

Acts #7: The Church, Stephen, the Heavenly Position

by Stephen Kaung

Stephen's life and martyrdom serve as a pivotal moment in the growth and identity of the early church, highlighting its transition from Judaism to a distinct faith in Christ.

Duration: 1:09:38

Scripture: Acts 6:8-14, Acts 7:51-60

Topics: "Early Church", "Forgiveness"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the concept of Judaism and its four main features. The first feature is a chord of law, which includes the Ten Commandments and other statutes given by God. The second feature is a system of pieces, which refers to the various ordinances and regulations within Judaism. The third feature is a place of worship, where believers gather to worship God. The fourth feature is a set of earthly promises, which are the blessings and rewards promised to those who follow the laws of Judaism. The preacher also emphasizes the importance of understanding the purpose of the law, which is to bring knowledge of sin. Additionally, the sermon highlights the connection between the life of Jesus in the Gospel and the actions of the church in the book of Acts. The preacher draws parallels between the spirit of forgiveness exhibited by Jesus on the cross and Stephen, who forgave his persecutors before being martyred. The sermon concludes by mentioning how Stephen's death influenced the conversion of Saul, who later became the apostle Paul.

Transcript

This December evening, January the 7th, 1973, in Richmond, Virginia, a minister given through Brother Stephen Tong. May we look to the Lord in prayer. O Lord, how we pray and thank Thee, because Thou art today seated at the right hand of the Father, waiting Thine enemy to be Thine foester.

How we pray and thank Thee, today we are seated with Thee in the heavenly. Where Thou art, there hast Thou brought us to. And for this we worship Thee today.

Lord, we pray that at this very moment, Thou will manifest Thyself to us. Thou will speak to us. Thou will reveal Thy mind to us.

Thou will so lift us out of ourselves and into Thyself that we may understand Thee, that we may cooperate with Thee, that we may worship Thee in spirit and in truth. So Lord, we do commit this time in ourselves and Thy word into Thy hand. Trust in Thee to do Thy work, and it is all for Thy own sake and for Thy glory.

In the precious name of our Lord Jesus, Amen. We have been sharing together in recent days something in the book of Acts. So tonight we would like to continue on a little further.

Will you please turn to Acts chapter 6. Acts chapter 6. We begin with verse 8. Acts chapter 6 verse 8. And Stephen, full of grace and power, wrought wonders and great signs among the people. And there rose up certain of those of the synagogue called of Freemen, and of Cyrenians, and of Alexandrians, and of those of Phoenicia and Asia, disputing with Stephen. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit with which he spoke.

Then there was a broad man saying, We have heard him speaking blasphemous words against Moses and God. And there arose the people and the elders and the scribes. And coming upon him, they seized him and brought him to the council.

And they set forth witnesses, saying, This man does not speak speaking words against the holy place and the law. For we have heard him saying, This Jesus the Nazarene shall destroy this place and change the customs which Moses taught us. And all who sat in the council looking fixedly on him saw his face as the face of an angel.

Chapter 7 verse 54. Chapter 7 verse 54. And hearing these things, they were cut to the heart and gnashed their teeth against him.

And being full of the Holy Spirit, having fixed his eyes on heaven, he saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, Lo, I behold the heavens open, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. And they cried out with a loud voice, and held their ears, and rushed upon him with one accord. And having cast him out of the city, they stoned him.

And the witnesses laid aside their clothes at the feet of a man, and said, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And kneeling down, he cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this thing to their charge. And having said this, he fell asleep.

Probably you have noticed that as the life of our Lord Jesus on earth is roughly thirty-three years and half. So in the book of Acts, you find the period that is covered by the book of Acts is roughly thirty-two years. In the gospel, we find how the Lord Jesus began to do and to speak in his body of incarnation.

So in the book of Acts, we find how the Risen Lord continues to do and to speak in a body which he took upon himself beginning on the day of Pentecost. So the gospel tells us of what our Lord Jesus did in his own person for thirty-some years. And the book of Acts tells us what our Lord Jesus continued to do and to speak in a corporate body which is the church.

It is the same Lord who is speaking and who is doing. But in the book, in the gospel, it is in his personal body. In the book of Acts, it is in the corporate body.

When you think of a body, you think of life. Because if there is no life, then there is no body. It is a corpse.

