

### Stephen's Testimony Before the Jewish Council

#### Acts 7:1-43

Acts 7:1-19: *"Then the high priest said, "Are these things so?" <sup>2</sup> 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.*

*<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.*

*<sup>17</sup> "But when the time of the promise drew near which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt <sup>18</sup> till another king arose who did not know Joseph. <sup>19</sup> This man dealt treacherously with our people, and oppressed our forefathers, making them expose their babies, so that they might not live."*

#### Background Notes

Acts 6:7 says that *"the word of God spread, and the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith."* The early growth of Christianity was phenomenal! Even a great number of Jewish priests were becoming believers.

Why was it that so many Jewish priests, of all people, were becoming Christians? No doubt it was because they knew the truth about the resurrection of Jesus Christ! They knew that there was no natural explanation for the empty tomb, and they knew that the story of the disciples stealing the Lord's body was false. After all, it was the chief priest who had bribed the soldiers to propagate this obvious lie. The priests also knew that the heavy curtain in the Temple had suddenly been ripped from top to bottom by unseen hands when Jesus died, thus opening the way into the Holy of Holies.

With so many priests becoming believers, it's understandable that the Sanhedrin wanted to stamp out Christianity as quickly as possible. So they arrested Stephen on trumped up charges and questioned him, trying to find fault with him and his message. And Stephen used his trial as an opportunity to preach! Much of Stephen's "sermon" before the Sanhedrin recounted Israel's mistreatment of God's messengers, including Joseph and Moses.

Why did Stephen emphasize Israel's rejection of God's messengers - particularly Joseph and Moses? Stephen was obviously drawing a parallel between Israel's past rejection of these messengers and Israel's present rejection of Jesus Christ, God's greatest Messenger. Israel had not changed her ways. She was still in rebellion against God.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. Israel's rejection of Joseph foreshadowed Israel's rejection of Christ.

In verses 1-19, Stephen began his sermon by giving the nation's history, beginning with Abraham, but moving quickly from Abraham to Joseph. The "four hundred years" of bondage (v6) is not a contradiction with Galatians 3:17 and Exodus 12:40, which say "four hundred *and thirty* years." Stephen was quoting the promise that God made to Abraham in Genesis 15. There God used a "round number" of four hundred in His prophecy. And the number of "seventy-five persons" in Egypt (v14) is not in disagreement with the number of "seventy" mentioned in Genesis 46:47. Stephen here included the sons and grandsons of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh, who were already in Egypt when Jacob arrived there. In verse 16, it seems that Stephen condensed the accounts of Abraham and Jacob buying parcels of land in Canaan for burial of the patriarchs at Hebron and Schem.

It's hard to miss the parallel that Stephen wanted his listeners to draw between the rejection of Joseph by his own brothers and the rejection of Christ by His own people. Joseph is one of the great *types* (spiritual pictures) of Jesus Christ in the Old Testament. As Joseph was rejected by his brothers who were the patriarchs of Israel, but then was raised to power over Egypt by God, so Jesus Christ was rejected by His "brothers" of the nation of Israel - but was raised to power over this whole world. As Joseph's brothers later had to recognize and bow to Joseph, so in the coming day Israel will recognize and bow to Christ as their once-rejected Messiah.

Joseph is a wonderful Old Testament spiritual picture of Jesus, Israel's rejected Messiah, and Stephen certainly wanted his listeners to see this. Israel's rejection of Joseph foreshadowed Israel's rejection of Christ.

## 2. Israel's rejection of Moses foreshadowed Israel's rejection of Christ.

Acts 7:20-43: *"At this time Moses was born, and was well pleasing to God; and he was brought up in his father's house for three months. <sup>21</sup> But when he was set out, Pharaoh's daughter took him away and brought him up as her own son.*

*<sup>22</sup> And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds.*

*<sup>23</sup> "Now when he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the children of Israel. <sup>24</sup> And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended and avenged him who was oppressed, and struck down the Egyptian. <sup>25</sup> For he supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand. <sup>26</sup> And the next day he appeared to two of them as they were fighting, and tried to reconcile them, saying, 'Men, you are brethren; why do you wrong one another?' <sup>27</sup> But he who did his neighbor wrong pushed him away, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge over us?' <sup>28</sup> Do you want to kill me as you did the Egyptian yesterday?' <sup>29</sup> Then, at this saying, Moses fled and became a dweller in the land of Midian, where he had two sons.*

*<sup>30</sup> "And when forty years had passed, an Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire in a bush, in the wilderness of Mount Sinai. <sup>31</sup> When Moses saw it, he marveled at the sight; and as he drew near to observe, the voice of the Lord came to him, (v32) saying, 'I am the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' And Moses trembled and dared not look. <sup>33</sup> 'Then the Lord said to him, "Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground. <sup>34</sup> I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt; I have heard their groaning and have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt."*

*<sup>35</sup> "This Moses whom they rejected, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge?' is the one God sent to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the Angel who appeared to him in the bush. <sup>36</sup> He brought them out, after he had shown wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red Sea, and in the wilderness forty years. <sup>37</sup> "This is that Moses who said to the children of Israel, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear.'*

*<sup>38</sup> "This is he who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the Angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers, the one who received the living oracles to give to us, <sup>39</sup> whom our fathers would not obey, but rejected. And in their hearts they turned back to Egypt, <sup>40</sup> saying to Aaron, 'Make us gods to go before us; as for this Moses who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' <sup>41</sup> And they made a calf in those days, offered sacrifices to the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands. <sup>42</sup> Then God turned and gave them up to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the Prophets: 'Did you offer Me slaughtered animals and*

*sacrifices during forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel?<sup>43</sup> You also took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, images which you made to worship; and I will carry you away beyond Babylon.”*

In verse 43, Stephen quoted from Amos 5. This account seems to indicate that even during their wanderings in the wilderness, Israel was involved in other idolatry, in addition to the worship of the golden calf. They rejected God’s servant Moses, and they rejected God.

Stephen’s purpose in his lengthy recounting of the life of Moses was to clearly show that Moses was handpicked by God, and then was prepared to be God’s special servant. But Israel rejected Moses - they disowned him (v35). Then Stephen specifically drew the parallel between Moses and Jesus Christ when he quoted the Messianic prophecy of Deuteronomy 18:15: *“The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear.”* This was a clear reference to the Messiah, Jesus Christ, in Stephen’s testimony about Moses.

Now look at verse 39, *“Whom our fathers would not obey, but rejected.”* Stephen certainly drove home his point to the Sanhedrin. Israel’s rejection of Moses foreshadowed Israel’s rejection of Christ.

## Practical Application

### Trust God to use your rejection as a testimony.

Suppose you had been Moses, trying to help Israel in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet the very people you were trying to help disowned you? Suppose they wouldn’t follow you as their leader? Suppose, after all you had gone through, they even scorned you, and said, *“Who made you a ruler and a judge?”* (v35) And then they rejected and repudiated you (v39)! If you had been Moses, would you have had any idea how God would use this rejection as part of Stephen’s main argument before the Sanhedrin fifteen hundred years later? Of course not. But **God knew!**

In the same way, we may not understand or appreciate how God will use our disappointments and rejections in His overall good plans for our lives, and for the lives of others. The way we handle disappointment, and adversity, and rejection can be a great testimony of our Christian character to others. Others are watching, and they will remember for years to come - it may even be written down. And our faithful and unswerving trust in our sovereign God, even in the midst of severe trials and rejection will be remembered in Heaven forever!

So trust God to use *your* rejection as a testimony!