



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Acts of the Apostles

Chapter 7

Bishop Youssef



Introduction

In This Chapter We Will Study:

- St. Stephen's defense to the charge of blasphemy against the temple and the Law
- The remarkable manner in which the first martyr for Christ died

St. Stephen's Address: The Call of Abraham (7:1-8)



- The previous chapter ended with Stephen before the Sanhedrin council facing accusations that he spoke blasphemy against the temple and the Law (cf. 6:13-14)
- Chapter seven contains Stephen's defense to these charges, and the account of his martyrdom
- As president, the high priest asks what reply Stephen has to make to the charges
- In order to make his defense, to unveil the fact that his accusers were fighting God, and to preach Christ, Stephen rapidly outlines Jewish history
- St. Stephen was perfectly respectful, and showed that he was disposed to render due honor to the institutions of the nation

St. Stephen's Address: The Call of Abraham (7:1-8)



- God's dealing with Abraham
- The call to leave Mesopotamia where he was born
- Did not tell him the place whither he was to go; wherefore when he had his first call, and first set out, he knew not whither he went; see Hebrews 11:8
- This was an emblem of the calling of the saints out of the world, from their former course of life, and from among their old companions and friends, to follow Christ whithersoever he is pleased to lead them; and who at last will bring them safe to the land afar off, the better and heavenly country
- Though Abraham was in Canaan before Terah's death, his settlement in it as the land of promise is here said to be after it, as being in no way dependent on the family movement, but a transaction purely between Jehovah and Abraham himself

St. Stephen's Address: The Call of Abraham (7:1-8)



- Both Abraham and Jacob had small parcels of land in Canaan; but they had them by purchase, not by God's gift; for, as Abraham was obliged to buy a burying-place in Canaan, Genesis 23:3-18, it is obvious he had no inheritance there
- It was a great trial to Abraham's faith, to be brought out of his country, and into another land, and which was promised to him and his; and yet, as not the whole, so not a single part of it was given him to possess
- Abraham possessed Canaan only by faith
- He looked to the fulfillment of the promise, that it would be the possession of his children when he had neither land nor seed

St. Stephen's Address: The Call of Abraham (7:1-8)



- Four hundred years, in round numbers, counting from the time the seed, Isaac, should be born to the Exodus
- It is stated in Ex 12:40 that the sojourning of the children of Israel was 430 years
- This includes the period from the call of Abraham to the Exodus
- But Isaac was born about thirty years after the call of Abraham, which leaves Stephen's period of 400 years
- The purpose of all the narratives on this subject is to trace the period before they became finally settled in the land of Canaan
- During all this period from the calling of Abraham, they were in a wandering, unfixed situation
- This constituted substantially one period, including all their oppressions, hardships, and dangers; and it was natural to have reference to this "entire" period in any account which was given

St. Stephen's Address: The Call of Abraham (7:1-8)



- God regarded their oppressive acts as deserving His indignation, and He evinced it in the plagues with which He visited upon them, and in their overthrow at the Red Sea
- “after that shall they come forth, and serve me in this place”, Here the promise to Abraham (Ge 15:16), and that to Moses (Ex 3:12), are combined; Stephen's object being merely to give a rapid summary of the leading facts
- God instituted the rite of circumcision, as a sign of that covenant which He had made with him and his posterity

St. Stephen's Address: The Call of Abraham (7:1-8)



- As a proof that he was born under this covenant, was a true son of Abraham and inheritor of the promises, he circumcised him the eighth day; and this rite being observed in the family of Isaac, Jacob and his twelve sons were born under the covenant; and thus their descendants, the twelve tribes, being born under the same covenant, and practicing the same rite, were, by the ordinance of Gods legal inheritors of the promised land, and all the secular and spiritual advantages connected with it.

The Patriarchs in Egypt (7:9-16)



- The brethren of Joseph, hearing of his dreams, and understanding them to portend his future advancement, filled with envy, sold Joseph into the land of Egypt, hoping by this means to prevent his future grandeur; but God, from whom the portents came, was with him, and made their envy the direct means of accomplishing the great design
- As they rejected Joseph, their descendants rejected Jesus
- God was with him, with the one rejected, and raised him to royal honors in the house of Pharaoh

The Patriarchs in Egypt (7:9-16)



- This famine, is said to be in all lands, Genesis 41:54 though only Egypt and Canaan are mentioned here
- Jacob and his family could not get sufficient provision for them in the land of Canaan, where they then were, but were obliged to go to Egypt for it
- Stephen here "refers" only to the history, without entering into details. By this general reference he sufficiently showed that he believed what Moses had spoken, and did not intend to show him disrespect

The Patriarchs in Egypt (7:9-16)



