Acts to the Epistles, Ch. 5

*Rejection by the Nation*

*Stephen’s Address to the Council*

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**Rejection by the Nation**

*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.*

*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.* ([Acts 7:51-58a](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Acts+7.51-58a&t=NKJV))

As there was a climactic point in the offer of the kingdom of the heavens to Israel at Christ’s first coming, so was there a climactic point in the re-offer of the kingdom following Christ’s ascension. And in each instance, reaching this climactic point resulted in a major shift in God’s dealings with Israel in relation to the proffered kingdom.

In the original offer, the climactic point is seen in the events recorded in Matthew, chapter twelve. Christ, in this chapter, had performed a miraculous sign in the presence of the people. He had healed a person possessed with a demon, who was both blind and dumb. And the people, seeing this miraculous sign, asked, “*Is not this the son of David?*” ([Matthew 12:23](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Matthew+12.23&t=NKJV)).

The way in which the question is worded in the Greek text indicates that the people were in a state of confusion. The Scribes and Pharisees had been following Christ about the country, seeking, at every turn, to speak against that which He was doing. And the people, hearing Jesus and seeing His miraculous signs on the one hand and then hearing a false report by their religious leaders on the other, didn’t know which way to turn.

The question that they asked after seeing Christ heal a man possessed with a demon, who was both blind and dumb, could be better translated, “*Is it possible that this is the son of David* [with their thoughts leaning more toward the negative than the positive]*?*” And their attitude toward Christ and His ministry in this respect was undoubtedly caused by the previous influence of the Scribes and Pharisees (*cf*. [Matthew 23:13ff](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Matthew+23.13ff&t=NKJV)).

The people of Israel at this point in Christ’s ministry, after seeing His miraculous works, could do no more than look at the validity of the Messenger and His message in the sense of “perhaps,” “maybe,” “possibly.” And, their thoughts, more so than not, were in line with those of the Scribes and Pharisees. For, even though they left room for the possibility that Jesus was the Son of David, they didn’t really think so.

Then, when the Scribes and Pharisees heard about the healing of the man possessed with a demon, who was both blind and dumb, they had a false explanation for Christ’s miraculous signs — an explanation designed to completely discredit Christ in the eyes of the people. They simply attributed, to Satan, the power through which Christ performed miraculous signs ([Matthew 12:24](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Matthew+12.24&t=NKJV)).

Christ was performing miraculous signs through the power of the Holy Spirit, after the manner in which God exercises His power ([Matthew 12:28](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Matthew+12.28&t=NKJV); *cf.* [Genesis 1:2](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Genesis+1.2&t=NKJV)); and the accusation of the Scribes and Pharisees was called by Christ, “*the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit*,” something that would not be forgiven the nation of Israel for two ages — the present age and the coming age ([Matthew 12:31-32](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Matthew+12.31-32&t=NKJV) [the word “world” in the Greek text ([Matthew 12:32](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Matthew+12.32&t=NKJV)) is “*aion*” and should be translated “age”]).

Then, immediately afterwards, the Scribes and Pharisees answered Jesus by stating, “*Master, we would see a sign from you*” ([Matthew 12:38](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Matthew+12.38&t=NKJV)). The intimation was clear. The Scribes and Pharisees had declared that the previously manifested sign was not from Christ, and they now requested to see a sign from Him. Thus, Christ responded after a fashion that was in complete keeping with their unbelief, false accusation, and ridiculing request:

*An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.*

*For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.* ([Matthew 12:39-40](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Matthew+12.39-40&t=NKJV); *cf.* [Matthew 12:41-45](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Matthew+12.41-45&t=NKJV)).

This is where the ministry of Christ changed in the gospel accounts. Because of that which the Scribes and Pharisees had done, their attention, rather than being directed to a sign having to do with the kingdom, was directed to a sign having to do with Christ’s subsequent sufferings — sufferings that must precede His glory. Then, later that same day, after all of this had occurred, Jesus went out of the house, sat by the seaside, and began to speak to the people in parables ([Matthew 13:1ff](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Matthew+13.1ff&t=NKJV)).

