**The House That David Couldn’t Build**

By Pastor Ricky Kurth

 Let’s begin with some questions. Who was the greatest babysitter in the Bible? The answer is David. He was able to rock Goliath to sleep!

Here’s another one. Why was Goliath so surprised when David killed him with a sling? It was because, up until then, it never entered his head!

Finally, where did King David keep his armies? Why, in his sleevies, of course!

 Speaking of King David in Acts 7:45, our text in Acts 7:46-60 begins by saying of him,

 **“Who found favour before God, and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob” (Acts 7:46).**

Now as you know if you’ve been with us for these studies in the Book of Acts, Stephen is defending himself here in Chapter 7 before the Jewish council that rejected the Lord Jesus as Israel’s messiah. And to convince them that they should have *received* Him instead, Stephen has been pointing out that many of the greatest Jewish men of God in the Old Testament were *types* of Christ, men whose lives foreshadowed the life of Christ.

 And the *last* type Stephen mentions before they stone him to death at the end of the chapter here is *David.* And he begins by reminding the council that David found favor with God. Maybe the best way to explain what he meant by that is to remind you of how Samuel *described* David when God sent him to tell Saul that God was taking his kingdom away from him and giving it to David. Samuel broke the news to Saul by saying,

**“…the LORD hath sought Him *a man after His own heart…”* (I Samuel 13:14).**

Samuel described David as a man after God’s own heart. No wonder he found favor with God!

 Now David did a lot of great things. But the thing that Stephen focuses in on here is that he desired to “find a tabernacle” for God, a place for Him to dwell. And the way that that’s worded makes it sound like God *never had* a dwelling place before that, and David went to find Him one. But we know that God *did* have a tabernacle, going all the way back to the days of Moses, whom God instructed to *build* Him one.

 So how come Stephen says David desired to *find* a tabernacle for God? Well, it’s because he was *quoting* what David said in Psalm 132:1-5:

**“…David…sware…I will not give sleep to mine eyes, or slumber to mine eyelids, Until I *find out* a place for the LORD, *an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob”* (Psalm 132:1-5).**

But here we have to ask what David meant when he said he wanted to “find out” a place for God to dwell in. And believe it or not, one of the definitions of that phrase in my dictionary is *to invent.* So Stephen is saying that David wanted to invent a dwelling place for God that would be new *kind* of dwelling place. Before that He lived in a *tabernacle—*a *tent.* David wanted to build him a *temple*.

And you know that’s what Stephen meant, for he begins the next verse with the word “but,” saying:

**“But Solomon built Him an house” (Acts 7:47).**

David *desired* to build God a house, but Solomon is the one that ended up building it, as God’s direction.

But now the question becomes: of all the great things that David accomplished, why is Stephen talking about the *one* thing that he *desired* to do, but God didn’t *let* him do?

Well, his point was that the first time God came to dwell among the Jews it was only in a temporary tent. The *second* time He came to dwell among them, He dwelt among them in a permanent and magnificent *temple.* And that’s a type of how the first time *the Lord Jesus* came to dwell among the Jews, *He too* lived in a temporary tent. That’s what the Bible calls our physical bodies, as when Peter wrote,

**“I think it meet, *as long as I am in this tabernacle*, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; Knowing that shortly I must put off *this my tabernacle…”* (II Peter 1:13,14).**

As you can see, Peter called his physical body a *tabernacle.* And during the Lord’s first coming *He* lived in one too. But when He comes back, He’s going to come back in a body that will be *so much grander,* it will be like the difference between the *tent* of Moses and the *temple* of Solomon. And that’s when He’ll give Israel the kingdom that she *refused* during His appearance to His people in Israel.

If all that sounds familiar, it is because *that’s the point* that Stephen has been making to the Jewish council throughout this chapter. He’s been pointing out that Israel didn’t get what they wanted from their heroes the first time they came, they got it during their second visit. Stephen has just finished talking about Moses, and how he tried and failed to free Israel from Egyptian bondage the first time he appeared to them, but succeeded in his second attempt forty years later. And the reason Stephen is pointing this out about Israel’s heroes is to point out that Israel didn’t get her kingdom during the Lord’s first visit among His people, but she will when He comes again.

