

**Text:** Ac 7.17-29

**Proposition:** God works to deliver in unexpected ways. Those who would be delivered must want God's deliverance.

Our look at Stephen's sermon so far

First, an overview with the major themes of land and blessing outside the land, and rejection of God-appointed leaders.

Second, Abraham, the foundation of faith for both Biblical Judaism and Christianity.

Then last week, Joseph, a parallel to Christ, with a call to men to rest by faith in Christ.

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)

Now Stephen turns to Moses – Moses occupies the attention of the bulk of his message.

One reason is the Jews accuse him of blaspheming the law, of holding Moses in contempt.

Stephen answers, ultimately, that those who accept what Moses said about the coming prophet are the ones who uphold Moses.

In the passage we will look at today, Stephen shows God's unusual working among his people for their deliverance as well as the next instance of Israelite resistance to God's redeemer.

The first instance of resistance came when the patriarchs rejected Joseph.

Now, the people will not have Moses... but we are getting ahead of the story.

Read Ac 7.17-29

**Proposition:** God works to deliver in unexpected ways. Those who would be delivered must want God's deliverance.

## I. Lovely in the sight of God (17-20)

A. The condition of the promise as our passage opens

1. Recall the specifics of the promise (5-7)
  - a. I will give you land
  - b. I will give you descendants
  - c. Your descendants will be aliens in a strange land
  - d. Your descendants will be enslaved and mistreated
  - e. I will judge the enslaving nation, and your descendants will come back to this place
2. The realities in our text (17-19)
  - a. The descendants of Abraham grew and multiplied (a fulfillment of the promise) (17)
  - b. The descendants of Abraham became alienated from their overlords as time went on (18)
  - c. The foreign king went beyond enslavement to genocide: commanding the exposure of infants (19)

All of these conditions correspond to the promise God gave Abraham.

BTW, the long, sad history of anti-Semitism begins here, even as the nation is barely beginning.

- Abraham's family is beloved by God.
- Abraham's family is hated by Satan (and he continually tries to destroy it)

These wicked attitudes drive modern geo-politics in the Middle East (which is not to say modern Israel is pure and innocent).

B. The unseen hand of God in Israel's circumstance

1. The number of the children of Israel under Joseph: 75 (14)

- a. Ex 1.5 says 70 descendants of Jacob at this point
  - b. In the LXX, the text says 75 in the Exodus passage
  - c. Discrepancy is resolved by noting that Joseph and his sons were already in Egypt, Hb. text doesn't count them, Gk text does
2. Now, the people are expanding rapidly
- a. In book of Numbers, the warriors at the time of the Exodus are counted at 603,550 (Nm 1.46)
  - b. Usual estimates for "men, women, and children" are extrapolated from that number to around 2,000,000 people
3. The hostility of the Egyptian king – no surprise to God

We are inclined to wonder when trouble comes, "Where is God?"

God is right where he always was, our troubles are no surprise to God, even the troubles that are *our own fault*.

Christians often quote these verses when they talk about their trust in God:

**Romans 8.28** And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose.

**Philippians 2.13** for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure.

**2 Corinthians 4.17** For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison,

What about when you consider your affliction to be *less than momentary, less than light*?

And in this case, because of prior revelation [promise to Abraham], the affliction was part of the promise. It is hard to see God's hand at work when life *isn't amazing* and when *things aren't working out so well*.

But the fact remains, nothing surprises God. Don't abandon Him!

## C. The unseen hand of God choosing a lovely lad for a deliverance (20)

### 1. The inspired description: “lovely in the sight of God”

- a. Used twice in NT, both times describing Moses
- b. Drawn from Ex 2.2, Heb. *tob*, “good, lovely” – same word God uses to describe creation, when he says, “behold it was very *tob* – good”
- c. Emphasis of this phrase is not the way the baby looks (aren’t all babies beautiful??)
- d. The child is chosen by God, or purposed by God, for a significant role, deliverer of Israel

The beauty of the child is in the status conferred on him by God.

### 2. The faithful parents under an oppressive regime

- a. The law of the day required the exposure of male babies
- b. Moses’ parents defied the law – another act of God’s providence

A key thread in this entire historical summary is the unseen hand of God at work. It’s at work in the growth of the nation, it’s at work in the oppression of Pharaoh, it’s at work in the principled rebellion of Moses’ parents.

God works in ways men don’t expect.