Within the symbolism of the passage, the “house” refers to the house of Israel, and the “sea” refers to the Gentile nations. And Christ began to speak in “parables” because of Israel’s unbelief ([Matthew 13:10-15](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Matthew+13.10-15&t=NKJV)). Israel had turned her back on the Lord, and He, correspondingly, turned His back on the nation. And, remaining within the symbolism used, Christ left the house of Israel and went to the Gentiles, pointing to things which were about to occur because of the nation’s unbelief (*cf.* [Matthew 21:33-43](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Matthew+21.33-43&t=NKJV)).

The word “parable” is simply an Anglicized Greek word — from *parabole* — which means, “to cast alongside.” The reference is to one truth placed alongside of a previous truth to help explain the previous truth. Thus, parables were given to further explain previously revealed truths.

However, for most of the nation, the parables would be meaningless. The people had heard but had not understood; they had seen but had closed their eyes ([Matthew 13:14-15](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Matthew+13.14-15&t=NKJV)). They had rejected the previous truths. Therefore, additional truths given in the form of parables to help explain the previous truths would be meaningless to them.

But for others in the nation — those who had heard and had understood, those who had seen and had not closed their eyes ([Matthew 13:16](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Matthew+13.16&t=NKJV)) — the parables would provide additional information so they could better understand the message that they had previously received. They had heard (and, through parables, were about to hear more) things that “*many prophets and righteous men*” had desired to see, but hadn’t been allowed to see in their day ([Matthew 13:17](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Matthew+13.17&t=NKJV); *cf.* [1 Peter 1:9-12](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1Peter+1.9-12&t=NKJV)).

Christ though, by going out of the house in [Matthew 13:1](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Matthew+13.1&t=NKJV), wasn’t through with Israel. He gave four parables outside the house ([Matthew 13:18-35](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Matthew+13.18-35&t=NKJV)), then He went back inside the house and gave three more ([Matthew 13:36-50](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Matthew+13.36-50&t=NKJV)). But note, even though back inside the house, Christ continued to speak in parables. Thus, His ministry, even within the house, took a sharp turn at this point.

Shortly afterwards Christ called attention to the Church for the first time ([Matthew 16:18](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Matthew+16.18&t=NKJV)), and the Cross began to move more and more to the forefront ([Matthew 16:21](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Matthew+16.21&t=NKJV); [17:22-23](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Matthew+17.22-23&t=NKJV); [20:17-19](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Matthew+20.17-19&t=NKJV)). Then, shortly before the events of Calvary, Jesus, through using a parable, called attention to that which the nation had done and was about to do — rejection, followed by crucifixion ([Matthew 21:33-42](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Matthew+21.33-42&t=NKJV)).

And, following this, Christ made the announcement that had been anticipated ever since the events in chapters twelve and thirteen:

*Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it.* ([Matthew 21:43](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Matthew+21.43&t=NKJV)).

The kingdom (that part of the kingdom that had been offered, the kingdom of the heavens, here called “*the kingdom of God*”) was taken from Israel with a view to the previously mentioned Church being called into existence to be the recipient of this offer (*cf.* [Matthew 16:18](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Matthew+16.18&t=NKJV); [1 Peter 2:9-10](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1Peter+2.9-10&t=NKJV)). And this leads into Christ’s sharp, lengthy, unparalleled rebuke of the Scribes and Pharisees — those who sat in “*Moses’ seat*” and controlled the religious life of the people.

They, through continually speaking against Christ’s message and miraculous signs, were the ones directly responsible for the nation’s unbelief. And, resultantly, they were the ones not only directly responsible for the nation’s rejection of the message but also for the rejection and subsequent crucifixion of the Messenger as well ([Matthew 23:1ff](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Matthew+23.1ff&t=NKJV); *ref.* [Bible One - Acts to the Epistles, Ch. 4](http://bibleone.net/A2E_04.htm), “Acceptance by Many”).

But even after Israel had rejected and slain her Messiah, God saw fit to give that same generation of Jews another opportunity to repent. Following Christ’s resurrection and ascension, God used individuals in the early Church to carry the message to Israel once again.

