



a ministry of:

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## ACTS: The Formation of the Church, Volume 2

Lesson 16, part one

### "Stephen's Speech" Acts 7:1-16

#### Day 1

*The voice of the LORD is upon the waters; the God of glory thunders, The LORD is over many waters. The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is majestic. Ps. 29:3-4*

Since Acts chapter seven begins with a question tying chapters six and seven together, I think it might be helpful to do a quick review of chapter six. We were introduced to Stephen in Acts 6:3, "a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit." Verse eight says he was "full of grace and power" and he performed "great wonders and signs among the people." Those who argued with him were unable "to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit" with which he spoke (v.10). After he was arrested, in verse 15 he stood before the Council and "his face was like the face of an angel."

Trumped up charges were brought against him. In verse 11, some men from the Synagogue of the Freedmen found some men to bare false witness against Stephen. He was charged with speaking blasphemous words against Moses and against God and for speaking against the holy place and the Law.

Stephen was brought before the Council and the high priest asked, "Are these things so?" (Acts 7:1) Stephen began to tell a story. Why tell a story about the history of Israel?

1. Begin your time in prayer. Remember Andrew Murray's words, "It is to prayer that God has given the right to take hold of Him and His strength."
2. Read Acts 7:1-3. What did God tell Abraham to do?
3. Read Acts 7:4. What did Abraham do?
4. What did God do to Abraham in verse 4?
5. What happened after Abraham settled in Haran, but before God removed him into the land that would become Israel's land?

Stephen's story is a story of God's mercy and grace. This story can encourage us as we see God's patience with Israel. We can know that He is just as patient with us.

6. Read Exodus 34:6-7. What does it say to us about God's patience?

There is also a warning for us, as there was for Israel.

7. Read Acts 7:42-43. What happened when God's patience came to an end?

God is "slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love." He woos us and calls us to repentance. He initiates and waits for us to respond. However, the warning is that there does come a time when we resist the Holy Spirit to the point that God hands us over to our own sin. What does this look like? God stops convicting us. His merciful gift of guilt feelings comes to an end and we no longer feel guilt.

8. Read Romans 1:24-28. What happens when God gives us over to our sin?

For Abraham, the God of glory appeared to him; this was grace. God chose Abraham to do His work and carry out His plan. He told Abraham to leave his own country and come to the land He would show him. However, Abraham went part way and settled down. God was patient and after Abraham's father died, God "removed him" into the Promised Land.

9. Has God ever had to "remove" you? Explain.

## Day 2

*And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.*  
Gal. 3:29

1. Begin your time in prayer asking God to open your spiritual eyes and ears to hear what the Spirit has to say to you and to see where God is working in your life and others'.

Yesterday we read of God's grace, mercy and patience in dealing with Abraham. Today we are going to look at what God's promises to Abraham mean to us today.

2. Read Acts 7:1-5. Did you find it odd that it says in verse 5, that God "gave him (Abraham) no inheritance in it, not even a foot"?

3. Read Genesis 13:15. What does God tell Abraham?

How is that not an inheritance? According to a footnote in The Key Word Study Bible, "God's gift was not given to Abraham personally, but to him as the founder and representative of the nation. The land was given to him 'in trust.'"

So Abraham did not own the land, not even a foot of ground. The land he was promised was for the future nation of Israel that would come from Abraham's seed.

4. Read Acts 7:6. What was going to happen to Abraham's offspring?

This prophesy was given in Genesis 15:13. When was it fulfilled?

5. Read Exodus 1:7-10. Why were the Israelites enslaved and mistreated?

6. Read Exodus 12:40-41. When did the Israelites leave Egypt?

7. Read Acts 7:7. What does God say He will do to the nation that holds Abraham's offspring in bondage?

8. How was Egypt judged by God? Read Ex.7:16-17; Ex. 8:3,17, 21; Ex. 9:6, 9, 18-19; Ex. 10:4-5, 21; Ex. 12:12.

9. Do you see God's mercy or grace in the 10 plagues, or a warning that God's patience has a limit?

10. How have you been show mercy or grace? (If you have trouble answering this, go back and pray the prayer at the beginning of today's questions and keep praying it until you see and realize God's mercy and grace in your life).

### Day 3

*Then the LORD took note of Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had promised. So Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the appointed time of which God had spoken to him. Gen. 21:1-2*

1. Begin your time in prayer. If you find you have very little to say to the Lord, then spend time quietly listening. The Bible says His sheep know His voice. Practice being quiet; He still speaks.
2. Read Acts 7:8. List the events that are covered in this verse.

This one verse covers chapters 21-36 in Genesis. Why would Stephen include the covenant of circumcision and the circumcision of Isaac, but skip Abraham offering Isaac up as a sacrifice and an angel stopping him before he killed Isaac on the altar. Why didn't he include the story of Jacob deceiving Isaac into giving him Esau's blessing as the first-born? Let's examine what is so important about circumcision.

3. Read Genesis 17:1-10. God makes a covenant with Abraham. What does God say He will do as His part of the covenant?
4. What did God tell Abraham to do as a sign of the covenant between him and God? (v.9-10)

There was a lot more to this covenant of circumcision than the cutting of the flesh. After Moses had been on the mountain with God for forty days and nights, God told him to go quickly back down to camp because the people had made a golden calf and they were worshipping it. When Moses saw what they had done, he took the two stone tablets that God had written the covenant upon and smashed them. Moses fell down before the LORD for forty days and nights and prayed that He would not destroy His people. God listened to Moses' prayers and the tablets were rewritten.

5. Read Deuteronomy 10:15-16. What did God do for His people?
6. What did He tell His people to do? (Deut.10:16, Deut. 30:6)
7. Read Romans 2:25. For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes \_\_\_\_\_. ESV
8. Read Rom. 2:26. So, if a man who is uncircumcised \_\_\_\_\_ the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as \_\_\_\_\_? ESV
9. Read Rom. 2:27. Then he who is \_\_\_\_\_ uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but \_\_\_\_\_ the law. ESV

10. Read Rom. 2:28. For no one is a \_\_\_\_\_ who is merely one outwardly, nor is \_\_\_\_\_ outward and physical. ESV
11. Read Rom. 2:29. But a \_\_\_\_\_ is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the \_\_\_\_\_, by the \_\_\_\_\_, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God. ESV
12. Are you a Jew? Why or why not?
13. Why is the covenant of circumcision important?

#### **Day 4**

*And the LORD was with Joseph, so he became a successful man. And he was in the house of his master, the Egyptian. Gen.39:2*

1. Begin your time in prayer. Let God know how you desire to hear Him speak to you through His word. Ask Him to open your ears to hear what the Spirit speaks to you. Take some time to listen.

*And the patriarchs [Jacob's sons], boiling with envy and hatred and anger, sold Joseph into slavery in Egypt; but God was with him... Acts 7:9. Amplified Bible*

2. The word "but" is a contrast word used to contrast two different things: The patriarchs vs. Joseph. List what you learn about each from this scripture.

*...and delivered him from all his distressing afflictions, and won him goodwill and favor and wisdom and understanding in the sight of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who made him governor over Egypt and all his house. Acts 7:10 Amplified Bible*

Between verses nine and ten, many events regarding Joseph's life were omitted. As always, there is a purpose and reason why every little thing is written in God's Word and why some things are omitted. Before we look at the reason let's review what was omitted.

In Genesis 39, Pharaoh saw that the LORD was with Joseph and how He caused everything Joseph did to prosper. So Pharaoh put him in charge of all that he owned and made Joseph his personal servant. Then Pharaoh's wife falsely accused Joseph of attempted rape and he was

thrown in prison for two years. During his time in jail, Genesis 39:21 says the Lord was with Joseph and gave him favor in the sight of the jailer. In Genesis 41, Pharaoh had a dream at which time he was told that Joseph was able to interpret dreams. He interpreted the dream and told Pharaoh how to prepare for a coming famine. Therefore, Pharaoh put him in charge and made him governor.

In Acts 7:8 when Stephen was talking about the covenant of circumcision being passed down from Abraham to Isaac, he went on to say, "Isaac became the father of Jacob and of the twelve patriarchs," which are the twelve tribes that made up the nation of Israelites. Then in verse 9 Stephen said, "And the patriarchs [Jacob's sons] boiling with envy and hatred and anger, sold Joseph into slavery in Egypt."

3. Did you find it odd that he did not say, "And Joseph's brothers boiling with envy and hatred and anger, sold Joseph into slavery?" Why do you think he used the term "the patriarchs?" (Hint: Look at the contrast in question 2 and what you learned regarding the patriarchs and Joseph and what the patriarchs later became and how Joseph is described in verse 10.)

Do the words "God is with you" make you think that things should go well for you? I think that is what we wish it meant or hope it might mean, but if you have read very much of the Bible you know that it does not mean that at all. Joseph went through many difficult situations before he was assigned to be second in command to Pharaoh. We know from doing the contrast that God was with Joseph and granted him goodwill, favor, wisdom and understanding, while the patriarchs were boiling with envy, hatred and anger. Even though the patriarchs were free and Joseph was a servant, God was with him preparing him for His purposes according to His will.

4. Read Luke 2:52. Compare what you read with Acts 7:10.

5. Are you going through difficult situations that from the world would call "bad luck?" Is God with you? Explain.

6. Can you see God's mercy or His judgment in the story of Joseph? Which events do you see as mercy and which events do you see as judgment?

Laura Story's song called "Blessings," views trials as God's blessings.

*We pray for blessings, we pray for peace; comfort for family, protection while we sleep. We pray for healing, for prosperity; we pray for Your mighty hand to ease our suffering. And all the while, You hear each spoken need; yet love us way too much to give us lesser things.*

*'Cause what if Your blessings come through rain drops? What if Your healing comes through*

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Worship → Grow → Serve

tears? What if a thousand sleepless nights are what it takes to know You're near? What if trials of this life are Your mercies in disguise?

## Day 5

*Then his brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants." But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place? And as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive." Gen. 50:18-20*

1. Begin your time in prayer.
2. Read Acts 7:11. What happened in Egypt and Canaan?
3. Who could not find food?

Again, Stephen did not refer to them as Joseph's brothers, but this time as "our fathers."

4. Read Acts 7:12. Whom did Jacob send to Egypt for grain?
5. Which time was this?
6. Read Genesis 42:1-2, 6, 8. When Joseph's brothers saw him what did they do? Who did they think Joseph was?
7. Read Acts 7:13. Whom did Joseph make himself known to?
8. Which time was this?
9. Read Acts 7:14-16. Who died in Egypt?

The story of Joseph was well known to the Jews to whom Stephen was speaking. However, Stephen was focused more on the patriarchs than on Joseph. Why is that? The patriarchs were jealous (v.9). God was with Joseph, but not with the patriarchs, (v.9) and they suffered from the famine and great affliction that came with the famine (v.11).

Then Stephen includes in the story that the fathers of Israel did not recognize Joseph in the first visit, but on the second visit, they did. Joseph and Moses are often viewed as foreshadows of Christ. They both delivered the Israelites from severe affliction. The fathers of Israel rejected them both. They were both rejected the first time by their people, Joseph in Acts 7:9 and Moses in 7:27. They were both recognized the second time, Joseph in verse 13 and Moses in 7:35-36.

Stephen is building on the history of a "stiff-necked" people. He was going to conclude that history repeated itself. Out of jealousy, they crucified their Messiah. They did not recognize Him in His first coming. They were "uncircumcised in heart and ears always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did." (Acts 7:51)

10. Read Zechariah 12:9-11. Will Israel recognize Christ at His second coming?

*Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:9-11*