

THE BOOK OF ACTS

CHAPTER 7

THE CHALLENGE OF CHAPTER SEVEN

Regardless of the circumstances we might face, we must always keep our eyes fixed on God's Word. The Word will give us boldness in the face of religion, false accusations, and even death.

The last enemy to be destroyed will be death (1 Corinthians 15:26). But as believers, we should not fear death. First Corinthians 15:55 says, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" Just as Stephen's eyes are open to the spirit realm, and Jesus awaiting him when facing death, the same is true for every child of God. We must not fear death, but live our lives spiritually proclaiming God's Word, even when confronted with severe opposition.

STEPHEN TESTIFIES (1-50)

in response to Paul's accusations, Stephen preaches a sermon reminding them of those who preceded them. Through recounting the history of Israel and the patriarchs, the Holy Spirit (through Stephen) is revealing to the council that God cannot be confined to a temple made with the hands of.

ABRAHAM

Act 7:1 Then said the high priest, Are these things so?

"These things" is a reference to 6:13-14. In other words, the high priest is asking Stephen, "Are you guilty?" But beginning in verse 2, Stephen will refer to Jesus. Stephen will begin with the call of Abraham and recount the history of Israel up until the time of Moses. He will also show how the ritual and ceremony of the temple is changed by Jesus' fulfillment of the law.

A SUPERNATURAL RACE

Act 7:2 And he said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran,

"The God of glory" is the Lord Jesus Christ. Glory is the visible image of God, the manifested presence of deity. Mesopotamia is Ur of the Chaldees (Genesis 12:1-9). Jesus appeared to Abraham when he was a sinner, a Gentile. He became a Jew when you believed and thus the father of the Jewish nation (Genesis 15:6).

The Jews were the last race to be formed on the earth. All other races were formed from the sons of Noah and were natural races (Genesis 10). Then God dispersed these races (Genesis 11) around the world and confuse their languages.

One race that came from Noah was the Chaldeans, who were sons of Shem. They settled in Mesopotamia. God called out one man from this race – Abram -- and when he believed in the Lord, God also changed his race. The Jews are a supernatural race. Their origin is not based upon natural seed, but upon faith.

This Jewish race is a type of Jesus, who was virgin born. It is also a type of the church, which is based on spiritual birth, regeneration. The story of Abraham leaving Ur of the Chaldees and traveling to Haran is told in Genesis 11:31.

ABRAHAM INSTRUCTED TO LEAVE UR

Act 7:3 And said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall shew thee.

The country Abraham was to leave was Ur and the kindred were his father and nephew, Lot. Abraham obeyed the first command, but not the second. He ran into continual trouble until he separated from his father (unbelievers) and Lot (carnal believers).

Act 7:4 Then came he out of the land of the Chaldaeans, and dwelt in Charran: and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell.

Abraham was stopped in Haran because he would not fully obey God and separate from relatives. He was in Haran 13 years until his father died (Genesis 11: 31-12:5). Abraham became wealthy in Haran, yet he was miserable.

GOD'S PROMISE TO ABRAHAM

Act 7:5 And he gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet he **promised** that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child.

Abraham was given God's promises while he was in Ur of the Chaldees, and he left for the land promised him in faith. But because of his unbelief, he failed to claim any promise in the land except his son Isaac. When Abraham arrived in Canaan, there was a famine. Rather than standing in faith, he traveled to Egypt.

Eventually, Abraham returned to Canaan, but he brought Egypt with him when he returned with Hagar. For nearly twenty-five years Abraham tried everything in the natural to fulfill the

promise God had given him. Haran, Lot, Eliazar, Egypt, Hagar, and Ishmael all had to be dealt with before Abraham would see the fulfillment of any of God's promises to him. After all of these leaning props fell out from under him, Abraham finally leaned on the Word (Romans 4:20-21). God promised it, God would perform it.

7:5 promised, *epangelo* (ep-ang-el-bow); To engage, to profess, to assert something concerning oneself, to announce what one is about to do (an intention), to render a service, to make a commitment, to pledge to do something. Here *epangelo* is God's assurance to Abraham that the land He showed him was for him and his descendents.

Act 7:6 And God spake on this wise, That his seed should sojourn in a strange land; and that they should bring them into bondage, and entreat them evil four hundred years.

