

Acts 040
Where Does God Live?
Acts 7:46-53
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Let's take our Bibles this evening and open them to the seventh chapter of the Book of Acts and verse 46. Acts 7:46. I decided to entitle this "Where Does God Live?" Because a lot of people think they have a corner on God. You know, He only works in our denomination or our church, or He only works this way or that way. And that's what Stephen, in his speech, is going to be dealing with tonight. Stephen is a very important character because he transitions us from the influence of Peter, who's the dominant guy early on-- But it's through Stephen's life and ministry that we're introduced to a man that will become Paul. Stephen being the bridge between the two. Reviewing a little bit here, because last week Russ Miller spoke. You may have forgotten what we're studying. We're studying the book of Acts. The story of Stephen has four parts to it. We have Stephen's arrest, end of chapter 6. Stephen's defense, which we're reading now before the Sanhedrin. Stephen's stoning, end of chapter 7. And then that's going to lead to the third persecution against the newborn church.

Stephen (Acts 6:8-8:4)

- I. Stephen's Arrest (6:8-7:1)
- II. Stephen's Defense (7:2-53)
- III. Stephen's Stoning (7:54-60)
- IV. Third Persecution (8:1-4)

So, we're still there with Stephen giving his defense before the Sanhedrin. And it's probably the longest sermon in the book of Acts, maybe the longest sermon in the entire Bible, when you think about it. Stephen, who is accused of speaking against the temple, is brought before the religious/political authorities of first century Israel, a group called the Sanhedrin. And he asked if the charges against him are true. You see that in Acts 7:1 So this gives Stephen, who is the first deacon of the early church, as a as a Hebrew, as a Jewish person a chance to, right there on the spot, give an impromptu speech selectively covering Israel's history, demonstrating her guilt-- that's basically what he's

doing. So, the first four parts of it we've covered. Stephen first talks about Abraham, which is where Israel began. Abraham's partial obedience when he was called from the Ur of the Chaldeans, verses 2 through 5. And then Stephen, verse 6 through verse 38 talks about the nation of Israel having a habit of getting things right the second time. She gets it wrong the first time, but she gets it right the second time. And he proves his case by looking at the life of Joseph, how the nation rejected him early on, but accepted him later. And then he shows the same pattern with the life of Moses. The nation rejected Moses when he was 40 but received him as their lawgiver and redeemer. When Moses was aged 80.

Stephen's Speech - Acts 7

1. Abraham's partial obedience (7:2-5)
2. Israel's initial rejections and later acceptances (7:6-38)
3. Israel's early rebellion against Moses (7:39-41)
4. Israel reinterpreted Moses' teachings through a polytheistic framework (7:42-45)
5. Neither the Tabernacle nor Temple were intended as permanent habitations of God (7:46-50)
6. Current generation imitating these same rebellions (7:51-53)

So, Stephen's point is: you're doing the same thing right now. You're rejecting Jesus. But you will accept him later, in the events yet future. And then from there, verses 39 through 41, he talks about how the nation, within forty days, rebelled against Moses. Moses was on the mountain receiving the law of God, he was only gone for forty days there on Mount Sinai. And it didn't take long for the nation, that God had brought out of the Egyptian bondage, to make a golden calf. So that's in verses 39 through 41. And then you get down to verses 42 through 45 and Stephen there explains how the nation took, Moses's clear teaching about monotheism-- you know, there's only one God-- and very quickly throughout her history, right up to the eve of the Babylonian captivity, became polytheistic. Worshipped many gods. And Stephen's point in all of this is: the nation of Israel really hasn't done that well historically. And they're not doing well right now, is what Stephen is getting to.

So now you move into part five of this, where verses 46 through 50, he starts to talk about the tabernacle that Moses built in the wilderness, which paved the way to the

temple that Solomon would build. And Stephen here explains that neither the tabernacle nor the temple were ever intended as permanent habitations of God. So, if God switches His program-- which He's done in the church age, and indwells the church and the individual members of the church and leaves the temple-- that shouldn't be a big shock to you, because neither the Tabernacle or the temple were ever intended to be the final place that God would dwell.

