

The
ACTS
of the Apostles



**GOD'S WORK IN OUR
LIVES PROVIDES
CONVICTION AND
CONFIRMATION OF
GOD'S GOODNESS AND
PROVISION**

ACTS 7

INTRODUCTION

- Stephen continues to speak with calm confidence as he boldly recounts a testimony of Israel's history of rejecting God despite His ongoing faithfulness.
- Stephen's tone and the content of his speech mirrors God's prophets who brought messages of conviction and confirmation to rebellious Israel in the past.
- Stephen's retelling of Israel's history shines a convicting light on their current hard-heartedness while confirming God's faithfulness.

INTRODUCTION

- Stephen's speech addresses three major tenets of Judaism that the overly devout Jews had elevated to a higher role of worship than God intended.
- The land, the Law and the temple were all given as gifts from God to His people to confirm His faithfulness and guide them in a worshipful, repentant relationship with Him.
- Instead, the idolatry and rebellion in their hearts directed their worship to the gifts and not the Giver.

**IDOL OF LAND:
GOD MAKES HIMSELF
AVAILABLE TO ALL
PEOPLE, IN ALL PLACES**

ACTS 7:1-6

CALLING HIS PEOPLE

- Stephen recounts the history of God first calling a people to Himself by visiting Abraham and offering him a prophetic vision of the future.
- God's promises to Abraham include the seemingly impossible multiplication of his family's lineage.
- God revealed a glimpse of salvation through Jesus Christ, Abraham's seed, that would be made available to "all the nations of the earth."

CALLING HIS PEOPLE

- In these verses, Stephen is careful to point out that God began establishing this promise long before anyone entered the land or His people were established as Israel.
- God first came to Abraham in Mesopotamia (verse 2) and then in Haran (verse 4).

CALLING HIS PEOPLE

- Even when Abraham arrived in the land, God didn't secure it for him but established a covenant relationship with him and his descendants (verse 8).
- John the Baptist rebuked the religious leaders for thinking their nation and location could secure them right standing with God (Matthew 3:7–9).
- Stephen's words bring further conviction that God's salvation is not limited to one location or people.

PROVISION IN EGYPT

- Stephen recounts the history of God's people by reminding his listeners of all that God did in the land of Egypt.
- In verses 9–10 , Stephen reminds them that God was with Joseph in Egypt and proved His faithfulness by delivering him from slavery, false imprisonment, and famine
- God used the land of Egypt to care for the ongoing multiplication of Abraham's lineage (verses 11–14).

PROVISION IN EGYPT

- Verse 16 mentions the land of Shechem, another reminder that God was at work establishing a relationship with the people He selected in whatever place He desired.
- God's work in Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob's lives was not limited to a location or a nation.
- It was defined and confirmed by His faithfulness to deliver them in their times of need and bring to fruition His covenant promises in their lives.

**IDOL OF LAW:
GOD REDEEMS HIS
PEOPLE FOR
RELATIONSHIP, NOT
RULES**

ACTS 7:17-34

ABRAHAM'S DESCENDANTS

- Stephen continues his prophetic speech in by retelling the history of the Exodus.
- He documents God's faithfulness in the land of Egypt through the life and calling of Moses.
- Abraham's descendants have continued to grow in number and are now beginning to identify as a people, but they are enslaved by the spiteful king of Egypt and are desperate for a source of rescue greater than themselves (Exodus 2:23-25)

NEED FOR SALVATION

- Stephen says salvation comes from the hand of God and not directly from any human leader.
- God calls to Moses from a burning bush (verse 30) and tells him of His divine plan to ransom an enslaved people so that He might be their God and they His worshipping people (Exodus 3:12).
- God desires to redeem the Hebrew people so that they can be free to walk in relationship with Him and not be bound to any earthly master (verse 34) .

