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### Stephen Continues his Defense before the Sanhedrin

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STEPHEN CONTINUES HIS DEFENSE BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN

STUDY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS  
NUMBER 26  
ACTS 7:40-50

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Stephen is actually judging the Sanhedrin rather than the Sanhedrin judging him. You see, the Sanhedrin is the court that tried Jesus and recommended his crucifixion. In doing this they had put in reverse the things Moses had tried to do in the giving of the law and in leading the children of Israel out of bondage. It is the Sanhedrin, not Stephen or Moses who had blasphemed against the Lord.

ACTS 7:40 "Saying unto Aaron, Make us gods to go before us: for as for this Moses, which brought us out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him." The mental attitude of the Jews for forty years told Moses, "We refuse to obey you. We want to go back to Egypt." The failure of the Jews was a mental failure. They would not accept Moses' leadership and this is illustrated here by Stephen. Possibly the Golden Calf incident was the most pronounced rebellion against Moses in all the forty years of his long leadership. The Golden Calf represented all the religion of Egypt, and though they are not in Egypt they have Egypt in their minds and hearts. They were mentally still in Egypt, and this is why they wanted Egyptian Gods. It says their "Hearts turned back to Egypt". Heart is never used except it refers to the thinking part of the mind. (In certain instances the word heart refers to the old sin nature, but where this is the case, it is quite clear by the context.) Heart is not used to refer to the emotions. So this is what the Jews said on the basis of what they thought. They were afraid of Moses, they held him in awe and they knew he had divine power on his side. But when Moses left them and went up into the mountain, they just fell apart. These weak Jews had a chat with this weak mouse called Aaron. They knew they could persuade him to do anything they wanted done. The Jews came with their human viewpoint and Aaron agreed with them. Aaron was somewhat of an artist and could make a good reproduction of a god they had had in Egypt. Moses is gone, and they are glad of it. Now they can chart their own course, throw off all restraint, and revert to the pagan life of Egypt.

ACTS 7:41 "And they made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifice unto the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands." The making of the Golden Calf and the reversion to the sensual worship of Egypt revealed their inner character. You see, when people worship the gods they have made with their own hands, such worship always leads to all kinds of licentiousness. Immorality, drunkenness, and degraded concepts of decency lie in this path. So they made a Golden Calf, tied one on, let go with their emotions and satisfied the lowest desires of their carnal nature.

When Moses returned, he walked into their camp, took the Golden Calf, crushed it to powder and made them drink it. In substance Moses said, "You want gold, so I'll give you gold. Now you drink it." These people had bowed to a golden image and now they have gold in their stomachs.

ACTS 7:42 "Then God turned, and gave them up to worship the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets, O ye house of Israel, have ye offered to me slain beasts and sacrifices by the space of forty years in the wilderness?" They had failed in Egypt and their failure was a lack of faith which was expressed by their pagan idolatry. This golden image expressed their lack of faith in the living God. Stephen quoted here from Amos 5:25-27. He did this in order to show that idolatry always expresses what people have in their minds. During that four hundred ninety years after they entered Canaan, they would keep turning to idols, and finally in 586 B. C. God would put them in captivity in Babylon where they would stay for seventy years. Stephen knows that the Sanhedrin members will understand his reference in this verse to the Prophets. One of those twelve prophets was Amos, and Stephen quoted from him. Since coming out into that desert, they hadn't offered sacrifices for the

sacrifices spoke of the person and work of Jesus Christ. The burnt offering, the fruit offering, and the peace offering all spoke of the person and work of Christ on the cross. The sin offering and the trespass offerings spoke of how sin was to be handled in the life of every believer. All of those five offerings helped orientate them to the grace of God, and for that reason they had neglected these offerings out there in the desert. They had human viewpoint and would not accept divine viewpoint. They were not submissive to the grace of God and in the place of God's grace they substituted idolatry.

ACTS 7:43 "Yea, ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, figures which ye made to worship them; and I will carry you away beyond Babylon." Moloch was the god of the Canaanites where they burnt their children in sacrifice. This god was in the form of an ox with outstretched arms, and here they built their fires and burned their children in sacrifice. As their children screamed they would beat loud drums so they could not hear their cries. Remphan refers to the worship of the Planet Saturn. Because of this idolatry they were taken to Babylon in captivity.

