

Acts Chapter 7 Con't

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Date: 30 December 2011

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[0 : 00] We are on page 478 up in the left-hand corner, which actually will be verse 41 of Acts chapter 7. And we are continuing to appreciate the lengthy message that Stephen is offering on behalf of his own defense.

Virtually all of chapter 7 is the answer to a question. Stephen has been charged with the offense of blasphemy.

The religious authorities have actually succeeded in paying witnesses, so-called, to testify against Stephen.

And there are, in people, in every generation, there are always people who are available to do anything if you grease their palm. And these are people with no standards and no scruples, and it is not a problem at all for them to lie if you make it worth their while.

And that's exactly what the religious establishment did. So these men stood up and testified that Stephen had said things that he had not said. And, of course, it was a kangaroo court, and the jury, and everything was all staged.

[1 : 22] He was immediately pronounced guilty and subject to stoning. But before we kill this man, we do have to let him have a last few words.

And that's what chapter 7 is all about. Stephen is giving his last few words in his own defense. And what it is going to consist of is a historical overview of the whole nation of Israel from the time God called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees.

And Stephen is going to reveal to the religious establishment how they, that current religious establishment, is following in the very same mode, very same modus operandi, very same attitude as their fathers, going all the way back to Moses and the children of Israel in the wilderness.

And his conclusion is going to be, as he addresses this council, this Sanhedrin, he's going to say, You men are just like your ancestors, and you behave the same way with the same mentality.

And when he finishes his message, then they are going to come upon him physically, and take him out and stone him to death.

[2 : 45] So that's where we're at. He is still recounting that history. In verse 41, They made a calf in those days. Those days refers to the time when they had left Egypt, and they are now out in the wilderness.

Moses is in the mount, receiving the tables of the law. And while Moses is gone, they become concerned over his absence. And they say, We don't know what happened to him.

And let us make us a god that we may return to Egypt. The god they're going to make is a takeoff on the Egyptian bull god, Apis, A-P-I-S.

And you may see pictures of this bull god to this day, because archaeologists have unearthed these bas-reliefs. And they not only had a bull god, they had a crocodile god, they had a scarab beetle god, they had a god for virtually everything.

And all the children of Israel are doing here is saying, We're going to need to go back where we came from. We're going to need to go back to Egypt. And we need to appease the Egyptians when we get there.

[3 : 51] And we need to make a god that will honor Egypt and their god, so they make this ridiculous golden calf. And by the way, where did they get the gold to make something like this? Remember when they left Egypt, they literally received from the Egyptians all kinds of items of value.

Now this is in the Exodus, we have time to go back there. But they received all kinds of items of gold and silver from the Egyptians upon their departure. And if you're wondering what that was all about, think of it as back pay.

Why? Because these Israelites had labored there in Egypt for years in a slave-like condition, receiving nothing but the bare necessities and sustenance for the body.

And when the time came for them to leave, they literally looted much of Egypt and took with them gold and silver in huge amounts, and a lot of livestock.

This was a huge troop of people moving out of Egypt before they got to the Red Sea. All kinds of animals, livestock, wealth, etc. So when they get there, to this place called Sinai, they are going to end up, everyone is going to throw in contributions of gold, they're going to make this golden calf, this image, which is a reflection of one of the gods of Egypt.

[5 : 18] And this is verse 41 of your sheet with page 478. And they made a calf in those days and offered sacrifice unto the idol and rejoiced in the works of their own hands.

And this is the same calf, of course, when Moses comes down out of the mount. Remember, he's got the tablets, and he sees what the people have done, and he takes the tablets and smashes them.

And what that symbolized, and this is really important to understand, but when Moses went into the mount and received the tablets of the law, Ten Commandments from the Lord, it was like an offer that God was making to the nation of Israel.

And the deal was, if you will obey my word, and if you will keep my laws, then you will be a peculiar people unto me, and we will have a wonderful relationship.

