

Acts 039  
Apostasy's Velocity  
Acts 7:39-50  
February 14, 2024  
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Let's take our Bibles this evening and open them to the Book of Acts chapter 7:39. We're in the middle of our verse-by-verse teaching through the book of Acts. Currently in Acts 7, dealing with a man named Stephen. He was the first deacon of seven appointed by the apostles in Acts 6. And he really becomes the central character in chapter 6, chapter 7, and he's largely responsible for the persecution that breaks out in chapter 8. And as we're going to see as we go through this, he's largely responsible for the Lord planting a seed in the heart of a man named Saul of Tarsus, who will become one of the greats of Christianity, named Paul, renamed Paul in Acts 9.

- 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, kind of the bridge between Peter and his early ministry in Acts and then Paul on the horizon is this man named Stephen. He's basically a bridge between those two great apostles. And Stephen, after he's appointed as deacon, is arrested. His arrest is given to us in 6:8-15. And it ends with Stephen being brought before the Sanhedrin-- which was the Jewish governing political body-- Acts 7:1. And he's given an opportunity to speak. And he doesn't waste the opportunity. He gives a tremendous sermon. One of the greatest and probably one of the lengthiest sermons recorded for us in the whole Bible. And basically, what Stephen does as a Jew is he condemns first-century Israel because of their national decision to reject Jesus as their king. So, it's a sermon, but it's a selective history lesson that he weaves his material together. He obviously is somebody that knew Jewish history and Old Testament scripture cold, because he's recalling all these things on the fly, on the spot. And he's using Israel's history selectively to reach a conclusion. The conclusion is essentially: Israel got it wrong back in the first century when they rejected Jesus. And it's not one of those sermons, you

know, that you would find in the Dale Carnegie course *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. Because the Sanhedrin, the Jewish leadership hear Stephen's speech they're so angry at what he says that they kill him right there on the spot. That's at the end of the chapter. So then, Stephen becomes the first martyr of the Church Age. Not only is he the first deacon of the Church Age, but he is the first martyr of the Church Age. So, by my count, this sermon has basically six parts to it. Number one, which we've already covered. Chapter 7:2-5, he starts out with Abraham's obedience as Abraham. Then Abraham was called out of the Ur of the Chaldeans, and he points out that yes, Abraham believed God, and he obeyed God, but he did not totally obey God. So, his obedience was partial at best. And what he's saying is Israel, from its roots, it's foundation—which is God's calling for Abraham-- has always been marked by obedience most of the time kind of thing, but not complete obedience. So, if I were to grade Abraham's obedience, I'd probably give it like a C+ because he doesn't completely obey God. And Stephen points that out.

### **Acts 7 – Stephen's Speech**

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)

Now this is part of their history they don't want to hear about because people have a tendency to rewrite history, to make their own country look better than it is. And Stephen won't let them do it because he's quoting their own scripture. He's quoting the Septuagint here, which is the Greek translation of the Old Testament created a couple hundred years roughly before the time of Christ. So, he's using their own history to show that Israel out of the gate, never had it completely right with God in the sense of obedience. And then he moves into verses 6 through 38 of chapter 7, where he says Israel has a tendency to get it right the second time. They don't get it right the first time. Israel's initial rejections and later acceptances. And he proves his point by focusing on Joseph in verses 6 through 16. This is a man we're studying him on Sunday mornings. A man whose own brothers rejected him, left him for dead, threw him in a pit, sold him

to the Ishmaelites or the Midianites who in turn sold him down into Egypt. That was when Joseph was about the age of 17. But by the time Joseph reached age 30 and through the providence of God, was elevated to second in command over all of Egypt, then the nation, the brothers that rejected Joseph now submitted to his authority. So, you got it right with Joseph, not the first time, but the second time. And if that weren't enough, now he does the same thing with the life of Moses the lawgiver, verses 17 through 38. You know, Moses, when he was 40, killed an Egyptian. And the next day Moses comes and wants to work out differences between fighting Israelites and God—but the Israelites say to Moses, you're not going to kill us like you did the Egyptian yesterday, are you? So, they rejected Moses as a leader. And that's when Moses flees into Midian for forty years. And then with the burning bush incident at age 80, he goes to Israel. And the second time around, forty years later, the nation of Israel submits to Moses authority. But they didn't do it right the first time, but they got it right the second time. So, Stephen, by narrating this historical material, is saying the current generation is doing the exact same thing. You're rejecting Jesus as your king, so you're getting it wrong the first time around. But don't panic. Don't worry. You're going to get it right the second time in events related to the return of Jesus Christ and the tribulation period.

