

A MINISTRY FOR HUNGRY SAINTS

UNDER THE EXALTED CHRIST, THE GOSPEL BEGINS TO SPREAD

THE ACTS

† THE BOOK OF ACTS

OF THE APOSTLES

An overview of the Book of Acts, by Given O. Blakely

ACTS 5:31-32

"Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are His witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey Him."

"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." (Acts 4:12)

Lesson #33

COMMENTARY ON: 7:43-53

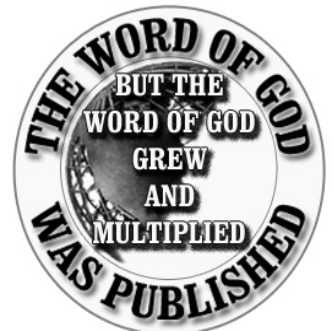
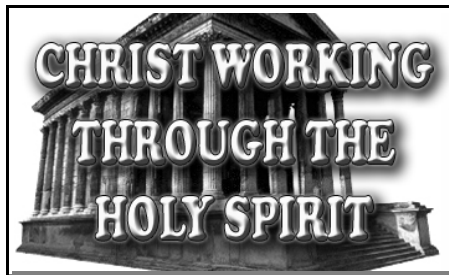
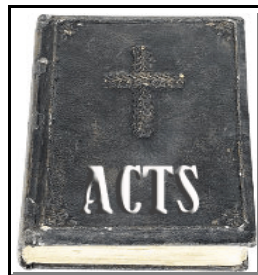
STEPHEN'S DEFENSE #6

Stephen escalates his charges against the Jews, pointing out that they continued their idolatrous practices following Sinai. Even though God had provided in the Tabernacle a visible means of identity with Himself, yet they fashioned idols, and even worshiped heavenly bodies. Being moved by the Spirit, Stephen is speaking in strict accord with the heavenly assessment of the people. He is also addressing them in view of their own hearts and wicked propensities. Judging from the manner in which Stephen concludes, the countenance of his audience must have been in perfect accord with their hearts. Their condition was absolutely inexcusable. They had been privy to the ministry of John the Baptist, the Lord Jesus Himself, the Apostles, and now Stephen. Yet they remained in the grip of unbelief. This confirms the nature of unbelief, and the influence it exerts upon both heart and mind. It cannot be dignified by assigning intellectual terms to it. There is no extent to which unbelief will not go to suppress the truth and justify self. It is the essence of all sin.

ACTS 17:26-27

"And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us."

" . . . and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

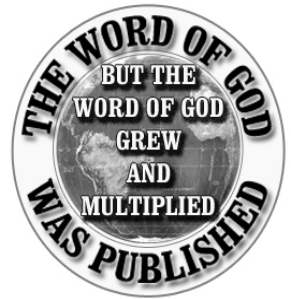


Since May, 1993, a ministry instituted for the encouragement of believers in Christ



The Book of Acts

Lesson Number 33



A MINISTRY INITIATED IN MAY 1993, AND DEDICATED TO STRENGTHENING THOSE WHO ARE IN CHRIST, BY BUILDING THEIR FAITH, ENHANCING THEIR JOY, AND STABILIZING THEIR HOPE, ENABLING THEM TO WORK OUT THEIR SALVATION WITH FEAR AND TREMBLING.

TRANSLATION LEGEND: ALT = Analytical-Literal Translation (2005), AMPLIFIED = Amplified Bible (1965), ASV = American Standard Version (1901), BBE=Bible in Basic English (1949), DRA = Douay-Rheims (1899), ERV = English Revised Version (1885), ESV = English Stand Version (2001), GNB = Good News (1966), GWN = God's Word (1995), IE = International English, ISV = International Standard Version (1967), JPS = Jewish Publication Society (1917), KJV = King James Version (1611), L.ITV = Literal Translation of the Bible ((1976), LIVING = Living Bible (1971), MKJV = Modern KJV (1962), MONTGOMERY = Montgomery's New Testament (2001), MRD = Peshitta-James Murdock Translation (1852), NAB = New American Bible (2002), NASB = New American Standard Bible (1977), NAU = New American Standard Bible (1995), NIB = New International Bible, NIV = New International Version (1984), NJB = New Jerusalem Bible (1985), NKJV = New King James Version (1979), NLT =New Living Translation (1996), NRSV = New Revised Standard Version (1989), PHILLIPS = J B Phillips New Testament (1962), PNT = BISHOP'S New Testament (1595), RSV = Revised Standard Version (1952), TNK = JPS Tanakj (1985), Webster = The Webster Bible (1833),WEYMOUTH = Weymouth's New Testament (1903), WILLIAMS = William's New Testament (1937), TYNDALE = Tyndale's Bible (1526), WYCLIFFE = Wycliffe New Testament (1382), YLT =Young's Literal Translation (1862).

----- Lexicon and Bible Translation Codes with Identification -----

LEXICON LEGEND: FRIEBERG = Friberg Lexicon, UBS = UBS Lexicon, LOUW-NIDA = Louw-Nida Lexicon, LIDDELL SCOTT = Liddell Scott Lexicon, THAYER = Thayer's Greek Lexicon, LEH = LEH Lexicon, GINGRICH = Gingrich Lexicon

THE INSPIRED RECORD OF HOW THE ENTHRONED CHRIST, BY MEANS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, WORKED THROUGH HIS HOLY APOSTLES AND GODLY MEN, TO SPREAD THE WORD OF THE GOSPEL THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE WORLD, AND TO BRING EDIFICATION AND STABILITY TO MEMBERS OF CHRIST'S BODY.

DISCLAIMER: The quoting of other translations is not to be taken as a condoning of them. My purpose is rather to show the remarkable diversity, and sometimes outright contradictions that exist among these various versions of Scripture. Our understanding of the Word of God ultimately depends upon our comprehension of the Lord Himself and His eternal purpose. Where this understanding is not present, we are shut up to scholasticism and conjecture, both of which are of the world, not of God.

STEPHEN'S DEFENSE, #6

“ 7:43 Yea, ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, figures which ye made to worship them: and I will carry you away beyond Babylon. ⁴⁴ Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as he had appointed, speaking unto Moses, that he should make it according to the fashion that he had seen. ⁴⁵ Which also our fathers that came after brought in with Jesus into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drave out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David; ⁴⁶ Who found favor before God, and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob. ⁴⁷ But Solomon built him an house. ⁴⁸ Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, ⁴⁹ Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest? ⁵⁰ Hath not my hand made all these things? ⁵¹ Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. ⁵² Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: ⁵³ Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.” (Acts 7:43-53)

INTRODUCTION

Stephen escalates his charges against the Jews, pointing out that they continued their idolatrous practices following their calf-worshipping debacle at Sinai – one in which three thousand were slain by the Lord (Ex 32:28). That compares with the three thousand that

were quickened – made alive from death in trespasses and sins – on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41). That was a most vivid enactment of the nature of the Old Covenant, which is termed as “*the ministration of death*” (2 Cor 3:7). Elsewhere, Paul affirmed that sin was

awakened by the Law, driving inherent lusts to the surface where they are expressed. How insightfully he states the case, doing so from the illuminated side of the cross: “*For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. And the*

Stephen presses the guilt of the Jews upon them, confirming that those before him are like their fathers – by Given O. Blakely

CONTENTS

- THE TOOK UP THE TABERNACLE OF MOLOCH AND THE STAR OF REPHAM (7:43)
- OUR FATHERS HAD A TABERNACLE (7:44)
- THEY BROUGHT IT INTO THEIR POSSESSION (7:45)
- UNTIL THE DAYS OF DAVID (7:46)
- SOLOMON BUILT THE HOUSE (7:47)
- THE MOST HIGH DOES NOT DWELL IN TEMPLES MADE WITH HANDS (7:48)
- HEAVEN IS HIS THRONE AND THE EARTH IS HIS FOOTSTOOL (7:49-50)
- STIFFNECKED AND UNCIRCUMCISED IN HEART AND EARS (7:51)
- THEY PERSECUTED AND KILLED THE PROPHETS, AND THE JUST ONE AS WELL (7:52)
- CONCLUSION

commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin, **taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me**" (Rom 7:9-11). Thus it was proved to be true, **"the strength of sin is the Law"** (1 Cor 15:56). That is, the holy Law of God gives strength to sin because of man's **very real corruption**. There is such a variance between God and the natural man, that the good, just, holy, and spiritual Law of God **awakens** sin (Rom 7:12,14). **It forces the contradiction of the human nature into the open by demanding that human conduct conform to the nature of God.** This is the manner in which it **"brings"** (not beckons) us to Christ, that we might be **"justified by faith"** (Gal 3:24-25).

THERE IS NO EXCUSE FOR SIN

Accounting for sin is not offering an excuse for it. **The reason the Law points out sin is not to provide men with a handy alibi for its presence.** Rather, the law is showing that God is just in condemning sin, and thrusting the sinner

from His presence. **It also provides insight into why He provided a Redeemer** – something that humanity was not able to do. Well did the Lord speak through the prophet Isaiah: **"And I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold: therefore Mine own arm brought salvation unto Me; and my fury, it upheld Me"** (Isa 63:5). Note, God's arm did not bring salvation to men, but to **Himself**. That is, **He provided a means through which His own righteous character could be satisfied, and thus mercy be extended to fallen humanity.**

Notwithstanding this ministry of the Law, and the gracious provision of redemption, **no excuse for sin is acceptable with God** – i.e., like men saying the devil made them sin, or they could not help it. **Flesh will rationalize in this way, citing all of the imagined reasons why sin cannot be helped.** Some of them include the following.

- ⇨ The devil is too strong.
- ⇨ The flesh is too weak.
- ⇨ I was born this way.
- ⇨ Unless the Lord helps me, I cannot stop sinning.
- ⇨ A generational curse is upon me.

To confirm the unacceptable nature of these alibis, consider how David spoke when he was convicted of sin. He sighted reasons, but they were not excuses. Rather, they shed light on his dreadful condition, and why he needed mercy from the Lord. His confession is found in Psalm 51:5. **"Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me"** (Psa 51:5). This was a **confession**, not an excuse.

"I Was Shapen in Iniquity"

That is, from his very birth, he had a propensity to sin, and now he saw it. Other versions read as follows.

- ⇨ *"I was brought forth in iniquity."*^{NKJV}
- ⇨ *"I was sinful at birth."*^{NIV}
- ⇨ *"I was born guilty."*^{NRSV}
- ⇨ *"I was brought forth in iniquity."*^{RSV}
- ⇨ *"I was formed in evil."*^{BBE}
- ⇨ *"I was guilty when I was born."*^{CSB}
- ⇨ *"In iniquity I was brought forth."*^{DARBY}
- ⇨ *"I was guilty of sin from birth."*^{NET}
- ⇨ *"I was brought forth in [a state of] iniquity."*^{AMPLIFIED}
- ⇨ *"I was ingendered in iniquity."*^{BISHOPS}
- ⇨ *"I have sinned and done wrong since the day I was born."*^{CEV}
- ⇨ *"I have been evil from the day I was born."*^{GNB}
- ⇨ *"I was born guilty."*^{GW}

It is quite obvious that David's statement is marked with such clarity that even the translators could not avoid what he was saying.

"In Sin Did My Mother Conceive Me"

That is, my mother was a sinner, and therefore, by nature, so am I, for **"Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one"** (Job 14:4). Other versions read as follows.

- ⇨ *"... sinful from the time my mother conceived me."*^{NIV}
- ⇨ *"... a sinner when my mother conceived me."*^{NRSV}
- ⇨ *"... in sin did my mother give me birth."*^{BBE}

Notwithstanding this ministry of the Law, and the gracious provision of redemption, no excuse for sin is acceptable with God – i.e., like men saying the devil made them sin, or they could not help it.



sin and righteousness are traced to one man – one source.

Through a single act – the eating of a piece of forbidden fruit – sin and death entered the world, and death was passed upon all men. Judgment was passed unto condemnation, and all men were made sinners. That is the revealed situation.

These things were known among early believers because they were proclaimed and expounded. The flawed doctrines of professing Christian men had not yet been developed, although they would begin to surface early. However, during the time of our text, the condition of men and their absolute need for salvation was generally known among believers.

Prior to the Giving of the Law

Even prior to the giving of the Law, the basic sinfulness of man was generally known among those who worshiped God. Following the flood, God Himself observed, *“the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth”* (Gen 8:21). Although they did not know how to handle such knowledge, Job’s friends also knew of man’s inherent corruption. *“Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one . . . How much more abominable and filthy is man, which drinketh iniquity like water?”* (Job 14:4; 15:16). The fact that these texts are contained in Scripture without any disclaimer confirms their validity.

After the Giving of the Law

Following the giving of the Law, Solomon observed, *“there is no man which sinneth not”* (2 Chron 6:36). David knew this also: *“They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one”* (Psa 14:3). Jeremiah testified to the unchangeable nature of men. *“Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil”* (Jer 13:23). And again he said, *“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?”* (Jer 17:9). Hosea traced the transgression of the covenanted people to the fact that they were men – the progeny of Adam. *“But they like men have transgressed the covenant: there have they dealt treacherously against me”* (Hosea 6:7).

- ⇒ “. . . sinner from the moment my mother conceived me.”^{CSB}
- ⇒ “. . . in sins did my mother conceive me.”^{DOUAY}
- ⇒ “. . . a sinner from the moment of conception.”^{NJB}
- ⇒ “. . . my mother was sinful who conceived me [and I too am sinful].”^{AMPLIFIED}
- ⇒ “I have sinned and done wrong since the day I was born.”^{CEV}

is integral to the basic human nature. **The capacity to sin is in every person who is in Adam’s lineage. – and that is what constitutes them “sinners.”** This is expressly stated in apostolic doctrine. *“by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners”* (Rom 5:19). From the perspective of the fifty-first Psalm, and from Romans 5:19, **men are not sinners because they commit sin, but they commit sin because they are sinners.** That is precisely what David confessed.

