

**Text:** Ac 7.9-16

**Proposition:** Salvation for rebelling men comes when men accept the Saviour God provides.

We've been talking about Stephen's sermon. The first message gave you an overview of the themes and direction Stephen took in preaching this message.

My outline of Stephen's sermon:

- A. The Lord and the Patriarchs outside the land (2-16)
  1. Abraham: from Mesopotamian urbanite to wandering herdsman (2-8)
  2. Joseph: from the Land to Egypt (9-16)
- B. The Lord's selection of the rejected Moses as the prophetic leader (17-43)
  1. Moses rejected (17-29)
  2. Moses selected (30-34)
  3. Moses resisted (35-43)
- C. The fathers mistake of limiting God's presence (44-50)
- D. Jewish guilt of embracing the fathers resistance to the Spirit (51-53)

Last week, we looked at his opening statement. There are numerous parts of Stephen's overall theme in that section, but I focused on the idea of justifying the preaching of Christ.

- After all, the preaching of Christ is the innovation the apostles are introducing to Jerusalem — the big question is, *was it legitimate?*
- That is our question also, is our preaching of Christ legitimate?

Of course, the answer is yes, preaching Christ is rooted in the promises to Abraham — we share a common foundation with *Biblical* Judaism.

**Sidenote:** I emphasize *Biblical* Judaism because the Judaism of the Pharisees (and the Judaism of today) is *not* Biblical Judaism.

- We should add, it is not simply a shared foundation, of course — in fact, preaching Christ is the *culmination* of Biblical Judaism and it *supersedes* Biblical Judaism.

Today we move on to Stephen's second point to see how Stephen adds to the foundation of his thought.

- With Abraham, the founder of faith, we had promises given.
- With Joseph, the rescuer of the seed, we see the promises delayed (as promised to Abraham).

The promises are delayed for two reasons — the first obvious, the other subtle.

1. *It isn't the fulness of time*: God's timetable is not man's timetable, fulfilment would come when God deemed the time appropriate
2. *The promise confronts* the perennial human problem, *the problem of sin* — something new introduced into Stephen's message which becomes the major theme, the ancient and present Jewish problem: *Resisting God's Provision of a Redeemer*.

We will see parallels between Joseph and Jesus; I believe Stephen deliberately lays the parallels. In these parallels lies the beginning of Stephen's ultimate point.

Read Ac 7.9-16

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## I. Resistance by the patriarchs (9-10)

### A. The attitude of the patriarchs to Joseph (9a)

#### 1. Jealousy defined

- a. In ancient Gk, this word has the original meaning of "to admire someone"

"The personal emotion expressed in the admiration is the true and probably the original core of the meaning, namely, 'to be stirred' ... usually in a friendly or hostile way either for or against someone or something."<sup>1</sup>

- b. This stirring up becomes *zeal* in a positive sense: "zeal for God" and *jealousy* in a negative sense, as here

Luke uses it particularly "in this sense to denote the attitude of the Jews towards Christian preaching."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Albrecht Stumpff, "Ζήλος, Ζηλώω, Ζηλωτής, Παραζηλώω," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 882.

<sup>2</sup> Stumpff, 887.

## 2. Cause recalled: prophetic dreams; parental favoritism

- a. The jealousy is a participle, describes the patriarchs *attitude*, which is the *cause* of their action
- b. Stephen doesn't mention the backstory, but it is familiar to us and to the original audience
  - 1) Joseph had two prophetic dreams where he saw himself as a lord over his brothers and even his father (his father even rebuked this)
  - 2) Joseph's father made him supervisor of all the others (coat of "many colours" likely a badge of office)
- c. Messianic parallel
  - 1) The advent of Jesus long prophesied with specifics that clearly identified him to careful observers
  - 2) The ministry of Jesus attested to by the Father in many ways, including the mighty deeds

The patriarchs *should have* heeded the message of Joseph's dreams, just as the Jews *should have* accepted the witnesses to Jesus.

## 3. Action taken

- a. They would have killed him
- b. At the last minute they sold him into slavery

Even this is a parallel to the crucifixion of Jesus.