For a period extending over approximately the first thirty-two years of the Church’s existence, Israel was given another opportunity to repent. And in this re-offer of the kingdom — actually, quite early in the re-offer — there was a climactic point in Israel’s rejection of the message, similar to the one seen in the original offer.

As in the original offer, miraculous signs were in view; and also, as in the original offer, the religious leaders in Israel completely rejected the signs ([Acts 6:8ff](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Acts+6.8ff&t=NKJV)). This all led to Stephen appearing before the council and calling the religious leaders’ attention to selected segments of Israel’s history from their own Scriptures, extending all the way back to Abraham.

Stephen then brought his lengthy address to a close by calling their attention to one central fact. Unbelief and rejection had marked the nation’s history from the beginning, and the present generation had done no more than climax the actions of their ancestors from preceding generations.

*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.* ([Acts 7:51-52](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Acts+7.51-52&t=NKJV); *cf.* [Matthew 23:34-38](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Matthew+23.34-38&t=NKJV)).

The conclusion to this message is built on several key elements in the message itself; and that which happened immediately after Stephen concluded his message — things occurring both in heaven and upon earth — can be understood only if one first understands Stephen’s message. And this message must be understood within the framework of the way God gave it, which was the same way Stephen expected the Jewish religious leaders to understand it.

And this requires an element of spiritual perception. A person must see beyond the letter of Stephen’s message (beyond the mere historical content, *i.e.*, see that of which the history speaks) in order to understand the events that occurred both in heaven and upon earth at the conclusion of this message ([Acts 7:54ff](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Acts+7.54ff&t=NKJV)).

A fourfold description is given of Stephen in this respect. He was a man full of faith, the Spirit, grace, and power ([Acts 6:5](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Acts+6.5&t=NKJV), [8](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Acts+6.8&t=NKJV) [“faith” in v. 8 should be translated “grace”]). “Faith” is simply believing that which God has to say about a matter, which portends that a person possesses a knowledge of the Word of God (*cf.* [Romans 10:17](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Romans+10.17&t=NKJV)); and “grace” is that which God is able to do, completely apart from human merit.

And a person in this position, filled with the Spirit (empowering the individual), can proclaim the Word, with results following. God, completely apart from any merit on man’s part, can take His proclaimed Word and bring about the desired results.

Thus, Stephen, in this position, knowing the Old Testament Scriptures to the extent that he did, could go beyond the letter to the spirit of the matter (*cf.* [2 Corinthians 3:6-18](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=2Corinthians+3.6-18&t=NKJV)). He knew what the Scriptures taught, and he possessed the spiritual insight to be able to take these Scriptures and put them together after the manner in which the Spirit of God had intended that they be put together. And this is exactly what he did by calling attention to selected portions of Jewish history covering approximately 1,000 years.

And he did it so well that, at the conclusion, activity both in heaven and upon earth reached an apex in relation to the message surrounding the re-offer of the kingdom to Israel. On the one hand, the heavens were opened, the Glory of God was visible, and the Son of Man could be seen standing at God’s right hand, awaiting the Jewish religious leaders’ reaction; and, on the other hand, the Jewish religious leaders showed their reaction after a manner heretofore unseen in the post-resurrection ministry of the apostles — by slaying Stephen ([Acts 7:54-60](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Acts+7.54-60&t=NKJV)).

**From Abraham to Christ**

Stephen’s address in Acts, chapter seven, can be divided into several parts. He began with events during Abraham’s day in order to introduce God’s promise concerning a seed, a land, and an inheritance in that land ([Acts 7:2-7](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Acts+7.2-7&t=NKJV)). Then, for most of the remainder of the address, he centered his thoughts on the experiences of two individuals — Joseph and Moses ([Acts 7:8-43](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Acts+7.8-43&t=NKJV)). And drawing the address toward a conclusion, he briefly mentioned events in Israel’s history, having to do mainly with the tabernacle and temple — events extending from the days of Moses to the days of Solomon ([Acts 7:44-51](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Acts+7.44-51&t=NKJV)).