This circumstance does not make sin any less repulsive or more tolerable to God. It does not lessen guilt, as both the tone and the words of the 51ST Psalm confirm. Admittedly, this is a spiritual technicality – but so is salvation. In fact, that is the point made in the fifth chapter of Romans. **If the reason for the presence of sin somehow reduces its nature, then the reason for salvation correspondingly reduces its magnitude.**

The truth of the matter is that sin

The fact of the matter is that both

Stephen presses the guilt of the Jews upon them, confirming that those before him are like their fathers – by Given O. Blakely

The prophet **Micah** observed, *“The good man is perished out of the earth: and there is none upright among men”*(Micah 7:2). These will suffice to confirm that the fact of man’s natural inclination to sin was not questioned by early believers.

THE POINT OF THIS

The point of this is to see that Stephen was preaching with a grasp of the situation. **Yet, he makes clear that this did not relieve men of the responsibility of their sin.** None of them claim, as some sinners do today, “I was born this way.” David said he was born with a corrupt nature also, yet he did not use that circumstance to excuse what he had done. Instead, in the fifty-first Psalm, he made certain requests of God that indicated **he was not content with his situation.**

- ⇨ *“Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean”*(7a).
- ⇨ *“Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow”*(7b).
- ⇨ *“Make me to hear joy and gladness”* (8)
- ⇨ *“Hide Thy face from my sins”*(9a).
- ⇨ *“Blot out mine iniquities”*(9b).
- ⇨ *“Create in my a clean heart, O God”* (10a).
- ⇨ *“Renew a right spirit with me”* (10b).
- ⇨ *“Cast me not away from Thy presence”*(11a).
- ⇨ *“Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me”* 11b).
- ⇨ *“Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation”*(12a).
- ⇨ *“Uphold me with Thy free Spirit”* (12b).

All of this was before Jesus took away the sin of the world. It was before He crushed the serpent’s head, spoiled principalities and powers, and led captivity captive. It was before men could be born again, or could be raised up and made to sit together with Christ in the

Stephen knows all of this, and is preaching with that in mind. **He will confirm to them that there was no essential difference between them and their fathers who fell in the wilderness.** He will not present this as excusing what they are doing. He will rather point out that their obstinance has compounded

Stephen knows all of this, and is preaching with that in mind. He will confirm to them that there was no essential difference between them and their fathers who fell in the wilderness. He will not present this as excusing what they are doing. He will rather point out that their obstinance has compounded their situation.

heavenly places. And what can said of those who continue in sin today? How much weight can be assigned to any claim of being unable to stop, or incapable of resisting powerful temptations? What of those who trace their sin to their fleshly lineage, or to some chemical imbalance, or some hereditary disease? Do you not see that **once sin is recognized to be what it is, men should at least come up to the level of David,** who was among those who *“were not made perfect without us, God having provided some better thing for us”* (Heb 11:40). God did not ignore the pleas of David, nor will He stop His ears to the cries of those who long to be pure in His sight. **That is just Theology 101!**

THE SITUATION BEFORE STEPHEN

However, the people before whom Stephen is standing have not delivered any evidence of even being serious. They have **not** correlated their actions with the statement made by God after the flood. They have **not** associated it with the observations concerning men contained in the book of Job. They have seen no relationship of their miserable condition with that of David, crushed with the weight of guilt.

their situation. They have absolutely no excuse for their condition.

Now Stephen will show that even though God had provided in the Tabernacle a visible means of identity with Himself, yet they fashioned idols, and even worshiped heavenly bodies. They sought for other visible associations with Deity. **Being moved by the Spirit, Stephen is speaking in strict accord with the heavenly assessment of the people.** He is also addressing them in view of their own hearts and wicked propensities. Judging from the manner in which Stephen concludes, the countenance of his audience must have been in perfect accord with their hearts. Their condition was absolutely inexcusable. They had been privy to the ministry of John the Baptist, the Lord Jesus Himself, the Apostles, and now Stephen. Yet they remained in the grip of unbelief. **This confirms the nature of unbelief, and the influence it exerts upon both heart and mind.** It cannot be dignified by assigning intellectual and philosophical terms to it. There is no extent to which unbelief will not go to suppress the truth and justify self. It is the essence of all sin, as is confirmed in the rejection of Christ.

THEY TOOK UP THE TABERNACLE OF MOLOCH AND THE STAR OF REMPHAN

“^{7:43} Yea, ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, figures which ye made to worship them: and I will carry you away beyond Babylon.”

Stephen continues to quote from the book of Amos, confirming the idolatrous tendencies of Israel, even though God had gone to great length to give them visible means that could be associated with His Presence. Not only did they have a seeable pillar of cloud by day, and a perceptible pillar of fire by night, they also had the Tabernacle, erected in the middle of their camp, and upon which the glory of God rested.

THEY TOOK UP

"Yea, ye took up . . ." Other versions read, *"took along,"* NASB *"lifted up,"* NIV *"carried,"* BBE *"took unto you,"* DARBY *"carried along,"* GWN *"also took along,"* NAB *"carried,"* NJB *"your real interest was in,"* LIVING *"you even took along,"* ISV *"you offered Me,"* WILLIAMS and *"No! You took."* AMPLIFIED

God had clearly demonstrated that He was among the Israelites, leaving no question about it. It was confirmed with all manner of evidence.

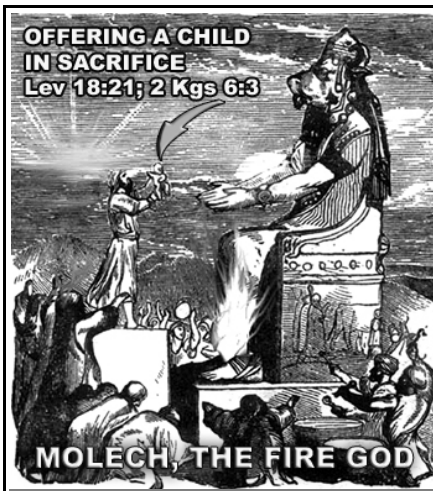
- ⇨ They came out of Egypt by His mighty hand, which deliverance was attended by ten unparalleled signs, and the favor of all the Egyptians.
- ⇨ On the first leg of their journey, en route to Sinai, **"the LORD went before them** by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night" (Ex 3:21). He faithfully kept those visible signs of leadership never taking them away (Ex 3:22).
- ⇨ He brought them through the Red Sea on dry ground – all of them, their children, their flocks, and their possessions (Ex 14:22).
- ⇨ He fought for them, overthrowing the Egyptians army in the Red Sea, then washing their carcasses up on the shore so Israel could see them (Ex 14:28,30-31).
- ⇨ He provided manna for them – miraculous bread that was "light" and adapted for their journey (Ex 16:15-18).
- ⇨ He provided them quails for meat in the evening (Ex 16:13; Psa 105:40).

- ⇨ The Lord gave them water from a rock, that gushed out like a river (Ex 17:6; Psa 78:15-16).
- ⇨ Although they were not fighting men, He enabled Israel to miraculously overcome the army of Amalek (Ex 13:17; 17:8-13).

Yet, this was not enough for them. They carried along with them things related to other god's, ignoring all of the evidence of Divine sufficiency that had been given to them.

THE TABERNACLE OF MOLOCH

"... the tabernacle of Moloch..." Other versions read, *"the shrine of Molech,"* NIV *"the tent of Molech,"* NRSV *"Moloch's tent,"* WEYMOUTH and *"the tent (the portable temple) of Moloch."* AMPLIFIED



Moloch, or Molech, is known as the fire god. This false god was referred to as *"the abomination of the Ammonites"* (1 Kgs 11:7). This idol had the head of an ox and the body of a man. Molech was especially noted because the worshipers of it offered their children in sacrifice to it. Early in His dealings with Israel, God warned them not to have anyone among them who did this. *"And thou shalt not let any of thy seed pass through the fire to Molech, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the LORD"* (Lev 18:21). This was mentioned four other times in the Levitical law (Lev 20:2,3,4,5). In his later years, because some of his wives worshiped this god, Solomon did *"build an high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, in the hill that is before Jerusalem, and for*

Molech, the abomination of the children of Ammon" (1 Kgs 11:7). Manasseh offered his children to this god, causing them to pass through the fire (2 Chron 33:6). In Jeremiah's day, the people built places for Molech, and offered their children to that false god (Jer 32:36; 7:31; 19:5-10). The Psalmist also mentions this practice, declaring that the people *"sacrificed their sons and daughters to demons"* NKJV (Psa 106:37). Isaiah alludes to the practice also (Isa 57:5). Ezekiel does the same (Ezek 16:20-21; 23:37).

In this text, Stephen traces these dreadful tendencies to their origin, which took place in Israel when they were in the wilderness. They carried the tabernacle of Molech with them, choosing to give that Ammonite abomination honor while seeking to maintain an association with God.

It is not clear whether they had a separate tabernacle for Molech, as well as one for God, or if they gave their hearts to Molech while maintaining the tabernacle services. I am personally inclined to the latter because of the nature of Amos' prophecy. This is also underscored by the fact that Amos thunders to the people that God cannot bear their religious activities. *"I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols"* (Amos 5:21-23). And again, *"That chant to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of music, like David; that drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments: but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph"* (Amos 6:5-6).

If it is correct that Amos is upbraiding the people for having hearts filled with idolatry, yet continuing to go through the mechanics of religion, then God is not only saying He will not receive their service. **He is also declaring that what they were doing was, in fact, toward Molech, and thus was considered to be nothing more than idolatrous practices.** All of this was much like the defection that took place at the base of

Mount Sinai when they credited the golden calf with bringing them out of Egypt.

The Parallel of Our Time

There is a remarkable parallel to Israel's idolatrous manners that is happening in our own time. Allow me to cite just one example. Today music has become an American idol. One can scarcely go for a single hour without hearing a sacrifice of corrupt music being offered to the god of music. The world's music has even been brought into the church, just as Israel brought it into the Temple service during Amos' time. There is a claim that it is being offered to God Himself, but God is not in all of their thoughts, and it is not likely that He Himself is the real Object of their professed praise. **The fact that these people have little appetite for the things of God, are Scripturally illiterate, and are not at all noted for being in way godly, confirms that their worship is not real.** For the most part, if not altogether, they have carried the tabernacle of Molech into the house of God. Like the idol Molech, this god is having the children sacrificed to it.

If this appears to be a bit strong, consider how the prophecy of Amos must have appeared in his day – or Stephen's recounting of it in his day. **The act of trying to adapt a purely man-made religion to some form of sanctioned worship or service is an exercise in vanity.** Jesus made this crystal clear when He said, *"But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men"* (Matt 15:9).

God has never allowed such a practice, and He does not today. **In the New Covenant men are not allowed to bring their old ways into the newness of life.** This became apparent in the ministry of Jesus. He forced the issue of hypocrisy to the surface, not allowing it to remain in the background under the mantel of religious professionalism. Stephen, being filled with the Spirit of Christ, will not allow it either. He brings up Amos' prophecy to confirm that reprehensible religious was still extant in the Jewish community.

THE STAR OF YOUR GOD REMPHAM

" . . . and the star of your god Remphan . . ." Other versions read, *"the star of the god Rompha,"*^{NASB} *"the star of your god Rephan,"*^{NIV} *"the star of your god Reifan,"*^{CJB} *"the star of your god Rempham,"*^{DOUAY} *"the star god Kaiway,"*^{LIVING} and *"the star-symbol of the god Rempha."*^{MONTGOMERY}

Of this star Amos said, *"But ye have borne the tabernacle of your Moloch and Chiun your images, the star of your god, which ye made to yourselves"* (Amos 5:26). Although I have researched this text extensively, I am not at all satisfied with the level of understanding I have obtained. I will therefore draw some general conclusions, and then give what I feel to be the crux of Stephen's reference to the words of Amos.

In general, the names of the idols of reference purport to refer to Saturn,^{McCLINTOK-STRONG} Stephen refers to Remphan^{EGYPTIAN} (Acts 7:43), also called Rephan^{NIV} (Acts 7:43), and Chiun^{HEBREW} (Amos 5:26). It appears that this god was also related to Moloch. In addition, Scriptures relate this with Baal, who appears to have been a chief god, with which these others were associated (Jer 32:35). All of this refers to *"the host of heaven"* to which God had given Israel up – to worship and serve them (Acts 7:42).

The crux of the matter is that Israel's wickedness is seen in the fact that even though God had provided them visible and sanctioned means assuring them of His presence, they deliberately chose to ignore them and adapt to the religion of the heathen.

IMAGES YOU MADE

" . . . figures which ye made to worship them . . ." Other versions read, *"images you made to worship,"*^{NKJV} *"the idols you made to worship,"*^{NIV} *"the forms which ye made to do homage to them,"*^{DARBY} *"the statues you made for yourselves to worship,"*^{GWN} and *"and in all the images you made."*^{LIVING}

It appears these idols were not large and imposing figures, like the golden calf. Notwithstanding, the Israelites did honor them, and even made images of them, which they apparently brought out of Egypt with them. Joshua alludes to the gods the people served in

Egypt. He called upon them to make a decision on who they were going to serve. *"Now therefore fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt: and serve ye the LORD. And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD"* (Josh 24:14-15).

