

Stephen's Powerful Sermon, Part 1

Scripture: Acts 7:1-16

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Turn in your Bibles to the seventh chapter of the Book of Acts. This morning, I have a rather difficult duty, and that is that the sermon in chapter 7 is 53 verses long. And I am in no way going to attempt to go through it all. And yet it is extremely hard to break it up, and I say that because it is meant to be a unit. It is total. Stephen was starting somewhere, going somewhere, and he got there, with a fantastic impact. In fact, so dynamic was his sermon that when he had come to the conclusion, before he could even speak the conclusion, they had killed him, they were in such a frenzy.

And so the sermon is a powerful thing, and, really, to do justice to this, I feel that we should just have really had a three-hour sermon today and just brought your lunch and just made a day of it. Because this is a total thing. And it's going to be very difficult for me to begin to really bring you some concrete conclusions, just by virtue of the fact that we're not going to get past verse 16, which, as you know, is quite an achievement in itself, even, starting in verse 1.

But we do want you to consider carefully, and this morning is not so much preaching as it is teaching. I want you to learn what it is that he's saying in this passage. And it may be three weeks before we can pull it together. But I know God will enrich our hearts, because it is His truth, and every verse within it is meat and food for our soul.

So we come to chapter 7, and the classic and great, powerful sermon of the man Stephen, as he defends his faith before the council of Israel. Peter said, "Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asks you regarding the hope that is within you." Peter was right. The effective Christian, the Christian who really meets the world with the gospel and really communicates and really makes an impression is the one who can give to every man who asks reasons for what he believes. And I dare say there are many Christians who believe but haven't got the faintest idea why they believe. And they find themselves wandering in and out of great periods of doubt.

There is a subject with which all Christian students are familiar, and that is the subject of apologetics. Apologetics is the subject of information that defends the faith. It is a study of defending the faith. In Acts 25:16, the word "apologia," from which we get apologetic and which has deteriorated to an apology, which is an excuse for something, but the word from which we get apologetics or a defense of the faith is the word apologia, which means a speech in defense of it, is used on several occasions

in the New Testament.

In Acts, chapter 25, verse 16, Paul, before Agrippa, says that "I have the right to give an apologia." In other words, "I have a right to defend myself, to defend my faith." In Acts 22:1, Paul stands before the unruly mob at Jerusalem and he gives an apologia of his faith. He defends what he believes.

In Philippians, chapter 1, in verse 7, hear what he says. "Even as it is right for me to think of you, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my bonds and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace." Paul viewed his ministry as an offensive confirmation of the gospel and a defensive defense of the gospel. He saw himself as on the offense and on the defense, defending what he believed and being aggressive in its propagation.

But there was a great defender of the faith even before Paul. We always think of Paul as the great contender for the faith, but there was another, and his name was Stephen. And his defense was so scintillating, and his defense was so apt, and his defense was so dynamic, that the people who heard him were swept along in the emotion of it all until they lost control of themselves and stoned him.

Stephen had been charged with four kinds of blasphemy. He had been charged with blasphemy against God, Moses, the law and the Temple, the most sacred things in the mind of any Jew. And he had to answer the charge. But he knew what he believed, and he knew why he believed it. And he answered it. And I think it's important to notice that he answered the charge with Scripture. He defended the faith not in vagaries of philosophy, not in logic, but in verbal testimony to the Scripture. And he even quotes it repeatedly verbatim, which shows something of what he must've known about Scripture.

The apostle Paul, in Acts 17:2, regarding him, it says this. "And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them and three Sabbath Days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures." Defending the faith involves being able to sit down, communicate your faith and defend it. Jude 3 says, "Don't only defend the faith. Contend for the faith." After you've defended it, fight for it. There's nothing worse than defending the faith and then, when somebody starts shooting at you, take it apart again and back down. First we defend it and then we contend for it.

Stephen was that kind of man. He knew what he believed. He knew why he believed it. He defended it. And then he staked his life on it, and he died for it.

Now, as we come to chapter 7, let's get a little background before we jump into this sermon. The early church has accomplished the initial goal that our Lord gave to it, which was the goal of reaching Jerusalem. The Lord said in Acts 1:8 that "You are to be my witnesses in Jerusalem."

By the end of chapter 5, they had already...or at the end of chapter 4, really, they had already begun to accomplish this. In chapter 5, verse 28, it simply says, "And behold they have...you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine and intend to bring this man's blood on us." And the Jewish leaders had said, "Your doctrine fills Jerusalem." They had accomplished phase one of the evangelization of the world with the gospel.

It was now time for operation number two, which was Judea and Samaria, moving out from Jerusalem. Now, Stephen became the key to this thrust, for many reasons. In the first place, they needed to get better organized in order to step out. The church was falling into some internal problems because they weren't structured right, so in chapter 6 they got organized. They chose seven Spirit-filled men to handle the business of the church so the apostles could be free to preach and to pray. One of those seven, the first one listed in Acts, chapter 6, in verse 5, was a man named Stephen, full of faith, full of the Holy Spirit, full of grace, full of power. Quite a man.

