

### Acts 7:44-53 NIV

#### “Do you resist God’s Spirit and don’t realize it”

“Our ancestors had the tabernacle of the covenant law with them in the wilderness. It had been made as God directed Moses, according to the pattern he had seen. <sup>45</sup> After receiving the tabernacle, our ancestors under Joshua brought it with them when they took the land from the nations God drove out before them. It remained in the land until the time of David, <sup>46</sup> who enjoyed God’s favor and asked that he might provide a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. <sup>47</sup> But it was Solomon who built a house for him.

<sup>48</sup> “However, the Most High does not live in houses made by human hands. As the prophet says

<sup>49</sup> ‘Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me? says the Lord. Or where will my resting place be?’ <sup>50</sup> Has not my hand made all these things?’

<sup>51</sup> “You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit! <sup>52</sup> 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 and murdered him—<sup>53</sup> you who have received the law that was given through angels but have not obeyed it.”

#### Acts 7 gives us a lot to digest.

Think of a person on a crash-diet trying to handle a 10-course formal dinner.

**This chapter contains mysteries, too.**

Our sermon title suggests one of those stumpers, and we’ll soon get to it.



**First, suppose the highest ranking person in your church greeted you as you arrived for worship this A.M. and asked: “Are these charges true?”**

**You’d wonder,**

**“What charges? What are you talking about?”**

**Acts chapter 7 starts with the high priest asking Stephen that very question:**

**“Are these charges true?”**

**As we have noted before, the Bible’s content is inspired; its chapter and verse divisions are not.**

Where our Bibles have chapter and verse divisions, there are no breaks in the original text. Chapters and verses numbers help us find words, but it’s always wise to read the contexts.<sup>1</sup>

**We need the closing verses of Acts 6 to understand the high priest’s question.**

**The people accusing Stephen brought hired liars into the courtroom who claimed:**

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<sup>1</sup> The paragraph headings or titles in most Bible versions aren’t inspired, either. .

<sup>13</sup> “This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. <sup>14</sup> For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us.”

**While Jesus was here, he spoke of raising a temple in three days after it was destroyed.**

**But as John 2:19-21 tells us, Jesus meant his body, not the Jewish worship place.**

**By calling him a Nazarene (from Nazareth), the witnesses intended to demean Jesus.**

The people making these charges saw no worth in ordinary folks.

Nazareth was located in the northern hills.

Jerusalem elites considered Jesus a hillbilly.<sup>2</sup>

**Had they checked the facts, they’d have discovered Jesus’ Bethlehem birthplace.**

This sort of disparagement still happens and causes me to like the following story:

“He wasn’t well educated and his manner was somewhat rough and crude. He became a Christian and was ‘on fire for God.’ He constantly pestered the minister to help him be of some genuine service to his Savior.

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<sup>2</sup> According to John 1: 46, even Nathanael wondered whether anything good could come out of Nazareth. Those concluding that about Nazareth seemed ignorant of Isaiah’s famous, beautiful, and still oft-quoted prophecy in 9:1-7.

“In desperation, the minister handed him a list of ten names with this explanation: “These are all members of the church, but they seldom attend services. Some of them are prominent men of the city. Contact them to be more faithful. Here is some church stationery you may use to write the letters. Get them back in church.’

“The man accepted the challenge with rugged determination and enthusiasm. About three weeks later, a letter from a prominent physician in the city reached the church office. His name had been on the list. Inside the letter was a check for \$1,000 and this note:

‘Dear Preacher, Enclosed is my check for \$1,000 to make up for my missing church so much, but be assured that I will be present this Lord's Day and each Lord's Day following. I will not by choice miss services again. Sincerely,

M.B. Jones, M.D.

**P.S. Would you please tell your secretary that there is only one "T" in dirty and no ‘C’ in skunk." <sup>3</sup>**



**There was no humor in the Acts 6 -7 courtroom. Critics wickedly accused Stephen and physically dragged him into court.**

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<sup>3</sup> **Guideposts**, May 1985 “Fudging Words” by Bonnie Summers Schmidt

**In his defense. Stephen reviewed several events in Bible history.**

**Stephen ended with this accusation:**

“You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit!”

**Why did Stephen mention the Holy Spirit? Can you find where Stephen even mentioned the Holy Spirit in Acts 7?**

A brief review of Stephen’s Acts 7 response reveals some amazing and sobering insights.

