

## **ACTS Ses 7: First Christian Martyr (56)**

Welcome back to our study. In the Acts of the Apostles, we're studying chapters six and seven today. And of course, this follows chapter five, where there was quite a stir against the early believers. And Gamliel, the great rabbi, warned them to *leave the leaders alone*, because they may find themselves fighting against God; he didn't say anything about the followers but the leaders in Jerusalem were left alone. But those who are followers of Christ will begin to see the intensity of persecution taking place and today we'll look at the first martyr of the church, not actually the first martyr of the church, the second martyr of the church. Does anyone know who the first martyr of the church? (The Church) considers the totally **innocent children who were killed by Herod when he was searching for Jesus as the first martyrs of the church**. And so, we have Stephen typically called the first martyr, but technically, he's not.

*Let's pray: In the NAME of the Father and the Son of the Holy Spirit . Lord Jesus, we thank you today for life, we humble ourselves before you. You are the Rabbi. You are the Lord and Savior of our lives. Holy Spirit, teach us and show us the truth of Scripture for our own lives. Teach us to be bold and courageous, as Stephen was. We pray this in Jesus NAME. Amen. In the NAME of the Father, Son, Holy Spirit.*

We pick up today with chapter six and seven. And this is **the key chapter that moves us from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria, and what is going to propel this vision of Jesus to bless the whole world is going to be persecution** and persecution and pressure in your life will result in one of two things:

We will run from it, and deny it

We will press in and allow the Lord to use us even more, it'll end up in fruitfulness as a result of persecution.

In this case, there was a diaspora<sup>1</sup> after Stephen was killed. They begin moving out from Jerusalem and spreading the gospel. They don't just run and hide, but they're now on the offensive in bringing the Gospel to Judea and Samaria with the leadership remaining in Jerusalem. They go out from Jerusalem to confirm and to preach occasionally. Picking up with chapter six, the first part, talks about deacons and then starting in verse eight, we move into a Stephen, and then his full defense in chapter seven of the faith where he goes through salvation history, which is not unusual, but it's the way he goes through salvation history. When you read this, and you answered the questions, you might have thought to yourself, *Well, you know he's going through the history of Israel to these people*. And that's not uncommon to go through your history, and you would think that they would know it, why go through all of this? Well, they do know their history, but they need to be reminded of their history. Specifically, it's the angle Stephen uses to go through the history. It's what he is accenting in the scriptures that he is using in the Old Testament that really tells the story and that's what we're going to take a look at the starting in ACTS 6:1-6, *Now in the days when the disciples were increasing in number, (So they're really growing), the Hellenist murmur against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution*. Now, right away, it mentions two different groups:

Hellenists: Greek speaking Jews who used the Septuagint (Greek OT). They most likely came from the Roman Empire and traveled to Jerusalem from the Roman Empire, there in Jerusalem.

Hebrews are the Jews who are Hebrew and Aramaic speaking; their native to the land of Palestine to the land of Canaan.

There is a tension that starts to arise between these two groups and isn't that something? Even though you have in this early church with it growing exponentially, it's taking off like wildfire, people are coming into the kingdom, people are being healed, and so forth., even in the midst of that, you have problems, you have tension starting to arise over, *I'm not being treated fair. I'm not being taken care of*. And in this case, the tension was over the caring of widows. This is really interesting; **the caring of widows was central to Judaism**. In the Old Testament, we see in Deuteronomy 26:12 the command to *take care of the widows*. This was a central part of Judaism. And the **reason that it's a central part of Judaism is because God is a husband** and as a husband, He cares for His bride, we are the Bride of Christ. And so, one of the real

focuses of God on His body is the widow, He wants to make sure that the widows are taken care of, and he challenges us to do it. For example, in James 1, (James wrote), as a Jewish epistle in its writing. W studied it a few years ago together and James **writes about what pure religion is** and he says in James 1:26 – 27, *If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this man's religion is vain. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this...* So, James is going to give the kind of the formula if you will, **what is pure religion**, because we've talked about well pure religion is this pure religion is that and James says this is pure religion. What is it? *to visit the orphans and widows in their affliction*, visit those without a husband, and those without a father, because God is a Father and God is a husband.