Abraham finally became strong and trusted God even to the point of offering Isaac. He knew God would raise him from the dead (Genesis 22). Under Isaac, the Israelites continued downhill until they went into captivity under Joseph. Seventy-five people went into captivity, 400 years later, 2 million came out.

Act 7:7 And the nation to whom they shall be in bondage will I judge, said God: and after that shall they come forth, and serve me in this place.

THE COVENANT OF CIRCUMCISION

Act 7:8 And he gave him the covenant of circumcision: and so Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs.

Circumcision was instituted to show the coming new covenant -- the new birth. It was a continual reminder of Israel's spiritual foundation, a nation which began supernaturally after all other races and nations. Circumcision meant new beginnings. Children were circumcised on the eighth day. The number eight meant nothing to the Jews. They would have related more to the number seven (Sabbath, Jubilee, etc.). Circumcision was also a continual reminder of the Abrahamic covenant, which was established on faith.

Having the father or doctor perform the circumcision was a reminder of the grace of God. As the child grew, his circumcision was a sign of something that occurred while he was completely dependent. Finally, circumcision was a reminder of the coming Messiah.

Today, we do not worship on the seventh day or even the first day. We worship on the eighth day. We are living in the new covenant, the day of new beginnings (2 Corinthians 5:17).

JOSEPH

SOLD INTO SLAVERY

Act 7:9 And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him,

The brothers who sold Joseph into slavery were a type of the Jews who crucified Jesus. The patriarchs sold Joseph to the Gentiles to get rid of him and knowingly sold themselves into slavery for the next four hundred years. God was with Joseph and he became the governor over the Egyptians, the Gentiles. The Jews (especially Judas) “sold” Jesus to the Romans, yet he went on to become the head of the church. Meanwhile, the Jews had gone into dispersion and will remain in that condition until Jesus returns.

GOVERNOR OF EGYPT

Act 7:10 And delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favour and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house.

Just as Joseph was raised from prison, Jesus was raised from the dead and hell. Just as God favored Joseph, God favored Jesus, made Him the head of the church, and gave Him dominion in heaven and earth.

FAMINE IN THE LAND

Act 7:11 Now there came a dearth over all the land of Egypt and Chanaan, and great affliction: and our fathers found no sustenance.

Now there came a dearth (famine and drought) over all the land of Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction (hunger and death): and our fathers (Israel) found no sustenance.

Because of their sins, these brothers were the cause of the trials and tribulations that confronted their own family and nation. God spared Egypt because of Joseph’s presence and gave that nation supernatural guidance to prepare and overcome the family.

Act 7:12 But when Jacob heard that there was corn in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first.

Act 7:13 And at the second time Joseph was made known to his brethren; and Joseph's kindred was made known unto Pharaoh.

There is coming a time in which Jesus, who was sold and now became the ruler of heaven and earth, will receive the Jewish nation to Himself, and they will again be in God’s favor.

Act 7:14 Then sent Joseph, and called his father Jacob to him, and all his kindred, threescore and fifteen souls.

Included in this number are Jacob's sons, their wives, children, and grandchildren. They are the ones who will settle in Egypt and go into slavery. They will also come out of captivity four hundred years later, numbering over 2 million.

DEATH OF JACOB

Act 7:15 So Jacob went down into Egypt, and died, he, and our fathers,

Act 7:16 And were carried over into Sychem, and laid in the sepulchre that Abraham bought for a sum of money of the sons of Emmor the father of Sychem.

Jacob and his sons were buried in Shechem when they first died, but Joseph was not. Joseph's bones remained unburied for four hundred years. They were eventually carried by the children of Israel to Shechem and buried there (Genesis 50: 22-26; Joshua 24:32; Hebrews 11:22).

EVIL AGAINST ISRAEL

Act 7:17 But when the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt,

Act 7:18 Till another king arose, which knew not Joseph.

But when the time of the promise drew nigh (400 years later), which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt, till another king arose, which knew not Joseph. This is found in Exodus 1:8-22.

Act 7:19 The same dealt subtilly with our kindred, and evil entreated our fathers, so that they cast out their young children, to the end they might not live.

The same dealt subtly with (schemed against) our kindred, and evil entreated our fathers, so that they cast out their young children, to the end they might not live.