And so Stephen was important to the progress of the church because he was taking over responsibility that freed the church to go. Secondly, he was important because he was a preacher, a New Testament prophet, and he preached to foreign Jews. So he began to extend this from the Palestine Jews to the Hellenist, or Grecian, Jews, who would come into Jerusalem. He went to their synagogues, as it's indicated in verse 9 of chapter 6, "the synagogue of the Libertines, Cyrenians, Alexandrians, them of Cilicia and Asia." So Philip began...Stephen began to move out to these various kinds of foreign Jewish assemblies. And in this sense he was stretching the gospel past just Jerusalem.

There was another reason that he was a catalyst to the extension of the gospel, and that was because of his execution. When he died, immediately following his death, chapter 8, verse 1 says, "And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem." The death of Stephen precipitated the persecution of the church. And, as you know, when the church gets persecuted, the church gets going.

And so the persecution came, and immediately they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, which is right on target, right on schedule, exactly where God wanted them to go. Phase two begins to move. And it isn't because God sent them out there directly. It's because the people in Jerusalem started persecuting them and they fled to those places.

Then verse 4 of 8 says this. "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the Word." So the catalyst to get the church rolling was Stephen, from several viewpoints. He was also very important, as we saw last time, as a transition into the ministry of Paul, for he was the first one who went to minister in Jewish synagogues that were foreign synagogues. Even though they were still in Jerusalem, they belonged to Jews who were foreign in where they lived, but they migrated to Jerusalem from time to time, met in their own synagogues.

Now, you'll know that the apostle Paul, as we just read in Acts 17:2, as was his custom, always went to the synagogue. So Stephen is also in that same kind of pattern, a forerunner to the apostle Paul. So he's a very important man, and he is definitely a catalyst for the extension of the church.

Now, because of his irresistible wisdom and the spirit of the man, just the way he handled himself and the way he proclaimed what he believed, he was unanswerable. In a debate, he came out on top, even though he was probably up against some of the finest minds in that part of the world, maybe even including a man named Saul, who later became the apostle Paul. But he was struggling with these minds, and he came out on top. And verse 10 of chapter 6 says, "They were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit," small s, "by which he spoke." In other words, the man, in terms of knowledge and delivery, was too much to handle. He could defend himself.

Now, when you can't win the argument, then you slander the opponent. Right? And so immediately they started slandering, and they got some false witnesses to accuse him of blasphemy. And they said, "He has blasphemed in four areas. He blasphemed God, Moses, the law and the Temple." And those are the big four in Israel. You don't fool around with any of those.

Stephen had blasphemed none of them. He had merely shown that Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of all of the things that those...that the law and Moses and the Temple had looked forward to, that Christ was the fulfillment of what they had been looking for and waiting for. But they twisted it around, turned it into a kind of an insurrectionist attitude, a revolutionary attitude, and accused him of these four things.

So in chapter 7, Stephen begins and concludes a great speech in defense of what he said. And he answers the accusations of blasphemy. Now, I want you to watch this, because I can't really preach this to you. I'm just going to have to teach it to you, because it's just a lot of interesting and exciting facts as we go through. So hang in there, get your brain in gear and don't wander off. It'll be painless, I assure you.

All right, so Stephen is in this, dominantly defending himself against the charges of blasphemy. You've got that. File that one away somewhere in your frontal lobe, because that's probably where it's stored. Not that I know, but I'm guessing. But, anyway, store that thought. He is defending himself against the charges of blasphemy.

Now, at the same time that he's doing that, he's doing some other things, and we must see these things. This is a masterpiece of a sermon, because he accomplishes four things at the same time. First of all, as I just said, he is defending himself against the charges of blasphemy, and he does this in a dynamic way. He makes direct reference to the fact that he believes in God, Moses, he sees the significance of the law and the Temple. He agrees with all of that in Jewish history.

He establishes the fact that he is an Israelite, that he believes all of this, that he is not blaspheming. That's important, and that's the main thing that he is doing, is defending himself against their charges. And he really gives a defense that all Christians can use for all time against the charges of Israel that we are not true to the true God and to His economy, as established in Israel.

But he does three other things. Watch this. Second thing he does is he knows that if he is going to be defending himself, he's got to maintain their interest. In other words, he's got to make his speech exciting, and he's got to make it so that he can capture their attention and not lose it. And so he knows what to do.

The Jews had a favorite subject. It was their very favorite subject over every other subject. You know what it was? Themselves. They loved it. And they loved the recitation, not their personal selves, but they loved the recitation of their own history, and Jews do today. And I think, because, you see, the Jew believed that his salvation was in his inheritance. That's Romans 2. That's the whole argument. They believed that it was because of their ancestry that they were saved. You see? They believed they were saved just because they were from Abraham's loins.

And so the Jewish history was the whole game, boy, that was everything. And they were forever and ever going back to Moses and Abraham and Jacob and Isaac and the greats of the Old Testament. See? They attached themselves constantly to all of these figures. These were sacred people. And their whole life was based upon what Moses said, or what some great rabbi said in qualification or explanation of Moses. And it was a constant cycle of identifying with history.

