

PETR MAREČEK

Department of Biblical Studies  
Sts Cyril and Methodius Faculty of Theology  
Palacký University Olomouc

## STEPHEN AND SAUL OF TARSUS IN ACTS 7:54–8:3\*

### SZCZEPAN I SZAWEL Z TARSU W DZIEJACH APOSTOLSKICH 7,54–8,3

#### ABSTRACT:

The paper “Stephen and Saul of Tarsus in Acts 7:54–8:3” which points out on the one hand the importance of the encounter between Stephen and Saul in Acts 7:54–8:3 and on the other hand the role these two characters in the context of the Acts of the Apostles, is divided into four parts. The first part shortly discusses the delimitation of the textual unit Acts 7:54–8:3 and its position in the Acts of the Apostles. The second part examines the question of the tradition and redaction criticism of Acts 7:54–8:3. The third shows Stephen as an important model of discipleship whose correspondence with Jesus, his Master, is not so much in terms of imitation but in terms of continuation. The fourth demonstrates that Stephen might be seen as the precursor of Saul/Paul who can be regarded as his continuator and successor.

Artykuł *Szczepan i Szawel z Tarsu w Dziejach Apostolskich 7,54–8,3* wskazuje z jednej strony na doniosłość spotkania Szczepana i Szawła z Tarsu we fragmencie *Dziejów Apostolskich*, a z drugiej strony na rolę tych dwóch postaci w całości biblijnej księgi. Artykuł został podzielony na 4 części. Pierwsza z nich wyznacza granice tekstualne fragmentu Dz 7,54–8,3. Druga ukazuje zagadnienie tradycji tekstowych i krytycznej redakcji omawianego tekstu. Trzecia część ukazuje Szczepana jako ważny model sposobu bycia uczniem, którego relacja z Jezusem jako Mistrzem jest opisywana nie tyle w terminach naśladowania, co kontynuacji misji. Czwarta część ukazuje Szczepana jako prekursora Szawła/Pawła, który z kolei może być widziany jako jego (Szczepana) kontynuator i następca.

Apart from Peter, who is the character mentioned most frequently among the apostles (Πέτρος – 56 times), Stephen,<sup>1</sup> and Saul/Paul<sup>2</sup> can undoubtedly be

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen (Στέφανος) is mentioned in the New Testament only in the Acts of the Apostles. His name occurs altogether 7 times (Acts 6:5, 8, 9; 7:59; 8:2; 11:19; 22:20).

<sup>2</sup> He bore two names. He is mentioned 15 times with the name Σαῦλος (namely in Acts 7:58–13:9) which is the Graecized form of Σαούλ “Saul”. The latter Greek spelling occurs only in the conversion accounts, when the risen Christ approaches Paul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:4; 22:7; 26:14) and when Ananias is sent to restore his sight (Acts 9:17; 22:13). Σαούλ is a Greek transliteration of the Hebrew name of the first king of ancient Israel שָׁאֻל “Saul”, which means “requested” (see e.g. 1 Sam 9:2; cf. Acts 13:21). The Semitic name Σαῦλος was a *supernomen*, whereas the Greco-Roman “Paul” (Παῦλος; from lat. *Paulus* “small”) was his Roman *cognomen*. The Greco-Roman name

considered the central protagonists in the Acts of the Apostles. The scene in Acts 7:54–8:3 is truly significant, not only because Stephen is the first Christian martyr, but also because here is the first mention of Luke's hero of the second half of Acts, the beginning of his story about Saul/Paul of Tarsus. Paul is the one who consents to the death of Stephen (Acts 8:1a) and on the basis of God's will he will pursue his work.

The aim of our study is to point to the importance of the encounter between Stephen and Saul in Acts 7:54–8:3 and to determine which role these two characters play in the context of the Acts of the Apostles. This paper is divided into four parts. The first part will briefly discuss the delimitation of the textual unit Acts 7:54–8:3 and its position in the Acts of the Apostles. The second part will discuss the question of the tradition and redaction criticism of Acts 7:54–8:3. The third part will show Stephen as an important model of discipleship whose correspondence with Jesus, his Master, is not so much in terms of imitation but in terms of continuation. The fourth part will try to demonstrate that Stephen might be seen as the precursor of Saul/Paul who can be regarded as his continuator and successor.

## 1. The delimitation of the textual unit and its position in Acts

In terms of delimiting our textual unit, researchers do not agree. Many exegetes divide the text into two parts<sup>3</sup> and refer to the thematic criterion that supports this division: the death of Stephen (Acts 7:54–8:1a) and its subsequent effects (Acts 8:1b–3). But from the narrative point of view, Acts 7:54–8:3 appears to be a closed whole, as is noted by numerous authors.<sup>4</sup> The main characters, Stephen (Acts 8:2) and Saul (Acts 8:3), in the narrative create continuity with the previous verses: Stephen (Acts 7:59), Saul (Acts 7:58; 8:1). The formulation ἐγένετο δὲ ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ “on that day there came to be” (Acts 8:1b) does not indicate a narrative interruption, but points to chronological simultaneity and creates a connection with

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Παῦλος, which was probably his main name, is used 127 times in Acts, namely from Acts 13:9 to the end of the book. See further G. H. Harrer, “Saul Who Is Also Called Paul,” *HTThR* 33 (1940), 19–33.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. e.g. G. Schille, *Die Apostelgeschichte des Lukas*, ThHK 5, Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1983, 187; C.K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles, Vol. 1, Preliminary introduction and commentary on Acts I–XIV*, ICC, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998, 379nn; J.A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, AncB 31, New York: Doubleday, 1998, 389; G. Rossé, *Atti degli Apostoli: Commento esegetico e teologico*, Roma: Citta Nuova, 1998, 323; D.L. Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2007, 309; C.S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary. Volume 2, 3:1–14:28*, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2013, 1429.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. e.g. G. Schneider, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, I, HThK V/1, Freiburg–Basel–Wien: Herder, 1980, 469; A. Weiser, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, Leipzig: St. Benno, 1989, 113; L.T. Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Sacra Pagina Series 5, Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1992, 138; J. Zmijewski, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, RNT, Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1994, 332; J. Jervell, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, KEK, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998, 250; W. Eckey, *Die Apostelgeschichte: Der Weg des Evangeliums von Jerusalem nach Rom. Teilband 1, Apg 1,1–15,35*, Neukirchen–Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2000, 178; R.I. Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary*, Hermeneia, Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2008, 195.