And so now we pick it up with part three of the sermon, where he deals with Israel's early rebellion against Moses. Yeah, you submitted to his authority the second time, but it didn't take this nation very long before they decided to rebel against Moses there at Sinai. And so, he deals with that now in verses 39 through 41. And so that's where we pick it up, verse 39. Stephen speaking, still impromptu, to the Sanhedrin. He says, *"Our fathers were unwilling to be obedient to him, but repudiated him, and in their hearts turn back to Egypt,"* Now notice this expression *"in their hearts."* That's where sin always starts, right? It starts in the heart. Proverbs 4:23 says, *Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it flow the springs of life.* Why did the nation of Israel turn on Moses so fast? Because that's what was in their hearts. It's kind of like, you can take the nation of Israel out of Egypt, but taking Egypt out of the nation of Israel is much harder. Because they wanted to go back to Egypt, as we're going to see. And they rebelled against Moses. Verse 39 says, *Our fathers were willing to be obedient to him, but repudiated him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt.* Where is Egypt? Egypt is there in the southwest. And the nation of Israel in the Sinai as they were in route to

Mount Sinai. And that Sinai wilderness is very, very hot. Doctor Randall Price, one of my friends who has spoken here before, has been there, and he says, I can see why the people rebelled all the time there, because it's hotter than the daylights there. Hotter than Texas, believe it or not. And so, you get thirsty real fast. And if you go without food, you get what my wife calls hangry-- not angry, but hangry. She says you must be hangry. Meaning I need to be fed, I guess. So it's easy to get hungry and thirsty out there. And so, they rebelled against Moses there, and they wanted to go back to Egypt because at least in Egypt, there was security. Numbers 11:5 says, *The Israelites in that wilderness area, We remember the fish which we used to eat free in Egypt, the cucumbers and the melons and the leeks and the onions and the garlic.* I mean, we didn't have to pay for it. It was provided to us. So freedom is a great thing. But the problem with freedom is it doesn't bring the security the human mind wants. Because if a person is free, they have to completely and totally depend upon the Lord for their needs to be met. And that's a hard thing to do because it requires a walk of faith. So rather than be free, a lot of times we just say, well, I'd rather just be a slave, because at least when I was a slave, I had some security. I got my three hots and a cot, as they say. You know, three hot meals and somewhere to sleep. Never mind the fact that you were a slave when you were in that condition.

You know, a lot of people talk about freedom, how we want freedom, we want to increase freedom and liberty. But there's always a trade off when you move away from slavery into freedom, the security that you're used to disappears. And that's what the nation of Israel was facing there. And a lot of them in their hearts, just wanted to repudiate Moses and go back to Egypt. And they got busy while Moses was on Mount Sinai making a golden calf. And it didn't take them long to do this. It took them forty days. Notice verse 40, it says, *"Saying to Aaron, 'Make for us gods (plural) who will go before us;'"* so notice that they didn't want to worship God, monotheism, singular God anymore. They wanted to worship gods. Now where in the world did they get the idea that there was a polytheism? Multiple gods? Well, they got that idea from 400 years in Egypt. That was the Egyptian pantheon. They were polytheistic, as is most of paganism. So they said, we want to go back into that system, and we like the security that system offered us. And they kind of rewrote history a little bit because they forgot the taskmasters whip and the mandatory building that they had to do under Pharaoh. Early chapters of Exodus talk about it. But yeah: we were slaves, but at least we had security.

And I'm not sure I really like this monotheistic idea, because this is a God that wants us to trust him, and I'm not sure I really want to do that.

