

# The Better Tabernacle

Acts 7:37-53

Halifax: 15 January 2012

## Introduction

For several weeks now, we have been looking at Stephen's defence before the Sanhedrin which was the supreme court of the Jews.

- There is so much to learn from this man!
  - He was a godly man; one who was filled with the Holy Spirit and with wisdom.
  - He was chosen by the church along with six other men to look after widows and orphans.
    - And as he went about his ministry, many of his fellow Hellenistic Jews (Greek speaking Jews) began to ask him about his faith.
    - And Stephen told them about Jesus Christ and His salvation.
      - And the more they talked to him, the more they found they were not able to resist wisdom and the spirit by which he spoke.
- And so they did what people often do when they cannot refute the truth...
  - They began to twist Stephen's words.
  - They even accused him of blasphemy against Moses and against God.
    - They took what he said and twisted it in order to bring charges against him.
      - It is very sad to see how often such measures are used today.
      - I read a book recently in which the author completely misrepresented the brother he was speaking against.
    - They accused Stephen of speaking against the temple by saying that it would be destroyed,
      - And of speaking against the law because he said the customs that Moses had given to Israel would be changed.
      - But that was not to speak *against* these as they alleged.
        - Stephen believed rather that these glorious institutions had fulfilled their purpose and now were to give way to what was greater in the unfolding of God's redemptive plan!
          - The temple and the customs of the law were only provisional until Jesus Christ came!
          - Stephen did not speak against the temple or the law, as they accused him of doing...
  - But Stephen is not at all unsettled by their charges.
    - He simply makes the most of the opportunity to speak before the court.
    - Without fear, he stands and boldly makes his defence!

- And with what wisdom he speaks!
- Rather than directly answering the charges, he simply gives an account of the history of the fathers—
  - Highlighting things that show that the temple with its customs is not the substance of true religion, but only provisional.
    - Abraham never had a temple and never obtained the land, yet he was blessed by God.
    - Moses himself was called in the wilderness, not in a temple.
  - And Stephen also highlights the fact that those whom God sent were almost always rejected by the fathers.
    - He shows how Joseph was rejected by the patriarchs even though God sent him to save...
    - And the same with Moses—rejected, not only initially, but even after he had delivered the people out of Egypt.
      - That brings us right up to where we are now in our study of Stephen's defence.
      - I overlapped the readings a little from last week because it is here that Stephen begins to speak about the tabernacle which is our focus this week.

You can see in verse 37 how Stephen begins to move into a discussion about the proper worship of God in the time of Moses which as at the tabernacle...

- And then he goes on to show how the tabernacle was later replaced by the temple...
  - But that even that was not the final tabernacling of God...
    - That God has something even greater for His people in Jesus Christ...
- The Jews had accused him of speaking against the temple because he had said that Jesus would destroy the temple at Jerusalem.
  - But we shall see that Stephen had a very high sense of God tabernacling among His people.
    - Rather than diminishing this, Stephen wants to raise his accusers to a much higher understanding of God's tabernacling with His people!
  - And my brothers and sisters,
    - these words are written in God's holy word to have that same impact upon you!
      - You need to see what is involved with God tabernacling among us...
      - So let's look at and learn from what Stephen has to say.

TRANS> First, Stephen declares that...

## I. The Lord graciously tabernacles with His people.

A. That means that He *tents* with us.

1. A tabernacle is a tent, so if someone tabernacles with you, it means that He pitches his tent where your tent is pitched.
  - a. You can see where Stephen refers to that in verse 44.
    - He says:
      - **Acts 7:44: Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as He appointed...**
    - The tabernacle was a continual witness to the people that God was there.
      - It was His tent, set up in the camp of His people.
  - b. What security there is—what protection—in having Him as a friend in your camp!
    - Truly, as we saw in our call to worship today, if the Lord is in our midst, we will see disaster no more!
      - Nothing evil can harm you when the Lord is with you to defend you!
  - c. Besides that, what resources there are for us—what provision—when He is in the midst of us—
    - when He is accessible to us so that we can call upon Him...
      - among us with divine resources to provide all that we need for life and godliness.
      - present with us to shepherd us and lead us into green pastures.

TRANS> It is a splendid thing to have the most High God tabernacle with us...

