

Sports & Rec Plus  
THE BOOK OF ACTS  
Lesson 15: Stephen's Speech to the Sanhedrin, Part 1  
Acts 7:1-10 (NIV®)  
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### **Acts 7 New International Version (NIV)**

#### **Stephen's Speech to the Sanhedrin**

*7 Then the high priest asked Stephen, "Are these charges true?"*

*<sup>2</sup>To this he replied: "Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Harran. <sup>3</sup>'Leave your country and your people,' God said, 'and go to the land I will show you.'*

*<sup>4</sup>"So he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Harran. After the death of his father, God sent him to this land where you are now living. <sup>5</sup>He gave him no inheritance here, not even enough ground to set his foot on. But God promised him that he and his descendants after him would possess the land, even though at that time Abraham had no child. <sup>6</sup>God spoke to him in this way: 'For four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated. <sup>7</sup>But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves,' God said, 'and afterward they will come out of that country and worship me in this place.' <sup>8</sup>Then he gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision. And Abraham became the father of Isaac and circumcised him eight days after his birth. Later Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob became the father of the twelve patriarchs.*

*<sup>9</sup>"Because the patriarchs were jealous of Joseph, they sold him as a slave into Egypt. But God was with him <sup>10</sup>and rescued him from all his troubles. He gave Joseph wisdom and enabled him to gain the goodwill of Pharaoh king of Egypt. So Pharaoh made him ruler over Egypt and all his palace.*

## INTRODUCTION

To know the background of this scripture passage we must go back to chapter 12 of the book of Genesis where God calls Abraham to follow Him with Abraham having nothing better than a verbal promise from God to rely on. (Originally Abraham was called Abram but was later changed to Abraham.)

God told Abram that He would:

- Make him a great nation, and He will bless him;
- Make his name great, and he will be a blessing;

- He will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you He will curse;
- And that all the people of the earth will be blessed through you.

The Bible then says, “**so Abram left.**” as the Lord had told him. At that time Abram was 75 years old when he left his home in Haran, taking all he had including his family, and followed God.

This is why Abraham is called the “Man of faith.” He followed God with only the verbal promise God had given him to trust in.

This is found in Geneses 12:1-4

### **Rick’s part** **Acts 7:1-5**

**7:1** Then the high priest asked Stephen, The high priest was probably Caiaphas who remained as high priest until A.D. 36.

“Are these charges true?” In modern legal terminology he is asking, “How do you plead?”

**7:2** To this he replied: “Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory **The God of Glory** is the sum total of His attributes.

appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, Genesis 12:1-4 refers to the repeat of this call after Abraham had settled in Haran. Evidently, God had originally called Abraham while he was living in Ur, then repeated that call at Haran, (Genesis 11:31-Genesis 12:1-4).

“You are the LORD God, who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and named him Abraham. 8 You found his heart faithful to you, and you made a covenant with him to give to his descendants the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Jebusites and Gergashites. You have kept your promise because you are righteous.” (Nehemiah 9: 7-8).

before he lived in Haran. He now goes on to recount the promise God gave Abram found in Geneses 12. The account that Stephen gives here shows that he is a man ready to explain and proclaim the Scriptures mightily. The Holy Spirit was within him not only to reveal to him new things but to bring to his remembrance the Scriptures of the Old Testament and to show him how to make them clear and use them at this time, (Luke 12:11-12). This reminds and teaches us that those who are full of the Holy Spirit will be full of the Scripture.

**7:3** ‘Leave your country and your people,’ God said, ‘and go to the land I will show you.’ Quoted from Genesis 12:1. This Scripture in Genesis 12:1 is the beginning of what we call, “The Call of Abraham/Abram.”

**7:4** “So he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. The first time I heard this account it just fascinated me and encouraged me to want to be that kind of person. Who just on the basis of the word or a promise from God would go out and do what God asked?

When I met my wife, Barbara, for the first time, we dated and courted for three years. During that time, I talked to her often about this and made sure she was also this same type of person that whatever God said, we would do, (if not, we would not have gotten married.) She also was that kind of person and made sure and quizzed me to be sure that I would follow God no matter what (or we would not have gotten married).