NEED FOR SALVATION

- The Mosaic covenant that God establishes later in the desert at Mount Sinai is meant to guard the holiness of His beloved people while mercifully exposing their incurable sin and need for His intervention.
- God desired to teach His people that He was their only source of purity and that He was willing to grant them mediated access to His presence despite their ongoing sin.

**IDOL OF TEMPLE:
GOD DEFINES WORSHIP
BY THE HEART, NOT
THE PRACTICES**

ACTS 7:35-53

REBELLIOUS HEARTS

- In the conclusion of his speech, Stephen exposes the excuse that the religious elite have made to disguise their rebellious hearts.
- They are still rejecting Jesus' lordship just as the Israelites rejected Moses' leadership in the desert (verses 35–39).
- He indicts those in attendance for valuing their religious rituals more than a true habit of worship and humility before God.

REBELLIOUS HEARTS

- Stephen reminds them of Israel's ongoing habit of idol worship.
- Even after witnessing God's mighty display of power as He led His people out of Egypt, the Israelites were more willing to seek affirmation in gods they can fashion and control than submit to the God who desires to guide them in His will.
- They worship God's House but they don't worship God's provision for their sins.

HYPOCRISY

- Stephen points out that a beautiful building and correct religious practices will never disguise one's willingness to honor lesser gods above God Himself.
- God never intended for His people to become fixated on the things they made in His name.
- Providing a house of worship was an act of His mercy, allowing for access to His presence and making Himself temporarily available to them.

HYPOCRISY

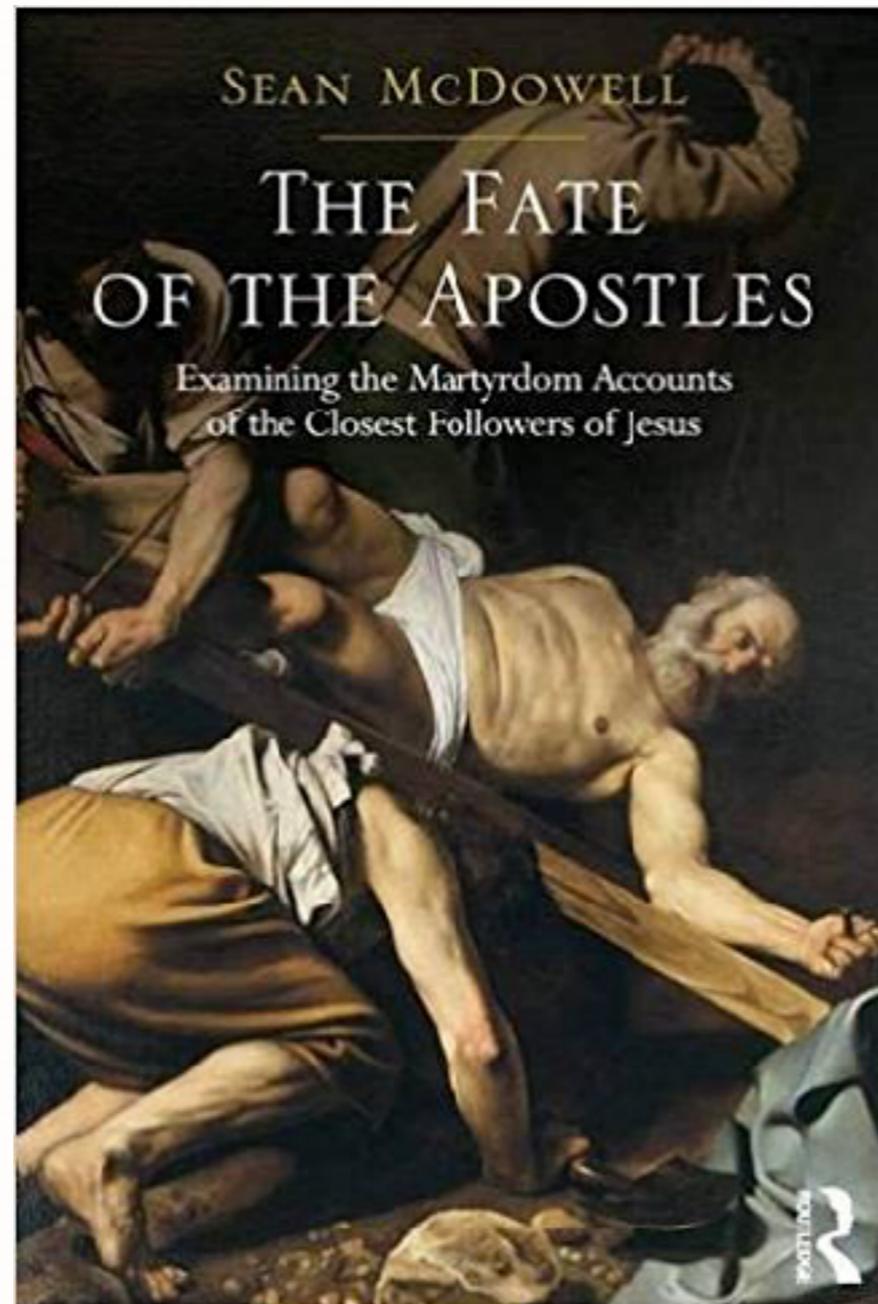
- Verses 51 – 53 are a direct indictment of the murder and hypocrisy that rages inside the hearts of those who play the part of pious religious leaders.
- Jesus said in Matthew 23:37, no outward adornment can hide a darkened heart full of sin from God.
- Stephen's final point is that the Jews have chosen to reject the God who has been faithful to draw near His people.