I guess it's much more comfortable being a slave. So, now there's a full blown rebellion going on in the Sinai Peninsula right after the greatest redemptive event in human history other than the cross has just transpired. The greatest redemptive event in human history, other than the cross of Jesus Christ is the Exodus. The ten plagues, the parting of the Red Sea, the closing of the Red Sea on the Egyptians. It doesn't get any better than that. And despite all of these things that God had done in and through Moses, they turned on him very, very fast. Second part of verse 40 says, and this is the people speaking, *"For this Moses who led us out of the land of Egypt--we did not know what happened to him."* Well, I know what happened to him. He went up to Mount Sinai to receive God's Law. And he was gone for just a mere forty days. But that forty-day absence caused them to reject monotheism. All the revelation of God that they received up to this point in time is monotheistic. They wanted to reject monotheism and go back to polytheism that they had been under in Egypt for 400 years. God is later going to say to Israel, this [Deut. 6:4] *"Hear Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!"* So they rejected that.

And Moses is gone for forty days. He's on Mount Sinai receiving God's law. And they said, we don't really know what happened to Moses. Well, they actually did know what happened to him. They just in their hearts didn't want to follow him anymore. How do we know it's forty days? You'll find it in Exodus 34:28. It says of Moses, *So he was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights.* You'll see that number in Exodus 24:18, *Moses entered the midst of the cloud as he went up to the mountain; (Mount Sinai) and was on the mountain forty days and forty nights.* So that's why I've entitled this lesson-- I have to come up with the titles of the sermon for the computer, which is kind of good for me. It forces me to think through, what is this whole thing about? I mean, how would you capture this whole thing in a title? And the title I picked is The Velocity of Apostasy. And it even rhymes, right? How fast apostasy can happen. Apostasy is the departure from known truth. And it happened fast. It happened in forty days. Exodus 32:8, of these things says, *They have turned aside quickly-- see how fast it happened? --[from] of the way which I commanded them.*

This is the same kind of thing that Paul is expressing consternation about in the book of Galatians. In Galatians 1:6, Paul planted those churches in southern Galatia on his first missionary journey. He wrote to them under a year later. This from Syrian Antioch about AD 48 to 49. And he was startled how fast those churches, you know, that had been grounded in grace, had left the doctrine of grace and turned to legalism. And so, he says in Galatians 1:6, *I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel.*" So, they abandoned Paul, not on some minor issue. You know, it's like the gospel, which is the whole deal with Christianity. So, apostasy, departure from known truth can happen very, very quickly. It doesn't take multiple generations for it to occur. The church where I met my wife in Southern California, when we were going through high school-- although we didn't know each other at that point. But that church was outstanding. It was dispensational. It was Bible teaching. And at some point, the pastor there got sort of bitten with the bug of 'I want influence' kind of thing. In other words, we've got to make this church bigger. And I was happy with its size. It was growing. People were getting saved. I mean, I received really my whole tutelage as a young Christian in and through this church. Through the pastor there, the youth pastor, and later the college pastor. And then I remember going away to graduate school. Well-- college and then later graduate school. So, I was gone from there for-- maybe, I don't know-- five years, something like that. And I remember coming back to that church thinking it was going to be the same place. And it was completely different. First, it was much bigger. There was a new building, a new mortgage. There were a lot of new people coming. But it was the same pastor. That's what made the whole thing so weird. And they were teaching these sort of, you know, motivational type talks with a few Bible verses thrown in. Saying things like, you know, We don't really mention blood in this church because that will scare away the unchurched. We don't really talk about prophecy and things like that because that will scare away the unchurched. But they had all these things they were bringing in. You know, the one-minute manager kind of thing was very popular at the time. These sort of, you know, very practical type lessons. And I just remember thinking to myself, wow, it really it really didn't take long for this church to shift, theologically, in the really something that it wasn't before.

And so, this is the truth. I mean, this happens to schools, this happens to movements, this happens to churches. It happens all the time. And you don't have to really sit around for decades and generations to watch it happen. Sometimes it happens

