

Acts 6:7-7:60 Stephen and Saul

Saw last week – Arose a problem

A)Chose 7 men.....

B)It Worked – Problem solved- God moving – the word went forth in Power!

1)Result - V.7

Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.

Verse 7 is a summary statement given by Dr. Luke, the author of this book, which he gives throughout this book when he wants to sum up or give you some kind of a field report on what God has done.

Now you might want to put a little mark in your Bible between v. 7-8 –

Because V.8 marks the beginning of a shift in the book of Acts

Remember the outline of the book. Chapter 1 verse 8, you will be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth.

In Chapters 2-7 we see witness of the Gospel in Jerusalem. Everything is happening there.

A)But Ch. 6 V.8 is what we might call the transition moment – the gospel is going out to the other regions and this event is the catalyst

B)Three key events - The first martyr, Stephen, will be killed.

1)Saul of Tarsus will be there witnessing it because they lay his clothes at his feet and he's observing it.

C)Chapter 8 Saul consenting to his death – spears heads a persecution that forces the early church out of Jerusalem.

1)The gospel spreads to Judea, Samaria

D)Also in Chapter 8 - Philip goes and spreads the gospel to Gaza and to Caesarea.

E)Then Saul of Tarsus gets saved in chapter 9, and that becomes the catalyst to bring the gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth.

V.8 And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. ⁹ Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), disputing with Stephen

A)We know that in Jerusalem, there was one big central place of worship known as the Temple.

B)Temple structure, sacrifices were done there. Priests worked there. Lots of activity was there.

C)But during Israel's captivity period in Babylon – they instituted the Synagogue centers.

1)Place to gather worship/prayer/ study ..scriptures

D)All you needed to start a synagogue was 10 Jewish men.

So By the time we get to the New Testament, there are Synagogues everywhere.

A)Jesus taught in the Synagogue in Capernaum – and He went into the synagogue and all the cities around Galilee.

B)The Talmud the book of Jewish writings tells us—that at this time, there were 390 synagogues in Jerusalem alone.

C)Think of the synagogue back then as sort of like churches today.

D)Each synagogue had its own flavor, its own kind of emphasis, own style of people that were from different areas

This particular one in our text was known as the synagogue of the freedmen

A)The Synagogue of the Freed Men was the synagogue comprised of ex-slaves, or freed slaves, or the family members of freed slaves,

B)Hence, the name - freed men.

C)We know that Pompey, the general of the Romans, took an enormous amount of people from No. Africa C)and From Asia Minor as his personal slaves in the city of Rome.

D)They eventually were freed in Rome, and a lot of them, who were Jewish, made their way here back to Jerusalem.

1) They established a synagogue.

E) V.9 we are told where they come from, North Africa, Cyrene, Alexandria, Egypt, and also from Cilicia.

Now this is interesting because Acts 21 we are told that Saul of Tarsus is also from the city of Cilicia

A) So it is possible this was his synagogue as well.

B) Even though he was a Roman Citizen – he might of landed here because he knew pp

C) I say that because we are going to see at the end of this story – Saul is present. – He is a young man!

1) Acts 22 he was the star student of the famed Rabbi Gamaliel – Saul of Tarsus was an intellectual giant

D) And when we are told here in V.9 that some from the synagogue were disputing with Stephen –

1) **Saul no doubt was a part of that**

10 And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke. - WOW!

This no doubt angered young Saul – that this table waiter – with no formal training was getting the best of him.

A) In Fact we could say that tonight reveals the story of two young men and what stands between them!

B) More on that later.

C) So God is using Stephen in a powerful way – the faithful Deacon is being used in greater ways – than just serving tables

11 Then they secretly induced men to say, They are going to fabricate a story like they did with JESUS

A) AND here is the accusation

-“We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.” 12 And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; and they came upon him, seized him, and brought him to the council. 13 They also set up false witnesses who said, “This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law; 14 for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us.”

B) Fourfold accusation: He speaks blasphemies against:

#1 God

#2 Moses

#3 He blasphemed the law of Moses

#4 Against the temple

15 And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel. –

Stephen is glowing like Moses did when he came down from MT. Sinai – should have been a clue.

CH 7 Then the high priest said, “Are these things so?”

