paul) who was overseeing the execution.
 - 1. Paul will himself face similar challenges after his conversion; the same challenges he caused for those he persecuted before his conversion.
 - a) **At his conversion:** "For I will show him how many things **he must suffer for My name's sake.**" Acts 9:16 NKJV
 - b) "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for **whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.**" Galatians 6:7 NKJV
 - 2. Why? Because a false witness will receive the punishment he is hoping that the accused will suffer!

a) “And the judges shall make careful inquiry, and indeed, **if the witness is a false witness**, who has testified falsely against his brother, then **you shall do to him as he thought to have done to his brother**; so you shall put away the evil from among you.” Deuteronomy 19:18-19 NKJV

1) More on Paul’s life of suffering in a moment.

(f) Stephen’s reaction to the stoning was itself Spirit-inspired.

1. He called on the Lord to receive his spirit as he neared death.

2. And then he did the most outrageous thing imaginable. Just as Christ did, he forgave His executioners as he breathed his last breath.

a) **Y’shua:** “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.” Luke 23:34 NKJV

b) **Stephen:** “Lord, do not charge them with this sin.” Acts 7:60 NKJV

C. And... Paul was there every step if the way...

(1) It seems that this council (Sanhedrin, religious court) has quickly forgotten the advice they received and heeded from Gamaliel.

- (a) Gamaliel had advised the council to release the apostles in Acts 5, advice to which the council was willing to comply.
 - 1. In Acts 5:17-21 the apostles were imprisoned and in Acts 5:22-32 they stood trial. Gamaliel's advice helped them get released after being beaten in Acts 5:33-42 (See [Disruptive Technology](#)).
- (b) And if Gamaliel was part of the council in Acts 5, he was likely a member in Acts 4.
 - 1. In Acts 4:1-22 Peter and John were arrested and put on trial (See [A Profound Challenge](#)).
- (c) And if Gamaliel was part of the council in Acts 4 and 5, he was also very likely present at the trial in Matthew 26:59-61 when Y'shua stood before the Sanhedrin (religious court)—although under a different high priest.
 - 1. Y'shua was also falsely accused as seems to be the modus operandi of this hypocritical court. (See [Final Footsteps](#))
- (d) And Gamaliel was Paul's teacher...
 - 1. *“I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city **at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers' law,** and*

was zealous toward God as you all are today.” Acts 22:3 NKJV

- a) And we are certain Paul was there at the council when Stephen was executed...
 - 1) *“and they cast him out of the city **and stoned him** [to death]. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named **Saul.**” (Acts 7:58)*
 - 2) So, if we rewind and place Paul by the side of Gamaliel, his teacher and mentor, we can surmise that Paul was there every step of the way, judging Y’shua and the Apostles and Stephen in this council of religious vitriol.
 - 3) And maybe that is why he had such hatred for Christ and his Followers as we see in the next chapter.
 - 4) “Now **Saul was consenting to his death.** At that time a **great persecution arose against the church** which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. **As for Saul, he made**

havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.” Acts 8:1-3 NKJV

(2) You reap what you sow... *“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for **whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.**”*

(Galatians 6:7)

(a) Paul is eventually falsely accused of the same thing (throughout his entire ministry) for which Stephen is executed.

1. “but they have been informed about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles **to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs.** {28} crying out, “Men of Israel, help! **This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against the people, the law, and this place;** and furthermore **he also brought Greeks into the temple** and has defiled this holy place.”” Acts 21:21, 28 NKJV

a) Paul has the same false accusations levied against him as did Y’shua and Stephen.

b) And he paid the price for the rest of His life.

c) He spends Acts 21-28 defending himself.

- d) And in the end it cost him his life.
- e) Whatever a man sows, that he will also reap!

D. Final Thoughts

(1) Be willing to forsake all...

(a) The price of purpose!

1. "Then He said to them all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, **let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily**, and follow Me. For whoever desires to **save** his life will **lose** it, but whoever **loses** his life **for My sake will save it.**" Luke 9:23-24 NKJV
2. ""If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, **and his own life** also, he cannot be My disciple." Luke 14:26 NKJV
3. "For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and **count the cost**, whether he has enough to finish it—" Luke 14:28 NKJV
4. "So likewise, whoever of you does not **forsake all** that he has cannot be My disciple." Luke 14:33 NKJV
5. ""Salt is good; but **if the salt has lost its flavor**, how shall it be seasoned? **It is neither fit for the land nor for the dunghill**, but men throw it out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" Luke 14:34-35 NKJV

6. Are you willing to go the distance?
 - a) Deny yourself?
 - b) Take up your cross daily?
 - c) Be willing to lose your life for His sake?
 - d) Count the cost?
 - e) Forsake all?
 - f) Be salty or find yourself on a pile of dung?