So, **if we're going to be the body of Christ, we must take care of the orphans, and we must take care of the widows. This is a very, very important.** It's very beautiful. We must visit the orphans and widows in their affliction and to *keep oneself unstained from the world*. This isn't a popular thing you know. What's popular is Christianity: 10 steps to Financial Freedom (that sells); 3 Steps to Powerful Miracles. (That sells). 10 steps to Spiritual Freedom: Become all that you can become in the Spirit, these things are big. So, sell a lot of tapes, write a lot of books, but how many times have you gone into a Catholic bookstore or a Christian bookstore or Barnes and Noble, Amazon, online, and saw a best-selling book entitled Five Steps to Effectively Minister to Widows? How many of us would go in there and see that title and think, *Man, I got to get that. That's a book I got to get*, and they're exactly the reason we, in some ways, are out of touch with what God is in touch with; what is really on *His* heart. You know, and what's on His heart is to take care of these people, and He wants to use us. He wants to use us to do that but I would encourage you as I speak to myself, to sort of recalibrate and redefine really what faith is, and that is to take care of the widow and that's what the argument is; that's the tension here in the early churches that some of the Hellenistic women, the Greek speaking, they're being overlooked in the distribution of the daily distribution of goods. So, they summon the 12, the body of the disciples and said, *It is not right that we should give up preaching the Word of God to serve tables*. So, you have the apostles, you have the 12, who are dedicated to preaching and to prayer. Those are the things that they're dedicated to, and that's really what, you know, a good pastor is dedicated to, the preaching of the Word, and to prayer, praying for the community, and preaching the Word, and they can't take the time away from that to wait on tables. Waiting on tables is important and very needy, but it's all a matter of distribution of gifts, there's a gift in the body for those tables and the weight on those widows and take care of them, and it isn't the job of the 12 to do that, because they can't do everything, so we're going to need more gifts, and Paul later writes to the 1Corinthians 12 about the various gifts in the body of Christ and **names all of the gifts<sup>2</sup>** and how the body of Christ works together. Well, they got together, in verse three, and they picked from among them seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this duty, but we will devote ourselves to prayer into the ministry of the Word, and what they said pleased the whole multitude and they chose Stephen, and then they named all seven of the those who are chosen to wait on the tables and they are deacons, they become the deacons, and that word "*Deacon*" means to serve, **and they're going to serve the physical aspects of the community**, they're going to take care of all of those things in the community that need to be taken care of. And two of the deacons that are very prominent are Stephen and Phillip. In the next session we go in chapter eight, into Philip, who is called to *minister to an Ethiopian eunuch* was reading Isaiah, but this week the focus will be on, Stephen. Now all of these men, these seven men that were mentioned, all have Greek names, which leads us to believe that this seven, the first seven deacons were from the Hellenists, the Greek speaking Jews, the first seven were from the Hellenistic group. Well, it says in verse four, *but we will devote ourselves to prayer into the ministry of The Word*. The ministry of the deacons allows *The Word* to go forward and prayer to go forward with the apostles. Then it says in verse six after they chose the seven that they *Set them before the Apostles and they (Apostles) prayed and laid their hands upon them*.

