

Acts 7 Sticks & Stones

Chris Starn / General

Acts of the Apostles / Stephen / Acts 7

Verses:

Acts 7

7 And the high priest said, “Are these things so?” ² And Stephen said:

“Brothers and fathers, hear me. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, ³ and said to him, ‘Go out from your land and from your kindred and go into the land that I will show you.’ ⁴ Then he went out from the land of the Chaldeans and lived in Haran. And after his father died, God removed him from there into this land in which you are now living. ⁵ Yet he gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot’s length, but promised to give it to him as a possession and to his offspring after him, though he had no child. ⁶ And God spoke to this effect—that his offspring would be sojourners in a land belonging to others, who would enslave them and afflict them four hundred years. ⁷ ‘But I will judge the nation that they serve,’ said God, ‘and after that they shall come out and worship me in this place.’ 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.

⁹ “And the patriarchs, jealous of Joseph, sold him into Egypt; but God was with him ¹⁰ and rescued him out of all his afflictions and gave him favor and wisdom before Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who made him ruler over Egypt and over all his household. ¹¹ Now there came a famine throughout all Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction, and our fathers could

find no food. ¹² But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent out our fathers on their first visit. ¹³ And on the second visit Joseph made himself known to his brothers, and Joseph’s family became known to Pharaoh. ¹⁴ And Joseph sent and summoned Jacob his father and all his kindred, seventy-five persons in all. ¹⁵ And Jacob went down into Egypt, and he died, he and our fathers, ¹⁶ and they were carried back to Shechem and laid in the tomb that Abraham had bought for a sum of silver from the sons of Hamor in Shechem.

¹⁷ “But as the time of the promise drew near, which God had granted to Abraham, the people increased and multiplied in Egypt ¹⁸ until there arose over Egypt another king who did not know Joseph. ¹⁹ He dealt shrewdly with our race and forced our fathers to expose their infants, so that they would not be kept alive. ²⁰ At this time Moses was born; and he was beautiful in God’s sight. And he was brought up for three months in his father’s house, ²¹ and when he was exposed, Pharaoh’s daughter adopted him and brought him up as her own son. ²² And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in his words and deeds.

²³ “When he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brothers, the children of Israel. ²⁴ And seeing one of them being wronged, he defended the oppressed man and avenged him by striking down the Egyptian. ²⁵ He supposed that his brothers would understand that God was giving them salvation by his hand, but they did not understand. ²⁶ And on the following day he appeared to them as they were quarreling and tried to reconcile them, saying, ‘Men, you are brothers. Why do you wrong each other?’ ²⁷ But the man who was wronging his neighbor thrust him aside, saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge over us?’ ²⁸ Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?’ ²⁹ At this retort Moses fled and became an exile in the land of Midian, where he became the father of two sons.

³⁰ “Now when forty years had passed, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in a flame of fire in a bush. ³¹ When Moses saw it, he was amazed at the sight, and as he drew near to look, there came the voice of the Lord: ³² ‘I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob.’ And Moses trembled and did not dare to look. ³³ Then the Lord said to him, ‘Take off the sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. ³⁴ I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their groaning, and I have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt.’ ³⁵ “This Moses, whom they rejected, saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge?’—this man God sent as both ruler and redeemer by the hand of the angel who appeared to him in the bush. ³⁶ This man led them out, performing wonders and signs in Egypt and at the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years. ³⁷ This is the Moses who said to the Israelites, ‘God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers.’ ³⁸ This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our fathers. He received living oracles to give to us. ³⁹ Our fathers refused to obey him, but thrust him aside, and in their hearts they turned to Egypt, ⁴⁰ saying to Aaron, ‘Make for us gods who will go before us. As for this Moses who led us out from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.’ ⁴¹ And they made a calf in those days, and offered a sacrifice to the idol and were rejoicing in the works of their hands. ⁴² But God turned away and gave them over to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the prophets:

“Did you bring to me slain beasts and sacrifices, during the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? ⁴³ You took up the tent of Moloch and the star of your god Rephan, the images that you made to worship; and I will send you into exile beyond Babylon.’

