

## I. Introduction

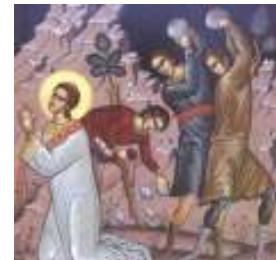
Good morning! Let's begin this morning by remembering a few things from our previous study in Acts. Last time, we looked at the story of Stephen, a remarkable man of faith who became the first martyr of the church. **Acts 6:8** says, "**N**ow Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people." Stephen was one of the seven men chosen to take care of the distribution of the food, so he is considered to be one of the first deacons of the church. But Stephen was also a powerful preacher and a miracle worker.



Stephen was doing only good things, but some of the Jews became jealous of him and they dragged Stephen before the Sanhedrin and brought false witnesses to testify against him. They attempted to condemn Stephen using lies, but Stephen spoke only the truth in response. The truth Stephen spoke showed that it was his accusers and the Sanhedrin that were in the wrong. And, instead of being the judges, the Sanhedrin became the accused. This outraged them and they reacted with violence. Stephen was dragged out of the city and stoned, although he was clearly innocent.



In his death, Stephen showed an attitude of love and compassion that was remarkably like the attitude of our Lord Jesus. **Acts 7:59-60**, "While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep." Stephen became the first martyr of the church, and he was welcomed into heaven.



But what did Stephen say to the Sanhedrin to make them so angry? Well, Stephen basically reviewed the history of Israel and declared that they and their fathers were sinners. It was true. But it was a truth no one likes to hear and it enraged them. Stephen's plain words of truth were harsh, but that does not mean that his words were unprofitable. Sometimes harsh words are what we need to hear to bring us to repentance, so perhaps some of those present on that day later came to repentance and salvation through faith in Jesus.

Let's take a look at what Stephen told them. We will break Stephen's message to the Sanhedrin into three parts so that we can use this opportunity to remember some of the Old Testament history as well. Today we will look at the first part of Stephen's message, Acts 7:1-16.

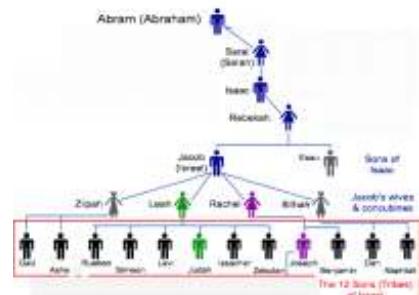
## II. Scripture Reading Acts 7:1-16, (NIV, 1984)

1 Then the high priest asked him, "Are these charges true?" 2 To this he replied: "Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran. 3 'Leave your country and your people,' God said, 'and go to the land I will show you.' 4 "So he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. After the death of his father, God sent him to this land where you are now living. 5 He gave him no inheritance here, not even a foot of ground. But God promised him that he and his descendants after him would possess the land, even though at that time Abraham had no child. 6 God spoke to him in this way: 'Your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. 7 But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves,' God said, 'and afterward they will come out of that country and worship me in this place.' 8 Then he gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision. And Abraham became the father of Isaac and circumcised him eight days after his birth. Later Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob became the father of the twelve patriarchs. 9 "Because the patriarchs were jealous of Joseph, they sold him as a slave into Egypt. But God was with him 10 and rescued him from all his troubles. He gave Joseph

wisdom and enabled him to gain the goodwill of Pharaoh king of Egypt; so he made him ruler over Egypt and all his palace. 11 "Then a famine struck all Egypt and Canaan, bringing great suffering, and our fathers could not find food. 12 When Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our fathers on their first visit. 13 On their second visit, Joseph told his brothers who he was, and Pharaoh learned about Joseph's family. 14 After this, Joseph sent for his father Jacob and his whole family, seventy-five in all. 15 Then Jacob went down to Egypt, where he and our fathers died. 16 Their bodies were brought back to Shechem and placed in the tomb that Abraham had bought from the sons of Hamor at Shechem for a certain sum of money.

