STEPHEN, THE TEMPLE, AND EARLY CHRISTIAN ESCHATOLOGY

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SUMMARY

The place of Stephen in the development of early Christianity is a continuing controversy in scholarship. That he was an historical figure, a Greek speaking Christian Jew, can be affirmed. While due consideration must be given to the critical issues surrounding the speech attributed to Stephen in Acts 7, it can nonetheless be argued that this text essentially represents the Temple critical stance not only of Stephen himself, but of the early Christian movement in Jerusalem as a whole. Stephen's outspokenness incurred persecution on account of the political and religious climate in which he denounced the Temple, its cults, and its adherents. Stephen's death is best understood against the background of heightened eschatological tension as Palestinian Jews awaited the imposition of Caligula's statue in the Temple, and prepared to die in its defence, in 40 CE.

1 This paper reached its definitive form during a period as Scholar in Residence at the Tantur Ecumenical Institute for Theological Studies, Jerusalem, during June and July 2000. I would like to acknowledge the assistance of the Rector and staff of Tantur, in making my time there productive. I would also like to express appreciation to Professor J. J. Taylor, S.M., who read and commented on an earlier draft, and kindly gave me access to the proofs of Vol. II of Les Actes des deux Apôtres (Études bibliques n.s. 41, Paris, Gabalda, 2000).


INTRODUCTION

Stephen has long been interpreted as an enigmatic figure in the Acts narrative. Not only is his relationship to Judaism and to his fellow Christian Jews in Jerusalem a matter of dispute, but so also are the historical value and interpretation of the speech attributed to him by Luke in the scene which culminated in his death. An inquiry into the figure of Stephen which goes beyond a literary study of Acts is therefore founded upon a series of text and tradition critical uncertainties and contested historical probabilities. It is the aim of this paper to address some of these issues, in particular those which relate to Stephen's position regarding the Temple, within the broader context of early Christian eschatology.

I have argued previously that the clear testimony of the synoptic Gospels, in particular Matthew and Mark, that Jesus spoke of the destruction of the Temple, has not been sufficiently taken into account in reconstructing the attitude of the primitive Christian community in Jerusalem to that institution: for the first Christians the Temple was an institution under judgement, whose destruction had been prophesied by Jesus, and on account of which prophecy he had been put on trial for his life. The early Church must be
understood in continuity with Jesus regarding the Temple, and this includes not only the original disciples of Jesus in Jerusalem in Acts 1-5, but also the condemnation of the Temple attributed to Stephen in Acts 6-7.

**HISTORICITY**

While the historical existence of Stephen has been disputed, and the details of the narrative and speech in Acts 6-7 require rigorous critical scrutiny, the majority of scholars are nonetheless convinced that Stephen was an historical personage in early Christianity in Jerusalem, and that he died as a consequence of his activities as a Christian. Irrespective of the degree to which the Stephen account fits the narrative and theological tendency of Luke-Acts, his historical existence nonetheless remains a probability. Further details may be less clear, but this study will proceed on the basis that Stephen was an historical figure of whom account


3 H. J. Schoeps, *Theologie und Geschichte des Judentums* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1949) 441-44. The hypothesis that the position of James, brother of Jesus, are attributed to a fictional character, Stephen, has not found support in scholarship.


8 Hellenists.

9 Taylor, "Jerusalem"; pace, Esler, *Community* 140.

10 Theologie 441.


must be taken in reconstructing the development of early Christianity in Jerusalem.

**HELENNISTS AND HEBREWS**

Acts 6:1-6 relates dissension in the Jerusalem church concerning provision of food for widows. Two groups, Εβραῖοι and Ελληνιστεῖς, are identified. It is generally assumed that the Ελληνιστεῖς were Greek-speaking Jews, of Diaspora origin, who had been converted to Christianity, while Εβραῖοι designates the Aramaic speaking Christians, of Palestinian origin. Scholars have also tended to assume that the dispute over provision of food is a lukan device to conceal a deeper theological rift in the early Christian community. As Hill has quite forcefully demonstrated, there is no evidence of any ethnic or doctrinal division between these two groups. In particular, there is no reason to believe that the first Christians were divided in their attitude to the Temple and its cult, with Εβραῖοι affirmative and conforming and Ελληνιστεῖς hostile and non-conforming. Such a reconstruction would assume that the Ελληνιστεῖς were in closer continuity with Jesus than were the immediate circle of his disciples. While the thesis of Schneiders never won support in scholarship, the anti-cultic stance of the later Ebionites, and the disaffection of the Essenes and other Jewish movements of the period, is a salutary reminder that we should not assume that Torah-observing Christians were necessarily commit-
ted to the Temple and cult. Even if the Jerusalem church did
attract priests (Acts 6:7) and Levites (Acts 4:26), this does not imply
that it conformed with the Temple system and participated in the
cult, as many hereditary functionaries, such as the priests at Qumran,
had become alienated from the Temple by this period. 12 We should
therefore recognize the controversy which led to Stephen’s death as
concerning discord in the hellenistic synagogues, 13 and not within
early Christianity, regarding the Temple and cult. Stephen, therefore,
should not be seen as an isolated figure in early Christianity, 14 but
rather as a not untypical Greek speaking Christian Jew of the
early period, who fell victim to circumstances which must now
be reconstructed.