So, let's pick it up here in verse 46. Stephen continued to speak before the Sanhedrin, a totally unrehearsed, impromptu speech under pressure. He says there in verse 46: *"David found favor in God's sight, and asked that he might find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob."* So, all the way back in the book of Second Samuel 7:2-3, David, the second king of the United Kingdom, following Saul, had a wonderful idea that he wanted to build a tabernacle or a permanent temple for God to live in. In Second Samuel 7:2-3, it says: *that the King (David) said to Nathan the prophet, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells within [the] tent curtains." Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that is in your mind, for the Lord is with you."* So, David, really impromptu, didn't really like this idea of a mobile temple, which is what the tabernacle was. And he wanted God to have a permanent dwelling place, a temple. And he expressed this idea to Nathan the prophet. And Nathan the prophet said, 'Go for it, build it.' But then God interrupts things in Second Samuel 7 And God said, 'You're not going to build a house for Me. I'm going to build a house for you.' So, David says to God, 'I'm going to build you a house, Lord.' And the Lord says, 'No, you're not going to build a house for Me. I'm going to build a house for you.' And although David was speaking of a literal house-- a temple-- God was using the word house there in Second Samuel 7 to describe a dynasty that would come through David's line. And so, this becomes the whole context for the giving of the Davidic Covenant. A very important covenant, which you see described there in Second Samuel 7:12-16. Notice what it says. It says: *"When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendants after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men, but my loving kindness shall not depart from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house..."* so here the word "house" is being used as a dynasty through David's line. *"...Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever;*

your throne shall be established forever." In accordance with all these words and all this vision, so Nathan spoke to David.

So, David wanted to build a literal house for the Lord. And the Lord says, 'No, I'm going to build a house metaphorically; a dynasty through you.' And through you, David, is going to come a forever throne and an eternal kingdom. So this is why Matthew's gospel, written to Hebrew Christians, painstakingly traces the genealogy of Jesus back to David. And then from David back to Abraham, because Matthew is trying to show that Jesus is the fulfillment of this Davidic covenant. He is the one that will bring in this forever throne and eternal kingdom. A prophecy as of to this day which has never been fully fulfilled. And it won't be fulfilled completely until the millennial reign of Jesus Christ. It's kind of an interesting play on words. 'I'm going to build you a house, Lord.' And the Lord says, 'No, David, I'm going to build a house metaphorically through you, a dynasty.' And that's how the Davidic Covenant came into existence 1000 years before the time of Christ. And this is what Stephen is summarizing there in verse 46. And then you go down to verse 47 and it says: *"But it was Solomon who built a house--"* a literal house—"for Him." For God. So, God didn't want David to build him a literal temple because David was a man of war.

You know, all you do is read through the Samuel books and every other chapter, he's in some battle or fight with something or someone. And David had blood on his hands. And God said, you're not really qualified to build me a literal house. I'll build you a dynasty, but you're not qualified to build me a literal house. That privilege is going to go to your son, Solomon. So, the temple building privilege went to David's son, Solomon. Solomon then being the third king of the United Kingdom. Saul, the first king, who I think was an error in the sense that they picked him. Because Saul came from the wrong tribe. He came from the tribe of Benjamin. And the kings are supposed to come from which tribe? --Judah. According to Jacob's prediction in the book of Genesis, chapter 49:10, which we're slowly but surely getting to Sunday mornings. Saul ran from about 1051 to 1011. David ran from about 1011 to 971, and then Solomon ran from 971 to 931 BC. So, each of the first three kings of Israel, they each reigned for forty years. David is the second king. He wants to build the temple. God says no, that privilege is going to go to your son Solomon. Because unlike you, David, Solomon is a man of peace and not war. In fact, in the name Solomon you might recognize the word *shalom*. The word Solomon is derived from the Hebrew word *shalom*, which means peace. You might