The Pharaoh was so enraged that these people multiplied even under hardship and slavery, he made a decree to kill all the young male children to hold down the population.

MOSES

BIRTH

Act 7:20 In which time Moses was born, and was exceeding fair, and nourished up in his father's house three months:

Moses was given an Egyptian name. He was found by the daughter of the Pharaoh Tutmos. She named him after her father, calling him Moses, which means “out of the water” (Exodus 2:5-10). His true mother nursed him for three months, weaned him and gave him to Pharaoh’s house (Hebrews 11:23).

Act 7:21 And when he was cast out, Pharaoh's daughter took him up, and nourished him for her own son.

Act 7:22 And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds.

Moses became a great speaker and worker. When Moses told God he could not speak, it was not true (Exodus 4:10). God made Aaron his mouthpiece and during the fifth plague, Moses pushed Aaron aside and spoke for himself from that time forward.

MOSES ATTEMPTS TO DELIVER

Act 7:23 And when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel.

God spoke to Moses at the same time he was offered the Egyptian Empire and Moses chose to go with his own people, Israel (Hebrews 11:24-27).

Act 7:24 And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian:

Moses was naturally a very strong man. With one blow, he killed the Egyptian man. Moses was also brilliant and a great speaker. He had many reasons in the natural to trust in his own ability. Pride was one of the areas God had to rid Moses of during his forty years on the backside of the wilderness.

Act 7:25 For he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not.

God spoke to his heart, and Moses knew he was the deliverer of Israel. Moses assumed because he knew he was the deliverer, the whole nation of Israel would also recognize he was their deliverer. But they did not. They believed Moses sided with the Egyptians.

Act 7:26 And the next day he shewed himself unto them as they strove, and would have set them at one again, saying, Sirs, ye are brethren; why do ye wrong one to another?

After the Egyptians taskmaster had gone, the Jews began to find among themselves.

Act 7:27 But he that did his neighbour wrong thrust him away, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us?

The children of Israel did not understand that Moses was their deliverer. This was eye-opening for Moses. Moses needed preparation. He was called, but not separated (Romans 1:1). He needed to understand his calling could not be revealed by force. Fists and human strength only confused the issue (Titus 1:7). Let God reveal you in His time: "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit . . ." (Zechariah 4:6).

Act 7:28 Wilt thou kill me, as thou diddest the Egyptian yesterday?

The people had witnessed the outward act of Moses but did not know his heart or the call of God on his life.

MOSES FLEES EGYPT

Act 7:29 Then fled Moses at this saying, and was a stranger in the land of Madian, where he begat two sons.

Moses saw his mistake and fled to the desert. He was in fear for his life. Moses needed to go to a place where he would learn to depend on God's Spirit alone. In the desert, Moses could not depend on his own strength. Fists do not solve problems with sheep. God was preparing Moses for two wilderness experiences. The first would be with sheep, the next with people (human sheep).

THE BURNING BUSH

Act 7:30 And when forty years were expired, there appeared to him in the wilderness of mount Sina an angel of the Lord in a flame of fire in a bush.

The time for Moses has arrived, but now he will not stand in his own strength; he was standing in the power of God.

Act 7:31 When Moses saw it, he wondered at the sight: and as he drew near to behold it, the voice of the Lord came unto him,

Moses saw a bush birthing, but it was not being consumed. This is a type of the anointing God would saturate Moses with, but Moses would not be consumed. God places His anointing on people, but their personality and personal strengths and weaknesses remain the same.

Act 7:32 Saying, I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Then Moses trembled, and durst not behold.

Saying, I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Then Moses trembled and durst not behold (did not want to look).

Act 7:33 Then said the Lord to him, Put off thy shoes from thy feet: for the place where thou standest is **holy** ground.

The ground was holy. This is very important to the message Stephen is giving. The religious Jews hearing this sermon preached that the temple is holy. The place where Moses stood was holy, but it was in Arabia, the land of cursing. Moses was not in Zion. Stephen is revealing that a holy place exists anywhere God is.

7:33 holy, *hagios* (hag-ee-oss); Compare “Hagiographa” and “hagiography.” Sacred, pure, blameless, consecrated, separated, properly revered, worthy of veneration, Godlikeness, God’s innermost nature, set apart for God, reserved for God and His service. Since nothing that is polluted could be *hagios*, purity becomes a big part of *hagios*. A holy God calls for a holy people.

MOSES SENT TO DELIVER

Act 7:34 I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people which is in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send thee into Egypt.

Now is the time of Moses’ separation. God, not Moses and his fists, is going to deliver the people.

Act 7:35 This Moses whom they refused, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge? the same did God send to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the angel which appeared to him in the bush.

Forty years earlier, the Jews had asked Moses, “Who made you ruler?” Now he was returning in God’s power to answer that question.

Act 7:36 He brought them out, after that he had shewed wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red sea, and in the wilderness forty years.

The “He” who brought them out was the Lord Jesus Christ.

Act 7:37 This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear.

This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear (Deuteronomy 18: 15, 18).

Act 7:38 This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us:

This is he (Moses), that was in the church (tabernacle) in the wilderness and the angel which spake to him in the Mount Sinai, and with our fathers: who received the lively (living) oracles (law) to give unto us:

ISRAEL MURMURS

Act 7:39 To whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt,

Act 7:40 Saying unto Aaron, Make us gods to go before us: for as for this Moses, which brought us out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him.

When Moses went to the mountain to receive the law, the people rejected him and turned to idols. Aaron was weak, and the people knew this. They were afraid of Moses, but knew they could sway Aaron. They waited until Moses was gone and began to work on Aaron.

These religious men interrogating Stephen have accused him of rejecting Moses, yet they are just as Israel was in the wilderness. They are accepting the law but rejecting Moses's prophecy of a great prophet who would come. This prophet (Jesus) has always been with Israel and Moses.

THE GOLDEN CALF

Act 7:41 And they made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifice unto the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands.

The golden calf made in "those days" was no more of an idol than the law was on the day Stephen stands before the religious leaders. They too, have turned the laws and sacrifices of God into idols and rejoice in their own works.

Act 7:42 Then God turned, and gave them up to worship the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets, O ye house of Israel, have ye offered to me slain beasts and sacrifices by the space of forty years in the wilderness?

The "host of heaven" were the Egyptian gods of the stars. The quote here is from Amos 5:25. The Israelites had disobeyed the commands of God by worshiping idols and sacrificing to heathen gods instead of the true God.

Act 7:43 Yea, ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, figures which ye made to worship them: and I will carry you away beyond Babylon.

The God of the Canaanites (Amorites) was an ox-headed statue that had two hoofs extended in front of his body. Children were placed on these hoofs, a fire was lit underneath, and the children were burned to death. Because the dying children would scream, the worshipers would loudly beat drums to drown out the screams.

The Hebrew word for drums is *toph*. One word for hell is *tophet*, which emphasizes the screams accompanying the flames.

The star of Remphan was Saturn. The Israelites followed the idolatry of the Canaanites and, as a result, eventually went into captivity in Babylon for seventy years.

Act 7:44 Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as he had appointed, speaking unto Moses, that he should make it according to the fashion that he had seen.

The purpose of the tabernacle, its worship, sacrifices, furniture, and law was to witness and teach about Jesus.

JOSHUA, DAVID, SOLOMON

Act 7:45 Which also our fathers that came after brought in with Jesus into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drove out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David;

Act 7:46 Who found favour before God, and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob.

Moses brought the law to Israel, but David discovered grace. David knew more about God's grace than any Old Testament writer. David's reign will be compared to the grace of God in our own dispensation (Acts 15:16). David also experienced more of God's grace and forgiveness than anyone else in the Old Testament. He was called a man after God's own heart and wrote about it much in the Psalms.

Act 7:47 But Solomon built him an house.

In acts 15:16, David's reign will be compared to the church but his tabernacle was a tent in Zion. It was Solomon who was chosen by God to build the temple. Solomon's reign is a type of the millennial reign of the Lord Jesus, which is to come. During David's reign, there was much war, and David was called a man of war. During Solomon's reign there was little war and a great span of peace. This is a type of the millennium.

Stephen presents three names: Moses, David, and Solomon. Each of these men stand the three time periods of Israel's history following their deliverance from Egypt: the law, the church age, and the millennium.

Act 7:48 Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet,

This word comes from 2 Chronicles 2:6. Stephen now turns the table on his accusers and becomes their judge. They believe God lives in their temple, but they are as apostate as their ancestors.

