

- A Study in Acts -

Chapter Seven – Stephen’s Defense and Death.

ACTS 7:38-50:

In our previous lesson, Stephen has established that he could not have blasphemed against God, as everything leading up to the coming of Moses, was His power and providence. In addition, he could not blaspheme against God or Moses, as it was Moses who proclaimed that the Great Prophet to come after him; **“Him you shall hear” – Deuteronomy 18:15-19.**

Stephen is now going to continue his history lesson in order to address the issue of speaking blasphemy against the temple; then to summarize universally that it is not he who has spoken evil of the Law of Moses, but in fact it was they, through disobedience.

Text #1:

Acts 7:38-43 **“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,** 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.** 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.’***”

Highlighted verses are quotes from: **Exodus 32:1, 23; Amos 5:25-27.**

It is now that Stephen introduces that while Moses was on the mount, Israel began what would be an on-going behavior of disbelief in God, apostasy, and rebellion. We know that not all would be part of these who would demonstrate this rebellious behavior; however, Stephen is making the point that the majority were guilty. This introduction will play into his summary towards the guilt of those he is answering to; as they demonstrate the same behavior towards the righteousness of God.

Moloch: One of the many heathen gods of the Canaanites (specifically the Amorites). The worship of this god was particularly egregious before God and included terrible sexual perversion and the sacrifice of children burned on the altar – see **Leviticus 18:21; 20:1-5; 1 Kings 11:7; 2 Chronicles 33:6; Psalms 106:35-42; Jeremiah 7:9-11; 19:4-13; Ezekiel 23:37-39.**

Remphan: Another of the pagan gods, this one worshipped by the Israelites in the wilderness; probably associated with Sikkuth of – **Amos 5:26.**

Text #2:

Acts 7:44-47 “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, 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.”

These verses now cover the books of **Joshua** through **2 Samuel** in concise summary.

Tabernacle: This is from the Hebrew, which means; “Tent of meeting”. This was a portable structure (only in the sense of its transportability from place to place), for the purpose of collective worship. It was at Mt. Sinai that Moses was given the Divine plans in intriguing detail for the construction of this facility (**Exodus 25-26**). It was constructed exactly as it was prescribed, and to include the details of its rising, lowering, and transport.

David: The second king of united Israel who was a man after God’s own heart, who would do the will of God (**1 Samuel 13:14; Psalms 89:20; Acts 13:22**). He would express the desire to build God a permanent house; however, God would not allow David to build this permanent structure, as he was a man of war and had blood on his hands (**1 Chronicles 28:3**).

As a side note, it should be mentioned that the kingdom of Israel would not know the full extent of the borders of promise till king David (**Genesis 15:18**). In addition, even though he would not be allowed to build the temple, he would amass many of the supplies for the future construction (**1 Chronicles 22:1-5**); as well as securing the place of its construction (**2 Samuel 24:10-25**).

Solomon: The third and last king of united Israel, who pleased God by asking for wisdom in response to His inquiry; would be he who would be charged with the actual construction of the temple (**1 Chronicles 28:9-19**).

Text #3:

Acts 7:48-50 “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?’*”

Highlighted passage is from: **Isaiah 66:1-2**.

This is the last point of Stephen’s defense before he summarizes. In this last point, Stephen establishes that no one can truly speak blasphemy against the temple, for God has never actually dwelt there, nor can He dwell in anything made by the hands of men!

In the passage of the quote (**Isaiah 66**); Isaiah is teaching concerning true worship in contrast to false or unacceptable worship. Isaiah is teaching in the first four verses of this chapter, that God will be worshipped in sincere humility instead of hypocritical ritualism (**vs. 3-4**).

This passage is used specifically by Stephen for its application to the Jews whom he is giving his defense. The Lord Himself, while giving these same leaders an oral indictment of this same problem in the days of Isaiah, said:

Matthew 23:23-28 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier *matters* of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others

undone. ²⁴ Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!

²⁵ “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. ²⁶ Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also.

²⁷ “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead *men’s* bones and all uncleanness. ²⁸ Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.”

It should also be noted for your records that Solomon actually said the same thing as Stephen, concerning the temple when he dedicated it at the conclusion of its construction, note:

2 Chronicles 6:18-21 “But will God indeed dwell with men on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built! ¹⁹ Yet regard the prayer of Your servant and his supplication, O LORD my God, and listen to the cry and the prayer which Your servant is praying before You: ²⁰ that Your eyes may be open toward this temple day and night, toward the place where *You* said *You would* put Your name, that You may hear the prayer which Your servant makes toward this place. ²¹ And may You hear the supplications of Your servant and of Your people Israel, when they pray toward this place. Hear from heaven Your dwelling place, and when You hear, forgive.”

Solomon’s opening question is rhetorical, as he knows that God is not actually going to dwell there; however, since Solomon knows this is where the collective of Israel will gather to offer themselves solemnly to God, he wants God to train His focus on the site to hear and forgive the people.

Although Stephen is not going to be given the chance to express it; for you and I, it is vital to understand that we have been built into a “**Holy temple in the Lord**” (**Ephesians 2:19-22**), where God dwells in our hearts (**1 Peter 3:15** – a kind of holy of holies); and we offer ourselves as sacrifice (**Romans 12:1-2**), in “**a new and living way**” (**Hebrews 10:19-22**).

In this phase of the historical defense of Stephen, they did not hear Moses, they demonstrated unrighteousness constantly, they do not understand the true nature of the temple; literally demonstrating that they didn’t hear Moses; thus, they didn’t hear God, and they still don’t hear!