

Acts Chapter Seven

Acts 7:1-5

And the high priest said, "Are these things so?"

And he said, "Hear me, brethren and fathers! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, and said to him, 'DEPART FROM YOUR COUNTRY AND YOUR RELATIVES, AND COME INTO THE LAND THAT I WILL SHOW YOU.' "Then he departed from the land of the Chaldeans, and settled in Haran. And from there, after his father died, *God* removed him into this country in which you are now living. "And He gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot of ground; and *yet*, even when he had no child, He promised that HE WOULD GIVE IT TO HIM AS A POSSESSION, AND TO HIS OFFSPRING AFTER HIM.

High Priest—calls for Stephen to make a defense—this is probably Caiaphas

Stephen gives the story of Israel from the time of Abraham:

- Stephen begins by addressing the audience—out of respect—as brethren and fathers.
- Stephen does not begin by addressing charges directly—he gives the bigger picture of Israel as his message (Dan 9, Neh 9, Ps 105-106). Stephen wants to proclaim the way of Jesus—more than defend himself.
- God is dealing with the devastation of His creation that is written of in Genesis 3-11. This is the story of how God Almighty will go about 'restoring all things'.
- God called Abraham away from his home because it was a place of idolatry (this also demonstrates that God is a pilgrim God—not confining Himself to one location).
- Abraham—obeys partially: settles in Haran—takes Lot with him. Promise will be delayed.
- God promises Abraham a child and land.
- Giving of the Holy Land—a sacred tenet—is of particular interest because the early church was selling ancestral lands to provide for their needy brethren.

Acts 7:6-8

"But God spoke to this effect, that his OFFSPRING WOULD BE ALIENS IN A FOREIGN LAND, AND THAT THEY WOULD BE ENSLAVED AND MISTREATED FOR FOUR HUNDRED YEARS. " 'AND WHATEVER NATION TO WHICH THEY SHALL BE IN BONDAGE I MYSELF WILL JUDGE,' said God, 'AND AFTER THAT THEY WILL COME OUT AND SERVE ME IN THIS PLACE.' "And He gave him the covenant of circumcision; and so *Abraham* became the father of Isaac, and circumcised him on the eighth day; and Isaac *became the father of* Jacob, and Jacob *of the* twelve patriarchs.

- Keystone for the rest of the story.
- Before Moses---covenant was made with Abraham
- Prophecy concerning enslavement in Egypt
- Exact number of years given for Israel's bondage.
- Promise would not come without burden/suffering
- God will judge nation that puts Israel in bondage.

Acts 7:9-10

"And the patriarchs became jealous of Joseph and sold him into Egypt. And *yet* God was with him, and rescued him from all his afflictions, and granted him favor and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh, king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his household.

- God emphasizes God's presence with Joseph—not necessarily with all Israel.
- When this section of story is shared—listeners can relate—see themselves
- Leaders had been jealous of Jesus—they were also jealous of the signs and wonders being accomplished by early church.

Acts 7:11-15

"Now a famine came over all Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction *with it*; and our fathers could find no food. "But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our fathers *there* the first time. "And on the second *visit* Joseph made himself known to his brothers, and Joseph's family was disclosed to Pharaoh. "And Joseph sent *word* and invited Jacob his father and all his relatives to come to him, seventy-five persons *in all*. "And Jacob went down to Egypt and *there* passed away, he and our fathers.

- God knew story ahead of time—famine was not a surprise.
- Brothers who rejected him—did not recognize him.
- Joseph came to Egypt (just like Jesus came to Israel) in order to bring salvation.
- Joseph—sends his word—invites brothers to come to him (just like the Father sent The Word—to invite Israel to come to Him).
- 75 persons in all—Gen 46:27—Stephen quotes Septuagint which adds sons and grandsons born to Joseph in Egypt.

Acts 7:16-19

“And from there they were removed to Shechem, and laid in the tomb which Abraham had purchased for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor in Shechem. “But as the time of the promise was approaching which God had assured to Abraham, the people increased and multiplied in Egypt, until THERE AROSE ANOTHER KING OVER EGYPT WHO KNEW NOTHING ABOUT JOSEPH. “It was he who took shrewd advantage of our race, and mistreated our fathers so that they would expose their infants and they would not survive.

