

## STEPHEN'S SERMON ACTS 7

Stephen was one of the seven men chosen to care for the Grecian widows who were being neglected in the daily ministrations (6:1-6). In addition to this work, he also preached the Word with great power and effect. Such preaching soon involved him in difficulty with the authorities, who had forbidden further preaching in the name of the Lord (6:8-15). He was charged with speaking blasphemous words against Moses and against God and with stirring up the people. He was brought before the council and allowed to defend himself before this group. His discourse covers Acts 7:2-53 and is one of the most remarkable statements to be found in scripture.

### I. Stephen's Defense (7:2-53).

#### A. The introduction (vss.2-8).

1. His speech is more than a recitation of O.T. history.
2. The people, the incidents he describes and the manner in which he did so had a theme.
3. His main point was that those who were supposed to be God's people have always resisted God's working (7:51).
4. God's chosen people have always rejected God's appointed messengers.
5. God's faithful ones have always been surrounded by their enemies who should have known better.
6. He is saying that, despite the charges against him, he is the one who respects God while his accusers are the ones guilty of blasphemy.
7. Stephen did not oppose the Law, on the contrary, he knows the Law well and his actions are in harmony with it.
8. Stephen started with Abraham.
  - a. When the patriarch was called upon to leave his home land and relatives behind and follow God (Gen. 12:1-3).
  - b. Indicated that God had been at work in places besides the temple in Jerusalem, which the Jews were so quick to defend against Stephen's alleged attacks.

#### B. The care of Joseph (7:9-16).

1. Joseph was opposed by those of his own household
2. He served God in the face of difficulty
3. God was with Joseph in Egypt (7:9). Another proof that His presence and favors were not restricted to the land of Israel.
4. God protected him, and in His providence overruled all the evil things that happened.
5. Joseph was able to provide for his family (7:12-15).

#### C. The case of Moses in Egypt (7:17-36).

1. When the Israelites were suffering in Egypt, God raised up Moses, another servant of God who was opposed by his own people and had to flee (7:27).
2. God had arranged for Israel's preservation and deliverance, but they rejected the one He sent them.
3. The same man they had spurned, led them out with "wonders and signs." (7:35-36).

#### D. The case of Moses in the Wilderness (7:37-41).

1. "This is that Moses..." (V.37). [Acts 3:22; Deut. 18:15-18].
2. God was preparing the nation for a great event—the coming of a prophet like Moses.
3. "Church in the wilderness" congregation, assembly of people.
4. "Living oracles" – Law for Israel to follow. Doing of them meant life.
5. The people rejected Moses leadership, turned back to Egypt in their hearts, and made a golden calf to worship.
6. The ancestors of Stephen's accusers had in the case of Joseph and Moses, demonstrated a pattern of rejecting God's will and opposing and mistreating the very servants God had sent to them.

- E. God's final Rejection of Israel (7:42-43).
    1. God turned His face away from them.
    2. God gave them up... an expression which indicates that God withdrew His gracious aid, permitted the appropriate punishment to be administered, and allowed them to go the direction they chose.
    3. Human sacrifices were offered to Moloch.
    4. Remphan– Both Moloch and Remphan were forms of ancient astrology—a substitute for worship of the true God.
    5. They made small images to worship their gods.
    6. This entire section pointed out that those who did not keep the Law were punished.
  - F. The tabernacle and the temple (7:44-50).
    1. The Israelites built a tabernacle, the forerunner of the temple, in the wilderness.
    2. Solomon later built a temple for God.
    3. God is not confined to man-made temples (7:47-50).
    4. Stephen's point: His accusers venerated the temple and its traditions, but Stephen was serving God, who is greater than the temple and gave holiness to the temple.
  - G. The Application: (7:51-53).
    1. What courage this took.
    2. They had betrayed and murdered the Christ and are rejecting the Holy Spirit's teachings, conveyed through the apostles and here through Stephen.
    3. Refused to keep the Law that God had sent them.
    4. Stephen's speech was one of stinging rebuke and indictment against those who had charged him with wrong.
- II. The Stoning and Death of Stephen.
- A. The fury of the Jewish council knew no bounds when Stephen's discourse came to an end, and it was all the more intense because the condemnation he had hurled at them was not a mere burst of passion, but a deliberate and cool announcement of a righteous judgment from the very Scriptures they profess to be loyal to.
    1. Cut to the heart... Literally, "sawn asunder in the heart."
      - a. Not like the response in Acts 2:37, i.e. not convicted of their sins.
      - b. They felt as if their hearts had been cut through with the rough teeth of a saw.
    2. Gnashed on him with their teeth.
      - a. Gritted their teeth and bared them with displeasure, with rage.
      - b. This dignified group of men became like a pack of angry dogs.
    3. The contrast between the enraged, gnashing and hateful Sanhedrin and the calm, confident and courageous Stephen was drawn out sharply by Luke as he wrote.
  - B. Stephen saw the glory of God (v.55)
    1. He informed his accusers of the heavenly scene (v.56)
    2. Standing... perhaps out of deep interest, or to receive His spirit.
    3. His words just add fuel to the fires burning out of control in their hearts.
  - C. They emit a loud cry, stop their ears to shut out Stephen's voice that they have been unable to silence. Became a lynch mob.
    1. They drove him out of the city and began to stone him.
    2. Mentions a young man by the name of Saul
  - D. Stephen's dying petition (7:60)
- Con: We should strive to have the knowledge of God's word and the conviction to teach and preach it as Stephen did. Even in dying, to have the attitude that he displayed. Great chapter.