



GRACE

REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

SOLI \diamond DEO \diamond GLORIA

THE BOOK OF ACTS

Sermon Notes

The Defense of Stephen, Part III

The Tabernacle and the Temple

Acts 7:44-50

June 3, 2007

- I. **The Tabernacle was Ordained by God**
- II. **The Temple was Requested by David**
- III. **God Cannot be Housed**

- ❑ It is often said that certain groups of Christians ‘limit God’ or ‘put God in a box.’
- ❑ What does it mean to ‘put God in a box’?
- ❑ Is it really possible?

I. **The Tabernacle was Ordained by God**

- ❑ Stephen concludes his ‘defense’ before the Sanhedrin by specifically addressing the charge set forth in Acts 6:13-14: ‘This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law, for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us.’
- ❑ Stephen, once again, refers to the Old Testament saints as ‘our fathers’ demonstrating his common ancestry with his fellow Jews.
- ❑ Stephen refers to the Tabernacle as the ‘Tabernacle [or Tent] of Testimony’ because it contained the tablets of Law, which were known collectively as ‘the testimony’ of God.
- ❑ Further, Stephen makes it quite clear that God ‘spoke to Moses [and] directed him to make it [the Tabernacle] according to the pattern which he had seen.’

- Furthermore, God told Moses specifically **how** to build the Tabernacle [‘according to the pattern which he [Moses] had seen’].

Read Exodus 25-27

Exodus 25:9: ‘According to all that I am going to show you, as the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furniture, just so you shall construct it.’

Exodus 25:40: ‘See that you make them after the pattern for them, which was shown to you on the mountain.’

Exodus 26:30: ‘Then you shall erect the tabernacle according to its plan which you have been shown in the mountain.’

- F.F. Bruce writes, ‘it was no ordinary tent: it was made by the direct command of God, and constructed in every detail according to the model that Moses had been shown on the holy mount.’
- In other words, the reason that the tabernacle was to be constructed ‘according to the pattern which [Moses] had seen’ was because the earthly tabernacle was to be a ‘copy and shadow’ of the ‘heavenly tabernacle.’

Hebrews 8:1-6

Now the main point in what has been said is this: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, **a minister in the sanctuary and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man.** For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices; so it is necessary that this high priest also have something to offer. Now if He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all, since there are those who offer the gifts according to the Law; who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, **just as Moses was warned by God when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, ‘SEE,’ He says, ‘THAT YOU MAKE all things ACCORDING TO THE PATTERN WHICH WAS SHOWN YOU ON THE MOUNTAIN.’** But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises.

Hebrews 9:22-25

And according to the Law, one may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. Therefore it was necessary for the copies of the things in the heavens to be cleansed with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; nor was it that He would offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year with blood that is not his own.

‘...there was a visible form represented to his eye, a pattern...or archetype of the whole, according to which everything was to be made; which teaches us, that everything in matters of worship ought to be according to the rule which God has given, from which we should never swerve in the least.’

John Gill

- ❑ Interestingly, God restricted the manner in which the tabernacle would be constructed and the manner in which He was to be worshipped.
 - Often times today, people claim that by worshipping God in accordance with the Scriptures alone individuals are in some way ‘limiting God’ or ‘putting God in a box.’ Yet, the manner in which we worship in no way ‘limits’ God when it is in accordance with His word. Rather, such worship reflects His glory.
 - However, worship often times reflects the ever-changing emotions of the individual rather than the eternal and unchanging precepts of God’s Word. Such emotive worship does not in some way ‘free’ God or reflect greater view of Him; rather, it too often leads to chaos that reflects the shifting feelings of the individual as opposed to the immutable character of God. It is this type of worship that demonstrates a woefully inadequate and limited view of God – a view in which God is perceived as greatest and mightiest when the feelings and emotions of the worshipper are the highest. Consequently, when emotions aren’t excited, God is somehow seen as silent or distant.
 - Stephen’s accusers, in a similar manner, had created traditions and rules that governed the way all were expected to worship God. They, not God, imposed these rules on others, demanding that all *true* Jews would abide by them. Yet, in doing so, the Jewish leaders assumed a role and authority that was reserved only for God.
 - And, it is because of these man-made traditions, that Stephen stood trial before the Sanhedrin. It was as though the testimony of Scripture was not sufficient for the Jews.
 - It is in this context, that Stephen explains David’s request to build a house for the LORD.

