

**Review & Intro**

- In Acts 6 we saw division developing between the Hebrews and the Hellenists.
- The Hebraic Jews were those steeped in Hebrew culture; the Hellenists, on the other hand, were Jews who were more steeped in Greek culture.
- The apostles resolved the dispute by telling the people to choose seven men to serve. Most prominent of these were Stephen and Philip.
- Stephen is involved in disputes with Jews from a Hellenist synagogue and is brought before the council.
- He will articulate why people can know God without relying on all the elements of the Jewish religion – and he will use Jewish history to demonstrate it.
- This speech shows us how God is the God of all people, the God of all the Earth, and can be known by all people.
- This gives a theological underpinning for a lot of what's coming in Acts.

**Stephen Arrested and Questioned (Acts 6:8-7:1)**

*8 And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people.*

*9 Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen*

*(Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), disputing with Stephen. 10*

*And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke.*

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11 Then they secretly induced men to say, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God." 12 And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; and they came upon him, seized him, and brought him to the council. 13 They also set up false witnesses who said, "This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law; 14 for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us." 15 And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel. 1 Then the high priest said, "Are these things so?"

- Stephen's response will be in four sections, reviewing certain parts of the history of Israel, dealing with Abraham, Joseph, Moses, and David and Solomon.

### **God's Dealings With Abraham (7:2-8)**

2 And he said, "Brethren and fathers, listen: The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, 3 and said to him, 'Get out of your country and from your relatives, and come to a land that I will show you.' 4 Then he came out of the land of the Chaldeans and dwelt in Haran. And from there, when his father was dead, He moved him to this land in which you now dwell. 5 And God gave him no inheritance in it, not even enough to set his foot on. But even when Abraham had no child, He promised to give it to him for a possession, and to his descendants after him. 6 But God spoke in this way: that his descendants would dwell in a foreign land, and that they would bring them into bondage and oppress them four hundred years.

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7 *'And the nation to whom they will be in bondage I will judge,' said God, 'and after that they shall come out and serve Me in this place.'* 8 *Then He gave him the covenant of circumcision; and so Abraham begot Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day; and Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot the twelve patriarchs.*

- In reading Stephen's defense, recall that the Land, the Law, and the Temple are important gifts from God, but the Jewish people's calling and their relationship with God did not really depend on those things.
- First, notice how "the God of glory" appeared to Abraham before he ever left Ur in Mesopotamia.
- Abraham failed to obey, only going as far as Haran. Despite that delay and disobedience, God's command and invitation was still there.
- Even in the Land, Abraham was still in disobedience for a long time. He brought some of his family with him.
- Abraham never had any possession of the Land.
- His descendants will be slaves in another land for four centuries, even though they have this Land-promise. But God will act to rescue them by doing things outside of the Land to judge the nation that will be oppressing them at that time.
- They enter into covenant with God 500 years before coming into the Land.

### **God's Dealings With Joseph (7:9-16)**

9 *"And the patriarchs, becoming envious, sold Joseph into Egypt. But God was with him* 10 *and delivered him out of all his troubles, and gave him favor and wisdom in the*

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*presence of Pharaoh, king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house. 11 Now a famine and great trouble came over all the land of Egypt and Canaan, and our fathers found no sustenance. 12 But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first. 13 And the second time Joseph was made known to his brothers, and Joseph's family became known to the Pharaoh. 14 Then Joseph sent and called his father Jacob and all his relatives to him, seventy-five people. 15 So Jacob went down to Egypt; and he died, he and our fathers. 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 points out how Joseph's brothers, the patriarchs, the heads of what would become the Twelve Tribes, became envious and sell Joseph.
- This was an indirect reference to the fact that the religious leaders had been jealous of Jesus and wanted to get rid of Him.
- Take notice of the parallels between the story of Joseph and Jesus.
- Jacob leaves the Land to save his life and the lives of the patriarchs.
- God was going to be with them even outside of the Land!

### **God's Dealings With Moses Before The Exodus (7:17-34)**

*17 "But when the time of the promise drew near which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt 18 till another king arose who did not know Joseph. 19 This man dealt treacherously with our people, and oppressed our forefathers, making them expose their babies, so that they might not live.*

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20 At this time Moses was born, and was well pleasing to God; and he was brought up in his father's house for three months. 21 But when he was set out, Pharaoh's daughter took him away and brought him up as her own son. 22 And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds. 23 "Now when he was 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 and avenged him who was oppressed, and struck down the Egyptian. 25 For he supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand. 26 And the next day he appeared to two of them as they were fighting, and tried to reconcile them, saying, 'Men, you are brethren; why do you wrong one another?' 27 But he who did his neighbor wrong pushed him away, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge over us? 28 Do you want to kill me as you did the Egyptian yesterday?' 29 Then, at this saying, Moses fled and became a dweller in the land of Midian, where he had two sons.