Ezekiel also refers to this idolatry. *"Then said I unto them, Cast ye away every man the abominations of his eyes, and defile not yourselves with the idols of Egypt: I am the LORD your God. But they rebelled against me, and would not hearken unto me: they did not every man cast away the abominations of their eyes, neither did they forsake the idols of Egypt: then I said, I will pour out my fury upon them, to accomplish my anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt"* (Ezek 20:7-8).

There is also the possibility that the mixed multitude that came out of Egypt with Israel (Ex 12:38) promoted these gods. These were the people who started the murmuring over having only manna to eat. *"And the mixed multitude that was among them fell a lusting: and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat? We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic: but now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes"* (Num 11:4-6).

If it is true that this mixed multitude in any way contributed to this idolatry, it shows the extreme danger of not completely coming out from defiling influences, and being separate. This, of course, is something that is required in Christ Jesus for God to even receive us (2 Cor 6:17-18).

THE POINT STEPHEN IS MAKING

The point Stephen is making is that the generation standing before him was no different than their fathers. They had maintained the formalities of their

revealed religion, yet really were not honoring the Lord. **While they had not made images, they had erected an intellectual facsimile of God that reflected their own perceptions, while ignoring the truth of God.** As I have already mentioned, today the same circumstance exists in the Christian community. Ornate buildings, social programs, entertainment, music of the world, etc. are being carried about and given the honor that is due to God alone.

I WILL CARRY YOU AWAY BEYOND BABYLON

“. . . and I will carry you away beyond Babylon.” Other versions read, “I also will remove you beyond Babylon,” NASB “Therefore, I will send you into exile beyond Babylon,” NIV “I will carry you away beyond Babylon,” ASV “I will take you away, farther than Babylon,” BBE “So I will deport you beyond Babylon!” CSB “I will transport you beyond Babylon,” DARBY “I am about to drive you into captivity beyond Babylon,” NJB “I will remove your dwelling beyond Babylon,” YLT and “I will remove you [carrying you away into exile] beyond Babylon,” AMPLIFIED

Stephen is still quoting from Amos, where it is written, “Therefore will I cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus, saith the LORD, whose name is The God of hosts” (Amos 5:27).

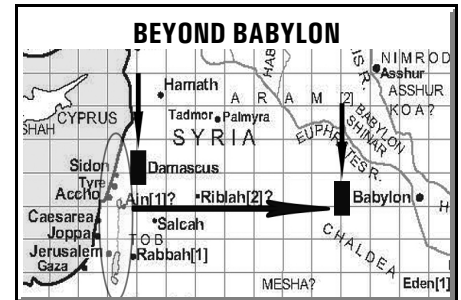
Amos prophesied before the

Babylonian captivity, during the reign of Uzziah, king of Judah, and Jeroboam king of Israel (Amos 1:1). He prophesied that God would carry the people beyond Damascus, which had particular regard to the captivity and dispersion of Israel (2 Kgs 15:29; 17:6). Stephen refers to Babylon, which applied specifically to Judah, who was carried to the remote regions of the Chaldean empire.

The thought delivered by this prophecy was that the gods in whom they were trusting could not stop their captivity, even though the real God told them it was coming – challenging them to do try and stop it.

Here we see the righteous judgment of God, First, He gives them over to their own desires, so that they cannot help but do them. Then, He judges them for doing what He allowed them to do. He did the same with the Gentile world, and He will do the same with spiritual Babylon as well. Men do well give heed to the apostolic word: “Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than He?” (1 Cor 10:22). That is the extended exposition of the word delivered to Israel when they stood on the border of the promised land: “Ye shall not tempt the Lord your God” (Deut 6:16). This was a word that Jesus delivered to the devil when he sought to move Jesus to act rashly (Matt 4:7).

Now, as Stephen stands before this hard-hearted audience, he will remind them that although their history had been written with an iron pen, yet they had learned nothing from it. **They were using the Temple to carry out their own will, like Israel used the tabernacle to carry out their corrupted wills.** The words of John the Baptist, the Lord Jesus Himself, the apostles, and now Stephen, had made them ever more calloused. In



Stephen the prophecy of Isaiah will again be fulfilled: “But the word of the LORD was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; **that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken**” (Isa 28:13). This is the Divine way of bringing a collapse to corrupt religion, and is most profitable to ponder. It is the unrelenting declaring of the truth of God.

THEY BROUGHT IT INTO THEIR POSSESSION

“⁴⁵ Which also our fathers that came after brought in with Jesus into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drave out before the face of our fathers.”

Stephen now addresses the period after the Israelites’ sojourn in the wilderness. This is after an entire generation had died off in the wilderness because of unbelief (Num 14:23; 26:65; 1 Cor 10:5; Heb 3:17-18).

OUR FATHERS BROUGHT IT IN

“Which also our fathers that came after brought in with Jesus into the possession of the Gentiles . . .” Other versions read, “which our fathers, having

received it in turn, also brought with Joshua,” NKJV “Having received the tabernacle, our fathers under Joshua brought it in with them,” NIV “in their turn, took with them when, with Joshua, they came into the heritage,” BBE “this same tabernacle, our fathers, with Joshua, actually brought into the land which God gave to them,” MRD “Years later, when Joshua led the battles against the Gentile nations, this Tabernacle was taken with them into their new territory,” LIVING “That Tent was bequeathed to the next generation of our forefathers. Under Joshua they brought it with them when they were taking possession of the land,” WEYMOUTH “Our

forefathers in turn brought it [this tent of witness] in [with them into the land] with Joshua when they dispossessed the nations,” AMPLIFIED and “This Tabernacle was handed down to our forefathers, and they brought it here when the Gentiles were defeated under Joshua.” PHILLIPS

When they entered into Canaan, Israel carried the chief article of furniture – the ark of the covenant – before them (Josh 3:11-14).

The record of setting up the Tabernacle is provided, having taken place in Shiloh, when the people were gathered together. “And the whole

Stephen presses the guilt of the Jews upon them, confirming that those before him are like their fathers – by Given O. Blakely

congregation of the children of Israel assembled together at Shiloh, **and set up the tabernacle of the congregation there.** And the land was subdued before them” (Josh 18:1).

WITH JESUS

This is a reference to Joshua, which is “Jesus” in the Hebrew form. In the King James Bible, there are two references to Joshua in which he is called “Jesus” (Acts 7:45; Heb 4:8). Although the other versions use “Joshua,” the term “Jesus” is technically correct, being translated from the Greek word ἰησοῦς (ie-sous), which is the identical word used for our Lord “Jesus.” The name means “Jehovah is salvation,” “Savior,” and “deliverer” – and Joshua is a type of Jesus as a Deliverer, or Savior.

GOD DROVE THE GENTILES OUT

“. . . whom God drove out before the face of our fathers . . .” Other versions read, “God drove out before ancestors,”^{NRSV} “God thrust out,”^{RSV} “God was driving out,”^{BBE} “God forced out,”^{GWN} and “which were driven out by God.”^{NJB}

The Scriptures associate the driving out of the heathen with the placement of the tabernacle. “And the whole congregation of the children of Israel assembled together at Shiloh, and set up the tabernacle of the congregation there. **And the land was subdued before them**” (Josh 18:1). When Israel overthrew Jericho, they first compassed the city several times. Each time the priests went before them, carrying the

ark of the covenant, which belonged to the Tabernacle (Josh 6:4).

After their entrance into Canaan, when the covenant was read anew to the people, their elders, officers, and judges stood on either side of the ark of the covenant as the reading took place. Joshua then read the entirety of the covenant to the people, with all of its blessings and curses (Josh 8:33-35).

All of this is involved in the people bringing the Tabernacle into the land of promise, together with everything that was associated with it. Once they arrived in Canaan, they did not dispense with the Tabernacle as though it was only intended to accompany them in their wilderness wanderings.

UNTIL THE DAYS OF DAVID

⁴⁶ “. . . unto the days of David,⁴⁶ Who found favor before God, and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob.”

UNTIL THE DAYS OF DAVID

“. . . unto the days of David. . .” Other versions read, “until the days of David,”^{NKJV} “until the time of David,”^{NASB} “up to the time of David,”^{NAB} “until the time of King David,”^{LIVING} and “till David’s time.”^{WEYMOUTH}

The Tabernacle remained as it

ministered, and where Hannah went each year (1 Sam 1:9; 2:14,22). It is where God first revealed Himself to young Samuel (1 Sam 3:3). In times of trouble, the people would get the ark from the Tabernacle in Shiloh in hopes of obtaining victory (1 Sam 4:3-4). This is also where David came when he ate the showbread (1 Sam 21:1-6).

In a sense, it is quite remarkable that the Tabernacle and the ark of the Covenant were maintained for so many

A Line of Demarcation

Here, then, is a spiritual line of demarcation – a time when the things of God would be made more clear – “**the days of David.**” His tenderness toward the Lord, His many Psalms, as well as his exploits, would testify to a living God. **It seems to me that the history of the world has often been turned on the pivot of a spiritual giant.** Such were men of tender heart who saw more than the others because they wanted more. They were more devoted, and more earnest in their quest for the living God.

These are the kind of men who cannot be trained or produced by an institution. They cannot be cloned or mass produced. We know that the eyes of the Lord are ranging throughout the whole world, looking for men of this caliber. Thus it is written, “For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them **whose heart is perfect toward him**” (2 Chron 16:9). Such men are not, nor have they ever been, in abundance. However, when they are found, they will be used. Ezekiel revealed that had sought for a man who “stand in the gap” before the Lord “for the land” (Ezek 22:30). God is even said to have been “**appalled that there was no one to**

It seems to me that the history of the world has often been turned on the pivot of a spiritual giant. Such were men of tender heart who saw more than the others because they wanted more. They were more devoted, and more earnest in their quest for the living God.

was for around four hundred years – “until the days of David.” During that interim, after being set up in Shiloh, there are a number of references to it. During the time of the Judges it was referred to as “the house of God” (Judges 18:31; 20:18,26,27). This is where Eli

years – particularly in view of the waywardness of the hearts of Israel. **Yet, behind all of this, the Sovereign God was waiting for a man who would be precious in His sight – a man who would make a more permanent arrangement for the ark of the covenant.**

Stephen presses the guilt of the Jews upon them, confirming that those before him are like their fathers – by Given O. Blakely

intervene”^{NIV} (Isa 59:16). Again the Lord said, **“I looked and there was none to help, and I wondered that there was none to uphold”** (Isa 63:1). Once the Lord challenged Jeremiah, **“Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth: and I will pardon it”** (Jer 5:1).

Whatever you may think of these passages, they cannot be conveniently pushed away. They reveal an aspect of God that must be known. However, I fear this is another spiritual morsel that has been buried by the modern church. Yet, we live in the prospect that it will again be discovered by a person who is especially tender and precious in the eyes of the Lord.

DAVID FOUND FAVOR

“Who found favor before God . . .”

Other versions read, *“who enjoyed God’s favor,”* ^{NIV} *“found favor in the sight of God,”* ^{RSV} *“was pleasing to God,”* ^{BBE} *“won God’s favor,”* ^{GWN} *“God blessed David greatly,”* ^{LIVING} *“God was very pleased with David,”* ^{IE} *“obtained favor with God,”* ^{WEYMOUTH} *“found grace (favor and spiritual blessing),”* ^{AMPLIFIED} and *“won the approval of God.”* ^{PHILLIPS}

I want to point out that this is the man whom modern preachers and teachers are often found deprecating. Ignorantly, men refer to him as a murderer and an adulterer – although God never refers to him in that manner, even though he did commit adultery, and did set Uriah up to be killed. Still others, attempting to promote their own ideas of family life, say that David was a bad father. They say this because his children went astray. Conveniently, they forget that God’s first created “offspring” did also – to say nothing of every single one of his progeny. When Stephen spoke of David, this is what he said: he **“found favor before God.”** When Paul referred to him, he said God **“gave testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfil all my will”** (Acts 13:22).

Confirming that David did find favor in the eyes of the Lord, his name is mentioned in Scripture no less than

1,085 times. Jesus is referred to as *“the son of David”* sixteen times. I do not know how it will fare on the day of judgment with those who have maligned David, and referred to him in such a way as to bring him down to their level. Candidly, however, I would not want to be in their shoes at that time, considering how God has spoken of him.

Keep in mind that Stephen was well acquainted with the whole life of David – and this is how he chose to speak of him. The same may be said of Paul. It seems to me that in a day that is noted for immorality and promiscuity, it is completely out of order to be emphasizing an unfortunate event in David’s life for which he repented and was forgiven. This in no way minimizes what he did. It does accent that he was a man of tender heart, precisely as God had said.

HE DESIRED TO FIND A TABERNACLE

“. . . and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob.” Other versions read, *“asked to find a dwelling place,”* ^{NKJV} *“asked that he might provide a dwelling place,”* ^{NIV} *“asked leave to find*

Solomon related what God has said to his father David. **“And the LORD said unto David my father, Whereas it was in thine heart to build an house unto My name, thou didst well that it was in thine heart”** (1 Kgs 8:18; 2 Chron 6:8). The project, then, was right, even if it was not commanded. The circumstance is highly unsettling to a legalistic approach to life in Christ.

The record of this occasion is found in First Samuel. The setting was David’s experience of **“rest round about from all his enemies.”** He was sitting in his own house, which was rather elaborate. Hiram, king of Tyre, had sent expensive **“cedar trees, and carpenters, and masons”** to David, **“and they built David an house”** (2 Sam 5:2). In all of this, **“David perceived that the LORD had confirmed him king over Israel, for his kingdom was lifted up on high, because of his people Israel”** (2 Sam 5:12).