Now as we read on, we see Stephen say something that the Jewish council wasn’t going to like!

 **“Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet” (Acts 7:48).**

Now this was something that was sure to get the men on Israel’s council of rulers riled up, for they *loved* their temple! So to *prove* that God doesn’t dwell in temples made with hands, Stephen went on to quote the prophet Isaiah, who said:

 **“Heaven is my throne, and earth is My footstool: what house will ye build Me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of My rest?” (Acts 7:49).**

To prove that God didn’t dwell in temples, Stephen reminded the council that Isaiah said that God was too *big* to dwell in temples. When I was a boy, my dad took us to Cape Canaveral, where NASA launched all her rockets and shuttles. On the tour, they showed us the *humongous* building where they built the Saturn rockets that carried men to the moon. That building is *four and a quarter million square feet.* My house is 2100 square feet by comparison! In addition, it was so tall it was *130 million cubic feet* in volume. At the time, it was the largest volume building in the world. Today that distinction goes to the Boeing jet factory in Seattle, that boasts a staggering 472 million cubic feet.

 But even a building of *that* magnitude can’t house God! Can’t you just picture Him as Isaiah described Him, sitting on His throne in heaven and using the earth as a footstool, a sort of ottoman?

And when God asked, “what is the place of My rest?” (Acts 7:49), that’s God’s way of saying that if he needed a place to sleep, He wouldn’t ask mere mortal men to build it!

 This reminds me of what God said to the Jews about their animal sacrifices in Psalm 50:10-13:

**“…*every beast of the forest is Mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills*...the wild beasts of the field are Mine. *If I were hungry, I would not tell thee:* for the world is Mine, and the fulness thereof. *Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?”***

The reason God had to *say* that is that the Jews had begun to put too much stock in animal sacrifices. He says in response, as it were, “I didn’t ask for sacrifices because I *needed* them. And even if I did, I wouldn’t need *you* to provide them.” And in saying, “What is the place of My rest?” He was saying, “I didn’t let Solomon build Me a temple because I was *sleepy* and needed a place to crash every night.” You may remember He told them,

**“He that keepeth Israel *shall neither slumber nor sleep”* (Psalm 121:4).**

“Slumber” is a very light form of sleep. Someone who is slumbering is very nearly awake. So God was saying that He neither slept nor napped! That means He didn’t let Solomon build Him a temple because He needed a place to sleep so He could rest up and go back to keeping watch over Israel the next day. And if He *did* need a place like that, He wouldn’t have asked *men* to build it, as Stephen goes on to say in Acts 7:50, where he finishes Isaiah’s quotation:

 **“Hath not My hand made all these things?” (Acts 7:50).**

The “things” that He’s talking about here are the things He made “in the beginning” (Gen. 1:1, the heaven and earth that He mentioned in the previous verse, the place of His throne and His footstool. He’s saying that if He needed a temple to rest in, *He Himself* would have made it when He made everything else.

 And the reason God said that to His people in Isaiah’s day is that they had come to put too much stock in the temple, as if just *going* to the temple made God look upon them with favor. So look what Isaiah said *after* the part of his prophecy that Stephen just quoted:

**“Thus saith the Lord, The heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool: where is the house that ye build unto Me? and where is the place of My rest? For all those things hath Mine hand made...but to this *man* will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My word” (Isaiah 66:1,2).**

God said, as it were, “When I look for a place to rest, I don’t look to a *building,* I look to a *man,* a man who is poor and of a contrite heart, one who trembles at My word.” Doesn’t that sound like a perfect description of the Lord Jesus Christ? Wasn’t *He* poor, and of a contrite spirit, one who trembled at God’s Word in His humanity?

 Stephen is telling them that they only *thought* God dwelt in their temple. He *actually* dwelt *in Christ,* like the Lord tried to tell them, but they didn’t want to hear it:

**“…*the Father is in Me,* and I in Him. *Therefore they sought again to take Him”* (John 10:38,39).**

Now Stephen didn’t *quote* the “but to this man will I look” part of Isaiah’s prophecy, but he knew that the men on that council would be thinking of it. He made that part conspicuous by its absence.

And the reason Stephen is saying this about their temple is because of what the council had charged him with:

 **“This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words *against this holy place,* and the law” (Acts 6:13).**

They had accused him of blasphemy against the temple. So he answered them by pointing out that *their own prophet* said that they made *too much* of their temple!

