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A0835 – August 31, 2008 – Acts 7:44-8:1 – The Stoning Of Stephen

Acts 7:44-8:1a Ἡ σκηνὴ τοῦ μαρτυρίου ἦν τοῖς πατράσιν ἡμῶν ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ καθὼς διετάξατο ὁ λαλῶν τῷ Μωϋσῇ ποιῆσαι αὐτὴν κατὰ τὸν τύπον ὃν ἑώρακει· ⁴⁵ἦν καὶ εἰσηγάγον διαδεξάμενοι οἱ πατέρες ἡμῶν μετὰ Ἰησοῦ ἐν τῇ κατασχέσει τῶν ἐθνῶν, ὧν ἐξῴσεν ὁ θεὸς ἀπὸ προσώπου τῶν πατέρων ἡμῶν ἕως τῶν ἡμερῶν Δαυίδ, ⁴⁶ὃς εὔρεν χάριν ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἠτήσατο εὑρεῖν σκηνῶμα τῷ οἴκῳ Ἰακώβ. ⁴⁷Σολομὼν δὲ οἰκοδόμησεν αὐτῷ οἶκον. ⁴⁸ἀλλ' οὐχ ὁ ὕψιστος ἐν χειροποιήτοις κατοικεῖ, καθὼς ὁ προφήτης λέγει· ⁴⁹ὁ οὐρανός μοι θρόνος, ἡ δὲ γῆ ὑποπόδιον τῶν ποδῶν μου· ποῖον οἶκον οἰκοδομήσετέ μοι, λέγει κύριος, ἢ τίς τόπος τῆς καταπαύσεώς μου; ⁵⁰οὐχὶ ἡ χεὶρ μου ἐποίησεν ταῦτα πάντα; ⁵¹Σκληροτράχηλοι καὶ ἀπερίτμητοι καρδίας καὶ τοῖς ὠσίν, ὑμεῖς ἀεὶ τῷ πνεύματι τῷ ἁγίῳ ἀντιπίπτετε ὡς οἱ πατέρες ὑμῶν καὶ ὑμεῖς. ⁵²τίνα τῶν προφητῶν οὐκ ἐδίωξαν οἱ πατέρες ὑμῶν; καὶ ἀπέκτειναν τοὺς προκαταγγείλαντας περὶ τῆς ἐλεύσεως τοῦ δικαίου, οἳ νῦν ὑμεῖς προδόται καὶ φονεῖς ἐγένεσθε, ⁵³οἳτινες ἐλάβετε τὸν νόμον εἰς διαταγὰς ἀγγέλων καὶ οὐκ ἐφυλάξατε. ⁵⁴Ἀκούοντες δὲ ταῦτα διεπρίοντο ταῖς καρδίαις αὐτῶν καὶ ἔβρυχον τοὺς ὀδόντας ἐπ' αὐτόν. ⁵⁵ὑπάρχων δὲ πλήρης πνεύματος ἁγίου ἀτενίσας εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν εἶδεν δόξαν θεοῦ καὶ Ἰησοῦν ἐστῶτα ἐκ δεξιῶν τοῦ θεοῦ ⁵⁶καὶ εἶπεν· ἰδοὺ θεωρῶ τοὺς οὐρανοὺς διηνοιγμένους καὶ τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐκ δεξιῶν ἐστῶτα τοῦ θεοῦ. ⁵⁷κράζαντες δὲ φωνῇ μεγάλῃ συνέσχον τὰ ὦτα αὐτῶν καὶ ὤρμησαν ὁμοθυμαδὸν ἐπ' αὐτόν ⁵⁸καὶ ἐκβαλόντες ἔξω τῆς πόλεως ἐλιθοβόλουν. καὶ οἱ μάρτυρες ἀπέθεντο τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτῶν παρὰ τοὺς πόδας νεανίου καλουμένου Σαύλου, ⁵⁹καὶ ἐλιθοβόλουν τὸν Στέφανον ἐπικαλούμενον καὶ λέγοντα· κύριε Ἰησοῦ, δέξαι τὸ πνεῦμά μου. ⁶⁰θεὸς δὲ τὰ γόνατα ἔκραξεν φωνῇ μεγάλῃ· κύριε, μὴ στήσης αὐτοῖς ταύτην τὴν ἁμαρτίαν. καὶ τοῦτο εἰπὼν ἐκοιμήθη. ¹Σαῦλος δὲ ἦν συνευδοκῶν τῇ ἀναιρέσει αὐτοῦ. (NA27)