As he sat in his house, Nathan the prophet was with him. David said to him, **“See now, I dwell in an house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within**

Notice that David did not take it upon himself to do this. He asked permission to do it, laying his desire before the Lord. That is what a tender hearted man would do. What is more, the Lord commended him for his desire.

a habitation,” ^{RSV} *“had a desire to make a holy tent,”* ^{BBE} *“asked that he might provide a permanent place,”* ^{GWN} *“asked for the privilege of building a permanent Temple,”* ^{NLT} *“David asked God to allow him to build a house for Him,”* ^{IE} *“asked to design a dwelling for the house of Jacob,”* ^{ISV} *“asked permission to find a dwelling-place,”* ^{MONTGOMERY} and *“prayed that he might be allowed to find a dwelling place.”* ^{AMPLIFIED}

Notice that David did not take it upon himself to do this. **He asked permission to do it, laying his desire before the Lord.** That is what a tender hearted man would do. What is more, the Lord commended him for his desire.

curtains” (2 Sam 7:2). How unlike those Israelites of succeeding generations who had to be rebuked because they refurbished and enhanced their own houses while letting the house of God lie in ruins (Hag 1:4). Nathan responded, **“Go, do all that is in thine heart, for the Lord is with thee.”**

That night, the word of the Lord came to Nathan. His words are recorded in Second Samuel 7:5-13. **“Go and tell My servant David. Thus says the Lord: Shall you build Me a house in which to dwell? For I have not dwelt in a house since I**

brought the Israelites out of Egypt to this day, **but have moved about with a tent for My dwelling.** In all the places where I have moved with all the Israelites, **did I speak a word to any from the tribes of**

make for you a house: And when your days are fulfilled and you sleep with your fathers, I will set up after you your offspring who shall be born to you, and I will establish his kingdom. **He shall build**

God asks David if He had ever asked anyone, whom He had appointed, to build a house for Him? Yet, he does not rebuke David for asking to do such a thing. He even honored his request, although He would not allow David to build the house.

*Israel whom I commanded to be shepherd of My people Israel, asking, Why do you not build Me a house of cedar? So now say this to My servant David, Thus says the Lord of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, to be prince over My people Israel. And I was with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make you a great name, like [that] of the great men of the earth. And I will appoint a place for My people Israel and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own and be moved no more. And wicked men shall afflict them no more, as formerly and as from the time that I appointed judges over My people Israel; and I will cause you to rest from all your enemies. Also the Lord declares to you that **He will***

a house for My Name [and My Presence], and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ^{AMPLIFIED}

A Most Remarkable Word

This is a remarkable word that provides some insights into the Divine nature. God asks David if He had ever asked anyone, whom He had appointed, to build a house for Him? **Yet, he does not rebuke David for asking to do such a thing.** He even honored his request, although He would not allow David to build the house (which proved to be a Temple). David explained that God had told him why he could not build the house. *“But God said unto me, Thou shalt not build an house for My name, because thou hast been a man of war, and hast shed blood”* (1 Chron 28:3).

Here we see at least two things worthy of note. First, God honored a request He had not directed to be asked. Second, the person in charge of doing the work could not be known as a man of blood.

What Was David Asking?

Why did David make this request? Was it simply that he wanted to update the Tabernacle, or replace it with a more modern version – if that kind thinking even existed? Indeed, this was not the case. **David realized that, according to appearance, he had a more comely place in which to dwell than the very ark of the covenant.** To David, it did not seem right for him to have a better place in which to live than the place with which the presence of the Lord was associated. After all, God had said of the Tabernacle, *“And let them make Me a sanctuary; **that I may dwell among them**”* (Exo 25:8). David’s thoughts, then, were not wholly divorced from what God had revealed about Himself

David’s primary consideration was not to simply have a religious structure. It was specifically to provide a place in which **the ark** could be housed (2 Sam 7:2). He felt this could not be a housing that was inferior to his own dwelling place. And how does God regard David’s request? **David found favor in the sight of the Lord!** Those are words that are worthy of consideration, reflecting the nature of godly men and God himself.

SOLOMON BUILT THE HOUSE

⁴⁷ **But Solomon built Him an house.** Other versions read, *“But it was Solomon,”* ^{NASB} *“But Solomon was the builder,”* ^{BBE} and *“But it was Solomon who actually built it.”* ^{NLT} God had revealed to David that his hands should not construct the house because he was a man of war, and had shed much blood. He designated that David’s son, Solomon, would build the house, being a man associated with peace (2 Sam 7:12-14).

The place for the building of the Temple was selected by David as the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite,

where the Lord appeared unto David, confirming this was to be the place (1 Chron 21:28-2:1). This was located in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, the place where God had commanded Abraham to offer Isaac. Therefore it is said of the commencement of the building of the Temple, *“Then Solomon began to build the house of the LORD at Jerusalem **in mount Moriah, where the Lord appeared unto David his father, in the place that David had prepared in the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite**”* (2 Chron 3:1).

In keeping with the pattern which

David apparently drew up, he gathered all of the materials that would be required. He did the following, as specified in 1 Chronicles 22:1-19. Behold the extensive nature of the repartition.

- ⇒ Appointed masons to cut hewn stones.
- ⇒ Prepared an abundance of iron for nails for the doors of the gates and for joining pieces together.
- ⇒ Gathered an abundance of brass that could not be weighed.

- ⇒ Procured cedar trees in abundance from Zidonia and Tyre.
- ⇒ Amassed one hundred thousand talents of gold (about 3,750 tons).
- ⇒ Gathered one million talents of silver (37,500 tons).
- ⇒ Brought together brass and iron too great to be weighed.
- ⇒ Prepared and fashioned timber and stone.
- ⇒ David added from his own personal treasury, over and above all that was prepared, three thousand talents of fine gold of Ophir (110 tons), and seven thousand talents of refined silver (260 tons) to overlay the walls (1 Chron 29:3-5).

MEASURED MATERIALS FOR THE TEMPLE	
GOLD	8,100,185 lbs
SILVER	7,627,000 lbs
BRASS	1,350,000 lbs
IRON	7,500,000 lbs
PLUS	
BRASS AND IRON TOO GREAT TO BE WEIGHED	

- ⇒ The chief of the fathers and the princes of the tribes of Israel, and the captains and rulers of the king's work, also gave willingly to the project. Their gifts included five thousand talents and ten thousand drama of gold (190 tons and 185 pounds, ten thousand talents of silver (375 tons), nineteen thousand

talents of brass (675 tons), one hundred thousand talents of iron (3,750 tons) (1 Chron 29:6-7)..

- ⇒ Those who had precious stones also gave them to the work (1 Chron 29:8).

The Temple structure itself was ninety feet long, and forty-five feet high - equivalent to a 4 ½ story building, and as long as six Cadillacs placed end to end (ninety feet). This does not include the porch (1 Kgs 6:3), chambers (1 Kgs 6:5-6, 10), massive stones (1 Kgs 6:7), and winding staircase (1 Kgs 6:8).

Solomon forced 30,000 men of Israel to labor on the Temple, sending them to Lebanon in shifts of 10,000 a month. They would spend one month in Lebanon, and two months at home (1 Kgs 5:13-14). He also had 70,000 who carried burdens, and 80,000 stonecutters in the mountains (1 Kgs 5:15). **He appointed 330 foremen, who supervised the workers – a crew of 180,000 men.** That would mean each foremen supervised about 550 men.

The Temple took seven years to build (1 Kgs 6:38). **By way of comparison, Scripture notes that it took Solomon thirteen years to build his own house** (1 Kgs 7:1).

A Point to be Made

Once again, I want to draw attention to, what I have called, the principle of reference. The remarkable level of details associated with planning and building the Temple is staggering. Yet, Stephen does not mention a single one of them. He only says that David found favor in the sight of the Lord, desired to find a tabernacle for God, and that Solomon built the Temple itself.

Stephen's reference would have

no significance whatsoever to anyone who lacked a knowledge of the facts in the case. **It is the awareness and accurate knowledge of the facts that allows for the correct profitable and processing of Stephen's words.** This remains true even though the Jewish council refused to profit from this knowledge. The fact of the matter is that right here the door was being opened for them to turn from their wicked ways. A due consideration of the thought and effort that went into the building of the Temple would have pointed them in the right direction.

An Observation

If this assessment is correct, the present level of ignorance that exists in the professing church concerning the details of Scripture, has far-reaching implications. **It suggests that the better part of the modern church cannot profit from insightful preaching.** For example, what possible meaning does Stephen's sermon have to such people? That is not to mention the preaching of Jesus and the apostles. I do not believe too much can be said about this circumstance. **Until it is corrected to some measurable degree, it is doubtful that the contemporary church is even capable of doing the work of the Lord.** In my judgement, the lack of productive Kingdom work is owing more to the *cannot* principle than the *will not* one.

The modern church sorely stands in need of a significant work to be done within itself. It is too carnal – too worldly. I am persuaded that these observations can be easily substantiated, and that opposing views can be cast down with very little effort. This is a matter that calls for God to raise up men of spiritual power and insight – men who, like David, find favor in His sight. Without such men, the church will remain spiritually sterile.

THE MOST HIGH DOES NOT DWELL IN TEMPLES MADE WITH HANDS

“⁴⁸ Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet.” Other versions read, *“does not dwell in houses made by human hands.”*^{NASB} *“does not*

live in houses made by men,”^{NIV} *“has not His resting-place in houses made with hands,”*^{BBE} *“does not dwell in sanctuaries made with hands,”*^{CSB} *“doesn't live in a house built by humans,”*^{GWN} *“does not*

dwell in buildings erected by men's hands,”^{WEYMOUTH} and *“does not live in man-made houses.”*^{PHILLIPS}

This is Stephen's answer to the

Stephen presses the guilt of the Jews upon them, confirming that those before him are like their fathers – by Given O. Blakely

charges that he had spoken blasphemous words against the Temple. The Jews had set up false witnesses who said, "This man ceaseth not to speak **blasphemous words against this holy place**, and the law: for we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us"(Acts 6:13-14).

Not only were these charges false, they were also to be considered in view of the fact that God does not dwell in houses constructed by men. When David inquired of Nathan concerning building the Temple, God instructed Nathan to say this to David: "Go and tell my servant David, Thus saith the LORD, Shalt thou build me an house for me to dwell in? Whereas I have not dwelt in any house since the time that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, **but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle**. In all the places wherein I have walked with all the children of Israel spake I a word with any of the tribes of Israel, whom I commanded to feed my people Israel, saying, Why build ye not Me an house of cedar?"(2 Sam 7:5-7).

Inspired to reason upon these words, and **before** building the Temple, Solomon said, "And the house which I build is great: **for great is our God above all gods**. But who is able to build Him an house, seeing the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain him? who am I then, that I should build Him an house, **save only to burn sacrifice before Him?**"(2 Chron 2:6). After he had completed the building of the Temple he reasoned, "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?"(1 Kgs 8:27). **Therefore, the Temple was constructed with an acute awareness of the fact that God does not live in a building – yet the work was fully sanctioned and directed by God.**

Isaiah also refers to this fact in his prophecy. "Thus saith the LORD, The heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool: where is the house that ye build unto Me? and where is the place of My rest?"(Isa 66:1). Paul also referred to the Divine trait of not living in a building, in his address to the philosophers in

Athens. "God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands"(Acts 17:24).

Jeremiah delivered the true sense of these words when he upbraided the people for trusting in the Temple instead of the God of the Temple. "Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place. **Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, are these**"(Jer 7:3-4).

Men may conclude from this that

hosts, which **dwelleth between the cherubims**"(1 Sam 4:4; 6:2), and "God the Lord that **dwelleth between the cherubims**" (1 Chron 13:6). When Hezekiah prayed, he addressed the Lord as the "Lord God of Israel **which dwellest between the cherubims**"(2 Kgs 19:15). In one of his psalms, Asaph addressed God as "Thou that **dwellest between the cherubims**"(Psa 80:1). The ninety-ninth Psalm says that God "**sitteth between the cherubims**"(Psa 99:1). Isaiah addressed the Lord as the One who "**dwellest between the cherubims**"(Isa 37:16).

The Basis of the Expression

All of this was based on the statement of God concerning how He

Further, the Tabernacle and Temple were not to be considered holy in the sense of a shrine, as those which contained idols. It was rather because of the Divine communication that took place there. That was true of every place that was particularly hallowed – places where altars were built, pillars anointed, and special names given

it is wrong to construct a house that is dedicated to the Lord. This is not, however, the manner in which David and Solomon thought. Nor, indeed, was it the way Jesus thought, who referred to the Temple as "My Father's house" (John 2:16).

The Scriptures Are Particular

The Scriptures are very particular concerning the manner in which God was associated with the Tabernacle and Temple. **Neither of them were areas to which God was confined**. When the Lord said Israel made a "sanctuary" for Him (Ex 25:8), and that he "walked in a tent and in a Tabernacle"(2 Sam 7:6), **He did not mean He lived there as a man lives in an abode**. Rather, this was a place where He **revealed** Himself, communing with them. This was done over the ark of the covenant, and particularly from between the cherubim that adorned its cover. The Scriptures spoke of His dwelling in this manner: "the Lord of

would commune with Israel – a statement relating to the building of the Tabernacle. "And there I will meet with thee, and **I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims** which are upon the ark of the testimony, of all things which I will give thee in commandment unto the children of Israel"(Ex 25:22).