⁴⁴ “Our fathers had the tent of witness in the wilderness, just as he who spoke to Moses directed him to make it, according to the pattern that he had seen. ⁴⁵ Our fathers in turn brought it in with Joshua when they dispossessed the nations that God drove out before our fathers. So it was until the days of David, ⁴⁶ who found favor in the sight of God and asked to find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. ⁴⁷ But it was Solomon who built a house for him. ⁴⁸ Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands, as the prophet says,

⁴⁹ “Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest? ⁵⁰ Did not my hand make all these things?’

⁵¹ “You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. ⁵² Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, ⁵³ you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it.”

The Stoning of Stephen

⁵⁴ Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. ⁵⁵ But he, 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 he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” ⁵⁷ But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. ⁵⁸ Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. ⁵⁹ And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” ⁶⁰ And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

Deuteronomy 18:15

¹⁵ “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen

Daniel 7:13-14

¹³ “I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. ¹⁴ And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

Ephesians 1:20-23

²⁰ that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. ²² And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Revelation 20:6

⁶ Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

The church is growing exponentially. Trouble has arisen from inside the church with Ananias and Sapphira and an issue between the Hellenistic and Jerusalem widows. **The apostles have handled both instances with wisdom and power.**

From the outside, the religious leaders of Jerusalem continue to try to find ways to stop this movement in its tracks. They have now arrested Stephen, one of the seven men commissioned to care for the daily distribution to the widows.

Now what kind of trouble could Stephen get into by just helping supply the needs of the widows in the church? We saw last week that Stephen was **“full of grace and power, doing great wonders and signs among the people.”** As I said last week, the Holy Spirit uses whomever He wishes, however He wishes.

Stephen has been arrested and is going to answer the charges leveled against him.

Acts 7:1-19

1 And the high priest said, “Are these things so?” 2 And Stephen said: “Brothers and fathers, hear me. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, 3 and said to him, ‘Go out from your land and from your kindred and go into the land that I will show you.’ 4 Then he went out from the land of the Chaldeans and lived in Haran. And after his father died, God removed him from there into this land in which you are now living. 5 Yet he gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot’s length, but promised to give it to him as a possession and to his offspring after him, though he had no child. 6 And God spoke to this effect—that his offspring would be sojourners in a land belonging to others, who would enslave them and afflict them four hundred years. 7 ‘But I will judge the nation that they serve,’ said God, ‘and after that they shall come out and worship me in this place.’ 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. 9 “And the patriarchs, jealous of Joseph, sold him into Egypt; but God was with him 10 and rescued him out of all his afflictions and gave him favor and wisdom before Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who made him ruler over Egypt and over all his household. 11 Now there came a famine throughout all Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction, and our fathers could find no food. 12 But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent out our fathers on their first visit. 13 And on the second visit Joseph made himself known to his brothers, and Joseph’s family

became known to Pharaoh. 14 And Joseph sent and summoned Jacob his father and all his kindred, seventy-five persons in all. 15 And Jacob went down into Egypt, and he died, he and our fathers, 16 and they were carried back to Shechem and laid in the tomb that Abraham had bought for a sum of silver from the sons of Hamor in Shechem. 17 “But as the time of the promise drew near, which God had granted to Abraham, the people increased and multiplied in Egypt 18 until there arose over Egypt another king who did not know Joseph. 19 He dealt shrewdly with our race and forced our fathers to expose their infants, so that they would not be kept alive.

Remember the charges brought against Stephen. **He was accused of speaking against two sacred aspects of first-century Jewish life: the law and the temple.** It is kind of difficult in our culture to understand how important these two items were to the Jewish people. It was a sense of identity for the Jews.

Think about how you feel about our history as a nation. Do you agree with the “demonstrators” as they tear down the statues and attempt to destroy the very institutions that many of us feel make us Americans? When you see a war memorial defaced, does your blood boil? This is how the Jews in Jerusalem felt when they accused Stephen of speaking against the temple and the law.

At Stephen begins his defense, **it is not immediately apparent how what he is saying is an answer to the accusation.** It an awesome synopsis of the history of Israel from Abraham to the captivity in Egypt. But you have to wonder how this helps his case.

But Stephen’s speech is much more than just an abstract history lesson. **Stephen is retelling Israel’s history to make the point that history anticipated the person and work of Jesus Christ.** He is also showing

that those accusing him are no different than their ancestors. **Their response to the truth is nothing new, as we will soon discover.**

Acts 7:20-29

20 At this time Moses was born; and he was beautiful in God's sight. And he was brought up for three months in his father's house, 21 and when he was exposed, Pharaoh's daughter adopted him and brought him up as her own son. 22 And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in his words and deeds. 23 "When he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brothers, the children of Israel. 24 And seeing one of them being wronged, he defended the oppressed man and avenged him by striking down the Egyptian. 25 He supposed that his brothers would understand that God was giving them salvation by his hand, but they did not understand. 26 And on the following day he appeared to them as they were quarreling and tried to reconcile them, saying, 'Men, you are brothers. Why do you wrong each other?' 27 But the man who was wronging his neighbor thrust him aside, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge over us? 28 Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?' 29 At this retort Moses fled and became an exile in the land of Midian, where he became the father of two sons.

The Jews, even today, hold Moses with great esteem. To the Jews Moses is the greatest prophet that ever lived. He led the Israelites out of Egypt and gave them the law. But Stephen is not speaking against Moses, but speaking against the cult of Moses.

Moses had told them that one would come after him. One that would be the greatest prophet who ever lived.

Deuteronomy 18:15

“The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen

By preaching the word, Stephen is countering the false understanding of his listeners. **Stephen is stating that Moses is a foreshadowing of the One who would come and lead His people in a greater exodus from their bondage to sin.**

Acts 7:30-38

30 “Now when forty years had passed, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in a flame of fire in a bush. 31 When Moses saw it, he was amazed at the sight, and as he drew near to look, there came the voice of the Lord: 32 ‘I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob.’ And Moses trembled and did not dare to look. 33 Then the Lord said to him, ‘Take off the sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. 34 I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their groaning, and I have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt.’ 35 “This Moses, whom they rejected, saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge?’—this man God sent as both ruler and redeemer by the hand of the angel who appeared to him in the bush. 36 This man led them out, performing wonders and signs in Egypt and at the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years. 37 This is the Moses who said to the Israelites, ‘God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers.’ 38 This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our fathers. He received living oracles to give to us.

At this point, Stephen's accusers cannot dispute what he has shared with them. **Stephen has now set them up to hear the heart of the message God wants him to share with them.** In reality, the message is not different than the message given by the Old Testament prophets to their ancestors, and they will respond in a similar way to the truth of Stephen's message. Just as the Israelites rejected Moses and killed the prophets, Stephen's audience did and will reject the greater Moses, Jesus Christ.

Acts 7:39-49

***39 Our fathers refused to obey him, but thrust him aside, and in their hearts they turned to Egypt, 40 saying to Aaron, 'Make for us gods who will go before us. As for this Moses who led us out from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.'* 41 And they made a calf in those days, and offered a sacrifice to the idol and were rejoicing in the works of their hands. 42 But God turned away and gave them over to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the prophets (Amos 5): " 'Did you bring to me slain beasts and sacrifices, during the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? 43 You took up the tent of Moloch and the star of your god Rephan, the images that you made to worship; and I will send you into exile beyond Babylon.' 44 "Our fathers had the tent of witness in the wilderness, just as he who spoke to Moses directed him to make it, according to the pattern that he had seen. 45 Our fathers in turn brought it in with Joshua when they dispossessed the nations that God drove out before our fathers. So it was until the days of David, 46 who found favor in the sight of God and asked to find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. 47 But it was Solomon who built a house for him. 48 Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands, as the**

prophet says, 49 “ ‘Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest? 50 Did not my hand make all these things?’

Stephen makes the argument that **God’s presence in the Old Testament was never confined to the temple or even the land of Israel.** God appeared to Abraham in Mesopotamia, to Moses in the burning bush, and to the people as a pillar of fire and smoke in the desert. Before the temple was built God dwelt in the tabernacle in the desert. It wasn’t until Solomon that the temple was completed and God’s presence experienced within it.

God cannot and is not confined by location or time. The story of the law and the temple are incomplete in the Old Testament. **Both the law and the temple point to one who was greater than even Moses. The law cannot save, in fact it’s purpose is to show us how we fall short in our sin, and the temple is insufficient. It is only in Christ that salvation comes and in the process we, as believers in Jesus, become the new temple under the new covenant.**

Stephen will now turn the tables on his accusers and become the prosecutor in this court scene. His audience is guilty of the ultimate crime.

Acts 7:51-53

51 “You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. 52 Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom

you have now betrayed and murdered, 53 you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it.”

Stephen charges his accusers with rejecting and killing “the Righteous One,” just as their ancestors rejected their brother Joseph, rejected Moses, rejected the prophets sent by God, and ultimately rejected God. They, like their ancestors, are just as bad off as the rest of mankind who have rejected Yahweh and His Son. And this makes them exceedingly angry.

Acts 7:54-60

54 Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. 55 But he, 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 he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” 57 But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. 58 Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. 59 And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” 60 And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

As the council is gnashing their teeth at Stephen, he sees Jesus standing at the right hand of God. **Stephen then makes a juxtaposition in verse 56 of saying that the Son of Man is standing at the right hand of God. He has just stated Jesus is the Son of Man.** This increases their rage. Why? We have to go to Daniel 7 to get our answer.

Daniel 7:13-14

13 "I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. 14 And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

Stephen has Jesus standing in the position of authority at the right hand of Yahweh. **Jesus has fulfilled Daniel 7:13-14. The kingship, the everlasting dominion has begun. This means that Satan, the Lord of the dead, no longer has any claim on us as believers. We are no longer going to spend eternity in the realm of the dead, but we are in the realm of the King Jesus. Not in some future time, but now and forever. Jesus is reigning now and will continue to reign.**

Look what Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus

Ephesians 1:20-23

20 that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. 22 And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Even though things look bad, in reality those who are and will persecute us will die and be judged, while we are in the hand of Jesus at the right hand of God, and we will ultimately rule with Christ in eternity.

Stephen is killed and while his accusers are stoning him, they put their coats at the feet of Saul, who will soon encounter Jesus and become Paul.

Takeaway

- All of history points to Jesus. Whether those who are living in each time see it or not. There is more going on around us than what meets the eye.
- While Moses and the law were both used by God for his will, they are not to be placed above Jesus.
- God is not contained by one place or time. And as a side note, no space is holy unto itself. It is made holy by the presence of God.
- Just as God handed over the Israelites to their depravity, if we reject Jesus we will also be handed over to worshipping other God.
- Jesus' Kingdom has come and will come. And we can rest assured that no matter what we experience on earth, Jesus is still King and we one day will rule with him. How do we know? Because God said so.
- How are you going to respond to the truth. The truth that we are a stiff-necked, sinful people who need a savior. We cannot save ourselves. God loves us, in spite of ourselves, and died so that we like Him will one day be resurrected.

Revelation 20:6

Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years

Questions for further thought

In our culture, do people think of God as living in heaven only or living inside of believers as well?

How can God use you to turn our culture's view of Christianity upside down?

Are you living with a regular awareness of God living in you? In what ways has God living in you changed your life?

In what ways has God living in you made a difference in other's life?

If you could join God in turning one thing in this world upside down, what would it be?

Do you have difficulty being bold? Why?

How do we balance boldness with humility?

Do you think hostility to Christian beliefs and values is increasing in our society? Why? What forms is such hostility taking? How should we respond?

What factors sometimes prevent you from seizing opportunities to express your beliefs and values? What can you do this week to seize the opportunities in your life?