This young man Stephen is going to launch into a the longest recorded sermon in the book of Acts. – V.51 verses

A) This is a great sermon – I love preaching this STYLE of sermon – A lot of information –

B) HE WILL END WITH ONE APPLICATION

C) His sermon – Builds - Stephen is going is going to give a History lesson of the nation of Israel.

1) Then he gives one BOOMING – POWERFUL APPLICATION

D) GREAT SERMON- but these can be hard sermons to listen to because we are impatient

1) We want the application right away – So I am going to ask you tonight to be patient – hang in there

E) Appreciate the approach and the information – 1) put yourself in the sandals of those listening

Stephen is going to lay out the History of the nation of Israel

A) The Jews love talking about their history it is their favorite subject

B) because they love tracing the work of God through the history of their nation.

1) you start talking about the history of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses. **That that's their identity.**

C) Plus, to many of them, that's their salvation. They believe they are saved by their hereditary status and their story.

D)And Throughout the OT the people of Israel were commanded to share their history with their children

1)To pass it on from Generation to generation – so that it would not be forgotten

E)So these religious leaders would be pleased to hear a young man like Stephen – recite their history.

1)Awesome – he has got it!

But there is going to be a pattern and a point to Stephen's sermon that I am going to tell you now – see if you catch it

A)Pattern is this- God raises up a deliverer that the leaders of Israel reject the first time –

B)That is the pattern:

C)The point is – what our leaders did historically with God's deliverers – you did with Jesus!

D)We will see this pattern build to a crescendo as he preaches this sermon.

Stephen's rebuttal to Accusation #1 that Stephen blasphemed God V.2-16

A)2 And he said, "Brethren and fathers, listen: The God of glory {These leaders would Appreciate that description

B)That little description of God, the God of glory, is found nowhere in the Bible except one other place, and that Psalm 29, It's a very famous Psalm of worship written by David,

"Give unto the Lord, O you mighty ones, give unto the Lord glory and strength. Give unto the Lord the glory to His name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness. The voice of the Lord is over the waters; The God of glory thunders". Psalm 29:1-3

Stephen is showing his knowledge of scripture and his reverence for God by referring to Him as the God of glory!

The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, 3 and said to him, 'Get out of your country and from your relatives, and come to a land that I will show you.' {He is quoting from Genesis 12 – Dude knows the Word!} - 4 Then he came out of the land

of the Chaldeans and dwelt in Haran. And from there, when his father was dead, He moved him to this land in which you now dwell.

5 And God gave him no inheritance in it, not even enough to set his foot on. But even when Abraham had no child, He promised to give it to him for a possession, and to his descendants after him.

6 But God spoke in this way: that his descendants would dwell in a foreign land, and that they would bring them into bondage and oppress them four hundred years. 7 'And the nation to whom they will be in bondage I will judge,' said God, 'and after that they shall come out and serve Me in this place.'

{Now he is quoting from Genesis 15 – he is just marching through their history and he knows it by heart.

All of this started with Abraham – God called him out

A)New thing – a new nation – a new land – God is the one who started all of this –

B)When Abraham was 100 yrs old –past the time of Child production – God gave him a son

1)He established a covenant with Abe

8 Then He gave him the covenant of circumcision; and so Abraham begot Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day; and Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot the twelve patriarchs.

C)Here is where his pattern is going to begin – here is the parallel he is going to make –

1)The very person that God selected to be a deliverer is the very person the our patriarchal leaders rejected

D)The pattern begins with Joseph

9 "And the patriarchs, becoming envious, sold Joseph into Egypt. The leaders of the nation of Israel, The Eleven Brothers, rejected Joseph. Joseph was one God selected.

And the leaders listening to Stephen don't catch the pattern at first because this is their history – So Joseph was sold into Slavery

But God was with him 10 and delivered him out of all his troubles, and gave him favor and wisdom in the presence of Pharaoh, king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house.

11 Now a famine and great trouble came over all the land of Egypt and Canaan, and our fathers found no sustenance. 12 But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first. 13 And the second time Joseph was made known to his brothers, and Joseph's family became known to the Pharaoh. 14 Then Joseph sent and called his father Jacob and all his relatives to him, seventy-five people. 15 So Jacob went down to Egypt; and he died, he and our fathers. 16 And they were carried back to Shechem and laid in the tomb that Abraham bought for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem.

