

Acts Part 18 – Stephen’s Defense (Defending the Faith)

A sermon series by Pastor Byron Chesney Wednesday, January 13, 2016

† Acts 7:1-18

- 1 Then said the high priest, Are these things so?
2 And he said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran,
3 And said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall shew thee.
4 Then came he out of the land of the Chaldaeans, and dwelt in Charran: and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell.
5 And he gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child.
6 And God spake on this wise, That his seed should sojourn in a strange land; and that they should bring them into bondage, and entreat them evil four hundred years.
7 And the nation to whom they shall be in bondage will I judge, said God: and after that shall they come forth, and serve me in this place.
8 And he gave him the covenant of circumcision: and so Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs.
9 And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him,
10 And delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favour and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house.
11 Now there came a dearth over all the land of Egypt and Chanaan, and great affliction: and our fathers found no sustenance.
12 But when Jacob heard that there was corn in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first.
13 And at the second time Joseph was made known to his brethren; and Joseph’s kindred was made known unto Pharaoh.
14 Then sent Joseph, and called his father Jacob to him, and all his kindred, threescore and fifteen souls.
15 So Jacob went down into Egypt, and died, he, and our fathers,
16 And were carried over into Sychem, and laid in the sepulchre that Abraham bought for a sum of money of the sons of Emmor the father of Sychem.
17 But when the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt,
18 Till another king arose, which knew not Joseph.

In our last study, 2 weeks ago, we examined the character of Stephen. We saw that the Jews disputed with him concerning what he was teaching and preaching. The Bible said that they could not resist his wisdom so they found some men that would lie and bring false accusations against him so they could put him on trial before the Sanhedrin council. As the council looked at him after accusing him, they saw as it were the face of an angel, and we went into some detail of what the Bible says about angel’s faces.

And, that is where we pick up from tonight after the council was stedfastly looking upon him. The first 53 verses of Acts chapter 7 deals with Stephens’s defense, but more precisely, defense of the Gospel, and then verses 54-60 describes his death.

There is no way we can cover this entire portion in one evening of study so tonight we will try to examine the first 18 verses of Stephen’s defense.

1 Then said the high priest, Are these things so?

Alright, so Stephen is before the Sanhedrin court and the accusation of blasphemy against God, the Temple, Moses, and the Law has been levied against him. The high priest asks him the question: “**are these things so?**” In other words, did you really say that Jesus was going to destroy the temple and change the laws of Moses?

2 And he said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran,
3 And said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall shew thee.

Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken Stephen addresses the council with the proper respect by giving them their respected greetings of men, brethren, and fathers. One reason for doing this is so that Stephen identifies himself as the same as these men. They are looking at him as a traitor because he is a Christian but he was born and raised up the same way as they were, a Jew. So he identifies with them as being brethren and fathers. This will cause them to look at him as one of their own instead of an outsider or traitor.

Notice that Stephen’s character remains intact regardless of this kangaroo court that he is up against. Christians should take note of his behavior and remember this in times when we are being falsely accused or not being treated properly.

our father Abraham Notice that Stephen chooses his words carefully. The Jews took much pride that they were “children of Abraham.” If you remember over in the Gospel of John chapter 8 when the Pharisees are disputing with Jesus they make the claim in verse 33 “**we be Abraham’s seed.**” Then further down in that same chapter the Pharisees make the claim again that Abraham is their father: **John 8:53** Art thou greater than our father Abraham, which is dead? and the prophets are dead: whom makest thou thyself? So Stephen makes sure he mentions “**father Abraham.**”

4 Then came he out of the land of the Chaldaeans, and dwelt in Charran: and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell. 5 And he gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child.

He continues with the story of Abraham and tells of how he was obedient to God and came out of the land of the Chaldeans and went to the Land of Canaan, and how God had made promises to Abraham that he would multiply his seed even though Abraham was fatherless at the time.

And he gave him none inheritance in it He brings up the fact that although Abraham was being obedient to God, he had to suffer. Even when he got to the land that God promised him he had no inheritance there. He was constantly having to move around with no place to call his own.

