



As Your Fathers Did, So Do You!
Acts 7:37-8:4
(Lesson #12)



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OUTLINE of Acts Chapter 7:37-8:4

- 1) Stephen continues to discuss Moses and reminds the Sanhedrin that Moses is the one who promised that God would raise up a prophet like himself (7:37).
- 2) Stephen then walks the Sanhedrin through all that happened with Israel and Moses, in particular the sin of the golden calf (7:38-41).
- 3) Stephen then quotes the prophets to remind the Sanhedrin, that because of the nation's sin, God gave Israel over to worship the host of heaven (7:42-43).
- 4) Next Stephen shifts his attention to the tabernacle, highlighting a couple of important points including that they continued using the tabernacle all the way to King David (7:44-46).
- 5) Stephen then highlights that Solomon is the one who built the house for Yahweh, although it is impossible for Yahweh to be limited to a house (7:47-50).
- 6) Then Stephen who stood accused, reverses the tables and lays accusations against the Sanhedrin (7:51-53).
- 7) The Sanhedrin upon hearing the charges became enraged (7:54).
- 8) Stephen on the other hand was given a vision of the resurrected Christ (7:55-56).
- 9) Upon hearing what Stephen said about what he saw, the Sanhedrin rushed upon him like a mob, cast him out of the city, and stoned him (7:57-59a).
- 10) Stephen cries out to God on their behalf (7:59b-60).
- 11) We learn from Luke that a man named Saul was there at the stoning of Stephen and he was consenting to what happened (8:1).
- 12) Devout men came and buried Stephen (8:2).
- 13) While Saul wreaked havoc on the church (8:3).
- 14) This caused the disciples to scatter preaching the Word as they went (8:4).

7:36 This man (Moses) led them out, performing wonders and signs in Egypt and at the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years. 37 This is the Moses who said to the Israelites, 'God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers.' 38 This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our fathers. He received living oracles to give to us. 39 Our fathers refused to obey him, but thrust him aside, and in their hearts they turned to Egypt, 40 saying to Aaron, 'Make for us gods who will go before us. As for this Moses who led us out from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' 41 And they made a calf in those days, and offered a sacrifice to the idol and were rejoicing in the works of their hands. 42 ¶ But God turned away and gave them over to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the prophets: "'Did you bring to me slain beasts and sacrifices, during the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? 43 You took up the tent of Moloch and the star of your god Rephan, the images that you made to worship; and I will send you into exile beyond Babylon.'

Vs 37 - Moses, the great leader and deliverer, who led the nation **towards the Promised Land for 40 years**, this is the Moses, the one you claim to be following, the one you claim I am blaspheming. This is the Moses, who led (like Jesus) the nation with many signs, wonders and miracles.

It is this same Moses who said: **'God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers.'**

Moses announced the coming of a prophet (and clearly Stephen is implying that Jesus is that prophet!)

This is recorded in **Deut 18:15-19**: *“The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers — it is to him you shall listen — just as you desired of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.’ And the LORD said to me, ‘They are right in what they have spoken. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him.’” (De 18:15-19 ESV)*

A few observations that the Sanhedrin should have come to when Stephen quotes this prophecy made by Moses:

- 1) God is promising a day when he would raise up a prophet, from among the nation of Israel.
- 2) The people could not bear with handling God speaking directly to them, so God spoke through Moses.
- 3) God will raise up another prophet and put his Words in this Prophet’s mouth.
- 4) Those who do not listen to His words will be held accountable by God for their actions!

We wonder what the Sanhedrin made of Stephen’s point.

Vs 38 - Moses is the one who was in the congregation, Greek word **ἐκκλησία (ekklesia)** normally translated **church**. Moses is the one who was in the Jewish congregation, in the wilderness, who was with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai.

Although we do not read about angelic involvement in Exodus, we do here and in other verses in the New Testament including (Gal 3:19; Heb 2:1-2).

At Mount Sinai, the angels of God were involved in giving the law of God. But we know little more than that.

Moses is the one who received these **living oracles** (the commands of Yahweh) (see Rom 3:2 and Heb 5:12) to give to us, to the nation of Israel.

Vs 39-40 - But, our fathers, the nation of Israel refused to obey him.

The nation, once again thrust him aside. Here we see that the leadership and deliverance by Moses is rejected a second time! As they had done in the first place, they do again.

And they turned their hearts back to Egypt. They desired to go back to Egypt (on multiple occasions, I might add), some examples include (Ex 14:11-12, 16:3, 17:3; Num 14:3-4).

As they had thrust Moses aside in the first place, once again they thrust him aside and they longed to return to Egypt, they longed to return to bondage. They longed to return to the land where their male children were being exterminated.

