

# The Acts of the Holy Spirit and the early church

June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2014 Stephen's message, Part 12

## The Tabernacle and the clarification of God's true residence



### Acts 7:44-50 (NASB)

*Our fathers had the tabernacle of testimony in the wilderness, just as He who spoke to Moses directed him to make it according to the pattern which he had seen. And having received it in their turn, our fathers brought it in with Joshua upon dispossessing the nations whom God drove out before our fathers, until the time of David. David found favor in God's sight, and asked that he might find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. But it was Solomon who built a house for*

*Him. However, the Most High does not dwell in houses made by human hands; as the prophet says:*

*Heaven is My throne, and earth is the footstool of My feet*

*What kind of house will you build for Me?' says the Lord.*

*Or what place is there for My repose? Was it not My hand which made all these things?*

The charges against Stephen were that he had spoken blasphemy against Moses and his Law, as well as speaking against the Holy Temple of God. In the previous part of this defense he had shown his respect for Moses and his Law. Stephen now proceeds to show that he did not design to speak with disrespect of the temple, or the holy places of their worship. He therefore expresses his belief in the divine appointment of both the tabernacle and of the temple.

## The Tabernacle of Testimony:

The tabernacle of witness - The "tent" or "tabernacle" which Moses was commanded to make, was in fact actually called a tabernacle of "witness," or of "testimony," because it was the visible witness or proof of God's presence with the Israelites. Now some historians believe this reference is only to the Arc of the Covenant, while others believe this designation is given to the entire area encompassed by the tent of meeting along with the Arc of the Covenant on the inside. Note the following commands by God to Moses in the initial building of this magnificent portable worship center:

### Exodus 25:1-8 (NASB)

*Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Tell the sons of Israel to raise a contribution for Me; from every man whose heart moves him you shall raise My contribution. This is the contribution*

*which you are to raise from them: gold, silver and bronze, blue, purple and scarlet material, fine linen, goat hair, rams' skins dyed red, porpoise skins, acacia wood, oil for lighting, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, onyx stones and setting stones for the ephod and for the breastpiece. Let them construct a sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell among them.*

The Tabernacle during the Exodus and the wandering in the desert with Moses and the conquest of Canaan with Joshua, was a portable tent draped with colorful curtains called the tent of meeting. It had a rectangular, perimeter fence of fabric, poles and staked cords. This rectangle was slanted towards the east, and always erected when the Israelite tribes made camp, whether for a short or lengthy time.

In the center of this enclosure was a rectangular sanctuary draped with goat-hair curtains, with the roof made from rams' skins. Over the rams' skins was placed a covering of **Tachash skins**, which is a term of questionable meaning which has been translated as blue processed skins of the Porpoise. The Jewish historian **Flavius Josephus** notes the following on the appearance of this tabernacle:

**There were also other curtains made of skins above these, which afforded covering and protection to those that were woven both in hot weather and when it rained. And great was the surprise of those who viewed these curtains at a distance, for they seemed not at all to differ from the color of the sky. But those that were made of hair and of skins, reached down in the same manner as did the veil at the gates, and kept off the heat of the sun, and what injury the rains might do. And after this manner was the tabernacle reared.**

Inside, the enclosure was divided into two areas, the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. These two areas were separated by a curtain or veil. Inside the first area were three pieces of furniture: a seven-branched oil lampstand on the left (south-side), a table for twelve loaves of show bread on the right (north-side) and the Altar of Incense located on the (west-side), straight ahead before the dividing curtain.

Beyond this curtain was the cube-shaped inner room known as the Holy of Holies, of which housed the Ark of the Covenant. Inside which were the two stone tablets brought down from Mount Sinai by Moses on which were written the Ten Commandments, a golden urn holding a sample of the manna that God used to feed his people for all the many years they wandered in the desert.

Finally, because all the leaders of the tribes wanted to be considered first and foremost, God had them all place rods (one from each tribe, 12 in all). God then told Moses whichever rod grew and budded at the end, he is the one I have chosen; therefore it was Aaron's rod that budded and bore ripe almonds that was finally put into the Arc of the Covenant.

