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Stephen—The Pivot of the Acts of the Apostles.

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THE Acts of the Apostles contains three leading ideas. In the first place there is the fact that a new era had arrived in which the influence of the Holy Spirit was to be manifested through the agency of the followers of Christ; this is supplemented by that which the Holy Spirit's influence was to attest —viz., the Universality of the Gospel, whilst running through the whole narrative is the record of Jewish opposition. Now, it is quite clear that in reference to the manifestation of the Holy Spirit as shown in the Acts of the Apostles, there are no clear marks of development, and, indeed, to expect such would be to reduce the revelation to something of a mechanical process. Development, however, is seen, but it is found in the realizing and proclaiming by the disciples of the Universality of the Gospel, and also in the opposition of the Jews to the new teaching. The purport of this paper is to show that the prime cause of the development of the idea of the Universality of the Gospel and consequently of the opposition on the part of the Jews to Christianity, was Stephen the Deacon, and that Stephen, therefore, is the pivot of the Acts of the Apostles.

The parting commission of our Lord to His disciples was that they should be His "witnesses," but the commission was clearly defined in its scope—viz., "both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth." It was not long before the first step was taken, under the leadership of Peter, of defining this commission and making it their own, and on the Day of Pentecost the beginning was made in the long process which was ultimately to make the Gospel accessible to the world. On that particular day "Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven," listened to the witness of Peter concerning his Master, and to these people gathered from the countries round the Mediterranean was the

word given, "For to you is the promise and to your children," and that which perhaps marks the only progressive note in Peter's speech, "to all that were afar off." It is evident that Peter had at least broken away from any local ideas with reference to the Gospel, but at the same time it is clear that his interpretation of Christ's words meant that "unto the uttermost part of the earth" and "to all that are afar off," was to be limited strictly to the members of the Jewish race. Even taking his words in iii. 26, "unto you first," as bearing the interpretation that those who were not "sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with your fathers" (iii. 25) should ultimately share in the Messianic Kingdom, this was merely a general Jewish expectation which was to be realized by Gentiles becoming proselytes of the gate. The simple and definite teaching of Peter was that of v. 31: "Him did God exalt with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour for to give repentance to *Israel*." Hence his work was what might be called of an intensive character, to create in the countrymen of our Lord a strong body of Christians whose natural characteristic of cosmopolitanism (to use Julius Cæsar's idea) would facilitate the expansion of Christianity when the widening vision came. Thus it is the "Jews, devout men," who are numbered amongst the converts on the Day of Pentecost, and Jerusalem itself was soon filled with the new teaching (v. 28) by the influence of the eight thousand who had early turned to Christ (ii. 42; iv. 4). Very soon the next district mentioned by our Lord was evangelized, for the influence of the healing of the sick (v. 16) was sufficient to drive home the truth of what common report had brought from Jerusalem, and, therefore, even before the scattering of the disciples mentioned in viii. 1, Judea would have known something of the Gospel. Any further advance on the part of Peter seems wanting, however, after this particular stage had been reached; Jerusalem, Judea, and the influence of the Jews "from afar off," could alone be attributed to him, and the further expansion was due rather to the influence of another mind.

The instrument for spreading the idea of the Universality of the Gospel, which Peter seems to have imperfectly grasped, was Stephen, and hence the obvious reason for the insertion of his long speech in ch. vii., the principles of which were to be the basis of all future action in the spread of Christianity. Stephen was a Grecian Jew, and his analytical and philosophical bent of mind is seen in his historical treatment of the purpose of God in the history of the Jews. What Stephen proclaimed to the Jews was this, viz. : That God revealed Himself to Abraham in heathen Mesopotamia and Haran ; therefore the Revelation of God was not local. He had given Abraham no actual possession in Canaan, and hence Palestine *per se* was not unique in the sight of God. He had revealed Himself to Joseph in Egypt, and to Moses in Midian, in the wilderness, and in Sinai ; the Tabernacle itself had been moved from place to place in the desert and in Canaan ; such a God could not therefore be a God of one place and nation only. This it was which made Solomon's prayer so vital a truth (vii. 49) ; it was merely the enunciation of what is heard later from St. Paul, that the God of the world and of Nature was not for the Jews only. It needed but the reproach in vii. 57, that circumcision should be recognized as embodying a principle and not simply an ordinance or totem, to reveal how completely Stephen had broken away from the insular ideas of the Jews, and that he had grasped the truth of Universality which Christ had given.