Stephen then concluded his address by making an application that these religious leaders should have been able to easily understand, in its entirety, apart from his saying anything further. Stephen had called their attention to a sequence of events, designed in chronological order, to reveal three things: (1) Israel’s history, (2) Israel’s present status, and (3) Israel’s future. Israel’s present status and future were to be drawn from the nation’s history, and these religious leaders should have possessed enough spiritual insight with respect to their own Scriptures to do this.

And, knowing that these religious leaders should have possessed this insight, Stephen brought the matter to a close after a fashion that could only have triggered the whole of the matter within their thinking. He accused them of doing exactly what their ancestors had done — rejecting, and even slaying, those whom God had sent unto them. And, as a basis for his remarks, he had previously set before them both Joseph’s rejection by his brethren and Moses’ rejection by his brethren ([Acts 7:51-52](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Acts+7.51-52&t=NKJV); *cf.* [Acts 7:9](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Acts+7.9&t=NKJV), [23-28](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Acts+7.23-28&t=NKJV)). Then, these religious leaders, seeing what they had done in the antitype (“the betrayers and murderers” of Christ), should have easily been able to see the remainder of the matter as well (revealing Israel’s future), through seeing that which subsequently happened to not only Joseph’s brethren but also Moses’ brethren.

*1. Overall Scope of Stephen’s Address*

Stephen’s address moves from the promise that God gave to Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia to the building of the tabernacle during Moses’ day and to the subsequent building of the temple during Solomon’s day. It moves from the promise concerning a seed, a land, and an inheritance in the land to that day approximately 1,000 years later when the seed of Abraham is seen in the land realizing an inheritance, with a temple, within a theocracy (though not in complete fulfillment of the promise given to Abraham, but typifying a future day).

The promise was given to Abraham in Ur of the Chaldees, in Mesopotamia, when he was seventy years old, five years before he departed for the land of Canaan (*cf.* [Genesis 12:1-4](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Genesis+12.1-4&t=NKJV); [15:13-16](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Genesis+15.13-16&t=NKJV); [Exodus 12:40-41](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Exodus+12.40-41&t=NKJV); [Galatians 3:17-18](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Galatians+3.17-18&t=NKJV)). And, though the theocracy was established at Sinai when the tabernacle was completed and the Glory of God filled the Holy of Holies, there was no temple in the land until the days of Solomon. It was during Solomon’s reign as king over Israel that the Old Testament theocracy reached its greatest height. And the building of the temple at the greatest height of the theocracy was where Stephen drew his address to a close.

In this respect, Stephen’s address, covering many types, forms one overall type. It covers the whole scope of the matter — from the promise to the realization of the promise (though the full and complete realization is seen in the antitype, not in the type).

And the fact that there would be a complete, future realization of the promise given to Abraham should have been evident to the religious leaders hearing Stephen’s address. Knowing that God would keep His promise to Abraham, they should have been able to clearly see three things: (1) the promise was not realized in its fullness during that time in history when the kingdom was at its greatest height (in the type); (2) there was, at the time Stephen gave his address, no existing kingdom in Israel; and (3) the type, set forth through events during Solomon’s day, necessitates a complete, future fulfillment in the antitype.

The theocracy had been taken from Israel over six hundred years prior to the events surrounding Calvary, allowing the Gentiles to exercise governmental power and control over the earth (and this would also be within a theocracy, though under Satan, in his kingdom). However, any Jew believing that which God had promised Abraham and having any spiritual perception at all about that portended by events during the days of Solomon would know that the times of the Gentiles must have an end. Israel must be reestablished within a theocracy at some future point in time.

This would be in complete fulfillment of the promise given to Abraham — a promise that must be brought to pass; and it would fulfill the type set forth during Solomon’s reign — a type which, in the antitype, must be fulfilled. Israel must be reestablished in the land with her King, the Temple, and the Glory.

These are the two points beginning and ending Stephen’s message — the promise given to Abraham and the theocracy during Solomon’s day. And through beginning with the promise and ending with the theocracy, Stephen called attention to the entire scope of revealed Jewish history.