The pattern starts with Joseph

- Rejected by his brothers the first time
- Accepted by his brothers the 2nd time – He becomes their savior

In a Similar fashion – Israel rejected Jesus the first time he came – Murdered him

A)But Zechariah the prophet prophesied that a day will come when Jesus comes back the 2nd time – Recognize him- Receive him

Side note but don't mention

So verse 16, I mentioned, but I want to point something out, "they were carried back to Shechem and laid in the tomb that Abraham bought for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem," Here's what's a little confusing, Abraham isn't buried in Shechem, but Shechem was the place that Jacob bought a piece of land from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem, in that place. Joseph, his bones were brought back from Egypt, and placed in Shechem. Jacob's bones were also taken back, but he was placed down in the Cave of Machpelah. Machpelah, you remember from Genesis, was the cave that Abraham bought to bury his wife Sarah. If you go to that area today called, Hebron, you will see the Tombs of the Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are buried there. What he's doing is telescoping two burial events into one, because he's on trial. He could die, and he has a lot of pressure on him. And for brevity, just to shorten up his longest sermon in the book of Acts, just a little bit. He telescope's two burial events into one.

So Stephen begins with the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, Jacob – leading to Joseph and now he is going to transition to Moses

A)Why? Because they accused him of blaspheming Moses and the Law – Rebuttal #2 V. 17-37 History IN Exodus

17 "But when the time of the promise drew near which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt 18 till another king arose who did not know Joseph. 19 This man dealt treacherously with our people, and oppressed our forefathers, making them expose their babies, so that they might not live.

B)There was a Pharaoh who did not know the story of Joseph,

1)did not appreciate the background and the contribution of Joseph to Egyptian culture.

C)He had a strategy to deal with the Jewish population of Egypt, much like Hitler's final solution.

1)He thought, let's just kill these babies BOYS when they're born, because they're populating so fast.

D)That's a horrible period of history, but God was stirring up his people in Egypt, -

1)began to cry out to God and raising up a deliverer to deliver them out of bondage.

20 At this time Moses was born, and was well pleasing to God; and he was brought up in his father's house for three months. 21 But when he was set out, Pharaoh's daughter took him away and brought him up as her own son. 22 And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds.

NOTE THE PHRASES: Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, ' ' 'and was mighty in words and deeds.' "

You can take Moses's life, we've told you before, and divide up into 3 40 YR periods

A)First 40 yrs – becoming a SOMEBODY -, trained in all the wisdom and schooling of Egypt.

B)Followed by 40 yrs of being a nobody – Desert

1)Final 40 yrs leading everybody

This is the first 40 yrs – Moses had it made!

A)Power, prominence , possessions –

B)Rolling in the dough - , the writer of Hebrews talks about the treasures of Egypt are at his disposal

C)If you want a more accurate picture of Moses in his younger years,

1)you have to think of a young, a playboy type,

D)with his own boat, his own chariot, with his personalized license plate, Pharaoh #2

E)But God started to do something in his heart at the age of 40 – His purpose

23 “Now when he was forty years old, **it came into his heart** to visit his brethren, the children of Israel.

24 And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended and avenged him who was oppressed, and struck down the Egyptian. 25 For **he supposed** that his brethren would have understood that **God would deliver them by his hand**, but they did not understand. {This tells us that Moses knew his heritage **he knew who he belonged to** –

He is thinking “I think my purpose is to be a deliverer for God’s people. – So he takes matters into his own hands and strikes down the Egyptian

26 And the next day he appeared to two of them {Hebrews} as they were fighting, and tried to reconcile them, saying, ‘Men, you are brethren; why do you wrong one another?’ 27 But he who did his neighbor wrong pushed him away, saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge over us? 28 **Do you want to kill me as you did the Egyptian yesterday?**’ {**They didn’t get it – they rejected Moses – first time around.**

29 Then, at this saying, Moses fled and became a dweller in the land of Midian, where he had two sons.

A)Moses knows he is going to be found out – and he flees to the Desert He was there for 40 years in obscurity. Forty years of being a nobody

B)Note this: Moses thought he was ready. I'm the guy to deliver these people. I'm one of them.

1)And so he set out to do it, in the energy of his flesh,

C)because he figured, I've been to school, I've been to the Temple of the Sun. Best school in town,

1)Graduated with Honors – thank you very much

He had all of the training physically, but God is calling him to his spiritual work,

A) if you try to do the work of God, a spiritual work, in the energy of your flesh. - It is not going to work

B)Moses was refined, but he was not ready.