(2) Closing Statement

- (a) *“There is a plan and a purpose for your life. I don’t know the specifics for you, but I do know it will follow this pattern: Problem-Solution-Plan-Challenge-Cost-Price. Identify the problem; concept the solution; craft the plan; face the challenge; count the cost; and pay the price. It is the price of purpose and it will cost you everything, including your own life. In the end you should be “All Used Up for God.” All it takes is the willingness to go the distance!” DJH*

Summary: CLOSED: GONE FISHING?

1. The Ministry Grows and Help is Needed

A. Purpose and Calling

- (1) Open: Serving Tables?
 - (a) We have a problem. Fix it! But How?

1. The apostles had a problem brought to their attention. Do they just add the burden to the load they are already carrying?
 2. It would seem that if they could have handled it the problem would not have arisen in the first place.
 3. What is the solution?
 - a) Start serving tables along with everything else they do?
 - b) Assign someone else to do the task?
 - c) Hint: if you've already left your fishing profession, don't go back to it!
- (2) The church was growing rapidly and so was the generosity of God's people.
- (a) As the people continued to sell their possessions and bring the proceeds to the apostles, they were tasked with the distribution of those resources to meet the needs of those less fortunate.
 1. However, it was becoming increasingly difficult for the twelve apostles to manage all the logistics of getting the resources into the hands of those in need.
 2. In particular, it seems that some local widows were missing out on the daily distribution.
 - (b) The Hellenists vs. The Hebrews

1. Hellenistic Judaism was a form of Judaism in classical antiquity that combined Jewish religious tradition with elements of Greek culture.
 2. The Hebrews were Jewish Christians who spoke almost exclusively Aramaic, and the Hellenists were also Jewish Christians, but whose mother tongue was Greek.
- (3) In response to this logistical difficulty the twelve summoned a group of disciples to propose a solution and present a plan that could correct the problem. I think it is safe to say that Peter is their spokesperson here. Why? Because in every scene since Pentecost, Peter is the one who spoke up.
- (a) They recognized that in the critical time of rapid growth of the church it would not be wise for them to distract from what they were commissioned by Christ to do.
1. They were to spread the good news and pray (to make disciples, baptize, and teach).
 - a) Should they add serving food and distributing resources to the widows?
 - b) A life in ministry is challenging and one of those challenges is the temptation to take on duties or

the mistake of going back to duties that are not yours to do!

- c) Here, Peter and the other apostles make the right choice!
- d) Note: Peter is often the first to speak and the one to lead, but he does not always make the right choice! In fact, he has a history of choosing incorrectly.

(b) Peter was called away from his old life as a fisherman...

1. But later he went back to fishing and dragged others with him into his error. And the fruit of going back to his old “profession.” NOTHING!
2. But, Y’shua has a way of turning around, even our silly mistakes. Cast your net in the OTHER DIRECTION Peter! Remember, you are no longer a fisherman but a fisher of men—that’s the “other side” of the boat!
3. Shortly after this course correction, Y’shua restores Peter three times, a prophetic restoration of Peter’s three denials of the Lord.
4. Read the events of Matthew 16:13-28, and you will see how Peter can go from prophetic insight in one moment to blowing it in the next moment.

- (c) But this time Peter and the eleven make the right choice. Others could certainly do things like handle benevolence and oversee the feeding ministry.
- (d) It was time to assign other Spirit-filled men, who were established and trustworthy, to take over the distribution part of the ministry.
- (e) Everyone agreed this was a good idea and they chose seven men, laid hands on them, and launched them into ministry.
 - 1. The laying on of hands was common practice in the Old Testament and in Judaism. It was done to accompany the conferring of a blessing or authority. Moses ordained Joshua by the laying on of hands and he was “filled with the spirit of wisdom.” (Numbers 27:15–23, Deuteronomy 34:9).
 - 2. Moses also ordained the 70 elders in (Numbers 11:16–25). And later those elders ordained their successors in the same way. It is historically likely these ordinations included the laying on of hands.
- (f) Stephen was one of the men chosen and he is the subject of the rest of this story.
 - 1. If you become an important person in an organization that threatens the status quo, be careful.

