

False Religion Rejects God's Deliverer (Joseph)

Acts 7:8-19

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Introduction

Last week, we began Acts 7.

- In this chapter Stephen makes his defence before the highest court of the Jews.

He had to defend himself because, as we saw back in chapter 6, he had been accused of blasphemy.

- This was a very serious charge.
 - The Romans had given the Jews permission to try those accused of blasphemy in their own courts and to execute them if they found them guilty.
 - And that is what happened to Stephen at this pivotal point in the early history of the church.
 - With his trial and martyrdom, we see a deepening of the breach between the disciples of Christ (who were Jews at this time) and the other Jews.
 - Now, for the first time, it is not just the authorities who are against Jesus' disciples, but the people also.
 - Prior to this, the people had restrained the wrath of the Jewish leaders, but they are becoming antagonistic as well.
 - This will lead to the scattering of the church and the evangelisation of the Samaritans and eventually the Gentiles.
- Stephen becomes the target of persecution here because he was a man who was full of things of God.
 - He had been selected to be one of the seven deacons because he was judged to be full of the Holy Spirit and of wisdom.
 - All seven of the deacons were selected on that basis.
 - But this must have been especially the case with Stephen because after they are selected,
 - Stephen is singled out even among them as a man who is full of faith and of the Holy Spirit.
 - And then in verse 8 (of chapter 6),
 - we are told that he is full of faith (or grace in many manuscripts) and power such that he did great signs and wonders.
 - As he went about doing his work for the Lord and doing good among the people,
 - he had many opportunities to speak about his hope in Jesus Christ.
 - The Hellenists or Greek speaking Jews of which he was one, began to take particular notice of him.

- Many of them were intellectuals, but they found that they could not resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which Stephen spoke.
- So being unable to overcome him with words, they began to attack him with false accusations.
 - They prepared false witnesses to accuse him of blasphemy.

Stephen was not guilty of blasphemy at all!

- They said that he was guilty because he had spoken against Moses and against the temple.
 - They got this from the fact that Stephen, like Jesus his Master and John the Baptist before Him,
 - had foretold the coming destruction of the temple, which Jesus had said would happen in that generation...
 - And also from the fact that Stephen, like Jesus, had spoken about the advent of Christ's kingdom which would bring a change in the customs that Moses had delivered to them.
 - No longer would God be worshipped in Jerusalem by the ceremonies that God had appointed under the law of Moses,
 - but now He would be worshipped in spirit and in truth—
 - because Jesus had come!
 - It was no longer to be shadows of Him because we have Him in truth.
 - Now we proclaim Him rather than acting out the drama of His sacrifice in a yearly calendar.
 - Now we have the Lord's Day on which we proclaim His finished work and rejoice in the blessing of the Holy Spirit!
- The Jews should have understood all along that the ceremonies surrounding the temple were only meant to be temporary—they were not the substance...
 - They pointed to the saving work that God would do through the Messiah only until He came.
 - But the Lord had blinded the Jews because of the hardness of their hearts such that many of them did not know the time of their visitation!
 - The Messiah had come, the kingdom of God had come with Him, atonement had been made, but they did not grasp this.
 - They still clung to the drama of the Old Testament in their worship as if it was the substance.
 - And so they were highly offended with Stephen because he was suggesting that the shadows were to be taken away—and the shadows were all they had!
 - It was not that Stephen was against the temple and the customs that went along with it that Moses had given his people...

- It was rather that Stephen understood that these had served their purpose...
 - and that now the very One to whom they all pointed had come!
 - Now that Stephen had come to know Him,
 - He had a greater appreciation for the ceremonies than ever before!
 - He saw the glorious reality to which they pointed in God's crucified and risen Son!

In chapter 7, Stephen gives a defence before his accusers.