THE DATE OF STEPHEN’S DEATH

The date of Stephen’s death is an issue concerning which we
need to establish some degree of clarity if we are to locate him in
his context within early Christianity. The narrative of Acts is of
little if any help, as no timescale is provided in the first eleven
chapters, nor are Roman or Jewish officials identified who can be
externally dated. The most that can be argued, but by no means
conclusively, is that the events of these chapters preceded the reign
of Agrippa I (41-44 CE; Acts 12:1). 15 The events recorded in
chapters 1 to 5 do not require a lengthy period, and any assumptions
about how long it would have taken for the Church to attract
Greek-speaking converts, and calculating an earliest possible date
for Stephen and the Hellenist leadership on that basis, would be
arbitrary and inherently dubious.

Three approximate dates for Stephen’s death have been identified
in recent scholarship:

1: c. 31-34 CE. This date, within a few years of the foundation
of the Jerusalem church, is favoured particularly by those scholars

12 If John the Baptist is correctly identified as a priest (Luke 1: 5 implicit; cf.
G. Eickes, cited by Epiphanius, Haer. 30.13.6), he would provide a further example
close to the emergence of the Jesus movement. Cf. J. P. Meier, A Marginal Jew (New York:
13 Hill, Hellenists 75-101.
14 Pace, Schlabmann, Stephen.
15 Cf. Schwartz, Agrippa 71-73. His arguments for a somewhat later date for the
death of Stephen will be considered below.
Ananus of the ius gladii during an inter-reignum, to bring about the death of James the brother of Jesus in 62 CE, was to cost him the high priesthood (A.J. 20.200-203). Dating Stephen's death to c. 36-37 CE depends not only on the questionable assumption of the historicity of the account of the trial of Stephen before the Sanhedrin, an issue to which we shall return. This theory may be strengthened, however, by the cumulative weight of traditions dating Stephen's death to seven years after that of Jesus, assuming that Jesus was crucified in 30 CE. If, however, Jesus was crucified in 33 CE, then these same traditions would support the third hypothesis, that Stephen was killed in c. 40 CE.

3: c. 40 CE. The third hypothesis is that the death of Stephen is to be dated to the Caligula crisis of 40 CE, as argued by D. R. Schwartz and J. J. Taylor. The assumption, once again, is that there was a power vacuum in Judea, and that the high priest was accordingly able to exercise wider powers than normal. It could be argued further that, during this time of heightened tension, the Jerusalem populace were more defensive of the Temple than at other times, and that temple critique was no longer regarded as simply contentious but as blasphemous and treasonable. This last point is important, not least because it does not require that Stephen was killed at the conclusion of a regular judicial process, and therefore does not require either that the ius gladii had devolved legitimately to the high priest or that he had usurped it. The prevailing situation of social unrest and mounting tension in defence of the Temple would account for a situation in which lynching and mob activity could overtake or circumvent official procedures.

The date of Stephen's death cannot be established definitively on the basis of the information contained in Acts or of such external evidence as in available. The precise date postulated assume the historicity of the Sanhedrin trial, and, in the case of the earliest date, that Paul participated in the composition. The consensus that

Stephen belongs within the first decade of Christianity would seem entirely sound, but within that period there is as yet no basis for certainty. If we were to accept that Stephen represented a departure from the position of the primitive Christian community, this would pose something of a problem for reconstructing the development of early Christian thought. However, as there is no basis for positing a doctrinal schism between Hellenists and Hebrews, or for believing that the early Church entertained views on the Temple significantly at variance with those attributed to Stephen, the problem with which we are confronted is of rather a different nature. If Schwartz and Taylor are correct in locating Stephen's death in the context of the upsurge in Palestinian Jewish devotion to the Temple in the face of the threat posed by Caligula's intended desecration, then we have in Acts at least an indirect record of the impact on early Christianity of this tumultuous episode. This is a question to which we shall return.