very, very fast. That's what Paul is upset about in the book of Galatians. I can't believe it happened so soon, is what he's saying. And in the case of Moses, Steven is saying it took forty days. It took forty days from seeing the greatest redemptive event in the history of mankind, other than the cross, and experiencing it-- from that time Moses then leaves and goes to Mount Sinai for forty days, and it took just a lousy forty days for them to turn around and want to go back to the bondage that they were in for 400 years, on the grounds that "at least we had security." It's a tragic thing that's happening here. The velocity of apostasy. Verse 41, it says, "At that time they made a calf and brought a sacrifice to the idol," now, how do they make this calf? First, who was leading the charge into the creation of the golden calf? Not the janitor or somebody, but the high priest of the whole nation. A man named Aaron. And we have a description of this in Exodus 32:22-24 when Aaron is confronted with this giant calf that they've made. Coming, probably from their remembrance of what they saw in Egypt. When Moses returns from Mount Sinai and confronts Aaron in Exodus 32:22-24, *Aaron said, "Do not let the anger of my lord burn; you know the people yourself, they are prone to evil."* In other words, Aaron says it's not my fault, these people's fault. I'm just giving them what they wanted. And that's really the beginning of the end, by the way, when pastors make up their mind to give people what they want. Pastors are not in the business of giving people what they want. I mean, if you went to a physician and he told you what you wanted to hear instead of what you need to hear, he or she would lose their medical license. But we're living in this spiritual environment where churches are completely built on telling people what they want to hear. And if you want to pack the place out, you just have to leave out a few topics that they need to hear but may not want to hear. So that's what happened with Aaron. Exodus 32:23 says, *"For they said to me, 'Make a make a god for us who will go before us; for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.'"* So he's gone for forty days and this is how they act. You know, when the cat's away, the mouse will play, right?

Verse 24, this is Aaron's excuse for this golden calf. *"I said to them, 'Whoever has any gold, let them tear it off.' So they gave it to me, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf."* Wow, look at that. The whole thing happened accidentally. Nobody wants to take responsibility for sin. That reminds us of the Garden of Eden, doesn't it? Genesis 3:11-13, where God confronts first Adam, then Eve about the rebellion that happened. These verses say, *And He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" The man said, "The*

woman whom You--" So it's not my fault, God. It's the woman's fault. It's really Your fault because You gave me the woman. Boy, there's some real the buck never stops here kind of mentality. *The man said, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate."* So, then God kind of condescends to their level. And it says in verse 13, *Then the Lord said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" And the woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."* So, the joke is, you know, Adam blamed Eve, Eve blamed the serpent, and the serpent didn't have a leg to stand on. Right?

I remember a long time ago; I was a substitute teacher taking some kids on a field trip. And there was a Frisbee, which was the school's property. And we brought the kids to a lake, and I was literally standing, I don't know five feet away from this kid that took the Frisbee, school property-- and I watched him do this I mean, I'm not blind. And, I was less blind then, than I am now. It was back in the days when my eyesight was working really well. But I watched this kid take the Frisbee and just throw it into this giant lake. So, I went up to the kid and I said-- I can't remember his name, Johnny or something. I said, "What happened to the Frisbee?" And this is, honest to God, what came out of this little kid's mouth. He says, "The lake took it." And I thought, wow, well, there we are. That's human nature. We just don't want to accept responsibility for our actions. So that was Aaron's excuse when he was confronted about the golden calf. Verse 41 says, *"At that time they made a calf and brought a sacrifice to the idol--"* and look at this-- *"and were rejoicing in the works of their hands."* They were just thrilled at what they had created. We don't want the true God. We don't want monotheism alone anymore. We like the Egyptian theology, polytheism. And so, they made something out of Egypt that they could remember. And they were rejoicing because they created it.

So, when you get into any kind of mindset which says you create your own religion, you're moving down the wrong path. You know, people say things like this: well, I don't believe in a God that would send anybody to hell. I believe in a God of love. Well, I believe in a God of love too. But I also believe in a God of holiness. And when you take one attribute of God love and you magnify it-- I mean, Rob Bell in his book *Love Wins* talks about Universalism; everybody goes to heaven in the end. That's basically what he's saying in that book that came out, I don't know, ten years ago. Emergent church mentality. When you take one attribute of God and you magnify it and you take another attribute of God like holiness, and you shrink it, what you have at the end of the



day is not the God of truth. You have a God that you've created. And so that's what they were doing with this golden calf. And they were just thrilled with what they had had created. And it's Aaron, the high priest, you know, leading the charge here.