This expression, then, was based upon God's covenantal dealings with Israel. It was never designed to suggest that God was confined to the Tabernacle or Temple. Further, the Tabernacle and Temple were not to be considered holy in the sense of a shrine, as those which contained idols. It was rather because of the **Divine communication** that took place there. That was true of every place that was particularly hallowed – places where altars were built, pillars anointed, and special names given (Gen 12:7; 26:24-25; 28:16; 32:30; 35:3,15). It was because of the **revelation** of God in those

places. This was also the reason Jesus resorted often to the garden – because of communication with God (John 18:2).

Having said all of this, **there is no**

way the flesh can capitalize on this situation, causing ones name to become great, and gaining worldly advantage. The fact that the Tabernacle was among the Israelites did not reduce the

magnitude of their transgression. Instead, the mechanics of their ceremonies were attributed to idols, even though they appeared outwardly to be serving the Lord.

HEAVEN IS HIS THRONE, AND THE EARTH IS HIS FOOTSTOOL

⁴⁹ **Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest?** ⁵⁰ **Hath not my hand made all these things?"**

Stephen continues drawing the attention of the council to the words the Lord spoke to David.

HEAVEN IS MY THRONE

"Heaven is My throne . . ." Other versions read, *"Heaven is the seat of My power,"*^{BBE} and *"Heaven is My seat."*^{PNT}

The place of communication was *"between the cherubims,"* but that was not the seat of the power. **The throne of God was not within the Tabernacle, or upon the ark of the covenant.** The

66:1). Jesus said of heaven, *"it is God's throne"* (Matt 5:34), and that those who swore by heaven *"swareth by the throne of God"* (Matt 23:22). The expression **"heaven is My throne"** is therefore a revelation spoken at other times that **Stephen wisely correlated with what God had said to David.**

Inter-relatory Words

In the Kingdom of God, truth is inter-relational. That is, words concerning fixed realities harmonize with each other, and blend together. Of course, it requires a person who is skillful in *"the word of righteousness"* to do this (Heb 5:13), and Stephen is well qualified.

What do these words mean: **"heaven is My throne"? It means that the**

because the throne is in heaven, and *"the heavens do rule"* (Dan 4:26).

THE EARTH IS MY FOOTSTOOL

" . . . and earth is My footstool . . ." Other versions read, *"footstool of My feet,"*^{NASB} *"a resting-place for My feet,"*^{BBE} *"the footstool under My feet,"*^{MRD} and *"a place to rest My feet."*^{LIVING}

Whatever one may choose to think about the earth, allowance must be made for this statement of God: *"earth is My footstool!"* In this text, Stephen again integrates Scripture. The statement concerning the earth being God's footstool is found in Isaiah 66:1. Lamentations 2:1 also alludes to the earth being *"His footstool."* Jesus also referred to this in Matthew 5:35.

David declared what he had on his mind. *"Then David the king stood up upon his feet, and said, Hear me, my brethren, and my people: "As for me, I had it in mine heart to build an house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and for the footstool of our God, and had made ready for the building"* (1 Chron 28:2). The 99th Psalm also refers to the Temple being the footstool of God. *"Exalt ye the LORD our God, and worship at His footstool; for he is holy"* (Psa 99:5). The 132nd Psalm does the same thing. *"We will go into his tabernacles: we will worship at His footstool"* (Psa 132:7).

The idea here is that the earth, together with all of its inhabitants, are subject to the Lord, and are at His disposal to use as he sees fit. **That is, God cannot be contained by anything He has made – much less what man has made.** In a figure of speech, the earth is a place where God rests His feet. It is not a place where He dwells, or lives. **In view of that, how would it be possible for a building to**

The throne of God was not within the Tabernacle, or upon the ark of the covenant. The government of God did not issue forth from a structure – even one that God had ordained and commanded to be built. The communications that took place there were "settled in the heaven"

government of God did not issue forth from a structure – even one that God had ordained and commanded to be built. The communications that took place there were *"settled in the heaven"* (Psa 119:89).

The words *"heaven is My throne"* were not included in the words God spoke to David, as recorded in the seventh chapter of Second Samuel. The Psalmist did declare, *"The Lord's throne is in heaven"* (Psa 11:4). Through Isaiah God also said, *"The heaven is My throne"* (Isa

origin of Divine rule is in heaven. That is where the seat of government is located. That is where the full glory of the King is displayed. That is where all decisions relating to the Kingdom are made. The court is held there, as confirmed in Job 1:6 and 2:1, Isaiah 6:1-1-8, and Second Kings 22:19-22. **Those whose minds are fixed upon the earth cannot possibly be correct in their views of Divine judgment and will.** As soon as ones mind is fixed on this present evil world, all sense of right and wrong become distorted. This is

contain Him, if the earth itself cannot.

Something Else to Be Seen

But, there is something else to be seen in the earth being God's "footstool." In all of God's vast creation, **His present activity is focused upon the earth.** This is confirmed in the 24th Psalm where the Lord further defines the earth. "The earth is the LORD'S, and the fulness thereof: the world, and they that dwell therein" (Psa 24:1). This is the arena in which the Lord is working, fulfilling a purpose that is designed to bring special glory to Him. As great as the sun is, it is not the focus of Divine attention. Nor, indeed is the moon, the stars, or the many galaxies that have been created in our solar system. **The ONLY real significance of the earth is that God is fulfilling His purpose in it.** Apart from that, it has no revealed utility. Now, with that in mind, God asks a further question.

WHAT HOUSE WILL YE BUILD ME?

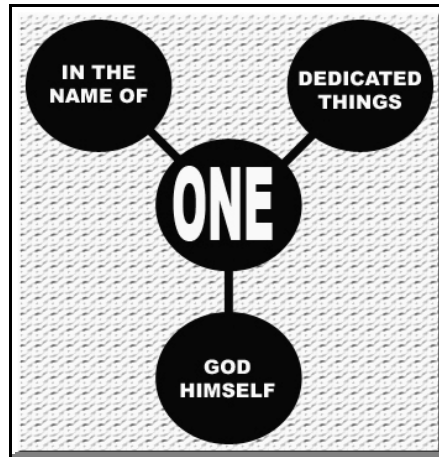
"... what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest?" Other versions read, "what place is there for My repose,"^{NASB} "what kind of house,"^{NIV} "what manner of house,"^{ASV} "What sort of house,"^{BBE} "What kind of house could you build for Me,"^{CJB} and "There is no place where I need to rest."^{LIVING}

This is a reference to the words of the Lord to David: "Shalt **thou** build **Me** an house for Me to dwell in?" (2 Sam 7:5). That is, Are you capable of constructing a place that can contain Me? **At this point, it is interesting to observe that all sectarianism presumes that this can be done – that God can be contained.** For them, God is contained in a creed or a dogma. Nevertheless, they have made an attempt to contain God, and it simply cannot be done!

There is something important to note here. Technically speaking, David did not say he wanted to build a house for God, but for "the ark of God" (2 Sam 7:2). When God said that David's son would build the house, He referred to it as "an house for My **name**" (2 Sam 7:13). Solomon said the house was to be built "unto the **name** of the Lord **his** (David's) God" (1 Kgs 5:3), and that he would build it "unto the **name** of the Lord **my** God" (1 Kgs 5:5). Yet, when, He started the

project, it is written that he "began to build the house **of the Lord**" (1 Kgs 6:1).

In this we note that things related to God, the name of the Lord, and the



Lord Himself are all woven together, like a threefold chord.

This is precisely why Jesus declared the merchants and moneychangers had made the house of prayer "a den of thieves" (Matt 21:13). It is why those who either assist or neglect the people of God have done it unto Jesus Himself (Matt 25:40,45). **Nothing that is associated with God, either by intention of by Divine mandate, can be disassociated from Him.** If, for example, people go through the mechanics of praising the Lord, yet their hearts are not in it, **they have actually blasphemed God,** and will be held accountable for it. This is precisely the point the Lord made through Amos concerning the children of Israel (Isa 1:13; Amos 5:23).

An Application

When this truth registers upon tender hearts, our current religious scene becomes most alarming. We are living in a generation when the merchants of the world have become fat because of Christian fads. Industries that have been financially advantaged because of this include structural engineering, construction, sound systems, video presentation, overhead projection, music industry, book publishing, clothiers, jewelers, and many more. **It parallels the vivid description given in the book of the Revelation concerning the false church.**

When the whole system is brought down by God, the merchants are depicted as lamenting. "And the merchants of the earth shall weep and mourn over her; for no man buyeth their merchandise any more: the merchandise of gold, and silver, and precious stones, and of pearls, and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet, and all thyine wood, and all manner vessels of ivory, and all manner vessels of most precious wood, and of brass, and iron, and marble, and cinnamon, and odours, and ointments, and frankincense, and wine, and oil, and fine flour, and wheat, and beasts, and sheep, and horses, and chariots, and slaves, and souls of men" (Rev 18:11-13).

The lament continues, accenting that earthly lusts and appetites were impacted by the fall of false religion. "And the fruits that thy soul lusted after are departed from thee, and all things which were dainty and goodly are departed from thee, and thou shalt find them no more at all. The merchants of these things, which were made rich by her, shall stand afar off for the fear of her torment, weeping and wailing, And saying, Alas, alas, that great city, that was clothed in fine linen, and purple, and scarlet, and decked with gold, and precious stones, and pearls! For in one hour so great riches is come to nought. And every shipmaster, and all the company in ships, and sailors, and as many as trade by sea, stood afar off, And cried when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, What city is like unto this great city!" (Rev 18:14-18).

Stephen is speaking to a group of people who have gained fleshly advantages from their involvement in religion – a revealed religion. One of the reasons these very people had opposed Jesus is because they viewed him as a threat to their prominent positions in religion. "If we let Him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and **take away both our place and nation**" (John 11:48). However, Stephen has no regard for their position, He is rather showing that they, like their predecessors, had consistently refused the men who had been placed in their position by God.

The Proper Use of Scripture

In this verse, Stephen also

combines the thoughts expressed in the 132nd Psalm with His words to David. *“For the LORD hath chosen Zion; He hath desired it for His habitation. This is My rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it”* (Psa 132:13-14).

Behold the expertise with which Stephen handles Scripture. **He correlates it with Divine purpose, always keeping in mind what the Lord was doing, and never attempting to justify a private view or an institutional emphasis.** This is the kind of person to which Paul referred in his letter to Timothy: *“Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth”* (2 Tim 2:15). *“Rightly dividing”* refers to the proper use of Scripture. Other versions render the phrase, *“handling accurately,”*^{NASB} *“correctly handles,”*^{NIV} *“rightly explaining.”*^{NRSV} This is not referring to the proper scholastic handling of Scripture – although that is certainly included. **It rather means using Scripture within the context of the revealed purpose of God, and with an understanding of the circumstance in which the truth is being spoken.** Those who do not use Scripture in this manner have every reason to be ashamed, for they have corrupted the use of the word of God.

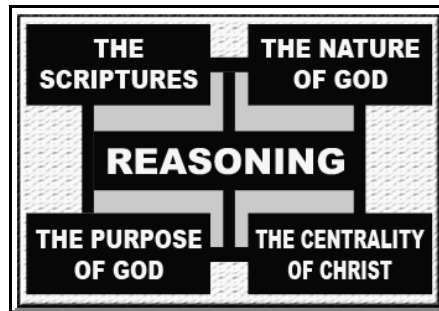
Think of it this way. When you read Stephen’s defense, do you get the idea he is trying to clear himself of all false charges? It is apparent that he is rather using the Scripture to make known the purpose and perspective of the

Living God? His grasp of truth enabled him to reason in a profitable manner.

SOUND REASONING

In order for men to reason properly, certain things must be known or comprehended. First, a person is required to have a working knowledge of the text of Scripture itself. **Scripture contains the expressive components of sound reasoning – the nomenclature through which foundational aspects of reasoning are expressed.**

There must also be an understanding of the nature of God as it has been revealed. Everything God says and does is within the context of His



nature. Things like His hatred of evil, love of good, inclination toward those tender heart, and intolerance of hypocrisy, must be seen to some measurable degree.

A grasp of the revealed purpose of God must also be possessed. What is He

doing among the sons of men, and why is He doing it? This has to do with His *“eternal purpose”* (Eph 3:11).

Finally, the absolute centrality of Christ must be seen. That is, His centrality to the realization of the purpose of God. If a person reasons as though the individual is the main thing, or the family, or the church, or a nation – reasoning will be skewed in the wrong direction. It is inevitable that such reasoning will lead to the wrong conclusions, give birth to erroneous ideas, and actually obscure the truth of God.

We see all of this and more in the speech being given by Stephen. As you read and ponder it, you become acutely aware that he is thinking on a different level. He is extolling the Lord and His gracious works. **All is leading to the conclusion that the most grievous sin of the people was the rejection, betrayal, and murdering of Jesus.** This is so because Jesus is the premier Man, sent to do the premier work, and is related to the premier purpose. Stephen sees it, and delivers his insight with great power.

The widespread practice of sectarian reasoning has impacted Christendom in a way that is nearly impossible to assess. It is my persuasion that very few weighty conclusions are being reached, and very few noble causes are being embraced. Minuscule thinking always breeds purposes that are destined to fail.

HATH NOT MY HANDS MADE THESE THINGS?