30 "And when forty years had passed, an Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire in a bush, in the wilderness of Mount Sinai. 31 When Moses saw it, he marveled at the sight; and as he drew near to observe, the voice of the Lord came to him, 32 saying, 'I am the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' And Moses trembled and dared not look. 33 'Then the LORD said to him, "Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground. 34 I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt; I have heard their groaning and have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt.'""

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- The better part of Stephen’s speech deals with Moses. Like Jesus, Moses was rejected, despite having the true call of God on his life to deliver the people.
- Notice the warning concerning the future Prophet like Moses.
- In verse 25 and following, the people do not receive Moses as the delivered.
- God appears to him in the burning bush, not in Israel but in Midian.
- Notice what God says: *“Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground.”* What is “holy ground” anyway?
- God has also come down to deliver them.

### **Moses Whom They Rejected (7:35-43)**

35 *“This Moses whom they rejected, saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge?’ is the one God sent to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the Angel who appeared to him in the bush. 36 He brought them out, after he had shown wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red Sea, and in the wilderness forty years. 37 This is that Moses who said to the children of Israel, ‘The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear.’*

38 *“This is he who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the Angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers, the one who received the living oracles to give to us, 39 whom our fathers would not obey, but rejected. And in their hearts they turned back to Egypt, 40 saying to Aaron, ‘Make us gods to go before us; as for this Moses who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.’*

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*41 And they made a calf in those days, offered sacrifices to the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands. 42 Then God turned and gave them up to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the Prophets: ‘Did you offer Me slaughtered animals and sacrifices during forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? 43 You also took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, images which you made to worship; and I will carry you away beyond Babylon.’*

- Stephen has moved from storytelling to making arguments.
- The very one they rejected is the one God used to deliver them powerfully.
- The prophecy of the “Prophet like Moses” seems to have already been a common argument on the part of the Jesus-believers.
- The hearts of the people rejected Moses even after seeing all the miracles, signs, and wonders. In their hearts, they even turned to idolatry.
- Stephen may be hinting in verse 43 that God will send Israel into captivity.
- Be cautious of antisemitic talking points regarding the star of Remphan. We cannot say that this is a reference to the Star of David.

### **Temples Made With Hands (7:44-50)**

*44 “Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as He appointed, instructing Moses to make it according to the pattern that he had seen, 45 which our fathers, having received it in turn, also brought with Joshua into the land possessed by the Gentiles, whom God drove out before the face of our fathers until the days of David, 46 who found favor before God and asked to find a dwelling for the God of Jacob.*

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*47 But Solomon built Him a house. 48 However, the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands, as the prophet says: 49 ‘Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool. What house will you build for Me? says the LORD, or what is the place of My rest? 50 Has My hand not made all these things?’”*

- The Temple did not exist from the time of Abraham all the way to Solomon.
- Stephen (really God) asks what kind of house can we build for Him?

### **Always Resisting (7:51-53)**

*51 “You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. 52 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, 53 who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it.”*

- There is perhaps a very deliberate choice to use the term “stiff-necked,” which is how God described the people of Israel to Moses.
- Stephen says that their heart and ears are what is truly uncircumcised.

### **The Death Of Stephen (7:54-60)**

*54 When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth. 55 But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the*

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*glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, 56 and said, “Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!” 57 Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; 58 and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. 59 And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” 60 Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not charge them with this sin.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep.*

- Their reaction is the opposite of those who were cut to the heart in Acts 2.
- Stephen has an open vision of Heaven, and he sees Jesus, the Son of Man, standing. The apostles had been proclaiming this, that Jesus was the fulfillment of Daniel’s vision of the Son of Man.
- Was Jesus standing to welcome the very first martyr?
- Saul has the job of guarding the people’s clothing.
- There’s a beautiful picture here, like that of Jesus’ death.
- We shouldn’t be surprised to learn one day that Stephen’s sermon and his manner of death picked away at Saul’s conscience day and night.
- In Acts 8, we will now see persecution breaking out, and the saints fleeing, spreading the Gospel as they fan out across the region.

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