The Acts Account of Stephen's Martyrdom

We need to give some consideration to the complex source critical issues surrounding the episode of Stephen's martyrdom in Acts 6:12-8:1. As the text stands it consists of a speech in Acts 7:2-53, and its narrative frame in 6:12-7:1 and 7:54-8:1. The latter speaks of a judicial process, in the context of which the speech functions as a defence. No sentence is passed on Stephen by the court before mob action overtakes the judicial process. But Stephen's stoning is nonetheless presented as a judicial execution, supervised by Saul. In addition to the historical question as to the process by which Stephen's death was brought about, we need to consider what sources Luke had available and redacted into his account. Most importantly, we need to consider whether the speech is a Lukan composition, or whether it is derived from one or more sources.

23 Schwartz, Agrippa 71-73, suggests that the dismissal of Simon Cantheras from the high priesthood by Agrippa I may have been similarly occasioned by his usurpation of the ius gladii in the case of Stephen.
24 See discussion by Rissner, Early Period 59-60.
27 Schreiermann, Stephen; Simon, Stephen, Pace, Hill, Hellenists.
28 Hill, Hellenists; Taylor, "Jerusalem".
29 Notwithstanding the discrepancies between the account in Acts and the (quite possibly anachronistic) prescriptions for conducting executions in m. Sanh. 6:1-3, the death of Stephen is nonetheless depicted as a judicial execution, with Saul an official, not a casual bystander. Cf. Haenchen, Acts 292-93.
and whether and to what extent any sources reflect, if not the actual words, then the theological stance of Stephen and those associated with him, and of other Christians of that period. 32

Sources

Luke-Acts belongs to an hellenistic Jewish tradition of historiography, 33 an extant contemporary representative of which is Josephus. Luke’s use of possible sources, and compositional method, should be understood in this light. It is clear that the Stephen pericope is composite, and that Luke’s creativity is apparent in the redaction. There is less clarity, however, on the extent to which Luke composed new material beyond redacting material from his sources into the Acts narrative. There is some degree of consensus that Luke has embedded a trial narrative, including Stephen’s speech, into a more original account of murder by a lynching mob. 34 The trial scene creates the narrative opportunity for the speech, which in turn serves to convey concisely several relevant theological motifs at the transitional point in the Acts narrative between the foundations of the church in Jerusalem and the dissemination of the Gospel further afield. 35

In the lukan redaction, the trial narrative is overshadowed by mob action in putting Stephen to death. While it can be argued that this is precisely what happened, that order in the court broke down and Stephen was lynched by the crowds, 36 the majority of scholars argue otherwise. While some maintain that the judicial process was followed to the end, 37 it is more widely believed that

Stephen died at the hands of a lynching mob in an hellenistic synagogue. 38 The court scene provides a context in which Stephen’s speech functions as a defence against the charges, or rather as a recapitulation of the charges he had brought against his non-Christian compatriots. 39

Given the elements of a formal trial narrative integrated with an account of a lynching, it would seem clear that Luke derived the account of Stephen from at least one source, and quite probably two, corresponding with the interwoven accounts of how Stephen met his death. 40 If there were only one source, this would presumably be an account of Stephen’s murder by lynching mob, as Luke’s clear intention in the narrative is to relate a judicial trial and execution. What we cannot know is what material available to him Luke did not use. Our reconstruction of Stephen can therefore only be incomplete and provisional.

While the interpretation of the speech as a purely lukan composition enjoys some support in scholarship, 41 the majority of scholars believe that Luke is transmitting received tradition. 42 Several scholars believe that this source originated in the church of Antioch, and is part of the same tradition as that preserved in Acts 11 and 13 concerning the origins of the Antiochene church and its mission to the gentiles. 43 This hypothesis may be supported by the anti-cultic but otherwise Torah-observant nature of the church of Antioch. 44

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33 Haenchen, Acts 274; Sterling, “Opening”.
36 Barrett, Acts 310-11; Sterling, “Opening”.
38 Cf. especially Sterling, “Opening”.
40 M. McLaren, Power 112; Wilson, Gentiles 137.
reflected in such documents as the Gospel of Matthew and the Didache which modern scholarship commonly locates in Antioch. However, such a stance was by no means unique to the church of Antioch, but was, so far as can be established, common to most if not all strands of Christianity which remained within a Jewish matrix during the first four centuries. We should hesitate, therefore, to associate the speech of Stephen with the tradition of the church in which Peter and Barnabas would appear to have been the major influences.

