

To The Ends Of The Earth

LESSON 6: PREACHING IN JERUSALEM, PART 4 (ACTS 6:8-7:36)

The church had been growing in Jerusalem as the gospel spread. The Jewish leaders were not pleased with this and threatened the apostles. Yet, the gospel continued spreading. This was aided through the work of the seven (Acts 6:1-7), which included a man named Stephen.

STEPHEN BROUGHT BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN (ACTS 6:8-15)

6:8-15. Stephen was full of grace (favor from God) and power, and was performing great wonders and signs among the people (having been given such miraculous abilities, Acts 8:14-19). Opposition to Stephen arose from Jews in various Jerusalem synagogues (as people would often congregate with those of similar backgrounds). These argued with Stephen. Yet, they could not stand against the wisdom and spirit (likely the Holy Spirit) he was speaking by (as it was truth). Rather than conform to the truth, they secretly persuaded some to say they had heard Stephen speak blasphemous words against Moses and God (punishable by death under Jewish law, Leviticus 24:16; similar to what had been done with Jesus, Matthew 26:59-65). They stirred up the Jewish people and leadership against him so that he was seized and taken before the Sanhedrin. The false witnesses continued accusing Stephen of blaspheming the temple and the law, claiming he said Jesus would destroy the temple and change the customs Moses handed down. Though Jesus taught some things that may give these impressions, these were false characterizations and misrepresentations of the truth. Then, all who sat in the Sanhedrin looked at him closely and saw his face as that of an angel.

FROM ABRAHAM TO MOSES (ACTS 7:1-22)

7:1-8. The high priest asked Stephen whether these accusations were true. Steven replied by giving a speech that covered many points of Jewish history, proving Jesus is the fulfillment of what happened in the past and leading to a powerful conclusion. He began by pointing to the covenant God made with Abraham. God called Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia (Ur of the Chaldeans) to leave his homeland and relatives and go to a land God promised (Genesis 11:31-12:3; 15:7; Nehemiah 9:7). Abraham left and settled in Haran until his father died. Then,

God had him move to the Canaan land, where the Jews were when Stephen lived (Genesis 12:4-7). Abraham lived a nomadic life without being given any land there, but was given a promise for the land to his descendants, even though he was childless at the time. God told Abraham his descendants would be strangers and enslaved in a foreign country for 400 years (Egypt). After this, God would judge the nation that enslaved them and bring Abraham's descendants to worship God in the land He promised to give Abraham (Genesis 15:13-14). God then gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision (Genesis 17:9-14). Later, Abraham became Isaac's father and circumcised him on the eighth day (Genesis 21:1-5), who then fathered Jacob, who fathered the twelve patriarchs of Israel (Genesis 49).

7:9-16. Stephen then described how the descendants of Abraham arrived in Egypt. Joseph's brothers (the patriarchs, sons of Jacob) became jealous and sold Joseph into slavery, which took him to Egypt (Genesis 37). But God was with him, and he prospered in what he did. He eventually found favor in Pharaoh's sight (king of Egypt), resulting in Joseph being appointed as second-in-command in Egypt (Genesis 39-41) and being over his household. When a famine caused suffering throughout Egypt and Canaan, Jacob sent his sons to Egypt for food for a first time (Genesis 42). On a second trip, Joseph revealed himself to his brothers and told Pharaoh about his family (Genesis 43-45). Jacob and all the family were invited to Egypt (where they all died, though the sons were buried in Shechem, Genesis 45-50). Therefore, Joseph was rejected but was used to save his family.

7:17-22. Abraham's descendants multiplied in Egypt during the time God was waiting to keep His promise (verses 6-7). Meanwhile, a new king came to power in Egypt who did not know Joseph and appreciate why Jacob's family was in Egypt (Exodus 1:6-8). He saw them as a threat, mistreated and enslaved them (Exodus 1:9-14), even killing their children (Exodus 1:15-22). Moses was born at this time, was beautiful in God's sight, cared for over three months in his father's home, and then put outside to be hidden (Exodus 2:1-4). He was then found and adopted by the king's daughter, educated as an Egyptian, and was powerful in speech and action (Exodus 2:5-10).

FROM EGYPT TO THE WILDERNESS (ACTS 7:23-36)

7:23-29. When Moses was 40 years old, he visited his own people (the descendants of Abraham/Hebrews). Despite being raised as an Egyptian, Moses refused to

be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter when he grew up and chose to suffer with the people of God (Hebrews 11:23-26). When Moses saw the oppression of the Hebrews and saw one of the Hebrew people being beaten by an Egyptian, he rescued and avenged him by killing the Egyptian (Exodus 2:11-12). He assumed the Hebrew people (who had the promise of God's deliverance, Acts 7:6-7) would recognize God was providing deliverance through him. But they did not understand and rejected this opportunity. The next day, Moses saw two Hebrews fighting each other and Moses tried to stop them. Yet, they turned on Moses and rejected his efforts and authority, asking if he was going to kill them like he had the Egyptian (Exodus 2:13-14). Moses then fled to the land of Midian, where he fathered two sons (Pharaoh also tried to kill him, Exodus 2:15).

7:30-36. After 40 years had passed with Moses in Midian, the angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in the flame of a burning bush (Exodus 3:1-2). Moses was amazed at the sight of the bush that was burning but not being consumed (Exodus 3:3). As he came near to look at it, he heard the voice of God, identifying Himself as the God of his ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exodus 3:4-6). Moses was afraid and did not dare to look. Then, God called Moses to take off his sandals because he was standing on holy ground (set apart because it was in the presence of God, Exodus 3:5). God had seen the oppression of the Hebrew people in Egyptian slavery and heard their groaning and cries (Exodus 3:7). This was the time God had come down to set them free from Egypt and bring them to the land God promised to give Abraham. God would accomplish this by sending Moses to Egypt (Exodus 3:8-10). At this point, Stephen reminded his audience that this was the same Moses the ancestors had previously rejected. He was the one who was chosen and sent by God, and who led them out of Egypt. He performed wonders and signs in Egypt (including the ten plagues, Exodus 4-12), in parting the Red Sea so they could cross on dry ground (Exodus 14), and in the wilderness for 40 years afterwards.

CONCLUSION

Stephen was providing his defense before the Sanhedrin by discussing some significant points about Jewish history. Up to this point in his sermon, he has made some points drawn from Abraham through the deliverance from Egypt. However, his big conclusion was still to come.

DISCIPLESHIP QUESTIONS

How did the Jewish people in the synagogues respond to Stephen's preaching?

What accusations were made against Stephen?

What did God command Abraham, and what did God promise Abraham?

Why did Abraham's descendants settle in Egypt?

How did Abraham's descendants reject Joseph?

What happened to Abraham's descendants in Egypt?

What did Moses do for Abraham's descendants?

How did Abraham's descendants reject Moses?

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