- Even though George Bernard Shaw,
 - in his preface to *Androcles and the Lion* refers to Stephen as:
 - “a quite intolerable young speaker” and “a tactless and conceited bore” who “delivered an oration to the council in which he...inflicted on them a tedious sketch of the history of Israel, with which they were presumably as well acquainted as he...”
 - And even though many liberal commentators follow Dibelius who speaks of “the irrelevance of this speech...”
 - It is in fact a most brilliant testimony of Stephen's understanding of the Old Testament in light of the coming of Jesus Christ.
 - In a very subtle and powerful way, he shows his hearers that their rejection of Christ is of a piece with their father's rejection of those God had sent to Israel through the ages.
 - It is no wonder that they now reject Christ when they had initially rejected Joseph and Moses and all the other prophets.
 - Stephen masterfully presents this history to them in a subtle, narrative form,
 - and then drives home the pointed application in verse 51-53 when he says to his accusers:
 - **Acts 7:51-53: You stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it.**

I told you last week that today, in the second sermon on Stephen's defence,

- we would look at Israel's rejection of those God sends to them in verses 9-36.
 - In this section, we have their initial rejection of Joseph and their initial rejection of Moses.
 - But I have decided not to bite off quite so much.

- Instead we are only going to consider the rejection of Joseph as it is presented to us in verses 9-19.
- We will look at the rejection of Moses in another sermon.

So let's go ahead and see what Stephen shows us through Joseph.

- First of all, see that...

I. It is the covenant people who reject the one God sends to save them.

A. It was the very sons of Jacob themselves who rejected Joseph.

- Stephen tells us in verse 8 that:
 - **Acts 7:8: "The patriarchs, becoming envious, sold Joseph into Egypt."**
1. What a thing for these brothers to do to their own brother!
 - How cruel and barbarous this was!
 - Joseph was their own flesh and blood.
 - He had been sent to them by his father and their father to see how they were doing.
 - He was on an act of mercy and they welcomed him by selling him into Egypt.
 - There was such bitter malice in them that at first they wanted to kill him—
 - But then because of Rueben's entreaty, they decided to throw him in a pit.
 - However, soon after they did this, a band of Ishmaelites came along who were in route to Egypt and the brothers decided to sell him into slavery,
 - All this when he had done no wrong to them!
 - What hatred for their brother and what contempt for their own father who cherished Joseph as the son of his old age.
 2. They did this, as Stephen says, because they were envious!
 - They envied him for a couple of reasons...
 - a. First, they envied him because he was the favoured son.
 - 1) He as the first born son of Rachael who was the woman that Jacob originally wanted for his wife.
 - You remember that Rachael's father Laban tricked him and gave him Lea first—and then Rachael in exchange for another seven years of labour.
 - Lea bore children, but Rachael was barren at first—and this set up a rivalry between the two sisters.

- The result was that they both gave Jacob their maids in a foolish contest to outdo each other in the number of children they gave to Jacob.
 - The children of their maids would in a sense be their children.
- But it was Rachael whom Jacob continued to love and so it was that when she finally had a son, Jacob's favour spread to him,
 - and the envy of his other wives spread to their sons.
 - The result was that the more Jacob loved Joseph, the more his brothers hated him.
 - And then they made themselves less pleasing to their father by unfaithfulness which Joseph reported...
 - causing his brothers to hate him even more and his father to love him even more!

TRANS> So you see that they envied Joseph because he was their father's favoured son.

- 2) We can criticise Jacob for this favouritism, but what should his sons have done?
 - They should have loved their father and honoured him, recognising that they were sons of Jacob's extra wives.
 - They should have been humble and accepted their place with gratitude that they could be born into a family that had God as their God.
 - But instead they envied Joseph.

TRANS> But this is not the only reason they envied him.

b. They also envied him because of his dreams.

- 1) Joseph had prophetic dreams which showed in symbols that his brothers and even his parents would bow down to him.
 - a) These were prophecies sent by the Lord who had special plans for Joseph.
 - But instead of waiting to see what God would do, as Jacob did, Joseph's brothers became all the more envious of him.
 - If we see God's favour upon someone, we ought to honour them instead of envying them...
 - For if we envy them, we oppose the one God has chosen to favour!
 - Remember how Jonathan honoured David when he saw that God had chosen David to be king?