**Stephen’s Speech**

While the origins of the source/s used by Luke for Stephen’s speech must remain uncertain, there is nonetheless a not inconsiderable body of scholars who believe that the theology expressed in the speech is substantially that of the historical Stephen. This is not to argue that Stephen delivered the speech immediately before his death, but simply that it reflects the theological tendency he represented. Of those who believe that there are authentic Stephen traditions in the canonical speech, the principal exception would seem to be that some regard Acts 7:41-50 as a lukan creation, reflecting the situation following the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE. Why these verses should be a later accretion to the tradition, however, is far from clear. There is no unambiguous allusion to the events of 70 CE in any part of the text, and Temple critique in Palestinian Judaism did not originate after the fall of Jerusalem, and nor did expectations of its destruction (Tg. 1 Sam. 2:1-10,32; Tg. Isa. 5:1-7; 22:20; 28:1-13; Tg. Jer. 7:9; 23:11; T. Lev. 10:3; 14:1-15:3; I Enoch 90:28:29; 91:11-13; Sib. Or. 3:665; V. Proph. 10:10-11; 12:11; j. Sota 6:3; Lam. Rab. 1:5). There would therefore seem no reason why Christian texts referring unequivocally to the destruction of the Temple should be dated after 70 CE, and still less why Temple-critical texts which make no reference to the destruction of the sanctuary should be dated to that period. Furthermore, this is precisely the section in the speech which comes closest to addressing the charges laid against Stephen. This in itself would seem to suggest that this section is integral to Stephen’s speech, at least in its narrative context. It should also be noted that the reader of Luke-Acts is well aware that Jesus had proclaimed the destruction of the Temple (Luke 21:6; cf. 13:34-35), though not (from the text) that this had led to his death. That an early Christian figure such as Stephen had repeated what Jesus had said concerning the Temple would have been entirely plausible, and not at all remarkable, to the first readers and hearers of Luke-Acts. The identification of Jesus as the agent of destruction, however, would be a novelty to a hearer or reader dependent on the lukan tradition, unless Jesus’ death is understood as instrumental in the rending of the Temple veil, and therefore in the future destruction of the Temple itself, in Luke 23:45.

Particularly among scholars for whom Luke views the Temple as a place of unique significance and the locus par excellence for Christian preaching, Stephen’s speech is seen as at variance with Luke’s theology. However, this interpretation of Luke’s position on the Temple overlooks several aspects of his presentation and word usage. Luke sees the Temple as having ceased to function as a place of divine residence, and, after the angelophany to Zechariah (Luke 1:5-24), uses φησὶ only in contexts where divine residency in terrestrial sanctuaries is denied (Luke 23:45; Acts 17:24), and ultimately for pagan cultic artefacts (Acts 19:24). The Temple is never designated as φησὶ in Acts except by Stephen.


47 Scrivens, “Hellenistic Christianity” 183; Wilson, Gentiles 149.


and Paul's accusers (6:13; 21:28), which suggests that Luke does not identify unequivocally with the notion of its holiness. The divine presence, for Luke, is increasingly dispersed from Jerusalem, and manifested not in the Temple but in the Church empowered by the Holy Spirit. Stephen's repudiation of the Temple, to which we shall return, is therefore not as incompatible with Luke's theology as has often been claimed.

Although Stephen is charged with claiming that Jesus would destroy the Temple (Acts 6:14), the speech as it stands contains neither such a prediction nor any direct answer to a charge to that effect. Not only is there no explicit reference to the destruction of the Temple, but Jesus is never mentioned by name, but merely alluded to as ὁ δίκαιος in Acts 7:52. However, Luke is conspicuously reluctant to link the destruction of the Temple with Jesus, as can be illustrated by the omission from his Passion Narrative of the traditions contained in Mark 14:58; 15:29; and 15:38, which appear also in the corresponding passages in Matthew (26:61; 27:40). 55

Whether or not Stephen and his early Christian contemporaries envisaged that Jesus would be the agent of the destruction of the Temple must remain an open question. While Jesus clearly spoke of the destruction of the Temple (Mark 13:2; 14:58; 15:29), suggestions that he himself would bring about this destruction are not owned by any strand in the tradition (cf. John 2:19). 56 This does not exclude the possibility that, during the post-Easter period, the destruction of the Temple and other eschatological phenomena with which Jesus had not explicitly linked himself (cf. Luke 17:20-37) came to be associated with him. As we have noted previously, the markan eschatological discourse carefully separates the terrestrial convulsions from the appearance of the Son of Man (Mark 13:14-27). 57 This development in the tradition may have been brought about in reaction to the Caligula crisis and its aftermath (c. 40-41 CE). 58 This would reflect a concern of the

