

Acts Part 19 – Stephen’s Defense Part 2

A sermon series by Pastor Byron Chesney Wednesday, January 20, 2016

† Acts 7:19-47

In our last study, we left off in Acts 7:18 and we looked at the first part of Stephen’s defense of the Gospel. We saw how he kept the attention of the Sanhedrin court and his accusers by going over the history of their people and identifying with them. He is building a case for the Gospel and the start of the New Testament Church while he is doing this. It is a very well-crafted sermon/defense. The last thing we read last week was at the end of the life of Joseph and the Bible says “another king arose, which knew not Joseph.” We pick up tonight in verse 19:

19 The same dealt subtilly with our kindred, and evil entreated our fathers, so that they cast out their young children, to the end they might not live.

Stephen continues with the history of the Hebrew people and what happened to them after a new King came in that “**knew not Joseph**.” That means that this new king had no dealings with the Hebrew people or the great things that had occurred through Joseph so he treated them as a foreign people.

“**they cast out their young children, to the end they might not live,**” this is of course speaking of when the Pharaoh ordered that all of the male Hebrew children be killed. You will find that in the O.T. in **Exodus 1:22: And Pharaoh charged all his people, saying, Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river, and every daughter ye shall save alive.**

20 In which time Moses was born, and was exceeding fair, and nourished up in his father’s house three months:

Now Stephen gets to Moses. You can bet that their ears really perked up at the mention of his name. There were two key people in the history of the Jews that they were very proud of, the first, of course, being Abraham, but the second was Moses. You can get a good picture of the pride they had in Moses over in the Gospel of John in the story of when Jesus healed the blind man that had been blind by birth. After he was healed the Pharisees became very upset because the healing had been done on the Sabbath so they start questioning the blind man:

John 9:26-29: Then said they to him again, What did he to thee? how opened he thine eyes? 27 He answered them, I have told you already, and ye did not hear: wherefore would ye hear it again? will ye also be his disciples? 28 Then they reviled him, and said, Thou art his disciple; **but we are Moses’ disciples.** 29 We know that God spake unto Moses: as for this fellow, we know not from whence he is.

They were accusing Jesus of breaking the laws of Moses by working on the Sabbath and they proudly declared that they were Moses’ disciples. They kept the laws of Moses because they knew that God spake unto Moses.

21 And when he was cast out, Pharaoh’s daughter took him up, and nourished him for her own son. 22 And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds.

Then he continues with the life of Moses and how he was protected and lived in Pharaoh’s palace and became a mighty man in the land of Egypt.

23 And when he was full 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 him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian: 25 For he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not.

Then he comes to when Moses’ eyes were opened to the truth that his own people were in bondage and being mistreated by the Egyptians. Remember that his own mother was allowed to be his nurse while he was growing up and no doubt she relayed to him the history and plight of his people. Moses had to have been torn between being loyal to Egypt and loyal to his own people. We see in the end that blood is thicker than water and he avenges his people. Let’s turn in the O.T. and read about this: **Exodus 2:11-12:** And it came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown, that he went out unto his brethren, and looked on their burdens: and he spied an Egyptian smiting an Hebrew, one of his brethren. 12 And he looked this way and that way, and when he saw that there was no man, he slew the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand.

The act of Moses killing the Egyptian is troubling for some people. There are basically two schools of thought on that subject.

1. The first being that Moses was justified by doing this and had acted on a divine calling and judgment from God to avenge his people by slaying their enemy.
2. The second being that Moses acted on his own and in a crime of passion slew the Egyptian and then tried to hide the evidence.

I am a firm believer in the first school of thought. God was using Moses to be the deliverer of Israel. He was standing up for his people and was poised to lead them out of Egypt’s bondage but the people rejected him. He was justified in slaying the Egyptian due to the fact that the Bible tells us that the Egyptian was “**smiting an Hebrew,**” which means, “**striking in a manner to kill.**” God has commissioned Moses to lead His people but because of their rejection of him they suffered another 40-years.

26 And the next day he shewed himself unto them as they strove, and would have set them at one again, saying, Sirs, ye are brethren; why do ye wrong one to another? 27 But he that did his neighbour wrong thrust him away, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us? 28 Wilt thou kill me, as thou diddest the Egyptian yesterday?

We see again Moses attempting to lead his people by trying to settle a dispute between two Hebrew men but they reject his council and then reveal that they saw him kill the Egyptian.

29 Then fled Moses at this saying, and was a stranger in the land of Madian, where he begat two sons.

This long narrative of the life of Moses is holding their attention as Stephen builds his defense. He tells of how Moses fled from Egypt after he learned that his killing of the Egyptian was not a secret. He would have to flee because as soon as Pharaoh found out he would be in great trouble. We know this to be a fact because the Bible tells us so in **Exodus 2:15:** Now when Pharaoh heard this thing, he sought to slay Moses. But Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh, and dwelt in the land of Midian: and he sat down by a well.

30 And when forty years were expired, there appeared to him in the wilderness of mount Sina an angel of the Lord in a flame of fire in a bush. 31 When Moses saw it, he wondered at the sight: and as he drew near to behold it, the voice of the Lord came unto him, 32 Saying, I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Then Moses trembled, and durst not behold. 33 Then said the Lord to him, Put off thy shoes from thy feet: for the place where thou standest is holy ground. 34 I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people which is in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send thee into Egypt.

Stephen then tells of the calling of Moses by God. Obviously Moses had went through the refining process necessary to fulfill God's plan for His people. We read back in Exodus that during the time that Moses was gone from Egypt that a lot had happened to cause God to put Moses to work: **Exodus 2:23-25:** And it came to pass in process of time, that the king of Egypt died: and the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage. 24 And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. 25 And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God had respect unto them.

