



*The Book of Acts*  
Bringing in a New Dispensation  
Acts 7:1-53

During our last session, the ekklesia, or assembly, experienced significant growth. I want to emphasize that the assembly in early Acts was not a small group (or what some call *Peter's Little Flock*). This assembly was large, comprising thousands of people who believed in Jesus as their Messiah. The requirement to be *in Christ* was belief that Jesus was the Messiah, but they also had to do something that is not required today, during the dispensation of grace, i.e., repentance, and baptism. This assembly was still under the judgment of God for their rejection of the Messiah. They had to save themselves from that *untoward generation* (Acts 2:40). They must repent and ceremonially cleanse themselves because of their rejection of the Messiah.

As with any entity that grows quickly, there were problems that arose in this burgeoning assembly. Growth is good, but when it occurs overnight, resources become stretched and people ultimately will be neglected. That was the case with these new believers in the Messiah in Jerusalem. To address the issue of Greek speaking Jewish widows being ignored during the daily serving of food, the apostles asked the crowd to choose seven trustworthy men. These men would be responsible for serving the tables, taking care of the widows' needs, and possibly even handling the purchasing and management of food supplies. These men had to not only be honest, but they were filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom.

How exactly they were filled with the Holy Spirit, and what that specifically means is not clear, however, one of the seven, Stephen, we are told was full of faith and power, and did great wonders and miracles among the people (6:8). Maybe we can assume that to be filled with the Holy Spirit was to be able to perform signs and wonders.

So far, in the book of Acts we have seen several fillings of the Holy Spirit.

1. Acts 2:4: The disciples were all filled with the Holy Spirit. The manifestation of this filling was they spoke in other tongues.
2. Acts 4:8: Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit. The manifestation of this filling was that the high priest and others recognizing that Peter was just a common man, exhibited some kind of fearless boldness, so much so that they marveled. It seems to be something supernatural.
3. Acts 4:31: When Peter and the other apostles were released and were with other believers, they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. Again, there was some kind of supernatural boldness.
4. Acts 6:3: The seven men chosen to serve tables were full of the Holy Spirit. We have already seen the manifestation of this filling in Stephen.
5. Acts 9:17: The prophet Ananias relayed to Saul the message given to him by Jesus, that Saul was to receive his sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit. The manifestation of that filling was Saul receiving his sight, and at once began preaching Christ in the Jewish synagogues.

The only other passage that mentions a filling is in Ephesians 5:18 where Paul wrote, "And be not drunk with wine wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit." He did not use the phrase *hagios pneuma*. He

*wrote pneuma*. He may have been referring to the Holy Spirit, or he may have been referring to the spirit of the believers. Literally, Paul wrote, "Be filled with spirit." I think we would be unwise to make a doctrine out of this verse.

We talk a lot about being filled with the Spirit today in Christian circles, but what does that actually mean? My point in discussion this is not to try to dissuade someone from saying they are filled with the Holy Spirit, but to point out that we really don't even know what that means. In the book of Acts, when someone was filled with the *hagios pneuma*, there was some kind of supernatural manifestation (that means visible) to back it up.

We should do more study into this, but what we know from our passage is that Stephen *was* filled with the Holy Spirit, was full of faith, and did great wonders and miracles among the people. As a result, Stephen caught the attention of the *antichrist* individuals. They produced false witnesses to incite the people against him. Eventually, he was apprehended and brought before the council, also known as The Sanhedrin.

We left off last time at chapter 6:15: "And all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel."

We used Judges 13:6 to help us understand what the face of an angel look like.

"A man of God came unto me, and his countenance was like the countenance of an angel of God, very terrible"

As you recall false witnesses had accused Stephen of (Acts 6:13,14).

1. Speaking blasphemous words against the Temple and the Law.
2. Claiming that Jesus would destroy the Temple and change the customs of Moses.

In chapter seven, Stephen will refute false accusations and claim that the religious leaders are the ones doing these things. Isn't it typical for those who falsely accuse to do the very things they accuse you of?

This is the longest of all the speeches in the book of Acts.

### Acts 7:1-53 | Stephen Defends Himself Against False Accusations.

Verse 1 —

**Then said the high priest, Are these things so?** This movement of believers in Jesus as the Messiah, and Stephen in particular now, was certainly trying the patience of the high priest. It is difficult to tell what the high priest is expecting by asking Stephen this question. Was he giving him a chance to defend himself? Or was he thinking Stephen might give in to the charges, take a beating like the 12 did earlier, and move on?

Verse 2a —

Stephen begins respectfully (1 Peter 3:15), **Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken.** Listen up. Stephen is going to lay out where the Jews went wrong. The Jews made a mistake in rejecting Jesus as Messiah because he did not establish his kingdom. This is the reason why they rejected him. They had accused Jesus of being controlled by Beelzebub the prince of the devils (Matthew 12:24).

Over the next 49 verses he is going to lay out several historical Biblical accounts that will show these Jews rejecting the Messiah for what they perceived as failure. This was a grave mistake. The Jews were well versed in their nation's history and the oracles of God had been committed to them (Romans 3:2), so I don't think Stephen's purpose was to give them a history lesson on Israel.