- When the brethren of Joseph went a second time down to Egypt for corn, Joseph made himself known unto them, Genesis 45:1
- It was known before that Joseph was an Hebrew, see Genesis 39:17 yet it was not known of what family he was, who was his father, or his brethren, but now it was known, Genesis 45:16
- The rejected Joseph becomes the prince and savior of all Israel
- The Septuagint Version quoted almost invariably by Christ and the apostles, as well as by Stephen here, after giving the sixty-six, adds: And the sons of Joseph born in Egypt were nine souls
- The nine, added to the sixty-six, make the seventy-five that Stephen gives

The Patriarchs in Egypt (7:9-16)



- The time which the Israelites remained in Egypt was 215 years, so that all the sons of Jacob were deceased before the Jews went out to go to the land of Canaan
- Into Sychem - This was a town or village near to Samaria
- It was called Sichar "Shechem," and "Sychem."
- It is now called "Naplous" or "Napolose," and is ten miles from Shiloh, and about forty from Jerusalem, toward the north

God Delivers Israel by Moses (7:17-36)



- The time of the four hundred years; when God promised to deliver the seed of Abraham out of their affliction and servitude, and bring them into the land of Canaan to inherit it
- Though various methods were taken to destroy them, and lessen their numbers, yet in little more than two hundred years, their number was increased and they multiplied more towards the time when the promise of deliverance drew to be accomplished, and even when they were the most afflicted, Exodus 1:12
- The children Israel in Egypt become slaves

God Delivers Israel by Moses (7:17-36)



- He took crafty, and yet cruel methods, to diminish the children of Israel, and to humble them; ordering the Hebrew midwives to kill all the males that were born; and charging all his people to drown such male children that should escape the hands of the midwives
- Moses was born through God's merciful goodness and favor, to be of a lovely and fair countenance
- He was wonderfully preserved in his infancy; for God will take special care of those of whom he designs to make special use

God Delivers Israel by Moses (7:17-36)



- When he was exposed on the banks of the Nile, Pharaoh's daughter took him up, adopted him, and treated him as her own son
- The Egyptians were, at that time, the most intelligent and best instructed people in the universe
- He was reared as the son of Pharaoh's daughter and would be educated in all the accomplishments of his time
- We know from the researches of the Egyptologists that at the period of Moses there were great universities for the education of all who were expected to engage in public employments

God Delivers Israel by Moses (7:17-36)



- This was a general tradition among the Jews: "Moses was forty years in Pharaoh's court, forty years in Midian, and forty years he served Israel."
- Probably he wanted to visit them on the ground of trying to deliver them from their oppressive bondage
- This desire seems to have been early infused into his mind by the Spirit of God; and the effect of this desire to deliver his oppressed countrymen was his refusing to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter - Hebrews 11:24
- Going farther in the heat of his indignation than he probably intended

God Delivers Israel by Moses (7:17-36)



- He probably imagined that, as he felt from the Divine influence he was appointed to be their deliverer, they would have his Divine appointment signified to them in a similar way; and the act of justice which he now did in behalf of his oppressed countryman would be sufficient to show them that he was now ready to enter upon his office, if they were willing to concur
- He appeared in a sudden and unexpected manner to them
- Here, not an Israelite and an Egyptian, but two parties in Israel itself, are in collision with each other; Moses, grieved at the spectacle, interposes as a mediator; but his interference, as unauthorized, is resented by the party in the wrong, whom Stephen identifies with the mass of the nation (Acts 7:35), just as Messiah's own interposition had been spurned

God Delivers Israel by Moses (7:17-36)



- The Jew with whom he was contending
- Filled with rage and passion, he rejected all interference, and all attempts at peace
- Questioned Moses saying: What right have you to interfere in this matter?
- Moses had thought the deed unseen, but it now appeared he was mistaken
- He now thought that the knowledge of it might reach Pharaoh, and that his life might thus be endangered
- Observe the point of Stephen, that Israel rejected Moses as a ruler and judge over them as they had rejected Joseph and Jesus
- Yet God chose both Joseph and Moses to be their saviors and rulers

God Delivers Israel by Moses (7:17-36)



- The Lord appears to Moses in a burning bush at Mount Sinai
- Men deceive themselves, if they think God cannot do what he sees to be good any where; he can bring his people into a wilderness, and there speak comfortably to them
- Saying, I am the God of thy fathers,.... Who made a covenant with them, promised the land of Canaan to them, and to their posterity, and to bring the children of Israel out of their servitude and bondage, and into the possession of the promised land
- The God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob; words which our Lord makes use of to prove the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, since God is not the God of the dead, but of the living

God Delivers Israel by Moses (7:17-36)



- Then said the Lord to him,.... To Moses, who through curiosity had made too near an approach: put off thy shoes from thy feet; in token of humility, obedience, and reverence
- “for the place where thou standest is holy ground; ‘ on account of the divine presence in it
- The repetition of the phrase denotes the certainty of it, the exquisite and exact knowledge the Lord took of the affliction of his people, and how much his heart was affected with it
- “will send thee ... –” This is a mere summary of what is expressed at much greater length in Exodus 3:7-10

God Delivers Israel by Moses (7:17-36)



- With great force Stephen makes his application
- Whom they refused - That is, when he first presented himself to them
- Stephen introduces and dwells upon this refusal in order, perhaps, to remind them that this had been the character of their nation, and to prepare the way for the charge which he intended to bring against those whom he addressed, as being stiff-necked and rebellious

God Delivers Israel by Moses (7:17-36)



- Thus the very person whom they had rejected, and, in effect, delivered up into the hands of Pharaoh that he might be slain, was the person alone by whom they were redeemed from their Egyptian bondage
- And does not St. Stephen plainly say by this, that the very person, Jesus Christ, whom they had rejected and delivered up into the hands of Pilate to be crucified, was the person alone by whom they could be delivered out of their spiritual bondage, and made partakers of the inheritance among the saints in light

Israel Rebels Against God (7:37-43)



- Moses is the person:
 - a. Who said God would raise up another prophet like him
 - b. Who spoke to the Angel on Mount Sinai
 - c. Who received living oracles to give to Israel
 - d. Whom the fathers would not obey but rejected
- This rejected Moses who was chosen by God to be a prince and a savior hath said
- Stephen introduced this to remind them of the promise of a Messiah; to show his faith in that promise; and "particularly" to remind them of their obligation to hear and obey him

Israel Rebels Against God (7:37-43)



- Israel is the nation:
 - a. Who turned back into Egypt in their hearts
 - b. Who pressured Aaron to make a golden calf
- Became idolaters, and preferred their Egyptian bondage and their idolatry to the promised land and the pure worship of God

Israel Rebels Against God (7:37-43)



- God left them to themselves, and then they deified and worshipped the sun, moon, planets, and principal stars
- Stephen introduces this to remind them how prone the nation had been to reject God, and to walk in the ways of sin
- It is certain that the Israelites did offer various sacrifices to God, while in the wilderness; and it is as certain that they scarcely ever did it with an upright heart
- Israel turned to the abominable worship of Moloch and other false gods, and hence shall be carried into Captivity. Moloch, a god of the Amorites, worshiped by human sacrifices

Israel Rebels Against God (7:37-43)



- They were idolatrous, either in heart or act, in almost all their religious services; these were therefore so very imperfect that they were counted for nothing in the sight of God; for this seems to be strongly implied in the question here asked, Have ye offered to Me (exclusively and with an upright heart) slain beasts and sacrifices by the space of forty years? On the contrary, these forty years were little else than a tissue of rebellion and idolatry
- Punishment brought on all Israel for its sins, predicted by Amos (Amos 5:25-27)
- Observe still his point of showing their national sinfulness

God's True Tabernacle (7:44:50)



- This tabernacle, built by God's command, according to his pattern (Ex 25:9,40), they had rejected for the tabernacle of Moloch (Acts 7:43)
- The tabernacle built at Sinai, a witness of the Covenant (Num 18:2), and of the good things to come (Heb 8:5)
- Was brought into the promised land by Joshua
- They also had the temple
- Asked for by David, who found favor before God
- Built by his son Solomon
- David, who sought to build a permanent temple (2 Sam 7:2; 1 Chron 22:7)
- He was restrained from building the temple, and it was erected by Solomon (2 Chron 6:7,8)

God's True Tabernacle (7:44:50)



- Yet the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands
- For heaven is His throne and earth is His footstool
- His hand has made all these things - cf. Isa 66:1-2
- The argument is that the tabernacle was laid aside for the temple by God's command; that God does not confine himself in any house made with hands, and hence the temple also might be laid aside
- God's real temple was greater than the building they revered so superstitiously

Israel Resists the Holy Spirit (7:51-53)



- Stephen charges the council of resisting the Holy Spirit, just as their fathers did
- Stephen now makes his direct application
- They are aliens in heart from God
- The uncircumcised were aliens from Israel
- Stephen told them that spiritually they were heathen
- They, like their fathers
- Their fathers persecuted and killed the prophets, so they have killed the Just One
- They received the law, but did not keep it
- This closing word is designed to shut up those idolizers of the law under the guilt of high disobedience to it, aggravated by the august manner in which they had received it

Stephen the Martyr (7:54-60)



