



SERMON NOTES

US N^o. 103

Date: June 2nd, 2013

Title: Stephen's Defense pt. 2 or First Saturday, then Sunday

#11 in the Series on the Acts of the Apostles

1. Review

- a. Christian apologetics comes from the Greek word "*apologia*" found in 1 Pet. 3:15, "...*always be ready to give a defense [apologia] to everyone who asks you...*;" a "*systematic defense of the doctrines of the faith.*"
- b. Stephen revisits three important personages to defend the belief that Jesus is the Messiah:
 - i. Abraham
 1. Called out from his people & nation;
 2. Traveled from Ur to Haran and then to Canaan;
 3. Friend of God; James 2:3, "*And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS ACCOUNTED TO HIM FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS.'*" And he was called the friend of God."
 4. God kept His covenant promises to Abraham
 - ii. Joseph
 1. God kept His promises given to Joseph in his dreams.
 2. Ministry of reconciliation; 2 Cor. 5:18-20, "*Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.*"
 3. God keeps His covenant with His people; Jacob's family saved from famine.
 - iii. Moses
 1. The Pharaohs got the better of the Hebrews (*salvation is not in the hand of a king*) and dealt treacherously with them by forcing them to expose their children;
 2. Rejected by his brethren;
 3. Holy ground is...;
 4. "*Prophet like Moses*" came in the person of Jesus of Nazareth

2. Stephen's defense continues

- a. Moses part 2...
 - i. He served as a mediator between the Angel and the people when on Mt. Sinai he received the living oracles to give to the Jews in the sense of being Israel's very life (*cf. Dt. 30:19-20; 32:46-47*). By following the law, they would be able to live their earthly life to its fullest extent.

1. Jesus' words give life; Jn. 6:63, *"It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life."*
2. True worship is inextricably bound up with living in covenant relationship with God and knowing the fulfillment of his promises.
- ii. Stephen now comes to Israel's rebellion against Moses and God's response (cf. Acts 7:39-41, 42-43). The people rejected Moses' leadership and their heart's disposition was to live as though they were still in pagan Egypt. (cf. Ex. 13:17, Num. 14:3-4) They adopted an empirical approach to their circumstances. Since they did not "see" Moses anymore, they demanded that an idol be their tangible spiritual leader and almost automatically, the rejection of divinely sent leadership and of God's message results in idol making. And so today, whenever the guidance of Scripture is set aside, humans will idolize the "wisdom" from some human source. Gurus, imams, priests and shamans guide us in our world of religious effort. Eloquent professors, lively talk-show hosts and magnetic movie stars become our moral and spiritual compasses in a secular world. Idol making unavoidably leads to idol worship, which Israel entered into with gusto, rejoicing in *"what their hands had made."* (cf. Acts 7:41/Ex. 32:4-6) This last phrase will be central to Stephen's indictment of his audience. (Acts 7:48-51)
 1. The first-century Jew's veneration of the temple was the same to God as worship of the golden calf.
- iii. God's punishment of the Israelites was to turn away from them and hand them over to the consequences of their sin (cf. Rom. 1:24-26). He handed them over to the worship of the powers behind the idols, the evil spiritual forces ever in mortal combat with God. (cf. 1 Cor. 10:20, Eph. 6:10-13) That Israel practiced idolatry in the wilderness and even star worship, is documented by the Pentateuch and the prophets. (cf. Lev. 18:21, Lev. 20:2-5, Dt. 4:19, Ezek. 20:10-26, Hos. 9:10) Stephen characterizes the sin by quoting Amos 5:25-27. "*Molech*" of the Ammonites was known as Venus' star. "*Rephan*" follows the Septuagint rendering of "*Kaiwan*" the Babylonian name for Saturn. Amos details the further judgment God metes out: exile, the ultimate curse for covenant disobedience, removal from the enjoyment of the Promised Land.
 1. Amos 5:8, *"He made the Pleiades and Orion; He turns the shadow of death into morning and makes the day dark as night; He calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out on the face of the earth; the LORD is His name."*
 2. Num. 24:17, *"I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near; a Star shall come out of Jacob; a Scepter shall rise out of Israel, and batter the brow of Moab, and destroy all the sons of tumult."*
 3. Rom. 1:25, *"Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen."*

