

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

ABRAHAM (ACTS 7:1-8) A CHARGE OF BLASPHEMY

Chapter 7 is a history lesson. Stephen is going to build from the dawn of Judaism to the ministry of Jesus and His fulfillment of prophecy.

- As Stephen is brought before the Sanhedrin to defend himself, he starts at the beginning of Jewish history with the story of Abraham being called into monotheism.

STUCK ON THE TANGIBLE

Jewish people could not separate God's blessing from a specific piece of land. Stephen was going to challenge their belief that God was confined to just their geographical area.

- One of the major themes of chap. 7 is that **wherever God is, that place is holy, and God is more concerned about people than places.**

GOD CAN BE ANYWHERE HE CHOOSES

Stephen quotes Gen. 12 showing that Abe was blessed by God before he ever saw the holy land. In fact, Abe had no "inheritance in it," but a promise that his relatives would be there.

- **Not only does God bless wherever He chooses, but He always delivers on His promises, even if we don't personally see it.**

A PROMISE OF LAND AND MANY DESCENDANTS

God promised Abe a holy land filled with many descendants. This promise was made at a time when Abe was older and childless.

- Before the promise of the holy land would be fulfilled, the descendants would also be enslaved for 400 years in Egypt.

LOOK AT HOW THIS PLAYED OUT

Stephen tells of a promise of descendants that Abe is assured he is going to have because he is also told they will be enslaved. But, he is also assured of a holy land that will be acquired after their liberation.

SO WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED SO FAR?

God is not confined by geography

- God delivers on His promises, even if we don't directly experience them
- There is sometimes adversity before we receive promises from God.

JOSEPH (ACTS 7:9-16)

CONTRASTS

As we move from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to Jacob's 12 sons who become the 12 tribes of Israel, we read about Egypt 6 times in just a handful of verses.

- **Though followers of God are blessed and provided for, that doesn't ensure our path will be easy.** There are horrors of history that contrast the grace of God.

WE SEE THIS CONTRAST IN JOSEPH

Though Joseph was abandoned and left for dead by his family, God had a plan for him. Through his adversity, **God was with him, rescued him, gave him wisdom, and eventually gave him influence and favor** with Pharaoh.

- **We learn that God is sovereign, even over those that oppose Him!**

BACK TO THE GEOGRAPHY ARGUMENT

Stephen goes back to the argument that God only blesses people in one place when he mentions that Joseph was in Egypt (enemy territory) and that his family also came to live in Egypt where God provided.

- **At times, God may lead us to hostile places and provide for us in the middle of our adversaries!**

LOSING CONTROL

Jesus presented a paradigm shift. When He died and poured out **the Holy Spirit, it made God's presence global and personal**, not confined to a temple or city. This broke the box the religious people had tried to put God in.

- Stephen was accusing them of making God too small by confining Him to just their area.

WHAT DID WE LEARN FROM JOSEPH?

God is sovereign and nothing happens outside of His knowledge or power

- God may lead us to hostile or uncomfortable places, but in those places He will still provide

MOSES (ACTS 7:17-29)

ON TO THE NEXT STEP

After Joseph died and the Jews had flourished in Egypt, the following Pharaoh didn't honor the Jews and actually started oppression that lasted over 400 years.

- Though it had been difficult for generations, God raised up an unlikely leader named **Moses** to liberate His people.

THE BRIEF STORY OF MOSES

Moses lived to be 120 years old, and Stephen breaks down his life in 40 year increments. During the time of the oppression of the Jews, Moses was saved from death by being put into the Nile in a basket and later found by the Pharaoh's daughter.

BEING RAISED BY THE ENEMY

Because Moses was raised by Pharaoh's family, he had the best education and became "powerful in speech and actions."

- Though Moses was humble and didn't have confidence in his abilities, God used the enemy to educate the man that wrote the Torah. **Look at how God uses things for His purposes!**

MOSES ALSO MADE SOME SERIOUS MISTAKES

Moses first attempt at leading and dealing with injustice resulted in murder. **Because he did not respond correctly to oppressive and hateful people, his own people rejected him** causing him to flee to the wilderness for 40 years.

WHAT DOES MOSES' LIFE TEACH US?

That God has a plan, sometimes it's odd, and sometimes it takes time to see it

- That leaders make mistakes, but God is gracious and has a purpose
- That there are repercussions for our actions, so we must be quick to repent and correct them

MOSES CONT. (ACTS 7:30-38)

THE FINAL 40 YEARS

Moses was a kind of Christ: he was a savior of his people that was ultimately rejected by them.

- It wasn't until the last part of Moses' life that he did actual ministry. The empowerment he had received at the burning bush after 40 years was now manifesting.

THIS TIME IT WOULD BE GOD'S WAY

Instead of taking justice into his own hands, Moses now depended on God to lead him. Again, we focus on location. The "holy ground" where Moses stood had **nothing to do with location, but with the presence of God.**

- **This reminds us to be careful not to make idols of places.**

POWER COMES AFTER SUBMISSION

Stephen reminds us of some of the great miracles that Moses took part in: the Red Sea, the plagues in Egypt, and the miracles in the wilderness.

- This was only possible because Moses **submitted to God and was humble, and in his humility he received the power to emulate the Savior.**

HONORING EVERY STEP

Stephen, a young Believer, did not elevate himself over the leadership of the past. He affirmed God's hand in every stage leading up to Christ, and his (Stephen's) role in the work of God.

- **We need to honor the past while still moving forward and advancing the Kingdom.**

THE STORY HAS LED US TO THIS (ESTHER 4:14)

- The Garden
- Abraham and the Patriarchs
- The prophets à Jesus on earth
- The apostles and birth of the church
- The present
- The City

HAVE WE FORGOTTEN OUR PURPOSE?

- This is our time to be Christ on earth! To be the peacemakers, encouragers, counselors, educators of God's Word, champions of social justice, lovers of the unlovable, the fillers of the gaps, prayer warriors, and messengers of hope!