- Tomb—only land Abraham ever possessed in Canaan—the rest he received by faith.
- Died in Egypt—buried in Shechem—describes death separating into two realms....new location, after death—has been purchased.
- Fulfillment of promises—time sensitive
- Cruel bondage takes place—prior to deliverance.
- Cruel king—pharaoh—is a type of satan
- Satan always desires to destroy man's seed—because seed was promised Who would destroy him.

Acts 7:20-22

“And it was at this time that Moses was born; and he was lovely in the sight of God; and he was nurtured three months in his father’s home. “And after he had been exposed, Pharaoh’s daughter took him away, and nurtured him as her own son.”And Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians, and he was a man of power in words and deeds.

- Moses—like Jesus—shown favor from birth.

- Moses' parents obeyed pharaoh—exposing their son—but watched over him from a distance.
- Moses nurtured 3 months in home of parents—then for almost 40 years, in pharaoh's palace.
- Moses educated (in worldly system)—advanced math, chemistry, engineering, and astronomy.
- I Cor 2:14—the natural man does not understand the wisdom of God.
- If Ramses II was pharaoh of this oppression (and it is thought that he was)—Moses could have been the next pharaoh. That pharaoh had no sons, so Moses would have been next in line (pharaoh's daughter had brought him up as her own son).

Acts 7:23-29

“But when he was approaching the age of forty, it entered his mind to visit his brethren, the sons of Israel. “And when he saw one *of them* being treated unjustly, he defended him and took vengeance for the oppressed by striking down the Egyptian. “And he supposed that his brethren understood that God was granting them deliverance through him; but they did not understand.”And on the following day he appeared to them as they were fighting together, and he tried to reconcile them in peace, saying, ‘Men, you are brethren, why do you injure one another?’ “But the one who was injuring his neighbor pushed him away, saying, ‘WHO MADE YOU A RULER AND JUDGE OVER US? ‘YOU DO NOT MEAN TO KILL ME AS YOU KILLED THE EGYPTIAN YESTERDAY, DO YOU?’ “And at this remark MOSES FLED, AND BECAME AN ALIEN IN THE LAND OF MIDIAN, where he became the father of two sons.

- Moses leaves throne out of concern for his brethren—just like Jesus.
- Moses intends to deliver his brethren—but can only do it by human strength at this point.
- Stephen tells story of Moses to highlight several things: Moses was uniquely raised up by God—to be the right leader for Israel. He was raised/educated in the wisdom of the Egyptians (I Kings 4:30, Is 19:11). Moses became the rejected rescuer. He realized his ancestry, though he was raised in the courts of pharaoh.
- Moses is being rejected by the very ones he was stepping in to save.

Acts 7:30-34

“And after forty years had passed, AN ANGEL APPEARED TO HIM IN THE WILDERNESS OF MOUNT Sinai, IN THE FLAME OF A BURNING THORN BUSH. “And when Moses saw it, he *began* to marvel at the sight; and as he approached to look *more* closely, there came the voice of the Lord: ‘I AM THE GOD OF YOUR FATHERS, THE GOD OF ABRAHAM AND ISAAC AND JACOB.’ And Moses shook with fear and would not venture to look. “BUT THE LORD SAID TO HIM, ‘TAKE OFF THE SANDALS FROM YOUR FEET, FOR THE PLACE ON WHICH YOU ARE STANDING IS HOLY GROUND. ‘I HAVE CERTAINLY SEEN THE OPPRESSION OF MY PEOPLE IN EGYPT, AND HAVE HEARD THEIR GROANS, AND I HAVE COME DOWN TO DELIVER THEM; COME NOW, AND I WILL SEND YOU TO EGYPT.’

- God of Glory comes to him—reveals Himself in a new way.
- God appears in unquenchable fire—identifies Himself as the God of Israel—the God of Moses' ancestors.
- We have the overlap of heaven and earth here—location: wilderness. Sinai is the place where the Law will be given.
- Here is another type of Jesus: God intending to fulfill His promises by bringing deliverance through a chosen man.
- Moses is the one who has been prepared and equipped by God for this task.
- This is Holy Ground—more ancient than the Temple.

