

# Stephen's Landmark Sermon

by Danny Bond

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*Stephen's sermon is a defense of his faith and an explanation of the plan of salvation through Jesus Christ, emphasizing his connection to the Jewish people and his understanding of the Scriptures.*

**Duration:** 48:07

**Scripture:** Exodus 2:2-3, Acts 7:17-33

**Topics:** "Stephen"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the story of Moses and how God trained him for forty years in the desert before calling him to be the deliverer of the Israelites. The preacher emphasizes the power of the Holy Spirit and encourages the audience to seek that power in their own lives. He then shifts to the story of Stephen, the first martyr for preaching the name of Christ, and highlights the excellence of Stephen's sermon despite his execution. The preacher concludes by emphasizing that God is a gentleman who offers salvation, but it is up to individuals to choose to receive or reject Him.

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## Transcript

This passage contains Stephen's landmark sermon. As a title for the message, that's what I've put, Stephen's Landmark Sermon. You could also call it a marvel of Christ's grace, because here Stephen is arrested.

He has debated with the religious leaders openly, and they have been unable to withstand his wisdom. When he begins to speak of the Scriptures and opens his mouth and talks of what God was doing in the Old Testament, these men who have rejected a real relationship with God and traded it in for a religion based on their interpretations of God's Word and their traditions. When he talks to these men who love tradition rather than God, he does it in such a way, opening the Scriptures, that he has a wisdom they can't resist.

They know God is speaking through him. The problem with these men is that they don't want to know God. They are perfectly content to be religious, perfectly content to talk about God, but they have no desire to know God.

You have to understand that. And religion is often used for that purpose. People will go to church to log in their time, quote, with God, and leave church and go live as they please.

And do that year in and year out, and have no relationship with the Lord whatsoever, and all the while assume they're going to heaven because they're religious. That's where these men are at right here. So, as they did with the Twelve, and as they did with Jesus, the members of the Sanhedrin, the 71 men that belong to the ruling body of Israel, arrest Stephen, he does not resist, and they pull him into this time of questioning him, and their real goal is to eliminate him.

They can't stop him, his effectiveness, he's doing signs and wonders which they can't explain away, and so they want to eliminate him. What they really want to do is find him guilty of blasphemy of the things they accused him falsely, which were that he was blaspheming God, blaspheming Moses, blaspheming the law, and blaspheming the temple. They accused him of that.

However, it's not true. So, what we have here in his sermon then is his defense. And after he's done with his defense, he makes his declaration that he looks up, and he sees the Son of Man on the right hand of God, and his face is glowing like an angel.

And when he is all done trying to communicate, get this, trying to communicate to them how to get to heaven, they murder him. Think of that. Here is a man before these religious leaders who has one goal, to show them the way to heaven.

When he's done, they murder him, because they don't want anything to do with God or heaven. What they want is money, power, position, and popularity, and a big following. That's it.

So they murder him to get rid of him. They can't deny him, they can't resist him, so they murder him. But let's look at his defense along the way.

To begin with Stephen's defense, he's not primarily reciting history for the sake of history, though he does give a lot of history. He's establishing that he's not guilty of blaspheming God, Moses, the law, and the temple. To begin with, then, God, he starts where they have accused him of the most serious crime, which would be to blaspheme God.

In verse 1, we read here, then the high priest, which would be probably Caiaphas, said, Are these things so? The same man who was there when they tried Jesus and sent him to the cross, is here. He says, Are these things so? Are you guilty of these charges? That's what he's saying. Stephen doesn't really say yes or no.

He starts to preach to them to show that he's not guilty of the charges, but ultimately, he's not a blasphemer. Get this, they are. They are.

And it is an amazing thing to watch how it opens with Caiaphas, the high priest, Are you guilty or not? You're on trial. It's amazing to watch the work of the Holy Spirit and the power of the Word of God as it slowly turns and before they know it, they are on trial before God. So, he says in verse 2, Brethren and fathers, listen, the God of glory appeared to our father.

He uses the phrase, our father, as he refers to Abraham. As he gets on into this, he says over and over, our fathers. Look, I'm one of you.