### **Hebrews 9:1-7 (NASB)**

*Now even the first covenant had regulations of divine worship and the earthly sanctuary. For there was a tabernacle prepared, the outer one, in which were the lampstand and the table and the sacred bread; this is called the holy place. Behind the second veil there was a tabernacle which is called the Holy of Holies, having a golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden jar holding the manna, and Aaron's rod which budded, and the tables of the covenant; and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat; but of these things we cannot now speak in detail.*

*Now when these things have been so prepared, the priests are continually entering the outer tabernacle performing the divine worship, but into the second, only the high priest enters once a year; not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the sins of the people committed in ignorance.*

It's a sad thing that we see here at the beginning of verse 44 in our study of Acts chapter 7. Stephen is relating that both his ancestors as well as the Jewish leaders knew and understood just what it was that God desired from them. There was no realistic way for these people ever to forget about God, for he was constantly with them in a visual way, either by fire or smoke or clouds.

### **Exodus 29:43-46 (NASB)**

*I will meet there with the sons of Israel, and it shall be consecrated by My glory. I will consecrate the tent of meeting and the altar; I will also consecrate Aaron and his sons to minister as priests to Me. I will dwell among the sons of Israel and will be their God. They shall know that I am the Lord their God who brought them out of the land of Egypt, that I might dwell among them; I am the Lord their God.*

Stephen continually reminded them that it was their descendants that had the testimony right in front of them for 40 years and they rejected it over and over. So you're the culpable ones Stephen says, you're the guilty ones here with your idolatry from earliest times to now, not me!!!

Stephen relates that he believes in the law, Moses and all the prophets as well as the Temple of the Testimony of God, the living oracles from God and finally how that Jesus is the culmination to that very same law. Pastor and Author **Dr. John MacArthur** writes the following on this one way conversation between Stephen and the Sanhedrin:

**So Stephen says, we brought it in, and God drove out the heathen to establish a place for His Tabernacle and the worship of Him. I believe it & I believe God ordained it. God gave Moses the plan. God had it brought into the land. God drove out the heathen so His Tabernacle could be established. I believe in the Tabernacle. Don't accuse me of blaspheming the Temple."**

## **Furthering the claim that wherever God is, is the place to be:**

We should remember that not a soul of the generation that came out of Egypt were permitted to enter into the land of Canaan, except Caleb and Joshua. For all lacked the faith in one way or another. Nevertheless, God was with them wherever they went, oh if we as a nation would only remember the Lord in all our dealings with each other and with the rest of the world, what a different place this would be!

### **Numbers 14:22-24 & 30b (NASB)**

*Surely all the men who have seen My glory and My signs which I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have put Me to the test these ten times and have not listened to My voice, shall by no means see the land which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who spurned Me see it. But My servant Caleb, because he has had a different spirit and has followed Me fully, I will bring into the land which he entered, and his descendants shall take possession of it, and Joshua, son of Nun*

Henceforth it is said that their fathers who "**came after**," that is, after the generation when the tabernacle was built. The sense is that Stephen means that it was not brought in by that quarrelsome generation, but by the next. Into the possession of the Gentiles, that is into the land possessed by the Canaanites and others at that time. Furthermore God continued to drive them out until the time of David. There are some historians that take this 45<sup>th</sup> verse of Acts 7 and believe that it actually means that the tabernacle was in the possession of the Jews, and was the appointed place of worship, until the time of David, who desired to build him a temple.

## **The desire of King David:**

Again we trace, though still in the form of a narrative, an indirect answer to the accusation brought against Stephen. He was ready to acknowledge without reserve that the Temple was planned by the man after God's own heart ((King David)), and built by the wisest of the sons of men.((King Solomon)) But the question still remained whether it was therefore the symbol of a final and perfect worship, whether it did not bear witness to its own incompleteness to the forthcoming perfectiveness of Jesus the Christ.

