

Acts Chapter 7 Con't

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[0 : 0 0] Well, welcome to our first class for the month of September, and we are continuing our exposition of Acts chapter 7, which is one of the most monumental chapters in all of the Bible.

It often goes really relatively unnoticed because it seems to be just the death of another of God's choice servants, but what's so unusual about that? Because we find that to be a reality all through the Old Testament and through the New Testament.

Someone is always going under the guillotine or whatever for their faith and for their belief, and this is no exception. But this is an exception because this is an extremely pivotal point in the history of the nation of Israel.

And for those of you who have been with us for some time, you can appreciate the strategic nature of the nation of Israel because it is through this tiny body located over in the Middle East that God has designed His purpose to redeem the earth.

And all of this is consummated in one individual who is designated as the Redeemer. And this Redeemer is, of course, Jesus Christ.

[1 : 2 0] The vehicle through which He was to come into the world is through the bloodline of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and it will filter on down person by person to David the king, and then a thousand years later to the person of Jesus Christ.

And He is the one through whom God is reconciling or will reconcile the entire world. It is impossible to underestimate the strategic importance of the nation of Israel and of the tribe of Judah, of those twelve tribes, because that's the royal tribe.

And Judah is the tribe through which our Lord Jesus Christ will be born. He is the son of David, the root and stem of Jesse. He is everything to us.

He is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. And all of His personages, all of His personage comes and flows through this strategic nation that God raised up, the Jew.

And you know something? Today, the vast majority of the Jewish people throughout the world do not even know or understand what I just told you about the person of Jesus Christ and the destiny of this nation.

[2 : 3 9] They see themselves as a persecuted lot, as people who have suffered tremendously for their faith in the one true God, and all of that's true. But they do not see, they do not accept nor understand the greater implications of what God has designed for that tiny nation.

So, in a sense, they are a people who, in many respects, are unable to fully appreciate their own heritage, as rich as it is. And it's really quite sad, but that's the reality of the situation.

So, we're in Acts chapter 7, and I want to remind you that this choice servant of God, who was earlier designated as one of the deacons, if you will, is on trial for his life.

And he had been proclaiming that Jesus Christ is the Messiah, that Israel was instrumental in His crucifixion, and that God raised Him from the dead.

And this man, Stephen, was proclaiming that message with great success. He was winning huge numbers of his fellow Jews to faith in Jesus as the Messiah.

[3 : 53] This, of course, did not sit well at all with the entrenched religious establishment of Judaism, which was comprised primarily of the Sanhedrin.

Sometimes it's translated the council. The council was made up of 70 of the most influential, well-placed, well-heeled, well-respected men in Israel.

These were the shakers and movers. The Sanhedrin was presided over by the high priest. Now, this would have been essentially the same group of people who are going to be putting Stephen on trial for his life.

They are going to be the same group of people who only a year or so earlier held a kangaroo court at 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning when they examined Jesus of Nazareth and condemned Him to death.

Then they would take Him to Pontius Pilate because they were not able to inflict the death penalty, but Pilate could. And they wanted from Pilate a death decree for Jesus of Nazareth.

[5 : 03] And you'll recall the conflict with Barabbas and releasing Jesus, releasing Barabbas, etc. Of course, Barabbas was released. Christ was crucified. This trial was presided over by the high priest, which was either Caiaphas or Annas.

And I told you I keep getting these guys mixed up. They were father-in-law and son-in-law. And one was the high priest and the other was the former high priest. And they simply changed roles.

But the high priest position was one that was given to these people by the Roman government. They were not entitled to be in the position of high priest because, first of all, the high priest had to be of necessity a direct descendant of Aaron.

And he had to be of the tribe of Levi. But these individuals, Caiaphas and Annas, were nothing more than political plum appointments.

The Roman government put them in that position with the intent that they would keep the people religiously in line and keep the lid on things so that they would be easier to govern.

[6 : 16] However, the people of Israel hated the religious establishment, considered them to be what they actually were, just a bunch of pompous buffoons who were lackeys of the Roman government and who were not in the position to dictate any terms or to command any respect from the population at all.

So, by and large, the common people had no use for them. But they were still under their thumb. And these are the people who are holding counsel with Stephen on trial for his life.

