

Acts 7 – Stephen defends himself before the Sanhedrin

I. The high priest opens the door for Stephen to defend himself – 7:1

- A. “Are these things so?”
 - 1. What things?
 - a) Blasphemous words against Moses and God (6:11)
 - b) Blasphemous words against temple and Law (6:13)
 - c) “Jesus will destroy “this holy place”, and change the customs of Moses (6:14)

II. Stephen presents a sermon to the council – 7:2-53

- A. **Abraham – 7:2-8**
 - 1. By faith (belief + obedience) he journeyed to where God told him.
 - 2. God promised to give the land (Canaan) to Abraham’s descendants, even though, at the time, Abraham had no child
 - a) God foresaw the children of Abraham in bondage but, afterward, they would inherit the land
 - 3. Covenant of circumcision was given to Abraham as a sign of the promise
- B. **Patriarchs and Joseph – 7:9-16**
 - 1. The children of Jacob were envious of Joseph and sold him into slavery
 - a) God was with him and delivered him out of his troubles
 - 2. Joseph obtained favor in Pharaoh’s sight by God’s hand
 - a) By way of the interpreted dreams, Joseph enabled Egypt to endure the famine that was to come
 - 3. The whole of Jacob’s family eventually joined Joseph in Egypt, seventy-five people in all
 - a) Jacob died and was buried in Shechem
- C. **Moses – 7:17-43**
 - 1. The people of Joseph were dealt with harshly by a man that did not know Joseph
 - a) The Hebrews became slaves
 - 2. Moses was born, being in his own home for three months, afterward raised by Pharaoh’s daughter
 - a) Moses learned the wisdom of the Egyptians and was mighty in words and deeds
 - 3. When Moses was 40 years old, he visited his people. Seeing his brethren oppressed, he killed an Egyptian
 - a) When Moses became aware that his killing of the Egyptian did not go unnoticed, he fled to Midian and bore two sons.
 - (1) His own brethren had seen him kill the Egyptian, and rejected his help.
 - b) He supposed that his brethren would understand that he was to deliver them, but they did not; presumably, Moses had concluded that, due to his Hebrew nature and being raised in Pharaoh’s house, God had always intended to use him to deliver the Hebrews. Perhaps, in addition to being afraid, he lost some faith in this conclusion when his own people rejected him and he ran away to Midian up until God called him through the burning bush. This would further explain Moses’ hesitancy to go back to Egypt.
 - 4. When Moses was 80 years old, God came to Moses in the burning bush and chose him to deliver God’s people from bondage

- a) Moses, who was rejected by his people, was the one God sent to be a ruler and a deliverer
- b) Moses brought the people out of Egypt successfully with the signs of God as confirmation
- c) Moses prophesied of another Prophet, whom the people were to hear
- 5. The people again rejected Moses as he received the “living oracles” from God, and turned back to Egypt in their hearts
 - a) They made a golden calf and intended on worshipping it
 - b) God delivered them up for forty years in the wilderness for this sin
- D. **Moses to Joshua and beyond – 7:44-50**
 - 1. God delivered the pattern of the tabernacle to Moses who in turn gave it to the people.
 - 2. Joshua and the people brought the tabernacle with them into the land of Canaan
 - 3. David asked to find a dwelling for the God of Jacob, and Solomon built Him a house – the temple
 - a) However, God does not dwell in temples made by man
- E. **Stephen makes his point – 7:51-53**
 - 1. They were “stiff-necked” – refused to allow their minds to be turned and guided by God.
 - 2. They were uncircumcised in heart and ears – While being circumcised in the flesh, they did not obey the law from their heart, nor were they willing to listen when God tried to correct them.
 - a) They persecuted all of the prophets
 - b) They killed those who prophesied of the Messiah
 - c) Now the children of the fathers have betrayed and killed the very One of whom Moses prophesied
 - d) They had received the law “by the direction of angels” but have not kept it, including the prophecies concerning hearing the Messiah

III. The council reacts to Stephen’s sermon – 7:54-60

- A. Their reaction
 - 1. They were cut to the heart
 - a) They apparently were convicted, but rather than react the way many of the Jews on Pentecost did, the council refuses to accept
 - 2. They gnashed at him with their teeth – sign of intense anger
- B. Stephen’s “vision”
 - 1. He gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand
 - a) This is the only place in Scripture where Jesus is standing at the right hand of God – to our knowledge Stephen was the very first to die for Christ.
 - 2. Stephen shares his sight with the council
- C. The council kills Stephen
 - 1. They stopped their ears – no longer were willing to listen
 - 2. They threw Stephen out of the city and stoned him
 - 3. They laid their coats at the feet of Saul – the same man who would go on to persecute the church and later become the apostle Paul. (Acts 22:20)
- D. Stephen was prepared to die, asked pardon for those killing him

Questions for Acts 7:

1. (a) Why does Stephen begin with discussing Abraham and lead them through Solomon and the temple? (b) How does this connect with the specific accusations against him?
2. (a) Providing an alternative look at Acts 6:14 and assuming the Freedmen were not twisting Stephen's exact words (only their meaning, v.13), what might be the significance of the accusation that Jesus "will destroy" (future-tense) this "place"? (b) Is this accurate? (c) If so, in what year "will" this occur? (d) Did Jesus prophesy of this event and, if so, where in Scripture? (e) What additional insight might this provide in the context of Stephen's sermon? (i.e. if these were truly Stephen's exact words (and not just twisted from the original words of Jesus to accuse him), then what possible point is made within his sermon that speaks to this?)
3. What does verse 22 suggest about Moses' claim that he was not a good speaker?
4. (a) What does verse 25 suggest that we do not read in the actual OT account? (b) Do you feel the explanation provided in these notes is accurate (II.C.3.b)? (c) If not, how would you harmonize this Scripture with others?
5. Why does Stephen spend so much time on Moses specifically? Give at least one major reference that Stephen makes about Moses that applies to the accusations against him.
6. The temple was designed to be a more permanent representation of the tabernacle. It was designed to allow man (by way of the high priest) to commune with God. How had the Jews' perception of the temple's purpose changed by Stephen's time? What point about this does Stephen make by quoting Isaiah?
7. What does it mean to be "stiff-necked" and "uncircumcised in heart and ears"? Name at least one way this can apply to us today if we aren't careful.
8. Many doctrines, such as Calvinism, claim that the Holy Spirit is irresistible. What does Stephen say? How might this apply to teaching others who believe the Holy Spirit is irresistible?
9. What was the last straw for the council that led to Stephen's death? After Stephen's statements about the temple and the character of the council, why is this significant?
10. Why do you suppose Stephen saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God?