So, here's Stephen before the Sanhedrin, verses 39 through 41, bringing this history up. Saying, you know, this nation has always been rebellious against God. Why should you Sanhedrin folks be any different? It's what Stephen is getting at. And then he moves to part four of his sermon, verses 42 through 45, where he talks about how Israel later on in her history reinterpreted Moses' teaching through a polytheistic framework. And this polytheism thing, many gods, it's not just something that the Exodus generation got involved in. You're going to find this all the way through Israel's history, this problem with idolatry. They're going to be in the land for 800 years, which is a long time, and polytheism is just going to dominate them from beginning to end. To the point where God has to finally do something to get rid of polytheism and idolatry amongst his people. So, He sends them into the Babylonian captivity to correct the problem. This is where Stephen is going now with his selective history lesson. Verse 42: *"But God turned away and delivered them up to serve the host of heaven;"* What's the host of Heaven? The host of Heaven is the stars. And the moon and the sun. Not the s-o-n, Son but the s-u-n, sun. So over in Deuteronomy 4:19, God warned them about worshipping the luminaries. And He said, there: *"beware not to lift up your eyes to heaven and see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the hosts of heaven, and be drawn away and worship them and serve them, those which the Lord your God has allotted to all the peoples under the heaven."* So he warned them about star, luminary, sun, moon, and star worship. And despite these warnings, this is exactly what characterized them, not just in Moses' time, but from the Joshua generation all the way to the eve of the Babylonian captivity. This is what they were caught up in.

That's why when you study the creation days, God has an order. A lot of people are today playing a lot of games with the creation days. They don't want to take them as 24-hour days. They don't want to put them in chronological order. And when you start messing with the creation days like that, you mess with a major message that God sent to Israel and why He did it the way he did it in creation. Genesis 1:3, *Then God said, "Let there be light;" and there was light.* That's day one. Then on day four-- you guys with me on this? Day four comes after day one. Can I get an amen on that? It's not until day four that the luminaries come into existence. The sun, the moon and the stars. It

says in Genesis 1:14, *Then God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night, and let them be for signs...and for days and for years."* So, notice day one is light. But you don't have the sun or the moon, which reflects the light or the stars until day four. So where did the light come from if the sun, moon and stars did not come into existence until day four? Answer: God is the source of light. In fact, the Bible many times says God is clothed in unapproachable light. God is completely and totally capable of creating light, having light. He is light without the sun. And He did it in the order that He did it, because He knew the depravity of the human heart to worship the sun. Every time people worship the sun, God is saying, go back to the creation days and see that there was light before the sun ever came into existence. I'm the source of light, God says. Worship Me. Don't worship this indirect object that I've created to contribute to light. So that's why the order of the creation days is a big deal. Because God is condemning sun worship that He knew in human history would develop based on the order in which He created. That's why when you mix up the creation days and don't take them in chronological order, you lose that message.

And then you go to the last two chapters of the Bible, the Eternal State. And this is what we read in Revelation 22:5. *And there will no longer be any night; and they will not have need of the light of the lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever.* It's repeated in Revelation 21:23. Last two chapters of the Bible, the Eternal State. *And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb.* So, notice how everything started. Light with no sun, moon or stars. Notice how everything is going to end. Light with no sun, moon or stars. I mean, you won't need the sun s-u-n in the eternal state because everything will be illuminated by the Son, you know, Jesus Christ s-o-n. So, the first chapter of the Bible and the last two chapters of the Bible specifically say it's foolish to worship the sun, the moon, and the stars because they're not the source of light anyway. God is the source of light. Light, heat, all these things existed before the sun, moon, or stars ever were created. And they will continue to exist long after God has done away with the sun, moon and stars. So that's the foolishness of worshiping these luminaries instead of God violates the history at the beginning of the Bible, and it violates the prophecies given at the end of the Bible. God did everything in a particular order to prevent this idolatry. But God's elect nation ignored all of that. And they started to serve, it says here, verse 42, *"But God turned away and delivered them up to serve the host of heaven;"*