And we noted earlier that they went out and grabbed some ne'er-do-wells from the local marketplace and greased their palms to offer fictitious testimony against Stephen.

And they stood up before this council and said, Yeah, he's the guy. I heard him talking. He was blaspheming God and so on and so on. And then they asked Stephen, Well, you've heard the charges against you.

You've been accused of blasphemy. Are these things so? And Stephen's answer to that question comprises the whole of Acts chapter 7, where he recounts the whole history of Israel.

[7 : 26] And he is going to establish the fact that Israel as a nation and its people have an historic reputation for rejecting the truth of God.

And you people, his bottom line is going to be, You people who are standing here in judgment over me, You are just like the generation of your fathers that have gone before.

You are following in their same footprints. You are no different from them. And then they are going to rise up and stone him. So let's just jump in with chapter 7 and his conclusion, which is on page 479 in the lower right-hand corner.

And we will look at verse 51, because here he is wrapping up his message. Stephen says in verse 51 of Acts chapter 7, You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears.

Now that's a really, really important statement, because the Jew was so familiar, of course, with the right of circumcision. And what that meant was, and I'll just be as brief as I can be, but you understand the right of circumcision, and right I mean R-I-T-E, the ritual of circumcision, eighth day, baby boy, circumcised.

[8 : 54] Took this little fella, eight days old, and pulled forward the excess skin on his penis, and cut it off with a flint knife.

That was the circumcision on the eighth day. And I'm sure that little eight-day old screamed bloody murder, because you could imagine it was very painful. But he would heal.

And this circumcision was the badge, or the physical identity of that individual, that that baby was now a covenant member of the household of Israel, of the faith in the house of Israel.

And it was absolutely essential that this circumcision be performed. And it served as an indication of dedication to God, consecration to God, where you literally gave part of yourself, part of your own flesh and blood, to ratify this relationship that you had with Jehovah, the God of Israel.

However, you could give your flesh, or your flesh could be taken from you involuntarily, when you were eight days old and had nothing to do with it. You could give your flesh to the dedication of God, but that did not mean you'd given your heart, or your will.

[10 : 29] And that is forever going to become the basis for describing the true loyalty of a Jew, from here on out. Well, if you are a Jew, you have been circumcised in the flesh.

But tell me this, is your heart circumcised? In other words, is your will and your mind given over to the cause of God, in the same way that is symbolized by the flesh of the body?

Because the difference is incredible. And here, Stephen says, you are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart. Your heart, which never refers to the blood pump in the chest, but it refers to the core of your being.

Your heart is the essence of what you are. We talk about the heart of the matter. We mean the very center of it. And if you have a heart, where the mind, emotion, will, all of these things are gathered, if you have a heart that is circumcised unto God, that means you are consecrated to God, not only outwardly in the flesh, with the removal of the skin from the penis, but you are consecrated to God on the inside as well.

That's what it means to have a circumcised heart. And he says they are uncircumcised in ears. Same principle. How do you circumcise an ear?

[11 : 58] Well, you don't do it physically. An ear that is circumcised will be of the same nature as a heart that is circumcised. It means you have an ear to hear.

Many times our Lord in his public discourses use this statement. He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear.

Well, of course we have ears for hearing. What else do we have ears for? Maybe to hang our glasses on. But the idea is, you have ears for hearing.

However, have you heard the expression? Well, yes, he was saying that, but they just turned a deaf ear to him.

What does that mean? It doesn't mean that they no longer had the ability to hear. It means they would not listen. There are none so blind as those who will not see, and none so deaf as those who will not hear.

[13 : 06] So, our hearing and our seeing need to be consecrated to God so that what we hear, the heart is able to act on.

And all of this, of course, says, it means you really need to be careful about what you let in your ears. You need to be careful what you hear, what you listen to.

And so many times, from Old Testament through New, the Lord has rebuked his people for these people, having ears, they hear not.

Having eyes, they see not. And that's a typical description of this nation, and that's exactly what Stephen is laying on them.

And he is accusing them, you stiff-necked, you will not be turned. Your head and jaw are set. You will not be moved.

[14 : 06] And you are stiff-necked in heart and ears. You do always resist the Holy Spirit. That's what a stiff-neck does, and that's what an uncircumcised heart and ears of, because we tend to be self-centered.