the previous story.<sup>5</sup> We should not divide what the author has joined. It seems that continuity from Acts 7:54 to 8:3 is significant.<sup>6</sup>

The textual unit Acts 7:54–8:3 belongs to the pivotal passages in the Acts of the Apostles, as it emerges in particular from the point of view of the structure of the Acts of the Apostles. This text forms the conclusion of the first major part of the book, which describes the mission of testimony in Jerusalem (Acts 2:1–8:3).<sup>7</sup> The first part of the risen Lord's commission to his disciples in Acts 1:8 ("You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.") regarding the missionary activity is now carried out by witnessing in Jerusalem, which reached its climactic point in the martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 7:54–8:3). The account of Stephen's speech (Acts 7:2–53) and his martyrdom (Acts 7:54–8:3) is given as the last preaching of the early church in Jerusalem (Acts 2:1–8:3). The second major part in Acts 8:4–12:25 narrates the spread of the gospel outside Jerusalem in the next two regions as the Hellenists are scattered throughout Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1b; 9:31) and so presents the continuation of fulfilment of the commission in Acts 1:8. In the second part the gospel announcement reaches up to Phoenicia, Cyprus and Syrian Antioch (Acts 11:19–20), which develops as a second great Christian centre.<sup>8</sup>

That the story about Stephen plays a key role in Acts is evident from the fact that his proclamation causes the crisis which leads to the spread of the gospel from Jerusalem. Placing the burial of Stephen (Acts 8:2) as the middle term between two references to the persecution (Acts 8:1b, 3), emphasizes the close connection in Acts between Stephen's martyrdom and the persecution of the church. The persecution is an expression of the unbelief of Israel,<sup>9</sup> though the author of Acts does not deny that many in Israel accepted God's salvation. In fact, the Stephen story precedes one of the growth summaries (Acts 6:7). Israel is divided, and the accent in this pericope is on its rejection. From this moment the author of Acts will highlight the belief of the gentiles and the unbelief of Israel (while still acknowledging a believing portion). Missionary activity encounters resistance (cf. Acts 13:45; 18:6; 28:19, 22). The martyrdom of Stephen plays a crucial role in light

<sup>5</sup> The expression ἐγένετο followed by the time sentence does not automatically mean a narrative break (cf. Acts 4:5; 5:7; 9:19, 37; 11:28; 12:18; 16:35; 19:10, 23; 23:12; 27:39; 28:17).

<sup>6</sup> D.L. Marguerat, *Les Actes des apôtres (1–12)*, CNT, Genève: Labor et Fides, 2007, 269.

<sup>7</sup> In spite of the fact that the structure of the Acts of the Apostles is not easy to define and that a generally convincing structure has not yet been found, it is possible to trace noticeable structural elements in Acts (Acts 2:1; 6:1; 8:4; 9:32; 11:19; 13:1; 15:36; 19:21).

<sup>8</sup> G. Stählin, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, NTD 5, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962, 116 rightly observes that whereas in chapters 1–7 and again in chapters 13–28 author of Acts follows a single thread of narrative, in chapters 8–12 he combines four: 1) the stories respectively of Paul (Acts 8:3; 9:1–30; 11:25–30), 2) the unknown Hellenists (Acts 8:4; 11:19–24), 3) Philip (Acts 8:5–13, 26–40), and 4) Peter (Acts 8:14–25; 9:32–11:18; 12:3–19). This means that in the five chapters the chronological sequence is obscure; also that this brief introductory passage lacks clarity. It is probably to be ascribed in its entirety to the editorial work of the author of Acts as he combines the various pieces of source and traditional material at his disposal.

<sup>9</sup> The word διωγμός "persecution" is used only in Acts 13:50 where the object of the persecution is Paul and Barnabas.

of Acts 1:8. The growth of the word of God cannot be stopped by human opposition. Opposition to Jesus and his witnesses ironically stimulates further growth (cf. Acts 9:23–25, 29–30; 13:50–51; 14:6, 19–20; 16:40; 17:10, 14; 22:18).

## 2. The question of the tradition and redaction criticism

The issue of sources in Acts 7:54–8:3 is complex and much debated. The portions of tradition and editorial work are determined quite differently in research.<sup>10</sup> In this narrative piece (Acts 7:54–8:3), Luke has processed the second part of the given report about the lynching of Stephen (the first part is in Acts 6:8–15). With some certainty, the following information can be counted as a part of tradition: the remark that Stephen was forcibly dragged out of the city and stoned (Acts 7:58a),<sup>11</sup> and the note about the funeral of Stephen (Acts 8:2).<sup>12</sup> For linguistic-stylistic reasons, and above all for compositional and content-related reasons, all other details are more likely to be assigned to the Lukan editorial work.

