

Acts 7

In chapter 6, we saw how Stephen is brought before the council and accused of blaspheming – God, Temple, Law and Moses.

In this chapter he addresses these accusations by narrating a panoramic history of the Israelites.

V1 - Then the high priest said, “Are these things so?”

- a. **Then the high priest said:** The **high priest** mentioned here was probably still Caiaphas, the same one who presided over the trial of Jesus (Matthew 26:57)
- b. We shouldn't think Stephen instructed the Sanhedrin on points of Jewish history they were ignorant of. Instead, Stephen emphasized some things in Jewish history they may not have considered: **That God never confined Himself to one place (like the temple), and that the Jewish people had a habit of rejecting those God sends to them.**
- c. This really was not a defense. Stephen wasn't interested in defending himself. He simply wanted to proclaim the truth about Jesus in a way people could understand

V2,3 - And Stephen replied: “Brothers and fathers, listen to me. The God of glory appeared to our ancestor Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, 3 and said to him, ‘Leave your country and your relatives and go to the land that I will show you.’

Stephen emphasized that the God of glory appeared to Abraham before he even came into the Promised Land.

“A single thread runs right through the first part of his defense. It is that the God of Israel is a pilgrim God, who is not restricted to any

one place...If he has any home on earth, it is with his people that he lives.” (John Stott)

V9 - “The patriarchs, jealous of Joseph, sold him into Egypt; but God was with him,

- a. God was with him: Again, Stephen emphasized the spiritual presence of God with Joseph all the time. Joseph did not need to go to the temple to be close to God – there was no temple. Instead, God was with him all the time.
- b. Becoming jealous, sold Joseph: Stephen mentioned the story of Joseph because he is a picture of Jesus, in that the sons of Israel rejected Joseph, who later became a savior to them (and the only possible savior).

V 20-22 At this time Moses was born, and he was beautiful before God. For three months he was brought up in his father's house; 21 and when he was abandoned, Pharaoh's daughter adopted him and brought him up as her own son. 22 So Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in his words and deeds.

- a. At this time Moses was born, and was well pleasing to God: Moses was also like Jesus in that he was favored by God from birth and preserved in childhood. As well, he was well pleasing to God without the temple or the customs of institutional religion.
 - b. Was mighty in words and deeds: Moses was also like Jesus who would come after him, in that he was wise, skillful with words, and a man of mighty... deeds.
- V23-28 - “When he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his relatives, the Israelites.[d] 24 When he saw one of them being wronged, he defended the oppressed man and avenged him***

by striking down the Egyptian. 25 He supposed that his kinsfolk would understand that God through him was rescuing them, but they did not understand. 26 The next day he came to some of them as they were quarreling and tried to reconcile them, saying, 'Men, you are brothers; why do you wrong each other?' 27 But the man who was wronging his neighbor pushed Moses[e] aside, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge over us? 28 Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?'

a. When he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren: At an appointed time, Moses came down from his royal throne out of care and concern for his brethren. This was another way that Moses was like Jesus who would come after him.

b. He supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand: When Moses offered deliverance to Israel, he was rejected and rejected with spite. Israel denied that he had any right to be a ruler and a judge over them.

Stephen's message was plain: "You have rejected Jesus, who was like Moses yet greater than him, and you deny that Jesus has any right to be a ruler and a judge over you."

v30 "Now when forty years had passed, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in the flame of a burning bush.

- a. Stephen again emphasized one of the main points of his reply to the council – that God, His glory, and His work was not confined to the temple. God appeared to Moses in the wilderness, before there ever was a temple.

b. I will send you to Egypt: Stephen emphasized that God both called and commissioned Moses.

c. This Moses whom they rejected: Even though Israel had rejected Moses and his leadership, God appointed Moses with unmistakable signs, including the burning bush in the wilderness.

- d. He brought them out: Though Israel rejected Moses at what might be called his "first coming," he still remained God's chosen deliverer for Israel.

v37 This is the Moses who said to the Israelites, 'God will raise up a prophet for you from your own people as he raised me up.' ...39 Our ancestors were unwilling to obey him; instead, they pushed him aside, and in their hearts they turned back to Egypt, 40 saying to Aaron, 'Make gods for us who will lead the way for us; as for this Moses who led us out from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has happened to him.'

