

2-God Does Not Dwell in Houses Made By Hands (Acts 7)

1. Stephen Speaks.

A. Stephen begins with Abraham.

1. Abraham stood at the beginning of their history as a people.

Acts 7:2 "And Stephen said, 'Listen to me, brothers and fathers! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran.'"

2. Then he moves on to Joseph.

Acts 7:9 "'The patriarchs became jealous of Joseph and sold him into Egypt. Yet God was with him,'"

3. Then he moves to Moses in the wilderness of Mount Sinai.

Acts 7:31-33 "'When Moses saw it, he was astonished at the sight; and as he approached to look more closely, the voice of the Lord came: 32 'I AM THE GOD OF YOUR FATHERS, THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND ISAAC, AND JACOB.' Moses shook with fear and did not dare to look closely. 33 'But the LORD said to him, 'REMOVE YOUR SANDALS FROM YOUR FEET, FOR THE PLACE ON WHICH YOU ARE STANDING IS HOLY GROUND.'"

Acts 7:38 "This is the one who was in the assembly in the wilderness together with the angel who spoke to him at length on Mount Sinai, and who was with our fathers; and he received living words to pass on to you."

B. And how did the people respond to the law that was given to them?

Acts 7:39-41 "Our fathers were unwilling to be obedient to him; on the contrary they rejected him and turned back to Egypt in their hearts, 40 saying to Aaron, 'MAKE US A GOD WHO WILL GO BEFORE US; FOR THIS MOSES WHO LED US OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT--WE DO NOT KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM.' 41 'At that time they made a calf and brought a sacrifice to the idol, and were rejoicing in the works of their hands.'"

This reminder of the first high priest and the way he led the nation of Israel into idolatry was a pointed indictment of the leadership of the high priest and the current leadership. These men have turned the temple itself into an idol of worship.

C. Stephen moves on the "tent of witness" (tabernacle)

The tabernacle was the place God came down to dwell among his people in the wilderness. Long before there was a temple in Jerusalem, God dwelt among his people in the Most Holy Place of the tabernacle that moved from place to place in the wilderness.

D. Stephen addresses Solomon's temple in Jerusalem. He quotes Solomon and Isaiah.

Acts 7:48 "'However, the Most High does not dwell in houses made by human hands;'"

Isaiah 66:1-2 "This is what the LORD says: 'Heaven is My throne and the earth is the footstool for My feet. Where then is a house you could build for Me? And where is a place that I may rest? 2 'For My hand made all these things, So all these things came into being,' declares the LORD. 'But I will look to this one, At one who is humble and contrite in spirit, and who trembles at My word.'"

E. They made the temple into an idol? Look at these verses—

Acts 7:41 ““At that time they made a calf and brought a sacrifice to the idol, and were rejoicing in the works of their hands.” (Also 7:48)

2. The religious leaders are unwilling to accept that God’s presence had, in their day, shifted away from the temple in Jerusalem?

A. Part of their resistance was that if they accepted God’s dwelling in his people by his Spirit, it would mean that people no longer needed to come to the temple for access to God. They stand to lose their power, position, and purpose for existence.

B. Even more significant, was their misunderstanding of what the temple was always meant to be. It was model of something greater that God intended to give his people in the person and work of Jesus.

C. Over time, the people had simply stopped looking for the greater reality still to come.

3. A long-standing history of murderous resistance to those who speak for God.

Acts 7:51 ““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.”

A. They are like a stiff-necked cow that resists the goad of the farmer.

1. The people of Israel had been this way throughout their history. They stubbornly resisted God at every turn, even as they called themselves by his name.

Exodus 33:3 “Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; for I will not go up in your midst, because you are an obstinate people, and I might destroy you on the way.”

Deuteronomy 9:13 “The LORD also said to me, ‘I have seen this people, and indeed, it is a stubborn people.’”

Nehemiah 9:16 ““But they, our fathers, acted arrogantly; They became stubborn and would not listen to Your commandments.”

2. By calling them “uncircumcised in heart and ears,” Stephen is saying that though they may have undergone physical circumcision to mark themselves as belonging to God, their hearts are far from him. They refused to listen to God or his witnesses.

Acts 7:52-53 ““Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, and you have now become betrayers and murderers of Him; 53 you who received the Law as ordained by angels, and yet did not keep it.”

B. Israel’s history was one of violence toward those who spoke God’s word to them.

Joseph’s brothers, the leaders of the twelve tribes, sought to kill Joseph when he prophesied about the future. The Israelites rejected Moses when he took action to deliver them. They rejected and killed many of the prophets who spoke to them about the greater prophet to come. According to tradition, Isaiah was sawn in two. Jeremiah was stoned in the temple courts (2 Chronicles 24:20-21). And they killed Jesus. Stephen didn’t expect to be treated any differently.