It is possible to consider the introduction of Saul/Paul in Acts 7:58; 8:1a, 3 as the editorial work of Luke. It would be completely contrary to his style if the anecdote about guarding the clothes by Saul/Paul (Acts 7:58) belonged to the tradition that is otherwise strictly concentrated on Stephen.<sup>13</sup> The role in which Saul appears in Acts 7:54–8:3 also corresponds to the Lukan style of representation. This editorial

<sup>10</sup> G. Schneider, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, I, HThK V/1, Freiburg–Basel–Wien: Herder, 1980, 471 assumes that the data – tumultuous action against Stephen (Acts 7:54b, 57?), and his stoning (Acts 7:58a), maybe a last word of the martyrs (7:59b?), funeral (8:2) and possibly even a note about the subsequent persecution in Jerusalem (8:1b.c?) – come from tradition. According to J. Roloff, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, NTD 5, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981, 126–127 and 129, the verses Acts 7:55a, 56–58a, 59–60; 8:2–3 are taken from the tradition. A. Weiser, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, Leipzig: St. Benno, 1989, 114 regards only Acts 7:58a; 8:2 (and at the core Acts 8:1b–c, 3) as a part of the inherited pre-Lukan source. R. Pesch, *Die Apostelgeschichte (Apg 1–12)*, EKK V/1, Zürich – Neukirchen: Benziger–Neukirchener, 1995<sup>2</sup>, 262 maintains that Luke makes use of three traditions, the martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 7:55–58a, 59–60; 8:2), the persecution of the Jerusalem community (Acts 8:1b), and especially the succession of Saul in Jerusalem (Acts 8:3). J. Jervell, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, KEK, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998, 256 supposes that we are dealing here with two traditions; the first concerns the death of Stephen by the people, the persecution of the Hellenists, and the lamenting of Stephen (Acts 7:54–57, 58a, 59, 60; 8:1b, 2); the other treats Paul as a persecutor (Acts 7:58b; 8:1a, 3).

<sup>11</sup> The Lukan account of the Stephen story (Acts 6:8–15 and 7:54–8:1a), as it now stands, seems more like mob reaction or a lynching than an official trial, despite the mention of the Sanhedrin. Cf. e.g. J. Zmijewski, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, RNT, Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1994, 338; J.A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, AncB 31, New York: Doubleday, 1998, 391; W. Eckey, *Die Apostelgeschichte: Der Weg des Evangeliums von Jerusalem nach Rom. Teilband 1, Apg 1,1–15,35*, Neukirchen–Vluy: Neukirchener, 2000, 179; D. L. Marguerat, *Les Actes des apôtres (1–12)*, CNT, Genève: Labor et Fides, 2007, 271–272. Stephen Martyrdom must have occurred between 32 and 34 (cf. J. Roloff, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, NTD 5, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981, 126; on the other hand W. Schmithals, *Die Apostelgeschichte des Lukas*, ZBK 3.2, Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1982, admits the possibility that the martyrdom of Stephen was later than the conversion of Paul [cf. 1 Tess 2:14]).

<sup>12</sup> J. Zmijewski, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, RNT, Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1994, 333.

<sup>13</sup> J. Roloff, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, NTD 5, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981, 126.

activity in no way means that Luke has not referred in some way to historical fact. On the one hand, Luke took into account the historical and traditionally enshrined fact that Paul had nothing to do with the murder of Stephen and, on the other hand, he took into consideration the fact that Saul was persecuting the Church (1 Cor 15:9; Phil 3:6) and that he was known as a notorious persecutor (Gal 1:13, 23). That Saul in Jerusalem (and the surrounding area; Acts 26:11) raged as a persecutor of Christians is in some tension with Paul's own statement: "I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ." (Gal 1:22). Jerusalem also belonged to Judea, and according to Acts 8:1–3, Paul personally participated in the persecution of the Christian community in Jerusalem.<sup>14</sup> However, the tradition of the Acts of the Apostles can be schematic, and Paul's personal interventions against believers in Christ in Jerusalem may be rather rare. In the formulation in Gal 1:22, Paul first of all affirmed that in Jerusalem and its environs he had not worked as a missionary. Therefore the churches in Judea had no knowledge of him. From a historical point of view, it is not necessary to be sceptical regarding the mention of Saul in Acts 7:54–8:3; he presumably attended the Cilician synagogue (cf. Acts 6:9) and so ranked among Stephen's opponents.<sup>15</sup>

As already stated, the reference to Saul/Paul seems to be inserted as an addition. The three mentions of Saul/Paul in Acts 7:58; 8:1a, 3 can be considered as a thoughtful and gradual addition.<sup>16</sup> Linking the story of Stephen to the story of Saul is therefore the work of Luke. By introducing Saul at this point in the narrative, Luke, on the one hand, prepares the story of his conversion in chapter 9 and also provides trustworthiness to Paul's later recollection of the incident (Acts 22:20), and on the other hand he points out the connection between Stephen and Saul/Paul. Saul/Paul, who in God's providence will later pursue his work, can be seen as Stephen's continuator and successor.

### 3. Stephen – an important model of discipleship

Stephen, who was the first of the seven<sup>17</sup> chosen to solve the conflict between "Hellenists" and "Hebrews" in the primitive Church (Acts 6:1–6), is presented in

<sup>14</sup> Some authors believe that the persecution of Christians by the Saul in Jerusalem is the product of the author of Acts (cf. e.g. C. Burchard, *Der dreizehnte Zeuge: Traditions- und kompositionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zu Lukas' Darstellung der Frühzeit des Paulus*, FRLANT 103, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970, 40–51; U. Schnelle, *Paulus: Leben und Denken*, Berlin–Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2014<sup>2</sup>, 74–75). On the other hand there are scholars who advocate, that in Jerusalem took place the persecution and the persecuted Hellenists were originators of the tradition in Gal 1:23 (cf. e.g. M. Hengel – A.M. Schwemer, *Paulus zwischen Damaskus und Antiochien: Die unbekanntten Jahre des Apostels*, WUNT 108, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998, 60–63).

<sup>15</sup> I.H. Marshall, *Acts: An Introduction and Commentary*, Nottingham–Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 2008 (= 1980), 159.

<sup>16</sup> H. Conzelmann, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, HNT 7, Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1963, 52.