Moses promised that there would come after him another Prophet and warned that Israel should take special care to listen to this coming Prophet. But just like Israel rejected Moses, so they were rejecting Jesus, who is the Prophet Moses spoke of.

b. This is he who was in the congregation... who received the living oracles: Moses, like Jesus, led the congregation of God's people, enjoyed special intimacy with God and brought forth the revelation of God.

c. They made a calf in those days... and rejoiced in the works of their own hands: When ancient Israel rejected Moses and God's work through him, they replaced him with their own man-made religion. Stephen applied the same idea to the council he spoke to.

The phrase and rejoiced in the works of their own hands is especially meaningful. One of the accusations against Stephen was that he blasphemed the temple. It wasn't that Stephen spoke against the temple, but against the way Israel worshipped the temple of God instead of the God of the temple. Just as Israel worshipped the calf in the wilderness, so now they were worshipping the works of their own hands.

v44 "Our ancestors had the tent of testimony in the wilderness, as God directed when he spoke to Moses, ordering him to make it according to the pattern he had seen. 45 Our ancestors in turn brought it in with Joshua when they dispossessed the nations that God drove out before our ancestors. And it was there until the time of David, 46 who found favor with God and asked that he might find a dwelling place for the house of Jacob. 47 But it was Solomon who built a house for him. 48 Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made with human hands

a. Stephen's point was that the presence of the tabernacle or the temple did not keep them from rejecting God and His special messengers.

- b. However, the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands: Stephen confronted their idolatry of the temple. In doing so, they tried to confine God within the temple. Yet God is too big to fit in any temple man could make.

v51 "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you are forever opposing the Holy Spirit, just as your ancestors used to do.

Stephen now accuses his hearers of being just like their ancestors. Carrying the name of God, but having rejected God. They have broken the law.

God accuses the leaders of being stiff-necked or stubborn 20 times in the OT.

Deuteronomy 10:16: Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer.

Exo 32:9 And the LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and indeed it [is] a stiff-necked people!

Jer 9:26 "Egypt, Judah, Edom, the people of Ammon, Moab, and all [who are] in the farthest corners, who dwell in the wilderness. For all [these] nations [are] uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel [are] uncircumcised in the heart."

V 54 When they heard these things, they became enraged and ground their teeth at Stephen.

Surely the anger in the council would have reached its peak when Stephen accused them of being law breakers and disobedient to law.

v55 But filled with the Holy Spirit, he gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

Reason for Stephen's radiant face. His vision showed Jesus who was standing.

v57 But they covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him. 58 Then they dragged him out of the city and began to stone him

Old dignified men suddenly lose their temper and the council turns into a ravaging mob. They display a rage and mob lynching which has not yet been done ever. That's why Luke describes it in detail.

v59 While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." 60 Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he died.

Stephen's life ended in the same way it had been lived: In complete trust in God, believing that Jesus would take care of him.

Acts 8:1-3

And Saul approved of their killing. On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. ...3 But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison

Saul was till now in the shadows but present throughout.

In the council, synagogue.

Could Stephen's words of forgiveness have caused a struggle in the heart of Saul?

Saul must have been puzzled how can the number of followers keep increasing, how can they hold on in the time of persecution, how can a dying man forgive his killers? Are Christian crazy? Then they cannot be corrected. They can only be eliminated by violence. This may have set off this violent persecution by Paul. And later the conversion of Paul.

The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church. (Tertullian).

Illus – Sr. Rani Maria. Martyred on 23 Feb 1995

Emphases

- 1. OT as the basis of NT**
- 2. Can a sermon bring about a change of heart?**

We can see examples of yes and no. ultimately God has to work according to his will and plan.

Illustration – convention speaker in church inspires people to give up drinking. The bar owner has to only wait till the next day when the sun is hot and all the people will return.

How many sermons have we heard?

Question

How do we still try to put God in a box?