

A Message to Die For

Acts Chapter 7

Act 7:1

1) Using History for Defense vs 1-50

The high priest said, "Are these things so?"

- Chapter 6 tells us that the High Priests are accusing Stephen of
 - Blasphemy against Moses (6:11)
 - Blasphemy against God (6:11)
 - Speaking against Jerusalem & the Temple (6:13 + 14)
 - Speaking against the Law. (6:13+14)
- Jesus said in Mark 13:11, " *When they arrest you and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but {it is} the Holy Spirit.*"
- There is that moment. You have to decide to do the right thing when you know it is going to cost you. It may even hurt. But you'll see the choice of obedience or defiance.

Act 7:2

Abraham

And he said, "Hear me, brethren and fathers! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran,

- New information. God appeared to Abraham in Mesopotamia.

Act 7:3

and said to him, 'LEAVE YOUR COUNTRY AND YOUR RELATIVES, AND COME INTO THE LAND THAT I WILL SHOW YOU.'

Act 7:4

"Then he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. From there, after his father died, {God} had him move to this country in which you are now living.

Act 7:5

"But He gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot of ground, and {yet,} even when he had no child, He promised that HE WOULD GIVE IT TO HIM AS A POSSESSION, AND TO HIS DESCENDANTS AFTER HIM.

Act 7:6

"But God spoke to this effect, that his DESCENDANTS WOULD BE ALIENS IN A FOREIGN LAND, AND THAT THEY WOULD BE ENSLAVED AND MISTREATED FOR FOUR HUNDRED YEARS.

Act 7:7

" 'AND WHATEVER NATION TO WHICH THEY WILL BE IN BONDAGE I MYSELF WILL JUDGE,' said God, 'AND AFTER THAT THEY WILL COME OUT AND SERVE ME IN THIS PLACE.'

Act 7:8

"And He gave him the covenant of circumcision; and so {Abraham} became the father of Isaac, and circumcised him on the eighth day; and Isaac {became the father of} Jacob, and Jacob {of} the twelve patriarchs.

- God promised a Land - Abraham didn't ever walk in that land as his possession.
- Stephen was accused of speaking against the Jerusalem (place) and the Temple
- Stephen shows that even Abraham and the Patriarchs didn't honor the holy place and that God knew what would be and gave the Promised Land to His glory, not due to the father's great obedience.

Act 7:9

Joseph

"The patriarchs became jealous of Joseph and sold him into Egypt. {Yet} God was with him,

- The patriarchs were sons of Israel (Jacob) and they were jealous of Joseph. Joseph will be God's deliverer for the patriarchs.

Act 7:10

and rescued him from all his afflictions, and granted him favor and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and he made him governor over Egypt and all his household.

Act 7:11

"Now a famine came over all Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction {with it,} and our fathers could find no food.

Act 7:12

"But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our fathers {there} the first time.

- The first time Joseph was not recognized by his brothers

Act 7:13

"On the second {visit} Joseph made himself known to his brothers, and Joseph's family was

disclosed to Pharaoh.

- The second time was when Joseph was revealed to his brothers.

Act 7:14 "Then Joseph sent { word } and invited Jacob his father and all his relatives to come to him, seventy-five persons {in all.}

Act 7:15 "And Jacob went down to Egypt and {there} he and our fathers died.

Act 7:16 "{From there} they were removed to Shechem and laid in the tomb which Abraham had purchased for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor in Shechem.

Act 7:17 "But as the time of the promise was approaching which God had assured to Abraham, the people increased and multiplied in Egypt,

Act 7:18 until THERE AROSE ANOTHER KING OVER EGYPT WHO KNEW NOTHING ABOUT JOSEPH.

- The time of the promise was approaching,
 - The people increased (multiplied) in number
 - Hardship increased upon the people of God.
- This was the time that Israel was forming from a group of Nomads to a nation. Ultimately the Nation was born at the crossing of the Red Sea. But until then they were developing under the protection of Joseph originally and then under the protection of the "Shepherd Kings" Until it was time for them to go forth. When God saw they were ready to go forth as a nation He raised up a king in Egypt that knew nothing of Joseph. Harsh treatment and slavery occurred, not for punishment but to create motivation to leave the comforts of Egypt.
- God is still in control even in adversity. His Holy place is even in Egypt.

Act 7:19 "It was he who took shrewd advantage of our race and mistreated our fathers so that they
Moses would expose their infants and they would not survive.

Act 7:20 "It was at this time that Moses was born; and he was lovely in the sight of God, and he was nurtured three months in his father's home.

- Moses was born in the time of mistreatment of the Jews.

Act 7:21 "And after he had been set outside, Pharaoh's daughter took him away and nurtured him as her own son.

Act 7:22 "Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians, and he was a man of power in words and deeds.

- Here we are told that Moses was had "power in words". Being Educated in Egypt yet when he stood before God Moses felt he had a speech impediment.