- The whole course of the speech had been such as to excite their anger, and now they could restrain themselves no longer
- Cut to the heart, they gnashed at Stephen with their teeth
- Their rage is shown by their gnashing teeth
- Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven
- He saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God
- The Lord who had promised his presence was with him
- His faith was so strengthened that, by faith, he saw the Savior in Heaven, through the opened heavens

Stephen the Martyr (7:54-60)



- He tells the council what he saw
- Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, speaking now not of himself at all (Acts 7:55), but entirely by the Spirit, is led to repeat the very words in which Jesus Himself, before this same council, had foretold His glorification (Mt 26:64), assuring them that that exaltation of the Son of Man which they should hereafter witness to their dismay, was already begun and actual
- In response, the council:
- Cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears
- Ran at him with one accord, and cast him out of the city

Stephen the Martyr (7:54-60)



- They cried, closed their ears to what they called blasphemy, then, in a tumult, without a vote on his guilt or innocence, rushed upon him to slay him, though yet uncondemned legally
- This was a fearful proof against them; for if Jesus was at the right hand of God, then they had murdered an innocent person; and they must infer that God's justice must speedily avenge his death

Stephen the Martyr (7:54-60)



- They did not however wait for any sentence to be pronounced upon him
- Though committing murder, they were scrupulous to comply with their custom of execution outside of the city
- The witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of Saul
- They stoned Stephen as he was calling on God
- Repeated to show that in the storm of stones he committed himself to Jesus
- In his sufferings, like his Master, he prayed for his enemies
- Saul, no doubt, noted this, and it had its effect

Stephen the Martyr (7:54-60)



- Having said this, he fell asleep (i.e., died)
- The death of Stephen was a murder, instead of an execution, because
 - (1) no vote of the Sanhedrin was taken, and
 - (2) the consent of the Roman governor, requisite to capital punishment, was not obtained



Conclusion

- Who is addressing the Jews in this chapter?
 - a. Our Lord Jesus Christ
 - b. St. Peter
 - c. St. Stephen

- Where did God appear to our father Abraham?
 - a. Egypt
 - b. Mesopotamia
 - c. New Jersey

- What did God ask Abraham to do?
 - a. Get married
 - b. Get out of his country and relatives and come to a place the Lord will show him
 - c. Help his wife with her errands.



Conclusion

- In v.6 Abraham's descendants would dwell in a foreign land and they will bring them into bondage. The foreign land is-----
 - a. Babylon
 - b. Egypt
 - c. Mexico

- God gave Abraham -----
 - a. The covenant of circumcision
 - b. The ten commandments
 - c. The Edenic covenant



Conclusion

- God's people ended up to be in Egypt when-----
 - a. Abraham commanded them to do so.
 - b. Pharos opened the door of immigration.
 - c. Joseph was sold into Egypt.

- In v. 9 & 10 displays,
 - a. God's deliverance to those who are faithful to Him.
 - b. Troubles and hardships inevitable, but God lefts us above them
 - c. Both a & b



Conclusion

- The scriptures described Moses as,
 - a. Well pleasing to God
 - b. Mighty in words and deeds
 - c. Both a & b

- In reference to ----- our Coptic Orthodox church practice removing shoes before presenting ourselves to receive communion
 - a. V. 30
 - b. V. 33
 - c. V. 32



Conclusion

- In v. 37, the prophet who is talking about is:
 - a. Isaiah
 - b. Daniel
 - c. Our Lord Jesus Christ

- God's people rejected Him and they were not obedient. God disciplined them.
 - a. By carrying them away to Babylon
 - b. Gave them up to worship the host of heaven
 - c. Both a & b



Conclusion

- St. Stephen narrated the history of the OT church. Which order is correct:
 - a. Abraham, Moses, David, Jacob, Isaac, Joseph, then Solomon
 - b. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Joseph, David, then Solomon
 - c. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, then Solomon

- “The Most high does not dwell in temples made with hands”
That means:
 - a. God is not present in a church building
 - b. God’s presence is not limited to a specific place but dwells in every soul that receives Him
 - c. It's enough to pray at home, no need for a church, God is not there any way



Conclusion

- Israel resisted the Holy Spirit by:
 - a. Not accepting God's plan for them
 - b. Not receiving His correction through the prophet
 - c. The opposition of the contemporary leaders to the Lord and His disciples
 - d. a, b, &c

- Unlike St. Peter, listeners in Acts 2:37, those who are listening to St. Stephen;
 - a. Cut to heart and repented
 - b. Cut to heart and filled with indignation
 - c. Cut to heart and died



Conclusion

- In imitation of His Savior in Luke 23:34, St .Stephen:
 - a. Offers his soul to God and prays for the forgiveness of His enemies
 - b. Kept silent, not answering their accusation
 - c. None of the above