They ignored, forgot about, and otherwise looked over all the miracles that God was doing in their midst! In their hearts, they turned back to Egypt!

Vs 40 - Here Stephen is **once again quoting scripture**, in this case Ex 32:1, he points out that the nation had seen the ten plagues, they had seen the Red Sea miracle. This nation had been led by a pillar of cloud during the day and a pillar of fire at night.

This is the nation, who when Moses did not come back down quickly from the mount, called for Aaron to make them gods!

Vs 41 – Again, Stephen simply continues to advance the discussion of what Israel did at the base of Mount Sinai (see Ex 32:2-4).

They rejoiced in the **work of their hands** is definitely a very kind way to say what was likely occurring.

The Jewish fathers, made a golden calf in the wilderness and worshipped the works of their own hands, so too the Sanhedrin, in love for the temple have shifted their focus and they too are worshipping the works of their own hands!

APPLICATION: It is easy to lose focus on the true and living God and focus on something connected to the true and living God. Let us be careful to keep the focus on Jesus.

In Exodus (32:6) it describes in even greater detail what they did.

Vs 42 – Stephen says that God turned away and gave them to worship the host of heaven as it is written in the prophets and then Stephen quotes Amos 5:25-27.

The nation of Israel refused to obey Yahweh and Yahweh, gave them over to the host of heaven! This language sounds very familiar to Rom 1:21-24.

I hope you are getting a sense of Stephen’s profound understanding of the scriptures!

Vs 43 - The idols the nation of Israel worshipped included Moloch to whom human sacrifices were offered (Lev 18:21, Lev 20:1-5) and a god of the stars called Rephan.

There rebellion will result in them being send into exile in Babylon as Amos 5:25-27 predicted.

At this point we could add three more observations:

- 1) The nation of Israel rejected Moses leadership and deliverance twice.
- 2) The nation of Israel had a history of idolatry. What happened at the base of Mt Sinai was only one example of a long list.
- 3) The Sanhedrin were rejecting the prophet that Moses promised!

44 "Our fathers had the tent of witness in the wilderness, just as he who spoke to Moses directed him to make it, according to the pattern that he had seen. 45 Our fathers in turn brought it in with Joshua when they dispossessed the nations that God drove out before our fathers. So it was until the days of David, 46 who found favor in the sight of God and asked to find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. 47 But it was Solomon who built a house for him. 48 Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands, as the prophet says, 49 "'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest? 50 Did not my hand make all these things?"

Stephen now moves to talk directly about the tabernacle and thus by way of extension the temple.

Vs 44 - Our fathers had the **tent tabernacle, in the wilderness**. God gave this initial “building of worship” the tent tabernacle, not in the land of Israel, but in the wilderness!

I hope you see Stephen’s point, our fathers had the tabernacle, not in Israel, but in the wilderness. God is not limited by geography or a building!

Secondly, having the tabernacle did not mean they could not or did not resist God. Quite the opposite, they had the tabernacle and yet, they resisted God!

Also, Moses was directed on how to make the tabernacle, according to the pattern that he had seen. Moses built the tabernacle based on a pattern that God showed him!

Vs 45-46 – Our fathers brought the tent tabernacle in with them when they came into the Promised Land with Joshua. So they brought the mobile tabernacle with them, when they came into the land to dispossess the seven Canaanite nations.

It remained this way, in Israel, not a temple but a tabernacle all the way until the days of David. The Exodus occurred in 1446BC David reigned 1011 - 971 BC. It remained this way for nearly 500 years.

Even the mighty King David did not worship in the temple that the Sanhedrin are so fixed on.

Vs 46 - David is the one who found favor in the site of God. David is the one who asked to build a dwelling place for God. In fact, it was David who wanted to build a more solid structure for Yahweh (II Sam 7:1-5).

Vs 47 - But ultimately, it is Solomon who build that house of Yahweh.

We looked at the verse where God told Nathan that David could not build the house, but it goes on in II Sam 7:12-13).

Vs 48-50 - Here comes the **punchline** where Stephen makes the point he has been alluding to this entire time. The Most High does not dwell (exclusively) in houses that are made by hands.

Due to his immensity and his greatness, Yahweh cannot be contained or limited to a building. So much for an excessive focus on the temple. The all-powerful God is not contained (solely) to a building.

You have shifted to worshipping God's temple instead of the God of the temple.

Only little g-gods are contained by rock, brick and mortar. The Most High says and Stephen quotes Isaiah 66:1-2.

Stephen's point is God is much bigger than the temple, He condescended to meet us there, but He cannot be contained in the temple.

51 ¶ "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. 52 Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, 53 you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it."

