

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

MARCH 22ND, 2026 // BOOK OF ACTS

ABRAHAM (ACTS 7:1-8) LOOK AT THE SETTING

Stephen knew he was in an impossible situation. The mob had created the circumstances he was in. Stephen had likely already settled in his heart the outcome of this line of questioning.

- **That is why, when he was asked to respond, he did not hold back and decided to preach the truth of Jesus, not defend himself.**

THE ACCUSATIONS

Stephen was accused of two primary offenses:

- 1.) Speaking against the holy place.
 - 2.) Speaking against the law.
- **The "holy place" was the tabernacle, and "the law" was an all-encompassing term describing the traditions and customs of Israel. These accusations are similar to the ones against Jesus.**

STEPHEN'S RESPONSE

Stephen begins where the history of Israel started—with Abraham. He reminds the court that it was by faith that Abraham followed God and that God was not confined to one place. Rather, God is anywhere He desires to be. Stephen also referenced Genesis 15:13-14, where God foretold of the Promised Land and the enslavement of Israel.

COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM

It was important for Stephen to be able to display keen awareness of the customs of Israel. God made a promise with Abraham that His descendants would be great. He marked this promise by circumcision.

- God made good on His promise to Abraham with the birth of Isaac. Through this line would come the nation of Israel.

JOSEPH (ACTS 7:9-22) JEALOUSY

You may have heard accounts of Joseph's life in *Joseph: King of Dreams* or *Joseph and the Technicolor Dreamcoat*. But the reality is that the jealous brothers who sold Joseph into slavery would become the patriarchs of Israel.

- **Stephen proved he knew the history of his people. He also showed that there was a history of rejecting God's anointed savior.**

SERVANT TO SAVIOR

Joseph had a gift that God had given him to understand and interpret dreams. This became very useful to him throughout his life while he was enslaved in Egypt. Eventually, he interpreted a dream for the ruler of Egypt, Pharaoh (Genesis 37-49).

- **In each of Joseph's roles, the Bible says that "God was with Joseph"—in betrayal, prison, slavery, and leadership.**

JOSEPH SAVES ISRAEL

In Genesis 45, after some back and forth with his brothers (the patriarchs of Israel), Joseph said it was good that he was sold and sent away to Egypt because God used him to save Israel from a great famine.

- **God used the brothers' rejection and betrayal of Joseph to bring about the salvation of Israel in Egypt.**

PARALLELS

Stephen is drawing the parallel between Joseph and Jesus, all the while proving that he not only understands the history of Israel but sees it in a way that points to Jesus.

- **Stephen showed the Sanhedrin how Joseph was God's plan to save Israel from the start. But Israel mocked, conspired against, betrayed, and rejected Joseph—similar to Jesus.**

MOSES (ACTS 7:23-36) GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

Stephen ends his recap of the origin story of Israel by spending time talking about Moses, one of the most iconic leaders in Israel's history.

- **He speaks about the oppression Israel was under and how miraculous the birth of Moses was. You can almost hear the same cadence as the birth of Christ while Stephen speaks.**

MOSES FLED

Moses murdered an Egyptian who was mistreating an Israelite. Then Moses tried to settle a dispute between two Israelites. The Israelites did not accept Moses's leadership, which caused Moses to flee Egypt.

- **Moses's "rescue attempt" was a bit premature. Stephen did a great job displaying the history of Israel rejecting God's chosen savior.**

GOD'S CALLING

Exodus 3 is a chapter I encourage you to go read. It is the account of Moses speaking with God through the burning bush.

- **Stephen was drawing another parallel. Moses was called and sent by God to deliver God's people, just as Jesus was sent to deliver God's people. Israel rejected both saviors.**

SUFFERING IS NOT IN VAIN

God saw His people's suffering. Furthermore, He did something about it.

- **Moses's story reminds us that God can use anyone to accomplish His plan. God's plan involved Moses growing his relationship with God and serving people. God matures us as we serve Him and others. It is all part of His good plan.**

THE POWER OF GOD

Mankind's rejection of God's plan has no power over God. Israel rejected Moses. God's plan was always

Moses. God raised Moses up and used him to judge Egypt, part the Red Sea, and lead Israel for years.

- **The Sanhedrin rejected Jesus. The plan was always Jesus. Their rejection of Jesus had no power over God's plan of salvation for all people.**

HISTORY

- We all have a history.
- Is our history getting in the way of Jesus, or is it displaying who Jesus is?
- The Sanhedrin was idolizing their history. They magnified traditions to manufacture holiness based on their own ability to follow God.
- Stephen articulated not only the history of Israel's rejection of God **but humanity's tradition of rejecting God.**
- **You and I have a strong propensity to reject God in our lives.**

TRADITIONS

- Notice that Stephen did not disrespect the history or traditions of Israel. But he did reframe them.
- Once we see a tradition through the lens of Jesus, it illuminates the main thing: Jesus.
- **Traditions aren't bad, but they can become what hinders us from freedom if we do not see them through Jesus first, meaning this: our identity is in Christ, not in what we do for Christ.**
- A tradition is coming to church for something other than Christ.

PROBLEMATIC TRADITION

- A tradition is seeing the church through a list of *haves* and *have nots*. Are we looking for tradition or Christ?
- A tradition is not being able to worship Jesus without "it."
- A tradition is seeing what we do for Christ as more important than being with Christ.
- A tradition is being more concerned with how something makes us look instead of how Christ can be seen.
- **That's the problem with traditions; they can become idols. It's critical to remember the gospel. Jesus gives us freedom from the problem with traditions.**

FULFILLMENT

- The Sanhedrin missed the Savior as He looked them in the eyes. This lets us know two important things.
- **It is possible to have all the evidence before you and see the fulfillment of promises and Scripture but still reject Jesus. Do we reject Jesus?**
- Stephen knew what many of us may not yet realize. **Finding total fulfillment in Jesus will cost us.**
- **God is calling us to follow Him. Are we willing to follow Him, even when it costs us?**
- If not in Jesus, where do we find total fulfillment?