What he's doing, ultimately, is he's saying, listen, if you would just open your hearts to God, if you would open your hearts to His Word, ultimately, you would become like me. A converted Jew who has found his Messiah. And thus he, watch how he uses our fathers, our fathers, our fathers, our fathers.

He's not blaspheming anything. He's a fulfillment of everything God ever called the Jews to be. And so he says in verse 2, Brethren and fathers, listen, the God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia before he dwelt in Haran.

So he addresses God as the God of glory, which is a tremendous comprehensive statement concerning God and shows the depth that Stephen has in understanding Him. Why? Because the glory of God is the sum total of His attributes. The glory of God is the sum total of His attributes.

He calls Him the God of glory. Reaching back to Psalm 29, verse 3, he plucks that title. Only used in Psalm 29, verse 3 in the Bible.

And then here by Stephen. And right away he begins to display that he has an understanding of the Scriptures that is far beyond theirs. It is in fact an understanding of the Scriptures market that only comes from long hours reading and studying and then ultimately praying over the Word of God.

He has insight, you could put it this way, that only can come to you when you're on your knees. Insight that comes to those that spend a lot of time on their knees with the Word of God. So he affirms his belief in the God of glory, our father Abraham.

And then he outlines the sovereign control of God with Abraham in verse 3. He said to them, Abraham, God says to Abraham, get out of your country from your relatives who are idolaters. Come to the land I will show you. Then he came out.

I like that. God says to Abraham, get out. He came out.

When God speaks to you, you do well to listen and obey. Even if you have to step out in faith into territory you've never been before. So he came out.

Verse 4, of the land of the Chaldeans and dwelt in Haran. And from there, when his father was dead, God moved him to this land in which you now dwell. So, God sovereignly calls Abraham.

His whole family was idolaters. That gives us an indication he probably was. God simply comes to him and says, I want you to follow me.

I have a plan for you. So he sovereignly calls him. Abraham obeys him and thus accomplishes God's purpose for his life.

That's the way it happens. God talks to you. You obey.

He works sovereignly in your life, but you have to obey him. Both work together. Your responsibility and God's sovereignty.

Verse 5, And God gave him no inheritance in the land, not even enough to set his foot on. But even when Abraham had no child, he promised to give it to him for possession and to his descendants after him. But God spoke, verse 6, God spoke in this way that his descendants would dwell in a foreign land and that he would bring them into bondage and oppress them 400 years.

And a nation to whom they will be in bondage I will judge, speaking of Egypt, said God, and after that they shall come out and serve me in this place. Prophecy of what he would do when he raised up Moses as their deliverer. So we see that he doesn't blaspheme their God.

He believes in the God of Abraham. And further, he is saying all of that to say, you see, I'm not guilty. But he goes further.

And he follows the flow of salvation history because he wants to unfold to them while he answers their accusations, he wants to unfold to them that Jesus Christ is the Messiah as foretold in the typology of Moses' life and ministry. In the typology of Joseph, his life and ministry. And he wants to be very clear that these men were just forecasts of the ultimate deliverer who would come.

Jesus Christ. So he's answering their accusations and revealing Christ at the same time in the Old Testament Scriptures. So he goes now into the time of the patriarch period.

In verse 8. Then he gave him the covenant, that is Abraham, the covenant of circumcision. And so Abraham begot Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day. Here's the covenant God gives to their father of circumcision.

When he finishes his sermon, he says, you are uncircumcised people in your hearts and in your ears. You have nothing to do with what God originally intended for you. That's where he's heading.

This is a forecast of that. He gave him the covenant of circumcision. And so Abraham begot Isaac, circumcised him on the eighth day.

Isaac begot Jacob. Jacob begot, here we go, the twelve patriarchs. They practically venerated these guys.

These are our fathers, the twelve patriarchs, the head of the twelve tribes of Israel. They practically venerate these guys. But now what he does is he takes the patriarchs and he lays the groundwork for the indictment he's going to give them of how they reject the ultimate deliverer, Christ, just as these men rejected Joseph, who was to be God's deliverer for them.

Verse 9. The patriarchs, becoming envious, sold Joseph into Egypt, but God was with him. I like that. The patriarchs were ungodly.

They were jealous. They sold Joseph into Egypt in slavery. But even though they rejected him, God was still with him.

