

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

MARCH 29TH, 2026 // BOOK OF ACTS

REPEATED REJECTION (ACTS 7:37-43)

"GOD WILL RAISE UP FOR YOU A PROPHET"

In his message to the Sanhedrin, Stephen references Jesus for the first time just as Peter did in Acts 3:22.

- He warns them to break the cycle of rejection and rebellion. Jesus was the prophet Moses spoke of. Just as they rejected Moses, they were doing the same to Him. Are we responding to Jesus and breaking the cycle in our lives?

"HE IS THE ONE...IN THE ASSEMBLY"

Stephen uses the Greek word commonly used for church in the NT. It was also used to describe a group of people called to a specific purpose.

- God was with the people in the wilderness (Exodus 13:21) and gave the law to Moses on Mt. Sinai. Stephen is saying that Jesus is the one who has been guiding them and gave them the law they believe they are protecting.

REPEATING OUR FOLLY

The people had been offered freedom, yet "in their hearts [they] turned back to Egypt," choosing oppression in a pagan land instead of abiding in the presence of God.

- Like a dog returns to its vomit (Proverbs 26:11), when God sets us free from the bondage and consequence of sin, instead of abiding in Him, we return to what is harming us.

"CELEBRATING WHAT THEIR HANDS HAD MADE"

The golden calf was manmade and became the focus of worship and sacrifice for the Hebrews. They replaced worship of God with worship of themselves through what they had made with their hands.

- Are we replacing worshipping God with worshipping manmade traditions? Who is at the center of our worship?

"GOD TURNED AWAY"

Stephen connects the Sanhedrin's rejection of Jesus to the Hebrews considering land and the temple more important than the God who gave these things to them.

- If their desire was to worship creation over the Creator, God would give them over to "worship the stars of heaven" He created.

"I WILL SEND YOU INTO EXILE"

Stephen uses the words of Amos 5:25-27 to show his listeners that their rejection of the prophet God sent them would bring judgment upon them through a "wilderness experience."

- Paul builds on this reality of God giving man over to the desires of the heart in Romans 1:24-32. Do we consider what we are being given over to when we reject Jesus?

RESISTING THE SPIRIT (ACTS 7:44-53)

"THE MOST HIGH DOES NOT DWELL..."

Possibly with the prophet Nathan's words in mind (2 Samuel 7:5-7) and quoting the prophet Isaiah (66:1-2), Stephen shows how God's presence was with his people, through the tabernacle, as they traveled and until the temple was built by David's son, Solomon.

- God's desire has always been to dwell with His people (1 Corinthians 3:16).

THEY STILL REJECTED GOD

Stephen's point is that having the tabernacle and temple did not keep the Hebrews from rejecting God and His messengers.

- Being in close proximity to people who have a relationship with God does not put us in a relationship with God. Attending church without being in a relationship with Jesus is not going to transform our lives.

CONFRONTING IDOLATRY

Stephen confronts the idolatry of the temple and how they attempted to confine God to these manmade structures.

- We still place these same constraints on God when we encounter Him on the weekends within the church building but let Him be absent from our lives throughout the week.

"AS YOUR ANCESTORS DID, YOU DO ALSO"

Stephen's history lesson now takes a turn with a series of "you" statements, starting in verse 51. He rebukes those who rejected Jesus as being stiff-necked (Exodus 32:9) and uncircumcised in heart and ears (Jeremiah 9:26).

- He may have had God's plea to His people in Deuteronomy 10:16 in mind: "Therefore, circumcise your hearts and don't be stiff-necked any longer."

"YOU STIFF-NECKED PEOPLE"

A literal stiff neck makes it difficult to turn one's head without pain or discomfort. Because it was painful and uncomfortable to face the reality that they were wrong, they refused to turn from their wrongdoing.

- Does the pain and discomfort of admitting when we are wrong (confession) keep us from turning away (repentance)?

"WITH UNCIRCUMCISED HEARTS AND EARS"

The Israelites prided themselves on the religious act of circumcision because it separated them from the Gentiles. But their actions showed that their hearts looked more like the pagans' hearts, and like the pagans, they heard truth and rejected it.

- Do we look more like the world in our actions? Do we reject the truth?

GUILTY OF REJECTING GOD'S MESSENGERS

The members of the Sanhedrin would have prided themselves on their adherence to the law, so to hear that they "received the law under the direction of angels and yet have not kept it" would have caused offense.

- Though they were offended, the message was true: the new wine of Christianity would not fit in the old wineskins of traditionalism (Matthew 9:17).

SEEING THE GLORY OF GOD (ACTS 7:54-60) "WHEN THEY HEARD THESE THINGS..."

Stephen was interrupted. He may have continued speaking, even offering the opportunity for repentance as Peter had (3:19-21).

- There was no trial or discussion, only harsh reactions, as they "were enraged and gnashed their teeth at him." Stephen's words describing what he was seeing (v. 56) still did not slow this angry mob.

"LOOK, I SEE THE HEAVENS OPENED..."

In the midst of this hellish scene, Stephen sees "the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God."

- Jesus is commonly described as sitting at the right hand of God the Father (Matthew 26:64; Luke 22:69; Colossians 3:1), but Stephen sees Him standing in solidarity with him as if to receive him.

"AFTER SAYING THIS, HE FELL ASLEEP"

Mentioning the name of Jesus, standing at the right hand of God, was too much for the mob. They ignored Roman law and dragged him outside the city, as a young man named Saul witnessed the disciple Stephen's martyrdom.

- Stephen prayed for the mob as Christ did on the cross (Luke 23:34). His prayer was heard, and Paul is the evidence of it.

"TO LIVE IS CHRIST, AND TO DIE IS GAIN"

Stephen's ministry was focused on helping others see the Kingdom of God. His life was driven by being as close to the Kingdom as he could be, and at the end, he saw the Kingdom and entered it.

- Saul, who held the coats of the men who stoned Stephen, would eventually have the same heart as Stephen and meet a similar fate (Philippians 1:21).

INVENTORY

- Have we placed the law ("rules") over a relationship?
- Are we trying to earn something that has been freely given to us?
- Are we deceived by believing that rejecting the parts of Scripture we don't agree with is not an outright rejection of the entire Word?
- When we reject the Word, we reject Jesus.
- If church is only about our preferences, then we may be consumers.
- If our "faith" is only displayed on Sundays, then it may be a performance.
- What are we willing to "sacrifice" to be near to God and see His Kingdom?
- Do we go to where God dwells, or does he dwell within us and go where we go?