

Acts 7**Lesson 7
Stephen's Defense and Stoning****Outline****I. Stephen's Defense** (vv. 1-53)

(Denies the charge of speaking against Moses)

A. *A review of the nation of Israel* (vv. 1-50)

1. The call of Abraham and the promise (vv. 1-8)
2. Joseph and the patriarchs in Egypt (vv. 9-16)
3. Moses: God's deliverer (vv. 17-43)
 - a. Delivered the children of Israel out of Egypt (vv. 17-36)
 - b. Promised that God would raise up another like himself (v. 37)
 - c. Was resisted by Israel (vv. 38-43)
4. The tabernacle and the temple (vv. 44-50)

B. *You resist God like your fathers* (vv. 51-53)

1. Stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears (v. 51a)
2. Your fathers persecuted the prophets who foretold of Christ (vv. 51b-52a)
3. You betrayed and murdered Christ (v. 52b)
4. You have not kept the law (v. 53)

II. Stephen's Stoning (vv. 54-60)

- A. *The Jews were cut to the heart and gnashed at him* (v. 54)
- B. *Stephen saw Jesus* (vv. 55-56)
- C. *The Jews cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears and ran at him* (v. 57)
- D. *The Jews stoned Stephen* (vv. 58-60a)
- E. *Stephen died* (v. 60b)

Key Verse That Summarizes the Chapter**Acts 7:51**

You stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you.

This chapter is Stephen's answer to the charges being made against him in chapter 6. He is accused of speaking against Moses and God (6:11), and against the holy place and the law (vv. 13-14). When the high priest asked, "Are these things so?" (v. 1), Stephen is afforded the opportunity to set the record straight.

Stephen's Defense (vv. 1-53)

A review of the nation of Israel (vv. 1-50). This section is the bulk of the chapter and Stephen's speech. There are four major thoughts in his review of the history of Israel.

1. **The call of Abraham and the promise** (vv. 1-8). God called Abraham to leave the land of the Chaldeans to go to a land He would show him (vv. 2-4).¹ Even before Abraham had children, God promised to give the land to Abraham's descendants (v. 5). God's promise to Abraham was threefold: a land promise, a nation promise (make a great nation of his family), and a seed promise (to bless all families of the earth through his seed) (Gen. 12:1-3).

God told Abraham that his descendants would be in bondage in a foreign land (Egypt) for 400² years, then he would deliver them and bring them to the land He promised them (vv. 6-7; Gen. 15:13-14).

God gave Abraham and his descendants the covenant of circumcision that marked this nation as a distinct and separate people (v. 8; Gen. 17). In these verses (1-8) we see God *building* a nation.

2. **Joseph and the patriarchs in Egypt** (vv. 9-16). Joseph's brothers sold him to some Ishmaelite traders who then sold him to Potiphar in Egypt (v. 9a; Gen. 37:25-28; 39:1). However, God was with Joseph so he rose in power and prominence in Egypt (vv. 9b-10). Thus, when a famine arose in Canaan, Jacob sent his sons to buy grain in Egypt (v. 11). This gave opportunity for Joseph to identify himself to his brothers and send for his father and relatives (75 in number)³ to come to Egypt (vv. 12-16). In these verses (9-16) we see God *preserving* a nation.

3. **Moses: God's deliverer** (vv. 17-43). In time the children of Israel grew large in number⁴ and another Pharaoh came to the throne and oppressed the people of God (vv. 17-19). In the midst of the effort to slow their growth, by killing their babies, Moses was born and spared by Pharaoh's own daughter (vv. 20-22). Moses spent 40 years in Egypt. Moses visited the children of Israel during which time he killed an Egyptian and thus fled to Midian for 40 years (vv. 23-29). God called Moses from a burning bush (Exo. 3) to be the deliverer, to lead his people out of Egypt and through the wilderness for 40 years

1 "Stephen's assertion that God appeared to Abraham *before* he left Mesopotamia and traveled to Haran sheds additional light on the Genesis account. According to Genesis 11:31 – 12:4, Abraham's father (Terah) took Abraham (then called Abram), Abram's wife Sarai, and Abram's nephew Lot, and left the city of Ur, which was in Mesopotamia...The account in Genesis does not make it clear that God appeared to Abram *before* they traveled to Haran, but Stephen's account does. From Stephen's account we learn that God's appearance to Abram before they traveled to Haran was the reason they left their home in Ur, a fact that accords with Genesis 15:7 and Nehemiah 9:7" (Johnny Stringer, *Acts, Truth Commentaries*, 127).

2 It was actually 430 years (Exo. 12:40-41; Gal. 3:17). The number here is rounded.

3 Genesis 46:27 says the number was 70. Stephen was quoting the Septuagint translation. Had this been a serious blunder Stephen's critics listening to him surely would have used that against him.

