

Stephen's Powerful Sermon, Part 2

Scripture: Acts 7:17-53

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Let's bow in prayer. Father, we do thank You for the day that our blessed Christ was born. We thank You for the day that heaven came to earth, God became a man, the day that Jesus Christ began to walk with us. We thank You that He grew up and died and rose again, that He lives within us, that He returns soon to take us to be with Him. Father, for all that Christmas is to us, we are grateful. And, Father, as we hear the words of thy blessed servant, Stephen, today, we pray that we might indeed be focused upon not so much him but upon the Christ whom he desires to exalt. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

If you have your Bibles, we'd like to ask you to turn to the seventh chapter of Acts. We are continuing to study Stephen's sermon, and we'll kind of hustle through it this morning and finish it up. Acts, chapter 7, beginning at verse 1 and running through 53, is really the text of his sermon. So if you'll just hold your place there for a moment, I'll give a few words of introduction and then we'll look at the text itself.

Some people have said, and it's nothing new, it's rather old, "Forget about the Old Testament. All we really need is the New Testament." And there are many people who carry around a New Testament who know very little about the Old Testament. Some people would say, "Well, Abraham and Moses have very little to do with us. All we need to do is stick to the things that are revealed at the coming of Christ and afterwards." And some people would cut off the New Testament from the Old, Christ from Israel.

Now, this viewpoint was presented most forcefully and articulately a century after Stephen by a wealthy ship owner by the name of Marcian. Marcian had become a Christian, and about the year 139 AD had come to Rome. He became very influential, and he believed that the church had no connection with Israel at all, that Christianity had no connection with Israel, that Christ really had little, if any, connection with Israel. And so he repudiated the authority of the Old Testament. He claimed it had nothing to do with the New Testament whatever.

Marcian had put together, then, a text of scripture, or a canon of scripture, and in his bible he left out, and I think this is interesting, all references to God's acts prior to the life of Jesus. He believed they had no place. Well, the church had to deal with a man who would cut off the new from the old, and so

they branded him a heretic and they put him out of the church. But the church has never gotten rid of Marcians. They keep popping up in every generation. There are always people who want to cut off the New Testament from the Old. There are always people who want to cut off the church from its connection to Israel.

Martin Luther faced it in his own day, and he made this statement: "The Old Testament is the cradle in which the Christ child is laid." It is not irrelevant to study the Old Testament, for the New Testament finds its birth in the Old. The Old Testament heritage supports the New Testament and explains it. And that is exactly Stephen's point as he preaches in Acts 7. He builds everything he says on the Old Testament. And our faith in Jesus Christ is rooted upon the fact of the Old Testament, that He is the Redeemer promised to Israel, the one who fulfills all of the Old Testament types, patterns and prophecies. And this is the way Stephen directs his attention, and the attention of his hearers, in chapter 7.

Now, we've already learned about Stephen, and I'm going to skip a lot of introductory remarks. He was one of the seven chosen leaders of the early church, dynamic, full of the Holy Spirit, full of faith, full of grace, full of power. He came about preaching to Jews who were removed from Israel. He came about preaching to Grecian Jews or Hellenist Jews who had been scattered, and when they would come back to Jerusalem they would maintain their own synagogue. He went to those synagogues, not those of the Palestine Jews but those of the Grecian Jews, there proclaiming the Messiahship of Jesus Christ.

As a result of the power of his message and the miracles that he performed, he was arrested and charged with blasphemy. They said, "He blasphemes God, Moses, the law and the Temple," the most sacred things in Israel. And so Stephen sets about to defend himself before the Council, the supreme court of Israel, in chapter 7.

The church is beginning to explode. It has already reached Jerusalem. People have been saved. Dynamic things have been happening. Miracles have been happening by the hundreds, perhaps the thousands. The resurrected Christ has gone to be with the Father and sent His Holy Spirit to empower this new dynamic church, and they're really doing the job. They have become a threat to Judaism.

And now the threat has not only filled Jerusalem, but it threatens to extend itself outside of Jerusalem with these non-Jerusalem Jews, and they panic. And they realize that their whole ecclesiastical system can come apart at the seams unless somebody stops this thing called Christianity. Stephen becomes the very dynamic voice for Christianity, and so they must stop Stephen, even as they tried to stop Peter and John. And so they capture him and charge him with blasphemy, all trumped up on the basis of false testimony by perjured witnesses.

Now, Stephen begins to preach in chapter 7, and in his sermon he does four things that we mentioned last time. Quickly, let me review them. Four things weave their way through the whole sermon. Number one, he tries to gain their interest. He knows that if they're going to hear what he says, they're going to have to want to hear it. They're going to have to have a desire to listen to this. And so he talks about their favorite subject. He builds his whole sermon on their own history, and that was their favorite subject.

The second thing that he wants to do in his message is answer the charges that he's a blasphemer. He wants to prove that it was perjury, that he is no blasphemer, that he believes in God, Moses, the law and the Temple, and that he believes God ordained those last three. And so he wants to do that.

Third thing he wants to do is indict them for killing their Messiah. He doesn't let them off the hook. He doesn't just want to defend himself. That would be to shirk his responsibility as a preacher. He will defend himself. At the same time, he will indict them for what they needed to be indicted for.

The fourth thing he wants to do is present Messiah. Is Christianity really anti-God, anti-Moses, anti-law and anti-Israel's Temple? No. And it's a good thing Stephen defended those things, for he defended not only himself but all Christians since then on the basis of the same charges. We believe in the God of Israel. We believe God ordained Moses. We believe God ordained the law. We believe God ordained His Temple and His Tabernacle, all for a specific time and a specific purpose. And it was His mind and His will. We're not against those things.