### III. Teaching

In this first part of Stephen's message, we see a brief review of the history of the family of Israel. In the center of this family tree, we can see Jacob, whom God renamed as Israel. So, we are reminded that the people of Israel are descended from a man named Israel. If we consider the family of Israel, then we might first look back to Israel's father Isaac and his grandfather Abraham, with their wives. Then we might also look forward to Israel's twelve sons and their wives; they are the patriarchs of the twelve tribes of Israel. Stephen, in his message, refers to all of these, but Stephen focuses mostly on Abraham and Joseph and we will do the same.

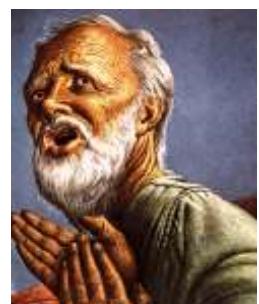


But first, let's notice Judah. It is not obvious in the English, but the word, "Jewish," comes from the name Judah and it literally refers to the descendants of Judah. Down through history, the word, "Jewish," has come to be used in reference to all of the people of Israel, but sometimes it is important to remember where the word comes from.

Mary and Joseph, Jesus' mother and adoptive father, were both from the tribe of Judah, and so one of the names of Jesus is the prophetic title, "Lion of Judah." This title is used in **Revelation 5:5**. "**Then one of the elders said to me, 'Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.'**" In this world we have many troubles, but do not weep; Jesus, the Lion of Judah, has won the victory over sin and death. Amen!



We often think of the Jews as the chosen people of God. But sometimes calling the Jews the chosen people gives the impression that God looked down from heaven at all the different peoples of the earth and chose the Jewish people as His own. But that is not exactly what happened. What happened is that God chose one man, a man of faith named Abram. God chose Abram, renamed him as Abraham, and from him God brought forth the Jewish people.



God chose Abraham because of Abraham's faith. **Romans 4:3**, "**What does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.'**" Abraham was not perfect; various sins of Abraham are recorded in the Bible. But Abraham had one huge thing going for him; Abraham believed God.

The world is often focused on outward appearances and the people of the world often think that it doesn't matter what you believe as long as you do the right things. But God looks at the heart. Pastor Joseph talked about this last week and he quoted **John 6:28-29**. Do you remember? Jesus was speaking to a crowd of people that had followed Him. "**Then they asked him, 'What must we do to do the works God requires?' Jesus answered, 'The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.'**" God has sent us Jesus to be our Lord and Savior. Everyone who believes and trusts in the Name of Jesus will be saved.

The Lord spoke to Abraham many times and Abraham believed God. Let's look at **Genesis 12:1-3**, "**The LORD had said to Abram, 'Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go**

**to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”**” Abraham, at that time still called Abram, believed God and left his home to go to a land he had never seen. That’s faith.

And the Lord gave Abraham, the man of faith, an amazing promise, “**all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.**” That’s a big promise. Abraham was just one man, but God promised that all of the peoples of the world, that is, every tongue, tribe, and nation, would be blessed through Abraham. Here we see an important key to understanding the Old Testament. The Lord chose Abraham and blessed him, but the larger purpose was to bless the nations.

So what was the Lord talking about when He promised to make Abraham a blessing to the nations? The Lord was talking about the coming of Jesus, the Lion of Judah, through Abraham’s descendants. In the story of Abraham there are many more prophetic revelations about the coming of Jesus.

One of the most dramatic revelations is in the story of when God asked Abraham to give his son, Isaac, as a burnt offering. This was a severe test of Abraham’s faith. But Abraham knew that somehow things would be okay. The first clue was that this was something the God of the Bible never asked for; it just isn’t His character. The idol gods of the pagans asked for human sacrifice, but the Creator God never asked for this. The second clue that everything would be okay was that God had promised that Abraham’s descendants would come through Isaac, and God always keeps His promises.

It tells us in **Hebrews 11:19, “Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.”** But even if Abraham knew that somehow things were going to be okay, it was still an extremely stressful trial, and I am sure Abraham was very relieved when the angel came and stopped him and pointed out the substitute ram that was stuck in the bushes.