Here, then, we reach a crucial point in the history of Christianity, for the influence which came from Stephen was destined to revolutionize the position till then occupied by Peter and the Apostles generally. This is at once brought home by the fact that the next outward movement of evangelization comes, not from Peter or any other of the Apostles, but from Philip, a fellow deacon with Stephen and, like him, a Grecian Jew, and hence influenced by Stephen's spirit. Philip, therefore, actuated no doubt by force of the persecutions (viii. 1), but also impelled by the teaching of Stephen, went down to Samaria, and began to preach Christ (viii. 4). Evidently there was a feeling of

irregularity about Philip's procedure, because of the despatch of Peter and John to give, as it were, an official approval of the new departure on the part of the newer teacher. Whether this view be correct or no, Peter and John accepted the situation and confirmed it by preaching in the villages of the Samaritans (viii. 25), but it is significant that Philip is at once led on further and is the means of extending the Gospel by the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch and by preaching as far as Cæsarea (viii. 40). In the meanwhile it is noted that the Gospel had reached Damascus (ix. 1, 2). Tarsus (ix. 30), Lydda (ix. 32), and Joppa (ix. 36), and thus at the close of the ninth chapter of the Acts it is possible to say that Judea, Samaria, and a few outposts had been Christianized, and that this advance was due to Pentecost or to Stephen. At this point it seems that a special revelation was given to the leader amongst the Apostles in the hope that it would open his eyes to the full significance of the Gospel as something for *every* creature and not for Jews only. The vision which was granted to Peter (x. 9-16) served the purpose of revolutionizing his mind to a fact which evidently the work of Stephen and Philip and the influence of Pentecost had not driven home.

Thus when he stands before Cornelius and his friends it is with a confession of past blindness, "God hath shown me" (x. 28), but at the same time with a positive statement which reveals an element of strangeness in the speaker. "*Every one* that believeth on Him shall receive remission of sins" (x. 43); such are the words which in themselves proclaim the Universality of the Gospel in all its fulness, but it is "of a truth I perceive" (x. 34), and the verb καταλαμβάνομαι implies a strangeness and hesitancy foreign to the general statement of x. 43. It seemed as though Peter was wavering in the balance, but now if ever was the time that the definite forward movement should be taken and the work pressed on of proclaiming the Gospel for Gentiles as well as Jews. Up to the present no clearly defined Gentile people had actually been touched by the Apostles or even by Philip. It is true that a more liberal outlook had been

gained when Samaria was evangelized, but the Samaritans had always been loosely connected with Judaism; a wider horizon had also been gained when Philip baptized the eunuch, but the latter was obviously a Jewish proselyte. A great advance was made when Peter admitted Cornelius and his friends into the Christian Church, but here again there was evidently some kinship to the Jewish faith, as the term "devout" and the ninth hour of prayer (x. 1, 2) imply.

The time had arrived in the stage of expansion when the non-Jewish world itself should be touched; the point towards which the Divine Commission (i. 8) given by Christ and enunciated clearly by Stephen was moving had now arrived. But the leader of the Day of Pentecost was to be leader no more, for the exponents of Christianity for the world were to be found in other than the Apostolic circle, and we come back once more to the influence of Stephen.

The work of Stephen was evidently of an educational character, and it is clear that the man who was capable of reading the lessons of history—as evidenced in his speech before the Council (ch. vii.)—would be equally ready in teaching the same lessons in private. Thus we find him at work amongst the thoughtful men of the day (vi. 9), and sowing seed which was destined to ripen at a critical period in the history of the early Church. For the fact which faces us is this. At the moment when Peter was dimly groping his way to the full meaning of being witnesses "unto the uttermost part of the earth," unnamed men had taken the lead where he hesitated to go, and these unnamed missionaries had derived their inspiration from Stephen. Such is the inference to be derived from xi. 20, 21, and vi. 9. The men of Cyprus and Cyrene, taught by Stephen that God was the God of the world and not of the Jews only, put the logical conclusion upon the Divine Commission (i. 8), and at Antioch "spake unto the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus."