We want what we want. We want to do what we want to do. And it is a posture of disobedience that characterized the nation of Israel from the time Moses brought them out of Egypt.

They rebelled, they grumbled, they complained, they got into idolatry, and everything else. And now, Stephen is telling them, you do always resist the Holy Spirit.

Let's go to our next page. As your fathers did, so do ye. Which, which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?

And keep in mind here, when the Scriptures use the term your fathers, it's not talking about their immediate parent, one generation removed.

[15 : 12] It's talking about the historical line of your fathers. It means literally your forefathers. It would include the immediate previous generation, but it also goes all the way back.

And what Stephen is saying is, you people have a history of this, and you are following in the same mold as your fathers. Which of the fathers have not your, which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?

And why did they do this? Why were the prophets ever persecuted? Same reason in every case. It was because of the message they delivered.

Because all of the prophets had one thing in common. They were all raised up of God. Remember, a prophet is God's spokesman to people. A priest is man's spokesperson to God.

And all the prophets, all the prophets were raised up for the same reason. And that was to deliver the message of God to the people. And in each and every case, the message was not well received.

[16 : 28] The prophet always delivered a message that demanded repentance. And repentance is only necessary when you're wrong. And they were charged with being wrong about different things.

Whether it was idolatry or whatever the sins were, God used the prophets to call them out. And I'll tell you something. Nobody likes to be told they are wrong about anything.

and yet that's the message that these prophets have to deliver. And I've been fascinated with Jeremiah, among others, but Jeremiah was called of God to go and deliver his message to Jerusalem.

This was to warn them that the Babylonians are going to come and they're going to plunder the city and they're going to take over. Of course, the people didn't believe him at all. And Jeremiah had this unpopular message to deliver and God said, Jeremiah, put my words in your mouth.

You go and relate this to the people and, oh, by the way, Jeremiah, there's something that you need to know. They're not going to listen. Your message is going to fall on deaf ears.

[17 : 38] Now, isn't that a trip to lay on a prophet? Go out there and preach your heart out and tell these people what they need to know, but you're not going to be successful. They are not going to listen.

And they didn't. That's exactly what happened. Jeremiah told them precisely what was going to happen and who was going to do it and where they were going to come from. And the people said, this guy's crazy.

Get him out of here. Go someplace else and preach that baloney. We don't want to hear that here. And they rejected Jeremiah's message. And if God knew that they were going to reject it, why bother?

Why send this man into the lion's den to suffer the kind of ill treatment that he's going to have to tolerate if they're not going to believe the message anyway? Why even deliver the message?

And the answer is because their culpability is going to be increased. And their judgment is going to be more severe. Because unto whom much is given, from him shall much be required.

[18 : 42] And God is going to be able to say, I sent prophets to you delivering the message day and night. and all you did was mistreat them, abuse them, and kill them.

And it's going to be no different with John the Baptist. It's going to be no different with Jesus Christ. And now, it's going to be no different with Stephen.

The nation Israel is on a roll. And they have a reputation of persecuting the very men God sent to warn them.

Interesting contrast. God raised up Jonah. You know the story of this rebellious prophet. Didn't want to go to Nineveh and preach.

Hated those people. They're Gentiles. Don't want to go to them. And he did go because God explained the advantages of obedience with the great fish and all the rest.

[19 : 43] And when Jonah got there and preached the message, you would have thought he would have been elated. Wow! These people really got into my message. I am a successful prophet. Nope.

He was really ticked. Because the people repented, he went away and pouted. The only time I know in all of Scripture where a prophet or a preacher was ever sad because the people listened to him.

But these were the wrong people. These were Gentile dogs. And he didn't want them to be spared. Read the whole story of Jonah. It's fascinating. Fascinating. Now, we're in chapter 7 here.

Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted and they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the just one, of whom you have been now the betrayers and murderers.

He's talking, of course, about their instigating the crucifixion of Christ, who have received the law by the disposition of angels.

[20 : 48] That, to me, is one of several puzzling verses in the scriptures. I have never gotten a handle on this. I just don't understand what is involved here.