And that is the way it is with Jesus Christ. Verse 10. God delivered him out of all of his troubles, gave him favor and wisdom in the presence of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, and made him governor over Egypt and all his house.

They first threw him in a pit, threw Joseph in a pit, his brothers, to have him killed, hopefully by a lion that would come by. Then they had a little mercy on him, one of the brothers said, oh, let's take him out. They sold him then into slavery.

But basically, they sought to destroy him. God overruled their efforts, raised Joseph up to become the governor of Egypt, and then used him when famine hit the land of Palestine and they would have starved to death. And there would be no Israel.

If Jacob and all of his sons starved to death, there would be no Israel. Thus, God used Joseph to save them to protect his plan of salvation because Christ was to come through their offspring. Verse 10.

God delivered him out of all of his troubles, gave him favor and made him governor over Egypt. So, they reject Joseph. They get rid of Joseph.

God rescues Joseph. And through Joseph, God rescues them. Verse 11.

Now a famine and great trouble came over all the land of Egypt and Canaan and our fathers found no sustenance. No food. But when Jacob heard there was grain in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first.

And the second time, Joseph was made known to his brothers and Joseph's family became known to the Pharaoh. Then Joseph sent and called his father Jacob and all his relatives to him, 75 people. So, Jacob finally went down to Egypt and there, well taken care of.

He ultimately died, he and our fathers. And they were carried back to Shechem and laid in the tomb that Abraham bought for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem. So, far from blaspheming God, he understands God better than they do.

He understands the plan of God better than they do. And he understands the treatment of their fathers against the deliverer, Joseph, better than they do. See, he understands that Joseph was a type of Christ.

Do you know that? It's a wonderful thing to contemplate. See, both men were from the nation of Israel, Joseph and Jesus. Jesus, like Joseph, was delivered up for envy.

Jesus was condemned to death by the testimony of false witnesses. Joseph was imprisoned because of false accusations by Potiphar's wife. Just as God freed Jesus from the prison of death and exalted Him, so He freed Joseph from prison and exalted him to high office.

Joseph was able, ultimately, to deliver his sinful brothers from physical death. Jesus rose from the dead and delivers us from spiritual death. You see, the parallels are very clear and they are there on purpose set forth by God.

So, he is not guilty of blaspheming God. Let's go to the next thing. He is not guilty of blaspheming Moses.

And He is very clear to show them that with a masterful defense. What amazes me, if I could just tuck in a footnote here. This sermon, when you're all done with it, stands as one of the greatest sermons ever preached.

Without question. It's so tightly woven. It is so deep.

It is so clear. It is so succinct. And you must bear in mind it's delivered by a man who pretty much knows he's going to die at the end of it.

Can you imagine that? This is the power of the Holy Spirit. To make us so completely independent from our circumstances around us by controlling our hearts and our minds and guarding us with His peace so that we can accomplish what He wants us to do. God wants a crystal clear witness to these men.

That is what they get. If you read it, it's so clear you would assume he's preaching to a loving congregation. He's going to come up and shake His hand afterwards for a great sermon.

That's the power of the Holy Spirit. Only God could do that. If He could do it for Stephen, He can do it for you.

Watch for that power in your life. Verse 17 When the time of the promise drew near, which God had sworn to Abraham that He would raise up, deliver, and bring them out of bondage from Egypt, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt till another king arose who did not know Joseph. Then this man dealt treacherously with our people and oppressed our forefathers, making them expose their babies so that they might not live.

Verse 20 At this time Moses was born and was well-pleasing to God. And he was brought up in his father's house for three months. But when he was set out, Pharaoh's daughter took him away and brought him up as her own son.

Now verse 22 is a fascinating verse to me. One thing I love about the Bible is the more you read it, the more light you get. The more you understand one section of the Bible, the more you'll understand another.

Verse 22 Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was mighty in... What does it say? Words and deeds. Whoa! You know what that means? This blows the lid off Moses' cover of the burning bush. Do you remember when God came to Moses in the burning bush? He says, Moses, I want you to be the deliverer for my people.

