

Acts 6.8-8.1

Stephen – Outside the Box

LAST 2 MONTHS TIME OF GREAT CHANGE – Our Family

- 1) School where our Children Study / Wife Teaches – MOVED
- 2) Seminary where I work – MOVED
- 3) Family MOVED to a New Apartment
- 4) NEXT SUNDAY – Church I attend will ALSO MOVE

ALL OF LIFE IS CHANGING – and struggling to keep up with it

Time your COMPLEXION CLEARS UP, HAIR FALLS OUT, TEETH

FURNITURE DISEASE – Chest is falling into my drawers

ONE FOOT IN GRAVE – THE OTHER ON A BANANA PEEL

Get used to Tram being 15 tenge / raise it to 20

Enjoying Pancake Syrup from Ramstore / Can't Find it Again

ONE PLACE WE LEAST WANT CHANGE – RELIGION

REFUGE OF STABILITY IN A SEA OF CHANGE – Stable, Reference

CRISIS FACING STEPHEN – Jew with Greek Culture – HELENIST

BIG UNDERSTANDING OF GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST

Defied the existing Traditional Jewish Understanding of Religion

6.9 “Synagogue of the Freedmen” – Roman prisoners, purchased freedom

EAGER TO KEEP IDEAL TRADITIONS THEY WORKED FOR

FEAR AND ANGER agst Stephen – Advocating Fundamental Change

ACCUSATION – 6.13 “This fellow never stops speaking against the HOLY PLACE and against the LAW. For we heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and CHANGE THE CUSTOMS Moses handed down to us”

3 SERIOUS CHARGES – DENIED Holy Holy Holy
 1) Building 2) Book 3) Behavior

SAME JEALOUS CONCERN HAD PAUL ARRESTED IN CH. 21

1. The Content of Stephen's Message

RESPONSE TO THE CHARGES MADE – Based on Scripture

Focus on Four Epochs of Israel's History / Four Great OT Heroes

1. Abraham in the time of the Patriarchs
2. Joseph during the Egyptian Exile
3. Moses during the Exodus and wilderness wanderings
4. David & Solomon – establishment of Monarchy

Two Themes of Sermon Address - Two Points of Critics Attack

- 1) Spoke Against Temple
- 2) Spoke Against Moses and Law

a. God Works in Unusual Places – not just Temple

CONTEXT – Jews convinced that God ONLY was in THEIR Place

7.2 “The God of Glory appeared in MESOPOTAMIA”

ABRAHAM WAS FATHER OF ISRAEL – LANDLESS

7.5 “God gave him no inheritance here, NOT EVEN A FOOT of Ground”

7.9 Joseph, sold as a slave into EGYPT, but God was WITH HIM

EGYPT, EGYPT, EGYPT – Mentioned SIX TIMES by Stephen
EGYPT mentioned more than 600 X's in Bible – MOSTLY BAD

7.17 God would FULFILL promise to Abraham – even in Egypt

GOD'S LAWGIVER WAS A PRINCE OF EGYPT

7.22 “educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians”

7.30 “an angel appeared to Moses in the flames of a burning bush in the desert near Mount Sinai – God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob”

7.33 PLACE WHERE YOU ARE STANDING IS HOLY GROUND

Where? Downtown Jerusalem? Wilderness of Sinai!!

HOLY GROUND – OUTSIDE THE HOLY LAND

WHERE EVER GOD IS – IS HOLY

Chrysostom said of this passage in 4th C -“There is not a word of temple here, not a word of sacrifices. This holy ground is far more wonderful than the ‘Holy of Holies’ for God is nowhere said to have appeared in the inner sanctuary in Jerusalem as he did in the burning bush...God is everywhere present...the holy place is wherever God may be”

FIRST MENTION OF A RELIGIOUS BUILDING

7.44 “tabernacle of Testimony with them in the DESERT”

7.47 Solomon built house for him – KNEW REAL TRUTH

TRUTH STEPHEN’S CRITICS DID NOT UNDERSTAND

7.48 “Most high does not live in houses made by men”

