

- c. Continuing to trace Israel's history – and God's salvation history leading up to the coming of the Messiah – Stephen advanced from Moses to David, with the point of transition being the Lord's sanctuary. Yahweh had directed Moses to build Him a sanctuary (Exodus 25:1-8), but strictly according to the pattern provided on the holy mountain (7:44; cf. Exodus 25:9, 40; Hebrews 8:4-5). This was no passing observation on Stephen's part, but an important component of his larger argument concerning God's dwelling and the notion of "holy place."

By reminding his accusers of Yahweh's comprehensive prescription for the tabernacle, Stephen was directing them to its true meaning and function in the progress of salvation history. God had no left no detail of the tabernacle's design and construction undefined, not because its shape and form and every one of its physical features and components were inherently "holy," but because He wanted Israel to understand a fundamental and crucially important truth: God's dwelling place – His sanctuary – is *divine*; it isn't in any way or to any extent the product of human will, conception, or design. This truth, so powerfully pressed upon the sons of Israel, flies in the face of natural human thinking and religious practice.

- As spiritual beings, humans are compelled to devise and construct "holy places." But they are entirely self-referential in their estrangement, so that they serve self-derived "gods" in self-determined ways. In the realm of human religion, men determine the identity, nature and particular form of the sacred (places, things, people, practices, etc.), however much they may attribute those determinations and designations to divine sources.
- Only in biblical religion does the sacred preclude the human. That is, a created entity's holy status is determined by God's connection with it – a connection *He* has ordained and established and then revealed to men. Thus a place of authentic interface between the divine and the created order – a "holy place" – exists only if God determines to manifest Himself to His creation, which He then does in a certain manner at a certain location in time and space, not as a result of human beings invoking His presence in connection with a "holy" thing or place they have designated.

The heart of Yahweh's promise to Abraham was that He would be the God of his descendants and dwell with them, thus formalizing the notion of "holy place." That promise was ratified for the Abrahamic nation at Mount Sinai, where the Lord called for the construction of a *tabernacle* as the tangible evidence of His presence in the midst of His redeemed people. The tabernacle departed Sinai with the sons of Israel, and Yahweh's presence – epitomized in the ark of the covenant – led them throughout their wilderness wanderings, going up ahead of them into the promised sanctuary land of Canaan (7:44-45; ref. also Numbers 10:33-36; Joshua 3:1-4:11). And having brought Israel into the land, the Lord settled them in His sacred habitation, driving out Canaan's inhabitants and giving His covenant children cities they didn't build, fields they hadn't sown and wells they hadn't dug, all the while dwelling in their midst in a portable "tent of meeting."

Yahweh was with the people of Israel from the moment they departed Egypt, and He attested His presence with them and covenant faithfulness to them by means of His sanctuary. From Sinai forward, Israel couldn't question whether the God of their fathers was committed to their preservation and well-being. With the ark of His presence going ahead of them, Yahweh directed their path through the wilderness and gave them victory over their enemies (Numbers 21:10-35) until the appointed time for taking possession of the promised land. The Lord had Joshua lead them up into Canaan, and even their disobedience and unbelief didn't turn Him away from His covenant oath. Israel was an incorrigible covenant-breaking "son," but God remained a faithful Father, fulfilling all His good word to Abraham's descendents (Joshua 23:1-14).

Despite Yahweh's persistent faithfulness, Moses' and Joshua's tragic prediction was realized: Their deaths and the end of their leadership saw the sons of Israel embarking upon a path of decline that would ultimately leave them in exile and the covenant land desolate (cf. Deuteronomy 31:14-30; Joshua 24:1-28).

- Unbelief led to idolatry and apostasy which the Lord judged with oppression and subjugation. When Israel cried out to Him, He raised up deliverers (judges) who liberated and led them back to Him. But as soon as that deliverer died, the cycle of apathy, apostasy, idolatry and judgment repeated itself until God in His mercy again sent another liberator/judge.
- Throughout the period leading up to monarchy, Yahweh's sanctuary was in the midst of His people (7:44-45). His glory-presence continued between the wings of the cherubim and He worked mighty deeds in Israel's sight, yet they would not yield their faith and devotion. Even when the Lord supernaturally intervened to restore the ark of His presence to Israel after delivering it to the Philistines in an act of judgment against them, the nation remained stiff-necked and unrepentant (1 Samuel 3-6).

The sons of Israel had taken "*the tabernacle of Moloch and the star of the god Rompha*" (7:43) along with Yahweh's sanctuary throughout their years in the wilderness, and that duplicitous idolatry only increased in the land. In open defiance of the Lord's repeated warning, the people embraced the false gods of Canaan, building altars to the Baals and erecting Asherahs as a complement to their worship of Yahweh at His sanctuary (Judges 2:1-13, 3:1-7; cf. Hosea 2:1-8).

The legacy of Israel from Sinai forward was unbelief, idolatry and rebellion, and yet the Lord remained faithful to His covenant. The nation defiled His dwelling place and despised the covenant at every turn, but Yahweh upheld His promise to Moses of a central sanctuary – a fixed habitation in the midst of the sanctuary land and the covenant people. More than four centuries after Moses' death, David came to the conviction that the newly conquered city of Jerusalem should be the site of that sanctuary, and he sought Yahweh's blessing for building Him a permanent dwelling on Mount Zion in (7:46).

David wanted to build the Lord a house, but that privilege fell to his son Solomon (7:47). Yahweh's explanation for refusing David's request was that his hands had shed blood as a warrior (1 Chronicles 28:2-3); in contrast Solomon – in his person and reign – represented the principle of *peace*. The Lord could not permit David to build His house, but not because of any sin on his part or even because he was a man of war; the reason was bound up in the typological (and therefore *impermanent*) role of the temple in the outworking God's salvation history.

