

Serving or Rejecting God? (Acts 7:1-53)^a

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Context

1. **Stephen, accused of blasphemy, testifies before the religious leaders**
2. **Longer than typical**
3. **As interesting as many of the Old Testament details may be, today's message concerns the overall theme of what Stephen has to say and the reaction of those listening to him**
 - Three primary passages, each dealing with an important period in Israel's history and the key people God used :
 1. The Patriarchs: Abraham to Joseph (Acts 7:1-16)
 2. The Exodus, giving of the Law, and wilderness wanderings: Moses (Acts 7:17-45)
 3. The temple and the throne of David: David, Solomon (Acts 7:45-50)
 - Watch for a pattern and ask yourself this question: *Why is Stephen rehearsing this well-known history to the religious experts of his day?*
4. **Acts 7:1-53**
 - *"Then the high priest said, "Are these things so?" 2 And he said, Brethren and fathers, listen: The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, 3 and said to him, 'Get out of your country and from your relatives, and come to a land that I will show you.' 4 Then he came out of the land of the Chaldeans and dwelt in Haran. And from there, when his father was dead, He moved him to this land in which you now dwell. 5 And God gave him no inheritance in it, not even enough to set his foot on. But even when Abraham had no child, He promised to give it to him for a possession, and to his descendants after him. 6 But God spoke in this way: that his descendants would dwell in a foreign land, and that they would bring them into bondage and oppress them four hundred years. 7 'And the nation to whom they will be in bondage I will judge,' said God, 'and after that they shall come out and serve Me in this place.' 8 Then He gave him the covenant of circumcision; and so Abraham begot Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day; and Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot the twelve patriarchs. 9 And the patriarchs, becoming envious, sold Joseph into Egypt. But God was with him 10 and delivered him out of all his troubles, and gave him favor and wisdom in the presence of Pharaoh, king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house. 11 Now a famine and great trouble came over all the land of Egypt and Canaan, and our fathers found no sustenance. 12 But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first. 13 And the second time Joseph was made known to his brothers, and Joseph's family became known to the Pharaoh. 14 Then Joseph sent and called his father Jacob and all his relatives to him, seventy-*

five people. **15** So Jacob went down to Egypt; and he died, he and our fathers. **16** And they were carried back to Shechem and laid in the tomb that Abraham bought for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem. **17** But when the time of the promise drew near which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt **18** till another king arose who did not know Joseph. **19** This man dealt treacherously with our people, and oppressed our forefathers, making them expose their babies, so that they might not live. **20** At this time Moses was born, and was well pleasing to God; and he was brought up in his father's house for three months. **21** But when he was set out, Pharaoh's daughter took him away and brought him up as her own son. **22** And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds. **23** Now when he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the children of Israel. **24** And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended and avenged him who was oppressed, and struck down the Egyptian. **25** For he supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand. **26** And the next day he appeared to two of them as they were fighting, and tried to reconcile them, saying, 'Men, you are brethren; why do you wrong one another?' **27** But he who did his neighbor wrong pushed him away, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge over us?' **28** 'Do you want to kill me as you did the Egyptian yesterday?' **29** Then, at this saying, Moses fled and became a dweller in the land of Midian, where he had two sons. **30** And when forty years had passed, an Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire in a bush, in the wilderness of Mount Sinai. **31** When Moses saw it, he marveled at the sight; and as he drew near to observe, the voice of the Lord came to him, **32** saying, 'I am the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' And Moses trembled and dared not look. **33** 'Then the LORD said to him, "Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground. **34** I have surely seen the oppression of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their groaning and have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt.'" **35** This Moses whom they rejected, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge?' is the one God sent to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the Angel who appeared to him in the bush. **36** He brought them out, after he had shown wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red Sea, and in the wilderness forty years. **37** This is that Moses who said to the children of Israel, 'The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear.' **38** This is he who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the Angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers, the one who received the living oracles to give to us, **39** whom our fathers would not obey, but rejected. And in their hearts they turned back to Egypt, **40** saying to Aaron, 'Make us gods to go before us; as for this Moses who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' **41** And they made a calf in those days, offered sacrifices to the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands. **42** Then God turned and gave them up to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the Prophets: 'Did you offer Me slaughtered animals and sacrifices during forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? **43** You also took up the tabernacle of Moloch, And the star of your god Remphan, Images which you made to worship; And I will carry you away beyond Babylon.' **44** Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as He appointed, instructing Moses to make it according to the pattern that he had seen, **45** which our fathers, having received it in turn, also brought with Joshua into the land possessed by the Gentiles, whom God drove out before the face of our fathers

until the days of David, **46** who found favor before God and asked to find a dwelling for the God of Jacob. **47** But Solomon built Him a house. **48** However, the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands, as the prophet says: **49** 'Heaven is My throne, And earth is My footstool. What house will you build for Me? says the LORD, Or what is the place of My rest? **50** Has My hand not made all these things?' **51** You stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit: as your fathers did, so do you. **52** Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, **53** who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it."¹

