

**THE POLEMICAL NATURE OF STEPHEN'S SPEECH TO THE SANHEDRIN IN  
ACTS 7**

by

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*The opinions expressed in this thesis do not necessarily reflect the views of the South African  
Theological Seminary.*

## DECLARATION

I hereby acknowledge that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted to any academic institution for degree purposes.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'D Aslett', written over a light yellow rectangular highlight.

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D ASLETT

14 April 2010

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## SUMMARY

The nature and purpose of Stephen's speech to the Sanhedrin has been much debated by scholars and theologians. One of the troubling aspects of the speech is the relationship between it and the charges made against Stephen. A second issue is what to make of the polemical material in the speech. Many scholars view the speech as irrelevant to its setting, some even maintaining that the speech is a Lucan composition inserted into the story of Stephen's martyrdom. Other scholars are of the opinion that the polemical material must be eliminated in order to find the original form of the speech. The basis of the confusion regarding the speech is the relationship of the content of the speech with the charges brought against Stephen and also with the invective (counter-charges) brought by Stephen at the end of the speech.

This thesis examines the polemical nature of Stephen's speech by examining how the content of the speech firstly defends the charges of blasphemy against Stephen and secondly serves to prove the counter-charges of blasphemy brought by him against the audience. The study shows that the speech is both a defence of the charges against Stephen and an arraignment of the counter-charges brought by him. The speech is therefore entirely relevant to its setting and cannot be a later addition to the martyrdom of Stephen. Moreover, the polemical material increases exponentially throughout the speech to culminate in the counter-charges.

The conclusion of the study is that the polemical nature of Stephen's speech serves to show that the charges against him are false and on the contrary, that the audience stands guilty of these charges. The charges of blasphemy against temple and law are committed by the audience in resisting the Holy Spirit, who is the witness of Christ, and betraying and murdering Jesus, who is the Temple and the Law. The Church should therefore view the polemical material of the speech as an integral part of the passage, not to be discarded as some scholars suggest, but relevant as a defence of the charges brought against Stephen and proving the counter-charges brought by him. These views will influence the manner in which the Church preaches the Gospel if the Bible is viewed as the inerrant Word of God, unified in theme and purpose.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1	Background	7
1.2	Problem	10
1.3	Objectives	11
1.4	Purpose	11
1.5	Design and methodology	12
1.6	Hypothesis	12

### CHAPTER 2: OLD TESTAMENT TRIAL AND LITIGATION MOTIFS

2.1	The relationship between the Old and New Testaments	14
2.2	God the sovereign Judge	24
2.3	Blasphemy	32
2.4	False witnesses	49

### CHAPTER 3: STRUCTURAL OVERVIEW OF STEPHEN'S SPEECH

3.1	Content survey of the speech	55
3.2	Structural analysis of the speech	65
3.3	Conclusion	74

### CHAPTER 4: CONTENT ANALYSIS OF STEPHEN'S SPEECH

4.1	Opening Address (v. 2a)	75
4.2	The Abraham story (vv. 2b-8)	76
4.3	The Joseph story (vv 9-16)	81
4.4	Time of transition (vv 17-19)	84
4.5	The Moses story (vv 20-38)	85
4.6	Israel's apostasy (vv 39-43)	89
4.7	The place of worship (vv 44-50)	91
4.8	Counter-accusations (vv 51-53)	93
4.9	Stephen's vision and death (vv 54-60)	95
4.10	Thematic content of the speech	98
4.11	Conclusion	102

**CHAPTER 5: EVIDENCE IN SUPPORT OF THE ALLEGATIONS BROUGHT BY STEPHEN**

5.1	Disobedience by resisting the Holy Spirit	105
5.2	Disobedience by betraying and murdering the Righteous One	113
5.3	The stoning of Stephen	120
5.4	Conclusion	121

**CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION**

6.1	The clarity provided by the literary backdrop of the Old Testament litigation or trial motifs in the understanding of the polemics of the passage	123
6.2	The structural relationship between the polemics of verses 51-53, the preceding verses of the speech and the charges against Stephen	126
6.3	The relationship of the contents of the polemics contained in the various sections of the speech with the charges and counter-charges of the trial	127
6.4	The evidence in support of the counter-charges brought by Stephen	129
6.6	Practical implications of the findings of the study for the Church	131
6.6	Areas for further research	131

	<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>133</b>
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# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background

The nature and purpose of Stephen's speech to the Sanhedrin (Acts 7:1-53) is a topic that has been much debated by scholars and theologians (Marshall 1980:131). One of the troubling aspects of the speech is the relationship between it and the charges made against Stephen. Kilgallen (1976:6) states that this relationship ranks as one of the most fundamental questions about Stephen's speech and its solution has become a central point of interpretation of the speech for many exegetes of all periods. Soards (1994:58) is of the view that the speech may be the most perplexing address in the book of Acts and that it is complex and ripe with interpretative problems. His basis for holding this view is that the speech makes no effort to explain the falseness of the charges and never offers an explicit rejection or a deliberative counter proposal.

There is a wide spectrum of views on the nature of the relationship between the speech and the accusations brought against Stephen. At one end of the spectrum, scholars believe that the speech neatly answers each of the accusations made against Stephen and consequently discuss the contents of the speech under the themes of the charges made (Bruce 1988:130; Marshall 1980:131; Neil 1962:427; Stott 1990:130). These scholars view the charges against Stephen as two-fold – he spoke against the Temple (or Holy Place) and against the Law and by doing so he was guilty of blasphemy against God. They therefore analyse Stephen's speech with regard to these two themes – the Temple (or Holy Place) and the Law. According to these scholars, the purpose of Stephen's speech was to show that God was not restricted to living in the Temple and that the history of Israel revealed their disobedience to the Law.

At the other end of the spectrum, scholars have been of the opinion that Stephen's speech is not a defence against the accusations at all (cf. Kilgallen 1976:9). These scholars, however, differ on what the nature and purpose of the speech are. Martin Dibelius regarded the speech as entirely composed by Luke, who inserted it into the

story of the martyrdom of Stephen and therefore viewed the speech as entirely irrelevant to its setting (Gasque 1989:221). Barrett (2004:340) views the speech as inserted by Luke to demonstrate his view on the relation between Judaism and Christianity. Soards (1994:58) states that the speech makes no effort to explain the falseness of the charges but that the rhetoric is rather counteraccusation and a kind of judicial rhetoric. There exists therefore this wide spectrum of views regarding the relevance of the speech to the charges brought against Stephen.

A second issue that has been problematic for scholars and theologians is the polemics of the speech and what to make of this polemic. Conzelmann viewed the polemical verses (v. 35, 37, 39-42, 48-53) as additions made by Luke to the original speech of Stephen and held that these polemical verses had to be eliminated in order to arrive at the original speech (Barrett 2004:335-336). Hemer (1989:422) also states that some scholars have seen Luke's hand in the polemics of the speech.

Kilgallen (1976:101), however, views these verses as part of the theme of the speech and Marshall (1980:146) ascribes the polemics to a change in style in verse 51 where Stephen moves into a direct attack on his audience. Soards (1994:67) simply mentions that verses 48-50 become sharply polemical. He concludes that one may or may not understand that Stephen completed his speech (Soards 1994:69). The nature of the polemics in Stephen's speech therefore still remains a topic of much discussion among scholars and theologians.

With regards to the relevance of the speech to the trial of Stephen, Watson (1996:ix-x) states that, while the speech is widely regarded as mainly irrelevant to the charges with a largely incomprehensible purpose, he views the speech as entirely relevant, fitting into a genre of defences in a criminal trial that do not focus on rebutting the arguments of the prosecution about the facts. He states that these defences share three characteristics that are found in the trial of Stephen: the conduct of the accused is justifiable; the prosecutors themselves are the real wrongdoers; the defence is so surprising that it draws particular attention. As stated above, Soards (1994:58) views the rhetoric of the speech as counteraccusation and a kind of judicial rhetoric. Witherington (1998: 260) agrees with his view but states that Soards



has failed to provide as full and satisfactory a rhetorical analysis as is needed. He states that a major reason why this speech has been misunderstood and not been seen as a coherent whole is because of the failure to notice the rhetorical form of this forensic piece of oratory, and the failure to recognize how the different parts of a speech function rhetorically.

Judicial or forensic language is not strange to the Scriptures. Judicial language can be found in both the Old and New Testaments. An example from the Old Testament is where God is referred to as the Judge of all the nations (Is 2:4, 33:22, Joel 3:12), who judges righteously (Jer 11:20) and will bring judgment to all mankind (Jer 25:31). In the New Testament an example of judicial language is found when Jesus said that now (the time of his death) is the time for judgment on this world (Jn 12:31a). The book of Revelation is also ripe with judicial language (e.g. Rev 14:7, 16:5, 19:2, and 20:12). Because of this forensic language used in the Scriptures, a forensic approach to Biblical passages is not unprecedented. Neyrey (1987:509), in his study of forensic process in John 8:21-59, states that a forensic approach to the Fourth Gospel (John) is scarcely new. It is therefore possible that the judicial language of the Old Testament, especially those found in the Major and Minor Prophets, in conjunction with the Mosaic Covenant, could create a clarifying literary backdrop for Stephen's speech and especially the polemics found therein.

During Stephen's trial, he faced certain charges brought against him, which he was given the opportunity to defend. Stephen was full of the Holy Spirit and at his trial his face looked like the face of an angel (Acts 6:5, 15). Stephen was thus not conducting his defence on his own; he had an advocate to assist him, his Council was helping him prepare his case (Luke 12:11-12). During his arraignment, trial and execution all three members of the God-Head are observed. Was there perhaps a different trial taking place at another level? Were the counter-charges made against his hearers related to that trial? The charges against Stephen related to blasphemy against God (Acts 6:11) and the counter-charges that he brought also related to blasphemy against God (Bruce 1988:153).

The research analyses these counter-charges in relation to the preceding part of the speech and also in relation to the charges brought against him. Evidence for these counter-charges is evaluated to determine whether they were proven and to determine whether the hearers were guilty of these charges. The trial or litigation motif of the Old Testament (especially the major and minor prophets) is examined to determine how this may create a literary backdrop for the polemics found in Stephen's speech.

## **1.2 Problem**

The preceding discussion helps to set the stage for the study to be conducted. It is clear that the relationship between Stephen's speech and the charges brought against him remains an issue that is debated among scholars and theologians. Furthermore, the nature of the polemical verses in the speech remains a topic of disagreement between scholars and theologians. This study explores the polemical nature of Stephen's speech to the Sanhedrin. The main issue to be researched is whether the polemics of Stephen's speech build on the previous part of the speech to show that the charges against Stephen are false and on the contrary, true of his hearers.

In order to accomplish this, several key questions need to be answered:

- 1 What clarity can the literary backdrop of the Old Testament litigation or trial motifs provide for the understanding of the polemics of the passage?
- 2 What is the structural relationship between the polemics of verses 51-53, the preceding verses of the speech and the charges against Stephen?
- 3 How does the contents of the polemics in verses 51-53, build on the preceding verses of the speech and the charges brought against Stephen? How is the content of the polemics related to the content of the preceding part of the speech and the charges?

- 4 What evidence exists to support or prove the counter-charges brought by Stephen?

### **1.3 Objectives**

The work explores the polemical nature of Stephen's speech to the Sanhedrin. One goal is to determine whether the polemics of the speech builds on the rest of the speech to show that the charges are false. A second aim is to analyse whether sufficient evidence existed to convict the hearers of these counter-charges brought against them. To accomplish the objective the research aims to:

- 1 Determine what clarity the literary backdrop of the Old Testament litigation or trial motifs provide for the understanding of the polemics of the passage.
- 2 Analyse the structural relationship between the polemics of verses 51-53, the preceding verses of the speech and the charges against Stephen.
- 3 Determine how the contents of the polemics in verses 51-53, build on the preceding verses of the speech and the charges brought against Stephen.
- 4 Analyse the evidence that exists to support or prove the counter-charges brought by Stephen.

### **1.4 Purpose**

The purpose of the study is to explore the relationship between the polemics of Stephen's speech in verse 51-53, the rest of his speech and the charges against him in order to determine whether the polemical verses build on the rest of the speech to show that the charges are false and whether sufficient evidence exists to prove the allegations brought by Stephen against his hearers and convict them of these charges.

The motivation for this study is to gain a better understanding of the passage of Scripture and the use of polemics in the speech. A proper understanding of Scripture

is essential to the preaching of the Gospel. One example of this was demonstrated by Philip when he explained the passage of Scripture (Isaiah 53:7-8) to the Ethiopian eunuch and told him the good news about Jesus (Acts 8:30-39).

Lessons may especially be learned in the study of ethics as Evangelical scholars and theologians often are called upon to defend Evangelical perspectives against liberal perspectives held by liberal theologians.

## **1.5 Design and Methodology**

The study follows a combination of various research designs. Firstly, *Historical studies, Narrative analysis* (Mouton 2001:170) is necessary in determining the historical and cultural influences on the speech. This entails a reconstruction of the past in order to determine what the customs and norms were in defending oneself in trials of this nature. Emphasis is especially placed on the use of polemics in defending oneself. Secondly, *Textual analysis, Hermeneutics, Textual Criticism* (Mouton 2001:167) is needed to analyse the structure of the speech with regard to the relationship between the polemics (verses 51-53), the rest of the speech and the charges. Thirdly, *Content Analysis* (Mouton 2001:165) is required in the analysis of the contents of the speech with regard to the relationship between the polemics (verses 51-53), the rest of the speech and the charges. Fourthly, *Theory-building or Model-building Studies* (Mouton 2001:176) is required to determine the pastoral implications for ministers of the Gospel. By way of analogical reasoning inferences are drawn from the study and used to construct theories regarding the implications for ministers of the Gospel. Finally, in all of the above the study requires *Literature Reviews* (Mouton 2001:179) of existing scholarly work on the text. The interpretation of these scholars is compared and evaluated in order to test, reject or validate the existing analyses and interpretations.

## **1.6 Hypothesis**

The hypothesis of the study is that the polemical nature of Stephen's speech builds on the foundation of the preceding part of the speech to show that the charges

against Stephen are false and on the contrary, that the hearers to whom the speech are addressed stand guilty of these charges.

# CHAPTER 2: OLD TESTAMENT TRIAL AND LITIGATION

## MOTIFS

### 2.1 The Relationship between the Old and New Testaments

The question whether it is beneficial to study the Old Testament when a topic found in the New Testament (such as Stephen's speech) is studied has always been contentious. The contention centres on the relationship between the two Testaments, which has been debated for centuries and remains of enduring importance (Goldsworthy 2000:81; Kaiser 1985:1; Lioy 2004:1). Biblical scholars hold different viewpoints regarding whether there is any relationship between the two Testaments. One view on the relationship between the two Testaments (by scholars like Rudolf Bultmann, Franz Hesse and Friedrich Baumgärtel) holds that there is a substantial discontinuity between them (Lioy 2004:2). These scholars are of the opinion that the Old Testament is simply a record of Israel's failure, resulting in the dawning of a new order – Christianity. Some of these scholars (like Schleiermacher, Harnack, Kierkegaard and Delitzch) go as far as to say that the Old Testament is a waste, or even a pagan religion (Kaiser 1978:266). Other scholars (like Wilhelm Vischer, Alfred van Ruler) on the other hand see continuity in the theology of the two Testaments, stressing the primacy and importance of the Old Testament (Lioy 2004:2-3). These scholars view the New Testament as a fulfilment of the promises (or, as is seen below, "the Promise") found in the Old Testament. There therefore exists this wide spectrum of approaches to the relationship between the Old and New Testaments.

Goldsworthy (2000:82) states that this range of approaches has followed an historical line of development through the centuries and remains contemporary because of the ongoing existence of orthodox, historic Christianity, which finds itself in substantial conflict with both modernism and postmodernism. According to Goldsworthy (2000:82), the simple question is how the two Testaments can fit

together to form one Bible with a unified message. While the natural tendency may be to solve the problem by allowing either continuity or discontinuity to dominate (an “either-or” solution), Goldsworthy is of the opinion that the Christian gospel would suggest a distinctively Christian perspective, which embraces both unity and diversity (a “both-and” solution). Historically, Christian interpretation of the Old Testament has revolved around the relationship of the Testaments (Goldsworthy 2000:84). According to Goldsworthy (2000:84), recent attempts at formulating this question have merely been different emphases and not mutually exclusive perspectives. Examples of these emphases, as listed by Goldsworthy, have been:

- Dimensions of Scripture (literary, historical and theological dimensions), which deals with the question of the continuity of these dimensions in the two Testaments.
- The canonical and theological status of the Old and New Testaments, which deals with the question whether the two Testaments have equal status or whether one of the Testaments has priority over the other.
- Thematic polarities between the Testaments, which deals with the question whether thematic approaches can highlight the nature of the problem of defining the continuity and discontinuity between the Testaments.

Stating that the Old and New Testaments are not related or show no continuity, means one has to ignore the fact that the same God who revealed Himself in His Son, Jesus Christ, also revealed Himself in the Old Testament (Goldsworthy 2000:89; Kaiser 1985:233). God however remains the same forever (1 Sam 15:29; James 1:17) and ignoring the Old Testament when interpreting the New could therefore lead to grave misunderstanding. Lioy (2004:4) thus states that the Old Testament is “an inspired document that finds dynamic unity and fulfilment in the New Testament” and both Testaments should be read together when studying a topic in order to gain a full and comprehensive understanding in the investigation of the matter (cf. 2 Tim 3:16). Goldsworthy (2000:81) also holds that Biblical theology presupposes some kind of unity in the Bible, notwithstanding its great diversity. According to him the problem lies in the modern pursuit of Biblical theology, where the majority of biblical theologies written in the last century and a half have been

theologies of either the Old or New Testament. The result has been to treat the two Testaments as if they were independent of each other.

The whole Bible must however be seen as unified in theme and purpose, because the Holy Spirit inspired men to write as they were led by Him (Kaiser 1985:233; Purkiser 1963:44, cf. 2 Peter 1:21). Manley (1953:13) states that the reader of the Old Testament must keep in mind that it differs from the New Testament in that it is incomplete, temporary and has a preparatory character. The Old Testament must therefore be read in the light of the New Testament; and the Old Testament is equally necessary to grasp the full significance of the New Testament. Vos (2004:299) states that the Old Testament is “forward-stretching” and “forward-looking”, setting its face toward new things to come. These new things are described in the New Testament. The Old Testament, having a prophetic attitude, “postulates the New Testament” (Vos 2004:299). Goldsworthy (2000:88) also views the two Testaments as interdependent because the New is needed to complete the Old but needs the Old to show what exactly is being fulfilled.

Vos (2004) explains the unity of the Bible as an unfolding of the mind of God, which he did through successive agents of his special revelation. He sees this revelation as starting with the Mosaic period, followed by the prophetic period and continuing with the New Testament period. He therefore states that rather than using the phrase “Biblical Theology”, a better suited name would be “History of Special Revelation” (Vos 2004:v). This is the only way by which man can comprehend the mind of God, for man cannot obtain the hidden content of the mind of God unless there is voluntary disclosure on God’s part (Vos 2004:4). One of the areas where the problem of the relationship between the Testaments could manifest itself is the manner in which Jesus and the New Testament authors use the Old Testament (Goldsworthy 2000:81).



### **2.1.1 Jesus' use of the Old Testament**

In studying the words of Jesus, it becomes evident that there is continuity between the Old and New Testaments. Jesus uses the Old Testament in two ways, He either quoted it directly, or he alluded to it indirectly (Guthrie 1981:955). It is furthermore clear that Jesus saw Himself as the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies (Guthrie 1981:955; Vos 2004:358). This is evidenced firstly by the titles that He used for Himself and secondly in His claims based on Old Testament Scriptures. The titles that Jesus used for Himself were based on Old Testament Scriptures, e.g. Son of man, servant of Yahweh and Lord (cf. Thielman 2005: 93-95; Marshall 2004:188-189). Guthrie (1981:955) states that there is a significant sense of continuity with the Old Testament detectable in Jesus' use of these concepts, particularly in His own awareness of His messianic office. Not only does this show unity between the Testaments, but according to Thielman (2005:95) it also implies unity of Jesus with God.

The claims that Jesus made were based on Old Testament Scriptures and show that He saw Himself as the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies. In His teaching of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:27), Jesus explained to them how Moses and the Prophets spoke about Him, thus using the Old Testament to clarify the events that lead to the writing of the New Testament, i.e. His crucifixion (Marshall 2004:190). Another example is where Jesus told the Jews that they had failed to see that the very Scriptures that they studied so diligently actually testified about Him (John 5:39). This implies that the Old Testament testifies about the New, for the New Testament is about Jesus and the two Testaments therefore complement each other. Finally, when Jesus appeared to His disciples after His resurrection, He told them that He was fulfilling everything written about Him in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms (Luke 24:44). Thielman (2005:97) writes that Jesus brought the teaching of the law and the prophets to completion, fulfilling them through His person, His deeds and His words. He thereby accomplished a divine purpose foretold and laid down in Scripture (i.e. the Old Testament as the Jewish Scriptures) (cf. Marshall 2004:189-190).

Jesus furthermore revealed the importance of all Scripture when He was tempted by the devil in Matt 4:4. Here He quoted Deut 8:3, which states that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God. This means that if we believe that the whole Bible is God-breathed, the Old and New Testaments remain important as both were given to us by God (2 Tim 3:16; cf. Nicole 1958:4). The preceding discussion of Jesus' use of Scripture illuminates the continuity of the two Testaments.

### **2.1.2 The use of the Old Testament by the New Testament authors**

One can furthermore detect the continuity between the two Testaments by the many references that the authors of the New Testament made to the Old Testament. Goldsworthy (2000:81) states that all the books of the New Testament, with the possible exception of 2 John and 3 John, contain direct references and allusions to the Old Testament, presupposing some continuity between the Testaments. Nicole (1958:1) estimates that more than 10 percent of the New Testament contains citations or direct allusions to the Old Testament. The New Testament authors also ascribed unqualified authority to the Old Testament, as they often based whole arguments on a single Scripture from the Old Testament (Nicole 1958:2). Thus, even though, as Guthrie (1981:953) states, the New Testament does not expound a "full-blown doctrine of Scripture", it provides the data on which such a doctrine can be built. Guthrie (1981:955) states that previous surveys have shown conclusively that the Old Testament background is indispensable for a true understanding of the teaching of the New Testament. He also concludes that it is clear that there are sufficient grounds for maintaining that a common view existed of the importance and authority of the Old Testament Scriptures in the Christian thought of the New Testament authors.

The Christian thought of the New Testament authors was shaped by the Old Testament in two ways: (1) They reasoned within the framework of Judaism, which was shaped by the Old Testament, because they were all Jews (either by birth or in their way of thinking); (2) They referred to the Old Testament in order to shape their

theological thinking (Marshall 2004:39). Vermes (2003:53) states that, with the exception of Luke, all the known New Testament writers and all the contemporary followers of Jesus were Jews. Consequently, Vermes (2003:53) states that the exploration of the Jewish world must be relevant to the study of the New Testament. Having grown up in Judaism, the New Testament authors would have started reading the Hebrew Bible from as early as five years old; at ten years of age they would have started learning the *Mishnah* and at fifteen years of age they would have started studying the *Talmud* (Edersheim n.d.:105; Lee 1988:122). From an early age they would also have been exposed to the private and united prayers of the family, the domestic rites of the weekly Sabbath and the Festivals, which would have made lasting impressions on their minds (Edersheim n.d.:108).

Synagogues also played an important role in shaping the thinking of the New Testament authors. During the time of the New Testament authors, synagogues dotted the land (Edersheim n.d.:250). In these synagogues, Moses was preached “from the earliest times” (Acts 15:21); the Prophets were read and followed by a “message of encouragement” (Acts 13:15) or an address (Luke 4:17) (Edersheim n.d.:250). The synagogues were ruled by people placed in authority who regulated the services and were responsible for discipline (Edersheim n.d.:250; Lee 1988:122). Education at the synagogues centred on the knowledge of God and to prepare for or impart this knowledge of God was the sum total and sole object of the Jewish education system (Edersheim n.d.:124; Lee 1988:123). Edersheim (n.d.:125) states that Jewish religion consisted of two things:

- (1) Knowledge of God, which by a series of inferences ultimately resolved itself into their theology; and
- (2) Service, which presupposed knowledge, making theology the foundation of all and also the crown of all, which conferred them with the greatest merit.

Stephen himself had belonged to the synagogue of “the Alexandrians” (either by birth or education) which gave him the grounds on which to address them (Edersheim n.d.:250; cf. Acts 6:9).

The Pharisees would also have had some influence on the New Testament authors. At the time when the New Testament authors wrote the Gospels and other New Testament books, the political situation within Judaism had changed since the time of Jesus. During the time of Jesus, four major Jewish sects existed: Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes and Zealots. After A.D. 70 (when the writing of the New Testament commenced) and the “Great Revolt”, the Zealots had been crushed by the Romans; the Essene communities were destroyed; the Sadducees’ basis for existence, the Temple, had been destroyed; and only the Pharisees therefore remained to contend with the Christians for the “soul” of Judaism (Horsley and Hanson 1985:43-44; Lee 1988:97-98). Both parties would probably rely on the Old Testament Scriptures in their arguments. Lee (1988:98) states that the influence of the Pharisees in the daily life of the Jews is clear from the polemic of the Christian Scriptures (the New Testament). The Pharisees never separated themselves from the masses, who freely followed the Pharisees’ observances of the laws of ritual purity. Paul, who wrote a large part of the New Testament, had a Pharisaic background as his father and he himself had been Pharisees (Edersheim n.d:226; Acts 23:6). These early Christians saw themselves as heirs of the religion expressed in the Old Testament and in Judaism. They thought of themselves as standing in continuity with the people who worshiped the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and whose literary expression is what they came to call the Old Testament.

Kaiser (1985:7) shows that several classes of citations of the Old Testament can be detected in the New. One of these classes is the *literal* or *historical* class, where the Old Testament is quoted in the same sense as was intended by the original Old Testament authors. Stephen’s speech is an example of this *literal* or *historical* class. In his speech there are numerous points of “univocal” meaning between his speech and his résumé of Israel’s history (see for example Acts 7:3 quoting Gen 12:1). This reveals continuity between the Testaments as Stephen made use of the Old Testament Scriptures by referring to events in the history of Israel, expressing the abovementioned continuity with the people of old. Goldsworthy (2000:87) states that Stephen’s use of the Old Testament could indicate that Stephen held a salvation-history approach to the appropriation of the Old Testament, having a sense of the

continuity between the slavific, historical events of the Old Testament and Jesus of Nazareth, so that Jesus is claimed to be the crowning saving act of God. Thielman (2005:125) sees this salvation-history as God's plan to forgive the sins of both Jews and Gentiles – Jews for their failure to listen to God's messengers and Gentiles for their idolatry. Jesus' death and resurrection brought the time for repentance and forgiveness into existence, first for the Jews and then for the Gentiles. Those who would not repent would face the judgment and those who repented would receive a place among God's people. This salvation-history plan of God was revealed in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms and can also be referred to as the "Promise" (Kaiser 1978:264). Kaiser (1978:264) sees the "Promise" as a single plan referred to by the New Testament and developed in the Old Testament. The promise was made to Abraham and through him to all mankind and was ultimately fulfilled in Jesus. The promise is referred to in about forty passages from almost every part of the New Testament (Kaiser 1978:264). This promise may be the golden thread in the various covenants that God made with His people in the Bible.

Another less apparent line of continuity between the Old and New Testaments is found when reading the passage that forms the focus of this study. Tannehill (1990:83-85) suggests that there is continuity in the qualifications of the leaders appointed by God. The seven, of whom Stephen was one, had to show wisdom (Acts 6:3). The stress on wisdom is only found in the book of Acts and Stephen's wisdom links him with Jesus, Joseph and Moses, who also share his qualities of "grace" and "power" (Tannehill 1990:83; Acts 6:8). They are also linked by the signs and wonders that they performed. The references to Joseph and Moses in Stephen's speech "also strengthen the sense of authorized continuity in the early church, not only between the twelve and the seven but also between the church and the Israel of Scripture," Tannehill (1990:84).

The relationship between the authority of Jesus and Moses is important in the understanding Acts 7, for speaking against Moses' authority forms part of the charge against Stephen. In the Old Testament, God used Moses as an intermediary to reveal His mercy and compassion to Israel; in the New Testament, God's grace and

truth reached their full and final expression in Jesus (Lioy 2007:28). God's favour was already present throughout the Old Testament era; however, Jesus brought even more "grace upon grace" with His incarnation (John 1:16; Lioy 2007:28). Thus, there exists a strong continuity between the Testaments in compassion and faithfulness of the Lord that He made available to the faith community (Lioy 2007:28). Lioy (2007:28) states that this continuity also extends to the Law, for God revealed the Law to Moses, who in turn revealed it to Israel (John 1:16; Lioy 2007:28). The Law pointed to Jesus, whom Moses wrote about (John 5:46). Jesus is therefore not a new Moses, He transcends Moses. This is also one of the points that Stephen made in his speech to the Sanhedrin. He reminded them that, as important as Moses was, he clearly pointed to a coming Prophet who was greater than he and the Law (Lioy 2007:40). The Law therefore finds its goal in Jesus and He is the one through whom the Law finds its continuity and significance (Lioy 2004:105). Jesus is therefore the continuity between the Old and New Testaments. It is clear that there is continuity between the Old and New Testaments in that they cannot be separated from each other without losing some of their meaning. Therefore, a study of the Old Testament may be invaluable in the understanding of Stephen's speech to the Sanhedrin, as the juridical backdrop of the Old Testament may provide some clarity in the study. There is however an air of discontinuity in the Bible that must first be dealt with.

