

ACTS of the Holy Spirit

Session #11 – 7:1 - 60

I. The Story of Israel - Abraham (7:1 - 16)

Verse 1

Then the high priest (probably Caiaphas) asked Stephen,
“Are these charges true?”

The charges against Stephen (Acts 6:11-14):

- 1) Speaking blasphemous words against Moses and God
- 2) Speaking against “this holy place” (temple) and the law
- 3) Saying that Jesus would destroy the temple and the customs given by Moses.

Stephen’s “defense” was really an attack based on the history of the Jewish nation and their rejection of God’s ideas.

Section 1 – (vs. 2 – 8) – God’s Promise

Point 1 – God appeared to Abraham prior to being in Israel!

Therefore, the temple was **NOT** necessary
the nation of Israel was **NOT** necessary

Point 2 – God promised but Abraham had to have faith

Point 3 – Even in bondage in Egypt – God kept his covenant

Section 2 – (vs. 9 – 16) – God’s faithfulness through Joseph

Point 4 – God was with Joseph OUTSIDE of Israel

Joseph is a “type” of Christ in that the “sons of Israel” rejected him and later he became their savior by supernatural means.

Point 5 – The only land Abraham ever really owned in Canaan was his burial plot – the rest was a promise received by Abraham from God.

Section 3 – (vs. 17 – 22) – Early life of Moses

Moses is another “type” of Christ in that his mother was selected by God in a miraculous way – He was “well pleasing” to God (Just like Christ at his baptism and at the Mount of Transfiguration -

All this Moses did OUTSIDE of the land of Israel and WITHOUT a temple.

II. The Story of Israel - Moses (7:17 - 50)

Section 4 – (vs. 23 – 29) – Israel rejects Moses

At forty years old – Moses came to see and “help” his fellow Hebrews but they rejected his help and he had to flee.

Point 6 - The Hebrews denied that he had any right to rule over them! This arrogance and pride was being used against God’s anointed and this is what is happening again in the days of Christ.

Section 5 – (vs. 30 – 34) – Moses at Mount Sinai

Point 7 – God appeared to Moses in a burning bush “in the wilderness” – He does not need temples or nations to limit his access to His people.

Point 8 – God calls and commissions those HE chooses.

Humanly speaking, Moses was a murderer and was not qualified to redeem the people of God – but God chooses his own redeemers not based on human logic or rules.

Section 6 – (vs. 35 – 36) – Moses was Israel’s deliverer

Even though his fellow Hebrews rejected him – Moses was sent by God to rescue them regardless of their lack of appreciation of him.

Point 9 – Moses was validated as God’s representative through many signs and wonders and words from God.

Therefore, when you are judging the validity of a person sent from God, there are clear and tangible signs to look for to confirm their calling by God!

Point 10 – Moses was sent to rescue **NOT** destroy God’s people!

While the Jews are “protecting” their nation, their temple, and their people – God is trying to save them not preserve their traditions.

Section 7 – (vs. 37 - 41) – Israel repeated rejection

Point 11 – Moses prophesied about a “prophet like me” that God would raise up in the future “from among you”.

Therefore, Jesus is that prophet God has raised up.

Point 12 – Just as Moses had special revelation from God upon Mount Sinai – So Jesus has an intimate relationship with God.

Point 13 – Just as the Hebrews made an idol in the desert and worshipped it as the “works of their own hand” instead of God – so the Jews worship the temple as their treasure rather than God who designed and commissioned the temple.

Section 8 – (vs. 42 - 44) – God responds to rejection

God released them to worship useless idols (Amos. 5:25-27)

Point 14 – The Babylonian captivity was a direct result of the Jewish people's rejection of God and his proper worship.

Section 9 – (vs. 45 – 50) – They still had the Tabernacle

Point 15 – Even with the physical presence of God in a Tabernacle and later a Temple – this did not keep the nation of Israel from rejecting God's messengers.

Point 16 – God does not reside only in temples – God is present where those who truly believe Him are present.

Therefore, just as throughout the history of our people, God is not limited to places or to peoples of our choosing – He is free to work among any people and at any place. Who are we to feel like we "own" Him or can direct his purposes?

III. Accusation of Stephen (7:51 - 53)

Verse 51

"You stiff-necked people! (sklerotrachelos /only usage)

Your hearts (kardia = the will/center of spiritual life)

and ears (ous = the mind/the faculty of understanding)

are still uncircumcised. (aperitmetos = only use/
a (not) + peritmeto (covered/redeemed – Gentile like!)

