



'Acts' - Extra Teaching Points #9

Acts 7:17 – 8:3 (NASB)

Pages 111 -124 in 'Acts For Everyone' (Part 1) by N. T. Wright

Acts 7:17-34 (NASB95)

*"But as the time of the promise was approaching which God had assured to Abraham, the people increased and multiplied in Egypt, ¹⁸ until THERE AROSE ANOTHER KING OVER EGYPT WHO KNEW NOTHING ABOUT JOSEPH. ¹⁹ "It was he who took shrewd advantage of our race and mistreated our fathers so that they would expose their infants and they would not survive. ²⁰ "It was at this time that Moses was born; and he was lovely in the sight of God, and he was nurtured three months in his father's home. ²¹ "And after he had been set outside, Pharaoh's daughter took him away and nurtured him as her own son. ²² "Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians, and he was a man of power in words and deeds. ²³ "But when he was approaching the age of forty, it entered his mind to visit his brethren, the sons of Israel. ²⁴ "And when he saw one of them being treated unjustly, he defended him and took vengeance for the oppressed by striking down the Egyptian. ²⁵ "And he supposed that his brethren understood that God was granting them deliverance through him, but they did not understand. ²⁶ "On the following day he appeared to them as they were fighting together, and he tried to reconcile them in peace, saying, 'Men, you are brethren, why do you injure one another?' ²⁷ "But the one who was injuring his neighbor pushed him away, saying, '**WHO MADE YOU A RULER AND JUDGE OVER US?**' ²⁸ 'YOU DO NOT MEAN TO KILL ME AS YOU KILLED THE EGYPTIAN YESTERDAY, DO YOU?' ²⁹ "At this remark, MOSES FLED AND BECAME AN ALIEN IN THE LAND OF MIDIAN, where he became the father of two sons. ³⁰ "After forty years had passed, AN ANGEL APPEARED TO HIM IN THE WILDERNESS OF MOUNT Sinai, IN THE FLAME OF A BURNING THORN BUSH. ³¹ "When Moses saw it, he marveled at the sight; and as he approached to look more closely, there came the voice of the Lord: ³² 'I AM THE GOD OF YOUR FATHERS, THE GOD OF ABRAHAM AND ISAAC AND JACOB.' Moses shook with fear and would not venture to look. ³³ "BUT THE LORD SAID TO HIM, 'TAKE OFF THE SANDALS FROM YOUR FEET, FOR THE PLACE ON WHICH YOU ARE STANDING IS HOLY GROUND. ³⁴ '**I HAVE CERTAINLY SEEN THE OPPRESSION OF MY PEOPLE IN EGYPT AND HAVE HEARD THEIR GROANS, AND I HAVE COME DOWN TO RESCUE THEM; COME NOW, AND I WILL SEND YOU TO EGYPT.'***

Q: Why is Moses such a defining character to the Jewish people?

- "The figure of Moses towers over ancient Judaism even more than Abraham, David, Solomon, or Elijah. **It was Moses through whom God had given the law**, with all its fascinating details, strict prohibitions, and stern commands." P. 113
- The Law was the tangible evidence that God had set them apart for Himself.
 - The Law made them different from all the other nations, and kept them separated from the rest of the world.

Q: What was Stephen getting at by retelling the story of Moses?

- He is showing God's pattern of raising up someone to rescue Israel and fulfill His promises, and Israel's pattern of rejecting the one whom God sent to rescue them.

Q: Why is it so important that we do like Stephen does here, and accurately tell the story of what God has done before?

- We sometimes act as though we've invited God into *our* story... but the truth is God has invited us into *His* story.
 - The better we know His story, the better we play our part in it!
- **When we lose the "big picture" of God's story, we run the risk of getting out of step with what God is doing!**
 - "Once again, **the main thing we have to watch is the question of how we tell the story...** It's a matter of watching for the places, both in the story and in our own lives, where suddenly God wants to reveal himself afresh. There are 'burning bushes', or near equivalents, all over the place, if we know where to look. **What new stories will people tell, in days to come, as they look back at your church and ask what new things God was doing in your day?"** P. 115

Acts 7:35-53

“This Moses whom they disowned, saying, ‘WHO MADE YOU A RULER AND A JUDGE?’ is the one whom God sent to be both a ruler and a deliverer with the help of the angel who appeared to him in the thorn bush. ³⁶ “This man led them out, performing wonders and signs in the land of Egypt and in the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years.

³⁷ “This is the Moses who said to the sons of Israel, ‘GOD WILL RAISE UP FOR YOU A PROPHET LIKE ME FROM YOUR BRETHREN.’ ³⁸ “This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness together with the angel who was speaking to him on Mount Sinai, and who was with our fathers; and he received living oracles to pass on to you. ³⁹ “Our fathers were unwilling to be obedient to him, but repudiated him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt, ⁴⁰ SAYING TO AARON, ‘MAKE FOR US GODS WHO WILL GO BEFORE US; FOR THIS MOSES WHO LED US OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT — WE DO NOT KNOW WHAT

HAPPENED TO HIM.’ ⁴¹ “At that time they made a calf and brought a sacrifice to the idol, and were rejoicing in the works of their hands.

