

Stephen's Masterful Defense of the Gospel

Acts 7

PART ONE

Introduction

Jesus "was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun." Matthew 17:2

Did Stephen's face shine like the face of Moses: "because he had been talking with God?" Exodus 34:29

The inadequacy of the Law of Moses and the fulfillment of the Law in Christ: 2 Corinthians 3:7-16

Stephen uses a brief overview of Israel's history with minor variations to show:

1. how prone they were to disobeying God by either hating, repudiating, even killing the ones God sends to deliver them.
2. that God's presence is not limited to any particular land or structure.

Making a defense of the faith is something all Christians are called to do.

1 Peter 3:13-15

The greatest militating factor against our "being prepared to make a defense" is *doubt*.

- 1) We doubt ourselves because of our awareness of our sins, so we feel unqualified.
- 2) We doubt our ability to make a good defense or articulate the gospel effectively.
- 3) We doubt our level of knowledge and understanding of Scripture.
- 4) We doubt God – who He says He is, or what He promises to do.

We are not called to make a defense *of* the Scripture. We are called to defend the faith *from* the Scripture.

Paul's opening argument: Acts 17:2-5

Stephen was calm, collected, and fearless. He knew the Scriptures well and laid out a very capable defense of the Christian faith and lost his life as a result.

The accusations from the false witnesses: 6:13-14

- Blasphemy against Moses and God (6:11)
- Speaking against the temple and the law (6:13)

The Jews venerated Moses, the temple, and the Mosaic law, and God, but used them to their own ends.

I. Laying the groundwork: establishing identity and orthodoxy

vv. 2-8

1. Find common ground. Be respectful, not contentious. Confidently gain their attention:

"Brothers and fathers, hear me."

One sure way to lose your audience is to disconnect yourself from them by casting yourself in an adversarial role.

Begin by talking about things you identify with and things you agree on.

Paul uses the same strategy to open his defense: Acts 22:1-3

2. Start with knowledge you can assume is widely accepted by your audience. *"The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham..."*

II. Make a compelling case from Scripture: Joseph as an OT type of Christ

vv. 9-16

"And the patriarchs, jealous of Joseph, sold him into Egypt; but God was with him" (v9).

1. His brothers were jealous of the special love he received from their father.
2. They were jealous about the special garment their father gave him to wear.
3. They resented his prophetic dreams in which they would bow down to him.
4. They sold him into captivity for the price of a slave.
5. They brought his garment back to his father covered in blood.

The detailed parallels between the betrayal of Joseph by his brothers and the betrayal of Jesus by His fellow Jews is unmistakable.

"For he perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up." Mark 15:10

"but God was with him and rescued him out of all his afflictions and gave him favor and wisdom before Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who made him ruler over Egypt and over all his household" (v9-10).

Hebrews 3:1-6

A New Prophet like Moses

"The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen—" Deuteronomy 18:15; 17-19

"And on the second visit Joseph made himself known to his brothers, and Joseph's family became known to Pharaoh" (v13).

Having heard the sermon of Stephen when he was Saul, Paul expounded even more in his defense of the faith at Antioch: **Acts 13:16-48**

Gospel Truth wins out by the force of its own argument, not merely by the skill of the apologist.

“The naked logic of the intellect will not by itself convince, but the logic that is seconded by unction carries with it wonderful weight” (Dean Goulburn)

Gospel Truth is most effectively presented by the Spirit-filled believer who:

1. studies the Scriptures,
2. cares about his audience,
3. finds ways to identify with them,
4. possesses an unshakable faith in God,
5. has no fear of man or desire to seek their approval.

Psalm 80:1-9; 14-19