And, you see, they lived after all the traditions. All along, they maintained a very little change. Hundreds of years went by, and there were very few changes, because they were locked to a system that was based on historical revelation. So the recitation of Jewish history was just really ringing their chimes.

But he not only wanted to hold their attention and defend himself, he wanted to do a third thing, and every good preacher wants to do this. He wanted to indict them for being sinful. And he does that at the same time, too. It's a masterpiece. At the very same time, he builds one of the most fantastic indictments that you'll ever read anywhere in Scripture. And he does it very deftly and very subtly, almost without notice, until when it finally climaxes they get the message so loud and clear that they kill him.

And that's why I say, since we'll never get to that today, you're going to be left somewhat hanging. But maybe you'll know you'll want to come back and find out how it all turns out. No fair reading ahead. No, I can't say that, either, because you're supposed to read the Bible. Well, anyway, I hope you don't understand what you read. Okay?

The third thing, then, what he wants to do is he wants to indict the people for sin. And he does it, as I say, very, very subtly. There's a fourth thing he wants to do, and every effective sermon must do this. He wants to present Messiah. Now, if you were to sit down...if I, as a preacher, were to sit down and say, "I want to do four things: keep their attention, defend myself against the charges, then I want to be sure that I indict them for sin and also present the Messiah," that would be very difficult to do in one fell swoop, frankly. But Stephen does it absolutely masterfully.

Now, you'll watch as we go through this, and you'll see how all of these things are woven together so beautifully by Stephen. And it doesn't really fully focus. It's like a...it's like looking through the binoculars when they're a little bit out of focus, and all of a sudden you come to verses 51, 52 and 53, and it's sharp. And he gets the reaction. But he's building.

Now, let's view this thing from the standpoint of his defense, which is the dominating theme. He is going to defend himself, you want to look at that little outline you have, against God, Moses, the law and the Temple, against being accused of blaspheming those four areas. Now, of course, the first thing to defend himself against is blasphemy against God. In verse 11 of chapter 6, they had hired men to perjure themselves and give false testimony against him, and they said that he has been blaspheming Moses and God.

Now, so Stephen must then begin by establishing the fact that he believes in God, and that he's no blasphemer of God. And he does it. This is the severest accusation. He must prove that he believes in God. Now, watch this. He must also prove that the God in whom he believes is the God of Israel. Right? He must establish that Christianity is not heresy, it is fulfillment. It is not something new that destroys something old. It is something new that fulfills something old. And so he must believe in the same God, and he must define God in the same terms. So there's only one God.

But, you know, it's been a historic problem with Judaism that they have really always felt that Christians never believe in the same God they believe in. They've always felt that we have tried to destroy the true God.

I don't know if you saw that little article in the Times a week ago, "Rabbi Urges Christians to Curb Efforts to Win Over Young Jews." "New York. A top Jewish leader has urged Christians to curb fundamentalist evangelistic efforts aimed at converting young Jews to Christianity. Rabbi Dr. Maurice Eisendrath, President of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations," he's up there, "said such efforts 'could damage the carefully cultivated roots of Christian-Jewish relations in our society and destroy the fabric of pluralism and religious freedom.'"

He singled out several things, he singles out an emphasis known as Key 73, he singles out Campus Crusade for Christ, as fostering attempts to convert Jews. "Although they are not directed specifically

at Jews," he said, "They are nevertheless putting unwarranted, unnecessary pressure upon Jewish young people which both distresses and disturbs us." And they are upset. And this article goes on to repeat how upset they are.

And he adds at the close of the article, "By far, the greater challenge to such Christian missionary efforts, especially if directed toward Jews, is to the Jewish community, who must increase and intensify its own opportunity for Jews to know and understand Judaism." "Leave us alone while we develop our own heritage," in effect. And they want to...they're going to go into a program now to teach their young people how to respond to Christian fundamentalists who use Biblical proof texts to amplify their points.

And what am I saying? I'm saying that this has again become an issue. And the accusation is that we bring heresy into Judaism, when in fact we bring fulfillment to it. Some of you who are sitting here this morning are Jewish. You have the marvelous joy of being twice blessed, because you're sons of Abraham by blood and you're sons of Abraham by faith. And you know what it is to be fulfilled in Christ, and that's exciting. And we are not saying that Judaism is something horrible and something Satanic. Its inception is divine, and God invented it, and God began it, but apart from Jesus Christ it becomes just as Satanic as any other system in the world that leaves Him out.

And so we desire to bring to those who know not our Messiah and their Messiah the facts concerning Jesus Christ. But it's always been a problem, because they have always accused us of fostering some religion that belongs to some other God than the Jehovah God of Israel, whom they claim to worship. So it's nothing new. It goes clear back even to the Bible.

So Stephen, then, to begin with, must establish that he believes in the same God that they believe in, and that's a great place to start when you're talking to Jewish people. And you can use this sermon as a great foundation point. This is a tremendous sermon. You could memorize it and give it in Jewish evangelism, and it would be as powerful and as effective as anything you could ever devise.

All right, so he wants to establish, then, that he believes in God, and that's going to be the beginning. Look at verse 1. "Then said the high priest, 'Are these things so?'" Now, we've accused you of four things. Is it true? Is the accusation legitimate? And here begins his defense. And I just...I just am overwhelmed at the courage of this guy, and his boldness.

Verse 2, "And he said." Now, this doesn't sound like a defense. It sounds like he's finally got his opportunity to give his speech. "Men, brethren, and fathers, listen to what I have to say." I like that. Don't you? He's not cowering under the table somewhere. He's up there, and he says, "You listen, because what I say is important."

Now watch what he starts out with. "The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham." Stop there. That's a great opening line, because that does the two things that he needs to do. It establishes he believes in God, and secondly it establishes he believes in the fatherhood of Abraham over Israel. He has established in one statement that he is not a denier of God but a believer in God, and he is a believer in the very God of Abraham. And that's where he wants to begin.

The word "brethren," you'll notice, in verse 2, refers to the majority of the audience. The word "fathers" refers to the Sanhedrin and the officials. So he encompasses all of them in a very kind of formal introduction, and yet it has respect in it.

Nineteen times in this sermon, at least, he talks about God, establishing his belief in God. But here he begins with the greatest statement that you could say about God. He says, "The God of glory." Now, if you've been around Grace Church any time you know a little bit about what glory is. Glory is the fullness of the manifestation of all that God is. Glory...the glory of God is the composite of all of His attributes, when it's talking about the nature of God.

We can talk about the God of love or the God of justice or the God of grace or the God of wisdom or the God of righteousness or the God of wrath or the God of power or the God of presence or anything we want. But we can just say the God of glory, and that encompasses every single thing that God ever is. That's the most comprehensive term.

See what Stephen is saying? He's saying, "I believe in God in the fullest possible conceivable sense." And the term "God of glory" appears only in the Old Testament, I think, on one other time, when everything that is possible within the framework of God's personality is pulled together in one great term, "the God of glory." So Stephen says "the God of glory."

In the Old Testament, there were many names for God. Jehovah Nissi, Jehovah Jireh, which means the Lord who provides, Jehovah Rapha, the Lord who heals, Jehovah Shalom, the Lord our peace. They called Him by many names...Jehovah Raah, the Lord our shepherd, Jehovah Tsidkenu, the Lord righteous, Jehovah Sabaoth, which means the Lord of hosts, Jehovah Shammah, the Lord omnipresent, Jehovah Elyon, the Lord most high, Jehovah M'Kaddesh, the Lord who makes holy. There are so many names, so many terms tied to God, but Stephen just pulls everything into one name, and he calls Him El Hakabodh, the God of glory.

And, you see, by saying that, he is saying that God is everything that could possibly be true of His character. I believe it all, every bit of it. And so, you see, very definitely establishing his confirmation that he believes in God.

But he has a second thought, and this is exciting. Because if you go back to verse 15, see, he's sitting there in the middle of all this deal. And they're looking at him, and they see his face, and it says as

they saw his face, it looked as if it had been the face of what? Of an angel. They looked at him, and he looked like an angel.

Now, we told you last time that this is indication that the glory of God was on his face. And so when he's sitting there, very interesting, he's lit up with the glory of God, and he refers to the God of glory. You say, "What's he doing?" He is given them point in fact, "God has set His approval on me." See? It's a very, very powerful point.

Now, when he said, "Glory," they immediately thought of Shekinah, the light and the glow of God. And there he was, lit up, glowing. You see? He was identifying not only that he believed in God, but that God believed in him, that he was tied to God. That's powerful stuff.

And then he says, "The God of glory appeared unto," not your father, Abraham. That would've been zap. See? That would've drawn the line. He says, "Our father, Abraham." "I'm not anti-Israel. Abraham's my father, too. And God founded this whole thing, and I'm in it. I'm not against it." So he establishes his firm belief in God and in the -- really the basic ordination of Israel from God through Abraham.

Now, he continues to show how God controlled the destiny of Israel. This is so important, because he wants to establish how firmly he believes in the God of Israel, and that God did ordain Israel, that Israel is God's nation, and that He did choose them and did call them, and he continues, verse 2, in the middle. He says, "The God of glory appeared unto our father, Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia."

Now, Mesopotamia is a land between the Tigris and the Euphrates River, which is east of Israel, a famous area called the Fertile Crescent. That's probably the area where the Garden of Eden was. It's the area where Babylon was. It's an area, as I say, between the Tigris and Euphrates River. It was called Mesopotamia, which is the Greek name for Chaldees, where the Chaldeans lived.

Now, Abraham, we know from the Old Testament, Genesis, was from a city named Ur, Ur of the Chaldees. Ur, according to Joshua 24:2, was a city of idolatry, and Abraham was an idolater. Somehow he came to a knowledge of the true God while he was in this area, Ur of the Chaldees or Mesopotamia. And God appeared unto him when he was in Mesopotamia, "before he dwelt in Haran."

Now, Haran was another town in Mesopotamia. Haran was north, apparently, best we can tell from archaeology. It was north. And Haran was a waiting place where Abraham wound up waiting. But God appeared to him first in Ur. Then he went to Haran, and we don't know too much about Haran except that it was famous for moon worship. They worshipped the moon in Haran.

Now, God appeared to, according to Genesis, God appeared to Abraham in Ur of the Chaldees, and he said, "Now, you get out of here, Abraham. I want to take you over to the land you've never seen, you don't know anything about. But I want you to go over there, and I want to found a nation through you." Now, it takes a lot of faith to pack up and leave.

Well, they...his father, Terah, T-e-r-a-h, gathered the family and they went to Haran. And they waited there, and God renewed His call. Then when Terah died, at the age of 205, then Abraham went to Canaan, the Promised Land. But he went from Ur to Haran and stayed there for a while until his father died, and then he went over to Canaan. So the call was renewed there. And the call, as it was renewed, is recorded in Genesis 12, when it was given to him in Haran.

Verse 3, " And said unto him, 'Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall show thee.'" Now, God said that to him both places, in Ur and Haran. Verse 4, "Then came he out of the land of the Chaldeans, and dwelt in Haran, and from there, when his father was dead, he removed into this land, in which ye now dwell."

There's a beautiful thing as you see the faith of Abraham. He didn't even know what was going on. God said, "Get up, pack up, you're going away. I'm going to send you. Just come on." And he did it. And he didn't really know what to expect. And Abraham's faith has always stood, throughout the ages, as the classic illustration of faith, hasn't it? And his whole life was faith, his whole life. He never, ever really saw the fulfillment of any promise. The closest he got to it was the birth of Isaac, but he never got anything else. He lived a whole life on promise, never possession. But he had faith.

Verse 4 says, "Then came he out." That's Abraham's faith. You say, "Well, God was pushing awful hard." You're right. And Abraham's faith was balanced by God's sovereignty. Look at the end of verse 4. It says, "He removed into this land." The "He" modifies God, and it's vague in the English. What it literally says in the Greek is, "God migrated him." God gave him a big shove, and he took off. The combination in the activity of Abraham was the faith of Abraham and the sovereignty of God, and that's how it always works, isn't it? But we don't want to get into that. We want to stay with the illustration here as Stephen is using it.

So Stephen then continues to acknowledge the God of Israel, the God of glory, in controlling the destiny of Israel. See, he says, "God is working through Abraham. I recognize that." And they were probably saying, "Hey, this guy's not too bad, you know. I don't know. Maybe he's not...you know, this guy might be all right." See? In other words, they can't even disagree with him. And they can't disagree with him until verse 51. And, man, it comes quick.

But he is so careful about the presentation to keep their attention and to make sure that they cannot deny what he's saying. And so all the way through, and he's maintaining their tacit approval by

reciting the facts that reveal the greatness of Abraham's faith, you know, and how God has called him.

But, as I say, he never got a possession. He only got a promise. Verse 5, "And He gave him no inheritance in it." Do you know that Abraham never got any land? Never did. The only piece of land Abraham ever got is recorded in Genesis, chapter 23. He bought it from the children of Heth, and he bought it as a plot of land to bury himself and his wife in. And he buried Sarah there. That's the only piece of land that he ever got. And he didn't get it from God. He had to buy it. And it says in verse 5, "God gave him no inheritance."

But what did God give him? "No, not so much as to set his foot on." Interesting statement. It's an emphatic. Nothing at all. Absolutely nothing. But also in the phrase, "Not so much as to set his foot on," is the word *bamah*, which means judgment seat. That is, he never ruled over anything. He never got anything. "Yet He promised that He would give it to him for a possession." All he ever got was promise, no possession.

It would come to his seed and to his loins, it says in verse 5, "to his seed after him." He even got that promise when he didn't even have a child. And God says, "You're going to have a child." Sarah went in a corner and went, "Snicker," you know. And Abraham went next door to the handmaid and thought, "I'll just have a child by her and solve Sarah's problem." And he created Ishmael, who became the father of the Arabs, and didn't solve anybody's problem. And the sons of Ishmael have been fighting the sons of Isaac ever since, all because Abraham didn't believe God.

So whenever you talk about Abraham's faith, you always qualify it. It's a good thing, too, because my faith needs to be qualified sometimes. Doesn't yours? "Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief." And so in verse 5, he never did get the possession. He only got the promise. The promise looked a little bit far off. They were going to have a whole nation. They haven't had one kid yet, and they're both over the hill. But God gave him a promise and he believed it.

And what's Stephen doing? He's just continuing to recite the history of Israel, because he wants them to know that he believes in Israel, as its destiny was ordained by God Himself. Verse 6, "And God spoke in this way." God said, "That his seed should sojourn in a strange land." God told Abraham, "Abraham, your seed, those that raise up, your descendents, your progeny, is going to go to a strange land. And they're going to bring them into bondage in that land and ill treat them 400 years." That's a round figure. Actually, it was 430 years. "They're going to be in bondage 400 years." He told Abraham that.

And verse 7, "'And the nation to whom they will be in bondage will I judge,' said God, 'and after that shall they come forth and serve Me in this place.'" They're going to get in there for 400 years, and then I'm going to move into that nation and I'm going to judge that nation and they're going to get out

of there and get back here to this land.

Now, what's Stephen saying? Stephen's saying, "I realize the destiny of Israel's in the hands of God." Do you see what he's saying? That's what he's recognizing. "I know that God is running the show. I believe in the God of Israel, who called Abraham, who took the children of Israel into Egypt, who brought the plagues on Pharaoh and got them out of Egypt, who presented the great deliverer, Moses. I believe it all," is what's saying. He's establishing himself in relation to the God of Israel.

And so Stephen nails down that fact, that he believes in God, the God of Israel. Oh, that's important. Now he's accomplished those two powerful points. He has captured their attention by reciting the history they love to hear. And I'll bet you he was a dynamic speaker. It says that they couldn't resist his spirit. And I think they just ate it up. And the second thing he accomplished was, he defended himself against the charge that he blasphemed God. He did believe in God. He did not believe God was unholy, unsacred. He believed God was the holy God of glory, the very God of Israel.

Now, that only leaves two more things that he wants to do. The third thing he wants to do is indict them for sinfulness and rejection. The fourth thing is to present Messiah. Now, watch how he does this. This is so powerful. And it doesn't really come to fulfillment until you get to verse 51, which is the key verse, you see.

In 51, look at it. Here's his summary. And, you know, talk about, you know, straight shots. "You stiff-necked and uncircumcised." You say, "That doesn't sound so bad." That's because you're not Jewish. The Old Testament says, "He that hardeneth his neck...is oft reprov'd and hardeneth his neck shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."

God talks about the resistance and bitterness and unbelief of Israel as a hard neck that won't bend. And uncircumcised, wow. That is absolutely the curse of all curses, because circumcision was a mark of Jewishness. And he was saying to them, "You phonies. You're circumcised outwardly, and inside you're not."

So he says, "You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears. You do always resist the Holy Spirit," bang, watch this, "as your fathers did, so do ye." Now, if that's his major point, then he's got to show what their fathers did, right? Before he can say, "So do ye." And so he's going to move into an indictment here that is really potent. And I don't think they really got the message until verse 51, and, boy, then they got it loud and clear.

Now, watch verse 8, watch how he moves in this. "Then He gave him the covenant of circumcision." You see, God gave to Abraham a sign, and it would be the sign that would identify all of his children, that the baby would be, on the eighth day, circumcised, foreskin removed. And it says "He gave him this covenant of circumcision; Abraham begot Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day; Isaac

begot Jacob, and Jacob begot the twelve patriarchs."

Now, the patriarchs are the fathers of Israel, and they are the 12 sons of Jacob who were the heads of all the tribes. Every Jew would trace back his heritage to one of those 12 guys. So here's Stephen, and he's saying, "God called Abraham, and He gave him the covenant, and Abraham passed it on to Isaac, and Isaac to Jacob, and Jacob to the twelve fathers." And you could just feel them going, "Boy, that's right. And we've gone...I am the son of...I'm one of Zebulun." And somebody else says, "That's nothing. I belong to Issachar." Somebody says, "I'm Joseph." "I'm Gad." "I'm Manasseh," one of the sons of Joseph, and on and on and on. Joseph, you remember, was divided into two, Manasseh and Ephraim.

And, you see, he was hitting them right at the point of their pride. They would all go back, whether it was Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Zebulun, Issachar, Dan, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Benjamin or Joseph, one of those 12, everybody attached himself to one of those. They were the fathers of Israel. And so you know what Stephen's doing? Stephen's saying, "I believe in the God of Israel right on down to the selection of the tribes. Through Abraham, I believe God's been forming all the destiny of Israel." He's not a blasphemer against God. He's a believer in God.

But that's only a setup, friends. He's about to knock the pins right out. Now, watch this, in verse 9. "And the patriarchs," those great men, and, you know, the Jews would always go back, "Well, our fathers did this, and our fathers," and they thought they were holy and sacred and wonderful fathers. Watch this, "And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt." "Do you know what your super-spiritual fathers did? They sold Joseph into Egypt."

Watch the next statement. "But God was with," who? Joseph. Do you know what your highest forefathers did? They blasphemed God. Did you know that? God called Joseph sacred. They sold him out of envy. Do you see what he's saying?

Now when he gets over to verse 51 and says, "As your fathers did, so do ye," you know what those brothers did? They rejected the one that God had ordained to carry the birthright in the family. They rejected Joseph, who was their redeemer. Do you know what they later did? They rejected Jesus, who was their Redeemer, and that's exactly what Stephen meant when he said, "As your fathers did, so do ye."

And this is the first building of this indictment. They don't understand what he's pointing at yet. They don't read it. They're just listening. "And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt, but God was with him." There's the dichotomy initially. You see, God was with Joseph and they sold him, which means they were at opposite ends from God.

In I Chronicles, let me just give you the historical information to set this in your mind. In I Chronicles 5:1, it says, in the parentheses, "Reuben was the firstborn, but forasmuch as he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given unto the sons of Joseph." The birthright went to Joseph. And it says in verse 2, "The birthright was Joseph's."

And do you remember in Genesis 37, a most interesting...Joseph kept having these dreams, you know. And, boy, they just really irritated his brothers something fierce, and I think they would have irritated me if I had been a, you know, typical person. "Joseph dreamed a dream," 37:5, Genesis, "and he told it to his brethren and they hated him the more." They already hated him. They didn't like him because he was such a wonderful guy.

"And he said unto them, 'Hear, I pray you, the dream which I have dreamed. For behold we were binding sheaves in the field and lo my sheaf arose and stood upright.'" All these little stacks of grain and one of them stands upright. "And all of the other ones fell down and worshipped mine." Now, that really wouldn't go over real big. Right?

If that isn't bad enough, "His brethren said unto him," in verse 8, "'Shalt thou reign over us? Or shalt thou, indeed, have dominion over us?' And they hated him yet the more for his dreams and for his words. And he dreamed another dream and told it to his brethren. And said, 'Behold, I have dreamed a dream more. And, behold, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to me.'" Really, Joseph? Wow.

"He told it to his father and his brethren, and his father rebuked him and said, 'What is this that you're dreaming?'" "What are you eating before you go to bed?" "'Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come and bow down ourselves to thee, too? What's become of you?' And his brethren envied him, but his father observed the same." It was a dream from God, that because of Reuben's sin he would forfeit the birthright and it would be transferred to Joseph.

So God, you see, set Joseph apart as the leader in that family. God set Joseph apart to bear the progeny and the right of rule in the family. And so Joseph was sacred, and when those individuals sold him for envy they blasphemed that which God called sacred. Do you see? Therefore, they were against God. And so Stephen establishes to begin with that as far back as that, the very formation of Israel, there was rebellion against the purposes of God through one Redeemer.

Then he says, "It hasn't changed at all. You did the same thing with Moses." You remember when Moses came and offered himself as a deliverer to Israel, we'll study this next week, they said, "Forget it. We don't want you. Who made you ruler over this place?" He fled for his life, and they had to wait 40 years of suffering before he came back the second time and they finally accepted him, and he led them out.

And they did the same thing with Jesus Christ. He came and they rejected Him as their leader and their deliverer. And so he says, "This is historical." And they still don't see the meaning, because he never has...he hasn't gotten to that quite yet.

And so he designed, then, to indict them. And from the very start here, with the story of Joseph, he does a masterful job. Now, the fourth thing that he wants to do...watch this, then we'll close...the fourth thing that he wants to do is he wants to present Messiah. He wants to present the fact that Jesus is Messiah. Now, he can't fully do this until he wraps up his sermon, but he's building. But I want you see this point in his building process. So powerful.

There are all kinds of ways in the Old Testament that the Messiah is presented. And here he is talking to these Jews. He wants to use their Old Testament. How is he going to do it?

Well, there are two kinds of prophecy in the Old Testament. One is verbal predictive and the other is typical. What I mean by that is there are certain prophecies that say, "Unto us a child is born, a son is given," etc., etc., etc. That's a verbal prophecy. Micah 5:2, "Bethlehem Ephrata, though thou be little among the sons of Judah, out of thee shall He come forth who shall be rule over my people Israel," prophecy directly that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem. All kinds of that. "A virgin shall conceive," Isaiah 7:14, "and bring forth a son. Thou shalt call His name Emmanuel, which is God with us." Verbal prophecy.

But there are other kind of prophecies, what we call prophecy in type. For example, every slain lamb in the Old Testament is a picture of the Messiah slain. Right? Every slain lamb is a picture of the Lamb of God, slain from before the foundation of the world. The Ark is, in a sense, a picture of the salvation of Christ. All kinds of things in the Old Testament are pictures of Christ.

And Joseph is a classic type of Christ. He paints the picture of Jesus Christ so explicitly that nobody could miss it. And that's what he does. He uses Joseph to present Christ. Watch this. Verse 9, "And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt." This same guy that he was just talking to a few weeks or months before he gave them this shot had also sold somebody for envy. Who was it? Jesus. Mark 15:10, "The chief priests delivered Him up," next two words, "for envy." And they sold him, Judas did, 30 pieces of silver.

So, you see, he's just...he's just beginning to drive home the convicting knife. He says, "Yes, it's historical. Your forefathers sold the chosen one of God because they envied him. They sold him for money." And I don't doubt for a minute that some of them began to think back to Jesus, because they knew he represented Jesus. They knew he represented Jesus Christ. And they must've thought, "Uh-huh, uh-huh, I can see it coming."

That isn't all, though. Look at verse 10. "And He delivered him out of all his afflictions." God did. God delivered him out of all of his afflictions "and gave him favor and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh, king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house."

You know what happened to Joseph? His brothers sold him. Remember that? Sold him to the Midianites. Took him down to Egypt. Got down to Egypt and went to work for a guy named Potiphar who had a wife who had her eye on Joseph. And she really liked Joseph. So she got him in a compromising thing. He was over there where she was, in her bedroom. And she started making advances to him, trying to seduce old Joseph. It's your heart, Joseph.

And you know what he did? He ran. Smart thing, Joseph did. He put those old wheels in motion and he was gone. Didn't fool around. Just avoid the temptation. He took off running. You know what happened? She got his coat. Mmm-mmm-mmm, incriminating evidence. So she reported that this thing had happened, that Joseph had, you know, done this to her, and she had his coat to prove it. And he wound up in the clink. False accusation. Put him in prison.

You know how Jesus got captured and put in prison? By false accusation. They had a mock trial and they brought forth false witnesses. Just like Joseph. But you know what happened? Joseph got out. And when he got out of there, he went to the next place, to Pharaoh himself. Sat on the right hand of the Pharaoh, the king of the land.

Do you know that the men delivered Jesus, in fact they delivered Him into the grave, and God took Him out of the grave and exalted Him to His right hand. Joseph, again, is a picture of Jesus. Joseph found the lowest kind of humility and was lifted to the loftiest exaltation. So was Jesus Christ. Joseph is a picture of Jesus.

The picture continues. It doesn't end there. Joseph, rejected by Israel, his brothers, was accepted by Gentiles in Egypt. You got that one? Jesus, rejected by Israel, turned and founded His church among whom? Gentiles. Continues to be a picture of Jesus.

And so we come to verse 11. "And now there came a famine over all the land of Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction, and our fathers found no sustenance." When Joseph went to Egypt, famine came. And his whole family back there in Canaan found no sustenance. They had rejected their leader. Do you know what happened to Israel when they rejected Jesus Christ? They fell into a spiritual famine and they still exist in it, don't they? Sure they do. The famine is a type of Israel's blindness today. They have no spiritual sustenance at all. None at all.

Verse 12, "But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first." He sent the other 11 brothers. "And at the second...at the second occasion," oh, I like it, "Joseph was made

known to his brethren." When is Jesus going to be made known to Israel? At His first coming? At His second. It's the same type again. The first time, rejected, sold for envy. The second time, accepted.

And so what happened? They sent the brothers down there. You remember, Joseph revealed himself to them, and then he supplied all their needs. A wonderful thing. Verse 14, "Then sent Joseph and called his father Jacob to him and all his kindred, three score and 15 souls." Everybody came. Everybody. All Israel was made up of those people. That was it. That was the whole nation.

You want to know what that's a picture of? That's a picture of the fact that at the Second Coming when Jesus is revealed, who's going to get saved? Part of Israel? All Israel. Romans 11, "All Israel shall be saved." Again, perfectly typified in the life of Jesus, the whole picture of Christ.

"So Jacob went down unto Egypt and died, he and our fathers." And there is a picture of Israel entering into the kingdom relationship. And then to historically finish it out, Jacob died. He was buried at Machpelah in a cave up at Hebron. But the rest of them were buried there in Shechem, verse 16, "carried over to Shechem and laid in the sepulcher that Abraham bought for the sum of money, the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem." So all Israel was to be saved.

You see here in a brief presentation of the life of Joseph, he is really presenting Christ. You see? And from their frame of reference, they knew Christ died, listen to this, friends, they knew He rose from the dead. They just didn't want to buy it. They had to know it. The evidence was overwhelming. They knew all of this, and they would easily relate the two. At least they would begin to relate it. And as the story progresses you'll see how much stronger the relation becomes.

So what has Stephen done in the beginning of his message? He has first of all answered the charge of blasphemy against God. Watch this. Secondly, at the same time, he has maintained their ears and their attention, because he's been talking about what they care about, themselves and their history and the great things that they adore. The third thing he has done is indict them by showing, first of all, the blasphemy of their own fathers in rejecting God's chosen one. The fourth thing he did in the beautiful picture of Joseph was present the Messiah. And so Stephen begins what climaxes in a great statement about Jesus Christ Himself.

There are so many lessons that we can learn from this this morning. We learn the lesson of boldness in witnessing, whatever the cost, don't we? We learn the lesson of defending the faith on the basis of Scripture and not reason. We learn the lesson of the sovereignty of God, who is running history. We learn of the faithfulness of God, who keeps His covenants. We learn the grace of God, who sends a Redeemer. He's rejected, and God sends Him back again. We learn about God, then, and we learn about courage, and we learn about boldness. We also learn about the sad blindness of hostility. Whatever it is the Spirit wants to teach you, learn it well. Let's pray.

Father, thank you this morning that we've been able to look into this truth, to consider the Word of God. We thank you for this beloved brother in Christ, fellow member of the body, Stephen. Oh, how we long to be with him in heaven and just sit down and talk with him. And, Father, would that we could know some of the courage he had transferred into our lives here in this earth, for courage will be unnecessary in heaven, but it's so necessary here. Give us some of that boldness that he had.

Father, we pray that we might be desirous of knowing the Word so well that we can approach people and we can give an answer for the hope that is within us reasonably, with meekness and fear. God, that we might not only defend the faith, but we might contend for the faith, fight for it, whatever the cost.

Father, thank you for instructing us and teaching us this morning, as we just begin to see the dynamics of this powerful presentation. Continue to encourage our hearts to apply what we've learned. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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