By this disposition of angels, we read it was ordained of angels, transmitted by angels, through mediation of angels, delivered by angels, and Phillips renders it, received the law of God miraculously by the hand of angels.

I just don't understand that because in connection with God giving the law to Moses, and through Moses, as best as I could understand and read the text, I see no involvement of angels in that at all.

We know Moses went into the mount, he was up there for 40 days, he received the tablets of the law, came down and gave it to the people, found that they had this golden calf, he smashed the tablets and then the tablets were reconstructed again.

But I just don't know where the angels come into that. Scott? Before we move too far past where the part says must you forever resist the Holy Spirit, the Old Testament too, they had the relationship with God, like through Moses.

[22 : 01] I think they had the concept of Elohim, which is plural. Did they recognize the Holy Spirit or was that something relatively new? They didn't say, who's the Holy Spirit?

must you forever resist the Holy Spirit? Would that be parallel to resisting God? Absolutely. Absolutely. The resisting of the Holy Spirit, of course, who is a member of the Triune Godhead, is the same thing as resisting God Himself because He is in every shape, form, and fashion a member of the Triune Godhead.

Godhead. So, the idea is that God is Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth, and God communicates to man, for instance, all of Scripture is given by inspiration of God, as God breathed, and it was the Spirit of God who inspired men to write the Scriptures, it was the Spirit of God who inspired Moses to write the Pentateuch, and so on.

So, in essence, He is saying you've rejected the Word of God, which is the same thing as rejecting the Spirit of God, since He is the one who has given it, provided it. Dana? Maybe you answered it, but just to rephrase the question, the Holy Spirit is significant in the Christian faith.

Did it have any significance in the Jewish faith? Oh, absolutely. And it surfaces in Genesis 1. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

[23 : 33] The earth was without form and void, and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the water. So, there in the very early verses of Genesis, we have all members of the Godhead present, because we've got a plurality of persons.

It's rendered in the English, it's rendered in the beginning, God. The word in Hebrew is Elohim, and it is God's plural. But they could not bring themselves to translate that that way, because of their emphasis upon their being one God.

Yet, they didn't know what to do with it, so they just left it as God's singular, but in reality, the plural is there. And everywhere you read God in the Old Testament, G-O-D, the word in the Hebrew is Elohim, which is plural for gods.

There is a plurality of persons in the Godhead, even though there is one God, not three, one God subsisting in three persons, one of whom is the Holy Spirit.

So, you do always resist him, that is, you reject the authority of God, and you have not kept it. And when they heard these things, now I don't know exactly logistically how this was set up, and I do not know that the whole of the council was there.

[25 : 00] They may have been, they may not have been, I don't know, but I do know that 70 members comprise the Sanhedrin, it is chaired by the high priests.

And ordinarily what they would do, if the whole complement were meeting, all 70 of them, they would meet in a large semi-circle, a large half-circle, 70 of them, seated right along.

And then when the time came to take a vote on an issue, they would always begin with a vote from the youngest member of the Sanhedrin.

They were seated around the semi-circle in accordance with their age, so that the youngest, the very youngest on the Sanhedrin would be seated at one extreme end, and then the next youngest to him, and the next youngest to him, and so on, until you got clear around to the other end, where you would find the oldest.

And they were seated that way according to their age. Whenever a vote was taken, the vote always began with the younger casting their votes first.

[26 : 19] and the reason this was done is to prevent the younger from being influenced by the vote of the older. They may have respect for certain individuals, and I'm going to vote the way he votes.

Well, they were not given that privilege. They had to cast their votes early, and then the older cast their votes last. We are not told whether the whole compliment was there, whether they had a quorum, or what, but we know that was the ordinary procedure when they had time to get something like this together.

You must remember that if they were going to convene the Sanhedrin, and it was the high priest's responsibility to call for a convention of the Sanhedrin, it would take some time to be able to convene it because you would have to notify all of the members, and the way they did that was by physical runners in that day.

Nobody was emailing anyone. You had to send a message, a personal message to all of these members and notify them as to when and where the meeting was going to be held.

We do not know that that took place here. It may be that in connection with certain activities, a number of these members were readily available and that they could be convened rather quickly, and I am assuming that that is the case because that seems to be how it developed here, although we're not told how many were there, but we do know that as they sat there in their semi circle, whether there were just 25 or 50 or 70 of them, however many there were, they are sitting there listening to Stephen, and he is giving his swan song, if you will.

[28 : 09] This is his answer to the question, are these things so? And when he comes down to this in verse 54, when they heard these things, they were cut to the heart.

In other words, we could say they really got the message, and they didn't like it. I'm sure it was embarrassing, it was painful, it was accusatory, and the worst part of it all was it was true.

And you've often heard the expression that the truth hurts, well, it hurt them, because they knew in their heart of hearts, they knew what this man was saying was right on.

Now, they've got the choice. What are they going to do? They have but two options. One is, you listen to what the man says.

You cannot refute it. You know it is true. Now the question is, are you big enough to admit it?

[29 : 23] That is a really bitter pill to swallow. Are you big enough to admit it? Fellas, this is exactly the same principle as to what happened on the day of Pentecost when Peter preached his message.

And his conclusion, remember, was repent, therefore, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Three thousand did that. Three thousand were big enough to say, you know what? What this man says is true.

Guys, we really blew it. Big time. Can't deny the truth of this? We might as well own up to it. Admit it. We screwed up.

Big time. This is the toughest thing a man or a boy has to do, is take responsibility for his actions and be able to say, be big enough to say, I was wrong.

[30 : 27] It's my fault. I'm to blame. I'm sorry. I apologize. Nothing is harder for a human being to do than that.

Let me tell you something. That's why so few do it. It's really hard. But it is life-changing. And it was life-changing for those three thousand on the day of Pentecost.

Now, these men who comprise this august body sit there in all of their expensive robes and finery, all of their position, all of their well-heeled perks, all of their everything, and they're sitting there at this crossroads.

What are they going to do? Are they going to say, well, Stephen, we paid these men to lie against you and to tell all of these untruths and everything you've said is true and we might as well just bite the bullet and be big enough to admit it.

They're not going to do that. And one of the reasons they're not going to do that is because of peer pressure. You know what I mean? The guy sitting next to him. The guy sitting next to him.

[31 : 34] Can you imagine somebody in that august body standing up and saying, I don't know about all the rest of you guys, but I'm with Stephen. What he said was true.

Can you imagine any of them having the moxie, having the guts to do that? You'd be a very rare individual. So what they did was just dummied up. They took the message to heart.

They were cut to heart. And when they took it to heart, that means they really understood it, and they rejected it. Nothing in the world you can do that is more dangerous to your spiritual well-being is to hear truth, recognize it as truth, and reject it.

truth. And what you do in doing that is you shut down. You shut down the possibility of receiving more truth.

When we hear truth and turn a deaf ear to it and will not walk in it, we run the risk of God turning off the spigot of truth because truth is forthcoming where truth has been obeyed and acted upon.

[32 : 51] And the best thing you can do to assure a continual flow of truth from God is by being obedient to the truth you have. That keeps the truth flowing.

And these are going to reject that. They were cut to the heart. They gnashed on him with their teeth. It means they they gritted their teeth.

They clenched their fists. I could just see the veins popping out in these guys' necks. I could just see the anger and the scowl and the look coming on their face. And they are determined that they are going to carry out this mission.

They gnashed on him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, and here's the Spirit of God again. Earlier, he says, you have resisted the Holy Spirit.

Now here we have Stephen being filled with the Holy Spirit. And all that means is that Stephen is under the complete control and availability to the Spirit of God.

[33 : 58] And he looked up steadfastly into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing on the right hand of God. and we'll have to conclude our study here for a moment.

But I just want to share this one thing with you in closing our session for today. We are told that when Christ ascended to heaven, he sat down at the right hand by the majesty on high.

The Son ascended to heaven in Acts chapter 1. When he arrived there, he sat down at the right hand of God. God. But here, the text says, Stephen saw Christ standing at the right hand of God.

And I can conclude nothing else other than the fact that Jesus Christ rose to his feet to receive the first martyr into heaven.

And that was going to be Stephen. Stephen. Stephen. Stephen. Stephen. Stephen. Stephen. Stephen. Stephen. Stephen. Stephen. Stephen. Stephen. Stephen. Stephen. Stephen.