

GOD'S NEW COVENANT**Acts 6–7**

Memory Verse: *“Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life”* (Rev. 2:10b ESV).

Background Helps:

Stephen was accused of speaking “blasphemous words against Moses and God” (Acts 6:11) or, more specifically, of speaking “words against this holy place [the temple] and the law [of Moses], for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place [the temple] and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us” (6:13-14).

In his defense before the Sanhedrin, Stephen rehearses a long stretch of Old Testament history from Abraham through Solomon (7:2-47). In verses 2-8 he reviews the covenant promises that God made to Abraham, including the promise of the land and the sign of circumcision. In verses 17-44 he focuses on the story of Moses, whom God raised up as an instrument to bring about the fulfillment of the promise (v. 17), to deliver the people from bondage in Egypt and lead them through the wilderness to the Promised Land.

In answering the charges against him, “Stephen’s speech seeks to show (a) that God’s presence with His people was not limited to a particular place or building [like the temple] (verses 2, 9, 10, 30-34, 38, 44-49) and (b) that far from overthrowing Moses, Christ is the promised prophet like Moses of whom Moses himself spoke (verse 37).”¹ In addition, Stephen shows how the people of Israel themselves rejected Moses’ leadership (vv. 23-29, 35, 39-41), just as they rejected subsequent prophets (vv. 51-52) and, finally, the Messiah himself (v. 52). They received the law through angels (vv. 38, 53) but failed to keep it.

Without referring specifically to the new covenant, Stephen’s speech shows that God’s covenant story has moved into a new phase where the physical temple is no longer important (7:48-50) and the prophet promised by Moses (v. 37), Christ, has superseded Moses (v. 52).

Lesson Helps:


A possible lesson aim: My students will learn about Stephen’s defense before the Sanhedrin, so that they will not reject the Messiah but even be willing to die for him.

Stephen’s speech gives a wonderful opportunity for an Old Testament review. For example, make a list of Old Testament events from Stephen’s narrative, and challenge your class to put them in chronological order. But then take these same events and, as indicated above in the Background Helps, show how Stephen uses this history to teach the Jews some important lessons: (1) God was never confined to one place [like the temple] (and now, under the new covenant, we are his temple [see 1 Cor. 3:16-17; 6:19-20]); and (2) beware of rejecting Christ in the same way that the Israelites

¹ Alan M. Stibbs, General Editor, *Search the Scriptures* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 42.

rejected Moses. And we may add, as spelled out in the lesson aim above, that we should even be willing to die for him—as Stephen was. Use the memory verse.

Home Assignment:

 Read Acts 10:1–11:18.

 Memorize Acts 10:43 ESV.