96 So, this is also a pattern that we see in the Old Testament to that when you lay on hands you lay the hands  
97 on someone, these two things happen;  
98 We consecrate them. To consecrate means to separate them for something; they're consecrated for  
99 something  
100 Laying on of hands and then they're commissioned to do something. So, you're consecrating them; setting  
101 them aside to do what they're commissioned to do.  
102 And there's a number of different things in the Church that people have hands laid on them and then they  
103 are commissioned. For example: Confirmation - we have the hands from the bishop laid upon us and we  
104 are blessed. We are commissioned to go out and to be a witness to be, a martyr of the church, to give our  
105 lives daily for Christ and in Holy Orders for the priesthood and for to become a deacon. This consecration  
106 and commissioning are also mentioned later with Paul talking to Timothy. Timothy was the young pastor  
107 in Ephesus, and it was a very large church, Timothy was a young man and Paul prayed for him, he was  
108 prayed and he received a gift and you can read about that in 1Timothy 4:14. Let me read that to you real  
109 quick. Paul writes to Timothy later and says,  
110 *Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophetic utterance when*  
111 *the Council of Elders laid their hands upon you.*  
112 So, in the Bible there's this transference of something, when we lay on hands, good and bad. Good. A gift  
113 is given, Commission, sent as Paul and Barnabas will later be commissioned in the laying out of hands.  
114 Holy Spirit did that. And then in the Old Testament, what do they do, remember the scapegoat, the sins of  
115 Israel, laid on the head. They lay their hands on the head of the goat, and there is like a transferal of the  
116 sin of the nation on that goat, and the goat is sent out into the wilderness. That's why it's called a  
117 **scapegoat**, the scapegoat. And that was done with the laying on of hands, also. So, they're commissioned  
118 to serve, which comes from the noun, *deacon*. You can read about that more to in Philippians 1:1.  
119 Now it says that in ACTS 6:7,  
120 *And the word of God increased; and a number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem,*  
121 *and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.*  
122 Wow. Who are these priests, the priests are the Sadducees and some of them are responding to the  
123 preaching of the gospel, and they're responding to the faith, coming to the faith, that's a radical  
124 transformation in their life. That's an amazing thing that is happening there.  
125 Now in ACTS 6:8, we begin to focus on Stephen and when we think of a deacon, we should think of  
126 Stephen, a man full of faith, full of the Holy Spirit. For earlier it says, *full of the Spirit and of wisdom*. So,  
127 he's got wisdom, faith, Holy Spirit, there's definitely a powerful anointing on his life. And it starts off in  
128 verse eight and says,  
129 *and Stephen, full of grace and power did great wonders and signs among the people. Then some*  
130 *of those who belong to the synagogue of the freedmen, (as it was called), and of the Cyrenians,*  
131 *and the Alexandrians and of those from Cilicia and Asia, arose and disputed with Stephen. But*  
132 *they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke.*  
133 So, Stephen is beginning to proclaim the gospel with, apparently, tremendous wisdom and power, and  
134 there's a demonstration of signs and wonders with his ministry. Wouldn't that be wonderful to see this on  
135 a regular basis, to see a very powerful proclamation of the Word of God followed by signs and wonders.  
136 Well, the leadership could not match his testimony, and we're going to see a number of parallels here. I  
137 sat in on one of the groups discussion and I could hear it coming out left and right, you're getting it, the  
138 comparisons between Jesus' ministry in the ministry of Stephen, and we should automatically be looking  
139 for this. **What happened to Jesus will happen to the church. What happened to the church will happen to**  
140 **us.** We will walk the way of the cross. We will walk the way of Jesus. And there are a number of parallels.  
141 Leadership could not match his testimony, they could not withstand the wisdom and the spirit  
142 with which he spoke. Well, if you look at Jesus, they could not withstand his wisdom, which he spoke.  
143 They couldn't trap him no matter what they did, he had a word for them, and they simply couldn't verbally

