

ACTS 7

But let's review:

Acts 6:8-15 NKJV 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. (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.

(Acts 7:1 NKJV) Then the high priest said, "Are these things so?"

So, the High Priest breaks in and wants to know if the accusations are true. Evidently, Stephen wasn't a man of few words, but then again, the Holy Spirit seems to have a lot to say to these men

Stephen was accused

1. **speak blasphemous words against Moses and God**
2. **speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law (the holy place = Temple)**
3. **Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us**

Spoiler alert: You will soon see that Stephen does not refute these accusations. What he (or the Holy Spirit in him) does is put the burden back on them by presenting the Sanhedrin facts that they knew, but hadn't truly understood. BTW: The High Priest is the same Caiaphas who presided over the trial of Jesus.

(Acts 7:2 NKJV) 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.

I want to read the verses in Genesis 12 to which Stephen refers:

Genesis 12:1-4 NKJV Now the LORD had said to Abram: "**Get out of your country, From your family** And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you. (2) I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. (3) I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; **And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.**" (4) So Abram departed as the LORD had spoken to him, and **Lot went with him. And Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.**

(I'm going to call Abram, Abraham)

Abraham wasn't totally obedient. He didn't immediately go a land that God was going to show him and he didn't leave his father and others in his family behind.

So even for the “**Father of Faith**”, it was a process of growing in faith and obedience. But on God's part, He made promises... but He patiently waited on Abraham to be obedient.

Stephen's point appears to be that God is not constrained to be only in be present inside a Temple. God came to Abraham. God spoke to Abraham, God God taught Abraham, God guided Abraham and blessed Abraham – all by grace.

(Acts 7:5 NKJV) 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.

It was this repeated promise of his own seed that would possess the land that Abraham believed. Any land Abraham had, was purchased. Yet he still believed God. Even when Abraham complained, God showed him the stars of heaven. **Gen 15:6b** And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." **Gen 15:6** And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.

Hebrews 11:9-10 NKJV By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as *in* a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; **(10)** for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God.

Hebrews 11:13 NKJV These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced *them* and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

(Acts 7:6 NKJV) 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.'

Genesis 15:13-16 NKJV Then He said to Abram: "Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land *that is* not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. **(14)** And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions. **(15)** **Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age.** **(16)** But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites *is* not yet complete."

For purposes known only to God, He tells Abraham that his descendants will be slaves in another country for 400 years.

But, the promise will stand! And Abraham knows it!

(Acts 7:8 NKJV) **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.

Genesis 17:1-14 NKJV When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I *am* Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless. (2) And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly."

Genesis 17:10 This *is* my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised.

The Jews prided themselves in their circumcision, failing to understand that the rite was symbolic of an inner spiritual relationship with God

Deuteronomy 10:15-22 NKJV (15) The LORD delighted only in your fathers, to love them; and He chose their descendants after them, you above all peoples, as *it is* this day. (16) Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer. (17) For the LORD your God *is* God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe.

Jeremiah 4:4 NKJV Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, And take away the foreskins of your hearts, You men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, Lest My fury come forth like fire, And burn so that no one can quench *it*, Because of the evil of your doings."

Abraham, justified by faith; Abraham was called the friend of God. No Law, No Temple

Next Up: Joseph

(Acts 7:9 NKJV) "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.**

No Law, No Temple – God was with Joseph. He gave him wisdom, discernment and grace. All the while, Joseph remembered God. And God remembered Joseph!

(Acts 7:11 NKJV) Now a famine and great trouble came over all the land of Egypt and Canaan, and our fathers found no sustenance.

(Acts 7:12 NKJV) But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first.

(Acts 7:13 NKJV) And the second *time* Joseph was made known to his brothers, and Joseph's family became known to the Pharaoh.

And Joseph, perhaps a type of Christ, forgave his brothers for the sins they committed against him. And not only that, he was a type of 'savior' – and being a Jew, in his powerful position, he was the only one

who could save them. Not from the bondage to come, but from the famine in the land.

(Acts 7:14 NKJV) Then Joseph sent and called his father Jacob and all his relatives to *him*, seventy-five people.

In Genesis and Exodus, it is recorded that there were 70 people who came to Egypt. The difference being that Stephen was quoting from the Septuagint (the Greek OT) and the translators counted Jacob's family differently, including Joseph's children.

(Acts 7:15 NKJV) So Jacob went down to Egypt; and he died, he and our fathers.

(Acts 7:16 NKJV) 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.

Onto Moses

(Acts 7:17 NKJV) "**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.

(Acts 7:20 NKJV) 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.

Many believe that Moses is also a type of Christ. He was miraculously kept safe from harm at birth. And he grew up becoming mighty in words and deeds. And, of course, he led his people out of bondage!

(Acts 7:23 NKJV) "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.**

I don't know if Moses the "Egyptian" was known also as Moses the Jew. It says that he believed that they should understand and appreciate what he had done...

(Acts 7:26 NKJV) 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.

Nope, they rejected him and ironically say 'who made you ruler and judge over us' – of course, the answer would be "Well, in forty years, God will".

(Acts 7:30 NKJV) "And when forty years had passed, an (the) **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.

(Acts 7:33 NKJV) '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 [I AM] COME DOWN TO DELIVER THEM. AND NOW COME, I WILL SEND YOU TO EGYPT." '

(Acts 7:35 NKJV) "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.

(Acts 7:37 NKJV) "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.'

(Acts 7:38 NKJV) "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,**

Acts 7:38-39 NLT Moses was with our ancestors, the assembly of God's people in the wilderness, when the angel spoke to him at Mount Sinai. And there Moses received life-giving words to pass on to us. (39) "But our ancestors refused to listen to Moses. They rejected him and wanted to return to Egypt.

(Acts 7:40 NKJV) 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.' (41) And they made a calf in those days, offered sacrifices to the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands.

The VERY BIG point Stephen is trying to get across to the leaders is, while Moses was up on the mountain receiving the law written with GOD's own finger, the people he brought out of bondage were worshipping an idol and wishing that they never left Egypt.

(Acts 7:42 NKJV) **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.'

This is from Amos 5:25-26 NKJV.

((Amos wrote around the same time as Isaiah and Hosea))

But, the interesting thing is: **"Then God turned and gave them up to worship the host of heaven"**

Romans 1:24-32 NKJV Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves

(26) For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature.

(28) And even as they did not like to retain God in *their* knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting;

So, the very law that GOD gave Moses they refused to obey!

(Acts 7:44 NKJV) "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.

The temple became an idol of sorts. And even Jesus had His issues with the Pharisees and Scribes:

Matthew 23:16-22 NKJV "Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obliged to perform it.' (17) Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctifies the gold? (18) And, 'Whoever swears by the altar, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gift that is on it, he is obliged to perform it.' (19) Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that sanctifies the gift? (20) Therefore he who swears by the altar, swears by it and by all things on it. (21) He who swears by the temple, swears by it and by Him who dwells in it. (22) And he who swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God and by Him who sits on it.

(Acts 7:48 NKJV) "However, the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands, as the prophet says:

(Acts 7:49 NKJV) '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?'

Quoting **Isaiah 66:1**

2Chronicles 6:18 "But will God indeed dwell with men on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built!

But, please read Ezekiel 8:1-18; It's a vision that God gave Ezekiel that shows the idolatry that permeated the Temple. This Temple God destroyed; And while the current Temple might look clean, the men in it, many of which were accusing Stephen, were anything but clean!

Stephan is about to unleash the Holy Spirit's displeasure with those in the hearing of his words.

Up to this point, we have learned about Abraham, Joseph and Moses. With so many great ancestors whose stories have taught us, encouraged us, warned us, there was something that Stephan / the Holy Spirit wanted them to understand:

God came to Abraham, Joseph and Moses; He revealed Himself to them; God did all these great and wonderful things without the Temple and before the Law was given! Stephen was being accused by the same men, and for the same basic reasons as Jesus (except for the part about being God 😊)

(Acts 7:51 NKJV) "*You* stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers *did*, so *do* you.

for though **they had the mark of circumcision** in their flesh, **of which they boasted**; yet they had not the true circumcision of the heart; their hearts were not circumcised to fear and love the Lord, nor their ears to hear the word of the Lord and the Gospel of Christ;

Deuteronomy 10:16 NKJV Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer.

The people of Israel were called stiff-necked many times. **The first** was when the people built the golden-calf and worshipped it because Moses tarried on the Mountain getting the LAW.

The last time was when Hezekiah urged the people to **return to the LORD** in the face of the Assyrians assault on the land. (2 Chron 30)

(Acts 7:52 NKJV) 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*."

Elijah: **1 Kings 19:10 NKJV** So he said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life."

Deuteronomy 33:2 NKJV And he said: "The LORD came from Sinai, And dawned on them from Seir; He shone forth from Mount Paran, And He came with ten thousands of saints; From His right hand *Came* a fiery law for them.

The Sanhedrin knew the Scriptures. They knew of Israel's constant disobedience to God and the breaking of the LAW. They might have conquered idolatry after the Babylonian Exile, but their hearts did not change! They swapped idols for their pride of circumcision; they made the Temple a place where they thought that God lived when nothing made by human hands could contain him. They sought their salvation by works and by pedigree.

(Acts 7:54 NKJV) When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with *their* teeth.

They were cut to the heart: but unlike those who heard Peter, these men were enraged! The verb-tense for the word “gnashed” implies not a single time but something that was building up for a while.

(Acts 7:55 NKJV) But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the 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!"

The Holy Spirit reveals a glimpse of heaven to Stephan. This man dared to proclaim that he was seeing the “Son of Man” (who all the leaders knew to be a reference to the Messiah and one that Jesus used of himself often). And here was Jesus, standing at the right hand of God! Not sitting, but standing as if he were honoring Stephan for his faithful and bold witness.

(Acts 7:57 NKJV) Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord;

I think I could accurately say that “all hell broke loose”.

Guzik teaches that the phrase “**Ran at him**” uses the Greek word *hormao*. This is the same word used to describe the mad rush of the herd of swine into the sea ([Mar 5:13](#)). This was an out-of-control mob rushing at Stephen.

(Acts 7:58 NKJV) 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.

And here we are, learning about a young man named Saul who was approving of the stoning and by laying their clothes at his feet was indicating that he was actually supervising the mob-action.

(Acts 7:59 NKJV) And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on *God* and saying, "**Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.**"

Not GOD, but the LORD Jesus;

(Acts 7:60 NKJV) 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.**"

Paul's calling and life was a testimony of God answering Stephan's prayer!!

At the very end of his life, Stephen sees Jesus standing, waiting and watching. Jesus isn't sitting, dispassionately viewing the scene. He was given a glimpse of the Throne Room and his King, standing at the ready.

In perfect faith, as the stones were battering his body, Stephen calls out to God, his LORD God, Jesus to receive his spirit. Just as Jesus did.

With a perfect Christ-like heart, Stephen also asks Jesus not to charge those stoning him with the sin of murderous hate. Just as Jesus did.

And with Jesus in view, he “falls asleep”. Now with Jesus, awaiting the resurrection of his body.

Folks,

We’ve talked about this fallen world and how sin runs rampant. Wickedness abounds because those who make a practice of it HATE GOD! And, they hate anyone who boldly testifies about His saving Grace and transforming Love. Sometimes, that hate becomes persecution and we have seen how persecution can lead to suffering and even death.

Peter taught:

1 Peter 4:12-19 NKJV Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; **(13)** but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. **(14)** If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed *are you*, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. **(15)** But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. **(16)** Yet if *anyone suffers* as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter. **(17)** For the time *has come* for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if *it begins* with us first, what will *be* the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? **(18)** Now "IF THE RIGHTEOUS ONE IS SCARCELY SAVED, WHERE WILL THE UNGODLY AND THE SINNER APPEAR?" **(19)** Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls *to Him* in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.

But Pastor Stu, I understand that I might have to suffer for Christ’s sake. But what about needless suffering?

Beloved of God, I don’t know why we suffer but I know that God loves me; I don’t have an answer to all the pain we experience, but I know God will use the circumstances of our lives to mold us to be like His Son. Perhaps the pain of the Potters Hands is directly related to how much the clay resists His touch! As Stephen admonished those who were about to stone him:

Don’t resist the Holy Spirit; His work in you is for your benefit and His Glory!