



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

His Leaders: Highest Privilege yet Most Heinous Crimes?

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Acts 7:44-53 *“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, 45) 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, 46) Who found favor before God and asked to find a dwelling for the God of Jacob. 47) But Solomon built Him a house. 48) However, the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands, as the prophet says: 49) ‘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? 50) Has My hand not made all these things?’ 51) You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. 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 betrayers and murderers, 53) Who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it.” (NKJV)*

“‘BETRAYERS AND MURDERERS,’ EXPRESS TWO OF THE BLACKEST CRIMES WHICH ONE MAN CAN COMMIT AGAINST ANOTHER, BOTH WHICH ARE CHARGED HOME BY STEPHEN ON HIS JUDGES, AND THROUGH THEM UPON THE PEOPLE THEY REPRESENTED.”
JOSEPH A. ALEXANDER

What is the point Stephen is making regarding the Tabernacle? Is more time given to the first Tabernacle, rather than Herod’s ornate and magnificent Temple? Do people still often think that a church building represents the presence of God rather than God being with His people?” Why did Stephen call his

leaders “stiff-necked?” How had they and their fathers “always” resisted “the Holy Spirit?” In what way were these leaders much worse than all of their most wicked fathers? Do people today commit even greater wickedness against God & His Son?

FOCUS ON FUTURE EVENTS / BIBLE STUDIES:

- FEBRUARY 19: SELECTED SCRIPTURES *THE BIBLE STUDY TAUGHT BY DELEGATE KIRK COX*
- FEBRUARY 26: ACTS 7:54-8:1 *THE FIRST CHRISTIAN MARTYR: MURDERED BY HIS OWN LEADERS!*

Stephen, the first deacon in the Church, had been brought before the supreme court of Israel on the false charges of speaking “blasphemous words against Moses and God” (Acts 6:11), and “blasphemous words against this holy place and the law” (13). Stephen had answered with a most brilliant, bullet-proof case from their own history and their Scriptures, not only acquitting him of all their charges, but instead indicting the entire court on precisely the same original charges! By the time he rests his case with Scripture and Eastern logic, he has successfully indicted his own judges with the most heinous crimes: Treasonous Betrayal and Premeditated Murder!

“THESE TWO THINGS ARE PUT SIDE BY SIDE—THERE WAS CONTINUOUS REBELLION AND DISOBEDIENCE AND CONTINUOUS PRIVILEGE.”
WILLIAM BARCLAY

I. RITUAL WITHOUT HONOR? ACTS 7:44-50

No doubt, the most beautiful buildings on earth did not match the Temple of Christ’s day. It had been rebuilt and expanded by one of the most famous builders in the empire, Herod the Great. After cleansing this Temple from the thieving extortion of these very leaders and answering all their questions, Jesus preached His final sermon of eight “*Woe’s*” on the Temple Mount from which Stephen has gotten the material for his case and

BIBLE STUDIES

- THURSDAY @ 6:30 AM –PRAYER MEETING – GAB 3RD FLOOR WEST CONFERENCE ROOM
- THURSDAY @ 7:00 AM –BIBLE STUDY – GAB 3RD FLOOR WEST CONFERENCE ROOM
- THURSDAY @ 4:30 PM –BIBLE STUDY – GAB ROOM 330 - SENATOR CARRICO’S OFFICE

Virginia

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indictment against these leaders. As Jesus left the Temple Mount for the last time and proclaimed it desolate or abandoned by God, His disciples wanted to show him the magnificence of the stones and the buildings of the Temple. *“And Jesus said to them, ‘Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down’”* (Mt. 24:2). These leaders had capitalized on the respect for the beauty of the Temple and had contrived a way to deceitfully dishonor the God of their Temple with ritualistic ploys to avoid the truth and lie to others (Mt. 23:16-22). Stephen destroyed their false supposition that God’s presence was with them because they had His Temple by emphasizing the first Tabernacle as better in that it followed the original model revealed to Moses and had been sufficient until David’s dynasty. But to worship a building and act as if it contained the Creator God of the universe, only to serve the Jewish nation, Stephen proved from Isaiah 66:1 was an absurd dishonor to God!

“THE COMPOUND TERMS, ‘*UNCIRCUMCISED IN HEART AND EARS*’, MEAN THEREFORE THOSE WHO HEAR AND THINK AND FEEL LIKE GENTILES, LIKE THE HEATHEN; AND THEIR SUDDEN APPLICATION TO THE SANHEDRIN . . . IS RATHER A TREMENDOUS SUMMING IT UP IN THE CONCLUSION, THAT THESE PROUD REPRESENTATIVES AND RULERS OF THE CHOSEN PEOPLE WERE IN FACT MERE HEATHEN.”

JOSEPH A. ALEXANDER

II. RELIGIOUS YET HEATHEN? ACTS 7:51

All the necessary evidence and summary arguments now having been presented and Stephen begins to give the boldest witness to his leaders as God’s final verdict upon them from Scripture. He begins with a word used seven times in the Old Testament and always accompanied by God’s abandonment, *“Stiff-necked!”* The word picture is of their strongest beast of burden and plowing, the ox, becoming worthless due to his absolute refusal to submit

to the yoke which harnessed his strength for the benefit of his owner. It pictured the height of stubborn rebellion. It was arrogance to the degree of absolute worthlessness. The greatest intensity of ingratitude is represented by greatest privilege and opportunity paralleled with willful and open sin against their only Savior and benefactor. The first use of this word is with the golden calf at Mount Sinai when given the Law of God (Ex. 33:3, 5) and it is contrasted with submission to Christ (Mt. 11:28-30). While claiming to be most religious, they were absolute heathen in their heart and ears, hearing what they wanted to hear and doing as they pleased. Always resisting the Holy Spirit, just as their fathers had done. They did that which they despised their fathers for doing!

“EACH STATEMENT AND INCIDENT WAS A LINK IN THE CHAIN OF LOGIC, AND WHEN THE CONCLUSION WAS STATED, IT WAS HELD FAST BY EVERY SENTENCE WHICH HAD PREVIOUSLY BEEN SPOKEN. IT VINDICATED STEPHEN AND CONVICTED THE RULERS, SO THAT WHEN ITS CLIMAX WAS REACHED THERE WAS LITTLE FOR THEM TO DO BUT EITHER TO KILL THEIR ACCUSER OR TO CONFESS THEIR SIN.”

CHARLES R. ERDMAN

III. RIGHTEOUS WITH HIGH CRIMES? ACTS 7:52-53

Stephen’s question indicts them with repeating the sinful history of their fathers. Their fathers had killed those who had prophesied regarding their coming Messiah—the Righteous One. But these leaders have far exceeded the sin of their fathers, they had ungratefully in blatant treason, betrayed their only Deliverer, the Son of God, and had demanded His murder upon the cruel Roman cross. Such despised the blessing of the oracles of God, by the angels of God, to the people of God, with the Temple of God, in their land provided by God! *“How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?”* (Heb. 2:3).

Questions to Ponder:

- 1) Is your religion only mere ritual which allows you to dishonor God in your life?
- 2) Are you a heathen in heart and ears because you hear what you want and do as you please?
- 3) Have you repented of sin, come to Christ who gave His life for you, and submitted to His easy yoke or are you ungrateful?