recognize in the word Solomon, the word Jerusalem. God's special city. And so, God gave Solomon this privilege of building this literal temple for the Lord. And in First Kings 6:1, Solomon starts construction on that about four or five years into his reign, about 966 BC. So, Israel has four temples total. Two past, two future. The one I'm talking about here is the Solomonic temple, eventually destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon on the eve of the Babylonian captivity. Then the nation of Israel returns from the captivity and thanks to the assistance of Haggai and Zechariah, who motivated Israel to get back to work, they finally rebuilt the temple, and it was temple number two. This is the temple that Herod came along and beautified. John 2:20. It's the temple that's built in the book of Ezra 1-6. Zerubbabel being the political leader of the nation when they came back from the Babylonian captivity. Haggai and Zechariah in that time period, giving prophecies motivating the children of Israel to rebuild that temple in the midst of much opposition. The younger men thought temple number two was great. The older men knew better because they remembered temple one, how beautiful the Solomonic temple was. And they cried when they compared temple two to temple one, because it paled by way of comparison. But Herod, John 2:20 came along and around the time of Christ, he enlarged the temple, beautified the temple. Took him, according to that verse there, forty-six years to do it.

And so that's the temple that's standing during the time of Christ. And this is the temple that Stephen is referencing here in Acts chapter 7. And then you come to verse 48: *"However, the Most High--"* and keep in mind how proud they were of this temple, these Jews. I mean, they were so proud of temple number two. And look at what Stephen is saying by way of contrast. *"However, the Most High does not dwell in houses made by human hands; as the prophet says."* so the title of this lesson is "Where does God Live?" And Stephen is saying, God lives wherever He wants. He's not dependent on this temple number two that you all are so proud of. And as you kind of travel through Stephen's sermon here, he's already introduced this idea many times because he's talked about the manifestation of God several times in Hebrew history. And those manifestations have absolutely nothing to do with the tabernacle or the temple. So back in verse 2, Stephen says, God manifested himself to Abraham when he was living in Ur of the Chaldeans, which later became Babylon. Today it's modern-day Iraq, far east of the map, in a place called Ur. And you see Stephen making a reference to that in verse two. And then when you go down to verse 10, it talks about how God

manifested Himself to Joseph when Joseph was in Egypt, which is southwest of the nation of Israel.

And then you go down to verse 38. And that's where we learn that God manifested himself to Moses at Mount Sinai. And then you go over to verse 30. That's where God manifested himself to Moses, about when he was about age eighty at a place called Midian. So, if God can manifest himself in Mesopotamia, Egypt, Sinai and Midian. Obviously, God is not confined to a temple. He's not confined to a building. He's not just like today. He is not confined to a denomination or a particular group. He manifests Himself wherever He wants. And this did not sit well with the Sanhedrin because they looked at temple number two as the end all be all, spirituality. God lives here and He doesn't live anywhere else. And Stephen has woven all his material together on the spot, introducing story after story, demonstrating that God dwells wherever He wants. He's not dependent on this temple. And the problem with the nation of Israel is they looked at the temple as a good luck charm. As long as the temple exists, nothing bad can happen to us. Kind of like the United States of America, right? As long as the twin towers exist, nothing bad can happen to us. And we see how fast that changed on 9/11.

So, nations have a tendency to look at buildings and objects as some kind of sign of security. And that's how the Sanhedrin looked at temple number two. They looked at it as literally a good luck charm. And they're not the first generation to do that. Back in the book of Jeremiah 7:4, Jeremiah there gives a temple sermon about temple number one. Because the Jews thought the Babylonian captivity could never happen. Because after all, temple number one is standing that Solomon built, and everything's fine. And so, Jeremiah in chapter 7 really preaches an entire sermon called the Temple Sermon against this mindset within Judaism, that the temple is a good luck charm. Here's just one line from that sermon. It's in Jeremiah 7:4. Jeremiah says: *"Do not trust in deceptive words, saying, 'This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord.'"* So, they were going around saying this over and over again, 'This is the temple of the Lord,' repeating it, treating the temple as sort of a good luck charm. That's what Jeremiah is dealing with in his day. Well, this is exactly what Stephen is dealing with here in Acts chapter 7. This mindset that as long as temple number two is up and running and beautiful as it is, nothing bad could ever happen to us. And so, Stephen is

saying, God doesn't need this temple. He lives wherever He wants. And he has given numerous examples in this historical account of God living wherever He wants.

