

Acts Chapter 7 Con't

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[0 : 00] We are engaging Acts chapter 7, and it is a very strategic chapter because it has to do with the, I guess we would say the first martyr of the Christian faith having to do with Stephen.

And how remarkably strategic this chapter is, it's very, very significant. And if you will look at your page, we will see that Stephen has just entered his defense.

He is standing before a large group of authoritative men who are the leaders, shakers, and movers in the Jewish community.

These are all highly respected, well-connected individuals. They comprise the Sanhedrin, which is sometimes translated in different versions of the Bible as the council.

This is a group of older men, well-respected by the community, and they provide the spiritual, quote-unquote, leadership for the nation of Israel.

[1 : 09] However, as we saw during the earlier ministry of Christ, the Sanhedrin presided over primarily, well, the president of the Sanhedrin was the high priest.

And his cohorts consisting mainly of the Sadducees. This was the real power block. These were the power brokers in Israel when it came to Jewish custom, culture, religion, etc.

And Stephen has been called before them, and he's been charged with sedition, with heresy, with just about everything they could charge him with.

And the whole thing is trumped-up charges. They went out and actually paid people to be false witnesses against Stephen and to give official testimony against Stephen with the intent that the verdict then would be axiomatic.

He's guilty, and he's guilty of blasphemy, and the Mosaic Law requires the penalty of stoning to death for blasphemy. So the whole thing was nothing but a kangaroo court from the beginning to the end.

[2 : 23] There was no way that this was going to be a fair trial. So Stephen is asked to give an account. Earlier we saw that the high priest directed his remarks at Stephen and said, You've heard what you've been charged with.

Are these things so? Is this true, what you've been charged with? And Stephen begins giving his defense. His defense consists of a recapping of the whole history of Israel and Israel's disobedience and failure historically.

This is very important because what he is doing is laying a case. And he is saying, You people, you and the Sanhedrin, are nothing more than a carbon copy of the fathers of the history of Israel from the time Abraham called them, which has been nothing but flat-out disobedience and rejection of God and His standards.

That's the history of Israel. It's not a pretty one. It's not a pretty one. And Stephen's conclusion is going to be, And you, in this Sanhedrin, you are perpetuating that negative history by what you are doing right now.

So this is the coup de grace that he's going to deliver when it comes to the end. And he will pay for it with his life. So let's begin continuing Stephen's explanation.

[3 : 58] We read at the top of the page that Abraham begat Isaac, circumcised him the eighth day. Isaac begat Jacob. And I'm just reading the bold print now, the King James Version.

And you can fill in with what's in between if you want. Begat Jacob. And Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs. That is the fathers. And the fathers moved with envy.

These are Joseph's brothers who were children of Leah and Rachel and Bilhah and Zilpah, the two concubines.

So they've got these twelve sons who are the patriarchs. They were moved with envy. And they sold Joseph into Egypt. But God was with him and delivered him out of all his afflictions.

That is Joseph. And God gave Joseph favor and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. Now I can just see these pompous old fools sitting there as Stephen is giving his defense. [5 : 06] And Stephen is not telling them anything they don't know. They already know the history of Israel. They know it very well. And they're probably wondering, okay, how long is this guy going to go on with this?

But we are obligated to let him have his say. He's got to make his pitch, his defense. We know already what the verdict's going to be no matter what he says. But we'll abide this. And I can just see them sitting back with their arms folded and a smirk on their face, knowing what the end of this is going to be, and just patiently waiting for Stephen to have his say. Look at the scene, if you will. And he talks about Joseph having been favored with wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. And he, that is Pharaoh, made Joseph governor over Egypt and all his house. And now there came a dearth over all the land of Egypt and Canaan.

[6 : 07] This great affliction. And what this was, of course, was a great drought. And this part of the world, as well as Israel and all of the Middle East, were accustomed to periodic droughts. We know a little bit about droughts here, don't we?

No part of the globe is exempt from droughts. And when you have a drought, no rainfall, you've got no crops. And everything gets desperate. Food prices climb. And food gets scarce because nobody's able to bring in a crop. And our fathers found no sustenance. But when Jacob heard that there was corn, or grain, really, in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first.

And the our fathers here, he is referring to, again, same people. These are the twelve sons of Jacob. Well, not all twelve, because Joseph was one of them. But they sent them as emissaries down to Egypt to see what they could bring back.

And he sent our fathers first. And at the second time, Joseph was made known to his brethren. And this is all recounted, of course, in the book of Genesis.

[7 : 13] And Joseph's brethren, or kindred, was made known unto Pharaoh. And then sent Joseph and called his father Jacob to him. Now, he's skipping a lot of the story.

You've been through the Genesis account. You know how this went with Joseph and his brothers and the deception and everything. But eventually, he called his father Jacob to him. And all his kindred, threescore and fifteen souls, that's seventy-five people, went down into the land of Egypt. Jacob went down into Egypt and died.

He and our fathers. And the fathers, keep in mind, constantly refers to the original twelve sons of the tribe of Israel. And what he is doing now, this history that he is recounting, is going back several hundred years.

Approximately fifteen hundred years. As Stephen is giving this account, talking about Joseph, he's talking about Joseph fifteen hundred years earlier.

[8 : 22] And, verse sixteen, And they were carried over into Shechem, and that's in Israel, that is modern-day Nablus, by the way. And they were laid there in the sepulcher that Abraham bought for a sum of money of the sons of Amor, the father of Sychem.

But when the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt, till another king arose, another pharaoh arose, which knew not Joseph. Now, of course, the pharaoh, who knew Joseph, had benefited enormously from Joseph's wisdom and Joseph's skill, and that pharaoh was deeply indebted to Joseph because Joseph was used to be the salvation of the whole nation of Egypt.

Remember, through his dreams of the seven years of plenty, the seven years of famine, and store up the grain, etc. So, this pharaoh knew that this young man, Joseph, was really well-connected with God, and he had tremendous respect for him, and he was very grateful for him.

But as the years rolled on, Joseph died, Joseph's children died, pharaoh died, another pharaoh died, and pharaohs kept raising up, and another pharaoh died.

[9 : 49] It wasn't long until you were a few pharaohs removed from Joseph, and then the party line became, Joseph, who's he? I don't know anybody like this. They didn't keep the kind of accurate history that they might have kept.

So, this pharaoh had no respect, no admiration, no memory, no knowledge, really, of Joseph and how he was used of God to preserve the whole nation of Egypt.

So, these people, that in the meanwhile had multiplied, numbering well over a million, maybe as many as two million people, were looked upon as pawns by the pharaoh, and they enslaved them. And they literally used them to constitute their labor force. And when you can get cheap labor, as cheap as nothing, that really helps stimulate your economy, and that's exactly what was happening. So, we read that, when the time of the promise drew nigh, verse 18, till another king arose, which knew not Joseph, the same dealt subtly with our kindred.

[10:57] And you can see how the other translations render this, a cunning advantage of our race, and so on. And evil entreated our fathers, so that they cast out their young children, to the end they might not live.

And we're not going to go back to Genesis and recount that, but you are familiar, how that the male Jewish children, were forced to be sacrificed, to the gods of Egypt.

In this particular case, it was the crocodile gods. And they literally were commanded to throw these newborn baby boys into the river.

And that's exactly what they were forced to do under law. The girls, they were preserving. The girls were allowed to live. It's kind of the opposite of what's going on in China right now.

The girls were allowed to live, because when girls grew to maturity, they could be of use to the Egyptians, and would not constitute any kind of a threat of insurrection, or difficulty in keeping them in line.

[12:00] But the boys, when they grew into men, they posed a threat. So we eliminate the boys, kill them. And that's exactly what was going on. And then, well, we're in a new page, aren't we?

Yeah. You've all got those, I take it? You've all got the next page? You don't? Oh, I'm sorry. Well, here, let's start these around. I thought I gave these out.

I guess I didn't. This is 478, 479. Okay, this is all that. Yeah.

478, 479. We need 73. We need 74. We need 74. Oh, 74, 74, 75.

Not that. Can I keep these? Well, I don't know if I've skipped a page or what. Yeah, those are verse 19.

[13:13] Verse 31. Well, okay, apparently I've messed this up somewhere.

Well, I'll just, we'll just have to use our Bible. God forbid. Okay, let's just go to our text in the Scripture then. Those of you who have Bibles with you, and if you don't, share it with the guy next to you.

We're in verse 20, chapter 7. Verse 20 of Acts, Acts chapter 7. And it was at this time that Moses was born, and he was lovely in the sight of God, and he was nurtured three months in his father's home.

And of course, this was all in secret, because he was already supposed to have been done away with, and the idea was, the midwives were told that when a Hebrew woman is on the birth stool, when she gives birth to the baby, if it's a girl, it's okay, you can care for it, and she will grow to maturity.

But if it's a boy, they were under instructions to destroy it, or dispose of it. This is nothing more than infanticide, and there's nothing else that you can call it.