4 The number was over 600,000 men when they came out of Egypt (Num. 1:46).

(vv. 30-36).⁵ Moses, the deliverer God had chosen, was rejected by his own people. This is parallel to what the Jews did to Jesus. Stephen was leading up to stating that the Jews had rejected God's leader, Christ. In these verses 17-36, God was *delivering* a nation.

This same Moses promised that God would raise up a prophet like him (v. 37; Deut. 18:15-18). This was a prophecy of Christ. Stephen was pointing out that by preaching Christ he was not speaking against Moses, even though that was the charge.

Stephen stated that Moses was the one through whom God gave the law (v.38). Thus, when Israel disobeyed, they were rejecting Moses (v. 39). They turned to idolatry even while Moses was on the mount (vv. 40-41). They went so far into idolatry that God gave them up and allowed Babylon to take them into captivity (vv. 42-43; Amos 5:25-27). His audience couldn't help but see the parallel he was drawing. Those who had called him into question were just like the Israel of old who had rejected Moses. It was them, not Stephen, who rejected Moses.

4. The tabernacle and the temple (vv. 44-50). The tabernacle was built as God had instructed Moses. It was used through the wilderness and brought by Joshua into the land of Canaan (vv. 44-45). "It was called a tabernacle of 'witness,' or of 'testimony,' because it was the visible witness or proof of God's presence with them; the evidence that He to whom it was devoted was their protector and guide."⁶ Thus, there was no excuse for turning to idolatry.

David asked to build a more permanent place of worship, the temple, which Solomon built (vv. 46-47). Stephen added that God does not dwell in temples made with hands (v.48).⁷ As evidence he quoted from Isaiah 66:1-2. Since it was not God's literal dwelling place, it was possible that it could be destroyed as Stephen had quoted from Jesus (Acts 6:14). The temple was just as temporary as the tabernacle.

You resist God like your fathers (vv. 51-53). Stephen now turned the charge back on his accusers. They were the ones against God and against Moses. They were like those who rejected Moses. He charged them with being stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart, with ears always resisting the Holy Spirit (v. 51). Just as the prophets who foretold of the Christ were opposed and killed, they had killed the very Christ that was prophesied (vv. 52-53). They had not kept the law they received just like those who opposed Moses (v. 53; cf. v. 39).

Stephen's Stoning (vv. 54-60)

The Jews were cut to the heart and gnashed at him (v. 54). When they heard what Stephen said, they were "enraged" (RSV) and "furious" (NIV) and gnashed their teeth at him.

5 The life of Moses is divided into three periods of 40 years each. He was in Egypt 40 years (v.23). He was in Midian 40 years (v. 30). He was in the wilderness 40 years (v. 36).

6 Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes*, (Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1997 by Biblesoft).

7 Solomon had made this point when the temple was dedicated (1 Kings 8:27).

Stephen saw Jesus (vv. 55-56). Stephen was allowed to see a vision of Christ at the right hand of God.⁸ The very one they had crucified was now ruling at the right hand of God.

The Jews cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears and ran at him (v. 57). They covered their ears and ran upon him and seized him.

The Jews stoned Stephen (vv. 58-60a). They took him out of the city to stone him. They laid their coats at the feet of a young man name Saul.⁹ As Stephen was crying out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit," they cast stones at him.

Stephen died (v. 60b). Stephen prayed that those who stoned him may be forgiven¹⁰. He then died, becoming the first martyr for the cause of Christ.

Questions

1. What were the charges made against Stephen which he answered? _____

2. What was Stephen's point about Abraham (vv. 1-8)? How did it relate to his message of his defense? _____

3. What was Stephen's point about Joseph and the patriarchs in Egypt (vv. 9-16)? How did it relate to his message of his defense? _____

4. What was Stephen's point about Moses as God's deliverer (vv. 17-43)? How did it relate to his message of his defense? _____

8 The reference to being full of the Holy Spirit (v. 55) may suggest that it was by the power of the Spirit that he was able to see the vision of Christ.

9 This is our introduction to the man who is later converted (Acts 9; 22; 26) and becomes the great apostle Paul.

10 This was not a request that they be forgiven without repenting and obeying the Lord. Compare the Lord's statement in Luke 23:34.

5. What was Stephen's point about the tabernacle and temple (vv. 44-50)? How does it relate to his message of his defense? _____

6. How did Stephen show that he was not speaking against Moses? _____

7. How did Stephen show that he was not speaking against the temple? _____

8. What was Stephen's point in verses 51-53? _____

9. What is the point being made by stating that God does not dwell in temples made with hands? _____

10. What was the reaction to Stephen's speech? _____

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