

~ACTS~

Lesson 23- Stephen's Defense (part 3)

We are in our third lesson in chapter 7 looking at Stephen's defense as he stands boldly in the face of persecution before the Sanhedrin Council. And we learned in chapter 6 that Stephen was charged with four counts of blasphemy: blaspheming God, Moses, the Law, and the Temple, Acts 6:11, 13. But it's interesting to note that Stephen is not defending himself, but the Holy Spirit is working in and out through him to convict the Sanhedrin Council that they are the ones who are guilty of this blasphemy because they have rejected Jesus Christ. And Stephen convicts them of this sin of rejecting their Messiah by taking them through their Jewish history. And as Stephen does this, he reminds them that their fathers have a habit of continually resisting the Holy Spirit and rejecting God's chosen deliverers.

We left off last talking about the life of Moses. So far, we have made it through the first 36 verses of chapter 7 looking at examples from the life of Abraham and Joseph and Moses. And Stephen continues to bring up examples from the life of Moses to prove to the Council that this Moses was indeed the deliverer sent from God to rescue them out of bondage and bring them into the promise land just as God had promised. But because of their hard heart, the Jewish fathers continued to resist the Holy Spirit. And now continuing from verse 37, Stephen gives them several more examples of how they continued to reject Moses and ultimately God's plan of redemption. And in these next few verses, Stephen is showing the Council how the Jewish fathers, they fell into a state of apostasy and continued to resist the Holy Spirit, [Acts 7:35-43](#).

All the Jews in Stephen's time knew that Moses was a prophet of God, and that he was sent by God as the chosen deliverer for the Jewish people. Everybody in that Council would agree with that, but Stephen is reminding them that "this Moses," whom you regard so highly, it was this Moses whom your fathers continually rejected. And they're no different today, because they too have rejected Moses by rejecting Jesus as the Christ. This is what Jesus said in John 5:46- "[For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me.](#)" That's the point Stephen is making right here in verse 37...

37) This is that Moses who said to the children of Israel, 'The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear.'

Stephen is quoting from Deuteronomy 18:15 LXX about the Prophet Messiah to come, and all the Jews knew this to be a Messianic prophecy and Stephen is convicting them of not heeding Moses' words. You can see how Stephen is turning the tables on them. They were accusing Stephen of blaspheming Moses, but Stephen turns it back on them and says you're the ones who are not listening to Moses because Moses wrote about Jesus Christ and you have rejected Him. This isn't the first time they have had someone convict them using this exact verse. Remember Peter, after the lame man was healed, Peter began preaching Jesus, and in Acts 3:22-23 he quotes this same verse from Deuteronomy 18:15. Now they are hearing it again from Stephen. Then Stephen gives them another example of the fathers rejecting Moses in verses 38-39...

38-39) ³⁸ This is he who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the Angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers, the one who received the living oracles to give to us, ³⁹ whom our fathers would not obey, but rejected. And in their hearts, they turned back to Egypt,

Moses was given the Law on Mount Sinai, but Stephen makes the point that even then, they rejected Moses and turned their hearts back to Egypt. The Greek is emphatic to always point back to Moses as the one they are rejecting. Stephen says, "**This is he...** this Moses who was sent by God..." Stephen says Moses received the Law from an angel, but we also know God was there with Moses on Mount Sinai because God descended on top of the mountain and burned up the whole top of the mountain, Exodus 19:16-20. We know that angels were involved with the giving of the Law because in other places of the New

Testament, Paul tells us that the Law was mediated by angels, Hebrews 2:2-3; Gal 3:19. So it seems this is a lot like the burning bush. The angel of the Lord was there, as well as God Himself as a pre-incarnate appearing of Jesus Christ. I personally believe that everywhere God showed up in the earth in the Old Testament, it was Jesus Christ, because Jesus is the Word of God.

