

Acts

Part 17 – “Promise, Rejection, and Deliverance”

Acts 7:1-16

Stephen’s speech (7:1-53) is the longest speech recorded in Acts. It reflects a remarkable grasp of biblical theology, that is, the doctrinal unity of the Bible. Stephen is, in part, responding to the charge that he has blasphemed God and Moses and has spoken against the temple and its rituals. Nothing could be further from the truth of course. Far from blasphemy, Stephen’s words are an explanation of the true purpose of Israel’s patriarchs, her temple and its practices.

Exegetical Outline:

- I. Stephen’s speech before the Sanhedrin (7:2-56)
 - A. Introduction (7:2)
 - B. God and Abraham (7:2d-8)
 1. God’s revelation to Abraham in Mesopotamia (2d-3)
 2. Abraham moves from Mesopotamia to Haran and to Judea (4)
 3. God’s revelation to Abraham in Judea (5-7)
 - a. God’s promise of land and descendants (5)
 - b. God’s prophecy of Israel’s slavery and deliverance (6-7)
 - c. God’s covenant of circumcision (8a)
 4. Abraham’s descendants (8)
 - C. God and Joseph (7:9-16)
 1. Joseph’s adversity (9a-b)
 2. God’s blessing (9c-10)
 3. Israel’s adversity (11-12)
 4. God’s blessing (13-16)



Main Idea: God’s presence and salvation have come to us in Jesus Christ.

In verses 1-16 Stephen uses Abraham and Joseph to teach his accusers about God’s presence and salvation in Jesus Christ. In doing this, Stephen proves to be a faithful interpreter of Scripture.

1. A place is provided through Abraham the wanderer. (vv. 2-8)

Stephen provides a rough history of Israel beginning with the fact that their father in the faith, Abraham was, by God’s design, a wanderer. After leaving Ur and settling for a while in Haran, Abraham finally settled in “this land in which you are now living.” And while this was the land that God had promised, it was never intended to be a permanent home. The Land of Promise was there to point toward a greater land which will never pass away and all wandering will finally cease.

Vs. 5 - “Yet he gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot’s length, but promised to give it to him as a possession and to his offspring after him, though he had no child.”

- Abraham received something far greater from God than real estate. He received God’s promise. The Land of Canaan was always a shadow pointing to a greater substance.
- God has been present with this people not only outside the temple but outside the Land of Promise. God spoke to Abraham in a pagan land before there was a tabernacle or any descendants. Let us not seek security in what we can touch and see in the present. Abraham looked forward in faith believing that

God would be faithful to all his promises. This faith in the reliability of God's promises was demonstrated in the covenant sign which was passed along to Isaac and his sons (**vs. 8**).

2. Salvation is provided through Joseph the rejected. (vv. 9-16)

Joseph's story continues the theme of God's presence with His people outside the confines of the temple. Here Stephen adds a second theme – That Israel consistently rejected the men whom God sent to rescue them. Though Joseph was utterly rejected by his own, he nevertheless became God's chosen means to save his people from certain death. Stephen will later confront his accusers with their sad history of rejecting all those whom God had sent to speak to them. This pattern of rejection became supremely wicked in their rejection of the Messiah.

It is not insignificant that Stephen mentions Shechem twice. Shechem was a Samaritan city at the foot of Mt. Gerizim and therefore outside Judea. The fulfillment of God's promise has never been focused on a particular parcel of land or a single nation.

Theology in Application

1. Controversy is inevitable and necessary.

Where ever the gospel of Jesus is believed and proclaimed there will be controversy. This controversy is necessary because there is no believing the gospel apart from struggling with the offensiveness of the cross.

2. In every dispute exercise respect and clarity.

Stephen, begins his speech with words of respect toward his hearers. A dispute is never an excuse for disrespect. However, showing proper respect does not contradict the responsibility of truth telling. Stephen will go on to tell these "fathers and brothers," that they are under God's judgment for rejecting the Messiah.

3. The Bible is its own best defense.

Stephen's speech begins not with a justification of himself but a biblical defense of his message. Stephen appeals to the Scriptures as the highest authority. The battle belongs to the Lord and so His Word is its own best defense. We must never seek to defend the gospel by presupposing that there is a source of authority higher than God's Word.

4. The church needs disciples who know the Bible well.

As I think about Stephen's competence in the Scriptures I am forced to consider a sobering question: Do we have similar competence? A related question would be: Does the church today do an adequate job of training God's people to be competent in handling God's Word? This is essential to our making of disciples. And as we consider the increasing opposition to the gospel in our own day may we labor all the more to produce disciples who, like Stephen, can give an answer for the hope that they have.