### **2.1.3 The apparent discontinuity between the two Testaments**

In dealing with discontinuity in the New Testament, Thielman (2005:38) states that the most promising strategy for handling the diversity is to recognize the principal theological themes and then follow two paths when significant deviations arise. The first is to re-examine the texts more closely, taking their literary and historical contexts into consideration, as this often leads to a better understanding of the Scripture and a finding that it does not contradict the dominant theological trend. Thielman views the diversity in Scripture as evidence of God's nearness to us and his otherness, which means we cannot always comprehend God and should not try to do so (Isaiah 55:8-9). Although Thielman is specifically dealing with diversity in the

New Testament, there seems to be no reason why these principles cannot be applied to the whole Bible. Kaiser (1985:233) states that the church would be freed from any obligation to derive doctrinal teachings from the Old Testament if discontinuity were more prevalent than continuity. He states however that the opposite is true and therefore we should not constantly erect walls of partition between the doctrines of the Old Testament and the New Testament.

One way of dealing with the apparent discontinuity in the Bible is called “Progressive Covenantalism” (Lioy 2008:81). Progressive Covenantalism is a new working model for comprehending the relationship between the two Testaments. Lioy (2008:81) explains the motif of the progressive revelation of God’s covenants as an extension of the kingdom blessings that He bestowed in creation and that these covenants are related to one another, build on one another and unite the people of God throughout the history of salvation, allowing them to share equally in His eschatological promises. This approach ties in with the salvation-history approach mentioned previously.

According to Lioy (2008:83), one previous approach to the diversity has been dispensational, focusing on the different ways in which God has worked among His people in different time periods. These approaches place the focus on discontinuity, isolating each of the various covenants between God and man; neglecting the interconnectedness of these covenants. The progressive approach, however, leads to unity and continuity of the covenants between God and man, appreciating the relation of the covenants with one another, as each covenant builds on the previous one (for a detailed discussion of the various covenants between God and man, see Lioy D (1998)). Lioy (1998:95) states that distinctions between the old and new covenants (as expressed in the Old and New Testaments) should not be overstated. There remains a fundamental unity between these old and new covenants. God has had one divine purpose throughout history – the restoration of the relationship between Him and mankind, which is what Kaiser (1978:264) refers to as “the Promise” (see the discussion above). Lioy (1998:98) states that the revelation of God in the Old Testament is “fragmentary, partial and incomplete” whilst in the New

Testament, with the advent of Jesus, it is “ultimate, complete and final.” There is thus both continuity and discontinuity present, “such as the distinction between a seed and a full-grown plant or a caterpillar and a butterfly” (Lioy 1998:98). The church is therefore not an afterthought in God’s plans but forms part of what was foretold in the Old Testament (Lioy 1998:98). Guthrie (1981:955) states that, even though there is a remarkable unity of thought throughout the New Testament, there is diversity in emphasis and expression; this may be extended to the unity and diversity of the whole Bible.

The above discussion reveals how the unity and apparent disunity in the Bible reveal a complete Book where the two Testaments are related to each another as the inspired and authoritative Word of God with a specific purpose; the restoration of the relationship between God and His people through Jesus. It is therefore beneficial to study the Old Testament when a topic found in the New Testament (such as Stephen’s speech) is explored, for the Old Testament may provide the backdrop in understanding the New Testament passage. The first aspect that is focused on in terms of the Old Testament trial and litigation motifs is the position of God as ultimate Judge as this leads to an understanding of the relationship between God and Stephen’s judges, the Sanhedrin.

## **2.2 God the Sovereign Judge**

The purpose of Stephen’s trial was for the Sanhedrin to reach final judgment on whether he was guilty of the charges brought against him or not. Conviction could carry the death penalty. God’s position as sovereign Judge therefore needs to be explored so that the relation between the Sanhedrin and God in Stephen’s trial can be understood because the Sanhedrin was the principal juridical body of the ruling elite in Jerusalem (Rapske 1994:100). Smith (1993:216) states that three things are essential for a good judge: authority and sovereignty; just and equitable decisions; and the ability to perceive and interpret properly all the evidence. God’s position as Judge is examined in line with these attributes of a good judge so that His position



as the highest Judge over mankind and more especially over the Sanhedrin as a juridical body can be understood.

### 2.2.1 The authority and sovereignty of God

Gen 1:1 states that God created everything “in the beginning”. This shows that God had to exist before the creation. The fact that God had no beginning can be concluded from the fact that God created all things and that he himself is an immaterial spirit (Grudem 1994:169). Also, Psalm 90:2 states that God exists forever. This means that God had no beginning or birth and has no end or death. Several other passages in the Bible also testify to the infinity of God (e.g. Ex 3:14; Job 36:26; John 8:58). We therefore understand that God exists now, that He has always existed and that He will exist forever. The fact that God is infinite and that He has created everything means that He is sovereign. Grudem (1994:217) states that “sovereignty” means God exercises power and control over His creation. One of the attributes of God’s sovereignty is that He also has “ethical sovereignty”, which means that God sets one consistent standard and that he cannot be in the presence of evil (Payne 1962:154, cf. Hab. 1:13). There is therefore no external moral standard to which God must conform (Dyrness 1979:53).

Payne (1962:154-155) suggests that, even though God’s ethical standard could be seen from early on in Gen 9:1-7, it became particularly clear at the time of the testament to Abraham. Two significant terms appear at this point, the *tōrā* in Gen 26:5 and the *mishpāt* in Gen 18:25. Yahweh is God of both. *Tōrā* means “instruction” and also, because God is king and teacher, “law” (Holladay 1971:388; cf. Lioy 2004:13). In time *tōrā* referred to God’s written word, which is the Old Testament and more particularly, to the Pentateuch, which is the Law of Moses (the first five books written by Moses). *Mishpāt* refers to the decision made by a judge (*shōfēt*) (Holladay 1971:221; cf. Lioy 2004:13), which becomes “custom” or codified *tōrā*. Payne contends that the *mishpāt* of the Old Testament cannot be separated from God as God is the basis of all ethical decisions. So God is Judge and King of the world because He created it and sustains it (Smith 1993:221). His sovereign judgment is

underscored in Joel 3:12, which refers to the Valley of Jehoshaphat, where God will sit to judge the nations on every side. This Valley of Jehoshaphat is not mentioned anywhere else in the Old or New Testaments. The name means “YHWH judges” and denotes God as the ultimate Judge, judging the nations (Keil and Delitzsch 1980: 220). Abraham also referred to God as the Judge of all the earth (Gen 18:25). Another passage that reveals God as sovereign Judge is found in Zechariah 3. Here Satan is portrayed as the accuser of Joshua, the High Priest. God is the Judge and Joshua is clothed in dirty rags. God, however, vindicates Joshua and provides him with new clothes. It is therefore clear that God has the authority and sovereignty to be the ultimate Judge, the next question is whether He has the ability to make just and equitable decisions.

### **2.2.2 Just and equitable decision-making**

Psalm 98:9 states that God is a Righteous Judge. According to Dyrness (1979:53), God’s righteousness often has a forensic element in that it has to do with courts and legal decisions. His righteousness and justice are therefore intertwined with His role as Judge (Smith 1993:217). Smith (1993:218) furthermore states that the difference between justice and righteousness in the Old Testament is that *mišpat* (justice) is a legal term geared to a court system, whilst *šēdāqâ* (righteousness) is conformity to a norm – this norm is God. There cannot be a norm outside of God to which He (and us) needs to subscribe, for it would mean that He would not be God as there would be something else above Him, i.e. the norm to which He must subscribe. God therefore is untouched and unstained by the evil in the world and cannot be tempted by it (Erikson 1998:311, cf. James 1:13), for God is holy (Josh 24:19; 1 Sam 2:2, 6:20; Ps 99:5; Rev 4:8). Erikson (1998:313) states that God’s righteousness is His holiness applied to His relationship to other beings. God therefore commands only what is right and good for those who obey (Ps 19:7-9). God’s acts are seen as righteousness (Smith 1993:220) and God’s sovereignty in the moral realm is expressed by His works; it is holiness in action (Dyrness 1979:53).

Because God is a Righteous Judge, we know that we can trust His judgment. God is like a judge who adheres to the law and applies that same law to the rest of society (Erikson 1998:314). Smith (1993:217) states that God is a Just Judge who will not leave unpunished the guilty ones (Ps 9:12). God therefore shows no favour or partiality in His judgment and expects the same from those who represent Him (1 Sam 8:3; Amos 5:12). God is therefore the standard of just and equitable decision-making. Finally God's ability to perceive and interpret evidence is examined.

### **2.2.3 Perceiving and interpreting evidence**

God alone is privy to the true motives of man's heart (1 Sam 16:7, 1 Chr 28:9, Ps 26:2, Ps 139:23, Luke 16:15, 1Cor 4:5). Our hearts reveal our true character (Matt 12:34, 15:18). Sin is therefore equated with having uncircumcised hearts (Lev 26:41, Eze 44:7, Jer 9:26, Rom 2:29). Even Stephen's polemical accusations against his hearers included that they were of "uncircumcised hearts", which is partly why they ground their teeth at him, for they would have understood this as an accusation of sin and disobedience in their lives. Because our hearts reveal our true status, only God can truly judge our motives and our deeds. Therefore, as God is the only one who truly knows the motives of men's hearts – He says in Deut 32:35 that it is His to avenge and that He will repay – judgment belongs to God. He is the only One who can truly perceive and interpret the evidence. The interpreting of the evidence regarding the motives of our hearts is closely related to the wrath of God for God's judgment is based on His wrath because He is a moral being, which necessitates His wrath towards any wrongdoing (Morris 1965:149). Morris (1965:150) states that God's wrath is aroused only and inevitably by sin and may be expected to be visited upon the perpetrator.

God is however also a merciful God (Ex 34:6; Deut 4:31; 2 Ch 30:9). Morris (1965:152-153) states that the wrath of God is personal and therefore His mercy is also very personal. His mercy is an act of the same God who allows His anger to be turned away, for God is by nature merciful rather than wrathful (Job 35:15; Ps 77:9; 78:38; Is 48:9; Mi 7:18), but He will not clear the guilty (Numbers 14:18). Therefore,

where there is sin, there is wrath. But it is the wrath of a loving father who yearns for his children to come to Him. There is forgiveness and the forgiveness necessitates the laying aside of wrath. The wrath is not set aside due to man's performance but is due to God himself (Morris 1965:177). Man has not paid for God's mercy by means of a bribe; it is given to man by God because He Himself paid for it through His Son, Jesus Christ. To receive this mercy, the gift needs to be accepted by man. This is the way that God has determined for His wrath to be turned away.

God is therefore not only the Judge; he also metes out sanctions against those who transgress (Brueggemann 1997:237). God's ethical sovereignty includes moral evaluation and punishment for moral infraction (Payne 1962:154-155). This is evident in the punishment of Adam for his disobedience (cf. Gen 3:17), vengeance for the murder of Abel (cf. Gen 4:10) and of course the deluge (Gen 6:5-7). Israel did not escape punishment for their disobedience either, as they wandered in the desert for forty years and were exiled to Babylon. God is therefore in the best position to perceive and interpret everything, for He is omniscient. This also places Him in the best position to mete out punishment for the crime according to deeds.

#### **2.2.4 God as Judge in the Old Testament**

The motif of divine recompense according to deeds is widespread in the Old Testament Scripture, especially in those Scriptures referred to as the writings and the prophets (Yinger 1999:60). Yinger (1999:60) furthermore states that this widespread use of the motif formed an important part of the theological axiom for Judaism. God's omniscience assured that "every deed both good and evil" would be judged (Yinger 1999:61; Prov. 24:12; Eccles. 12:14). Obedience to God's ways was however not seen as earning one's salvation. Salvation proceeded solely from God's grace as part of His covenant with man (Yinger 1999:62). Obedience was therefore simply the proper response of love and trust in the covenant God who had already bestowed life in fullness. Apostasy was possible and would be punished with God's wrath and the loss of covenantal blessings (Yinger 1999:63). Deeds were therefore the evidence of one's relation to the covenantal God. Yinger (1999:63) states that

the boundary between apostasy and fidelity is nowhere legislated in unambiguous fashion, as it is not a matter of legal boundaries, but of the human heart. This view is clarified by Jesus in John 5:16-30. Deeds are simply evidence of one's status in Christ. On the final day of judgment, those who have trusted in the Messiah – as evidenced by their good deeds – will live forever in the presence of God; while those who rejected the Messiah – as evidenced by their evil deeds – will spend eternity away from God (Lioy 2007:117).

### **2.2.5 Jesus as Judge in the New Testament**

Lioy (2007:83-84) states that from the start of Jesus' earthly ministry, God's judgment rested on the established civil and religious authorities. Jesus' clearing of the temple in John 2:12-22 has the theological significance that it revealed the old order, represented by the temple built by Herod the Great, would make way for the new order, represented by Jesus' body. The whip made out of cords and used by Jesus signified God's authority and judgment. Wilson (2004:248) states that Jesus' clearing of the temple in Matt 21:12-17 signified judgment on the temple as Jesus took responsibility for the sanctity of the dwelling of Yahweh. According to Wilson (2004:248) this challenge to the operation of the temple at the time was not simply negative, but also had a positive aspect, as Jesus was healing those who were excluded from the life of the temple by their infirmities and therefore presented the possibility of holiness which was not based upon exclusion. The Son of Man motif found in Rev 1:13 also portrays Jesus as Judge as the passage has a forensic connotation. Scholars seem to agree that this expression is based on Daniel 7:13 and functions in a judicial role (Lioy 2003:116, Witherington 2003:81, Morris 1983:53, Moyise 1995:54, cf. Dan 7:9, 22). The phrase illuminates Jesus' role as supreme Ruler and Judge (Lioy 2003:118, Witherington 2003:82).

Wilson (2004:254-255) states that we can understand three issues regarding Jesus' judgment: the nature of the judgment; the time of the judgment and Jesus' role in the judgment. As to the nature of Jesus' judgment, He proclaimed it for two reasons, i.e. that the religious leaders had not done God's will and that they had rejected God in

the figure of His Son. Regarding the timing of the judgment, Jesus enacted His judgment on the temple; He also predicted the outworking of His acts of judgment on the temple in the imminent future; furthermore He predicted a universal judgment with certainty regarding its occurrence but with no indication of its timing. As to Jesus' role in the judgment, Wilson (2004:255) states that it is clear that Jesus is portrayed as the One who will sit on the throne of judgment, the location of God Himself.

Jesus' role as Judge is evidenced throughout the New Testament. Wilson (2004) for instance states that Matt 21-25 reveals Jesus as Judge in several ways. Firstly there is Jesus' prophetic acts of judgment, like His triumphal entry into His city (Matt 21:1-11), the clearing of the temple discussed above; and the withering of the fig tree (Matt 21:18-22). Secondly, there is Jesus' proclaiming of *Meshalim* of judgment against the Jewish leaders (Matt 21:28-22:14). Thirdly, there is Jesus' proclaiming of the prophetic woes against the Jewish leaders (Matt 23:13-36). Fourthly, there is Jesus' prophetic prediction of national catastrophe (Matt 24). Finally, there is Jesus' proclaiming of eschatological judgment (Matt 25:31-46). John 5:16-30 also reveals Jesus' role as Judge. In this passage Jesus claimed strong associations with the Father, revealing divine authority (cf. Lioy 2007:113-117). His oneness with the Father is underscored by the claim that the Father has handed over judgment to Him (v.22), because He is the "Son of Man" (v.27, cf. Lioy 2007:116). Jesus judges in accordance with the Father (John 5:30, John 8:16) and He does so justly (John 7:24).

Another passage that reveals Jesus' role as Judge is Rev 20:11-15. The passage portrays a courtroom scene where judgment of the wicked takes place. Scholars disagree on whether it is the Father or the Son sitting on the throne (Lioy 2003:151-152, Morris 1983:240). Scholars who hold that it must be the Father do so because Jesus testifies for His people as promised in Rev 3:5 (Lioy 2003:151, Morris 1983:240). Another view is that Jesus and the Father do this jointly. This view is based on the many Scriptures that support Jesus sitting at the right hand of God (Lioy 2003:152; cf. John 5:27, 9:39; Heb 1:3, Acts 10:42, 17:31). Morris (1983:240)

states that the Father is the Judge but that He judges through the Son. A further question is who appears before the great white throne for judgment. Is it all people or only the wicked; the saints being exempt from judgment. Wilcock (1975:196) is of the opinion that the rest of Revelation as well as Paul's statements in Rom 14:10 and 2 Cor 5:10 support the appearance of all people before the throne to face judgment, but that the saints will not come under judgment according to John 5:24 as their names are recorded in the Book of Life and therefore countermand the accusations found against them in the books of human responsibility (Rev 20:12, cf. Morris 1983: 241; Witherington 2003:251). This may also have been the case in Stephen's trial. The accusations brought against him were countermanded by his status in Jesus and this may explain why he saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God as Stephen's advocate (Acts 7:56; 1 John 2:1 KJV).

Jesus also spoke of this final day of judgment to come (Matt 10:15, 11:22, 24, 12:36, 41, 42; John 5:29). He stated in John 5:45 that the prosecutor on the final day of judgment would be Moses, the very one on whom the Jews had placed their hope (Lioy 2007:120). At this end-time judgment, Jesus and the Father will make the decisions together (Lioy 2007:151, cf. John 8:16). This is illustrated in Stephen's vision of Jesus standing at the right hand of God in Acts 7:55. A court-room image is portrayed of the Father sitting and Jesus standing at His right hand, judging together. If Moses is the prosecutor and Jesus the advocate (1 John 2:1) for His people we may have a position where everyone is brought before the Father and Jesus confirms whether He knows them or not (Matt 7:21-23, John 10:27). Those who reject Jesus now will therefore face Him as their Judge at His second advent (Lioy 2007:169; cf. John 5:22, 27, 30; Acts 10:42, 17:31; Rom 2:16; 2 Cor 5:10; 2 Tim 4:1; 1 Pet 4:5). Jesus will one day evaluate how all people lived and would determine their eternal futures (Lioy 2007:115). For us as mortals, the judgment day lies in the future, but from a divine perspective, that day was already at hand (Lioy 2007:116).

The final judgment is therefore still a judgment based on works, but the question is whose works (Wilcock 1975:196, cf. Morris 1983:241)? Those whose names are recorded in the book of life are judged according to the works of Christ and His

imputed righteousness, whilst the rest can only depend on their own righteousness, which is wholly inadequate (Wilcock 1975:197). The judgment is therefore a judgment of works and regardless of what age people live in, they are under God's judgment due to their disobedience (Morris 1983:241; Lioy 2007:93). The final judgment is reserved for unbelievers who reject the Messiah (Lioy 2007:94, 116 cf. John 5:24) and the heavenly court of divine justice forms the backdrop of the Father's condemnation of those who reject the Son (Lioy 2007:94). Jesus is therefore at the centre of the final judgment, forming the standard against which judgment will be measured as well as pronouncing judgment Himself.

The above discussion makes it clear that God is the ultimate Judge and the final authority, not the Sanhedrin (Brueggemann 1997:235; Kennedy 1984:122). Brueggemann (1997:234) concludes that the metaphor of God as Judge shows that Yahweh is committed to the rule of law and can be counted on to intervene on behalf of the oppressed and unfairly treated (cf. Dyrness 1979:54). The Sanhedrin in Acts 7 represented God and God would therefore expect them to adhere to the standards of His moral code, showing no favour or partiality in their judgment. Tenney (1977:624) states that God's sovereignty is the overwhelming concept of all the Old Testament history and law and that this sovereignty of God the Creator was denied and mocked by the most serious of spiritual iniquities in the Old Testament – blasphemy. Lioy (2007:115) states that rejecting the truth of the Son's divinity is also blasphemy. The charges of blasphemy brought against Stephen would therefore have to be measured against God's standards and the judicial process followed would also have to meet His standard. The meaning of blasphemy as found in the Old Testament is explored.

## **2.3 Blasphemy**

Stephen faced charges of blasphemy against God and Moses. These charges were based on Him speaking against the Temple and the Law (Kilgallen 1976:32). But, as Kilgallen (1976:32) states, it is remarkable that the basis for the charges against Stephen is that he said that Jesus would destroy the Temple and change the



customs. The bases of the charges were therefore not that Stephen himself tried to damage the Temple or said that the Law should change. The bases for the charges were narrowed down more precisely in Acts 6:13-14. Stephen spoke against the Temple and the Law, saying that Jesus would destroy the Temple and change the customs handed down by Moses. These were the foundations of the Jewish life: “Temple and Torah, God and Moses” (Tannehill 1990:85).

The importance of the Temple to the Jewish people lay in its functions. Firstly, the Temple had a theological function as the place of God’s presence; the place of sacrifice; and the place of prayer (Lioy 2007:83). Secondly, it had a political and economical function as the place that held together the community and gave them an identity, as well as the place that functioned as a treasury and where a large portion of the economy passed through in the form of tithes and offerings (Lioy 2007:83). Jesus’ clearing of the temple in John 2:12-22 shows that the latter function of the Temple had suppressed the former and more important function. The worship of God was being hampered by the commercial activity of the moneychangers, who changed foreign currency into the proper currency needed to buy the animals for sacrifice and to pay the temple tax, as well as the merchants, who sold the ceremonially clean animals for the sacrifice (Lioy 2007:84). Furthermore, the businessmen traded in the court of the Gentiles, the only spot where Gentile converts to Judaism were allowed to worship, thus excluding them from the worship of God (Lioy 2007:85). The house of prayer had become a den of robbers (Matt 21:13). To understand whether speaking against the Temple would constitute blasphemy, the basis of blasphemy needs to be explored.

### **2.3.1 The basis of blasphemy**

Blasphemy is founded upon the third commandment (Ex 20:7; Deut 5:11). It states that God’s name should not be taken in vain, for God will not leave those who take His name in vain unpunished. Lioy (2004: 65) mentions several ways in which the name of God could be profaned (cf. Ex 22:28, Lev 18:21, 22:2). One of the ways was to swear falsely by the name of God (Lev 19:12). This is dealt with under the next

heading. The sentence for someone convicted of blasphemy was death by stoning (Bromiley 1979:521; Grant & Rowley 1963:1040; Lev 24:15-16, John 10:33). With regard to the death penalty for blasphemy (and idolatry), Bock (1998:38-39) refers to Deut 21:22-23, which requires someone who has been executed (by stoning) on these charges to be hanged on a tree for public display as the object of God's curse. The text also became associated with other forms of hanging death, including crucifixion (cf. Gal 3:13). This form of penalty was limited to blasphemy and idolatry in the Mishnah in *m Sanhedrin* 6.4 (Bock 1998:67). Blasphemy and idolatry were thus taken very seriously (Bock 1998:67).

Blasphemy centred on the profane use of God's name (cf. Isaiah 52:5). Lioy (2004:62) states that in Old Testament times, a person's name meant more than just a form of identification, it was practically equivalent to bearer of the title. The importance of what one's name represented is shown by the change of name that occurred when God entered into the covenant with Abram. God changed his name from Abram, which meant "exalted father", to Abraham, which meant "father of many". God also changed Jacob's name when He confirmed His covenant with him, changing it from Jacob, which meant "he grasps the heel" or "he deceives", to Israel, which meant "he struggles with God". A person's name therefore signified his character. Thus, God's name represents His being and His character. As discussed above, God is holy, righteous and sovereign, and His name therefore represents these attributes of His, as well as every part of Him. To defame or defile God's name was to reject His mercy and power (Tenney 1977:624). Lioy (2004:63) states that God was directing His people, with this Commandment, to honour and revere His name.

### **2.3.2 Blasphemy in the Old Testament**

Blasphemy is found in several passages of the Old Testament. In Lev 24:10-23 an Israelite was arrested and kept in custody for blaspheming the Name with a curse. God's sanction was that he should be stoned by the entire assembly. God reiterated in verses 15-16 that anyone who blasphemed the name of the Lord should be stoned

to death. Bock (1998:36) states that the seriousness of blasphemy can be seen in this text; speaking against God was the equivalent of verbal murder. In 2 Kings 19:5 God, through the prophet Isaiah, found the subordinates of the king of Assyria guilty of blasphemy against Him. Their blasphemy consisted of words spoken against God, which placed God on the same level as pagan gods and stated that God could not deliver Israel from the hand of the Assyrian king. They even claimed that God had sent the Assyrian king to destroy Jerusalem. They did not honour or revere the name of God and were duly punished for this (cf. Isaiah 37).

A further basis for blasphemy in this case could be that the king of Assyria had spoken against God's chosen leader, King Hezekiah (cf. Bock 1984:38). Bock (1984:34) explains that speaking against God's appointed leaders came to be seen as blasphemy. The prohibition extended to administrative figures, kings, priests and any other figures of significant leadership. An example of this would be the rebellion of Korah and his followers against Moses and Aaron in Numbers 16. The basis for the charge of blasphemy was that speaking against God's chosen leaders was tantamount to an attack on the wisdom of God in appointing them (Bock 1984:35). Thus the charge against Stephen included blasphemy against Moses; one of God's appointed leaders.

In Ezekiel 20:27-29 and Ezekiel 35:12-15 the meaning of blasphemy is widened. In the first passage God found the Israelites guilty of blasphemy, not because of any irreverence in speaking the name of God, but because they forsook Him and conducted worship practices contrary to His instructions (cf. Neh 9). In Ezekiel 35:12-15, blasphemy was committed indirectly against God by Edom because they spoke against the mountains of Israel, thus boasting against God (Bock 1998:42). Sanders (1990:58) states that the sin here consisted of the presumption of a gentile nation that they could take for themselves what God had given to Israel. The above discussion clarifies Blasphemy as taking God's name, which represents His character, in vain. This includes any worship contrary to the manner as laid down by God and idolatry (Marshall *et al* 1996:142). It also includes the continual disregard of God's commands and His Word (Grant & Rowley 1963:109, cf. Numbers 15:32ff).

Blasphemy can be committed directly or even indirectly, as in the case of Edom, where the ultimate insult was against God. The offence was instituted by God and entailed an offence against Him.

### **2.3.3 The *modus operandi* of committing blasphemy**

According to Bock (1998:30), blasphemy in Judaism involved both utterances and actions (cf. Sanders 1990:59). Blasphemy however remains complex and difficult to understand because the concept was not always named but was rather described. Sensitivity revolved around the fear of committing the offence in the attempt to name it. The terminology used to describe blasphemy indicates that blasphemy consisted of insulting or shaming another through a form of utterance (Bock 1998:33). Speaking against the rulers of God's people also amounted to blasphemy as it was seen as speaking against the wisdom of the God who chose them. This can be seen in 1 Kings 21:13 where Naboth is (falsely) accused of cursing God and the king; as well as in the rebellion against Moses and Aaron in Numbers 16:30.

As far as blasphemy by means of action is concerned, the concept is more difficult (Bock 1998:33). Several Scriptures support blasphemy by way of one's acts (Num 14:11, 23; 16:30; 2 Kings 19:3; Isaiah 37:3; Ezekiel 35:12; Neh 9:18, 26). These acts may particularly be acts that challenge God's uniqueness, such as idolatry or limiting God's powers (Bock 1998:42). Blasphemy also had the connotation of an attitude manifesting itself in action that went beyond the mere uttering of harsh words (Bock 1998:35).

### **2.3.4 Blasphemy in New Testament times**

In New Testament times blasphemy encompassed more than uttering God's Name; it was any slanderous or scurrilous word spoken against humankind or God or anything associated with His majesty and power (Larkin 1995:104, cf. Luke 22:65; 23:39; compare 5:21; Num 15:30). Marshall (1980:129) confirms that blasphemy had a wider sense of any violation of the power and majesty of God. Watson (1996:25-

26) however states that the much later *Mishnah* in tractate Sanhedrin 7.5 stated that blasphemy was solely committed in uttering the name of God (cf. Bock 1998:2; Sanders 1990:60). He states that the *Mishnah* did not however set forth the legal system of the Sanhedrin as it was before A.D. 70 but rather as an ideal. Similarly, Bruce (1998:126) states that, according to the later formulation of rabbinical law, blasphemy involved the profane use of the name of God and any utterance of that name apart from the high priest's pronouncing of it on the Day of Atonement was a profane use. He also states that blasphemy had had a wider meaning in the early days of the first century A.D. (cf. Mark 14:61-64).

Bock (1998:184) states that while it is true that there are no sources indicating the legal practice before A.D. 70 (especially as it relates to blasphemy), enough material exists to describe the cultural view of blasphemy as it was at that time. Bock (1984:6) describes this cultural view of blasphemy prior to A.D. 70 by examining the charge of blasphemy against Jesus in Mark 14:54-65. The nature of the charge has largely been narrowed down to two categories: 1) Jesus' discussion of the temple, and 2) Jesus' claim about the Son of Man seated at the right hand of God and returning on the clouds, with its combined allusion to Ps 110:1 and Dan 7:13 (cf. Catchpole 1971:136). With regards to the first category, Jesus' discussion on the temple, Bock (1984:193) states that one must bear in mind that the objective of the leadership was to hand Jesus over to Pilate. In order to do this the charge had to convince outsiders that there existed a serious threat to peace in a socially sensitive area. The inability of the planned false witnesses to collaborate their testimony seriously impeded the prospect of a successful prosecution and the Temple charge was therefore handled and dropped in favour of something more that would lead to conviction.

This is found in the second possible category of blasphemy, Jesus' claim about the Son of Man seated at the right hand of God and returning on the clouds (with its combined allusion to Ps 110:1 and Dan 7:13). Bock (1984:29) states that the rending of clothes by the high priest is indicative of the specific act that was seen as blasphemous (cf. Watson 1995:38). This ripping of clothes was a clear sign that blasphemy had been heard (Bock 1984:204). Watson (1995:39) shows that Leviticus

21:10 forbade the rending of clothes by the high priest. This may have swayed the Sanhedrin to follow the high priest's pronouncement of judgment, for he engaged in a show of grief that was forbidden him but was obligatory on his fellows. What would have been perceived as blasphemy was the fact that Jesus was placing Himself at God's side, as well as endowing Himself with the authority to be their Judge (which was speaking against God's rulers; cf. Bock 1984:35). Jesus' reply combined allusions to the enthroned authority of a regal figure (Ps 110:1) with the authoritative figure of one like a Son of Man (Dan 7:13) (Bock 1984:200). Bock (1984:202) concludes that this combined allusion is a declaration of Jesus' total vindication by God, allowing Jesus to share authority with God and return with authority as final judge on behalf of God's saints.

According to Jewish custom, sitting on God's right hand was seen as a seating that represented honour and reward. This exaltation of humans was limited to only a few people, who could only sit in God's presence when directed by God to do so (Bock 1984:182). In the eyes of the leadership, Jesus was no great luminary like those of the past. Rather, He was an untrained Galilean, claiming for Himself the ability to sit at God's side (sharing God's highest honour) and the authority to be their Judge (Bock 1984:29, 202, 203). The same family of the high priest, Annas, was involved from the time of Jesus' trial up to the stoning of James, Jesus' brother in 62 AD, a period of about 30 years (Bock 1984:196). This is therefore the same family that Stephen accused of handing over and killing the Just One (Acts 7:52; cf. Bock 1984:192). It is therefore no wonder that Stephen's claim of seeing "heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God" (Acts 7:56 NIV) was the "final straw" that led to his stoning, as they would have remembered Jesus' own claims during His questioning. Upon hearing this claim by Stephen, "they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him" (Acts 7:57 NIV).

Sanders (1990:66) is however of the opinion that Jesus' claim of being the Son of God was not the reason for the charge against him. He claims that anyone who considered themselves as a son of God would simply be seen as arrogant or

deluded. Rather, the charge related to a challenge to the temple, which manifested in Jesus' overthrow of the tables in the area where doves were sold and money exchanged (cf. Watson 1995:380). It must therefore be determined whether speaking against the Temple and the Law would necessarily amount to blasphemy.

### **2.3.5 Speaking against the Temple and the Law**

Nothing was more sacred to the Jews than the Temple and the Law. The Temple was considered to be God's house and the Law was considered to be God's word (Stott 1990:128). The *Mishnah Aboth 1.2* quotes Simeon the Just as saying: "By three things are the world sustained: by the Law, by the [Temple]-service, and by deeds of loving kindness" (Watson 1996:22). The importance of the Law and the Temple is thus illustrated. The blasphemy in as far as speaking against the Temple was concerned lay in the disrespect shown to God by treating the holy place in this manner (Bock 1984:50). Bock (1984:59) indicates that the Jews were sensitive in three areas: the people-leadership, the Temple, and the Law. God's intimate relationship with all three fuelled the sensitivity. Thus offensive remarks against the people (leaders), the Temple and the Law resulted in the view that blasphemy was present.

A threat to the Temple was however not only offensive to Jewish religious feelings, but also threatened their livelihood, as the economic life of Jerusalem and its residents depended on the Temple (Baltzer 1965:264; Barrett 1991:357; Bruce 1988:126). The function of the Temple in Jewish social, economic, political and cultic life as well as its significance in Jewish thought during the period up to 70 AD was complex (Taylor 1999:710). Amongst others it was: (1) The sole legitimate location of sacrifices; (2) The principal centre for the exposition and administration of Torah; (3) A source of administrative rulings on all matters of Jewish life and belief; (4) The economic centre of Jerusalem and surrounding areas; (5) The location of the Holy of Holies, which was the symbolic centre of Judaism and to some, the cosmos; and (6) Conceived to be as the earthly residence of God (Taylor 1999:711). The Temple was also the Supreme Court over other local courts (Baltzer 1965:264; Deut 17:8-13).

This forensic function of the Temple is further illustrated in the book of Ezekiel. In Ez. 8-11, Ezekiel has a vision of being carried to Jerusalem where he sees the idolatry of Israel committed in the Temple. He sees the Glory of God leave His throne (above the cherubim) and take up station at the threshold of the Temple (Ez 9:3), from where God issues His command for judgment to begin; thus showing Himself to be the Judge who would forsake the throne which He had assumed in Israel (Baltzer 1965:267; Keil & Delitzsch 1978:128). This was also the preliminary move before the final departure of God from the Temple (Taylor 1969:102). Thus the Temple was the place from where God administered to His people both mercy and judgment.

After this Ezekiel saw the Glory of God leave the threshold of the Temple (Ez 10:18) and the city to take station at the Mount of Olives on the east (Ez 11:23; cf. Baltzer 1965:267; Taylor 1969:107, 113). This departure was through the eastern gate, which was the principal entrance to the whole of the Temple-space, thus signifying God's withdrawal of His gracious presence from the people of Israel by His departure from the Temple (Keil & Delitzsch 1978:142). Nineteen years later, Ezekiel saw the Glory of the Lord coming from the east and entering and filling the new Temple (Ez 43:2-5; Chance 1988:6; Taylor 1969:264). The Glory of God returned from the east, thus restoring the relation which had existed before (Keil & Delitzsch 1978:275) and establishing God's presence amongst His people forever (Chance 1988:6; Ez 43:7). This signifies that the building only truly becomes the Temple when God has consecrated it to be the dwelling-place of His divine and gracious presence in the midst of His people, by the entrance of His Glory (Keil & Delitzsch 1978:274). This is also evidenced in v 12, where a link between the Law and the Temple is established: "This is the law of the temple: All the surrounding area on top of the mountain will be most holy. Such is the law of the temple." The presence of the Glory of God therefore makes the place (in this case the Temple) holy and the place (Temple) has no intrinsic holiness of itself.

Salvation thus starts with the presence of God and is not connected with a place, such as the Temple (Baltzer 1965:267). Once the Glory of God has left the place (like the Temple above), salvation leaves as well. This is confirmed in the New



Testament where Jesus referred to the Glory of God leaving the Temple when He passed judgment on it, “Behold, your house will be left vacant” (Matt 23:38; Luke 13:35), after which He left the Temple and prophesied its destruction to the disciples (Matt 24:1-2). A link between salvation and the presence of Jesus can also be inferred from His answer to the Pharisees in Luke 13:32 after they had asked Him to leave because Herod wanted to kill Him. Jesus answered, “I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.” Jesus’ presence therefore meant salvation for the people and if He were to leave, salvation would leave with Him (Baltzar 1965:275). Jesus’ cleansing of the Temple (John 2:13-17; Matt 21:12-17) also happens in accordance with Ezekiel 43:8-9 where the abominations which are thrown out are the shopkeepers (Baltzar 1965:275) and with Malachi 3, where judgment was based on the defiling of the Temple and not worshipping God in an acceptable manner (Baltzer 1965:268). Thus when Jesus enters the Temple or is in the Temple, the Temple is only then really the Temple (Baltzer 1965:275). Jesus and the Glory of God are connected and where He is, the Glory of God is, as is evidenced by the cloud in the accounts of the transfiguration (Matt 17:1-13, Mark 9:2-13; Luke 9:28-36; Baltzer ) and the ascension (Acts 1:9). Of significance at the ascension are the angels’ words to the disciples that Jesus would come back in the same way as they had seen Him go into heaven, in a cloud, which shrouds the presence of God (Baltzer 1965:276). This scene is furthermore placed on the Mount of Olives, which is related to the scene in Ezekiel (Baltzer 1965:276).

In the meantime, until the second coming of Jesus, the Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost (Acts 1:2). His presence was made known by what Luke refers to as a sound *like* that of wind and has to do with Old Testament theophanies (2 Sam 22:16; Job 37:10; Ezk. 13:13) where the wind signifies God’s presence as Spirit (Marshall 1980:68). Another sign of the Holy Spirit’s presence is what seemed to be tongues of fire, which also relates back to Old Testament theophanies, especially those of Mt. Sinai (Ex 19:18; Marshall 1980:68). The association of the Spirit with fire also furthers the theme of cleansing and judgment spoken of by John the Baptist (Luk 3:16; Marshall 1980:69). Thus the Glory of God, by the time of Stephen, was no

longer confined to the Temple but was present in every Christian through the filling of the Holy Spirit, as is evidenced by Stephen's vision of the Glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God (Acts 7: 55).

One must also keep in mind that there was a time when there was no Temple (Baltzer 1965:264), a point which Stephen may have been trying to emphasise in his speech. The Temple in Stephen's time was not the Temple built by Solomon, as that had been destroyed during the Babylonian exile. The present Temple was erected by the returning exiles. The Temple was later enlarged and beautified by Herod (Scharlemann 1968:104). This Temple was however disappointing because it was smaller than the original and did not contain the Ark of the Covenant, which was lost during the Babylonian exile (Barker 1991:141). The Temple was supposed to contain the Ark, which was the mercy seat of God – thus His presence (Barker 1991:140). Baltzer (1965:265) stresses that there are three basic types of understanding of this presence of God:

- (1) The concept of God Himself dwelling in the Temple, which is supported by Solomon's dedication of the Temple (1 Kings 8:12-13).
- (2) The concept of the dwelling of the Name of God in the Temple, which is supported by Solomon's prayer of dedication (1 Kings 8:27, 29; cf. Deut 12:5, 11; 14:23; 16:2; 26:2), thus the dwelling of God's name in the Temple is the guarantee of His real presence.
- (3) The concept of the Temple as the place of the appearance of the glory or mighty presence of God (the *kebôd Yahwê*). This goes back to the Tent of Meeting and is a fire-phenomenon, enveloped by a cloud that protects man from being blinded by the appearance of God (Ex 33:7-11; Ex 40:34-38; Numbers 9:15-23; 1 Kings 8:10-11).

The notion of God Himself dwelling in the Temple was however completely destroyed with the destruction of the Temple in AD 70 (Taylor 1999:712). The negation and termination of divine presence is also confirmed through the rending of the sanctuary curtain (exposing the emptiness of the Holy of Holies) at the crucifixion of Jesus revealing that God had departed (Taylor 1999:719-720; Walton 2004:136).

The presence of God is disseminated later with the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the Church after Jesus' ascension (Taylor 199:720). Sylva (1987:261) contends that Acts 7:46-50 have been interpreted as signifying:

- 1) A replacement of the temple, thus a rejection and condemnation of the temple; or
- 2) An affirmation of God's transcendence of the temple.

These theories have been treated extensively by scholars and each theory therefore stands as a viable interpretation of the message of Acts 7:46-50 (Sylva 1987:262). Each of the two theses is therefore briefly explored.

The rejection thesis is based on Acts 7:46-47 where David, who found favour with God, wanted to provide a dwelling place for Him; but it was Solomon who built a house for God (Sylva 1987:263). Scholars find in these verses a condemnation of the Temple because Solomon had erred in building a house for the Lord because David's intention was rather to find a tent in Jerusalem for the Ark (Sylva 1987:263). This interpretation however ignores the whole of 1 Chronicles 22 as well as the fact that the Glory of God entered the Temple during Solomon's dedication thereof (see the above discussion). Thus the rejection thesis is not convincing and Sylva (1987:263) concludes that the arguments "are weak and do not actually support this thesis" (for a full discussion of criticism against the rejection thesis, see Sylva 1987:263-265).

The transcendence thesis is based on Acts 7:48-49 and 1 Kings 8:27 (Sylva 1987:265). Both passages state that God cannot be contained by that which is built by man. Sylva (1987:268) identifies three possible problems with this thesis:

- 1) The use of the term *cheiropoiētois* in v 48.
- 2) The use of a citation from Isa 66:1, 2a in Acts 7:49, 50 instead of similar words found in 1 Kings 8:27b (2 Chr 6:18b); and
- 3) The relation of vv. 46-50 to vv 51-53.

These possible problems are however solved when one understands the function of Acts 7:46-50 as an answer to the temple accusation of Acts 6:11-13 (Sylva 1987:268):

- 1) The term *cheiropoiētois* is not used to denounce the temple, but rather to respond to the accusation that Jesus “will destroy the temple.”
- 2) Similarly, the use of Isa 66:1, 2a instead of 1 Kings 8:27b also answers the temple accusation by means of the terms *oikodomēsete*, *cheir* and *epoiēsen* in the Isaiah passage.
- 3) The relation between vv 46-50 and 51-53 is that by distorting Stephen’s message about the Law and the Temple, the audience had participated in the history of Israel’s rejection of God’s message through His messengers.

Thus the material in Stephen’s speech highlights the transcendence of God over the Jewish belief that God was locally present in the Temple (Walton 2004:143). The emphasis is that the Temple does not confine God and therefore the speech does not hurl polemical accusations against the sanctuary in principle (Chance 1988:40). There is however a polemic against the Temple viewed as a “house” or “resting place” of God, which confines and restricts Him (Chance 1988:40). Furthermore, the Jews erred by building their hope upon the Temple rather than upon God (Barrett 1991:363), a fatal error that Jesus had warned about (Matt 7:21-27). The rejection thesis also does not tie in with Luke’s portrayal of the Temple in Luke-Acts (Chance 1988:40). In Luke-Acts the Temple is portrayed as the preeminent religious sanctuary in Israel (Weinert 1981:86). This is done by firstly expressing the communion (or personal closeness) that exists between God and Israel; and secondly, the communication between God and Israel (in both directions) is also expressed (Weinert 1981:86). This sacred site as the definitive place of communication between humanity and God however became redundant with the ministry of Jesus (Taylor 1999:719).

Another aspect to keep in mind concerning the Temple is that by the time Luke-Acts was written, it had been destroyed (in about 70 AD) (Barrett 1991:357; Taylor 1999:710). There were hopes of rebuilding the Temple early on, but these hopes waned as time passed (Barrett 1991:357-358; Taylor 1999: 710). This is evidenced by the manner in which God worked. Throughout the book of Acts, God acted

outside the Temple or the land of which the Temple was the focus or any other form of “sacred place” (Walton 2004:148).

Patrick (1985:197) mentions a case of blasphemy that is very similar to Stephen’s trial. In Jeremiah 26 the prophet Jeremiah stood at the Temple and warned the Jews that the Temple would be destroyed if they failed to obey and follow God’s law. The people arrested Jeremiah and wanted him executed for speaking against the Temple and the city. The priests and the prophets accused him before the officials of Judah. Interestingly, the officials reflected on the precedent of the prophet Micah when King Hezekiah heeded to his warning and avoided God’s judgment (Micah 3:12). They too heeded to Jeremiah’s warning, thus acquitting him of the charges brought against him. Stephen’s judges failed to consider precedent, a hypocrisy that Jesus had accused them of previously when He accused them of decorating the graves of the righteous and saying that, given the opportunity, they would not have killed the prophets like their forefathers had done (Bruce 1988:152). Jesus however contended that they had committed the same sins as their forefathers (Matt 23:29-36; Luke 11:47-51).

### **2.3.6 The falseness of the charge of blasphemy against Stephen**

Whether the charge of blasphemy against Stephen was false, remains a contentious issue. Luke wrote that false witnesses were set up against Stephen to bring the charges against him (Acts 6:13). Scholars disagree on whether this means that the charges were in actual fact true or false. There exists a wide spectrum of belief as far as the truth of the charges is concerned. Scholars range from believing that the charges are completely true, to believing that there is only some truth in the charges, to believing that the charges are absolutely false. Some examples of this spectrum is therefore briefly investigated. Watson (1996:15) is a scholar who believes that the charges against Stephen are completely true and that “the witnesses can scarcely have been false”. He states that Stephen’s speech can only have made sense if Stephen had made such claims. He argues that Stephen believed Jesus had changed the laws of Moses and would destroy the Temple.

Bruce is an example of a scholar who has taken the middle road. He notes that there was only some truth in the accusations against Stephen (Bruce 1988:126). He believes that the witnesses were false even though their reports had a basis of truth, because anyone who testifies against a spokesperson of God is *ipso facto* a false witness. Larkin (1995:104) also believes that we find a mixture of truth and falsehood in the charges. In comparing the accusations with the words of Jesus (Luke 21:6), Jesus predicted the destruction of the Temple, but not that He was the destroyer. Jesus was furthermore not an opponent to the law (Matt 5:17-18, Luke 16:16-17) but rather altered the customs of Moses (the oral tradition) where He found that allegiance to them meant nullifying the written law of God. Another scholar finding some truth in the allegations is Marshall (1990:128). He is of the opinion that, even though the charges were false, Stephen said something which was twisted by his opponents in this manner. He therefore rather believes in a twisting of the truth. He however does not or can not clarify what this truth was and how it was twisted. Finally, Alexander (1980:254) believes that the charge was no doubt true so far as it related to the doctrine that the new religion (or rather the new form of church) was to supersede the old. Its falsity lay in the representations of the two as hostile or antagonistic systems and that the change was to be effected by coercion or brute force.

As an example of a scholar who holds to the complete falsity of the charges, Witherington (1998:258) takes issue with the fact that some scholars conclude that the charges are true and that Stephen was in fact a radical critic of the law and the Temple. He states that Luke makes it clear that the charges and witnesses are false. Stephen therefore does not even answer these charges, but rather presents his own true witness. Witherington (1998:259) states that there has been an assumption of “where-there’s-smoke-there’s-fire”, meaning that if the witnesses said that Stephen spoke against the Law and the Temple, he must have said something about it. A convincing argument for the falseness of the charges is presented by Tannehill (1990:84). His view on the continuity in authorized leadership between Stephen, Jesus, Moses and Joseph has already been discussed above. He states that this

authorised continuity undermines in advance the credibility of the charge that Stephen spoke “blasphemous words against Moses and God” (Tannehill 1990:84; Acts 6:11). The continuity of wisdom and the performance of signs and wonders between Stephen and Moses makes such blasphemy highly unlikely.

The wide spectrum of approaches to the falseness of the charges discussed above makes it clear that determining the falseness of the charges against Stephen is not an easy task. In order to answer this question, one has to determine what Jesus Himself said about the Temple and the Law and apply an objective test to determine whether Stephen committed blasphemy.

### **2.3.7 Jesus’ claims about the Temple and the Law**

As far as the Temple was concerned, Jesus showed that he respected the Temple by clearing it of greedy practices on two occasions (John 2:13-17; Matt 21:12-17). He also showed a higher regard for the holiness of the Temple than the religious leaders (see Matt 23:16-17). The Temple-destruction that Jesus referred to, was that of His body (John 2:19-21; cf. Matt 26:60), this was a prediction of His death on the cross and His resurrection three days later. The religious leaders mistook this claim as referring to the Temple in Jerusalem. With regards to the destruction of this Temple in Matt 24:2, Jesus was prophesying the destruction of the Temple by the Romans in A.D. 70, a prophecy which came true and is therefore not blasphemous in terms of Deut 18:20-21. This destruction aligned with Jesus’ teaching that the Temple would be replaced. In His discussion with the woman at the well in John 4 regarding the place of worship on Mount Gerizim or the Temple in Jerusalem, Jesus said that neither would be used in future. The reason for this was that Jesus had come to replace the temple. He said that He was greater than the Temple (Matt 12:6) and predicted the destruction of it (Matt 24:1, Mark 13:1), which came true in approximately 70 A.D. He also referred to His body as “this temple” (John 2:19), meaning that Jesus is the true Temple. This is revealed by many factors as illustrated by Walton (2004:145-146): Firstly, the focus of the prayers of the early Christians is on Jesus rather than on the Temple; Secondly, rather than the Temple

being the meeting point of heaven and earth, Jesus provides the means by which God and humanity are brought together; Thirdly, rather than the Temple revealing the characteristics of the heavenly realm, Christians experience the life of the heavenly realm (at least in part) through Jesus and the transforming work of the Holy Spirit; fourthly, Jesus and the Holy Spirit convey the immanent-transcendent presence of God.

As far as the Law is concerned, Jesus stated that He had not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets, but to fulfil them (Matt 5:17). As already mentioned, Jesus was not an opponent to the law (Matt 5:17-18, Luke 16:16-17) but rather altered the customs of Moses (the oral tradition) where He found that allegiance to them meant nullifying the written law of God (Larkin 1995:104). Lioy (2007:21-22) states that Jesus strove to undo the humanly imposed notions of right and wrong that ran counter to God's intention for the law (cf. Mark 7:1-23). Jesus therefore did not come to change the law, but rather perceptions of the law (Lioy 2007:24). In short then, Jesus came to clarify the purposes of the Temple and the Law, as intended by God. Jesus is the Temple and He is the Law. These clarifications went against the beliefs, traditions and teachings of the Jewish leaders and therein lay the insult. Sanders (1985:252) states that Jesus did not oppose the temple and the law, but rather showed that He believed that the dispensation as it was then, was not final.

Was Stephen therefore guilty of blasphemy? He may have been in the eyes of the Sanhedrin, but a subjective test cannot be applied to determine his guilt in this matter. If an objective test is applied, Stephen is not guilty of blasphemy, for God is the sovereign Judge who determines whether someone is guilty of blasphemy against Him. Stephen, as a witness of Christ, was filled with the Holy Spirit and could therefore not be guilty of profaning the Name of God; rather as shall be seen later, Stephen was glorifying the Name of God. The charge against Stephen is therefore false as his acts do not constitute blasphemy. One cannot have a charge that is true if the accused is not guilty of committing it. Reason dictates that the charge in that case is false.



### **2.3.8 Stephen's accusers and blasphemy**

When one considers Stephen's accusers, Bromiley (1979:522) states that they accused Stephen of blasphemy, but Jews who boasted of the law and yet failed to keep its basic precepts were themselves accused of blasphemy in Rom 2:24. Paul (who guarded the clothes of Stephen's executioners and thereby associated himself with the deed, showing his approval) for example wrote that he previously blasphemed (1 Tim 1:13) and tried to force the church to blaspheme (Acts 26:11) when he was persecuting the church as part of the Pharisaic party. Tenney (1977:624) states that in the New Testament one could blaspheme Jesus (James 2:7).

Stephen accused his hearers of amongst other things, resisting the Holy Spirit and betraying and murdering the Righteous One, Jesus (Acts 7:51-52). Earlier it was noted that Bock (1998:36) states that speaking against God (blasphemy) was the equivalent of verbal murder. This act of blasphemy went even further than verbal murder – they actually physically murdered the Son of God (cf. the parable of the wicked tenants in Matt 21:33-45). The ironic position therefore exists that it was not Stephen who was guilty of the crime of blasphemy, but his accusers. The charge against Stephen was false, but may have been true of his accusers. However, in order to fully understand this, the meaning of false witnesses needs to be examined.

## **2.4 False Witnesses**

In a trial like Stephen's, a person could only be convicted of charges brought against him on the testimony of more than one witness (Bromiley 1979:817; Nu 35:30; Deut 17:6, 19:15), of which women and children were excluded (Gehman 1970:1002). It seems that a person could only be convicted if some collaboration in the testimony of the witnesses was present (Matt 26:59-60; Mark 14:56).

### 2.4.1 The prohibition on giving false testimony

As previously stated, Lioy (2004: 65) mentions that one of the ways in which a person could blaspheme the Name of God and contravene the third commandment, was to swear falsely by His Name (Lev 19:1). Patrick (1985:56) states that one would assume that the third commandment would cover false testimony in a trial as well, but this was not the case because testimony in a trial was not given under oath and therefore giving false evidence would not fall under the prohibition of “swearing” falsely. The giving of false testimony was however prohibited by the ninth commandment and several other Old Testament Scriptures (Ex 20:16, Deut 5:20; Prov. 14:5; 24:28 cf. Marshall 2007:556). Giving false testimony was seen as a violation of God’s covenant with His people (Lioy 2004:79). It was therefore not only a breaking of faith with the offended party, but with God Himself.

The prohibition against the giving of false testimony is elaborated further upon in Exodus 23:1-3. In this passage the witness is warned not to conspire with others to testify falsely, nor to colour his testimony to suit his own desires, nor to tailor his testimony according to personal prejudices (Patrick 1985:89). Patrick (1985:56) states that the rationale for the ninth commandment lies in the Israelite trial procedure, which depended heavily on the testimony of witnesses and made little use of physical evidence as is done today. Conspiracy between witnesses had the potential to injure innocent parties, making the judicial process a vehicle for murder and theft. Thus God had to ensure the reliability of the judicial process by avenging falsehood as a crime against Him (cf. Bromiley 1979:817).

One can therefore detect a link between the third and ninth commandments. Lioy (2004:79) illustrates this link in the use of the word *shāw*, which is rendered “in vain” in the third commandment and “falsehood” in the ninth commandment. It is clear that giving false witness against another and bringing false accusations against him was tantamount to blasphemy against God. The penalty for giving false testimony was to be the same as that which the person against whom the testimony is given would have received had he been convicted (Bromiley 1979:817; Deut 19:16-19). Thus, for

example, in Stephen's case the false witnesses brought false charges of blasphemy, which carried the death penalty. Their crime of false testimony would therefore also carry the death penalty.

#### **2.4.2 False testimony and collusion in the Old Testament**

Several Old Testament passages illustrate the seriousness of giving false testimony. According to Exodus 23:7, false accusations and putting an innocent person to death bore God's condemnation and was considered evil. An example of the seriousness of conspiracy and false testimony, as well as the sanction against it, is found in 1 Kings 21. Here is a case of collusion where false charges are brought against Naboth and false witnesses are set up against him. The case consists of conspiracy to commit murder and theft; the charge against him – blasphemy. Naboth is convicted and stoned. The motive behind this conspiracy is to expropriate Naboth's property for King Ahab, which is duly done after his murder. The conspiracy and murder receives God's condemnation and He sends Elijah to pronounce His judgment on both King Ahab and his wife, Jezebel. Judgment is pronounced on their conspiracy and abuse of the judicial system, which God considers an evil deed. They both receive the death penalty and the declaration that dogs would lick their blood (cf. 1 Kings 22:38 and 2 Kings 9:30-10:28 for the fulfilment of these judgments). According to Marshall (2007:555), Luke has seen the similarities in the stories and used the echoes between them to confirm the way in which the persecution of the godly has been characteristic of the Jews throughout their history, as Stephen himself attempts to show in his speech with respect to the ongoing persecution of the prophets right through to Jesus Himself.

Further illustrations of the seriousness of falsehood is found in the false report by eight of the ten spies who explored the Promised Land prior to Israel's entering it. Their falsehood was condemned by God, who struck them with a fatal disease (Num 14:36). Also in Zechariah 8:17 God says that He hates false testimony and in Micah 3:5 God says that he will appear to judge, amongst others, those who give false

testimony. God therefore sees the making of false accusations and giving of false testimony in a very serious light (cf. also Deut 19:16-18, 22:13-18).

### **2.4.3 The false witnesses against Stephen**

Luke wrote that the witnesses who testified against Stephen were false. Scholars disagree on what exactly made these witnesses false. Barrett (2004:328) states that it is unclear where the falsehood of the witnesses lies. Was it in their allegations of hearing Stephen say that Jesus would destroy the Temple? Was it in the content of what they claimed to have heard? Was it in the interpretation they put upon the words? Or was it perhaps in some combination of the above?

Again there is a wide spectrum of beliefs held among scholars regarding the falsehood of the witnesses. On the one side of the spectrum, Watson (1996:15) concludes that the witnesses could not have been false because they would have been guilty of overkill when they said that Stephen “never stops” speaking against the temple and the law (Acts 6:13). There would have been many people who had listened to Stephen and could testify that this was not true. On the other side of the spectrum, Witherington (1998:258) states that it is abundantly clear that the witnesses and the testimony are false and those synagogue members who were putting people up to saying these sorts of things were guilty of fraudulent and underhanded activities.

Some scholars have however chosen the middle road, saying that the witnesses were false, but their testimony was truthful. Bruce (1988:126) is of the opinion that the witnesses were false, not because of their testimony, which according to him contained a basis of truth, but because anyone who testifies against a spokesman of God, is *ipso facto* a false witness. Larkin (1995:104), however, states that the witnesses were not false simply because they were opposing God’s spokesperson. Rather, their testimony was a misrepresentation of what Stephen intended to say, revealing an identifiable mixture of truth and falsehood. Alexander (1980:253) believes that the false witnesses were not false in the sense of being inventors or

fabricators or gross liars, but in that they were perverse or unfair reporters, who, even in repeating what was really said, distorted it and caused it to produce a false impression. Scharlemann (1968:102) also states that Luke called the testimony against Stephen false, but not in the sense of being contrary to fact. The witness was false in the sense that this matter was introduced for purposes of compromising the accused rather than as testimony in an open and fair trial.

As already indicated, conspiracy among witnesses to abuse the trial procedure for their own benefit or desires is sufficient to render the testimony false in terms of Exodus 23:1-3. The synagogue members, who “set up” the false witnesses to testify about the charges against Stephen, therefore fall within the meaning of the giving of false witness. The witnesses who colluded with them would also stand guilty as co-perpetrators (Patrick 1985:56; Bromiley 1979:817). Furthermore, Stephen was not guilty of blasphemy against God, which means that their conspiracy had the purpose of convicting the innocent. This carries God’s condemnation as evil and is inextricably linked with blasphemy against Him.

#### **2.4.4 The role of judges in evaluating the credibility of witnesses**

In terms of Deut 19:18, the judges in a trial had a legal duty to thoroughly investigate whether the witnesses were false or credible. The judges had to perform this investigation “in the presence of the Lord” with the High Priest present (Deut 19:17). When found guilty of giving false testimony, the false witness was to receive the same sentence as he intended to obtain for the falsely accused person (Freedman 1992:554, Deut 19:19). Thus, in Stephen’s trial the Sanhedrin had a legal duty to thoroughly investigate the witnesses and determine whether their testimony was false. This does not seem to have happened. The false witnesses and the synagogue member who set them up were never examined to determine the credibility of their testimony.

The falsehood of these witnesses has already been established, but Stephen’s position as a witness needs to be explored. Truth stands in opposition to falsehood.

John 1:14-17 makes it clear that truth comes through Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself said that He is the truth (John 14:16). He also said that the God must be worshipped in truth (John 4:24). Stephen was testifying to the truth of God. Gehman (1970:1003) states “Those who in the face of danger and distress testify to the truth of God are witnesses in the highest sense (Heb., chs. 10; 11; 12:1).” Stephen was in such a position, falsely accused before the Sanhedrin and facing false testimony against him, he continued to testify to the truth of God, not squirming to attack the beliefs or opinions of his hearers. Stephen was therefore a witness in the highest sense, sealing his testimony with his blood (Gehman 1970:1003). He was the exact opposite of a false witness, but his judges failed to determine this.

In this chapter it has been established that God is the Sovereign Judge, who sets the ethical standards to which His subjects must adhere. God could not find Stephen guilty of blasphemy as Stephen was not taking God’s name in vain, but was rather glorifying the name of God. Furthermore, the witnesses against Stephen, as well as those who conspired with them, were under condemnation for their conspiracy and abuse of the judicial process, for this was tantamount to blasphemy against God – breaking oath with Him. There is the paradoxical situation where Stephen is innocent of blasphemy and is the true witness, whereas his accusers are guilty of blasphemy and are false witnesses. This is the basis from which the polemics in Stephen’s speech is explored and the manner in which the polemics builds on this foundation is investigated. In the next chapter the structural relationship of the polemics of verses 51-53 of the speech is analysed taking the preceding part of the speech and the false charges of blasphemy brought against Stephen by false accusers and witnesses into account.

## **CHAPTER 3: STRUCTURAL OVERVIEW OF STEPHEN'S SPEECH**

In this chapter an overview of the structure of Stephen's speech to the Sanhedrin is conducted. The content of Stephen's discourse is surveyed and its structure is examined. This is important as it forms the foundation on which the content analysis of the speech is performed in the next chapter. The issues dealt with also assists in determining how the speech is related to the charges brought against Stephen. Furthermore, the analysis assists in the understanding of how the polemical material in the speech, especially the counter-accusations made at the end, relate to the rest of the speech.

### **3.1 Content survey of the speech**

In this section the content of the speech is briefly surveyed, which assists us with our analyses of the structure of the speech. The survey of the content is started with an overview of the various ways in which one can analyse the speech.

#### **3.1.1 Ways of analysing the speech**

To some the speech is an example of an apologia (Bruce 1988:130; Marshall 1957:146; Stott 1990:130); to others it is an evangelistic proclamation of the Gospel (Stott 1990:130; cf. Larkin 1995:105); while still others find in the speech various theological viewpoints such as Hellenistic theology or Samaritan theology. Those who hold that the speech reveals Hellenistic theology see the speech as Temple critical (Barrett 2004:338; Bruce 1987:40; Hill 1992:41), while those who see the speech as revealing Samaritan theology find that it supports the Samaritan view that worship was not only restricted to the Temple but could also took place on Mt Gerizim (John 4:20; Scharlemann 1968:50-51, cf. Barrett 1994:339). One's view of the nature of the speech influences the manner in which one analyses it.

The aforementioned views fail to adequately explain the nature of the speech because they focus on certain parts and aspects rather than the whole. Thus Witherington (1998:260) states that a major reason why the speech is often misunderstood and not seen as a coherent whole is because of the failure to notice the rhetorical form of the speech and how the different parts of a speech function rhetorically. Witherington (1998:259) views the speech as an offensive criticism of those Jews who have rejected God's prophets and their messages through the ages. I am however of the view that the speech goes even further than this, as it can also be regarded as a "*testimonia adversus Iudaeos*", which, according to Bruce (1987:39), focuses on some aspect of Jewish faith or practice and argues that it has departed from the divine intention. In the case of Stephen's speech, this focus is on the worship of God.

There seems to be a belief among scholars that the choice regarding the nature of the speech is an "either/or" rather than a "both/and" approach. It seems to be believed that the speech cannot be both a defence and an arraignment, but rather has to be either the one or the other. Thus Soards (1994:58) for instance finds that the rhetoric of the speech is "rather counteraccusation and judicial in nature" and Morgan (1957:147) regards it as a confirmation of the destruction of the Temple and the change of customs established by Moses, which is not blasphemous but rather a fulfilment of the coming of Jesus. It was therefore not a defence, but an arraignment and Morgan (1957:147) ascribes to Stephen a role as judge over the nation rather than prisoner at the bar. This can however not be supported; for as was discovered in chapter 2, God is the ultimate Judge. Stephen's plea that God should not hold "this sin" against his executioners (v 60) confirms that he saw God as the Judge of the nation and did not ascribe this role to himself.

There is, however, no reason why the speech could not be both a defence and an arraignment. Chapter 2 established that Stephen was not guilty of blasphemy or of being a false witness and that this was rather true of his audience and accusers. The speech could therefore reveal Stephen's innocence (defence) and the guilt of his



executioners (arraignment). In order to take the whole speech into consideration, it must be analysed in relation to the charges brought against Stephen as well as the counter-charges brought by him. Analysing the speech in this manner would have various advantages. Firstly, it would take the whole speech into consideration without overemphasising certain parts thereof. Secondly, it would lead to unity within the speech itself. Thirdly, it would lead to unity between the speech and its surrounding context. In light of the above discussion, the analysis starts by looking at the relation between the speech and the charges.

### **3.1.2 Relation between the speech and the charges**

The differing views held by scholars range from those who are of the opinion that Stephen's speech neatly answers all of the accusations brought against him (Bruce 1988:130; Larkin 1995:105; Marshall 1980:131; Neil 1962:427; Stott 1990:130) to those who believe that the speech is entirely irrelevant to its setting and could be removed without the passage losing any of its meaning (Foakes-Jackson 1930:284; Gasque 1989:221). It has however only been in the last two or three centuries that scholars have started to deny any relation between the speech and the charges (Kilgallen 1976:10).

The speech consists mostly of a selective survey of Old Testament history, which is not unfamiliar in Jewish usage (Bruce 1987:40; Marshall 1980:134; Richard 1978:259, Ps. 78, 105, 106). In fact, this may be the most prominent example of the use of the past in an address in the form of explicit quotations of Scripture and allusions to stories told in the Old Testament (Soards 1994:60). Even though this kind of usage of Old Testament history is not unfamiliar in Jewish writings, its use in the speech has been the cause of confusion among scholars as it does not seem to fit into a defensive argument. Scholars furthermore disagree about the unity (or disunity) of the speech. Bruce (1987:40) for instance believes that there is unity in the speech and divides the survey into four parts: (1) The patriarchal narrative (Acts 7:2-16); (2) The oppression in Egypt and call of Moses (Acts 17:17-34); (3) The exodus and wilderness wanderings (7:35-43); and (4) Tabernacle and temple (7:44-

50), which is then followed by a vigorous denunciation of the contemporary Jewish establishment for bringing to its climax the disobedience of earlier generations. Barrett (1994:319) on the other hand is not convinced of the unity of the speech and separates the whole passage of Acts 6:1-8:4 into several components as follows: (a) The story of the Hebrew and Hellenist widows; (b) The list of names in Acts 6:5 and the appointment of seven men to special service; (c) The story of the arrest and stoning of Stephen; (d) The speech of Stephen; and (e) Stephen's martyrdom and its consequences in a general persecution and the eventual spread of the Gospel to Antioch. He is of the opinion that it cannot be assumed that these constituent parts belong together because it is not certain that any of them, except (d), is a single piece of material.

Scholars may fail to see the unity in the speech because they fail to recognize how the different parts of the speech function rhetorically (Witherington 1998:260). Thus, by breaking the speech up into its various segments and analysing how these segments function together, unity in the speech may be established and the relationship between the charges and the speech may become evident. The opening address or *exordium* (v. 2a) as Witherington (1998:260) calls it is a brief call for attention and establishes *ethos* or rapport with the audience. This opening address starts off the speech with a sense of camaraderie, "brothers and fathers", but still with some urgency, "listen to me" (Larkin 1995:105). It would have been important for Stephen to establish common ground with his audience as it comprised some of the best scholars of his nation and he was about to argue with them from a Book which they knew by heart (Shedd: 899:96). The overview of the history of Israel that Stephen was about to present was not new to his audience. As has already been seen in Chapter 2, the study of the Old Testament was the foundation of the Jewish education system.

The opening address is followed by the historic account of the Jewish nation or the *narratio* (vv. 2b-34) as Witherington (1998:260) refers to it. This section prepares the audience but does not actually introduce the arguments and has been the most problematic for scholars to understand; especially when it comes to the relationship

between vv. 2-16 and the rest of the speech, which has been a subject of specific scholarly attention (Kilgallen 1976:10). The explanations offered for the function of these verses have been quite diverse (Kilgallen 1976:10). The most drastic opinion (influenced greatly by the work of Dibelius) is that there is no discernable connection between verses 2-16 and the rest of the speech (Foakes-Jackson 1930:284). Interestingly, the opposing view holds that vv. 2-16 stand out as a unit and forms the central structural feature of the speech, providing the outline, the content and the constituent elements of Israel's indictment (Kilgallen 1976:14; Richard 1978:260). The latter scholars also see a close link between these verses and the accusations which precede Stephen's speech (Kilgallen 1976:14).

What has confused scholars about these verses is that they are hard to relate thematically to the rest of the speech and the accusations and that they are quite different in mood and emotion from the concluding verses of the speech, which is much more polemical in nature (Kilgallen 1976:14). This view cannot be supported because the exact opposite is true. The passage contained in vv 2-16 can only be understood if it is studied in relation to the surrounding verses and the theme that runs through the whole passage, which is the acts of God in establishing His relationship with Israel. The relationship between vv 2-16 and the rest of the speech must therefore be analysed.

The whole of the narration passage contains the stories of three persons, *i.e.* Abraham, Joseph and Moses. The passage contained in vv. 2-16 focuses on two of these main stories, *i.e.* Abraham and Joseph. The Abraham story is found in vv. 2-8 and the Joseph story in vv. 9-16. Verse 8 has been viewed by some scholars as a transitional verse between the two stories (Kilgallen 1976:45; Lüdemann 1989:86; Soards 1994:62). This verse however contains an important reference to the covenant of circumcision, which was the seal of God's promise to Abraham to bring the Israelites out of Egypt for them to worship God in "this place" (v.7; cf. Richard 1978:261). V 8 therefore forms an integral part of the Abraham story and does not merely play a transitional role between the two stories. Vv. 6-7 are also inextricably linked to the rest of the narration as it summarises what is to follow in the rest of the

speech (Kilgallen 1976:41-42; Richard 1978:260). Kilgallen (1976:42) thus concludes correctly that the Abraham story is introductory to what follows in the speech because it lays down a theme and an outline which demands completion beyond the episode in which it is found.

V. 4 contains the beginning and the end of the history of Israel as Stephen and his audience would have known it. A connection is established between Abraham and Stephen's audience by their presence in the very place where Abraham had received his call and God's promise regarding the possession of this place (Larkin 1995:106; Lüdemann 1989:86; Marshall 1980:135). Their presence thus evidenced the fulfilment of that promise and as Larkin (1995:108) concludes, the purpose of the Abraham story was to show that true worship of God is inextricably bound up with living in a covenant relationship with God and knowing the fulfilment of His promises. The Abraham story illustrates the start of the covenant relationship between God and Abraham with a promise of a place of their own where they could worship God. Circumcision was the seal of this covenant relationship.

The passage in vv. 9-16 moves away from the God-Abraham story to the God-Joseph story. Verse 8b confirms that Joseph, who is to be discussed next, is a descendant of Abraham (Lüdemann 1989:86). This passage explains how God's words in v. 6 (regarding Abraham's descendants living as strangers in a foreign land, where they would be mistreated and enslaved four hundred years) started to be fulfilled. First Joseph went to Egypt (v. 9) and later Jacob, his father, and the rest of Israel followed to settle there (v. 15). This would only be a temporary arrangement (as God had said) for even the bodies of Joseph and Jacob were brought out of Egypt and buried in Abraham's tomb (v. 16). The main theme in the passage remains God's covenant relationship with Israel, for it is emphasised that God was with Joseph in Egypt (v. 9). God's providence to the nation of Israel is thus evident in the passage as it fulfils the accomplishment of His purposes in the eternal covenant with Abraham to build a great nation (Larkin 1995:109). God's prophecy that there would be a temporary sojourn in another country is also fulfilled in this passage and

the presence of Stephen's audience in the Promised Land was a testimony to that (Larkin 1995:109).

The passage contained in vv. 2-16 then sets the backdrop for the next section, contained in vv. 17-19, which is a transition period to the time of Moses. V. 17 explains that the events in this passage were to lead into the time for God to fulfil His promises to Abraham. Some of God's words in v. 6, i.e. the oppression and enslavement of Israel, are again fulfilled in this passage. Thus vv. 2-16 form an important part of the speech and cannot simply be discarded as some scholars have suggested.

The narration section is followed by the arguments (vv. 35-50) or *argumentatio* as Witherington (1998:260) calls it. This is the *logos* section of the speech where the major arguments are laid out (Witherington 1998:260). The narration has laid the foundation for the arguments and now, like a skilful lawyer, Stephen presents his arguments to his audience. Finally, the peroration (vv. 51-53), or *peroratio* as Witherington (1998:260) refers to it, offers the emotional appeal, the *pathos*. This section contains the counter-accusations against his audience. The recurring theme of disobedience and rejection of God's appointed leaders, which as was established in Chapter 2 is seen as blasphemy against God, comes to a climax in this section with direct accusations of disobedience and the rejection of God's Righteous One by murdering Him.

The above discussion highlights the relationship between the speech and the charges as well as the inter-relationship of some of the parts of the speech. The mystery why the early part of the speech is neutral or positive and the latter part is more polemical is solved when the speech is broken down into its normal rhetorical parts (Witherington 1998:260). This idea is not uncommon in contemporary times where this kind of address is today referred to as an inductive sermon and is particularly effective with indifferent or hostile audiences, which are likely to reject a preacher's proposition if it were presented early in the sermon (Robinson 1980:126-127). In the next section the polemics in the speech is analysed in order to determine

where the polemics of the sections of the speech are found and how the polemical material function together.

### 3.1.6 The polemical material in the speech

There is much disagreement among scholars regarding the polemical nature of the speech. There seems to be agreement that the speech contains polemical material, but what scholars cannot find agreement on is exactly where the speech becomes polemical. Some scholars, like Soards (1994:62), find that the speech becomes polemical as early as v. 4b, “this country in which *you* are now living” (Italics mine), where Stephen starts to distance himself from his audience. Other scholars, like Haenchen, find no polemics in the stories of Abraham and Joseph, and find that the story of Moses (vv. 17-44) is only partly polemical, with vv. 35 and 37 being polemical verses added to the neutral history (Richard 1978:250). Still other scholars, like Conzelmann, go as far as to say that the polemical verses of the speech have to be eliminated in order to arrive at the original form of the speech (Barrett 2004:336). The speech therefore needs to be analysed in order to determine the polemical nature thereof.

Stephen’s opening address of “brothers and fathers” (v. 2a) shows that his hostility towards the Council is only introduced gradually (e.g. in verses 25 and 39) and leads to a proposition in v. 51 where the Jews in general are attacked (Kennedy 1984:121; Witherington 1998:265). The audience is clearly portrayed as hostile and therefore Stephen cannot immediately state his beliefs but must follow the route of insinuation (Shedd 1899:96; Witherington 1998:260). The polemics has to be introduced gradually or (as their subsequent conduct shows) the audience would not have listened (Shedd 1899:96; Witherington 1998:260). Stephen therefore first has to meet his audience on common ground and show them that he had arrived at his teaching through a study of the Scriptures (Shedd 1899:96; Witherington 1998:260). This approach was also used by Peter in his address to his audience (who had recently crucified Jesus) at Pentecost (Robinson 1980:127), albeit with different results to Stephen’s, for God brought three thousand people to accept Jesus as

Messiah and Lord (Acts 2:14-41). It may also have been good early Christian rhetorical technique to leave the possibly most objectionable part of the speech until the end, hoping that the speaker's ethos had been established by then (Witherington 1998:265). Thus the opening address contains no polemical material as Stephen's aim was to establish rapport with his audience. It is with this method of insinuation in mind that one must analyse the polemics of the speech, not just focusing on what Stephen is saying, but also on what he is not saying (or rather on what he is insinuating).

Haenchen's view (*supra*) that the stories of Abraham and Joseph are free of polemics cannot be supported. The rejection of Joseph because "the patriarchs were jealous" (v. 9a) depicts the first rejection of one of God's chosen leaders (vv. 9b-10), a theme which keeps recurring in the speech and is clearly polemical (Soards 1994:63). One therefore finds that the gradual introduction of polemic has begun and increases exponentially as the speech progresses, for the story of Moses contains several levels of polemic. Stephen states that Moses was cared for in his father's house for three months after which he was brought up and educated in the wisdom of the Egyptians for forty years (vv. 20-22). Thus, the same Moses whom Stephen's audience held in such high regard, had limited Jewish upbringing against his vast Egyptian upbringing, which adds to the polemical nature of the speech (Richard 1978:321). This is followed by the recurring theme of the rejection of God's appointed leaders. For, even though Moses realised that God had appointed him to rescue the Israelites (v. 35), they had not (v. 25). The polemic is underscored in v. 27 with the response of a fellow Israelite to Moses, "Who made you ruler and judge over us?" and in v. 35 the polemic is taken even further by generalising and attributing this rejection of Moses to the whole nation of Israel (Richard 1978:320).

The passage in vv. 39-43 deals with the rejection of Moses by Israel in the desert and the most serious of all, the rejection of God and the worship of the golden calf that their hands had made. If it is kept in mind that the charges against Stephen were blasphemy for speaking against the law (which Moses had received) and the temple as the place of worship and God's presence, it is ironic that at the very time of the

receiving of the law by Moses, their forefathers were making themselves guilty of blasphemy by disobedience to Moses and the worshiping of idols. Furthermore there may be a polemical edge to the use of “hand-made” (*cheiropoiētois*) when Stephen referred to the Temple, insinuating that the Temple had become an idol for the Jewish people, in similar vein to Jeremiah’s warnings (Jer 7:1-15) about leaning on the Temple for safety in the face of foreign military might (Walton 2004:143).

Richard (1978:320) finds that the polemical nature of this part of the speech is aimed at Judaism where the author, noting several texts in Exodus 32 which state that the Jews made a calf, generalises and accuses the Hebrews of calf-making. It is however not convincing that the polemic is against Judaism *per se* rather than against the disobedience of some of the Jewish people. It makes more sense that Stephen is laying the foundation for the accusations that are to follow at the end. The link between the two being disobedience; first of the forefathers in the desert and then of the audience in the Promised Land (v. 51). Watson’s (1996:36) evaluation of the relationship between Judaism and the polemic of the speech is therefore more convincing. He states that one of the main thrusts of the speech is Jewishness. Stephen firstly establishes his own Jewishness, with Abraham as the first Jew who received the covenant from God and circumcision as the sign of the covenant (v. 8). But a covenant is a contract and as such the Jews must also keep their part. This they, the unconverted Jews, had failed to do, and they are “uncircumcised in heart and ears” (v. 51). They are therefore not true Jews. Whether the focus of the speech is Jewishness is, however, debatable. It makes more sense to analyse the polemical nature of the speech in relation to the charges and counter-charges than to focus on the question about Judaism. The focus of the speech seems rather to be on obedience and worship of God.

One more view that needs to be dealt with before the analyses of the structure of the speech is that of Barrett (2004:337) who holds that some of the material in the speech needed Christian elaboration but did not receive it. He cites one example where the rejection of Moses in vv. 25, 27 could have been used to point directly to the story of Jesus, by whose hand God gave deliverance to His people, who



nevertheless rejected Him as Ruler and Judge. Not only was Moses vindicated by God as ruler and redeemer (v. 35), he prophesied the coming of a Prophet like himself (v. 37). Barrett (2004:337) concludes that this polemical material, unlike v. 52, which is there to provide the one Christian application that is explicitly present in the speech, could have been and probably was in the source Luke used. Barrett (2004:337) furthermore states that not all the polemical material is by any means polemical in a specifically Christian sense. Israel's rejection of the living Word of God in favour of its religious institutions is one of the most common prophetic themes. If one however keeps in mind that Stephen was using insinuation in presenting his speech (Witherington 1998:260), it becomes clear that the link between the rejection of Moses as God's appointed leader of Israel (vv. 25, 27) and the rejection of Jesus as God's anointed by the audience (v. 52), is made. The story of the rejection of Moses lays the basis for the counter-accusation in v. 52. Stephen also establishes a link between the forefathers' killing of the prophets who predicted the coming of Jesus and the killing of Jesus by the audience (v. 52) after he had laid the basis that Moses himself had foretold the coming of Jesus (v. 37).

The above discussion illustrates the polemical nature of the contents of the speech and the disagreement among scholars regarding the extent and purpose of the polemics. Next, the structure of the speech is examined and analysed as this helps with the understanding of how the various segments of the speech function together and relate to the charges against Stephen and the counter-charges made by him (Richard 1978:276).

### **3.2 Structural analysis of the speech**

The structure of the speech centres on an historic account of the Israelites, which means that overall unity of the speech is achieved because the narration is done in sequence or chronological order of events (Richard 1978:260). Because the speech takes the form of a narration, one way of analysing it may be by way of a narrative structural analysis (Richard 1978:260). Therefore, using the narrative account as a basis, I would suggest the following narrative structure for the speech:

- A Opening address (v. 2a)
- B The Abraham story (vv. 2b-8)
  - i) God appears to Abraham in Mesopotamia (v. 2b)
  - ii) God calls Abraham (v. 3)
  - iii) God's revelation to Abraham (vv. 4-7)
  - iv) God gives the covenant of circumcision (v. 8a)
  - v) God's revelation of descendants fulfilled (v. 8b-c)
- C The Joseph story (vv. 9-16)
  - i) Rejection of Joseph by the patriarchs (v. 9a)
  - ii) God elevates Joseph to leadership (v. 9b-10)
  - iii) God's revelation of living as strangers in foreign land fulfilled (v. 11-16)
- D Time of transition (vv. 17-19)
  - i) God's revelation of enslavement and mistreatment fulfilled (vv. 17-19)
- E The Moses story (vv. 20-38)
  - i) Moses' birth and Egyptian upbringing (vv. 20-22)
  - ii) Moses' conviction that God would use him to rescue Israel (vv. 23-26)
  - iii) Rejection of Moses by Israel (vv. 27-29)
  - iv) God appears to Moses in the desert near Mt Sinai (vv. 30-32)
  - v) God calls Moses (v. 33)
  - vi) God's revelation of leaving Egypt for Promised Land fulfilled (vv. 34-36)
  - vi) God's revelation to Moses (v. 37)
  - vii) God gives the law (v. 38)
- F Israel's apostasy (vv. 39-43)
  - i) Rejection of Moses by Israel (v. 39)
  - ii) Israel's idol worship while Moses is receiving the law (v. 40-43)
- G The place of worship (vv. 44-50)
  - i) The tabernacle designed by God and built by Moses (vv. 44-45)
  - ii) The temple desired by David and built by Solomon (vv. 46-47)
  - iii) God will not be confined by man (vv. 48-50)
- H Counter-accusations (vv. 51-53)
  - i) The audience continues in the sin of Israel (v. 51a)

- ii) They are guilty of disobedience to God (v. 51b)
- iii) They are guilty of rejecting and killing God's Righteous One (v. 52)
- iii) They are guilty of disobeying the law (v. 53)
- I Stephen's vision and death (vv. 54-60)
  - i) God appears to Stephen with Jesus at the right hand of God (vv. 54-56)
  - ii) Israel rejects Stephen and kills him (vv. 57-60)

This suggested narrative outline is based on three factors flowing from the preceding discussion:

- 1) The content of each section as discussed in the content survey above. Each section contains a cohesive thematic content that can be delineated into a segment of the whole narration.
- 2) In each section the polemic of the speech also increases until the final climax in the last section. The sections contain building blocks of increasing polemic, which culminate in the rejection and execution of Stephen.
- 3) The outline is also in agreement with accusations brought against Stephen, i.e. blasphemy against Moses and God; Law and Temple. The various sections deal progressively with Stephen's defence of the accusations against him and the counter-accusations brought by him at the end.

There is however a variety of ways to outline the speech (Soards 1994:58), but most scholars analyse it by way of a narrative structure and the differences between the analyses of the various scholars are therefore based on differing views of the events described in the speech rather than on recurring themes contained therein. Because of this focus on the narrative structure, most outlines suggested by various scholars do not differ much from my suggested outline above (cf. Killgalen 1976; Lüdemann 1989:86; Richard 1978:276; Soards 1994:58-59). Minor differences may be observed where the various scholars focus on different aspects of the content of each event. A marked difference may however be observed between my suggested outline and those of Killgalen (1976) and Lüdemann (1989:86) with regard to the position of the passage contained in vv 54-60 (Stephen's vision and death). These scholars, like many others, do not consider the statements contained in these verses

as an integral part of the speech (Soards 1994:60). Other scholars on the contrary analyse them as part of the outline of the speech (cf. Kennedy 1984:122; Richard 1978:276; Soards 1994:58-59). These verses can however not be ignored in an analyses of the speech, for as Kennedy (1984:122) states, they provide an epilogue in which Stephen's vindication is evidenced by his vision and which then leads to his acquittal of his persecutors (cf. Soards 1994:58-59). Furthermore, as discussed in chapter 2, the theme of the presence of the Glory of God, the Temple and the Holy Spirit are continued and climax in these verses.

Richard (1978:261) is of the view that Luke followed the Old Testament records of Genesis 12 onwards for the Abraham story and draws from the content and quotations of that book, while using the first three chapters of Exodus for the story of Moses. I do not support the idea that Luke acted as an editor in drawing from various sources to create the speech of Stephen. If one bears in mind Jesus' words in Luke 21:12-16, read with Acts 6:5, 15, it seems clear that the source of Stephen's speech was Stephen himself under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Marshall 1980:129). Scholars have also been troubled by the "abrupt" change of style and possibly of author from v. 35 onwards (Richard 1978:262). This has been exacerbated by the fact that this piece of the speech does not follow the Old Testament narrative in a systematic way, but rather follows a more thematic and polemical point of view (Richard 1978:262). Here I agree in part with the view offered by Richard (1978:263) that there is historical continuity between the preceding part of the speech and the part contained in v. 35 onward in that the author's (unlike Richard's view that the creator of the speech is Luke, I rather hold the view that the creator of the speech is Stephen under the influence of the Holy Spirit) attitude toward the Biblical narrative does not change, but the polemical tone of the composition continues to increase.

The preceding discussion follows an analysis based on the narrative structure of the speech. While this kind of analyses remains important in the analyses of the speech, I am not convinced that Stephen simply chose to respond to the accusations against him by merely telling a story that the audience would have been far too familiar with. If this were the case, one would have to agree with the objections raised by scholars

such as Dibelius and Foakes-Jackson discussed above. The difficulty created by this may be the attempts to divide the speech into neat little sections that can be labelled and filed. To determine the purpose of the historic narrative, one would therefore analyse the speech based on themes contained in the narration. This kind of examination is done by means of an architectonic structure (Richard 1978:264). In his examination of the architectonic structure, Richard (1978:264) finds that the speech contains a distinct and very cohesive internal structure and lists several features that underscore this internal cohesiveness, which include: (1) The clear delineation of the speech into two sections, i.e. the history of the fathers (vv. 2-50) and the address to the audience (vv.51-53); (2) The history of the speech follows the Old Testament narratives: from the patriarchs, to Moses and the late history of Israel; (3) Throughout the historical sequence the thematic and polemic tone of the discourse increases until it reaches a climax in the invective of vv. 51-53; (4) The thematic element of “place” leaves a distinct trace beginning with the departure of Abraham from his land (v. 3 and v. 7), through the sojourn in Egypt, the desert experience, and terminating with the tabernacle/house theme of vv. 42-50; and (5) The theme of “descendant” is clearly discernable throughout: Abraham (his seed), Joseph (Jacob), Moses, “the prophet”, David (Joshua), the prophets, and the Just One (contrasted to “your” fathers and “you”) (Richard 1978:264-265).

While the above analysis of Richard (1978:264-265) cannot be faulted, I would rather suggest the following features regarding the architectonic structure of the speech:

- 1) The following two themes run throughout the whole speech (Marshall 1980:131):
  - a) The constant rejection of God’s appointed leaders by the nation; and
  - b) The constant disobedience in the worship of God by the nation.
- 2) The main thrust of the speech seems to be the acts of God toward His people based on the covenant relationship that He had established with them (Barrett 2004:337).
- 3) The speech describes various instances where God appeared to His appointed leaders, which, as was discovered in Chapter 2, was a sign of honour and reward:

- a) In v. 2 God appeared to Abraham in Mesopotamia;
  - b) In v. 30 God appeared to Moses in the desert of Mt. Sinai;
  - c) In v. 55 God appeared to Stephen when he saw Jesus permanently in the presence of God (Richard 1978:39).
  - d) Even though it is not expressly stated that God appeared to Joseph, God's presence with Joseph (v 9b) and His providence toward Joseph (v 10) is clearly stated in the passage.
- 4) The purpose of these references to God's appearance to His appointed leaders is twofold:
- a) It shows that God Himself had appointed His leaders personally; and
  - b) The fact that God had appeared to them in different places, coupled with the arguments presented in vv. 48-50, reveals that God transcends human structures and does not  *dwell*  in or is not confined to manmade structures (Tannehill 1990:93; Witherington 1998:263).
- 5) The speech contains two references to revelations made by God.
- a) God's revelation to Abraham (vv. 6-7), which was sealed by God giving the covenant of circumcision. Israel however rejected the Word of God in this revelation, for God revealed that Israel would leave Egypt and worship Him "in this place" (v. 7), which Israel rejected by immediately turning to idolatry once they left Egypt (v. 39-41), thus receiving God's judgment (vv. 42-43).
  - b) God's revelation to Moses (v. 37-38), which was sealed by God giving the law. Israel however also rejected the Word of God in this revelation, for God said that He would send a Prophet like Moses from Israel (v. 37). According to v. 35, Moses was sent to be Israel's ruler and deliverer; therefore the coming Prophet would also be Israel's Ruler and Deliverer (cf. Acts 3:22), but again Israel rejected God's revelation by killing the Righteous One (v. 52; cf. Acts 3:23).

Another scholar whose structural analyses of the speech may be interesting to observe, is Combrink (1979). He divides the speech into "cola" in order to determine

what the main statements in each section are (Combrink 1979:4). Based on these “cola” he then divides the speech into pericopae as follows (Combrink 1979:29-36):

A. Stephen opposed (Acts 6:8-15 – Cola 1-9)

According to Combrink (1979:8), the résumé for this pericope is that Stephen, full of grace, power and the Holy Spirit and with a face like that of an angel, was opposed by members of the synagogue of the Freedmen. They charged him with speaking against the Temple by means of false witnesses. As Stephen was speaking through the Holy Spirit, they could not withstand him.

B. God’s promise to Abraham (Acts 7:1-8 – Cola 10-11.13)

According to Combrink (1979:10), the résumé for this pericope is that God called Abraham to the promised land, without giving him any part of his own. However, God promised it to him and his descendants whom he would deliver from a foreign country to worship Him there. Thus God gave Abraham the covenant with the circumcision as a sign, and thus Abraham became father of Isaac, and the promise of his seed was also realized.

C. God was with Joseph (Acts 7:9-16 – Cola 11.14-28)

According to Combrink (1979:11), the résumé for this pericope is that although the patriarchs sold Joseph, God was with him and made him governor of Egypt. As a result of the famine and the corn in Egypt where Joseph was governor, Jacob and the patriarchs came to Egypt where they died. Eventually they were taken back and buried in a grave bought by Abraham.

D. Moses, powerful in words and deeds (Acts 7:17-22 – Cola 11.29-36)

According to Combrink (1979:12), the résumé for this pericope is that Moses was born when a Pharaoh treated God’s people cruelly and the time of God’s promise to Abraham drew near. Adopted by Pharaoh’s daughter, he became powerful in words and deeds.

E. Israel rejects Moses (Acts 7:23-29 – Cola 11.37-46)

According to Combrink (1979:13), the résumé for this pericope is that Moses decided to visit his fellow Israelites. They did not understand that God was working through him, and therefore questioned his authority and rejected him. Moses then fled to Midian.

F. God’s call and commission to Moses (Acts 7:30-34 – Cola 11.47-11.51)

According to Combrink (1979:14), the résumé for this pericope is that after forty years an angel appeared to Moses in the desert. As the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob spoke to him, it was a holy place. God commissioned Moses to go to Egypt since God wanted to set his people free in accordance with his earlier promise to Abraham.

- G. Moses, powerful in words and deeds, delivers Israel (Acts 7:35-38 – Cola 11.52-55)

According to Combrink (1979:15), the résumé for this pericope is that this Moses, rejected and commissioned by God, delivered his people by wonders and miracles. He also foretold the coming of the Prophet and mediated God's living messages to His people.

- H. Israel rejects Moses (and turns to idols) (Acts 7:39-43 – Cola 11.56-63)

According to Combrink (1979:16), the résumé for this pericope is that Israel pushed Moses aside and turned to the worship of idols. Therefore God turned away from them and gave them over to their idol worship and foretold the punishment of the Babylonian exile.

- J. Israel turns from the tent to the temple (Acts 7:44-50 – Cola 11.64-66)

According to Combrink (1979:17), the résumé for this pericope is that the tent of God's presence (which was designed by God Himself and made according to His directions to Moses) was with their ancestors in the desert, and in the land God gave them, until the time of David. Solomon, however, built a house for God, but the most high God does not live in houses built by men.

- K. You are just like your ancestors – uncircumcised! (Acts 7:51-53 – Cola 11.67-70)

According to Combrink (1979:18), the résumé for this pericope is that their fathers persecuted and killed God's messengers and those who announced the coming of the Righteous One. They (the audience) are just like their fathers.

- L. Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, is stoned (Acts 7:54-8:1 – Cola 12-23)

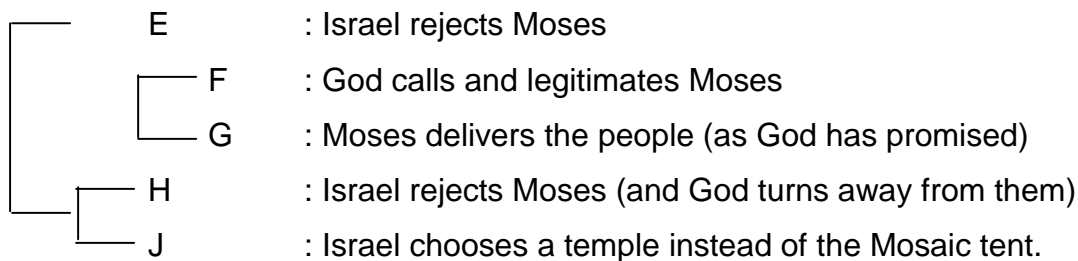
According to Combrink (1979:19), the résumé for this pericope is that as the Council members reacted furiously to him, Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, had a vision of the glory of God and the Son of Man standing in heaven. They stoned him, leaving their clothes with Saul. Stephen (like Jesus) gave over his spirit to Jesus and prayed for his murderers.



M. Stephen is buried and the Christians persecuted (Acts 8:1-3 – Cola 24-29)

According to Combrink (1979:19), the résumé for this pericope is that Stephen was mourned and buried and the church began to suffer persecution.

The above analysis is of course again based on the historic narrative of the speech, but what is interesting about this analysis is that Combrink (1979:21) takes it further than a merely narrative structure by stating that pericopae E – HJ are structured in a chiasmic manner as follows:



Combrink (1979:18) is furthermore of the view that pericope K (the periscope where the polemic of the speech reaches a climax) has a chiasmic structure. In order to understand this part of the analysis, the meaning of a “chiasmic structure” must be examined. Lioy (2004:97) states that in a chiasmic literary schema, the second half of a text corresponds to the first half in reverse, or inverse, order and each corresponding section has parallel content. Lioy (2004:97) explains further that chiasm is more than an intriguing literary device. The structural centre, which lacks any parallel with other sections of the literary unit, is the climax, or crucial portion, of the text. The two halves of the passage then hinge (or turn) on this structural centre. Therefore the main point (or central thrust) of the passage may be found in the chiasmic structural centre. The outlying frames of the text thus form the secondary emphases of the text. These frames are at the relative beginning and end of the text. Lioy (2004:97) maintains that recognizing the presence of chiasm in a text can be helpful in properly interpreting it. He however cautions that the text must not be artificially rearranged and forced to fit within a preconceived scheme.

### 3.3 Conclusion

Based on the above explanation of a chiastic structure and the preceding discussion of the internal themes contained in the speech, the chiastic structure contained in the analysis of Combrink (1979) supports the recurring themes that I have found in the speech, i.e. Israel's constant rejection of God's appointed leaders and failure to be obedient in the worship of God. This supports a thematic structure of the speech, which has a polemical nature that increases through the speech and culminates at the end (Richard 1978:264). The golden thread through the speech is the relation between the charges brought against Stephen and the accusations made by him. The charges related to blasphemy against God and Moses, the bases being that Stephen spoke against the Temple (the seat of God) and the Law (as given by Moses). Stephen's speech shows that Israel rejected Moses and refused to worship God, a state of continued disobedience. Stephen showed that the Law and the Temple therefore served no purpose in a state of continued disobedience. This was the basis of the accusations brought by Stephen, which was that the disobedience of Israel continued in his audience. Based on this, the following thematic structural analysis is suggested:

- The case for continued disobedience in the rejection of the leadership of Moses:
  - First the grounds for Moses' appointment by God is laid in Acts 7:2-19
  - Moses' appointment is revealed in Acts 7:20-39
  - The rejection of Moses is supported in Acts 7:25, 27, 35, 39, and 40.
- The case for continued disobedience in the refusal to worship God:
  - The fact that God appeared to Israel in other places than the Temple is revealed in Acts 7:2, 4, 6, 9, 30, 32, 33, 38, and 44.
  - The worshipping of idols by Israel is revealed in Acts 7: 40-41, 42, and 43.
  - The refusal to worship God in the correct manner is revealed in Acts 7: 44
  - The fact that God is not confined to the temple is revealed in Acts 45-50
- The accusations of continued disobedience in the audience are contained in Acts 7:51-53.

All these conclusions have a direct bearing on the content analysis of Stephen's Speech, as evidenced by the data in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER 4: CONTENT ANALYSIS OF STEPHEN'S SPEECH**

In this chapter a content analysis of Stephen's speech to the Sanhedrin is conducted. The goal is to examine the polemic in the contents of the speech in order to understand the relationship of the polemic contained in each section of the speech with the polemic of the other sections of the speech as well as the charges against Stephen and the counter-charges brought by him. The analysis and discussion of each section is focused on the three factors used in chapter 3 to delineate the sections, i.e:

- 1) The cohesive thematic content of each section.
- 2) The increase of polemic in each section until the final climax in the last section. The building blocks of increasing polemic, which culminate in the rejection and execution of Stephen at the end, are highlighted in each section.
- 3) The progression in each section in dealing with Stephen's defence of the charges against him (discussed in chapter 2) as well as the counter-accusations brought by him at the end (discussed in chapter 5).

The background to the speech, according to Acts 6:8-15 is that Stephen is ministering among the people when opposition arises from some quarters of the members of the synagogues. Stephen performs great wonders and miraculous signs among the people. The members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen however begin to argue with Stephen but are unable to stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he speaks. This causes the arrest and prosecution of Stephen on charges of blasphemy. In verse 1 the high priest, as chairman of the proceedings, invites Stephen to respond to the charges (Marshall 1980:134).

### **4.1 Opening Address (v 2a)**

Stephen responds with a courteous address to his fellow Jews, referring to them as "brothers and fathers", thus establishing rapport with his audience (Marshall 1980:134; Witherington 1998:260). The call for their attention may imply that

Stephen is going to say something polemical, which requires their patience (Alexander 1980:256; cf. Acts 2:14, 29). It also shows that, as Jesus instructs in Matt 23:2-3, Stephen respects their government (until such time as God removes it) (Calvin: 1844:250). Thus no polemic is introduced in the opening address as it would defeat the purpose of gaining the ear of the audience and as discussed in chapter 3, the polemic is rather introduced gradually until it culminates in v 51. Thus the prologue is in direct contrast to the epilogue (vv 54-60), where Stephen is stoned by these very “brothers and fathers”.

## **4.2 The Abraham story (vv. 2b-8)**

### **4.2.1 God appears to Abraham in Mesopotamia (v. 2b)**

The difficulty of the relationship between vv 2-16 and the rest of the speech is dealt with extensively in chapter 3, where the conclusion is drawn that these verses form an integral part of the speech, especially in establishing the relationship between the speech, the charges and counter-charges. This relationship becomes more evident in the ensuing analyses of these verses. In v 2b Stephen refers to God as the “God of glory”; already indicating that God transcends the Temple, which is an important focus of the speech and especially the defence against blasphemy relating to the temple (Marshall 1980:134). The speech is “framed with glory”, beginning with the glory of God appearing to Abraham (v 2) and concluding with a vision of the glory of God and the Son of Man in heaven (v 56) (Witherington 1998:264). The theme of the glory of God and the Temple is explored in chapter 2 where it becomes clear that the presence of the glory of God makes the place (in this case the Temple) holy and the place (Temple) has no intrinsic holiness of its own (cf. Liroy 2010:79). God’s transcendence of the Temple forms the basis of Stephen’s defence of the charge of blasphemy against the Temple.

Here Stephen uses the unusual phrase “God of glory”, which only appears in LXX Ps 28:3 (although Ps 24 refers to Jesus as the King of glory) (Johnson 1992:114; Soards 1994:61). Alexander (1980:256) believes that the phrase “God of glory” emphasises that it is the same God who revealed Himself of old, which is a standing

sense of glory in the Old Testament and Stephen uses it here as an allusion to the charge of blasphemy against Moses and God. This is an important building block in the defence of the charge of blasphemy against Stephen. The purpose is also to show God's divine authority as God initiates the involvement with Abraham (as discussed in chapter 3) (Soards 1992:61). It also anticipates v 55, where God appears in a vision to Stephen and reveals His glory to Stephen (Johnson 1992:114; Soards 1994:61). This vision is the culmination of Stephen's defence as it shows his acquittal. It furthermore places Stephen in the company of devout Jews who had dynamic encounters with God as God's chosen leaders, i.e. Abraham, Joseph, Moses, the prophets, Jesus and Peter (Witherington 1998:264).

Further rapport and association with his audience is established when Stephen refers to Abraham as "our father" (Witherington 1998:264), a theme which recurs throughout the speech with references to "our fathers" (vv 11, 12, 19, 38, 44, 45). This stands in direct contrast to the end of the speech (vv 51-52) where Stephen attacks the audience and uses "your fathers" in addressing them (Johnson 1992:115). The difference being that these "fathers" refer to the disobedient Israelites of history, which the audience have emulated in their disobedience. Thus as is seen throughout the speech, the polemic is introduced and increased gradually, growing from subtle insinuations to more direct attack.

Abraham is instructed by God to leave Mesopotamia, which is the area that lies between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers (Alexander 1980:256; Calvin 1844:251; Marshall 1980:135). Abraham forsakes his own country, not of his own accord, but because God tells him to go (Calvin 1844:251). God thus appears to Abraham outside of the Promised Land and before the Temple is built (Bruce 1988: 133; Marshall 1980:135). This again lays an early foundation for the later argument that God transcends the Temple (Witherington 1998:266). It also shows, as is seen more clearly in the next section, that Abraham places does not place the importance of any place above God (as opposed to the audience, who placed their trust in "this holy place" (Acts 6:13)). This theme is developed later in the speech and discussed in more detail later.

#### **4.2.2 God calls Abraham (v. 3)**

Abraham's obedience to God is revealed in this verse (Bruce 1988:134; Marshall 1980:135; Witherington 1998:266). God does not immediately show him where he must go, which implies uncertainty and requires "strong faith" on Abraham's part (Alexander 1980:257). Abraham's obedience also recognises God's authority (Soards 1992:62). Abraham does not allow his love for his nation and location to hinder his obedience and worship of God even though the destination and arrival time is unsure (Calvin 1844:252). This stands in direct contrast to Stephen's audience, whose love of their nation and location (the Temple) is more important to them than obedience and worship of God (this theme is developed throughout the speech). Thus the polemic is insinuated against the audience, an aspect discussed in detail in chapter 3. This is also important for Stephen's defence as it shows Stephen's regard for the sovereignty of God over the life of man, which speaks against any charge of blasphemy.

#### **4.2.3 God's revelation to Abraham (vv. 4-7)**

As mentioned in chapter 3, v. 4 contains the beginning and the end of the history of Israel as Stephen and his audience know it. A connection is established between Abraham and Stephen's audience by their presence in the very place where Abraham received his call and God's promise regarding the possession of this place (Larkin 1995:106; Lüdemann 1989:86; Marshall 1980:136). Their presence thus evidences the fulfilment of that promise and as Larkin (1995:108) concludes, the purpose of the Abraham story is to show that true worship of God is inextricably bound up with living in a covenant relationship with Him and knowing the fulfilment of His promises rather than with the place of worship. The importance lies not in the place itself, but in the relationship with God. This is also evidenced by the reference to "this land where you are now living", which denotes some polemic regarding the place as Stephen separates himself from his audience even though he also lives in this land (Soards 1994:62).

The Abraham story illustrates the start of the covenant relationship between God and Abraham with a promise of a place of their own where they can worship God. Thus the place merely facilitates the worship of God, which is of higher importance. Circumcision is the seal of this covenant relationship, again illustrating the importance of the relationship rather than the place of worship (v 8). Thus the polemic against the audience is again implied and builds on the polemic of the previous section. This also adds to Stephen's defence against blasphemy as the importance of the covenant relationship with God is emphasised.

Vv. 6-7 are inextricably linked to the rest of the narration as they summarise what is to follow in the rest of the speech (Calvin 1844:256; Kilgallen 1976:41-42; Richard 1978:260). Kilgallen (1976:42) thus concludes correctly that the Abraham story is introductory to what follows in the speech because it lays down a theme and an outline which demands completion beyond the episode in which it is found (as discussed in chapter 3). God reveals the future of the nation of Israel to Abraham and Stephen reminds his audience that the slavery in Egypt did not happen by mere chance, but was foretold by God as part of His plan (Calvin 1844:256). Thus God's sovereignty is again stressed, which speaks against the charge of blasphemy.

This history should have led to the humility of the audience because it illustrates rather the grace of God than their own achievements (Calvin 1844:256). God cared for them long before the Temple and the Law existed (Calvin 1844:256). The polemic against the audience is thus extended but is not yet direct, as mentioned in chapter 3. God's role as the ultimate Judge, explored in chapter 2 above, also comes to the fore in v 7 where God says that He will punish the oppressors of His people. God is the Judge of the world who will not let any injuries go unpunished (Calvin 1844:258; Deut 32:43; Rom 12:19). Thus Stephen stresses that God is the ultimate Judge even in Stephen's trial. The narration in v 7 is interrupted by the words "God said" reminding the audience that these are Divine words that must be fulfilled and the judgment is therefore final and absolute (Alexander 1980:201; Is 55:11).

One sees in the story of Abraham that God is in control of events (Barrett 1994:342; Soards 1994:62). The focus is on the words and deeds of God, whilst Abraham merely follows in obedience (Johnson 1992:121); God appears (v 3), speaks (v 3, 6), moves (v 4), gives an inheritance (v 5), promises (v 5), judges (v 7) and gives a covenant (v 8); Abraham merely goes and dwells (v 4) and begets and circumcises (v 8) (Barrett 1994:343; Stott 1990:132). The focus is on God's plan, which He reveals to Abraham (Soards 1994:62). Kilgallen (1976:35) sees v 7 as the central point of the Abraham story as it gives purpose to God's original command to Abraham (v 3) and defines Israel in terms of God's original purpose for freeing her to worship Him. This should again have led to the humility of the audience and stands as a building block for the counter-charges made later. Israel did not keep her part of the covenant relationship to worship God and placed more importance on the place than act of worship.

#### **4.2.4 God gives the covenant of circumcision (v. 8a)**

Verse 8 has been viewed by some scholars as a transitional verse between the two stories of Abraham and Joseph (Kilgallen 1976:45; Lüdemann 1989:86; Soards 1994:62). This verse however contains an important reference to the covenant of circumcision, which is the seal of God's promise to Abraham to bring the Israelites out of Egypt for them to worship God in "this place" (v.7; cf. Barrett 1994:346; Richard 1978:261; Witherington 1998:266). V 8 therefore forms an integral part of the Abraham story and does not merely play a transitional role between the two stories. It offers an important conclusion to the Abraham story by making the point that circumcision is the sign of the covenant between God and Abraham and his descendants (Bruce 1988:135; Marshall 1980: 136; Stott 1990:132). It is however not the cause of righteousness, for Abraham obtained righteousness before he was circumcised (Alexander 1980:262; Calvin 1844:259; Rom 4:11). Abraham's acceptance of the covenant of circumcision expresses his absolute trust and faith in God to keep and fulfil His promises (Bruce 1988:135). It furthermore signifies that a person is one of God's chosen and Stephen's charge in v 51 that his audience is uncircumcised in heart illustrates that they are spiritually outside of God's people (Witherington 1998:266). Therefore all the requirements for the Jewish religion were



fulfilled long before there was a “holy place” (Bruce 1988:135). Thus the polemic against the audience builds on that of the previous section by highlighting the false trust placed in the holy place.

#### **4.2.5 God’s revelation of descendants fulfilled (v. 8b-c)**

The passage in vv. 9-16 moves away from the God-Abraham story to the God-Joseph story. Verse 8b confirms that Joseph, who is to be discussed next, is a descendant of Abraham (Lüdemann 1989:86). Abraham’s obedience is once more illustrated in the circumcision of Isaac on the eighth day (Marshall 1980:137). Thus the relationship between God and Abraham is highlighted by illuminating Abraham’s acceptance of the covenant and fulfilling thereof.

### **4.3 The Joseph story (vv. 9-16)**

This passage explains how God’s words in v. 6 (regarding Abraham’s descendants living as strangers in a foreign land, where they would be mistreated and enslaved four hundred years) are fulfilled. First Joseph goes to Egypt (v. 9) and later Jacob and the rest of Israel follow to settle there (v. 15). This is however only a temporary arrangement (as God had said) for even the bodies of Joseph and Jacob are brought out of Egypt and buried in Abraham’s tomb (v. 16). The main theme in the passage remains God’s covenant relationship with Israel, for it is emphasised that God was with Joseph in Egypt (v. 9). God’s providence to the nation of Israel is thus evident in the passage as it fulfils the accomplishment of His purposes in the eternal covenant with Abraham to build a great nation (Larkin 1995:109). God’s prophecy that there would be a temporary sojourn in another country is thus fulfilled in this passage and the presence of Stephen’s audience in the Promised Land testifies to that (Larkin 1995:109). The manner in which the story is told gives it a polemical tone (Soards 1992:63). Richard (1979:257) however maintains that scholars consider the Joseph part of Stephen’s speech (vv 9-16) to be the least polemical. However, the story illustrates that opposition to something or someone favoured by God is futile and may even backfire (Witherington 1998:267). The polemic against the audience is thus implied as they are opposing Stephen, for Stephen has already manifested the

same positive traits as the characters in his speech – Abraham, Joseph, Moses and Jesus (Witherington 1998:267)

#### **4.3.1 Rejection of Joseph by the patriarchs (v. 9a)**

Scholars routinely dismiss any polemical intent in the Joseph story (Richard 1979:258). Marshall (1980:137) furthermore states that it is not clear what the theological point of the detail is. Several factors however show that the intention of the passage is more polemical than it first appears to be, especially regarding the relationship between Joseph and the patriarchs. Richard (1979:258) for instance points out that the use of the verb *ζηλώω* in the speech is “deliberate” and makes the episode more polemical than the original Genesis account since Stephen does not counterbalance this negative detail with other more positive details as the Old Testament author does. The same can be said for the rest of v 9 where only Joseph is seen in a favourable light, which is not so in the Genesis account and later treatments of Joseph in Jewish literature (Richard 1979:259).

Richard (1979:259) finds that v 9 is as “violently polemical” as vv 51-53 and bases this on the fact that the selling of Joseph “into Egypt” is attributed to his brothers in Acts 7 whilst the original Genesis account attributes the selling of Joseph into Egypt to the Ishmaelites/Midianites. However, if one considers Joseph’s own words to his brothers in the original account “I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt!” (Gen 45:4) it is clear that the original Genesis account also seems to attribute the sale of Joseph into Egypt to his brothers; the Ishmaelites/Midianites simply being the agents through whom this is done. This does not however lessen the polemic of the passage, which is based on the patriarchs’ jealousy and rejection of Joseph, whom God chose to save His nation. As discussed in chapter 3, the rejection of God’s appointed leaders is a major theme of the whole speech. Stephen makes the point that the fathers of the nation Israel are murderers of their brother, for not only is their original intention to kill Joseph, but they sell him into slavery (which is a kind of death) and then lie about it (Calvin 1844:260). Because of them, Joseph endures many hardships, as expressed in Ps 105:17-18. This builds toward the counter-accusations that Stephen later brings against his audience; for it paints the

backdrop of the murderous actions of their fathers, which they have continued in killing Jesus (and later, Stephen).

#### **4.3.2 God elevates Joseph to leadership (v. 9b-10)**

The polemical material in this passage is contained in the difference between God's treatment of Joseph in this section and his brothers in the following section. Joseph is seen in an entirely positive light while his brothers are cast in a very negative position (Richard 1979:261). The brothers cannot find *χορτάσματα*, which indicates "sustenance" rather than "food" (*βρώματα*) (Richard 1979:260). Thus Joseph finds sustenance or favour with God whilst his brothers are unable to find it because of their evil deeds (Marshall 1980:138; Richard 1979:261-262; cf. Deut 31:17; 2 Chr 20:6-17; Ps 37:18-19). Thus the positive/negative structure of the content of these passages creates a polemical picture of the patriarchs, which has continued throughout the history of Israel (v 52) and has culminated in the audience (v 52) (Richard 1979:262).

God not only saves Joseph from all his trials but also glorifies him through an exalted position attained through wisdom and grace (Kilgallen 1976:48). This again illustrates that resistance against God and his chosen leaders is futile (as discussed in chapter 2); something the audience is also guilty of (vv. 51-53). Thus the polemic against the audience is again implied in this section. The emphasis in the Joseph-story, as in the Abraham-story, is on God as the main actor (Barrett 1994:348). God thus saves Joseph when he calls upon Him, not in the Temple, but far from it in Egypt (Calvin 1844:261). The fathers of Israel (Joseph's brothers) were however forced to depart from the Promised Land and died in Egypt (Calvin 1844:263). This again emphasises the positive/negative structure of the section as Joseph's body was brought out of Egypt and buried in the Promised Land. Stephen once again emphasises the sovereignty of God, which defends the charge of blasphemy against him.

### **4.3.3 God's revelation of living as strangers in foreign land fulfilled (v. 11-16)**

The word *ἐξαποστέλλειν* ("to send forth") used in Jacob sending his sons to visit Egypt often connotes God's commission, either directly or indirectly through agents, revealing again God's working of His plan and His sovereignty (Soards 1994:63). V 16 has a polemical undertone in its mention of Shechem (Richard 1979:259). Shechem is in Samaritan territory and thus Stephen could have as an ulterior motive an attack against his audience (Richard 1979:259). The fathers are buried in the hated Samaritan territory (Marshall 1980:139). The emphasis of the burial place in Shechem will not be appreciated by Stephen's audience considering the "first-century antipathies" between Jews and Samaritans (Witherington 1998:268). Abraham obtains "not even a foot of ground" (v 5) in the land where the audience now lives and is only able to buy a burial ground in Samaria, which falls outside of "this holy place" (Acts 6:13). Thus none of the fathers are buried in the "holy place" and Abraham never had ownership thereof, exposing the false importance placed by the audience on the place rather than on the worship of God.

