

## Acts 7:1-8

### Grasping your Spiritual History

**REVIEW:** Last week we were introduced to Stephen, one of the first 7 to be “deacons” in the early church.

- Their duty & service had to do with caring for the widows... **God cares about widows!** “**Ja 1:27**” ...
- Their qualifications (**6:3b**) good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit & wisdom...
- Stephen definitely qualified! As we soon find him doing much more than convalescent ministry...
  - **6:8-10**... (Where we were last week) ...
- Stephen caused such a stir that he was soon brought before **the highest council in Israel**, the **Sanhedrin**. 70 rulers & the High Priest ...
- Stephen was interrogated before these powerful and influential men...with face like an angel (**6:15**)
- But because Stephen was full of the Holy Spirit he wasn't nervous. God was going to speak through him in a very powerful way... (God confidence) ...
- The accusations? – **V:11, 13-14**...
- Stephen's response turned out to be not a mere “defense” but a damning condemnation of the Jewish ruling counsel using their own history of wicked behavior... (via the Holy Spirit)
- The Holy Spirit was basically proclaiming to the Jewish leaders through Stephen, “*We Jews have a long history of rejecting the chosen ones God sends to us.*” ... “*We are doing it again!*”

This is the longest message preached in the book of Acts (7:1-53) and one of the most important.

In it, Stephen reviewed the history of Israel and the lessons learned from their revered leaders:

- **Abraham** (Acts 7:2-8), **Joseph** (V:9-17), **Moses** (V:18-44), **Joshua** (V:45), and **David & Solomon** (V:46-50).
- But this address was more than a recital of familiar facts; it was also a rebuff of their indictments against Stephen and a review of their own national sins.
- Stephen proved from their own Scriptures that the Jewish nation was guilty of worse sins than those they had accused him of committing.

### What were these sins?

#### # 1. Failure to grasp their own spiritual history...

##### **7:1-8** READ and PRAY...

Stephen's address opens with "the God of glory" (7:2b) and closes with the glory of God (7:55), and all the time he spoke, his face radiated that same glory!

Glory? Because Israel was the only nation privileged to have the glory of God as a part of its inheritance.

"They are the people of Israel, chosen to be God's special children. God revealed his glory to them. He made covenants with them and gave his law to them. They have the privilege of worshiping him and receiving his wonderful promises." Romans 9:4, NLT.

But unfortunately, the glory of God had departed, first from the tabernacle (**1 Sam. 4:22**) and then from the temple (**Ezek. 10:18**).

God's glory had come in His Son (**John 1:14**), but the nation had rejected Him.

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” John 1:14, NKJV.

“But although the world was made through him, the world didn't recognize him when he came. Even in his own land and among his own people, he was not accepted. But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God.” John 1:10-12, NLT.

- Abraham (**Acts 7:2ff**) was the founder of the Hebrew nation, and his relationship to God was one of grace and faith...
- God had graciously appeared to him and called him out of heathen darkness into the light of salvation, and Abraham had responded by faith.
- Abraham was saved by grace, through faith, and **NOT** because he was **circumcised** / **kept a LAW** / or worshipped in a **TEMPLE**.
- All of those things came after faith... **Rom 4:1ff**

“What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to

him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness,”

Romans 4:1-5, NKJV.

- **Abraham believed the promises of God and it was THIS FAITH that saved him. Stephen’s message is that is how we are saved today! (always same...)**

(5) God promised the land to Abraham’s descendants, and then (6) told Abraham that his descendants would suffer in Egypt before they would enter and enjoy the land, and this took place just as God promised.

From the very beginning, God had a wise plan for His people, and that plan would be fulfilled **as long as they TRUSTED His Word and OBEYED His will.**

“Come now, and let us reason together,” Says the LORD, “Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool. **If you are willing and obedient, You shall eat the good of the land; But if you refuse and rebel, You shall be devoured by the sword**”; For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.” Isaiah 1:18-20, NKJV.

The Jews greatly revered Abraham and PRIDED themselves in being his “children.”

But they **confused physical descent with spiritual experience** and **depended on their national heritage** rather than their **personal faith.**

Christians do this today trusting in their denominations and church names rather than a **personal FAITH & RELATIONSHIP with Christ.**

The Jews were blind to the simple faith of Abraham and the patriarchs, and **they had cluttered it with man-made traditions** that made salvation a matter of good works, not faith.

**Saying: “God has no grandchildren”.** Each of us must be **born into the family of God** through **PERSONAL FAITH in Jesus Christ...**

“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” John 1:12, 13, NKJV.

The Jews prided themselves in **CIRCUMCISION**, **failing to understand that the rite was SYMBOLIC of an inner spiritual relationship with God.**

“Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer.” Deuteronomy 10:16, NKJV. (God)

“You stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you.” Acts 7:51, NKJV. (Stephen’s message / conclusion)

“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but **faith working through love.**” Galatians 5:6

“In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by **the circumcision of Christ,**” Colossians 2:11, NKJV.

Over the years, **the fulfilling of rituals** had taken the place of **the enjoyment of reality.** This happens in churches even today. (God help us...)

**IF OUT OF TIME END HERE**

**The Holy Spirit uses Stephen to illuminate yet another sin pattern of the Jewish people...**

**2. They rejected their God-sent deliverers (V:9-36)**

The Holy Spirit led Stephen to mention Joseph and Moses because these two Jewish heroes have this in common: They were **both rejected as deliverers the first time, but were accepted the second time.**

- Joseph's brethren hated their brother and sold him into servitude, yet later he became their deliverer. They recognized Joseph "at the second time" (Acts 7:13) when they returned to Egypt for more food.
- Israel rejected Moses when he first tried to deliver them from Egyptian bondage, and he had to flee for his life (Ex. 2:11-22). But when Moses came to them the second time, the nation accepted him and he set them free (Acts 7:35).

**These two events illustrate how Israel treated Jesus Christ.** Israel rejected their Messiah when He came to them the first time (John 1:11), but when He comes again, they will recognize Him and receive Him (Zech. 12:10; Rev. 1:7).

In spite of what they did to His Son, God has not cast away His people (Rom. 11:1-6). Israel today is suffering from a partial spiritual blindness that one day will be taken away (V:25-32). Individual Jews are being saved, but the nation as a whole is blind to the truth about Jesus Christ.

**May we not make the same mistake**

**END**