But not a real body. So when we think of a body, it brings to us the thought of life. And when you think of life, life is something that grows.

You know in the gospel you find our Lord Jesus, when he was born, he was born at age in Bethlehem. Then you find he grew up. Because there was life in Bethlehem.

He grew up, waxed strong, both physically and mentally. And he continued to grow until he reached the age of thirty, maturity. And then he began his ministry for over a year.

Now if we use this analogy and try to apply it to this corporate body that we find in the book of Acts, you will find the same principle is working there. Because this body of Christ, this church of God, is according to the principle of life. Therefore on the day of Pentecost, you will find the church is born.

The body of Christ begins its existence on earth. And then the body begins to grow, and grow, and grow. And when you come to the end of the book of Acts, you will find it has grown a great deal.

According to the principle of growth of life, you may divide the book of Acts into three stages. Now of course, if you want to divide the book of Acts according to the spread of the gospel, that is fulfilling the commission that God has given to the church. Then you will find from chapter 1 to chapter 7, it is witnessing in Jerusalem.

From chapter 8 to chapter 12, it is all Judea and Samaria. And chapter 13 to chapter 28, until now, it is to the end of the earth. That is one way of dividing the book of Acts.

But there is another way of dividing the Acts according to the growth of the body of Christ. That vessel in which and through which the Lord, the risen Lord, is speaking and is doing. I will say from chapter 1 to chapter 5, it is babyhood.

From chapter 6 to chapter 15, it is adolescence. And from chapter 16 to chapter 28, it is adulthood, or reaching toward maturity. You know, when you open the book of Acts, and you read the first five chapters, what impression does it give to you? Now we are talking about impression.

Of course, impression is something intangible. And yet it is very real. When you read the first five chapters of the book of Acts, what is your impression? Here you will find on the day of Pentecost, a hundred and twenty people, they were baptized in one spirit into one body.

And immediately on that first day, you will find three thousand were being added. And all those who believed in the Lord, how they persevered in the teaching and in the fellowship of the apostles, in the breaking of bread and in prayer. And you will find how God was redone.

Miracles were done. Many more were being added. And in spite of the rapid growth of the body, the whole condition was very healthy.

Because all those that were together, they were of one mind and of one soul. They loved one another. They were completely delivered from self-possessiveness.

Nobody said, this belongs to me. But they shared everything with everybody according to each their needs. They had problems, but not much problems.

You know, in chapter five, you will find a little problem. Ananias and Sapphira came in. But immediately you will find God took care of that problem.

So in a sense you will find during the first five chapters, what you see is such natural spontaneous growth. They were under the constant care of the Heavenly Father. The presence of the Holy Spirit was so real in their midst.

And the blessing of the Lord was certainly upon them. They just lived their days happily, joyfully, enjoying the Lord and enjoying one another. And there was almost no problem.

Is this like babyhood? When we are babies, we are taken care of by our parents. These are days that are carefree. These are days that are happy days.

Everything is provided. And there is no problem. If there is any problem, our parents will take care of our problems.

So we may say that during the stage of babyhood, we just enjoy and rejoice in the goodness of our parents. You will find the first five chapters of the book of Acts are like that. The church, the body of Christ, that vessel of God.

When it is first born, you will find it goes through a period of such blessedness and of such care by the Heavenly Father. But then when you come to chapter 6, and on to chapter 15, you know when a person begins to outgrow babyhood and get into adolescent period. Now that's a most difficult period.

Here you will find conflict begins to come in. Here you will find struggles, problems. An adolescent period is an unsettled period.

Everything seems to be in turmoil. Nothing is settled. It is the most unstable period.

We call it the growing pains of life. As a person begins to grow, you will find there is some pain there. And sometimes you do not know what it is.

You just feel there is something there. And yet you cannot explain it. You are dissatisfied with everything.

You are trying new ideas all the time. And you enter into all kinds of failures and defeats. And yet you are full of wonders and full of amazement.

It is a time of puzzlement. And yet through all these, your life gets adolescent. When I read chapter 6 to chapter 15 of the book of Acts, my impression is, my, the body of Christ is going through an adolescent period.

You will find problems and problems come into the church. You will find lots of adjustments have to be made. Lots of discoveries, new discoveries have to be made.

And because of that, lots of conflict. Certain things have to be shattered. They have to come out of the shell and enter into entirely new realms.