Speaking of the Word, the Logos, Stephen says Moses is “**the one who received the living oracles to give to us.**” The word “oracles” is *λόγια*, which is a plural neuter form of the word Logos. These living oracles is the Living Word of God given to Moses. This is the Law of Moses including the Ten Commandments given to him on Mount Sinai. And Stephen says the **fathers would not obey, but rejected.** The Greek literally says, “This is the one whom our fathers would not willingly render themselves in submissive hearing and obedience to, but they rejected, pushed away.” This word “rejected” in verse 39 is the same word in 7:27 as “pushed away” when Moses first showed himself as the deliverer, “**but he who did his neighbor wrong pushed him away...**” Again, this is the Jewish fathers rejecting Moses and pushing him away. And Stephen says, “**And in their hearts, they turned back to Egypt.**”

This is the progression of apostasy. This is the same progression Paul shows us in **2 Timothy 4:3-4.** They actively, out of their own will, reject the Truth, and then as a result they are turned away from God by their own lusts, being drawn back to sin. And in the case of the Jewish fathers, they rejected the living Word of God given to Moses, and their hearts were drawn back to Egypt and idolatry.

40-41) ⁴⁰ saying to Aaron, ‘**Make us gods to go before us; as for this Moses who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.**’ ⁴¹ **And they made a calf in those days, offered sacrifices to the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands.**

Talk about short term memory, but the truth is they did just what 2 Timothy 4:3-4 says. Before Moses went up into the mountain, everyone heard the Ten Commandments from God Himself on the mountain and the first two commandments specifically say not to worship idols saying, “*You shall have no other gods before Me and you shall not make for yourself a carved image and you shall not bow down to them,*” Exodus 20:3-4. These are the first two commandments, and they broke them immediately and turned their ears away from Truth. And Stephen says they were happy about it too because they **rejoiced in the works of their own hands.** And this is what the Sanhedrin Council was still doing. They weren’t worshipping God, they were worshipping the idol of Legalism. Works based salvation is just another form of idol worship. It’s rejoicing in the works of your hands instead of rejoicing in the work of our Savior Jesus Christ.

Now look at the result of this apostasy in verse 42...

42) Then God turned and gave them up to worship the host of heaven...

There comes a point when a person has seared his conscience and hardened his heart over and over again that God just gives them over to their own lusts and depraved mind, Romans 1:18-31; 1 Tim 4:1-2; 2 Pet 2:1-3, 12-22; 2 Thessalonians 2:3. The New Testament is full of warnings against apostasy. This is also the warning to the Hebrews specifically in Hebrews 10:26 and 6:4-6 and in Galatians 1:6-7; 3:1.

When Stephen says God gave them up to worship the “host of heaven,” he’s not speaking of Godly things, this is what Paul describes in Ephesians 6:12 as “spiritual wickedness in heavenly places.” These are demons and fallen angels. Let’s look at the remainder of verse 42 and 43...

42-43) ⁴² Then God turned and gave them up to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the Prophets: ‘**Did you offer Me slaughtered animals and sacrifices during forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel?**’ ⁴³ **You also took up the tabernacle of Moloch, And the star of your god Remphan, images which you made to worship; And I will carry you away beyond Babylon.’**

Stephen is quoting from Amos 5:25-27 again from the LXX, and Amos says, “**You also...**” Even though they went through the motions of sacrificing to God those forty years, their heart was turned back to Egypt, and they were really sacrificing to demons in their heart. This is what the religious Jews were doing in the 1st century. On the outside there is this appearance that they were worshipping God, but in their heart they were worshipping demons, **Isaiah 66:3-4**; whitewashed tombs, Matt 23:27-28. Therefore, because of this idolatry, God gave them over to their debased mind. Stephen says in verse 43, “**You also took up the tabernacle of Moloch, And the star of your god Remphan, images which you made to worship.**” This was demon worship at its worst because taking up the tabernacle of Molech was the act of child sacrifice, Jeremiah 32:35; 2 Kings 23:10; and Remphan was the worship of the planets, namely Saturn. But all through the Jewish history, the children of Israel were constantly falling back into this type of pagan idolatry. Stephen is quoting from the prophet Amos, but he, through the direction of the Holy Spirit makes a slight change as he recites this passage. Amos originally says **I will carry you away beyond Damascus**, because at that time, Amos was a prophet for northern Israel, and he was prophesying of the Assyrian invasion that would destroy northern Israel. And then about 150 years later Babylon invaded Jerusalem and wiped out Judah as well. But I think even more, this could be a prophetic statement of the future Babylon the Great in Revelation, Rev 14:8; 16:19; 17:5. This is a foreshadowing that if the Jewish nation continues playing the harlot with demons, Babylon the Great and the future Antichrist will carry them away and only a remnant will remain, Romans 9:27-29.