 And we know those councilmen got the point, for when Stephen said that—that was the last straw! That was about all that Israel’s council of leaders was going to take from Stephen. And you know that because of the way Stephen suddenly shifts gears in Acts 7:51:

 **“Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye.”**

Up until this point, Stephen has been playing nice, giving the council the respect they deserved as God’s duly appointed leaders of His people. He’s been handling them with the proverbial kid gloves. But as you can see here, *the gloves are off.*

And it’s not hard to figure out why. If you know the story, you know they stone him to death at the end of this chapter. So the thing that made him shift gears was probably when he saw them starting to pick up stones to hurl at him, or when they gave some other indication that they’d heard enough.

 But now, having said that the gloves were off, if someone called you as a Gentile “stiffnecked,” you might realize that it wasn’t exactly a compliment, even if you didn’t look it up and learn that the word means to be *stubborn, obstinate* or *inflexible.* But you wouldn’t know what it meant to a *Jew* to be called stiffnecked. The first time the word appears in the Bible is when God gave Moses the law, and before he even got down the mountain with it, God’s people had *broken* it by making a calf to worship. When that happened, God said to Moses,

**“…thy people…*have corrupted themselves:* They have *turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them:* they have made them a molten calf, and have worshipped it…And the Lord said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and, behold, *it is a stiffnecked people”* (Exodus 32:7-9).**

Do you see how that defines the term “stiffnecked” as being corrupt, due to having turned out of the way in which God commanded to walk? The idea is: if God tells you to do something, you’re supposed to bow your head and say, “Yes, Sir.” If you *refuse* to bow your head to God’s will, it must be because the neck you use to bow your head is too stiff to bow to God’s will.

 But that’s not *all* that the word “stiffnecked” would have meant to a Jew who knew his Bible. The first few times God used that word, He added how He planned to *respond* to His people’s stiff necks:

**“I have seen this people…it is a stiffnecked people: *Now therefore let Me alone, that My wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them:* and I will make of thee a great nation” (Exodus 32:9,10).**

 **“…the Lord had said unto Moses, Say unto the children of Israel, *Ye are a stiffnecked people:* I will come up into the midst of thee in a moment, *and consume thee”* (Exodus 33:5).**

As you can see, when God called the Jews stiffnecked, He threatened to *end* them, and start all over again by making a new nation out of Moses.

 And when Stephen *also* called them “uncircumcised in heart and ears,” that was something else to which God promised to respond by ending them, as we see when Jeremiah wrote,

**“*Circumcise yourselves to the Lord,* and take away the foreskins *of your heart…lest* *My fury* *come forth like fire, and burn that none can quench it,* because of the evil of your doings” (Jeremiah 4:4).**

As you know, God told the Jews to circumcise the flesh of their foreskins, something they did when a baby boy was eight days old, or when a Gentile man joined the congregation of Israel. But God only told them to do that to symbolize how He *also* wanted them to cut off the sins of their fleshly *hearts.* So in calling them *uncircumcised* in heart, Stephen knew *that the councilmen would know* that God’s fury was about to come upon them as well.

 Do you know what else they would know when Stephen called them uncircumcised in heart? They’d know that Ezekiel said,

 **“Ye have brought into My sanctuary strangers, *uncircumcised in heart,* and uncircumcised in flesh, to be in My sanctuary, *to pollute it, even My house”* (Ezekiel 44:7).**

When uncircumcised Gentiles entered the temple, God said that this *polluted* the temple. That’s interesting, in light of the fact that the council had charged Stephen with blaspheming the temple! That means what he was doing here was turning the tables on them, and telling them that *he* wasn’t blaspheming the temple, *they were* with their uncircumcised hearts.