<sup>17</sup> The names of six others are Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolaus (Acts 6:5).

the Acts of the Apostles as an important model of discipleship. In Acts, the interest in Stephen is emphasized for two main reasons.

First and foremost, the portrait of Stephen in Acts includes many features that recall the description of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke. In particular, the death of Stephen in Acts matches closely the death of Jesus in Luke's Gospel. Stephen is introduced as "a man full of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 6:5; cf. 6:3; 7:55),<sup>18</sup> which evokes the introduction of Jesus after his baptism where he is presented as "full of the Holy Spirit" (Luke 4:1). Stephen belongs to the group of seven who are "full of wisdom" (Acts 6:3) and in his work he is endowed with wisdom (Acts 6:10). This characteristic recalls the description of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke, where from his childhood he is introduced as a person "full of wisdom" (cf. Luke 2:40, 52) and as a teacher of wisdom (cf. Luke 2:47; 7:35; 11:31), whose gift is wisdom (Luke 21:15). Stephen together with his six companions is the recipient of this gift. Although according to Acts 6:1–2 the seven were chosen to handle table-service for the welfare of the poor (widows), Stephen appears publicly as a man who "did great wonders and signs" (Acts 6:8) and as an outstanding speaker (Acts 6:9–14; 7:2–53). In this way the author shows the parallel with Jesus' public ministry, which was centered on performing miracles and on teaching activity (cf. Luke 4:14–44). By introducing the beginning of Jesus' public activity in Galilee, his teaching is strongly emphasized (Luke 4:15, 18–19, 21, 24–27, 31–32, 43, 44) and stands in the foreground, so also in Acts Stephen's teaching activity is highlighted through his speech (Acts 7:2–53). Stephen's speech (Acts 7:2–53), which causes such a stormy response in his listeners (cf. Acts 7:54: hostility and rage), corresponds to the angry rejection of Jesus at the beginning of his public ministry in Nazareth (Luke 4:28). Stephen's words before his martyrdom "I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" in Acts 7:56 recall the prophesy of Jesus before the Sanhedrin: "from now on the Son of Man will be sitting at the right hand of the power of God" (Luke 22:69). Jesus' exaltation to heavenly dominion, which occurs through the infidelity of his adversaries, can only be recognized by believers like Stephen (cf. Act 7:55–56). In contrast to Luke 22:69, Acts 7:56 does not speak about the "sitting" of the Son of Man at the right hand of God, as it corresponds to the idea of exaltation, which is based on Psalm 110:1, but about his "standing". This particular "standing" of the Son of Man, has gone through the most varied interpretations in exegesis,<sup>19</sup> must be understood on the basis of the context. It seems most probable that Stephen's words about the standing of the Son of Man at the right hand of God should be taken closely along with Jesus' promise: "everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God" (Luke 12:8;

<sup>18</sup> The Holy Spirit enables Stephen to perceive God's glory (Acts 7:55) and to face his coming death praying for his killers (Acts 7:60).

<sup>19</sup> See e.g. R. Pesch, *Die Vision des Stephanus: Apg 7,55–56 im Rahmen der Apostelgeschichte*, SBS 12, Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1966, 14–24; C.K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles, Vol. 1, Preliminary introduction and commentary on Acts I–XIV*, ICC, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998, 384–385.

in Matt 10:33 “the Son of Man” is replaced by “I”).<sup>20</sup> Jesus is standing as advocate to plead Stephen’s cause before God and to welcome him into God’s presence. The vision of the risen Christ that was granted to Stephen also confirms the accusations that Stephen has made in his speech.

Luke deliberately portrays the description of the martyrdom of Stephen in terms that insistently evoke the passion and death of Jesus.<sup>21</sup> In Acts 7:54–8:3 there is the absence of a formal sentence as is the case in Luke 22:71 (versus Mark 14:64).<sup>22</sup> The account of Stephen of his vision, which becomes a testimony of the Son of Man himself against the listeners, is understood by them as blasphemy. They blocked their ears according to the rabbinic custom in order to stop having to listen to the blasphemy.<sup>23</sup> The loud cries of the listeners in Acts 7:57 to Stephen’s account of his vision (Acts 7:56), recalls the loud cry of the crowd, who asks for Pilate to crucify Jesus (Luke 23:23). During his stoning, Stephen prays the same prayer (Acts 7:59)<sup>24</sup> as his master on the cross (Luke 23:46), namely a traditional evening prayer, based on Psalm 30:6 LXX.<sup>25</sup> And just as Jesus asked the Father for forgiveness for his enemies (Luke 23:34a),<sup>26</sup> so his disciple Stephen proves his love for his enemy (Luke 6:35 // Matt 5:44) and intercedes for his murderers: “Lord, do not hold this sin against them” (Acts 7:60b).<sup>27</sup> The note on the burial of Stephen (an indication that the tradition had understood his death, not as execution due to a court verdict of the Sanhedrin, but as lynching) in Acts 8:2a, which is carried out by “devout men” like Simeon (Luke 2:25), people at Pentecost (Acts 2:5) and Ananias (Acts 22:12),<sup>28</sup> highlights the justice of Stephen’s cause. The righteous

<sup>20</sup> G. Schneider, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, I, HThK V/1, Freiburg – Basel – Wien: Herder, 1980, 475; J. Zmijewski, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, RNT, Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1994, 338; R. Pesch, *Die Apostelgeschichte (Apg 1–12)*, EKK V/1, Zürich–Neukirchen: Benziger–Neukirchener, 1995<sup>2</sup>, 264; I.H. Marshall, *Acts: An Introduction and Commentary*, Nottingham–Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 2008 (= 1980), 158.