## B. The rescue of Joseph from the depths to the heights (9b-10)

### 1. The statements of God's favor

- a. God was with him (9b)
- b. God rescued him (10a) [from Potiphar and prison]
- c. God exalted him (10b) [in the eyes of Pharaoh]
- d. God made him governor of all of Egypt (10c)

## 2. The parallels of Christ's favor

- a. The Jews hounded him to death
- b. God was with him, and raised him from the grave "God rescued him"
- c. God exalted him to his right hand (Ac 2.32-33)
- d. God made his enemies the footstool of his feet (Ac 2.34-36)

The parallels might not have been entirely obvious to Stephen's hearers, but as he draws to his end, they are going to get this message:

*Your fathers opposed God's appointed leader, and so do you!*

But the story doesn't end with the accusatory parallel, there is also a hopeful parallel.

## II. Reconciliation through the saviour's intervention (11-15)

### A. The plight of the people without Joseph (11)

1. They were without food
2. Just as those without Christ are without the bread of life

Men reject Christ and run off seeking spiritual refreshment in every imaginable place, but find nothing.

- Pleasures cannot satisfy
- Philosophy leads to dead ends and despair
- Science without God leads to "techno-terror" — an advanced world with no hope
- You name it, nothing ultimately satisfies the spiritual hunger of our people, nothing but the true gospel of Jesus Christ

### B. The salvation of the people was in Egypt, through Joseph (12-13)

1. Jacob went looking for the place where there was bread
2. They found bread in Egypt, specifically and dramatically through the despised Joseph

If you find yourself in the famine of the land, the famine of the world and its systems, you need to go where there is bread. You need to go to Jesus, the bread of life.

### C. The whole nation at that time bowed before the despised son (14-15)

1. There is an eschatological parallel here as well
2. When the nation is hard-pressed by her enemies (antichrist, the armies of the nations) in the future, the rejected Christ will come for them
3. He will rescue them and call them to himself
4. They will mourn for him as for an only son, and repent
5. He will bring them into his kingdom, to finally bring about the fulfillment of the promises to Abraham

*Every knee will bow!*

One last thing: you will note that I made a “small ‘s’ saviour” in this point: we are referring to Joseph, but with Joseph, Stephen is referring to Jesus!

- Joseph was reconciled with his family
- Sinners can be reconciled through Jesus

## III. Rest in the promises (16)

### A. The burial of the patriarchs

1. From the OT, we only specifically know about the burial of Jacob and Joseph
2. Joseph and the patriarchs buried Jacob in Machpelah, the cave Abraham bought
3. Moses and the Israelites brought Joseph's bones on the Exodus, and buried them in Shechem, the place Jacob first settled when he returned from the service of Laban

Stephen is conflating two stories here.

## B. The reason for these burials

1. Jacob believed the promises God made to Abraham
2. Joseph believed the promises God made to Abraham
  - a. They rested in God's promises.
    - 1) They **had rejected** God's prophecy and God's man
    - 2) God redeemed and reconciled them anyway
  - b. By the end of the story, the tension between saviour (Joseph) and nation (the patriarchs) vanishes — they are resting in God's promises.

That's exactly the point the unbelieving Sanhedrin and 1<sup>st</sup> century Jews were missing: God's promises are true in Christ; national hope is in Christ.

What did they need? Faith in Christ, resting in Christ, waiting on Christ's soon return.

## Conclusion:

**Proposition:** Salvation for rebelling men comes when men accept the Saviour God provides.

Men today are in a state of rebellion against God's Redeemer, Jesus Christ.

- Just this week in the States, a court ruled against a monument put up to remember the war dead in some Maryland city. The monument is a cross, set up in 1925 to commemorate the sacrifices of WW I. "Tear it down," the unbelievers cry.
- All the activism, anger, rebellion, false teaching, false living that prevails in our world prevails in spite of God's provision of a Saviour from sin. (A "big 'S'" this time!)

Stephen's message to the Jews on that day laid out the themes of a God-provided Saviour, and a man-rejected Saviour.

Don't be found among those who reject the work of God in Jesus Christ. Be sure he is your Saviour from sin.