And as you look at the second part of verse 42 and most of verse 43, it's a quote from Amos 5:26-27. Now the date of the prophet Amos would be about 755 BC. So, what he's pointing out is this idolatry existed in the time of Moses, and it kept right on going through Israel's history. You know, at least up until the time of Amos. And then after that, on the eve of the Babylonian captivity. It says: "*as it is written in the book of the prophets, 'It was not to Me that you offered victims and sacrifices forty years in the wilderness, was it, O House of Israel? You also took along the tabernacle of Moloch (paganism) and the star of the god (little g) Rompha, the images which you made to worship.'*" So, this is Amos now condemning the nation of Israel in 755 BC for carrying over polytheism that laid into Israel's history. So, what does God do? Look at the very end of verse 43, Amos still being quoted here: "*'I also will remove you beyond Babylon.'*" That's why the Babylonian captivity took place. That took place and they were taken into captivity as a nation in 586 BC. And they were in Babylonian captivity for seventy years. And what was the point of that seventy-year captivity? It was to purge the nation of Israel of polytheism. It was to purge the nation of Israel of idolatry. It was to purge the nation of Israel from worshipping these stars and statues and things of that nature. And when they came out of the captivity, seventy years later, Israel still had a lot of problems, but not idolatry, not the worship of statues. Babylonian captivity took care of that. In fact, that's where arose-- from that point on, leading into the New Testament era-- the Pharisees; who started off very well intentioned. We're going to purge idolatry completely from this nation. And to do that, we're going to build a fence around the law. We're going to add extra-Biblical regulations to keep us away from idolatry and Sabbath breaking. And it started off well-intentioned, but by the time of Christ, the tail was wagging the dog and legalism had taken over. That's why Jesus says, you've made null My word through your traditions. The traditions of the Pharisees had become more important than God's Word. So, they went through this pendulum of being idolaters. They went into divine discipline for seventy years. They came out of that. Polytheism was gone. The statues were gone, but legalism was alive and well.

So, watch that in your personal life because God can deliver you from something. But sometimes we're so afraid of going back to what it is we were delivered from, we move into rules and regulations that are outside the biblical text.

And sometimes those rules and regulations take priority over God's Word. Christians are very adept at creating rules and regulations for things that you don't find in the pages of God's Word. And so, you can go from one pendulum, and you could swing back and get into something that's just as bad, if not worse. So, stay out of the ditch of idolatry. Stay out of the ditch of licentiousness. But an equally difficult ditch to stay out of is the pharisaical ditch.

I remember I had a roommate. And he had a big struggle in his life with alcoholism. And the Lord helped him with that. But as he came out of alcoholism, he started to get almost crazy with rules and regulations in the apartment. Because he was so afraid of going back into alcoholism that he started, in his mind, erecting all these rules and regulations, which in his mind took precedence over biblical truth. So, he basically banned from our apartment any kind of anything that had alcohol in it, like, I don't know things that you-- I'm not much of a chef, as you could probably tell. By the way, never trust a skinny chef-- right? So, things that you put on your food that might have an alcohol ingredient in it, he banned it under the authority of Jesus because that reminded him of his past. And at one end of the stick, you want to sympathize with somebody like that, because you don't want them to revert backwards. But at the end of the stick, I could see legalism coming into his mind as he was starting to promulgate all these rules and regulations. That's basically what happened to Israel. They went from one pendulum right back to another pendulum.

But here Stephen is pointing out the time when they were in polytheism. And that's why the Babylonian captivity happened. Verse 44: *"Our fathers had the tabernacle of testimony in the wilderness, just as He who spoke to Moses directed him to make it according to the pattern which he had seen."* And he's pointing out the tabernacle, which was a precursor of the temple. The temple would not be built until Solomon's day, 966 BC. The nation of Israel at this point has not even entered the land of Canaan. They're still wandering in the wilderness. So, what did they use for a temple? They weren't in the Land of Israel. They weren't in the city of Jerusalem. Solomon would not come until much later to rebuild the temple. So, they had something called the tabernacle, which is like a mobile temple. You set it up, it had furniture in it. There were specific instructions regarding how to carry the furniture. And if you messed any of this stuff up, the holiness of God killed a person right there on the spot.

Inside the Holy of Holies was the Ark of the covenant, which you know about from the Indiana Jones movies, right? I hope you know more about it from the Bible. We'll take a second idol there, the Indiana Jones movies. You can learn about it. But the whole thing screamed with monotheism. And they would set it up during the day. And when it came time to move, because they were mobile, because they weren't yet in the land, they had to take it down and carry it a certain way. And then they got to the next campsite. They set it up again. I mean, there's just mind-numbing detail about this in the book of Exodus, the Book of Numbers. And so, Stephen is bringing up this tabernacle because the whole thing was about monotheism. One God. And as you go down to verse 45, it says: *"And having received it in their turn, our fathers brought it in with Joshua upon dispossessing the nations whom God--"* see how God is singular there? it wasn't "gods" that helped them capture Canaan. It was God. Singular. *"--upon dispossessing the nations whom God (singular) drove out before our fathers, until the time of David."* So, they had this monotheistic tabernacle, and Joshua used it, obeying God to dispossess the Canaanites. After the first generation coming out of Egypt fell into unbelief, God started working with the next generation. And they, under Joshua and Caleb, entered Canaan. Brilliant conquest of Canaan. God said, you're coming back into this land 400 years later. That's what he told Abraham, your people will. So that's fulfilled in the book of Joshua. And it was God (singular) and this monotheistic tabernacle, this mobile temple which helped them accomplish that feat.