- We should want to join ourselves to the person God chooses to bless and bless them ourselves rather than envying them!
 - God had plans for Joseph to be the deliverer of his family, so by opposing Joseph they were doing what they could to oppose their own salvation!
 - Our Lord blesses people to make them a blessing to others, but when there is bitterness and envy in us,
 - we do what we can to prevent the blessing from spreading to us!
- b) You can tell that Joseph's dreams kept coming up in the minds of his brothers as an occasion against him.
- You can tell this because when Joseph's brothers decide to get rid of him, they say:
 - "We shall see what will become of his dreams now!"
 - Clearly this had lodged in their hearts to feed their bitterness.
- 2) That is how bitterness operates in our hearts...
- Somebody does something that offends us and then we keep repeating it in our minds.
 - That way, instead of being offended once, we are offended again and again—every time we think about it.
 - I have often had people tell me how wronged they have been,
 - but then as it turns out, there is not that much wrong that has been done.
 - It is just that they have repeated the wrongs hundreds of times in their minds and made so much of them.
 - This is why bitterness eats people up.
 - Don't let bitterness rule in your heart!
 - It will destroy you and it will keep you from God's blessing.

TRANS> So you see that there was this extreme cruelty because of envy.

3. Stephen emphasizes that it was the very patriarchs themselves who did this!
- a. In verse 8, he speaks of how God made His gracious covenant with Abraham and continued it with Isaac and Jacob and with the twelve sons of Jacob.
- These twelve sons became the twelve tribes of Israel!
 - They were the very heirs of God's covenant!
 - They were the circumcised descendants of Abraham!
 - Stephen and his fellow Jews proudly traced their lineage back to them.

- b. But Stephen is reminding them that at first, these patriarchs acted in a most contemptuous reprehensible manner.
 - They were wicked and cruel to the one God was raising up to save them.
 - They were murderers who had no regard for their own father.

TRANS> The patriarchs were no example to be followed in the way they treated their brother!

B. The parallel to Stephen's accusers and to Jesus is obvious.

1. Jesus was sent by His father in heaven on a mission of mercy.
 - He came to His own people, to the covenant people, the sons of Israel, and He went about doing among them.
 - But because He was God's favoured Son and because He prophesied of His reign over them all in God's kingdom,
 - they envied Him and became so bitter toward Him that they wanted to get rid of Him—and so they did...
 - His own brothers who should have loved Him all the more when they saw that He was God's favourite instead envied Him!
 - Instead of rejoicing that God raised Him up to be their Saviour, they hated the very thought that they should bow down to Him.
2. Stephen now understands that the history of Joseph is a shadow picture of Jesus.
 - But he does not express this to his accusers directly...
 - He is very subtly bringing out the point that it was none other than the very covenant people of God who did what they could to get rid of Joseph whom God has chosen and ordained to save them.
 - Was it any wonder that the Messiah Himself whom God sent to save should receive the same treatment?
 - As we saw already, in verse 51, Stephen ceases to be subtle.
 - **Acts 7:51-53: You stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it.**
 - But you see, when Stephen speaks of Joseph and his rejecting brothers, he is only laying the foundation for that very direct accusation.
 - He does not despise the law.
 - It is rather that his accusers despise the one God sent save them.

- C. Today we see the same envy among the covenant people against the one God sent to save.
- And I am not just talking about the Jews either!
1. God's covenant people today are those who are baptised in the name of Jesus Christ.
 - They have His name upon them, they have his promises and His covenant and His gospel.
 - They are called by His name, but very often they are full of envy toward Jesus.
 2. Of course they do not say this.
 - a. They claim to be His followers and proudly take His name.
 - Just as the Jews who rejected Jesus proudly took the name of Abraham and of the patriarchs and of Moses and David.
 - But they did this when Abraham and the patriarchs and Moses and David were no longer around.
 - The one who was around—whoever he was—
 - the one that God had sent in their generation to represent Him...
 - that one was always the one who was rejected.
 - And so it was that when Jesus came—
 - Jesus who was the very one that Abraham and the patriarchs and Moses and David longed for—
 - He was despised and rejected by His own generation.
 - He was envied and crucified!
 - Who was this Nazarene to have the Father's favour?
 - Who was He to be Lord over them?
 - b. And so today, in the same way, there are millions who are baptised in Jesus' name and who speak highly of Him, but who actually hate the real Jesus.
 - You can find out by looking at the way they sneer at the gospel!
 - They sneer at it inasmuch as the gospel teaches that we have no righteousness apart from Jesus!
 - They will have Him as a teacher if they can control the content,
 - but they will not have Him to be their only source of righteousness!
 - They reject what the Scriptures say about Him, though they claim to use the scriptures.
 - They want righteousness from their own works, or their own goodness, or just from God's general love...
 - but not from a crucified Saviour who dies as a substitute.

