

Discussion Questions

July 21, 2024

Acts 7:1-53

Stephen's Sermon on Missing Jesus & His Presence



1. Share an example where you completely missed what God was doing in or around your life but could see it more clearly at a later date.

2. Read Acts 6:11-7:1

What are the accusations being made against Stephen?

3. If you have time, read all of chapter 7, if time is short, read 7:23-37.

What is the main point Stephen is making in this passage?

Summarize the ways the people had missed God's attempts to rescue them.

4. How can misunderstanding God's Story impact how we live as followers of Jesus today?

5. In 7:44-50, Stephen shows their misunderstanding of the temple as being the place where God dwells even though their own scriptures say God can't be confined there.

In what ways do we "put God in a box" and limit Him by time or place?

What does it look like for us to live in the reality that God dwells with us at all time in all places? Share any practical examples of how you intentionally do this.

6. Discuss your thoughts on how "church clothes" could or could not reinforce a misguided theology of God's presence?

How do you balance respect for God's holiness with the understanding that God is always with us?

Acts 7:1-2, 44-53 (NLT)

Then the high priest asked Stephen, "Are these accusations true?" This was Stephen's reply: "Brothers and fathers, listen to me...

"Our ancestors carried the Tabernacle with them through the wilderness. It was constructed according to the plan God had shown to Moses. Years later, when Joshua led our ancestors in battle against the nations that God drove out of this land, the Tabernacle was taken with them into their new territory. And it stayed there until the time of King David. David found favor with God and asked for the privilege of building a permanent Temple for the God of Jacob. But it was Solomon who actually built it. 48 However, the Most High doesn't live in temples made by human hands. As the prophet says,

'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Could you build me a temple as good as that?' asks the Lord. Could you build me such a resting place? Didn't my hands make both heaven and earth?"

"You stubborn people! You are heathen at heart and deaf to the truth. Must you forever resist the Holy Spirit? That's what your ancestors did, and so do you! Name one prophet your ancestors didn't persecute! They even killed the ones who predicted the coming of the Righteous One - the Messiah whom you betrayed and murdered. You deliberately disobeyed God's law, even though you received it from the hands of angels."

Jewish Identity Markers

- the Land of Israel
- The Law of Moses
- The Temple

Stephen's 2 primary points

1. They have a long History of rejecting God and His chosen deliverers
2. The Temple is not where God dwells.

**Acts 7:1 (NLT)**

Then the high priest asked Stephen, "Are these accusations true?"

John 5:39-40 (CSB)

You pore over the Scriptures because you think you have eternal life in them, and yet they testify about me. But you are not willing to come to me so that you may have life.

Acts 7:2 (NLT)

This was Stephen's reply: "Brothers and fathers, listen to me...

Acts 7:2-3 (NLT)

This was Stephen's reply: "Brothers and fathers, listen to me. Our glorious God appeared to our ancestor Abraham in Mesopotamia before he settled in Haran. God told him, 'Leave your native land and your relatives, and come into the land that I will show you.'

**Acts 7:9**

"These patriarchs were jealous of their brother Joseph, and they sold him to be a slave in Egypt.

Acts 7:9-10

But God was with him and rescued him from all his troubles. And God gave him favor before Pharaoh, king of Egypt. God also gave Joseph unusual wisdom, so that Pharaoh appointed him governor over all of Egypt and put him in charge of the palace.

Acts 7:17

As the time drew near when God would fulfill his promise to Abraham, the number of our people in Egypt greatly increased.

Acts 7:23-29 (NLT)

"One day when Moses was forty years old, he decided to visit his relatives, the people of Israel. He saw an Egyptian mistreating an Israelite. So Moses came to the man's defense and avenged him, killing the Egyptian. Moses assumed his fellow Israelites would realize that God had sent him to rescue them, but they didn't.

"The next day he visited them again and saw two men of Israel fighting. He tried to be a peacemaker. 'Men,' he said, 'you are brothers. Why are you fighting each other?'

"But the man in the wrong pushed Moses aside. 'Who made you a ruler and judge over us?' he asked. 'Are you going to kill me as you killed that Egyptian yesterday?' When Moses heard that, he fled the country and lived as a foreigner in the land of Midian.

Acts 7:34 (NLT)

I have certainly seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their groans and have come down to rescue them. Now go, for I am sending you back to Egypt.'

Acts 7:35

"So God sent back the same man his people had previously rejected when they demanded, 'Who made you a ruler and judge over us?' Through the angel who appeared to him in the burning bush, God sent Moses to be their ruler and savior.

Acts 7:37 (NLT)

"Moses himself told the people of Israel, 'God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from among your own people.'

Acts 7:39-40 (NLT)

"But our ancestors refused to listen to Moses. They rejected him and wanted to return to Egypt. They told Aaron, 'Make us some gods who can lead us, for we don't know what has become of this Moses, who brought us out of Egypt.'

Acts 7:51-53 (NLT)

"You stubborn people! You are heathen at heart and deaf to the truth. Must you forever resist the Holy Spirit? That's what your ancestors did, and so do you! Name one prophet your ancestors didn't persecute! They even killed the ones who predicted the coming of the Righteous One - the Messiah whom you betrayed and murdered. You deliberately disobeyed God's law, even though you received it from the hands of angels."

Acts 7:44 (NLT)

"Our ancestors carried the Tabernacle with them through the wilderness.

Acts 7:48-50

The Most High doesn't live in temples made by human hands. As the prophet says, 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Could you build me a temple as good as that?' asks the Lord. 'Could you build me such a resting place? Didn't my hands make both heaven and earth?'

Dr. Tony Merida - Exalting Jesus in Acts

In this long section Stephen essentially tells the Sanhedrin that God's presence is not confined to a building. God's presence has always been with his people, and that presence predates the law, the temple, and the land. He reminds them that God, by his nature, is not imprisoned in a place

1 Kings 8:27

..even the highest heavens cannot contain you. How much less this Temple I have built!