HYPOCRISY

- Instead, they have established their own self-made sense of religious purity by turning all their attention to religious practices and buildings.
- Jesus taught that true worship of God comes from people not tied to a building or code of religious practices (John 4:21–24).
- The heart of a worshipper expresses its humility before God in all things, at all times (Romans 12:1).

THE FATE
OF THE
APOSTLES

PETER AND PAUL



PETER

- Peter is mentioned more in the New Testament than any other apostle, including Paul.
- All four Gospels list him among the first called to follow Jesus (Matt. 4:18-20; Mark 1:16-17; Luke 6:12-16; John 1:40-42).
- Along with James and John, Peter was in the inner circle of Jesus. He was clearly the leader.

PETER

- Peter is the primary character in the first 15 chapters of Acts.
- Although Peter denied Jesus three times, he became emboldened in his faith after the resurrection.
- When instructed not to speak of Jesus, he replied that: “We must obey God rather than men.”
- He was willing to suffer and die because he witnessed the risen Christ.

PETER

- The traditional view is that Peter was crucified during the reign of Nero (AD 64-67).
- His martyrdom is reported by Clement, Ignatius, Eusebius, and Tertullian. It is also found in some non-scriptural books: *Apocalypse of Peter* and the *Acts of Peter*. Many of these works also report this was done during the reign of Nero.
- His crucifixion is also reported in some works.

PAUL

- Next to Jesus, the apostle Paul is the premier figure at the beginning of Christianity.
- He was born in the city of Tarsus, trained at the feet of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), and was a highly honored teacher of the Torah and member of the Sanhedrin (Acts 5:34-39).
- Luke tell us that Paul was born a Roman citizen (Acts 22:28) which gave him more opportunities in the Roman Empire.

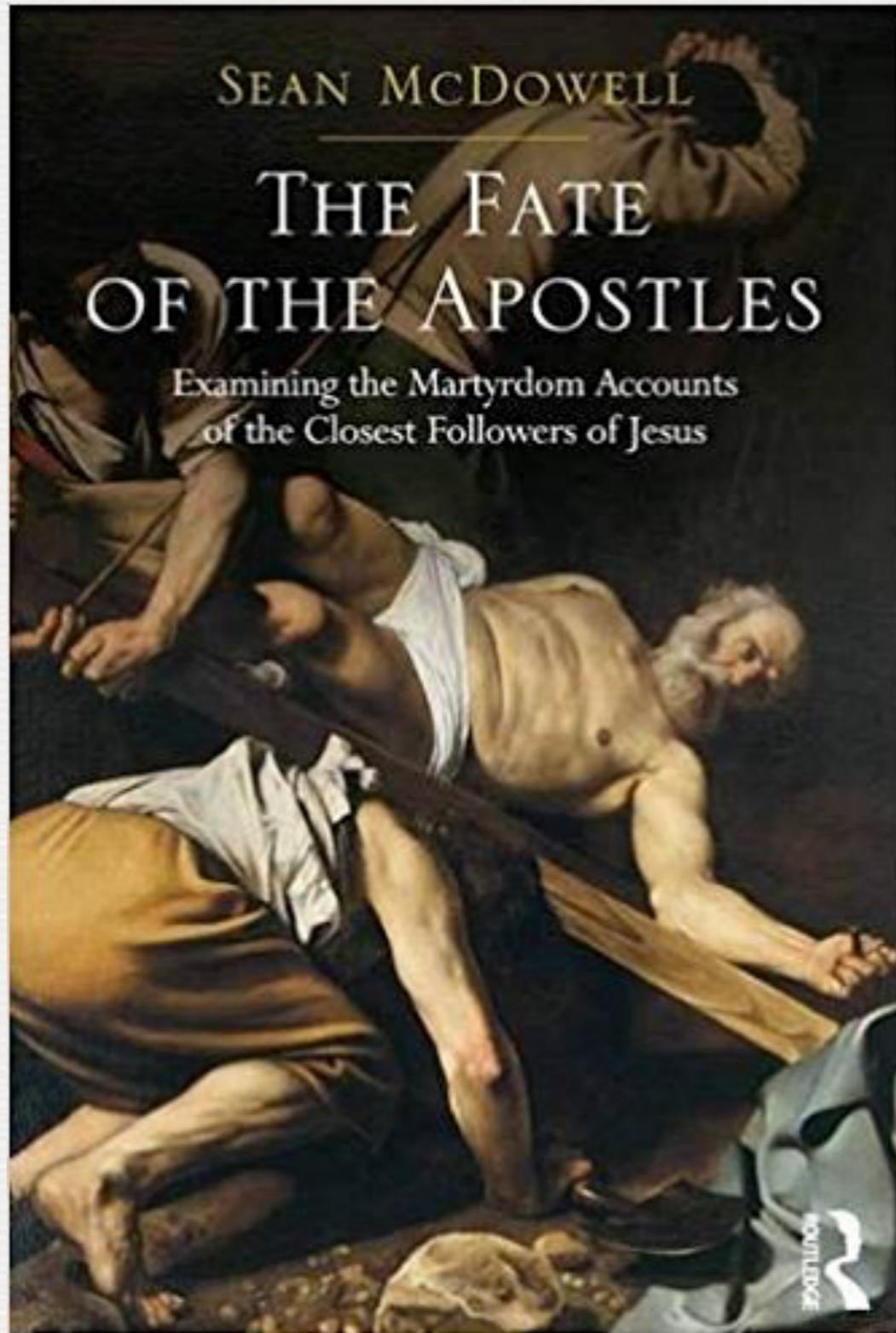
PAUL

- The traditional view is that Paul was beheaded during the reign of Nero (AD 64-67).
- New Testament books and other church fathers (Clement, Ignatius, Tertullian) say Paul was in Rome.
- His martyrdom is reported by Clement, Ignatius, Eusebius, and Tertullian. Some also place it during the reign of Nero.
- His beheading is probably true (no other version).

SEAN MCDOWELL

THE FATE OF THE APOSTLES

Examining the Martyrdom Accounts
of the Closest Followers of Jesus



PRAYER: JACK PHILLIPS