Acts 7:44-8:1a “Our fathers had the tabernacle of testimony in the wilderness, just as He who spoke to Moses directed *him* to make it according to the pattern which he had seen. ⁴⁵“And having received it in their turn, our fathers brought it in with Joshua upon dispossessing the nations whom God drove out before our fathers, until the time of David. ⁴⁶“*David* found favor in God’s sight, and asked that he might find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. ⁴⁷“But it was Solomon who built a house for Him. ⁴⁸“However, the Most High does not dwell in *houses* made by *human* hands; as the prophet says: ⁴⁹‘Heaven is My throne, And earth is the footstool of My feet; What kind of house will you build for Me?’ says the Lord, ‘Or what place is there for My repose?’ ⁵⁰‘Was it not My hand which made all these things?’ ⁵¹“You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did. ⁵²“Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become; ⁵³you who received the law as ordained by angels, and *yet* did not keep it.” ⁵⁴Now when they heard this, they were cut to the quick, and they *began* gnashing their teeth at him. ⁵⁵But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; ⁵⁶and he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” ⁵⁷But they cried out with a loud voice, and covered their ears and rushed at him with one impulse. ⁵⁸When they had driven him out of the city, they *began* stoning *him*; and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul. ⁵⁹They went on stoning Stephen as he called on *the Lord* and said, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!” ⁶⁰Then falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them!” Having said this, he fell asleep. ¹Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. (NASB95)

Question: If Potiphar was a eunuch why was he married?

The answer is real simple, social reasons, it would mask his emasculation and he could keep his social standing. This is why it was common for eunuch’s to be married in the ancient world.

Question: In Acts 7:43 when was the time Jews worshipped Moloch?

Moloch is called Molech in the OT. It’s used eight times. Lev 18:21; 20:2, 3, 4, 5; 1 Kgs 11:7; 23:10; Jer 32:35). It comes from the Hebrew consonants *mlk*. *mlk* just has

consonantal value but the vocalization is what's important, how you vocalized it determined the word meaning, so *mlk* could be "an angel" "a king" or this Ammonite god "Moloch." In Stephen's speech he's quoting Amos 5:26, 27 where *mlk* is used but in the NASB they don't translate Moloch and that's because they translated it "king" but it can just as well be translated Moloch and so the KJV is correct here in their rendering, so that's where Stephen is getting this. God had condemned Moloch worship but it was a constant problem for Israel. In v 42 the forty years of wandering in the wilderness occurred in the time of Moses but don't think because v 43 follows right on it's heals it occurred during that time period. Stephen is telescoping events, compressing them together so to speak so that v 43 actually is a reference from much later, the time of Amos. Amos prophesied to the northern kingdom about 752BC so Stephen's saying all the time from Mt Sinai to the Exile you worshipped idols, your whole history Israel is just one big idolatrous movement. Don't give me this, "We obeyed the Law and so forth, baloney." So who rejected Moses, it's not me Sanhedrin, it's you and your fathers before you. Now as per this Moloch he was a god of fire and the Israelites were so negative to the word of God that they would take their newborns and sacrifice them in the fires of Moloch, burn them alive right there in the valley of gehenna and you'd hear the screams of these babies echoing through the valley. It was horrible but Stephen says, "These are the consequences for rejecting the word of God." The nation rejected, rejected, rejected and they paid the price for rejection and certainly you don't want to go through that again, do you Sanhedrin? So, this is the story of Moloch, the specific reference harks back to the time of Amos, 750BC. Now, has Moloch passed from the scene of history? Not at all,

In northern California there's a compound called Bohemian Grove situated in a redwood forest. The Elite (U.S. Presidents past and present, media personalities, diplomats, heads of state, etc, etc.) people involved in the New World Order, gather at the Grove every July for a 2 or 3 week secret encampment. Why? To carry out an occult ceremony in which a human effigy is ritually sacrificed and cremated to a 40 foot high statue of an owl representing an ancient pagan deity known as Moloch. Nothing new under the sun, just ancient paganism, and this is what has been going on every summer in California since 1873, this is the religion of many of the Elite players who plan a New World Order.

Alright, moving on in the speech we come to the conclusion of Stephen's apologia. To remind you of the charges turn to Acts 6:11, "we heard him speak blasphemous words against God and Moses." and verse 13, "he speaks against this holy place and the law." Now those are one and the same charge because God's dwelling was the holy place, that is the Temple and Moses was known for "the law," Toray, so he's being charged with