Starting with verse 44, Stephen begins addressing the accusation of blaspheming the Temple. Remember, Stephen had four counts of blasphemy charged against him: blaspheming God, Moses, the Law, and the Temple. So far, he has turned the tables on the Sanhedrin and convicted them of blaspheming God, Moses, and the Law, now Stephen will address their blasphemy of the Temple. Notice he is still not defending himself. He just standing boldly and speaking the Truth. Let's read this next section from **Acts 7:44-50**.

44) Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as He appointed, instructing Moses to make it according to the pattern that he had seen,

Moses built the tabernacle from the direction of God according to the instructions giving to him on Mount Sinai, “**according to the pattern that he had seen**” Exodus 25:40. This tabernacle was a foreshadow of the sacrifice and High Priestly ministry of Jesus Christ. It was a type of the True tabernacle. This means that God gave him a glimpse into heaven, because that is where the true tabernacle is... in heaven, **Hebrews 8:1-6; 9:11-12**; Revelation 15:1-8. Moses saw this heavenly tabernacle and was instructed to copy it here on earth.

45-47) ⁴⁵ which our fathers, having received it in turn, also brought with Joshua into the land possessed by the Gentiles, whom God drove out before the face of our fathers until the days of David, ⁴⁶ who found favor before God and asked to find a dwelling for the God of Jacob. ⁴⁷ But Solomon built Him a house.

Moses built the tabernacle and the tabernacle traveled with the Israelites into the promise land even through the reign of king David until they had peace from all their enemies, and they were settled in the land of promise. At this time David wanted to build a house for God, but because he was a man of war, God wouldn't let him, but he said His Son would build Him a house. Just as the tabernacle was a type of the heavenly tabernacle, so also was the temple of Solomon. The purpose of the temple was never to be the permanent dwelling place of God, but rather a foreshadow of something greater to come. Even Solomon knew his temple was not worthy to be called the house of God, **2 Chron 6:18**. This is what Stephen is reminding the Sanhedrin Council of. They were worshipping this physical temple like an idol, exalting this temple even greater than God, rather than worshipping the God Himself. Solomon says even the universe itself cannot contain our God, much less something made with human hands.

48-50) ⁴⁸ However, the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands, as the prophet says: ⁴⁹ 'Heaven is My throne, And earth is My footstool. What house will you build for Me? says the LORD, Or what is the place of My rest? ⁵⁰ Has My hand not made all these things?'

Stephen is quoting Isaiah 66:1 LXX, reminding the Jews that there is nothing built by man that is worthy of God to dwell in. And in fact, this temple is only meant to be a foreshadowing of a greater temple that God will build. Notice the prophecy to David about the Temple, **1 Chron 17:10-14**; 2 Sam 7:11-14; 1 Kings 5:5. This is prophetic. God is not just speaking of Solomon, but of His Son Jesus Christ who would build the household of God. Remember what Jesus said in **John 2:19-22**. This is significant because just like everything in the Old Testament, it was foreshadowing the work of Jesus Christ and in the New Covenant, the Lord is building His house... that is His Church, **Ephesians 1:22-23; 2:19-22; 3:14-20**; Psalm 127:1. God is so big that even the universe is too small for Him to dwell in, but yet because of Jesus and the covenant in His blood, He is dwelling in our hearts. This just shows how much He loves us. We who have been born again out from His Spirit, we are being built together in Christ for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. A dwelling place that is not of this world. A place where we abide in Him and He abides in us, John 15:3-8. This is Koinonia Fellowship, and this has been His plan from before the foundation of the world; that He would dwell with us and make His home with us for all eternity. This is the promise from **John 14:21-23; 17:20-23**. This is why Peter describes us as living stones, **1 Peter 2:4-10**.

Jesus Christ is building the household of God in which He Himself is the chief cornerstone, and we will dwell in Him forever. This is the temple that Stephen is describing; a living temple, a spiritual temple made by God. That's what Stephen says in verse 48... **The Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands**. There is only one temple that God is going to dwell in; that is the temple that He is building through His Son, in which we will dwell with Him forever. Stephen says... You are accusing me of blaspheming the Temple? But you're the ones blaspheming the temple because you rejected Jesus Christ.

Next week we'll look at the remainder of chapter 7 and Stephen's indictment and their response.