

“Stephen – Part 2”
(Stephen’s Defense – focus on Acts 7:1-16)
Acts 6:8 – 7:60
(Preached at Trinity, April 20, 2005)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Last time we began looking at this lengthy section dealing with the Stephen’s defense of the faith and ultimate martyrdom. This passage marks a transition in the Book of Acts.
 - A. Stephen was already a man of distinction within the church. Being a man full of the Holy Ghost and of wisdom he was chosen to be one of the first deacons in the church.
 - B. He was a man blessed with uncommon gifts.
Stephen, being closely associated with the Apostles, was able to do many of the Apostolic miracles
 - C. We are not told that he was called as a preacher of the Word, yet he boldly stood for the Gospel
2. Last time I focused primarily upon the initial reaction of these unbelieving religious leaders to Stephen and the Gospel message. Their reaction in the face of this godly man is consistent with the world’s reaction to us.
 - A. They despised both Stephen and his message. The world will also despise us and the message we bring.
 - B. They could not overcome the truth of the Gospel – **Verse 10**
 1. Stephen spoke with wisdom and power
 2. His faith was in God
His power came from God –
Acts 6:10 – “And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.”
 - C. In the end they had to resort to false witnesses.
They could not deny the excellence of Stephen – **Verse 15**
They could not deny his righteous character
3. Tonight I want to begin looking at Stephen’s defense. After the false witnesses made their accusations the high priest looked at Stephen and asked, “Are these things so?” In other words, “How do you plead, Guilty or Not Guilty?”
Beginning with **Verse 2** Stephen begins his defense. He starts at the beginning of God’s call of Abraham to give a lengthy discourse leading up to Christ. It would have been a much longer sermon had he not been cut short.
4. We will see in this chapter that Stephen was a man mighty in the Word. His defense came from the Old Testament Scriptures which he quoted freely. (From the Septuagint) He had great boldness as he defended the Word.
1 Timothy 3:13 – “For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.”

5. Stephen was being accused of blaspheming God, Moses, the law, and the Temple. In his defense he recites Israel's history as he brings them face to face with their sin and Christ. He was telling them something they all knew very well. He was speaking before the Sanhedrin. They knew their history. They knew the Scriptures. What they did not know is how to make proper application of them. They were ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.
6. He begins by addressing them with respect – "Men, brethren, and fathers"
He is respectful to them expecting to be treated fairly.
Then he masterfully uses Israel's history in his defense that he has not blasphemed God, nor Moses, nor the Law, nor the Temple.
At the same time he is about to use their own history to indict their failure to recognize that Jesus is the fulfillment of all of God's promises to Israel. In rejecting their Messiah they were imitating their apostate fathers who from the beginning rejected God's purpose and plan. Stephen was not the blasphemer – they were.
7. We will find throughout this passage the very nature of preaching. Preaching draws implications and nuances out of the Biblical text. Sometimes it is very direct. Sometimes it is very subtle.
 - A. Preaching should always cause us to reflect inwardly. What does this have to say to me?
 - B. We should always prepare ourselves for preaching. We should pray, God help me to be a hearer of the Word.
 - C. Equally important we should pray, God help me to be a doer of the Word. In other words, God help me to apply this to my life.
James 1:22-24 – "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. ²³ For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: ²⁴ For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was."
 - D. We should always pray that we will not have rebellious hearts that find it all too easy to dismiss God's Word.
8. Stephen begins by defending himself against the charge that he had blasphemed God. He affirms his absolute belief in the God of Israel – the God of glory who raised up the nation according to his electing purpose and absolute power. He also brings out the very subtle nuances that his hearers should have applied to themselves. Instead, in the end, they rejected the messenger and killed him.
 - I. Stephen first draws their attention to the God of glory
 - A. This is the most complete name for God
 1. The glory of God is the full sum and expression of His attributes
 - a. To reveal the glory of God is to reveal the divine essence
 - b. The glory of God reveals the fulness of God
 2. This expression is used here and in Psalm 29:3
Psalm 29:3 – "The voice of the LORD *is* upon the waters: the God of glory thundereth: the LORD *is* upon many waters."
 4. In Psalm 24 He is called the King of glory
Psalm 24:8 – "Who *is* this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle."
 3. Stephen begins his defense by affirming the glory of God
He is no blasphemer but exalts God in all his glory

- B. From here Stephen begins to set forth this God as the Author of history
1. God is unfolding history by His sovereign prerogative
 2. It all culminates in Christ
 3. At this point Stephen's listeners are in full agreement with him. You can almost see them nodding their heads.
- II. Then Stephen begins to unfold Israel's history - God called forth Abraham
- A. The God of glory had a plan – It's fulfillment began with a lone man in Mesopotamia.
1. Abraham lived in Mesopotamia, the land of the Ur of the Chaldees
 2. God called Abraham to depart from Mesopotamia and go to the land that God would appoint. Abraham travels as far as Haran and dwelt there for a season.
Verses 2-3 – “And he said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran, and said to him, 'Go out from your land and from your kindred and go into the land that I will show you.
 3. Upon his father's death God speaks to Abraham and reiterates His charge to Abraham to leave this country and travel to the land God would appoint.
Verse 3 – “And said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall shew thee.”
Genesis 12:4 – “So Abram departed, as the LORD had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran.
 4. God's call upon Abraham and Abraham's obedience was according to God's Sovereign plan
- B. God's sovereign plan is not according to human wisdom – God works his purpose according to His wisdom in His time
1. God promised an inheritance to Abraham, yet Abraham never saw it. Still God promised that he would give to Abraham a possession and to his seed after him
Verse 5 – “And he gave him none inheritance in it, no, not *so much* as to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when *as yet* he had no child.”
 - a. The only land Abraham possessed was his burial plot
 - b. The closest thing Abraham came to seeing the possession was the birth of Isaac
 2. The point is Abraham believed God
 - a. He heard God, he trusted God, he obeyed God
 - b. This is precisely what Stephen's hearers had not done
They had heard God's Word – they did not believe, did not trust, did not obey.
 - c. Notice their dismissing tone concerning Christ
Acts 6:14 – “For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place”

- C. Stephen continues by saying that Abraham's seed would dwell in captivity for 400 years before they would see it
Verse 6 – “And God spake on this wise, That his seed should sojourn in a strange land; and that they should bring them into bondage, and entreat *them* evil four hundred years.”
1. Stephen is setting forth the evidence that God's plan was unfolding – it would not reach its pinnacle until Christ
 2. Stephen also begins to unfold the warning – all who oppose the plan of God and the people of God will be judged
Acts 7:7 – “And the nation to whom they shall be in bondage will I judge, said God: and after that shall they come forth, and serve me in this place.”
 - a. It is a subtle warning. Had they been looking at themselves they might have heard – but their hearts were too hard
 - b. It won't be unto Stephen makes it very direct that they hear

III. Stephen then moves to the patriarchal period

- A. God's sovereign control of Israel's history continued
1. Abraham became the father of Isaac who became the father of Jacob
 2. Jacob became the father of the twelve patriarchs – the heads of the twelve tribes of Israel – **Verse 8**
- B. Stephen is laying the foundation for his blistering condemnation that would come in **Verses 51-53**
1. The patriarchs were the most respected in Israel's history
 2. These men, however, became jealous of Joseph and sold him into Egypt. By doing so, they rejected the very one God had set apart to be a blessing
 3. This would serve as a graphic illustration of the nation's spiritual blindness in the case of Jesus
Acts 7:9 – “And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him,”
 4. It was because of envy that they killed Christ.
 - Are they hearing Stephen's preaching?
 - Are they applying it to themselves?
 - Sometimes the preacher is accused of stepping on toes only when he makes direct application. The Word of God should step on our toes in every sermon
- C. In spite of his brothers' envy and rejection God was with Joseph
Acts 7:9-10 – “. . . but God was with him, ¹⁰ And delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favour and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house.”
1. Stephen is making it absolutely clear that the twelve patriarchs were guilty of opposing God and His purpose - They sold Joseph and God rescued him
 2. The nation's rebellion against God began with the patriarchs. These blind unbelieving men of Stephen's generation were doing the very same thing their fathers had done.
 3. Already Stephen is giving glimpses of Christ. This is what God's early redemptive history does. It all gives glimpses of Christ.

- D. Stephen then reminds them that after the rejection of Joseph a great dearth came upon the land
Acts 7:11 – “Now there came a dearth over all the land of Egypt and Chanaan, and great affliction: and our fathers found no sustenance.”
1. This is a perfect picture of a life apart from Christ – there is great spiritual emptiness
 2. The religious leaders accusing Stephen were completely blind to their own spiritual famine.
 3. Joseph, however, would be the salvation of his brethren
Acts 7:14 – “Then sent Joseph, and called his father Jacob to *him*, and all his kindred, threescore and fifteen souls.”
- E. Finally, Jacob dies along with the rest of the patriarchs and they are buried
Acts 7:15-16 – “So Jacob went down into Egypt, and died, he, and our fathers, ¹⁶ And were carried over into Sychem, and laid in the sepulchre that Abraham bought for a sum of money of the sons of Emmor *the father* of Sychem.”

Conclusion:

1. At this point Stephen moves to the next phase of Israel’s history. He’s about to introduce Moses. Stephen has not rejected God, he has not rejected Moses.
2. Stephen’s defense has been clear. He has not been guilty of blaspheming God. To the contrary he exalts God in His sovereign purpose in raising up Abraham and the patriarchs.
3. But Stephen’s defense is very subtle. He wants all eyes to be upon God’s redemptive purpose that is unfolding in the history of Israel. This purpose finds its fulfillment in Christ.
4. Throughout this message Stephen is speaking directly to the hearts of his hearers. They were not hearing.
5. How about you? What effect does preaching have upon you. It demands careful listening, prayerful hearing, willful doing.
 Do you ever find it easy to dismiss preaching, even when it is the clear exposition of Scripture? If so it is revealing a hardness of heart. Pray that God will give you a tender, sensitive heart as you sit under the preaching of His Word.