Palestinian Christians, and perhaps specifically those of Jerusalem, to distance themselves and Jesus from any role in the threatened destruction upon the Temple, without negating the judgement implied in the future destruction which Jesus had predicted. If the tradition of Jesus' eschatological teaching, including his prophecy of the destruction of the Temple, underwent such a transformation early in the second decade of the Church, then it would be entirely plausible that, during the earliest days of the Christian movement, at least some Christians believed that Jesus himself would bring about the destruction of the Temple. 59

STEPHEN AND THE THEOLOGY OF LUKE

The accusations brought against Stephen in the narrative frame are that he had blasphemed Moses and God (Acts 6:11), and spoken to ὁ τόπου τοῦ ὄγιου, clearly referring to the Temple, (6:13), saying that Jesus would destroy τὸν τόπον τοῦτον and change the traditions of Moses (6:13,14). Much of these allegations could have been extrapolated, however tendentiously, from the speech as it stands, but not that of proclaiming the destruction of the Temple by Jesus. Of crucial interest to scholars has been the charge of threatening the Temple is brought against Jesus in the high priest's court in Mark (14:58) and Matthew (26:61), but not in the trial narrative in Luke. It is widely argued that Luke deliberately transfers these charges from the trial of Jesus to that of Stephen. This is explained either in terms of a desire to avoid associating Jesus with the destruction of the Temple, or of locating reference to this event at the point in the narrative where the transition to the Gentile mission is imminent. 60 That the death of Stephen leads in the Acts narrative to the dispersion of some Christians from Jerusalem, and the dissemination of the gospel outside the land of Israel, and ultimately to gentiles, is clear (cf. Acts 11:19-30). This is clearly a dominant theme in Acts, but it does not explain why in Luke Jesus is not charged with threatening the Temple. This is

54 Cf. CONZELMANN, Acts 57; HAENCHEN, Acts 286.
59 TAYLOR, “Jerusalem”.
better explained in terms of the subordinate lukan agenda to dissociate Jesus from the destruction of the Temple.

A further point of discontinuity between the trial narrative of Jesus in Luke, when compared to that in Mark, and the trial of Stephen in Acts is that Stephen’s accusers are labelled μαθητοί (Acts 6:13; cf. ἀνευδοκούσαν Mark 14:56, 57). The significance of the omission of this labelling of Jesus’ accusers from Luke 22:66-71 may simply be a consequence of omission of the Temple charge, but the notion of falsity in Stephen’s accusers nonetheless requires consideration. It is far from clear that the testimony is described as false in the sense of untrue. μαθητοί have both ethical as well as factual connotations, and does not turn entirely on the factual accuracy of the statement in question. 61 I would suggest, therefore, that the witnesses are to be understood as false in the sense of being malicious and hostile, governed by falsehood rather than by truth. 62 It is the character of the witnesses, not the accuracy of their testimony, which draws the label. This does not mean either that Luke was affirmative of the Temple system, or that he is shy of attributing rejection of the Temple to Stephen. It is the identification of Jesus as the agent of the destruction of the Temple which Luke baulks, not only in the account of Stephen’s trial, but in that of Jesus too.

**STEPHEN AND THE TEMPLE**

It has been observed that Stephen’s speech is not a direct response to the charges brought against him in the narrative frame. So far as the Temple is concerned, however, Stephen says more to confirm than to refute the accusations. Notwithstanding that Stephen is in the first instance attacking his prosecutors rather than their institutions, 63 there can be no denying that the speech contains quite explicit repudiation of Solomon’s Temple and by extension its successor, that extended by and associated with Herod (7:44-48). 64 While it has been argued that Stephen did not link Jesus with his proclamation of judgment upon the Temple, 65 this would seem inherently implausible in that it disregards the strength of the traditions that Jesus himself had proclaimed the destruction of the Temple, 66 and assumes that the early Church, including Stephen, was oblivious to the circumstances of Jesus’ death. As has been discussed above, it is Luke, rather than Stephen, who avoids linking Jesus directly with the destruction of the Temple. It has also been argued that Stephen’s offence would have consisted not so much in proclaiming judgment on the Temple as in not promising restoration thereafter. 67 Before reaching any conclusions, however, we need to consider some aspects of the speech in greater detail.