And there are pains all along. But thank God, when you go through that period, you will come out. And you will find you have grown.

Now that is chapter 6 to chapter 15. Then from chapter 16 to chapter 28, you will find that the church is growing and spreading. And it not only is in Jerusalem, all Judea and Samaria, but it has gone to all Asia and even to Europe.

To the end of this world. And you will find God's purpose is being carried out further and further. The reason why I share with you my impression is because there is something I feel God wants us to learn as to the development, the growth of the body of Christ.

The church, which is the corporate body of Christ, is an organism, not an organization. Because it is an organism, because it is life, therefore you will find there will be such growth as life goes on. And this you will find in chapter 6 and chapter 7. When the church was first formed on the day of Pentecost, up to the time of Stephen, the martyrdom of Stephen.

The Roman Empire, as well as the Jewish society, they look upon this way, all this life, all these powers of Jesus, as just another set of deities. You know at that time the name Christianity does not exist. We talk about Christianity today, but Christianity, the name Christianity did not exist at that time.

Not even the name Christian. Now we call ourselves Christians, everybody knew, but at that time even the word Christian was not used yet, because disciples were called Christians in the church in Antioch. So people look upon those who follow the Lord Jesus, they did not know how to identify them.

Here were over 10,000 people in Jerusalem. At that time you know over 10,000 people in Jerusalem who believed in the Lord Jesus. Who followed the Lord, who spoke of the Lord, who preached the Lord Jesus.

And they lived a different way of life all together. And people look at them and say, now who are they, who are they? They did not understand. Sometimes they call, they are followers of Jesus, and that's true.

Other times they say they are the people of the way, because their way of life is different from the other people's way of life. But they do not know who they are. And as a matter of fact, at that time they all looked upon these people, this body of Christ, as just another sect in Judaism.

The Roman Empire did not persecute this group of people at that time. Because they had a policy, a policy of appeasing the religion of those people whom they subdued. So they considered these people as part of Judaism.

So as they would protect the Jews, Judaism, so they would protect this group of people. And to the Jewish people, they were also confused. Because they find out that these here were a people.

They were Jews. But they were so different from the other Jews, and didn't know what to do with them. You know, in Judaism there are different sects.

For instance, Pharisees is a sect. Sadducees is a sect. And now we discover, wrong, and now we discover there are another sect called the Athenians.

But at that time they considered these followers of Jesus as another sect in Judaism. So for the time being, you will find they were not persecuted. Even though they were opposed, and yet there was no general persecution.

They only want to bring this group into conformity to Judaism. They were not thinking of wiping it out as if it was something altogether different. Now that was the situation in the beginning.

But dear brothers and sisters, Christianity, if I may use this word, just for convenience sake, Christianity is not a sect of Judaism. Christianity is something totally different. What the Lord has brought into this earth is something entirely different from anything that has ever been on this earth.

To consider Christianity as part of Judaism, as if it is usual Christianity, now that is foreign to God's thought. Christ has come to this earth to give a new life. And with this new life, he is bringing into being something completely new and different from anything that has ever existed.

The new wine has come. And trying to put the new wine in the old wine scheme will not only damage the old wine scheme and break it, but the new wine will also be dissipated. You do not put new wine in the old wine scheme.

Why? Because the new wine is full of expansion. The fermenting is still going on. But the old wine scheme has lost its elasticity.

It is fixed. It cannot be expanded anymore. So when you put new wine into the old wine scheme, it will burst the old wine scheme and make it completely destroyed.

And at the same time, the new wine will dissipate. So the Lord says, you do not put the new wine in the old wine scheme. You have to put the new wine in the new wine scheme because the new wine scheme is elastic.

It can expand as the new wine expands. It is not fixed. Therefore, it can contain the new wine.

Our Lord Jesus coming to this earth is bringing to this world a new wine. Just like the people say they will fill with new wine. In a sense, they are right.

They will fill with new wine. But after they are filled with new wine, how can you try to put it in the old wine scheme? How can you make it as a part of Judaism? How can you make it as another sect of Judaism? That is impossible. But remember, historically speaking, before the martyrdom of Stephen, everybody considered Christianity as an offshoot of Judaism.

And probably Stephen with the early disciples. Why? Because those early disciples were mainly Jews. And being Jews, somehow they were confined in their mentality.