- They are envious of Him as the only one who is righteous!
 - They want to claim righteousness for themselves also!
- And so they sneer at those whom God has sent to preach the true gospel of righteousness.
 - There are times when they even murder them.
 - Things have not changed much.
 - It was the true Jesus that those who rejected Joseph and Moses and the prophets actually rejected.
 - And so it is today that many who bear the name of Jesus actually reject Him.
 - We must call them to repentance!
 - God sent Jesus for them!
 - But if they continue to reject the one God sent to save His people, they cannot be saved.
 - Are there any among us today who envy Him?
 - Are any of you trying to establish your own righteousness instead of finding it in Jesus, the one God favours?
 - Would you die in your sin, envying Him?
 - God forbid!

TRANS> So then, you see how the covenant people themselves try to eliminate the very one God sends to save them...

- But take heart...

II. God does not let them eliminate the one He has sent!

- Verse 9 gives us this wonderful contrast
 - **Acts 7:9: And the patriarchs, becoming envious, sold Joseph into Egypt. But God was with him.**

A. Isn't that wonderful news—**God was with him!**

1. That made all the difference!
 - God had chosen Joseph to be Israel's deliverer at this time.
 - And so he would be their deliverer.
 - They could not stop God's plan, no matter what they did.
 - They could not keep Joseph down because God was with him.
2. In fact, all they did to get rid of Joseph actually ended up putting him into the place where he needed to be that he might become their lord and saviour!

- a. They sent Joseph to Egypt to be a slave, but God sent him there to make him a ruler and a deliverer!
 - Verse 10 explains what happened in Egypt since God was with him...
 - God was with him...
 - **Acts 7:10: "and delivered him out of all his troubles, and gave him favor and wisdom in the presence of Pharaoh, king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house."**
 - They thought to bring him down, but instead they elevated him!
 - b. From this position, Joseph became the only source of bread for a starving world.
 - Anyone who wanted bread had to get it from him.
 - I trust that you know the story of Joseph—but if not, I will say more about it later.
 - Just know that he was elevated to be the only source of food for his father and his eleven brothers.
 - c. Who could have known that God would use the cruel action of Joseph's brothers to be the means by which his brothers would be saved?
 - This is God's amazing providence at work!
 - Satan and all his minions can murder and kill and enslave and do whatever they want,
 - but in the end, their actions turn out to advance the kingdom of God.
- B. Once again, the parallel with Stephen's accusers is obvious.
- How these Old Testament histories had come alive for Stephen now that he knew the One they were truly about!
 - How they are alive for us who know Jesus!
 - 1. God was with Jesus and that made all the difference!
 - He is called God's elect—His chosen servant!
 - The elect of the elect whom God sent to save His people from their sins—to be Lord and Saviour for them.
 - 2. Even though the Jews did all they could to get rid of Him, God was with Him.
 - As Peter has already told the Jews on several occasions in Acts,
 - "You crucified Him, but God raised Him up."
 - Peter says that even their rejection of Jesus and crucifixion of Him was all according to the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God.
 - It fulfilled God's plans concerning Him.
 - As with Joseph, their efforts to eliminate Jesus only put Him into the place where He was able to be Lord and Christ for His people...

- He had to be exiled and cursed for our sake as the one who came to bear our sins...
 - So the Jewish leaders who envied Him crucified Him;
 - And on the cross, He was made an offering for His people's sins...
 - And God accepted His offering for us and raised Him from the dead, declaring Him to be Lord and Christ.

- He is now the only source of salvation—
 - the only source of forgiveness—
 - the only source of righteousness for we have all sinned—
 - the only source of eternal life!
 - Just as Jacob's family had to go to Joseph if they were to live, so we must go to Christ if we would have eternal life!

TRANS> They rejected Jesus, but God was with Him the whole time to bring about His saving purpose through Him.