II. The Temple was Requested by David
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- ❑ In **Verse 46**, Stephen says that ‘David found favor in God’s sight, and asked that he might find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob.’
- ❑ This truth is reflected in one of the great Psalms of Ascent.

Psalm 132:2-5:

How he swore to the LORD
 And vowed to the Mighty One of Jacob,
 ‘Surely I will not enter my house,
 Nor lie on my bed;
 I will not give sleep to my eyes
 Or slumber to my eyelids,
 Until I find a place for the LORD,
 A dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob.’

THE HISTORY OF THE TEMPLE

(below is, in part, taken from *The Kregel Pictorial Guide to the Temple*, by Robert Backhouse)

Israel's First Place of Worship: The Tabernacle

The Tabernacle, or Tent of Meeting, was first set up at Mount Sinai by the Israelites after their escape from slavery in Egypt. Through it God taught them how they were to worship him. When Moses entered the tent, "The LORD would speak to Moses face to face as a man speaks to his friend." Exodus 33:11

Construction

The outer boundary of the Tabernacle area was made up of curtains hung over a metal framework, and measured 150 feet by 75 feet, and 7 ½ feet high.

The Tabernacle was a large tent measuring 45 feet by 15 feet. The idea of "God's tent," a portable structure, was specifically suitable for the Israelites as they traveled through the Wilderness. It had two rooms: an outer room, the Holy Place, where only priests were allowed; and an inner room, called the Holiest Place, or Holy of Holies, only entered once a year by the high priest. Here stood the Ark of the Covenant, containing the Ten Commandments.

Outside in the courtyard stood the altar on which sacrifices of goats, lambs, bulls and other animals were burnt, and an bronze washing basin, or laver.

At the Tabernacle God's people met with the presence of God.

Solomon's Temple

- Completed in 959 B.C.
- Destroyed in 586 B.C.

King David was not permitted to build a Temple, though he collected money and materials for its construction. His son, Solomon, took seven years to build the first Temple in Jerusalem. It was twice the size of the portable Tabernacle which it replaced and on which it was modeled. (The Tabernacle had been brought to Jerusalem: 1 Kings 8:1-5.)

Solomon used the forced labor of 80,000 quarrymen and 70,000 porters to cut and transport huge stones for building the Temple; and 30,000 Israelites collected cedar and juniper wood from Lebanon. The Temple was paneled with cedar, on which skilled Phoenician craftsmen carved cherubim, flowers and palm trees, before the whole interior was overlaid in gold.

Outside the Temple stood a three-tiered bronze altar and a great bronze basin (the laver) for ritual washing, supported by twelve bronze oxen, three at each point of the compass.

The double doors of cypress wood, which opened into the Holy Place, were flanked by two pillars, on the right Jachin, and on the left Boaz.

Solomon's Temple, a fulfillment of King David's dream, was a monument to the glory of God (1 Kings 6-7; 2 Chronicles 3-4)

Zerubbabel's Temple (Second Temple)

- Completed in 515 B.C.
- Desecrated (but not destroyed) in 167 B.C.

Under the leadership of King Zerubbabel and the High Priest Joshua, the Israelites rebuilt Solomon's Temple, but on a far inferior scale. When the foundation stone of this Temple was laid, many of 'the older priests wept aloud' in disappointment (Ezra 3:7-13).

The prophets of the Old Testament encouraged the returned Jewish exiles to complete the restoration of the Temple and worship God faithfully there. The prophet Haggai asked pointedly, "Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house [the Temple] remains a ruin?" (Haggai 1:4)

The Second Temple was probably improved and more elaborately adorned during the third and second centuries BC, but we know little about his period in its history.

Herod's Temple [Israel's 'Renovated' Second Temple] (an expansion and renovation of Zerubbabel's Temple)

- Began in 19 B.C.
- Completed in 64 B.C.
- Destroyed in A.D. 70 by the Romans

Herod, King of Judea from 37 BC to AD 4, was not a Jew by birth, but a descendant of the hated Edomites, and a member of the Idumean dynasty. Herod was very corrupt and was loathed by the Jews. Therefore, in order to appease the Jews of his time [as a political move], Herod began the task of expanding and renovating the Second Temple. This was a massive building project.