blasphemy. Now how had he spoken against God and Moses? Actually he had not from the perspective of the revelation. Stephen had a worldview whose content came from the source documents themselves, right out of Scripture but the rabbinic authority had a worldview whose content came from tradition. So you had Scripture and tradition and whatever Stephen taught it did conflict with their tradition but it did not conflict with Scripture. So what Stephen does is he starts citing Scripture, OT text after OT text in this speech, it's a marvelous speech as he exposes their souls to the word of God, he insists that they hear the source material because there's not a simple answer to the high priests question in verse 1. It involves context and so he exposes them to the greater context of Moses by going back to Abraham, Joseph and then answering the charge of blaspheming Moses. He's filling these peoples minds with the word of God, that's what he's doing, he's not going to give them the chance to misinterpret him, he's had enough of that, so he develops his argument in context so there is no way they will miss the message. And boy we're going to see they "Got it alright." So now that he's answered the charge of blaspheming Moses and Moses is a type Sanhedrin, such that verse 37 is real important. He quotes Deut 18:15, "God will raise up for you a prophet like me, from your brethren," and no doubt that prophet is Jesus. And just as you didn't accept Moses' as God's deliverer the first time so you didn't accept Jesus as God's deliverer the first time. And so the accused becomes accuser. And in v 44 he turns to the second charge, that of blaspheming God who dwelled where but the tabernacle and the temple. And just watch, you have to marvel at this defense because here's a man who's standing before the greatest bunch of lawyers in the land of Israel, the most brilliant and powerful men, so he's in a pressure situation, it's seventy-one vs one and yet who holds his cool? Who is able to maintain his composure? And not only that but who is able to articulate the word of God when the pressure is on? And by doing so exert pressure on his opponents? This speaks volumes of this man's confidence in the word of God. He's not afraid of them, he's the picture of Christian courage. We've heard legends of the courage of Ben-Hur. Well here's the model for the Christian. Stephen.

So now he turns to the second charge. Do you Stephen speak against the Temple? Do you speak against God Himself? And once again he does something very brilliant. Notice his argument? Does he start with the Temple proper? No. He backs up to the tabernacle in the wilderness. Why is he doing that? Same reason he started with Abraham in the first part of the defense. Context. You want to learn from this as Stephen had learned. He knew that if you present your answer out of context their always going to misinterpret you. So he starts with the origin of the Temple which is the tabernacle.

Verse 44, **Our fathers had the tabernacle of testimony in the wilderness, just as He who spoke to Moses directed *him* to make it according to the pattern which he had seen.** Now here's a picture of the Tabernacle. This was built by the Israelites down by Mt Sinai. It was a tent-like structure surrounded by a fence. This was where the Israelites came to worship God in the OT and so they would come, not from the north or the south or the west but from the east. It had only this one entryway. Why? Because there's only one way of salvation, in Jesus Christ, and God the Father from eternity past designed that He be the only way of salvation. Then you came to the first piece of furniture, the bronze altar and this is where you had the blood sacrifice and that pictures that the only way to God's presence is through blood sacrifice, then you come to the laver and this was full of water and you had to wash the blood and mud off your hands and feet, this is a picture of the believer's daily cleansing by confessing his personal sin. Once you went inside you entered a long room with three articles, on the left was the menorah or the seven-branched golden lampstand and each lamp was lit to put off light signifying that the Messiah was the light of the world. On your right you had the table of showbread, your twelve loaves and so forth and this pictured the Messiah as the bread of life. Then you had in the center the altar of incense and this pictures the prayers of the believer going up before God. They are fragrant to Him. And finally behind this veil, the inner veil was the ark of the testimony or ark of the covenant and that's what Stephen is emphasizing. This article had two angels on top and they had these great wings that covered their faces so they were staring straight down at the lid of this ark. And up above it was the Shekinah Glory, the visible presence of God in the Most Holy Place and once a year the high priest would go into this room and following the procedures of Lev 16 he would put blood here on the lid and that would cleanse the nation of their sin annually, the angels would look upon this and be amazed that the Lord God of the universe was satisfied, and of course it looked forward to the once for all sacrifice of Jesus Christ and so the angels when Jesus Christ satisfied the Father on the cross they look upon this as utter amazement because Jesus Christ propitiated the Father. So Stephen is talking about this structure that portrayed salvation and he calls it by a name rarely used in the OT, the **tabernacle of testimony**. Now why do you suppose he calls it that? Because inside this ark there were several articles, one of which was a tablet, on the outside there was another tablet and these tablets had the 10 commandments written on them. Now these were the testimony or witness. Because the Mosaic Law was a contract. So in a contract you have parties and God was one party and Israel the other party and when you had these ancient treaties both parties got a copy of the terms of the contract. And so God's copy was placed inside the ark and Israel's copy was placed beside the ark. And both parties needed a copy so they could access the terms, what are my obligations, what does God expect of me, what have I signed up for here. And the nation could go back and measure behavior. Has God been

faithful to do what He said and have we been faithful to do what we said? And obviously Stephen is leading up to the conclusion that God had been faithful all along but they had broken the contract. So that's why he calls it the tabernacle of testimony, because it held the court record that they indeed had transgressed the law. And therefore Lev 26 and Deut 28 came into effect, five degrees of cursing and they had already been through that once and gone into Exile in 722 and 586, now there's been a partial regathering to the land, they're under Roman rule but they have some autonomy, but having continued to reject the law more judgment is coming. So Moses had this vision where he looked directly into heaven and he saw the tabernacle there and he got a perfect imprint of this thing and the nation Israel built it. Now the very fact the high priest had to go into that most holy place year after year after year with the blood to satisfy God proved over and over *ad nauseum* them that they could never please God, they were sinful, but that one day the great High Priest would come and satisfy God, and that great High Priest is the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