Acts 7:35-37

“This Moses whom they disowned, saying, ‘WHO MADE YOU A RULER AND A JUDGE?’ is the one whom God sent *to be* both a ruler and a deliverer with the help of the angel who appeared to him in the thorn bush. “This man led them out, performing wonders and signs in the land of Egypt and in the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years. “This is the Moses who said to the sons of Israel, ‘GOD SHALL RAISE UP FOR YOU A PROPHET LIKE ME FROM YOUR BRETHREN.’

- God sent Moses to be a ruler and judge...the people reject him and God's purposes.
- Miracles take place in three distinct places—land of Egypt, Red Sea, wilderness.
- Once more—we see Moses through the lens of God—as deliverer of Israel.

- Deliverance was not accomplished with human strength—but due to God's purposes.
- Moses promises that another Prophet will come after him. Jesus is that Prophet—and will be rejected as well.

Acts 7:38-40

“This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness together with the angel who was speaking to him on Mount Sinai, and *who was* with our fathers; and he received living oracles to pass on to you. “And our fathers were unwilling to be obedient to him, but repudiated him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt, SAYING TO AARON, ‘MAKE FOR US GODS WHO WILL GO BEFORE US; FOR THIS MOSES WHO LED US OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT—WE DO NOT KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM.’

- In the congregation in the wilderness—Jesus put on flesh and lived among us as well. This congregation is a type of the 'church' to come.
- With our fathers—Jesus came as Emmanuel.
- Moses entrusted with the Law—intended to be Living Word.
- Though Moses is revered by Israel—he wasn't received when he was sent.
- When God comes to fulfill His promises—His people turn away rather than toward Him.
- They turn to idolatry instead (Israel's primary sin)—Deut 4:28, II Kings 19:18, II Chron 32:19, Ps 115:3-8, Ps 135:15-18, Is 37:19, Is 44:10-20, Is 46:6-7, Jer 10:2-5.
- They turn from the offer of relationship—back to idolatry. They had been delivered for the purpose of worship.

Acts 7:41-43

“And at that time they made a calf and brought a sacrifice to the idol, and were rejoicing in the works of their hands.”But God turned away and delivered them up to serve the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets, ‘IT WAS NOT TO ME THAT YOU OFFERED VICTIMS AND SACRIFICES FORTY YEARS IN THE WILDERNESS, WAS IT, O HOUSE OF ISRAEL? ‘YOU ALSO TOOK ALONG THE TABERNACLE OF MOLOCH AND THE STAR OF THE GOD ROMPHA, THE IMAGES WHICH YOU MADE TO WORSHIP THEM. I ALSO WILL REMOVE YOU BEYOND BABYLON.’

- Made a calf—idolatry
- Rejoicing in the work of their hands—Israel was worshiping the Temple they made with their hands rather than the Tabernacle of God in their midst.
- Delivered them up to host of heaven: God gives them over
- At a pivotal point in the history of Israel—they turn from worship to idolatry...which will take them into a deeper bondage.
- Stephen is bringing a charge to Israel's spiritual leaders—that they have turned to idolatry as well.
- Amos 5:25-27—turning to idolatry brings about judgment.

Acts 7:44-47

“Our fathers had the tabernacle of testimony in the wilderness, just as He who spoke to Moses directed *him* to make it according to the pattern which he had seen. “And having received it in their turn, our fathers brought it in with Joshua upon dispossessing the nations whom God drove out before our fathers, until the time of David. “And *David* found favor in God’s sight, and asked that he might find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. “But it was Solomon who built a house for Him.

- Even though Israel rejected God—they clung to the temple.
- Moses saw the true tabernacle in heaven—making an exact depiction on earth.
- Israel began to worship the temple instead of the God Who fills it and used it to demonstrate Himself.

Acts 7:48-53

“However, the Most High does not dwell in *houses* made by *human* hands; as the prophet says:

**‘HEAVEN IS MY THRONE,
AND EARTH IS THE FOOTSTOOL OF MY FEET;
WHAT KIND OF HOUSE WILL YOU BUILD FOR ME?’ says the
Lord;
‘OR WHAT PLACE IS THERE FOR MY REPOSE?**

‘WAS IT NOT MY HAND WHICH MADE ALL THESE THINGS?’

“You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did. “Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become; you who received the law as ordained by angels, and *yet* did not keep it.”