## **4.4 Time of Transition (vv. 17-19)**

### **4.4.1 God's revelation of enslavement and mistreatment fulfilled (vv. 17-19)**

The previous passage contained in vv. 2-16 sets the backdrop for the passage contained in vv. 17-19, which is a transition period to the time of Moses. V. 17 explains that the events in this passage are to lead into the time for God to fulfil His promises to Abraham by increasing the people of Israel, but Israel refuses the grace of God in their stubbornness (Calvin 1844:266). Some of God's words in v. 6, i.e. the oppression and enslavement of Israel, are again fulfilled in this passage. The oppression of the Jews starts with an Egyptian king who does not know Joseph, which could either indicate that he is ignorant of Joseph and his good deeds for Egypt or that he prefers to forget about him because of the increase in numbers of the Israelites (Marshall 1980:139). This Egyptian king cruelly forces them to expose their infants (Ex 1:10f., 22; Marshall 1980:139). But Pharaoh's actions only set forth the power and grace of God (Calvin 1844:267). The focus of this part of the speech is therefore God's promises and all events are evaluated with regards to the will and

work of God (Soards 1994:64). As stated earlier, this continues the theme of God's sovereignty again defends the charge of blasphemy, as Stephen clearly reveres the power (and name) of God.

## **4.5 The Moses story (vv. 20-38)**

The Moses story once again emphasises God's initiative, which leads to the revelation to Moses, direction to Moses and deliverance through Moses (Soards 1994:65; Witherington 1998:270).

### **4.5.1 Moses' birth and Egyptian upbringing (vv. 20-22)**

The addition of "before God" in this passage may indicate that Moses finds favour with God already at an early age (Marshall 1980: 139; Witherington 1998:269). The story of Moses is told by dividing it up into three parts, each covering a period of forty years (Barrett 1994:356; Witherington 1998:269). Moses spends forty years in Egypt, forty years in Midian and forty years leading the Israelites (Barrett 1994:356). This passage follows a well-known Greek three-fold pattern of speaking first about the birth, then the early upbringing and finally the education (Witherington 1998:269). As mentioned in chapter 3, the referral to Moses' Egyptian education contains a polemic undertone. The Egyptians studied astrology and were idol-worshippers and it is among them that Moses was raised and educated (Calvin 1844:269). This is ironic as seen in the light of Israel's idolatry and worship of heavenly bodies (v 41), while Moses speaks face to face with the living God (Ex 33:11). Because of Moses' princely upbringing, he will have been mostly educated in the liberal arts (Calvin 1844:270). Some Jewish Hellenists actually believed that Moses was the father of science and culture and the founder of Egyptian civilization (Bruce 1988:139). Moses, being cut off from Israel, could therefore have turned against his own nation if God had not restrained his mind (Calvin 1844:268). Thus the exalted position that Moses was given by the audience (refer to chapter 2 for a discussion of exalted positions in Jewish belief) was not by his own actions or achievements, but by the favour of God, a theme already covered in the analysis above.

#### **4.5.2 Moses' conviction that God would use him to rescue Israel (vv. 23-26)**

This section contains the second forty-year period of Moses' life (Witherington 1998:269). Moses' age is given as 40, which was when the Jews saw someone as "grown up" (Marshall 1980:140; cf Ex 2:11). Moses' "visit" to his fellow countrymen and the choice of words may indicate that God has placed the thought in Moses' mind, which is positive concern for the Israelites (Calvin 1844:271; Marshall 1980:140; Soards 1994:65). Some scholars even see the killing of the Egyptian as an act of God with Moses being the agent (Soards 1994:65). The fact that Moses buries the Egyptian body indicates that he does not want anyone hostile to know what he has done and report the incident to the authorities because he hopes that the Israelites will recognize that they have an ally and friend in an influential position through whom God will deliver them from slavery (Barrett 1994:357; Bruce 1988:139; Marshall 1980:140; Witherington 1998:269). This lays the foundation for the polemic of the next section.

#### **4.5.3 Rejection of Moses by Israel (vv. 27-29)**

When Moses discovers two Israelites quarrelling he tries to reconcile them by appealing to them to behave as brothers (Marshall 1980:140). His efforts are however in vain as the wrongdoer attacks him for appointing himself as ruler and judge, thus failing to realise that God has appointed him as such (Barrett 1994:359; Marshall 1980:141). The rejection of Moses is therefore at the same time the rejection of God, who appointed him (Soards 1994:65). Thus the answer to the Israelite's question, "Who appointed you a ruler and a judge over us?" is in fact God, but this never occurs to the Israelite (Soards 1994:65). This happens even when Moses is not acting in a role of authority, but merely extending a friendly admonition to reconcile (Calvin 1844:273). Moses then becomes an exile in Midian (Bruce 1988:140; Marshall 1980:141). Thus the Israelites postpone their own deliverance with forty more years (Calvin 1844:273). The preceding discussion ties in with the counter-charges that Stephen is to make later. The audience also failed to see that God had appointed Jesus as Saviour (and Stephen as His witness), rejected Him by killing Him and declined their deliverance. Stephen's admonition to be reconciled with God is also attacked like Moses' admonition mentioned here.

#### **4.5.4 God appears to Moses in the desert near Mt Sinai (vv. 30-32)**

The third forty-year period of Moses' life starts with v 30 (Barrett 1994:360; Witherington 1998:269). Forty years after Moses' exile God appears to him in a burning bush at Mount Sinai (Marshall 1980:141). The mention of an angel is a metaphorical way of speaking of the presence of God in the bush (Calvin 1844:276-278; Marshall 1980:141). Moses is instructed to treat the place as holy ground; another reminder that God is not confined to Jewish soil; as the most important place of Old Testament revelation, Mount Sinai, was not in the Promised Land (Bruce 1988:140; Marshall 1980:141; Witherington 1998:270). God calls Himself the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, thus signifying the covenant made with them, of which circumcision is the sign and highlighting the coming fulfilment of the promise (Calvin 1844:279). Again Stephen's emphasis is on the sovereignty of God in working in people's lives, refuting the charge of blasphemy against Stephen.

#### **4.5.5 God calls Moses (v. 33)**

The place where Moses is standing is "holy ground". This honour is given because of the presence of God, not because of the place itself (Bruce 1988:140; Calvin 1844:281). This is not permanent but temporary, for Calvin (1844:281) writes that Jacob erected an altar to God in Bethel, after God had shown His presence there (Gen 35:7; see also Ex 20:24). Thus God remembers His promises to the patriarchs and appears to them where and when He wills (Bruce 1988:141). This shows that the audience's belief that God is confined to the "holy place" is unfounded as no place has any intrinsic holiness of its own.

#### **4.5.6 God's revelation of leaving Egypt for Promised Land fulfilled (vv. 34-36)**

In this section the main element of the revelation is the promise of God to deliver His people from their ill-treatment and bondage in Egypt by the hand of Moses (Calvin 1844:281; Marshall 1980:141). The trouble caused by the perceived "abrupt" change of style and possibly of author from v. 35 onwards is dealt with in chapter 3 where it is pointed out that there is historical continuity between the preceding part of the speech and the part contained in v. 35 onward in that the author's attitude toward the

Biblical narrative does not change, but the polemical tone of the composition continues to increase. The narrative style is dropped and a series of statements about Moses is made, which are expressed “somewhat rhetorically in the Greek text” (Marshall 1980:141). Each statement starts with the demonstrative “This” (man) used four times over (Marshall 1980:141). The point is clear; it is this very Moses whom the Israelites rejected in Egypt whom God appointed as leader and redeemer (Marshall 1980:142). Thus Witherington (1998:270) finds that the speech becomes more pointed, containing clear-cut polemics, from v 35. They longed for the tyranny of Egypt and rejected the grace and authority of God and Moses (Calvin 1844:286). The audience is guilty of the same conduct (expressed later by Stephen) and the very Jesus whom they rejected will appear again as God’s appointed Leader and Judge (Rev 1:7).

#### **4.5.7 God’s revelation to Moses (v. 37)**

God reveals to Moses the coming of Jesus, a Prophet like himself, appointed by God to be Judge and Ruler but rejected by the people (Witherington 1998:271). Thus Stephen makes the point that, not only did Israel reject Moses in the past, but even now, despite boasting that Moses is their only teacher, they have rejected Moses by not believing his prophecy (Calvin 1844:285). Anyone who believes Moses will not refuse Christ (John 5:46; Calvin 1844:285; Lioy 2010:79). As mentioned in chapter 3, the speech thus contains a recurring theme in the appointed leaders of God. First Joseph is rejected by his brothers but reveals himself to them on their second encounter in Egypt; Moses is rejected by the people and on his second visit they have no option but to accept him; Jesus is rejected by the people (in this case the audience) and will come again at the parousia, which may be evidenced by Stephen’s vision as discussed below (Barrett 1994:358; Bruce 1988:142).

#### **4.5.8 God gives the law (v. 38)**

This verse would be the climax in the description of Moses, where he receives the living words of God (Marshall 1980:143). This happens far from the Promised Land and it is God’s presence that makes any place “hallowed ground” (Bruce 1988:143; Witherington 1998:271). Their obedience to this law (the living words of God) would



mean that they would continue to be God's covenant people (Marshall 1980:143). Stephen refers to these as the "living words" of God (v 38) and Calvin (1844:287) states that the law reveals the righteousness of God and contains the doctrine of life and salvation. Therefore, the law has life in itself and offers life to man; however, man cannot attain this life on his own, only death and corruption. Christ is the only health of man and Stephen seeks Christ in the law, for Christ is the soul of the law. His audience are however carnal and seek no spiritual thing in the law, only an outward show thereof and they therefore stay in the dead and deadly letter of the law (Calvin 1844:287). Stephen's reference to the law as the living words of God (v 38) is a high valuation of the law and speaks to the charge of blasphemy by demonstrating that he did not speak against the law (Sylva 1987:269).

This compliments what Jesus Himself says about the Law. He came not to abolish the Law and the Prophets but to fulfil them (Matt 5:17). Lioy (2007:24) states that the Greek verb *plēroō* has three interrelated meanings, each of which apply to what Jesus says about Himself: (1) He fulfilled the law by carrying out its ethical injunctions, showing forth its spiritual meaning, and bringing all that it stood for prophetically to completion; (2) He is the realization of its types and prophecies and the exclusive inspired interpreter of its teachings; (3) He alone fully satisfied the payment for sin required by the law. Jesus did however take issue with the teachings of some influential people of the time who taught the law and required others to conform strictly to it, but also rested their salvation on their law-keeping (Lioy 2004:137). Thus Jesus came to "dismantle the traditional misinterpretations of others concerning the law" (Lioy 2004:136). Thus Stephen defends the charge of blasphemy against him, specifically with regards to him speaking against the law.

## **4.6 Israel's apostasy (vv. 39-43)**

### **4.6.1 Rejection of Moses by Israel (v. 39)**

The foundation has been laid to show what Moses says and does under the authority of God. Stephen now makes the point that it is this very Moses whom the Israelites reject, which moreover, is a rejection of the God-given leader (Marshall 1980:142).

This is tantamount to blasphemy, as discussed in chapter 2. They reject Moses by turning their hearts back to Egypt, a place of cruelty and enslavement rather than the rest of the Promised Land (Calvin 1844:289). The accusation that Stephen spoke against the Law and Moses therefore comes from the descendants of those who refused Moses' authority in his own lifetime and as stated above, they further reject Moses by not believing his prophecy about Jesus (Bruce 1988:143). This very Moses is their future prosecutor with Jesus as the Judge (as discussed in more detail in chapter 2).

The preamble of the Ten Commandments reads, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery" (Ex 20:2). This forms the basis of the relationship between God and His people as the preamble indicates that the laws of God are a reflection of His personal relationship with His people (Lioy 2004:54). The Israelites however reject God's ownership and rule in their lives by worshiping an idol in the form of a calf and thus also reject the covenant that the Lord has made with them (Lioy 2004:59). Furthermore, they make their sin even worse by longing to go back to Egypt, thus preferring the bondage of slavery over the liberation of God (Witherington 1998:271). Again this adds to the bases of the counter-charges to come, for this is the sin of their fathers that the audience continues in. They rejected Jesus as redeemer and deliverer and preferred the bondage of slavery (sin) over salvation (Gal 4:3, 9, 24)

#### **4.6.2 Israel's idol worship while Moses is receiving the law (v. 40-43)**

The first two Ten Commandments read, "You shall have no other Gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol..." (Ex 20:3-4). These two commandments may at first glance appear to be similar, but there is a difference between them. Whilst the first commandment decrees who must be worshipped, the second commandment decrees the mode of worship (Lioy 2004:57). Thus, whilst God is giving these very commandments to Moses, Israel is already guilty of transgressing the first two commandments. Witherington (1988:272) states that the expected answer to the first question in v 42b is "no", since the question begins with the Greek word *μη*. The use of a calf or bull in worship was a persistent temptation for Israel (1

Kings 12:28) and this practice was denounced by Old Testament writers (2 Kings 10:29; Hos 8:4-6) (Marshall 1980:144). Because of this God turned away from them and despite several warnings, the Israelites turned to idolatry and the worship of the host of heaven several times (2 Ch. 33:3, 5; Jer. 8:2) (Marshall 1980:144; Witherington 1998:271). As Bruce (1988:144) states, “These are terrible words, but the principle that men and women are given up to the due consequences of their own settled choices is well established in scripture and experience” (cf. Witherington 1998:271). The host of heaven refers to the sun, moon and stars (Deut 4:19) and resembles deities or the dwelling place of deities (Marshall 1980:144).

The point Stephen is making is that rejection of God by disobedience leads to rejection by God and absence of His blessing (exile) (Marshall 1980:145). This practice endured even after the wilderness wandering and arrival in the Promised Land, leading to the Babylonian exile (Bruce 1988:143). The statement in v 42a concerning God’s act of judgment clearly declares that God possesses ultimate authority and has final say over human affairs (Soards 1994:66), which is discussed in more detail in chapter 2 above. This again illustrates the guilt of the forefathers continued by the audience – the Holy Land is not able to save them, but only Jesus as their redeemer (this is discussed in more detail in chapter 3). They however killed Jesus and placed their trust in the “Holy Place” (Lioy 2010:79).

## **4.7 The place of worship (vv. 44-50)**

### **4.7.1 The tabernacle designed by God and built by Moses (vv. 44-45)**

The tent of witness was a portable place of worship, which the Israelites had in the wilderness. It was made according to the instructions and pattern given to Moses (Ex 25:40) and taken over by the fathers who entered the Promised Land (Marshall 1980:145). Stephen’s focus here is to argue about worship and places of worship in the sections to follow (Witherington 1998:272). This is necessary to address the charge of blasphemy (by speaking against the Temple) brought against Stephen.

#### **4.7.2 The temple desired by David and built by Solomon (vv. 46-47)**

Stephen refers to David as one who “found favour in the eyes of God”, which emphasises the authority of God (Soards 1994:67). Human life is thus lived in relation to the standards of God (as is discussed in chapter 2 above) (Soards 1994:67). This continues the development of God as the major actor throughout the entire speech mentioned in chapter 3 above and developed throughout the preceding sections (Witherington 1998:272). The portable tent continued to the time of David, who then asked to provide a dwelling place for God (Ps 132:4-5). Marshall (1980:148) is of the opinion that the word “dwelling” used here probably refers to a place of worship. The prophet Nathan however told David that his son, Solomon, would be the one to build a house for God (2 Sam. 7:5-16).

#### **4.7.3 God will not be confined by man (vv. 48-50)**

There is some discrepancy among scholars about whether the building of the Temple carried God’s approval (Marshall 1980:146; Sylva 1987:262). Several Scriptures however reveal God’s approval of the Temple (1 Kings 8:10-11; 9:3). But, this does not mean that God is confined only to the Temple (Marshall 1980:146). It does not mean that God’s presence cannot be found in the Temple, but rather that God’s presence cannot be confined to it or controlled by those who control the Temple and its rituals (Witherington 1998:273). As discussed in chapter 2, the transcendence thesis (God transcends the Temple) provides the best explanation for this passage (Lioy: 2010: 79; Sylva 1987:263; Witherington 1998:263). This point was made by Solomon himself (1 Kings 8:27) and also by Isaiah (Is 66:1f), whom Stephen quotes (Marshall 1980:146). Soards (1994:67) therefore sees these verses as “sharply polemical”. The audience have placed their trust in the Temple to secure the presence of God, but Stephen points out that the Temple cannot do this.

There is also a defence of the charge of blasphemy (by speaking against the Temple) found in this passage. The Christian message is not a rejection and replacement against the Temple, but rather that God (and therefore Jesus) transcends the Temple (Sylva 1987:271). By stating that the Temple was built with human hands, Stephen is issuing a warning that the Israelites are again in danger of

placing more importance on what their hands have made (the Temple) than on God. Similar to their worship of the calf, which their hands had made, in the desert (as mentioned in chapter 3) (Witherington 1998:274). Witherington (1988:274) furthermore makes the point that the quotation from Isa 66:1-2 shows that Stephen stands in line of the prophetic critique of a Temple theology that neglects or negates the transcendence of God and does not go beyond it because the crowd does not react to his speech at this point, but only when he attacks their character.

#### **4.8 Counter-accusations (vv. 51-53)**

As stated in chapter 3, the polemic tone of the speech reaches its climax in this section with the “invective” (Richard 1978:264). Stephen’s counter-accusations are that the audience is: (1) Stiff-necked (i.e. stubborn and unwilling to bend or rethink things); (2) Uncircumcised in heart and ears (spiritually dead and unwilling to listen to the truth); and (3) Thus in general always opposing the Holy Spirit (Witherington 1998:274). After laying the charge against the audience, vv. 52-53 presents argument and evidence in support of the accusations (Soards 1944:68). The indictment has been building up throughout the speech as highlighted above and now the counter-charges sum it up in “pointed and personal terms” (Bruce 1988:151). As mentioned in chapter 3, Stephen moves from insinuation to direct attack – the basis has been laid for the charges which are now to follow.

Some scholars find that the placement of the counter-charges next to vv. 46-50 means that Israel’s disobedience led to the building of the Temple (Sylva 1987:272). This however does not fit with the “replacement thesis” (discussed in chapter 2) (Sylva 1987:272). Sylva (1987:272) is of the view that the connection between the passages contained in vv 46-50 and vv 51-53 is rather that the audience distorted Stephen’s message about the Temple and the Law and thus continued in the history of Israel by rejecting God’s messages through His messengers. There however seems to be more than simply the rejection of Stephen’s message in this section. Stephen accuses them of rejecting and killing Jesus and his focus does not seem to be on his message, but rather on Jesus (the “Righteous One”).

#### **4.8.1 The audience continues in the sin of Israel (v. 51a)**

The picture of the disobedience of the Jewish fathers and the rejection of God's chosen leaders has been painted and the polemical aspect of this history is a scathing condemnation by Stephen of his Jewish audience, "You are just like your fathers!" After laying the foundation of the attitudes of the Israelites through the ages, Stephen accuses his audience of sharing in these attitudes (Marshall 1980:146). They are obstinate people (Ex 33:3) who have failed to show that they really belong to God's covenant (Marshall 1980:147; Morris 1983:112). Circumcision, the sign of this covenant, is understood metaphorically as the cutting away of pride and sinfulness from the heart (Lev. 26:41; Deut 10:16; Jer 4:4), and Jeremiah describes people who are deaf to the call of God as having "uncircumcised ears" (Jer 6:10) (Marshall 1980:147). The prophets were killed for their attack on Israel's perverted worship of God and the audience persisted in this vein by killing the Son of God (rather than worshipping Him) and now rejecting God's messengers, of which Stephen is one of them (Bruce 1988:152).

#### **4.8.2 They are guilty of disobedience to God (v. 51b)**

Disobedience is particularly true of those who resist the Holy Spirit (Is 63:10), who spoke through the prophets and now through the Spirit-filled apostles and witnesses in the early church (Marshall 1980:147).

#### **4.8.3 They are guilty of rejecting and killing God's Righteous One (v. 52)**

The audience have a false boasting, the glory of their nation, by which they constantly refer to their fathers and their traditions. Stephen attacks this very boasting of theirs by saying that they should be ashamed of the corruptions of their fathers and not be guilty of doing the same things (Calvin 1844:249). Marshall (1980:147) states that there was a well-established tradition in Judaism that the Jewish people had been responsible for the deaths of the prophets (1 Kings 19:10, 14; Neh 9:26; Jer 26:20-24; Luke 6:23, 11:49, 13:34; 1 Thes 2:15; Heb 11:36-38). Stephen takes up this accusation and makes it more specific; the prophets who were killed had prophesied the coming of Jesus and now the audience have gone even

further by handing the Righteous One (Jesus) over to the Romans and thus constituting themselves as His murderers (Marshall 1980:147). The title of “Righteous One” given here to Jesus is appropriate in a forensic speech like this as it indicates Jesus’ innocence and the guilt of the audience (Witherington 1998:274).

#### **4.8.4 They are guilty of disobeying the law (v. 53)**

Stephen takes his accusations further by stating that his hearers (and not he) are guilty of breaking the law of Moses, which was received through angels (as tradition held) (Marshall 1980:147). This verse is therefore a defence of the charge of blasphemy against Stephen and an indictment against the audience and their fathers for not keeping the law (Sylva 1987:273). Bruce (1988:153) believes that the audience will have listened to the earlier part of Stephen’s speech with great interest, wondering where his outline of patriarchal times will lead him. But as he continues, the drift of his argument becomes clearer and as the polemic increases they hear him with increasing anger and horror. Then, when he flings the charge of blasphemy at them, their vexation and rage can no longer be restrained and they attack Stephen.

### **4.9 Stephen’s vision and death (vv. 54-60)**

#### **4.9.1 God appears to Stephen with Jesus at the right hand of God (vv. 54-56)**

As discussed in chapter 3, many scholars (like Killgallen (1976) and Lüdemann (1989:86)) do not consider the statements contained in vv 54-60 as an integral part of the speech (Soards 1994:60). Other scholars however view them as an epilogue in which Stephen’s vindication is evidenced by his vision and which then leads to his acquittal of his persecutors (Kennedy 1984:122; cf. Soards 1994:58-59). These verses are however inextricably connected to previous part of the speech. The vision acts as evidence for the preceding part of the speech, confirming that Jesus is raised and exalted (Soards 1994:69). The reaction of Stephen’s audience is to gnash their teeth – a sign of rage (Ps 35:16; Lk 13:28). According to the teachings of Jesus in Matt 5:22, this action is sufficient for judgment. Liroy (2004:146) states that what

Jesus means in this verse is that any verbal abuse makes one liable to eternal damnation.

Stephen's vision of Jesus standing at the right hand of God may be better understood if this is kept in mind. The heavens open similar to the baptism of Jesus when the heavens opened as a sign of revelation from God (Marshall 1980:149). The referral to Jesus as the "Son of Man" is a title almost exclusively used by Jesus of Himself in the New Testament and may indicate His role as vindicator of those who follow Him as their Advocate (Bruce 1988:156; Marshall 1980:149; Witherington 1998:275) (cf. Matt 10:33; Luke 12:8). It is a title unique to the speech (Soards 1994:69). It can also indicate Jesus' role as Judge, discussed in chapter 2 (John 5:27). Some scholars also see Jesus' standing as a sign of judgment upon Stephen's opponents and a "kind of proleptic vision of the parousia or second advent of Jesus" (Marshall 1980:149). There is no reason why Jesus cannot fulfil both functions – Advocate of Stephen of the charges brought against him (1 John 2:1) and Judge of the audience of the charges against them (John 5:22, 27, 30; 9:39) (cf. Lioy 2010:80). This is confirmed by Stephen's address of "Lord" in his prayer for forgiveness, recognizing Jesus' authority to and power to realize forgiveness and judgement at the same time (Soards 1994:70).

Jesus stood before this same court a short time before and upon being asked by the High Priest whether he was the Messiah, said "Yes" and what's more, "you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Almighty, and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Mark 14:62). For this, Jesus was convicted of blasphemy and sentenced to death. In chapter 2 it is seen that sitting at the right hand of God is an exalted position reserved for few worthy candidates. Thus the judges have no option but to condemn Stephen for blasphemy or they would have to review their previous decision (Bruce 1988:154).

Stephen's vision of Jesus standing at the right hand of God may also signify that the Jews' overemphasis of God's presence in the Temple is being exposed. Here Stephen sees Jesus on His heavenly throne at the side of the Father and this is not



in the Temple, which is an “institution which gives religious privileges to one group in preference to others” (Bruce 1988:157). Jesus has opened the way for all nations to come into the presence of God, which the Temple cannot provide (Bruce 1988:157) (cf. Mark 11:17).

#### **4.9.2 Israel rejects Stephen and kills him (vv. 57-60)**

The people shout and block their ears because they perceive Stephen’s words as blasphemous (Marshall 1980:149). As discussed in chapter 2, God defines what is blasphemous. The crowd in this case respond in total contrast to Peter’s audience in Acts 2:37-41. Another contrast exists between Stephen and his audience in their clothing. The Mishnah required the victim who was about to be stoned to be stripped of his clothing; here the executioners however strip themselves of their clothing (leaving it in the care of Saul) to perform their “gruesome function” more easily (Marshall 1980:150). As discussed in chapter 2, the Mishnah regulated the detailed procedure of how the stoning was to take place and stated that execution was to be treated as an unwelcome necessity to be avoided if the slightest legal loophole could be found (Bruce 1988:160). There is very little evidence to support the fact that Stephen’s audience execute him with reluctance as a “disagreeable but unavoidable duty” (Bruce 1988:160). The execution of Stephen is also unlawful as a subsequent meeting of the Sanhedrin is required to discuss the case and render a verdict the following morning (Watson 1996:62).

There seems to be an anomaly between Stephen’s earlier attack on his audience and his prayer for their vindication (Marshall 1980:150). One must however separate the charges which formed the basis of the attack, i.e. disobedience and rejection of God (blasphemy), from the basis of the prayer for vindication, i.e. the taking of Stephen’s life (murder). Stephen leaves the judgment regarding blasphemy in the hands of God but pleads for their vindication and forgiveness of his murder. The preceding analysis is done in accordance with the narrative structure of the speech, as delineated in chapter 3. It is however also mentioned in chapter 3 that one can also analyse the speech by means of an architectonic structure, based on themes contained in the narration, to determine the purpose of the historic narrative. Such an

analysis will be beneficial as the themes contained in the speech become clearer, especially in relation to the charges and counter-charges.

## **4.10 Thematic content of the Speech**

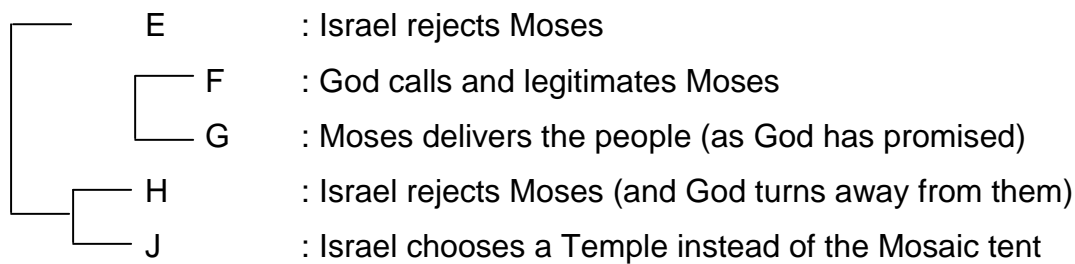
The analysis of the architectonic structure of the speech is conducted according to the themes determined in the structural analysis of chapter 3.

### **4.10.1 The case for continued disobedience in the rejection of the leadership of Moses:**

The focus of this theme is to address the charge of blasphemy against Stephen regarding Moses and the Law (discussed in detail in chapter 2) as well as the counter-charges brought by Stephen (discussed in chapter 5). As mentioned in chapter 3, two themes run throughout the whole speech, i.e. the constant rejection of God's appointed leaders by the nation and the constant disobedience in the worship of God by the nation (the latter is dealt with under 4.10.3 below). The rejection of Moses as one of the abovementioned leaders is however pertinent due to the exalted position offered to him by the audience in the charge against Stephen (Moses' exalted position is discussed in detail in chapter 2). In the speech the grounds for Moses' appointment by God is laid in Acts 7:2-19, which include the stories of Abraham and Joseph. These stories of Abraham and Joseph paint the backdrop for the story of Moses and the perceived problematic relationship of vv. 2-16 (the stories of Abraham and Joseph) with the rest of the speech is dealt with in chapter 3 and also in the preceding analysis of the narrative structure. As highlighted in the analysis of the narrative structure, the constant focus of the speech is God's divine authority as God initiates the involvement with Abraham, Joseph, Moses and the Israelites (Barrett 1994:343, 348; Johnson 1992:121; Larkin 1995:102; Soards 1994:62, 64, 65; Stott 1990:132; Witherington 1998:270).

The story of Moses' appointment as God's leader is told in Acts 7:20-39, whilst his rejection by the Israelites is contained in Acts 7:25, 27, 35, 39, and 40. Combrink's (1979:21) chiasmic structure (referred to in chapter 3) of the rejection of Moses is

relevant. He states that pericopae E – HJ (see chapter 3) are structured in a chiasmic manner as follows:



Pericopae H & J seem to support the notion that Israel chose to build the Temple in disobedience to God. It is however pointed out in the analysis of the narrative structure as well as in chapter 2 that this was not the case. The above chiasmic structure is therefore a bit forced, as cautioned against by Liroy (2004:97) (see chapter 3 above). Pericopae E to G cannot be faulted and the theme is also true of Joseph who was rejected by Israel but later called and legitimated by God and used to deliver Israel, as well as Jesus who was rejected and killed by Israel but legitimated by God (Matt 3:17, 17:5) and will deliver Israel at His Second Coming (Zech 12:10-13:6; Matt 21:39; Matt 24:30-31; Luke 13:35; Rom 11:26-27). Thus the audience continue in the sin of their forefathers by rejecting Moses, for Moses predicted the coming of Jesus (Dt 18:14-20), whom the audience killed.