2. It is also a very remarkable thing because God is a transcendent, holy God, and we are sinners!
  - As transcendent, He does not need a tent at all—
    - He can't even be contained in a tent or in any one particular place...
      - It is an amazing condescension on His part to pitch His tent with our tents.
      - He tabernacles in a way that we can understand, that we can see.
  - And as He is holy, it is remarkable that He can come among us sinners...
    - He is a consuming fire when He comes among sinners...
    - He envelops what is not holy in the flames of fiery indignation.
      - How could it be that He would deign to tabernacle in our midst when we are sinners?

B. Stephen explains that in the wilderness, the LORD presented a tabernacling of Himself with His people that was a *pattern* (τυπος) of His presence.

- Look at the whole of verse 44:
    - **Acts 7:44: 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...**
1. Moses was to make it according to the *pattern* or the *image* that God had showed him.
    - Hebrews explains that it was patterned after the realities of the heavenly sanctuary.
      - Not an ethereal sanctuary, but according to reality of things that were yet unseen.
        - Not only the reality *that* God was with His people,
          - but also of *how it is that He could be with them* even though they are sinners and He was a holy God.
      - In other words, it was a picture or a type—again, the word in the original is *typos*—
        - so it shows us realities that cannot be seen by us in a way that can be seen.
  2. In particular, the tabernacle showed how a holy God could be among us and not destroy us on account of our sin...
    - a. If you know anything about the Old Testament, you will know that the people were taught that God is holy.
      - God commanded them that they dare not come upon the mountain upon which He was revealed lest they be pierced through.
      - He terrified them by speaking forth the Ten Commandments with majesty that shook Mount Sinai.
    - b. And then, when He gave them the tabernacle,
      - He gave them all sorts of regulations to teach them that they must be holy because He is among them.
        - They were to be distinct from the other nations.
        - They had food and clothing laws that set them apart.
        - And they had the moral law that called them to holy conduct.
    - c. But of course the people did not always keep these laws—they came short...
      - And so there was a priesthood associated with the tabernacle...
        - And this priesthood was responsible for offering all manner of sacrifices to atone for sin.
        - By this, God showed that He dwelt among sinful people through means of substitutionary sacrifices.

- And so the blood of bulls and goats and lambs and birds were offered on the altar in front of God's tent.
  - In this way, the people were taught that the holy God was among them by means of sacrifices offered to atone for their sins.
- d. But of course this was only a pattern or picture of the reality.
- No one was to be so blockish as to think that the blood of bulls of goats offered by a priest on an altar in a tent could atone for sin!
  - Nor were they to suppose that the most high God could be confined to a tent.
  - The living God was showing His people a picture of heavenly reality.
  - God did this until the real sacrifice—the sacrifice from heaven—could be offered.
- C. We now know, we who live in these days, that Jesus Christ is the true sacrifice from heaven that the tabernacle of Moses was patterned after.
1. Jesus is God Himself, actually coming to tabernacle among us...
- John explains this in His gospel when he says...
    - **John 1:14: And the Word** (that is, the Son of God) **became flesh and dwelt** (the word is tabernacled) **among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.**
    - The word *dwelt* is *tabernacled*.
  - God the Son actually did this!
    - It was not just a pattern or a type as in the Old Testament.
      - The Son of God who had no body (being an eternal spirit), actually became flesh—being born of a woman.
        - He became one of us with a true body and true human soul.
    - Talk about condescension!
      - That the Creator should stoop to become a creature!
      - Truly He is Immanuel which means, “God with us!”
2. But that is not all!
- What a about the problem of sin?
    - How does He come among us without destroying us?
  - He Himself became the true sacrifice to atone for our sins!
    - He became the sacrifice that was represented at the tabernacle of Moses.
      - He actually allowed that all of our iniquities should be laid on Him—pressed down upon Him in all the weight of guilt...
      - He was charged with all of our crimes so that He is said to have borne the sin of many!

- The penalty of those sins—the curse that would have put the whole church in Hell forever—was charged to Him...
  - It was such a burden that it caused this mighty lion of the tribe of Judah to sweat drops of blood as He anticipated it...
  - It put Him in the place of cursing before God and man on the cross.
  - And there He remained until it was finished—until every last sin had been atoned!
    - Down to the grave He went, but then on the third day, He was raised with full justification for all His people.
- Here is the true tabernacling of God with man!
  - Christ in the flesh crucified and risen again for our justification!
    - So that we might come before God and not be destroyed!
    - So that we might be like the burning bush that it enveloped with God the consuming fire, yet not destroyed!
    - Because He lives, we who believe live also! freely and forever forgiven by His gracious act!
      - Truly, in Christ, God tabernacles among us.

