



Chapter 7: “You are always resisting the Holy Spirit!”

Context: The Accusation

Formal charges were brought against Stephen by false witnesses (vs. 6:13)

“This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law (vs. 6:13)

“We have heard him say Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs Moses delivered to us” (vs. 6:14)

Stephen’s Defense (verses 2 – 47)

At first glance – a brief history of Israel from Abraham to Solomon (vs. 2-47)

People:

- Abraham (vs. 2-8) –
- Isaac (vs. 8)
- Jacob (vs. 8, 12, 14-15)
- The Patriarchs (vs. 8-9)
- Joseph (vs. 9-15) –
- Moses (vs. 20-39,44) –
- Aaron (vs. 40)
- Joshua (vs. 45)
- David (vs. 45-46) –
- Solomon (vs. 47) –

Places:

- Mesopotamia (vs. 2)
- Haran (vs. 2, 4)
- Shechem (vs. 16)
- Egypt (many verses)
- Canaan (vs. 11)
- Midian (vs. 29)
- Mount Sinai (vs. 30,38)

But Stephen spends more time on certain topics:

Moses (vs. 20-40)

- Misunderstood savior

“He supposed that his brothers [people] would understand that God was giving them salvation by his hand, but they did not understand.” (vs. 25)

- Rejected ruler and redeemer

“This Moses, whom they rejected, saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge?’—this man God sent as both ruler and redeemer by the hand of the angel who appeared to him in the bush.” (vs. 35)

- Led them out of bondage, performing signs and wonders

“This man led them out, performing wonders and signs in Egypt and at the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years.” (vs. 36)

- Prefigure of The Prophet to come

“This is the Moses who said to the Israelites, God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers.” (vs. 37)

- Spoke with “angels” and received oracles to give to us

“This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our fathers. He received living oracles to give to us.” (vs. 38)

Disobedience and Idolatry (vs. 39-43)

- Refused to obey

“Our fathers refused to obey him, but thrust him aside, and in their hearts they turned to Egypt...” (vs. 39)

- Turned to worship the “works of their hands”

“And they made a calf in those days, and offered a sacrifice to the idol and were rejoicing in the works of their hands.” (vs. 41)

- God gave them over to idolatry, quoting Amos 5:25-27

“But God turned away and gave them over to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the prophets...” (vs. 42)

The Tabernacle/Temple (vs. 44-50)

- Had access to the tabernacle until the time of David
"Our fathers had the tent of witness in the wilderness, just as he who spoke to Moses directed him to make it, according to the pattern that he had seen... So it was until the days of David." (vs. 44-45)
- David asked God to for a place to build a temple, and Solomon built it
"[David] found favor in the sight of God and asked to find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. But it was Solomon who built a house for him." (vs. 47-48)
- But God doesn't dwell in houses made by hands, quoting Isaiah 66:1-2
Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands, as the prophet says, 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest? Did not my hand make all these things?'" (vs. 48-50)

Summary of Themes of Stephen's History

God's presence/activity/favor is not restricted to a particular sacred space

- Abraham was called while in Mesopotamia, and received not even one foot of the promised land (vs. 2)
- Joseph was granted favor and wisdom by God and became a ruler over Egypt (vs. 10)
- The patriarch's bones were buried in Shechem (Stephen's interpretation)
- Moses became a foreigner in Midian (vs. 29) and heard from God in the wilderness of Mount Sinai (vs. 30)
- The people had the tabernacle in the wilderness (vs. 44)

The rejected one becomes the deliverer

- Joseph was sold into slavery by the patriarchs, even though God was with him (vs. 9)
- Moses, first rejected by his own people, was sent by God as ruler and redeemer (vs. 35)

Disobedience to God's plan leads to God's rejection

- Ancestors refused to obey Moses at Sinai (vs. 39)
- They turned to idol worship (vs. 40-41)
- God gave them over to idolatry (vs. 42-43)

Man-made things are not God's dwelling

- "The Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands," (vs. 48)
- Compare with idolatrous Israel "rejoicing in the works of their hands," in verse 41
- Jesus had said: *"I tell you that something greater than the temple is here."* (Matt. 12:6)

Stephen's speech: Not mere history but cutting polemic! In the vein of other scriptural passages recalling Israel's sinful and rebellious history, such as:

- Psa. 106:6-46
- Eze. 20
- Neh. 9:6-38

Accusers Become the Accused (verses 51 – 53)

Stephen equates his accusers with those ancestors: "You are always resisting the Holy Spirit!"

- "Stiff-necked people" (vs. 51) means hopelessly stubborn. Recalls OT passages like:
"And the Lord said to Moses, 'I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people.'" (Exo. 32:9)
"Know, therefore, that the Lord your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stubborn [stiff-necked] people." (Deut. 9:6)
- "Uncircumcised hearts and ears" (vs. 51) recalls OT passages such as:
"Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn [stiff-necked]." (Deut. 10:16)
"Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will punish all those who are circumcised merely in the flesh... for all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in heart." (Jer. 25:26)
"Thus says the Lord God: No foreigner, uncircumcised in heart and flesh, of all the foreigners who are among the people of Israel, shall enter my sanctuary." (Eze. 44:9)

Accused of speaking against the temple, Stephen may be implying that they are not worthy to enter that temple!

"Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?" (vs. 52)

- Notice the parallel with Jesus' accusations against the Pharisees:
"²⁹Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous, ³⁰saying, If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets. ³¹Thus you witness against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets." (Matt. 23:29-31)

Stephen's Martyrdom (verses 7:54 – 8:1a)

Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into Heaven... (vs. 55-56)

- Jesus is *standing* at the right hand of God, an allusion to Psa. 110:1
- Uses Jesus' favorite term for himself, "Son of Man," an allusion to Dan. 7:13

Notice the parallels between Stephen's death and that of Jesus:

- Alluded to scriptures
- Prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" (vs. 59)
- Cried out, "Lord do not hold this sin against them!" (vs. 60)

The Holy Spirit that empowered Jesus during his death is the same Holy Spirit empowering Stephen during his

What Does All This Mean for Us?

- Let's not miss the 'scenic view' for the 'signs'
- Let's seek to be like Stephen in his knowledge of the scriptures!
- But let's not be too impressed with Stephen's knowledge. After all, Jesus taught:
"¹¹ And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not be anxious about how you should defend yourself or what you should say, ¹² for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say." (Luke 12:11-12)
- The Holy Spirit may not always lead us to a safe place. But to God's will and his purpose!

Next: Acts Chapter 8