- Though Jews had built temple—it was destined to pass away—as God begins ministry to gentiles (begins to take place in next chapter).
- God is not confined to one place—never has been.
- Stiff-necked: God called Israel this in Ex 32:9. They were physically circumcised—but not of heart (Jer 9:26). Deut 10:16: Circumcise the foreskin on your heart and be stiff-necked no longer.
- As Jewish leaders worship the temple while denying their God—they deny their own forefathers and what God spoke to them.
- Stephen's sermon turns from a recitation of Israel's anointed history to a sudden denunciation of his audience.
- He has traced their idolatry to Israel's initial days in the wilderness. Stephen is not the heretic—Israel is. Jewish rulers are following in the footsteps of their ancestors. Israel, not only rejected their Messiah—they are returning to the rebellion of their ancestors. While God is writing a story of salvation—Israel is performing in a story of rebellion.
- Stephen stands with Abraham, Moses, David and the prophets—while Israel identifies with Joseph's brothers, the Israelites who rejected Moses and built the calf in the wilderness.

Acts 7:54-60

Now when they heard this, they were cut to the quick, and they *began* gnashing their teeth at him. But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” But they cried out with a loud voice, and covered their ears, and they rushed upon him with one impulse. And when they had driven him out of the city, they *began* stoning *him*, and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul. And they went on stoning Stephen as he called upon *the Lord* and said, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!” And falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud

voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" And having said this, he fell asleep.

- Cut to the quick—cut to the heart/conviction—but they made the wrong response.
- Sanhedrin grows angry as the message narrows its' aim at them.
- Council is angry—gnashes their teeth (7 times Jesus describes hell as a place of gnashing teeth).
- Standing at the right hand of God—Heb 1:3—place of greatest prominence—He is seated there because His work is finished—He stands now to receive the first martyr.
- Stephen—a witness—someone who gives evidence. While standing in an earthly court—he is being observed by a heavenly court (Dan 7). Though a human court is condemning him to death—the heavenly court is finding in his favor.
- I Cor 2:8, Col 2:14-15
- Instead of heaven and earth coming together in the temple—they are overlapping in the life of His followers.
- Rushed upon him with one impulse—'hormao'—same word used to describe the pigs madly rushing into the sea.
- Fulfills John 16:2-3
- Saul is a witness to this sermon and martyrdom of Stephen. Saul picks up this wicked persecution by the Jews against the early church,
- Both Stephen and Saul were young men and leaders in the early church. They only met one time—as enemies.
- Stephen's behavior and the council are in stark contrast with one another.
- Chapter closes with Stephen uttering a prayer that is similar to Christ.

Acts Chapter Seven—Workbook

Key Words:

Harmonize:

Read Psalm 105

Dig:

- 1) How does Stephen address his audience?
- 2) When did God first appear to Abraham?
- 3) By starting his history with Abraham—what does Stephen try to establish?
- 4) By the size of the promise made to Abraham—what conclusions can we draw concerning Abraham?
- 5) What covenant did God make with Abraham?
- 6) Specific time periods are given in chapter seven—what are they?
- 7) What parts of this oral history of Israel are similar to something Jesus had to face?
- 8) Which verse sums up why Stephen rehearsed this history to his listeners?

Discuss:

- 1) What is the difference between supernatural wisdom and human wisdom? How are each gained?

- 2) In verse 10—God gives Joseph supernatural wisdom—in verse 22—Moses was taught all the wisdom of Egypt. What would this look like today? How do you recognize the difference?

- 3) What appeal does idolatry have to the human heart?

- 4) What was the difference between the tabernacle and the Temple? What were their similarities? What is their spiritual fulfillment?

Point of Prayer:

In verse 60, Stephen prays a prayer of forgiveness and release toward those who were persecuting him. Is there someone in your life that needs forgiveness extended to them?

Integrate:

What other scriptures come to mind as you read this chapter?

Application:

- 1) Has God ever promised you something you didn't want? (vs 5)

- 2) Have you ever experienced jealousy toward someone? Do you understand why? How did you deal with it?

- 3) Have you ever had a "burning bush" moment—where God's direction changes your entire life course?

- 4) What is the most miraculous event you have ever witnessed?

- 5) Has the Lord promised you something that required—or is requiring—a long wait?

- 6) In this history, we see some generational patterns passed down through Israel. Do you have any generational patterns that have passed down in your family?

- 7) How are you most likely to respond in a situation where there is conflict or accusations?