Act 7:49 Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest?

This is a quote from Isaiah 66: 1-2. God is deity, therefore He is omnipresent. He can be in heaven and, at the same time, make the earth His footstool.

Act 7:50 Hath not my hand made all these things?

Only apostate people try to put God in a temple built by man. God created everything in heaven and earth. He cannot be contained.

STEPHEN ACCUSES THE COUNCIL (51-53)

Upon the conclusion of his sermon, Stephen accuses the council of being hardened against God and His Word even as their fathers had been. He boldly charges them guilty of killing the Messiah and not keeping the law because of their rejection of Him.

Act 7:51 Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye.

Stephen now concludes his sermon. He accuses them of being hardened against God and His Word. They are uncircumcised in heart because they have not received Jesus, the Messiah, as their Savior. They have purposely shut off their hearts by purposely shutting their ears to the gospel. He is now accusing them of being sinful and rejecting God as their fathers had before them. These religious leaders take pride in not being as bad as the Old Testament fathers had been, yet they actually show themselves to be worse.

Act 7:52 Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers:

Stephen is telling them the same thing they heard from Jesus Himself (Matthew 21:28-46; 22:1-13; 23:29-32). Just as the fathers persecuted the prophets who foretold of the coming of Jesus, they have now killed the Holy One prophesied of. These Jewish leaders rid themselves of

problems by killing them. They killed the prophets and they killed Jesus. Now they will repeat the pattern by killing Stephen.

Act 7:53 Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.

In addition to the law, many of the books of the major and minor prophets were given by angels (Galatians 3:19). The purpose of the law was to teach of Jesus Christ. By rejecting, persecuting, and killing Jesus, they have not kept the law.

THE SANHEDRIN'S REACTION (54-60)

The council is so convicted, they determine to stone Stephen. Stephen is dragged outside the city and stoned. While being stoned, he intercedes for all those responsible for his death.

CUT TO THE HEART

Verses 54 through 56 give the reaction of the Sanhedrin to Stephen's message.

Act 7:54 When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth.

The council now understands the meaning behind Stephen's message, and become convicted in their hearts.

DYING GRACE

Act 7:55 But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God,

Stephen was under a strong anointing to preach; now he has a strong anointing to face death. Stephen has been given dying grace and is able to see both the natural and spiritual world simultaneously. The glory that took Jesus into heaven now surrounds Stephen.

Act 7:56 And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.

Stephen refers to the anointing for death as the "opening of heaven." Jesus, who is usually seated in heaven, stands up to greet one of His saints who is about to arrive in heaven. Throughout the Word, saints are met with departed relatives, angels, and the Lord Jesus Himself. We will also be greeted by the same regal welcome at the rapture of the church (1 Thessalonians 4: 16-17).

RELIGION'S REACTION TO THE TRUTH

Act 7:57 Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord,

The religious leaders fight the conviction they feel by killing Stephen in an attempt to stop his message. Since they are in a courtroom (6:15) and not in the streets surrounded by multitudes of people, they feel safe in attacking Stephen and dragging him outside to be stoned.

These religious leaders are now out of control. They are acting like wild animals. They scream in an attempt to drown out Stephen's voice. They also cover their ears to block themselves from hearing Stephen sermon any longer. These men represent the highest court in the land, yet they are acting like maniacs. This is the reaction of religion when it is cornered.

STEPHEN'S STONING

Act 7:58 And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul.

Since the members of the religious council are sticklers about obeying the law, they stone Stephen outside the city. The witnesses of the stoning are the false witnesses who had been bribed by the court into giving a false testimony against Stephen (6:11-14).

Act 7:59 And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

The council does not stone Stephen; they stand by and watch the false witnesses stone him. While Stephen is being stoned, he calls out for the Lord to receive his spirit.

Act 7:60 And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

Stephen, like Jesus on the cross, is interceding for the people who are stoning him. Those watching are just as guilty as those who stoned Stephen. Stephen's prayer, like that of Jesus on the cross, will be answered after his death. Jesus asked for those who crucified Him to be forgiven. Later, the Roman guard received salvation. Stephen's prayer results in the salvation of Saul of Tarsus who stands by, holding the coats of those who do the stoning. This prayer will be answered in chapter 9.