So, Steven is pointing out that this nation, despite its monotheistic roots was in rebellion against God until the eve of the Babylonian captivity, because they moved into polytheism. When you understand this background, you start to understand what Jesus was doing in the sermon on the Mount. Jesus in the sermon on the Mount is always getting back to the original intent of the Law of Moses when it was uncontaminated by idolatry. And he's also getting back to the original intent of the Law of Moses, when it was uncontaminated by pharisaical regulations. A lot of people misunderstand the sermon on the Mount. They think it's somehow Jesus is correcting Moses. You know, Jesus versus Moses. Or Moses versus Jesus. And that's not true at all. Jesus is trying to get back to what Moses originally said. And He's trying to get people to understand Moses's true intent before Moses teaching was corrupted through polytheism and legalism. That's why He keeps saying things like this. "You have heard that the ancients were told" and "but I say unto you." For example, in Matthew 5:21-22, *"You have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not commit murder' and 'Whoever commits*

murder *shall be liable to the court.* 'But I say to you--' going back to Moses' original intent-- *"that everyone who is angry with his brothers shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell."* And he's talking here about how Moses Law was originally aimed at the heart. Because the 10th commandment was: Thou shalt not covet, which is an internal sin. I mean, I could covet things without physically doing anything. Coveting is desiring something that rightfully belongs to somebody else. And you desire that for yourself, even though God has forbidden that from you. Someone else's career, money, house, car, spouse, fame. Whatever it is. So according to the law of Moses, my heart has committed sins that my hands haven't gotten around to yet. Idolatry did not reveal that to the people any more than legalism did. It caused them to focus on externals. But Jesus and the sermon on the Mount says, let's go back to what Moses originally meant. "You've heard it said," "but I say unto you." Later on, in the sermon on the Mount, He says [Matt 5:27-28], *"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery'; but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart."* In other words, according to the law of Moses, the law of God sits in judgment on the heart. Legalism never brought this out any more than idolatry brought it out. So, when you can see all this extra biblical stuff that Israel was buried in for all these centuries, you can understand what Jesus is doing in the sermon on the Mount. He's not contradicting Moses. He's getting back to Moses' original intent.

And by the way, believe it or not, the people that listened to Jesus preach, they loved it. Because it says here in Matthew 7:28-29, *When he had finished these words--* what words? The sermon on the Mount-- *the crowds were amazed at His teaching. For he was teaching them as one having authority. Not as their scribes.* Because the scribes were always quoting Rabbi this, rabbi that Rabbi Hillel, Rabbi Shammai. They were quoting what's called the *halakhah*, which is traditions built on top of God's word. They were quoting the *Gemara*, which is extra biblical commentary related to the legends of the fathers. They were quoting the Mishnah. The Mishnah has to do with rabbinical decisions, and sometimes they were quoting Kabbalah. Kabbalah is mystical kind of interpretation of the Old Testament law. I don't want to get too into politics, but Trump's daughter, Ivanka-- she is completely and totally wrapped up in Kabbalah along with her husband. Isn't her husband's name Jared? Jared Kushner. Completely and

totally wrapped up in Kabbalah. That's what's sort of interesting about the Trump so-called peace plan, which actually played a role in dividing the nation of Israel. It came from the handiwork of Jared Kushner, who, along with his wife, is totally wrapped up in Kabbalah, which is mystical interpretations of the Old Testament. I'm not trying to take political sides or anything, I'm just trying to make you aware of different things going on in our world. Jesus would have nothing to do with Kabbalah. He would have nothing to do with Mishnah. He would have nothing to do with Gemara. He would have nothing to do with Halkhah. And He had everything to do with: let's get back to what Moses originally said. And the people, when they heard it, couldn't believe what they were hearing. Because here's a guy that went back to the original source, Moses, and wasn't quoting all this extra biblical type of stuff, which was nothing more than a reaction against idolatry. Extra Biblical Revelation.