A crucial issue concerns how the Temple is compared with the Tabernacle, and how Stephen envisages the cultic life of Israel during the wilderness period. The Tabernacle erected in the wilderness by Moses is acknowledged as ordained by God (Acts 7:44; cf. Exod 25:40). The notions of localised divine presence, and of encounter between humanity and God, would therefore at first sight seem to be affirmed. However, the Tabernacle was an essentially mobile sanctuary, and conferred no permanent sanctity, privilege, or centrality in the cosmos on any particular place. 68 Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that the construction of the Tabernacle was a part of the same dispensation as that which instituted or regularised the sacrificial cult according to the Pentateuchal narrative. 69 The citation of Amos 5:25-27 in Acts 7:42-43 is clearly in this context primarily a polemic against the idolatry of Israel in the wilderness, which their descendants are accused of continuing, rather than a denial that sacrifices were offered prior to the building of the Temple. 70 Stephen draws a link between the idolatry committed by Israel at

63 As argued by Hill, Hellenistics 75.
65 Wilson, Gentiles 134.
67 Henkel, Between 21-22.
69 Koester, Dwelling 84.
Sinai and the Temple cult as practised in Jerusalem at the time. This was the worship offered by Stephen’s accusers, and is therefore that which is condemned. This does not in itself constitute a total rejection of sacrificial worship, or of the hellenistic synagogue, and still less a prediction that the Temple would be destroyed. It is not possible to argue on this basis that Stephen “was opposed to all cultic activity as being contrary to the situation in Israel in the wilderness.” The reference to the golden calf, with its connotations of apostasy and idolatry, seriously qualifies any idealisation of Israel’s wilderness period. A motif of continuous disobedience to God is therefore at least as likely a reading as any contrast between the wilderness period exemplified by the Tabernacle and the subsequent history of Israel represented by the Temple.

While Stephen acknowledges the Tabernacle as having been built in obedience to God, as related in the Pentateuch, he regards Solomon’s building of the first Temple as epitomising Israel’s history of defiance of God. His objection to the Temple, however, goes beyond its having been built contrary to the will of God. Stephen rejects explicitly the notion of the Temple as the dwelling place of God (Acts 7:48-50). His use of ὁ θεός in Acts 7:47-49 is the only occurrence in Acts where the term refers to a sacred place as opposed to a domestic edifice. The designation not uncommon in the biblical tradition of the Temple as, at least symbolically, God’s house, is explicitly denied by Stephen on the only occasion when the concept is employed in Acts. Similarly, Luke’s usage of ναός is coupled with unequivocal repudiation of the notion of divine residence in human sanctuaries; in other words the concept is employed only where its significance is denied. It is this ideology of the Temple as designating a specific location as the dwelling place of God that is repudiated. The principle applies to all cultic buildings, and that in Jerusalem is no more than the case by excellence.

71 GASTON, Stone 281.
72 RICHARD, Acts 328.
73 GASTON, Stone 159; cf. BHIER, Stephanusgeschichte 71-77; DONALDSON, “Moses Typology” 31; SIMON, Stephen 28.
74 Cf. DONALDSON, “Moses Typology” 31.
76 LARSSON, “Temple-Criticism” 389-91.
78 For the contrary position see KOESTER, Dwelling 80-81.

The views attributed to Stephen are in continuity with a widespread recognition in first century Judaism and previously of the inadequacies, theological and moral, of the Temple system. “Die Tempelkritik der Stephanusrede hat eine lange innerjüdische Vorgeschichte, in der das Bewusstsein, daß Gott nicht in menschliche Bauwerke zu bannen ist, lebendig war.” Irrespective of whether divine residence was conceptualised in literal terms, any challenge to the notion would have been offensive to those who believed the Temple to have been built on a uniquely sacred site, and to those whose economic and political power derived from the Temple and its cult. Shiloh, the traditional final resting place of the Tabernacle, had been destroyed, as had the Temple built by Solomon; the destruction of the former having been cited by Jeremiah in warning of the destruction of the latter (Jer 7:12-14; 26:9). This in principle leaves Herod’s Temple vulnerable to divine judgement and destruction, although Stephen makes no mention of the destruction of previous edifices which had been regarded as divine dwelling places.