- By divine design, the central sanctuary was to exist in the context of peace and rest in Israel (Deuteronomy 12:1-14), so that the Jerusalem temple – which functioned as that sanctuary – could not be built until such a time. David secured those conditions (cf. Deuteronomy 12:10-11 with 2 Samuel 7:1), but through a reign largely defined by warfare and bloodshed. David's labors as Israel's warrior-king had brought about the circumstance suitable to the building of the central sanctuary, but his son Solomon presided over the kingdom of peace David had secured.
- The principles of peace and rest were fundamental to the law of the central sanctuary, and this is the historical reason for God's choice of Solomon to build the temple. But there was a more important salvation-historical reason involving first the typological role of Solomon, but also the typology of the temple as preparatory fulfillment of the central sanctuary.

*Yahweh's revelation to Moses of a future central sanctuary was ultimately His promise to dwell permanently – in the context of settled, comprehensive peace and rest – with His covenant son in His sanctuary-land – a promise only provisionally fulfilled in the Jerusalem temple.*

- So the salvation history following the temple's construction was attended by the Lord's repeated affirmation of Mount Zion as the place of His everlasting habitation– the place where all men would come to learn of Him, worship Him and serve Him (cf. Isaiah 2:1-4 with Micah 4:1-8; also Psalm 132:11-14; Isaiah 54:1ff, 62:1-12). *This affirmation continued in the face of God's eventual revelation that the temple would not endure.*

The prophetic promise of permanence was a key factor in Israel's refusal to believe that Jerusalem and the temple could be destroyed by the Babylonians (cf. Jeremiah 27-28 with Ezekiel 24). And after that desolation occurred, they clung fervently to God's word that the city and temple would be rebuilt (e.g., Isaiah 44:28). Mount Zion and its sanctuary might fall, but they couldn't be obliterated; God's own prophets declared them to be His everlasting habitation. The city and temple were indeed rebuilt, but to pronouncements by the prophets that Yahweh's true sanctuary – the sanctuary that was the concern of the prophetic Scriptures and the true fulfillment of the law of the central sanctuary – pertained to an altogether different "house," one to be built by the Branch of David as pledged in the Davidic Covenant (cf. Zechariah 3-4, 6:9-15 with Amos 9:11-15).

From the time the Lord first revealed Himself to the patriarchs He left no doubt that He is a God who “*does not dwell in houses made by human hands*” (7:48). To highlight and affirm His covenant oath to be the God of Abraham and his seed, He appointed Canaan as His symbolic habitation, then commanding at Sinai that a portable house be built for Him so that He could dwell in the midst of His people as they moved through and conquered the land. Later, when David had secured peace on every side, Yahweh localized the symbolic place of His habitation in the Jerusalem temple (note, however, 1 Kings 8:22-27). But He eventually destroyed that sanctuary as *ichabod* – as an empty human structure from which His glory had long since departed (Ezekiel 10-11). Seventy years later the Jerusalem temple was rebuilt, but with the conspicuous absence of Yahweh’s glory-presence. Unlike the wilderness tabernacle and Solomon’s temple, the Lord’s glory-cloud didn’t descend upon and fill the second temple; its agonizing emptiness would continue until the Lord Himself came to His temple, establishing Himself – in the person of His Son – as the true fulfillment of the law of the central sanctuary.

That day had come, and Jerusalem was no longer the “city of the great God.” No longer were Abraham’s children obligated to journey there to meet with and worship their God; no longer was it a sin to worship Yahweh outside Jerusalem. At the same time, this “no longer” meant the fulfillment of the law of the central sanctuary, not its abrogation: What that law embodied, namely the obligation of men to come to the true God where He is found and worship Him in truth according to His self-revelation, had at last been fully realized. Like every feature and component of salvation history, the central sanctuary prophesied of the Coming One: *Jesus of Nazareth is the point of divine encounter; He is the “holy place” where the living God is personally and fully manifest and in whom He is worshipped in truth and in authentic communion by the Spirit* (John 4:1-26).

Thus Stephen appropriately closed out his consideration of the biblical concept and expressions of “holy place” by citing from the final chapter of Isaiah’s prophecy (7:49-50; ref. Isaiah 66:1-2), a passage in which the Lord interacted with the rightful desire of His people to recognize and honor Him. Throughout the prophecy God had emphasized repeatedly and from various vantage points that He is the sole Savior of His own; they were not to look for help, deliverance or preservation from anyone or anything else (ref. 30:1-26, 31:1-9, 40:1-48:22). He would deliver the true sons of Abraham from their enemies and give them everlasting rest (ref. 13:1-21:17, 23:1-27:13, 33:1-35:10), even purging and restoring them to Himself by His great power (ref. 22:1-25, 28:1-29:24, 56:1-58:14). Most importantly, Yahweh would act as Savior of His people through His Servant, the Branch of David (ref. 7:1-12:6, 32:1-20, 49:1-55:13, 59:1-65:25).

Surely such a great salvation calls for something in return, but Yahweh’s response was that men have nothing to give: They can build Him no house or monument; whatever they might fashion or provide already belongs to Him. Their desire to honor Him is good, but the recompense He seeks, and the one by which He is honored, is *faith*: The one to whom He will turn His gaze is the one who looks away from himself and his resource to find everything in the Righteous One, the Holy One of Israel (66:2; cf. 53:11, 60:1-61:7).