

Acts Chapter 7

Acts 7:1 "Then said the high priest, Are these things so?"

“High Priest” (see notes on 4:6). Probably Caiaphas (see note on John 18:13-14), who remained in office until A.D. 36.

“Are these things so”: In modern legal terminology, “How do you plead?”

We see here, that this high priest began to question Stephen, and he was not expecting the answer he gave. He preaches to the high priest and rulers.

Verses 2-53: The theme of Stephen’s speech concerns Israel’s repeated rejection of God’s messengers, despite God’s grace. Using primarily “Joseph” and “Moses,” Stephen shows how “Israel” rejected first their own brother Joseph (verse 9), then Moses as the deliverer (verse 27), and later Moses as the God appointed leader (verse 39).

It was the Sanhedrin and the nation, not Stephen, who blasphemed Moses (verse 37), and the Law (verse 53). Stephen, through indirect suggestion, shows that Christ has been rejected like Joseph and Moses. Such rebellion is not a characteristic of God’s redeemed people.

Stephen’s response does not seem to answer the High-Priest’s question. Instead, he gave a masterful, detailed defense of the Christian faith from the Old Testament and concluded by condemning the Jewish leaders for rejecting Jesus.

Acts 7:2 "And he said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran,"

“The God of glory”: A title used only here and (in Psalm 29:3). God’s glory is the sum of His attributes (see notes on Exodus 33:18-19).

“Abraham ... Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran”:

God spoke to Abraham in Ur before he moved to Haran (Gen. 12:1; 15:7; Josh. 24:2-3; and Nehemiah 9:7).

We see here, that Stephen goes back to the call of Abraham, which all Israelites believe in.

Acts 7:3 "And said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall shew thee."

Quoted from (Genesis 12:1).

They and the rulers know that every word he (Stephen), is saying about God appearing to Abraham and telling him to leave his homeland is true.

Acts 7:4 "Then came he out of the land of the Chaldaeans, and dwelt in Haran: and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell."

“Land of the Chaldaeans”: Where Abraham’s original home city or Ur was located (Gen. 11:28, 31; 15:7; Nehemiah 9:7).

“When his father was dead”: At first glance (Gen. 11:26, 32 and 12:4), seem to indicate that Terah lived for 60 years after Abraham’s departure from Haran. Terah was 70 when his first son was born (Gen. 11:26); Abraham was 75 when he left Haran (Gen. 12:4); Terah would have been 145; and Terah lived to be 205 (Gen. 11:32).

The best solution to this apparent difficulty is that Abraham was not Terah’s firstborn son, but was mentioned first (Gen. 11:26), because he was most prominent. Abraham then, would have been born when Terah was 130.

We see in 4th verse, that Abraham was obedient to God and left his homeland. He stayed in Haran until his father died and then left there and came to the land that Jerusalem was now part of. Abraham had left a life of luxury and a big home and dwelt in tents. He was looking for a city whose maker was God.

Acts 7:5 "And he gave him none inheritance in it, no, not [so much as] to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when [as yet] he had no child."

Quoted from (Genesis 17:8; 48:4).

This message given by Stephen could not, and would not, be questioned to this point, because they knew it was absolute truth. Abraham had faith that all God said was truth and never questioned about his seed, even though at that moment he had none. He knew God would not lie and that it would come about just as God had said.

Acts 7:6 "And God spake on this wise, That his seed should sojourn in a strange land; and that they should bring them into bondage, and entreat [them] evil four hundred years."

“Four hundred years” is the round number used (as in Gen 15:13-14), to express the 430 years in Egypt (Exodus 12:40).

Of course, they knew Stephen was speaking of the Hebrews being in Egypt 400 years and being slaves to this people.

Acts 7:7 "And the nation to whom they shall be in bondage will I judge, said God: and after that shall they come forth, and serve me in this place."

Quoted from (Exodus 3:12).

This judgment spoken of here, was the ten plagues that came on Egypt to make Pharaoh let the people go. They did come to the Promised Land after 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. They built the temple in Jerusalem and did worship God.

Acts 7:8 "And he gave him the covenant of circumcision: and so [Abraham] begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac [begat] Jacob; and Jacob [begat] the twelve patriarchs."

“Covenant of circumcision”: Circumcision was the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant (see notes on Gen. 17:11).

“Twelve patriarchs”: The 12 sons of Jacob, who became the heads of the 12 tribes of Israel (Gen. 35:22-26).

We see here also, that Stephen has not said one thing so far that they had not been taught from their youth. They believed every word. They were proud to be of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Acts 7:9-10 "And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him," "And delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favor and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house."

They know that Joseph was truly made second in command in Egypt.

Acts 7:11 "Now there came a dearth over all the land of Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction: and our fathers found no sustenance."

This of course, was speaking of the seven years of famine called dearth here.

Acts 7:12 "But when Jacob heard that there was corn in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first."

We see here, the revealing to these leaders of the temple that Stephen knew the history of the Hebrew people from the training he had gotten in his Hebrew home. This story had been told over and over in Hebrew homes, how Joseph had saved his people when the famine came.

Acts 7:13 "And at the second [time] Joseph was made known to his brethren; and Joseph's kindred was made known unto Pharaoh."

“Second time”: Joseph revealed himself to his brother on their second trip to Egypt to buy grain (Gen. 43:1-3; 45:1-3).

He is relating how they first went and bought food not knowing that Joseph was their long gone brother. Finally, the famine became so bad, that all of Jacob's family had to go to Egypt to survive the famine.

Acts 7:14 "Then sent Joseph, and called his father Jacob to [him], and all his kindred, threescore and fifteen souls."