C)He had the BA degree, and the Bachelor of Science degree, and the Master of Arts degree,

But God gives him the third degree.

A)And the third degree is the BD degree, the backside of the desert degree.

B)God makes his leaders in the desert – David fugitive yrs - Moses – 40 –

C)Joseph - Prison and Slavery for about 13 yrs

D)Saul of Tarsus – 3 yrs in the desert of Arabia – comes back as Paul eventually becomes known as Paul the apostle

1)Desert times are important

30 “And when forty years had passed, {2nd 40 yrs an Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire in a bush, in the wilderness of Mount Sinai. 31 When Moses saw it, he marveled at the sight; and as he drew near to observe, the voice of the Lord came to him, 32 saying, ‘I am the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ And Moses trembled and dared not look.

33 ‘Then the Lord said to him, **“Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground.**

What does he mean Holy ground?

A)Here's the principle, ordinary surroundings get lifted to extraordinary status when God is present.

B)(This building ? Nothing special- A room at work – Bible Study – Your home

1)ordinary surroundings get lifted to extraordinary status when God is present.

C)Why a burning Bush?

1)The burning fire was emblematic of the presence of God.

In the same way that Mount Sinai, there was fire, lightning, and thunder.

A)That was all emblematic, symbolic, of the glory of God, the glory of the God of Glory.

B)God was present in His pure light, in His Holiness, and so fire becomes a symbol.

C) Here is Moses, who has burned out trying to do God's work in the energy of his flesh.

1) He has gone up in flames, so to speak, and God is here to say, **I'm here to light your fire,**

D) Moses - This burning bush represents your life, not just My presence,

1) but your life in My presence.

You're going to burn, and burn, and not burn out,

A) because I'm going to infuse you, at an old age, and you're going to be called into your older years, 120

B) You're going to burn, but not be consumed. You're going to burn, but not burn out.

C) Same is true for your life and my life **Our God is a consuming fire**

1) He doesn't want to burn you up or burn you out – but he wants to brighten you up –

D) He wants to burn in you – Your life ablaze for his glory

God says to Moses

34 I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt; I have heard their groaning and have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt.”

35 “This Moses whom they rejected, saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge?’ is the one God sent to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the Angel who appeared to him in the bush. 36 **He brought them out,** {2nd time after he had shown wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red Sea, and in the wilderness forty years.

37 “This is that Moses who said to the children of Israel, now he is quoting Deuteronomy 18 ‘The Lord your God will raise up for **you a Prophet like me from your brethren.** Him you shall hear.’ {Messiah- the leaders are all nodding their heads – yes right – true

A PROPHET LIKE ME - You want to see how much Jesus and Moses are alike? Consider this.

- They tried to kill Moses as a baby.
- They tried to kill Jesus as a baby.
- Moses left the royal position of the royal court to be a deliverer among his people.
- Jesus left the royal position of the royal court of Heaven, making himself of no reputation,

or pouring himself out to be among his people.

- Moses became a shepherd.
- Jesus is called the Good Shepherd.
- Moses was the mediator of the covenant, The Old Testament, the old covenant
- Jesus is the mediator of the new covenant.
- Moses was rejected the first time. Received and accepted the second time.
- Jesus was rejected by his people the first time. According to Zachariah he will be received and accepted the second time.

Stephen understands that to be fulfilled in Christ.

38 “This is he {Moses who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the Angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers, the one who received the living oracles to give to us, 39 whom our fathers would not obey, but rejected.

Do you see what Stephen is doing?

A) He is affirming his allegiance, not only to God, but to Moses and to the law that Moses gave.

B) AFFIRMING THE special nature in which the law was given! #3 Accusation – No

1) God gave the law, it was mediated by angels, it was received by Moses, it was for the nation.

C) BUT here comes the pattern again – this time in association with the law –

1) they rejected Moses- Moses is up with God getting the law and the people are growing impatient

And in their hearts they turned back to Egypt, 40 saying to Aaron, ‘Make us gods to go before us; as for this Moses who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.’ 41 And they made a calf in those days, offered sacrifices to the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands. 42 Then God turned and **gave them up** to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the Prophets: {This is what God does

when People reject him – he gives them up to pursue their own lust – to come to the end of themselves

‘Did you offer Me slaughtered animals and sacrifices during forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel?’

