

Text: Acts 7:1-60

Title: Stephen's Preaching and Death

Truth: Israel repeats its pattern of rebellion against God.

Date/Location: September 27, 2023 at FBC

Introduction

The Jewish high priest and affiliates were going to KILL one of their own people because of a difference over beliefs. We think this is terrible today, thanks to our heritage as Christians and Americans. Force is no way to convert anyone. Jews of that day had the OT requirements in mind, that a false prophet had to be stoned to death. But they could not prove that Stephen was a false prophet. They could not contradict him; they could not deny the miracles; they could not stand the conviction about sin and being stiff-necked. All they could do was get him out of their sight and out of their hearing.

Remember, Stephen is answering the charges that were levied against him:

1. Blasphemous words against Moses and God.
2. Blasphemous words against the temple and the law.
3. Jesus of Nazareth with destroy the temple and change the customs which Moses delivered to us.

I. Preaching of Stephen

Stephen makes the case that the Jewish people have a historical pattern of rebellion against God and his messengers, and that it is no different at the present time because they have rebelled against God by rejecting Jesus and persecuting His followers. They prove the point by killing Stephen.

Stephen hits all the highlights of Jewish history, including:

- A. **Abraham** is an example of obedience to God. God revealed instructions to the Hebrew patriarch, and he was obedient even though God had not given him a settled place to rest his foot. God gave some prophetic information about a future judgment of

Israel, and the covenant of circumcision. Again, Abraham obeyed what he was supposed to do.

- B. The Patriarchs and **Joseph**. Fast forwarding from Abraham three generations, Stephen explains that the 11 patriarchs were jealous of Joseph and sold him into slavery.

The modern Jews were jealous of the Christians and their rapidly growing following. The only way they felt they could overcome that is by threats of violence.

Despite the forefathers' hatred, aborted attempt to kill Joseph, and then selling him as a slave, they could not undermine the plan of God to use Joseph to *save* their fledgling nation. What an irony: they hated him; God used him to save them. Joseph is thus a type of Jesus in this way—a persecuted savior.

- C. **Moses**. Centuries later, the people were oppressed by Pharaoh. God arranged for a Jewish man to be brought up in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and to become a powerful advocate for them. But they rejected him so that he fled to Midian for more than a generation of time, 40 years.

God again revealed Himself, this time to Moses. He told Moses that He had heard the cries and seen the oppression of His people and was sending Moses to deliver them. The one rejected by them became their God-sent ruler and deliverer. He indeed brought them out of Egypt, despite their initial rebellion against him.

- D. More about **Moses**. He was put in place as a prophet and they were supposed to listen to him, as they were called to hear the Prophet that would come later. He received the Law from God on Sinai. But the people rejected him (v. 39). They turned back to Egypt. They wanted other gods to follow. They offered sacrifices to a golden calf. They turned to the works of their own hands. They turned to Moloch and Remphan. As a result, God would turn them over to Babylon, and gave them up to their false worship. That was His judgment upon them.

- E. Israel had the additional privilege of having the tabernacle in their midst. It was the “tabernacle of witness” which testified of the presence and power of God. God drove out the nations before

them under Joshua until the time of David. God does not really live in a temple made by hands...but He had a special dwelling place among the nation of Israel. And yet...

- F. The present-day leaders resisted the work of the Holy Spirit in them, just as their fathers did. Stephen presses home the application of his sermon: you are rebellious against God, just like they were.
1. Your fathers persecuted the prophets (Joseph, Moses, etc.) No more examples need be given—they know what he is talking about with the persecution of Jeremiah and others.
 2. Your fathers killed the prophets who foretold of the coming of the Just One. Isaiah is reputed to have died at the hands of wicked King Manasseh.
 3. You, San Hedrin, betrayed and murdered Jesus.
 4. You have received the Law by the direction of angels but have rejected it.

Stephen is very direct here. No beating around the bush.

II. Murder of Stephen

- A. The leaders were “cut to the heart.” Their behavior shows this was not godly conviction but rather they felt hatred because he was accusing them of wrongdoing when they felt they were justified in all that they did.
- B. Stephen was full of the Spirit at this time (like 6:15 indicates). He foresaw the throne before which he shortly would be standing as a martyr.
- C. The council descended into violence. Such behavior should be way below their dignity. But it ended up like mob violence. They had no sanction from the Roman governor to be able to kill another person. I wonder if anyone was prosecuted for this by the governor? Only Rome had the power to put someone to death (John 18:31). One commentator mentioned that regarding the temple, the San Hedrin might have had jurisdiction. But that argument is inconsistent because that same group of people

turned Jesus over to be crucified. They testified to Pilate that it was not lawful for them to put anyone to death (whether by stoning or crucifixion).

- D. A young man named Saul (Greek: Paul) was there and encouraging the whole wretched situation.
- E. Thus the council fulfilled yet again the words of Stephen—"which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?" And you too...
- F. Despite this, Stephen called out to God to receive his spirit and—note this remarkable godliness—ask God not to charge his murderers with this sin. I believe God answered that prayer, but this did not absolve those murderers of all their sin. To experience that forgiveness, they themselves would have to pray to God in repentant confession.

Conclusion

Case closed: the Jewish people have a historical pattern of rebellion against God and his messengers, and that it is no different at the present time because they have rebelled against God by rejecting Jesus and persecuting His followers. They prove the point by killing Stephen.

Hasten to hear this: Gentiles are no different! People tend to be proud rebels—openly or quietly does not matter. With enough power at their disposal, people will do terrible things to other humans in their pursuit of godless self-autonomy.

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