[14:42] And that's exactly what was taking place. But, there was this, there was this woman named Jochebed. And, when Moses was born to Jochebed, somehow or another, they were able to avoid the standard procedure, and perhaps this was a birth delivery at home, and that the midwives had nothing to do with it, it might have been something on the sly.

You know, the kind of garments that women wore back in those days could easily disguise a pregnancy well into the later months, and that might be what took place here.

But at any rate, we read that Moses was born, and after he had been exposed, Pharaoh's daughter took him away, and nurtured him as her own.

And you're just going to have to fill in some of this history here, what happened to Moses and the bulrushes and Pharaoh's daughter, because we haven't time to go into that. But it's all back in Genesis.

And we read in verse 22, that Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians, and he was a man of power in words and deeds.

[15:58] But when he was approaching the age of 40, it entered his mind to visit his brethren, the sons of Israel. We don't know exactly how much Moses knew, but he obviously knew something about his original roots.

He knew that these who were actually enslaved were his kin. That he knew. So how much altogether he understood, we don't know, but he knew this much.

And we are told that when he saw one of them, that is one of his own brethren, being treated unjustly, he defended him and took vengeance for the oppressed by striking down the Egyptian. And the scene that is created in Genesis is that this Hebrew man was being abused, perhaps beaten or whipped by one of his Egyptian taskmasters.

And Moses stood there and watched what was going on, and finally, something in Moses snapped. And he was not going to allow that to go on.

[17:10] And he came at the Egyptian and killed him. It was a case of, I guess today we would call it a justifiable manslaughter.

He was protecting another life, but at any rate, under the law that existed at that time, he was charged with murder. And we read that in verse 25, he supposed that his brethren understood that God was granting them deliverance through him, but they did not understand.

And on the following day, he appeared to them as they were fighting together, and he tried to reconcile them in peace, saying, Men, you are brethren. Why do you injure one another?

And this is another fight that's taking place between two of his brethren. But the one who was injuring his neighbor pushed him, that is, Moses, away and said, Who made you a ruler and judge over us?

You do not mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday, do you? And this is an interesting twist, because Moses is being turned on by his own people now. And these are the same people that he waded into and dispatched the Egyptian to protect his brethren, and now they are using that against him.

[18:26] How's that for a turnaround? And at that remark, Moses fled. He lit out and became an alien in the land of Midian, where he became the father of two sons.

Now this is a very rapid moving history. Midian is southern Saudi Arabia. That's the land of Midian, and you can plot it on your maps, Bibles have the maps in it.

And after 40 years had passed, now this is the second 40 years, Moses' life is divided into three 40s. He spent his first 40 years in Egypt, in the courts of Pharaoh, receiving a premier Egyptian education, all of the perks and benefits, etc.

Then, the second 40 years, he is going to spend in the land of Midian, in the backside of the desert. He will be there for 40 years, and his father-in-law will be Jethro, and he will take a wife there, and eventually, after that 40 years, God will reveal himself to him through the burning bush, and say, you're going back to Egypt, and you're going to lead the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt. That began his third section of 40 years. So, his life is divided into 40, 40, and 40. And these last 40 years, he will spend leading the children of Israel out until he is buried on Mount Nebo, and the Lord refuses to allow him to come into the promised land.

[19:49] Roger? Back in chapter 25, it says, suppose his brethren would have understood how God by his hand would deliver him. Would that have been a prophecy, or was Moses already had something revealed in him?

Apparently so. Apparently so. And I'm just guessing now. I don't want to speculate too much, but it's entirely possible that the Pharaoh's daughter who raised Moses and took him as her own son, that she briefed him on his origin and who he really was.

He had to have known in order to be able to identify these as his brethren. And his mother no doubt filled him in on these things, or the woman who was serving as his mother filled him in on this, but exactly how much he knew, we don't know.

Did the brethren know who he was, that he was an Israelite too? The two that were quarreling? It would seem that they did because otherwise why would he have intervened?

And why would he have taken the side of the Hebrews as against one of the Egyptians? It appears that they knew who he was.

[21:14] So we read in verse 30, after 40 years had passed, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in the flame of the burning thorn bush.

And when Moses saw it, he began to marvel at the sight. And as he approached to look more closely, there came the voice of the Lord. Now remember, Stephen is just relating this, and all these guys are sitting around in this semi circle, sitting there, some of them are drumming their fingers on the table, and some of them are sitting there with their arms folded across their chest, looking at

him, glancing at each other, listening to him go on, and he's recounting the whole history of Israel. So keep that scene in mind. And verse 32, I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.

These are forever established as the fathers for Israel. when Christ addresses the scribes and Pharisees in the Gospels, he's going to say, which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? And he's not talking about your fathers of the preceding generation. He's talking about your fathers from several generations back. And when we use that term and we say our fathers, we automatically think of the man who begot us.

[22 : 44] But in the biblical culture and custom, when they use the fathers, they're talking about a whole spate of ancestors going all the way back. That's the fathers, plural. And that's exactly what he's talking about here.

The God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and Moses shook with fear and would not venture to look. But the Lord said to him, take off the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.

I have certainly seen the oppression of my people in Egypt, and have heard their groans, and have come down to deliver them. Come now, and I will send you, Moses, to Egypt.

This Moses whom they disowned, saying, who made you a ruler and a judge, is the one whom God sent to be both a ruler and a deliverer, with the help of the angel who appeared to him in the thorn bush.

And I just want to inject something here, fellas, because this surfaces so many times in the Bible. God doesn't need anybody to do his bidding, things, but he was pleased to involve human instrumentality and sometimes angelic instrumentality to do his bidding, not out of a sense of need, but just out of a sense of desire.

[24 : 11] God very graciously condescends to involve humans in his plan. Doesn't have to, but he chooses to. And that's an important principle to keep in mind. It goes all the way back to, you know, God didn't need Noah and his sons to build that ark. He could have created any kind of situation he wanted to, to rescue those people and preserve them alive.

But he used people and never lose sight of that because that involves you. God is pleased to use people to meet the needs of people. He's always operated that way, not out of necessity, but out of choice. And we find that principle applied time and time again. And sometimes he uses angels to do the same thing. God doesn't need any of these instruments. He could do whatever he wants to do just directly. God could have, had he chosen to do so, he could have just given us a Bible intact, plop, falls out of heaven. Here it is. Make copies of it. He could have even provided the copies. But what did he do? He used human instrumentality to record scripture. And one thing this does is it gives the Bible a human dimension. So we've got a divine authority, but a human dimension. And for the subject of the Bible and how it came to be, the only way we can think of it is that the Bible has one author, just one. The author is the Holy Spirit. The human writers are many, over 40. And that's important to keep in mind because people say things like, well, the Bible was just written by a bunch of men, wasn't it? Well, yes, it was. It was written by a bunch of men, but they didn't author the Bible. The author is the Spirit of God. And the author used human personality, human vocabulary, human stylistic differences to record a remarkable book that comes with divine authority, but it has a human dimension. The Bible is both divine and human.

So God is pleased to use human instrumentality. And that means he is willing to use all of us. Someone has said, I wish God would use me. And my answer to that is, all you have to do is make yourself usable and God will use you. And God is probably using all of you right now, but in ways that are not all that obvious to you. Most service that is rendered for God is rendered by people who are not even aware they are doing it. But they are because of their heart attitude, because of their agenda, because of their motivation. They think they are a nobody just going about the day-to-day business of living. And they have no idea how profoundly they may be used of God in little ways that sometimes can result in a big item. So keep that in mind, especially if you think God can't use you or doesn't want to use you, because that certainly is not true. So in verse 34, I have seen the oppression of my people in Egypt and have heard their groans, and I have come down to deliver them. Come now, and I will send you to Egypt. That's kind of funny. I like that. And I have come down to deliver them.

Come now, and I will send you to Egypt. Wait a minute. I thought you said you were going to deliver. What do you need me for? And God is saying, I'm going to deliver them. I'm going to use you to do it.

[28 : 12] It's kind of like somebody wrote a book. Somebody wrote a book by the title, Here Am I, Lord. Send Aaron. That's what Moses was saying, you know. Here Am I. Send somebody else.

That's exactly, Moses is saying, I can't do this. I can't be that. I can't. I'm all full of these weaknesses and deficiencies. I can't do anything. And the Lord is saying, listen, all you need to know is, I am sending you. And I do not send anyone anywhere to do anything without making provision for them. All you need to do is move out on command, and we'll take care of the rest. So I have sent, I have come down to deliver them. Come now, I will send you to Egypt.

And Moses, whom they disowned, saying, who made you a ruler is the one whom God sent to be both a ruler and a deliverer with the help of the angel who appeared to him in the thorn bush. This man, Moses, led them out, performing wonders and signs in the land of Egypt and in the Red Sea and in the wilderness for 40 years. This is the Moses who said to the sons of Israel, God shall raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren. And who's he talking about? He's talking about the Messiah.