<sup>21</sup> T. L. Brodie, “The Accusing and Stoning of Naboth (1 Kgs 21:8–13) as One Component of the Stephen Text (Acts 6:9–14, 7:58a),” *CBQ* 45 (1983), 417–432 has identified another possible source of this account: The Accusing and Stoning of Naboth (1 Kgs 21:8–13).

<sup>22</sup> Both – Jesus and Stephen – had false witnesses against them (cf. Mark 14:56–57; Acts 16:13).

<sup>23</sup> H.L. Strack – P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrash*, II, München: C.H. Beck, 1924, 684. Other clarifications offers G. Schille, *Die Apostelgeschichte des Lukas*, ThHK 5, Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1983, 189: “Das Zuhalten der Ohren ist die natürliche Reaktion des Mobs, der vom Gegner nichts mehr anzunehmen bereit ist.”

<sup>24</sup> However, he does not address his prayer to God himself, but to Jesus, the exalted *Kyrios*.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. H.L. Strack – P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrash*, II, München: C. H. Beck, 1924, 269.

<sup>26</sup> Luke 23:34 is absent from some important early manuscripts, including P<sup>75</sup>, B, D\*, W, Θ and others, and may not be original to the Gospel. See B. M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 2000<sup>2</sup>, 154. The text in Acts, however, is not in doubt.

<sup>27</sup> The reference to the ignorance with which Jesus justified his forgiveness petition is missing here. After the Jerusalem representatives have deliberately denied themselves the message of salvation offered to them after Jesus’ death and resurrection by the apostles, this reason for alleviation has disappeared. There is also the absence of invitation appeal for repentance in the speech of Stephen.

<sup>28</sup> These devout men who buried Stephen could be his followers; however the narrower context (cf. Acts 8:1b.c) implies that the outside standing Jews are meant. It is supposable that Luke is

Stephen is buried by righteous persons.<sup>29</sup> Similarly with Jesus, it was emphasized that he was the innocent righteous man (Luke 23:4, 14–15, 22, 41, 47) and that his burial was carried out by a “devout” person, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a good and righteous man who was awaiting the kingdom of God (Luke 23:50–51). The mourning (or lamentation, *κοπετός*)<sup>30</sup> in Acts 8:2b also recalls that made over Jesus by the women of Jerusalem (Luke 23:27, 48). From what is mentioned above we can see clearly that Stephen, the first Christian martyr, is portrayed in Acts with many characteristics that recall the overall depiction of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke. Stephen is an important model of discipleship, whose correlation with Jesus is not just in terms of imitation but also particularly in terms of continuation.

Secondly, we can see that the portrait of Stephen in Acts represents the main characteristics of the apostles. The first that we come to know about Stephen and his six other associates who have been chosen to wait on tables (cf. Acts 6:2) is that they were “full of the Spirit and of wisdom” (Acts 6:3; cf. 6:5, 10). The reference to Holy Spirit recalls his central role in the life of the early church. The Holy Spirit is promised to the apostles for their missionary activity (Acts 1:8) and they are filled with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:4). Peter is filled with the Holy Spirit during his defence before the Council (Acts 4:8). After the common unanimous prayer the Christian community in Jerusalem is filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 4:41). The missionary activity takes place through the action of the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 8:29, 39). The members of the church are encouraged by the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:31). The special characteristic of Stephen, as well as his six other associates, is also wisdom. Jesus, during his public ministry, promised his disciples that he would be the one who would be present at the moment of their persecution and who would give them the right “speech” and “wisdom” to bear testimony to their adversaries, who will not be able to resist (Luke 21:15). This promise is fulfilled in the case of Stephen (cf. Acts 6:10). We can observe the convergence of *ἀνθίστημι* “withstand” and *σοφία* “wisdom” which occurs only in two Lukan passages (Luke 21:15; Acts 6:10) and which implies that the wisdom Stephen receives and the opposition he faces are no mere coincidence. Jesus’ promise also fulfils in connection with Peter who speaks and acts on behalf of the apostles (cf. Acts 4:14). In Acts 6:8 Stephen is portrayed as a man who was “full of grace and power” and who did “wonders and signs” among the people. The characterisation “full of grace and power” (Acts 6:8) reminds us of the apostles of whom it is said: “With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all” (Acts 4:33). In the Acts of the Apostles it is possible to see the role of divine grace in the process of conversion and justifica-

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indicating that despite the mob reaction some Jews at least had respect for Stephen and his views and saw him as a noble and righteous man. Cf. R.C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation, Volume 2: The Acts of the Apostles*, Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1990, 100–101.

<sup>29</sup> C.R. Holladay, *Acts*, The New Testament Library, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016, 177.

<sup>30</sup> The word *κοπετός* is *hapax legomenon* in the New Testament.



tion (cf. Acts 11:23). Stephen's doing "wonders and signs" (τέρατα καὶ σημεῖα)<sup>31</sup> is not only a fulfilment of the prophecy of Joel 3:3, quoted in Peter's sermon at Pentecost in Jerusalem (Acts 2:19), but it corresponds to Jesus' public ministry (Acts 2:22) and also to the missionary activity of apostles (Acts 2:43; 5:12; cf. 4:30). We can see also some resemblances between the depiction of Stephen in Acts 7:54–8:3 and the portrait of the apostles in Acts. The first reaction to the speech of Stephen (Acts 7:54) corresponds to the reaction to the speech of the apostles: διεπρίοντο "they were infuriated" (Acts 5:33).<sup>32</sup> In contrast to Acts 5:33, Gamaliel does not intervene here. Stephen reacts unimpressed by the rage and anger of the crowd. He is accorded the assistance of the Spirit (Acts 7:55: "filled with the Holy Spirit"; cf. Acts 6:5, 8, 10), as was Peter in Acts 4:8. The Holy Spirit enables Stephen to perceive God's glory and to face his coming death. His gazing into heaven (Acts 7:55a) recalls the attitude of the apostles at the ascension of Jesus (Acts 1:10). Finally, Stephen, who was with a unanimous (ὁμοθυμαδόν)<sup>33</sup> rush (cf. Acts 19:29) dragged to his death, not so much because of his speech against the temple and the law (Acts 6:11, 13, 14), but because of his clear confession of Christ Jesus, with his testimony to the vision of the glorified Son of Man (Act 7:56).<sup>34</sup> He resembles other apostles who suffered dishonour for the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 5:40–41).