So Stephen defends himself and all Christianity. But he's not just selfish. At the same time, he is indicting and proclaiming Christ. And that's important.

Now, we will see these four things woven throughout chapter 7. Defending himself is the key, and so he defends himself first of all against the charge that he blasphemed God, and we saw that last week. From verses 1 through 16, he is busy defending himself against the charge that he is a blasphemer of God. Now, to blaspheme means to take that which is sacred and call it worthless. They had accused him of blaspheming God, counting God as...their God as worthless, valueless, as nothing. And so he begins by defending himself against that charge in verse 2.

He said, "Men, brethren, fathers, listen. The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran." Now, he does two things here. First of all, he says, "the God of glory." He acknowledges God in His fullness. Glory is the fullness of God's attributes, and so Stephen says, "I believe in God, the God of glory."

And they couldn't argue with that, because the term "the God of glory," El Hakavod, had to do with the consummate nature of God, you see. He is not...they couldn't say, "Oh, well, you might not believe in

this fact about God or this fact about Him. Maybe you've got a little partial God." "I believe in the God of glory," the full God.

And not only that, he says, "the one who called Abraham." "I believe in the God of Israel." They accused him of blaspheming God. He says, "Wrong. I believe in God. The God of our father Abraham is my God and your God, at least you pretend that He is." And so he acknowledges that he believes in God. And so he begins to recite the history of Abraham.

And, oh, he captivates their attention, and they were having to agree with everything he said, because he was just going right down through Genesis reciting exactly what they knew to be facts. He didn't even editorialize. He merely repeated and recited verses, both in exact quote from the Septuagint and paraphrasing and alluding to. It's a very natural flow as he records for them verbally the history that they knew so well.

So he holds their attention and defends himself against the charge that he didn't believe in God. And all the way through he talks about God. Nineteen times in the chapter he talks about God. He believed in God. He defends himself.

But as he moves into that through the first eight verses, he then realizes he must do the other two things. That is, he must indict them for executing their Messiah, and, secondly, he must present Messiah. So he begins to indict them in verse 9 with a powerful shot. We saw this last week. "And the patriarchs," those were the 12 sons of Jacob, and all the tribes of Israel, of course, were begun by those patriarchs, so every Jew went back to one of those patriarchs as his father. "The patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt."

"You know," he says, "you're always revering the patriarchs. 'Ah, wonderful patriarchs. We love and esteem the patriarchs.' You know what your wonderful patriarchs did? They sold Joseph. God had given Joseph the birthright. God had proclaimed him as the progenitor, or as the right of primogenitor. He had the one who...he was the one who had the birthright. And God was with him, but you were against him."

And here comes the beginning of the indictment. "God exalted Joseph. You debased him. You rejected him and sold him for envy." So he's beginning to indict them. And all the way through, he does this. "You indict...you rejected Joseph." Later on, he says, "You rejected Moses." Then when he comes to Christ, he says, "Just what your fathers did, you're doing again, rejecting Christ." So he's beginning to set the pattern for indictment by first of all acknowledging that they, in turn, had rejected Joseph, who was God's select. So this is the beginning of the indictment.

Then as he goes on down through verse 16, just reviewing very...in a cursory fashion, as he goes on through verse 16, he presents Joseph's life in just little vignettes. And he does it for a very important

purpose, and that is to present Christ, for Joseph was a picture of Jesus Christ. He was a type of Christ. Christ was of Israel. So was Joseph. Christ was sold for envy. So was Joseph. Christ was accepted by the Gentiles and rejected by Israel. So was Joseph. Christ was humbled, then exalted. So was Joseph. Christ was once rejected, but the second time He'll be received. So was Joseph. Joseph is a picture of Jesus Christ all the way through his life.

And so he has done in the first little section through verse 16 all the things he wanted to do. He has given them their history, which holds their interest. He has countered the charge of blasphemy against God by establishing he believes in the God of glory, the God of Israel. He has indicted them for rejecting, in the past, the one whom God approved of, Joseph. And he has acknowledged that Jesus is the Messiah by a very clear picture of Joseph as the type of Christ, and Jesus fit the picture exactly.

Then, having defended himself against the charge against God, he moves to defend himself against the charge against Moses. They said, "You blasphemed Moses," chapter 6, verse 11, so he wants to defend that, and he begins in verse 17. And he does it so beautifully by just continuing the history. This sermon is a masterpiece. It's so concise and so powerful and pungent. And he has every point in the right order. In verse 17 he moves just by continuing history, just flows right into Moses, you see.

Up through verse 16, he's taken them from Abraham to Joseph, from the call to the captivity, the first great era of Jewish history. Now he just glides into the second era, which was from Moses on to the Babylonian captivity. And he just slides into Moses, and he defends himself against the charge that he was anti-Moses, verse 17, and we'll pick it up there.

"But when the time of the promise drew near." Now, the time of the promise meant the time when God designed to fulfill His promise to Abraham. Now, what was His promise to Abraham? "Get thee out of thy country and go to a land that I will give thee." Right? "And your seed will inherit the land." And the promise was that they would have the land. But they were in Egypt. They weren't in the land. But it was now time, God said, to get them to the land. So God was going to move them to the land "which God had sworn to Abraham."

Now, by this time, the people had grown and multiplied in Egypt. You'll remember that Joseph had been down in Egypt, and he'd been the right-hand man of Pharaoh. And the famine had hit the country of Israel. And so Jacob had come on down with his sons, and they had established residence there where Joseph was in Egypt. They had been there ever since. All the patriarchs, according to Hebrews 11:13, had already died off, and several other generations had been born and raised in Egypt.

