

Sunday September 9th 2018
The Word of God
A Survey of the Bible – Part 11F
'Men and Brethren, What Shall We Do?'

1). On the Day of Pentecost Peter, and 119 others, filled with the Spirit began to preach a message concerning Jesus, that He is the Christ, the Son of God, to an eternally saved generation of Jews. And in doing so the Kingdom of the Heavens previously offered to the same eternally saved generation was being offered to them again, subject to the nation's repentance – a change of mind concerning their centuries of unbelief to bring about that seen in Malachi's prophecy –
Mal 4:5 *Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. 6 And he will turn The hearts of the fathers to the children, And the hearts of the children to their fathers.*

And a change of mind with regards to the identity of Jesus, the King who they had crucified - Ac 3:19 *"Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, 20 "and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, 21 "whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began. 22 "For Moses truly said to the fathers, 'The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear in all things, whatever He says to you. 23 'And it shall be that every soul who will not hear that Prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.' 24 "Yes, and all the prophets, from Samuel and those who follow, as many as have spoken, have also foretold these days. 25 "You are sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.' 26 "To you first, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities."*

From within their own scriptures, from the pen of Moses whom they revered, the Jews would have known that Joseph had been rejected by his brothers and a time of intense suffering had followed that rejection, the 7 years of famine, from which Jacob's entire family was delivered only after they encountered

Joseph a second time after he had been made ruler over all of Egypt, which was then followed by a time of blessing.

a). They would also have known that Moses was rejected by his brothers and a time of intense suffering had followed in the brick yards of Egypt and it was only when God sent back to them the one whom they had rejected that deliverance from Egypt and the establishment of the Theocracy then followed.

b). And in Acts Chapter 3 Peter demonstrates that Jesus had been rejected by His brothers and if the nation would repent of this rejection then Jesus would return and there would be 'times of refreshing' that would come from the presence of the Lord, a time of blessing, and once Jesus had returned there would come the 'times of the restoration of all things' – deliverance from Gentile world power, the restoration of the Theocratic Kingdom covenanted to David, the return of the Glory and the restoration of God's perfect rule from the heavens over the Gentile nations of the earth.

c). And to accompany this message to the Jewish nation there were signs wonders and miracles to attest to the credentials of the ones sent to give the message and to demonstrate the veracity of the message itself making the undeniable connection with the message Jesus preached and the same signs which proliferated as he did so.

d). And such was the message and the supernatural signs that accompanied it that the Jewish people who had previously rejected the Christ embraced Him in their thousands.

2). Ac 2:41 Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.....47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

Ac 4:4 However, many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.

Ac 5:14 And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women,

Ac 6:1 ¶ Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying,

And as the number of the disciples multiplied so did the hostility of Israel's religious leaders multiply against the message - Ac 4:17 "But so that it spreads

no further among the people, let us severely threaten them, that from now on they speak to no man in this name." 18 And they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.....21 So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way of punishing them, because of the people, since they all glorified God for what had been done.

Ac 5:17 ¶ Then the high priest rose up, and all those who were with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with indignation,

Ac 5:33 When they heard this, they were furious and plotted to kill them.

a). As we look at this I am sure we can see that the message with its accompanying signs and the nation's religious leaders were on a collision course that could only result in a climactic outcome one way or the other.

b). And as things moved in the direction of this collision Stephen is introduced - *Ac 6:1 ¶ Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. 2 Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. 3 "Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; 4 "but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word."*

And so, to take care of the daily distribution 7 men were appointed who were 'of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom'. One of whom was Stephen.

c). Then, immediately following the appointment of these 7 men, the scripture records – *Ac 6:7 Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith. 8 ¶ And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people.*

Here is the gathering of the perfect storm – the number of disciples in Jerusalem 'multiplied greatly', and among them were 'a great many of the priests' who were now 'obedient to the faith', and Stephen 'did great wonders and signs among the people'.

d). Of all the extraordinary events that were taking place during this incredible time it was the great many priests who were being obedient to the faith that would have rocked the religious establishment to its very core, setting the stage for what would come next.

e). Let's remember that within the Mosaic economy it was the priests who represented God to man and man to God, it was the priests who performed the daily rituals of cleansing and blood sacrifice for the sins of the people in the Temple, not to mention the events surrounding Passover and Atonement.

f). And having now believed that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God many of the priests would now have known - Mt 5:17 ¶ *"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.*

Being obedient to the faith they would have understood that the Law was fulfilled in Christ and that His sacrifice now made redundant all the sacrifices of the Temple service as witnessed in - Mr 15:38 *Then the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.*

They would now have understood that God no longer accepted the Temple sacrifices under the Law and their obedience to the faith meant that they would no longer participate in them.

g). Now, as the whole of Jewish life was centered on the Temple and the ministry of the Levitical priests in all the offerings and sacrifices we can understand how the very nature of being a Jew that had existed from the days of Moses was being radically turned on its head – completely in accord with the scriptures, but completely out of line with the desires, ambitions and perceptions of the Religious leadership.