2. We just saw what happened to Peter and company in Chapter 5 and if it was not for Gamaliel, Peter and some of the other apostles would have already been executed.
 3. Now, Stephen is in the crosshairs! Why? He is very effective, TOO EFFECTIVE in the ministry.
- (4) As such the ministry grew, more and more people became disciples of Y'shua, and even many priests were converted.
- (a) Note: not all Jewish leaders were obstinate hypocrites; many were converted along the way.

Summary: FALSE INDICTMENTS

2. Stephen becomes the Next Target of the Religious Elite

A. False Witnesses vs. Wisdom of the Spirit

- (1) Oppositional Indictments
 - (a) Targeting the opposition is not a new strategy in the 21st century.
 1. Stephen is the Oppositional Target of an Indictment...
 - a) **Oppositional:** relating to or denoting a group of opponents, characterized by resistance or dissent.
 - b) **Target:** a person, object, or place selected as the aim of an attack; mark, bullseye, prey; a person or

thing against whom criticism or abuse is or may be directed.

- c) **Indictment:** charge or accusation of a serious crime: a thing that serves to illustrate that a system or situation is bad and deserves to be condemned; charge, accusation, arraignment, allegation, imputation; ANTONYM acquittal

(2) Stephen displays such an anointing and God uses him mightily to perform great miracles.

(a) A certain sect of Jews from Synagogue of the Freedmen argue with Stephen against his claims.

- 1. These are men from various cultural backgrounds, who have likely converted to Judaism from past pagan beliefs, so for them to hear they are still missing something is very offensive.

(b) The Synagogue of the *Freedmen [Libertines KJV]

- 1. **libertine* [Latin] a man who was a slave but has been set at liberty (set free).

a) In the Roman world this was a reference to one's social status, usually for the purpose of differentiating one from someone who was never a slave.

2. Only a handful of historical references provide clues to the nature and composition of this Synagogue of Freedmen in Jerusalem, producing multiple scholarly theories and speculations.
 - a) Some scholars believe that these persons were slaves of the Romans (who were not Jewish by birth) who had been freed, became proselytes of the Jewish religion (converted to Judaism), and had a synagogue in Jerusalem. Some English Translations call this group the Synagogue of Freed Slaves.
 - b) Ancient sources mention thousands of slaves who embraced Jewish beliefs. If set free, these slaves who were proselytes, enslaved non-Jews, who came to embrace the Jewish way of life were called *Freedmen [Libertines].
 - c) The names of the synagogue from which they came can refer to the makeup of the language of the congregation, such as “synagogue of the Hebrews”
 - d) Other scholars contend that these freedmen were not Jewish proselytes but Jews by birth who had been taken into captivity by the Romans and then

set free and subsequently called *Freedmen [Libertines]. There were many such Jews.

e) It has never been fully established just who these men of the Libertines were and just where their synagogue was.

(c) They find it impossible to refute Stephen's Spirit-inspired wisdom.

1. You'd think that would result in their own acknowledgment that Stephen is correct, but as we've seen so often, the religious spirit has a tight grip on some!

(d) Instead, they hatch a diabolical plan; they convince some men to come forward and falsely claim they've heard Stephen teach blasphemous things against Moses and God.

1. Y'shua was clear that trials are part of following Him.
2. The false claims against Stephen are spewed publicly, so the common people, elders, and scribes can hear the accusations.

(e) Naturally this causes those who hear the claims to apprehend Stephen, indict him, and drag him before the council. This is something Y'shua told us was coming!

1. What will Stephen say? As we will soon see it is completely Holy Spirit Inspired!
- (f) In addition to those who had no problem vomiting lies publicly to get an indictment, these Jews from Synagogue of the Freedmen convince false witnesses to testify in a trial against Stephen.
1. It is unclear if they are the same false witnesses who spoke out publicly, as it is one thing to spew things out in the open and altogether different to make claims under oath.
- (g) False Witnesses
1. There are many instances in the Bible that speak about the violation of bearing False Witness.
 2. It is even in the Top 10 (Exodus 20:12).
 3. But none is more damning than this. Whatever the punishment would be fitting according to law, for the one being accused, is the punishment the false witness will receive!
 4. The Lies
 - a) As we will see in Section 4, Paul will face the same accusations as did Y'shua and Stephen, a consequence of the poisoned fruit of his involvement with what happened to Stephen.