TRANS> So you can learn from this that God's tabernacling and templing is all about Christ...

- In the Old Testament, it was a pattern of Christ tabernacling among us that was shown.
  - For us who live in these New Testament times, this is all written for us to help us understand more of Christ.
- Now, in the New Testament, He is the true and real fulfilment of God tabernacling among us.

## **II. Stephen shows us that God's people respond in radically different ways to His tabernacling with us.**

- Of course, people ought to gladly receive the living God who comes to dwell with us so graciously and to bring us provision for our sin...
- A. But sadly, there are many who prefer to come to God in their own way.
- Instead of receiving Him, they want to come in their own way
1. Stephen shows that Israel rejected the tabernacle when it was first given in the wilderness—
    - a. He explains that even while Moses was on the mount receiving instructions about how the people were to dwell with God,
      - they rejected him and turned their hearts back to Egypt and its worship.

- Not that they wanted to be slaves again,
  - but that they wanted to worship God the way the Egyptians worshipped their gods.
- Verses 38-41 speak of their rejection of Moses which led to a rejection of the tabernacle.
  - **Acts 7:38-41: 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.’ 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, whom our fathers would not obey, but rejected. And in their hearts they turned back to Egypt, 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.’ And they made a calf in those days, offered sacrifices to the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands.**
- b. The idea seems to be—
  - “We know how to worship.”
  - “We know how to come to God.”
  - “Why do we need to wait for Moses to tell us?”
  - The Egyptians had represented their gods with images of calves—young bulls—that represented fertility and strength.
    - The Israelites were familiar with all that was involved in this worship—
      - the dancing, the revelry, the singing, perhaps even tongues as records show that tongues were spoken in Egypt as early as 2000 BC in their worship, it seems that there as even ritual sex and drunkenness.
  - If you read carefully in Exodus, you can see that the Israelites have no intention of rejecting Yahweh.
    - It is the God that brought them out of Egypt that they wish to worship—not the gods of Egypt...
      - It is only that they want to worship Him according to the way the Egyptians worshipped their gods.
      - And so the calf is made and the calf is worshipped as an image of the God who brought them out of Egypt.
        - In their minds, they were not trying to make God angry.
        - They were coming to worship Him.
        - They were giving up their gold to make this image for His worship.
      - But they were very wrong to do this!
        - They were not regarding Him a holy.

- c. We are told in Exodus that God was furious with them and threatened that He would destroy them and raise up to Himself another nation.
  - Moses had to intercede for them.
  
- 1) The living God is not to be worshipped in whatever way we think best!
  - He is a holy God and He must be approached only in the way He has appointed!
    - This is such a hard lesson for people to learn.
    - Read through the book of kings—there are only two or three kings who actually removed worship at the high places.
      - God makes note of this violation again and again.
  - Notice how Stephen describes their offence at the end of v. 41...
    - that they “rejoiced in the works of their own hands.”
      - It was worship that they devised!
      - The tabernacle was made by their hands too—but it was made according to God’s commandment.
        - That is the point—it is not for us to decide how God will be approached or what we will bring to Him.
  
- 2) You see, God wants His worshippers to rejoice in His provision for them,
  - not in their provision for Him—not in the works of their own hands.
  - The plain truth is that our works are not acceptable before Him!
    - We come rightly to Him only when we come to receive Him as He tabernacles among us—making provision for our sins.
      - John 1:12 says:
        - **Jn 1:12: “As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become the sons of God.”**
    - That is how the true religion is different from all other religions.
      - It is not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy that he saves us.
      - It is of grace, not of works.
        - The worship that He prescribes is that which shows Him providing for us.
        - We offer praise, and yes, they brought the Lamb, but it was emphasised that the Lamb represented what He would provide, not what we would provide!
  
- 3) If you want to be saved, you must not come bringing to God whatever you may think would impress Him or please Him.