It was an offer that God was making. It wasn't an imposition. You need to understand that. It wasn't an imposition, and God wasn't saying to the children of Israel, this is what you have to do, and I demand it, and you don't have any alternative.

[6 : 38] No, no. It was an offer. And it was an if you will obey my commandments, and if you, then you will be a peculiar people unto me. And when Moses came down with the Decalogue, and saw what was going on with the golden calf and everything, in anger he took the tablets and dashed them, and broke them.

And it was as if Moses was saying, the deal's off. This is what God was going to offer you. No deal. And we know that the tablets were refashioned again.

And why was that? It was only because of the longsuffering and the grace of God, that he didn't just write them off right there and say, I'll find somebody else.

But the offer was extended beyond their disobedience. And you remember what happened. What happened with the golden calf? Moses had the golden calf pulverized and turned into dust.

And he mingled it with water and made them drink it. And that was the end of that golden calf. So this is where we pick up in verse 42.

[8 : 03] Then God turned. Then God turned. God turned away. God gave them up to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the prophets.

Oh, ye house of Israel, have ye offered to me slain beasts and sacrifices by the space of 40 years in the wilderness?

Yay! Ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch. That, of course, was one of the, one of the idols, one of the strange gods. And the star of your god, Rimphon.

This is another. She, Egypt had gods coming out their ears. And he says, figures which you made to worship them. You know why God is so opposed to idolatry or to making anything.

Not only, not only, strange gods, images, idols, et cetera, but he forbade them to make any likeness of himself.

[9 : 15] You shall not fashion any idol or likeness of the true God. Because the moment, the moment you try to reduce anything that symbolizes or that stands for the God of heaven, the God of creation of heaven and earth, you immediately impose upon him limitations.

And God has no limitations. He cannot be reduced to a shadow or a statue or an idol of any kind. And that is precisely why he forbade that.

Early on in the Ten Commandments, and thou shalt make no graven image, because any representation is woefully inadequate. God is spirit.

And God is spirit. And they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth, Jesus said in John 4. And what that means is, God ought not to be represented by physicality of any kind.

God is spirit. No image, no idol is adequate and ought not to even be made if it is to represent the deity. Because how do you depict spirit?

[10 : 35] Can't see it? Can't feel it? Can't touch it? It is supposed to be an intellectual, spiritual operation, not physical.

And this sets the God of heaven above and beyond all other supposed deities, creations, etc. And it is a place reserved unto God by himself.

And this is precisely why idolatry is looked upon in the Old and New Testament as such a grievous sin. Idolatry is a slap in the face to the true God.

And they had become quite accustomed to doing that. In fact, if you read Jeremiah, just read the first few chapters of Jeremiah, and you will see that it is a lengthy indictment against Israel and against Judah for the principal sin of idolatry.

It is spiritual adultery. And God, through Jeremiah, says, I have been espoused to you as a nation, as your husband.

[11 : 50] And you have been espoused to me as my wife. And all you have done is commit spiritual adultery with one deity, pagan deity after another.

And I have been faithful to you. Only you among all the nations of the earth have I known. But you have known many idols and many gods.

And he talks about their worshipping under every green tree. And these were places of spiritual and physical adultery with these pagan priestesses, etc.

It was a very, very debauched scene. And Jeremiah is leveling an indictment against the whole nation of Judah.

And he is saying, You are becoming just like your sisters up to the north. And they're already gone. The Assyrians have already invaded and carried them into captivity.

[12 : 52] And all that is left is the two tribes in the south to whom Jeremiah is addressing his comments. And he is saying, You are following in the same footsteps as your pagan neighbor Israel up north.

And God is going to bring an enemy upon you from the north. And he is going to sack and ruin the city. And he preached that for years.

And when God called Jeremiah, He said, This is the message I want you to take to my people. You deliver the message. They won't want to hear it. And they're going to persecute you for delivering it. And oh, one other thing, Jeremiah. You need to know this. They're not going to turn. Your message is going to fall on deaf ears.

And yet God commissioned Jeremiah to deliver that message, which he knew full well in advance would not be received nor believed. And it wasn't.

[13 : 53] So what was the purpose of the message? If God told Jeremiah up front, By the way, I'm putting my words in your mouth, And I want you to go and proclaim this message to these people. And one more thing, Jeremiah.

They're not going to believe it. But you delivered anyway. And if you're wondering, What is the reason for that? It simply increased the guilt and the culpability of these wayward people.

And Jeremiah's end game is, And the enemy is going to come against you And sack the city and carry you off into captivity. And all of these people were saying, Ah, this guy's crazy.

He's a radical. He's an extremist. Don't believe this garbage. Our God would never allow that to happen to us. He's our God. Blah, blah, blah. And that is precisely what happened.

And this is part of what Stephen is recalling here In this long list of indictment here. But he's going back even further than that before Jeremiah.

[14 : 51] And he's saying, Our fathers, verse 44. Well, look. Verse 43. You took the tabernacle of Moloch and the star of your god Remphon, Figures which you made to worship them.

And I will carry you away beyond Babylon. I will exile you. I will deport you. I will banish you. That was to the land of Babylon.

And this will be during the time of not only Jeremiah, but Daniel. Daniel will be one of those deported to Babylon. He will be about 12 years old when he has taken prisoner along with thousands of others and made to march all the way to Babylon.

And this is all part and parcel of this same era. Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness. This was the tabernacle that they were instructed to build that Moses got the directions from.

As he had appointed, speaking unto Moses, that he should make it, that is the tabernacle, according to the fashion that he had seen. Now that's really gross mistranslation there.

[16:12] They did not bring that in with Jesus. They brought it in with Joshua. The word Jesus, well, in Hebrew, there is no J.

There is no equivalent to the letter J. And in Greek, there is no equivalent to the letter J. Joshua in the Old Testament would begin with our letter Y.

And it is Yeshua. Yeshua. And when you bring that over into the New Testament, it is Jesus. But it starts actually with what we would call a capital letter I, because there's no J in Greek either.

And it would be Jesus. So the Jesus of the New Testament is the Yeshua of the Old Testament.

Joshua is an Old Testament form of Jesus.

And Jesus is a New Testament form of Joshua. And the word literally means save or Savior. The angel said to Mary, you shall call his name Jesus.

[17:22] And the reason you're going to give him that name, Yeshua, is because that's going to be his principal job. Savior. For he shall save his people from their sins.

So this father's coming in and the tabernacle, of course, is probably 1600 years before Jesus of Bethlehem is born.

This is referring to the Old Testament. Scott? Yeah, you said that they weren't to have any representations of God physically. Mm-hmm. I mean, but that would be impossible because they didn't know what God looked like anyway, right?

Right, right. Okay, but angels, they saw angels and interacted with them, it seems like on a regular basis. And there are physical representations of angels?

Yes. And so I guess you would count on those being an accurate representation with the wings, the cherubim, the... I think so, yeah. Mm-hmm.

[18:25] And they will reflect that in, well, in the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark of the Covenant is just a chest.

It's a box that is overlaid with gold. And it's a box close to the size of a coffin. And the lid for the box is the mercy seat.

That's the lid. And on top of the mercy seat, there are two cherubim with overshadowing wings.

And, of course, they've been depicted in many ways in different pictures.

We don't know exactly what they look like because we've never been able to, of course, find the Ark. Unless you saw Harrison Ford in Raiders of the Lost Ark, then you know what it looks like and all the rest of it.

And, you know, truthfully, that may not be too far afield. We don't know exactly what it looked like, but that was probably in the ballpark. I mean, from the description that is given in the Book of Exodus, you can kind of visualize what it must have looked like.