HEAVEN IS GOD’S THRONE / EARTH IS HIS FOOTSTOOL
GOD COULD NOT BE CAPTURED INSIDE THEIR BOX

STEPHEN SEES LONG AWAITED MESSIAH OF ISRAEL

“oh good, he is coming for us right – the House of Israel, people of faith”

BIGGEST SHOCK

7.56 I see heaven open & the Son of Man standing at the rt. hand of God

YOU GUYS MISSED HIM – Xst WAS HERE & YOU KILLED HIM

MAY SEEM LIKE A CONFUSING SERMON TO YOU – not to them

WOUND OF ITS IMPACT WAS UNBEARABLE – Stephen must die

7.54 “they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him”

7.57 covered ears – yelled at top of voices – dragged out of city – stoned

GROUND TEETH – THREW STONES – NOT OPENED BIBLES

Stephen’s Interpretation was Faultless and Irrefutable

6.10 “they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit”

THEME OF SERMON – God of Israel, on the Move / NOT BOUND

No Building can CONFINE HIM or CONTROL HIS ACTIVITY

ONLY PROMISE OF GOD’S PRESENCE IS WITH HIS PEOPLE

Solemn Covenant Promise – Wherever God’s People Are – He Is

God of the Old Testament - Living God - on the move & on the march

b. God Works through Unusual People - MISUNDERSTOOD

SACRED HEROES ARE MORTAL MEN

Abe – Idol worshipper – WHY left Mesopotamia

Joe – Young Man thrown away into Egyptian prison

David – Young, small son of Jesse – Shepherd Boy

Moses – Old Man tending sheep in the desert wilderness

LONGEST SECTION on MOSES – FOCUS CRITICS COMPLAINT

1) Moses was Called by God

7.20 “no ordinary child”

7.22 “powerful in speech and action”

7.25 “God was using him to rescue them”

7.38 “he received living words to pass on to us”

STEPHEN HONORS MOSES – SHOWS HIM NO DISRESPECT

2) Moses was Rejected THEN and NOW

7.25 His own people did not realize – God was using him to deliver

7.27 they pushed Moses aside – who made you ruler & judge over us

7.35 they rejected Moses

7.39 they refused to obey him –rejected him – hearts turned back to Egypt

Stephen was PROPHET TO ISRAEL – quotes Amos and Isaiah

APPLIES their REBUKES TO ISRAEL TO HIS LISTENING CRITICS

PAY LIP SERVICE TO MOSES & LAW – WORST OFFENDERS

THREE NAILS IN STEPHEN’S COFFIN

// just like Israel ignored the Law and the Prophets of God

1) 7.51 “You always resist the Holy Spirit”

2) 7.52 “You killed the Prophet Greater than Moses – Righteous One”

3) 7.53 “You have not obeyed the Law of God”

2. The Character of Stephen's Life

a. Lived Like Jesus - FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT

6.3 "known to be full of the Spirit & wisdom" PRE-REQUISITE Service

LESSON FOR THOSE IN LEADERSHIP TRAINING
THOSE WHOM GOD CALLS HE FIRST PREPARES

6.5 "Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit"

SPIRIT SO FILLED HIM THAT HE REFLECTED JESUS

PERHAPS A KEY TO HIS GREATNESS WAS HIS HUMILITY
WILLING TO BE GREAT LIKE JESUS – BE A SERVANT

6.8 "Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power"
SWEETNESS & STRENGTH merged in One Personality

6.8 "did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people"

LUKE (author of Acts) ATTRIBUTES SIGNS TO JESUS

PETER'S SERMON ON PENTECOST – 2.22

"Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles,
wonders, and signs"

POWER OF JESUS – GIVEN TO HIS APOSTLES – 5.12

"The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders"

POWER OF JESUS – THRU APOSTLES – GIVEN TO STEPHEN

6.6 "They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their
hands on them"

FOUNDATION OF GREAT MINISTRY IS
GOD TRANSFORMED CHARACTER – seen clearly in Stephen

b. Preached Like Jesus Spirit and Word work Together

6.7 "Word of God SPREAD" – Apostles Preached and Prayed

"a large number (of the 8000) priests became obedient to the faith"

