



SERMON NOTES

US N^o. 102

Date: May 26th, 2013

Title: Stephen's Defense pt. 1

#10 in the Series on the Acts of the Apostles

1. Background – 2 Tim 3:16-17, *"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."*
 - a. Stephen arrested for blaspheming the Law of Moses and speaking against the Temple; false witnesses testify against him.
 - i. Stephen's defense of Christ with Hellenistic Jews was so powerful that no one could resist his proofs of Jesus as the Messiah.
 - ii. Hellenistic vs. Hebrew Jews
 - b. Stephen re-tells the Narrative of Israel, highlighting specific events to demonstrate just where they are at in the Story now.
 - c. Stephen's audience is not favorably disposed to his arguments; this is their chance to put a stop to this foolishness.
 - d. Stephen's speech is the Church's first real confrontation with the Jewish leaders.
2. The Speech
 - a. In general there are three main points:
 - i. God frequently sends messengers but the people equally reject them;
 - ii. **People** tend towards self-sufficiency and idolatry by making gods in their own image
 - iii. God is not restricted to one land or one building
 - b. Abraham
 - i. The God of Glory appeared to Abraham in Mesopotamia, outside of the Promised Land. Ps. 29:3
 1. God dwells in glory denoting majesty, or splendor, or magnificence;
 2. Mesopotamia is the region between the two rivers, the Tigris & the Euphrates, the land of the Chaldeans (Babylon); exile
 - a. Stephen could be relating Abraham's pilgrimage to the experience of the Hellenistic Jews, some of whom came from Mesopotamia (*cf.* Acts 2:9)
 3. Saul of Tarsus will soon have his own vision of God's glory, equally being called out from his family & land.
 - ii. Abraham obeyed in steps, proceeding with his immediate family to Haran, a flourishing city in the upper Euphrates valley at the intersection of important trade routes. After his father Terah's death, God "*resettled*" him in Canaan, a location that Stephen relates directly to his audience (*cf.* Acts 7:4). Their very presence in the land shows the fulfillment of the promise.

- iii. There are both comparison and contrast here, Stephen holds up Abraham as a model of faith in God's promise alone over against religious effort that finds security in the tangible. And today we too must be willing to say no to our dependence on religious effort and say yes to the God who calls us to follow him alone.
- iv. It continues the theme that God will provide the inheritance through deliverance and highlights the purpose of the inheritance: to have a place where one may worship God. True worship becomes inextricably bound up with living in a covenant relationship with God and knowing the fulfillment of his promises.
 - 1. Luke 1:67-75, *"Now his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying: 'Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us In the house of His servant David, as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, who have been since the world began, that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us, to perform the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember His holy covenant, the oath which He swore to our father Abraham: to grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life.'"*
- v. The 400 year stop-over in Egypt foretold but not explained; God promises hardship, judgment and punishment for their oppressors and that they would be brought out into the Promise.
- vi. The gift of *"the covenant of circumcision"* is given and it follows that Abraham becomes the father of Isaac, the father of Jacob, the father of the Patriarchs. This was not just a matter of covenant obedience; it was a matter of God's covenant faithfulness. Today we have the Scriptures in which we may read God's covenant promises over and over again:
 - 1. Rom 15:4, *"For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope."*
 - 2. We also have a covenant sign, baptism, which we may take to ourselves as a mark of God's covenant of grace; Col 2:9-12, *"For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power. In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead."*
- vii. Take away
 - 1. Abraham's journey of faith was in steps; Ur to Haran to Canaan. It was a journey initiated by a Divine command to leave family and land, maintained by relationship and obedience. Redefinition of family and relationship.
 - a. God moves us by steps;
 - b. God calls out of one land into another; but there are costs and things (or people) left behind;

- c. God wants to show us by walking with us; not just GPS coordinates;
 - d. Certain promises and uncertain timing.
- 2. Covenant theology – true worship is tightly bound up with living in covenant relationship with God and knowing the fulfillment of his promises.
- 3. Hardships prove and provide for the future.
- c. Joseph
 - i. His brothers were envious of him and sold him as a slave into a life and land of bondage;
 - 1. Jesus was envied by the Jewish leaders (*cf.* Jn. 21:9) and also sold as a slave (*cf.* Ex. 21:32, Mt. 26:14-16)
 - ii. Joseph remained faithful in slavery and prison. God's visions to him carried him through the dark periods of his life;
 - iii. Joseph was elevated and sat in the place of Pharaoh, the mightiest nation on the earth at that time;
 - 1. Jesus is now elevated and seated at the right hand of God the Father (*cf.* Eph. 1:20, Heb. 8:1)
 - iv. The covenant promises to Abraham and his sons were on the verge of dying out in the fourth and fifth generations through famine. They gained relief by sending to Egypt for food (*cf.* Gen 41:54, 57; Gen. 42:2, 5). Not only did Joseph preserve them alive, but on the second visit he revealed himself to them and effected a reconciliation (*cf.* Acts 7:13; Gen. 45:1-16).
 - 1. Jesus through His sacrifice reconciled the world to Himself and given us the ministry of reconciliation. (*cf.* 2 Cor. 5:18-19)
 - v. Joseph was buried in Shechem, the land of the hated Samaritans;
 - vi. Take away
 - 1. Parallel between Jesus and Joseph
 - 2. God keeps His covenant promises
 - 3. The ministry of reconciliation of Jesus and now of us
- d. Moses
 - i. The Pharaohs got the better of the Hebrews (*salvation is not in the hand of a king*) and dealt treacherously with them by forcing them to expose their children;
 - 1. Are not our children being forcibly exposed today?
 - ii. Moses as an infant was threatened by a great king
 - 1. Jesus' life threatened by Herod
 - iii. Then Moses "*visited*" his brothers and when he encountered injustice he defended an oppressed Jew and avenged him by slaying the Egyptian oppressor (*cf.* Ex. 2:11/Acts 7:24). He supposed this brave act would be a rallying point for mounting a liberation movement, surely his countrymen would understand that by this man, on whom God's hand had rested from birth (*cf.* Acts 7:20), God would bring them salvation. But they did not understand, just as their first-century descendants would not understand the mission of Jesus, the prophet like Moses. This lack of understanding led to rejection (*cf.* Ex. 2:13-15/Acts 7:26-29). The