It has been argued that Stephen views the Temple not so much as rejected by God but as superseded by Christ. This, however, ignores the clear theme of judgement that pervades Stephen’s speech, and his denunciation of Solomon’s Temple as having been built in disobedience to God. The Temple does not become obsolete with Christ; it never was God’s dwelling place. This goes beyond thoughts reflected in such texts as 1 Kings 8:27 and Isa 66:1-2, on the inadequacy of human constructions to accommodate God. Rather, the very notion of an earthly building as a divine residence is condemned.

Stephen does not merely repudiate the conceptualisation of temples as divine dwelling places, but in using the term θερηοποιητος associates such institutions with idolatry (LXX Lev 26:1,10; Isa 2:18; 10:11; 16:12; Dan 5:4,23; 6:27; Judith 8:18; Wis 14:8,).
While the principle is universal, the context implies a clear reference, specifically and primarily to the Temple in Jerusalem.

Stephen's speech contains no explicit prediction of the destruction of the Temple, at least in its canonical form. The possibility that Luke omitted such a section from his source must be considered. It is clear from the narrative that the speech is to be understood as having been interrupted (Acts 7:54), and Stephen's words at Acts 7:56 are not a resumption of his speech but a response to his imminent martyrdom. This does not in itself prove that Luke omitted material found in his source, but Acts 7:51-53 would seem to require some kind of pronouncement of judgement consequent upon the catalogue of covenantal disobedience which Stephen has related.

The destruction of the Temple would have been an appropriate form in which such judgement might have taken, not only on account of the precedent in the destruction of Solomon's Temple by the Babylonians in 587 BCE (2 Kings 25:9), but also in fulfilment of Jesus' prophecy of destruction upon the Temple (Mark 13:1-2; 14:58; 15:29). We have noted Luke's reticence in associating Jesus with the destruction of the Temple. He would therefore have had his own theological motive for allowing the lynch mob to move in before Stephen pronounced Jesus the agent of the destruction of the Temple. If this is the case, then the charge against Stephen remains unanswered in the lukan narrative, not because Stephen never proclaimed the destruction of the Temple, or even because he did not identify Jesus as the agent of that destruction. Rather, the charge remains unanswered because Luke attributed to him in the Acts narrative and speech do represent his having claimed the identification of Jesus as the agent of the destruction, even if he was given no opportunity to defend it during the public trial held before his death. We nevertheless still need to locate Stephen in his context within early Christianity.

Stephen's speech does not refute the charge that he had claimed Jesus would destroy the Temple, and would be consistent with tradition which identifies him as the first of the Christian martyrs. An implied affirmation that the Temple would be destroyed. Given that the reader of Luke-Acts is in no doubt that Jesus had destroyed the Temple, and given the context that Jesus would destroy the Temple, and would be consistent with tradition which identifies him as the first of the Christian martyrs, it is commonly supposed that Stephen in some sense not be at issue in the Stephen narrative, irrespective of whether or not he represents a stage in the process of transition of Christianity and the Temple was standing at the time of composition. Stephen's early Christian mission from a Jewish movement to a Graeco-Roman speech, if not a denunciation of the Temple, at the very least, Roman cultic movement.

We have already argued that Luke went against his doctrinal position that his early church position. We have argued also that the views of early church in Jerusalem. We have argued also that the views of early church in Jerusalem. We have argued also that the views of early church in Jerusalem. We have argued also that the views of early church in Jerusalem. We have argued also that the views of early church in Jerusalem.


88 Roloff, Apostelgeschichte 119.

89 Taylor, “Jerusalem”.

90 See most recently Sterling, “Opening” 215-16.
narrative of Acts and Luke’s conception of the development and spread of Christianity, Stephen functions entirely within a Jewish matrix. Even if he is correctly identified as a Hellenist, and had diaspora origins, he is active in a Christian community located not merely in Judaea but in Jerusalem itself. His speech is concerned entirely with Israel and the history of the dealings of that nation with its God. Stephen cannot therefore be described as representing an Hellenistic Jewish Christian radical rejection of Judaism. 99

Attempts to relate Stephen to broader trajectories in early Christianity are inherently problematic. Attempts have been made in recent scholarship to link Stephen and his circle with traditions contained in Mark, 92 with the Johannine tradition, 93 with the letter to the Hebrews, 94 to Barnabas and the forms of Christianity developed in Alexandria by the second century CE, 95 and to the Christian Jewish Ebionite 96 and Nazarene 97 movements. These reconstructions rest largely on the opposition to the Temple cult reflected in these various traditions, and in some cases secondarily on perceived criticism of the original circle of Jesus’ disciples. A weight to the tradition preserved by Abu’l Fath that Stephen had a home in Samaria, 98 most scholars argue on the basis of the Pentateuchal allusions in Stephen’s speech. Agreements are cited between Stephen and the Samaritan Pentateuch against Masoretic text and Septuagint. 104 However, a similar textual tradition is attested in the Qumran scrolls, and nothing more than a non-Masoretic Palestinian textual tradition can be postulated on this basis. 105

