Acts of the Apostles – 7

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A. The Defense of Stephen (*1-53*).
   1. High Priest allows Stephen's defense (*1*).
   2. History of Abraham (*2-8*).
   3. History of Joseph (*9-16*).
   4. History of Moses (*17-44*).
   5. History of David (*45-46*).
   6. History of Solomon (*47*).
   7. Application (*48-50*).
   8. Invitation (*51-53*).

B. The Death of Stephen (*54-60*).
   1. Reaction of wicked men to truth (*54*).
   2. Confirming vision of Jesus (*55-56*).
   3. The Jews stone him wickedly (*57-58*).
   4. He dies in faith and love (*59-60*).

The Sense and Meaning

A. The High Priest gives Stephen an opportunity to answer the accusations given by the Jews (Acts 7:1).
   1. The High Priest asks, "Are these things so?" He refers to the accusations listed.
   2. The Jews accused Stephen of (a) blasphemy against Moses, (b) blasphemy against God, (c) blasphemy against the temple, (d) blasphemy against the law, (e) prophesied destruction of the temple by Jesus, and (f) the change of Moses' customs by Jesus.
   3. Without premeditation on Stephen's part, you will now read a wonderful sermon from the Holy Spirit using Divine wisdom to instruct and condemn these Jewish hypocrites.

B. Stephen begins his defense by appealing to the history of God's dealings with Abraham (Acts 7:2-8).
   1. He begins kindly and respectfully to obtain their attention. He gets tough at the end.
   2. He begins with the God of glory – the great God of Israel – Who appeared to Abram.
   3. He begins with Abraham, in whom they trusted so much (Matthew 3:9; John 8:31-45).
   4. God called Abraham in Ur of the Chaldees; Terah came with him to Haran contrary to God's call; Terah died in Haran; and then Abram came on into Canaan with Lot.
   5. Abram did not inherit Canaan but believed and saw heaven (Romans 4:16-22; Hebrews 11:8-16), due to his great faith and spiritual perception (Gal 3:9; John 8:56).
   6. Isaac and descendants were sojourners for 400 years and in bondage to Egypt 215 yrs.

a. The sojourning of Israel may be dated from Abraham (Ex 12:40-41; Gal 3:17).
b. Or it may be dated from Isaac's weaning as the Seed (Acts 7:7:6; Genesis 15:13).
c. Between Abraham entering Canaan and Isaac being weaned is thirty years.

C. Stephen continues his defense by appealing to history of God's dealings with Joseph (Acts 7:9-16).
1. "But God was with him" relates "the Lord was with him" (Genesis 39:2-3,21,23).
2. The Bible has combinations of 66 and 70 elsewhere (Acts 7:7:14 cp Gen 46:26; Deut 10:22).
3. By including or excluding Jacob, Joseph and his sons, and the patriarch's wives all these passages reconcile beautifully. God does not round off or make statistical errors.

D. Stephen continues his defense by appealing to history of God's dealings with Moses (Acts 7:17-44).
1. The time of the promise refers to the expiration of the 400 or 430 years promise (Acts 7:7:6).
2. The people grew most rapidly from 75 souls to 600,000 men 20+ (Acts 7:7:17 cp Ex 12:37).
3. A new pharaoh, frightened by their growth, ordered infanticide of males (Ex 1:7,22).
4. Moses had all Egyptian wisdom and was mighty in words and deeds (Heb 11:24-26).
5. Forty years was popular with Moses – in Pharaoh's house, in Midian, and with Israel.
6. The Spirit shows Israel rejected Moses as rule and judge, though he was God's choice.
7. Note is made of forty years of signs and wonders, just like the apostles (Micah 7:15).
8. If you truly loved Moses, you would have remembered his prophecy of Jesus Christ.
9. Our fathers would not obey Moses, and God turned against them to destroy them.
10. The "Jesus" of 7:45 is Joshua who led the second generation of fathers into Canaan.

E. Stephen continues his defense by appealing to history of God's dealings with David (Acts 7:45-46).
1. God sent judges for 450 years to guide and protect Israel unto Samuel the prophet.
2. David was a man after God's own heart and desired to build Him a permanent temple.

F. Stephen continues his defense by appealing to history of God's dealings with Solomon (Acts 7:47).

G. Stephen makes application of his last point in Israel's history by reducing the temple (Acts 7:48-50).
1. Remember, the Jews accused Stephen of blaspheming against the temple (Acts 7:6:13-14).
2. The God of glory we worship does not dwell in a building made by human hands.
3. In fact, Isaiah declared already of God's immensity and independence (Isaiah 66:1-2).
4. Do you wonder how many of these unbelieving Jews knew the rest of Isaiah 66:2?

H. Stephen now extends an invitation to these Jews to repent and believe on Jesus Christ (Acts 7:51-53).
1. You cannot do much more damage than to call a Jew uncircumcised in any part.
2. Even Moses had taught them to circumcise their hearts (Deut 10:16), as Paul did later.
3. They resisted the Holy Ghost by His teaching apostles; no man resists the Holy Spirit.
4. As I have described the rebellion of your fathers against Moses, you are the same.
5. You are just like them: they killed the prophets telling of Christ; you killed the Christ.
6. Though God gave you the law by the disposition of angels, you will not obey it.

7. Keep in mind that Stephen's face during this sermon has the appearance of an angel.

I. Wicked men react angrily to truth when it is presented perfectly – spiritually and boldly (Acts 7:54).
   1. What a difference to the great multitude at Pentecost who were pricked in the heart.
   2. Rather than study, question, or prove Stephen's words; they resort to gnashing words.

J. Jesus gives Stephen great confirmation of His Presence and provoking of his enemies (Acts 7:55-56).
   1. Their jeers, taunts, ridicule, blasphemies, accusations, and hatred are lost on Stephen.
   2. The Holy Ghost directs his attention upward to see the glory of God and Jesus Christ.
   3. And precious Stephen, by the Holy Ghost, tells these wicked men what he is seeing.

K. Showing moderation, balance, and fairness of false religion, they angrily stone him (Acts 7:57-58).
   1. They screamed out against his vision of Christ and stopped their ears to hear no more.
   2. Great unity – one accord – is often the result of mutual hatred against saints of God.
   3. When you cannot refute a doctrine with Scripture, then you can stone the preacher.
   4. A young man named Saul kept the binding clothes of those who stoned Stephen.

L. Stephen dies as a man full of the Holy Ghost and committed to the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 7:59-60).
   1. He calls upon God and asks the Lord Jesus he saw to receive his spirit (Acts 7:55-56).
   2. Shouting loudly, he begs the Lord not to lay this sin to their charge (Matt 4:44-45).
   3. And as do all saints of the Lord Christ, He fell asleep in Jesus (I Cor 15:6; I Thes 4:13).

The Application

A. God takes care of His own and never forsakes them, as He took such tender care of Stephen.

B. We should aim to live, testify, forgive, and die as did Stephen before the wicked Jews.

The Difficulties

A. How do we reconcile God promising Abraham land for a possession that he never owned?

B. Why are the 400 years of 7:6 reported as 430 years in Genesis 15:13 and Galatians 3:17?

C. Why are the 75 souls of 7:14 reported as 66 in Genesis 46:26 and 70 in Deuteronomy 10:22?

D. How could the children of Israel multiply from 75 souls to about 2,400,000 in just 215 years?