Now notice, **Our fathers had this tabernacle of testimony** where? Did they have it in Jerusalem? Did they have it in the Promised Land? No, out here **in the wilderness** of Sinai, Gentile soil, which means then, that God's presence was not fixed in one place it was mobile, it was able to be moved around and because it was able to be moved around then, says Stephen, logically, you people who are standing here accusing me of speaking against the temple, accusing the Lord Jesus Christ of speaking against the temple as though this is some great sin of blasphemy; the temple says Stephen, is no more a proper absolute than the Torah was. These things, he says, have to be taken in their divine viewpoint context and these people were not doing it. So this is why Stephen takes their most favorite point of worship, the Temple, shows that originally it was a temporary tent, shows that it bore witness of their sin and shows that it was mobile. All these things, of course, refuting their position.

Now we come to verse 45, and notice, once again he returns to the biblical framework. Stephen, when he defended the Christian faith, brought up historical event after historical event, just like the stream of prophets that came before them. All the great prophets from Moses to Isaiah to Jeremiah, when they go to address the nation or the people they keep bringing up the same events and the same doctrines. So he's giving us a model of how to defend the Christian faith. So first he went back to the Call of Abraham. Then he advances to the Exodus, he moves to Mount Sinai and now in verse 45 he's going to advance to the next event, the Conquest and Settlement under Joshua. When he gets through with the Conquest and Settlement he's going to go to the Election and Reign of King David; he follows exactly the biblical framework, as do all the great men of

Scripture. These men used this framework system of thinking, I am convinced, over and over and over and over again; it was the core of their entire defense of the Christian faith.

So he begins, **And having received it in their turn, our fathers brought it in with** Jesus. Here he's pulling another typological interpretation because the Hebrew name for Joshua is Yeshua and we get from Yeshua the name Jesus. So the equivalent of the OT name Joshua was Jesus. And just as Joshua brought them into the land in the OT so who in the future is going to bring Israel into the land? The NT equivalent Jesus. Exact same name, in the Greek its Iesous and Iesous is the name here used for Joshua so that the KJV translators actually translate this Jesus, not Joshua. So again Stephen sees this parallel.

And Iesous upon dispossessing the nations whom God drove out before our fathers, this is the Conquest and Settlement. Joshua had been Moses' apprentice from way back and when Moses died up on Mt Nebo Joshua became the leader and he camped out on the other side of the Jordan getting ready to make his entrance into the land. Now Jericho was the key military fortress in the land of Canaan at the time, so it was a strategic decision to take Jericho first. And so the conquest began by moving west and taking Jericho, then they kept going west and took Ai and Bethel. Then Joshua's army turned south to drive out those inhabitants and finally they went north to complete the conquest, which they never did completely but this was the plan, they forced their way into the center of the land like a wedge and then pushed out, this was general Joshua's military strategy.

But as he followed this, what went with him, and that's what Stephen's point is, what went with him all this time? The tabernacle of the testimony, the ark of the covenant. Mobility again, it wasn't fixed in one place; it was moving all over the place. It finally ended up in Shiloh but the point is that God isn't stuck in some sort of a gold cage; that's not the picture of God's presence in the Old Testament he says; and furthermore during this period you'll notice in verse 45 how it ends, "**whom God drove out before our fathers, until the time of David,**" so let's see what he's saying here. He's saying from the year 1400 BC down to the year 1000 BC or a period of four hundred years there was holy war. By the way, if any of you tend toward pacifism you've got a problem because the Bible authorizes war under certain conditions and the Christian is authorized to kill and be the best killer he possibly can to destroy the enemy in the right situation. It is the Christian privilege, it is the Christian right to serve the Lord by killing the enemy when those situations arise in history. So for four hundred years it was God's will that the enemy be annihilated; these people were a cancer, they had to be eliminated from history. And if they weren't eliminated from history you and I would not be here today; certain

aces at certain times in history, certain cultures become so degenerate that the only way God can save the rest of the human race is to eliminate them, **until the time of David.**

