

Stiff-necked and Uncircumcised in Heart and Ears.

Acts 7:44-53.

Sunday morning, January 24, 2009.

I. The remainder of Israel's history.

- A. Stephen finishes his survey of Israel's history in just a handful of verses.
 - 1. He goes from Moses to Joshua to David to Solomon.
 - 2. He goes from tabernacle to temple.
- B. In doing so he finishes the theme of the presence of God not being tied to a certain place such as the Jewish temple in Jerusalem.
- C. Stephen really drives this point home by quoting from Isaiah 66:1,2.
"Heaven is my throne, and earth is My footstool. What house will you built for Me says the Lord, or what is the place of My rest? Has My hand not made all these things?"
- D. Stephen also completes the theme of the poor treatment which God's servants received throughout the history of the old covenant. by asking: "Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?"

Application:

We do well to note here that the Lord never asked for a temple to be built for Him. He directed that a tabernacle be built for Him. It was David who later would feel bad that he lived in a palace and the Lord in a tent, and he desired to build the Lord a permanent home. Solomon, David's son, would accomplish this.

The tent speaks of a temporal and transient state of being. It anticipates better and permanent things to come.

So Abraham, Isaac and Jacob lived in tents in the land of promise; they referred to their lives as a sojourning, meaning a temporary stay as opposed to belonging somewhere.

They also referred to their lives as a pilgrimage, that is a journey to a better, more permanent place which they could call home.

When the Lord asked for a sanctuary He asked for a tent, denoting the transient nature of the entire old covenant.

When the temple was built, it became an end in itself and for many took on the nature of an idol.

How do you see your life and your dwelling place?

II. Stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears.

How did Israel sink into the idolatry of the temple, and the persecution of the servants of God?

Stephen summarizes the spiritual condition of the hearts of God's people.

- A. He calls them stiff-necked. A Greek term meaning "stubborn."

A stiff neck will not bend and will not bow.

It stands tall in its own conceit and self-sufficiency and pride.

It refuses to take its place before God as a creature, and as a fallen creature at that.

The proud and stubborn soul can not receive God's grace, for God gives His grace to the humble.

As a stiff-necked, proud and stubborn people they were left to the imaginations of their own hearts, and their own desires, which will lead us astray at every turn.

Application:

We have to become small before God. Have you experienced that? Are you experiencing that?

B. Uncircumcised in heart and ears.

What do we make of those terms; how do we understand them?

1. Circumcision was the covenantal sign of the Old Testament times; it was the sign that the people belonged to God.

It consisted of the cutting away of the covering consisting of the foreskin.

2. Why was this chosen as the sign of the covenant?

Because the old covenant looked and longed and lived toward the day of the coming of the promised seed; that is the seed of Abraham Genesis 22:18.

3. Circumcision was an outward sign in the body pointing to the coming seed.

That a corresponding work of grace had to be worked in the heart was clear from the earliest of times. This is the “circumcision of the heart and ears”

- “The Lord...chose...you above all peoples, therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer.” Deut. 10:15,16.
- “And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your god with all your heart and with all your soul that you may live.” Deut. 30:6.
- “Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskins of your heart you men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem.” Jer. 4:4.
- “He is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.” Rom. 2:29.
- “In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ.” Colossians 2:11.

4. Circumcision of the body looked for the coming Seed; the Lord Jesus Christ. Circumcision of the heart cut away the covering from our hearts so that our hearts might know and fellowship with the Lord. That we might “hear” Him and “see” Him. John 10:4 and 2 Cor. 3:14-16.

5. In the new covenant circumcision has been replaced with baptism.

“Cutting away...” has been replaced with “Washing away...”

The reason is that the promised seed has come in the Person of Christ.

Both ordinances illustrate the same spiritual operation.

- C. The reason why Stephen’s hearers could not walk in fellowship with the Lord and constantly fell into idolatry and mistreatment of god’s servants was the uncircumcision of their hearts and ears (and eyes).

Application:

And what about you; have you ever been in earnest asking the Lord for this gracious cutting away of the covering of your heart so that you might live?