

Introduction: Stephen The Faithful Servant

Do you know what you believe?

Can you articulate and defend what you believe?

Not only defend, but support what you believe.

In looking at Acts chapters 6 and 7 we read of Stephen and a plot against him...

Act 6:11 So they secretly persuaded some men to allege, "We heard him speak blasphemously against Moshe and against God."

Act 6:12 They stirred up the people, as well as the elders and the Torah-teachers; so they came and arrested him and led him before the Sanhedrin.

Act 6:13 There they set up false witnesses who said, "This man never stops speaking against this holy place and against the Torah;

Act 6:14 for we have heard him say that Yeshua from Natzeret will destroy this place and will change the customs Moshe handed down to us."

Stephen has been charged with having taught against Moshe, God, the Temple and the *Torah* - in other words, against everything Judaism stands for. Demonstrating that the best defense is a good offense, as we will see, he indicts the religious leaders after the manner of the Prophets, saying it is they who have abandoned each one of these four sacred trusts.

Rather than giving a simple yes or no answer...

He begins what would become an extremely powerful testimony and demonstration of...

1. His faith
2. The power of the Ruach ha Kodesh

We know this because this is how he is identified:

Act 6:5 What they said was agreeable to the whole gathering. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Ruach HaKodesh

Stephen, begins his testimony with Avraham, recounting the history of Israel,

- Beginning with Avraham, being chosen, leaving his home land
- Yitz'chak would receive brit milah – the sign of the covenant
- Ya'akov would become the father of 12 patriarchs.

Stephen is painting a picture of the majority in Israel whom are refusing to honor those whom God chose to bring them the salvation he had promised them—especially Yosef ([Act 7:9-16](#)), who was recognized by Pharaoh, a Gentile, but not by his own brothers.

Likewise with Moshe,

Act 7:38 This is the man who was in the assembly in the wilderness, accompanied by the angel that had spoken to him at Mount Sinai and by our fathers, the man who was given living words to pass on to us.

Act 7:39 "But our fathers did not want to obey him. On the contrary, they rejected him and in their hearts turned to Egypt,

Act 7:40 saying to Aharon, 'Make us some gods to lead us; because this Moshe, who led us out of Egypt — we don't know what has become of him.'

Like Yosef, Moshe was also rejected by the very one's he was to lead.

Accused of speaking out against the Temple of Adonai, Stephen says the following:

Act 7:45 Later on, our fathers who had received it brought it in with Y'hoshua when they took the Land away from the nations that God drove out before them. "So it was until the days of David.

Act 7:46 He enjoyed God's favor and asked if he might provide a dwelling place for the God of Ya`akov

Act 7:47 and Shlomo did build him a house.

Act 7:48 But Ha`Elyon does not live in places made by hand! As the prophet says,

And quoting Isaiah 66:1 -2:

Act 7:49 'Heaven is my throne,' says Adonai, 'and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house could you build for me? What kind of place could you devise for my rest?

Act 7:50 Didn't I myself make all these things?'

Stephen refutes the final charge, that he has spoken improperly against the Temple ([Act 6:13-14](#)), by showing that it was the people, not God, who wanted a **dwelling place** or **house** more substantial than the **Tent of Witness** or "Tabernacle" originally authorized in the *Torah*. The establishment has tended toward "Temple-olatry" instead of adopting God's attitude. Hence Stephen's reference to Isaiah.

Act 7:51 "Stiffnecked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You continually oppose the Ruach HaKodesh! You do the same things your fathers did!

Stiffnecked. This term is used six times in the *Tanakh*: [Exo 32:9](#); [Exo 33:3](#), [Exo 33:5](#); [Exo 34:9](#); [Deu 9:6](#), [Deu 9:13](#). Always it is *Adonai* portraying the Israelites to Moshe, or Moshe portraying them to God or to themselves.

Gentiles cannot call Jews stiffnecked without subjecting themselves to the charge of being antisemitic. But Jews can—in intra-family fights different rules apply.

Uncircumcised hearts ([Lev 26:41](#); [Deu 10:16](#), [Deu 30:6](#); [Jer 4:4](#), [Jer 9:25](#) ([Jer 9:26](#)); [Eze 44:7](#), [Eze 44:9](#)) **and ears** ([Jer 6:10](#)).

The uncircumcised heart and ear are the *Tanakh's* characterizations of Israel: God's people outwardly bear the sign of the covenant with Avraham ([Act 7:8](#)) but inwardly are heathen, impure, rebellious (compare Rom. 2:17-Rom. 3:2).

Act 7:52 Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who told in advance about the coming of the Tzaddik, and now you have become his betrayers and murderers! —

Act 7:53 you! — who receive the Torah as having been delivered by angels — but do not keep it!"

Accused of not keeping Torah, Stephen turns the microphone on his accusers...

Yeshua called them hypocrites for:

- keeping the letter but not the Spirit of Torah.

Mat 15:7 You hypocrites! Yesha`yahu was right when he prophesied about you,

Mat 15:8 'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far away from me.

Mat 15:9 Their worship of me is useless, because they teach man-made rules as if they were doctrines.' "

Mat 22:18 Yeshua, however, knowing their malicious intent, said, "You hypocrites! Why are you trying to trap me?"

One of several documented occasions where Yeshua is being challenged in relation to His obedience to Torah, but also the oral torah.

Luk 12:56 Hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky — how is it that you don't know how to interpret this present time?

If they knew how to do this, the leaders would have recognized and understood who He is.

Luk 13:15 However, the Lord answered him, "You hypocrites! Each one of you on Shabbat — don't you unloose your ox or your donkey from the stall and lead him off to drink?"

Luk 13:16 This woman is a daughter of Avraham, and the Adversary kept her tied up for eighteen years! Shouldn't she be freed from this bondage on Shabbat?"

Act 7:54 On hearing these things, they were cut to their hearts and ground their teeth at him.

Obviously Stephen's remarks were designed to produce a reaction, which they did. However that reaction was much different than the one that was produced by Kefa's *Shavu'ot* sermon, when the crowds were "stung" in their hearts

Act 2:37 On hearing this, they were stung in their hearts; and they said to Kefa and the other emissaries, "Brothers, what should we do?"

Act 2:38 Kefa answered them, "Turn from sin, return to God, and each of you be immersed on the authority of Yeshua the Messiah into forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Ruach HaKodesh!"

But with Kefa, the message produced repentance and faith, While Stephen's message produced rage and fury. Both responses emanated from the heart.

What is the difference?

The response is dependent upon if one's heart is circumcised or not.

Act 7:55 But he, full of the Ruach HaKodesh, looked up to heaven and saw God's Sh'khinah, with Yeshua standing at the right hand of God.

Act 7:56 "Look!" he exclaimed, "I see heaven opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!"

The text of [Psa 110:1](#) (see [Mat 22:44](#)) says, "Adonai said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand...',"

but Stephen sees him standing. Why did Stephen see Yeshua standing?

When one is sitting at the right hand, they are sitting there in a place of honor, not performing any duties.

Since Yeshua's function in heaven with God is to be the *cohen gadol* for all believers and intercede for them ([Heb 2:16-18](#) [Heb 7:25](#) and *passim*), could it be that Stephen sees him performing his high-priestly duties, for which sitting would be inappropriate. How do we know this?

Heb 10:11 Now every cohen stands every day doing his service, offering over and over the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.

Heb 10:12 But this one, after he had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, sat down at the right hand of God,

Heb 10:13 from then on to wait until his enemies be made a footstool for his feet.

Heb 10:14 For by a single offering he has brought to the goal for all time those who are being set apart for God and made holy.

Act 7:57 At this, they began yelling at the top of their voices, so that they wouldn't have to hear him; and with one accord, they rushed at him,

Act 7:58 threw him outside the city and began stoning him. And the witnesses laid down their coats at the feet of a young man named Sha'ul.

What are Stephen's last words?

Act 7:60 Then he kneeled down and shouted out, "Lord! Don't hold this sin against them!" With that, he died;

What is their sin here?

1. Bearing false witness
2. Denying (speaking against) the power of the Spirit of Adonai.

Act 7:54 On hearing these things, they were cut to their hearts and ground their teeth at him.

Mat 24:45 "Who is the faithful and sensible servant whose master puts him in charge of the household staff, to give them their food at the proper time?"

Mat 24:46 It will go well with that servant if he is found doing his job when his master comes.

Mat 24:47 Yes, I tell you that he will put him in charge of all he owns.

Mat 24:48 But if that servant is wicked and says to himself, 'My master is taking his time';

Mat 24:49 and he starts beating up his fellow servants and spends his time eating and drinking with drunkards;

Mat 24:50 then his master will come on a day the servant does not expect, at a time he doesn't know;

Mat 24:51 and he will cut him in two and put him with the hypocrites, where people will wail and grind their teeth!