As Christians we should take notice of this as well. Just because you are being obedient to God doesn’t mean everything will go the way you expect it to in the time

period you expect it to. God works on a different schedule than we do. If everything worked out exactly as we desired it to work out and on our own timetable, we would for sure miss out on God's riches blessings. Sometimes we make the mistake of following our own will instead of God's will and every now and then we think that what has occurred is the best thing for us, but if we had done God's will then things would have been even better.

To the casual observer it may seem that Stephen is stalling for time by going over these old stories that they already knew, but in fact, what he is doing is building a case for himself by trying to prove to them how everything in the past history of the Jews has pointed up to and led to this moment in time when Christ would be the answer for the sins of men and would establish His Church. So, in essence it is the history of the promised Messiah and the establishment of the New Testament Church.

6 And God spake on this wise, That his seed should sojourn in a strange land; and that they should bring them into bondage, and entreat them evil four hundred years. 7 And the nation to whom they shall be in bondage will I judge, said God: and after that shall they come forth, and serve me in this place.

Stephen continues telling of the life of Abraham and how that by following God that Abraham suffered and also his seed would undergo a lot of hardship and trials before they would ever possess the land that was promised.

And the nation to whom they shall be in bondage will I judge One lesson we can learn from this though is even though we may face trials and hardships, God, in his own time will avenge his people and bring judgment on those that are against Him.

8 And he gave him the covenant of circumcision: and so Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs.

And he gave him the covenant of circumcision Stephen is, of course, referring to the covenant of circumcision that God made with Abraham in **Genesis 17:10-11: This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised. 11 And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you.**

Then Stephen gives the list of the Patriarchs starting with Abraham's son, Isaac, and then Isaac's son, Jacob, who became Israel and his sons were the 12 Tribes of Israel.

9 And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him, 10 And delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favour and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house.

Stephen continues with the history lesson of the Hebrew people by showing the council how even the early patriarchs went through troubles and trials even though they were God's chosen people. Even Joseph who had done no wrong but yet was treated badly, God stayed with him and delivered him from his afflictions. Not only did God deliver him but sat him up to be a great and mighty man in the Kingdom of Egypt.

11 Now there came a dearth over all the land of Egypt and Chanaan, and great affliction: and our fathers found no sustenance. 12 But when Jacob heard that there was corn in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first.

He gives the narrative of what happened while Joseph was governor of Egypt and the famine set in and everyone outside of Egypt was starving and how his brothers that had sold him into slavery were forced to come to him to be saved from starvation.

13 And at the second time Joseph was made known to his brethren; and Joseph's kindred was made known unto Pharaoh. 14 Then sent Joseph, and called his father Jacob to him, and all his kindred, threescore and fifteen souls.

When we read this we think, "hmmm, why is he bothering going over all of this old history that everyone already knows?" But one thing you have to understand about the mindset of the Jews, especially in those days, was that they loved to talk about and hear about their history. The number one thing the Jews liked to discuss was their history of being God's people. They were very proud of it, it meant a whole lot to them.

Stephen knows this and by bringing up all of this historical background he is holding their interest and building his case. As long as he keeps talking about the history of the Jews and Abraham and the patriarchs, he has their undivided attention.

15 So Jacob went down into Egypt, and died, he, and our fathers, 16 And were carried over into Sychem, and laid in the sepulchre that Abraham bought for a sum of money of the sons of Emmor the father of Sychem. 17 But when the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt, 18 Till another king arose, which knew not Joseph.

We all know the story, Joseph forgave his brothers and they all came to live in Egypt and his father eventually died and they buried him and meanwhile the sons continued living in Egypt and enjoyed life up until a new Pharaoh took over who didn't know Joseph and things then drastically changed for the Hebrews.

And, just as I said when we began this lesson tonight, Stephen's defense of the Gospel continues through this entire chapter. There is no good place to end it for tonight but for time sake we will cut it off right here.

† All Scripture from the Authorized King James Version