99 DONALDSON, “Moses Typology” 30;
93 CULMANN, “Jesu zu Stephanuskreise” 44-54.
98 SCHROPS, Theologie 408-12; 441-45; Jewish Christianity 42-46; SIMON, Stephen 192-94; G. STRICKER, Die Judenchristentum in den Pseudoklementinen (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1981); cf. BIEHA, Stephanusgeschichte 242.
102 FITZM, Acts 368.
104 SCHROPS, “Background” 385.
clearly cannot be dependent upon a Samaritan source or tradition, but presuppose a Christianity rooted in a Jewish tradition which acknowledged the Prophets as Scripture. The only positive indication in Stephen’s speech of a link with Samaria is in Acts 7:10, where the tombs of patriarchs are located in Shechem rather than in Hebron (Gen 33:19). This tradition is not contained in the Samaritan Pentateuch, but is otherwise attested in Julius Africanus (cited by Jerome, Ep. 57:10; 105:13). It is likely that this reflects a Samaritan tradition, and therefore that the canonical speech of Stephen reflects Samaritan Christian influences. These Samaritan influences, however, are more likely to have entered the tradition after the death of Stephen, and to be the product of Christian preaching in Samaria, appropriating and interpreting Samaritan traditions. They therefore cannot inform our reconstruction of the historical Stephen and his condemnation of the Jerusalem Temple and cult. Stephen represents continuity with the teaching of Jesus rather than an early Christian appropriation of extraneous traditions.

Conclusions

To recapitulate briefly, we can maintain with some confidence that Stephen was an historical figure, an hellenistic Jew who embraced Christianity during its earliest period in Jerusalem. If, as it seems probable, he died in a context of conflict within the hellenistic synagogues of Jerusalem, his death cannot be dated precisely. However, the climate of heightened eschatological tension and defensiveness of the Temple precipitated by Caligula’s intended desecration thereof in 40 CE would provide a context in which such intra-hellenistic Jewish conflicts might escalate to the proportions reflected in the Stephen narrative.

In his repudiation of the Temple and cult, Stephen held views broadly in line with both Palestinian “Hebrew” and Diaspora “Hellenist” Christians. It was not the content of his views, but reflected in the speech in Acts 7, that precipitated his death, rather the context in which they were expressed. Whether this context is to be identified as the hellenistic synagogues jealous of the sanctity of the Temple, or as the situation of heightened tension in the face of Caligula’s threat, which brought persecution upon other Palestinian Christians also, it was these circumstances and not any distinctiveness in his theology, that exposed Stephen to persecution and martyrdom.

The appropriation of Samaritan traditions in Stephen’s speech does not identify Stephen as a Samaritan. It is more likely that these motifs were introduced into the tradition after Stephen’s death, when members of his circle undertook the first Christian mission to the Samaritans. The emphasis on Moses and diminution of davidic traditions, in particular the association of Solomon and his Temple building with idolatry, are employed to substantiate in a Samaritan context a position regarding the Jerusalem Temple and cult which was common to early Christianity, and not unique to Stephen and his circle.

Stephen stands in continuity with Jesus and his original circle of disciples in his condemnation of the Jerusalem Temple and repudiation of its sacrificial cult. The charge that he had identified Jesus as the agent of divine judgement and destruction upon the Temple may reflect a more widespread primitive Christian conviction. If this is the case, then the crisis of Caligula’s intended desecration of the Temple, and the climate of heightened eschatological expectation this induced, could have influenced the transmission of Jesus traditions towards the form found in the eschatological discourse in Mark 13. The death of Stephen, and wider persecution of the Palestinian Christians, together with failed anticipation of the return of Jesus in judgement, may have influenced the Christians of Jerusalem and Judaea away from association of Jesus with the destruction of the Temple they continued to await, and towards expectation of a longer terrestrial future for the Church before the parousia of Christ.

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107 STERLING locates the origin of this tradition in the burial of Joseph at Shechem according to Josh 24:32 LXX, “Opening” 211.
110 SCROGGIS, “Hellenistic Christianity”; SCOBIE, “Source Material”.