#### 4. Stephen – the precursor of Saul/Paul

The first mention of Saul/Paul that we find in Acts is at the moment of the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:54–8:3). As in the earlier case of Barnabas (Acts 4:36–37), one who is to play a major role makes an inconspicuous entry onto the narrative stage as a minor character, perhaps partly to unify the narrative.<sup>35</sup> This unobtrusive introduction is due to the fact that Paul is well-known to the readers of Acts and contributes something significant to the portrait of the person. This main character of the second half of Acts is presented at the moment of the stoning of Stephen with the statement: "the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul." (Acts 7:58b). As for the witnesses, it was their duty to play the chief role in such an execution. They were responsible for executing a culprit and thus had to take the consequences of their testimony into their own hands (cf. Deut 17:7; Lev 24:14; Deut 13:9–10). According to Mishnaic law, the person to be stoned was stripped (*Sanh.* 6:3).<sup>36</sup> If Luke reports here by contrast on the removal

<sup>31</sup> The phrase "signs and wonders" is derived from the LXX, where it often describes God's mighty acts on behalf of Israel (e.g. Exod 7:3; Deut 4:34; 28:46; 29:2; 34:11; Psalm 135:9; Isa 8:18).

<sup>32</sup> This verb is used only in these two verses in the New Testament.

<sup>33</sup> This adverb may echo ironically the remarkable harmony and unanimity of the early Christians (Acts 1:14; 2:46; 4:24; 5:12; 15:25); in this case the unanimity is one of rejection.

<sup>34</sup> J. Kürzinger, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, I, GSL.NT 5/1, Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1963<sup>2</sup>, 197.

<sup>35</sup> R.C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation, Volume 2: The Acts of the Apostles*, Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1990, 99.

<sup>36</sup> H.L. Strack – P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrash*, II, München: C.H. Beck, 1924, 685.

of the garment of the witnesses, this is not an indication that he is insufficiently informed about the process of stoning according to the Jewish law or that it is his misunderstanding.<sup>37</sup> Also it does not seem that Luke imagines the witnesses removing their outer garments to gain ease of movement so that they are able to cast those stones more effectively.<sup>38</sup> How can we understand such detail? Is it possible to consider the piling of cloaks at the feet of someone as a symbolic act? The phrase “at the feet” is suggestive in light of Luke’s use of it in Acts 4:35, 37; 5:2. If Luke uses the gesture consistently, it could signify recognition of Paul as a leader of those opposed to Stephen, a position that he will immediately assume in Acts 8:3.<sup>39</sup> Or would it be possible that the witnesses placed their cloaks at the feet of Saul, because he was known to them personally?<sup>40</sup> As the most likely and most convincing, it seems that the mention of putting off the cloaks of the witnesses is a deliberate change, which makes it possible to introduce meaningfully Saul/Paul into the event and to assign a task to him.<sup>41</sup> He is not guilty of stoning Stephen, but he has participated marginally. He was “standing by, approving and keeping the coats” of those who killed Stephen (cf. Acts 22:20).

Saul/Paul, at whose feet the witnesses put down their outer garments, is first and foremost introduced as a *νεανίας* “young man”. We can observe that in Acts 7:58 and 23:17 (*νεανίας*) and in Acts 5:10 and 23:18, 22 (*νεανίσκος*) young men are mentioned who perform a certain service.<sup>42</sup> Not the old but the young are designated to perform the service. Saul/Paul, who is described as a young man, is thus identified as a person performing service.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>37</sup> G. Schille, *Die Apostelgeschichte des Lukas*, ThHK 5, Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1983, 189.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. J.B. Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1992, 209; W. Eckey, *Die Apostelgeschichte: Der Weg des Evangeliums von Jerusalem nach Rom. Teilband 1, Apg 1,1–15,35*, Neukirchen-Vluy: Neukirchener, 2000, 182; D.L. Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2007, 315; I. H. Marshall, *Acts: An Introduction and Commentary*, Nottingham – Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 2008 (= 1980), 159; R. I. Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary*, Hermeneia, Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2008, 198. E. J. Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2012, 392 supposes that Stephen could have been stripped of clothes, even though it is not mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles.

<sup>39</sup> L.T. Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Sacra Pagina Series 5, Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1992, 140; D.G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, PNTC, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2009, 268; C.S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary. Volume 2, 3:1–14:28*, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2013, 1445.

<sup>40</sup> J.A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, AncB 31, New York: Doubleday, 1998, 394.

<sup>41</sup> D. Dormeyer – F. Galindo, *Die Apostelgeschichte: Ein Kommentar für die Praxis*, Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2003, 118.

<sup>42</sup> The terms *νεανίας* and *νεανίσκος* are used in Acts as synonyms as is evident from their use in connection with Paul’s nephew (cf. Acts 23:17–18, 22). The term *νεανίσκος* denotes someone aged twenty-one to twenty eight (Philo, *De opificio mundi* 36 §105). Cf. J. Murphy-O’Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, 3; J.A. Fitzmyer, *The Letter to Philemon: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AncB 34C, New York: Doubleday, 2000, 105.

<sup>43</sup> It is not convincing that Luke represents Saul as a young man in order to minimize his guilt. This view holds W. Schmithals, *Die Apostelgeschichte des Lukas*, ZBK 3.2, Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1982, 74.