Probably to the early Christians, they also considered themselves as part of Judaism. That is the reason why you find they still went to the temple during the time of prayer. And even though at the same time they had their breaking of bread.

In other words, they did both. There wasn't a clear cut. There wasn't a clear testimony that this is something completely new.

It had nothing to do with Judaism. It is new wine in new wine scheme. But how was it brought about? You will find this was brought about first in Stephen.

Stephen was that vessel, that person with which, with whom God is able to make the first break. And that is the reason why Stephen is so significant in the growth of the church, the body of Christ. Stephen, if we understand him correctly, he is the forerunner of Paul the Apostle.

As a matter of fact, you will find Paul begins his life with Christ at the martyrdom of Stephen. And if you continue on to study, you will find Paul's vision or Paul's concept of the church, the body of Christ, actually is a continuation of what Stephen had seen. So Stephen actually is the forerunner of the Apostle Paul.

He is a pioneer of the heavenly way. Who is Stephen? He is one of the seven chosen by the church in Jerusalem to serve the people. You remember the story? Because the disciples multiplied at that time.

And there were those widows with Hellenistic backgrounds. They were being overlooked in their provision daily care. As we mentioned last time, in the church in Jerusalem, all the believers were Jews.

There were maybe a few apostolites, but very few. You will find the church in Jerusalem was composed mainly of Jews. But there were two different kinds of Jews.

One kind was the Hebrew Jews, those Jews that were born and reared in Palestine. And they were stricter in keeping the law of Moses. And they were narrower in their mentality.

But there were Hellenistic Jews, Jews in the dispersion. They were born and reared in the Gentile city. And they were under the influence of Greek culture.

And these people, they were broader in their mentality and they were not as strict in keeping the law as the Hebrew Jews. So in the early days you will find the church in Jerusalem was composed of Hellenistic Jews and Hebrew Jews. And because the apostles, the top apostles, they were all Hebrew Jews.

Therefore somehow they neglected the widows of the Hellenistic Jews. And, you know, there was some problem there. And to solve that problem, the apostles suggested that they should select seven men, full of wisdom and the Holy Spirit, with good report, to serve the table.

And when the church in Jerusalem began to choose these seven people, Stephen was the first to them. Stephen was the first. He was full of wisdom and of the Holy Spirit.

He served the table well. So well that he was able not only to serve the table, but he was able to minister the word of God. If we are faithful in little things, we will be given more.

So here you find Stephen, he not only was one of the seven deacons serving the table, but he evidently was one used by God in the ministry of the word, especially towards the Hellenistic Jews. He was a man full of grace, full of grace and power. Everything that is written concerning Stephen, you will find the word full there, full.

He is not a person that knows just a little bit of Christ. He is a person that is in the fullness of Christ. He is full of wisdom, full of grace, full of the Holy Spirit, full of power.

Everything connected with Stephen is full. Why is he so full? Probably there is one reason. And that reason is he is not in any way scattered, bound by tradition.

You know, as a Hebrew Jew, he is more prone to be bound by the traditions of the fathers. But as a Hellenistic Jew, he is freer in his spirit. And not being bound by the traditions of the fathers, he is open and freer in his spirit to receive more, fuller of grace.

He is a man full, knowing the fullness of Christ. And he ministered primarily to these Hellenistic Jews who resided in Jerusalem. And because of that, the synagogue of the Hellenistic Jews rose up to persecute

him.

So you will find that persecution did not come from the Jewish synagogues as a whole, but from these Hellenistic synagogues. Synagogues of the Hellenistic Jews. Those synagogues that were established for the Jews from Africa, for the Jews from Asia, Cilicia, from these places.

These, these, these Hellenistic Jews. And they came up, they rose up, and they began to persecute Stephen. They brought him to the Jewish council, the Sanhedrin, the Seventy, the council of the Seventy, the highest Jewish court.

And they accused him. They accused him as speaking words against the holy place and the law. You will find they accused him of the same thing they accused our Lord Jesus.

They accused the Lord Jesus as one who said that he would destroy the temple. And in three days he will raise it up. They didn't understand what the Lord was speaking.

He was referring to his own body. But they said, he said the temple would be destroyed. And here you will find the same thing.

They accused Stephen as saying that Jesus would destroy the temple and change the customs that Moses taught us. So brothers and sisters, what do you find here? You find here a man full of Christ, full of the new wine. And he came into direct conflict with the old wine.

These Jewish people would like to see that this new wine will be contained in the old wine. If the new wine refused to be contained in the old wine, then they have to persecute Stephen, conform or else destruction. Brothers and sisters, at this juncture, you will find a very serious crisis.

Whether God is able to keep his life pure on earth. Or whether there will be an upheaval. Or whether the body of Christ will be a new wine scheme to a new wine.

Or whether the body of Christ will degenerate into an organization, an institution, a set of media. Now that is really the issue here. To put it in another way.

Whether Christianity should be Judaized. Or whether Christianity will be free. According to God's pattern.

This is what is Judaism. What are the features of Judaism? The features, the characteristics of Judaism are fourfold. Number one, a court of law.

Number two, a system of priesthood. Number three, a place of worship. Number four, a set of earthly promises.

Now these four items compose Judaism. What is Judaism? Judaism is a court of law. No, it is not law.

The Ten Commandments plus all the statutes and the ordinances and the features. This court of law was given by God. It was not something invented by man.

No. It has a divine origin. It was given to Moses by the hand of the angels.

It came from God. But brothers and sisters, why was the law given in the first place? When you read Romans you find the law is given for the knowledge of sin. As you read the book of Galatians you find that by the law we know what sin is.

People do not know themselves. They think that they can. They can do.

They think that they have something good in them. They think that they can please God. They think that they have merit.

Because people do not know themselves. Therefore God gives law to man. To give man a knowledge of sin.

If there is no law, we do not know what sin is. It does not mean there is no sin. But there is no knowledge of sin.

Sin is still there. I mean from the day of Adam until Moses, sin was already there. But people did not have the knowledge of sin until the law came.

The law said thou shalt not covet. Then when you covet, you are greedy, you sin. You know you have sinned.

The law is given for the knowledge of sin. The law is given to shut us up unto Christ. By the law we know that we have not done what we should.

By the law we know we have failed. By the law we are brought to our extremities. And thus we are shut up.

Law leads us. Now this is the purpose of the law. But instead of learning the real purpose of the law, the children of Israel said all that God has said we will do.

We will do them. Sure we will do them. They try to be justified by their own words.

And because of that they are condemned. Condemned by the very law that they desire, a code of law. Judaism goes of their code of law.

There is no law under the heaven nobler and higher and more divine in origin than the law. They go of their law. And yet they are condemned.

Now that is, brothers and sisters, is a history from the very beginning of the history of the church up to the present. People try to make Christianity a kind of religion like Judaism. They try to reduce the Bible into a system of theology.

People try to put out a book of doctrine or a book of discipline. Everything is to be reduced into rules and regulations with good intentions. Trying to simplify everything.

Trying to make everything so clear. Just like the Ten Commandments. But brothers and sisters, when you reduce the word of God into a system of theology, when you try to reduce Christianity into a creed of faith or a book of discipline with rules and regulations, you Judaize, you put people under the bondage.

We are not under law. But we are not without law. We have a law.

It is the law of the spirit of life. God has not given us in Christianity, in Christ, in the church, God has not reduced everything into rules and regulations. No.

He has given to us the spirit of life. And the spirit of life in the church is the law. Is the law.

So you'll find it is not a death thing. It is a living. That's the new one.

They consider Stephen as speaking against the law. Why? Because they kept the law in the physical, material sense. In letters.

But Stephen saw the law, the real purpose of the law, leading up and they could not accept it. No. 2. Judaism has a system of priesthood.

The Levitical. Because of the failure of the children of Israel. Now God's intention in the beginning was to make them a nation of priests.

In Exodus chapter 19. God said I have brought you as an eagle's wing unto myself. And I will make you a nation of priests.

Now what do you mean by a nation of priests? It means that every Israelite is going to be a priest. Serving God. But because when Moses was receiving the law among Sinai, the children of Israel worshipped the golden cow.

Because of their failure they disqualified themselves as priests. So out of the twelve tribes God was forced to elect, to select one tribe, Levi, to the priesthood. And of that tribe only one family was able to serve as priests.

The family of Abraham. The Jewish system, Judaism, is a system where the people cannot serve God. The people are not able to serve God and they are not allowed to serve God.

Service to God is limited to a tribe, to a family. That's Judaism. Brothers and sisters, is it not true? Throughout the centuries, from the beginning of the history of Christianity, even to our time, people tried to Judaize Christianity.

Instead of seeing that all believers are priests, people tried to limit the service to God to a certain class. Only those of that class can serve God. The rest of the people are laities who know nothing.

They cannot serve God, even if they want to. Spiritual service is monopolized by a special class. This probably is the meaning of Nicolaitans in Revelation chapter 2 and 3. Because in history we do not find such a sect called Nicolaitans.

So you have to go into the meaning of the word. Nicol means conquer. Laitan is laity.

Conquering the laity. In other words, a special class of people. Monopolizes all the spiritual services and leaves the laity as the audience.

That's Judaism. Peter says, as we come to Christ we are a living stone. We are being built up into a spiritual house.

A holy. We are not only a spiritual house being built up, but at the same time we are the holy priesthood that serves in that house. Every believer is a priest.

Revelation chapter 1 it says, He has washed us from our sins and has made us a kingdom. Brothers and sisters, why are we saved? We are saved to serve God as priests. We do not need any intermediary class between us and God.

Between God and man there is a mediator. Even Jesus Christ our Lord. But there is no mediator between us and Him.

The universal priesthood of the believer. Now that is the new wine spirit. But how often people try to put a new wine in the old wine spirit.

You have the life of a priest and yet you are not allowed to serve because you have not been trained and ordained. That is putting the new wine in the old wine spirit. It will break the old wine spirit.

Number three. A place of worship. To Judaism the temple is most important.

Yes, the temple of Christ was chosen by God. The pattern of the temple was revealed by God. The temple was built as a house of God.

For God to dwell by His Spirit. The temple is everything to the Jewish people. When the temple was destroyed in AD 70, Judaism was almost finished.

Even up to the present. Because there is no temple in Jerusalem there can be no sacrifice. No sacrifice.

And you know if there is no sacrifice then there is no remission of sins. So far as Judaism is concerned there is no redemption. There is no salvation.

I have attended several of my Jewish friends. Their funerals. And as I attend their funerals and listen to what the rabbi says.

You go away with a sense of hopelessness. There is no hope. There is no sacrifice.

There is no temple, no sacrifice. So what can you do? The only thing the rabbis try to comfort people is well maybe your merits will go before you and will speak good for you. That's all.

But the place of worship is very important. You have to go to Jerusalem. You have to go to the temple.

Then you can worship God. Otherwise you cannot. So you remember when our Lord Jesus met the Samaritan woman by the well of Jacob? And the Samaritan feeling, the religious feeling of the Samaritan woman was stirred up by the Lord.

So the woman asked the Lord, now you Jews said you must worship in Jerusalem. There is no other place. But we Samaritans said we worship on Mount Gerizim.

Now who is right? Whether we should go to Jerusalem or whether we should go to Mount Gerizim. And you remember our Lord Jesus said, woman the time has come. It is not a matter of in Jerusalem or in Gerizim.

The Father is speaking for true worshipers. Those who worship Him in spirit and in truth. How people today still put so much emphasis on their building.

As if this is the holy place where God is worshipped and nowhere else. Even bothering superstition you know. During the war time in the beginning of the Pacific war I was in Singapore.

And of course the bombings were there every day you know. And the bombs fell here and there and everywhere. And one day early in the morning a brother in the Lord rang to me to my house.

And I could see the agony in his heart. He rang to me and he said brother Colin do you hear? A bomb has fell right through the roof of an assembly hall. And he said if God did not protect his church then where is our protection? He is lost.

Brothers and sisters how we have that Judaizing concept in our mind. We think that God is worshipping a place. We worship the Father in spirit and truth.

The place is secondary. If the Lord is here, even if it is a garage, thank God for that. If the Lord is not there, even if it is a cathedral, what is there? But dear brothers and sisters while the same thing how people try to Judaize Christianity.

To such an extent when we say we go to church we mean we go to a building, a place. You can see how far we have moved already. How far? They accused Stephen as blaspheming the temple.

But no. They saw only the physical but Stephen saw the real. And finally a set of earthly promises that Judaism.