So, what's Stephen getting at here? He's getting at the fact that the nation of Israel, throughout our history, has had a real habit of reinterpreting Moses' teachings through a polytheistic framework. And in fact, that's what led to the Babylonian captivity. Number 1: Abram's obedience was partial, not complete. Number 2: Israel has a tendency to initially reject, but later accept. Look at what they did with Joseph. Look at what they did with Moses. And you're doing the same thing right now. Number 3: look at how fast it took for the nation of Israel to become idolatrous. It took just forty days. Number 4: look at Israel's history because the idolatry didn't stop there. Israel reinterpreted Moses teaching through a polytheistic framework right up until the Babylonian captivity. And now he moves into part 5 of his sermon, beginning in verse 46, which I won't start tonight because we're almost out of time, but I'll kind of preview it a little bit, if you'll allow me. He says the tabernacle that Moses created, the design of the tabernacle coming from heaven itself and the temple that Moses built, 966 BC that Nebuchadnezzar destroyed, that the returnees from the captivity rebuilt, that's alive right now and functioning-- and probably you could see it in the background as Stephen was speaking. He's speaking these words right there in Jerusalem. This tabernacle and this temple that you all are so proud of-- because they looked at the temple and its precursor, the tabernacle, as a good luck charm. They didn't think anything bad could happen to them as long as they had the temple.

I remember getting into a car with a guy one time, and he had these fuzzy dice from Las Vegas dangling from the rearview mirror in the front of the car. And then at the back of

the car he had a little statue of the Virgin Mary. And so finally I said, well, aren't these contradictory here? You've got the Virgin Mary in the back; you've got these dice in the front. And he said, "Hey, man, I've got both ends covered." So, they were basically two good luck charms the guy had in his car. And I guess in his mind he thought, you know, nothing really bad could happen to me because I've got these two good luck charms. That's how the Jews looked at the temple. And it was beautiful. The disciples were calling attention to it in the ministry of Jesus. Jeremiah has a whole sermon about the temple in Jeremiah 7 before it was destroyed for the first time by Nebuchadnezzar. Jeremiah 7:4 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."* It's repeated there three times. And what they were saying is we're not going to go into Babylonian captivity the way Jeremiah is speaking. We've got a temple here. And as long as this temple is in existence, nothing bad could happen to us. Well, something bad did happen. They went into captivity, but they rebuilt it, coming out of the captivity. And the mindset with this refurbished temple in the time of Christ is, as long as this temple is functioning and up and running, nothing bad is ever going to happen to us.

And so, Stephen now deals with that subject in verses 46 through 50. And he starts talking about how the tabernacle, which was the precursor to the temple, and the temple as built by Solomon and refurbished by the returnees were never intended to be permanent habitations of God. Did God send his Shekinah glory into the temple in the days of Solomon? Yes, He did. It was wonderful. It was beautiful. But God never said, "That's the only place I'll work." They thought that was it. That was the high point of revelation. And Stephen, throughout this speech has said, God has worked in Egypt, God has worked at Sinai, God has worked in Midian, God has worked in Mesopotamia. You cannot confine the work of God to this building. When God gets rid of this building and He will, because Jesus said that would happen. That-- by the way-- is what got Steven into trouble with the Sanhedrin. They said he's speaking against the temple. And Steven was just repeating what Jesus said. Not one stone will be left on another. When God gets rid of this temple-- and He's going to-- His spirit is going to go into the individual believer in the church age and the individual believer in the church age. Their body will become the temple of the Holy Spirit.

And that's happening right now, is Steven's point, I believe. And that shouldn't shock you, because I've surfaced four things in this sermon where divine revelation has



happened outside the temple. And he's telling this to people who looked at the temple as the ultimate good luck charm. He deals with that in verses 46 through 50. That's not going to make them very happy. And he quotes their own scriptures to prove his point. And then next week we'll move into part 6 of the sermon, where Stephen will say the current generation is imitating these same rebellions. And that's what will lead to his death.