Then, between these two points, in order to drive the whole matter home, Stephen spent most of his discourse dealing with two individuals — Joseph and Moses. These religious leaders, after Stephen had put the whole matter together for them, should have been able to clearly see what their own Scriptures plainly taught.

They, with the spiritual perception that their position portended, should have been able to clearly see exactly what had happened, what was then happening, and what was about to happen. Stephen had outlined the whole matter, from their own Scriptures. He had laid the whole matter out for them. And, at that point, they should have been able to reflect on this sequence of Scriptures and see these things for themselves.

The Spirit of God had given this complete, overall type extending from Abraham to Solomon in order to explain the complete, overall antitype. And the various individual types, making up this larger, complete type, were given for the same reason. Stephen laid before them, from their own Scriptures, that which would explain exactly what had happened, what was happening, and what was about to happen. It was all there for them to see. And, again, they should have possessed the spiritual insight to grasp the matter at this point. Their eyes should have been opened, as had previously occurred with the two disciples on the Emmaus road ([Luke 24:25-31](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Luke+24.25-31&t=NKJV)).

*2. Joseph, Moses, Christ*

Stephen, drawing from the Old Testament Scriptures, built his discourse mainly around two points in time — events surrounding Christ’s first coming, and events surrounding Christ’s second coming. The generation of Jews to whom he spoke had witnessed and participated in events surrounding Christ’s first coming, and they were being offered an opportunity to witness and participate in events surrounding Christ’s second coming as well, wherein the prophesied blessings lay.

Stephen dealt with the time Joseph went to his brothers and was rejected. And he also dealt with that later time when Joseph again stood in the presence of his brothers, with his brothers, this time, accepting him ([Acts 7:9-13](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Acts+7.9-13&t=NKJV)). Then Stephen called attention to exactly the same sequence of events occurring in Moses’ life — rejection at the hands of his brethren, followed by their accepting him when he appeared again at a later date ([Acts 7:23-36](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Acts+7.23-36&t=NKJV)). And the acceptance, in both cases, led into a type of that time also typified by Solomon’s day, where Stephen drew his review of Israeli history to a close.

Note once again what Stephen did in this discourse. He began by laying the groundwork by calling attention to the promise given to Abraham. Then he moved through three separate parts that all ended at the same point in time — the Messianic Kingdom. He moved through the days of Joseph, the days of Moses, and the days of Solomon.

And the religious leaders, hearing this message, should have had no trouble at all grasping the whole of that which Stephen had laid out for them. The message was clear.

Joseph’s brothers had rejected him, and a time of intense trouble followed. The seven years of famine that followed forced them to go to Joseph in Egypt; and this second meeting of Joseph and his brothers resulted in their accepting him, with deliverance and blessings following ([Genesis 37:18-20](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Genesis+37.18-20&t=NKJV); [41:56-42:6](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Genesis+41.56-42.6&t=NKJV); [45:1ff](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Genesis+45.1ff&t=NKJV)).

Moses’ brethren had rejected him, and a time of intense trouble followed. The bondage under the Assyrian ([Isaiah 52:4](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Isaiah+52.4&t=NKJV)) became so great that the Israelites were forced to cry out to the God of their fathers; and God, hearing their cry and remembering His covenant, sent Moses back, resulting in the people accepting him, with deliverance and blessings following ([Exodus 2:14](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Exodus+2.14&t=NKJV); [3:7-10](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Exodus+3.7-10&t=NKJV); [12:1ff](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Exodus+12.1ff&t=NKJV)).

And the parallel concerning that which had happened in the antitype couldn’t be missed. The Jewish people had rejected the One Whom both Joseph and Moses typified; and, according to the types, a time of trouble could only follow (specifically, the Great Tribulation spoken of so much in the Old Testament, to occur following the present dispensation when God resumes His national dealings with Israel [though all the anti-Semitism throughout the dispensation would, in a respect, be in view]).