This is why they didn't like Jesus, because one of the disciples called Jesus' attention to temple number two. Jesus turned right around and said, the whole thing's about to be destroyed. Matthew 24:1-2. It says: *Jesus came out from the temple and was going away when His disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him.* As if Jesus can't see them, you know? I mean, why are they pointing out the buildings to Him? Because that's where their trust was; in these sorts of national monument type religious monuments. And one of the things I always appreciate about Jesus is how direct He is in responding to people. He doesn't really mess around a lot. Have you noticed that? Verse two: *And He said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down."* And He's saying the whole thing is about to come down. Speaking prophetically of something that would happen forty years into the future where Titus of Rome would come in the horrific events of AD 70, destroy the city and the sanctuary. Josephus tells us that the temple during those events would catch on fire. The gold in the temple would melt and ooze down between the stones of the temple, and it would dry there. And the Roman soldiers, to get their hands on the gold, would take the temple apart, stone by stone, exactly like Jesus said they would. Why? Because the nation of Israel is under discipline, Deuteronomy 28, for having rejected their king in the first century.

So, Stephen, when he starts talking like Jesus and saying things like this, the Jewish leadership doesn't like Stephen any more than they appreciated Jesus for saying things like this. This is what Jesus said on Palm Sunday, which, by the way, is coming up in our calendar. It's where Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey and presented His messianic credentials to the nation. Luke 19:42-44 says: *saying, "If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes..."* In other words, you could have had the kingdom if the nation's leadership had received Me. *"...For the days will come upon you when your enemies (Titus of Rome) will throw up a barricade against you, and surround you and hem you in on every side--"* Josephus says that's exactly what Titus of Rome did in AD 70. *"--they will level you to the ground and your children within you--"* strong pro-lifers right there—"and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation."

So, Jesus in Matthew 24 predicts the destruction of temple number two in the Olivet Discourse and on Palm Sunday. As I've tried to explain, that's exactly what happened. In fact, when you go to Israel today, you see the remains of it. The temple literally was taken apart stone by stone. And there's a rock pile of what used to be the temple available for people to look at 2000 years later. You know God means what He says and says what He means. So that's what God thinks about your good luck charm. You know what you're trusting in is about to be disassembled. Totally disassembled. And of course, they didn't believe it until it happened. Now you go to verses 49 through 50 and he quotes the prophet Isaiah to demonstrate that God never intended the temple, or the tabernacle before it, to be a final habitation of the Lord. Verse 48: *"However, the Most High does not dwell in houses made by human hands; as the prophet says..."* What prophet? --Isaiah. You should know this by reading your own prophet. Isaiah 66:1-2 is quoted here in Acts 7:49, *"Heaven is My throne--" not the temple-- " earth is the footstool of my feet; What kind of house will you build for me?" Says the Lord, "Or what place is there for my repose? Was it not my hands which made all these things?"* God says, 'Do you really think I need a building to live in? I'm the creator of the heavens and the earth. So, if I switch My program away from My presence in the physical temple to the church and indwell the individual members of the church, that shouldn't surprise you at all.'

As Stephen is speaking to the Sanhedrin, God says, just look at your history; Egypt, Midian or Sinai. You can't confine My revelations or My manifestations to a single place. If I switch to human beings as my new temple, that shouldn't surprise you at all. That's kind of the point that Stephen is getting at. And that's exactly what God has done in the age of the church. First Samuel 16:13-14 describes the ministry of the Spirit in the prior age. It says: *Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David--* Not in David. "Upon him." --*from that day forward. And Samuel rose and went to Ramah. Now the spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord terrorized him.* So, in the prior age of time, the spirit came **upon** people, not **in** people, and the spirit could leave people. But Jesus announced a change in the upper room. Things will be different in the age of the church, beginning in Acts 2. He says there, *"I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever..."* See how different that is in comparison to the prior age where the Spirit departed from Saul?