## II. Prepared by the providence of God (21-22)

### A. Providential deliverance (21)

1. When the baby was too large to hide, they “hid him in plain sight” (and technically obeyed the law of exposure)
2. On that day, Pharaoh’s daughter happened by
  - a. God worked in her heart
  - b. She worked on her agenda (Egyptian politics)
  - c. God worked for Israel through Pharaoh’s daughter

## B. Providential preparation (22)

### 1. All the learning of the Egyptians

- a. This detail isn't discussed in the OT, but in the Jewish writers
- b. Both Josephus and Philo cite this about Moses
- c. Others are more extravagant than Stephen, some going as far as saying Moses was responsible for "all the learning of the Egyptians"

### 2. The point is that Egypt offered Moses the best possible training for the role he would play

- a. Egypt was the super-power of the day
- b. Moses would get the latest of science, mathematics, the arts
- c. Moses would be trained in government, administration, leadership

What would the average Israelite happen to think of Moses in Pharaoh's court?

- "Spoiled rich kid"?
- "Lucky"?
- "Big deal, why doesn't he do something for us"?

The hand of God is not usually very visible, even for believers. Many Israelites no doubt were not counting much on the promises God made to Abraham.

Their deliverer is rising among them, but he is *Unlooked For*...

## III. Rejected despite a heart for God (23-29)

### A. The expectations of the deliverer (23-25)

#### 1. Notice Moses' actions

- a. It entered his mind... (23)
- b. He defended... (24)
- c. He supposed... (25)

Moses took stock of his own life, he saw what God had done for him, he expected God had done it for a reason.

There is no revelation that God spoke to him at this time, these are *his* expectations and *his* actions.

(And of course, he was right, but not the way he expected to be right...)

## 2. Man's timing vs. God's timing (23)

### a. Moses' age

#### 1) The translations

- a) "approaching forty" NAU
- b) "full forty years old" KJV
- c) "forty years old" ESV
- d) "about forty years old" NET
- e) "And when forty years were fulfilled to him" YLT

#### 2) The OT doesn't mention the age

**Exodus 2.11-12** Now it came about in those days, when Moses had grown up, that he went out to his brethren and looked on their hard labors; and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his brethren. So he looked this way and that, and when he saw there was no one *around*, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.

#### 3) Nevertheless, Rabbinic tradition divides Moses' life into three 40 year periods, Stephen confirms it here

### b. Moses "visits" his people – not just a social call

- 1) Luke uses the word throughout Luke-Acts to refer to "God or his emissaries overseeing and caring for his people."<sup>1</sup>
  - a) Zechariah's prophecy, "Blessed *be* the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited us" (Lk 1.68)
  - b) When Jesus raised the widow of Nain's son: "Fear gripped them all, and they *began* glorifying God, saying, 'A great

<sup>1</sup> John B. Polhill, *Acts*, The New American Commentary 26 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 195.

prophet has arisen among us!' and, 'God has visited His people!'" (Lk 7.16)

c) James, talking about the Gentile issue: "Simeon has related how God first **concerned** Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name." (Ac 15.14)

2) The visit of Moses, in his mind, is a visit on behalf of God, as an emissary of God

c. Moses sees himself as the deliverer of his people, and the circumstances of his life to date confirm it in his mind

1) Thus, what Moses did was consistent with a sense of God's call, but without God's voice

2) Consequently, Moses set about the task in a human way, taking vengeance (24) on an abusing Egyptian

3) But note well: Moses made a choice to be identified with the people of God (Heb 11.24-25)

**Hebrews 11.24-25** By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin,

Moses had a heart for God.

B. The reactions of the "delivered" (26-29)

1. Moses intervenes on the next day in a quarrel between two Hebrews (26)

2. The offender rejects Moses: "who made you ruler and judge?" (27)

a. What was the answer to the question? God made Moses a ruler and a judge

b. What did the man mean? We won't follow you.

3. Consequences: Moses fled to Midian (the next 40 years wrapped up in one verse) (29)

**Conclusion:**

The life of Moses is another parallel to Jesus. We see that Moses was unlooked for and unexpected as a deliverer. So too was Jesus.

We see that Moses was unwanted as a deliverer. So too was Jesus.

Our title:

*Unlooked For and Unwanted*

The human race is caught up in bondage to self and sin. All kinds of difficulties attend our ways if we go our own way in our life.

God, hundreds of years ago, acted to provide a deliverer — you may not have looked for him, but there he is, Jesus, the saviour from sin.

Is Jesus wanted by you?