[19:26] And that might be kind of right on. Yeah, Dana? Following up on that question, not making an image of God, where does Michelangelo's ceiling fit in with that and or all the Catholics? I'm sorry, where does what?

Michelangelo's ceiling and then also all the Catholic statues of Christ. Yeah, well, Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel is breathtaking.

I mean, we were there a little over, I guess it was about a year ago. It was a year ago this month.

And it was stunning. But they shouldn't make an image of God in the earth.

Yeah, well, the official position that the Roman Catholic Church has taken from the beginning regarding the idols, the statuary, and all the rest of it, they refer to those as aids to worship.

And they insist that they do not worship those things themselves, but they use them as remembrances or as an aid or a help to worship. I question the wisdom of it.

[20:38] I am personally confident that it ought not to be done. But creativity looms very large in the creative soul of people. And I suspect that many of these idols, statuary, everything, were done for this reason.

And I don't want to dwell on this, and I don't want to be judgmental, but this is what I think. And this is just a Wiseman opinion. I think that those things were made, created, the idols, the pictures, and all the rest, out of a genuine or an honest desire to aid or to help in worship.

I think it was unwise. It should never have been done. But the principal thing that I think motivated them to do that, to allow it and to create those things, is feeling, is emotion, is an inner desire to reflect God in some tangible, physical, visible way that people could see, and thus help them more to identify with the deity.

I think it was a very unwise decision, but I can understand how and why it was made because of this. Whenever you put intellect alongside of emotion and feeling, and look for which one is going to survive, nine times out of ten, the emotion and the feeling will survive, and the intellect will pay the price.

And that is because we tend to feel things more deeply than we think. And that's one of the basic flaws of our old nature.

[22 : 30] We tend to be more feeling and emotionally oriented than we are intellectually related. And when you do that, then you make your intellect and what we would call maybe your better intuition or your better sense, you make that subject to your feeling and emotion.

And this is part of the human problem. When Barbara and I were seriously dating and she had agreed to marry me, she knew intellectually, mentally, scripturally, biblically, she knew she had no business marrying this guy because he was not a believer.

And she knew intellectually what the scriptures taught about that. But what was she willing to do? She was willing to follow her heart and not her mind.

And she was so in love and saw stars in her eyes that she was able to rationalize, giving place to her emotions and feelings over what she knew she shouldn't do.

In other words, she knew better. Then why wasn't she willing to do better? Because she was in love. And that's the emotion and the feelings.

[23 : 58] And fellas, that is so powerful. It is emotion and feeling that drives people to extremes in all kinds of things. It is emotion and feelings that drives Islamic radicals to be what they are.

They have an intellectual position about what they believe to be true regarding Allah. And they have a desire, an emotional, a compulsion, a feeling to carry that out.

And emotion and feeling is responsible for more things than the intellect. And when people say things like, I don't know why I did that. I knew better. Yes, you did know better.

You didn't know better. But so often we don't listen to our minds. And we justify it by saying, I followed my heart.

And for a lot of people, all that matters is the heart. Forget what the intellect tells you. Just follow your heart. Now that sounds good. That sounds good.

[25 : 01] But fellas, in the Bible, in the Bible, the word heart that is found so often in the Old and New Testament almost never means the blood pump in the heart, in the chest.

It means the core of your being and it includes the intellect. As a man thinketh in his heart.

Well, you don't think in your heart. You think in your brain. But not biblically. Biblically, the heart is not only the seat of affection, the core of your being, it is the core of your intellect, your rational processes, your logic post.

That is the mind. And feelings are very important. What a miserable world it would be without feelings and emotions. But you dare not allow your feelings to dictate over your intellect.

One of the best examples I've heard of this is with the phenomena of vertigo and when pilots are in training, especially like our fighter pilots in jet planes, etc.

[26 : 19] They are taught from the get-go and so are commercial airline pilots. You follow your instruments and what the instruments say. You do not rely on your feelings.