JESUS PROMISED HIS SPIRIT TO HIS FAITHFUL SERVANTS

“When you are brought before synagogues, rulers, and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say” Lk 12.11,12

“For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict” Luke 21.15

PROMISE FULFILLED IN STEPHEN 6.10 “they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by which he spoke”

SERMON – DRANK DEEPLY at the WELL OF SACRED SCRIPTURE
Risen Jesus had taught Stephen/ Like He did Disciples on Rd. to Emmaus

EVEN BEFORE he OPENED his MOUTH– TRUTH of GOD on FACE
6.15 “All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that HIS FACE WAS LIKE THE FACE OF AN ANGEL”

ACCUSATION – “blasphemy against Moses”
GOD’S AFFIRMATION – Face shown like Moses

JOHN STOTT “Was it not God’s deliberate purpose to give the same radiant face to Stephen when he was accused of opposing the law as he had given to Moses when he received the law? In this way God was showing that both Moses’ ministry of the law and Stephen’s interpretation of it had his approval.”

c. Died Like Jesus - FALSELY ACCUSED

DRAGGED BEFORE SAME COUNCIL TRIED Jesus & Apostles

THEY COULD NOT REFUTE HIS TRUTH / INVENTED LIES
6.13 “they produced false witnesses who testified”

1) Saw Jesus STANDING NEAR at God’s Right Hand

F.F. Bruce “Stephen has been confessing Christ before men, and now he sees Christ confessing his servant before God”

KOSMONAUT in Soviet Spacecraft–Looked out window “No God here”

Presence of Jesus is not DISTANT GALAXIES – near, another realm
 // John in Revelation 1.17 “I saw him and fell at his feet as though dead”

FATHER HAD STORE IN SHOPPING MALL – PET SHOP
 POODLES HAIRCUT AND MADE BEAUTIFUL
 Friends used to sit with DOG WHISTLES – watching and blowing
 DOG WHISTLE – sound beyond range of human ear
 Piercingly clear to more sensitive ears of a Dog / Agony
 OUT OF CONTROL – IMPOSSIBLE TO GROOM

Sound in Another Realm / Sights of Another Realm / JESUS IN GLORY

2) 7.59 “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit”

// Jesus on Cross to Father = Prayer to Lord Jesus = Jesus is God
 // to Cross – False Accusations led to Unjust Execution

3) 7.60 “Lord do not hold this sin against them”

DISCIPLE IMMITATED THE FORGIVENESS OF HIS MASTER
 CRIED OUT – NOT FOR HIMSELF OR HIS PAIN – for Attackers

WARREN WIERSBE “You wonder what kind of world we live in when
 good and godly men like Stephen can be murdered by religious bigots!
 But we have similar problems in our “enlightened” age today: taking
 hostages, bombings that kill and maim innocent people, assassinations,
 and all in the name of politics or religion. The heart of man has not
 changed, nor can it be changed apart from the grace of God”

“He FELL ASLEEP” peaceful description of a brutal death
 HIS DEATH WAS FULL OF CHRIST

For Stephen DEATH was CORONATION
 For Israel DEATH was CONDEMNATION – Gospel now to Gentiles

GOD does NOT CALL ALL TO BE MARTYRS – all “living sacrifices”

SOMETIMES HARDER TO LIVE FOR ~~X~~ —THAN— to die for Him
Jim Elliot – “I seek not a long life, but a full one, like You, Lord Jesus...I
must not think it strange if God takes in youth those whom I would have
kept on earth till they were older. God is peopling Eternity, and I must not
restrict him to old men and women” Jan 8, 1956 Elliot peopled Eternity

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The Christ that Stephen Preached

3. The Christ that Stephen Preached

a. Replaced Temple – MEETING PLACE – God & Man

MEETING WITH GOD NOW ONLY THROUGH JESUS

He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life – No one comes apart from Him

“I tell you that one greater than the Temple is here” – Matt 12.6

“Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days...the temple he had spoken of was his body” John 2.19,21