#### **4.10.2 The case for continued disobedience in the refusal to worship God:**

This theme speaks against the charge of blasphemy regarding the Temple brought against Stephen and the counter-charges brought by him (discussed in chapter 5).

As stated above, one of the main thrusts of the speech seems to be the acts of God toward His people based on the covenant relationship that He had established with them (Barrett 2004:337). The speech also describes various instances where God appeared to His appointed leaders, which, as is seen in Chapter 2, was a sign of honour and reward:

- In v. 2 God appeared to Abraham in Mesopotamia;
- Even though it is not expressly stated that God appeared to Joseph, God's presence with Joseph (v 9b) and His providence toward Joseph (v 10) is clearly stated in the passage;

- In v. 30 God appeared to Moses in the desert of Mt. Sinai; and
- In v. 55 God appeared to Stephen where he saw Jesus in the presence of God (Richard 1978:39).

The purpose of these references to God's appearances to His appointed leaders is two-fold:

- 1) It shows that God Himself appointed His leaders personally; and
- 2) The fact that God appeared to them in different places, coupled with the arguments presented in vv. 48-50, reveals that God transcends human structures and does not dwell in and is not confined to man-made structures (Tannehill 1990:93; Witherington 1998:263).

God furthermore appeared to Israel in other places than the Temple (Acts 7:2, 4, 6, 9, 30, 32, 33, 38, and 44). Thus God initiates the relationship with His people, but Israel turned from God to worship idols (Acts 7: 40-41, 42, 43). They also refused to worship God in the correct manner (Acts 7: 44) and the audience continued in this vain by rejecting Jesus and believing that God could be confined to the Temple and controlled by the rituals of the Temple (Acts 45-50). They thus chose not to be obedient to God in their worship but rather placed their trust in "what their hands had made" (Acts 7:41) (cf. Liroy 2010:79).

#### **4.10.3 The accusations of continued disobedience in the audience are contained in Acts 7:51-53.**

As stated above (under 4.10.1), chapter 3 mentions two themes that run throughout the whole speech, i.e. the constant rejection of God's appointed leaders by the nation and the constant disobedience in the worship of God by the nation (the former is dealt with under 4.10.1 above).

The speech contains two references to revelations made by God.

- 1) God's revelation to Abraham (vv. 6-7), which was sealed by God giving the covenant of circumcision.
- 2) God's revelation to Moses (v. 37-38), which was sealed by God giving the law.

Israel rejected the Word of God in the revelation to Abraham where God revealed that Israel would leave Egypt and worship Him "in this place" (v. 7) by immediately turning to idolatry once they left Egypt (v. 39-41), thus receiving God's judgment (vv.

42-43). Israel also rejected the Word of God in the revelation to Moses where God said that He would send a Prophet like Moses from Israel (v. 37). According to v. 35, Moses was sent to be Israel's ruler and deliverer; therefore the coming Prophet would also be Israel's Ruler and Deliverer (cf. Acts 3:22), but again Israel rejected God's revelation by killing the Righteous One (Jesus) (v. 52; cf. Acts 3:23). The whole speech highlights the disobedience and obstinacy of Israel, which lays the foundation for the counter-charges against the audience that they continue in the obedience and obstinacy of their fathers.

As discussed in chapter 3, Combrink (1979:18) is of the view that periscope K (Acts 7:51-53), has a chiasmic structure. He states that the résumé for this pericope is that their fathers persecuted and killed God's messengers and those who announced the coming of the Righteous One and that they are just like them. I would however suggest the following view of the contents of this section:

- (1) You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears!
- (2) You are just like your fathers:
- (3) You always resist the Holy Spirit.
- (4) Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One.
- (5) And now you have betrayed and murdered Him –
- (6) You who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it.

- The contents of propositions (1) and (6) deal with the disobedience of the audience;
- The contents of propositions (2) and (4) deal with the continued sin of their fathers by the audience; and
- The contents of propositions (3) and (5) deal with the rejection of God (i.e. the Holy Spirit in (3) and the Son in (5)).

Thus the link of continued disobedience and the grounds upon which it is based are established in this section.

## 4.11 Conclusion

As stated in the introduction of this chapter, the goal of the preceding analysis is to examine the polemic in the contents of the speech. The goal is to understand the relationship of the polemic contained in each section of the speech with the polemic of other sections. Furthermore, a second aim is to understand how the polemical contents relate to the charges against Stephen as well as the counter-charges brought by him. The analysis and discussion of each section above is focused on the three factors used in chapter 3 to delineate the sections as follows:

1) The cohesive thematic content of each section:

The analysis shows that the speech is a discourse on the history of Israel and Judaism wherein the history is viewed in its positive and negative aspects, both of which are polemical in nature (Richard 1979:263). Each section forms a cohesive unit wherein the positive/negative aspects of the history are juxtaposed. The overall message is that Israel has always rejected God's appointed leaders, which amounts to blasphemy, and the audience is continuing in this sin of their forefathers by having murdered Jesus, the Prophet foretold by Moses, which is at the same time a rejection of Moses (they confirmed this by also killing Stephen, a witness of Christ, at the conclusion of the speech).

2) The increase of polemic in each section until the final climax in the last section:

The building blocks of increasing polemic, which culminate in the rejection and execution of Stephen at the end, are highlighted in each section. The analysis reveals that the polemic in the speech is introduced gradually, building up during the speech to finally culminate in the direct counter-charges against the audience. The polemic moves from implied insinuations to direct accusations against the audience, which in turn are based on the implied insinuations of the previous sections. Without the foundation laid by the preceding part of the speech, the accusations would have no substance and would simply be empty slurs at the audience. Stephen's speech is thus not law or temple critical; but as Witherington (1998:275) puts it, "... it is people

critical on the basis of the Law and the Prophets, and of a proper theology of God's presence and transcendence and so a proper theology of God's dwelling place."

3) The progression in each section in dealing with Stephen's defence of the charges against him (discussed in chapter 2) as well as the counter-accusations brought by him at the end (discussed in chapter 5):

The analysis reveals that Stephen defends the charges brought against him in each section of the speech; not by directly refuting them but by showing reverence for the sovereignty and power of God in the lives of His people, which speaks against blasphemy. Thus the speech builds on the charges brought against Stephen by showing that it is not he, but the audience who are guilty of those very charges. Thus the abovementioned analysis assists in drawing the above conclusions regarding the nature of the relationship between the speech and the charges brought against Stephen, as well as with the counter-accusations brought by Stephen against his audience. The evidence in support of these charges against the audience is examined in the next chapter.

The analysis of the architectonic structure based on the themes of the speech is performed in accordance with the delimitation found in chapter 3, i.e. the case of Israel's constant rejection of God's appointed leaders, especially Moses, and the case of their failure to be obedient in the worship of God. The first case acts as a defence against the charge of blasphemy related to the Law whilst the second case acts as a defence against the charge of blasphemy related to the Temple. These two cases then culminate in the counter-charges brought by Stephen, which is that the disobedience of Israel continues in the audience. The bases, content and evidence in support of these counter-charges must be explored further to understand how these counter-charges relate back to the polemic of the speech and the charges brought against Stephen. This is done in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 5: EVIDENCE IN SUPPORT OF THE ALLEGATIONS BROUGHT BY STEPHEN

In this chapter the counter-charges brought by Stephen against the audience is examined in order to substantiate these charges. The goal is to determine whether these charges are supported by evidence contained in the passage. The focus of the study will be to gain a better understanding of how the counter-charges relate back to the rest of the speech (especially the polemics contained in the speech) and to the charges brought against Stephen. In the previous chapters it is established that the charges against Stephen are false and that Stephen is vindicated by Jesus in his trial. The trial against Stephen is thus concluded with a verdict by the ultimate Judge of “not guilty”.

Stephen has however made his own allegations against the audience and it needs to be established whether these are supported by evidence in order to conclude the “trial” against the audience. If this is not done, the counter-charges will be left “hanging in the air”, which will not be satisfactory for this study of the polemical nature of the speech. Several aspects of the previous chapters will help in this regard. The structure of the charges found in the previous chapter will assist in the analysis:

- (1) You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears!
  - (2) You are just like your fathers:
    - (3) You always resist the Holy Spirit.
    - (4) Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One.
    - (5) And now you have betrayed and murdered Him –
  - (6) You who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it.

As stated in chapter 4, propositions (1) & (6) deal with the disobedience of the audience while propositions (2) & (4) deal with the continued sin of their fathers by



the audience and propositions (3) & (5) deal with the rejection of God (i.e. the Holy Spirit in (3) and the Son in (5)). In this chapter, the propositions are however grouped differently to deal with them in a systematic manner according to the thrust of the counter-charges brought by Stephen, i.e. disobedience in resisting the Holy Spirit and disobedience in betraying and murdering the Righteous One, after which the stoning of Stephen by the audience is examined. These counter-charges have as basis the “idolatrous emphasis” placed on three aspects of Jewish life, i.e. the Law, the Temple and the Holy Land (Lioy 2010:79).

## **5.1 Disobedience by resisting the Holy Spirit**

The disobedience by resisting the Holy Spirit encompasses propositions (1) “You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears”, (2) “You are just like your fathers” and (3) “You always resist the Holy Spirit.” The meaning of propositions (1) and (2) are covered in the preceding chapters of this study and will therefore only be highlighted here: Proposition (1) refers to the disobedience of the audience, which, according to proposition (2) is a continuation of the disobedience of the audience’s forefathers. Stephen substantiates these aspects in the preceding narrative section of his speech (as explored in chapter 4). Proposition (3) extends the continued disobedience of Israel to the resisting of the Holy Spirit. Lioy (2010:80) thus states that Israel’s misplaced trust in the Law, Temple and Holy Land makes them unable to recognize the work of the Holy Spirit. This counter-charge of Stephen’s relates back to the charge against him of blasphemy by speaking against the Temple, for there is a link between Holy Spirit and the Temple that needs to be examined.

### **5.1.1 The Holy Spirit and the Temple**

As discussed in chapter 4 and evidenced by many examples of Scripture, the presence of God comes first (Clowney 1973: n. p.). This is seen in the fact that God first appeared to Abraham and Jacob before they built their altars (Gen 28:16). God also first appeared to Moses in the burning bush before the tabernacle was designed

and made. It was established in the previous chapters that the presence of God makes the place (where He appears) holy and where God's presence dwells is therefore His Temple. Heaven is called God's Temple because His presence dwells there (Ps 11:4; Habak 2:20; cf. Hodge 1978:546) and Jesus' body is referred to as a Temple because of God's presence; for "in him dwelt the fullness of the Godhead" (Hodge 1978:546; John 2:19). Further evidence that God's presence makes the place holy is the fact that the glorification of Jesus took place outside of the Jewish Temple (Clowney 1973: n.p.; cf. Matt 17:1-2). God's presence at the glorification of Jesus is evident from His words spoken at the time and God's permanent presence with Jesus was already established in chapter 4 where it was established that Jesus rules at the right hand of God (cf. Ps 110:1, 2). Further evidence of God's presence with Jesus on earth is found in the anointing of Jesus with the Spirit of God (Isa 11:2ff; 61:1-3; cf. Clowney 1973: n.p.; Lioy 2010:87). Jesus furthermore referred to His body as a "house not made of hands" (Clowney 1973:n. p.) and proclaimed that He was greater than the Temple (Matt 12:6). He also referred to His body as the Temple, which He restored in three days and which relates to the empty tomb (Jn 2:19) (Clowney 1973, n.p.) Thus, whereas the previous Old Testament notion was "Jerusalem and its temple as the focal point for God's holy presence and redemptive activity" the current New Testament position is that "the latter is centred in the risen Lord and His spiritual body" (Lioy 2010:87).

Scripture also refers to Jesus as the capstone (Matt 21:42) and thus His resurrection placed the capstone in place, completing the Temple (Clowney 1973: n.p.). This refers not to Jesus' body as the Temple but another Temple, which is the Temple that Jesus builds in His followers. The Temple of Israel symbolized God dwelling among His people and a place for them to gather and worship Him (Clowney 1973: n. p.). Jesus built the Temple in Himself as He actualized the saving presence of God and also in His people as He gathers them to Himself (Clowney 1973: n. p.). Jesus expressed this to Peter in Matt 16:18, where He said that those who "rest upon the apostolic foundation" of Jesus as Lord and Saviour would become part of the new Temple of the people of God (Clowney 1973:n. p.). The "building" is erected on the foundation of Jesus Christ and becomes a meeting place for man and God

(Barrett 1971:90). The building is not made of brick and mortar but of the “living stones” of the Temple of God, i.e. believers (1 Cor 16; 1 Pet 2:5; Barrett 1971:90). Jesus paid the price for sin by becoming the sacrificial Lamb once for all (Heb 10:10). Thus Jesus fulfils the Temple as He is the Temple (Clowney 1973: n.p.). True worship is thus not centred on the Temple built by human hands, but on the divinely built Temple – Jesus. This status is then also “transferred to believers through the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit” (Lloy 2010:88). Stephen’s audience failed to understand the significance of this as they focused completely on the Temple built with human hands, which was an incomplete religion as the Ark, which was necessary for the atonement of sin as the mercy seat of God, was absent from the Temple.

The one who dwells in the Temple (which is each believer, every separate church and well as the church as a whole) is the Holy Spirit (Grosheide 1976: 88; Hodge 1978:59; Morris 1983:103). As evidenced by Stephen’s vision, God the Father dwells in the heavens and Jesus Christ is at His right hand; therefore it is neither the Father nor Christ who dwells in Christians, but rather the Holy Spirit as representative of Christ (Boles 1975:207). Thus Boles (1975:207) states “The Holy Spirit represents God and Christ on earth. When the Holy Spirit dwells in Christians, God and Christ dwell in them.” The saints are therefore the Temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19, Eph 2:21-22). The word *ναός* used in 2 Cor 3:16 for Temple denotes the sanctuary or shrine (as opposed to the word *ἱερόν* denoting the entire precincts), which “points to the very presence of God” (Morris 1983:69, 103; cf. Grosheide 1976: 88). The Holy Spirit indwells them (1 Cor 3:16, Eph 2:22) and they are to be pure (1 Cor 6:17) as God rejects a defiled Temple (Boles 1975:204). Anyone who defiles or damages the Temple (Church) would face God’s retribution (1 Cor 3:17; Lloy 2010:92).

Any sin against the members of the Church is sin against the Church and against the Holy Spirit (Boles 1975:167). The Church (as the Temple) is holy and dedicated to God and must therefore be kept pure to be fit for His presence (Tasker 1983a:99). God dwells in them, and walks in them (2 Cor 6:16). This Temple of God consists of the “whole company of Christian believers” (Tasker 1983a:99; cf Boles 1975:205).

Conversely, every believer's body is also the Temple of the Holy Spirit (Boles 1975:205; Hodge 1978:546; Morris 1983:103; Lioy 2010:91) (1 Cor 3:16; Rom 8:10, 11). The words employed in 1 Cor 6:19 refer to a singular body, indicating that each individual believer is a Temple of the Holy Spirit in which God dwells and thus the believer belongs to God and not to himself (Barrett 1971: 151; Grosheide 1976:151-152; Morris 1983:103). The believer is sacred as he is "set apart to worship and serve God exclusively" (Lioy 2010:92). The prerequisite is however obedience (Boles 1975:206), "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him" (John 14:19 NIV; cf. Hodge 1978:546). Paul summarizes the above discussion adequately when he states that the people of Jesus are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ Himself being the Chief Cornerstone; in whom all the building fitly framed together grows unto a holy Temple in the Lord and in whom they are also built together for habitation of God through the Holy Spirit (Eph 2:20-22).

### **5.1.2 The work of the Holy Spirit**

Jesus said He would request the Father to send the Holy Spirit to indwell Christians (John 14:16) and that the work of the Holy Spirit would be:

- 1) To abide in Christians forever (John 14:16);
- 2) To teach Christians (John 14:26);
- 3) To testify of Jesus (John 15:26); and
- 4) To convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:8).

Point no (4) needs further elaboration. The word "convict" indicates that the matter in dispute is placed in clear light before the other party so that "it must be seen and acknowledged as truth" (Westcott 1958:228). Therefore, if the other party rejects the matter in dispute, he rejects it "with his eyes open and at his peril" (Westcott 1958:228). The mission of the Holy Spirit is to take of Christ's things and declare them to others (Boles 1975:136; John 16:14). The Holy Spirit would in this way guide the disciples (in their speaking and writing) in telling others what Christ had taught them (1 Pet 1:12; 2 Pet 2:21; Boles 1975:136). Thus, the witness of the Spirit and the witness of Christians are in fact one (Hendriksen 1954:324; Tasker 1983b:179).

The result of this work of the Holy Spirit is either conversion or hardening; nevertheless, the Holy Spirit will have exposed the world's sinfulness, lack of righteousness and standing under judgment (Hendriksen 1954:325; Westcott 1958:228).

Jesus elaborated on the work of the Holy Spirit in convicting the world as follows:

- He will convict the world of sin, because they did not believe in Jesus (Joh 16:9). This means that the Holy Spirit will expose the desire of men to live their lives in self-centered independence, renouncing any allegiance to Jesus (Tasker 1983b:179). Some will repent and turn to Christ for salvation whilst others will harden their hearts and resist (Hendriksen 1954:325); either way the sinfulness of man is exposed (Westcott 1958:229).
- He will convict the world of righteousness, because Jesus went to the Father and is seen no more (Joh 16:10). In this instance the Holy Spirit will testify that all Jesus said and did was right because Jesus was vindicated by returning to the right-hand side of the Father (Tasker 1983b:180; Torrey 1974:77). Thus the world viewed Him as an evil-doer while the opposite was true, He is the Righteous One (Acts 7:52; Hendriksen 1954:326; Westcott 1958:229)
- He will convict the world of judgment, because the prince of the world has been judged (Joh 16:11). The Holy Spirit makes it clear that judgment exists because the prince of this world already stands condemned. Thus the judgment of the cross was not on Jesus but upon the devil (Tasker 1983b:180; Torrey 1974:78). This judgment will be made evident at the end of the age when the devil is cast into the lake of fire and brimstone (John 20:12; Hendriksen 1954:326). The world therefore stands convicted when it aligns itself with Satan in the condemnation of Jesus (Hendriksen 1954:326).

Jesus' promise of the Holy Spirit was fulfilled when He came at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4) and God started to dwell among His people (Lioy 2010:77), making them holy (because of God's presence). The disciples (excluding Judas Iscariot) and Jesus' relatives were gathered in an upper room for prayer when the Holy Spirit came upon them (Acts 2:1; Lioy 2010:77). They could both see the Holy Spirit's arrival in the

tongues of fire and hear the Holy Spirit's arrival in the sound of wind (Boles 1975:142; Lioy 2010:78). In this way they were filled with the Holy Spirit and the "permanent, abiding presence of the Spirit within each believer made them individually and collectively the Temple of the Lord" (Lioy 2010:77; Acts 2:4). God's presence became more "powerful and personal" among the followers of Jesus than ever before in history (Lioy 2010:78). From the preceding discussion it is clear that not everyone will accept the testimony of the Spirit and Stephen's charge against the audience makes is evidence of the their resistance of the Holy Spirit. The consequences of this resistance therefore need to be explored.

### **5.1.3 The consequences of resisting the Holy Spirit**

The apostle John refers to a sin unto death, which he differentiates from sin not unto death (1 John 5:16, 17). Stott (1983:187-189) analyses three suggested possibilities for this "sin unto death"; i.e.:

- 1) A specific sin (such as one of the seven deadly sins); or
- 2) The apostasy of Christians; or
- 3) The blasphemy of the Holy Spirit.

He argues convincingly that there is no Biblical support for the first two suggested possibilities and accepts that the sin unto death is the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, which he states is the "open-eyed rejection of known truth". This sin therefore consists of the rejection of the Holy Spirit's testimony about Jesus the Messiah; thus blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Boles 1975:159; Palmer 1964:165). The aforementioned "open-eyed rejection of known truth" is expounded by Palmer (1964:166), who states that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is "not the usual reasoned denial of Christ and of God in general", but is rather committed by a non-Christian in whom the Holy Spirit has been working in a non-saving way. According to Palmer (1964:169-171), Hebrews 6:4, 5 gives the best description of the blasphemer and his sin, where this person has the following attributes:

- 1) The sinner is enlightened to understand the spiritual truths but without the regenerating and saving work of the Holy Spirit. Thus the Pharisees were enlightened regarding the divinity of Christ when He healed a man by exorcizing

a demon; however they attributed the power to Beelzebub. Many such miracles were of course performed by Jesus on various occasions, revealing the Godhead of Christ, yet were ignored by Stephen's audience.

- 2) The sinner has tasted the heavenly gift of the life and work of Christ. Stephen's audience had seen Christ, seen Him work and heard Him teach, yet they killed Him (as discussed below).
- 3) The sinner has experienced the work and influence of the Holy Spirit, but has not been indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Matt 7:22). Stephen's audience had clearly experienced this or Stephen would not have accused them of resisting the Holy Spirit.
- 4) The sinner tasted the good Word of God, like the seed that fell on rocky ground it was received with joy, but when pressure comes the sinner stumbles (Mark 4:16 & 17). Stephen debated the Word of God with members of the audience (Acts 6:10) and preached the Word of God to them in his speech (Acts 7), yet they would not listen.
- 5) The sinner tasted the powers of the age to come, which refers to the wonders and miracles Stephen performed among the people and members of his audience (Acts 6:8).
- 6) The sinner falls away by renouncing Christ in spite of the abovementioned lucid knowledge and experience. In the case of Stephen's audience, the renouncing of Christ was manifested in killing Him (Acts 7:52).

Jesus classed the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit as the unforgivable sin – although He did not call it this (Matt 12:32; Mark 3:29; Luke 12:10; Palmer 1964:166). This sin consists of speaking against the “manifest activity of God” (France 1985:210). It is a deliberate and irreversible hardening against God by someone who has seen the truth (France 1985:211; Tasker 1983c:128) and thus leads the sinner “into a state of incorrigible moral and spiritual obtuseness, because he has wilfully sinned against his own conscience” (Scott 1983:189). Boles (1975:164) suggests that, “One could blaspheme God, and repent of it and accept Christ; one could reject Christ during his dispensation, and accept the teachings of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost or thereafter (cf. Acts 2:37-39). However, if one rejects or rejected the Holy Spirit, there is no

other dispensation.” Thus once the Spirit is rejected, salvation is impossible because of “God’s abandoning the sinner to his own sins” (Palmer 1964:171; cf. Rom 1:24). Man is so corrupted that leaving him to his own devices is to ensure that salvation is impossible (Palmer 1964:171; Titus 1:15).

Boles (1975:164) thus views blasphemy against the Holy Spirit as the “malignant, persistent, wilful rejection of the Holy Spirit.” He however does not find that Stephen’s audience committed the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, but rather the sin of resisting the Holy Spirit (Boles 1975:166). In his view the word “resist” used here derives from the Greek *antiptete*, which is a word meaning “to fall against or upon (*anti*, against, *piptō*, to fall), then, to strive against, resist,” (Vine 1940:286). This implies that the Holy Spirit had been “working in their hearts in some way” (Parker 1964:34). Boles (1975:166) is of the view that Stephen uses it here to imply “active resistance” (emphasis original), which led Stephen’s hearers to commit a “great crime” in killing Stephen, but “this sin (of resisting the Holy Spirit) may not take on the malignant features of blasphemy.” Boles (1975:167) goes on to say that the sin of resisting the Holy Spirit “causes one to reject the truth, and may cause one to reject the final opportunity of salvation.”

It must however be said that it is unclear what the difference is between the sins of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit and resisting the Holy Spirit as propounded by Boles (1975:164-167) above. If one considers that Stephen accuses the audience of *always* resisting the Holy Spirit (emphasis mine) and that Stephen’s message is finally rejected by killing him, coupled with the fact that Stephen’s message is at the same time the message of the Holy Spirit (as pointed out above) and that in killing him they destroyed the Temple of the Holy Spirit (discussed above), it is difficult to see how this sin is not blasphemy against the Holy Spirit as propounded by Stott (1983:187-189) and discussed previously. The fact that they testified falsely against Stephen also exacerbates the sin of blasphemy (as discussed in detail in chapter 2).

Stephen’s audience had clearly on many occasions seen the Son of God perform miracles and heard Him teach as no-one they had heard before, yet they betrayed



and murdered Him. Now despite the witness of Stephen and the Holy Spirit they still refused to accept and obey the message (in contradistinction with Peter's audience in Acts 2:37) and killed Stephen, Jesus' true witness. This is clearly committing blasphemy against the Holy Spirit as discussed above. An examination of the accusation that they betrayed and murdered the Righteous One, Jesus, must however also be conducted.

## **5.2 Disobedience by betraying and murdering the Righteous One**

The disobedience by betraying and murdering the Righteous One encompasses propositions (4) "Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One", (5) "And now you have betrayed and murdered him" and (6) "You who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it." Proposition (4) proclaims the continued disobedience of Israel, which was explored in the preceding part of Stephen's speech (see chapter 4). In the past Israel killed the messengers whom God sent to proclaim the coming of Jesus – the Prophet whom Moses himself had also predicted (as discussed in chapter 4). Stephen builds on the preceding part of the speech by showing that the disobedience of Israel continues in the audience. Due to their disobedience and their misplaced trust in the Law, Temple and Holy Land, they were unable to recognize that Jesus was God living among them and schemed with the Roman authorities to kill Him, just as Israel in the past killed the messengers whom God had sent (Lioy 2010:80). This furthermore relates back to the charge of blasphemy against Stephen for speaking against the Law. Proposition (5) makes it clear that they, who claimed to have a high regard for the Law (as seen in the charges against Stephen), have not obeyed the Law just as their forefathers had not obeyed it. In order to understand this charge the link between Jesus and the Law needs to be examined.

### 5.2.1 Jesus and the law

Jesus did not come to destroy the Law but to fulfil it and thus brought to life the very principles and relations expressed therein (Matt 5:17). The Law demanded total obedience from man (Bruce 1979:53), but total obedience to the Law is impossible for mankind due to man's sinful state (Rom 3:23). The Law promises life to those who keep it perfectly. The problem is however that man does not keep it perfectly (Bruce 1979:54). The only exception to this is Jesus Christ, who kept the Law perfectly (Bruce 1979:54; 2 Cor 5:21). During His entire life on earth, Jesus remained subject to the law (Lioy 2007:21; Gal 4:4). Jesus also taught and expounded upon the Law to those who would listen (Lioy 2007:21; cf. Matt 5:21-48). Thus Jesus explained the true meaning and purpose of the Law (Lioy 2007:21). Jesus' polemic was aimed against the interpretation of the Law by the Pharisees and Scribes, because Jesus had the authority to promulgate Torah (Suggs 1970:107). On the other hand, the law promises cursing and death to those who disobey it (Rom 2:12; 6:23; Bruce 1979:55). Thus Paul writes that Christ took the curse of the Law upon Himself so that others might be released from it (Deut 21:23; Gal 3:13; Bruce 1979:54; Lioy 2007:48), which is based on faith in the grace of Christ rather than merit for observing the Law (Bruce 1979:55; Lioy 2007:48).

Jesus kept the Law perfectly by always remaining subject to it and fulfilling it (Lioy 2007:48). He fulfilled it by "carrying out its ethical injunctions, showing forth its true spiritual meaning, and bringing to completion all that it stood for prophetically" (Lioy 2007:48). It is this work that the whole of the Old Testament era and its "luminaries" anticipated and prepared for (Lioy 2007:73). In his speech, Stephen points out that these were the prophets that were killed by the audience's forefathers, whose actions the audience continued when they killed the very One whom the prophets spoke about – Jesus Christ (the Righteous One). Stephen furthermore states that Moses received the Law to pass on to Israel (Acts 7:38) and that Moses also prophesied the coming of Jesus (Acts 7:37). The Jews revered their "famed lawgiver and leader of their ancestors in the wilderness" (Lioy 2007:136). Jesus is however greater than the famous personalities of the Old Testament (John 4:12-14; Lioy

2007:107; 170). Thus Jesus was the “embodiment of the Torah, about whom Moses wrote” (Lioy 2007:136). The Law called for a “quintessential sacrifice”, which Jesus fulfilled as the Lamb of God and is therefore the “realization of the Torah’s types, prophecies, and expectations” (Lioy 2007:73). Jesus was the sacrifice once and for all so no more sacrifice for sin is necessary or possible (Heb 10:10, 12, 14, 18, 26). Jesus’ authority therefore over-ruled the authority of the law (Pancaro 1975:492)

The Law pointed to Jesus in various ways. Firstly, the Law pointed to Jesus as Lord of the Sabbath (Jn 5:17; 7:21-24; Pancaro 1975:508). The circumcision prescribed by Moses was performed on the Sabbath in order not to break the Law. The Sabbath work of Jesus was therefore a fulfilment of the Law (Pancaro 1975:508). Secondly, the Law pointed to Jesus being the Son of God, which was supported by the miracles of Jesus (Jn 10:34-36; Pancaro 1975:508). Thirdly, the teachings of Jesus was in total agreement to the Law in two ways: (1) Moses would condemn those who did not believe that Jesus was the coming Prophet to whom he pointed (Jn 5:45-47; Pancaro 1975:508; see chapter 2); (2) the requirement of two witnesses were fulfilled by the Father witnessing with the Son (Jn 8:12-20; Pancaro 1975:509; see chapter 2). Fourthly, the law “demanded” the death of Jesus as its fulfilment (Jn 11:49-52; Pancaro 1975:509). Jesus is therefore the Divine Incarnate Torah as is made clear in John 1:1, where John refers to Jesus as “eternally pre-existent” (Lioy 2007:26). Thus, as pointed out in previous chapters, Jesus is “Creator, Sustainer, Ruler, and Judge of the universe” (Lioy 2007:26) and He came to perform specific work.