Vs 51 - Then Stephen having provided his history lesson which proved his points he now clearly articulates his main points! It is here that we will see the **accused**, now **becomes the accuser** and he levels four charges:

FIRST - You **stiff-necked people**. This language comes from the Old Testament (Ex 32:9, 33:1-5). Like your fathers before you, you are a stiff-necked people!

SECOND - You are **uncircumcised in heart and ears**. This language also comes from the Old Testament (Deu 10:15-16; Jer 6:10). Just like your fathers!

THIRD - You **always resist the Holy Spirit**. Again, this language comes from the Old Testament (Is 63:10).

Fourth - **As you fathers did, so do you!** What your fathers did with Joseph, is what you do too. What your fathers did with Moses, is what you do too. You are only doing what the nation of Israel has constantly done.

He has watched them, during his sermon and he warns them that they are doing exactly what their fathers did!

Vs 52 - Further and FIFTHLY - Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?

Here again, he is not making this up but relying on Old Testament Scriptures (II Chr 36:15-16 or as Jesus said in Mat 23:29-36).

He comes to his final point: **you have now betrayed and murdered the Righteous One.**

Betrayers, the Greek word is **προδότης (prodotes)** Luke uses this same word in his gospel of Judas (Luk 6:16).

Murders, a term Luke used to describe Barabas in Acts 3:14.

You have betrayed and murdered the **Righteous One!** Your fathers persecuted and killed the ones who announced the coming of the Righteous One. **YOU KILLED THE RIGHTEOUS ONE!**

Then the **Righteous One** came and you have **betrayed Him** and **murdered him.**

Vs 53 - Here Stephen dropped the mic!

You, as part of the nation of Israel **received the law** as **delivered by angels, but you did not keep it.**

The verb is in the **imperfect tense**, it brings with it the idea of you have not kept it in the past and you are not keeping it now!

This is all true, they are guilty of the most heinous sin, betraying and murdering the Righteous One. This calls for immediate repentance.

But the same sun that melts wax... Yep hardens clay.

Peter had said similar things, and we have seen thousands repent. What will the Sanhedrin do?

54 ¶ Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. 55 But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 56 And he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." 57 But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. 58 Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. 59 And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." 60 And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

Vs 54 - So for whatever reason the Sanhedrin had tolerated all that Stephen was saying. They had allowed him great liberty. But upon hearing **these charges**, they were, the Greek word is **διαπρίω (diaprio)**, it **means cut in two** they were **(diaprio)** to the **(kardia)**. They were **enraged** and cut to the very **heart**.

This is the exact same word that was used when the 12 were before the Sanhedrin in (Acts 5:33). Then Gamaliel stepped in.

Here, they ground their teeth at Stephen. The Greek word Luke uses here is a **Hapax-Legomenon**. It is to gnash with the teeth, it is to snarl. They are enraged, they are **filled with rage** and they ground their teeth at him, they gnashed their teeth at him!

Vs 55 - But Stephen, **full of the Holy Spirit**, gazed into heaven, although his **body** was in the council room, **he was given a glimpse** into heaven. As he **gazed** into heaven, he saw the **glory of God**.

Pause, it is fitting that the guys who opened up his sermon calling God, the **God of glory**, and here in the end of his life he sees **the glory of God**.

Here we are told Stephen saw the glory of God and he **saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God**.

This same Jesus we are told ascended to the heavens and is seated at the right hand of the father (Act 2:32-34; Eph 1:19-20; Col 3:1; Heb 1:3; 8:1).

Here Stephen sees **Jesus standing**.

This could be highlighting many possibilities: Maybe **Jesus stood**, at the end of Stephen's life, **to claim Stephen as his own**. Maybe Jesus stood in honor of the Deacon Stephen who had run his race well. Maybe Jesus stood as Stephen passed the finish line so that Jesus could say: Well done my good and faithful servant.

Dr. Fruchtenbaum in his commentary wrote: *"However when the Bible views Him as standing, it emphasizes His continued work in the area of sustaining he saints. In the case of Stephen, Yeshua stood up to receive the soul of this saint into heaven."*

Dr. MacArthur in his commentary wrote: *"Stephe sees Jesus standing to show His concern for him. He also stands to welcome Stephen to Heaven."*

Vs 56 - Then Stephen said with **his outside voice**, no doubt **overcome by the glory of God**: **"Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."**

By the way if his own **personal safety** was a concern, **he would not want to say with his outside voice what he is seeing!**

Stephen said, with his outside voice: I see the **heavens opened**, and the Son of Man, standing at the right hand of God.

If you remember **Son of Man** was the **title** that Jesus most often referred to Himself by.