h). And so, it is not surprising that we find this in - Ac 6:9 *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. 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.*

There arose those from the Synagogue of the Freedmen disputing with Stephen, and there is a shocking irony in this.

i). The Freedmen were Jews who had previously been Roman captives who had then been given their freedom, and although they had decided to be domiciled outside of Israel they had built for themselves a Synagogue in Jerusalem, 'the Synagogue of the Freedmen', which they would attend when in Jerusalem. And they had no doubt been in Jerusalem for Passover and Pentecost and were still there in the days that followed.

j). The shocking irony is that it is from the Synagogue of those set free by Rome that a plot is hatched to overthrow Stephen who is preaching the Christ the One who would deliver the Jewish people from Gentile world power for all time.

k). As this group disputed with Stephen they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke – and Stephen, filled with the Spirit and speaking the wisdom of God would have taught from the scriptures and they were not able to resist him because the scriptures are irrefutable. But rather than embrace that which they could not resist *they secretly induced men to say, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God."* A disturbing parallel to the way the religious establishment had dealt with the Christ before His crucifixion - Mt 26:59 *Now the chief priests, the elders, and all the council sought false testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, 60 but found none. Even though many false witnesses came forward, they found none. But at last two false witnesses came forward 61 and said, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.'"*

l). And in addition to this *they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; and they came upon him, seized him, and brought him to the council.* And having brought Stephen to the council, the same council that had wanted to kill Peter and John and had killed the Christ, *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."*

And notice the last part of v14 and remember the great many priests who were being obedient to the faith.

3). And so, from the Day of Pentecost all things had been moving to this climactic point, to Stephen's address to the council and their reaction to it; Stephen having been raised up to accomplish this purpose. This would be a climactic point to parallel the events in Matthew Chapter 12 and Israel at Kadesh Barnea.

a). This was a climactic point that had to result either in repentance and the Lord's return on the one hand or total rejection on the other, there would be no middle ground.

b). So, let's look at what Stephen, filled with the Spirit, said to the council-
Ac 7:1 ¶ Then the high priest said, "Are these things so?" 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. 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.

We will notice that Stephen didn't address the high priest's question directly, 'Are these things so?' but instead took the council to their own scriptures, to Abraham and his descendants, to the land, an inheritance and a covenant, to the very origins of the Jewish nation that the council would have known so well. And of all the things He could have drawn their attention to there is one thing uppermost that the Holy Spirit wanted to convey - Ac 7:9 "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 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.

c). As Stephen continued with his account he showed them that the patriarchs having become envious 'sold Joseph into Egypt' – they had rejected him anticipating his death at the hands of those to whom he was sold.

d). But there is a marked contrast in the outcome of the patriarchs' actions. God delivered Joseph giving him favor and wisdom in the presence of Pharaoh, making Joseph governor over Egypt and all Pharaoh's house. For the patriarchs though famine and great trouble came to them forcing them to turn to Joseph, to the one whom they had rejected, *"And the second time Joseph was made known to his brothers, and Joseph's family became known to the Pharaoh.*

And on their second visit Joseph was made known to his brothers and deliverance and blessing followed.

Ac 7:17 ¶ *"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. 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.*

And again, by going to their own scriptures, the Holy Spirit through Stephen took the council to the life of Moses, the one whom they revered, and the one in whose seat, they sat.

e). Stephen began with Moses' first visit to his brethren after 40 years, supposing that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver

them by his hand, but they did not understand, resulting in Moses being rejected - Ac 7:26 *"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.*

It is not by coincidence that God takes the Jewish council to the lives of Joseph and Moses as what is pictured through them reveals exactly what they had just done to Jesus. And having spiritual life they would have had the ability to see this spiritual truth - Ac 7:30 ¶ *"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."*

And here we see that during the 40 years of Moses' absence the people were oppressed to such a degree that their groaning had been heard by God and He had come to deliver them by the hand of Moses, the one the nation had rejected.

f). And as with Joseph, as we have seen, rejection was followed by a period of intense suffering that only increased until the nation would cry out to the God of their fathers.

Ac 7:35 *"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,*

The parallel with the events of the Lord's first advent are obvious. Jesus is the One who God had sent to deliver His people, but they had rejected Him. And so, following the types of Joseph and Moses only an intense time of suffering could then have been expected – but, the nation was being offered a chance, an opportunity to set right that which they had done, to make possible the Lord's return with deliverance and blessing to follow, as also seen through the types of Joseph and Moses.

g). And the parallel is drawn between the disobedient generation in the wilderness and the disobedient nation to whom the Kingdom of the Heavens was now being re-offered.

Ac 7:44 "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. 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?'

And then from the account of Joseph and Moses the Holy Spirit, through Stephen, then turned to the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, patterned after the Heavenly Tabernacle and to the Temple built by Solomon in Jerusalem.

h). And the focus here is the Glory of God and the Theocracy – but both must wait until next time. If the Lord is willing.