- You must come to Him with nothing but your sin and receive everything you need from Jesus Christ.
    - He is given to us as crucified because we cannot in any way make ourselves acceptable to God through our own resources.
    - You must humble yourself and come to Him alone if you would be saved.
2. And look, Stephen shows us the long term consequences of Israel's choosing to worship God according to their own way...
- a. The LORD turns them over to even greater folly in their worship so that they even begin to worship the bodies in the heavens.
    - Look at verse 42-43:
      - **Acts 7:42-43: 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? 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.'**
    - They actually made images of heavenly bodies and bowed before them in their worship!
      - The Lord did not even count this as worship to Him!
        - He indicates that they did not even offer sacrifices to Him in the wilderness because He did not regard their sacrifices.
        - You can't worship God and demons at the same time.
        - We are told how they went after Baal of Peor.
        - It was in later years that they actually worshipped Moloch and Remphan—but the seed of this sin was in them from the beginning.
          - And this is the foolishness of God turned them over to.
  - b. In Romans 1, Paul speaks of this dreadful judgement upon those who choose their own worship and set up their own morals...
    - The Lord turns them over to madness— to a reprobate mind...
      - to absolute foolishness—their foolish heart is darkened...
        - because of their ingratitude and because they did not want to retain the true God in their thoughts.
- 1) Those who go their own way **morally** soon find that they have no control over themselves—
    - they are in bondage to sin and selfishness—to drugs—to sexual perversion—to immoral relationships—to violence—to stealing—to abusive speech...

2) So also with worship—what foolish things people will believe! What foolish things they will do!

- What superstitions—
  - Just look at all the rites and ceremonies in Rome—
    - all the holy days—all the saints—all the prayers to Mary—all the genuflecting and the paper hats.
- Look at some of things people do in some contemporary worship...
  - what they call holy laughter—or being slain in the spirit—or start hooting or humming—
  - They do things that people stopped doing when Jesus cast out demons.
    - God turns them over to these things when they choose their own way.

3) That is why we are careful to do only what God has commanded in our worship.

- We read and preach from the Scriptures that He has given us...
- We avoid instruments because He has not called for them in the New Testament—they were only to be played by Levites in the Old Testament.
- We sing the songs He has given us in the Bible.
- We avoid holy days that are of mere human origin.
- We refuse to use images or to add our own ceremonies.
- We want only what God has appointed.

TRANS> You put yourself in the place of danger as soon as you turn from God's way—

- from receiving His provision in Christ and His direction—to your own way.
  - God turns you over to more and more folly...
- c. And at the end of your own way, there is punishment...
  - After saying that God turned them over to deeper idolatry, the Lord adds at the end of verse 43 adds,
    - **“And I will carry you beyond Babylon...”**
    - That is the land of exile—the place of captivity and bondage.
      - All because they had not received God who came to tabernacle among them but chose their own way!

3. This, of course, is exactly what had happened in Stephen's day when God the Son had come to tabernacle among them.

- a. John 1:11-12 explains:
  - **John 1:11-12: He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:**
  - The Son of God was right there in the midst of them...
    - How glad they ought to have been to see that He had come!
    - The God of heaven had come to save them from their sins—
      - to truly dwell with them—
      - to accomplish all that had been depicted in the tabernacle...
    - How they should have welcomed Him!
      - But instead, they took Him and nailed Him to a cross!
  - As with the golden calf, not one of them would have said that they were rejecting Yahweh—
    - They would have said that they were worshipping Him!
    - But they were rejecting the provision that He had made for them by clinging to the Old Covenant worship.
  - They refused to give up their own way to receive God the Son who had come to tabernacle with them forever!
    - They chose their own way—they rejoiced in their own works.
      - In pride, they refused to rejoice in His work for them—the only work by which they might have been saved.
- b. But my friends—Jesus is also among us—right here, right now!
  - He tabernacles with His people.
    - Oh yes, He is in heaven until the last day when He comes to us and establishes a new heaven and new earth for us...
      - but as soon as you receive Him and His saving work, He comes to you through the Holy Spirit to dwell with you.
    - He dwells in the midst of His church today—
      - and he dwells in you if only you will humble yourself, give up your own works, and receive Him.
      - He has come to save and He promises that if you come to Him, He will by no means cast you out.
        - It doesn't matter what you may have done—
        - The whole point is that it is not about what you bring to God—it is about receiving what He has provided for you in Jesus Christ.