HIS SPIRITUAL BODY –Church- REPLACES MATERIAL TEMPLE

Stephen makes clear – TEMPLE ITSELF – points to Someone Greater
7.48 “What kind of house will you build for me? Says the Lord”

b. Fulfilled Law - Jesus is New Moses – Law of Kingdom of God

JESUS Angered Pharisees & Scribes – CONTRADICTING False Interpr

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” Matt 5.17

TEMPLE & LAW GOD GIVEN GIFTS

BOTH FIND THEIR GOD-INTENDED FULFILLMENT IN CHRIST

MAGNIFY THEIR IMPORTANCE WHEN POINT TO CHRIST

JOHN CALVIN “No harm can be done to the temple and the law, when Christ is openly established as the end and truth of both”

c. On the Move KEY PLACE OF STEPHEN IN BOOK OF ACTS

JESUS – Plan for Church – GO! Jerusalem, Judea, Sam. Ends of Earth
Clearly JEWISH RELIGION WAS SPIRITUALLY BANKRUPT

PAUL & BARNABAS FOUND THIS IN PISIDIAN ANTIOCH 13.44

“the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively

against what Paul was saying. Then P & B answered them boldly: ‘We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles’

CHURCH WAS SHOCKED BY MARTYRDOM – GOD USED IT

Stephen = Hellenist – Jews raised with Greek Culture and Language

THEY THOUGHT BIG

Stephen Deadly Sin – God NOT CONFINED – building, book, customs

Stephen – killed FOLLOWERS KICKED OUT OF JERUSALEM

8.1 “On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem AND ALL EXCEPT THE APOSTLES WERE scattered”

SOVEREIGN SAVIOR GOT THE CHURCH TO GO!

APOSTLES ALLOWED TO REMAIN IN JERUSALEM

TRADITIONAL FAITH – Acceptable in Tolerant, Unbelieving World

11.19 “Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, & Antioch

FUTURE LAY WITH SCATTERED HELLENISTS –

Church in Antioch “first place they were called Christians”

International Church – Jew and Gentile – Many Races and Cultures

Antioch – Began World Evangelism – Home Church of Apostle Paul

8.1 Saul introduced to Book of Acts / Book he will soon DOMINATE

GOD WAS WITH PAUL & MISSIONARY CHURCH

Just as He was with Abraham, Joseph and Moses

GOD IS COMMITTED TO HIS PEOPLE – NOT BUILDINGS

In both the Old and New Covenants

SHOULD NOT seek UNECESSARY CHANGE FOR CHANGE SAKE
BUT WHEN UNAVOIDABLE CHANGE COMES- Should NOT FEAR

GOD HAS SEEN END FROM THE BEGINNING

GOD IS IMMUTABLE – UNCHANGEABLE – ETERNAL

CHANGE – Necessary, but DIFFICULT part of Growth

ONLY THING THAT DOES NOT CHANGE IS A CEMETARY
Every Living Thing Changes – So Will a Living Church

ONLY 2 BINDING PROMISES GOD HAS MADE –

To CHURCH – “that he would never leave it”
About WORD – “that it would never pass away”

MISSIONARY CONTEXT OF THE PROMISE –
RISEN JESUS – “Go and make disciples in all nations....and I am with
you always, to the end of the age”

HE IS WITH THOSE WHO ARE GOING – NOT STANDING STILL

~~Fulfilled Law~~

~~Replaced Temple~~

~~Standing Near~~

~~Moving On~~

~~MANY INTERESTED— Stephen FIRST MARTYR— Christian Church~~

~~NOT MAIN REASON RECEIVED PROMINENT FOCUS from Luke~~
~~STEPHEN and His Message— TRANSITIONAL FIGURE CHURCH~~

~~JEWISH RELIGION WAS SPIRITUALLY BANKRUPT~~
~~LEADERS— FIRM GRIP ON DEAD TRADITIONS~~

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~~you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we~~
~~now turn to the Gentiles.”~~ Acts
~~13:44-46~~

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~~Reported their Mission to Sending Church in Antioch
“all that God had done among them and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles”
Acts 14.27~~

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