144 entrap him. And I imagined that Stephen was much the same. So, the, the leadership could not match his  
145 testimony.  
146 False accusations: They falsely accused our master; they'll falsely accuse you. We just have to  
147 make sure that we are accused, not for doing wrong, but for doing right, as Peter says in his first epistles,  
148 *We'll be blessed in everything that we do.*  
149 Mob violence: Takes place against, Stephen, just like Jesus. Also, we're looking at these  
150 things that Stephen has in common with Jesus. We mentioned the false witness both of them had relating  
151 to the destruction of the Temple. That's going to be an important point as we go on a little bit to look at  
152 the destruction of the Temple because the attack that Stephen is launching in his salvation history  
153 discourse here is centered on the Temple, just as Jesus' ministry was centered on the Temple, doing away  
154 with the old and the coming of the new which is Jesus. And then also both of them had something else in  
155 common, the:  
156 Vision of the Son of Man, which we'll look at here. **In their final prayer, they both appealed for**  
157 **forgiveness for their accusers.** Now, ACTS 6:13 says,  
158 *Then they secretly instigated men who said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words*  
159 *against Moses and God, and they stirred up the people in the elders and the scribes and they*  
160 *came upon him and seized him and brought him before the council and set up false witnesses*  
161 *who said, this man never ceases to speak words against this holy place in the law. For we heard*  
162 *him say that this Jesus of Nazareth, will destroy this place, and will change the customs which*  
163 *Moses delivered to us.*  
164 Well right away they're setting up Stephen for the death penalty, and then the minute that the words of  
165 blasphemy come up, he knows they're trying to entrap him, just like they tried to entrap Jesus for the  
166 death penalty, blasphemous words. What they want is for Leviticus 24:16 to come to mind in the in the  
167 audience, and that's blasphemy. And the penalty for blasphemy is death, but they have a bit of a problem  
168 because they can't carry out the death penalty; they need the Roman government to do that just as they  
169 roped in the Roman government with Jesus. But we're going to see here that they're really breaking the  
170 law in a number of ways because they're not supposed to be carrying out capital punishment, but they're  
171 setting up Stephen with the death penalty in mind by bringing up blasphemy. Then the speech starts in  
172 ACTS 7:1, Stephen's speech is a review of salvation history which I absolutely love because I like to look at  
173 the big picture. It's a speech reviewing salvation history from Abraham to the present. **One of the major**  
174 **themes that Stephen hits on is the rebellious history of Israel, and the fact that they have stiff necks.**  
175 The other common theme in his review of history is **Gentile nations where God appears because these**  
176 **people are so hung up on this is the place. This is the only Temple. This is we've got the right formula here,**  
177 and Stephen is going to bring out that God has manifest in a number of different areas is going to use  
178 prophets that talk about their inordinate addiction to idolatry and the Temple. So we begin, and we begin  
179 to read chapter seven, the high priest said, *Is this so?* and Stephen said, Brethren and fathers, hear me.  
180 The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia. Okay, so he's purposely  
181 mentioning these cities starting with our father Abraham, who was in Mesopotamia. So, he's de-  
182 emphasizing the land. Remember last week we saw another de-emphasizing of the land? What were they  
183 doing? Selling the property, selling their houses and Stephen kind of continues this theme of de -  
184 emphasizing this land ; this land is important, yes, this land is important. **Was the Temple important? Yes,**  
185 **the Temple was important, but it was important for a season. God had bigger plans than what you're all**  
186 **wrapped up in here today, but you're so addicted to this. And, and so stiff neck when it comes to listening**  
187 **to the spirit that you can't get beyond this physical aspect of the faith.** I run into this myself with people  
188 who don't give their attention to the Spirit of the Lord in the church in loving one another, and so forth,  
189 but they are hardcore Orthodox, got to be this way, and it's like they're addicted to the physical trappings.  
190 They're good, and they lead us to something special, but **they're more concerned about the physical**  
191 **aspect of all of this, than the hearts and souls of people, and loving and winning people.** I've seen people



addicted to their Sacramentals for example, where they put more emphasis on their Sacramentals wearing their scapular, cross or their Bible, or whatever it might be, and they neglect the message behind it. Stiff necked. So, we see it's still continuing today to a certain degree but he starts with Abraham, and he says, *he was in Mesopotamia before he lived in Heron and said to him, depart from your land and from your kindred, and go into the land which I will show you, and then he departed from the land of the Chaldeans and lived in heron. And then he, he moves on, and he talks about in verse nine, Egypt says in verse seven, but I will judge the nation which they serve said God and after that, they shall come out and worship me in this place, and he gave him the covenant of circumcision.* And so, Abraham became the father of Isaac, and Isaac was circumcised by his father, and so Abraham became the father of Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day and Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of the 12 patriarchs and the patriarchs were jealous of Joseph and sold him into Egypt. So, he mentioned Egypt, and we move from Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and now to Joseph., one of the patriarchs, Joseph. And then it says, But God was with him in Egypt and rescued him out of all his afflictions and gave him favor and wisdom before Pharaoh, king of Egypt who made him Governor over Egypt and over all his household. And then he mentions the famine. the famine that takes place. And then he goes all the way on to Moses in ACTS 7:17-41, he moves on to Moses, and Moses' life is a type of Jesus. He was rejected by his brethren. He was also rescued and becomes a redeemer, similar to the Joseph story, but we started off in verse 17, *But as the time of the promise drew near, which God had granted to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt, till there rose over Egypt another king who had not known Joseph. He dealt craftily with our race and forced our fathers to expose their infants, that they might not be kept alive. At this time, Moses was born and was beautiful before God and he was brought up for three months in his father's house, and when he was exposed, Pharaoh's daughter adopted him and brought him up as her own son, and Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in his words and deeds.* That echoes Stephen a bit there. Stephen divides Moses' life into three sets of 40, which is the number of trial - 40 years with Pharaoh, 40 years out in the wilderness, and then 40 years leading Israel in the wilderness. I want to take a look at this here for a second in verse 23 on Moses. He's going through the history highlighting Moses and *when he was 40 years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the sons of Israel.* Okay this is talking in a very similar way about Jesus. He was 40 years old; *it came into his heart to visit his brother and the sons of Israel.* Moses wanted to visit his brother at 40 years old. Do you remember what happened when he saw his brother was being killed? *And Moses killed the Egyptian.* He killed the enemy, and he had to flee and seeing one of them being wronged he defended the oppressed man and avenged him by striking the Egyptian. Here's the point right here, Verse 25 Moses, he's supposing that his brethren understood that God was giving them deliverance by his hand, but they did not understand. So, he's really telling the history, but he's telling it in such a way that there was a *deliver* but look what they did to the *deliver*, and they didn't understand. Remember when Joseph was finally exalted, and his brothers found out what he was doing and who he was? What did they say? Don't kill us. And Joseph had to explain to them, *you didn't understand. I was sent ahead to bring life, to give you life, but you didn't understand.* And in Moses' case, *you didn't understand.* And he goes on, and finally to Jesus, *they didn't understand.* Because you're a stiff neck, just like your brethren. **The more things change the more things stay the same.** I mean he's giving them a really clear rebroadcast of their history, and showing them that they've rejected the Redeemer, and they are stiff neck people. Remember what it says in John 1? Every time I hear John 1, I think of a pizza parlor in Pella, Iowa because I sat down in a pizza parlor in Pella, Iowa in 1981 and I memorized the first chapter of John in a pizza parlor. So, every time I think about it, I think of Pizza John 1:10-11. *He was in the world and the world was made through Him, yet the world knew Him not. He came to His own home, and His own people received Him not.*