You know in Judaism God promised Abraham and his sheep a lot of earthly land. The Lord said now if you keep my word then your sheep or your oxen, your cows will not lose cows or land. Your fields will be prosperous and you will have many children.

You will find that all the promises to the people of Israel were earthly promises. A set of promises. And they are still looking for these promises.

Waiting for these promises. When the Messiah should come then Israel will become the head of the nation and not the tail. And that was one reason why they rejected Christ.

Because they examined Christ, they observed Christ and they found that he did not make Israel the head. Therefore he could not be the Messiah. Judaism is a set of earthly promises.

Dear brothers and sisters, how people today try to make Christianity also a set of earthly promises. Have you heard the teaching of prosperity? If you love the Lord, if you do this and do that then you will prosper. God promises to be prosperous.

If you want a Cadillac you will get it. Brothers and sisters, what is Christianity? God does not promise us earthly blessings. But God does promise us.

He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly in Christ Jesus. This is in one truth. Now people today are looking for earthly blessings.

You don't find that. You don't find that. Yes, God does bless us physically, even materially.

That's true. But that is not Christianity. God can bless us and God does.

But that is not Christianity. Christianity is God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly in Christ Jesus. What are we looking for? If we are looking for earthly blessings we reduce Christianity into Judaism.

If we are looking forward that we may apprehend more of the spiritual blessings in the heavenly in Christ Jesus. Brothers and sisters, here you find a conflict between Stephen and the council and the synagogue.

They want to reduce Christianity into a part of Judaism.

Moses, the law, the temple and so forth. But Stephen, full of wisdom and the Holy Spirit, he traced the history of Israel from Abraham down. And when Stephen traced the history, it is history.

And yet Stephen saw the history of Israel in the light of God. In other words, when Stephen related the history of Israel, he saw whatever God was doing, was leading. And when Christ has come, then the shadow.

In other words, he saw the real meaning of the history. Stephen stands for one who sees that which is spiritual, that which is heavenly, that which is eternal and real. And it is all in Christ, the Son of Man, who is in glory.

That is what Stephen saw. What a contrast that vision with the concept of the council and the Jewish people at that time. It is a conflict between heaven and hell.

Stephen was a pioneer of the heavenly way. He refused to see Christianity as a part of Judaism. He saw that Christianity or the church is a new one for the new one.

It is something completely different. It is spiritual in nature, heavenly in nature. It is not earthly.

It is not physical. And because of that, Stephen was daunted, was daunted. But when he was daunted, he looked up and he saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

And he said, I saw the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. Now that is the vision. Brothers and sisters, if the head is in heaven, then the body is heavenly.

If the head is at the right hand of God, then the body has all the power and authority of the head. And here you find Stephen exhibited a spirit similar to the spirit of Christ. When Christ was on the cross, he said, Father forgive them, for they know not what they are doing.

And here you find the same spirit in Stephen. When he was stoned, he said, forgive them, forgive them. But the blood of Stephen is like a seed sown in the heart of Saul.

And later on you will find Saul took up just where Stephen left off. Thank God. As the body rose, it went through certain pain and comfort.

But out of that you will find God was able to keep his body pure from the contamination of Judea. And that marks the beginning of the separation between Christianity and Judaism. And as you go on in the book of Acts, you will find the separation will become clearer and clearer.

Until finally you will find in Paul, you see the pure new wine scheme with the new wine. So brothers and sisters, we need to go back to the word of God. And in the light of the word of God, see the conflict we are in today.

It is a conflict between heaven and earth. It is a conflict between the new wine and the old wine. And you know, you can never contain the new wine in the old wine.

It has to find a new wine. And the church, according to the scripture, is the new wine scheme. It is entirely different from any organization.

It is an organism living, elastic, and expanding with the life of Christ within. Shall we pray? Our Heavenly Father, we do thank thee for thy word. Thou dost reveal to us thy mind through thy word.

We thank thee for giving us a new life. And it is thy will that it should be contained in the new wine scheme, never in the old wine scheme. O Lord, we do pray that we may not be foolish, trying to put thy wine, new wine, into old wine scheme.

But Lord, we may offer to thee a new wine scheme, that thy life may be preserved and thy life may grow. So Lord, we pray that thou would use these simple words to help us to see that our life may not in any way be inhibited, but our life may be preserved and be useful. In the name of our Lord Jesus.

Amen.

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