Also, so you know, this is the last time in the New **Testament** Jesus will be referred to as the **"Son of Man"** from here, Jesus will be referred to as the **"Son of God."**

One more point, this is the only time I can find in the New Testament where anyone other than Jesus uses this term.

Also, one more point, its etymology and its connection with the promised Messiah, goes all the way back to the book of Daniel (Dan 7:13-14).

Vs 57 - Upon hearing that many if not all cried out with a loud voice, they stopped their ears, and they rushed upon Stephen together.

They started **screaming like little children**, they **covered both ears with their hands**. They **rushed upon him together!**

No vote, no order, no decorum, they rushed upon him and they seized him.

Vs 58 - Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him.

This is in keeping with Leviticus (24:14).

But what got them here in no way followed Jewish law!

Then then in one of the **most brutal ways imaginable** killed him by hitting him with stones.

The **false witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul**. A Pharisee who hated this Jesus movement and was **consenting to everything that was being done**.

One suspects he was among those who disputed with Stephen and could not overthrow Stephen's Biblical reasoning and logic. One wonders if he was with the Sanhedrin, for where did Luke get all that information about what Stephen said before the Sanhedrin.

Vs 59 - As they were pelting Stephen with stones, he called out: **"Lord Jesus receive my Spirit."**

Lord Jesus I am coming home, receive me. You see Jesus was not just Stephen's Messiah, He was also Stephen's Lord!

God gave grace to this Deacon Stephen so that he could die well!

Notice Stephen did not believe in a temporary holding pattern, it does not seem he believed in his soul sleeping. He was crying out to Jesus to receive him in his spirit essence.

APPLICATION: How about you and me is Jesus our Lord. Is he our King, is He our Sovereign? I am not asking is He Lord, for He is. Have we made Him Lord of our life?

Vs 60 - As the stones continued to hit him, he dropped to his knees and then with a loud voice he shouted: **"Lord, do not hold this sin against them."**

This reminds us of Jesus:

"And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And they cast lots to divide his garments." (Lu 23:34 ESV)

Then he fell asleep.

They murdered him. They ruthlessly, viciously, filled with malice, executed him.

But for the believer death in this life is compared to falling asleep.

Then **he died**, then the **final stone ended his life**, but prior to that happening.

He cried out to the Father asking that God not hold this sin against his executioners.

Here we see God's perspective on the death of a believers, only a temporary suspension of physical activity! But no suspension of the spirit activity.

Now up until now Jerusalem has been ground zero for this movement that will pick up the name Christian. But we could have predicted, because God is not a God of geography that it was going to expand beyond the borders. And guess what, that is exactly what is about to happen!

8:1 And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. ² Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. ³ But Saul was ravaging the

church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison. Philip Proclaims Christ in Samaria ⁴ Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.

Vs 1 - Saul, the Pharisee, Saul who will become Paul, Saul who would write more of the New Testament than any other person.

Saul was there and he approved the execution. It means he took pleasure in the execution.

Here is what Paul says in Acts 22:

“And when the blood of Stephen your witness was being shed, I myself was standing by and approving and watching over the garments of those who killed him.” (Ac 22:20 ESV)

Then, following the death of Stephen, GREAT PERSECUTION arose against the believers in Jerusalem.

Notice they were all scattered abroad, this would result in two important things:

- 1) This persecution, that created the scattering, drove the disciples out of Jerusalem and scattered them throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria with the gospel.
- 2) This scattering from Jerusalem was likely the impetus of the gospel writers, in particular Matthew and Mark codifying their gospel accounts. What man meant for evil, God used for good!

Except the apostles, it seems their elevated status had purchased them a little security. But as we will see, not much and not for long.

Vs 2 - Devout men came and buried Stephen and made GREAT LAMINATION over him!

This word devout, is only used by Luke (Luk 2:25 – Simeon; Acts 2:5, and here).

The idea of the word lamentation is to beat the breast as a sign of extreme grief.

Vs 3 - But Saul begins to ravage the church.

The verb is in the imperfect tense; thus, we should get the idea that Saul kept ravaging the church. He meant to destroy it, he wanted to ruin it, he was devastating the church

Saul begins to enter homes and drag off professing believers.

Saul even arrests women and throws them into prison for believing in Jesus. Paul is going to put a stop to this!

Here is how Paul described this:

“I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women,” (Ac 22:4 ESV)

Vs 4 - What Satan meant for evil and the destruction of the church, God has used it to save even more people.

The disciples, trained by the apostles are fleeing from persecution and carrying with them, the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ!

Preaching as they were scattering. Rom 8:28-29 is always true!

The persecution dispersed the disciples, but it did not silence them, rather it was used to distribute the gospel all over the Roman empire.