B. And there are many who do indeed receive Him.

- That is the second kind of response to Him.
    - There is really nothing else but these two responses...
      - Either you are before God with your own works...
      - Or you receive Jesus who came to tabernacle among us and you obtain eternal life and the complete remission of sins.
1. Stephen speaks about the fathers in the time of Joshua who brought up the tabernacle and the ark to the Promised Land of Canaan.
    - He speaks about how the LORD was indeed with them as symbolised by the tabernacle...
      - And how He drove out their enemies before them in the Land of Canaan.
    - You can see in verses 44-46 how they are said to have received the LORD who had come to be among them...
      - **Acts 7:44-46: 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, 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, who found favour before God.**
    - Isn't that excellent!
      - All they did was receive the Lord who came to dwell among them and then they become heirs of all His promises!
      - They inherited His kingdom that abides forever and that had so much more that the Lord was going to do for it!
        - They who were by nature enemies of God because of sin were reconciled to Him and found favour with Him.
  - And you see how those who loved the Lord moved forward in establishing a dwelling place for God...
2. David, according to verse 46, yearned to establish a dwelling for the God of Jacob in the Promised Land.
    - a. David knew the promise that once God had settled His people in the land and given it to them,
      - He would establish a place for His name to dwell—a permanent house among His people.
        - And in view of that promise, David, after conquering the land, asked if he might build that house.
        - It was very right for him to ask this,
          - but the LORD told him that it would be for his son Solomon to do because David had been a man of bloodshed—rightly so—conquering the land.

- b. But you see what we learn about David here—that he yearned for God to show the people of Israel that He was among them!
    - This is what we all ought to yearn for!
      - We want people to know that Jesus lives among us!
      - We want to show each other this and we want to show outsiders this wonderful truth.
    - And so it was that Solomon had the privilege of building God’s house (verse 47).
      - Today, God does not reveal Himself through a building, but through the proclamation of the gospel among His people.
        - That is why we pray for the church where God is revealed—
          - That she would preach the gospel...
          - That she would proclaim Jesus Christ as crucified for the remission of sins...
          - And that she would be filled with the Holy Spirit.
            - The church is the temple with Jesus Christ as the cornerstone and the word of the apostles and prophets as the rest of the foundation.
      - Those who love God, yearn for Him to dwell in His church...
        - They yearn for the Holy Spirit and they yearn for the proclamation of Jesus Christ.
        - Truly God dwells with all who receive Jesus as crucified!
          - This is our life!
            - We come together each Lord’s Day because Jesus Himself calls us to gather.
            - And then we do what He has called us to do.
3. But Stephen makes a very important point to his accusers here about the house that Solomon built as a dwelling place for the LORD...
  - He points out once again that not only the tabernacle, but also the temple is only a pattern of the true tabernacle of God—
    - Solomon said this when he had dedicated the temple, but Stephen quotes from Isaiah 66 where Isaiah speaks for the LORD Himself:
      - **Acts 7:48-50: However, the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands, as the prophet says: ‘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? Has My hand not made all these things?’**
  - Stephen wants the court to know that the temple is only a picture of the dwelling of God that is now become reality in Jesus Christ.

- The prophets and righteous men all knew that something much more than a temple with priests offering sacrifices was necessary for God to be reconciled to man.
- They did not understand just what God would do, but they only looked at the temple as a place where God was revealed as reconciled through sacrifice—
  - not as a place where true atonement was made.
  - Of course not, because the sacrifices were offered again and again—day after day, year after year.
    - They were pictures—not the substance of thing that was pictured.
- But the Jews before whom Stephen stood did not seem to understand this.
  - They seemed to think that the temple was all that was needed!
  - They were just like so many people today who suppose if they go to church and pray and perhaps read their Bibles, all is well!
    - It is not well!
      - It is not about what you do or about what the church does...
      - It is about Jesus Christ who came to tabernacle with the church.
      - I can't emphasise it enough—
        - You can come to church and pray and do everything, but until you receive Christ, you cannot be reconciled to God.
        - You have to trust in His work for you, not in your work for Him.
          - Now of course when you come to Him He changes you so that you do start living for Him...
          - You do start worshipping Him and going to church and reading the word and praying—
            - of course you do because Jesus saves you...
      - But you do those things because of His saving work for you,
        - not in order to be saved.
        - Oh no, that would a very silly thing to think that your pitiful works for God—all laced with sin—could save you!
          - Jesus suffered because we are so sinful!

TRANS> So be sure that you are among those who receive Jesus who tabernacles among us.

- And now I want you to see, in the final portion of our text, how...

### **III. Stephen, filled with the Holy Spirit, sternly rebukes those who reject the true tabernacle**

- It is a terrible wicked thing to reject God’s gracious provision and go your own way!
- There is a lot of speculation about what caused him to suddenly address his hearers with such a strong rebuke...
  - Perhaps it was the way they responded to what he had just said...about the temple being a pattern and not the substance itself...
    - But one thing is certain—it was a strong rebuke because the rejection of Jesus was such a great sin...
- How wrong it was for the fathers to reject the LORD when He tabernacled among them...
  - But how much more wrong it was for the Jews to reject Jesus who had come from heaven to tabernacle among them!
  - Whatever promoted his strong words, they are certainly quite appropriate!
    - For these men had rejected Christ who had been openly revealed among them.