next day Moses attempted to mediate between two Hebrews, and they shoved him aside. Rhetorically, they questioned the source of his authority and his motive – was it to murder, as he had the Egyptian? Moses was called a “*ruler & judge*” by the people but he was to be a “*ruler & deliverer*.” Moses thus flees to the wilderness.

1. Jesus also visited His brethren; Luke 1:78, “*Through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us;*” and Luke 19:44, “...*you did not know the time of your visitation.*”
2. Jesus was to bring salvation; Luke 1:71, “*That we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us*” and Luke 19:10, “...*for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.*”)
- iv. God gave Moses some immediate instructions and a commission (Acts 7:33-34). Because he stood on “*holy ground*” he must out of respect he must remove his sandals. God prefaced his commission of Moses by revealing his covenant compassion for his people, which he would express in redemptive activity. (cf. Ex. 3:7-8/Acts 7:34) Moses could take heart, he was not alone in this enterprise because God had declared his personal stake and role in liberating his suffering people. This encounter in the desert at Sinai should remind Stephen's audience and us that wherever God chooses to make Himself known, there is holy ground. For a second time outside the Holy Land, God had appeared to a person of his choosing and made known a portion of his covenant promises and saving will. This presents a challenge to first-century Jews, so jealous for “*this holy place*,” the Temple, and to all others who cling to certain sacred spaces of their religious heritage.
- v. Stephen now makes a direct connection between Moses and the Messiah by quoting the “*prophet like Moses*” prophecy (cf. Acts 7:37/Deut. 18:15). The main parallel Stephen draws between Jesus and Moses, however, is their mistreatment and rejection by Israel. This becomes a powerful argument for the legitimacy of Jesus' messianic claims. Just as rejection of Moses led to false worship and constant breaking of the law, so continued rejection of Jesus, the “*prophet like Moses*,” will mean that the Jews will never be freed of their false worship (the idolizing of the temple) and false piety (the keeping of man-made customs).

e. Solomon and the Temple

3. Highlights

- a. Q
- b. Religious effort y faith & relationship
- c. God is bigger than anything man could construct for Him; God is the initiator.
- d. God is faithful to His covenants. True worship is inextricably bound up with living in covenant relationship with God and knowing the fulfillment of his promises.
- e. Wherever God chooses to make Himself known, there is holy ground.
- f. Continued rejection of Jesus will mean that the Jews will never be freed of their false worship (the idolizing of the temple) and false piety (the keeping of man-made customs). Men make their gods as an act of self-sufficiency; God turns away

g. By following the law, they would be able to live their earthly life to its fullest extent.

4. Q

a. Q

5. Take-away

a. From Abraham's life and journey

i. Abraham's journey of faith was in steps; Ur to Haran to Canaan. It was a journey initiated by a Divine command to leave family and land, maintained by relationship and obedience. Redefinition of family and relationship.

1. God moves us by steps;

2. God calls out of one land into another; but there are costs and things (or people) left behind;

3. God wants to show us by walking with us; not just GPS coordinates;

4. Certain promises and uncertain timing.

ii. Covenant theology – true worship is tightly bound up with living in covenant relationship with God and knowing the fulfillment of his promises.

iii. Hardships prove and provide for the future.

b. From Joseph

c. From Moses

i. The Pharaohs got the better of the Hebrews (*salvation is not in the hand of a king*) and dealt treacherously with them by forcing them to expose their children;

ii. Wherever God chooses to make Himself known, there is holy ground.

iii. Continued rejection of Jesus will mean that the Jews will never be freed of their false worship (the idolizing of the temple) and false piety (the keeping of man-made customs). Men make their gods as an act of self-sufficiency; God turns away

iv. By following the law, they would be able to live their earthly life to its fullest extent.

v. V

vi. Exile is the ultimate curse for covenant disobedience, removal from the enjoyment of the Promised Land.

d. c