**1. Were you to ask most Christians, “Where is the most holy place on earth?” what locations would you expect to hear?**

**Would responses include: Jerusalem, Rome, Lourdes, Dallas, Salt Lake City, Nashville?**

**Most first century Jews would have thought the Jerusalem Temple.**

**In his presentation, Stephen related historic times when God appeared to Israel’s most famous leaders: Abraham, Jacob, and Moses.**

The Lord appeared to those men in such diverse places as Mesopotamia, Haran, Egypt, and Midian.

**We know the locations now as Iran, Iraq, Egypt, and Jordan (possibly Saudi Arabia).**

**In v. 48, Stephen said something amazing.**

“The Most High does not live in houses made by human hands. As the prophet says,” (quoting the Lord through the prophet Isaiah):

**<sup>49</sup>‘Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me? says the Lord. Or where will my resting place be?<sup>50</sup> Has not my hand made all these things?’**

**If the Lord made everything, how could only a few places be holy?**

**How many folks prize footrests?**



**In Bible times, a footrest might not have been the cleanest of objects.**

**What part of a footrest would you regard as holy?**

**Most important, how do you treat the holy temple God gave you?**

**The Bible emphasizes:** “Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.” I Corinthians 6:19, 20 NIV.

**No building is holy, but our bodies should be.**

**2. Here is Stephen’s second major point: The ancient fathers repeatedly disobeyed God.**

**When God sent prophets to warn them of wrong-doing, the ancients killed most of them and scorned the rest.**

**About 1350 BC, Moses told Israel:**

“The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him... The Lord said; ‘I will put my words in his mouth. He will tell them everything I command him. <sup>19</sup>I myself will call to account anyone who does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name.’”<sup>4</sup>

**T**hou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.  
Exodus 20:16

**Jesus performed miracles no one else had ever performed or could ever.**

**He did and taught everything God assigned him.**

**But few leaders listened to Jesus.**

They envied him, falsely accused Jesus, convicted him in a kangaroo court, and killed him.

**You know Moses’ Law, the Ten Commandments.**

**The fathers regularly violated the first command:**

**“You shall have no other gods before me.”**

**Moses was away only a few days when Israel demanded a god they could see and**

**“out jumped that golden calf.”**

**The first century god wasn’t a golden calf that incited partying and permissiveness.**

The triple-headed god of political power, greed, and pleasure ruled much of Israel’s leadership.

**Countless people now bow at the altars that very triple-headed god of power, greed, and pleasure.**

**After doing this, they wonder why there’s so much hate and turmoil.**

**The ninth commandment forbade telling lies.**

**Yet Israel’s leaders secretly hired hoodlums to testify against Jesus and Stephen in their highest, most solemn court.**

**The Sanhedrin deserved the *stiff-necked* label.**

**3. But when did Israel resist the Holy Spirit?**

**Recall how corrupt folks became in Noah’s time?**

**In Genesis 6:3, the Lord warned,**

**“My Spirit will not abide with man forever.”**

**Ephesians draws a clear contrast between living by God’s Spirit and living by our own desires:**

“And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Deuteronomy 18:15-19 NIV

<sup>5</sup> Ephesians 4:30-32 NIV



**For years, I carried bitterness and anger.**

I took a lot of my frustration out on our kids that I should have shed in proper, godly ways.

When I look at family pictures taken in the early years, I usually see a blank stare on my face, and Norma, bless her heart, always looks cheerful.

**We get rid of all bitterness, and we forgive as God forgave us in Christ.**

We regularly check our minds to keep bitterness from reentering.

**No one cleans house only once a year.**

**We also comply with Jesus’ words.**

**Do you remember what the Lord told Moses about Jesus?**

“I myself will call to account anyone who does not listen to my words that the prophet (Jesus) speaks in my name.”

**The New Testament contains Jesus’ and his Apostles’ teaching.**

If we go by what a religious teacher tells us or even follow the so-called Lectionary, we won’t get Jesus’ full message.

**I pray that we’ll all read through the entire New Testament by year’s end.**

**Read as if God is speaking to you; you’ll be happier, more confident, and feel lots more love.**

**One last notable point that Stephen made.**

**The Lord wants us to look forward, not back.**

**Life becomes increasingly unstable and unpredictable.**

Many people want the “good old days” back.

**The Israelites wanted to go back to Egypt.**

I don’t know what the Lord has in mind for us or this country.

In the same way, God told Abraham to go to a land he would show him, God calls us forward.

**The *Book of Hebrews* discusses all the great men and women whom God called to a new country.**

“If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return.

Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.”<sup>6</sup>

**I pray that all of us will trust our loving Creator, boldly witness our faith in Jesus our savior, forgive our enemies, and love one another.**



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<sup>6</sup> Hebrews 11:15, 16 NIV