

# Acts 7:1-60: Is God an Angry Judge Or Your Savior?

Ricardo Campos, Pastor Grace Chapel, Orange, CA November 20, 2016

## I. Introduction

Have you ever been mistaken about who God is? For example, did you ever think that you were fighting for the truth, on God's side, but then discovered that you were actually fighting against Him? Or perhaps you thought He was punishing you because of your sin when in fact He was trying to rescue you? Which God do you see, the real one or the one your circumstances created?

## II. Acts 7:1-60: Is God a Heartless Judge or a Patient Father Who Hates to See You Suffer?

**7:1-16, who really dishonored God, Stephen or the Sanhedrin?** Stephen is accused of speaking against God, Moses, the Mosaic Law, and the temple, is it true? Right from the beginning of Stephen's sermon, we see his view of God; he calls him the "God of glory," i.e., the God to whom all glory belongs. Instead of speaking blasphemies against God, Stephen honors Him in the highest possible way. Israel's history begins with their father Abraham. Before Abraham ever entered the Promise Land, God appeared to him and made him a promise: He was going to give him and his descendants the Promise Land (the land of Canaan). Eventually, God brings him there, but He doesn't give him any part of it, not even enough to set his foot on. Instead, when Abraham was still childless God said, "Your descendants will live in a foreign land under slavery and oppression for 400 yrs. But then I will free them and they will worship Me." The sign of this covenant was circumcision, so eventually Abraham had Isaac and circumcised him the eighth day. Isaac had Jacob and Jacob the twelve patriarchs. Notice: God's dwelling presence was with Abraham outside the Holy Land.

The patriarchs became jealous of their brother Joseph and sold him into Egypt but God's dwelling presence was with him. Thus, God delivered him from all his troubles and gave him favor and wisdom before Pharaoh, who then made him governor over all Egypt, including Pharaoh's own house. A great famine hit Egypt and Canaan, so Jacob sends Joseph's brothers for grain in Egypt. On the second trip, they discovered that their brother was the governor of Egypt. Then Joseph sent for his father and all his relatives. Eventually they all die, but they are not buried in Egypt. Notice: God's dwelling presence was with Joseph outside the Holy Land and Joseph, the rejected one, became his brothers' savior.

**7:17-43, who really disrespected God, Moses and the Law, Stephen or the Sanhedrin?** As the time of God's promise to free Israel drew near, Moses was born but he was raised in Pharaoh's house as an Egyptian. Always aware of his Jewish heritage and seeing his people's oppression and knowing that God had appointed him their deliverer, Moses sought to deliver Israel. But they rejected him saying, "Who made you a ruler and judge over us?" Since he had committed murder in his attempt to deliver them, he fled to the land of Midian. After 40 yrs, the Angel of the Lord (Jesus Christ, the God who made the Covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) appeared to Moses in the burning bush and confirmed that he was Israel's deliverer and it was now time to deliver them from Egypt. So by the power of the Angel (who enabled him to perform signs and wonders in Egypt, the Red Sea, and the wilderness) that's exactly what Moses did. Notice: God's dwelling presence and great works were with Moses outside the Holy Land (in Egypt, Sinai, and the wilderness), in fact, anywhere God is is Holy Ground. And the one Israel rejected as judge and ruler became their ruler and savior.

It was this same Moses who told Israel that God was going to raise a Prophet like him from among them and they were supposed to listen to Him (Stephen is implying that Jesus Christ is that Prophet whom they didn't listen to). The same Moses who spoke with the Angel on Mt. Sinai and received the Law, but whom Israel rejected and refused to obey. Instead, their hearts turned back to Egypt and they made a golden calf which they worshiped and sacrificed to. So God gave them over to their idolatry and they worshiped the stars and sacrificed to the gods Moloch and Remphan. Notice: God's blessings and presence are not limited to the Promise Land or temple. Instead, God's presence was with Moses and Israel outside the Holy Land and apart from any tabernacle or temple. And Israel again rejected the one God appointed as their savior.

**7:44-50, who really defiled the Temple, Stephen or the Sanhedrin?** God instructed Moses and Israel to build Him a tabernacle in the wilderness. And after God drove out the Canaanites from the Promise Land, He allowed Solomon to build Him a temple. Notice: God's presence was with Moses and Israel outside the Holy Land. But it was not due to a tabernacle or temple because God does not dwell in temples made with hands for heaven is His throne and earth His footstool. Stephen is showing them that they've mistaken the temple for God; it's become their idol.

**7:51-53, what's Stephen's point?** Stephen has reached the end of his sermon, what's his point? "You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers *did*, so *do* you." Throughout Israel's history they have resisted God's Holy Spirit, disobeyed His Law, persecuted His prophets, killed those who foretold the coming of their Savior, and when He arrived—the Prophet Moses predicted—they murdered Him! Notice: though they had God's presence, they rejected Him. And when God became flesh and came to save them, they killed Him. The rejected One was their Savior, but they were utterly blind to His salvation.

**7:54-60, who's disrespecting God and the Law now, Stephen or the Sanhedrin?** Peter preached a similar sermon to a group of people and the accusation was the same, "You murdered Messiah!" They too were "cut to the heart" (Acts 2:37), but they repented. This mob is so furious they grind their teeth at Stephen. However, Stephen is full of peace. He looks to heaven and sees Jesus standing at God's right hand. This is the only time in Scripture Jesus is seen as standing at God's right hand. He's rendering His verdict on Stephen's case; He's ready to receive Stephen into glory. When the Sanhedrin hears this, they're done; they don't want to hear anymore. So they rush at Stephen, drag him outside the city, and stone him to death. In an attempt to legalize this mob rule, they have the witnesses cast the first stones according to the Law (Deuteronomy 17:6-7). Meanwhile Stephen asks the Lord to receive his spirit and to forgive his murderers (as the Lord said of His perpetrators, Luke 23:34).

### **Which God do you see, the one of your making or the one who longs to save you?**

Stephen's sermon made two key points: (1) God's presence is always with His people and it has nothing to do with a particular Land or temple. (2) Throughout Israel's history, God has used the rejected one to save his people: Joseph, Moses, all the prophets, and ultimately, Jesus Christ, His Son! Stephen was saying, "You think that God's presence, power, authority, and approval is with you. But it's not. Look at your history. You're doing what your fathers did; and you did it to Messiah!" .....Which God do you see? The one who dwells with His people and whose power works on their behalf like Stephen? Or do you see a God created by your circumstances?

### III. Conclusion

*Then the LORD said to him, "Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground. I have surely seen the oppression of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their groaning and have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt."*