So the people of God were now living in Egypt. The people had grown and multiplied in Egypt. They never had gone back to their own land yet. But now was the time. Now was God's time of the

promise, to move Israel back to the land which He had promised them.

But then something happened at this time, prior to the time of the promise. It says, "the people grew and multiplied until another king arose who knew not Joseph." Now, Joseph had died. That whole generation of patriarchs had passed from the scene. And so there was really no champion left for the cause of Israel, and a Pharaoh rose who didn't know Joseph, and, not knowing Joseph, had no reason to be kind to Jews, and consequently began to oppress. Verse 19, "The same dealt craftily with our kindred, ill treated our fathers, so that they cast out their young children, to the end they might not live."

Now, all of a sudden, there's a leader who pops up in there who begins to maltreat the Jews. And over in Exodus, chapter 1, verse 13, we have a little bit of a description of this. It says, "And the Egyptians made the children of Israel to serve with rigor. And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage and mortar and in brick and in all manner of service in the field, and all their service wherein they made them serve was with rigor." In other words, they worked them to death, and they made them do very difficult things. Josephus says that Egyptians made them cut a great many channels for the river, and they made them build pyramids. And Josephus also says, "They designed to accustom themselves to hard labor." And so they really worked them. They made slaves out of them.

Then the statement is interesting in verse 19. He says, "so that they cast out their young children, to the end they might not live." Some commentators say that that means that the Jews threw away their babies because they didn't want them to grow up in Egypt under the oppression that they were under. I really don't think that's what it's saying. It's an interesting thought, but I don't think it fits with the indication in Exodus. I think the "they" there refers to the Egyptians, so that they cast out the Jews' young children. And that does square with the record of Exodus.

You'll remember that in the record of Exodus the decree came down, in Exodus, chapter 1, verse 22, "Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river." That was Pharaoh's monumental statement. He designed to kill all the male children. But God had a deliverer. So one little baby got thrown into the river, only he got thrown into the river in a little boat, which is cheating a little bit, praise the Lord. But, anyway, he did. And that was Moses. God had prepared a deliverer.

Verse 20, "In which time Moses was born, and was exceedingly fair." Now, Stephen has been accused of blaspheming Moses, so he just really praises Moses. The first thing he says about him is the guy was stupendously handsome. "Exceedingly fair" means fair to God, handsome, elegant. And Josephus says that the history tells him that when Moses walked down the street, everybody stopped doing what they were doing just to look at him, because he was so striking and so handsome. So he was quite a man. But even as a baby he was exceedingly fair, handsome child.

Well, he lived at home for three months, "nourished up in his father's house three months. And when he was cast out," 21, "Pharaoh's daughter took him up, and nourished him as her son." So after three months he's put in the river. You remember, he floated down, and Pharaoh's daughter was down there at the river, and here came this little Hebrew baby, and, boy, what a beautiful child. And so she just scooped that little fellow up and just decided to raise him as her own son, the son, really, of Pharaoh's household. So Moses was adopted as the son of Pharaoh, with all the benefits. You can imagine what kind of benefits went with being the son of Pharaoh. So he lived in the palace.

Verse 22, Stephen continues to build up Moses. He never talks about the negatives in Moses' life, and there were a lot of them. I mean, you realize, of course, that Moses had such a little bit of faith that when God told him he was going to speak for Him, Moses said, "I'm sorry, God, I have a st...st...I...I stu...stu...I...I...I stutter." And God said to him, "Who made your mouth?", which is one of the greatest statements I ever heard. "Who made your mouth? Don't tell me you stutter. I'm in control." And so all his life he had to speak in Aaron's ear.

And I just think probably, this is strictly MacArthur, it's not textual, I think Aaron was probably a real drag. I think Moses was a fireball and got all fired up and, "I've got to tell the people." And he'd whisper in Aaron's ear, and Aaron, "Uh, Moses would like to tell you that..." You know. I don't know if that's true.

But, anyway, Moses didn't have all glory, you know. Moses had his bad moments. He showed off in the wilderness. God said, "Speak to the rock," he took a stick and hit it, just so everybody'd think it was him, and he never got to enter the Promised Land because of it. But, you see, Stephen stays away from all that. He's defending himself against blaspheming Moses, so he just praises him.

Not only was he handsome, but, verse 22, "Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and mighty in words and deeds." Well, that doesn't sound like blasphemy. That doesn't sound like you're putting Moses down. That sounds like you're building him up. And that's exactly what he was doing.

And it was true. He was an amazing person. Not only exceedingly fair and handsome, not only with all of the ability that was his just by virtue of his birth and his inheritance physically, heredity, but what was his by the education that he got in Egypt. I mean, the Egyptians, they tell us, knew geometry and medicine and astronomy, and they were very advanced, and Moses was a remarkable man, with all of that natural ability coupled with the finest and most comprehensive education available in the ancient world. And he was going to be God's deliverer, to lead Israel to the land of promise. He was mighty.

Verse 23, "And when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the children of Israel." Now, some histories tell us that Moses by this time was a captain in Pharaoh's

army, one of the leading men, that he'd won great battles, that he was highly esteemed and beloved in the land. But he knew that he was a Jew, and he always knew that. In fact, he had even been cared for by his own mother in the palace right there where Pharaoh was.

And so, as he grew up, at full 40 years of age, God put in his heart a desire to help his people. God called him, as it were, to be the deliverer. And so he had it in his heart to go to his own people, to visit. The word "visit" implies looking kindly on someone with intent to help them. And so he went, verse 24. He went down to where they were. It's a long way from the palace down to the hovels and the slave working yards of the Jews. But he went.

Verse 24, "And seeing one of them suffer wrong," remember what was happening? One of the Egyptians was beating one of the children of Israel. And so he defended that children of Israel, that child of Israel, "and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian." And Exodus tells us he killed him and buried him in the sand. Now, it's obvious why he killed him. It might not be so obvious why he buried him in the sand unless you think about it for a minute. You don't run around killing Egyptians in Egypt, especially Egyptian leaders and taskmasters. And whoever this man was, it was important enough to get rid of his body so nobody would really know what happened, so he buried him in the sand.

And he thought he had done really what was the first act of emancipation. He thought, "Now they'll accept me as their leader and their deliverer because I have proven that I'll stand in their place, I'll defend their lives." Verse 25, "For he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them." See? He thought, "Now, they'll know that I am sent from God to be the deliverer." "But they understood," what? "Not." They didn't understand.

He had done the first thing. He had shown that he was going to defend them. But they didn't get the message. They understood not. So blind, they were blind to their own redeemer, their own deliverer, the one who was going to take them to the Promised Land. It was the time of promise, verse 17 said it, and it was time to go, but they weren't going to go because they weren't going to accept the deliverer.

Jesus came and offered a kingdom. They didn't accept the King. Did they get the kingdom? No, it was postponed. Moses came and said, "I'll give you the Promised Land." Did they get the Promised Land? Forty years later they got it. No, 80 years later, because they didn't believe when the redeemer came the first time. Sounds familiar, doesn't it?

Verse 26, "And the next day he showed himself to them as they strove." He came down there and two of them were arguing. He not only came to defend them from their enemies, he came to make peace among them. He was the truest kind of deliverer. His plans were not only political, they were personal. He not only saw the deliverance of Israel as a nation, he saw himself as a peacemaker

between individuals. That's the heart of a real deliverer, isn't it? Great man.

So he came to these two who were fighting, "and he would have set them at one." What that means literally is, he would have urged them to peace. He's a true deliverer. Verse 27, how did they respond? "But he that did his neighbor wrong shoved him away, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and judge over us?' "Who are you, fellow? Who made you a ruler and a judge over us?" He shoved him away. All he had said was, "Sirs," verse 26, "you are brethren. Why do you wrong one another?" He was coming to make peace, and they shoved him away. He was rejected.

The man was angry. He was really angry. It was as if he said, "Who told you to butt in? Butt out. Who asked you?" Just a blatant kind of sarcastic rejection. Verse 28, "Wilt thou kill me, as thou didst the Egyptian yesterday?" Yeah, can't you get the sarcasm in that? But, you know, when Moses heard that, his heart started beating very fast. Because, you see, the idea of hiding the Egyptian was keeping this thing on the QT. And now all of a sudden this guy, instead of accepting him as a deliverer, is going to throw this up in his face and confront him like a criminal.

And when Moses knew that the cat was out of the bag, the next verse tells us simply this. Verse 29, "Then," what? "Fled Moses." He got out of there. He knew that if the Egyptians found out, it'd be all over, because they would then brand him as the leader of a Jewish rebellion, a Jewish insurrection, and it'd be finished. So he just took off, and he fled. "And he was a sojourner in the land of Midian, where he begat two sons." That's interesting. You say, "Why does he tell us that?" Well, I'll tell you in a minute why he tells us that.

Moses went over to the land of the Gentiles and raised up seed. Remember his wife, Zipporah? He married her over there and he fiddled around in the desert for 40 years herding sheep. Watch verse 30. "And when forty years were expired, there appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai an angel of the Lord in a flame of fire in a bush." Sinai is also Mount Horeb in Exodus 3:1, so you don't get confused if you see them used interchangeably.

There he was at Sinai and saw this burning bush. You remember the story? He saw this burning bush, and he went over to the burning bush. Verse 31, "When Moses saw it, he wondered at the sight. And as he drew near to behold it, the voice of the Lord came unto him." He got over there near that bush. He saw that sight. Interesting footnote, "sight" is oramah in the Greek. Pan is all. So now you know why Panorama City's Panorama City. It comes from the Greek. It means to have a vision of everything. Now, that doesn't really help know why Panorama City is Panorama City, but anyway. Why did I say that?

Verse 31, "When Moses saw it, he wondered at the sight." And that was free anyway. "And as he drew near to behold it, the voice of the Lord came to him saying," now, God speaks. He sees this vision, see? This oramah, this sight, this vision. And there's a bush that's burning, but it's not burning.

I mean, the fire is there, but it's not being consumed. And obviously it's representative of the presence of God, the Shekinah Glory, the glow of God in the bush.

And God talks, "Saying, 'I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob.' Then Moses trembled, and dared not behold. Then said the Lord to him, 'Put off thy shoes from thy feet, for the place where thou standest is holy ground.'" God said, "Moses, take off your shoes. You're standing on holy ground."

And you say, "Well, why did God go over all that about 'I am the God of thy fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob'?" God was establishing the covenant again. God said, "I promised Abraham, 'I'll bring you into the land and it'll be yours.' I repeated it to Isaac. I repeated it to Jacob." God is coming back to Moses as the covenant God, you see? He's coming back to Moses with the promise of the fulfillment of the covenant that He made that they would go into the land.

Verse 34, "I have seen, I have seen," which really means, "I have certainly seen," "the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send thee into Egypt." God says, "It's the time of the promise. Finally, after 40 years, I'm going to take the people into the land, and you're going to be My man. You're going to be the one that's going to do it, Moses. I will send thee."

And so God comes back as the God of the covenant. Isn't it wonderful to know how faithful He is? Forty years had gone by, but God doesn't forget. He says, "I have seen, I have seen. I've certainly seen. Remember? I know their groaning. I know it's time to go. It's all in the plan." God is faithful, isn't He? God is faithful.

And so God comes as the covenant God and says, "You're My man, Moses. You're going to lead them out." Now watch how Stephen brings this around and makes it powerful. Verse 35, "This Moses whom they refused, saying, 'Who made thee a ruler and a judge?,' the rejected Moses, "the same did God send to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the angel who appeared to him in the bush." And he's just...he's just absolutely devastating with that point.

One of the arguments the Jews inevitably have is this. "If Jesus had been our Messiah, we would have known it." That's an old one. "If Jesus had been our Messiah, all of those great Jewish leaders would've known He was our Messiah. We wouldn't have missed it." That's one of the things that Jews even argue about today. "Why, with all of the great rabbis and teachers of the past, they would know if the Messiah came. They wouldn't have missed him."

And Stephen says, "Guess what? You missed Moses. Guess what? You missed Joseph. You never picked up on Joseph until the second time around, and you never picked up on Moses until the second time around." And when is it they're going to pick up on Jesus? The second time around.

That's no argument at all. "We would've known." Your history proves you didn't know. "You do always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers have done, so do you." "You're right on schedule. It always takes two times to get through to you."

And Stephen is powerful. "This Moses whom you said, 'Who are you to butt in? Butt out', that's the one that God chose to lead you." Verse 36, "He brought them out, after he had shown wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red sea, and in the wilderness forty years." God picked Moses, and Moses did the job. He brought them out of Egypt. That's a powerful point, you see, because he really lays heavy on them the responsibility for rejection.

So he's done three things in the second section. In defending himself against the charge of blasphemy, first of all, he has also continued to recite their history and hold their interest. Thirdly, he has indicted them for rejecting Moses. Then he said, "You blaspheme Moses." He flips the table and says, "You're the ones that have been doing that. Look at Egypt. Your fathers blasphemed Moses. They rejected him. But that's no shock. They did it with Joseph, too."

Now, he masterfully has one other thing to do of those four. What is it? Present Messiah. Oh, does he do this, with power. Verse 37, "This is that Moses," now, he's still going to let Moses talk for himself. "This is that Moses who said unto the children of Israel," listen to what Moses said, prophecy, "A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you." Oh, you mean there's coming another great prophet in the days to come? That's right. "He will be of your brethren," comma, what are the next two words? "Like me; Him shall ye hear." Moses said, "People, God's got another deliverer in mind for you. He'll be just like me. And when He comes along and you recognize that He's like me, listen to Him. Listen to all that He shall say unto thee."

And, you know, every Jew knew that passage in Deuteronomy. Every one of them. Deuteronomy 18:15, every Jew knew that. Because they all knew that was Messianic. Remember in John 6:14, the wonders that Jesus had done in feeding the 5,000 men and all the women and children? They rushed up and they said, "Surely, this is of a truth," what? "That prophet that should come into the world." Which one? The one Moses promised us. They knew that was Messianic. Moses says, "When you see somebody who's like me, that's your Messiah. A prophet like me."

You say, "Well, how does that present Christ?" Listen, they knew everything about Christ, and if they looked at the facts they'd see that Christ paralleled Moses in every way. You see? That's the point. They knew all the facts. For example, Moses was a deliverer from among his own people, a Jew. So was Jesus Christ. Moses came down from a palace to release men in bondage. He condescended. So did Jesus Christ. Moses offered himself to Israel and was rejected and then went and raised up seed among the Gentiles. Now you know why verse 29 is in there. So did Jesus, didn't he? Rejected by Israel, he turned and raised up seed in the church, the Gentiles.

Moses was rejected the first time but accepted the second time, and so will be Jesus Christ. Moses was a great redeemer. So was Jesus Christ. Moses leads people out of bondage. So does Jesus Christ. You can talk about Moses as a type of Christ over and over and over. Moses is even a shepherd. So is Jesus Christ. So Moses said, "You look, and when you see one like me, you listen to him. He's your Messiah." And they had looked, and they had not seen. And Jesus said of them, "You are blind leaders of the blind." They couldn't see anything. Blind. So the history of Moses is the foreshadowing of the history of Christ.

So, you see, Stephen is so masterful in his presentation. He defends himself against the charge, at the same time holding their interest by reciting their history. And he also portrays that Moses is a picture of Jesus Christ, and he lets them fill in the details.

Third thing they charged him with was the fact that he had blasphemed the law. Let's quickly look at that. Verse 38, and he slides into this. Defending himself against this is important, because they were lovers of the law, and, oh, is this powerful. "This is he," still talking about Moses, and Moses and the law go together, so the transition is very easy. "This is he that was in the church," and there the word ecclesia appears, not to be confused with the New Testament church.

The New Testament church doesn't start until the Day of Pentecost. There was no church in the wilderness as we know it. The word here is ecclesia. It's simple Greek term means to call out, or called-out ones. The reason he calls the group of Israelites the called-out ones is because they were called out of Egypt, not because they were the body of Christ, the church. So let's call them a called-out congregation.

"This is he that was in the called-out congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him in Mount Sinai, with our fathers, who received the living oracles to give unto us." Now, the living oracles are the law. So he says, "Moses was with the congregation in the wilderness, and he received the law that he was to give to us."

Now, what's Stephen saying? He's saying, "I believe in the law. I believe God gave the law to Moses up in Mount Sinai. I believe that." He speaks of Moses at Sinai receiving the law. Remember in Exodus 19, the great cloud came down and the fire and thunder, and the mountain began to shake, and God landed on the top of the mountain, and He said, "Moses, get up here. I'm going to talk to you." And Moses went up the mountain, and God gave him the law. And Moses stayed up there a long time.

Stephen says, "I believe that. I'm not a blasphemer of the law. I believe they are living oracles, not dead rules, living commandments. I believe God ordained them." He couldn't be accused of being one who thought the law was some kind of a dead issue. He believed it was living truth from the

mouth of God. So Stephen defends himself against the charge that he was a blasphemer of the law. He recognizes God as the author, angels as the mediator and Moses as the recipient. So he acknowledges his belief in the law. It was God's law. It wasn't a dead law. It was a living, powerful revelation from a living, powerful God. That's not blasphemy.

But look at verse 39. So he's defended himself against the charge of blasphemy. Now, watch him indict them. This is a shot. "Whom our fathers would not obey." He says, "You want to talk about disobedience to God's laws, then check your own history. You're always going back to the sanctity and sacredness of your forefathers. They were the ones that were disobedient. "Whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt." They said "Nuts" to Moses. "We want to do what we did in Egypt."

Remember what they did? Moses was up there getting the law, and what are they doing? Making false gods that they learned about in Egypt and worshipping them at the foot of the mount where Moses is getting the law. Israel's not so sacred. Their fathers weren't so to be esteemed. They sure couldn't boast of the fathers' loyalty to Moses or the law. They weren't loyal to Moses or the law. They rejected Moses even at Sinai. They rejected God's law even while it was being given. They didn't even wait to hear it. They rejected it before they even knew what it was.

"And in their hearts, they turned to Egypt." What does that mean? They desired Egyptian pleasures and Egyptian forms and Egyptian gods. And so they initiated the idolatries of Egypt at the foot of Sinai, and they kept those idolatries rolling through the history of Israel until God finally got so upset with them He just hauled them off to Babylon. For hundreds of years, what began at Sinai continued.

They showed they didn't care much for the divine order. Verse 40, "And they said to Aaron, 'Make us gods to go before us, for as for this Moses, who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we know not what's become of him.'" Now, you notice, he's overlapping their rejection of Moses with their rejection of the law, so he continues that same theme.

Now, you say, "Well, maybe they didn't know the law. I mean, Moses didn't get it yet." Listen, they knew enough of the law to know you don't worship the gods of the Egyptians. Abel knew that. Abel knew to make a sacrifice to the true God, didn't he? We talked about that last Sunday night, and all that's involved. He knew it, and if he knew it, he did it by faith, and if he did it by faith, faith is based on revelation. "Faith cometh by," what? "Hearing." Therefore, he had to hear something. He operated on faith. They knew to worship the true God, and they knew to sacrifice only to Him. And when they were building this idol and sacrificing to it, they knew they were disobeying God.

And God's first commandment had long ago been given, anyway. No other gods. No other gods. They knew that. They knew that before it was written on stone. They were to worship the true God. And so they even violated that. Before it was even given them, they had broken and shattered the

law. So Stephen's simply saying, "You who are always saying, 'We uphold the law,' just look at your history. You were down at the foot of the mountain disobeying the law when God was up at the top of the mountain giving it. That's how long it took you. And just after God had performed miracles to get you out of Egypt." Shortsightedness.

And so there they were, at the foot of the mountain. Verse 41, "And they made a calf in those days," a young bull, literally, in the Greek. Indication of...the young bull would be the fact that the Egyptians worshipped Apis and Mnevis, two bulls. One was supposed to be Osiris reincarnated. The other was the sun god reincarnated. And so they worshipped these two bulls, and this is Egyptian worship. They had learned this in Egypt. So they made this bull.

It's interesting that Aaron may have tried to stop them in a rather underhanded kind of ridiculous way. He said, "If you're going to do this, then you'll have to bring all your earrings, your gold earrings and your gold ornaments." And it may have been that he wanted to stop them from doing it by putting the price so high they wouldn't want to give up those things. But they did. Maybe he figured that if I'll get them to do that, they won't be willing to. But they did. They brought it all, melted it all down and made a golden calf, a golden bull.

"And they offered sacrifice unto their idol, and they rejoiced in the works of their own hands." And the Book of Exodus tells us that they took their clothes off and they were in naked shame, carrying on a sexual orgy in the worship of this young bull. All the time, Moses is up there communing with God. Boy, you talk about contrast, friends. You'll never see a more stark one than that.

And you see what...Stephen is just absolutely indicting the land of Israel and the nation of Israel for rejecting God all the way through. They rejected God. They rejected Joseph. They rejected Moses. They rejected His law. And Moses came down off that mountain, and, you know, he was really upset, to say nothing of God. God said, "I'm going to wipe out the whole nation." Moses started praying, and he said, "God, that's going to look ridiculous. The Egyptians are going to say, 'Well, isn't that an interesting God? He goes through all that trouble to get them out and then slaughters them all in the desert. God, you don't want to do that. That'll give you a bad reputation.'"

So Moses prays, you know. And God didn't do it to save His reputation. God did it because He's gracious. So God said, "I'll only slay 3,000, and let the rest live." But none of them ever entered the Promised Land. All they did was live 40 years wandering all over the place. And Moses was so mad he slammed down the tablets of stone and broke them all over everywhere and had to go back up and get another set.

But that's what was going on. The point is that here was Israel, claiming, "We are the ones who love the law. Stephen, you hate the law." And he says, "Oh, look at your history. Who are you kidding? Who are you kidding?" The sad thing is, they made this calf, verse 42, what shocking words, "Then

God turned, and gave them up." Is that sad? God said, "All right, Israel. That's it. Go."