239 It fits so well with what Stephen is telling them about Moses. He supposed that his brethren understood  
240 that God was giving them deliverance by his hand, but they did not understand. Jesus came to his own  
241 home and his own people received him not. It did not receive him. So, we have that parallel. And then as  
242 you read along, you see in verse 27,  
243 *But the man who was wronging his neighbor thrust him aside saying, Who made you a ruler and*  
244 *a judge over us. Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?*  
245 At this retort Moses, fled and became an exile in the land of Midian where he became the father of two  
246 sons and then it moves along. For the sake of time, go to verse 35,  
247 This Moses, whom they refused saying, *Who made your ruler and a judge?* is similar to Jesus, *Who are*  
248 *you, son of Joseph, a carpenter, up in Nazareth, a country bumpkin? Who are you become a ruler over us?*  
249 God sent both ruler and deliverer by the hand of the angel that appeared to him in the bush. He led them  
250 out having performed wonders in Sinai in Egypt and at the Red Sea and in the wilderness for 40 years. He  
251 says, this is the Moses who said to the Israelites, God will raise up for you a prophet from your brethren,  
252 as he raised me up. (Deut 18:15) Moses said, God will raise up a prophet for you in the future, like me,  
253 prophet, then he said, **Listen to Him, LISTEN to Him.** Jesus comes on the scene. And he goes into the  
254 waters of baptism, what do we hear the Father say? **This is My beloved Son, listen to him.** And now  
255 Stephen is reminding them again, this was the prophet. This was the prophet that God spoke about from  
256 Moses way back in Deuteronomy 18, that *God will raise up a prophet like me.* Deuteronomy goes into,  
257 *listen to him. This is he who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel, who spoke to him at*  
258 *Mount Sinai and with our fathers and received living Oracles to give to us. Our fathers refused to obey Him.*  
259 *But thrust him aside in our hearts, (He is talking about Moses), they refuse to obey you. And they thrust*  
260 *him aside and, in their hearts, they turned to Egypt.* So, at this point when they were getting their  
261 deliverance through Moses, they didn't listen to Moses, they turned aside, They turned their hearts  
262 toward Egypt, which is a way of saying that they are looking to idolatry, they're looking to the gods of  
263 Egypt. Remember the golden calf incident in the Old Testament and Deuteronomy 32? This would come  
264 right away in the narrative here. In fact, it goes on and mentions it. Let me just read it then I'll get back to  
265 my point, (they) *turned to Egypt, saying to Aaron, make for us gods to go before us. As for this Moses who*  
266 *led us out from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him, and they made a calf in those*  
267 *days and offered a sacrifice to the idol and rejoiced in the works of their hands.* See, back there in the Old  
268 Testament in the story that Stephens telling them, he is giving them the review of the golden calf incident  
269 where they offered to an idol. They rejected Moses and offered to an idol. Well, you can get what's going  
270 on here, it's going to bring it up into the modern period, and that you've rejected Christ and what idol are  
271 they offering worship to? They're offering worship to this idol, to the Temple, Jerusalem, this land. This  
272 place has become like a god, but God turned and gave them over to worship *the host of heaven* as it is  
273 written in the book of the prophets. *So, they turned to Egypt, they rejected Moses, and they remained as*  
274 *slaves, this is back in the Old Testament; they rejected Moses, they became slaves to their addiction to*  
275 *idolatry.* And you know that the prophets write about this in Ezekiel Chapter 20 :7-8. Let me read this to  
276 you that Israel was addicted to idolatry; they rejected God's leaders, and they were addicted to idolatry is  
277 Ezekiel 20:7-8 and it says (this is God's speaking. He's talking about the apostasy in the wilderness),  
278 *And I said to them, cast away the detestable things your eyes feast on every one of you, and do*  
279 *not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt, I am the larger God, but they rebelled against me and would*  
280 *not listen to me. They did not every man cast away every detestable thing, their eyes feasted on, nor did*  
281 *they forsake the idols of Egypt.*  
282 So, they were thoroughly addicted to the idolatry of the Egyptians. They made their calf, they mentioned  
283 that in chapter 41 and that golden calf incident is Exodus 32 And that's the point where everything  
284 changed. This is important to get - **everything changed** and Stephens trying to tell them this, that because  
285 of your idolatry everything changed at this point. We have, for example, He had the Levites, before that  
286 God had a nation of priests. You wanted to raise them up as a nation of priests, but because of the broken