So you go on up and you do what I tell you to do and you say what I tell you to say. And Moses says... He doesn't want to do it. Moses says, Lord, I can't do it because... Well, what can't? Why? I can't do it because I have a problem speaking.

I'm really not a good communicator. Since when? Right now? He made it up right there. Stephen blows the lid off of it.

Moses was raised by Pharaoh's daughter in Egypt as a prince. He was mighty in words. Whoo! That tells me Moses was putting on a show for God.

Lord, I can't deliver your people. I'm no good with words. And God says, Who made your mouth? Don't show me what your mouth is all about.

I know all about you. I know all about your skills. And that man who was great and mighty in words in Egypt, when you read Deuteronomy, the last sermon Moses preached before he died, that man is an awesome orator.

Just a side note to tell you how quickly our human nature will come up with an excuse to God as to why we can't do what He's asking us to do, even if it's a flimsy excuse. And that was a flimsy one. And the great thing is, is he ended up going and doing it anyway.

And God mightily blessed him. I thank God he's patient with us. Aren't you? So, verse 23.

When he was 40 years old, when he was back in Egypt, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the children of Israel. And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended and avenged him who was oppressed and struck down the Egyptian. For he supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand, but... This is kind of a summary of their whole history.

They did not understand. The next day he appeared to two of them as they were fighting and tried to reconcile them, saying, Men, you're brethren. Why do you wrong one another? But he who did his neighbor wrong pushed him away, saying, Who made you a ruler and a judge over us? See, here he is

saying, I'm here to deliver you.

They're saying, We don't want your deliverance. Who are you? Who made you a ruler and a judge over us? Which was pretty much their attitude all the way through. With all the deliverance God sent to them.

Verse 28. Do you want to kill me as you did the Egyptian yesterday? They totally have an attitude with him. Mr. Murderer.

Then at this saying, Verse 29. Moses fled and became a dweller in the land of Midian where he had two sons. Verse 30.

When 40 years had passed, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire in a bush in the wilderness of Mount Sinai. Moses goes to the children of Israel, seeks to reveal himself to them as deliverer because God had put it in his heart to be the deliverer. Watch this.

40 years go by when he flees and he goes into Midian and he lives in the wilderness. 40 years go by before he actually becomes the deliverer. Why did God put it into his heart then wait 40 years? Because that's the way God does it.

He doesn't always wait 40 years, but we're not all Moses. He will put something in your heart that he wants to do in the future. We tend to sense that he's placing a vision there or a desire, a calling, and we want it now.

Without all the training and preparation God intends to give us. See, the training and preparation can't start until you identify that he's calling you to do something. Does that make sense? Hello.

So, with Moses, he says, alright, this is where it begins. Moses wants to start right now. God wants to train him for 40 years.

So he sends him to the back desert of Midian where he is a shepherd for 40 years. And during those 40 years he learned every trail at Sinai, every waterhole, every place would be sufficient to take care of the people of God. And he learned how to take care of sheep, which was preparation to learn how to take care of the people of God.

So, 40 years goes by. And then God calls him to be the deliverer. Now, verse 30.

The angel of the Lord appeared to him at that time in the flame of fire in the bush in the wilderness of Mount Sinai. Verse 31. When Moses saw it, he marveled at the sight, and he drew near to observe it.

And the voice of the Lord came to him, saying, I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob. And Moses trembled and dared not to look. Now, at this point, you have to imagine these men.

They're spellbound. They cannot believe that this guy who was just a deacon waiting on tables, effectively, stands before them all. He is courageous.

He's not intimidated. And he is unfolding the scriptures. And he's talking about their history, which, by the way, was their very favorite subject.

They loved, of course, to talk about themselves. It was their favorite subject. And so, by this time, you've got to realize they're looking at each other going, wow, this guy is incredible.

And he's talking about Moses. That's right. And Abraham.

That's right. And our fathers. That's right.

And so now they're looking at each other going, he's really good. Where's he going with this? Wait till they find out. And so, verse 33, the Lord said to him, to Moses, take off your sandals, off your feet, for the place whereon you stand is holy ground.

I have surely seen the oppression of my people who are in Egypt. I have heard their groaning and have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt.

So, God sees the time has come to fulfill His promise to deliver them from bondage. And God raises up the deliverer who's now been prepared. And here is the reaction of the people to their deliverer sent from God.