5. Nothing New Under the Sun: This is the same bogus council we saw Y'shua stand before in Matthew 26 (with a different high priest), and the council Peter, John and other apostles faced, both in Acts 4 and 5.
 6. God Hates Injustice—It's an abomination!
- (h) Nevertheless, everyone who sat in the council witnessed the same thing; Stephen looked as innocent as an angel and his defense was Spirit-inspired.

Summary: STELLAR DEFENSE

3. Stephen's Brilliant Defense

A. Abraham's Legacy

(1) "Are these things so?"

(a) Stephen begins with the one whom the high priest would recognize as the patriarch of his faith.

1. The high priest asks Stephen if the accusations are true.

a) Stephen, addresses his defense to his "brothers and fathers."

b) He shows honor and reverence (although underserved, from what we've previously witnessed about the conduct and operation of this council).

- c) Notice the irony of his entire rebuttal...
 - 1) **False Claims:** he teaches blasphemous things against Moses and God; he speaks against the temple, the priesthood, Judaism and the law.
 - 2) **His Defense:** His brilliant application of the Torah and Prophets.
- (b) These accusations and his arrest shouldn't have come as a surprise, nor should his defense!
 - 1. Y'shua warned us this would happen.
 - 2. It happened to Him in Matthew 26 when He also faced false witnesses, and the Apostles have already been on trial for His name's sake two times since Pentecost (Acts 4, 5); and they were beaten the last time.
 - 3. So, the persecution is no surprise, nor should the presence of the Holy Spirit in Stephen's defense. And that is what we witness with every word he spoke when the high priest asked, "*Are these things so?*"
- (2) Stephen begins with the story of Abraham and his descendants, which encompasses Genesis 12-36.
 - (a) **The Promise:** God called Abraham to leave his country and relatives and go to a land He would show him. (Genesis 12:1)

- (b) Eventually they would come to this land in which we now live.
- (c) But, God gave him no permanent inheritance in the land because the real promise would be to his innumerable descendants who would inhabit the land.
- (d) And, those descendants would not inherit the land before they would live in a foreign land and before they would face oppression and bondage. (Genesis 15:14)
 1. Note: Stephen refers to Genesis 15:13 and the 400 years of being strangers in a land and afflicted.
 2. This would be understood by the high priest as the time between Isaac's weaning and the Exodus. Isaac was weaned and Ishmael mocked (Genesis 21:8-9).
 3. This was 30 years after God told Abraham to leave Haran. Paul's expertise in Judaism adds clarity to when the persecution began!
 4. But, the actual total number of years between the promise (when God told Abraham to leave his home) and the Exodus (the Law on Mt. Sinai) is 430 years as is also later clarified by Paul in Galatians 3:15-18.
 5. For additional clarity, it is important to note that although Israel is a stranger for 400 years, they are not in bondage for 400 years. The bondage is only for

80 years (it starts at the time of Moses' birth and the Exodus takes place when he is 80 years old).

6. **Timeline:** it was 64 years from the death of Joseph to the birth of Moses. During those 64 years the people were 'guests' in Egypt and not 'slaves' and were multiplying rapidly in numbers, and it was when the new Pharaoh, who did not know Joseph, took over (Exodus 1:8) that the captivity (hard labor) began. This was right before the birth of Moses when Pharaoh ordered the death of all newborn boys (that is why Moses was hidden). That would mean the hard labor (affliction) lasted for 80 years, the age Moses was when he was called back to Egypt to free the people. The affliction began right before the birth of Moses and ended at the Exodus when Moses is 80. The Exodus was 144 years after the death of Joseph.
 7. Click [here](#) to read more details about the math regarding the number of years of affliction.
- (e) **Stephen Continues...** The nation [Egypt] that oppressed them in bondage would eventually be judged by God; then His people would leave that land and serve God in this land.

- (f) Abraham began having children and he was given the covenant of circumcision as a sign, which took place for all males on the eighth day after birth. (Genesis 17:11-12)
- (g) Abraham's seed of promise went through Isaac, then Jacob, and then Jacob's twelve sons, who became the twelve patriarchs of Israel.
 - 1. Jacob was renamed Israel (see Genesis 32:28 & 35:9) and his twelve sons became the tribes of Israel.

B. The Patriarchs in Egypt and the Life of Joseph

- (1) Stephen moves on in history to highlight Joseph.
 - (a) Those sons of Jacob are a jealous lot...
- (2) Stephen goes on to explain the life of Joseph from Genesis 37-50.
 - (a) *Ten of those patriarchs, the sons Jacob, became jealous of Joseph and sold him into slavery and he eventually landed in Egypt. (Genesis 35:23-26; 37:12-36)
 - 1. *Ten because Joseph is the eleventh and Benjamin, the twelfth, had not been born yet.
 - (b) Joseph went through severe challenges as a servant slave in Egypt, and then as a prisoner, but eventually God showed him favor and gave him a revelation that made him a favorite of the Pharaoh of that time.

- (c) Pharaoh put him in charge of his household and second in command over all of Egypt to deal with the coming double portion harvest and ensuing famine. (Genesis 41:41-43)
- (d) When the famine came over Egypt and Canaan, as Joseph predicted, and his father Jacob and his *brothers, who sold him into slavery, could no longer feed themselves, they became aware that Egypt had food stored and for sale.
 - 1. *Now eleven brothers as Benjamin was born by then.
- (e) Jacob sends his ten sons (not including Benjamin) to Egypt to buy grains and that is when they encountered Joseph, whom they do not recognize.
 - 1. They assumed Joseph was dead, and they could not recognize him in his Egyptian garb and makeup.
 - 2. Plus, it has been 13 years since they've seen him
- (f) They returned home, but must revisit Egypt a second time and that is when Joseph reveals his true identity and introduces them to Pharaoh.
- (g) Joseph sends for his father and other surviving relatives to come live in Egypt.

- (h) Eventually Jacob died in Egypt and is later brought back to be buried in the same tomb as Abraham. (Genesis 49:29-32)

C. The Life of Moses

- (1) The transition from Joseph to Moses: (Reminder: there are 64 years between Joseph's death and Moses' birth.)
 - (a) The time of the promise to Abraham drew near...
 - 1. What time was promised to Abraham? The time for the affliction and hard labor—and eventually judgment of Egypt!
- (2) Stephen moves on and outlines the substantive events in the life of Moses from Exodus 1-40.
 - (a) As Jacob's sons multiplied in Egypt as guests, NOT slaves, it was time for God's promised affliction to come.
 - (b) Food for Thought: How long was Israel an invited guest before they became slaves in bondage?
 - 1) You already learned that there were 64 years between Joseph's death and Moses' birth.
 - 2) Joseph was 17 years old when he was sold into slavery (Genesis 17:2).

- 3) Joseph was 30 years old when he was released from prison and placed in charge over Egypt (Genesis 41:46).
 - 4) They were 2 years into the famine when Joseph revealed himself to his brothers (Genesis 45:6). That makes it 9 years after Joseph came to power. (7 years of double portion + 2 years of famine)
 - 5) Joseph is 39 years old when Jacob and his family came to Goshen in Egypt and he was 110 when he died (Genesis 50:26). That means they lived 71 years as guests in Egypt while Joseph was alive.
 - 6) And since we know Moses was not born until 64 years after Joseph's death, and that is when the Pharaoh who did not know Joseph took over and instituted Israel's hard labor, we can conclude that Israel was an invited guest in Egypt, not slaves, for 135 years.
- (c) **Back to Stephen's Defense:** A Pharaoh who did not know Joseph was now king and he grew afraid of the rapidly increasing masses of Israelites living in Goshen for the past 135 years. (Exodus 1:8)

- (d) This king (a treacherous leader) wanted to control the Hebrew population, so he commanded that newborns be murdered. (Exodus 1:22)
- (e) When Moses was born God spared him for three months and he was able to live at home. (Exodus 2:1-3)
- (f) But then he was placed in the guardianship of Pharaoh's daughter, who raised him as her own son in Egypt. (Exodus 2:5-10)
- (g) Moses was literally raised as an Egyptian and learned all their ways and he was quite good at it!
- (h) But when he was forty years old he was inspired to connect with his blood relatives who had been in bondage to Pharaoh since his birth (40 years).
- (i) As he visited the work camp he witnessed an Egyptian overseer abuse an Israelite slave and when he stepped in to defend, he killed the Egyptian. (Exodus 2:11-12)
- (j) He assumed his Hebrew relatives would see it for what it was, a sign that he would deliver them from bondage one day, but they did not see it that way.
- (k) Furthermore, the next day when he visited again, when he attempted to settle a dispute between two Israelites, their reaction was to reject his leadership and to call attention to how he murdered the Egyptian, worrying he

would use the same “technique” with them. (Exodus 2:13-14)

- (l) It frightened Moses that they might expose him, so much that he fled Egypt to Midian. (Exodus 2:15)
- (m) Forty years later, Moses is now eighty years old; Israel has been in bondage that long; and God appears to Moses as a fire in a bush near Mount Sinai.
- (n) Moses was stunned that the fire had not consumed the bush and his desire to know more drew him closer. God tells him to take off his shoes; this is holy ground. (Exodus 3:2-5)
- (o) That’s when God spoke to him and identified Himself. (Exodus 3:5)
 1. Yahweh informs Moses that He knows of the oppression, and that He is going to send Moses on an assignment to deliver the people from Egyptian slavery. (Exodus 3:7-10)
 2. Moses is stunned, as expected, and has many questions: “Why me, who are You, why would they listen, what do I say when they don’t?”
 3. God tells him to remind the people that he, Moses, is the one they rejected forty years earlier, and that God spoke to him from a bush.

- a) Israel has a history of rejecting the ones God chooses: *“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.”*
- (p) To make a very long story very short, God did deliver His people by using Moses, and with many supernatural signs and disastrous punishments of Egypt (the 10 Plagues). (Exodus 7-12)
- (q) In the end Israel crossed the Red Sea with yet another miracle and they lived in the wilderness for forty years, until Moses was one-hundred-twenty years old.

D. Stephen Continues by Recounting Israel’s Rebellion

- (1) The prophet like Moses—you better listen to him.
 - (a) Stephen shifts the atmosphere as he begins to show how Israel is a rebellious people. His intent is certainly to include the council he is addressing as also rebellious.
- (2) Stephen then rewinds a bit and reminds his accusers of a few things about Moses and Israel.
 - (a) *“The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear.”*
(Deuteronomy 18:15)

1. See [A Profound Challenge](#) for a detailed explanation of the prophet like Moses.
- (b) Moses led the people in the wilderness and received the law on Mt. Sinai, the commands, which by their actions our forefathers ultimately rejected.
- (c) They wanted to go back to Egypt because, in their opinion, Moses took too long on the mountain. (Exodus 32:1, 23)
- (d) These rebels convinced Aaron to make a golden calf so they could worship and celebrate while Moses was gone. (Exodus 32)
- (e) Then God turned them over to their own rebellion, just as the prophet Amos prophesied. They neglected the sacrifices and connected to pagan gods. (Amos 5:25-27)

E. Stephen Continues with a Lesson about the True Tabernacle

- (1) Time to connect the tabernacle the temple and you!
 - (a) It's all according to a pattern...
- (2) If exposing a history of rebellion was not convicting enough for Stephen's accusers, here is where his defense really begins to uncover the deep things they've missed. God was meant to dwell within mankind, not in a tent or a building.

- (a) Many times throughout Exodus, Moses was instructed to build the tabernacle precisely according to the pattern shown him on the mountain. The prophetic purpose of such instructions is affirmed in the New Testament.
1. You are the true tabernacle and that is why when Y'shua said, destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up, He was referring to His body. (John 2:19-21)
- (b) They erected the tabernacle and then moved it around in the wilderness all the way until Joshua brought it into the promised land in Joshua 3.
- (c) That tabernacle was in use for hundreds of years (450-500 years) until David conceived to build a temple for the Lord (II Samuel 7) and Solomon built it (I Kings 5-6).
- (d) But, Solomon knew no manmade structures could contain God (I Kings 8:27). The temple was symbolic of man who would one day have God in him. *"Do you not know that you are the temple of God."*
- (e) Solomon built it with Isaiah in mind! *"What house will you build for Me?"*
- (f) And we learned it from Paul this way. *"Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit."*

F. The Tipping Point

(1) Does Stephen rest his case?