### **2 Samuel 7:1-7 & 12-16 (NASB)**

*Now it came about when the king lived in his house, and the Lord had given him rest on every side from all his enemies, that the king said to Nathan the prophet, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells within tent curtains." Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that is in your mind, for the Lord is with you." But in the same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan, saying, "Go and say to My servant David, 'Thus says the Lord, "Are you the one who should build Me a house to dwell in?"*

*For I have not dwelt in a house since the day I brought up the sons of Israel from Egypt, even to this day; but I have been moving about in a tent, even in a tabernacle. Wherever I have gone with all the sons of Israel, did I speak a word with one of the tribes of Israel, which I commanded to shepherd My people Israel, saying, 'Why have you not built Me a house of cedar?'*

*When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men, but My lovingkindness shall not depart from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever.'"*

It seemed like a good idea to everyone. David, the king of Israel, decided a change needed to be made. Nathan, the prophet, thought it sounded good. Certainly David's motive was good. Ever since before entering the Promised Land and establishing a new nation, for about five hundred years, the worship of God centered around the tabernacle.

Though David was sincere and genuine, and though it seems that he probably had a good and commendable idea, the Lord quickly let both Nathan and David know that such was not the case. The first mistake David made was thinking that God needed him, or at least needed a house in which He could dwell.

It was not that God did not approve of David any longer, or that He was displeased with David. He gives David magnificent promises concerning his descendant and kingdom. But who is the fulfillment of these promises? Is it Solomon, David's immediate son, or Jesus, David's future descendant. The answer: They both do! The Lord God will use Solomon and his building of the physical temple to be a pattern of what David's future Descendant will do when He builds a spiritual temple, the church, but still the question remains, why not David???

### **1 Chronicles 22:6-13 (NASB)**

*Then he called for his son Solomon, and charged him to build a house for the Lord God of Israel. David said to Solomon, "My son, I had intended to build a house to the name of the Lord my God. But the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 'You have shed much blood and have waged great wars; you shall not build a house to My name, because you have shed so much blood on the earth before Me. Behold, a son will be born to you, who shall be a man of rest; and I will give him rest from all his enemies on every side; for his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quiet to Israel in his days. He shall build a house for My name, and he shall be*

*My son and I will be his father; and I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel forever.'*

*Now, my son, the Lord be with you that you may be successful, and build the house of the Lord your God just as He has spoken concerning you. Only the Lord give you discretion and understanding, and give you charge over Israel, so that you may keep the law of the Lord your God. Then you will prosper, if you are careful to observe the statutes and the ordinances which the Lord commanded Moses concerning Israel. Be strong and courageous, do not fear nor be dismayed.*

David had fought wars, and God did not want a man that had shed so much blood to build His house, even though it was God who ordered David to do most all the warring that he did. The exception is the charge of premeditated murder against Uriah the Hittite, so that David could pursue the beautiful Bathsheba as well as the deaths of over 70,000 Israelites. Now here in all its sordid details is the account of the slaughter of many in the Holy Land because of the pride of their king.

## **2 Samuel 24:1-4 (NASB)**

*Now again the anger of the Lord burned against Israel, and it incited David against them to say, "Go, number Israel and Judah."*

&

## **1 Chronicles 21:1 (NASB)**

*Then Satan stood up against Israel and moved David to number Israel.*

*The king said to Joab the commander of the army who was with him, "Go about now through all the tribes of Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, and register the people, that I may know the number of the people." But Joab said to the king, "Now may the Lord your God add to the people a hundred times as many as they are, while the eyes of my lord the king still see; but why does my lord the king delight in this thing?" Nevertheless, the king's word prevailed against Joab and against the commanders of the army. So Joab and the commanders of the army went out from the presence of the king to register the people of Israel.*

The first thing we should glean from this episode is that it was Satan who provoked David to number Israel. In other words, numbering Israel's army was done because the adversary Satan was tempting David. That is a very important thing to remember because it explains much. The second thing to consider is David's reason for doing this was, "that he may know it." In other words, his own delight or pleasure was what induced him to do this.

These are the keys to understanding this sin. God allowed David to be tempted by Satan because Israel had taken their eyes off God as their ruler, fortress and provider. Therefore, when we see that the anger of the Lord incited David, this is more of a way of saying that God allowed Satan to tempt David specifically to show him the pride that he had welled up inside.

