

Stephen's Address, Pt 1.
"Abraham and Joseph."

Acts 7:1-16.

Sunday morning, January 10, 2010.

I. General observations.

- A. Stephen's accusers had brought their charges against him before the Sanhedrin in Ch. 6:11-15.
 - 1. "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God."
 - 2. "He does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law."
 - 3. "We have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us."
- B. Now the High Priest, presiding over the Sanhedrin, gives Stephen a chance to respond to his accusers, saying to Stephen: "Are these things so?"
- C. The response that follows is the longest recorded address in the book of acts, for which reason Luke deserves, and demands, our undivided attention as we work our way through it.
- D. In Stephen's response he does not openly and directly defend himself against the charges brought against him. Instead he weaves together themes related to the charges as they flow from Israel's history. Two themes stand out:
 - 1. The location of God's presence and glory. This theme is introduced by way of the life of Abraham in vss. 2-8.
 - 2. The theme of the treatment of God's servants is introduced by way of the life of Joseph in vss. 9-16.
- E. As a sermon and an address it has a number of unusual features when compared to other recorded sermons and addresses.
 - 1. Stephen never refers to the Lord Jesus by name in all 52 verses of this address. Twice he alludes to Him indirectly:
 - As the prophet, like unto Moses, that the Lord would send. Vs. 37.
 - As "the Just One," of whom you have become the betrayers and murderers. Vs 52.
 - 2. Stephen never refers to, or even indirectly alludes to, the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, which was a central theme in the apostles teaching and preaching.
 - 3. There is no call to repentance or promise of forgiveness extended to the Sanhedrin. Only words of indictment.

Application:

This chapter represents a turning point in the history of Israel as a nation. Up to this point Christ as the resurrected and exalted Savior was preached to her. Repentance and the forgiveness of sin was offered through Christ to the nation of His brethren. All this changes here. Christ And His people are once more rejected here in the person of Stephen, and the gospel phase "beginning at Jerusalem," Acts 1:8, grinds to a halt. All that remains for Jerusalem is that fearful and certain looking toward judgment spoken of in Hebrews 10:27. From here the gospel will go to the Samaritans and the gentiles in Ch. 8 and on.

We learn from this passage the sobering truth that God's spirit will not strive with men or nations forever. Genesis 6:3. We learn that there is a time when the Lord gives men and nations over to the base desires of their own hearts. Romans 1:24, 26 and 28. We learn that there is a time when even the prayers of the great intercessors of the history of God's people would not make a difference. Jeremiah 15:1,2. We learn that there is such a thing as "An acceptable time" and "A day of salvation" in the life of peoples and nations, and that we should be careful not to receive this grace in vain. 2 Cor. 6:1,2.. We are warned here not to refuse Him who speaks from heaven, for if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth (in the old covenant ministry), much less will we escape if we refuse Him who speaks from heaven (in the new covenant ministry). Hebr. 12:25.

II. The presence of God's glory and Person—Abraham.

A. The God of glory... Vs. 2

That is the God who is the glory of the temple in Jerusalem;

The God who is the glory of the city of the Jerusalem.

The God who is the glory of the land and the people of Israel.

B. Here Stephen begins to dismantle the notion that the God of glory is inseparable tied to the land and people of Israel and to the city and temple of Jerusalem in particular. God is too big to fit in the Jewish shoe-box.

1. Stephen showed how God was with Abraham in Mesopotamia; in Ur of the Chaldeans. He showed how God was with him in Haran where he lingered as long as his father lived.
2. Even when the Lord brought him to the land of promise, He gave him no possession in it; only the promise of a future inheritance symbolized by the covenant of circumcision.
3. The Lord was with His people the 400 years they lived in Egypt.
4. The Lord was with Joseph when he was sold into Egypt Vs. 9.
5. Later Stephen will re-visit this theme in Vss. 48-50.

Application:

The Lord is with His people still; wherever they are: Persecuted in Eritrea and many other lands; in beds of sickness; in places of loneliness and adversity. The important things for them are not the glory of a land and city and temple which they hold in their hand, but the promises of a full grace and salvation which they have laid up in their hearts, and toward which they live and long. "While we look, not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are unseen, for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are unseen are eternal." 2 Corinthians 4:18.

III. The treatment of God's servants—Joseph.

A. Here Stephen begins to introduce the theme of the maltreatment of God's servants in Israel's history.

B. He will trace this thought-line from Joseph to Moses to all the prophets to "the Just One" which is the Lord Jesus Christ. Vs. 52.

C. Yet grace and salvation came by the hand of the rejected one, Joseph—Jesus.

Application:

What do you expect from the "seed of the serpent?" What do you think Stephen expected from his brethren? What do you expect? Is this realistic?