

# Acts 6:8–7:60 | Part 1



The availability of Christianity for you is not casual, it is the consequence of the crucifixion of Christ by His chosen people. The push of persecution was the path that brought you life.



Acts 6:8–15

And Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people.

But some men from what was called the Synagogue of the Freedmen, including both Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and some from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and argued with Stephen.

But they were unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking.

Then they secretly induced men to say, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God.”

And they stirred up the people, the elders and the scribes, and they came up to him and dragged him away and brought him before the Council.

They put forward false witnesses who said, “This man incessantly speaks against this holy place and the Law; for we have heard him say that this Nazarene, Jesus, will destroy this place and alter the customs which Moses handed down to us.”

And fixing their gaze on him, all who were sitting in the Council saw his face like the face of an angel.

I have some Jewish coworkers and we were all in Paris last week for a conference and we were at dinner one night and one of the questions raised was “what’s up with Easter? Like what’s it actually about?” Are you a Jew and you don’t know these things? This question, this division, this rift between Jews and Christians remains to this very day. The Jews rejection of their Messiah is a **bewildering** travesty the origins of which we’re getting a front row seat to here in Acts.



Romans **11:7–10**

7 What then? What Israel is seeking, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened;

8 just as it is written, “God gave them a spirit of stupor, Eyes to see not and ears to hear not, Down to this very day.”

9 And David says, “Let their table become a snare and a trap, And a stumbling block and a retribution to them.

10 “Let their eyes be darkened to see not, And bend their backs forever.”

It would seem the deacons of the previous verses are busy with a bit more than just serving tables. Stephen is performing great wonders and signs and arguing with the Synagogue of the Freedmen. His wisdom is so intense, accurate and irrefutable no one is able to cope with it. The odd but now obvious answer is for these debaters to employ more sinister means. And isn’t this the way it always goes? Christianity is reasonable. For all its miracles, spiritual beings and realms, Christianity is not foolish to a rational, reasonable mind. It is only the foolish and those darkened with the deceitfulness of sin who would dare dispute against it. That is most of the world though, so dispute they do, to their shame. The contrast is strong. Foolish, underhanded schemes against a glowing angel face of purity, innocence, sincerity and truth. An accusation has been made, how will Stephen respond? What will be his defense?



## Acts 7

Time flows on day by day, year by year but occasionally there are bold defined exclamation points defining the twists and turns of the otherwise continuous flow of history. Acts 7 is such a point and a uniquely subtle yet gravitationally significant bending of the entire course of time in a new mysterious direction. History had flowed in a consistent predictable fashion up until this fateful, infamous day. The Israelites vs the World. The cycles of falling away, enslavement and eventual restoration. Today the cycles end. Israel's rejection and crucifixion of Christ set in motion a catastrophic turn of events finding their culmination in the martyrdom of Stephen. This final rejection will finish the cut of Israel from the Vine leaving opportunity for a new people to be grafted in, the Gentiles.

The tree of Christianity is not American, it has deep, vibrant, Jewish roots. Reading Acts should give us tremendous pause as we consider the slender moments of history which allowed for us to stand here today as Gentile children of God.

Far too often we overlook the character of God and the depth of our own sinfulness. God owes the sinful, selfish, godless human race absolutely nothing. Any salvation is a gift and that gift was first and exclusively offered to ethnic Israel and it is only through their unimaginable, inexplicable, mind boggling rejection that we can enjoy any of His benefits. I'm a van der Hoeven, I have Dutch roots. We have a saying if you ain't Dutch you ain't much. In reality though if you aren't chosen you're broken. This is the fundamental yet all too often overlooked truth on the universe.

1. God makes choices
2. God chose to place special love on ethnic Israel
3. Israel chose to reject God
4. God chose to cut off Israel and graft in the Gentiles
5. God will choose to graft ethnic Israel back in



### Ephesians 3:1–10

1 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—  
 2 if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you;  
 3 that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief.  
 4 By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ,  
 5 which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit;  
 6 to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel,  
 7 of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to the working of His power.  
 8 To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ,  
 9 and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things;  
 10 so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.

Gentiles are not Jews, there was a blessing separation in this ethnic distinction. The great mystery of the gospel and New Testament church was the **cutting off** of the Jews and the **grafting in** of the Gentiles. You almost feel like you're sitting down with Paul face to face in a Panera's in Romans 11 as he, a Jew, speaks to you, a Gentile.



Romans **11:17–22**

17 But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree,  
18 do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you.  
19 You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in."  
20 Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear;  
21 for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either.  
22 Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off.

Bask in the kindness of God for cutting off the Jews for their own violent unbelief. Their violence has served to offer salvation to you. This narrative is the end of a fuse **exploding** the gospel in your direction. The violent **martyrdom** of Stephen paved the way for the messengers of eternal hope to arrive at the door of your **heart**.

Even as the rocks fly, bashing in Stephen's skull, the Jews are finally hurling away their own salvation and casting it out into the world. Out for you and me. Persecution driving out the message of redemption, forgiveness, the Holy Spirit flung out into the rest of the world. What a day, what a terrible, glorious day. Thank you Lord for the devastation of the persecution that brought us salvation. For the blood and sacrifice of the Christian martyrs which brought the gospel to my town, my home, my ears.

My deserved, doomed, unchosen destiny turned from death to life. Thank you Lord for such kindness.



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