43 You also took up the tabernacle of Moloch, A pagan god where babies were placed alive on the burning cast iron arms- burned alive in hopes of earning a blessing from this pagan God

And the star of your god Remphan,
Images which you made to worship;
And I will carry you away beyond Babylon.’

Pattern God gave them Moses – He gave them the law to follow – but they rejected Moses/ Law

A) Turned to idolatry – their idolatry resulting in their captivity in Babylon

B) It is the common pattern in the History

C) Now he is going to transition to talking about the 4th thing they accused him of blaspheming – the temple

44 “Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as He appointed, instructing Moses to make it according to the pattern that he had seen, 45 which our fathers, having received it in turn, also brought with Joshua into the land possessed by the Gentiles, whom God drove out before the face of our fathers until the days of David, 46 who found favor before God and asked to find a dwelling for the God of Jacob.

47 But Solomon built Him a house. 48 “However, the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands That's a direct quote out of 2 Chronicles 2, spoken by Solomon – Stephen knows his Bible – then he quotes Isaiah the prophet as the prophet says: 49 ‘Heaven is My throne, And earth is My footstool.

What house will you build for Me? says the Lord, Or what is the place of My rest? 50 Has My hand not made all these things?’

God didn't need a temple- He doesn't dwell in houses made with human hands –but God allowed the temple to be built

A) So Stephen is reaffirming the greatness of God – but he is also giving validation to the Temple.

B) God allowed it to be built – it has its place

1) Prominent place in the prophetic picture

C) So that is the History lesson - that is the information

1) Not Stephen is going to drop the Mic – so to speak

D) Here comes his point – he is where the application begins

E) This is where their attitude changes from great sermon Stephen to We are going to Kill you!

1) a pastor can usually tell. – Great message – to I wish you didn't say that – go there
2) how dare you talk about that – TUNE OUT

51 “You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears!

A) Wow- that is bold – MARRIAGE COUNSELING

B) Now stiff-necked was a term Moses used to describe the people of Israel.

1) Stephen's using the word that Moses, whom they rejected—USES

C) Moses called y'all stiff-necked. He used stiff-necked in Exodus 33 and Deuteronomy

1) that sounds like Jesus. "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! "
2) You're all about the outward, not about the inward. You know the woes of Matthew 23.

51 “You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears!

You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. 52 Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?

And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, 53 who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it.”

REACTION

54 When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth.

55 But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, 56 and said, “Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!”

JESUS STANDING Is there a contradiction?

A) Because, we know from several NT passages, Jesus ascended to Heaven and SAT down at right hand God?

B) A priest always sat down when the work was done.

1) Cross – The Work is finished. – SAT DOWN

C) But now he is standing – Why? To welcome home the first Martyr of the early Church –

1) Welcome home Stephen – Well done

57 Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and **ran at him with one accord**; 58 and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their **clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul**. 59 And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” 60 Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not charge them with this sin.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

Lessons

#1 The Holy Spirit will shine through us and give us boldness when we make a stand for Jesus

#2 Be ready to give a Defense

A) Stephen gives an incredible defense.

B) 1 Peter 3:15 *always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you.*

C) Defense is apologia – apologetics

D) Study of apologetics – not learning different ways to give an apology –

E) No it means a Defense – defend the gospel

Wait – Didn’t Jesus tell his disciples not to worry about what to say – he would tell them

A) No he said – I will bring to your remembrance the things I have taught you.

B) Listen we need to know what we believe and why –

1) We need to study to show ourselves approved

C) We need to get into the word – And God will bring to our remembrance things we have studied

D) Like he is doing here in our text with Stephen

#3 The chapter presents, two young men.

A) The young man of Stephen, and the young man of Saul of Tarsus.

B) Both remarkable young men. Both used of God, eventually.

1) Both remarkable in their gifting,

C) You couldn’t have two more opposite men at this stage.

1) What is dividing them is, the cross.

D) The Cross divides all men – what do with the cross

One embraced the cross – the other rejected the cross – but in chapter 9, that all changes.

A) Saul of Tarsus is going to meet the resurrected Jesus that he doesn’t believe in

B) Saul will become Paul and the most Dominant figure in the rest of the book of Acts

C) And throughout the history of the Christian Church!

D) His life is an incredible testimony!