Evidently a more liberalizing spirit was necessary if the words and command of Christ were to be fully put into effect; the insular Jewish mind needed still further enlightenment, and

that enlightenment came through the agency of these Hellenic Jews. The balance of influence, therefore, moved at once to Antioch, which was soon revolutionized by the unnamed disciples of Stephen. It is significant of the spirit which was bringing about this revolution in the insular ideas of Jews towards the Gospel, to note those who were the leading men of the Church at Antioch. Reference to xiii. 1 shows that they comprised Barnabas of Cyprus and Lucius of Cyrene, men who had caught the spirit of their compatriots (xi. 20, 21) owing to their contact with the Hellenic influences. In addition there were Symeon called Niger, and the double name indicates one accustomed to mingle amongst non-Jews; Manaen the foster-brother of Herod, and therefore one who would be open to the liberalizing spirit which contact with Greece and Rome would bring; and Saul of Tarsus, a city which had known something of Eastern mysticism as well as the influence of Alexander the Great and his descendants, and later of Rome. Here, therefore, were men whose whole life and upbringing were preparing them for the work committed to them. If Saul could pride himself on being a native of Tarsus, a citizen of no mean city, which knew the meaning of Greek influence; if, also, he could lay claim to Roman citizenship by birth; if, moreover, similar attributes could be predicated of Barnabas surnamed Justus, Symeon called Niger, whose double names revealed at least contact with Rome and Hellenic ideas, then, in the atmosphere of such men, Jewish insularism could not long survive. Their acceptance of the secular rights which accrued to Roman citizens involved the acknowledgment of a social and political universality, whether Greek or Roman, which must bring in its train, sooner or later, the acknowledgment of the possibility of religious universality. It is not too much to say, therefore, that the purely Jewish spirit had been incapable of realizing the full purport of the Divine command to be witnesses "unto the uttermost parts of the earth," and that it was due to the Hellenic training of Stephen and to the unnamed men of Cyprus and Cyrene that the narrow Jewish idea gave place to the broader conception of

the Universality of the Gospel. In Antioch this Universality was proclaimed, and was Divinely approved in a somewhat significant way. "The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch," so we read in xi. 26, but the Greek word for "called" is not the usual καλέω but χρηματίσαι, which, whenever used, implies a Divine admonition (*cf.* Acts x. 22; Heb. viii. 5; xi. 7; xii. 25). The word "Christian," also, is itself full of significance, for it includes Hebrew thought in the idea of the Anointed One, Greek language in the word "Christ," and Latin influence in the ending "iani." The Divine approval of the work of Stephen and his followers was therefore proclaimed by a Divine revelation and by the bestowal of a title which, by comprising the three representatives of the powers which influenced the world, foreshadowed the world-wide significance with which Christ had given His commission. Viewed in this light, therefore, the choice of Saul to be the Apostle to the Gentiles bears the appearance of Divine disapproval of the meagre ideas of the early disciples, whilst the statement of St. Paul in xxvi. 17, 18, implies that he was deliberately appointed by God because of the failure of the Twelve.

At this point, therefore, we enter upon the third stage in the development of the idea of the Universality of the Gospel. The first phase was concerned with the purely Jewish idea of expansion, of Universality amongst the children of Israel only; the second with the enunciation of the world-wide aspect by Stephen and the gradual expansion of his ideal through the medium of Philip and his unknown followers of Cyprus and Cyrene. The third stage will show the influence of Stephen in the missionary journeys of St. Paul, with the cross current of Jewish insularism striving against the more liberal spirit.

Chosen by God, therefore, in default of the older disciples, St. Paul, the product of the Antiochian school, is "sent forth" to carry the Gospel to other than Jews. There is, however, no trace of iconoclasm in his spirit, for only slowly does the complete idea come even to him. The "work whereunto he had been called" was the Gentiles, yet on landing at Salamis it is

to the Jews he goes; the proconsul (a Gentile) has to *send* for him. So, again, at Antioch and Iconium (as, indeed, later) St. Paul goes first to the Jews, but his note grows stronger and his vision wider as he advances. In his first speech at Antioch he identifies Christ with the Messiah (xiii. 23); in his second speech in the same place he definitely proclaimed the Universality of the Gospel as inclusive of the Gentiles (xiii. 47). The influence of Stephen had thus carried Paul to the most explicit declaration yet made of the inclusion of the Gentiles in the Gospel, but his Hellenic spirit took him even further. At Lystra it was not Paul the Jew who was speaking, but Paul the man of Greek training, and the Universality which Christ had proclaimed became grounded on the witness of Nature to "the living God . . . of all the nations" (xiv. 15, 16). Hence it is well to note how this particular point is marked, for it is the evidence of this journey which finally assures the disciples of that which had been implicit all along—*i.e.*, that a door of faith was open for the Gentiles as well as Jews (xiv. 27). The news was still something of novelty. Paul and Barnabas tell the brethren in Phœnicia and Samaria (xv. 3), and the recital evidences that the work of Philip (viii. 4) had obviously been amongst Jews only. The question of circumcision which arose also reveals that the minds of the Jewish Christians were revolving in a narrow circle, and that they had not grasped Stephen's idea that circumcision involved principle, and not simply ritual. A distinct step forward, however, is noticeable. Peter, some ten years now since the conversion of Cornelius, is at length able to say that he believes the Gentiles will be saved in the same way as the Jews—*i.e.*, by grace—whilst St. James simply takes up the position of Paul at Lystra when he speaks of the "residue of men seeking after the Lord, and all the Gentiles" (xv. 17).

Fortified, therefore, by the approval of the official leaders at Jerusalem, St. Paul set out on the journey which was to put the seal to his life's work. The widened vision which had characterized his first journey was now to be consummated by clear

and definite work for the Gentiles. Hence, probably, the significant dropping of Mark (xv. 38). It was obviously no fear of physical incapacity on his part which made St. Paul decline to have him in this second journey, for the route chosen was easier of travel than that pursued on the first journey. Evidently Mark was not whole-hearted in the wider ideas which Paul had enunciated and put into practice, and there was to be no room in this journey for any but those who would carry the commission of i. 8 to its proper conclusion. This seems to have been the spirit in which St. Paul set out; there was evidently a clear-cut plan in his mind for the pursuit and consolidation of the work amongst the Gentiles. Thus, after his journey across Asia Minor, the appeal of "a man" (xvi. 9)—not a Jew—is sufficient to enlist instant action for work amongst Gentiles, whilst the results of his work at Philippi, by its very cosmopolitanism—resulting as it did in the conversion of a Roman, a wealthy Greek woman of Thyatira, and a slave—set the seal of Divine approval upon this forward movement. Once within the region of Greek thought and influence, however, the definite plan of the Apostle is slowly unfolded. He had come into contact with many Greeks at Thessalonica and Berœa (xvii. 4, 12), and in Athens, especially, the note which he had sounded at Lystra (xiv. 15-18) was again given with studied and reasoned power. The God whom he proclaimed on the Hill of Ares (xvii. 22-31) was no longer the God who considered some men "common or unclean," but one whose relation to the world was based upon a nobler idea. He is the Father of mankind, for our rational instincts tell us "we are His offspring" (xvii. 28). He has set a standard of righteousness "for the whole world" in Jesus Christ, and has given a pledge of it to "all men" by the Resurrection (xvii. 31). At this point, therefore, we reach the climax of the conception of the Universality of the Gospel. Stephen had clearly seen this from the history of the Jews themselves, and the one upon whom his mantle had fallen now showed that the accumulated results of human history and experience pointed to a Universal Father

of mankind whose universality could not be narrowed down into a Messiah for the Jews only, but who of necessity would send the "man whom He had ordained" to be the Saviour of "all men," and not of the Jewish race alone.

The ideas and thoughts are strangely modern in their conception, but they were the logical outcome of the spirit and teaching of the proto-martyr to whose death the Apostle of the Gentiles had been consenting. It is significant, however, to note what followed the visit to Athens, for the procedure of St. Paul now follows closely on the lines laid down by Stephen. The work of the latter had not been spread over a wide area, and there is no account of any extensive journeys to proclaim the Gospel to the Gentiles. On the contrary, his work was done in Jerusalem only (v. 8-10), but the work was intensive in character and calculated to produce, as we have already seen (xi. 20, 21), ever-widening circles of influence. So now St. Paul seems to take up the same plan. No longer were there to be journeys across Europe, but rather concentration and teaching, in the hope that results might follow similar to those which accrued from the methods of the martyr-deacon. No places could have been better suited for St. Paul's purpose than Corinth and Ephesus. Stephen had concentrated his attention on the Hellenic synagogue in Jerusalem in order that its cosmopolitan character might result in widening the area of Christian influence and ideas; so now in Corinth and Ephesus St. Paul fixed upon a base equally effective. Corinth was one of the keys of the Roman Empire. It was a geographical centre, since it was on the highway between Rome and the East; it was also a link between Northern and Southern Greece, whilst the prevailing Hellenic atmosphere guaranteed at least an absence of insularism. Ephesus also was similarly favoured as to situation; its position as the trade emporium of the East meant a constant flow of traders and visitors; this constant influx meant the centring of the ideas of Greece and Rome as well as of the East, and made possible, therefore, the outflow of doctrines which might be enunciated in Ephesus. Hence St. Paul spent

some three and a half years in Corinth and Ephesus teaching (xviii. 11) and reasoning (xix. 9), with the result for which he had no doubt wished—*i.e.*, "that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks" (*cf.* xix. 26).

It is now, and not until now, that St. Paul's thoughts turn to Rome (xix. 21). The fact seems to imply that he felt his work was done so far as the East was concerned, and that in Rome he might bring to a proper conclusion the task which had been entrusted to him. Yet it is significantly stated that another journey confronts him before Rome is reached, for Jerusalem itself must be visited (xix. 21), and the reason of it lies in xx. 4. There were to accompany him seven Gentile Christians, whose presence was to be living evidence of the seal of Divine approval upon his work: two natives of Asia Minor, the fruits of his earlier missionary work; three citizens of European Greece, the scene of the first part of his second missionary journey, and two representatives of the Province of Asia, the result of his intensive work at Ephesus and Corinth. Here was comprehensive and convincing testimony to the truth of the Universality of the Gospel for which St. Paul stood. It was no wonder that a profound impression was produced among the elders at Jerusalem, and that they "glorified God" when they heard and saw what God had been doing through His chosen agent. The disciple of Stephen had at length come to his own, and the influence of the proto-martyr at last had reaped its reward.

The above sketch of the unfolding of the Universality of the Gospel has shown the centrality of Stephen in this development; the record of the opposition of the Jews to Christianity will witness to the same fact.

It is clear that if the Acts of the Apostles records a progressive unfolding and development of the idea of the Universality of the Gospel, it is equally true that there is also development in the negative position taken up by the Jews. At the outset there was no conception that Christianity was iconoclastic in

character, for the first Christians were sincere Jews who kept the regular hours of prayer (iii. 1 ; ii. 42), looked to the Temple as their sanctuary (ii. 46 ; v. 12), and were, as ii. 47 significantly declares, "in favour with all the people." Hence the primary move in the direction of opposition was not democratic in origin but was, on the other hand, purely official in character. Peter and John were arrested on the first occasion (iv. 1-3) simply because of their teaching regarding the Resurrection, which offended the Sadducees. The Sadducees are to be identified with the "priests of the temple" (iv. 1), whilst the "Captain of the Temple" also was a priest ; hence this proclamation of the Resurrection of Christ at once roused into opposition the official custodians of the Temple, who were also the central authority in the Holy City. It was therefore a combination of official zea against the rise of a new sect, coupled with a dislike for the doctrine to which they themselves were opposed, which induced the further action on the part of the Sadducean priests. They could not get behind the evidence of their senses with respect to the impotent man (iv. 16), but they were determined that a movement subversive of their own power and position should not be allowed to develope (iv. 17). This accounts, therefore, for the first three arrests of the Apostles, "they were filled with jealousy" (v. 17) lest the new movement "which filled Jerusalem" (v. 28) should mean their own deposition from power, and thus "bring this man's blood on us." Hence the concerted action of the whole Sadducean party (v. 17) to destroy the incipient movement which might spell ruin to themselves.

Apart, therefore, from the teaching of the Resurrection, there seemed to have been nothing on the part of the Apostles calculated to arouse very strong opposition from the Jews, and at the close of the fifth chapter the spirit of opposition is confined to the priests of the Sadducean sect, who were fearful that the new teaching would mean the escape of a considerable number of Jews from their official oversight, a position which would involve their own downfall, and this by the subversion of the chief tenet of their belief.

The next move, however, came from the Pharisees and their satellites, the Scribes. The influence of this party was confined mainly to the synagogue, and it was in the synagogue that they came into contact with Stephen (vi. 9). The teaching of the latter was not confined to one particular point, nor would the Pharisees be concerned to narrow down their discussions to the one subject which had roused the opposition of the Sadducees (*cf.* xxiii. 9). On the contrary, as we have seen above, the teaching of Stephen would be so subversive of the position occupied by the Pharisees as guardians of the Law that it very quickly drove them to declare, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God." Hence the natural result followed, Pharisees and Sadducees joined hands to crush the innovators, and with the cry of "The Temple and the Law in danger" (vi. 13) appealed to popular prejudice in the hope of stifling the now spreading movement.