⁴² “But God turned away and delivered them up to serve the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets, ‘IT WAS NOT TO ME THAT YOU OFFERED VICTIMS AND SACRIFICES FORTY YEARS IN THE WILDERNESS, WAS IT, O HOUSE OF ISRAEL? ⁴³ ‘YOU ALSO TOOK ALONG THE TABERNACLE OF MOLOCH AND THE STAR OF THE GOD ROMPHA, THE IMAGES WHICH YOU MADE TO WORSHIP. I ALSO WILL REMOVE YOU BEYOND BABYLON.’ ⁴⁴ “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.

⁴⁵ “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. ⁴⁶ “David found favor in God’s sight, and asked that he might find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. ⁴⁷ “But it was Solomon who built a house for Him. ⁴⁸ “However, the Most High does not dwell in houses made by human hands; as the prophet says: ⁴⁹ ‘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? ⁵⁰ ‘WAS IT NOT MY HAND WHICH MADE ALL THESE THINGS?’ ⁵¹ “You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did.

⁵² “Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become; ⁵³ you who received the law as ordained by angels, and yet did not keep it.”

Q: What is the main point Stephen is making?

- The Jews had turned their system of worship into idolatry.
 - Their Temple was marvelous, and they were proud of how “together” and popular their religion had become.
- “The primal sin, in all major Jewish writing, is **idolatry—worshipping something as if it was God when it wasn’t**. And the way idols get produced is, of course, by human hands... The sheer absurdity of it is rubbed-in scornfully in the ancient Jewish writings: first you manufacture a god, then you worship it? What kind of nonsense is that? And the thrust of the final section of Stephen’s great speech is that **this is precisely what his own people have done - with their own Temple!**” P. 116-117

Q: When did Israel’s problem with Idolatry begin?

- It was there even while they were in the wilderness on the way to the Promised Land. ([Vs. 40-42](#))
 - When the Israelites left Egypt, they still hung onto their Idols!
 - This is hard to understand given they had seen the plagues, the parting of the Red Sea, the destruction of enemies, and the glory of God descending on Mount Sinai.
 - Yet, how often do we cling to idols from our old lives even after God works powerfully in our lives?

Q: Do Christians today still fall into Idolatry?

- Yes!
 - Sometimes they bring idols from their old life into the new one.
 - And sometimes they turn “church” into an idol like the Jews did with the temple!
 - “As we **consider our own traditions**, and think of them lovingly since they ‘prove’ we ourselves are in the right place in our worship and witness, perhaps sometimes we need to allow the story to be told differently, and to see whether **we ourselves might be in the wrong place within it.**” P. 119

Acts 7:54-8:3

Now when they heard this, they were cut to the quick, and they began gnashing their teeth at him. ⁵⁵ **But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God;** ⁵⁶ **and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."** ⁵⁷ **But they cried out with a loud voice, and covered their ears and rushed at him with one impulse.** ⁵⁸ **When they had driven him out of the city, they began stoning him; and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul.** ⁵⁹ **They went on stoning Stephen as he called on the Lord and said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!"** ⁶⁰ **Then falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!"** Having said this, he fell asleep.

^{8:1} Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. ² Some devout men buried Stephen, and made loud lamentation over him. ³ But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison.

Q: What was Stephen seeing in verses 55 & 56?

- "Visions like this are more like what happens when you've been standing on a mountain in thick cloud, hardly able to see the person walking six feet ahead of you, and suddenly a great wind sweeps away the cloud and you can see not only your companions, not only the crags and peaks all around, but far away, down in the valley, the streams and trees and villages in the afternoon sun. All those things had been there all the time, but you can only see them when the mist lifts. That's what it seems to have been like for Elisha and his servant when the Lord opened their eyes and they discovered themselves surrounded by horses and chariots of fire (2Kings 6:17). That is what it was like, I believe, with Stephen. **There was the heavenly court, suddenly superimposed upon the earthly one.** Instead of the high priest and his fellow judges, there was a scene such as we find in Daniel 7, with the Ancient of Days, the God of Glory Himself, sitting in judgment, and with the son of man, not (as in Daniel) 'coming' toward him to be seated, but *standing* before him to act as advocate in the court.

The human judges might be condemning Stephen to death, but the heavenly court was finding in his favor. Perhaps, indeed, a long memory of that double scene, etched on an impressionable young mind, may lie behind 1Corinthians 2:8 and Colossians 2:14-15." P. 121-122

- If heaven is another dimension, all around us but concealed, then it is possible that Stephen was given the ability to see the unseen, and heaven was revealed to him.
 - Perhaps this is why Paul says in [2Thess 1:7](#) that Jesus "will be revealed from Heaven", as opposed to "come down or back" from Heaven.

Q: Being a martyr is about being a witness. What does Stephen's martyrdom give witness to?

- First, his faith was worth more to him than his life.
- Second, he took Jesus seriously when He said, "Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you" ([Matt. 5:44](#)).
 - Jesus Himself had prayed on behalf of those who killed Him too ([Luke 23:34](#)).
 - NOBODY acted like that when they were being killed... except those who really followed Jesus!

Follow Up Assignment

Q: Have you invited God into *your* story, or have you accepted God's invitation into *His* story?

- How can you know if you have answered this question correctly?
- **What new stories will people tell, in days to come, as they look back at your church and ask what new things God was doing in your day?"**

Q: Do you have any idols you need to deal with?

- If yes, will you tell someone what your idols are, and get help removing them?

Q: What does your behavior toward your enemies and those who persecute you give witness to?