“⁶⁰ Hath not my hand made all these things?” Other versions read, *“Did not my hand make all these things,”*^{NRSV} *“Didn’t I myself make all these things?”*^{CJB} *“when all these things were made by Me,”*^{NJB} *“Didn’t I make both heaven and earth?”*^{LIVING} *“Remember, I made all these things!”*^{IE} *“It was my hand that made all these things, wasn’t it?”*^{ISV} and *“Did not my hand make this universe?”*^{MONTGOMERY}

“These things” refers to the heaven the earth – God’s throne and footstool. **“ALL these times”** refers to everything that populates these two realms. In view of the vastness of God’s throne and footstool, what house could you make for Him? **Would it not have to be large enough to contain at least His throne and footstool – to say nothing of Himself?**

As noble as the desire of David

was, it still reflected a very limited view of God. **This is not said to demean David, but to accent how comparatively very little of God had actually been made known at that time.**

Even though much has been revealed about the Lord since the time of Job, there is still a lot of truth to be seen in his words: *“Lo, these are **parts** of His ways: but **how little a portion is heard of Him?** but the thunder of His power who*

can understand?" (Job 26:14).

David, who had been given to see more than Job, said of the Lord, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; **it is high, I cannot attain unto it**" (Psa 139:6).

Isaiah, who was also given to see a larger measure of the Lord declared, "Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? **there is no searching of His understanding**" (Isa 40:28).

Paul, who perhaps saw more than any person other than the Lord Jesus Himself, confessed, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! **how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!**" (Rom 11:33).

The reasoning of this verse is as follows. **After looking at what the hands of God has made, what could men possibly make that would be appropriate for Him?**

It is because David "found favor" with the Lord that He was allowed to build a house for Him. **It was not because God required one to be built.** True religion does not necessitate such a house, although, especially under the Old Covenant, it was allowed and blessed because of the nature of the covenant. However, just as surely as God found no delight in the burnt offerings and sacrifices that He Himself ordained (Psa 51:16; Mic 6:7; Heb 10:6), so there was no delight in the Temple itself, even though it was called by Jesus "My Father's house" and "a house of prayer for all nations" (John 2:16; Matt 21:16).

During the days of Jesus, the Temple was viewed by many as an end of itself – a beautiful and ornate structure – without regard to the activities that were to take place within it. Jesus said to some of these people, "Woe unto you, ye

*blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by **the gold of the temple, he is a debtor!**"* (Matt 23:16).

This inordinate view of the Temple also surfaced once when Jesus had commended a poor widow for placing two mites in the Temple treasury. He

In our own time, there is an inordinate accent on religious structures. While this is not an area in which laws are to be drawn up and imposed upon men, care must be taken not to allow the realm of the seen to dictate how, when, and the extent of our thoughts about the Lord.

had declared her gift was more than all of the others, among whom were gifts given by the rich. At that time "His disciples came to Him for to show Him the buildings of the temple" (Mat 24:1). Luke says that some had noted "how it was adorned with goodly stones and gifts" (Luke 21:5). It was at that time that Jesus foretold the destruction of the Temple that would take place when Jerusalem would be judged for its rejection of Jesus (Lk 21:6).

The people were prone to think of the Temple in disassociation from God Himself. For some, it was a place of business, where animals used in sacrifice could be sold at a profit, being easily obtained by those who heartlessly met the requirements for sacrifice – or at least imagined that they did so. For others, the Temple was a place of employment – like the Temple guard (Acts 4:1; 5:24). For still others, it was a place of religious status – as with the chief priests, scribes, and Sadducees.

The Lord's statement concerning the heaven being His throne and the earth His footstool, was designed to discourage this kind of thinking. They were to ponder the Lord within a larger context that things that can be seen, or things that had been fashioned by men.

In Our Time

In our own time, there is an inordinate accent on religious structures. While this is not an area in which laws are to be drawn up and imposed upon men, **care must be taken not to allow the realm of the seen to dictate how, when, and the extent of our thoughts about the Lord.** Throughout history, there have

been godly men who saw this propensity and sounded a warning about it. One such man was W.B. Godbey, who lived from 1833 to 1920. He wrote the following on this subject. "An awful tide of idolatry is at the present day running in the line of church edifices. If the house should burn down and the preacher backslide a whole modern congregation would collapse spiritually in twenty-four hours and conclude they hadn't a bit of religion . . . How will we ever get the heathen saved if we do not quit sacrificing the Lord's money to that hellish goddess, Pride, in needless expenditure on church edifices, thus using God's money 'to sacrifice to devils'" W.B. GODBEY (1880-1920)

Suffice it to say, it is not my purpose to deliver a diatribe against structures devoted to the service of the Lord. **However, such are acceptable only to the degree that those who plan, build, as use them are wholly devoted to the Lord – as David was.** God accepted David's plan because HE found favor with God, not merely because of the plan.

Buildings are also proper only when the activities within them are themselves pleasing to the Lord. Men are to remember that God has no need for what men possess. If He was hungry, he said, He would not tell them (Psa 50:12). That does not mean that they are to give no gifts. It does mean that they are to give them for the right reasons, and in a manner that honors and pleases the Lord.

STIFFNECKED AND UNCIRCUMCISED IN HEART AND EARS

⁵¹ **Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your**

Stephen presses the guilt of the Jews upon them, confirming that those before him are like their fathers – by Given O. Blakely

fathers did, so do ye."

It is apparent that as Stephen was speaking, he perceived the hardness of the people. He had spoken for some time, confining himself to a God-honoring assessment of the history of children of Israel. He had spoken in the language of Scripture, and had wisely correlated various texts with understanding and wisdom that ought to have been obvious. Now it has become evident that these

person refuses to turn toward the Lord. It comes from a word meaning "stubborn, headstrong, obstinate," THAYER "resistance against changing ones behavior," FRIBERG "hardened," UBS and "completely unyielding." LOUW-NIDA

This is the only place this word is used in the New Covenant Scriptures. It is used seven times in the writings of Moses, and once in the Chronicles.

⇨ God said of Israel, "it is a **stiffnecked**

and unwilling to turn to the Lord. He uses the exact language that both God and Moses used when Israel refused to hear God, and instead chose to make their own gods. **This was not an out-of-character occurrence, but was a display of who they really were** – a "stiffnecked people."

It appears from the text that there may very well have been angry outbursts and interruptions going on as Stephen spoke. If this is so, it would account for the change in tone that takes place in this verse. Suddenly Stephen leaps from the consideration of Israel of old to the people who were standing before him. **They were, as he will strongly affirm, from the same generation of the wayward ones in the past** – noted for being obstinate, disobedient, and rebellious. It ought to be noted that those who teach that the church is just like Israel have said something of great magnitude. **If what they say is true, then the church to which they refer is, at the very best, in a fallen state.** Those who are in Christ Jesus are a new creation, and can in no wise be properly described as stiffnecked or rebellious. They are new creatures in Christ Jesus, old things have passed away, and all things have become new (2 Cor 5:17). If they are stubborn, it is only because they are walking in the flesh.

Such a condition cannot be brushed aside by saying they are like Israel. If they continue to remain in such a state, they will also be like Israel in failing to enter the promised land. Therefore the church receives this solemn warning, "Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do alway err in their heart; and they have not known my ways. So I swear in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest.) **Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God**" (Heb 3:10-12). And again it is written, "Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, **any of you should seem to come short of it**" (Heb 4:1).

Some might object, saying that "seem" means the people addressed really do not fail to enter the rest. However, if that is the case, the sentence of nonsensical, having no meaning

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people are not like those who believed on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41), nor are they similar to the great multitude who believed in Solomon's porch (Acts 4:4). These were members of the brood of vipers to which John the Baptist referred (Matt 3:7). They belonged to the order of "hypocrites" to which Jesus referred (Matt 23:13).

Stephen has been patient, however he knows that the Spirit of God "shall not always strive with men" (Gen 6:3). Therefore he will bring things to a head, and draw their venom out so that their wickedness will be known. This is the manner of the Lord. If men refuse to believe Him, He will draw that wickedness out, so that all may see it.

STIFFNECKED

"Ye stiffnecked . . ." Other versions read, "how stubborn can you be?"^{GWN} "stiff of neck,"^{MRD} "You stubborn people,"^{NLT} "You stiffnecked heathen!"^{LIVING} "You stubborn leaders!"^{IE} "stubborn in will,"^{WILLIAMS} "You stubborn and stiff-necked people,"^{AMPLIFIED} and "You obstinate people,"^{PHILLIPS}

The word "stiffnecked" refers to an obstinate spirit – one in which the

people" (Ex 32:9).

⇨ Moses said "thou art a **stiffnecked people**" (Ex 33:3)

⇨ God told Moses to say to the people, "Thou art a **stiffnecked people**" (Ex 3:5).

⇨ Moses said to God, "for it is a **stiffnecked people**" (Ex 34:9).

⇨ At the close of his life, Moses said to Israel, "thou art a **stiffnecked people**" (Deut 9:6).

⇨ At that time, Moses also repeated that God had said of them, "it is a **stiffnecked people**" (Deut 9:13).

⇨ God commanded Israel, "Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more **stiffnecked**" (Deut 10:16).

⇨ Hezekiah sent messengers throughout all Israel and Judah saying, "Now, be ye not **stiffnecked as your fathers were**" (2 Chron 30:8).

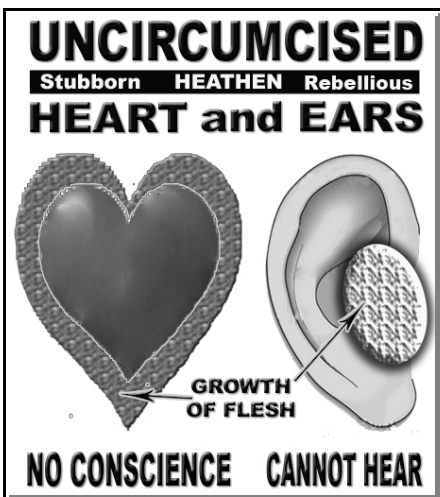
Stephen charges the Jewish council with being stubborn, unyielding,

whatsoever. **What purpose is there in fearing if the condition against which we are warned is not even real.** Here, the word “seemed” accents judgment – to be thus judged as questionable, or not seen as a legitimate entrance into the rest. In other words, the door is left open to avoid the condition. However, it was against a legitimate, delivered, and on-their-way-to-Canaan people that God’s wrath welled up, and in it He swore **they would not enter.**

That is the ultimate end of being stiffnecked, obstinate, and stubborn. Therefore it is written, “*He, that being often reprov’d hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy*” (Prov 29:1). Another version reads, “*A man who remains stiff-necked after many rebukes will suddenly be destroyed—without remedy*”(Prov 29:1).^{NIV}

UNCIRCUMCISED IN HEART AND EARS

“... and uncircumcised in heart and ears. . .” Other versions read, “*with uncircumcised hearts and ears,*”^{NIV} “*whose hearts and ears are shut to Me,*”^{BBE} “*How can you be so heartless and disobedient?*”^{GWN} “*You are heathen¹ at heart and deaf to the truth,*”^{NLT} “*Your hearts are not circumcised! You won’t listen to God!*”^{LIVING} “*heathenish in hearts and ears,*”^{WILLIAMS} “*still heathen and uncircumcised in heart and ears,*”^{AMPLIFIED} “*heathen in your thinking, heathen in the way you are listening to me now!*”^{PHILLIPS} “*hardhearted people,*”^{CEV} and “*How heathen your hearts, how deaf you are to God’s message!*”^{GNB}



To be uncircumcised in heart and ears is to be insensitive, with no conscience, and incapable of hearing. **The picture is of a growth that restricts both the heart and the ears – a growth of flesh.** This inner growth inhibits the truth from getting through the ear and into the heart. Sin has rendered the person incapable of either hearing or responding to the Lord.

This is a picture of the unregenerate state, and of the necessity for the new birth. That is why Moses told the people their hearts had to be circumcised. “*Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked*” (Deut 10:16). Centuries later, Jeremiah again challenged the people to circumcise their hearts. “*Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your heart, ye men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem: lest my fury come forth like fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings*” (Jer 4:4). He declared, “*all the house of Israel are uncircumcised of heart*” (Jer 9:16). Jeremiah also traced the inability of the people to hear to their ear problem. “*To whom shall I speak, and give warning, that they may hear? behold, their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot hearken: behold, the word of the LORD is unto them a reproach; they have no delight in it*” (Jer 6:10).

Ezekiel twice referred to strangers who were “*uncircumcised in heart*” (Ezek 44:7,9). The only remedy for the situation, was for the Lord to circumcise their hearts, which Moses promised He would do in the future. “*And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live*” (Deut 30:6).

What an indictment to make after all of this had been said about the condition in which these people were found! **Here were people who had received every advantage.** It is said of them, “*Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ*

came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen” (Rom 9:4-5). How could any people receive more advantages in the flesh, or as men? **Yet, to the very message that declared the fulfillment of the promises made to their fathers, their reaction was like the heathen – just as though they had never heard from God, never experienced His benefits, never had any promises, and were never given any prophet.**

In Our Time

Much of the obstinance we see today – if not all of it – is directly traceable to this condition: **uncircumcised hearts and ears.** It is time for those who teach the people to call the condition what it is – like Stephen is doing in our text. It is not proper to allow those who are wise in the ways of the world, like psychologists and sociologists, to explain a condition that has already been defined by the living God.