C. And you can be sure that God continues to be with His elect today.

1. As Christ was when He was in the world, so are we who follow Him in truth.
 - We bear His reproach and enter into His sufferings.
 - But God is with us and that makes all the difference.

2. Though our enemies try to silence us and eliminate us, all of their efforts only serve to further the kingdom of God.
 - Believers are mocked, they are imprisoned, they are enslaved, they are killed,
 - But the gospel continues to go forward and God's servants are strengthened and raised to greater glory through every assault.

 - There are times when things may look very dark for us,
 - just as they did with Joseph and with Jesus,
 - But God is with us to deliver us out of all our troubles and to make us kings and priests with Jesus.
 - The very troubles themselves are working to bring us to a more glorious inheritance.
 - So do not be discouraged!
 - God is with His elect and nothing can keep Him from His purpose concerning them.
 - If you belong to Christ, you can be sure that He is with you and will deliver you out of all our troubles.
 - His amazing providence brings forth blessing for all His elect.

TRANS> Indeed, God's amazing providence even brings blessing to many who initially opposed the one God sent.

- And this is the third thing I want you to see from what Stephen has to say about Joseph.

III. God's amazing, gracious providence brings blessing to the very ones who at first rejected the one He sent to save!

- That's right—
 - God's grace is so powerful that even those like Joseph's brothers who envied him and cruelly rejected him end up receiving blessing from Joseph.
 - God's grace is so powerful and gracious that even many of those who crucified Jesus ended up partaking of His salvation!
 - In malice they made Him into a bloody sacrifice of atonement...
 - But then in repentance they receive forgiveness and life through that same sacrifice!

A. God brings the rejecters of His sent one into the place of blessing by showing them how much they need the one they at first rejected...

1. Just look at how God showed Jacob and his sons their need.
 - He sends a famine!
 - Look at verse 11.
 - **Acts 7:11: Now a famine and great trouble came over all the land of Egypt and Canaan, and our fathers found no sustenance.**
 - They came to realise that they were completely out of resources!
 - They began to understand that they did not have what they needed to live.
 - But Jacob heard that there was bread in Egypt—as it says in verse 12—so he sent his sons to inquire about it.
 - They were desperate.
 - In the account in Genesis, they go to Joseph and he recognises them, but they do not recognise him.
 - Joseph sends them away with a little grain, but demands that they return to him with Benjamin who had not accompanied them the first time.
 - Jacob initially refuses.
 - He does not want to lose Benjamin.
 - But eventually he realises that he and Benjamin and the rest of his family will starve to death if they don't go back to Egypt.
 - They must go—he must let Benjamin go.
 - In this way, the LORD drove them to see their deep need of Joseph's bread.

- They cannot possibly live without it!
- And Jacob's older sons become so aware of their desperate need that in order to convince Jacob to let Benjamin go,
 - they offer to lay their lives on the line for Benjamin.
- And when they come to Joseph, the sincerity of that offer is tested.
 - Joseph so arranges things that Benjamin is accused of stealing—
 - and now his repentant brothers show their love for their father by agreeing to switch places with Benjamin so that Benjamin can return to their father.
 - They who had once been eager to destroy their father's favourite son are now prepared to lay down their lives for the sake of their father's favourite son.
 - God graciously brings them to forsake everything for the promise of sustenance.

TRANS> This is exactly what the Lord does for all of His elect with Jesus.

2. The LORD works in us until we see that we cannot live without Him.
 - a. He does not always show us this in the same way...
 - Some of you covenant children believed your parents from the very beginning when they told you that you are a sinner before a holy God.
 - It's really something that we all ought to believe because it is so obviously true.
 - It is easier for a child to believe it before he has been exposed to all the lies of the world that deny it.
 - So some of you have seen and been convinced that you will utterly perish under the wrath of God without Christ from the very start.
 - b. But there are many others here among us who initially rejected Christ.
 - 1) Many of you have parents who did not teach you about your true need of Christ because they were in denial of their own need of Him.
 - And for many, even when you were first told about your sin and about how Jesus came to save,
 - you were greatly offended by the very idea!
 - The very idea that there should be a God who would accept nothing but this Jesus who died on the cross!
 - You were, as described before, envious of Him at first...
 - "Why should I have to come to **Him** to be accepted by God?"
 - "Why would He be so harsh as to reject **me**?"