So now we move to the next event in the biblical framework, the Election and Reign of King David. See how he moves from event to event. This is a powerful approach. So let's read of this event, Verse 46, **David found favor in God's sight, and asked that he might find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob.** ⁴⁷**"But it was Solomon who built a house for Him.** ⁴⁸**"However, the Most High does not dwell in houses made by human hands; as the prophet says: ⁴⁹"Heaven is My throne, And earth is the footstool of My feet; What kind of house will you build for Me?" says the Lord, 'Or what place is there for My repose? ⁵⁰"Was it not My hand which made all these things?"**

Now to get the background, what was going on all during this period turn back to 2 Sam 7. David, in David's day, faced an international custom. So let's first look at what the international custom was and then we'll talk about 2 Sam 7. Take Egypt for example, in Egypt there was the custom established that when the Pharaoh went out into battle and was victorious he would come back and celebrate. Part of the celebration was giving thanks to the god who supposedly gave him the victory. One way they would thank the god was by building them a great house. So we can think, for example of Pharaoh Thutmose III, who came back from a battle at Armageddon, and gave his praise to Amon Re, an Egyptian god. And he built Amon Re a great temple.

It was in that kind of a situation that 2 Sam 7 occurred, so when you read in verse 2, "that the king," this is at the end of all the wars, King David "said unto Nathan, the prophet, See, now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells within tent curtains." So David, in part, is simply following the custom that any other king would do. Verse 3, Nathan thought it sounded like a pretty good idea, so he says go ahead and do it. But then this plan gets wiped out in verse 4, ⁴**"But in the same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, saying, ⁵"Go and say to My servant David, 'Thus says the LORD, "Are you the one who should build Me a house to dwell in?"** See, its sarcasm. In other words, God says who do you think you are building Me a house. Besides, God says in vv 6-7, Did I ever ask you or anyone else to build Me a house? In fact, God said, David, I tell you what I'll make you a house, and in history God made David a house alright, but it's a play on words. In the Hebrew God says, I'll make you a *beth*, you see that word in the word "Bethlehem, Bethel, Bethany," but *beth* can mean two things; it can mean a literal house or it can mean a dynasty and so God says to David, David, I'll make you a *beth*, and what he meant was a dynasty, and it's going to be an eternal dynasty. Now this could work out by a neverending successing of kings from David's loins or it could work out another

way, couldn't it. And it worked out that David's line of kings ended in an eternal king, the Lord Jesus Christ. So though David was wrong to want to build Him a temple, that was a pagan idea and God corrected that, but we can't be too hard on David because he did have the right attitude, his heart was in the right place. To see David's heart attitude turn to Psalms 132 on your way back to Stephen's speech. Verse 1, "Remember, O LORD, on David's behalf, All his affliction; ²How he swore to the LORD And vowed to the Mighty One of Jacob, ³"Surely I will not enter my house, Nor lie on my bed; ⁴I will not give sleep to my eyes Or slumber to my eyelids, ⁵Until I find a place for the LORD, A dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob."

So David had the right attitude but this building a house idea was a pagan idea. Verse 47, "**But it was Solomon who built a house for Him.** David wasn't allowed to build the house because David was a bloody man. The temple spoken of here is described in 1 Kings 6 but the major difference between this temple and the tabernacle is mobility. The tabernacle was like a very expensive tent that could be set up and taken down but the temple was a permanent structure and what are you going to do, keep God in one place, Jerusalem, the holy city and that's it? Now Stephen gets to the point. ⁴⁸"**However, the Most High does not dwell in houses made by human hands; as the prophet says:** quoting Isa 61:1-2, ⁴⁹"**Heaven is My throne, And earth is the footstool of My feet; What kind of house will you build for Me?**" says the Lord, "Or what place is there for My repose? ⁵⁰"**Was it not My hand which made all these things?**" In other words, you can't cage God in. You can't lock God into your golden cage. God's omnipresent. So these Jews, by putting so much emphasis on the Temple as the place God dwelled, maligned the truth because the **Most High** does not dwell in houses made by human hands but is sovereign over all heaven and earth. And here you are trying to cage Him in to Jerusalem. You guys got the wrong doctrine of God, not me. You guys blaspheme God, not me. Get with the program. So he exposes them to more source material, Isa 66, to prove his point. **Heaven is My throne, And earth is the footstool of My feet; What kind of a house will you build for Me?** It's ridiculous to think you can box God in. He boxes you in, you don't box Him in. Verse 50, **Was it not My hand which made all these things** and you, by your hands, in turn, take My materials and build Me a house? It's absurd, I'm the Creator of all, I'm out in the open, you're in the box. Let's get our theology straight. And what Stephen has recognized, as a Hellenistic Jew is that if you can't confine God then you can't confine the word of God. It's got to go out, and so Stephen is making the break. But the Temple is their playground see, there whole lives are built around the Temple, they're the guardians of God so to speak, so he's walking on thin ice with them, criticizing their narrow views.