One purpose in tracing Israel's history is to show them that he is not guilty of the things he has been accused of, that is, blaspheming God, Moses, the law and the temple. He is going to turn the situation around and accuse them of doing those very things themselves because they had rejected their Messiah.

They rejected Jesus because of his perceived failure in not setting up his kingdom, and yet, *Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, David, Solomon...all these men failed in some form and fashion, but they were not rejected by the Jews.*

Verses 2-8 —

First up: **Abraham.**

Abraham believed God when there was no temple to worship in. Therefore a point he makes is that worship in the beginning of the Hebrew nation was not restricted to the temple, since it didn't exist yet. Stephen is showing them that even now worship of God is no longer restricted to the temple. Abraham never saw or experienced the inheritance of the Land of Promise, he believed and worshipped God.

Stephen's main defense is that they accused him of not worshipping in the temple. However, Abraham also did not worship in the temple, and they did not reject him.

Verses 9-16—

Next up: **Jacob** and **Joseph.** Stephen points out the nation's spiritual blindness. Of course the Sanhedrin would say that they revered the twelve patriarchs, or the sons of Jacob. Joseph, whom God had set apart for a special blessing was rejected by his brothers and sold into slavery. Here, I think, we see Joseph as a type of Christ. The sons of Israel were spiritually blind to God's blessing of Joseph and likewise Stephen is pointing out to those he was addressing that they too were spiritually blind in rejecting Jesus as Messiah.

Verse 13, **And at the second time Joseph was made known to his brethren...** After Joseph had been given up for dead, his brothers made the sojourn to Egypt for food, but they did not recognize Joseph who had become powerful and second only to Pharaoh. It wasn't until they saw him the second time that they recognized him as their brother. Is Stephen giving a subtle message that, *you may not have*

*recognized the Messiah at his first coming, but make no mistake you will recognize him at his second coming!*

Verses 17-50—

Next: **Moses**. Stephen defended himself against the false accusation that he blasphemed God and temple. Now he spends a great deal of time on the second accusation, rejecting Moses and the Law. There has never been any indication that Stephen did not revere and honor God, nor could anyone truthfully point out that he did not also honor Moses.

In the account of Moses Stephen points out the constant pattern of Israel of rejecting God because of their pride and spiritual blindness. For example Israel would not obey and forced Aaron (Moses's brother), **Make us gods to go before us...and they made a calf in those days and offered sacrifice unto the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands (7:40,41).**

Stephen also presents the history of the temple, beginning with the tabernacle in the wilderness and ending with Solomon's temple to show his respect for it because God had appointed it.

Finally, **Joshua** (vs. 45), (Greek word *Iesous*, translated **Jesus**). He did not drive out all the inhabitants of the Land. **David**, he failed to build the Temple, and it was left to his son **Solomon** and yet failed by taking foreign wives. And, **the house** Solomon built for the Lord was in many ways a *failure* because **the most High dwelleth not in temple made with hands.**

From the beginning, Stephen is defending himself by turning the tables on the religious leaders. He is being accused of blasphemy, but his response is that through their own history they are the guilty ones, and he will turn their charges back on them.

There are several ways to interpret this passage that we have just read, making it difficult to teach.

1. It is a history lesson.
2. Stephen is pointing out all of the failures of the patriarchs and yet the religious leaders still revere them. So just because Jesus did not set up his kingdom (considered a failure by the religious leaders), why reject him?
3. Stephen is tracing three main ideas,
  1. **There is a progress and change in God's program.**
    1. God called Abraham, the father of the Jews from Mesopotamia to the land of promise.
    2. The sojourn of Joseph and the move of the twelve tribes from the land of promise to Egypt.
    3. The captivity of Israel and the deliverance by Moses.
    4. The building of the tabernacle in the wilderness.
    5. The construction of the temple.

**2. The blessings of God are not limited to the land of Israel and the temple area.**

1. Abraham was given promises well before he lived in Haran.
2. Joseph found favor with Pharaoh in Egypt and God was with him.
3. Moses was commissioned by God in Midian, not the promised land.
4. The Law itself was given outside of the Land.
5. The tabernacle was built for worship of God in the wilderness (however it was portable and was eventually moved to Israel).

**3. Israel has always evidenced a pattern of opposition to God's plan and his men.**

1. Instead of going directly to the promised land, Abraham stayed for some time in Haran.
2. Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers.
3. Moses was rejected by the Israelites.
  1. Both Joseph and Moses were not accepted until their second appearances, i.e., types of Christ.
4. Israel rejected true worship by turning to idols.
5. The people of Israel missed the point of the temple (vv. 48-50). Verse 48 implies that the Jews believed the temple was God's dwelling place on earth. While it was the place of worship and prayer, it was not God's home (1 Kings 8:39).

Israel had better be careful not to resist as they have in the past.

Verses 51-53 —

Stephen accuses them of being **stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears**, and **resisting the Holy Ghost. As your fathers did, so do ye**. The bottom line of his charge to them is that *the fathers put to death and persecuted the prophets, and you are just like them*. You have become **betrayers and murderers...of the Just One**.

*You received the law handed down by angels, and have not kept it!*

*Hypocritical phonies*. This doesn't go over too well, as we will see next time.