Act 7:23 "But when he was approaching the age of forty, it entered his mind to visit his brethren, the sons of Israel.

Act 7:24 "And when he saw one {of them} being treated unjustly, he defended him and took vengeance for the oppressed by striking down the Egyptian.

Act 7:25 "And he supposed that his brethren understood that God was granting them deliverance through him, but they did not understand.

- The Children of Israel did not understand. Stephen accused of speaking against Moses. Israel didn't understand the Moses was their deliverer.

Act 7:26 "On the following day he appeared to them as they were fighting together, and he tried to reconcile them in peace, saying, 'Men, you are brethren, why do you injure one another?'

Act 7:27 "But the one who was injuring his neighbor pushed him away, saying, 'WHO MADE YOU A RULER AND JUDGE OVER US?'

Act 7:28 'YOU DO NOT MEAN TO KILL ME AS YOU KILLED THE EGYPTIAN YESTERDAY, DO YOU?'

Act 7:29 "At this remark, MOSES FLED AND BECAME AN ALIEN IN THE LAND OF MIDIAN, where he became the father of two sons.

- Act 7:30 "After forty years had passed, AN ANGEL APPEARED TO HIM IN THE WILDERNESS OF MOUNT Sinai, IN THE FLAME OF A BURNING THORN BUSH.
- Act 7:31 "When Moses saw it, he marveled at the sight; and as he approached to look {more} closely, there came the voice of the Lord:
- Act 7:32 'I AM THE GOD OF YOUR FATHERS, THE GOD OF ABRAHAM AND ISAAC AND JACOB.' Moses shook with fear and would not venture to look.
- Act 7:33 "BUT THE LORD SAID TO HIM, 'TAKE OFF THE SANDALS FROM YOUR FEET, FOR THE PLACE ON WHICH YOU ARE STANDING IS HOLY GROUND.
- Act 7:34 'I HAVE CERTAINLY SEEN THE OPPRESSION OF MY PEOPLE IN EGYPT AND HAVE HEARD THEIR GROANS, AND I HAVE COME DOWN TO RESCUE THEM; COME NOW, AND I WILL SEND YOU TO EGYPT.'
- Act 7:35 "**This Moses whom they disowned, saying, 'WHO MADE YOU A RULER AND A JUDGE?' is the one whom God sent {to be} both a ruler and a deliverer with the help of the angel who appeared to him in the thorn bush.**
- Stephen is pointing out that Our Fathers rejected God's deliver again. Israel is in the habit of rejecting God's plan and His deliverers.
- Act 7:36 "This man led them out, performing wonders and signs in the land of Egypt and in the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years.
- Act 7:37 "This is the Moses who said to the sons of Israel, 'GOD WILL RAISE UP FOR YOU A PROPHET LIKE ME FROM YOUR BRETHREN.'
- Implication of another deliverer and we know this is Jesus.
- Act 7:38 "This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness together with the angel who was speaking to him on Mount Sinai, and {who was} with our fathers; and he received living oracles to pass on to you.
- Act 7:39 "**Our fathers were unwilling to be obedient to him,** but repudiated him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt,
- Stephen again showing the tendency of Israel to reject and disobey what God designed for them. Even to the point of fashioning idols (next few verses) and carrying with them the tabernacle of Moloch.
- Act 7:40 SAYING TO AARON, 'MAKE FOR US GODS WHO WILL GO BEFORE US; FOR THIS MOSES WHO LED US OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT--WE DO NOT KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM.'
- Act 7:41 "At that time they made a calf and brought a sacrifice to the idol, and were rejoicing in the works of their hands.
- Act 7:42 "But God turned away and delivered them up to serve the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets, 'IT WAS NOT TO ME THAT YOU OFFERED VICTIMS AND SACRIFICES FORTY YEARS IN THE WILDERNESS, WAS IT, O HOUSE OF ISRAEL?
- Act 7:43 'YOU ALSO TOOK ALONG THE TABERNACLE OF MOLOCH AND THE STAR OF THE GOD ROMPHA, THE IMAGES WHICH YOU MADE TO WORSHIP. I ALSO WILL REMOVE YOU BEYOND BABYLON.'
- Act 7:44 "Our fathers had the tabernacle of testimony in the wilderness, just as He who spoke to Moses directed {him} to make it according to the pattern which he had seen.
- How odd is it to see side by side what Israel's life was like. They carried the Tabernacle of Moloch and the Tabernacle of Testimony (ark of the covenant).
 - Oh, if this is the picture we project to the people of this world. No wonder they have a hard time believing. The example we live before them. Why would they want to become like us.
 - Do we put God in a box. We carry Him around only to pull Him out at appointed times to acknowledge Him. This is the hour and a half I give to God. When I am through; back in the box. You know I can't be seen with you at work or at school. It doesn't matter the size of the box. Shoe box or a temple.

- Act 7:45 Joshua "And having received it in their turn, our fathers brought it in with Joshua upon dispossessing the nations whom God drove out before our fathers, until the time of David.
- God was in the box, Yet He gave great victory to Joshua and Israel.
- Act 7:46 David "{David} found favor in God's sight, and asked that he might find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob.
- Act 7:47 "But it was Solomon who built a house for Him.
- David desired to build a house for God but it was Solomon who built the temple for God.
 - God has done well so let's give Him a better box.
- Act 7:48 "However, the Most High does not dwell in {houses} made by {human} hands; as the prophet says:
- Act 7:49 'HEAVEN IS MY THRONE, AND EARTH IS THE FOOTSTOOL OF MY FEET; WHAT KIND OF HOUSE WILL YOU BUILD FOR ME?' says the Lord, 'OR WHAT PLACE IS THERE FOR MY REPOSE?'
- Act 7:50 'WAS IT NOT MY HAND WHICH MADE ALL THESE THINGS?'
- In Isaiah 66:1&2, Isaiah said of God that man's boxes cannot contain God. In fact it is ridiculous to think you can compartmentalize God. He made the Cedars and Oaks that you use to build your box.

Act 7:51 **2) Application for the Present** vs 51-53

It is the prayers of every preacher that the messages they preach have an application that every hearer can apply to their life. Stephen has an application.

"You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did.

- Lifestyle Evangelism was not yet conceived. It was important that these men know the truth. They need to know it now. Not glean it from his life over the next few years.
- Saul of Tarsus was in the crowd hearing every word. Saul was renamed Paul but at this point he gave heartily approval to the stoning of Stephen. Yet were Stephen's words ineffective? No Look at Paul.
- Paul taught:
 - Men being Stiff necked (mostly an Old Testament term but the same principal in Paul's writing concerning being immovable or hardened) Romans 2:3-5 "*But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same (yourself,) that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God,*"
 - Men uncircumcised in heart Paul wrote in Romans 2:25-29 "*For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision. Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision? And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law? For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither [is that] circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he [is] a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision [is that] of the heart, in the spirit, [and] not in the letter; whose praise [is] not of men, but of God."*

And Again in Philippians 3:3 "*For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh."*

And again in Colossians 2:11 "*In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ:"*

 - Men resisting the Holy Spirit Paul wrote in Eph 4:30 "*And grieve not the holy Spirit of God"*

- Stephen gave the history lesson to point out that they now are doing just as their fathers had done.

- Act 7:52 "Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become;
- The Old Testament Prophets had a message for Israel, or the Northern Kingdom or the Southern Kingdom or to the restored kingdom to turn towards God. Usually it was severe with a pending judgment if there was no repentance (turning towards God). Most prophets were not heard all were at the least grumbled against and some even killed.
 - Stephen mentions the numerous prophecies concerning the Messiah. Yet these prophets were killed for their message.
 - Stephen connected his accusers to the men who killed the prophets of old.
 - Can that line be drawn to you? Do you kill or betray the Righteous one today? How? (see verse 53)
- Act 7:53 you who received the law as ordained by angels, and {yet} did not keep it."
- We receive the Word and yet do not keep it.
 - Tough word to Give. I am impressed with Stephen and his willingness to stand up for the truth even in the risk of his becoming just like the persecuted prophets of old.
- Act 7:54 **3) Response to the Message** vs 54-60
Now when they heard this, they were cut to the quick, and they {began} gnashing their teeth at him.
- KJV says "cut to the heart"
 - Stephen's message has left a permanent mark on these people. The goal of every sermon is a response. If nothing happens one of two things.
 - The preacher is in need of a new job or
 - The hearers have calloused themselves to numbness.
- Act 7:55 But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God;
- Act 7:56 and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."
- Stephen preached by being full of the Holy Spirit. At the end he looks up and sees all the way to Heaven. He sees the Father and the Son.
 - Here he is standing. Psalm 110 & Hebrews Jesus is sitting. But this is the first martyr of the Church and Stephen sees Jesus Standing to receive this hero, this martyr.
- Act 7:57 But they cried out with a loud voice, and covered their ears and rushed at him with one impulse.
- Act 7:58 When they had driven him out of the city, they {began} stoning {him;} and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul.
- Luke here is introducing the man Saul who will later become Paul. He was here and this message will shape Paul's theology. Not immediately but will eventually.
 - We are shaping peoples view of God whether we know it or not. There are people in each of our lives who know we profess to be Christians.
- Act 7:59 They went on stoning Stephen as he called on {the Lord} and said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!"
- Act 7:60 Then falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" Having said this, he fell asleep.
- Stephen even in his death was following Jesus. He remembered the account of Jesus on the cross asking the Father to receive his spirit (Luke 23:46) and to not hold the sin against them (Luke 23:34)
 - This is a fantastic standard for you and me to keep following Jesus. Stephen experiencing the ultimate rejection or ridicule for his faith and yet he walks in the exact steps of Jesus.
 - Can we walk in Our Lords exact steps or are we like those who reject Jesus.

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