covenant and idolatry, they are *laicized*<sup>1</sup> and one tribe rises up, the Levitical tribe to become the priests, the whole animal sacrificial system is put in place at this time. And you can read about this in history, they had bowls, they had goats and sheep, they had the three animals sacrifice, they had a stronghold on Israel. And that's why, when a priest is ordained in Israel, what do they sacrifice? A Bull, the calf. That's what they sacrifice as a reminder that you're a priest. And so, the **whole animal sacrificial system was instituted to deal with idolatry.** God didn't say, *Oh, I love the smell of flesh.* He says, *I detest it. I want obedience, rather than sacrifice.* So even within the Old Testament there are scriptures that demonstrate that the liturgical ritual laws used are inferior to the moral law of the 10 commandments. And so, in verse, 42 and 43, Stephen is going to pull out of the hat some Scripture, he's going to pull out, Amos 5:25 – 27, But God turned and gave them over to worship the host of heaven as it is written in the book of the prophets, quote,

*Did you offer to me slaying beasts and sacrifices 40 years in the wilderness, O House of Israel, and you took up the tent of Moloch, and the star of the gods, the figures which you made to worship, and I will remove you beyond Babylon.*

So, Stephen quotes from Amos 5 here, and what is Amos 5 doing? Looking back to the idolatry in the wilderness, the golden calf incident, and looking forward to the exile that the 10 tribes in the north are going to experience at the hands of the Assyrians. So, he is looking back at idolatry, looking forward to exile and the hint here is that **the present generation is guilty of idolizing the Temple.** And in verses 44 through 50, there's a major rebuke for the attachment of the Temple. Listen to this carefully. *Our fathers had the tent.* Okay, so all this whole argument, up till now has been dealing with the presence of God among the people. He says in verse 44, *Our fathers had the tent of witness in the wilderness, even as he who spoke to Moses directed him to make it according to the pattern that he had seen our fathers in turn brought it with Joshua, when they dispossessed the nations, which got thrust out before our fathers, so it was until the days of David, who found favor in the sight of God, and ask leave to find the habitation for the God of Jacob, but it was Solomon, who built a house for him, yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made with hands, as the Prophet says, Then he quotes Isaiah, chapter, 66, verses one and two. Heaven is my throne, the earth my footstool. What house will you build for me, says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest did not my hand make all these things,* then he stops and says, *You stiff-necked people* pretty dramatic. What was he doing there versus 44 through 45? What were the two things in the Old Testament mentioned in Deuteronomy by Moses before they crossed over to concessions that Moses made. Remember back in First Samuel chapter eight? What did they ask for at the end of the period of the Judges? Everyone is sort of doing their own thing, they're getting beat up on all the different sides and stuff. And what did they ask Samuel for, do you remember? They came to him and said in 1Samuel 8, *We want a king. We want to King.* Important point here is, is that the right request? They want a king. They're meant to have a king. But Samuel is upset with their request. Why? Because they want a king like the other nations and Samuel is really bugged about this. And God through the prophet Samuel says, *This is not about you, Samuel. This is about me that says they have not rejected you, Samuel, but they have rejected me from being their king. but give them what they want.*