Do you know, you always knew that Romans 1 said God gave up the Gentiles, didn't you? God gave them up. God gave them up. God gave them over. Three times in chapter 1. Let them go. But did you know that God also did it with Israel? "If that's the way you want to go, go." Oh, the shocking words of Hosea 4:17. I think of this so often. "Ephraim is joined to idols," listen, "let him alone." That's what God said. "Let him alone." God said, "I've had it."

And so God just let them go. And what did they do? From the time of the wilderness wandering to the Babylonian captivity, all those years in between, they just kept worshipping idols. It was a constant pain, constant problem. And Stephen brings that up. "Then God turned and gave them up to worship the host of heaven." The Egyptians worshipped all the stars and the planets, and they had a whole complex of deities in the sky.

And they turned to all this, "as it is written in the book of the prophets," and now he quotes old prophet Amos, chapter 5, verse 25 to 27. Amos said, "O ye house of Israel, have ye offered to Me slain beasts and sacrifices by the space of forty years in the wilderness?" The answer is, "No, we didn't offer them to You. We offered them to You once in a while and to other gods other times." God says, "Did you offer them to Me 40 years?" "No. "Yea, you took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Rephan," which is another celestial deity. "Here's what you worshipped, and I finally just carried you away into Babylon, beyond Babylon."

So in a short little statement, Stephen recites the history of idolatry in Israel, from Sinai to Babylon. And you know they had the law all that time? They had the law. All those years they had the law. They had teachers of the law, scribes and everybody. They just kept rejecting, rejecting, rejecting, rejecting. So Stephen says, "Don't accuse me of blaspheming the law. Check your own history."

And it's a sad thing at the beginning of verse 44. He says, "Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness." You say, "Well, maybe they were ignorant." They had the tabernacle of testimony right in front of their faces. You say, "Well, maybe they couldn't help it. Maybe they forgot God." They didn't forget God. All through the wilderness God had that tabernacle slapped right in front of their faces, didn't He? And they camped around it and they stared at it. And God said, "You have the testimony. You're culpable. You're guilty. You've just plain old period rejected it."

Later on, when they got the Temple, you remember what they did? Read it in Ezekiel 8. They had the Temple and so they just went in the Temple and drew false gods all over the walls of the inside of the Temple and went in and bowed down to them. In Ezekiel, chapter 8, it says there were a whole group of men in the Temple worshipping the sun. There were some women weeping for Tammuz, who was the false virgin-born "son," the counterfeit of Christ, the supposed son of Ashteroth, the priestess of Babylonian cultism.

Here they were worshipping all these false gods and phony priests, "the sons of Jaazaniah, every man with his censer in his hand," making like they were priests. God said, "That's what's in My temple." They rejected the testimony of the tabernacle in their midst. They just plain old rejected it. "You people," he says, "have been the rejecters of the law."

All idolatry, friends, started in Sinai. It started right there, as God was giving the law, and it went on through Israel until the Babylonian captivity. And God just gave it up. And God hauled them off into captivity. Seventy years of terrible things there. God purged them. They went back to their land, finally, some of them did. And so he says, "I believe in the law. It's living oracles from God. Your history proves your people have rejected it." So he turns the tables.

Now, in this section, he doesn't specifically present Messiah, but he does do those other three things. The last thing, we'll just quickly look at this. They had accused him of blaspheming the Temple, verse 44. So what he does is just give a little history of the Temple to show that he believes that God ordained it.

"Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as He had appointed." Who is He? God. God ordained the Tabernacle. Why? Moses went up there and God gave him the plans, didn't He? Gave him the blueprint. It says right there in verse 44, "speaking unto Moses, that he should make it according to the fashion that he had seen." God gave him a vision of the blueprint and he came right down, and God said, "Here, build this. It's My building."

Stephen said, "I acknowledge it. It's of God. I'm not anti-Temple. I believe in the Tabernacle, even. God started it all there." And "which also our fathers that came after." That means it wasn't the first generation. The first generation died in the wilderness. But the ones born of them carried it in. "They brought it in with Joshua into the possession of the nations." Put quotes around "possession of the nations." That's a title for the land of Israel, because it belonged to the Gentiles.

So he says, "We brought it in, and God drove out the heathen to establish a place for His Tabernacle and the worship of Him." "I believe it. I believe God ordained it. God gave Moses the plan. God had it brought into the land. God drove out the heathen so His Tabernacle could be established. I believe in the Tabernacle. Don't accuse me of blaspheming the Temple."

And it lasted until the days of David. By the time David came along, he looked at his own beautiful palace and he looked at God living in a tent, and he said, "It isn't right." II Samuel, chapter 7, says he went to old prophet Nathan, and he said, "Nathan, it's a bad deal here. I've got a lovely place and God lives in a tent. We've got to do something. I think I'll build God a house." And Nathan says, "Hey, David, that is a great idea. David, go do that. Lord be with you."

That night God comes to Nathan and said, "Nathan, who told you to tell him that? Why don't you check with Me on those things?" God says, "I don't let David build My Temple. He's a man of blood. His son, Solomon, will build My Temple." And then to compensate for what God took away from David, He said, "But I'll give David's seed an eternal kingdom." In II Samuel 7 He promised him the birth of the Messiah, who would reign forever and ever on His throne in Jerusalem.

And so David's time came, and there was to be a Temple. And so it says, "David, who found favor before God and desired to find a Tabernacle for the God of Jacob, but Solomon built Him a house." David wanted to do it, but he couldn't do it, because God didn't let him do it. God had other plans. So they had taken the Tabernacle in. It was all right for a while. But finally David wanted to build one, and He let his son do it.