Not so in the church age because the Spirit is with you forever. *"...that is the spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because he abides with you and will be in you.* Not upon you, inside of you-- forever. I put together a chart to help us see the difference. In the prior age, the Holy Spirit came upon people externally. Today He comes within people internally. In the prior age, people could get saved and receive the Holy Spirit later to do some great work like be a king or build a tabernacle. But today what's normative is, you receive the Holy Spirit inside of you forever the moment you trust Christ as Savior. In the prior age, the Spirit's involvement with people was largely temporary. That's why David prayed in the Psalms, "take not thy Spirit from me." In our age, He's inside of us forever. As far as I can tell, in the prior age, not everybody had an experience with the Holy Spirit that was a believer. But today, everyone that's a believer in Jesus Christ has an experience with the Holy Spirit because He comes inside of us forever at the point of faith alone in Christ alone.

So, there is a tremendous *pneuma*-- if I can throw a fancy word at you-- a pneumatological change right there in Acts chapter 2. It's huge. Unless you understand the shift, you don't really appreciate who we are in God's plan and program. I mean, we are literally privileged people to the max. We have a relationship with the Holy Spirit that those in the Old Testament-- not only could they not even dream about it, they couldn't even understand it. And don't get me wrong, the Spirit was active in the Old Testament because Jesus says to the disciples: 'You know Him.' So they knew something about the Holy Spirit. But He wasn't inside of them forever. That was new. That was a shift. And that's the Christians exhortation to morality. First Corinthians 6. Why do you go to a temple prostitute? Don't you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit? Don't you know that when you do that, you just took the Holy Spirit with you into that sin? See that? See most people today, the way they motivate Christians is you're going to lose your salvation. Arminianism. The twin of Arminianism is Calvinism, which says, well, if you live a life of sin, you are never saved to begin with. Paul knew nothing of either Arminianism or Calvinism. Those are systems that arose roughly 1600 years after Paul left the Earth. What Paul says is, if you do that kind of sin; sue each other, join yourself to a temple prostitute, sexual immorality-- Don't you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit? In other words, you're dragging the Holy Spirit into that sin, and as a result, you're grieving the Spirit, Ephesians 4:30.

You know, don't let the sun go down on your anger lest you give the devil a foothold. Well, why not Paul? Because if you do that, you're going to grieve the Holy Spirit who's inside of you forever. Don't quench the Spirit, he says. So, the way we exhort people to moral living within modern day Christianity is just far afield from the way Paul thought and taught. And Paul's exhortations to morality come from this idea that our body is now the permanent dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. So Stephen is saying, the Holy Spirit is about to leave that place. In fact, he's already left it. And he's taken up new residence in the individual believer in the church age. And don't let that surprise you, because God never intended the temple, to be His permanent residence. That's Stephen's point. And he's saying this to people that looked at the temple as their good luck charm.

So that's what he's doing in verses 46 through 50. And then you get to the end of his sermon, verses 51 through 53, which is really the clincher of the whole thing. And he's standing before the Sanhedrin here in part six, and he's saying: 'This generation, the one I'm talking to, the leadership is making the exact same mistakes that every Hebrew generation has made up to this point in time. They are rejecting the truth. Just like Abraham was partially obedient, just like the nation of Israel with Moses and Joseph. They have a tendency to get things right the second time. Just like the nation rebelled against Moses after only forty days had passed, just like the nation became polytheistic. This generation is doing the exact same thing. And you're looking at this temple as if everything's okay because it's the good luck charm. It's the twin towers. Nothing bad can happen to us as long as we have these twin towers. So, as you look at verses 51 through 53, he accuses the nation of doing what it's always done. Number one, resisting the Holy Spirit, verse 51. Number two, being prophet killers. I mean, they killed their ultimate prophet, Jesus. They're about ready to kill Stephen, who's functioning as a prophet, in the sense that he's calling the nation back to repentance, verse 52. And you're a bunch of lawbreakers, verse 53. So, take a look here at verse 51. He accuses them of resisting the Holy Spirit. It says: *"You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears..."* What pleases God is not just a Jew. But a believing Jew. And if you're not a believing Jew who is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, then you're nothing more than someone that's stiff necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears. Paul in Romans 2:28-29 says, *For he is not a Jew who was one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh, But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is*