He's talking about the Lord Jesus, who will not appear on the scene for another 1,500 years from the time Moses is saying this. He is talking about that prophet that should come, and that will be none other than our Lord Jesus. And as Stephen, you know, I can just see these guys sitting there listening to all this, and one of them might lean over to a fellow next to him and say, he's stalling for time. Because he's giving this long history, you know. He knows what's coming.

And you know, the truth of the matter is, that may also have been in the mind of Stephen. But what Stephen is saying to himself is, under the inspiration of God, I'm going to make my case, and I'm going to get my licks in. I'm going to deliver this defense, and I'm going to see to it that they are saddled with an indictment of guilt for what they are doing, because it is the same thing that their ancestors have been doing for years. I'm going to make the case and tie it all up in a neat little package. And he knows, Stephen knows how this thing is going to end. He knows what the verdict is going to be. It's a foregone conclusion. But he's going to get his licks in while he can. More power to him. Verse 38, this is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness, together with the angel who was speaking to him on Mount Sinai, and who was with our fathers.

[31 : 20] And he received living oracles to pass on to you. And our fathers were unwilling to be obedient to him, but repudiated him, and in their hearts turned back to Egypt. Remember their rebellion against Moses?

Well, who made you a ruler and a judge over us? What gives you the right to tell us what to do? Who made you king anyway? We're not going to follow you. Let's get up a group and go back to Egypt. At least we weren't starving there. We had leeks and onions and garlic, and life was pretty good there, compared to this, being out here in the desert.

And they said to Aaron, this is Moses' brother. While Moses is in the mount, receiving the tablets of the law, they said to Aaron, make for us gods who will go before us. For this Moses, who led us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what happened to him. He led us out now, and he left us here. And where was Moses when they said this? He was in the mount. He was at the top of Mount Sinai, receiving the tables of the law from the Lord. And he was up there for a long time. And the people down there are saying, we don't know what happened to him. We don't know if he's dead or what. You know what we ought to do? We ought to turn around and go back to Egypt. Maybe they will receive us back again. Making all kinds of crazy plans.

[32 : 51] And they say to Aaron, make for us gods who will go before us. What god are they going to make? They're going to make a golden calf.

Why? Why make a calf? Because that was one of the gods of Egypt. The Egyptian god, Apis, A-P-I-S, was the bull god.

There are pictures in bas-reliefs in Egypt today, in the museums, with the figure of this Egyptian god, Apis, the bull god.

And they're making a golden calf, was throwing a sop to the Egyptians, saying to the Egyptians, oh, we worship the same god you do.

It was nothing more than plain idolatry. It was a compromise gesture to try and ingratiate themselves to the Egyptians.

[34 : 05] Incredible. This is the fickleness of the human heart. At that time, they made a calf, verse 41, and brought a sacrifice to the idol, and were rejoicing in the works of their hands.

But God turned away and delivered them up to serve the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the prophets. It was not to me that you offered victims and sacrifices 40 years in the wilderness, was it, O house of Israel.

You also took along the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of the god Romphah, the images which you have made to worship them. I also will remove you beyond Babylon.

Now our fathers had the tabernacle of testimony in the wilderness, just as he who spoke to Moses directed him to make it, according to the pattern which he had seen. And having received it in their turn, our fathers brought it in with Joshua upon dispossessing the nations whom God drove out before our fathers until the time of David.

You see, he's just rapidly recounting the whole history of Israel from the time they came out of Egypt right up to the time that David was the king. A thousand years or so. And we read that in verse 45, having received it in their turn, our fathers brought it in with Joshua upon dispossessing the nations whom God drove out before our fathers until the time of David.

[35 : 35] And David, the king, now when he's talking about David, he's moving up in history because David was on the scene just a thousand years earlier.

See, Moses was 500 years before David, now this is a thousand years. And David found favor in God's sight and asked that he, David, might find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob.

That is, David wanted to build a house of the Lord, the temple. But it was Solomon who built a house for him. However, the Most High does not dwell in houses made in human hands, as the prophet says.

Heaven is my throne, and earth is the footstool of my feet. What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord? Or what place is therefore my repose?

Was it not my hand which made all these things? But you men, are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, are always resisting the Holy Spirit.

[36 : 36] You are doing just as your fathers did. And we'll conclude this for now, and we'll finish chapter 7 and get into 8 and the stoning that actually took place in our next session.

Thank you.