Verse 35, this Moses whom they, the fathers, whom they rejected. Saying, who made you a ruler and a judge is in fact the one God sent to be the ruler and the deliverer. Do you see it? The very one God sent to be their ruler, the very one God sent to be their judge is the very one they rejected.

He is setting the stage for their rejection, the men in front of them, as it parallels the rejection of the fathers with the deliverer that God sent them. They are repeating history. Only their rejection is far more serious than all the others combined.

Verse 36, they rejected Moses, but Moses in the end became their deliverer anyway, and so he brought them out after he had shown wonders and signs in the land of Egypt and in the Red Sea and in the wilderness for 40 years. They finally went into the promised land. Verse 37, this is that Moses who said to the children of Israel, the man who was undeniably sent from God as testified by the plagues, the signs, the wonders, the Red Sea, everything.

The man who was undeniably sent from God is the same man who spoke of the Messiah in verse 37. And he told all the people, the Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear.

That was Moses' prophecy of Jesus Christ, their Messiah. And so Stephen is very clear with this. You say you believe in Moses.

Our fathers rejected Moses as their deliverer. He delivered them anyway. Moses spoke of our Messiah, Jesus Christ.

You've rejected Him just as the fathers rejected Moses. You see, if these men in the Sanhedrin had been willing to consider the facts that day about Christ, they could not have missed the parallels in their nation's history with their own behavior toward Jesus Christ. The parallel between Jesus and Moses.

Just as there is a parallel between Joseph and Jesus by design in the masterful plan of God, there's a parallel with Moses and Jesus. Did you know that? Moses humbled himself by leaving Pharaoh's palace. Jesus Christ humbled himself by leaving the palace of heaven and coming down here.

Moses was rejected at first. So was Jesus Christ. Moses was a shepherd.

Jesus is the good shepherd. Moses redeemed his people from bondage in Egypt. Jesus redeems men from bondage in sin.

The history of Moses foreshadows the history of Jesus Christ very clearly. So far from blaspheming Moses, he believes in Moses and what he was all about far more than their forefathers, far more than them. Then they said he blasphemed the law.

He gives his response to that in verse 38. This is he, Moses. This is amazing to me what follows.

This is he who was in the congregation in the wilderness. That's when they were all together, about 3 million people, parked at the base of Sinai, which was effectively a huge granite pulpit with God on top. So here they are.

That's the congregation in the wilderness. It's facing this pulpit with God on top. Thunder and lightning and smoke.

And Moses goes up there to hear God speak. Then he comes back down, you remember, with the Ten Commandments. Now follow this.

This is he, Moses, who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai. There were angels up there as well as God. And with our fathers, the one who received the living oracles or the law of Moses, the Word of God given to us.

So he affirms his belief in the law as God gave it. And that is crystal clear. He was not a blasphemer of the law.

It's clear now to the Sanhedrin. So he's defended himself. But now he goes beyond that.

And he goes from defense to offense. Now he goes on the offensive. In verse 39 he says, Whom our fathers would not obey but rejected.

God gave Moses the law, but our fathers rejected Moses. And in their hearts turned back to Egypt. Saying to Aaron, Make us gods to go before us, for as for this Moses, verse 40, who brought us out of the land of Egypt.

Look at this. We do not know what has become of him. I'm so sure.

They're all gathered around. It's like a dead end street. They come into this carved out valley type area and at the end of it is this Mount Sinai which is a huge pulpit.

They're facing the mountain in a cul-de-sac. If that helps. And Moses goes up to the top of the mountain and stays there.

They know exactly where he is. He's up on the mountain hearing from God. No sooner does he leave than the children of Israel turn to Aaron and they say, this is amazing, verse 40, Make us gods.

Make us gods. Wait a minute. You saw God manifest Himself in the plagues in Egypt.

You saw God miraculously preserve you through those plagues, open the Red Sea, take you across on dry land. That's your God. The God who's with Moses.

The God that's talking to Moses on the mountaintop. How quickly they forget. How quickly their hearts just go back to Egypt, to the things of Egypt.