- “I’m not such a bad person.”
- “This cannot be true!”

2) But over time, God began to work in you.

- He began to show you that you truly are a sinner and that you cannot save yourself.
 - He brought a famine to you so that you became desperate for the bread of life.
 - Perhaps He used some particular circumstances, but there was a growing realisation that you must come to Jesus for life!
 - You realised that there was no place to go for the bread of life.
 - The very one that you had rejected you realised was the one who would give you eternal life.

TRANS> And then having shown you your need,

B. The Lord actually united you to the one you once rejected.

1. Stephen summarises how Joseph’s brothers and Jacob were united with Joseph as their source of life.

- In verses 13-15 it says:
 - **Acts 7:13-15: And the second time Joseph was made known to his brothers, and Joseph’s family became known to the Pharaoh. Then Joseph sent and called his father Jacob and all his relatives to him, seventy-five people. So Jacob went down to Egypt; and he died, he and our fathers.**
- God had uniquely prepared Joseph to sustain them, so they left everything and went to him in humble dependence.
 - By God’s grace, Joseph does indeed sustain them when they leave everything and come to him.
 - Jacob might have hesitated to go down to Egypt at first because the Lord had forbade Isaac to this when a famine came...(this is in Gen 26:1-5)
 - But this time the Lord appears to Jacob and assures him that it is the right thing to do and He renews his promise to him.
 - In Gen 45:1-4 it says:
 - **Gen 45:1-4: So Israel took his journey with all that he had, and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. Then God spoke to Israel in the visions of the night, and said, “Jacob, Jacob!” And he said, “Here I am.” So He said, “I am God, the God of your father; do not fear to go down to Egypt, for I will make of you a great nation there. I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up again; and Joseph will put his hand on your eyes.”**
- So they come and they find life—
 - from Joseph of all people!
 - and in Egypt of all places!

2. What a message this is for Stephen's accusers... and for us too!
 - Life is to be found in Jesus, the one they crucified—of all people!
 - And outside the temple and its ceremonies—of all places!
 - Some of Stephen's most virulent enemies who bitterly rejected the Lord Jesus did come to see their need of His righteousness and come to Him.
 - Even the one named Saul who was there as a leading figure when Stephen was stoned.
 - He never forgot this!
 - You must come to the true Jesus who only saves through the cross—of all people...
 - and often outside the mainline churches—to those who preach the true gospel—of all places!
 - And oh what blessing you will find if you will come!
 - Jesus had the words of eternal life!
 - In Him there is new life!
 - In Him there is total forgiveness!
 - In Him there is hope of resurrection!
 - In Him there is justification, adoption, sanctification, and resurrection.
 - What joy, what comfort, what peace, what security, what hope!

C. Once you have come to the One God sent to save, the Lord keeps the hope of glory alive in you.

1. You can see this with the patriarchs by the choices they made about their burial.
 - a. They wanted to be buried in the land that God had promised to His people.
 - 1) Even though they did not get to enjoy this land in their own lifetime,
 - they were like Abraham who had come to seek a city whose builder and maker was God.
 - And they knew that the next great step in God's plan, as it unfolded, was that their descendants would be given the land of Palestine.
 - In hope of this promise, they wanted to be buried there.
 - They believed that God would complete all that He had promised to them long after they had departed from this world.
 - 2) Take a look at verse 16 and you can see how it says that they were all buried in the land.
 - **Acts 7:16: "And they were carried back to Shechem and laid in the tomb that Abraham bought for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem.**