- iv. The episode of the golden calf lies between the giving of instructions about the tabernacle and its construction. Stephen develops a strong contrast between the idolatry condemned by Amos – “*the shrine [skene] of Molech and the idols [typous]* – and *the tabernacle [skene] of the Testimony*” constructed according to the pattern God gave Moses (cf. Acts 7:43-44). The tabernacle of the Testimony was God's provision of a structure for true worship. Again God took the initiative in revealing how he was to be approached. God meant to create a safe environment for his worship by expelling the nations already in Canaan. (cf. Jos. 23:9; 24:18)
 - 1. Jesus tabernacled among us; Jn. 1:14, “*And the Word became flesh and dwelt [skene] among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.*”

b. Solomon and the Temple

- i. Stephen immediately introduces a strongly contrasting thesis: *However, the Most High does not live in houses made by men*. This assertion that the transcendent God (compare Luke 2:14; 19:38) is not confined to things “*made with human hands*” would have jolted his hearers. The Jews commonly used “*made with human hands*” to refer to idol worship. (cf. Is. 31:7) To apply this phrase to the temple could well enrage them. God's is transcendent and as Creator of all demonstrate His self-sufficiency (cf. Is. 66:1-2/Acts 7:49-50; 1 Kings 8:27)
- ii. Stephen effectively answered the second charge, that he speaks blasphemy against “*God*” and “*this holy place*.” (cf. Acts 6:11, 13) In so doing he identifies the real blasphemers: anyone who so venerates the temple that it ceases to be a place where the transcendent God is glorified and becomes a place where self-glorifying men take pride in what they have done for God. Today too the church may face the temptation of an “*edifice complex*,” assuming that unless a visible structure for the worship of God is raised and maintained, we haven't truly worshiped or borne an effective witness. Stephen gives us perspective. Remember, it is the transcendent God we are worshipping. He does not need our buildings to receive our praise. We may need them to facilitate worship and witness, but we must make sure we need them and use them for the right reason.

3. Stephen's Martyrdom; Acts 7:54-60

- a. Stephen's indictment works from the inside out. The Jews are “*stiff-necked*,” unwilling to bow to authority. (cf. Ex. 33:3, 5; 34:9, Acts 7:39-41) Their resistance is not to human beings but to God the Holy Spirit. (cf. Is. 63:9-10) They have never truly come into a saving covenant relationship with God, for though outwardly circumcised and proud of their ethnic-religious heritage, they are uncircumcised in their hearts. (cf. Lev. 26:41; Jer. 9:26) In their disposition toward God they do not differ from pagans, who refuse the sign of the covenant. They have ears that spiritually do not hear, it is as though they were covered with uncircumcised foreskin. (cf. Jer. 6:10) This unrepentant, unregenerate condition is the same as that of their fathers. Their ancestors' rebellion issued in persecution of God's messengers, the prophets. (cf. 2 Chr. 36:16; Luke 6:23; 11:49; 13:34) They even killed those who proclaimed the coming of the Righteous One, the Messiah. (cf. Acts 3:14)

- b. And this generation has proceeded further by betraying and murdering the Messiah himself. (cf. Luke 9:44; 18:32; 22:4, 6; 24:7; Acts 3:14) Thus they stood condemned of the very charges they level against Stephen. By doing away with the Lord's anointed, God's one provision of salvation, they have shown themselves to be truly against him and his presence.
 - c. They are also against Moses' law, altering its authority through selective obedience. (cf. Ex. 20:13, 16) In fact, they leave their man-made traditions, "*customs handed over by Moses*," intact, even if it means violating the plain command of the law (cf. Mt. 15:3-6). Yes, they received the law at the direction of "*angels*," yet they have not kept this divinely given standard. Religious performance fueled by fear or pride is an obstacle to the true knowledge of God's provision of salvation. But more, it sets itself in competition with worship of the one true God by raising up idols. In the end it will wage war on true worship.
4. Martyrdom; Acts 8:1-4
- a. Saul of Tarsus approves of Stephen's death; Cilicia
 - b. Saul prosecutes and persecutes the new Church.
 - c. Christianity spread; 2 Cor. 4:15-18
5. Take away
- a. Stephen's three main points
 - i. God frequently sends messengers but the people equally reject them;
 - ii. People tend towards self-sufficiency and idolatry by making gods in their own image;
 - iii. God is not restricted to one land or one building
 - b. Religious effort v faith & relationship; Empiricism v Faith; Pragmatism v Obedience
 - c. God is faithful to His covenants. True worship is inextricably bound up with living in covenant relationship with God and knowing the fulfillment of his promises.
 - d. Continued rejection of Jesus will mean that the Jews will never be freed of their false worship (the idolizing of the temple) and false piety (the keeping of man-made customs). Men make their gods as an act of self-sufficiency; God turns away
 - e. By following the law, they would be able to live their earthly life to its fullest extent.
 - f. Martyrdom today.
 - i. *"...you think that they were martyred for their sincere faith in JC (that was the real reason) but no one heard that publicly; they were martyred and persecuted as enemies of the states, as child molesters, as bigots, as narrow minded, stupid people who had fallen for a ruse and could not contribute nothing to society. Your suffering will not be noble so your mind must be filled with the Word of God when all people persecute you and turn on you. And if common grace pulls back and you see even your children tossing in the lot that you should die. This is no game, you want revival and awakening, but know this that great awakenings have come preceding great national catastrophes or the persecution of the church."* Paul Washer, Founder/Director & Missions Coordinator of HeartCry Missionary Society which supports indigenous missionary work