

**"The Trial of Stephen"**

**Part 7**

**Acts 6:8-7:60**

**Introduction:** In our study of Acts we are looking at Stephen's trial before the Sanhedrin. The Jews who had heard Stephen speak in the synagogue did not appreciate his words, so they were set on destroying him. They hired false witnesses who falsely testified against him.

**Acts 6:13-14**

*<sup>13</sup> And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law:*

*<sup>14</sup> For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.*

The emphasis of the Jews was on the temple, the Law and Moses. In the sermon we are looking at Stephen has pointed to three Old Testament saints. Abraham, Joseph and Moses. Each of these men worshipped God without a temple and each of them were saved without the Law. Even the man they worshipped and that was Moses. There was something else Stephen was bringing to their attention in the history of Israel. The nation had developed a habit of rejecting the men whom God sent to deliver them. Joseph was rejected by his brother and Moses was rejected several times by his brethren. Both Joseph and Moses were men sent from God to preserve the nation. This pattern of rejection had continued because the Jews whom Stephen was speaking to had rejected the Greatest Deliverer of all, Jesus Christ. This is the point that Stephen is laying the foundation for. Tonight as we continue Stephen is going to focus upon the Jews thoughts concerning the temple. Let us remember that the Jews believed that God had to be worshipped in Jerusalem and in the temple. Just as a side note this was the very temple that God's glory had departed from when the Babylonian captivity happened, and it had never returned. So all the emphasis they placed on the temple was empty because God's presence was not there. The only time God's presence was in the temple was when Jesus entered in while He walked the earth.

**I. "The Tabernacle and the Temple"**

**Notice Acts 7:44-45**

Here Stephen points to the Tabernacle that was both portable and temporary as Israel traveled through the wilderness. When Joshua took over after the death of Moses, they carried the Tabernacle into Canaan. Israel worshipped God without a temple. It was a Tabernacle and not a Temple that was the center of worship. The Tabernacle existed into the days of David.

**Notice Acts 7:46-47**

David desired to build God a Temple but would only be permitted to gather the materials. It would be Solomon who would build the Temple. The point to be seen here is that it was not God's idea for the Temple, but it was David's. Notice the words of Constable:

*"The temple, Stephen implies, was a royal whim, tolerated of God."*

**Notice Acts 7:48**

Stephen makes the statement here that God cannot be confined to a Temple. Let us notice what Solomon said at the dedication of the Temple.

**1 Kings 8:26-27**

<sup>26</sup> *And now, O God of Israel, let thy word, I pray thee, be verified, which thou spakest unto thy servant David my father.*

<sup>27</sup> **But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?**

**Notice Acts 7:49-50**

Here Stephen quotes from the words of Isaiah.

**Isaiah 66:1-2**

*Thus saith the LORD, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest?*

<sup>2</sup> *For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.*

Notice the words of Neil on Stephen's point:

*"It would seem that these verses form the real thrust of Stephen's speech. In quoting with approval Isaiah's words, Stephen would appear to imply that, as Christ is the new Moses, he is also the new Temple. In him and through him alone can men approach God."*

This is exactly what the book of Hebrews teaches. Jesus is better than the old economy. He is better than Moses, He is better than angels, and He is better than the old sacrificial system. Man does not meet God at a certain geographical location, but we meet God in Jesus Christ.

**Application:**

Stephen confronted the Jews of their idolatry of the temple. They had tried to confine God to Jerusalem and to the Temple. But God is too big to fit in any temple that man could make.

There are many people who do the very same thing today. They want to confine God to the church. In other words they believe they meet with God in the church but, as far as they are concerned God is absent from the rest of their lives. To these people God only lives at church. These people come to church and act very "religious" because they believe that is where they meet with God and then they go back home thinking they left God at the church, and they live in their sin. This was the very pattern and practice in the lives of many of the Jews.

We must understand that while we come here to worship God, but He is not confined to this building.

**Matthew 5:33-35**

<sup>33</sup> *Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths:*

<sup>34</sup> *But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne:*

<sup>35</sup> *Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King.*

God is everywhere and we can worship God anywhere.

**Psalms 139:7-13**

<sup>7</sup> *Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?*

<sup>8</sup> *If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there.*

<sup>9</sup> *If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea;*

<sup>10</sup> *Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.*

<sup>11</sup> *If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me.*

<sup>12</sup> *Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee.*

<sup>13</sup> *For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb.*

## II. Confronting the Jews

### Notice Acts 7:51-53

We will look in detail at these verses, but I wanted to first of all see how direct and to the point Stephen's application is. He was not concerned about offending his listeners. He did not in anyway soften the Truth. Many would look at Stephen here and say that he was "extreme", and I would certainly agree with that statement. But he needed to be extreme because the situation for the Jews was "extremely" desperate. They were lost and dying in their sins. They did not need someone to tell them everything was just fine, they had Satan and his demons to do that. They needed someone to tell them the Truth directly. Just like a doctor who finds in his testing an aggressive cancer in his patient. He calls them in, and he presents the Truth and what he believes to be the best aggressive treatment. It is not what they wanted to hear but it is what they needed to hear because the cancer needs to be treated as quickly as possible. This is exactly what is needed in the pulpit of the churches today. Pastors need to tell the Truth concerning sin, judgment, consequences, wrath and the holiness of God. People today do not need stories and they do not need entertainment. They need the Truth and as a pastor I can say that it is my responsibility to study the Word of God and come here with the Truth of God's Word to deliver to you. If I come here unprepared and preach an hour and there are 200 people here, then I just wasted 200 hours of God's time. Churches need pastors who will proclaim the Truth and let the Holy Spirit then do His work.

### Notice Acts 7:54

Here we see that the Holy Spirit took the Truth Stephen preached and He used it to "cut the hearts" of the listeners. That is conviction!!

**Notice Acts 7:51 again.**

There is far too much here to skip over. Stephen called these Jews "stiffnecked" and "uncircumcised" in heart and ears. What was he talking about? To be stiffnecked meant that they refused to bow their heads in worship. They would not recognize Jesus Christ as the Messiah, they refused to bow to Him.

Stephen referred to them as uncircumcised in heart and ears because while they had been circumcised on the outside they were not circumcised on the inside. Circumcision was the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant, but it was also a picture of what God desired to do within the heart of each individual. These Jews boasted in circumcision, but they had missed the point.

**Deuteronomy 10:14-16**

*<sup>14</sup> Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens is the LORD's thy God, the earth also, with all that therein is.*

*<sup>15</sup> Only the LORD had a delight in thy fathers to love them, and he chose their seed after them, even you above all people, as it is this day.*

*<sup>16</sup> Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked.*

What does it mean to have a circumcised heart? It is to have a heart that has been separated from fleshly control and desires. The outward circumcision of the Jews was to symbolize what had happened on the inside. Just like water baptism does not make us righteous, but it is an outward sign that we have been crucified, buried, and resurrected with Jesus Christ and in Him we are new creations. In the same way circumcision was to be an outward sign of what had happen in the heart when a person is saved. The Jews whom Stephen was addressing placed all the emphasis on the outward circumcision, but this was of no value if there was not an inward change. God knew what their hearts were like.

**Jeremiah 9:25-26**

*<sup>25</sup> Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will punish all them which are circumcised with the uncircumcised;*

*<sup>26</sup> Egypt, and Judah, and Edom, and the children of Ammon, and Moab, and all that are in the utmost corners, that dwell in the wilderness: for all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in the heart.*

Israel was no different than the Gentile nations. They were circumcised on the outside but not in the heart. This is exactly the situation with Stephen's audience. The apostle Paul taught the Romans on circumcision also.

**Romans 2:25, 28-29**

*<sup>25</sup> For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision.*

*<sup>28</sup> For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh:*

*<sup>29</sup> But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.*

**Notice Acts 7:51 again.**

These Jews had uncircumcised hearts and ears. What does it mean to have uncircumcised ears? An unsaved person is controlled by the flesh/sin nature within his or her heart. The power of the flesh and its lusts and desires have never been cut away as it has been in the heart of the believer. Not only does the flesh have power over the heart but it also keeps a person from being able to discern the Truth of God's Word.

**Matthew 13:13-14**

*<sup>13</sup> Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand.*

*<sup>14</sup> And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive:*

**Conclusion:**

**1 Corinthians 2:14**

*<sup>14</sup> But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*

Unsaved people are under the blinding and deafening power of the flesh.