

- A Study in Acts -

**Chapter Seven – Stephen’s Defense and Death.**

**ACTS 7:1-16:**

In our previous lesson, we closed the **sixth chapter** with false accusations made against Stephen. The first two accusations came about when the Freedmen that had been disputing with him could not resist the wisdom of the Spirit, so they induced men to make false accusation.

The first two accusations were that Stephen has spoken blasphemous words against Moses and God.

After they brought him before the council; additional false witnesses were brought before the council that added to the first two charges. These new charges included Stephen speaking blasphemous words against the temple and the Law.

As these charges were levied against Stephen, all who sat in the council waiting for him to break down under the charges, instead witnessed his countenance as calm, dignified, and confident.

**In this chapter**, we will now be introduced to Stephen’s defense before the council concerning these charges.

**Text #1:**

**Acts 7:1 “Then the high priest said, “Are these things so?””**

Breaking up the obvious amazement of those assembled here concerning the countenance of Stephen, the high priest demands a plea of innocence or guilt. It is now that Stephen will settle into his defense. This defense will include, uniquely, a synopsis of God’s dealings with the children of Israel’s fathers, leading up to a summary indictment; whereby Stephen, like Peter and John in chapter four will turn the accusations of the council back upon them.

This brief synopsis of the Old Testament history is just that, a synopsis (A brief outline or general view, as of a subject or written work, an abstract or a summary. – American Heritage Talking Dictionary).

Although a good account of the history of the Old Testament, it has estimations and generalities that were understood by the audience of Stephen.

**Text #2:**

**Acts 7:2-8 – The Patriarchs**

**“And he said, “Brethren and fathers, listen: The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, <sup>3</sup> and said to him, ‘Get**

*out of your country and from your relatives, and come to a land that I will show you.*'<sup>4</sup> Then he came out of the land of the Chaldeans and dwelt in Haran. And from there, when his father was dead, He moved him to this land in which you now dwell.<sup>5</sup> And God gave him no inheritance in it, not even *enough* to set his foot on. But even when Abraham had no child, He promised to give it to him for a possession and to his descendants after him.<sup>6</sup> But God spoke in this way: that his descendants would dwell in a foreign land, and that they would bring them into bondage and oppress *them* four hundred years.<sup>7</sup> *'And the nation to whom they will be in bondage I will judge,'* said God, *'and after that they shall come out and serve Me in this place.'*<sup>8</sup> Then He gave him the covenant of circumcision; and so Abraham begot Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day; and Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot the twelve patriarchs.

The highlighted places are actual quotes from the Old Testament: **Genesis 12:1**; **Genesis 15:14**; and **Exodus 3:12**.

As the history being illustrated by Stephen starts with Abraham, the most important emphasis of this opening comes from two important points:

1. **1.** God promised to Abraham to give his descendants the land God had called him to reside in (**vs. 2-5**)!
2. **2.** Before they would take possession of this land, the descendants of Abraham would go down into Egypt and become servants there (**vs. 6-7**).

Everything in these two points is clearly highlighted, long before they would occur, to Abraham in **Genesis 15**. The exquisite detail of the prophecy of God to Abraham in this passage clearly states that his descendants will become servants and be afflicted by this nation for four hundred years (**Genesis 15:13**). After that point God would judge this nation and bring Abraham's descendants out of that land (**Genesis 15:14**). In addition, as God would bring them out of Egypt and judge that nation, He would likewise use the children of Israel to judge the Canaanites and give to the descendants of Abraham, their land as a possession.

As a sign of this covenant with Abraham (**vs. 8**), God would also give him the command of circumcision (which would be given in **Genesis 17**), long before the giving of the Law of Moses.

In **verses 2-8**, Stephen has produced the needle, thread, and laced them together, so that now he can sew the completion of these events together. This is an important mindset for the concluding portion of this first part of the text. Since it was Abraham, who had been made known all these things before they occurred, it is going to be spoken of in some of the details, as if it were he that had performed them. In this, simply keep in mind that the sewing starts with the promise to Abraham, and in **verse 17**, concludes with the same understanding; thus, starting with him, and ending with him, everything in the middle is as if he were still involved.