You are just like your ancestors:

You always (aei = ever/constantly) **resist** (antipipto =
anti (against) + pipto(light)) **the Holy Spirit!**

Point 17 – You continue to repeat the same error – resisting the work of the Holy Spirit by rejecting the work of God's revelation and God's commissioned and appointed messengers.

20 times in the O.T. – God accused them of being "stiffnecked"

Note: The realization of martyrdom releases Stephen from fear to give this message of truth!

Verse 52

**Was there ever a prophet
your ancestors did not persecute?**

**They even killed those
who predicted the coming
of the Righteous One.**

And now you have betrayed (prodotes = give over)
and murdered him (phoneus = homicide)

Jesus echoed this in Luke 11:47-48 – "Woe to you, because you build tombs for the prophets, and it was your ancestors who killed them. So you testify that you approve of what your ancestors did; they killed the prophets, and you build their tombs."

Paul agreed – 2 Thessalonians 2:15-16 – "who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to everyone in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved."

Verse 53

**you who have received the law
that was given through angels
but have not obeyed it."**

Point 18 – You have not obeyed God's law because in your pride you murdered God's anointed.

This would have outraged the Sanhedrin because they pride themselves on "obeying" every jot and tittle of the law.

The Implications of Stephen's Message:

- 1) Prior to this encounter, many of the Christians saw Jesus as a "Jewish Messiah" – now the reality sets in that Jesus is a Messiah for all people!
- 2) The church is not just a "righteous remnant" of Judaism – but a new movement founded in Jerusalem but not limited to Jerusalem
- 3) The Jewish institutions have no value in of themselves
- 4) Stephen points out that a persons nationality or adherence to a particular religious heritage does not save them – but only acceptance personally of Jesus as the Christ. Therefore, rejection of Christ is death.

IV. Martyrdom of Stephen (7:54 - 60)

Verse 54

**When the members
of the Sanhedrin heard this,
they were furious** (diaprio hardia = saw in two in the heart)
and gnashed their teeth (brycho odous = grind teeth together)
at him.

Rage is the reaction that proves their ungodly position!
Seven times the scriptures speaks of Hell as a place of "weeping and gnashing of teeth".

Verse 55

But Stephen,
full of the Holy Spirit,
looked up to heaven
and saw the glory (doxa) of God,
and Jesus standing (histemi = standing is a position of power
and support = the victory position!)
at the right hand of God.

Stephen at his time of victory sees Christ standing with him in
heaven.

Verse 56

“Look,” he said,
“I see heaven open (dianoigo = To open the closed)
and the Son of Man
standing at the right hand of God.”

This would probably be considered the highest form of
blasphemy by the council. Stephen seeing God on His throne like
Daniel did! To see an open door of welcome. Also seeing Christ
standing on the right hand means they were wrong about Christ
all along!

What a welcoming committee!

Verse 57

At this
they 1) covered their ears
and, 2) yelling (krazo = crazy sounds)
at the top of their voices,
they all 3) rushed at him,
Their rage overflowed in crazy zeal for death!

Verse 58

dragged him out of the city
and began to stone him.

Meanwhile,
the witnesses laid their coats
at the feet
of a young man
named Saul.

Like in the days of Christ’s crucifixion, their rage left them no
time for legal matters or traditional concerns.

We see the introduction of Saul who will dominate the closing
chapters of Acts.

Verse 59

While they were stoning him,
Stephen prayed,
“Lord Jesus, receive (dechomai = to take by the hand)
my spirit.”

Now the standing Jesus at the right hand of God reaches out to
take the hand of Stephen as he comes home for eternity.

Just as Jesus’ words on the cross – “into thy hands I commend
my spirit” (Luke 23:46) – Stephen trusts his spirit (his eternal
nature) into the hands of God.

Verse 60

Then he fell on his knees
and cried out,
“Lord,
do not hold this sin against them.”

When he had said this,
he fell asleep.

Stephen died as he lived; **mimicking Jesus**. Just as Christ cried
out for mercy upon his murderers (Luke 23:34), so Stephen also
cries out for mercy for his accusers.

We find out later, that this simple prayer had a major impact on
Saul. We never know the impact of radical faith on those standing
around!

³ As Stephen “fell asleep” the church becomes awake!

A Summary of Stephen's Ministry:

- 1) He witnessed with his **LOVE** – He was a server who was used in power ways by the Spirit to demonstrate the love of God and His Son Jesus Christ.
- 2) He witnessed with his **LIPS** – When he was given the opportunity, he was not afraid to share the truth as the Spirit led him,
- 3) he witnessed with his **LIFE** – Ultimately his death was his greatest proof of what he did and what he said was truth! This truth profoundly affected Paul who would be the Apostle to the Gentiles.