 And when Stephen said that they were also uncircumcised “in ears,” every Jewish leader would know that there was only one place in the Bible that talked about being uncircumcised in ears, and that’s when God said to His people,

**“To whom shall I speak...that they may hear?...*their ear is uncircumcised,* and they cannot hearken: behold, the word of the Lord is unto them a reproach; *they have no delight in it”* (Jeremiah 6:10).**

Do you see how that defines being uncircumcised in ears as being unable to hear God’s Word because you have no delight in it? And Stephen knew *that the council would know* what God said in the *next* verse about what He planned to do about their ear condition:

**“*Therefore I am full of the fury of the Lord*; I am weary with holding in: *I will pour it out…upon the inhabitants of the land*, saith the Lord” (Jeremiah 6:11,12).**

So when Stephen called the Jewish council uncircumcised in ears, he was quoting *yet another verse* that warned them that the wrath of God was about to fall on them too.

 And what you’re seeing here in this verse is a dispensational landmark. Up until this point where Stephen shifts gears, the nation of Israel still had a chance to repent of their sin of crucifying their Messiah. And if they would, God would send their Messiah back to them to establish the kingdom of heaven on earth for them, as Peter had told them earlier, saying:

**“Repent ye therefore, and be converted*,* that your sins may be blotted out,when *the times of refreshing* shall come from the presence of the Lord. *And He shall send Jesus Christ,* which before was preached unto you” (Acts 3:19,20).**

But right here in this very verse, the door to the people of Israel has closed, as we’ll see as we continue to discuss Stephen’s words.

When Stephen said, “ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye,” this is something that their fathers did in the wilderness when the Holy Ghost spoke to them through Moses, when

**“the angel of His presence saved them…But they rebelled, *and vexed His holy Spirit:* therefore He was turned to be their enemy, *and He fought against them”* (Isaiah 63:9,10).**

As you can see, they resisted the Spirit when He spoke to them through Moses. But they *also* resisted Him when He spoke to them later through the prophets, as Nehemiah testified:

**“Yet many years didst Thou forbear them, and testifiedst against them *by Thy spirit in Thy prophets:* yet would they not give ear” (Nehemiah 9:30).**

And now Stephen said they were resisting the Spirit *again* in resisting the efforts of the apostles and the little flock of the Lord’s followers. And the Lord had warned them what God would do when they did that when He said,

**“A certain man had a fig tree…and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, *Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down…*And he answering said unto him, Lord, *let it alone this year also…*And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, *then after that thou shalt cut it down”* (Luke 13:6-9).**

After the people of Israel failed to produce spiritual fruit for God during the Lord’s three-year ministry among them, God the Father wanted to *cut the nation down* when they crucified His Son. But God the Son got Him to agree to give His people *one more year.*

And if you’ll check Bishop Usher’s dates at the top of the page found in some Bibles, you’ll see that Israel’s additional year *ends here in Acts 7.* Those dates aren’t part of God’s inspired text, of course, but Usher was pretty good at dating things, and he nailed it here.

 Next, Stephen asks the men on the council a telling question:

 **“Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers” (Acts 7:52).**

Now you’ll notice that Stephen *doesn’t* ask the council which of the prophets their fathers *did* persecute. He asks which prophets they *didn’t* persecute, knowing that it would take less time to list the ones they *didn’t* oppose than the ones they did. The implication is that their fathers had persecuted *all* of the prophets. Stephen seems to be daring them to name one that they didn’t!

 And now the chickens were coming home to roost for the Jewish council, for you may remember what the Lord said about the consequences of following in the footsteps of their fathers when it came to resisting the Spirit:

**“Therefore…said…God, I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they shall slay….*That* *the blood of all the prophets*…*may be required of this generation”* (Luke 11:49,50).**

In the New Testament, God added *apostles* to the prophets He’d sent His people in the past. And when they rejected these New Testament apostles and prophets, the Lord vowed that God would require the blood of *all* the prophets *of that generation.* This was due to what the Lord told His disciples in Matthew 13:17, when He said:

**“...*many prophets*…have desired to see those things which ye see, *and have not...”***

That generation had been given more spiritual light than any other generation in Israel’s history, and had *rejected* it. So it was time for God to close the book on them, and pour out His wrath on them for being the “betrayers” of the Lord. Don’t ever think that Judas was the only one who sold the Lord out. The word “betray” means to deliver someone into the hands of an enemy by treachery, and the Lord had said,

**“…the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death, And shall *deliver* Him to the Gentiles…to crucify Him” (Matthew 20:18,19).**

As you can see, *the whole nation of Israel* was guilty of betraying the Lord, as Stephen affirms here in our text.