- Stephen omits the details here, but his point is that they were all eventually buried in the land of promise...
 - We are told how Joseph in particular was so sure of God's promise that he instructed his sons to carry up his bones to be buried in the land when they came out in 400 years.
 - In this way, Joseph's bones were a continual reminder to help keep the promise alive for Israel while they were in Egypt.
 - By this they were reminded that Egypt was not their final destination.
 - Egypt was the next step in God's plan, but after that, they would go to Canaan.
- b. But what does this have to do with us?
- 1) It is just what we learned last week from Abraham...
 - We must always be forward looking.
 - We must not settle down into what God has given us so far as if it were His final inheritance...
 - We have received so much more than Abraham or Jacob or Moses or David—
 - Jesus has come in the outworking of God's plan and He has purchased our redemption and given us His Spirit.
 - But this is not all there is...
 - It is only a down payment.
 - We are to labour in the present age for the advance of His kingdom,
 - but always with a view to the future kingdom of glory that is promised to us.
 - If this is all there is, we will grow discontent...
 - but it is not all—there is much more and we must keep this hope alive if we are going to keep on serving God.
 - 2) Stephen's accusers had missed Christ because they thought the temple and the law of Moses was all they needed for redemption...
 - It was sufficient in its time to prepare them for Christ,
 - but it was not sufficient at all after He had come.
 - They were not looking forward to what God had for them the way Jacob and his sons did.
 - God had brought them to Egypt and He had raised up a provider for them in Joseph to save them from starvation,
 - but this was not at all the completion of all that God had promised!

- Much greater things were coming and they knew it...
- Much greater things are coming for us also.
- There is a hope of glory.

TRANS> God is committed to keeping that hope of glory alive in us.

2. See how God works to keep us looking for the glory to come.
 - In verse 17-19, we see two things that God did to keep the hope of future glory alive in His people...
 - Stephen's accusers would have done well to learn from these two things...
 - We must learn from them also...
 - a. First, see in verse 17 how God gave them incredible multiplication as He had promised Abraham even when he could have no child in old age.
 - It says,
 - **Acts 7:17: "But when the time of the promise drew near which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt**
 - God promised to us (and actually to Abraham) that He would gather people from all nations to Himself to fill up His glorious kingdom.
 - This is happening before our eyes.
 - Thousands come to Christ each day—6000 professions according to the statisticians and that is not even counting those who grow up in a Christian home!
 - As we see God's promise so marvellously fulfilled, it ought to make our hope all the more strong in the promise of the glory to come.
 - It ought to motivate us to prepare ourselves for that glory and to spread the hope of that glory to others!
 - God fulfills His promise to keep the hope alive.
 - b. And secondly, see in verse 18-19 how God sends trials and difficulties to keep the hope of glory alive.
 - I will begin in verse 17 for the context...
 - **Acts 7:17-19: But when the time of the promise drew near which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt till another king arose who did not know Joseph. This man dealt treacherously with our people, and oppressed our forefathers, making them expose their babies, so that they might not live.**
 - 1) What an awful thing!
 - God sent this raised up this king who oppressed them and even killed their babies!

- He had told Abraham that they would be oppressed, so this was foretold just as their increase was foretold,
 - but this was not so pleasant—
 - What, were they increased only to be slaughtered by this tyrant?
- 2) How could this possibly help to keep their hope alive?
- This kept their hope of future glory alive because it kept them from settling into Egypt as if Egypt was all there was for them!
 - It was not all.
 - It was difficult to get them out of Egypt when the appointed time came.
 - We will see this in the next sermon...
 - But just think how difficult it would have been if they had been well treated!
 - They needed affliction to keep them looking to God for the next thing.
- 3) Jesus tells us that we will have much tribulation in this world also.
- Not only will there be a great increase in those who come to Him from the nations, but there will also be persecutions and tribulation for us as His disciples.
 - We need these so that we will keep looking ahead to glory and not set our affection on the things of earth.
 - God has a glorious future for us...
 - He has yet to destroy Satan and all who are united with him in rebellion...
 - He has yet to raise these frail bodies and make them immortal.
 - He has yet to reveal the glory of Jesus Christ as judge of all.
 - But if we had not trials and no afflictions,
 - We would settle down the way the Jews did in Stephen's day.
 - We would lock into what we have now without looking to the future promise of glory.

Conclusion:

How gracious our Lord is to His people!

- Even we initially reject the one He sends to save us—
 - He uses that very rejection to put Him where He must be to save us!
 - And then He shows our need of Him and brings us to Him and unites us with Him,
 - And then He keeps our hope in Him alive—
 - The very one that we by our rebellious nature reject He makes to be our Saviour!
 - Have you seen your need of Him?
 - Have you come to Him?
 - Have you a living hope of the glory He promises?