The main hero of the second half of the Acts of the Apostles (who is there predominantly given the Latin name Paul) is at first called Saul. The fact that he is given a Hebrew name serves to emphasize his Judaism.<sup>44</sup> Why his name is changed at Acts 13:9 can only be guessed.<sup>45</sup> The apostle is in Cyprus in front of the Roman proconsul in his first official encounter with the Roman-Hellenistic world. It might therefore be advisable to use exclusively the name under which the apostle of the early church was well known.<sup>46</sup> That Paul shares part of his name with Sergius Paulus may also be a literary reason why Paul's name is here first introduced in Acts.<sup>47</sup>

The mention of Saul before and after the words of the dying Stephen (Acts 7:58b and 8:1a) is possibly to make clear that Saul has heard his prayers, when he commits his spirit to the Lord Jesus (Acts 7:59). He firmly expresses his faith in Christ, thus acknowledging his destiny to be with the risen Lord (recall Luke 23:43; 1 Thess 4:17b; Phil 1:23b). When he uttered the prayer for forgiveness for his executioners (Acts 7:60b), he clearly demonstrated his love for his enemy (Luke 6:35 // Matt 5:44).<sup>48</sup> Although Saul is an eye witness of Stephen's two prayers, the first of which displays the firmness of his faith, while the second bears witness to his love for men. This experience does not bring him to faith; only the appearance of Christ before Damascus does that. The murder of Stephen makes Saul more likely to become an active persecutor of Christians (Acts 8:3). Stephen's prayer for those who are stoning him extends also to Saul.<sup>49</sup> Within the narrative it helps to prepare the ground for the conversion of Saul.

Saul/Paul who appears for the first time in Acts at the moment of Stephen's death will be later be presented with the characteristics of Stephen. Saul/Paul can

<sup>44</sup> J. Jervell, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, KEK, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998, 253.

<sup>45</sup> It is not a question of a change of name either at his conversion (Epiphanius of Salamis, *De duodecim gemmis rationalis*, 80) or at the time of his commission (cf. John Chrysostom, *Hom.* 3,3; PG 51,137). See further e.g. D. L. Marguerat, *Les Actes des apôtres (13–28)*, CNT, Genève: Labor et Fides, 2015, 31.

<sup>46</sup> H. Conzelmann, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, HNT 7, Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1963, 74 thinks, that Luke uses the opportunity provided by Paul's first convert (Sergius Paulus) to introduce Paul into the mission under his own name (so already Jerome, *De viris illustribus* 5; cf. J. Jervell, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, KEK, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998, 347; R. Pesch, *Die Apostelgeschichte (Apg 13–28)*, EKK V/2, Zürich–Neukirchen: Benziger–Neukirchener, 2003<sup>2</sup>, 25). J.A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, AncB 31, New York: Doubleday, 1998, 505 supposes: "It is not impossible, that Luke, being aware of the connotation of Greek adj. *saulos*, "loose, wanton," a term describing the gait of courtesans and effeminate males, decides to avoid the Semitic name that he had been using and preferred the Greco-Roman name in the rest of the story of Paul's evangelization." C.R. Holladay, *Acts*, The New Testament Library, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016, 262: "Paul's name change might just be a Lukan wordplay on Sergius Paulus – the conversion of a Roman 'Paulus' prompts a shift from the Hebrew 'Saul' to the roman 'Paul'".

<sup>47</sup> J. Kürzinger, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, II, GSL.NT 5/2, Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1970, 28 mentions the possibility that for the author of the book of Acts two different traditions come together in our place, so that Acts 13:9 could be regarded as a juncture of these traditions.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. G. Schneider, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, I, HThK V/1, Freiburg–Basel–Wien: Herder, 1980, 477.

<sup>49</sup> Some say that the conversion of Paul was God's answer to the prayer. Cf. W.J. Larkin, *Acts*, The IVP New Testament commentary series 5, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995, 123.

be seen as a continuator and successor of Stephen. Just as Stephen was first introduced as “a man full of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 6:5, 10; cf. 6:3), so also this distinctive feature characterizes Saul/Paul. At his conversion Saul gets the promise to “be filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 9:17) and at the beginning of his missionary work in Cyprus this promise comes to its fulfilment (Acts 13:9). Moreover Paul’s entire missionary activity takes place in connection with the action of the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 13:2, 4, 52; 16:6, 7; 19:6, 21; 20:22,23; 21:4, 11; 28:25).

The special characteristic of Stephen, as well as the other six of his associates who have been chosen to serve, is wisdom (Acts 6:3). During his public ministry, Jesus promised his disciples that he would be the one who would be present at the moment of their persecution and who would give them the right “speech” and “wisdom” to bear testimony, which their adversaries will not be able to resist (Luke 21:15). This promise is fulfilled not only in the case of Stephen (cf. Acts 6:10), but also with Paul, who is endowed with eloquence and convincing words, e.g. when he speaks to Agrippa (cf. Acts 26:28).

Further in Acts 6:8 Stephen is portrayed as a man who was “full of grace and power” and who did “wonders and signs” among the people. The divine grace also has a pivotal role in the life of Paul and his co-workers. In Acts 14:26 it is stated about Paul and Barnabas that in Antioch they “had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed”.<sup>50</sup> Paul speaks about his task – given to him by the Lord Jesus – of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace (Acts 20:24). Stephen’s doing “wonders and signs” (τέρατα καὶ σημεῖα), which fulfils the prophecy of Joel 3:3 quoted in Peter’s sermon at Pentecost in Jerusalem (Acts 2:19), is in accordance not only with Jesus’ public ministry (Acts 2:22) and with the missionary activity of the apostles (Acts 2:43; 5:12; cf. 4:30) but also with the missionary work of Paul and his co-workers (Acts 14:3; 15:12). “Signs and wonders”, which occur through Paul and his co-workers, are evidence of divine support for their missionary preaching, which is characterized as “a word of his grace” (Acts 14:3). As the action of Stephen, which was characterized by “wonders and signs”, was done through grace, so it is with Paul.

There is a certain relation between Stephen’s speech and Paul’s speeches. Stephen’s speech, one of the most important sections of Acts,<sup>51</sup> includes two major themes which are intermingled: 1) Throughout the history of the chosen nation, God called upon persons to act as liberators, but the Jews rejected them. 2) The Jews had the tabernacle in the wilderness and later the temple built by Solomon, but they fell into idolatry (Acts 7:39–43) and made the mistake of thinking that God actually dwelt in the temple (Acts 7:44–50). Although Stephen’s speech has in many respects a distinctive character, yet in style it has affinities with Paul’s speech in Pisidian Antioch with the historical section about the period of the early monarchy

<sup>50</sup> Later also Silas is commended by the Christian community to the grace of the Lord (Acts 15:40).

<sup>51</sup> The literature is immense; see e.g. the list by D.L. Marguerat, *Les Actes des apôtres (1–12)*, CNT, Genève: Labor et Fides, 2007, 227–228.

(Acts 13:16–23),<sup>52</sup> and in content it has links with Paul’s speech in Athens that contains the condemnation of the belief that gods dwell in temples (Acts 17:24–25).

Moreover, it is possible to notice another parallelism between Stephen and Paul that relates to the motive of divine revelation. In Acts Stephen is described as a recipient of divine revelation, which is narrated indirectly in Acts 7:55 and directly in Acts 7:56 and emphasized by the repetition. This introduction of Stephen as a recipient of divine revelation assimilates him to Abraham (Acts 7:2) and Moses (Acts 7:30–31) and points to the event on the day of Pentecost, following the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus into heaven, when the Holy Spirit came and filled the apostles, when they began to speak in other languages (Acts 2:4) and when Peter in his speech quoted from the Old Testament prophet Joel, explaining that in the last days, the Holy Spirit will be poured out on all people with attendant signs that include prophecy, dreams and visions (Acts 2:17). Stephen’s vision in Acts 7:55–56 can be contrasted with Saul’s vision on the Damascus road in which Jesus responds to the one who is preventing the spread of the Gospel (Acts 9:4–5; 22:6–7, 19; 26:14–15). Later on during his missionary work in Corinth, Paul is encouraged by a vision of the Lord Jesus in the face of danger (Acts 18:9–10).<sup>53</sup> Additionally the author of Acts presents Paul as a person who is endowed with dreams (Acts 16:9–10; 27:23–24). Thus, through his use of dreams and visions, Luke affirms the mandate of the early Church as a continuation of the mandate of Jesus’ own ministry (cf. Luke 3:21–22; 4:1–13; 9:29–36; 10:18; 22:43–44).<sup>54</sup>

Finally we can observe that Stephen’s prayer for forgiveness for his executioners – “Lord, do not hold this sin against them” (Acts 7:60b) – serves as a substitute for the offer of forgiveness normally found in the speeches in Acts, namely both in the preaching of Peter (cf. 2:38; 3:19; 10:43) and of Paul (Acts 13:38). Stephen cannot speak of forgiveness to his listeners who have stopped their ears (Acts 7:57), but as his last act he prays for their forgiveness, thus expressing his petition for their good and testifying to God’s saving offer.<sup>55</sup>

## 5. Conclusions

Stephen and Saul/Paul indisputably belong among the central protagonists of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles. Acts 7:54–8:3, which is the concluding

<sup>52</sup> There is a radically different function for the historical sketches in the two speeches, however. Stephen uses Old Testament history to depict the rebelliousness of the Jews toward their divinely appointed leaders. Paul uses it to show God’s faithfulness to his promises for Israel, promises that were ultimately fulfilled in Christ.

<sup>53</sup> After the Damascus Road confrontation, the Lord Jesus speaks to Ananias and directs him to go to minister to Saul, reassuring the disciple that he will not be harmed but will be carrying out a part of God’s plan (Acts 9:10–17).

<sup>54</sup> With regard to the theme of dreams and vision in Luke-Acts, see J.B.F. Miller, *Convinced that God had Called Us: Dreams, Visions, and the Perception of God’s Will in Luke-Acts*, Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2007, especially 109–236.

<sup>55</sup> R.C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation, Volume 2: The Acts of the Apostles*, Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1990, 86.

section of the narrative about the preaching of the early Church in Jerusalem (Acts 2:1–8:3), is one of the central passages in the Acts of the Apostles. The key role of the story about Stephen is evident from the reality that his proclamation causes the crisis that leads to the spread of the gospel from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1b; 9:31) and so his martyrdom leads to the fulfilment of the commission in Acts 1:8. The introduction of Saul/Paul in Acts 7:58; 8:1a, 3 seems to be inserted into the narrative about Stephen, although this editorial activity in no way means that the author of Acts does not here in some way refer to historical fact. Introducing Saul at this point in the narrative prepares for the story of his conversion in Acts 9 and provides trustworthiness to Paul's later recollection of the incident in Acts 22:20, but it also shows that with Stephen's death the empty place will, through God's providence, be taken by Saul/Paul. Stephen, who is portrayed in Acts with many characteristics that recall the representation of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke, is an exemplary model of discipleship, whose correlation with Jesus is not just in terms of imitation but also and particularly in terms of continuation. Stephen, who can be considered a paradigmatic disciple of Jesus and whose portrait in Acts represents the distinctive characteristics of the apostles, can be regarded as a precursor of Saul/Paul, who can be seen as his continuator and successor. Just as God, in his providential goodness, cared that by the spreading of the Gospel there would be no place where the Christian message would not be accepted (a Christian community arose in each mission site), so he also takes care that the place left after the death of the first Christian martyr is not left empty.

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