not from men, but from God. John the Baptist speaking to the Jews, Matthew 3:9 says: *"and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father'; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham."*

God was never impressed with a Hebrew just because they were Hebrew. What God is impressed with is the Hebrew within the Hebrew people or nation that's a believer.

Stephen says, you guys aren't even believers. You're uncircumcised in heart. God has not done that inward work on your heart. So, he says, you men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, look at Acts 7:51, *"[you] are always resisting the Holy Spirit;"* so this nation has always resisted the Spirit of God and it's doing it again. That's his point. Very important verse, because Calvinism through its TULIP acronym teaches the "I" in tulip is irresistible grace. Irresistible grace in Calvinism basically means that if you're one of the elect and God is calling you to Himself-- to quote the movie Star Wars: "Resistance is futile." I mean, you're coming to Jesus whether you want to or not. God is actually giving you the gift of faith, regenerating you so that you can believe. And the people that receive those blessings supposedly are the elect. You know, the rest of the world that's not of the elect therefore are ordained to go to hell. Calvinism-- irresistible grace. Steele, Thomas, and Quinn, in their book *The Five Points of Calvinism*, described the "I" in tulip as follows:

"The 'efficacious' call of the spirit, or irresistible grace' is the special inward call of the Spirit [that] never fails to result in the conversion of those to whom it is made. This special call is not made to all sinners [but] is issued to the elect only."

So, it's "Resistance is futile." Well, if this is a true theology-- and no theology is true unless it's Biblical, right? --then what in the world do you do with this statement by Stephen, who accuses the nation of always resisting the Holy Spirit? How do you resist the Holy Spirit if the Holy Spirit, through irresistible grace, can't be resisted. You see that? The truth of the matter is, you've got many examples in the Bible of people resisting the Holy Spirit. People do it all the time. It's true that the Holy Spirit is convicting the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment, but God is not overriding people's volition. If you want to resist the Holy Spirit and go to hell, then you're free to do that. And people do it constantly. Stephen here is accusing the nation of Israel of always resisting the Holy Spirit. But the Calvinists are saying: irresistible grace. So, I have a choice. I can either believe someone's philosophy. Or I can believe what the Bible says.

Last time I checked, this is Sugar Land Bible Church, right? Not Sugar Land Calvinist church. Not Sugar Land Arminian church. Sugar Land Bible church. We hold everybody's theology subservient to Scripture. It doesn't matter how popular a theology is. It has to be validated in Scripture or it's not worth holding on to. It's nothing more than a philosophy imposed over the Scripture. And I'm showing you an example where the "I" in Calvinism collapses. It's right there in verse 51. You always resist the Holy Spirit. People were resisting the Holy Spirit in the days of Noah. That's why it says there in Genesis 6:3, *Then the Lord said, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, because he also is flesh; nevertheless his days will be one hundred and twenty years."* I mean, God's Spirit is convicting these people for one hundred and twenty years. They resist him for one hundred and twenty years. And God says, that's enough. And the flood came. Now, how are you going to run that through the Calvinist view of irresistible grace? That verse doesn't fit there either. But the good news for Israel is there's coming a future point in time where they will not resist the Spirit any more.