A. Stephen accuses them of being like their fathers...in verse 51...

- **Acts 7:51: You stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you.**
- You will notice that he no longer refers to “our fathers,” but to “**your** fathers,”
  - He is speaking about the fathers who rejected God’s covenant as His hearers are now doing.
    - He brings three accusations (notice that he is now speaking as the accuser instead of as the defendant)...

1. First, he accuses them of being stiffnecked...

- This is a good description of all people who reject God’s gracious provision in Christ.
  - The term stiffnecked is used to speak of extreme stubbornness—of an animal who will not accept the yoke.
  - He will not go in the way he is directed, but only in his own way.
- What could be more stubborn than to keep going your own way when God has come and Himself provided the only way of salvation.
  - Why stiffen up and refuse Him?
  - There is nothing so stubborn as to refuse to yield to what can save you and bless you!
    - Yet, the reason is that no one wants to admit that they are in such a sorry state—such a corrupt person—that they need this provision!
      - They might be willing to admit that they need deliverance from cancer or poverty,
        - but not from their own moral wretchedness....

- Do not stiffen up your neck!
    - You need a Saviour just the same as everyone else.
    - Don't be like the Jews and like their fathers who refused the yoke!
2. Secondly, Stephen accuses them of being uncircumcised in heart and ears!
- Those were fighting words to a Jew—for if there was anything they prided themselves in, it was their circumcision!
    - And indeed, circumcision was a sign that marked them out as those who were in covenant with the living God!
    - But it is not enough to have the bare sign in their flesh!
      - The thing that really matters is a circumcised heart—a heart that is transformed by the Spirit of God so that the tabernacling Lord Jesus is warmly received and served as Saviour.
  - It is actually worse to have the sign of the covenant and not keep the covenant than to not have the sign at all.
    - You are in a position to hear of God's provision, but you reject it!
    - Baptism has now taken the place of circumcision and there are many today who are baptised in the flesh, but not in the Spirit.
      - Do you have the sign of God's cleansing on the outside, but do you yet refuse His cleansing on the inside?
        - Then circumcise your heart!
        - Receive the washing of regeneration, even a new heart that receives our tabernacling Saviour.
          - After all, it was into His name that you were baptised!
          - So what are you doing, rejecting Him who has everything you need!
3. Thirdly, Stephen accuses them of always resisting the Holy Spirit...
- a. Whenever God brings new revelation, He also sends the Holy Spirit.
    - The Spirit not only helps you to understand the revelation, but also to act upon it.
    - If you have received the tabernacling Jesus, it is because the Holy Spirit opened your heart to the gospel...
      - He caused you to see how much you need forgiveness and life...
        - and He broke down your stubbornness until at last you yielded.
  - b. But perhaps you are like Stephen's hearers—resisting the Spirit with everything you have.



- The things you are hearing are true and the Spirit has shown you that they are true—but you are fighting, refusing, rejecting...
- Well you need to stop it right now and yield to the truth.

B. And now Stephen brings forth evidence to show them that they are like their Fathers...

1. They are like their fathers because like them, they are rejecting the one that God sent in their generation.

- The dead prophets were always honoured—but those who preach the truth that are alive are the ones that are persecuted!
- The living ones are opposed because they can speak back when their teachings are twisted to suit the sentiments of unconverted men.

2. Stephen describes Israel's rejection of those God sends with these words...

- **Acts 7:52: 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,**
- With these words he drives home the point that his accusers are the worst of them all because they have rejected the very One all the prophets spoke about!
  - The Just One, which is a name for the Messiah that all the Jews claimed to be waiting for!
  - Stephen is saying—
    - He is here! He has come!
    - And instead of receiving Him, you betrayed Him and murdered Him!
- They boasting of observing the law and they accused Stephen of breaking it,
  - But the truth is, they are the ones who have not kept the law!
    - By claiming to have kept it when they came so short of it, they degrade the law.
    - When you come to Jesus to be justified, you establish the law...
      - You establish it as an absolute standard that can only be met through the work of Jesus Christ.
  - Only by coming to Him do you show that the demands of the law can never be set aside—
    - That they must all be met and can only be met through the Son of God who tabernacles with us.

**Conclusion:**

- So what about you?
  - Have you received the One who came to tabernacle among us?
  - Do you care that He has done this?