And mark this. Calf worship was an integral part of Egyptian religion. These people do not believe in the God who has miraculously delivered them.

How about that? They're stuck on worshiping the gods of Egypt. Moses, we don't know where he is. So Aaron, can you make us some gods real quick? What is this? Drive-thru God? You know, can you make us a God real quick? We'd like a couple of calves, if you can knock them out.

And we'd like to worship them. That is so tragic. Their penchant for idolatry was insatiable.

Always wanting to replace God with something else. So here they are. Aaron goes along with it.

And they make these golden calves. And Moses is on the mountaintop with God. When he comes down, can you imagine? Moses comes off the mountaintop.

He has two tablets. Stone tablets. Mark it.

They're still warm. They're still warm. God cut them from the mountaintop with His own power.

And He wrote on them with His own finger. And they're still hot from the finger of God with the Word of God. Here he comes.

With the Word of God hot from God. About to give it to the people. And as he comes down from the mountain, here they are.

They're in a total idolatrous form of worship and sin and everything else. And they're worshiping these calves. They've rejected God already.

So what is the point of Stephen? It's incredible. What he's telling the Sanhedrin is that you think your fathers are so great they love the law of Moses? You think I'm a blasphemer of the law of Moses? I am not. The fathers were.

Because when Moses comes down with the law, they're already worshiping a golden calf. Get this. They rejected the law before they even received it.

They rejected the law before they even received it. Don't tell me Israel is this great people of the law of God. Don't tell me the fathers loved the law and so do you.

Don't tell me the fathers rejected it before they even received it. That is so radical. It was so true of them.

They studied the law, but they rejected it in their hearts. Verse 42, then God gave them up. God gave them up.

Judicial hardness. When God comes to you by His Holy Spirit and He speaks to you and reveals Himself and draws you unto Himself, you have to make a decision. Am I going to respond to God or continue to obey sin and the devil? If you reject God and obey yourself, your own heart, and sin and the devil, God will

continue to come to you and call you unto Himself.

If you continue to reject Him, there can come a time where He will give you up and over to what you want. And if it isn't God, He'll give you over to whatever it is you want. Your master passion.

The Bible says of Pharaoh, Pharaoh hardened his heart. God approached him again through Moses. He hardened his heart.

God approached him again in grace through Moses. About nine times you read, Pharaoh hardened his heart. Then around number 10, you read, and God hardened Pharaoh's heart.

But not until Pharaoh had repeatedly resisted the Holy Spirit. Now these people have been delivered by God. They've seen the Red Sea parted.

They've seen miracles from God. They've seen God reveal Himself. God's Word.

And they reject it all. So, they've made their decision and God gives them up. It's what I call judicial hardness.

There comes a time for some people, before they die, when God shuts off the lights and there's no way back. You're past the point of no return. God gives you up.

I don't want you, God. I love you. I don't want you, God.

I died for you. I don't want you, God. I rose from the dead again after paying for your sins to save you.

I don't want you, God. Come unto Me and I will give you rest. I don't want you, God.

And finally, God says, you don't want Me? I don't want you. You don't want Me? I don't want you. You don't want Me? I don't want you.

Alright, you can have what you want. A life without Me. You see, if you feel God speaking to your heart today, if you feel the Lord Jesus Christ speaking to your heart, drawing you to salvation, if you feel God speaking to your heart, respond to Him while you feel Him because there may come a time when you don't.

Respond to the Lord while you feel Him because there may come a time when you don't feel Him anymore. If He gives you up, then you're done. When He gave them up, verse 42, notice, they went on to worship the host of heaven.

Idolatry. As it is written in the book of the prophets, did you offer Me slaughtered animals and sacrifices during the forty years in the wilderness of the house of Israel? He's quoting Amos here from chapter 5. You also took up the tabernacle of Molech and the star of your God, notice your God, Rephaim, images that you made to worship and I will carry you away to Babylon. It is a prophecy from Amos of God taking them into captivity for rejecting Him and worshipping idols.

Molech is the God they worship by offering their babies. There are some sins that are not new. They rejected worship of God and they made these idols, little idols about 2 feet, 3 feet high, out of metal.

They would then heat them in the fire. These little idols, Molech, little Molech idols had these arms that stuck out. They would heat them up in the fire until they were red hot.