So God meets Moses on the side of the mountain and appears unto him as a flame burning in a bush. God commissions him to be the leader to free his people from Egypt's bondage.

35 This Moses whom they refused, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge? the same did God send to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the angel which appeared to him in the bush. 36 He brought them out, after that he had shewed wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red sea, and in the wilderness forty years.

We get a little insight in these verses about Moses being chosen by God to be the leader of His people. Back when he was 40-years old the people rejected him as ruler but now he is 80-years old and God is sending him to be a ruler and deliverer of his people. I think this is further proof that God intended all along for Moses to be the leader of the Children of Israel but he wasn't quite ready yet and the people were not ready yet either.

37 This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear.

Here Stephen is reminding them of how Moses had prophesied about the coming Messiah to the Children of Israel. We find that back in **Deuteronomy 18:15-18** The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken; 16 According to all that thou desiredst of the LORD thy God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not. 7 And the LORD said unto me, They have well spoken that which they have spoken. 18 I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him.

The mention of the Messiah is one more step toward pointing to Jesus as the one that was prophesied about by Moses. This is an essential key in Stephen's defense of the Gospel and the establishment of the New Testament Church.

38 This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us: 39 To whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt, 40 Saying unto Aaron, Make us gods to go before us: for as for this Moses, which brought us out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him. 41 And they made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifice unto the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands.

Now Stephen is giving examples of the unbelief and the disobedience of the Jews when they rejected Moses as their leader and they turned to false idols to worship.

"that was in the church" Notice the Bible uses the word **"church"** here. The word church comes from the Greek word, **ek-klay-see'-ah**, which means; **"a called out assembly."** As it is being used in this text is not in the same context as what we consider the "church" today, as the "body of Christ," but it does imply that it is a group of people called out of Egypt and separated from the world by God.

42 Then God turned, and gave them up to worship the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets, O ye house of Israel, have ye offered to me slain beasts and sacrifices by the space of forty years in the wilderness? 43 Yea, ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, figures which ye made to worship them: and I will carry you away beyond Babylon.

"God turned, and gave them up," what a terrifying statement. Friends that is the last thing we ever want to happen to us, to be given up by God. We talked about it some last Sunday morning when we preached about the time when God finally says enough and he gives up on someone. We all know the outcome of the Children of Israel, none of the original ones that came out of Egypt made it to the Promised Land except for Joshua and Caleb. God gave all of the other ones up because of their disobedience and lack of faith in Him and in the man Moses, whom he chose to be their leader.

What Stephen is doing is giving this Sanhedrin court a comparison of themselves and the Children of Israel and how they rejected God and his prophet and now they are doing the same thing.

44 Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as he had appointed, speaking unto Moses, that he should make it according to the fashion that he had seen.

Remember, one of the accusations against Stephen is that he had blasphemed against Moses and the Temple. Here in his defense he is showing how the tabernacle in the wilderness was designed by God to be a "witness", †it was the visible witness or proof of God's presence with them; the evidence that he to whom it was devoted was their protector and guide.

What Stephen is doing here is defending himself against the charge of blasphemy of the Temple, showing that he did not mean any disrespect to the Temple.

45 Which also our fathers that came after brought in with Jesus into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drave out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David; 46 Who found favour before God, and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob. 47 But Solomon built him an house.

Verse 45 has been the subject of a lot of debate by Bible students and scholars alike. The use of the name “Jesus” here throws some people for a loop. Let’s look at it right quickly:

First of all, the name Jesus comes from the Greek word “**lēsous**” (pronounced **ee-ay-soose**). The word means; “**Jehovah is salvation**.” There are several variations of that name used in the Bible, including;

- **Jesus, the Son of God**, the Saviour of mankind, God incarnate
- **Joshua** the captain of the Israelites, Moses’ successor . His name comes from the **Hebrew word**; “**yeh-ho-shoo’-ah**;” is translated twice in the New Testament as “**Jesus**” here in **Acts 7:45** and in **Hebrews 4:8**: *For if Jesus had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day.*
- **Jose (joe-say)**, son of Eliezer, one of the ancestors of Christ “**Luke 3:29 Which was the son of Jose, which was the son of Eliezer...**” Here the name “**Jose**” is translated from the Greek word “**lōsē**” pronounced “**ee-oh-say**” – the same word we get Jehovah from.
- **Jesus, surnamed Justus**, a Jewish Christian, an associate with Paul in the preaching of the gospel “**Colossians 4:11 And Jesus, which is called Justus, who are of the circumcision. These only are my fellowworkers unto the kingdom of God, which have been a comfort unto me.**”

The important thing to remember here is that the name Jesus was a common Hebrew name and it means “Jehovah is salvation”. Here in the Book of Acts we see that Joshua was the salvation of the Children of Israel as he brought them into the land of the Gentiles (meaning the Promised Land, or Canaan).

unto the days of David; 46 Who found favour before God, and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob. 47 But Solomon built him an house.

And then he concludes his history of the Jewish people by ending with the Temple that Solomon built because David was not allowed to build it.

Next, things are going to turn ugly. Stephen is going to stop defending himself and the accusations against him. He must realize that his words were falling on deaf ears and he is going to give them a one-two punch in the gut with the next words he speaks. Which we will cover in our next study when we conclude Chapter 7.

† All Scripture from the Authorized King James Version

‡ Albert Barnes Notes on the Bible