This is exactly the point Stephen drove home at the end of his discourse. Stephen used words designed to provoke these religious leaders to the point that they would be forced to see, from their own Scriptures, that which had been done. And knowing that they would be provoked to the point of seeing this much of the matter, the hope and expectation was there that they would also go on to see the remainder as well.

Between the rejection and acceptance lay trouble. Christ had been rejected, and only trouble awaited the nation. But still, even though this was set forth in the types, which couldn’t be broken, that generation was given a choice. The wrong could be rectified, and the nation could move into that prophesied era of blessings lying beyond Joseph’s rejection, beyond Moses’ rejection, and beyond Christ’s rejection. They could move into that prophesied era typified by the manifested Glory during Solomon’s day.

The choice left to Israel had been echoed by Peter on the day of Pentecost ([Acts 2:38](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Acts+2.38&t=NKJV)) and by Peter again at a later time ([Acts 3:19-26](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Acts+3.19-26&t=NKJV)). This is what the re-offer of the kingdom of the heavens had to do with, along with all the signs, wonders, and miracles continuing to be manifested. Israel was given an opportunity to repent (the nation was given an opportunity to change its mind), followed by national baptism.

Israel had rejected her Messiah, and the Jewish people were now being given an opportunity to receive the One Whom they had rejected. And, viewing the matter from the vantage point of Stephen’s discourse, blessings could follow only after acceptance. Only trouble could ensue during the interim lying between rejection and acceptance.

**Looking Up into Heaven**

Stephen simply laid out before Israel’s religious leaders exactly what God Himself had to say about the matter, exactly after the manner in which God had revealed it. And, with this in mind, is it any wonder that the heavens were opened, the Glory was manifested, and Jesus was seen standing at God’s right hand (*cf.* [Psalm 110:1](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Psalm+110.1&t=NKJV); [Hebrews 1:13](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Hebrews+1.13&t=NKJV))?

Everything was in readiness in heaven, and the decision was left to Israel’s religious leaders on earth. Had the Jewish religious leaders at this point reacted positively to the message and, in turn, led the nation in a correct direction (national repentance, followed by national baptism), Christ would have returned and restored the kingdom to Israel.

*1. The Heavens Opened*

Beyond Acts, chapter seven, there are only three instances in Scripture of the heavens being opened. However, only the last instance corresponds with events following Stephen’s message.

The heavens were opened in [Acts 10:11](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Acts+10.11&t=NKJV) to allow Peter to see a vision, revealing that God no longer distinguished between the Jews and the Gentiles in relation to the message being proclaimed ([Acts 10:12-14](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Acts+10.12-14&t=NKJV), [28- 29](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Acts+10.28-+29&t=NKJV); *cf.* [Matthew 10:5-8](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Matthew+10.5-8&t=NKJV)), though it was still “*to the Jew first*” ([Romans 1:16](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Romans+1.16&t=NKJV)).

Then the heavens will be opened when Christ breaks the sixth seal during the coming Tribulation ([Revelation 6:12-17](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Revelation+6.12-17&t=NKJV)), allowing the earth-dwellers to see the source of the wrath coming upon the earth.

Then the heavens will be opened when the “*King of kings and Lord of lords*” comes forth at the end of the Tribulation to put an end to the times of the Gentiles, to reestablish Israel in her rightful place at the head of the nations, and to rule and reign over the earth for 1,000 years. Thus, only this last time that the heavens are seen opened corresponds to the heavens being opened in Acts, chapter seven. The heavens being opened following Stephen’s address anticipated the possibility that Christ would come forth, restoring the kingdom with its Glory to Israel. However, such didn’t occur because of the subsequent, climactic reaction of the Jewish religious leaders.

Rather than perceiving the whole of that which Stephen had laid out before them, they apparently saw no farther than the events surrounding Calvary (Joseph’s rejection and Moses’ rejection, typifying Christ’s rejection). And, resultantly, they became infuriated to the point that they took Stephen, cast him outside the city, and stoned him ([Acts 7:54-58](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Acts+7.54-58&t=NKJV)).

And, as a consequence — though the message continued to be proclaimed, with the door remaining open for Israel to repent (continuing to remain open for almost three more decades) — the heavens would not be seen opened again in relation to Christ’s return and the restoration of the kingdom with its Glory to Israel until that future day following Israel’s greatest time of trouble, in [Revelation 19:11ff](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Revelation+19.11ff&t=NKJV) (*cf.* [Revelation 6-18](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Revelation+6-18&t=NKJV)).

*2. The Glory; The Son of Man*

The Glory was removed from Israel at the time of the Babylonian captivity ([Ezekiel 10:4](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Ezekiel+10.4&t=NKJV), [18](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Ezekiel+10.18&t=NKJV); [11:22-23](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Ezekiel+11.22-23&t=NKJV)). And, with this captivity and the removal of the Glory, the theocracy ended and “*the times of the Gentiles*” began.

There can be no restored theocracy during “*the times of the Gentiles*.” But this period of time must also one day end, with the Glory and the theocracy subsequently being restored to Israel ([Ezekiel 43:1-5](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Ezekiel+43.1-5&t=NKJV)). This is what was anticipated by the Glory being seen through the opened heavens.

And the expression, “*Son of man*,” is a Messianic title, drawn from the Old Testament Scriptures (*cf.* [Psalm 8:4-6](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Psalm+8.4-6&t=NKJV); [Daniel 7:13-14](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Daniel+7.13-14&t=NKJV); [Hebrews 2:5-10](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Hebrews+2.5-10&t=NKJV)). This expression was used by Christ on numerous occasions during His earthly ministry, referring to Himself (*e.g.*, [Matthew 9:6](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Matthew+9.6&t=NKJV); [10:23](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Matthew+10.23&t=NKJV); [11:19](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Matthew+11.19&t=NKJV); [12:8](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Matthew+12.8&t=NKJV); [13:37](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Matthew+13.37&t=NKJV), [41](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Matthew+13.41&t=NKJV)).

And Stephen’s use of this expression, describing to Israel’s religious leaders what he saw in heaven, was in complete keeping with its Messianic usage elsewhere. Stephen, through the opened heavens, saw the Glory of God and the Son of Man standing, awaiting Israel’s reaction to the message.

A more powerful message could not have been delivered to Israel’s religious leaders. This wasn’t what Stephen had to say about the matter. Rather, this was what God had to say. And, resultantly, it could put the heavens in motion to the extent that it did. And also, resultantly, it could cause the stir on earth that it caused.

On the one hand, the heavens were opened, revealing movement within the Godhead itself; on the other hand, Israel’s religious leaders on earth were so shaken that they slew the man who had called their attention to that which God had to say.

(And herein is a truth which needs to be instilled within every minister, along with every other Christian, in the country. If an individual, in his ministry and witness, wants to proclaim the type message that will result in movement among those both in heaven and upon earth, there’s only one way in which it can be done. It can be done only after the same fashion that Stephen did it.

This is why Paul told Timothy, “*Preach the word*…” [[2 Timothy 4:2](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=2Timothy+4.2&t=NKJV)]. And note the context of Paul’s exhortation — Christ’s appearance to judge man and to rule and reign in His kingdom [[2 Timothy 4:1-8](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=2Timothy+4.1-8&t=NKJV)].)

Thus, with a message of the nature Stephen proclaimed, is it any wonder that the nation found itself at this climactic place, with Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, coming into the picture immediately afterwards? Stephen’s message, with its conclusion, is the apex in the book of Acts.

The course that the nation would take for the next two millennia was set at this point, with all the sufferings that the nation would have to endure. And, with Stephen’s death, the progression of events in the book of Acts began to increasingly go in a completely different direction.

*Ref:* [The Acts Period](https://www.koffeekupkandor.com/gods-word-seven.php#The%20Acts%20Period) and [Acts to the Epistles Commentary](https://www.koffeekupkandor.com/gods-word-seven.php#Acts%20to%20the%20Epistles%20Commentary) in this site.

Book: [Bible One - Acts to the Epistles, Ch. 5, by Arlen Chitwood](http://bibleone.net/A2E_05.htm)