And then to appease the God Molech, they would take their babies and offer them to Molech, put them on the red hot arms of Molech and the babies would die as an offering to Molech. Very much a forecast simply of abortion that is done because you want to keep on sinning and you don't want any kids. Molech is not new.

When He gave them up, you see their life is just full of idolatry. They rejected the law before they even got it. They went on to continue to.

So, God, Moses, the law, He's not blaspheming these things. He sees them as they are. And He goes finally to the temple.

They said that He was blaspheming the temple. In verse 44, He shows He has a greater understanding of the temple and God's work there than they do. He says, Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness as He appointed, instructing Moses to make it according to pattern they had seen.

That's where you had the Ark of the Covenant and the burnt offering, the altar of the burnt offering, the laver and so on. And our fathers, which our fathers having received and in turn also brought with Joshua into the land possessed by the Gentiles, the promised land whom God drove out before the face of our fathers until the days of David. So, this portable tabernacle that they would carry around with them when they moved.

And they took it into the promised land, verse 46, who found favor before God and asked to find a dwelling. David asked God if He could build him a house. Asked to find a dwelling for the God of Jacob.

But David didn't build the house. Solomon, verse 47, built him a house. So, this man understands their history, their God, their prophets, their deliverers, their temple, their tabernacle in a very succinct way.

And he understands something that they don't. He understands what Solomon understood. Verse 48, However, the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands, as the prophet says.

See, if we could stop right there. As they're seated around Stephen in a semi-circle, they think they know it all. We are the men of God, the law, the temple, Moses.

He's already nailed them on the first three. Now, just down to the temple. The first temple, which was Solomon's, had been destroyed by the Babylonians.

Ezra 5.12 The second temple was rebuilt by Zerubbabel. It was destroyed. The current temple, which they were in front of, had been built, get this, by a non-Jew by the name of Herod.

And that temple would be destroyed within the lifetime of many of the people that were listening because it was destroyed in 70 A.D. All of that is to say that the temple was always a transient thing with God and temporary and even destroyed a couple of times and the one that was there in front of them would be destroyed as well. The bottom line being this, what Solomon said to God when he dedicated his temple in 1 Kings 8.27, Solomon understood that it isn't about the building, it's the God the building represents. He said, when he dedicated his temple, but will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heavens of heavens cannot contain you.

How much less this temple, God, that I've built. I built you this temple, but Lord, I know that you don't live in that little ten by ten room in there with the gold covering on the walls. I know that you are everywhere at

once and you, even the heavens cannot contain you.

That's the God Solomon worshipped, that's the God Stephen worshipped, that is not the God the Sadducees who made up the most part of the Sanhedrin worshipped because they did not even believe in life after death. You see how far above and beyond them this man is? You see, if they believed the way he did, they would be like him, but they don't. They are godless, religious individuals with a Bible in front of them, is what it amounts to.

And a religious outfit, religious vocabulary, religious tones, and a terrible jealousy and envy that manifests itself in violence. Let me point something out to you. One thing about religious people who do not care about a relationship personally with God is they get very violent when you talk to them about sin.

They get violent when you talk to them about sin. They don't want to talk about that. Whereas a born-again Christian, if you talk to them about sin, they're going to say, you're talking to me, yeah.

That's me. I'm a sinner saved by grace. I don't have a problem with that.

I know I'm a sinner. That's how I got saved. But you talk to somebody who's just religion only, and they're going to get really upset at you.

And if you tell them, you need to repent of your sins and follow Christ, if you get a violent response from someone who says they know God, when you're talking about Jesus and repentance and sin, you're talking to somebody who doesn't know God. Because, blessed are the poor in spirit, Jesus said, theirs is the kingdom of heaven. When you realize you're poor in spirit, bankrupt, destitute, unable before God to save yourself, He comes in.

He rushes in. Salvation is a rescue job. And He offers you the free gift of salvation and forgiveness.

He forgives you. He cleanses you. And He puts His Spirit inside of you to live in you for all of eternity.

And you are a different person. And all the while, you know you're a sinner saved by the grace of God. And that's why you love Him so much.

