

"The Trial of Stephen"

Part 3

Acts 6:8-7:60

Introduction: Tonight in our study of Acts we have come to chapter 7 where we will consider Stephen's sermon which is the longest sermon in the book. In Acts 6 Stephen was dragged in before the Sanhedrin and placed on trial for what he preached at the synagogue of the Libertines. Before we get into Stephen's sermon, I want to take a little bit of time and consider who Stephen was facing and why there was so much animosity toward him.

Stephen is speaking to Jews who were still deep into Judaism. Stephen is living in a transitional time. The church age has started, and many things are beginning to change from what the Jews were used to. The Jews worshipped in the temple, and they brought animal sacrifices because this is what the old Testament taught them. They were accustomed to a priesthood and the priests would serve in the temple. Now Stephen enters their synagogue, and he begins to tell them that that God can be worshipped anywhere, and there is no need for animal sacrifices anymore. Let us notice the conversation between Jesus and the woman at the well because in this conversation we can see what was taught among the people.

John 4:19-24

¹⁹ *The woman saith unto him, Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet.*

²⁰ *Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.*

²¹ *Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father.*

²² *Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews.*

²³ *But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him.*

²⁴ *God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.*

She was a Samaritan, but she knew what was taught among the Jews. Based upon the Old Testament economy they were taught that you had to worship God at a certain

geographical location. The people whom Stephen preached to believed this. In the church age there is no need for the animal sacrifices because Jesus was THE SACRIFICE that takes sin AWAY. In the church age there no longer a need for a temple because those who are saved become the TEMPLE of God. In the church age there is no longer a need for the temple priests because when we are saved, we become priests and we can enter into the presence of God anytime. All of this was unbelievable to the Jews. To them this all seemed like a false teaching. This is the Truth that Stephen was trying to communicate to his audience. Stephen is a man with a transitional message. The false witnesses reported that Stephen said Jesus would destroy the temple. We do not know if this was said or not but if it was you can see why the people became so angry. To them the temple was the place where they could worship God.

Then there is the fact that Stephen represented Jesus as he stood and taught the Truth. Jesus had exposed these people for who they really were. They were legalists who had misused the Law to make themselves look religious and godly. When Jesus preached to them, they came under heavy conviction and that is why they crucified Him. Now Stephen is on the scene and his preaching is just like Jesus' preaching. Stephen reminds them of Jesus, and they hate it, and they are under conviction again and they are determined to kill him as they did the Lord. Let us remember the Words of Jesus in John 3.

John 3:19-21

19 And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

20 For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.

21 But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.

I point all of this out to help you to see what Stephen is facing.

➤ **The Sermon**

This sermon is the longest sermon in Acts, and it is the last message of the Gospel to the Jewish people before the Gospel would go out to all the world. It will be this sermon that will bring a great wave of persecution that will cause the spread of the Gospel.

Notice Acts 7:1

The High Priest was probably Caiaphas. This was the very man who Jesus stood before at His trials. We can be sure that as he asked this question to Stephen, he already has his mind made up that Stephen is guilty and worthy of death. But his question gives Stephen an open door to speak the Truth and he steps into the opportunity.

Notice Acts 7:2

Stephen begins his message with a respectable address of his listeners. We sense no animosity in him, and the reason is because he has a love and a deep concern for his listeners. Notice Stephen's words at the end of the chapter.

Acts 7:59-60

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

*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.*

While they are stoning Stephen he is praying for their forgiveness. Therefore, he did not share this sermon out of pride to show them how much he knew but he shared this sermon out of love because he cared about the souls of his enemies.

But there is something else to see here. Stephen is doing what Peter exhorted his readers to do.

1 Peter 3:14-16

¹⁴ But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled;

¹⁵ But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:

¹⁶ Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ.

Stephen was ready and prepared to give an answer of the hope within him and he will do that very thing. In this sermon Peter will not only tell them WHAT he believes but he will also tell them WHY he believes it.

Application:

This is something that very few believers can do today. They believe the Truth of the Gospel, but they could never give and answer as Stephen does here explaining why they believe what they believe. But each of us should be equipped to do this. Stephen will quote many Old Testament passages in this sermon. He has no notes, but this Truth is written in his heart and mind.

Notice Acts 7:2

I want to draw your attention to the title that Stephen gives to God in this verse. He refers to Him as the "God of glory." So this chapter opens with the God of glory and now let us see how it closes.

Acts 7:55

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

The chapter ends with the "glory of God". Here is a man who lives for the glory of God and before he dies, he sees the glory of God.

Application:

If we are looking to see the glory of God in our life, we must be living for the glory of God. When the Bible speaks of the glory of God it is speaking of the manifestation of the power of God, the grace of God and the presence of God.

As we step further into the sermon, we will see that Stephen points to 4 men. He points to Abraham, then Joseph, then Moses and then to Jesus at the end.

➤ **Abraham**

Notice Acts 7:2 again.

God appeared to Abraham in Mesopotamia before he dwelt in Haran, and it was in Mesopotamia that Abram was called to go to Canaan. We read of this in Genesis 11-12.

Genesis 11:29-32

²⁹ And Abram and Nahor took them wives: the name of Abram's wife was Sarai; and the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah, and the father of Iscah.

³⁰ But Sarai was barren; she had no child.

³¹ And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter in law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there.

³² And the days of Terah were two hundred and five years: and Terah died in Haran.

As we then go to Genesis 12, Abram is in Haran.

Genesis 12:1

Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee:

Why does Stephen start with Abram in this sermon? Because Abram was the father of the Hebrew Nation, and he was saved by grace through faith not by the keeping of the Law and he did not worship in a temple. This is the point that Stephen wants to make to his audience.

Genesis 15:6

⁶ And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.

Romans 4:2-3

² For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God.

³ For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.

Not only was Abram saved by grace through faith, but he was also saved without a temple. There was no temple and there was no Law when Abram lived and yet he was considered righteous because of his faith.

Notice Acts 7:2-8

Abraham's life is a very good picture of what the Christian life is like today. He was called from the old life to follow God by faith into a new land. As he went, he was faced with many trials along the way that were designed to strengthen his faith. He failed in many of the trials and had to live with the consequences but through it all God never forsook Abraham. God was always there even if it was at the last minute to step in and rescue Abraham from doing something that would forever hinder the plan of God. Over the years his faith grew until it reached the pinnacle in Genesis 22 where he was called to offer Isaac as a burnt offering on Mount Moriah. Abraham there is willing to sacrifice his son

because he knew if he did that God would have to raise Isaac from the dead in order to fulfill His promises and His covenant.

Hebrews 11:17-19

¹⁷ By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son,

¹⁸ Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called:

¹⁹ Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.

Application:

Abraham's life is a picture of our new life in Christ in many ways. We too have been called from the old life into a new life with Jesus where we are expected to live by faith. We are called to be holy as our God is holy. In this new life our faith is tested almost every day and in some of the trials we do not do very well. Like Abraham we too face consequences from our failures that we must live with the rest of our lives. There is heart break and loss in this new life. There are situations like Abraham faced where we must make difficult decisions and to stay true to God there is great pressure as we face the unknown. In all of it however we are never alone for our Lord will never forsake us.

Hebrews 13:5

⁵ Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.

Conclusion:

Abraham made many mistakes but eventually he came to the place where he kept his focus on the promises of God.

Hebrews 11:13-15

¹³ These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

¹⁴ For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country.

¹⁵ And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned.