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The Emergence Of The Church

We covered the first two events in the Church Age which were the Heavenly Origin of the Church at the Ascension and Session of Christ and the Earthly Origin of the Church on the Day of Pentecost when the Father and the Son poured forth the Spirit. And we've linked the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and six of his works, RIBSISG to the Church in distinction from Israel. Today we begin a new event called the Historical Emergence of the Church, that is, how the Church, during the book of Acts, became a separate entity from Israel. It's wise to trace this through a series of steps. It's not just one event that happened; it's a series of events. So we'll look at five steps in the coming weeks: "Step 1: Spiritual Separation of Believing Jews," that's Acts 2. "Step 2: Recognition of God's Worldwide Plan," Acts 6-7. "Step 3: Inclusion of Samaritans and Gentiles in the Church," Acts 8-11. "Step 4: Official Recognition of Gentiles in the Church," Acts 15 and "Step 5: Center of Church Moves out to Gentile World," Acts 16, 21 and 28.

The idea here is to show that as far as the recognition of the Church's existence it did not happen instantaneously. Though the origin of the Church's existence did occur instantaneously, the realization of it and understanding of it took decades to work out. So we're going to briefly deal with Step 1: The Spiritual Separation of the Believing Remnant of Jews and then we want to move on to Step 2: Stephen and what happened in Acts 6-7 as he realized God's Worldwide Plan. So Step 1, quickly, the idea is that the Church positionally was founded on the Day of Pentecost. Regeneration, Indwelling, Baptism, Sealing, plus the Intercession of the Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts all occurred on that day; for the first time in history all that happened simultaneously, instantly, and supernaturally. But a modern problem people have with this is that in the Spiritual Gifts department, they want to think that you have to have all the gifts in every generation. That's

fallacious; you don't have to have all the gifts in every generation. If some of those gifts were given to get the Church started and founded, once the foundation is laid, you no longer have to have them. That's why in Eph 2:20 it refers to the foundation of the Church as the prophets and the apostles, as a past event, it had been founded on them in Acts 2, which is why you find the choosing of the 12th apostle in Acts 1. That's not incidental, in the plan of God the foundation must be laid before the building can begin on the day of Pentecost. It's why Heb 2:3-4 refers to the miraculous signs, gifts and wonders of the early church as a past event, no longer continuing. Is this denigrating the work of the Holy Spirit? Is this denying miracles? No, that's not what we're saying. We're saying that the Holy Spirit gives certain gifts to certain generations for specific purposes and when those purposes are accomplished He no longer gives them. And once they are given to any generation, the benefits are enjoyed by every following generation. Because what is the Church? Is it the group of believers at any one time on the planet? No, it's all the believers whether on planet earth or heaven beginning on the day of Pentecost. So if a gift was given to the Church back here, it was given to the Church for all time. In other words, the body is a single unit, just like our human bodies. And once a gift is given to a generation of the Church it benefits every following generation. That's step one and what happened was a subset of the nation Israel was split off from the nation at large. The subset was saved; the nation at large was set for judgment.

Turn to Acts 6 we're going to spend quite a bit of time in the text for step two. This is not a class in exegesis but today we'll do that a little more than usual. By the way, the Church from Acts 2 to Acts 6-7 is primarily in Jerusalem. Remember Jesus said "you will be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the uttermost parts of the world." Has the Church witnessed in Samaria and the uttermost parts of the world up to this point? The answer is no. The Church is still confined to Jerusalem, yet the Lord Jesus Christ said this Church will gradually expand; go, make disciples of all the nations, that is a picture of what is coming, they probably didn't pay much attention to it as we'll see but that is God's plan for what is coming, whether people want to go out and witness or not -that is what will happen.

The Book of Acts has a series of events that shows you how the Holy Spirit works in spite of Christians, because the Holy Spirit is doing His thing whether we are cooperating or not. Half the time we haven't even got a clue

what's really going on. That's why when we dealt with the intercession work of the Holy Spirit we said He makes intercession for us with unspeakable speech, speech that can't be uttered. It can't be uttered because we're not supposed to hear what's being communicated on that line. That's a secure communication going on between the Holy Spirit who is indwelling our regenerate nature, and the Lord Jesus Christ sitting at the Father's right hand. And that secure line is set up so that other people can't get the information. Who might want it? The god of this world, Satan. He's not omnipresent, he's not omniscient, he doesn't know all that's going on, but the Holy Spirit does so He prays on our behalf, when we don't know how or what to pray, He does and He prays perfectly for us about this little thing and that little thing, things not shared with you, not shared with me, not shared with anybody outside of that secure line. And it's done so that God retains the initiative in history. He drives history and we kind of, after the fact, catch on; we see what God is doing and it's usually a kick in the rear to get with the program.

In Acts 6 we're going to watch this as a case study of how He does it. Think about this situation, Step 2, The Recognition of God's Worldwide Plan, that God's plan reaches far beyond Israel. That was not recognized up through Acts 5. How do we know it wasn't? Look at the quote from Dr. Ladd. Here's what he says: "Acts outlines the steps by which the church gradually broke with the synagogue and became an independent movement. In fact, one of the central motifs in Acts is the explanation of how a small fellowship of Jews in Jerusalem, to all intents and purposes hardly distinguishable from their Jewish milieu, became a Gentile fellowship in the capital city of the empire, completely freed from all Jewish practices." It was an amazing historical transition. It occurred within thirty or forty years. It took three or four decades for the Church to separate out from Israel. Now what caused that separation? It didn't happen overnight. Some observations from the text in Acts 2; notice what the Christians were doing. Often these are cited as evidences that Christianity is pro-socialism, that's not what's going on here, there have been times in Christianity when circumstances warranted some of these behaviors, but it's not socialism at all because everything that is done here is voluntary. But, if you notice in Acts 2:42, "And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 And everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. 44 And

all those who had believed were together, and had all things in common, 45and they began selling their property and possessions, and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. 46And day by day continuing with one mind in the temple,” where? “in the temple.” Now why did the church meet in the temple? Because that was what Jews did, that was where they worshipped. So they had not separated from going down to the Temple. And in James, arguably the earliest epistle, he says in chapter 2 they were still meeting in the *sunagogue*, the synagogue. So the believing Jews had not separated from the Jewish community at this point. They were all mixed together.

The irony is, of course, while they’re walking around in the temple made of stone they had become living temples of the Holy Spirit in their bodies. They were the temple. And yet they didn’t realize that had happened. So in Acts 6 something happens, and there are a number of interesting historical observations, if you look in verses 1-2 of Acts 6. “Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. 2And the Twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, ‘It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. 3But select from among you, brethren, seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. 4But we will devote ourselves to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.’ 5And the statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. 6And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them.”

This passage is usually referenced when we start talking about the office of the deacon, and that’s correct. This is where the office of the deacon began, but that’s not what we’re interested in today. That’s important to know but something else was happening here in the larger and grander scheme. In the first place in verse 1 it says “while the disciples were increasing a complaint arose.” Who is complaining and who are they complaining against? There were two groups of Jews, notice no Gentiles here. Both of these parties are Jews. One are the Hellenistic Jews, the others are the native Jews.

Hellenistic versus the natives; both are Jews. Let's look at the Hellenistic group. Who are the Hellenistic Jews? What does Hellenistic mean? Greek, Greek Jews, Jews who had come from outside Palestine. These are Jews who are part of a larger community which we call the Diaspora, i.e. the dispersed Jews. Who are the Diaspora Jews? The Diaspora are Jews living outside the land of Israel. When did the Jews start living outside of the land? Let's go back in the OT. We've gone through the framework, we've gone through the various events of OT history, and you recall that we have at Mt Sinai the revelation of God as the King of Israel and the King gives His law. And if Israel obeys they will be blessed but if Israel rebels they will be disciplined. And you trace the rest of the OT and it's a description of the King's discipline. What happened was that the people rebelled, the kingdom was Divided and the two Kingdoms went into Decline, and finally they end up in Exile. What happened to Jews in the Exile? They were deported to Gentile lands, in particular Assyria and Babylon.

When the restoration occurred after seventy years of the exile, when they got down to the restoration that was a Partial Restoration of the southern kingdom. The Jews of the northern kingdom were not restored. They remained out there in Gentile lands. And their descendants now, centuries later, are all over the Mediterranean. This is interesting because this is stage-setting and it shows you something about how the Holy Spirit works. If you think of this on a time line: way back in 721BC you have the northern kingdom go into exile, in 586BC the southern kingdom goes to exile, some of them come back in 516 BC, mostly from the southern kingdom, *some* come back. The rest of them remain outside the land, and they gradually spread all over the place. They start businesses, they start trading, and they start moving all over the place. But now look what's been created here! Something new in history has been created that wasn't there before. What has God done here? Now centuries later the Lord Jesus Christ comes, the gospel goes forth in the land of Israel, not in the Diaspora, it's in the land that the gospel is announced so new revelation begins to happen in the land, not outside of the land.

Remember when we were dealing with the life of Christ, what did Jesus say about where the disciples should go in His day? Go not where? To the Gentiles, go only to the house of Israel. So the Lord Jesus Christ sounds like a dispensationalist right there. Obviously He didn't want the disciples to go

outside of the land; He wanted them to stay in the land. Why? Because God had a kingdom program He was working with Israel and it had to do with their Promised Land.

Meanwhile, these Diaspora Jews are spread out all over the world. As they spread and as they establish their businesses, what do you suppose these Jews in the Diaspora are doing? What they had to have done, for example they moved into the Aegean area and established trading? What would they have to do with their language? They'd have to learn Greek, they'd have to learn Persian, they'd have to learn Aramaic, they'd have to learn Latin, they'd have to learn Phoenician, and they'd have to learn Coptic. So after centuries now we have Diaspora Jews living in other countries by the thousands who are linked in with these Gentile people. Here's a Jew in Greece, here's a Jew in Syria. But they're linked back to the native Jews in the land too. They're linked by their genealogy, they're linked because of their Jewish practices, because of Torah. So they have dual links, they're linked to the cultures they're living in and they're linked to the culture in Palestine.

What does that suggest that God is setting up historically here? He's putting a vehicle in place for the gospel to go out into all the world. Also prior to the Lord Jesus Christ God did something else to prepare the world for the gospel. He had a group of people invade and come to power called the Romans. And everywhere the Roman army went the Roman engineers followed them. And the Roman army engineers built what? They built aqueducts, they built roads, they built amazing things that connected the whole empire. It's amazing what God had providentially set up in preparation for what? For the gospel to go out to the whole world.

So do you get my point? Besides the spiritual and linguistic things going on out here with these Jews that lived out among Gentiles, who had connections to the natives Jews back in the land, there were physical and material things going on. The Roman roads were built all over the Mediterranean connecting city to city. And guess who traveled on those roads and brought the gospel throughout southern Europe, within a matter of two or three decades? The Christians. So independently of spiritual and religious things there were engineering things, there were political things, all of history was being worked according to the counsel of His will. So do you see how it was all set up? When God went to pull off the gospel it wasn't just the Holy Spirit

working in the Church. It was God working all around the world, setting it up for the propagation of the gospel. That's one of the evidences of the providence of God. Don't be naïve; He's setting things up right now for what's coming.

Now the Diaspora, one of their cultural links besides speaking Hebrew and being able to read the Torah, was that they would come back to Jerusalem periodically. Why would they come back to Jerusalem? Because there was the temple, because there were the feast days; Passover, Unleavened Bread and Pentecost. Who was there on Pentecost? The Diaspora Jews. So these Diaspora Jews came back periodically. One of the reasons that they would come back was that they wanted to be buried in Jerusalem. And history tells us that they would come back, and the men in those days were dying earlier than their wives just like they do today, and these widows would be left around Jerusalem. So all of a sudden we have a large community of widows, many of whom believed in Christ.

So they needed funds to keep alive and in 6:1 it's the Diaspora widows that are complaining against the native widows. The problem was the natives recognized that these Diaspora women weren't the same as them. They were thought of as "of the world," as compromisers with the world. So now we have a cultural difference inside the Church.

It also says the dispute was over "the daily serving of food" or tables, clearly the early Church had some program to distribute funds to the needy widows, to take care of them, they thought that was important. What's so interesting is that the Jews outside of the Church had a charity program too. Jewish records tell us of two kinds of poverty programs that they ran. One was every Friday private charity boxes would be distributed. The Jewish population, the poor, would be given enough money for fourteen meals, two meals a day for the next seven days. That was a poverty program that Jews ran. By the way, they were the only people in the world that ran poverty programs because that's the effect of the word of God, to have compassion. And the strangers who also were poor were given daily food. However, in verse 1 the implication is that the serving going on there, that particular welfare program is being run internal to the Christian community because obviously the complaint is inside the Church.

So what does that tell you is happening culturally here in verse 1, without going into verse 2, right away what do we know? That the Church is beginning to separate out, it's beginning to take care of its own, it's beginning not to rely on the poverty programs of the larger culture around them. It has already, probably within weeks and months created its own welfare program. This has been the mark of the Church wherever it's gone. In America, we Christians don't see this because the Christian idea of welfare has spread outward to the secular state. So we've grown up in that environment so we always associate welfare programs with the government. But historically, everywhere the Church has gone, medicine and poverty programs have gone with it.

