

ACTS: I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH (PART 10)

Acts 6:3-7 Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them. And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.

Chapter 6 is one of the pivotal moments in the book of Acts, when the church experiences “growth pains.” It is here that the leaders appoint the first seven “deacons” to shoulder some of the responsibility of ministry – because the church cannot grow effectively if we expect those who lead us and preach to us to also handle many other ministry responsibilities. These seven men are not specially gifted, nor are they politically empowered – in fact, the word “diakonos” simply means “a servant.”

This passage is also pivotal because it gives us the background for what happens next in Acts – two of these laymen (Stephen & Philip) are about to be mightily used by God to preach the gospel, to work miracles, and to propel the church forward. The book of Acts pattern shows us that EVERY member of the church is to be anointed for ministry!

Acts 6:8-15 And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people. Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake. Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God. And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council, And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law: For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us. And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.

The emphasis in Stephen's life is on FULLNESS: he was full of the Holy Spirit, full of wisdom, full of faith, and full of power. In Scripture, to be "full of" means "to be controlled by." Stephen was a God-controlled man who had a huge impact on his church – and he was NOT one of the leaders!

Jews who had returned from many nations resided in Jerusalem in their own "quarters," and some of these ethnic groups had their own synagogues. Remember that going to the synagogue didn't mean going to church – the synagogues were OPPOSED to the church! They didn't want to hear the message of a new covenant that would take the place of their own religion, which had now become little more than a ritual. Because of Stephen's powerful testimony, some of his own countrymen viciously opposed him, and set up false witnesses against him – but God used even these circumstances to build His Church!

John 15:18-21 If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me.

Acts 6:15 And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.

Chapter seven contains Stephen's response to the Jewish council; it is the longest address in the book of Acts. In it he reviews some of the highlights of Israel's history to show them that their forefathers at first rejected some of the very men they now claim to revere!

- Each of the people mentioned is a TYPE OF CHRIST in some way.
- Most were REJECTED by Israel the first time they appeared to them.
- Most were then EXALTED by God and eventually accepted by Israel.
- Each one reveals Israel's failure to listen to one SENT FROM GOD.
- The point is the significance of "THE SECOND TIME."

ABRAHAM

Acts 7:1-8 Then said the high priest, Are these things so? 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 Charran, And said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall shew thee. Then came he out of the land of the Chaldaeans, and dwelt in Charran: and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell. 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.

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. 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. 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.

The **FIRST TIME**, Abram's father Terah set out for Canaan, but only got as far as Haran and decided to live there until he died (Genesis 11:31).

The **SECOND TIME**, God spoke His great covenant to Abram and he set out for a land that he had never seen (Genesis 12:1-3).

JOSEPH

Acts 7:9-16 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 favour and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house. Now there came a dearth over all the land of Egypt and Chanaan, and great affliction: and our fathers found no sustenance. But when Jacob heard that there was corn in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first. And at the second time Joseph was made known to his brethren; and Joseph's kindred was made known unto Pharaoh. Then sent Joseph, and called his father Jacob to him, and all his kindred, threescore and fifteen souls. So Jacob went down into Egypt, and died, he, and our fathers, And were carried over into Sychem, and laid in the sepulchre that Abraham bought for a sum of money of the sons of Emmor the father of Sychem.

The **FIRST TIME**, Joseph was rejected by his brethren, betrayed for pieces of silver, and falsely accused by Potiphar's wife.

The **SECOND TIME**, Joseph is exalted to the throne of Egypt, given a name (Zaphnathpaaneah / Jerome said it means "Savior of the World") to which every knee bows, and accepted by his brethren.

MOSES

Acts 7:17-36 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, which knew not Joseph. 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. In which time Moses was born, and was exceeding fair, and nourished up in his father's house three months:

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. And when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel. And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian: For he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not. 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 neighbour wrong thrust him away, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us? Wilt thou kill me, as thou diddest the Egyptian yesterday? Then fled Moses at this saying, and was a stranger in the land of Madian, where he begat two sons. And when forty years were expired, there appeared to him in the wilderness of mount Sina an angel of the Lord in a flame of fire in a bush. When Moses saw it, he wondered at the sight: and as he drew near to behold it, the voice of the Lord came unto him, Saying, I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Then Moses trembled, and durst not behold. Then said the Lord to him, Put off thy shoes from thy feet: for the place where thou standest is holy ground. I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people which is in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send thee into Egypt. This Moses whom they refused, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge? the same did God send to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the angel which appeared to him in the bush. He brought them out, after that he had shewed wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red sea, and in the wilderness forty years.

The **FIRST TIME**, Moses narrowly escaped being slain with all the other children at the time of his birth, then his family was protected in Egypt until he grew. However, when he tried to help his fellow Israelites, he was rejected ("Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us?").

The **SECOND TIME**, Moses appears to his brethren with the name he received at the burning bush ("I Am That I Am"), and he brings them out of Egypt with miracles, signs and wonders.

Now Stephen begins to show how everything under the Old Covenant – including their beloved Tabernacle and Temple – actually pointed to the fact that God was eventually going to do something GREATER!

Luke 24:27 And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

Acts 7:37-50 This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear. This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us: To whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt, Saying unto Aaron, Make us gods to go before us: for as for this Moses, which brought us out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him. And they made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifice unto the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands. Then God turned, and gave them up to worship the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets, O ye house of Israel, have ye offered to me slain beasts and sacrifices by the space of forty years in the wilderness? Yea, ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, figures which ye made to worship them: and I will carry you away beyond Babylon. Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as he had appointed, speaking unto Moses, that he should make it according to the fashion that he had seen. Which also our fathers that came after brought in with Jesus into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drave out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David; Who found favour before God, and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob. But Solomon built him an house. Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest? Hath not my hand made all these things?

Israel didn't listen to Moses – even after he delivered them, they still longed for Egypt in their hearts, and wanted to go back.

Israel didn't listen to Aaron – they made a golden calf, and gave that dead idol the credit for the blessings God had given.

Israel didn't listen to the prophets – they began to worship and serve the false gods of the heathen nations all around them.

And Israel missed the point that the Tabernacle, the Temple, the priesthood, the feast days, the law, and all the sacrifices, were actually just “rehearsals” pointing ahead to something much greater – because God could never be contained in a building!

Acts 7:51-53 Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.

Stephen tells the council that, although they may be circumcised in BODY, they are uncircumcised in HEART. Although they were GIVEN the covenant, they are living OUTSIDE the covenant. Although they pride themselves on being JEWS, spiritually they are like GENTILES.

The **FIRST TIME**, Israel resisted, persecuted and killed all of the prophets who pointed the way to the coming of the “Just One” – the same way they resisted, persecuted and killed JESUS who fulfilled all their prophecies. **JESUS WAS REJECTED THE “FIRST TIME”!**

But the **SECOND TIME**, Jesus will not be coming to earth as a baby – He will be returning as King of Kings and Lord of Lords!

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

Zechariah 13:6 And one shall say unto him, What are these wounds in thine hands? Then he shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends.

Revelation 1:7-8 Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.

Hebrews 9:28 So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.

How ironic that the people who should have been FIRST to accept Jesus will actually be the LAST to accept Him! The Jews had all of God's blessings to testify to them, and they missed it. **What about YOU?**

Acts 7:53 Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.

1 Peter 1:10-12 Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.