

ACTS

THE MOVEMENT BEGINS

Acts 7 | "The Defense of Stephen"

INTRO: Stephen has been arrested, and he is now going to give his defense to the Sanhedrin by comparing these religious leaders with their "fathers" = **Reject God the 1st time; Accept the 2nd time.**

I. STEPHEN'S RECOUNTS THEIR HISTORY. (v. 1-16)

ABRAHAM (v. 1-8)

A. (v. 4)

1. **"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."**

a. "when his father was dead"

1) **PROBLEM #1:** In the Book of Genesis, we are told that Terah was 70 years old when he started having sons ([Gen. 11:26](#)), and died at 205 years old ([Gen. 11:32](#)), thus *if* Abram was his firstborn, that would make Abram 135 years old when Terah died (205-70=135). BUT, in the very next chapter ([Gen. 12:4](#)), it says that Abram was 75 years old when he left Haran! So, was Abram 75 or 135 years old when his father Terah died?...

2) **SOLUTION:** Here, Stephen says that Abram left Haran after his father Terah died ([Acts 7:4](#)), and Moses tells us that Abram was 75 years old when he left Haran ([Gen. 12:4](#)), thus Terah would have been 130 years old when Abram was born, *which means that Abram could not have been the firstborn son, though he is the 1st son mentioned* ([Gen. 11:26](#))!

a) **NOTE:** Abram was probably mentioned first by Moses because of his prominence as *the father of the Nation of Israel*.

b) **Q** = How long did Abraham dwell in Haran before his father died?...

i. Abraham was born when his father Terah was 130 years old, and Abraham was 75 when he left Haran ([Gen. 11:32; 12:4; Acts 7:4](#)).

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- ii. In this 75 year gap:
 - a. Abraham married Sarah ([Gen. 11:29](#)), his half sister ([Gen. 20:21](#)), which girls were typically married after puberty (12-13 years old), thus Abraham would have been ~23 when married.
 - b. Abraham was already married to Sarah when they moved from Ur of the Chaldeans to Haran ([Gen. 11:29-31](#)), so there could be as much as a 50 YEAR GAP between the *call* to Abraham and his *obedience*!
- b. **KEY:** The point Stephen is making is that Abraham did NOT obey God the *first* time, but he obeyed the SECOND time!
 - 1) God's call to Abraham ([Gen. 12:1-3](#)) was given back when he was in Ur of the Chaldeans, but he didn't obey until almost 50 years later in Harah!

B. (v. 6)

- 1. **"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."**
 - a. **PROBLEM #2:** There are two figures mentioned in the Scriptures. Some passages mention 400 years of bondage ([Gen 15:13, 16; Acts 7:6](#)), and others 430 years ([Ex. 12:40-41; Gal. 3:17](#)). Which is it? 400 or 430?...
 - b. **SOLUTIONS:** There are 2 Major Views:
 - 1) Some scholars reconcile this by saying the *total sojourn* in Egypt was 430 years, but they were only "*afflicted*" for 400 years. In other words, the enslavement began 30 years after they arrived in Egypt.
 - a) However, this does not line up with the chronology. This view would place the affliction of Egypt while

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Joseph is still alive, but the Text says that it was after Joseph died. (Ex. 1:6-8; Acts 7:18)

- 2) Other scholars,¹ and I tend to agree, reconcile this by saying that their sojourn "*in a land that is not theirs*", or as Stephen says here "*a strange land*", would not only speak of their time in Egypt, but would include their time in Canaan (Gen. 17:8; Exodus 6:4; Psalm 105:10-11) & Mesopotamia (Gen. 31:41; 32:4), thus the "*affliction*" that they suffered would not only be the Egyptian affliction, but includes *all* the affliction they suffered in the land of Canaan, Mesopotamia, and Egypt combined.
 - a) The 430 years would begin when Abraham left Haran and came to *sojourn* in the land of Canaan (Gen. 12:4), and that the 400 years of *affliction* began when Isaac was being weaned and Ishmael was "*mocking*" him (Gen. 21:9) and "*persecuted him*" (Gal. 4:29), which was 30 years after the Abrahamic Covenant was confirmed (Gal. 3:17). Then you would count 400 years until the Exodus.
 - b) **NOTE:** This view puts the children of Israel in Egypt for 215 years, and places Moses' birth 64 years after Joseph died, and fits the Biblical chronology as a whole.

THE PATRIARCHS & JOSEPH (v. 9-16)

C. (v. 9)

1. **"And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him,"**
 - a. Cf. Genesis 37:25-36
 - b. **NOTE:** Stephen is making the point that Joseph was rejected by his own brothers, though God later exalted him. The "*rejected one*" became the "*exalted one*" because *God was with him*.

¹ <https://answersingenesis.org/bible-questions/how-long-were-the-israelites-in-egypt/>

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D. (v. 13)

1. **"And at the second time Joseph was made known to his brethren; and Joseph's kindred was made known unto Pharaoh."**

a. "the second time"

- 1) Stephen is showing them that the rejected one became the savior of the rejecters, and he's implying that that the same thing was true with the Messiah.²

E. (v. 14)

1. **"Then sent Joseph, and called his father Jacob to him, and all his kindred, threescore and fifteen souls."**

a. "all his kindred, seventy-five souls"

- 1) **PROBLEM #3:** The Bible critics always try to find discrepancies in the Bible, and they try to use this verse to show a contradiction because the Old Testament says that 70 descendants went down with Jacob ([Gen. 46:27](#); [Ex. 1:5](#); [Deut. 10:22](#)) and yet Stephen here says 75.
 - a) **Q** = Which is it? 70 or 75?... YES!! BOTH!
- 2) **SOLUTION:** The list in Genesis ([Gen. 46:8-26](#)) lists the 70, but Stephen is including the 3 sons of Ephraim and 2 sons of Manasseh (cf. [Num. 26:28-37](#); [1 Chron. 7:14-15, 20-25](#)).

F. (v. 16)

1. **"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."**

² Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum. "Commentary Series: The Book of Acts." Apple Books. p. 287

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- a. **PROBLEM #4:** Moses wrote that Jacob was buried in Hebron ([Gen. 50:13](#)), but Stephen seems to say that Jacob was buried in Shechem.
- 1) **SOLUTION:** Stephen is only referring to "*the fathers*" being buried in Shechem, not Jacob, which the Greek Text allows.
 - a) Sarah was buried in the cave of Machpelah in HEBRON, and later there followed Abraham ([Gen. 25:9; 49:31](#)), Isaac ([Gen. 35:27, 29; 49:31](#)), Rebekah ([Gen. 49:31](#)), Leah ([Gen. 49:31](#)), and Jacob ([Gen. 50:13](#)).
 - i. **NOTE:** Jacob was buried in Hebron by his sons before any of them died ([Gen. 50:13](#)) and he was not "*carried over into Shechem*" with his sons, their *fathers*, who had gone back to Egypt with Joseph.
 - b) Jacob purchased the plot in SHECHEM for an altar ([Gen. 33:19-20](#)), which he gave to Joseph, and Joseph's descendants eventually buried him there in Shechem along with "*the fathers*" (the sons of Jacob) who they had also brought up from Egypt ([Josh. 24:32; Acts 7:15-17](#)).³
- b. **PROBLEM #5:** Abraham bought a sepulcher in Hebron from *Ephron, a Hittite* ([Gen. 23:15-18](#)), and we know that Jacob purchased the plot in *Shechem* ([Gen. 33:19-20](#)). However, here Stephen says that Abraham bought a sepulcher in *Shechem* from *Emmer, the father of Shechem*.
- 1) **SOLUTION:** After Sarah died, Abraham lived another 38 years and married Keturah and had six more sons ([Gen. 17:17; 23:1; 25:7](#)), and it was probably during those 38 years that Abraham bought the plot of land in *Shechem* from *Emmer, the father of Shechem*. Then, after his death, the plot in *Shechem* was eventually sold or lost somehow to the Hivites. However, about 85 years after Abraham's death, Jacob may have known that this plot of land belonged to his grandfather Abraham, so he

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purchased it back again and brought it back into the family ([Gen. 33:19-20](#)).

- c. **NOTE:** Those who heard Stephen's message were familiar with the Genesis account and they didn't notice any "mistakes" on his part.

MOSES (v. 17-44)

G. (v. 22)

- 1. **"And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds."**
 - a. *"all the wisdom of the Egyptians"*
 - 1) This would have included science, astronomy, medicine, and mathematics.

H. (v. 25)

- 1. **"For he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not."**
 - a. When Moses was 40 years old ([v. 23](#)), he already knew he was a Jew, but by faith he visited his brothers for the purpose of identifying with his people and no longer with the Egyptians.
 - 1) Cf. [Hebrews 11:24-27](#) - *"By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible."*
 - b. **NOTE:** Moses assumed that Israel would recognize him as their deliverer, but they rejected him! ([v. 26-28](#))

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- c. **KEY:** Again, the first time the Jews rejected the one God sent!

I. (v. 36)

1. **"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."**

- a. For the first 40 years, Moses was really SOMETHING.
- 1) He had all the education.
 - 2) He was a great orator.
 - 3) He was able to get things done.
- b. For the next 40 years, Moses became NOTHING.
- 1) He was in obscurity as a shepherd to his father-in-law's flocks.
 - 2) He was humbled and realize that he was not all that he had in his first 40 years ([Exod. 4:10-14](#)).
- c. For the last 40 years, Moses learned that God can take NOTHING and make SOMETHING.