In verses 51 and following Stephen goes on a full frontal assault, and commentators have been shocked at the viciousness of these words, these are scouring words. Now without going into a lot of detail Stephen is putting himself in the line of the prophets. Stephen sees himself as a suffering prophet and suffer he will. If you turned back to Jer 7 you'd see the same thing with Jeremiah. He violently attacked the nation for their apostasy from the truth. He was a man who had to watch his once great nation go caput. It's a difficult thing to watch for a true patriot, some of you are old enough to have watched in horror as a once great nation, the United States of America has crumbled. Why does this happen? Rejection of the word of God, rejection of the word of God. The same thing happened to the nation Israel in Jeremiah's day, the same thing was happening right before Stephen's eyes in this speech. Rejection of the word of God. So Stephen was a great patriot of his nation and he knew that if these leaders didn't do something different from their fathers, the whole nation would crumble into oblivion. And prophetically speaking if he'd lived another 37 years he would have seen his own nation falter. Verse 51, **"You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did."**⁵²**"Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become; "**⁵³**you who received the law as ordained by angels, and yet did not keep it."**

So in v 51 he goes into name-calling. He calls them **stiff-necked** a word that refers to scar tissue, hardening of heart. We'd say it means autonomy, autonomous rebellion. They wanted to dictate the terms to God, they didn't want to submit to His dictates. It was all a big religious show at the Temple. This is nothing new, from the time the nation made the golden calf God had been calling them stiff-necked (Exod 33:5). Then he calls them another popular name, **uncircumcised** and this was a word used of Gentiles who were outside the covenant. Physical circumcision was a sign of the Abrahamic Covenant but spiritual circumcision of the heart was the OT code word for regeneration. And he's saying they're just as damned as the Gentiles. In our day we'd translate Stephen to be saying, "You're a bunch of damned fools." Now, you don't learn that in seminary, they don't have classes on that. But this is the school of the Lord Jesus Christ who in Matt 23 called the same group of people, "whitewashed tombs, hypocrites, and blind guides," so this is a lesson to all of you who see Jesus as some kind of an effeminate pacifist, some emaciated individual off the pages of Medieval art. That is not the Jesus of history. Jesus was not a pushover, He was a man's kind of man and He wasn't afraid of calling people names when the shoe fit. In the same vein came John the Baptists with his scathing words, "You brood of vipers, who warned you of the wrath to come." So Stephen is in good company, it's the rest of us who have bowed the knee to tolerance and compromise

that our out of line. They were **always resisting the Holy Spirit**. Now what does this phrase mean they did. It means they rejected the word of God. They had rejected the word of God in the Mosaic testament of v 44 and now they had rejected the Word of God incarnate, the Lord Jesus Christ, God's Messiah, and now they continue to reject that same word of God in the prophet Stephen. So Stephen says when you resist the word of God you are resisting the Spirit of God; there is no difference in his mind between the work of the Spirit and the word of God; none of the artificial modern day split between the Holy Spirit and doctrine. The two are wedded together in Stephen's thinking. And finally he makes a fourth line of attack, he goes at their traditionalism saying, **you are doing just as your father's did**. See it's just a long line of tradition you guys are following. If you were following Moses you would have accepted Jesus Christ. But as it was, **"Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become;"** Jewish tradition elaborates on the murder of Isaiah, they took him and sawed him asunder in the reign of Manaseh. And Jeremiah was stoned at the hands of the people who had forced him to go to Egypt with them. Now you've gone and done exactly what your fathers did, by murdering **the Righteous One**. They had filled up the sin of their fathers. They had murdered the prophet "like unto Moses." This is irony because the members of Sanhedrin rejected their fathers saying in Matt 23:30, Oh, "if we had been *living* in the days of our fathers, we would not have joined them in *shedding* the blood of the prophets.' Oh no, not us, we're different than them. Stephen insists they were traditionalists, just like their fathers.

Verse 53, **you who received the law as ordained by angels, and yet did not keep it."**

The expression **ordained by angels** shows that the Mosaic Law given on Mt Sinai was mediated by angels. This is the teaching in Gal 3:19 and Heb 2:2,ⁱ what's Stephen's point by saying this? The argument in Hebrews is that the revelation given by angels was lesser than the revelation given by Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is greater than the angels. And if they and their fathers had rejected the revelation ordained by angels and been judged how much greater would their judgment be having rejected the revelation of Yeshua? What this means is they were in for a clobbering. And this was the final straw. Stephen just blew over everything they trusted in. These people had placed their trust in tradition over God Himself. And as a result, when Stephen came in and he crushed it and he destroyed it by historical proof they got the point alright, but they couldn't take it. They would have nothing more to do with this Stephen character.

Verse 54. **Now when they heard this, they were cut to the quick, and they began gnashing their teeth at him.** We'd say this is subjectivity in the courtroom. See, this is

what happens when you have a group of people who go negative to God's Word. Sooner or later people who reject the authority of the Word of God actually reject the authority of their conscience and as a result their minds become filled with human viewpoint, but the weakness of all human viewpoint is that it can't control emotions. They just react, they can't think objectively, their emotions just overtake them. So when they heard Stephen evaluation **they were cut to the quick**. In the Greek this is the equivalent of someone taking a saw and cutting your body in half, he had officially wiped out their worldview, everything they believed, everything they lived for was totally decimated. This word, and it was used back in 5:33, this had happened before, but on that occasion the great Gamaliel, Paul's teacher, had stopped them, but nothing is going to stop them now. They're not asking what should we do, they just want to rip Stephen's head off. And so **they began gnashing their teeth at him**. And what this means is they were literally grinding their teeth together like this, this is an uncontrollable anger, a fierce wrath, they became so intensely hostile they just couldn't wait to get their hands on Stephen. And the irony of it is that they are about to do exactly what Stephen said they would do in v 52.

With all the subjectivity in the court notice in v 55 who's completely calm. There's only one guy in that court who is objective at this point, who can think clearly and it's Stephen. **But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God;** ⁵⁶**and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."** ⁵⁷**But they cried out with a loud voice, and covered their ears and rushed at him with one impulse.** ⁵⁸**When they had driven him out of the city, they *began* stoning him; and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul.** ⁵⁹**They went on stoning Stephen as he called on *the Lord* and said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!"** ⁶⁰**Then falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" Having said this, he fell asleep.**

Let's start with verse 55, **Being full of the Holy Spirit**, this is how Stephen could relax under pressure, here's a man facing an angry mob but he knew the Word of God so he's completely at ease. This man is so relaxed that he's able, despite the rough treatment, that he's able to quote Scripture. You're about to see how one of the greatest believers ever to walk the face of the earth responds under pressure.

So first **he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God** and what he's seeing there we explained back in v 2 as the radiating light coming from the throne of God. And when you couple this vision with 6:15, Stephen had the face of an angel? You have to wonder if the text is indicating that just before he began his defense, "Did Stephen get a

foretaste of this vision, just ahead of time, sort of a divine motivation, you go ahead Stephen, give your defense of Me, I'm right here, I'll see you again in a few minutes?" And so he does go ahead. And when he started that defense his face shone brightly as Moses face shone in the OT. And everyone in that court was fixed on Stephen's every word. And now that he's given the apologia he gets the full vision of the **glory of God** radiating from His heavenly throne, **and Jesus standing at the right hand of God**, a unique event. Not once do you ever read of Jesus standing. You always read of Jesus sitting at the right hand of God. But here He isn't sitting, He's **standing** and He's looking right at Stephen. Why is Jesus on His feet on this momentous occasion? He's on His feet to bestow a special honor on this martyr. This martyr that has just given his testimony. And by the way, that word *martyr* in the Greek means "testimony," so it's very *apropos*.

There's a lot going on here, let's point out a few things. First, what honor is the Lord Jesus about to bestow upon this first martyr of the Christian Church? According to Matt 10 "He who confesses Me before men, I will confess before the Father." This is a special reward for martyrs. They are personally confessed before God the Father. God blesses those who have had to take physical torture and persecution for His Son. We hear little about martyrs today. If you would like to do your own reading on how some of the great Christians have died there's a book called *Fox's Book of Martyrs* and it's a classic history of the great men and women who have died for Christ over the centuries. And I think it would be a sobering experience for some of you who have had little or no suffering in your life to read that and it'll give you a refreshing perspective on what it means to face what Stephen faced. And all down through the book of Revelation and into church history there's a theme, that as I say, we do not recognize and we're not familiar with it and that is that there's a special place in the heart of God for those people who give their last dying breath for Christ.

The second thing about Christ standing up off the Father's throne is that it shows that heaven itself is responding to the torture in history; that heaven is not indifferent to evil on earth. Sometimes you get this picture that God is like a Greek statue sitting up in heaven unmoved by history on earth. But that what happens down here and the pain and the sorrow and the heartache gets an immediate response from Christ in heaven. And so Christ knows that His beloved Stephen is going to be killed.

The third thing to notice is that when Stephen is killed he's the first part of Christ's body on earth to join Him in heaven. And the Lord Jesus Christ who said, "In this world you will have tribulation, but take courage, I have overcome the world," stands to welcome this first courageous member of His body.

Then in v 56 Stephen, in true prophetic form, relates the vision. **and he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”** And the fact he mentions the **Son of Man**, that’s a title of the Messiah from Dan 7:13, this is the only person in the entire NT who ever uses that title except Jesus. This title from Dan 7 is a coronation title, when the Lord Jesus walks up to the Father and He is crowned King of kings and Lord of lords and handed over an everlasting dominion. They know very well what Stephen is saying, this Jesus whom you crucified, is God incarnate. And look at the response, this is the ultimate in subjectivism, as these apostate people with their emotions out of control now get to the point where they cannot even stand any more truth; they will not listen to any more facts, the facts don’t matter, all that matters is their emotions. So they scream in 57, just all of them get together and they collectively scream to drown out Stephen’s last words, **But they cried out with a loud voice, and covered their ears and rushed at him with one impulse.** ⁵⁸**When they had driven him out of the city, they began stoning him;** and that’s an inceptive imperfect, it means they were beginning the procedure, how this happened without Roman approval as in the case of Jesus is explained by Josephus to the effect that any offense against the sanctity of the Temple could be capitally punished without Roman involvement. So they drove **him out of the city** because it was illegal to spill blood inside the city of Jerusalem, so they drove him out, there are two traditions here, one says the place of stoning was to the north of the city, another says it was to the east.

Now the procedures for stoning were that the criminal would be taken to the place of stoning and when they got within 15 feet they would tell him to “confess,” and obviously they just skipped that little part here, forget that, then they would take them within six feet and strip their clothes off, then they would put him up on a platform about 12 feet high and you’d bring forth the first witness. There had to be two witnesses. Now we know these witnesses were lying witnesses from 6:13, so these men are about to commit murder. And so the first witness would shove Stephen off the platform onto the rocks below and if that didn’t kill him the second witness would take his body, turn him over so he was face up, so he could look him right in the eyeballs and he’d take about a 30-40 pound rock, that’s why you see them **removing their robes** in v 58, and they’re tossing them at the feet of a young man named Saul, and Saul is probably the one that paid these witnesses off to begin with, he just couldn’t take being beat intellectually, his intellectual pride had been knocked down to size by Stephen’s brilliance, so he was right there making sure it never happened again, so they tossed their robes at his feet because you’ve got to have some arm room to pick up these boulders, and then he’d drop it right on his chest, and if that didn’t do it then everyone would join in with the rocks until you expired.

Now notice verse 59, what's going on with Stephen during all this? With his last few breaths' of air he utters "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." What did the Lord Jesus utter on the cross? "Father, I commit My spirit unto Thee," (Luke 23:46) same words, both come from the same OT passage. So turn with me to Ps 31. Both these men when they died had this Psalm running through their minds. They had memorized Scripture so when they got in an adverse situation, when the heat was on they didn't fall apart, they applied the word, they concentrated on doctrine, and so Stephen was being dragged out of the city and this is what he was reciting, "In You, O LORD, I have taken refuge; Let me never be ashamed; In Your righteousness deliver me. ²Incline Your ear to me, rescue me quickly; Be to me a rock of strength, A stronghold to save me. ³For You are my rock and my fortress; For Your name's sake You will lead me and guide me. ⁴You will pull me out of the net which they have secretly laid for me, For You are my strength." And this was all going on in the silence of his soul and when he got to v 5 he blurted out, "Into Your hand I commit my spirit;" except he made sure and said, Lord Jesus so they would get the point. Back to Acts 7, he quotes another passage, in v 60 he literally screams out with all that's left in him, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." Who else said those last words? The Lord Jesus Christ on the cross (Luke 24:34). That's grace orientation, even though these men are murdering them wrongly these men maintain grace orientation, don't hold it against them Lord. **And having said this he fell asleep** and what this is is dying grace. The Lord extends mercy here and despite the fact that this is a brutal murder it's a very peaceful death, he just fell asleep like he was lying on a bed. You as a believer are going to die, barring the rapture, but you don't have to fear death, there is nothing to fear because of dying grace, just relax about it, it's going to come but immediately after that you're going to be with Jesus Christ.

Now, what can we learn from all this. By way of application we learn how to relax in a pressure situation. You don't have to worry when you're thrown in the fire like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, you can relax and articulate the Christian faith. Don't get anxious about things, the Lord Jesus Christ is right there with you, and you can trust the word of God, you can rely on Him, He's going to get you through and He's right there watching with intense scrutiny what's happening in your life. All you have to do is stick with the word, memorize the word, study the word, live the word and preach the word, that's what this man did and so the witness goes out.

¹Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death.

¹ It was also recorded in Josephus, *Antiquities*, xv, v 3.

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