And when you get in a difficult situation and you are up in the air in that plane and you feel like you are flying in one particular mode and your instrument says you are not, this vertigo thing can be very deceptive.

It makes you feel like you are somewhere where you aren't or going in a direction and where you aren't. And the tendency is to trust your gut feeling rather than that instrument.

And when you look at that instrument and it tells you that you are really in danger and on the edge, the tendency is not believe the instrument, believe your gut instinct, your feeling, your emotion.

And as history has proved time and time again, in situations like that, the instruments are a lot more reliable than your feelings. And you need to learn to trust the instrument.

[27 : 28] But you use your mind and your intellect to do that and you make the intellect override what you are feeling. And so many times decisions are made on the basis of feeling and emotion and not well thought out intellect.

And that gets us in a whole lot of trouble. Been there and done that. And you probably have too. So you know what? And yet there is something positive and good about saying, you know, I just had this gut feeling and I went with it.

Well, you know, sometimes that's okay. Sometimes that works out all right. But sometimes it's disastrous. So if you have a logical intellectual basis for holding a position, go with that. Stick with that. As opposed to your feelings and the gut instinct. And that's what's involved. I think that's the very thing that allowed the creation in the Catholic Church to proliferate with these images and idols.

I think it all began with the best of intentions. With a good noble objective of aiding and helping people to visualize and to picture and to get a handle on the being of God.

[28 : 50] But it's counterproductive and we need to keep our worship of God where it is supposed to be. He cannot be confined to anything. And any time you make an image or whatever, you, necessity, limit him.

So I think it's a thing that came about with good intentions, but it has been detrimental. So, yes? Faith itself is a blend.

Intellectual. Heart. Yeah, you're right. You're right. Faith is, we, faith, faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.

How do you process the Word of God? You process it through your mind, through your intellect. I've often said, Christianity is a thinking faith.

We're not saying that there's no room for emotions or feelings, but feelings, fellas, in order for feelings to be valid, they need to be based upon fact.

[30 : 01] and isn't it good to feel good? Certainly. Everybody wants to feel good, but you need to feel good for the right reasons. You need to feel good because there is a basis behind your feeling good, and that basis is appreciated and understood only through the mind, the intellect, or the biblical heart.

And I'm convinced that this is one of the reasons that people get so confused about this, is because when the Bible talks so much about the heart, to believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, they think that means just emotions or feelings, and this is why, and how some people get so emotional and excited, etc., because they think that's a demonstration or reflection of their connection with God, and yet it is supposed to be primarily an intellectual thing.

Well, the food is here. We didn't yet. Bob? Sorry. When you're talking, you know, like a stained glass window of Christ and pictures and everything, you're actually saying in a way it's idol worship? Well, I suppose it depends a lot on what the person is thinking and feeling as they view that. For some, it probably is, you know, which is tragic.

And for some, it isn't. Some are able to override that with their intellect and know what is really behind it, but many do not, and especially children. Because children tend to be intensely literal, and they do not have an ability to conceptualize things that are not physical or literal.

[31 : 50] literal. And it isn't until a child reaches a certain age that they are able to process things that are, what shall I say, that are not literal, because they tend to be very literal.

And the danger, of course, is as a child, you are subject to all those things, and it sets in your mind that way, and then you bring it into adulthood. So it's a real problem.

It really is. Dana? You brought up the idea of following your heart. I liked one of the ideas of the Sun's commencement speech, and that is, life often doesn't take us where we want to go, where we expect to go.

And the goal is to follow your heart, and by definition you fail if you've gone out in a different direction. And he said, instead of that, four of you go to make the heart work.

Okay. Good. Yeah. Good. Good. Thank you. Thank you. Well, we just got sidetracked a little bit from our study this morning, but we'll pick it up here next week.

[32 : 59] Good. Good. Good. Good. Good. Good. Good. Good. Good.