JOSHUA TO SOLOMON'S TEMPLE (v. 45-50)

II. STEPHEN'S APPLICATION TO THE SANHEDRIN. (v. 51-53)

A. (v. 51)

1. **"Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye."**

- a. "stiffnecked" - Gr. *sklērotrachēloi* - "hard-necked; obstinate; stubborn; headstrong"
- 1) This accusation was based in the Hebrew Scriptures ([Exod. 32:9](#); [33:3, 5](#); [34:9](#); [Deut. 9:6](#))

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- b. *"uncircumcised in heart and ears"*
 - 1) God said this about Israel too in the Law and the Prophets ([Lev. 26:41](#); [Deut. 10:16](#); [Jer. 4:4](#); [6:10](#); [9:26](#); [Ezek. 44:7](#)).

- c. *"ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye."*
 - 1) The Jewish people always resisted the Holy Spirit and were resisting Him now, even as their fathers did ([Isa. 63:10](#)).

B. (v. 52)

- 1. ***"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:"***
 - a. *"Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?"*
 - 1) All of the prophets were persecuted by the Jewish people ([2 Chron. 36:15-16](#); [Matt. 23:29-36](#); [Luke 11:47-51](#)).

C. (v. 53)

- 1. ***"Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it."***
 - a. The Old Testament do not mention the Law being given by angels. However, Stephen mentions a Jewish tradition here, and it is reaffirmed by the New Testament ([Gal. 3:19](#); [Heb. 2:2](#)) that the Law was given by angels. In other words, the Law was given by God to Moses by means of angels.
 - 1) **NOTE:** Many Jewish traditions are not Biblically correct, but a few are, as is the case here.

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- b. **NOTE:** Stephen is accusing that this generation was guilty of the same sin as their fathers: *resisting the Holy Spirit*.
- 1) Just as Jesus denounced that generation and foretold of those Jewish leaders of killing those that He will send to them (**Matt. 23:29-36**), so Stephen is denouncing the generation for being guilty of rejecting the Messiahship of Jesus.
- a) Cf. **Matthew 23:29-36** - Jesus, in speaking to the scribes and Pharisees, said, *"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell? Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city: That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation."*

D. (v. 56)

1. **"And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God."**
- a. "standing"
- 1) The New Testament emphasizes over and over that Jesus is now SITTING at the right hand of God (**Mt. 26:64; Mk. 16:19; Acts 2:34; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2**), which speaks of the finished work of

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redemption. However, Jesus STOOD UP to receive the soul of the first martyr into heaven!

E. (v. 57-58)

1. ***"Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul."***

a. Stephen's sermon resulted in "fiery but mostly peaceful protest,"⁴... I mean, MOB ACTION!

b. "stoned him"

1) **Q** = In A.D. 7, the right of capital punishment was taken away by the Roman Senate (Gen. 49:10; John 18:31), so how could they execute Stephen here?...

a) There are few possible explanations:

i. The Roman Government made one exception to the rule.

a. The Sanhedrin was allowed to carry out capital punishment when the offense pertained to the sanctity of the Temple,⁵ and the charge against Stephen included the claim he violated the sanctity of the Temple (6:13).

ii. This event may have happened in A.D. 36.

a. In A.D. 36, Vitellus deposed Pontius Pilate from his procuratorship and became the new imperial legate of the Province of Syria, which included Judea. Pilate's successor, Marullus, did not arrive until A.D. 38, so there may

⁴ <https://thehill.com/homenews/media/513902-cnn-ridiculed-for-fiery-but-mostly-peaceful-caption-with-video-of-burning>

⁵ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum. "Commentary Series: The Book of Acts." Apple Books. p. 312.

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have been a break where the Sanhedrin could take advantage without Roman oversight.

iii. This was a mob scene, and mobs do not regard the rules of law.

a. **NOTE:** According the Biblical chronology, it seems that Paul's conversion was in A.D. 35,⁶ so this explanation could be right.

2) Under Jewish law, death by stoning followed a strict procedure,⁷ and the place of execution was "outside the camp" ([Lev. 24:14](#)), thus outside the court.

c. "a young man's feet, whose name was Saul"

1) "a young man" - Gr. *neaniou* - "youth"

a) This Greek word was used of anyone up to the age of forty, with some Greek writings speaks of a man between the ages of 24-40 years old.⁸

III. THE STONING OF STEPHEN. (v. 54-60)

⁶ Aretas was ruler of Damascus again in A.D. 38, and Paul was converted 3 years earlier, thus converted in A.D. 35 (cf. 2 Cor. 11:32).

⁷ m. Sanhedrin 6:1

⁸ <https://biblehub.com/greek/3494.htm>