Now, this is only...I think the fact of what David wanted was only partially fulfilled in the Temple of Solomon, because it was so temporary. And it's interesting to me that the verse 47 is so quick. "But Solomon built Him a house." Which is kind of an indictment, in a sense. Because they said, "The Temple, the Temple, the Temple." He's saying, "Well, Solomon built Him a temple, too. Where is that?" I mean, they put all their eggs in the Temple. They worshipped the building, not the God who was supposed to be there. You see? "Solomon built Him a temple." Implied: So did Zerubbabel and it's gone, too. "And you guys are standing in Herod's." See? "I mean, if you're talking about the Temple that God built, this isn't it. This isn't it."

"If you're accusing me of speaking against this Temple, this isn't the Temple that God built, anyway. The one that He ordained was built by Solomon. So don't lay on that stuff about this being the Temple. I mean, Solomon's temple was the Temple, too, but it was only temporary. God must've known that, because He wiped it out Himself. Then came Zerubbabel's temple and that went. Now you've got Herod's temple, and just give it a few years now, in 70 AD, and it's going to go, too. You can't put God in a box."

And so what happens? In verse 48, "Nevertheless, the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands." Do you know who said that? You'll never believe it. Solomon. Solomon said that. Solomon said, when he built the house for God, "It's not going to hold Him." And Stephen's saying, "I'm not blaspheming the Temple, friends. I'm saying God is bigger than the box you've got Him in, and I'm only saying what Solomon said. So don't accuse me of blaspheming your temple. Solomon would be accused of it, too. Look what he said."

And then he quotes the prophet Isaiah in chapter 66:1 and 2. "As saith the prophet, 'Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool.'" Isn't that beautiful terms? "'What house will you build me?' saith the Lord." "How are you going to put me in a box?" "Or what is the place of my rest?" "Where am I going to sit?" "Hath not my hand made all these things?" And so Stephen says, "Don't accuse me of

blaspheming the Temple, or you have to accuse Solomon of blaspheming the Temple that he made. I'm just saying God's bigger than your box."

Oh, what a masterpiece, isn't it? He's defended himself, held their attention, indicted them and presented Christ. And now comes the punch. Listen to this one. This is what's known as the climax, to put it mildly. Usually you're a little more gentle. Listen to Stephen. "You stiff-necked and uncircumcised." Now, that is right on the edge of really letting them have it. You see, to say to a Jew "stiff-necked" means that you resisted God. You know, just got a stiff neck. You won't bow to God. See? You know, a person who stands firm and will not bow. You know, kings always wanted people to bow. They were stiff-necked. They wouldn't bow.

"You stiff-necked," he says, "and uncircumcised in heart and ears." You know, they prided themselves on circumcision. And he says, "The only circumcision you've got's physical." And that really was a shot. "You do always resist the Holy Spirit. I've been giving you right now 50 verses of your history, and it sounds the same from the start to the end. God wants to do this, you don't buy it. God says, 'Joseph's My man.' You reject. God says, 'Moses is My man.' You reject. God says, 'Here's my law.' You reject. God says, 'Here I am, bigger than any building.' You stick Him in a box. You always resist the Holy Spirit, and it's nothing new," watch it, "as your fathers did," what? "So do you. You're in the same rut they were in."

Then he really gets pointed. "Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?" Have you ever checked Israel's history to see how the Jews treated the prophets? Which of the prophets have they not persecuted? Every one of them. You know what happened to Jeremiah? He got stoned. You know what happened to Isaiah? They cut him in half with a saw. They've done it all along.

Then he says this, "And they have slain them who showed before of the coming of the Just One." Then he just really drives it home, "of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers." Boy, that is powerful stuff. And he says, "You knew better, because you received the law by the disposition of angels, and you have not," what? "Kept it." And he really unloads.

Well, by that time, they have completely gone berserk. They are so infuriated, and so angry, that they completely lose control. First of all, they start grinding their teeth in anger. Stephen's last words explode into an uproar. There's no vote. There's no death sentence. There's a lynching. It's a mob scene. They grab him by the legs and drag him through the streets, throw him off a little edge, and they drop big giant boulders on him and crush the life out of him.

They could've repented, couldn't they? But they didn't. Some people hear the things of Christ and repent. Others join in on the crucifixion. And Stephen died. But before he died, dear ones, he preached. And, oh, how he preached. I'm glad I heard his sermon. Aren't you? Let's pray.

Father, we thank You this morning for this man of God, Stephen. Oh, what a thrill it's been to just go through this with him. Thank You for the power You gave him, the wisdom. Father, thank You for what You've shown us about boldness, about courage, about knowing the Bible well enough to use it, and about not defending the faith with reason but with revelation. Thank You for what You've shown us about Jesus as He's been seen in Joseph and Moses.

Father, I pray that no one would go from this place who is still rejecting Him. There may be some sons of Israel here who are still rejecting the Messiah. There may be others who are saying no to Jesus Christ. May it not be so, Father. May they hear the preaching of Stephen.

Father, those of us who are Christians, help us to be like Stephen and count our lives expendable for the cause of the truth. Help us never to water down the truth to avoid anything, but always to preach with the same fire and boldness that he preached. Help us to stand up for what we believe with courage, undaunted, fearless. And if we live, we live unto Thee. If we die, we die unto Thee. To live is Christ, to die is gain.

God, thank You for Stephen. How he humbles me. Oh, how he stands out. Such a giant. God, may it be so of us, that we confront the world with the same boldness that he did. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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