

Having seen Stephen's arrest last week (6:8-15), we come this week to begin to consider Stephen's defense. This defense is basically a history lesson about the nation of Israel—beginning with Abraham and concluding with David. But it's very important to keep in mind, that far from a mere history lesson, Stephen recounts these events in answer to the high priest's question in v1—"Are these things so?" That is, are the accusations leveled at you true?

And if you remember, the accusation leveled at Stephen was that he spoke against Moses, God, the law, the temple, and the customs pasted down by Moses. Thus, what he does is this—he shows them from their own history (through the OT Scriptures), that far from despising these things, he actually was esteeming them. The entire history of the nation of Israel (beginning with Abraham through David), pointed toward Christ and His new and better covenant. This is the primary point of his entire defense.

John Scott—"It is important to bear in mind the nature and purpose of Stephen's speech. After the two serious accusations had been levelled at him, the high priest challenged him with the direct question: 'Are these charges true?' (7:1). So Stephen needed to defend himself against them in such a way as to develop a defense for his radical gospel. What he did was not just to rehearse the prominent features of the OT story, with which the Sanhedrin were as familiar as he, but to do so in such a way as to draw lessons from it which they had never learned or even noticed. His concern was to demonstrate that his position, far from being 'blasphemous' because disrespectful to God's word, actually honored it. For OT Scripture itself confirmed his teaching about the temple and the law, especially by predicting the Messiah, whereas by rejecting Him it was they who disregarded the law, not he. Stephen's mind had evidently soaked up the OT, for his speech is like a patchwork of allusions to it."

His defense can be divided up into 4 parts: Abraham (vv2-8); Joseph (vv9-16); Moses (vv17-43); and David (vv44-50). Verses 51-60, contain Stephen's application of his defense to his hearers (vv51-53), and their response (vv54-60). Thus, it's my intent this morning to limit our consideration to the history of Abraham as found in vv2-8. We will consider this history under three main headings: God's call of Abraham (vv2-4); God's promise to Abraham (vv5-7); and God's covenant with Abraham (v8).

- I. God's Call of Abraham (vv2-4)
- II. God's Promise to Abraham (vv5-7)
- III. God's Covenant with Abraham (v8)

#### I. God's Call of Abraham (vv2-4)

1. V2—"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, and said to him, 'Get out of your country and from your relatives, and come to a land that I will show you (let me suggest three things about Abraham's call).'"
2. (1) Its source, v2—"The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham"—Stephen describes God as "the God of glory."
3. That is, the God who is glorious, or the God who possesses glory—the Greek word rendered "glory" literally means "opinion or estimate."
4. It literally refers to an opinion or estimation of someone—thusly, it's rendered praise, honor, or glory.
5. When you have a good opinion or estimation of someone you bestow praise, honor, or glory upon them.
6. Thus, the phrase "the God of glory" basically means the same thing as phrases such as "the God of praise" or "the God of honor."

7. He is the God who deserves praise, honor, and glory—He doesn't just deserve some praise, honor, or glory, but all the praise, honor, and glory.
8. (2) Its content, vv2b-3—"when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, and said to him, 'Get out of your country and from your relatives, and come to a land that I will show you'."
9. God's call of Abraham was twofold—he was to come out of his home land, and he was to come to the land shown by God.
10. (a) He was to leave his own country and relatives—Luke mentions that Abraham was from Mesopotamia.
11. We learn from Genesis 11:31, that he was specifically from "Ur of the Chaldeans" which is the same with Babylon.
12. If you remember, Abraham left Ur and then dwelt in Haran, until the death of his father, and then continued to Canaan.
13. Thus, Abraham left his native country, the land of his fathers, and when he was 75yrs-old, he left Haran for Canaan (Gen.12:4).
14. (b) He was to come into the land God would give him—this of course is a reference to the land of Canaan (the promise land).
15. Thus, God didn't merely call Abraham from something, but He called Him to something—something better.
16. (3) Its response, v4—"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 the land in which you now dwell."
17. Notice, Luke speaks of Abraham's call from his native land, to dwell temporarily in Haran, and then eventually to Canaan, in two ways.
18. First, he says that Abraham himself obeyed that call—"Then he came out of the land of the Chaldeans."
19. Second, he says that it was God who brought him out of his native land into the land in which they now dwell.
20. This refers back to the revelation that God gave to Abraham when he temporarily dwelt in the land of Haran.
21. God motivated Abraham and gave him grace to obey God and continue his journey from Haran to Canaan (before I leave this point, let me briefly mentioned two things about Abraham's calling as it has direct bearing upon Stephen's audience).
22. (a) The grace of calling—by this I mean, God called Abraham while a Babylonian pagan far from Him
23. And I think this is a major point of Stephen—remember, he has a purpose in giving this historical lesson.
24. The Jews were proud of their nationality—in fact, they divided the entire world between them and the Gentiles.
25. In the mind of a Jew, there were two types of people in the world—there were Jews and there were non-Jews.
26. But here, Stephen reminds these Jewish leaders, that their beloved nation, had its start with an idolater.
27. Now, we have to remember, Abraham's call out of Babylon, was both geographical and spiritual—in leaving Babylon, he left idolatry (Josh.24:2).
28. (b) The need for calling—I suggest this is another reason why Stephen reminds them of father Abraham.
29. Just as their father (according to the flesh), needed to be called by God, so they needed to be called by God.
30. Simply put, all men need to be born again—this is true regardless of the context into which we've been born.

31. If you were born a Hebrew during OT times or NT times, you still had to be born again by the Spirit.
32. You can be born in the US, Africa, Asia, a poor house, a rich house, a pagan house, or a Christian house.
33. It makes NO difference—you must be born again—you must be called out of darkness into the light.
34. This is why Christians are referred to as the church, because the word for church (ecclesia) means "called out" and "gathered."
35. The church is comprised of those who have been called out of darkness and gathered into Christ by faith.
36. Abraham obeyed God, leaving Babylon and his idolatry—he was a man of faith—he was a saved man.
37. The men of the Sanhedrin were not the true seed of Abraham, otherwise, they would do the works of Abraham.
38. But if you recall, it was this very Sanhedrin who killed the Messiah, and has persecuted His servants.

## II. God's Promise to Abraham (vv5-7)

1. V5—"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."
2. (1) It concerned a land—the land promised Abraham was the land of Canaan, or modern-day Palestine.
3. Though God promised it to Abraham, Stephen says that Abraham did not possess the land for himself.
4. V5—"And God gave him no inheritance in it, not even enough to set his foot on"—that is, he had no lasting part in it.
5. God promised to give the land to Abraham for a possession, something that would come to pass long after Abraham dies.
6. In fact, his descendants would receive the land as an inheritance under Joshua (more than 500yrs later).
7. Heb. 11:8-10—"By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. 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; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God."
8. Notice, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, all dwelt in the land of promise in tents as they had no lasting possession.
9. (2) It concerned a people—God gave this promise to Abraham when he was 75, and had no descendants.
10. God not only promised a vast land as an inheritance, but He also promised a vast family to fill that land.
11. Thus, as you know, from Isaac came Jacob (who had 12 sons), and then 400yrs later, they were liberated from Egypt by Moses.
12. Over 40yrs later, Joshua led them into the promise land, and eventually, it was given to them as an inheritance.
13. In fact, the whole of the land promised Abraham, wasn't given to his descendants until David and Solomon.

14. Verses 6-7—"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. 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."
15. Verse 7 is a quotation of Gen.15:14, where God actually foretold to Abraham, that his descendants would be enslaved 400yrs in Egypt.
16. In other words, they would not be given the land as their inheritance, until after their Egyptian captivity.
17. Thus, no sooner did God promise Abraham the land and a people, He also prophesied their 400yr bondage.
18. Thus, here's the point—God promised Abraham both a land and people, without actually giving him either.
19. If you remember, Abraham was 75yrs-old when God first made this promise, and Abraham was childless.
20. Gen.15:1-2—"After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, 'Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.' But Abram said, 'LORD GOD, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?'"
21. (a) God promises Abraham a people (vv1-6), v4—"And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, 'This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir.'"
22. Abram believes God, v6—"And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness."
23. (b) God promises Abraham a land (vv7-21), v7—"Then He said to him, 'I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it.'"
24. It's at this point that God enters into a formal covenant with Abraham, and it concerns both a people and land.
25. And so, as we read in Hebrews 6:17—"Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath (or a covenant – a reference to Gen.15)."
26. Observation 1—According to the NT, Abraham understood that the land and people, pointed to Christ and salvation.
27. Abraham knew, that through Isaac would come the Messiah, in whom he would have a better land than Canaan.
28. This is also seen in the OT—look back to Gen.15:6—"and he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness."
29. "And he believed in the LORD"—who is meant by "LORD" but ultimately the promised Seed of the woman.
30. Rom.4:13—"The promise that he would be heir of the world" Gal.3:16—"Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made."
31. Observation 2—According to the NT, all Christians, like Abraham, are promised the same inheritance, for which we must wait.
32. As Abraham was promised a land and people, so Christians are promised a better land, that will be populated with Abraham's true descendants.

### III. God's Covenant with Abraham (v8)

1. V8—"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."

2. Covenant theology is obviously something essential to Scripture, which is divided into two covenants or testaments (the old and new).
3. The Old Covenant was made with Abraham and his physical seed, whereas, the new covenant is made with his spiritual seed.
4. Thus, the Old Covenant is best understood to include those historical covenants made with Abraham, Moses, and David.
5. Put another way—the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic covenants, all constitute the OC, made with native Israel.
6. This is why the land promised Abraham and his descendants, isn't given to them until the Mosaic Covenant.
7. And other promises made to Abraham, such as from him would come kings, wouldn't be fulfilled until the Davidic Covenant.
8. In other words, these three covenants, the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic, are all necessarily related.
9. And they are related in a number of ways: first, they are all made with the same people (the Hebrews, or physical decedents of Abraham); second, they all point to Christ and the new and better covenant.
10. Stephen refers to the covenant made with Abraham as "the covenant of circumcision" as God does in Genesis 17.
11. Gen.17:9-14—"And God said to Abraham: 'As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generation. This is My Covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: every male child among you shall be circumcised; and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you.'"
12. (1) Circumcision was a sign of covenant membership—this was true for natural descendants of Abraham, and foreigners bought with money (vv12-13).
13. Thus, while foreigners could become covenant members, this covenant was with Abraham and his physical seed (v9).
14. As a result, those within his descendants who were circumcised were in covenant with God, and those uncircumcised broke covenant with God.
15. The reason being, this covenant that God made with Abraham, he made with Abraham and his physical seed.
16. Thus, physical circumcision was a means to distinguish the physical seed of Abraham from the rest of mankind (these alone were God's covenant people).
17. (2) Circumcision was a pledge of a new and better covenant—by this I mean, it pointed to spiritual things.
18. (a) The nature of circumcision—physical circumcision entailed, cutting away a part of a person's flesh.
19. Thus, it was a painful and bloody ordinance, and pointed to the need of having our old heart cut away.
20. Deut.30:5-6—"Then the LORD your God will bring you to the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it. He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers. And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live."
21. The nation was about to enter the promise land, and God leaves them with a sad and sobering prophecy.
22. Beginning with v1, He foretells their exile into Babylon, as a consequence of their disobedience to God.

23. And yet, He also foretells a time, 70yrs after their exile, when He will return them to the promise land.
24. And yet, He makes very clear, the returning remnant, will return as a penitent and believing remnant (vv2-4 - this they will do under Ezra and Nehemiah).
25. Thus, v5 speaks of their return to the land which their fathers possessed, and there they would dwell beneath God's blessing.
26. Verse 6 describes why they will return to the LORD, and obey Him with all their heart and their soul.
27. V6—"And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants"—this means, He will change their hearts (He will regenerate them).
28. Notice the result of this regeneration (or spiritual circumcision)—"to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live."
29. Having spiritual life and loving God truly and sincerely, is the result of this personal and powerful circumcision.
30. Col.2:11-13—"In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses."
31. Paul speaks about the "circumcision made without hands" which means, it is a spiritual and not physical act.
32. This spiritual circumcision is symbolized in water baptism, which becomes the sign of the new and better covenant.
33. Thus, while the Sanhedrin were physically circumcised (and members of the OC), they were not spiritually circumcised (and thus, they were not members of the NC).
34. Acts 7:51—"You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you."
35. (b) The timing of circumcision—"and Abraham begot Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day."
36. Why did God have His OC people circumcise their sons on the eighth day, but because of its significance.
37. What's another way of saying the eighth day but the first day—in fact, the OT often underscored the importance of the eighth day.
38. And why? But because it would be on the eighth day, or the first day of the week, that Christ would raise from the dead.
39. This simply means this—all our salvation has been bought and secured through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.
40. This is why the church has historically administered baptism, the sign of the NC, on the first day of the week (in relation to public worship).
41. Why? Because, just as the sign of the OC was administered on the eighth day, so should the sign of the NC.
42. Remember what Paul said of Abraham in Romans 4:11, that "he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised."
43. For believing Abraham, circumcision was not only a covenant sign but also a seal to his heart, that he was righteous before God.
44. And too, we as the true seed of Abraham, those of us who believe as father Abraham believed, should see in our baptism the sign of God's covenant blessings—and as we do so, I pray it too will become a seal to our hearts (Song 8:6 – 'Set me as a seal upon Your heart, as a seal upon Your arm').