

### 23. Stephen Reviewed the Further Rebellion of Israel

We saw in our last topic that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand the consequences of rebellion against God. We saw that God judged the land of Egypt and the king of Egypt for rebellion against God. However, Israel was also guilty of rebellion against God. In our topic today, we will see how to help our children understand how God judged the rebellion of the people of Israel as they traveled through the desert on their way from the land of Egypt to the land of Canaan.

God used Stephen to show the Jewish Sanhedrin that the people of Israel had rebelled against the Lord and rejected His leadership throughout the time that they were in the desert. Acts 7:37-41 says, “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.” Here, we see that Stephen showed both the past rebellion of Israel and the rebellion of Israel at the time of Stephen.

In these verses, Stephen quoted a statement from Moses given in Deuteronomy 18:15. That verse says, “The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear.” This statement by Moses in Deuteronomy was actually a prophecy about Christ. Then, Deuteronomy 18:19 says, ““And it shall be *that* whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require *it* of him.”” Through Moses, God had given a promise that any person who rejected Christ would be judged by God. Now, Stephen was speaking to the very men who had rejected Christ, condemned Him to death and then sent Him to Pilate to carry out their death sentence. His warning was a warning that they would be judged for sin.

The Lord had spoken through Moses to the people in the desert. Exodus 19:3-6 says, “And Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, ‘Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: “You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and *how* I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth *is* Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” These *are* the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.” Moses told the people what God had said and the people answered in Exodus 19:8b, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do.” Stephen said that the Prophet mentioned in Deuteronomy is also the Angel who spoke on the mountain and gave Moses the Ten Commandments.

Even though the people of Israel said that they would obey God, they rebelled against God in less than forty days. Moses went back up on Mount Sinai to receive the living oracles (the Ten

Commandments given to Moses by Christ). Meanwhile, the people were rejecting God in their hearts instead of obeying Him. In their hearts, they turned back to the idols of Egypt. The people said to Aaron in Exodus 32:1 and repeated by Aaron in Exodus 32:23, ““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.”” Both the people of Egypt and the people of Canaan worshiped the calf at that time so Aaron made them a golden calf. Then, the people “...offered sacrifices to the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands.” Here, we see that the people of Israel had accepted the idols of Egypt.

God knew the hearts of the people of Israel. Stephen said in 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.””” Stephen also said that Israel chose to worship the sun, moon and stars. To verify his words, Stephen quoted the statement above from Amos 5:25-27. Stephen said that the people of Israel had practiced false worship from the time that they were in the wilderness until the time that they were taken to the land of Babylon.

Although the people of Israel offered sacrifices for the forty years that they were in the desert, most of the people were not offering those sacrifices to God. Instead, they were offering their sacrifices to their idol and later to the sun, moon and stars. This false worship was happening even though Acts 7:44-46 says, ““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 favor before God and asked to find a dwelling for the God of Jacob.”” Here, we are reminded that throughout their time in the wilderness, the people of Israel had a visible reminder of the presence of God.

While Moses was on Mount Sinai, God gave him the instructions for the building of the tabernacle. Before God gave Moses very complete instructions for the tabernacle, God said in Exodus 25:8-9, ““And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them. According to all that I show you, *that is*, the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings, just so you shall make *it*.”” Moses was told to make everything in the tabernacle according to the exact pattern that God had shown him. This was due to the fact that the various things in the tabernacle all pointed forward to Christ. As a result, God reminded Moses in Exodus 25:40, ““And see to it that you make *them* according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain.”” God had even prepared gifted men to design everything in the tabernacle so that it was according to the pattern.

This tabernacle was a visible reminder to Israel throughout their forty years in the desert. Exodus 40:38 says, “For the cloud of the Lord *was* above the tabernacle by day, and fire was over it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys.” The fact that Stephen talked about this tabernacle did two things. First, it showed the high respect that Stephen had for the tabernacle and later for the temple. That was important because the false accusations against Stephen said that he had blasphemed both the temple and the law. Here, he showed that He had a

high respect for the tabernacle and temple. Second, he showed the Jewish religious leaders that the people had been in rebellion against God and His law throughout the time that they were in the wilderness. That will be of great importance in our next topic because Stephen said in Acts 7:51, “*You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you.*” Here, we see that Stephen showed the present rebellion of the Jewish religious leaders against the Father, against the Holy Spirit and against Christ.

David wanted to build the temple to replace the tabernacle but God said that he could not because he was a man of war. However, God told David that Solomon would build the temple. Acts 7:47-50 says, “*But Solomon built Him a house. 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?’*” Solomon recognized that the temple could not contain God just as the earlier tabernacle could not contain God. In his prayer in 1 Kings 8:27, Solomon said, “*But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built!*” Stephen said the Jewish leaders had blasphemed God by saying he blasphemed the temple, even though they did not specifically accuse him of blaspheming God. By saying this, he pointed to their guilt.

Then, Stephen quoted from Isaiah 66:1-2 which says, “*Thus says the Lord: ‘Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool. Where is the house that you will build Me? And where is the place of My rest? For all those things My hand has made, and all those things exist,’ Says the Lord. ‘But on this one will I look: On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word.’*” Stephen did not quote the last sentence of verse two because the Jewish religious leaders certainly did not have a poor and contrite spirit. They did not tremble at the Word of the Lord.

The charge against Stephen in Acts 6:13 was that he spoke blasphemous words against the holy place (temple) and the law. The high priest in Acts 7:1 asked Stephen whether these two charges were true. Stephen showed that He had a very high respect for the temple. He showed that he was obedient to the Word of God. However, at the same time, he also showed that throughout their history as a nation that most of the Jews had not followed God in their hearts. As a result, they had blasphemed God.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand clearly the way that Stephen answered the Jewish religious leaders in this chapter. Stephen did give the evidence that proved that he was innocent of the charges that had been made against him. At the same time, Stephen also made it clear that the nation of Israel had been in rebellion against God throughout their history. The religious leaders must now choose whether they were going to rebel against God or come to Him through Christ. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn how to explain the choice people face.