Back to verse 51. *"You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in hearts and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit--"* Now here's his point-- *"you are doing just as your fathers did."* You're repeating the same exact mistakes. Unfortunately, there's coming a time where they won't repeat the same mistakes, where they'll get it right the second time, which is their pattern. But getting it right the second time is better than not getting it right at all, I guess. It's this generation here, the Sanhedrin, that's not getting it right the first time. That's his point. Demonstrating it from their own history. When they get it right the second time, Zechariah 12:10 says, *"I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a first born..."* Lord, we're so sorry (as the tears flow) that we've messed it up for so long. But we're here now, and the Lord says, I'll take you because of that word grace. Unmerited favor.

So, Stephen's first point as he's wrapping up his sermon is: They always resist the Holy Spirit. His second point is: They are prophet killers. Every prophet that comes to them, they kill. Verse 52: *"Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?"* Now, Jesus made a statement about this in Matthew 23:35 to this same group of

leaders, in this case the Pharisees. He said: *"so that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you (Pharisee leaders) murdered between the temple and the altar."* And Abel's story is in Genesis, as you know. The Zechariah that he's referring to here is in Chronicles. The Jews didn't divide up the Chronicles books like we do-- First Chronicles, Second Chronicles. It was just the last book Chronicles. So Abel's story, Genesis. Zechariah's story, Chronicles. And what he's saying there is: From beginning to end there's a pattern here. Every prophet that God sends, you end up abusing, mistreating, and in most cases, killing. Verse 52, *"...They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One..."*

So, what were all these prophets doing? Well, part of their ministry was announcing the coming of the Messiah. Jesus made a reference to this on the Emmaus Road after He rose from the dead. He said in Luke 24:27 it says: *Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in the Scriptures.* Verse 44 says: *Now he said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all these things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled."* So, as the Jewish nation is rejecting all these prophets, they're also rejecting the ministry of those prophets which was designed to point towards Jesus Christ. Verse 52, *"...Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They kill those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, (the Messiah, in other words) whose betrayers and murderers you now have become."* So, what he's saying is: 'You're repeating the exact same sin. Except yours could be worse, because the one to whom the prophets pointed to, showed up in the flesh. And you said, we will not have this man to reign over us.' And they rushed Him through the judicial system, broke every evidentiary rule they had in the process to get Him turned over to Rome as fast as they could to get Him dead and taken off the scene. Now I understand what David Ragan was saying in his talk at our conference, that really, it's all of us that killed Christ, so there's plenty of blame to go around because Jesus died for the sins of the world. I mean, I get all that, but that's not Stephen's point here. The Bible makes that point elsewhere. But that's not what Stephen is saying here. Stephen is focused on the guilt of first century Israel. That's his point in weaving all this material together.

So, if you want information on how all of us killed Christ, I'd have to send you to another part of Scripture for that. I wouldn't send you to this part of scripture because Stephens point, as he's speaking to the Sanhedrin, is you're guilty. You did it. You're repeating the same error of the past. And then he moves into verse 53. And he calls them after Spirit resistors and prophet killers, he calls them law-breakers. Verse 53: "*You who received the law as ordained by angels, and yet did not keep it.*" Now notice this reference to the law as given by angels. That is another kind of jab at them. He's mentioned the Sinai Revelation earlier in the speech, but he kind of closes this sermon by reminding them of how God manifested himself at Sinai and gave the law. And in fact that Sinai Revelation was so overwhelming that it's described here as being mediated by angels. So, the greatest manifestations of God, Stephen is saying, have nothing to do with this building and this good luck charm that you all are so proud of. That's how he's closing the sermon; by bringing this to their attention, reminding them of stuff he's already said earlier. Galatians 3:19 says: *Why the law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made.*