“Jacob ... and all his kindred ... threescore and fifteen souls” (Genesis 46:26-27; Exodus 1:5; Deut. 10:22), give the figure as 70. However, the LXX (the Greek translation of the Old Testament), which as a Hellenist Stephen would have used. In (Gen. 46:27), reads “seventy-five”. The additional 5 people were Joseph’s descendants born in Egypt (see notes on Gen. 46:26-27).

The number 75 should not be seen in conflict with the Old Testament accounts (Genesis 46:26), identifies the number as 66, in referring to those who accompanied Jacob to Egypt.

Exodus 1:5 gives the number 70, but refers to all those who came out of Jacob’s loins, including Joseph, his two sons, and Jacob himself. Stephen here includes within that number “all his kindred,” totaling 75.

Seventy-five souls belonging to Jacob went into Egypt, (including Joseph and his family), and approximately three million came out.

Acts 7:15-16 "So Jacob went down into Egypt, and died, he, and our fathers," "And were carried over into Shechem, and laid in the sepulcher that Abraham bought for a sum of money of the sons of Emmor [the father] of Shechem."

“He and our fathers ... laid in the sepulchre”: “They” refers to Joseph (Jos. 24:32), and his brothers. But not Jacob, who was buried in Abraham’s tomb at Machpelah (Gen. 50:13).

“The sepulcher that Abraham bought ... of Emmor ... of Shechem”: (Joshua 24:32), states that Jacob bought this tomb, although Abraham had earlier built an altar at Shechem (Gen. 12:6-7), and probably purchased the land on which he built it. Abraham did not settle there, however, and the land apparently reverted to the people of Hamor.

Jacob then repurchased it from Shechem (Gen. 33:18-20), much like Isaac repurchased the well at Beersheba (Gen. 26:28-31), that Abraham had originally bought (Gen. 21:27-30). It’s clear that Joseph was buried at Shechem as he requested (Gen. 50:25; Exodus 13:19; Jos. 24:32). The Old Testament does not record where Joseph’s brothers were buried, but Stephen reveals it was in Shechem.

Here are some more important details that only a Hebrew would know. Jacob was not buried in Egypt, but near Jerusalem. To read more about all of this in detail, read the Genesis lessons.

Acts 7:17 "But when the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt,"

God had promised Abraham that his seed would be so many they would be a multitude; in fact, so many that they would be as the sand of the sea.

Acts 7:18 "Till another king arose, which knew not Joseph."

“King ... knew not Joseph” (see note on Exodus 1:8).

Acts 7:19 "The same dealt subtilly with our kindred, and evil entreated our fathers, so that they cast out their young children, to the end they might not live."

“Cast out their young children”: Only the male babies (Exodus 1:15-22).

This is when the Hebrew boy babies were to be killed at birth and thrown into the Nile River. This evil King took the Hebrews into bondage and used them for slave labor. They became afraid of the Hebrews, because they were multiplying so fast.

Verses 20-21: “Moses ... cast out”: In God’s providence, however, he was rescued by Pharaoh’s daughter (see notes on Exodus 2:5-10).

Acts 7:20 "In which time Moses was born, and was exceeding fair, and nourished up in his father's house three months:"

In this time of upheaval, Moses was born.

Acts 7:21-22 "And when he was cast out, Pharaoh's daughter took him up, and nourished him for her own son." "And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds."

We see that God spared Moses for the purpose of delivering His people out of Egypt. His mother raised him for Pharaoh's daughter until he was weaned, then Moses was trained in the Egyptian schools as an Egyptian prince.

Acts 7:23 "And when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel."

“He was full forty years old”: Moses’ life may be divided into three 40 year periods. The first 40 years encompassed his birth and life in Pharaoh’s court; the second his exile in Midian (verses 29-30); and the third revolved around the events of the Exodus and the years of Israel’s wilderness wandering (verse 36).

Acts 7:24 "And seeing one [of them] suffer wrong, he defended [him], and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian:"

We see here that, Moses (trying to help the Hebrews), has caused problems for himself. Notice, that it wasn't an Egyptian who was telling on Moses, but his fellow Hebrews.

Acts 7:25 "For he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not."

Even though Moses is an Egyptian prince, his nationality is Hebrew and the Pharaoh would not be pleased that a Hebrew (regardless of who he was), killed an Egyptian.

Acts 7:26-28 "And the next day he shewed himself unto them as they strove, and would have set them at one again, saying, Sirs, ye are brethren; why do ye wrong one to another?" "But he that did his neighbor wrong thrust him away, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us?" "Wilt thou kill me, as thou didst the Egyptian yesterday?"

This was quoted from (Exodus 2:14).

Acts Chapter 7 Questions

1. What surprising answer did Stephen give the priest?
2. Who appeared to Abraham?
3. What did He tell Abraham to do?
4. When did Abraham leave Haran?
5. What had Abraham left to wander with God?
6. How many children did Abraham have when God promised to leave the land to his seed?
7. What did these Hebrew temple leaders know about Stephen's message?
8. How long would the Hebrew children sojourn in a strange land?
9. What was the strange land?
10. What covenant did God make with Abraham?
11. Who was the father of the twelve patriarchs?
12. What position did Joseph hold in Egypt?
13. What does dearth in verse 11 mean?
14. In verse 14, how many of Jacob's people, including Joseph and his family, went into Egypt?

15. Where was Jacob buried?

16. What had God promised Abraham?

17. When the new King of Egypt took over, what did he have the Hebrews to do with their boy babies?

18. Who raised Moses for her own son?

19. How old was Moses when he killed the Egyptian?

20. Who accused Moses of killing the Egyptian?

21. What did Moses do to keep Pharaoh from finding out?