

Acts 7:39

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

To whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt,

Analysis

To whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt. Stephen exposes Israel's fundamental rebellion—outward physical deliverance accompanied by inward spiritual resistance.

The double refusal—would not obey and thrust him from them—shows both passive and active rejection. Disobedience begins internally (would not) and manifests externally (thrust him). This pattern reflects human depravity: even witnessing God's power doesn't guarantee submission to His authority.

The phrase in their hearts identifies the root problem. Reformed theology emphasizes the heart as the seat of affections and will. External compliance without heart transformation remains rebellion. Turned back again into Egypt reveals the tragic irony—physically freed from slavery, they remained mentally and spiritually enslaved.

Egypt represents the world system, sin's bondage, and fleshly comfort. Though God delivered them, they preferred slavery's predictability over faith's demands. This warns against merely external religious conversions that leave hearts unchanged. True deliverance requires heart transformation, not just changed circumstances.

Historical Context

Israel's wilderness rebellions fill Exodus and Numbers—golden calf (Exodus 32), grumbling (Exodus 16), Korah's rebellion (Numbers 16), and longing for Egypt (Numbers 11:5). These incidents became paradigmatic examples of faithlessness in Jewish theology.

Stephen's audience would recognize these references immediately. His indictment is devastating: you're repeating your ancestors' pattern—rejecting God's messenger despite witnessing signs. First-century Jews took pride in not being like their rebellious ancestors, yet Stephen shows history repeating. The golden calf incident occurred merely weeks after Sinai—proximity to God's presence doesn't guarantee faithful obedience.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does internal heart rebellion manifest in external religious rebellion?
2. What 'Egypt' do Christians sometimes long for after experiencing spiritual deliverance?
3. Why doesn't witnessing God's power automatically produce obedience?
4. In what ways might we physically be in God's kingdom while our hearts remain elsewhere?
5. How does this passage illuminate the necessity of regeneration—a supernatural heart change?

Interlinear Text

ῷ	οὐκ	ἡθέλησαν	ὑπήκοοι	γενέσθαι	οἱ	πατέρες
To whom	not	would			obey	fathers
G3739	G3756	G2309			G1096	G3962
ἡμῶν	ἀλλ'	ἀπώσαντο	καὶ	ἐστράφησαν	ταῖς	
our	but	thrust him from them	and	turned back again		G3588
G2257	G235	G683	G2532	G4762		
καρδίαις	αὐτῶν	εἰς	Αἴγυπτον			
hearts		into	Egypt			
G2588		G1519	G125			

Additional Cross-References

Numbers 11:5 (References Egypt): We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick:

Exodus 16:3 (References Egypt): And the children of Israel said unto them, Would to God we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger.