

Acts 7

Most people have sat and watched the sun go down in a blaze of amazing colours and perhaps have wanted that moment to last for ages. But of course it never does. The sun sets and then it gets dark and that special moment is then only a memory. We cannot stop time and 'freeze' such an experience. Even taking a photo never does it justice as the feeling and the atmosphere of being there are not captured. We live in a dynamic world where time does not stop. We cannot freeze special moments and bottle them to keep them for ever. We are always in movement. Yet there is a constant human desire to halt time and fix an experience. Unfortunately that would fossilise it (if we could actually do so). Spiritually, people try to do this and always fail.

This desire to fossilise a spiritual experience comes in many forms. It might be to try to dwell at some "mountain top experience" (like Peter tried to do) instead of coming down and getting on with real life. It might be to try to stay the same in the church so that no service or anything ever changes because it is so 'nice'. Or it could be to so value one building that it is as though God is only present in that one place and that that is the only place to come close to God.

This is the problem that Stephen in this chapter is trying to overcome in his defence speech. The Temple in Jerusalem was over-valued and treated as the place where God met his people. In short they had fossilised God to a solitary place and had forgotten that God was dynamic. Stephen reminds them that God did perfectly well before a Temple was ever made.

Read Acts 7.1-8

In what way does Stephen show God to be dynamic in the time of Abraham?
Why is remembering all these promises so powerful?
What most characterises Abraham's life?

Read Acts 7.9-19

In what way does Stephen show God to be dynamic in the time of Joseph and the exile?
How do God's promises start to be fulfilled?
Where is God in all of this?

Read Acts 7.20-44

In what way does Stephen show God to be dynamic in the time of Moses and the desert?
What was Moses' biggest mistake and how much time did this cost?
Did Moses try and 'fossilise' the site of the burning bush?
What special promise does God give to Moses?
What is the particular value of the Tabernacle?

Read Acts 7.45-50

In what way does Stephen show God to be dynamic in the time of David and Solomon?
What do the prophets say about the Temple and why?

Read Acts 7.51-8.1

In what way does Stephen show God to be dynamic as he speaks?
What is the most damning aspect of this episode that Stephen speaks against?
Why is this such a turning point for the Jews and the church?
Why is 8.1 so important?
Have you experienced a time when you tried to stay still when God was moving forward?

Reflect on how this ends Part 1 of Acts and how you have felt when one 'chapter' in your life has come to an end.