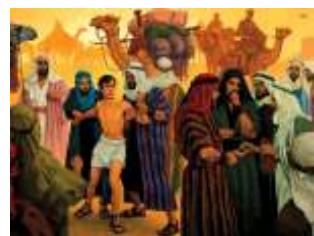
The story of Abraham and Isaac in Genesis 22 can be a bit shocking the first time you read it, but if you study it carefully, it becomes apparent that Abraham and Isaac are acting out a sort of prophetic play that speaks of Jesus and the cross. The story of Abraham and Isaac illustrates how the heart of Father God broke for Jesus when Jesus was offered as a substitute sacrifice for the sins of the world. Jesus became the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, giving His life as a ransom for ours. And, on the third day, Jesus rose from the dead.

In addition to Abraham, another member of the family of Israel that Stephen said a lot about in his message before the Sanhedrin was Joseph. **Acts 7:8** tells us, “**Then he gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision. And Abraham became the father of Isaac and circumcised him eight days after his birth. Later Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob became the father of the twelve patriarchs.**” This is the Jacob who was renamed as Israel, and his twelve sons were the twelve patriarchs, the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel. Joseph was one of these sons, and he was much loved by his father.

As Joseph was growing up, he began to have prophetic dreams. For example, **Genesis 37:9** tells us, “**Then he had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. ‘Listen,’ he said, ‘I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me.’**” This dream symbolically speaks of Joseph’s father, mother, and eleven brothers bowing before him, and it made Joseph’s brothers angry and jealous. When they had the chance, the brothers decided to get rid of Joseph.



**Acts 7:9a, “Because the patriarchs were jealous of Joseph, they sold him as a slave into Egypt.”** Sold as a slave, Joseph endured many hardships in Egypt, including false accusations and imprisonment. But he gained his freedom and high position when he interpreted a dream for the Pharaoh. The dream was a prophetic message from God predicting seven years of plenty followed by seven



years of famine. Pharaoh was so impressed by Joseph's wisdom that he placed Joseph in charge of the country so that preparations to endure during the years of famine could be made during the years of plenty.

**Acts 7:9b-10, “But God was with him and rescued him from all his troubles. He gave Joseph wisdom and enabled him to gain the goodwill of Pharaoh king of Egypt; so he made him ruler over Egypt and all his palace.”** Joseph diligently made preparations in Egypt by storing up vast amounts of grain during the seven good years. But other lands, including the land of Canaan, which we now call the land of Israel, had not prepared and there was great suffering.

We will skip over the details, but the result was that Joseph's family, his father, Israel, and his eleven brothers and all of their wives and sons and daughters eventually moved to Egypt where they bowed down before Joseph, just as was prophesied in the dream.



Joseph provided for them all and Joseph thus saved his own family and all of Egypt from the famine. That is the basic story but let's also take a look at the attitude Joseph shows toward his brothers, the same brothers who ridiculed him, abused him, and sold him into slavery. **Genesis 45:4-5, “Then Joseph said to his brothers, ‘Come close to me.’ When they had done so, he said, ‘I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you.’”**

Joseph was abused and rejected by his brothers and was sold into slavery. As a slave in Egypt, he again faced lies and betrayal and suffering. Joseph suffered at the hand of his brothers and then suffered more at the hands of the Egyptians. But at the right time, God raised Joseph up and made him ruler of the land and he became the savior of his brothers and the Egyptians alike.



#### IV. Conclusion

Before Stephen finishes his message, Stephen will accuse the Sanhedrin directly and they will be enraged and they will decide to kill Stephen. But what we see in today's passage is that Stephen was preaching Christ to them using the Old Testament, and especially the stories of Abraham and Joseph which are very rich in prophetic content about the Messiah to come, who is our Lord Jesus. Stephen is trying to help the members of the Sanhedrin to look and see how Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies and how what happened in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection was all predicted hundreds of years earlier.

What about us? What can we learn from these things? Well, I think we have seen very clearly the guiding hand of God in history and the loving providence that God gives to all. God cares about all people and He desires for all to be saved. We saw this in the words of the Lord to Abraham, that through Abraham, all peoples would be blessed. We saw this again in the story of Joseph where Joseph rescues both the foreign nation of Egypt that had imprisoned and abused him and also his brothers who sold him into slavery. Truly the grace of the Lord is wonderful.

Let's close with Psalm 100, “1 Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth. 2 Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. 3 Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. 4 Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. 5 For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.”

#### V. Prayer