So, this is a **divine accommodation.** God is going to accommodate their weakness. They can't handle Him as king. He wants to be their king. What's He going to do? He's going to give them a type of King like the other nations. He is going to give them a type, but a type as you know in the Old Testament, is doomed to be replaced at some point. He is going to give them a type. of what was the other thing that they received in Deuteronomy that Moses said, *You're going to ask for in the future a place for a Temple.* So, in Deuteronomy, there are two provisions: **a king** in the future, and **a place** where the Temple is going to be built. **God wants to be their dwelling. God wants to dwell in every man's home and be a nation of priests, and He wants to be their king,** but they're not ready for that right now so God is giving them a type of King, and a type of dwelling, a Temple, but from the very beginning the DNA that Temple had written in it is it's going to fall. Sooner or later, it's going to fall and the real (one) is going to be here, there

335 will be no more need for an earthly king, the real king will be here. So, *God gives them what they want and*  
336 *waits to give them what they need*, which what they need is Him as the true Temple, the dwelling place  
337 and for Him to be their real king. But they have not accepted this. *In fact, they've rejected it and they have*  
338 *made it now into an idol, just like the Pharisees who prided themselves on not touching the unclean*. It had  
339 been so long that they forgot the reason they couldn't touch the unclean, that the reason they couldn't  
340 touch the unclean was because *their level of righteousness could not withstand the unrighteousness in*  
341 *the world*. So, God had to say, *You're grounded. You can't go out there, you can't be with the world. Why?*  
342 *You can't handle it.* And so, it'd be like a seventh or eighth grader or a 10th grader, coming to school the  
343 next day after they've been grounded saying, *Guess what? They're grounded.* Right here, you're looking at  
344 a *big ground, I can't touch it, can't play with you.* And they start to think of it as they're *bad* (special).  
345 That's how far idolatry takes you is that we start to say, *You know, I can't touch you and that's a badge of*  
346 *honor.* If we had the time, we could go into lots of different ways that we do that as Christians, but the  
347 point is that the Temple is doomed to fall. And Jesus comes as the king and mentions that he is the new  
348 Temple, and they rejected him and that's why verse 51, *You stiff-neck people.* Now I always say that with  
349 great enthusiasm, *You stiff-necked people. Uncircumcised in hearts and in ears; you always resist the Holy*  
350 *Spirit.* When I say that I have to be honest with you, I have I have a couple of fingers pointed right back at  
351 me when I point to them, you know there's an old saying you point, you've got three fingers pointing back  
352 to you. I really feel that on this one, where I feel like at times, I'm a stiff neck person uncircumcised in my  
353 heart, that I'm not really listening. And all I'm doing is going through the outer motions, and inside my  
354 heart is not soft, uncircumcised. And I'm just being honest with you there. And I feel like God has to deal  
355 with me at different times, as your fathers did, so do you, as your fathers did, so do you. So, Stephen  
356 accuses his generation as having the same heart problem as previous generations, *Which of the prophets*  
357 *did not your fathers persecute?* In other words, you say, *this is in our pedigree. We've been doing this all*  
358 *along. We've never stopped from the moment we began to persecute God's delivers and not listen to them.*  
359 This is no different. This is no different. And so, this generation is guilty of thinking we're different, we're  
360 different, but they're no different. And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the  
361 Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered you who received the law is delivered by  
362 angels, and did not keep it that was actually a tradition that the law was given by angels by angels, you can  
363 look up the Catechism it's article 332 that talks about this, that it was given by ancients, the law. He says  
364 that those delivered by angels, but you have not kept it. And then verse 54 In the end, is that transition  
365 where he goes sort of into this beatific vision. And then he's martyred I love this. Now when they heard  
366 these things, they were enraged and they ground their teeth against him, but he full of the Holy Spirit  
367 gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and stand in Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And he  
368 said, Behold, I see the heavens opened in the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. And they cried  
369 out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together upon them what what are they hearing,  
370 he says, uses this this term Son of Man. First of all, he sees the heavens open, and he sees the glory of  
371 God. The Beatific Vision mentioned that he sees God, the reward that all of our lives are pointing toward  
372 to see God. That's the beatific vision. What was it that made him so strong? What was it that made him so  
373 purposeful? So, filled with hope and no fear, and total courage. It's the beatific vision. It's seeing God, he  
374 saw God. He saw God, and I would say in our own lives as far as practical application. But what keeps us  
375 going in the midst of persecution. When people say things against us when our NAME is spoil, when, when  
376 we are hurt physically suffering, whatever it is, we always live our lives in hope of the beatific vision, to  
377 keep our eyes on Christ. I will go through anything we say to see Christ, and we learned something from  
378 Stephen here that he sees the beatific vision, and he sees the Son of Man standing at the right hand of  
379 God now the Son of Man is mentioned in Daniel chapter seven verses 13 and 14 and we probably have  
380 read this in the last three Bible studies that we've gone through together I bet we've read this four or five  
381 times. Together, we should almost be able to say it, Daniel mentions the NAME, the Messiah, the One who  
382 is leading the fifth kingdom after Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome. The fifth kingdom that starts off as a