So, the law of God was mediated by angels. Galatians 3:19. Hebrews 2:2 says the same thing. It says: *For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty...* So, this is yet another reference, verse 53, that the law of God given at Mount Sinai was mediated by angels. And so, the nation of Israel had the law of God. The revelation that was given at Mount Sinai was so profound that it's described as angelic. And yet you broke all the laws. That's what he's saying. He's accusing them of law breaking. They broke all the laws that God gave them through angelic manifestations. I'm reminded of what, uh, I think it's Acts 15:10. I think it's Peter there that's going to speak at the Jerusalem Council as all these Gentiles are getting saved and coming into the church. And the Jewish leadership has to figure out, are we going to put all these Gentiles under the law of Moses? And you could see why they thought that way. Because that was the pattern going back to Sinai, that if you're a Gentile and you want to become a proselyte and learn of Yahweh and walk with the Lord, you've got to come under the law of Moses. That's why Ruth told me, Naomi, Ruth the Moabitess, your God will be my God. Your people will be my people. So, the church in Acts 15, as all of these Gentiles start getting saved after Paul's first missionary journey into southern Galatia, they've got to make the same decision. Do we put all these Gentiles under the law to join the church? And I love what

Peter says in Acts 15:10. *"Now therefore why do you put God to the test? By placing upon the neck of the disciples (Gentile converts, in other words) a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?"* So, Peter's point there in Acts 15 as they're making this decision is: Us Jews have done a terrible job keeping God's law. So why in the world would we put the Gentiles under that law that we ourselves can't keep?

This is what Stephen is getting at. You rejected angelic manifestations, which, by the way, wasn't at the temple. It was at Mount Sinai. God doesn't need the temple. He gave you the law and you broke all of His laws. Now, who did the law point to? Anybody know? It pointed to Jesus. I mean, it's one thing to break all the laws. It's another thing to reject the one that the law points to. Jesus said in John 5:39 and 46, to the Jews, *"You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these (the Scriptures) that testify about Me... For if you believe Moses--"* now, who was Moses? --the lawgiver, the one through whom the Sinai revelation came after being mediated from God to man through angels. *"...For if you believe Moses--"* Jesus says-- *"you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me."* Stephen wraps up his thoughts here by saying, you know, you all are not just Spirit resistors; you're not just prophet killers, but you're lawbreakers. Right down to your rejecting the one that the law pointed to, which is Jesus whom you guys turned over to Rome to be executed. He was your king. He was the one that could have brought in the kingdom. But you rejected Him. So, it's really quite a talk here, wouldn't you say? Not exactly seeker-friendly stuff. And after being given the opportunity to talk, verse 1, he weaves all this history together from verse 2 to verse 53. He gets to the final part of it, and his point is the current generation is imitating all these rebellions. So, his hearers-- the Sanhedrin-- all stood up and gave him a standing ovation. Just like we gave David Ragan at our church on Sunday. We all appreciate what he said. We stood up and gave him a standing ovation. Yay! --Oh, I'm sorry. That's not what happened. They were so angry at this that they didn't even take any time to deliberate. They killed him right there on the spot in verses 54 through 60.

Stephen's Stoning (Acts 7:54-60)

- A. Audience's reaction (54)
- B. Stephen's dying vision (55-56)
- C. Stephen's death (57-60)

The audience's reaction, verse 54. Stephens Dying vision, verses 55 through 56. Stephens death, verses 57 through 60. So, we'll study that martyrdom next time. I don't know if we're going to have a sellout crowd next week to talk about a martyrdom. But we'll study that next week, including the reality of dying grace. I think there's a special grace given by God to the believer that's moving through death's door. That dying grace is all over Stephen, as you're going to see. And Stephen will go down in history as the first martyr of the church age. First deacon selected, Acts 6. First martyr, Acts chapter 7. And in fact, Jesus will be portrayed in that paragraph, verses 54 through 60, of being in the standing position, as Stephen's soul separating from his body is moving from earth to heaven. Jesus is never in the standing position. Every reference you see to Christ in His present session at the Father's right hand, He's always seated. Here, He's standing. And I'll try to make the case that I think He's standing in this one instance because of honor that the Son of God is showing to this man Stephen, who would not compromise and suffered a martyr's death. So, take a look, if you could, for next week, at verses 54 through 60, in your private reading time.