And here's an obvious case that by the time of Acts 6:1 we have the rise of this distribution to needy widows. But the distribution isn't going too well because there's a cultural division, people just don't like to mix from different cultures and that's what's happening. So it's interesting that when they go to solve the problem, notice the priority in verses 2-3. It's clear by verses 2-4 that the apostle's priority is not distributing funds to widows. What's their priority? Prayer and ministry of the word of God. And so the apostles, in spite of the fact that they have a problem in the Church do not permit that to interfere with prayer and ministry of the word. A lesson about priorities in the Church: the priority of prayer and ministry of the word will not be replaced by all the other programs. That does not mean the programs are bad, it means that what's good will not take place of what's best. So right from the beginning there's recognition that prayer and the word of God are primary over everything else, including poverty and taking care of people. And it's not that they're indifferent, it's just an order of priority.

The next observation to make is in verse 5. If you look at verse 5 very carefully, names are given. What's interesting about those names is they're all Greek. So the deacons that are being appointed here are Diaspora deacons, deacons from the Greek speaking world. Why did they do that? Why did the congregation of disciples pick all Diaspora deacons? Apparently they thought they could distribute things fairly and justly, so that's what they did. And if we come down further in verse 8 we see Stephen, apparently one of the fantastic deacons, performing great wonders and signs, which apostles were doing. So although he wasn't an apostle he was a man in whom the Holy Spirit was working mightily in a way like an apostle. It says in verse 9 that,

in addition to distributing funds he was also debating the Scriptures. “But some men from what was called the Synagogue of the Freedmen, including both Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and some from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and argued with Stephen.” Look again in verse 9 and ask yourself, do you suppose that’s a native Jewish synagogue? Or is it a Diaspora Jewish synagogue? Clearly it’s a Diaspora Jewish synagogue. These are Jews from outside the land. What is the Holy Spirit doing here, what’s He telling us in Acts 6? That another set of Jews besides Peter, Paul, John and the native guys are in Jerusalem and the Holy Spirit is now beginning to work among this Diaspora group of Jews, He’s stirring things up. And they were so upset by what Stephen was doing, the arguments began, they began to dispute, and it says, v 10, “But they were unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking.”

So even though he was a deacon, he was involved in lively public debates, and nobody was able to answer him. Remember that little observation because later on he’s martyred and the guy that apparently led the execution is the guy that writes the rest of the NT. No one was able to take Stephen on. Stephen was seeing something that Peter wasn’t seeing. Stephen was seeing something that John wasn’t seeing, James wasn’t seeing, Mark wasn’t seeing, Matthew wasn’t seeing. This guy was really stirring people up in the Diaspora community. The Diaspora community wouldn’t know Peter from a hole in the ground, probably wouldn’t have respected him either, he’s just a local boy, don’t bother with those guys, they don’t know anything, they haven’t been out in the world.

But one of their own, who had been in the world, who had been well-traveled, who knew multiple languages, when one of those guys becomes not just a Christian but he becomes an articulate Christian who knows the word of God and sees the implications, sees where it’s going, now we’re going to have some arguments. Because they are now sensing the explosive nature of the gospel, this is going to upset everything. In verse 11, they can’t answer the man so they’re going to set up some traps. Doesn’t this look familiar? When was the last time in the Bible we read about setting up traps? For the Lord Jesus Christ. “Then they secretly induced men to say ‘We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God.’ 12 And they stirred up the people, the elders and the scribes, and they came upon him and dragged him away, and brought him before the Council. 13 And they put forward false

witnesses who said, “This man incessantly speaks against this holy place, and the Law.” 14“for we have heard him say that this Nazarene, Jesus, will destroy this place and alter the customs which Moses handed down to us.”

Watch verse 13. The charge is two-fold. The charge is that he speaks against the Torah and he speaks against the temple. Why do you suppose they interpreted the gospel to be against the temple and Torah? Why would that be a charge against the early Christian preachers? These guys, they’re attacking Moses’ Torah, they’re attacking the temple. What must have they been saying that the enemies of the gospel would turn around and make that charge? What were they saying salvation was by? By grace through faith in Christ, that you don’t come to God through keeping the Torah. So the fact they’re angry and they’re interpreting the gospel as anti-law, or antinomian, the charge here is immediately that the gospel of grace is antinomian. You still hear that charge. This goes back to the 1st century, that’s exactly what the charge was in the first century.