small stone human without human hands, and wrote grows into a mighty mountain, and it overpowers those four kingdoms, and then he mentioned the one in charge of it. I saw in the night visions, and behold with the clouds of heaven, there came one like a Son of man. He came to the Ancient of Days and to him was given dominion glory and a kingdom, and all the peoples, nations and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed, you almost have a picture here of Stephen giving the whole history that you have failed the bow your knee to the God Almighty and all of his servants and prophets, And then all of a sudden what happens. He says you stiff neck people uncircumcised in your heart and they become angry, and what happens at that point, he sees the Son of man, and he does what everyone's failing to do begins to worship. The Son of Man standing at the right hand of the Father, and at that point they what do they do grind their teeth against him. They grind their teeth against him and then he sees this son of man and, but they cried out with a loud voice, and they stopped their ears and rushed together upon him, you know, it reminds me of reminds me of talking to my sister when I was growing up. And I said something to her, and she was sitting at the table saying, I'm not listening, I'm not listening, I'm not listening that that should do anything to let me know, I'm not listening. And so, as Peter, or as Stephen tells them the facts of their history. You don't listen. And he's turning it up louder and louder, and every story, every story of salvation history and finds he finally he turns it all the way up, and you're now listening and they're going, man and man, it's so ironic we they're basically doing physically what he just said everyone else has been doing, we're not listening. I know it. Mike, what I've been trying to, trying to say. And then they cried out with a loud voice stopped their ears and rushed together upon him, and then they cast him out of the city and stone him, and the witnesses lay down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. And as they were stoning Stephen he prayed, Lord Jesus received my spirit, and he knelt down and he cried out with a loud voice, Lord, do not hold the sin against them. When he said this, he fell asleep, died. And Saul was consenting to his death. Believe that saw was some time somewhere around 25 to 40 years old at this time, and I guarantee you, he'll never forget it. But the point I want to leave you with is this as we move into chapter eight 910 11 where we start to see the ministry of Saul explode and take on the world, where did it begin that began with him there at the feet of a genuine witness of Christ, of martyr, and we cannot say enough about the power of martyrdom, whether it's dying like Stephen, or giving up your will with your children and paying the price of raising a family, going to work and dying to yourself, you cannot minimize the power of a witness, and this, this, witnessing Stephen Paul witnessing Stephen is going to change Paul's life forever, and forever. And what, what we can learn from Stephen is that when we're going through difficulties and persecution, we can keep our eyes on Jesus, the hope of that beatific vision. And we also can do what Stephen did, that's copy Christ, that is, to entrust ourselves to the Father. I trust you. I trust you. I trust you and forgive those who persecute us and love. That's how the Roman Empire was changed. That's we saw, we see Roman guards who put down their weapons and join the Christians in the Coliseum, they said, I cannot withstand this testimony. I'm one of them. And it was their love and their complete self-abandon giving themselves totally. And this is what Paul is witnessing, and this is what changes a man, and this is what will change our country, not just Bible studies and not books, but living, breathing, witnesses who die to themselves and live for Christ. It is a beautiful thing. It is an attractive thing. It is Mother Teresa, it is John Paul the Second, it is people who are doing it, and they're changing the world and they're there they are examples for us today, namely the Father and the Son of the Holy Spirit. Lord Jesus, thank you for giving us the example of Stephen. May we also keep our eyes upon you and the Beatific Vision, living in hope, Seeing you, the right hand of the Father. We pray this in Jesus.

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431 <sup>1</sup> Diaspora: the dispersion of the Jewish people beyond Israel.



432  
433 <sup>2</sup> 1Corinthians 12:1 – 31, Spiritual Gifts description...there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit...