

# Abounding Grace Christian Church

## The Acts of the Holy Spirit through the Church – Part 24

### I. Exposition of Chapter Seven.

A. **Verse 1** – “Then the high priest said, ‘Are these things so?’- As we’ve mentioned before, the high priest mentioned here was probably Caiaphas. The question is to Stephen, asking if the accusations of his accusers was so.

B. **Verses 2-53** – **Stephen’s Powerful Message.**

1. Some facts about his Message:

a. This is the longest recorded message in the book of Acts which suggests that Luke (and the Holy Spirit) thought it was of utmost importance.

b. This message was somewhat of a catalyst which caused the Gospel to reach outside Judaism.

**“Stephen, a Grecian Jew, by his life and words prepared the way for the gospel to reach outside the pale of Judaism.”<sup>1</sup>**

c. Though this message may seem to only be a concise survey of Israel’s history, it was intended to show them their own sin and failure to follow God’s commands.

**“On the surface Stephen’s speech, the longest in Acts, seems like a bare recital of selected events from Israel’s history. It does not appear to answer the charges against him. In actuality, it is a carefully chosen summary of Israel’s history which serves to turn the charges back on Stephen’s accusers. They, not he, were the resisters of God. They, not he, had blasphemed God’s temple.”<sup>2</sup>**

2. **Verses 2-8 - The Promises to Abraham.**

a. **Verse 2** – “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,”

1) “...Brethren and fathers...” – Speaks to them with respect as brothers (fellow Jews) and as “fathers” which is a way of recognizing their authority.

2) “...The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham...” – Of course Abraham was the father of the Hebrew race and highly regarded. The main point here, however, is that the “God of glory” revealed Himself to Abraham. This phrase, according to I. Howard Marshall may be to “...emphasize at the outset the transcendence of the God who does not live in a temple made with hands.”<sup>3</sup> He took the title “God of glory” from **Psalm 29:2**, where, in the context of the entire Psalm, is revealing God’s glory by speaking powerfully and majestically. God had revealed His glory by speaking this way to their ‘father (ancestor) Abraham’ when he was in Mesopotamia (cf. **Genesis 15:7**).<sup>4</sup>

3) Richard N. Longenecker asserts:

**“But while Jewish in form, in content his address runs counter to much of the popular piety of the day. He argues that God’s significant activity has usually taken place outside the confines of Palestine, that wherever God meets his people can be called ‘holy ground,’ that God is the God who calls his own to move forward in their religious experience...”<sup>5</sup>**

4) This is seen in other examples given by Stephen as well. Joseph going to Egypt (**verses 9-16**); the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt (**verses 17-43**); the construction of a portable and temporary tabernacle (**verses 44-46**). Even the temple was not intended to be the limit of where God dwelt (**verses 47-50**).

b. **Verses 3-4 - Genesis 12:1-3** records God’s instruction for Abraham to leave his homeland to go to a foreign country that God would show him. It appears that this call came to Abram when he was in Haran (cf. **Genesis 11:31-32**).

c. **Verses 5-8** – Abraham never possessed the promised land but he did receive the promise of an heir – a son, a progenitor for the rest of the Hebrew people. **Verse 6** is referencing **Genesis 15:13** concerning the fact that Israel would be in bondage to Egypt for about 400 years and **verse 7** is a quote from **Genesis 15:14**. **Verse 8** mentions circumcision which was given as the

<sup>1</sup>Stanley D. Toussaint, “Acts,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 369.

<sup>2</sup>David S. Dockery, ed., *Holman Bible Handbook* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 1992), 641.

<sup>3</sup>I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction and Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), 134-135.

<sup>4</sup>See Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on Acts* (<http://www.soniclight.com>: Sonic Light Publication, 2019), 160.

<sup>5</sup>Richard N. Longenecker, “Acts,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 135.

sign that God would deliver what He had promised. It was the seal of the Abrahamic Covenant. (cf. **Genesis 17**). Concerning circumcision, Stanley Horton writes:

**“Another thing God gave Abraham was the ‘covenant of circumcision’ – as a covenanted assurance of His faithful love...”<sup>6</sup>**

**3. Verses 9-16 – The Deliverance through Joseph.** – By using Joseph as another example, Stephen is showing further that God’s people are not dependent upon a particular land, or ritual for that matter, in order to have a relationship with God. Notice **verse 9** ends by stating **“But God was with him.”** This denotes closeness and favor with God. The account of **verse 11** is found in **Genesis 41:54–55; 42:5**; the account of **verse 12** – is found in **Genesis 42:4**; and the account of **verse 13** is found in **Genesis 45:1–4**. The entire story of Joseph is found in **Genesis 37-50**.

**“The patriarchs, moved with jealousy, sold Joseph into Egypt (Gen. 37:11, 28). ‘But God was with him.’ God rescued this rejected person out of all his ‘troubles’ (tribulations, distressing circumstances) and gave him favor and wisdom before Pharaoh...Stephen strongly contrasts the way Joseph’s brothers treated him and the way God treated him. Stephen is leading also to a comparison with the way the Jewish leaders treated Jesus and the way God exalted Him.”<sup>7</sup>**

**4. Verses 17-34 – The Deliverance through Moses.** – Some scholars suggest that Stephen now comes to the Exodus and Moses in order to refute the charge that he was blaspheming against (slandering) Moses (**6:11**) and was speaking against the Mosaic Law (**6:13**). Longenecker makes the following statements:

**“But here Stephen’s primary emphasis is on God’s providential and redemptive action for his people apart from and outside of the land of Palestine, of which Stephen’s hearers made so much...Its primary purpose seems rather to be that of making the vital point, contrary to the popular piety of the day in its veneration of ‘the Holy Land,’ that no place on earth – even though given as an inheritance by God himself – can be claimed to possess such sanctity or be esteemed in such a way as to preempt God’s further working on behalf of his people. By this method Stephen was attempting to clear the way for the proclamation of the centrality of Jesus in the nation’s worship, life, and thought.”<sup>8</sup>**

**“Stephen’s understanding of Moses was as orthodox as his view of God, but his presentation of Moses’ career made comparison with Jesus’ career unmistakable. As in the previous pericope, there is a double emphasis in this one, first, on God’s faithfulness to His promises in the Abrahamic Covenant and, second, on Moses as a precursor of Jesus. ‘More specifically than in the life of Joseph, Stephen sees in the story of Moses a type of the new and greater Moses—Christ himself.’”<sup>9</sup>**

**5. Verses 35-50 – The Apostasy of Israel.**

**a. Verse 36 – “He brought them out, after he had shown wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red Sea, and in the wilderness forty years.”**

1) The **“...wonders and signs in the land of Egypt...”** can be found in **Exodus 7-12**.

2) The **“Red Sea”** account is found in **Exodus 14**.

3) Note: This is the third time the span of 40 years is mentioned. Moses was 40 years old when he fled from Egypt (**verses 23-29**). Then 40 years later Moses had the experience of the burning bush and God giving him the call to go and deliver Israel from Egypt. And here, we see they were 40 years in the wilderness. So, Moses was 120 years old when he died (**Deuteronomy 34:7**).

**b. Verse 37 – “This is that Moses who said to the children of Israel, ‘The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear.’”** This is a quote from **Deuteronomy 18:15**. This passage was understood by the Jews to be a Messianic prophecy. Dr. Robert Utley states:

**This is a Messianic quote from Deut. 18:15. Stephen is identifying God’s presence during the Exodus and Wilderness Wandering Period as both God’s angel and God’s special successor of Moses (i.e. the Messiah, the Prophet). Stephen is not depreciating Moses, but truly listening to Moses!<sup>10</sup>**

---

<sup>6</sup>Stanley M. Horton, *Acts: A Logion Press Commentary* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2001), 144.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 145.

<sup>8</sup>Longenecker, "Acts," 137-138.

<sup>9</sup>Constable, *Notes on Acts*, 168. The last sentence Constable quotes from William Neil, *The Acts of the Apostles*. New Century Bible Commentary series. London: Marshall, Morgan, and Scott, 1973; reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., and London: Marshall, Morgan, and Scott, 110.

<sup>10</sup>Robert James Utley, *Luke the Historian: The Book of Acts*, vol. Volume 3B, Study Guide Commentary Series (Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International, 2003), 105.