ACTS 7:44 "Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as he had appointed, speaking unto Moses, that he should make it according to the fashion that he had seen." The tabernacle spoke of the witness to Christ. The tabernacle was made with very specific regulations. It represented the truth of God. God's revelation is always accurate.

ACTS 7:45 "Which also our fathers that came after brought in with Jesus into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drove out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David;" Joshua brought the children of Israel into Canaan and in their conquest it was God who drove the enemies out before them.

ACTS 7:46 "Who found favour before God, and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob." Moses was oriented to grace. David made this great discovery for his own life, and in the Psalms David tells how he came to understand the grace of God. It was in David's heart to build a temple, a permanent place for the worship of God, but this task was left for his son, Solomon. Psalms 32 and 38 and 51 are rebound Psalms and showed that David knew when he got in trouble he could stand on the grace of God, rather than on his own weak character. The Psalms declare the essence qualities of God. So Stephen is reminding the Sanhedrin that both Moses and David discovered the amazing power and glory of the grace of God, which you, the Sanhedrin have never discovered. The tabernacle was in the town of Nob during the days of David, and David wanted to erect a permanent tabernacle so all the people would come to know the glory of the Lord. And though David didn't build it, it was built in the next generation when more people would understand the grace of God and thereby be able to understand the real meaning of the temple. Stephen is reminding them that they have completely misunderstood the meaning of the glory of the Holy Temple, for its glory was not in the stones and beautiful appointments of the building. The real greatness of the building was that it pointed to Jesus Christ. But these Sanhedrin members were too self-righteous and too blind to recognize this. Solomon's generation could build the temple for his generation understood doctrine. The doctrine of the Psalms of David finally took root. The temple was a training aid to teach them of Christ. But here the Sanhedrin sat in the temple without realizing what the whole thing was all about.

In these verses Stephen is showing the Sanhedrin that he is not the guilty one, but they are the ones bearing the real guilt. Both the tabernacle and the temple were teaching aids to tell the people of Christ and his sacrifice on the cross. The very articles of construction were so designed to show forth the whole work of Christ's atonement in his death on the cross. The Ark of the Covenant was constructed of Acacia wood and gold. The wood spoke of Christ's humanity and the gold spoke of his deity. The mercy seat spoke of the work of Christ. Everything in the holy of holies

spoke of the person and work of Christ. The table of shewbread spoke of the fact that Christ is the bread of life. The candlesticks spoke of Christ, the light of the world. The white linen spoke of the righteousness of Christ. The Jews had a complete doctrine of salvation in these teaching aids in the tabernacle and the temple. Certain rituals, using all these aids helped the people to be constantly reminded of Christ. But now a generation of unbelievers had come along, the Lord Jesus Christ is not their Saviour, and he is not real to them, and ritual without reality was their present status. Remember, ritual without reality is always meaningless.

"The Most High" refers to the Lord Jesus Christ, but having the temple does not mean they had the Saviour.

Then Stephen quoted from Isaiah 66:1-2. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Creator of everything, and as in Romans 1:18-20 everything in the created universe is designed to portray Christ. Nature itself speaks quite loudly of the existence of God. The building of the temple is not substitute for accepting Christ personally. They have built him a house and then have rejected the one for whom it was built. Ritual in a temple is meaningless if you have rejected the person of Christ. On the very occasion of Christ's crucifixion, they partook of the passover, but were unsaved and the meaning of the passover went right over their heads. They had ritual but no reality. What house will you build me? There is no house they can build that is meaningful if they have rejected Christ. "What is the place of my rest?" 1 Cor. 3:16 tells us that we are the temple of the Holy Spirit. The temple of God today is the body of every believer. Every single believer in the earth is a temple of God's presence.

ACTS 7:50 "Hath not my hand made all these things?" Jesus Christ is the creator of all these things. Hebrews 1:10 and John 1:3 and many other passages tell us this truth. Stephen is reminding the Sanhedrin that the hands that created all these things are the hands they nailed to the cross. The hands of the Creator are the hands of the Saviour.

We will conclude the life of Stephen in our next study.