### **Text #3:**

**Acts 7:9-16 - The Patriarchs in Egypt**

<sup>9</sup> *"And the patriarchs, becoming envious, sold Joseph into Egypt. But God was with him*<sup>10</sup> and

*delivered him out of all his troubles, and gave him favor and wisdom in the presence of Pharaoh, king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house.* <sup>11</sup> *Now a famine and great trouble came over all the land of Egypt and Canaan, and our fathers found no sustenance.* <sup>12</sup> *But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first.* <sup>13</sup> *And the second time Joseph was made known to his brothers, and Joseph's family became known to the Pharaoh.* <sup>14</sup> *Then Joseph sent and called his father Jacob and all his relatives to him, seventy-five people.* <sup>15</sup> *So Jacob went down to Egypt; and he died, he and our fathers.* <sup>16</sup> *And they were carried back to Shechem and laid in the tomb that Abraham bought for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem."*

As the history unfolds, and the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham is brought to life, we see the family of Abraham (through Jacob), go down to Egypt. This was also made known through the dreams of Joseph (**Genesis 37:1-11**); and the words of God to Jacob (**Genesis 46:1-7**).

As we see this promise fulfilled in the descendants of Abraham coming to Egypt, Stephen mentions that there are 75 who make the venture down into Egypt from Canaan.

This has been a source for uniformed attacks against the validity of scripture for many years now. They want to compare this statement of Stephen to the list recorded in **Genesis 46** (which has a total of 70 names).

The problem in the comparison is that the list in **Genesis 46** is not a list a those who would come to Egypt from Canaan; but simply a generational outline of the descendants of Jacob who would form the nation while in Egypt (See: **Genesis 46:3**).

We know this for some simple reasons:

**First** – the list in **Genesis 46** includes Er and Onan, who were long dead before the family of Jacob came to Egypt.

**Second** – the list includes ten sons of Benjamin. Joseph and Benjamin's brother Judah refers to Benjamin as a boy (lad – see: **Genesis 44:20**). It would not be possible then that the ten children of Benjamin would be included in those coming from Canaan to Egypt.

**Third** – in the list of **Genesis 46**, there are also mentioned male grandchildren, as well. Although we would have to concur that it could have been that some of the older brothers may have had grandchildren, it is not just the oldest, as there are grandchildren to Asher (**46:17**).

**Fourth** – the house of Joseph, which included his two sons born to him in Egypt, were already there: but part of the list.

All of this to say that the list in **Genesis 46** is not an inventory of those who actually made the trip from Canaan to Egypt, but a list of the generations of Jacob who would become the great nation promised to him in Egypt – **Genesis 46:3**.

Stephen is not referring to this generational list at all; he is simply quoting from the historic traditional figure of those estimated to have gone down to Egypt from Canaan. We may be assured that this incidental custom concerning this number of people in Stephen's dialogue is something completely understood at this time (although unknown to you and me), due to the simple understanding of the hostility of his audience towards him. If he had included anything historically inaccurate, these listening would not have waited for him to finish in order to stone him.

This brings us to another point of contention, from those who have not paid attention to the context. In **verse 15 & 16**, we have it stated that Jacob died in Egypt and the other patriarchs, and that they were carried back and buried in a tomb purchased by Abraham from the sons of Hamor in Shechem.

First, Jacob died in Egypt, but was carried back and buried where Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, etc. were buried, which was a tomb that Abraham purchased from the sons of Heth (in Hebron – **Genesis 23**), long before the death of Joseph.

The tomb purchased from the sons of Hamor, was purchased by Jacob, and the only one of the fathers carried back to be buried in that tomb was Joseph (**Joshua 24:32**).

This is why I prefaced this teaching as linear and summary in nature, starting with the promise to Abraham and concluding with fulfilling the promise to him (**vs. 17**).

Even though others would be involved in this history, it is as if Abraham himself were doing these things because it was spoken to him first. The same rule is to be used concerning Jacob; even though it was not him who came out of Egypt with his descendants, it was as if he did because those who did were his descendants. Once again, had his audience not understood this simple thread of linear history (that this was not a misstep, but a summarization), they would have used this as a reason to stone Stephen long before the conclusion.

All this to say that this linear thread is establishing that God wrought all this to be first in prophecy, then in fulfillment. This is establishing in Stephen's testimony the first and most important fact, everything to come in this defense has been brought about by God.