(a) After the perfect defense—an inarguable testimony and perfect Spirit-led application of the Torah and Prophets that indeed proved the witnesses were false—Stephen could have rested his case with his definitive statement about the tabernacle in the wilderness and the **Temple** that Solomon built—a perfect rebuttal to the accusation of the, “...**false witnesses** who said, “*This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words **against this holy place and the law;**”* (Acts 6:13)

1. When the high priest asked, “**Are these things so?**”

(Acts 7:1)

a) The answer is, “Of course not, I know this stuff like the back of my hand—the entire history of our people and the purpose of this temple is in my DNA!”

b) And my answer was entirely inspired by the Holy Spirit, just as promised by my Messiah. “*for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.*” Matthew 10:20 NKJV

- c) But he does not end there, and we can assume that what came next was also inspired by the Holy Spirit, and it guaranteed his execution!

Summary: THE PRICE OF PURPOSE

4. The Moment He Can't Go Back

A. Stephen's Rebuke: Israel Resists the Holy Spirit

- (1) The Holy Spirit is speaking through me...
 - (a) You, however, oppose the Holy Spirit!
- (2) This is no way to get the verdict you hope for. And honestly, we all know he had no shot of a fair trial anyway, especially when you consider the history of the characters overseeing it.
 - (a) He calls them hard-headed, stubborn, and deaf men, with darkened hearts.
 - (b) He tells them they are resistant to the Spirit of God.
 - (c) He reminds them that they have the same DNA of those who tortured the prophets, the ones who foretold of the coming Messiah.
 - 1. Y'shua said the very same thing about them in Matthew 23.
 - (d) And then he seals his fate...
 - 1. You betrayed the true Messiah and murdered Him.

2. You received the law, but would not keep the law!

B. Stephen is Convicted and Executed

(1) The point of no return!

(a) *“Convict a soft heart and you get repentance; convict a hard heart and you get violence.” DJH*

(2) The end result of this kangaroo court is that Stephen becomes the first Martyr in Church history.

(a) These religious hypocrites are convicted to the core and they order Stephen’s execution.

(b) Even so, Stephen is filled with the Spirit and he feels only the glory of God, and he sees Y’shua at the right hand of the Father.

(c) They don’t care what he has to say—his perfect defense was meaningless to them from the start; they never intended to care.

(d) They dragged him out of the court and stoned him to death.

1. Blessed is Stephen for being persecuted for righteousness.

2. Blessed is Stephen for being lied about for the sake of Y’shua.

3. Great is his reward in heaven!

4. Thus far, the other apostles were only beaten for His name's sake...
- (e) And to keep the blood from spattering all over their clothes, they left their garments with Saul (Paul) who was overseeing the execution.
1. Paul will himself face similar challenges after his conversion; the same challenges he caused for those he persecuted before his conversion.
 2. Why? Because a false witness will receive the punishment he is hoping that the accused will suffer!
 - 1) More on Paul's life of suffering in a moment.
- (f) Stephen's reaction to the stoning was itself Spirit-inspired.
1. He called on the Lord to receive his spirit as he neared death.
 2. And then he did the most outrageous thing imaginable. Just as Christ did, he forgave His executioners as he breathed his last breath.

C. And... Paul was there every step if the way...

- (1) It seems that this council (Sanhedrin, religious court) has quickly forgotten the advice they received and heeded from Gamaliel.

- (a) Gamaliel had advised the council to release the apostles in Acts 5, advice to which the council was willing to comply.
 - 1. In Acts 5:17-21 the apostles were imprisoned and in Acts 5:22-32 they stood trial. Gamaliel's advice helped them get released after being beaten in Acts 5:33-42 (See [Disruptive Technology](#)).
- (b) And if Gamaliel was part of the council in Acts 5, he was likely a member in Acts 4.
 - 1. In Acts 4:1-22 Peter and John were arrested and put on trial (See [A Profound Challenge](#)).
- (c) And if Gamaliel was part of the council in Acts 4 and 5, he was also very likely present at the trial in Matthew 26:59-61 when Y'shua stood before the Sanhedrin (religious court)—although under a different high priest.
 - 1. Y'shua was also falsely accused as seems to be the modus operandi of this hypocritical court. (See [Final Footsteps](#))
- (d) And Gamaliel was Paul's teacher...
 - 1. And we are certain Paul was there at the council when Stephen was executed.
 - 2. So, if we rewind and place Paul by the side of Gamaliel, his teacher and mentor, we can surmise

that Paul was there every step of the way, judging Y'shua and the Apostles and Stephen in this council of religious vitriol.

3. And maybe that is why he had such hatred for Christ and his Followers as we see in the next chapter.

(2) You reap what you sow... *“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for **whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.**”*

(a) Paul is eventually falsely accused of the same thing (throughout his entire ministry) for which Stephen is executed.

1. Paul has the same false accusations levied against him as did Y'shua and Stephen.
2. And he paid the price for the rest of His life.
3. He spends Acts 21-28 defending himself.
4. And in the end it cost him his life.
5. Whatever a man sows, that he will also reap!

D. Final Thoughts

(1) Be willing to forsake all...

(a) The price of purpose! Are you willing to go the distance?

1. Deny yourself?
2. Take up your cross daily?
3. Be willing to lose your life for His sake?

4. Count the cost?
5. Forsake all?
6. Be salty or find yourself on a pile of dung?

(2) Closing Statement

(a) *“There is a plan and a purpose for your life. I don’t know the specifics for you, but I do know it will follow this pattern: Problem-Solution-Plan-Challenge-Cost-Price. Identify the problem; concept the solution; craft the plan; face the challenge; count the cost; and pay the price. It is the price of purpose and it will cost you everything, including your own life. In the end you should be “All Used Up for God.” All it takes is the willingness to go the distance!” DJH*

QUESTIONS & DISCUSSION

1. Identify the problem and the solution in Acts 6:1-7.

- A. What was special about Stephen?
- B. What specific choice is made that allows the apostles to stick to their main assignment?

2. Read Matthew 4:18-20 and then John 21:1-6...

- A. Like we just read about Stephen, Peter was called to a specific purpose. What was he called away from and what was he called to do?
- B. What error did he make towards the end of Y'shua's ministry on earth? Was it fruitful? Why or why not?
- C. How did Y'shua help remedy the error?
- D. What might "Cast the net on the right side of the boat" mean relative to course-correcting Peter's life?
- E. How might it apply to your life right now?

3. In Matthew 16:13-28 we watch Peter travel the whole spectrum of decision-making, from right choice to wrong choice.

- A. Describe what he does, step-by-step.
- B. What is the remedy of his error in Matthew 16:24-28?
- C. How does Peter's propensity to make impetuous decisions show up in John 18:15-27?
- D. How does Y'shua remedy his error in John 21:15-19?

4. In Acts 6:8-15 the religious elite are at it again...

- A. What is Stephen doing that makes them angry?
- B. What do they do to stop him and why?
- C. Why should we not be surprised according to John 16:33?
- D. How are the accusations against Stephen similar to what these same accusers said about Y'shua in Matthew 26:59-61?

5. In Acts 7:1-50, Stephen offers a stellar defense against the accusations...

- A. Read the entire narrative in sections: Acts 7:1-8; 7:9-16; 7:17-36; 7:37-43; and 7:44-50. In each section describe how Stephen uses the Torah or Prophet to refute the accusation that he is teaching against the temple and against God's laws.
- B. How do we know this is a Spirit-inspired defense according to Mark 13:9-11? (Hint: see also Acts 6:5, 10, 15; & 7:55)
- C. What does God think about these accusations? (See: Deuteronomy 19:18-19; Proverbs 11:1; 12:22; 17:15)
- D. How might what Stephen says in Acts 7:44-50 be related to what Paul teaches in I Corinthians 3:16 and 6:19-20?

6. Stephen seems to seal his fate with a stiff rebuke of those presiding over his trial in Acts 7:51-53...

- A. How do those convicted respond? (See Acts 7:54-60)
- B. How is their response demonstrative of this quote? *"Convict a soft heart and you get repentance; convict a hard heart and you get violence."*
- C. How is what happened to Stephen a blessing according to Matthew 5:10-12?

7. As we see, Paul (Saul) was there overseeing Stephen's execution, a conviction based on the testimony of false witnesses, and it did not stop there according to Acts 8:1-3...

A. How are Deuteronomy 19:18-19 and Galatians 6:7 demonstrated in Paul's life after his conversion? (See Acts 21:21, 28)

8. If you were called like Stephen, would you answer the call if you knew your fate would be like his fate?

A. Use Luke 9:23-24 & 14:25-35 to help craft your response.

9. How is the following statement being demonstrated in your life?

A. *"There is a plan and a purpose for your life. I don't know the specifics for you, but I do know it will follow this pattern: Problem-Solution-Plan-Challenge-Cost-Price. Identify the problem; concept the solution; craft the plan; face the challenge; count the cost; and pay the price. It is the price of purpose and it will cost you everything, including your own life. In the end you should be "All Used Up for God." All it takes is the willingness to go the distance!"*