The Construction of the Temple

Made of marble and gold, Herod's Temple shone so brightly in the sun that it was difficult to look directly at it. Built on the exact location of Solomon's and Zerubbabel's Temple, it could accommodate hundreds of thousands of pilgrims at one time and was twice as large as the largest temple enclosure in Rome.

One thousand (1,000) priests trained as masons by Herod worked on the temple, as did ten thousand (10,000) highly skilled laborers using ten thousand (10,000) wagons. Some limestone blocks of the supporting platform weighed more than five hundred (500) tons.

An area of about **36 acres** was enclosed by a **massive wall nearly one mile in total length**. It is said that the Temple grounds (inside the Court of the Gentiles) could hold as many as **210,000 worshippers at one time**. Some of the stones in these walls measured from **20 to 40 feet in length** and **weighted more than one hundred tons each**. Inside the four walls were porches, that is porticos or cloisters. Over the porch areas were flat roofs, each supported by three rows of Corinthian pillars, each pillar being cut from a single block of marble, and each pillar being **37 ½ feet high**. The Royal Porch on the south was supported by 160 pillars arranged in four rows of 40 pillars each.

The Court of the Gentiles

Within the walls and their porches was the court of the Gentiles - an area, paved with marble, to which all people were welcomed, both Jew and Gentile.

Proper reverence and decorum were expected of all, and there were signs, in Greek and Latin, warning Gentiles not to enter the Temple building itself (the courtyard area immediately surrounding the Sanctuary) or risk losing their lives.

The Eastern Wall

The Eastern wall followed the original line dating from Solomon's days. The main feature in the wall, the Eastern Gate, was the original eastern entrance to the Temple Mount. At one point, the walls of the temple rose more than two hundred twenty-five (225) feet above the bottom of the Kidron Valley.

The South Wall

This wall was more than 900 feet long and more than 150 feet high. Pilgrims entered the temple primarily through this entrance — the Double Gates — after climbing the Southern Stairs, a broad staircase more than 200 feet wide.

The Western Wall

A common gathering place during Jesus' time, this wall featured various architectural wonders and gates. Massive ashlar, hand-shaped stones brought from the quarry nearly a mile away, were featured near the Western Wall as well. One 45-foot-long stone weighed nearly 600 tons.

The North Wall

The Antonia fortress was located here. Built by Herod the Great, this fortress guarded the northern side of Jerusalem and held Roman troops during Jesus' time who watched the temple activities.

The Sanctuary [containing the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies]

The Sanctuary and surrounding courtyards rested on top of the hill on which the city of Jerusalem stood. Herod began work on the Temple in about 19 BC, and finished the Sanctuary in 12 B.C. The entire project was not completed until 64 A.D.

The Sanctuary building (which contained the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies) was **fifteen stories high [about 150 feet tall!]**. The veil separating the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies was, likely, **ninety feet tall!**

Worship in the Temple was based on that of the Tabernacle, only everything was on a far grander scale. The Temple was destroyed in A.D. 70 by the Romans.

- ❑ Yet, as F.F. Bruce rightly says, ‘God desired no house of cedar for him; instead, he would himself establish David’s house – his dynasty – in perpetuity.’

**In other words, God directed Moses to build the Tabernacle;
David requested to build the Temple for God.**

- ❑ For God, the physical Temple was not what was supremely important; it was the One to whom it pointed. This is why God told David that He would establish David’s house forever.

Luke 1:32-33:

‘He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end.’

- ❑ For King David, impressive buildings, luxury and extravagance reflected the material and worldly wealth that was due royalty. In fact, the very monarchy of which David was a part was a result of the nation of Israel’s desire to be like the surrounding pagan nations.
- ❑ Therefore, David’s request was a result of his desire to provide for God in a manner that would be appropriate for himself [David], not what God Himself desired.
 - This occurs often in human relationships as well [*especially marriage relationships]. We typically give others what we would want for ourselves.
 - Thus, David’s request was not exactly born out of a sinful heart. It was not from a desire to ‘be like the other nations.’ It was from a man who was seeking for God that which was appropriate for himself as a king.

However, God did not ask for a Temple. He did not ‘need’ that. He was in no way impressed by the luxuries of this world. Rather, His purposes were perfectly fulfilled in the tabernacle that He commanded be built, for the tabernacle represented God’s continual holy presence amidst His people.

- ❑ Yet, in spite of these truths concerning the Temple, God did honor it:
 - He was present there and appeared there
 - Jesus honored the Temple
 - The Early Christians worshipped in the Temple
- ❑ Also, it seems that God, in His providence, demonstrated in both the tabernacle and the Temple, two different aspects of His nature:
 - First, in the **Tabernacle** – God is mobile; He is immanent, with us; He is Immanuel, ‘God with us.’
 - Secondly, in the **Temple** – God is immovable, immutable; God is fixed in His purpose; He is Transcendent.

III. God Cannot be Housed

- ❑ Rather than David, however, Stephen recalls that ‘it was Solomon who built a house for Him.’ [Verse 47]
- ❑ Notice, that **immediately** after Stephen says that Solomon built God a house, he says, in

Verse 48: ‘**HOWEVER**, the Most High does not dwell in houses made by human hands...’

- Stephen concludes by quoting from **Isaiah 66:1-2:**

‘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?
‘WAS IT NOT MY HAND WHICH MADE ALL THESE THINGS?’

- ❑ In other words, although Solomon built a ‘house’ for the LORD, He cannot be ‘housed.’
- ❑ Solomon even makes this clear when he dedicates the temple, in 1 Kings 8:27:

‘But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You, how much less this house which I have built!’

- ❑ The Psalmist echoes Solomon’s words:

Psalm 139:7-8

Where can I go from Your Spirit?
Or where can I flee from Your presence?
If I ascend to heaven, You are there;
If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there.

- ❑ However, despite the clear testimony of Scripture, the Jews of Stephen’s day, especially the ones who accused him of speaking ‘against this holy place,’ had come to believe that the totality of God’s essence was in some mysterious way confined to the Temple in Jerusalem.

‘The gods of the heathen might be accommodated in material shrines, but no God Most High.’
F.F. Bruce

‘It is evident then from Scripture itself that God’s presence cannot be localized, and that no building can confine him or inhibit his activity. If he has any home on earth, it is with his people that he lives...God is Himself the Creator; how can the Maker of everything be confined within man-made structures?’
John Stott

‘The temple was the symbol of God’s presence, not the prison of His essence.’ John MacArthur

- ❑ Tragically, by the first century, A.D., the Temple ‘had become a symbol of Jewish exclusivism and a rallying place for Jewish nationalism..’ It was no longer a place of worship, but rather, ‘a place where Israel sought to imprison their God and manipulate him according to their own concerns.’ John Polhill
- ❑ The truth that God’s presence and essence cannot be ‘housed’ had become clear throughout Stephen’s sermon. He had made it quite clear that God appeared to Abraham **in Mesopotamia**; God appeared to Moses in the burning bush **in the wilderness of Midian at Sinai**; God’s great act of deliverance in the Exodus took place **in Egypt**; God gave His Law to His people **in Midian**. Also, God’s ordained place of worship, the tabernacle, was established **in the wilderness**. The key was that all of these major events in Israel’s history took place **outside of the land of Israel**.

- ❑ The Jews had, once again focused on the physical symbol, rather than the One to whom the symbol pointed: the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

‘The temple of Herod was the glory of Jerusalem at this time [the time of Stephen’s speech]. Much of it was covered with gold. So as a person drew near Jerusalem, he saw it shining against the skyline. The temple had never been as glorious as it was in that day, and the priests, like priests who serve in cathedrals everywhere, loved the temple and could not see beyond it.’

James Montgomery Boice

- ❑ The Temple bore several characteristics that the Jews do not seem to have fully realized:
 - It was a Human Creation [even the very *idea* of it]

‘Stephen’s reference to its being ‘made by men’ (v. 48, literally, ‘hand-made’) connects directly with the golden calf in the wilderness and is an implicit charge of idolatry. When a place of worship becomes a representation of God himself, it becomes a substitute for a living relationship to God. The man-made ‘house’ is worshiped, not the living God; and that is idolatry...God cannot be confined to one place or people. Israel’s history demonstrates that.’ Polhill

- It was a reflection of what **Man** thought was appropriate for God
- It was Physical
- It was Temporary [It grew old; It could be destroyed; and it was destroyed in A.D. 70]
- ❑ According to W. Manson, ‘**The Temple was not intended...to become a permanent institution, halting the advance of the divine plan for the people of God.**’
- ❑ May we take great hope in knowing that, even today, that God is both immanent and transcendent; that He cannot be confined to a specific place; and that there is absolutely no place that we can flee from His presence.
- ❑ Read Isaiah 57:15-19.