RESISTING THE HOLY SPIRIT

“... ye do always resist the Holy Ghost . . .” Other versions read, “*You always resist the Holy Spirit,*”^{NKJV} “*are always resisting the Holy Spirit,*”^{NASB} “*you are forever opposing the Holy Spirit,*”^{NRSV} “*you are ever working against the Holy Spirit,*”^{BBE} “*you continually oppose,*”^{CJB} “*ye do always set yourselves against the Holy Spirit,*”^{MED} “*Must you forever resist the Holy Spirit?*”^{NLT} “*you have always resisted the Holy Ghost,*”^{TNT} “*You are always against what the Holy Spirit is trying to tell you,*”^{IE} “*you also are continually at strife with the Holy Spirit,*”^{WEYMOUTH} “*you are always actively resisting the Holy Spirit,*”^{AMPLIFIED} “*It is always the same - you never fail to resist the Holy Spirit!*”^{PHILLIPS} “*You are always fighting against the Holy Spirit,*”^{CEV} and “*You always fell against the Holy Spirit.*”^{LITV}

The word “resist” comes from a Greek word with the following lexical meaning. “*To be adverse, oppose, strive against,*”^{THAYER} “*rush against,*”^{FRIBERG} “*fight against,*”^{UBS} and “*to resist by actively opposing pressure of power,*”^{LOUW-NIDA}

In this case, the Holy Spirit is exerting influence upon Stephen’s hearers – convincing of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8-11). Working through the words of

Stephen presses the guilt of the Jews upon them, confirming that those before him are like their fathers – by Given O. Blakely

Stephen, He was pricking their conscience, and goading them within. **But they threw up a wall of resistance, refusing to yield to His tender influences.**

An indication of what is involved in resisting the Holy Spirit is seen in the depiction of the Spirit's activity prior to the flood. Of that time the Lord declared, "And the LORD said, My spirit shall not always **strive with man**" (Gen 6:3). As Stephen uses the word "resist," the picture is not one of merely raising up a wall, and refusing to welcome the Holy Spirit. **There is a note of hostility in the word, so that the one who bears the words being used by the Holy Spirit is actually attacked, either verbally or bodily.** At this point, the attack of Stephen is in word, but it is picking up its intensity.

Notice how gentle Stephen started his discourse: "Men, brethren, and fathers" (Acts 7:2). He was mannerly and respectful, giving no cause in himself for the Word of God to be blasphemed. He carried out what Paul said to Timothy, "And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth" (2 Tim 2:24-25). However, those who are "in the flesh" cannot be appeased, and their anger cannot be assuaged. **The more insightful words are spoken, the more the hostility increases, until it finally boils over in the harshest expressions.**

By resisting the Holy Spirit these men confirmed **they did not have a spiritual religion** – for one cannot be spiritual while resisting the Holy Spirit.

AS YOUR FATHERS DID

"... as your fathers did, so do ye."

Other versions read, "you are doing just as your fathers did,"^{NASB} "You are just like your fathers,"^{NIV} "just as your ancestors used to do,"^{NRSV} "You do the same things your fathers did!"^{CJB} "Your ancestors did this, and you are just like

a generation is not always contiguous, but can spring up from time to time.

And what has been said about this generation – particularly the one Stephen identified as "your fathers"? The sweet Psalmist of Israel testified, "How oft did they provoke Him in the

By resisting the Holy Spirit these men confirmed they did not have a spiritual religion – for one cannot be spiritual while resisting the Holy Spirit.

them!"^{IE} and "Just as your fathers did so are you doing now."^{PHILLIPS}

There Is A Generation

There is the generation of the ungodly. John the Baptist called them a "generation of vipers" (Matt 3:7). Jesus called them the same (Matt 12:34; 23:33). God referred to "the generation of them that hate Me" (Ex 20:5). Asaph referred to "a stubborn and rebellion generation" (Psa 78:8). Jesus spoke of an "adulterous and sinful generation" (Mk 8:38). Solomon said, "There is a generation that curseth their father, and doth not bless their mother. There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness. There is a generation, O how lofty are their eyes! and their eyelids are lifted up. There is a generation, whose teeth are as swords, and their jaw teeth as knives, to devour the poor from off the earth, and the needy from among men" (Prov 30:11-14). Such

wilderness, and grieve Him in the desert! Yea, **they turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel**" (Psa 78:40-41). In Nehemiah's day, this is what was said of them: "Yet many years didst Thou forbear them, and testifiedst against them by Thy Spirit in Thy prophets: yet would **they not give ear**: therefore gavest Thou them into the hand of the people of the lands" (Neh 9:30). Isaiah said this of them: "But they rebelled, and **vexed His holy Spirit**: therefore He was turned to be their enemy, and He fought against them" (Isa 63:10).

Therefore, rather than choosing to identify with father Abraham through faith, they chose to link themselves with those who resisted the Holy Spirit of God. In them was confirmed the saying of Paul, "For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel" (Rom 9:6). Just so, all that are of the church, are not of the church.

THEY PERSECUTED AND KILLED THE PROPHETS, AND THE JUST ONE AS WELL

"⁶² Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just Ones; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers..."

Behold the change in the tone of

Stephen's words. He has now reached the point that Paul and Barnabas reached in the synagogue of Antioch Pisidia. After delivering a message much like Stephen is delivering to the Jewish council, it is written, "Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been

spoken to you: **but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles**" (Acts 13:46).

It is glaringly evident that this is the kind of circumstance Stephen now faces. Therefore, he will continue

Stephen presses the guilt of the Jews upon them, confirming that those before him are like their fathers – by Given O. Blakely

speaking with both candor and power, accelerating in his fervor and the charges that he levels against them.

PERSECUTING THE PROPHETS

“Which of the prophets have not **your fathers** persecuted? . . .” Other versions read, “Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute?”^{NIV} “Which of the prophets was not cruelly attacked by your fathers?”^{BBE} “Can you name a single prophet your ancestors never persecuted?”^{NJB} “Name one prophet your ancestors didn’t persecute!”^{LIVING} and “Your ancestors persecuted every prophet who ever lived.”^{IE}

Do not fail to notice who he

- ⇒ Hanani (2 Chron 16:10).
- ⇒ Jeremiah (Jer 15:10,15).

Jesus said the prophets were noted for being persecuted (Matt 5:12). And now Stephen says that generation of persecutors lives on. **Such people may have been able to trace their lineage back to Abraham, but they were not of his lineage.** They belonged to the generation that rejected Moses, tempted God and persecuted the prophets. In this text, we are beholding how God reckons guilt, and it is a fearful thing to consider.

KILLING THE PROPHETS THAT

- ⇒ Zecharaiah (2 Chron 24:21).
- ⇒ Urijah (Jer 26:23).
- ⇒ Jesus told the people their fathers killed the prophets (Lk 11:47; 13:34).
- ⇒ Paul also referred to this, stating specifically that the prophets were slain by their own people, the Jews (1 Thess 2:15).
- ⇒ There is also a well known Jewish tradition that says Isaiah is the prophet who was “*sawn asunder*” (Heb 11:37), having suffered martyrdom under Manasseh. As a point of interest, I provide the following. “Calmet, writing above a hundred years ago, says, ‘I am assured that the punishment of the saw is still in use among the Switzers, and that they put it in practice not many years ago upon one of their countrymen, guilty of a great crime, in the plain of Grenelles, near Paris. They put him into a kind of coffin, and sawed him lengthwise, beginning at the head, as a piece of wood is sawn;’ Pict. Bib.’ It was not an unusual mode of punishment to cut a person asunder, and to suspend the different parts of the body to walls and towers, as a warning to the living; see 1Samuel 31:10, and Morier’s Second Journey to Persia, p. 96.”^{ALBERT BARNES}

Do not fail to notice who he identifies as their fathers. It was not Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob! He connects them with their proper ancestors, even as Jesus did when speaking to those who opposed Him. Our Lord said – perhaps to some of the very people standing before Stephen – “ye are the children of them which killed the prophets”

identifies as their fathers. It was **not** Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob! He connects them with their proper ancestors, even as Jesus did when speaking to those who opposed Him. Our Lord said – perhaps to some of the very people standing before Stephen – “*ye are the children of them which killed the prophets*” (Matt 23:31).

The prophets certainly received their share of persecution – and it came from their own people. Permit me to cite a few of them.

- ⇒ Moses (Ex 17:4).
- ⇒ David (Psa 31:13).
- ⇒ Gideon (Judges 6:28-32).
- ⇒ Elijah (1 Kgs 19:1-21).
- ⇒ Micaiah (1 Kgs 22:26:27).
- ⇒ Elisha (2 Kgs 6:31).

SHOWED THEM

“ . . . and they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One . . .” Other versions read, “And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One,”^{NKJV} “And they killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One,” “They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One,”^{NIV} “and they put to death those who gave them the news of the coming of the Upright One,”^{BBE} “and they killed them which showed before of the coming of the Righteous One,”^{ERV} and “They killed those who predicted that a man with God’s approval would come.”^{GWN}

There are several prophets whose martyrdom is recorded. Here are some of them.

- ⇒ The prophets during the time of Jezebel (1 Kgs 18:4,13).

While the martyrdom of prophets who particularly chronicled the coming Messiah is not provided in detail, **the Spirit does say that the foretelling of Christ was the heart and core of the message of the Prophets** (Lk 24:25,27,44; John 1:45; Acts 3:18,24; 10:43; 26:22; 28:23; Rom 1:2; Eph 2:20; 1 Pet 1:10).

The link was so close between these people and the generation that slew the prophets, that Jesus said the blood of all of the holy prophets would charged to the generation that was living then. “*Therefore also said the wisdom of God, I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they shall slay and persecute: that the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation; from the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, which perished between the altar and the temple: verily I say unto you, It shall be required of this generation*” (Luke 11:49-51).

This is the manner of Divine reckoning. When people set themselves against God, and even opposes those who He sends, and to whom He has given insight and power, the credit for sins committed by such men as Cain, and even the Jews that stoned Stephen, will be credited against them. This is because they were animated by the same spirit, partaking of the same attitude and demeanor. Truly, *“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”* (Heb 10:31).

YOU BETRAYED AND MURDERED THE JUST ONE

“ . . . of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers . . . ” Other versions read, *“whose betrayers and murderers you have now become,”* ^{NASB} *“And now you have betrayed and murdered Him,”* ^{NIV} *“whom you have now given up and put to death,”* ^{BBE} *“You have now become the people who betrayed and murdered that Man,”* ^{GWN} *“the Messiah whom you betrayed and murdered,”* ^{LIVING} *“And now, you have turned against this righteous One and murdered Him,”* ^{IE} and *“now in our own day you have become betrayers and his murderers,”* ^{PHILLIPS}

This very point has now been made in nearly every sermon preached thus far in the book of Acts.

⇨ **PENTECOST.** *“Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified*

and slain” (Acts 2:23). *“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ”* (Acts 2:36).

⇨ **SOLOMON’S PORCH.** *“And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses”* (Acts 3:15).

⇨ **PETER AND JOHN BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN.** *“Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before*

surrounding witnesses, to hear men arguing about whether or not the Jews killed Jesus!

The irony is that the hardness of these people occurred **when** the door of salvation had been opened, a highway raised up for travel to glory, and a time of Divine acceptance was available. They were living in the day of salvation and the acceptable year.

I do not know that it is possible to accurately describe the wickedness of a generation, living during the zenith of the Sun of righteousness, who insist on living for themselves, and rejecting those who herald the glad tidings of good

How foolish it must sound before heavenly intelligences, and the cloud of surrounding witnesses, to hear men arguing about whether or not the Jews killed Jesus!

you whole” (Acts 4:10).

⇨ **PETER TO THE COUNCIL AND THE HIGH PRIEST.** *“The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree”* (Acts 5:30).

How foolish it must sound before heavenly intelligences, and the cloud of

things. What can be said of a generation that is lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God, yet choose to wear the name of Jesus, and claim identity with His church? **This is a day that cries out for godly and bold men like Stephen – men who will not hold their peace!**

THEY RECEIVED THE LAW BY THE DISPOSITION OF ANGELS, YET DID NOT KEEP IT

⁴⁶³ ***Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.”***

Stephen further identifies the wicked generation of which those standing before him are members. He is speaking in the power of the Spirit, and he is saying the kind of words the Lord speaks to such people. **In fact, before this is over, Jesus will stand up in recognition of this faithful man of God.** I am sure that in a generation that has an appetite for trivia, and is noted for glossing the

truth, there really is no place for men like Stephen.

RECEIVED THE LAW BY THE DISPOSITION OF ANGELS

“Who have received the law by the disposition of angels . . . ” Other versions read, *“You have received the Law by the direction of angels,”* ^{NKJV} *“as ordained by angels,”* ^{NASB} *“that was put into effect through angels,”* ^{NIV} *“as delivered by angels,”* ^{RSV} *“as it was ordered by angels,”* ^{BBE} *“by the ordinance of angels,”* ^{GENEVA} *“as transmitted by angels,”* ^{NAB} *“by decrees*

given by angels,” ^{NET} *“by arrangement of messengers,”* ^{YLT} *“received them by the hands of angels,”* ^{LIVING} *“the commands God gave through angels,”* ^{IE} *“as it was ordained and set in order and delivered by angels,”* ^{AMPLIFIED} and *“miraculously, by the hand of angels.”* ^{PHILLIPS}

The phrase *“disposition of angels”* means *“by the ministration of angels.”* That is, they delivered it and put it into effect. It was transmitted by them – carried from heaven to earth for the people. Elsewhere Paul refers to the Law

Stephen presses the guilt of the Jews upon them, confirming that those before him are like their fathers – by Given O. Blakely

as *“the word spoken by angels”* (Heb 2:2). Moses said that God came from Sinai with ten thousands of saints, which we judge to have been angels. *“And he said, The LORD came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them; He shined forth from mount Paran, and He came with ten thousands of saints: from His right hand went a fiery law for them”* (Deut 33:2). The Psalmist pictured the giving of the Law as taking place at Sinai, with God among thousands and thousands of angels: *“The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place”* (Psa 68:17). The Psalmist also alluded to Sinai in the eighteenth Psalm, and to the violent disruptions that took place there. In his description he wrote, *“And He rode upon a cherub, and did fly: yea, He did fly upon the wings of the wind”* (Psa 18:10). Paul says of the Law, *“it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator”* (Gal 3:19).