This, therefore, was the attitude of the Jews up to the moment when Stephen stood before the Council; the spirit of opposition was primarily official and confined mainly to interested parties.

After the speech of Stephen, however, the whole position was radically changed, and the change is merely one more indication of the fact that Stephen is the pivot upon which the Acts of the Apostles turns. The words of Stephen in ch. vii. —as seen previously—were an endeavour to show in the history of the Jews a philosophic basis for the Universality of the Gospel, and to make his hearers realize that the God who did not confine His operations to one particular land was indeed the God of the whole earth and of all people. Incidentally he had shown something of the progressive character of the Revelation of God to the Jews and the consequent transient nature of the externals of Jewish religion—*i.e.*, the Tabernacle, the Law, and the Temple. Such ideas, however, were revolutionary to a people who had identified religion with nationality. If the Law and the Temple were not the permanent embodiment and representation of their national faith, if God were indeed the God of the whole world in the sense that He was to be the God

of all and of every nation, then the expression "the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob" would lose its meaning for the Jews. The whole feeling of nationality therefore rose up against such apparently anti-national and unpatriotic teaching, and the opposition of the Jews, therefore, entered upon its second stage. At the outset it had been official; it now became national, and fierce opposition was offered against what was considered detrimental to national consolidation.

The opposition, from this point onwards, is traced along the path of Stephen's influence. Stephen himself paid the penalty for his supposed iconoclasm with death (vii. 59-60), and his followers immediately felt the iron hand of oppression (viii. 1; ix. 1). When Saul, the pupil of Stephen, follows in the footsteps of his master and teacher he is at once threatened with death, both at Damascus (ix. 23) and at Jerusalem (ix. 29), whilst, on the other hand, it is significant that the other Apostles who had not yet proclaimed the Universality of the Gospel on the lines laid down by Stephen are allowed to remain in Jerusalem unharmed (viii. 1). Yet after the conversion of Cornelius, when Peter was groping his way to the fulness of Christ's commission and the Apostles had publicly proclaimed the (xi. 18) truth for which Stephen had died, it was still more significant that Herod should kill James and seize Peter (xii. 23). Herod had at all times desired to identify himself with Jewish national life, and in this act against the Apostles, who were now proclaiming a seemingly anti-national doctrine, he struck a blow for Jewish insularism which would be hailed as the act of a true patriot.

The same spirit of opposition to doctrines which embodied in them antagonism to the Jewish national position is observable in the experience of St. Paul. At Antioch and Iconium he is forced to flee because, in the former town, he had applied the reasoning of Stephen and seen that there was "light for the Gentiles" (xiii. 47) as well as for Jews. At Lystra, where he shows the witness of Nature to God as the God of "all the nations" (xiv. 16), he paid the penalty almost with his life

(xiv. 19). So again at Thessalonica (xvii. 5) and in Greece and Asia generally (xx. 3, 19), the spirit of opposition was roused against him for the same reason which brought death to Stephen (vi. 13; xxi. 20, 28). The Jews felt it certain that the application of the principle enunciated by Stephen and applied by Paul would indeed mean the passing of the Law, the Temple, and with them the nation itself. This is the meaning, therefore, of the outburst on the part of the Jews when St. Paul explained his commission to the Gentiles (xxii. 21, 22); it meant that his hearers had mentally raised a ring-fence enclosing the Jew, his Temple and Law, and that he who attempted to break down the fence would share the fate of a traitor.

Apart from this Jewish opposition to any effort on the part of the Apostles to touch those outside the Jewish nation, we can see, in the relationship of the Christian Jews to the question of circumcision, another phase of this insularism which identified belief with nation. The challenge to Peter (xi. 2) after the conversion of Cornelius, simply showed that the Christian Church in Jerusalem was ranging itself on the side of patriotic feeling, and it was but the natural attitude from men who were above all things "of the seed of Abraham." This, again, was the motive which prompted the deputation from Judea to descend on Antioch (xv. 1) with the *ipse dixit:* "except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses ye cannot be saved," and similarly when Paul and Barnabas had returned to Jerusalem (xv. 5). It meant that the conservative nationalism of the capital was hurling itself against the new spirit which was spreading from Antioch, and this simply heralded the decline of Jerusalem from its position of uniqueness as the centre of religious faith and worship.

The examination, therefore, of the development of the two main ideas of the Acts of the Apostles reveals how inseparably they are connected with the work of Stephen, and shows that Stephen is the pivot, or central factor, round which the whole of the Acts revolves.