God moved David in the same way that He hardened Pharaoh's heart. Not that He made David sin, but that He took away his hand of restraint of sin in him, and David's own human pride and vanity does the rest. Now we know that God Himself tempts no man or woman to do anything wrong:

**James 1:12-15 (NASB)**

*Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.*

God tempts no man to sin but neither is He obligated to restrain any man from his own sin. And here God takes full responsibility for bringing this judgment upon Israel. **Pastor and teacher Tony Warren** writes the following:

**For by removing his hand of restraint from David, He "allowed" Satan to provoke him to this error. Without God's hand of restraint on believers as they live out their lives in this world, they would all be as lawless and wicked as the unsaved people are. It is only "God in us" that keeps us from succumbing to our diverse sin nature in the lusts of the flesh.**

The one aspect in the life of King David, is that he really was a man after God's own heart. This we must understand in looking at his life as a whole, that being apart from his many failures, he nevertheless did in fact love the Lord God and was for the most part devoted to Him in his life. Now after David had showed his pride by choosing to number the strength of Israel, lets observe how he deals with the consequences to this sin:

**2 Samuel 24:10-17 (NASB)**

*Now David's heart troubled him after he had numbered the people. So David said to the Lord, "I have sinned greatly in what I have done. But now, O Lord, please take away the iniquity of Your servant, for I have acted very foolishly." When David arose in the morning, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Gad, David's seer, saying, "Go and speak to David, 'Thus the Lord says, "I am offering you three things; choose for yourself one of them, which I will do to you."'" So Gad came to David and told him, and said to him, "Shall seven years of famine come to you in your land?*

*Or will you flee three months before your foes while they pursue you? Or shall there be three days' pestilence in your land? Now consider and see what answer I shall return to Him who*

*sent me.” Then David said to Gad, “I am in great distress. Let us now fall into the hand of the Lord for His mercies are great, but do not let me fall into the hand of man.”*

*So the Lord sent a pestilence upon Israel from the morning until the appointed time, and seventy thousand men of the people from Dan to Beersheba died. When the angel stretched out his hand toward Jerusalem to destroy it, the Lord relented from the calamity and said to the angel who destroyed the people, “It is enough! Now relax your hand!” And the angel of the Lord was by the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. Then David spoke to the Lord when he saw the angel who was striking down the people, and said, “Behold, it is I who have sinned, and it is I who have done wrong; but these sheep, what have they done? Please let Your hand be against me and against my father’s house.”*

## **God is bigger than any box you might have Him in:**

These words were written originally by the late, great prophet Isaiah:

### **Isaiah 66:1-2a (NASB)**

*Thus says the Lord, “Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool. Where then is a house you could build for Me? And where is a place that I may rest? “For My hand made all these things, thus all these things came into being,” declares the Lord.*

Now we see that Stephen is actually quoting Solomon who quoted Isaiah.

And Stephen's saying, "I'm not blaspheming the Temple, friends. I'm saying God is bigger than the box you've got Him in, and I'm only saying what Solomon said. So don't accuse me of blaspheming your temple. Solomon would be accused of it, too.

## **In Closing:**

When one is faithful to truth, as Stephen was then, as we are now, they meet with bitter antagonism. Note the following:

**If Jeremiah had kept quiet he would not have been cast into the dungeon.**

**If Daniel had yielded quietly he would not have been cast into the lion’s den.**

**If John the Baptist had kept quiet he would not have been cast into prison and beheaded.**

**If the Apostle John Know had kept quiet he would not have been sentenced to the galleys.**

If missionaries who have gone into hundreds of fields had kept quiet they might not have suffered loneliness and persecution and martyrdom. If we are faithful in opposing

wickedness in its many places of power today we will undoubtedly meet with unpopularity and opposition. The following poem written many years ago, relates the facts of trying to live righteously in this world of ours:

## **No Enemies**

**By Charles Mackay**

**(English Poet, 1814–1889)**

**YOU have no enemies, you say?  
Alas! my friend, the boast is poor;**

**He who has mingled in the fray Of duty,  
that the brave endure, Must have made foes!**

**If you have none,  
Small is the work that you have done.**

**You've hit no traitor on the hip,  
You've dashed no cup from perjured lip,  
You've never turned the wrong to right,**

**You've been a coward in the fight!**