### **5.2.2 The work of Jesus**

John 1:14 states, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.” The word for “made his dwelling” is the Greek *skēnōō* which is literally translated “tabernacled” (Lioy 2007:27; Vine 1939a:345). This refers back to the “shrine in the wilderness wherein the Lord displayed His glory among the Israelites” which Stephen also mentions in his speech (Lioy 2007:27). Jesus’ glory was displayed at His transfiguration (Matt 17:1-13) but more so in His death, resurrection and ascension

(Lioy 2007:27; cf. John 7:39; 12:23, 28; 13:31-32; 17:1, 4-5). Previously, God “made his mercy and compassion known through an intermediary such as Moses” (Lioy 2007:28; cf. Exod 33:18-19; 34:6-7). Now, however, the mercy and compassion of God found their “full and final expression” in Jesus (Lioy 2007:28; cf. John 14:6; Eph 2:8). Stephen’s audience failed to recognise this and held on to Moses instead of acknowledging Jesus.

The Law found fulfilment in the death and resurrection of Christ (Pancaro 1975: 510). This was not because the Law condemned Jesus, for “the Law is impotent to condemn Jesus”, but rather through the will of the Father (Pancaro 1975:510). Jesus’ “apologia” was furthermore totally based on the Law (Pancaro 1975:511). Jesus is the “incarnation of the divine Torah” and as such fulfilled everything God had spoken (Lioy 2007:10). “In this way, the Saviour brought to pass the spiritual reality foreshadowed by the ceremonial laws, thus rendering them obsolete and outdated” (Lioy 2007:22; cf. Warfield 1950:392; Heb 8:13). The Jewish theology is therefore “re-read” in the light of Jesus’ death, resurrection and ascension (Lioy 2007:8). The ceremonial law merely pointed to the ultimate sacrifice, the Lamb of God, whose death and resurrection “rendered powerless the law’s ability to condemn those trusting in Him” (Lioy 2007:22). Christianity therefore “came to proclaim the real sacrifice for sin which God had provided in order to supersede all the poor fumbling efforts which men had made and were making to provide a sacrifice for sin for themselves” (Warfield 1950:426).

Jesus stated that He did not come “to abolish the Law and the Prophets” but rather “to fulfil them” (Matt 5:17). Thus Jesus “did not seek to annul, repeal, do away with, or make invalid the Mosaic legal code”, but rather to correct the views and interpretation of the Law (Lioy 2007: 22-23). Lioy (2007:24) states that Jesus fulfilled the Law in the following three ways:

- 1) By carrying out its ethical injunctions;
- 2) By showing forth its true spiritual meaning; and
- 3) By bringing all that it stood for prophetically to completion.

Thus Jesus obeyed the Law “perfectly, thoroughly, and absolutely” (Lioy 2007:24). Jesus is therefore the culmination (“that is the destination, goal, outcome, and fulfilment”) of the Law and “all its types and prophecies are realized in Him” (Lioy 2007:35; Matt 5:17; Heb 1:1, 2) and also “the final fulfilment of the promises of God’s redemptive covenant” (Letham 1993:46).

Letham (1993:46) furthermore states that the promises of God’s redemptive promises are fulfilled in three ways, which, for the purpose of this study, are relevant to Stephen’s speech. Firstly, the “threefold promise” to Abraham was only completely fulfilled in Christ. This “threefold promise” included; (1) The promise to Abraham of possession of land (Gen 12:7; 13:14-17; 15:18-21; 17:8); (2) The promise of a great nation, with Abraham as ancestor (Gen 12:2; 13:16; 17:4-6; 22:15-18); and (3) The promise of Abraham’s seed blessing all the nations of the earth (Gen 12:3; 22:18). Stephen made the point that Abraham had received “not even a foot of ground” (Acts 7:5 NIV). The inheritance of Abraham was fulfilled in what “God gives to the church in Christ” (Letham 1993:46; 1 Cor 6:9; Eph 1:14; 5:5; Col 1:12; 3:24; Heb 9:15; 1 Pet 1:4). The promise of a great nation “while being realized in Israel, was hardly thereby exhausted”, but was “preparatory to the coming of Christ” (Letham 1993:46). There is none greater than Christ (Phil 3:9, 10), who is head of the Church (Eph 5:23). The blessing of all the nations on earth was fulfilled in Jesus’ “extension of redemption to the Gentiles” (Letham 1993:47; Gal 3:16).

Secondly, the redemptive promises made to Moses pointed to Christ (Letham 1993:47), with Christ being “found worthy of greater honor than Moses” (Heb 3:3 NIV) and which Stephen alerted his audience to (Acts 7:37). The offering of sacrifices for the forgiveness of sin pointed to the ultimate sacrifice of Christ, the Lamb of God (Warfield 1950:392). Thus the law defined sin and exposed man’s sin every time the sacrifices were made. The continual use of these sacrifices also revealed the repetitiveness of man’s sin (Letham 1993:47). An ultimate sacrifice was therefore needed to pay for man’s sin once for all (Letham 1993:47; Warfield 1950:391; Heb 10:5-10). Thirdly, the promise to David of a son who would reign forever was never realised in any of the Kings of Israel or Judah but only in Christ

(Letham 1993:47; Luke 1:32, 33). Similarly, Stephen's referral to David's desire to provide a dwelling place for God (Acts 7:46) was ultimately fulfilled in Jesus, who was God dwelling among the people (Is 7:13-14; Matt 1:23; John 1:14). Jesus also made it possible for God to continue dwelling among His people by the Holy Spirit indwelling the saints (see discussion above).

Jesus alone "fully satisfied the payment for sin required by the law" (Lioy 2007:24). The teachers of the Law believed that an outward compliance with the Law ensured a right relationship with God (Lioy 2007:25). Man's sinful nature however makes this impossible (Lioy 2007:25; Rom 7:7-25) and Stephen highlighted this failure of the forefathers to keep the Law in his speech covering the history of Israel. "Only those who relied on God – completely and exclusively – were admitted to the divine kingdom" (Lioy 2010:25). Jesus' death was therefore a "representative sacrifice" for many as "Jesus on the Cross offers an expiatory sacrifice for the sin of men against the holy God" (Hunter 1950:100). This however implies that man on his part has to accept this "representative sacrifice" by faith and certain consequences flow from resisting Jesus.

### **5.2.3 Consequences of resisting Jesus**

Since Jesus is the fulfilment of the Law, those who reject Him reject the Law and also reject Moses through whom God gave the Law (Pancaro 1975:509). Furthermore, those who reject Jesus and His message do not do the will of God (John 7:17; Pancaro 1975:509) and they also do not do the work of God (John 6:29; Pancaro 1975:510). Jesus Himself pronounced doom for those who would not receive Him (Matt 23:38; Clowney 1973: n. p.). Thus because Stephen's audience (who had "received the law that was put into effect through angels") "betrayed and murdered" Jesus, they did not keep the Law given by Moses (John 7:19; Acts 7:52, 53; Pancaro 1975:509). Also, those who claimed to follow Moses but rejected what he had said about the Messiah placed themselves under God's judgment (Lioy 2007:12; John 5:45-47; 12:48). In fact, as pointed out in chapter 2, those who boast of the Law and yet fail to keep its basic precepts are accused of blasphemy in Rom

2:24 (Bromiley 1979:522) and Paul (who guarded the clothes of Stephen's executioners and thereby associated himself with the deed, showing his approval) states that he previously blasphemed (1 Tim 1:13) and tried to force the church to blaspheme (Acts 26:11) when he was persecuting the church as part of the Pharisaic party.

As Lioy 2007:33 states, those who like Stephen "trust in the Son and operate in the power of the Spirit are declared righteous" and "they live in such a way that they fully satisfy the requirements of the moral law." On the other hand, those who like Stephen's audience "reject the Messiah ... remain eternally condemned as sinners" (cf. Rom 9:30-32) and "their unregenerate status will never change as long as they insist on trying to get right with God by scrupulously keeping the law...." In the parable of the wicked tenants, Jesus also illustrated that they have no part in the Kingdom of God (Matt 21:43). As stated earlier, Jesus is the Capstone of the Temple of the Holy Spirit, the Church. In this parable He confirms that the "stone the builders rejected has become the capstone" (Matt 21:42 NIV). The parable is an allegory of Israel's history of "failure in its duty to God and the consequent danger" (France 1985:308; cf. Tasker 1983:204). Stephen's accusation that the audience's forefathers killed God's prophets (Acts 7:52) is established in this parable (cf. France 1985:308; Tasker 1983:204). The landowner's son in the parable clearly depicts Jesus and the tenants instinctively reject Him in their "unthinking greed" and France (1985:309) states that the rejection of God's sovereignty, and therefore of His Son, by His people is more a matter of 'gut reaction' than of reasoned policy. As stated above, Jesus' resurrection is His vindication (France 1985:309) and rejecting Him leads to exclusion from the "kingdom of God" (Matt 21:43 NIV). The use of "kingdom of God" (as opposed to "kingdom of Heaven") is more personal and indicates exclusion from the presence of God among His people (France 1985:310), for "the one who wants to receive the Father not only will but must receive the Son" (Cole 1989:259). Further evidence to support Stephen's counter-charges against the audience is found in the stoning of Stephen.

### 5.3 The stoning of Stephen

Like a skilful lawyer, Stephen managed to destroy the three pillars of Jewish faith (Law, Temple and Holy Land) and was thus branded a blasphemer and stoned (Lioy 2010: 80). As seen in the previous chapter, the vision Stephen sees of Jesus standing at the right hand of God has a double function. Firstly, Jesus is acting as Stephen's Advocate on the charges against him and pleads his case before God (Lioy 2010:80) (Lioy 2010:80); Secondly, Jesus acts as Judge (Lioy 2010:80). Stephen is thus acquitted and "welcomed into heaven" and although he is rejected by his audience he is honoured by Jesus (Lioy 2010:80). Thus Stephen follows the path of those leaders with whom he shared the special character traits (as discussed in chapter 3), i.e. Joseph, Moses and Jesus, by being rejected by Israel. The audience continues in this vein of their fathers by rejecting Stephen's message and killing him, just like their father had rejected the messages of the prophets and killed them (Acts 7:52). Jesus warned that some, like the audience, would murder Christians thinking that it was an act of worship acceptable to God (John 16:1; Tasker 1983b:15).

1 Cor 3:17 records that anyone who defiles the Temple of God shall himself be destroyed. As explored previously, as an individual believer Stephen was the Temple of the Holy Spirit, and stoning him is therefore a defilement of the Temple of God. While it is true that the word for defile here refers to corrupting the individual (Vine 1939:242) or "to bring into a worse state" (Hodge 1978:59), Hodge (1978:59) states that under the old dispensation the penalty for defiling the Temple was either death or expulsion (Lev 15:31; Num 19:20) and God is not less jealous of His spiritual Temple. It could therefore be argued that persecuting and killing the church (and individual members) carry equally harsh penalties, which is supported by Paul's view of himself as a blasphemer when he was persecuting the church (Act 26:11; 1 Tim 1:13). The stoning of Stephen by the audience therefore provides posthumous evidence for Stephen's counter-charges against his audience.



## 5.4 Conclusion

The goal of this chapter was to determine whether Stephen's counter-charges are supported by evidence contained in the passage and to gain a better understanding of how the counter-charges relate back to the rest of the speech (especially the polemics contained in the speech) and the charges brought against Stephen. Stephen's counter-charges were that the audience were guilty of resisting the Holy Spirit and betraying and murdering the Righteous One, Jesus (Acts 7:51-52). The discussion in this chapter makes it clear that these charges firstly relate to blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, which relates back to the similar charge against Stephen. In the charge against Stephen the accusation relates to the Temple built with human hands, while in the case of the audience, the charge relates to the divinely built Temple of the Holy Spirit – the Church, where every individual member, including Stephen, is a Temple of the Spirit. The counter-charge builds on the polemical material of the speech as the historical narrative provides the evidence of Israel's continued disobedience against God, which culminates in the audience's blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

Secondly the counter-charges relate to betraying and murdering Jesus, which relates back to the charge against Stephen for blasphemy against Moses and the Law. Jesus as Torah was the fulfilment of the Law and thus to reject Him is to reject the Law and Moses as giver of the Law. Earlier in this study it was noted that Bock (1998:36) states that speaking against God (blasphemy) was the equivalent of verbal murder. This act of blasphemy went even further than verbal murder where the audience actually physically murdered the Son of God. The preceding polemics of the speech provides evidence for this counter-charge as the forefathers persecuted and murdered the prophets of God, which again culminated in the audience where they killed the Son of God.

Thirdly, the stoning of Stephen provides posthumous evidence for the counter-charges of Stephen as his witness is in unison with the witness of the Holy Spirit. Killing him is the rejection the Holy Spirit and destruction of the Temple of the Holy

Spirit, which is to be kept holy. The persecution and killing of a witness of Christ is also seen as an act of blasphemy. The result of all the above mentioned acts of blasphemy by the audience is an everlasting state of sinfulness, damnation and exclusion from the kingdom (or presence) of God. Thus Jesus, in Stephen's vision of Him standing at the right side of God, fulfils the role of Judge (as discussed above in chapter 2) to pronounce His verdict on the counter-charges brought by Stephen against the audience.

## **CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION**

The findings of chapters 2 through 6 make it possible to answer the four key questions introduced in chapter 1. Also, the observations and conclusions drawn from these questions will make it possible to determine how the polemics of the speech builds on the rest of the speech to show that the charges against Stephen are false. A clear understanding of this relationship between the charges, polemics and the rest of the speech will furthermore indicate whether sufficient evidence exists to convict the hearers of the counter-charges brought against them

### **6.1 The clarity provided by the literary backdrop of the Old Testament litigation or trial motifs in the understanding of the polemics of the passage**

The analysis of the Old Testament litigation and trial motifs assists in the understanding of the polemics of Stephen's speech. There is an established relationship between the Old and New Testaments and both Testaments should be read together when studying a topic in order to gain a full and comprehensive understanding in the investigation of the matter (cf. 2 Tim 3:16). The whole Bible must therefore be seen as unified in theme and purpose, because the authors were inspired in their writings by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21). The Old Testament must therefore be read in the light of the New Testament; and the Old Testament is equally necessary to grasp the full significance of the New Testament. Jesus' use of the Old Testament also testifies to its unity with the New Testament. Jesus used the Old Testament in two ways, He either quoted it directly, or He alluded to it indirectly (Guthrie 1981:955). It is also clear that Jesus saw Himself as the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies. One can furthermore detect the continuity between the two Testaments by the many references that the authors of the New Testament made to the Old Testament. They also ascribed unqualified authority to the Old Testament, as they often based whole arguments on a single Scripture from the Old Testament.

The New Testament authors saw themselves as standing in continuity with the people who worshipped the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and whose literary expression is what they came to call the Old Testament. This continuity is underscored in the historical nature of Stephen's speech, which starts at the calling of Abraham.

Some aspects relevant to Stephen's speech and which lead to a better understanding of the polemical nature thereof come from the trial and litigation motifs found in the Old Testament. Firstly, the Old Testament establishes God as the sovereign Judge. The study shows that God has both the authority and the sovereignty to be the sovereign Judge. As Creator (and Owner) of the world and everything in it, the infinite and sovereign God exercises power and control over His creation. God therefore has the only authority to act as sovereign Judge over His creation (Joel 3:12). God is furthermore a Righteous Judge (Ps 98:9). His righteousness and justice are therefore intertwined with His role as Judge (Smith 1993:217). He therefore only commands what is right and good for those who obey (Ps 19:7-9) and can be trusted to make just and equitable decisions (Ps 9:12), because He knows the motifs of man's heart (1 Cor 4:5). Because of God's omniscience, He is in the best position to perceive and interpret evidence in making judgments. The New Testament however makes it clear that judgment is handed over to Jesus (Rev 1:13). Jesus therefore fulfils the roles of Ruler and Judge as evidenced by Stephen's vision of Him at the right hand of God, a position representing honour and reward.

Secondly, the Old Testament trial and litigation motifs help us understand the crime for which Stephen was charged, i.e. blasphemy. Blasphemy is founded in the third commandment (Ex 20:7) with the penalty being death by stoning (Lev 24:15, 16) after which the corpse was to be hung on a tree (or crucified – cf. Gal 3:13) for public display as the object of God's curse (Deut 21:22, 23). It therefore centred on the profane use of God's name (which signified His character) and was the rejection of His Mercy and Power. Blasphemy also included speaking against God's chosen leaders as it was seen as speaking against the wisdom of the God who chose these

leaders. As far as committing blasphemy by speaking against the Temple is concerned, the Jews viewed the Temple as holy as it was seen to be the dwelling place of God. Several passages however support the idea that the Temple has no intrinsic holiness of itself, but it is rather the presence of God that makes the place holy. God therefore transcends the Temple and He cannot be confined by it, or the rituals performed in it, or the persons in charge of administering the Temple or its rites. Thus warnings of the Temple being destroyed due to disobedience of the people do not equate to blasphemy as evidenced by Jeremiah's warning (Jer 26) and Jesus Himself predicting the destruction of the temple (Matt 24:2). The Jews also considered speaking against the customs of Moses as blasphemy. This was the oral tradition which was added to the written Law of God and enforced as God's Law. Jesus himself spoke against these traditions when they nullified the written Law of God. Jesus thus did not advocate any change in the Law, but rather perceptions of the Law. Thus speaking against this oral tradition of the religious leaders did not constitute blasphemy either.

Thirdly, the Old Testament trial and litigation motifs lead to a better understanding of the false witnesses who testified against Stephen. The giving of false testimony is prohibited by the ninth commandment (Ex 20:16) and false testimony was seen as a violation of God's covenant with His people. This included conspiring with others to testify falsely or even colouring one's testimony to suit one's own desires or personal prejudices (Ex 23:1-3). This is what the witnesses against Stephen did (Acts 6:13). The penalty for giving false testimony would in this case carry the death penalty as the charge of blasphemy against Stephen carried the death penalty (Deut 19:16-19). The conspiracy among them to have an innocent person (Stephen) convicted of a crime in order to meet their own desires was sufficient for falsehood and makes the conspirators guilty of blasphemy against God.

## **6.2 The structural relationship between the polemics of verses 51-53, the preceding verses of the speech and the charges against Stephen**

The study shows that while the speech could be viewed in several ways, there is no reason why it could not be both a defence of the charges brought against Stephen as well as an arraignment in the counter-charges brought by him. This view of the speech holds the advantage that the whole speech is taken into consideration without overemphasising certain parts thereof, while it also leads to unity in the speech and unity between the speech and its surrounding context (i.e. the charges against Stephen and the counter-charges against the audience). The study furthermore reveals that the structure of the speech can be analysed in a variety of ways, the two most dominant being a narrative structure (which focuses on the historical narration of the speech) or an architectonic structure (which focuses on the development of themes within the speech).

The narrative structure centres on a selective survey of Old Testament Jewish history, which leads to unity in the speech as the events are placed in chronological order. In each section, the polemical material increases, building up to the climax in vv 51-53, where Stephen moves from insinuation to direct attack. The analysis of the narrative structure of the speech was performed in accordance with the following three factors:

- 1) The content of each section, where each section contains a cohesive thematic content that can be delineated into a segment of the whole narration.
- 2) In each section the polemic of the speech also increases, building on the polemic of the previous section until the final climax in the last section of the speech, culminating in the rejection and execution of Stephen.
- 3) The outline is also in agreement with accusations brought against Stephen, where the various sections deal progressively with Stephen's defence of the accusations against him and the counter-accusations brought by him at the end.

The architectonic or thematic structure of the speech also has a polemical nature that increases throughout the speech and culminates at the end (Richard 1978:264). The golden thread through the speech is the relation between the charges brought against Stephen and the accusations made by him. The thematic structure consists of the following:

- The case for continued disobedience in the rejection of the leadership of Moses:
  - First the grounds for Moses' appointment by God is laid in Acts 7:2-19
  - Moses' appointment is revealed in Acts 7:20-39
  - The rejection of Moses is supported in Acts 7:25, 27, 35, 39, and 40.
- The case for continued disobedience in the refusal to worship God:
  - The fact that God appeared to Israel in other places than the Temple is revealed in Acts 7:2, 4, 6, 9, 30, 32, 33, 38, and 44.
  - The worshipping of idols by Israel is revealed in Acts 7: 40-41, 42, and 43.
  - The refusal to worship God in the correct manner is revealed in Acts 7: 44
  - The fact that God is not confined to the Temple is revealed in Acts 45-50
- The accusations of continued disobedience in the audience are contained in Acts 7:51-53.

All these conclusions have a direct bearing on the content analysis of Stephen's Speech, as evidenced by the data in the next section.

### **6.3 The relationship of the contents of the polemics contained in the various sections of the speech with the charges and counter-charges of the trial.**

The content analysis of polemics contained in each section of the speech revealed that it builds on the polemics of each preceding section to defend the charges brought against Stephen and substantiate the counter-charges brought by him. The analysis and discussion of each section was focused on the three factors discussed under 6.2 above as follows:

1) The cohesive thematic content of each section:

The analysis showed that the speech is a discourse on the history of Israel and Judaism wherein the history is viewed in its positive and negative aspects, both of which are polemical in nature (Richard 1979:263). Each section forms a cohesive unit wherein the positive/negative aspects of the history are juxtaposed. The overall message is that Israel has always rejected God's appointed leaders, which amounts to blasphemy, and the audience is continuing in this sin of their forefathers by having murdered Jesus, the Prophet foretold by Moses (which is at the same time a rejection of Moses).

2) The increase of polemic in each section until the final climax in the last section:

The building blocks of increasing polemic, which culminate in the rejection and execution of Stephen at the end, are highlighted in each section. The analysis reveals that the polemic in the speech is introduced gradually, building up during the speech to finally culminate in the direct counter-charges against the audience. The polemic moves from implied insinuations to direct accusations against the audience, which in turn are based on the implied insinuations of the previous sections. Without the foundation laid by the preceding part of the speech, the accusations would have no substance and would simply be empty slurs at the audience. Stephen's speech is thus not Law or Temple critical; but as Witherington (1998:275) puts it, "... it is people critical on the basis of the Law and the Prophets, and of a proper theology of God's presence and transcendence and so a proper theology of God's dwelling place."

3) The progression in each section in dealing with Stephen's defence of the charges against him as well as the counter-accusations brought by him at the end:

The analysis revealed that Stephen defends the charges brought against him in each section of the speech; not by directly refuting them but by showing reverence for the sovereignty and power of God in the lives of His people, which speaks against blasphemy. Thus the speech builds on the charges brought against Stephen by showing that it is not he, but the audience who are guilty of those very charges. The analysis of the narrative structure assists in drawing the above conclusions regarding the nature of the relationship between the speech and the charges brought against



Stephen, as well as with the counter-accusations brought by Stephen against his audience.

The analysis of the architectonic structure based on the themes of the speech is performed in accordance with the delimitation found in 6.2 above, i.e. the case of Israel's constant rejection of God's appointed leaders, especially Moses, and the case of their failure to be obedient in the worship of God. The first case acts as a defence against the charge of blasphemy related to the Law whilst the second case acts as a defence against the charge of blasphemy related to the Temple. These two cases then culminate in the counter-charges brought by Stephen, which is that the disobedience of Israel continues in the audience.

#### **6.4 The evidence in support of the counter-charges brought by Stephen**

Stephen's counter-charges are two-fold:

- 1) The audience's continued disobedience by resisting the Holy Spirit;
- 2) The audience's continued disobedience by betraying and murdering Jesus.

The examination revealed that Stephen's counter-charges are supported by evidence contained in the passage. Furthermore the counter-charges relate back to the rest of the speech (especially the polemics contained in the speech) and the charges brought against Stephen. Firstly, Stephen's counter-charge that the audience were guilty of resisting the Holy Spirit (i.e. blasphemy against the Holy Spirit) is connected to the charge against Stephen of blasphemy regarding the Temple. In the charge against Stephen the accusation is linked to the Temple built with human hands, while in the case of the audience, the charge relates to the divinely built Temple of the Holy Spirit. This Temple is the Church, where every individual member, including Stephen, is a Temple of the Spirit. The counter-charge builds on the polemical material of the speech as the historical narrative provides the evidence of Israel's continued disobedience against God, which continues in the audience's blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

Secondly the counter-charge of betraying and murdering Jesus relates to the charge against Stephen for blasphemy against Moses and the Law. Jesus as Torah was the fulfilment of the Law and thus to reject Him is to reject the Law and Moses as giver of the Law. While Bock (1998:36) states that speaking against God (blasphemy) is the equivalent of verbal murder, this act of blasphemy went further than verbal murder because the audience literally murdered the Son of God. The preceding polemics of the speech provides evidence for this counter-charge as the forefathers persecuted and murdered the prophets of God, which again continued in the audience when they killed the Son of God.

Thirdly, the stoning of Stephen provides posthumous evidence for the counter-charges as his witness was in unison with the witness of the Holy Spirit. Killing him was the rejection the Holy Spirit and destruction of the Temple of the Holy Spirit (Stephen's body). The persecution and killing of a witness of Jesus is also seen as an act of blasphemy. The result of all the above mentioned acts of blasphemy by the audience is an everlasting state of sinfulness, damnation and exclusion from the kingdom (or presence) of God. Thus Jesus, in Stephen's vision of Him standing at the right side of God, fulfils His role of sovereign Judge to pronounce judgment on the counter-charges brought by Stephen against the audience, while fulfilling His role of Stephen's Advocate in his trial.

On the basis of the evidence presented, a definitive conclusion can be reached concerning the primary question raised in this work. The polemical nature of Stephen's speech serves to show that the charges against him are false and on the contrary, that the audience stand guilty of these charges. The charges of blasphemy against the Temple and the Law are committed by the audience in resisting the Holy Spirit, who is the witness of Christ, and betraying and murdering Jesus, who is the Temple and the Law.

## **6.5 Practical implications of the findings of the study for the church**

The study showed that Stephen's speech is a defence of the charges against him, thus refuting the opposing views held by many scholars. Furthermore, the study revealed that the speech was not a Lucan composition inserted into the story of the martyrdom of Stephen and irrelevant to its setting. On the contrary the speech builds on the charges against Stephen to show that they are false and also proves the counter-charges brought by Stephen against his audience. This again underlines the unity of the whole Bible especially with regards to the unity between the two Testaments, which was also explored in the study. This means that the Church should view the speech as relevant to its setting and original to Stephen as his defence and arraignment; supporting of his counter-charges.

The polemics in the speech are, contrary to some scholarly views, original to the speech and important to the function of the speech as both a defence and an arraignment. The study shows that the polemics in the speech increases exponentially to move from insinuation to direct attack at the invective of the speech. Thus the church should view the polemical material of the speech as an integral part of the passage, not to be discarded as some scholars suggest, but relevant as a defence of the charges brought against Stephen and proving the counter-charges brought by him. These views will influence the manner in which the Church preaches the Gospel if the Bible is viewed as the inerrant Word of God, unified in theme and purpose.

## **6.6 Areas for further research**

There are three major areas for future research worth mentioning. First, the Jewish views of honour and exaltation were briefly mentioned in the study with reference to Moses and Jesus. Jesus' position at the right hand of God and the Jewish view of Moses as an exalted figure had some relevance to the study but a comprehensive

analysis of these views was not performed. A study of the exalted position of Jesus at the right side of God as well as the exaltation of human figures, especially in the light of Matt 20:21-23, against the views held by Judaism will be an interesting study.

Secondly, some disagreement exists among scholars on whether the Sanhedrin had the authority to stone someone for committing blasphemy. This was not covered in depth in this study as it fell outside its scope. An examination of the authority of the Sanhedrin to enforce capital punishment could be done especially when comparing the trials of Jesus and Stephen. The Sanhedrin did not execute Jesus without the consent of the Roman government, but executed Stephen with no such prior consent. The legal position of the Sanhedrin could be explored to clarify the opposing views of their authority.

Thirdly, the work of the Holy Spirit and of Jesus was covered in this study. The relationship between the work of the Holy Spirit and the work of Jesus could be explored to clarify the Church's understanding of this in proclaiming the gospel. Of special interest would be their relationship to the Mosaic covenantal system, especially in the book of Hebrews, which highlights this relationship.

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