The Patriarchs: Abraham to Joseph (Acts 7:1-16)

1. **And the Patriarchs, becoming envious, sold Joseph into Egypt. But God was with him. (Acts 7:9)**
2. **Joseph, the rejected, became the means by which provision was made for the rest of the family—and ultimately the line of promise.**

The Exodus, giving of the law, and wilderness wanderings: Moses (Acts 7:17-45)

1. **Moses was the chosen instrument of God to deliver Israel out of Egypt**
2. **Moses intercedes on behalf of oppressed brethren, but is rejected (Acts 7:24-28)**
3. ***This Moses whom they rejected . . . is the one God sent to be a ruler and a deliver (Acts 7:35)***
4. **It was Moses who . . .**
 - A. **Performed signs and wonders (Acts 7:36)**
 - B. **Said, *The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear* (Acts 7:37 cf. Deu. 18:15)**
 - C. **Was with the congregation in the wilderness for 40 years**
 - D. **Received the *living oracles* (the law) on Mount Sinai (Acts 7:38)**
 - E. **Received the plan for the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness by divine revelation (Acts 7:44)**
5. ***Whom our fathers would not obey, but rejected (Acts 7:39)***

The temple and the throne of David: David, Solomon (Acts 7:45-50)

1. **Found favor before God, desired to build a dwelling place for God**
2. **David gathered and planned, received divine directions, in preparation for his son, Solomon, who would build the Temple (the “house” of God)**
3. **Yet, even the kings in the line of David and Solomon became increasingly corrupt leading to the judgment of the throne of David—such that there was no king in Israel since—even unto the day in which Stephen here spoke.**
 - A. *I will carry you away beyond Babylon (Acts 7:43)*

The punch line: Acts 7:51-53

1. ***You stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it (Acts 7:51-53).***
 - A. **Continually resisting the Holy Spirit**
 - B. **Acting just like their fathers**
 - I. **Their fathers had killed those who predicted Messiah Jesus**
 - II. **They had killed Messiah Jesus Himself**
 - C. **They were walking in the same historical rut as their fathers—the well-worn pattern of disobeying and rejecting God, all the while believing they were seeking and serving God.**

The pattern

1. **On the stage of history: revelation by God followed by rejection by cultures and nations**
 - A. **Adam and Eve**
 - B. **Worldwide evil prior to the flood**
 - C. **The nations at the tower of Babel**
 - D. **Israel's failure to follow God, both the north and south**
 - E. **The failure of the throne of David to institute godly rule**

F. The failure of Israel to accept her Messiah

2. But what about our own lives — our walk with God as professed believers?

A. Loving God, worshiping God, but living in disobedience

- I. **Christians who believe they are seriously following God, even praying for His will in their lives, but who are living in direct disobedience to His will**
 - a. **Unmarried Christian couples who are sexually active**
 - b. **Professing Christians who are practicing homosexuals**
- II. **Our disobedience can be major or minor, but if we think we can be true disciples of God while walking in serious disobedience, we are no different than the Sanhedrin at the time of Stephen**
 - a. **Believed they were among those who were serious about serving and seeking God (after all, Paul—soon to be Saul—was one of them!)**
 - b. **In reality, they were diametrically opposed to God and His principles**
 - c. **This is serious spiritual deception!**

B. What about less obvious situations where we reject God's voice in our lives?

- I. **We don't like the message**
 - a. ***Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord (Acts 7:57)***
 - b. **But if we liked the message, then we'd already be motivated in that direction. To get us to *turn* and change our ways involves helping us to see we are on an incorrect path or held captive by incorrect thinking**
- II. **Our pride gets in the way**
 - a. **Unwilling to accept input from those we deem as “lesser” than ourselves**
 - i. A man who was blind from birth, having been healed by Jesus,

testifies before the religious leaders

- The man answered and said to them, "Why, this is a marvelous thing, that you do not know where He [Jesus] is from; yet He has opened my eyes! Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him. Since the world began it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind. If this Man were not from God, He could do nothing." They answered and said to him, "You were completely born in sins, and are you teaching us?" And they cast him out. (John [9:30-34](#))

b. Unwilling to admit our own faults

- i. Concerning Israel, Paul writes: *For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God* (Rom. [10:2-3](#)).
- ii. Yet, these are the very faults that need to be addressed if we are to be conformed into the image of God's son (Rom. [8:29](#))

III. We discount the familiar as a source of God's input in our lives

a. The familiar is not given proper honor and attention

- i. *And when He [Jesus] had come to His own country, He taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished and said, "Where did this Man get this wisdom and these mighty works? Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this Man get all these things?" So they were offended at Him. But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house" (Mat. [13:54-57](#)).*
- ii. Really a symptom of our unwillingness listen to those we deem as "lesser" or even *similar* to ourselves

b. Seeking God's voice through the unusual

- i. Like "spiritual teenagers" who never hear what our parents are saying, but the minute we hear it from somewhere else (a source *without authority*, like another adult or peer), then it is value and considered
- ii. Attempting to "validate" that it must truly be God's voice if it comes from someone who doesn't know us very well

c. Discounting that God most often speaks in normal situations through the voices of those He has placed around us.

- i. A well-known Proverb states, *Faithful are the wounds of a friend* . . . (Pr. 27:6). Why?
- Friends know us over the long haul have insight into our struggles, gifts, and personality
 - Friends have a vested interest in us, value us as friends and brothers and sisters in Christ
 - Friends can't get away with "hit-and-run"; they have to be careful and thoughtful with what they have to say. Friends will still be around tomorrow
 - Friends are motivated to preserve the relationship

Principles

1. God often works through unexpected means

- A. **Abraham traveled all the way from Chaldea to the land of promise, but received no immediate inheritance in the the land he was taken to**
- B. **God purposefully took Israel down into Egypt, under favorable conditions, knowing this would eventually result in their bondage and need of deliverance**
- C. **Pharaoh's evil scheme to kill the male Hebrews led to Moses being raised up in the house of his daughter in preparation for leading Israel out of Egypt**
- D. **The crucifixion of Jesus, a seeming defeat, was actually a spectacular defeat over death and darkness which only the genius of God could have engineered**
- E. **When things seem to go astray in our own lives, we are often too quick to conclude that it can't be God—as if we have the ability to reliably discern the mind and will of God in relation to the events of our lives**
- F. **Where is our trust in God's sovereignty over us?**

2. Mankind has a well-worn history of rejecting God, both personally and nationally. Fortunately, God is enormously patient

- A. **God provides numerous opportunities for us to hear what we need to hear and to respond in repentance. Consider God's patience with the religious leaders of Israel:**

I. The ministry of John the baptist

II. The ministry of Jesus

III. The day of Pentecost (Acts 2)

IV. Peter and John, heal a man born lame, testify before the council (Acts 3)

V. Peter and John, released from prison by an Angel, testify before the council (Acts 5)

VI. Stephen, witnesses before the council (Acts 6-7).

B. However, *if* we persist in our stubbornness, God eventually gives us what we *want* rather than what we *need*.

- I. After Israel repeatedly rejected Moses, God turned and gave them up to worship the host of heaven . . . Molech . . . and the star of . . . Remphan (Acts 7:42-43)

3. We must continually pray to have spiritual ears so as to avoid that which Isaiah and Jesus warned of:

- A. The commissioning of Isaiah: *Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: "Whom shall I send, And who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me." And He said, "Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on hearing, but do not understand; Keep on seeing, but do not perceive.' "Make the heart of this people dull, And their ears heavy, And shut their eyes; Lest they see with their eyes, And hear with their ears, And understand with their heart, And return and be healed." (Isa. 6:8-10)*
- B. Jesus' use of parables: *Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled . . . (Mat. 13:13-15)*
- C. *But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear (Mat. 13:16)*

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Endnotes:

1. [Acts 7:1-53](#), Unless indicated otherwise, all Scripture references are from the *New King James Version*, copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Links Mentioned Above

- a - See http://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/Acts_by_Tony_Garland/22_Acts_7_1-53/index.htm.
b - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/tg.htm>.
c - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org>.