Next it says that he speaks against this holy place. What do you suppose was true about the gospel to lead observers to conclude that the gospel is anti-temple? What aspects of the gospel? They say it’s an attack on the Torah because the gospel is antinomian, it says you don’t have to keep the law to be saved. It’s anti-temple because remember what Jesus said to the woman at the well, the day is coming when you can worship Him anywhere, that God is with you and you will be a temple. So there must have been a realization on Stephen’s part that believers were now indwelt by the Holy Spirit. So now the indwelling Holy Spirit is the center of attention, not the physical temple. And that struck a nerve because boy, the Temple was everything, the Jews were the temple guardians and how dare you speak against the temple. So whatever Stephen was saying, he really raised a ruckus, and these are very, very serious charges. And this is where you begin to see the split between the Jewish believers and the Jewish community at large that insists on the traditional understanding of Moses.

In verse 15, there’s a description. Luke is the author and he got most of his stuff because he was a traveling companion with Paul. Paul was present, he got involved in this incident, and it’s kind of intriguing to ask yourself whether the description of verse 15 was given because Paul saw it and he later remembered this. “And fixing their gaze on him, all who were sitting in

the Council” that is the officials conducting the trial, “saw his face like the face of an angel.” What do you suppose that looked like, we’re not really told, the text just says there was something peculiar about this guy that really got their attention.

Now Stephen begins his answer. We want to go through chapter 7 carefully. Chapter 7 is the first major apologetic as the Church begins to leave Jerusalem. Peter’s apologetic, chapter 2, was given to people inside the city of Jerusalem, but now we begin to have a little split here. Now the tempers begin to flare and beginning in chapter 7 Stephen begins to turn the tables on these charges, it’s not he and other Jewish Christians who are against Moses and the Temple, it’s them. So I’ve given you the outline of this defense. We’re going to go through it because it gives you a glimpse of what these wonderful first generation Christians were like, and how far some of the Diaspora Jewish believers had come in their understanding of the word of God. Verse 2-16 I’ve divided as discussing the origin of Israel; verses 17-43, the origin of the Torah; verses 44-50 the origin of the temple. The text follows the accusation; answers are made to questions. And the accusation and accusational question is in verse 6:13; that is the charge that the Christian had to answer. So now we have an apologetic. And here’s an example of what an apologetic looks like. An apologetic is an answer, primarily in a court environment. It’s an answer to an accusation. It is a defense to a legal charge. Socrates gives his *Apology* for the charges against his corrupting the youth of Athens. And Stephen begins his apology by giving a recital of Jewish history.

We’re going to start by looking at verse 1. “And the high priest said, ‘Are these things so?’” Here’s the officer in charge, he’s the authority. And this is an official proceeding, not just a street gathering, this is official. So he demands an apologetic. And Stephen rises to the occasion. And before Stephen opens his mouth, remember in 6:10 the background? It says they were unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit of Stephen. So now we’re going to watch the wisdom and the Spirit of Stephen. When he gets done, not only do they have no answers for him, they are so angry that can’t do anything except resort to physical violence. And that’s always another thing to notice. Whenever Satan motivates physical violence against the Church he’s already been defeated, because he’s so unable to meet the claims of the gospel by rational argument that he has to use physical violence to stop it. Physical violence is an admission that nothing else can stop it. That’s always

the case, and this is the beginning of church history and it's been repeated thousands of times, it's still being repeated today, in China, in the Moslem lands, wherever Christians are persecuted, mostly in Moslem lands, wherever Christians are persecuted it's always the case that the persecutors have failed to argue successfully against it, or they're just insecure people.

So the high priest demands an answer. Beginning in verse 2, this first section, verses 2-16, Stephen is going to remind his Jewish accusers of their own origins. "And he said, 'Hear me, brethren and fathers! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran,'" now it's interesting he uses "the God of glory." "The God of glory" was associated with the temple. And he says, you know, you people are always fussing about the God of glory and the temple; he says where did the God of glory first talk to a Jew? It wasn't in Jerusalem, it wasn't even in the land of Israel, it was over in Mesopotamia, so it started on Gentile soil. So clearly Stephen right from the start shows that there is a worldwide aspect of God's working, even in starting the Jewish nation.

Years ago there was an article in the Jerusalem Post. This was from 1976, there was a letter to the editor, and it's interesting, here's what a Jew observed. There was a discussion about Christianity, Islam and Judaism. Here's an astute thing, it reminds me of Stephen. To the editor of the Jerusalem Post: "Dear Sir, The phrase "Palestine as the cradle of the three monotheistic religions is being repeated *ad nauseum* by Christians and also by de-Judaized Jews. It should be critically analyzed from a Jewish point of view. This country is certainly not the cradle of Judaism." Now isn't that a funny statement to make? Here's a guy writing in the Jerusalem Post, and he's a Jewish guy and he says "This country is certainly not the cradle of Judaism. Abraham recognized God in Iraq. The Torah was given in the no-man's land of Sinai. The foot of the lawgiver of Israel never touched the soil of Canaan. *Eritz Yisrael*" the land of Israel "was acquired by Israel. It did not beget Israel. Jerusalem became the holy city of Judaism in the late state of the history of Israel and Judaism, 800 years, in fact, after Abraham. Islam is the supreme achievement of Arabia. Islam had no roots in Palestine. It conquered Palestine. The prophet of Islam visited Jerusalem only in a vision." Mohammed never visited the Jerusalem. "Only Christianity originated in this country. The God of the Christians was born here, He lived here and He died here. The Christian church was first established in

Jerusalem. So sum up, the two monotheistic religions, Judaism and Islam, do not have their cradle in Palestine. This country is only the cradle of Christianity.”

There’s a Jew that knows history. And you can well imagine that when Stephen opened his speech with verse 2, how that must have struck at the very foundation of this religious arrogance of the authorities. I remind you, says he, that this God that you speak endlessly of appeared to Abraham out in Timbuktu. And he’s saying the God of Israel spoke in the outside world, come on guys, get your horizons stretched out. You claim to read Torah, did you read the part about God speaking to our Father Abraham outside the land of Israel? Abraham isn’t just any Jew, he’s the original Jew.

Verse 4, “Then he departed from the land of the Chaldeans, and settled in Haran.” This is all Genesis, this is all history, it’s a historical recital and he is reminding them, they all knew this. It’s just that Stephen’s now taking what they knew, the chunks of history that they had known since they were boys, young boys, and he’s turning it around and he’s throwing it at them. “...And from there, after his father died, God removed him into this country in which you are now living.” So he did come here but he wasn’t born here. He moved. Verse 5, “And He gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot of ground; and yet, even when he had no child, He promised that He would give it to him as a possession, and to his offspring after him. 6But God spoke to this effect, that his offspring would be aliens in a foreign land,” it’s all Genesis 15, it’s all the Abrahamic Covenant, and in fact verse 8 speaks of the Abrahamic Covenant.

So isn’t this interesting. Stephen begins his apologetic to Hebrew accusers by going back to their own origin and purpose. Watch what he’s doing, he’s using strategic envelopment. Here are his Hebrew accusers, but because they’re Hebrews they’re part of the Israelite nation. And what this guy is going to do, he’s going to say okay, I’m going to surround your argument with mine. My argument is bigger and my argument is going to envelop you and interpret you in terms of the Abrahamic Covenant. And you guys can accuse me all you want, but I’m telling you and you know it because you’ve studied the Scriptures, you know that your very existence is defined by the purposes of God in the Abrahamic Covenant. What are the three things in the Abrahamic Covenant that we studied? Land, seed, and a worldwide blessing. Stephen

has things together here. He knows things are opening up to that third aspect, the worldwide blessing. And it's interesting in verses 6-7 the aspects of the covenant that he's talking about are the land and the seed, he doesn't mention the worldwide blessing. But if you follow his argument, and we will continue this next week, if you follow his argument you're going to see that by not saying that third thing in the Abrahamic Covenant, he doesn't have to, because when he gets through this argument they're going to realize... in effect here's his argument. We Jews exist in history in order for a larger program of evangelization toward the whole world, and where this exciting breakthrough in Stephen's understanding occurs is after he gets done, after he's murdered, one guy in particular was listening very intently to this, and who is the guy that finally broke the gospel out of the land of Israel? The guy who's listening to Stephen? You see the importance of Acts 6 is that here is where Paul got started in his re-working of theology. Paul's not stupid; Paul saw the strength and wisdom of Stephen's argument for worldwide repercussions. And the resulting NT is largely Pauline, but Paul started his understanding under Stephen's ministry.

So we've seen steps 1 and 2 in the historical recognition of the Church's emergence from Israel. "Step 1: Spiritual Separation of believing Jews," that's Acts 2. "Step 2: Recognition of God's Worldwide Plan," Acts 6-7. And we'll continue to work through these steps in the book of Acts.

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