And when he added that the prophets had shown before the coming of the Just One (Acts 7:52), that was Stephen’s way of telling the council that not only did all of their *types* speak of Christ, all of their *prophets* spoke of Him as well! As the Apostle John put it,

**“the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Revelation 19:10).**

 I’ll bet Stephen would have gone on to tell them how their prophets talked about Christ, just as he’d shown them how their types did. But they weren’t going to give him that opportunity. So instead, Stephen closed his message by saying of them and their fathers,

 **“Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it” (Acts 7:53).**

That word “disposition” can mean *distribution,* as when estate lawyers speak of the disposition of a man’s assets. So when Stephen said they received the law by the disposition of angels, he was talking about what we read in Deuteronomy 33:2, where Moses wrote of God,

**“*He…came with ten thousands of saints*: from His right hand went *a fiery law”***

If you’re wondering, “What were angels doing hanging round when God gave the law?” take a look at how Paul described that event when he wrote,

**“…the law…was *ordained* by angels…” (Galatians 3:19).**

Here I should mention that when we ordain a man to the ministry these days, we may lay hands on him and pray over him, but we aren’t doing anything spooky. That is, we’re not able to impart any kind of spiritual gift as they were able to do in Bible days with the laying on of hands. So when you hear about “an ordained minister,” that’s just a reference to a man who was *recommended* to the ministry by a group of godly men who serve as leaders in a local church. You’d think that a pastor’s recommendation of a man would be good enough, but God prefers *several* men (cf. Acts 13:1,2).

 Similarly, the law comes recommended by *angels.* You’d think that *God’s* recommendation would have been enough. You’d think it would have been enough for Him to say, “I’m God, and I’m giving you this law,” but He likes to go above and beyond what’s expected of Him.

 It’s kind of like when He swore with an oath (Heb.6:17). He knew that giving His word should be good enough, but He likes to go above and beyond what’s expected of Him in that area as well, and so raised His right hand, as it were, and swore an oath to bolster His Word.

 And He went above and beyond what was expected of Him when He gave the law in the presence of angels as well. But despite receiving the law from God Himself, with the recommendation of angels, Israel’s leaders hadn’t *kept* the law, as Stephen is not shy about pointing out to them, knowing they’re about to kill him anyway.

 But in hearing this, the Jews on the council take *their* gloves off in response to Stephen’s indictment:

 **“When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth” (Acts 7:54).**

The reason they were cut to the heart is that Stephen was speaking the Word of God, and Paul calls God’s Word “the sword of the Spirit” (Eph. 6:17). If you believe God’s Word, it will “prick” you in your heart (Acts 2:37). But if you reject God’s Word, it will cut you to the heart, as we’re seeing here.

 And when Stephen says that they “gnashed” on him with their teeth, that doesn’t mean they bit him. Job wrote,

**“*He teareth me in his wrath,* who hateth me: *he gnasheth upon me with his teeth”* (Job 16:9).**

Do you see how that verse defines gnashing on someone with your teeth as tearing into them in your wrath?

But as Israel’s leaders tore into *Stephen* in their wrath, he calmly turned his gaze toward the heavens:

**“But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God” (Acts 7:55).**

Now normally you can’t just look up and see into heaven, of course. This appears to be a vision that the unbelieving Jews on the council could not see. Knowing this, Stephen went on to tell them what he was seeing. Luke records:

**“And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God” (Acts 7:56).**

Now the Jews on the council had heard the Lord call Himself the Son of Man often enough to know who Stephen was talking about here. But when he reported that the Lord was “standing” at God’s right hand, that’s not what we read of Him in Hebrews 10:12:

**“...this man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins…*sat down* on the right hand of God.”**

This difference in posture might not mean much to Gentiles like us, unless you know your Jewish Scriptures well enough to know what the men on that council surely knew, that David had said,

**“The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit Thou at my right hand, *until I make Thine enemies thy footstool”* (Psalm 110:1).**

 Every Jewish leader on that council knew that Stephen was saying that it was time for God to make His enemies His footstool, and do what Isaiah said He would do when he prophesied:

**“The Lord standeth…*to judge the people”* (Isaiah 3:13).**

And that was something that those leaders didn’t want to hear, as we see as we read on:

**“Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord” (Acts 7:57).**

Do you know who stops their ears? Someone who knows you’re telling the truth, but doesn’t want to *hear* the truth!

 **“And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul” (Acts 7:58).**

Now the “witnesses” here are the *false* witnesses that the council bribed to testify against Stephen (Acts 6:11-14). It’s not clear why they laid their clothes at that young man’s feet, but it may have had something to do with the difficulty involved in hurling stones while wearing flowing robes. It may also have had to do with how the Jews were just well known for tearing their clothes off when they got good and mad at someone (cf. Acts 22:23). And they were *murderously* mad here, as we see as we read on:

 **“And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit” (Acts 7:59).**

Now here, don’t overlook the fact that this is an excellent prooftext for the deity of Christ. Did you notice how that verse calls the Lord “God”? It says Stephen called on God, “saying” *Lord Jesus…*

I’m sure the men on the council *loved* hearing that! But Stephen didn’t care. He knew he was about to die anyway.

 He then went on to give up the ghost in a way that we should all aspire to die, by praying for the enemies who are taking our lives, if that’s how we end up receiving our promotion to glory.

 **“And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep” (Acts 7:60).**

Now what Stephen is doing here is the same thing the Lord did when He died on the cross, and prayed, “Father forgive them.” We know God answered *that* prayer, for God gave Israel another year to repent. That prayer describes how it was that the Lord convinced His Father to give them that extra year in Luke’s parable. But the question is, did He answer *this* prayer of Stephen’s?

 The answer would appear to be: yes and no. We know God *did* answer His Son’s prayer in the sense that instead of pouring out His wrath, as He was supposed to do according to prophecy, He saved Saul and introduced the dispensation of the mystery, thereby *postponing* His wrath for the past 2,000 years now!

But we know He *didn’t* answer in the affirmative in that the nation of Israel will receive no more opportunities to repent *as a nation,* and God’s wrath will fall on them during the Tribulation that will follow the Rapture that draws our dispensation to a close, and at the Lord’s return to judge and make war (Rev. 19:11).

 And what you are seeing here is the fulfilment of the parable the Lord told in Luke 19. Here’s the Reader’s Digest version:

**“…He *added* a parable…A certain nobleman went into a far country…But his citizens sent a message after him, saying, *We will not have this man to reign over us”* (Luke 19:11-14).**

 The Lord “added” that parable because it had to do with Israel’s *added* year. The Lord Himself was the nobleman, and the far country is heaven. After the Lord died and went to heaven, the Jews sent a message after Him.

But did you ever stop to wonder how they did that? I mean, how do you send a message after someone you’ve killed and sent to heaven? Smoke signals?

 No, there’s only one way you can send a message after someone whom you’ve killed and sent to heaven, and that is to kill *another* man and send *him* to heaven with your message. Whenever I read this, I always remember old school football coach Mike Ditka grabbing the jersey of Chicago Bear tight end Emery Moorehead on the sidelines of a game, pulling him close enough to scream some instructions into his face, and then shoving him into the game to go deliver the message to his teammates! That’s kind of like what Israel’s leaders did when they sent Stephen to deliver their message to God.

 And when Stephen arrived in heaven, God received the message the Jewish council sent Him loud and clear. With the murder of Stephen, they were saying in no uncertain terms, “We will not have this man to reign over us,” speaking of the Lord Jesus.

 And so the book was closed on the nation of Israel. The “diminishing of them” would continue for a time (Rom. 11:12), as God continued to stretch forth His hands all day long to *individuals* in Israel to give them a chance to be saved (Rom. 10:21). But as a nation they had committed the unpardonable sin of Matthew 12:31. They had blasphemed the Spirit by murdering a man who was *filled* with the Spirit (Acts 6:5), and the last state of that “wicked generation” was worse than the first (Mt.12:45).

 And it could never be argued that God didn’t bend over backwards to reach the people of Israel throughout the many centuries He called them His own. But their rejection of Him culminated in the New Testament with three brutal murders, that of John the Baptist, the Lord Himself, and His prophet Stephen. And their culpability and guilt increased with each homicide. With John, they *permitted* it. With the Lord, they *demanded* it. And as we’ve seen with Stephen, they *committed* it.

 No wonder Paul wrote of them, “the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost” (IThes.2:16).