Religion reacts violently to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That's what happens here. So, Stephen refers to Solomon and he quotes Isaiah 49.

Heaven is my throne and earth is my footstool. What house will you build for me? Says the Lord. What is the place of my rest? Has my hand not made all these things? Stephen wasn't guilty of blasphemy in the temple.

Get this. They were. Because they confined God to it.

He wasn't guilty of blasphemy in the temple. They were because they confined God down to live literally in a box. The Holy of Holies.

They confined God down to the temple. They narrowed Him down to be this little thing that lived in the temple. They totally missed it.

The temple was a symbol of God's presence. Not ever to be the prison of God's essence. The temple was a symbol of God's presence.

Never meant to be the prison of His essence. Even the heavens can't contain Him. Now, He just brings it all home and He nails them.

And this is where we're going to stop. He says in verse 51, He's had them mesmerized until now. They're spelled down.

And now He turns and He shows them their guilt in resisting the Holy Spirit. He says, You stiff-necked... Literally, that has to do... It pictures a person who defiantly refuses to bow before God. You stiff-necked.

Uncircumcised. Whoa! That is their biggest thing. Uncircumcised.

In heart and ears. Word counts. You always resist the Holy Spirit.

You are no different than your fathers. Their pattern of resisting the Deliverers clearly sent by God is the pattern you have followed and you have resisted the ultimate Deliverer, the Messiah. You always resist the Holy Spirit as your fathers did.

So do you. Verse 52, Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One of whom you now have become the betrayers and the murderers. The prophets foretold Christ and they killed the prophets, your fathers.

Christ came and now you killed Him. You murdered Him. Yeah, and they're about to murder Stephen too.

You have received the law by the direction of angels and you have not kept it. You keepers of the law, you don't even keep it yourselves. You have no respect for Moses.

You have no respect for the law. You never did venerate God and worship Him completely. You never looked to the One Moses promised.

You are God rejecters. And you are unforgiven and you are no different than Gentiles is what he's basically saying. When they heard these things, verse 54, they were cut to the heart.

Literally, the Greek is cut in half. They were cut to the heart and they gnashed on Him with their teeth. That is so radical! Everything he has said has been designed to lead them to heaven.

When they get to the end, they gnash on Him with their teeth. They run on Him and they will go on to kill Him. And Stephen would shortly become another in the long line of God's messengers killed by God's chosen nation and the first to be killed for preaching the name of Christ.

The excellence of his sermon is not to be overlooked by the fact that he's executed rather than being acquitted. This will forever remain as one of the greatest sermons ever preached. Had these men been willing to simply listen to it, their hearts would have been open and they would have repented.

Tragically, they didn't. They just continued to harden their hearts to the Holy Spirit. I hope that you don't.

There's a very clear message that runs all the way through here. God is God. He lives, He saves, and He wants to save you.

And you have a choice. You let Him. You receive Him.

You don't resist Him. Or, your choice is to reject Him. And God is a gentleman.

He will never kick down the door of your heart to come and live inside of you and save you. You must hear Him standing at the door knocking at the door of your heart. And you must, of your own choice, open the door and let Him in.

If you've never done that, do it today. You only have today. Not tomorrow.

Tomorrow will be today again. And all we can be really sure about is that right now we have an opportunity to give our lives to the Lord. If you've never done it, do it right now.

Believe on Christ. Ask Him to forgive you for your sins. Ask Him to come and live within you.

And surrender your life to the Lord. Make sure you are not one from this day forward who resists the Holy Spirit, but one who receives Christ, the Giver of the Holy Spirit. Receive His free gift of love.

And love Him in return. And know when you leave today, you belong to God from here on out. And when you die, you go into Heaven forever.

Let's pray. Father, we thank You that You are loving and rescuing God. We thank You for Your deliverance in Jesus Christ.

And Lord, we receive You today, Jesus, as our Lord and Savior. Forgive my sins, Lord Jesus. Live within me, Lord Jesus.

And work Your saving work in every heart here today. May we be a people led by Your Spirit, born by Your Spirit, led by Your Spirit, and empowered by Your Spirit. Fill us, O God.

Send us forth to be the light of the world in a real relationship with You. And we ask it in Jesus' precious name, Amen.

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