

STAND FIRM / Sunday, September 27, 2015

Unifying Topic: REMEMBERING GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

Lesson Text

I. The Promise Of Nation (Acts 7:2-4, 8-10)

II. The Rebellion Of A Nation (Acts 7:17, 33-34, 45-47)

III. The Judgment Of A Nation (Acts 7:53)

The Main Thought: Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? Saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest? (Acts 7:49, KJV).

Unifying Principle: People will defend against all criticism of their beliefs, even if their defense is life threatening. How do people stand up to such perilous criticism? When Stephen spoke to his accusers in the council, he summarized the history of God's faithfulness to the Israelites and then challenged the council members for not keeping the Law themselves.

Lesson Aim: To summarize Stephen's courageous speech to his accusers in the council, including his challenge to them.

Life Aim: To reflect on the meaning of beliefs and a willingness to stand firm in the midst of life-threatening circumstances.

HISTORY:

Acts 6:8-15 Stephen was one of the seven Grecian men of good report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom in which the apostles laid hands on and appointed as deacon. He began to do great signs and wonders and miracles among the people. However, when those of the synagogues got whiff of it, they rose up with dispute against Stephen. They didn't like what he was saying but, they couldn't withstand the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke. So since they couldn't win, they instigated men to lie and say that he blasphemed against Moses and God. With this, they stirred up the people, elders, and scribes and laid hold on Stephen and had him arrested; dragging him before the council where by false accusers testified against him. They accused him of speaking against the Temple and against the laws of Moses; Jesus of Nazareth would destroy the Temple and throw out all of Moses' laws and customs. All of a sudden Stephen's face became as radiant as the face of an angel's. **7:1** The high priest then asked Stephen, "*Are these things true*" in which they are saying? Stephen was on trial for his life. The charges had been made; accused of insurrection of preaching that the sacred institutions of the nation were to be destroyed, that is, the land, the law, the temple, and the customs.

LESSON:

Acts 7:2-4, 8-10 The Promise Of Nation

7:2 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,— Stephen addressed those questioning him as men, brethren, and fathers, affirming his oneness with them and addressing them in a polite manner, reminding them that he was a Jew too, as he asked them to listen to him. He began his speech with the history of Abraham. Abraham was among the earliest people in all the Jewish history; the first Jew called; the man chosen by God to be the founder of the nation of Israel. He related that it was the "*God of glory*" who first appeared to their father Abraham, when he was dwelling in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran (Haran). The "*God of glory*" is the sum of God's attributes. The point is: God showed Himself to Abraham when they didn't have a temple or tabernacle; God can appear in front of people anywhere. They do not have to be in a special place. All Stephen has said was true. He believed in the same God who appeared to Abraham.

7:3 And said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall shew thee. Abraham was a pagan; an idol worshiper from a foreign country, and God showed up and called

him out of a pagan lifestyle. God sovereignly chose Abraham and poured out His grace on him. He was to come out of his country (Ur of the Chaldees), and from his kindred, and come into the land which God was to show him. Stephen wasn't really defending himself; instead, he took the offensive, seizing the opportunity to summarize his teaching leading to Jesus. And from there he continues to speak to them.

7:4 Then came he out of the land of the Chaldaeans, and dwelt in Charran: and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell. Abraham was obedient to God. On God's command, he came out of the land of the Chaldaeans, stayed in Charran (Haran) until his father (Terah) died, and then left where they dwell now, Canaan.

7:5 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. Verse 3 says "*come into the land that I will show you*", but, at this point Abraham was not given anything he could set his foot on when he moved; it was a promise. God promised to give it (land) for a possession to him and his seed after him. Wow, Abraham didn't even have a child at the time. The point is: the promises are by faith for a future inheritance and possession and he gave up all for God and His promise of an eternal inheritance. Abraham truly trusted God when he made that choice; that first step to move. He believed God's promises without first seeing them. Two things:

1. Abraham never possessed the land.
2. Abraham didn't have a son until he was incapable of bearing seed (100yrs. old).

7:6 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. God prophesized to Abraham revealing that his seed would journey to a foreign land. All believers are the seed of Abraham by faith. His seed would not even possess the land, not for a long time, for his seed (the Israelites) would be brought into bondage to a strange land and there would become slaves for 400years.

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. That nation would be Egypt whom God would truly judge. Afterwards God's people would return and serve and worship Him in the Promised Land.

7:8 And he gave him the covenant of circumcision: and so Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs. God assured Abraham with a Covenant of Circumcision. Circumcision was the seal of Abraham's faith; just as the believer is sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. Abraham became the father of Isaac, and circumcised him on the 8th day; Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob became the father of the 12 patriarchs (fathered 12 sons). Circumcision was the sign that Abraham was truly trusting God and His promise.

7:9 And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him,— God had given Abraham a son, Isaac; and Abraham had him circumcised, sealing the fact that Isaac was the child of promise; the promised seed for the promised Jewish nation through whom God's people were to be born. Through the line, Joseph was born, and the forefathers rejected God's choice servant, Joseph. So, the patriarchs were flamed up with envy and jealousy against Joseph, sold him into slavery in Egypt, but God was still with Joseph strengthening him to go through the trials. Joseph had told of his dreams but they were blinded with so much envy. Stephen was saying that God's Will and plan could not be stopped, no matter what the present generation did against

Christ and His followers.

7:10 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. This is what God did: delivered Joseph out of all his afflictions, and gave him favour and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh, king of Egypt; causing Pharaoh to make Joseph governor over Egypt and all of Pharaoh's house.

Acts 7:17, 33-34, 45-47 The Rebellion Of A Nation

7:17 But when the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt,—Israel had been in Egypt for about 400yrs. The people had grown enormously both in numbers and prosperity, becoming comfortable, complacent, lethargic, worldly, and carnal. And God prepared to save His people and fulfill His glorious promise to Abraham. The time of the promise drew near. God moved world events to save His people. God's timing is just as important as His promise.

7:33 Then said the Lord to him, Put off thy shoes from thy feet: for the place where thou standest is holy ground. God had protected and prepared the chosen child Moses. Pharaoh's daughter had rescued, raised and educated him in the palace for 40yrs, as if he was her own. Being in the palace and cut off from his own people, when the time came for God's chosen servant to be used the Jews misunderstood and rejected him. This verse begins after Moses has run away from the palace, and is now a shepherd in Midian tending sheep of his father-in-law Jethro. At the backside of the desert near Horeb, the mountain of God, and suddenly an Angel of the Lord appeared to him as a flame of fire in a bush. Moses saw that the bush did not burn up, he came closer. God called him by name commanding him to take off his shoes from his feet, for where he was standing was holy ground. It was the presence of God which made the ground holy. Stephen's emphasis could not be missed by the Jewish people...

- they were exalting Moses (the law) above God Himself.
- the promise of God was given long before the law.
- the reason God was calling Moses was to save the people for the Promised Land, not the law.
- Moses (the law) was only a part of God's plan. Moses and the law were not the end, not the thing God was after. The promise was the end.
- the temple was not the only holy ground. God's presence was what made the ground holy. Therefore, where God is, there is holy ground.

7:34 I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people which is in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send thee into Egypt. Again, it was God who acted, not the people. It was God who said, "*I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people which is in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send thee into Egypt.*" And Moses was commissioned to return to Egypt and stand in the court of Pharaoh demanding that God's people be released from bondage. Yes, it was God's chosen servant, despite the people's rejection; whom they had said to "...*Who made you a ruler and a judge?*" God sends Moses to them again. Just as Moses had been rejected, so, Jesus was being rejected.

7:45 Which also our fathers that came after brought in with Jesus into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drave out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David;— Stephen makes reference to the tabernacle in the wilderness and the fact that having received the tabernacle from their fathers, they brought it into the land of Canaan, which was possessed by the Gentiles, whom God drove out when they entered into it with Joshua their leader, and captain, at the head of them; who is here called Jesus. The Greek form of Joshua is translated "*Jesus*" in Hebrews 4:8. This was a portable Tabernacle or Temple. Stephen had been accused of <http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sunday-school.html>

speaking against the Temple, but he recognized the importance of the Temple; he knew that it was not more important than God. God is not limited. God doesn't live only in a sanctuary, but wherever hearts of faith are open to receive Him. This next reference is made to the days of David.

7:46 Who found favour before God, and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob. David found favor before God and desired to build the God of Jacob a Tabernacle.

7:47 But Solomon built him an house. But David's son, Solomon was permitted to build God a house.

Acts 7:53 The Judgment Of A Nation

7:53 Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it. The law had been put into effect by the hands of angels, yet, the people had not kept it. They glorified in the law, but violated it just as much as their forefathers. God had chosen the Jews for His special purposes. He had given the Law to them. He had sent His Messiah, but they had opposed both the Law and the Messiah. Stephen had turned the tables from himself to his accusers. They were the ones guilty of the charges of:

- worshipping false gods,
- carrying the tabernacle but their hearts were upon the false gods,
- being so blessed with God's presence, yet chose the world,
- they were resisting the Holy Spirit,
- they persecuted the prophets, fulfilled the prophecies,
- and they had not kept the Law.

Stephen was on trial for his life. He had been called upon to defend himself, but instead of actually defending himself, Stephen had preached about the tragic failure of the people to follow and obey God. With so many charges against them, how could Stephen be the one who was wrong?

SUMMARY:

Stephen defended himself, but not by offering a legal defense. He defended himself by proclaiming the glorious mercy and grace of God throughout Israel's history. The God of glory appeared unto Abraham; called him out of his country and come to a land in which God will show him. Abraham was obedient to God's command (**vv.2-4**). God assured Abraham with the covenant of circumcision. He showed how the forefathers of Israel was moved to envy, rejecting God's chosen servant Joseph. Nevertheless, God delivered him out of all his afflictions, gave him favor and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh and made him governor over Egypt and all his house. They forefathers rejected God's chosen servant and His deliverance (**vv.8-10**).

The Jews grew and multiplied in Egypt as the time grew near when God prepared to fulfill His promise to Abraham to deliver the people from slavery, (**v.17**). God called Moses by name commanding him to take off his shoes from his feet, for where he was standing was holy ground. And Moses was commissioned to return to Egypt and stand in the court of Pharaoh demanding that God's people be released from bondage, for God had seen their affliction and would deliver them (**vv.33-34**). The people rejected God's chosen servant Moses, and God's deliverance planned through Moses. Afterwards, Joshua led the battles against the Gentile nations and the Tabernacle was mobile until the time of David, whom God greatly blessed, and who desired to build a permanent Tabernacle for God, but instead Solomon built the Temple (**vv.45-47**). Stephen is speaking to people who have received God's Law delivered by angels, but did not keep the Law (**v.53**).