We have, then, the following Scriptural statements regarding the giving of the Law and angels.

- ⇒ God came to Sinai with ten thousands of his saints, or angels.
- ⇒ At Sinai God rode upon a cherub, or cherubim.
- ⇒ At Sinai God was among twenty thousand, even thousands of angels.

speaking for God. Because what was spoken was, in fact, the mind of the Lord, it is viewed as having been directly from Him – even though it was by means of a messenger. This perfectly accords with the manner through which John received the Revelation. It was given by God, yet when it was delivered to John, it came by means of an angel (Rev 1:1).

Something To Be Seen

Right here, the importance of sound doctrine can be seen. **Once men perceive the remarkable clash of the Divine nature with the human nature, it will be easy to see why angels spoke the Law.** Men could not have survived a direct confrontation with God. When men have a demeaning and common view of God, it tends to distort everything in Scripture, putting it out of their reach, so that it cannot be properly understood. That is why Jesus said to His critics, *“Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life”* (John 5:39-40). It is also why He said to the Sadducees, *“Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God”* (Matt 22:29). Their view of God Himself was skewed, and this tended to blind them to the truth of Scripture.

Stephen’s Point

The point being made is that this group of men had charged Stephen with

heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us” (Acts 6:14). No moral infraction! No defilement of the Temple! No failure to keep the commandments! No! Just as Paul pointed out later, the righteousness of the Law was being fulfilled in Stephen, just as it is in all who believe (Rom 8:4).

But what could be said of his accusers, and of the generation to which they belonged? None of them had ever charged an angel with unfaithfulness. In all of their history, there had never been a person bold enough to say that an angel told a lie, or was not faithful in the message he delivered. There was a general consent throughout their history that angels were, in fact, greatly to be feared. **Yet, even though angels had delivered the Law, yet they had not kept it, disregarding their words as though it was nothing more than the prattling of a man.**

AND HAVE NOT KEPT IT

“... and have not kept it.” Other versions read, *“have not obeyed it.”*^{NIV} *“do not keep it.”*^{CJB} *“haven’t obeyed those teachings.”*^{GWN} *“did not observe it.”*^{NAB} *“deliberately disobeyed.”*^{NLT} *“deliberately destroyed.”*^{LIVING} and *“you are the men who have disobeyed it!”*^{PHILLIPS}

I am alarmed that so many versions of Scripture misrepresent this text. The expression **“kept it”** and **“obeyed it”** are not at all synonymous. The Greek word for *“obeyed”* is ὑπακούσατε (hoop-ak-oo-sa-te), and means “to hearken to a command, to obey, be obedient unto, submit to.”^{THAYER} The Greek word translated *“kept”* is ἐφυλάξατε (e-foo-la-ska-te), and means “to guard, watch, have an eye upon, to protect, and care for.”^{THAYER}

So far as Scripture is concerned, keeping the Word **precedes** obeying it. Therefore Moses told the people to *“keep his commandments, and obey His voice”* (Deut 13:4). Again it is written, *“ye shall keep My statutes, and do them”* (Lev 20:8). Again we read, *“that ye may learn them, and keep, and do them”* (Deut 5:1). Again, and with even more specificity, it is written, *“to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them,”* or in order to do them (Deut 17:19).

No one had charged Stephen with not keeping the Law, or being a transgressor of the Law ... No moral infraction! No defilement of the Temple! No failure to keep the commandments

- ⇒ The Law was given by the disposition of angels.
- ⇒ The Law was ordained by angels.
- ⇒ The Law was spoken by angels.

All of this indicates that the voice the people heard when the Law was delivered was actually that of an angel,

speaking against the Temple and against the Law (Acts 6:13). Yet, they were part of a generation that had received the Law by the hands of angels – not a man – and had not kept it. **No one had charged Stephen with not keeping the Law, or being a transgressor of the Law.** The best charge they could trump up against him was as follows: *“This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law: for we have*

When Stephen said they had received the Law by the disposition of angels and had not kept it, he meant precisely what the word means. **They had not maintained that Law with care. Rather, they had mixed it with their own traditions, and diluted it with the doctrines of men.** They had not done like David, who hid the Word in his heart, that he might not sin against God (Psa 119:11). It was **not** their meditation night and day. They did **not** live by every word of God. Unlike Jeremiah, What God said was **not** the “joy and rejoicing” of their hearts (Jer 15:16). **That is precisely why they were disobedient.**

We do well to learn from this text, as well as others, the extreme jeopardy of not maintaining a firm grasp on the word of the Lord. **Our security in Jesus is**

directly proportionate to how we maintain a hold on the Word – particularly the Gospel. This is the very point that is being established in Hebrews 2:2; *“For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard Him.”*

Stephen was speaking to a people who were exposed to the Scriptures but did not have a heart-grasp of them. It was therefore easy for them to think in contradiction of the Law, all the while claiming to believe it.

A Similar Situation

I cannot help but observe that we are faced with a generation that is even inferior to the one to whom Stephen was speaking. We live in a time when, within the nominal church, the level of knowledge concerning the Word of God is appalling. This is in spite of the fact that we have a “more sure word of prophecy” – one that has been accomplished, declared, and expounded. Additionally, in the New Covenant, we have the administration of the Holy Spirit who strengthens, imparts, guides, and illuminates the Word in the hearts of God’s people. To be so ignorant in this day of salvation is a transgression of such magnitude, it causes my heart to tremble. There is no excuse for it, and God will not hold such a people guiltless.

CONCLUSION

The courage of Stephen is marvelous. Yet, we cannot stand in awe of it, or be moved to imagine that he was a kind of superman. **His courage and insight were the products of his faith.** Faith clarifies our vision and strengthens our heart, thereby producing a bold confidence. It also brings discernment, so that the person possessing faith comes to a point where he can distinguish between good and evil. **He needs no list of rules to do so, but has a character that is**

repulsed by sin and drawn to righteousness. It seems to me that in our time, there is a crying need for people of great faith. Good and profitable leaders will come from such a pool of people, just as surely as Stephen surfaced from a group strong believers in his day.

As long as the professing church continues to attempt to produce spiritual leaders by means of academics and institutionalism, it will remain in an

impoverished and emaciated state, for neither of those can produce what is required. Our churches must be the kind that bring people to faith, and then nourishes them in the faith, seeing to it that they grow up into Christ in all things. When this happens, men like Stephen will surface again, just as surely as he did in the early church, when the sense of truth was more acute and prevalent. May you be one of those who are noted for the love of the truth.

Our next Hungry Saints Meeting will be held on Friday, 8/3/2007. We will continue our current series of lessons on the book of Acts. The Thirty-fourth lesson will cover verses 43 through 53 of the seventh chapter: “THE STONING OF STEPHEN.” Opposition to the preaching of the Gospel has grown from objections registered in the Temple, to an aggressive arrest, and an accounting before the Jewish council. The ones who are hostile against those preaching the Gospel are growing more aggressive. This is largely owing to the fact that they have been unable to resist the reasoning being presented, or intimidate those who are spreading word about Jesus of Nazareth. Now, things rise to such a crescendo that Stephen will be murdered. Our meeting will begin at 7:00 P.M. You are invited to bring your family and friends for fellowship around the Word of God. Refreshments are served afterward, with a time of extended fellowship for everyone.

The Blakely Family: Given, June, Benjamin, and Eva
406 South Sergeant Street, Joplin, MO 64801

A place where believers can meet, fellowship, be edified, and express themselves.

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COMMENTARY on Hebrews: <http://wotruth.com/hebindex.htm>

COMMENTARY on Revelation: <http://wotruth.com/revelationindex.htm>

COMMENTARY on First John: <http://wotruth.com/1stjohnindex.htm>

COMMENTARY on Romans: <http://wotruth.com/Romans.htm>

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COMMENTARY on Colossians: <http://wotruth.com/Colossians.htm>

COMMENTARY on Second Corinthians: <http://wotruth.com/2Corinthians.htm>

COMMENTARY on Acts: <http://wotruth.com/Acts.htm>



REFRESHING WATERS RENEWAL SCHEDULE

***** TUESDAY, August 7th, 2007 *****

Breakfast	8:00 AM
Singing, introduction and prayer for speaker	9:00 AM
Sermon #1, Brother Robert Cobb, "He Is The Author and Finisher of Our Faith" (Hebrews 12:2)	9:10 AM
Song; introduction and prayer for speaker	9:55 AM
Sermon #2: Brother Boyce Mouton, "He Is Mediating the New Covenant" (Hebrews 9:15; 12:24)	10:00 AM
Break	10:45 AM
Song, introduction and prayer for speaker	11:20 AM
Sermon #3: Brother Al Stoner, "He Is Executing the Ministry unto Which He Was Appointed" (Isaiah 61:1-4)	11:25 AM
Lunch	12:10 PM
Singing, announcement of first testimony	1:30 PM
Sermonette #1: Brother Isaac Murphy	1:50 PM
Testimony #1: Sister Amanda Miller	2:00 PM
Singing; introduction and prayer for speaker	2:15 PM
Sermon #4: Brother Gordon Souder: "He Is Speaking from Heaven" (Hebrews 12:25)	2:30 PM
Break	3:15 PM
Singing, announcement and prayers for first two Sermonettes	3:45 PM
Sermonette #2: Brother Jonathan Blakely	4:00 PM
Sermonette #3: Brother Paul McCulfor	4:10 PM
Break	4:20 PM
Dinner	5:00 PM
Singing, introduction and prayer for speaker	6:20 PM
Sermon #5: Brother Leon Bates, "He Is Causing Glory to Be Brought to God" (Ephesians 3:21)	6:45 PM
Singing; offering; in. . .roduction and prayer for speaker	7:30 PM
Sermon #6: Brother Aaron Hutchcraft, "He Is Nourishing and Cherishing the Church" (Ephesians 5:29)	7:45 PM

***** WEDNESDAY, August 8th, 2007 *****

Breakfast	8:00 AM
Singing, introduction and prayer for speaker	9:00 AM
Sermon #7: Brother Tim McCulfor, "He Is Building His Church" (Matthew 16:18)	9:10 AM
Song; introduction and prayer for speaker:	9:55 AM
Sermon #8: Brother Gene Hutchcraft "He Is Producing the Fruits of Righteousness In the People of God" (Philippians 1:11)	10:00 AM
Break	10:45 AM
Song; introduction and prayer for speaker	11:20 AM
Sermon #9: Brother Jeremy Williams, "Through Christ, GOD Is Supplying All Our Need" (Philippians 4:19)	11:25 AM
Lunch	12:10 PM
Singing, introduction and prayer for speaker	1:45 PM
Sermon #10: Brother Jason Hutchcraft, "He Is Giving Eternal Life to All That God Has Given to Him" (John 17:2-3)	2:00 PM
Singing, introduction and prayers for sermonettes and Testimony	2:45 PM
Sermonette #4: Brother Matthew Cobb	3:00 PM
Sermonette #5: Brother Jonathan McCulfor	3:10 PM
Testimony #2: Mike Knapp	3:20 PM
Break	3:35 PM
Open Forum (thoughts on Renewal theme, or something seen as a result of the meetings, Led by Brother Aaron Hutchcraft) ..	4:00 PM
Dinner	5:00 PM
Singing, introduction and prayer for speaker	6:30 PM
Sermon #11: Brother Jonathan Ingram, "He Is Making Intercession for Those Who Are Coming to God" (Hebrews 7:25)	6:45 PM
Songs, offering, introduction and prayer for speaker	7:30 PM
Sermon #12: Brother Michael Blakely, "He Is Causing the Consolation of His People to Abound" (2 Corinthians 1:5)	7:45 PM

***** THURSDAY, August 9th, 2007 *****

Breakfast	8:00 AM
Singing, introduction and prayer for speaker	9:00 AM
Sermon #13: Brother Tony Parker, "He Is Giving His People An Understanding of God" (1 John 5:20)	9:10 AM
Song, introduction and prayer for speaker	9:55 AM
Sermon #14: Brother Victor Knowles, "He Is Maintaining Fellowship with the Saved" (1 Corinthians 1:9)	10:00 AM
Break	10:45 AM
Song; introduction and prayer for speaker	11:20 AM
Sermon #15: Brother Ricky Sims, "He Is Causing Grace to Reign Through Righteousness to Eternal Life" (Romans 5:21) ...	11:25 AM
Lunch	12:10 PM
Singing, announcement of next two testimonies	1:45 PM
Testimony #3: Sister Betty Cobb	1:55 PM
Testimony #4: Sister Tascille King	2:10 PM
Singing	2:25 PM
Discussion led by Brother Aaron Hutchcraft	2:35 PM
Break	4:10 PM
Dinner	5:00 PM
Singing; introduction and prayer for speaker	6:30 PM
Sermon #16: Brother Mike Zaucha, "He Is Preparing A Place for Us" (John 14:2-3)	6:45 PM
Songs, offering; introduction and prayer for speaker	7:30 PM
Sermon #17: Brother Given O. Blakely, "He Is Bring Many Sons to Glory" (Hebrews 2:10)	7:45 PM
The Lord's Supper (Mediation by Brother Dave Kennedy)	8:30 PM