This is a good principle to follow at all times in your marriage and before you get married. You should not wait until God asks you to do something, then you decide if you will do it. You must make the decision ahead of time to always do what God says. Then when it comes up you will have already decided to do what God says to do. You might ask, “What if what God wants me to do does not make sense?” Well, there is a verse of Scripture for that, *Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will direct your paths.* Proverbs 3:5-6.

After the death of his father, God sent him to this land where you are now living. God sent him to the land, but it was many, many, many years later that he began to possess any of it. This reminds us that with God time is of little value. He is the God of time. He made time and He sustains time. It may seem like it takes a long time for God to do something. But, remember it may take a long time, but God is always on time, He is never late.

**7:5** He gave him no inheritance here, not even enough ground to set his foot on. But God promised him that he and his descendants after him would possess the land, even though at that time Abraham had no child. See the paragraph in these notes just before this note for more information.

God gave him a promise; God gave him His Word—His Truth—and that was all he needed since God does not lie. This is quoted from Genesis 17:8; Genesis 48:4.

QUESTION: How did Abram (Later his name was changed by God to Abraham.) come to a knowledge of God as there was no temple, synagogues, nor churches, not even a Bible in existence?

ANSWER: Abraham was following God. Sometimes we may think that the temple or in this case a synagogue or a church is so great because it has been around for a long time and has lots of money, a big budget and staff, and an illustrious history. But remember Abraham was here before all of them. Also, the Father, Son, and Spirit—the Trinity—was here long before the world was in existence.

God can reveal Himself in and through anything. As it says in Romans: *Since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.* Romans 1:19-21

God had an infinite number of witnesses of Himself long before the world was created. Also, in the future, long after the world will have been destroyed, God will still have a never-ending number of people around Him and the whole universe to proclaim Him and praise Him.

## **Rod's Part** **Acts 7:6-10**

Now Stephen is going to continue his defense by using Scripture of what God told Abraham.

**7:6** God spoke to him in this way.

- Notice that Stephen uses the authority of God and not his own.
- Other Scripture uses terminology like, “Thus says the Lord.”

For four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated.

- Here Stephen is referring to the years that the Hebrew descendants of Abraham are slaves in Egypt.
  - Hearing this would not have been easy for Abraham:
    - His future family would be slaves and not free.
    - His future family would suffer and be mistreated.

**7:7** But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves.

- God also gave a promise that He would judge the nation that put his future family into bondage.

God said, ‘and afterward they will come out of that country and worship me in this place.’

- But with the promise of slavery, came the promise that they would have a special place to worship God.

- Stephen here suggested the idea that *God knows how to take care of and protect His people*. He was resting on this assurance himself and is now challenging the council to have the same assurance.

7:8 Then he gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision. Circumcision became the sign of the covenant for Israel.

- Circumcision became the sign of the covenant for Israel, and the covenant was passed down through these descendants of Abraham.
- In the Bible, circumcision is the ritual act of removing a male's child or adult's foreskin.
- In the Jewish culture this normally took place eight days after birth.
- God first instituted circumcision in Genesis 17, when he made an everlasting covenant with Abraham. This act demonstrated the Israelites commitment to the covenant and to let God be God in their lives. It also reminded them of God's part of the covenant, which was that God promised to make Abraham the father of many generations, that he would be a faithful, personal God, and that he would give them a land to call their own.
- Other Old Testament references that refer to circumcision are Exodus 12:43-49, which indicates that circumcision was a requirement for participation in Passover. Later, in Joshua 5, before the battle of Jericho, Joshua circumcised all the males born in the desert. Deuteronomy 10:16 refers to circumcision of the heart, so that the Israelites might love and obey the Lord.
- The New Testament shows us that the Jewish custom of circumcision was still practiced in their society.
  - Luke 1:59 and 2:21 tell us that eight days after they were born, both John and Jesus were circumcised.
  - Paul also was circumcised eight days after his birth.
  - As Christianity spread to the Gentiles, circumcision became a source of division. Some Jews believed circumcision was necessary for salvation and others believed that Gentile Christians needed to observe Mosaic Law. We can read about these disputes in Acts 15 and Paul's response in Galatians 5 and Romans 2.
    - Paul spoke against imposing physical circumcision on Gentile Christians.
      - He declared that "circumcision has value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised" (Romans 2:25).
      - In Galatians 5:2-6 he wrote that those who decide to be physically circumcised are then trying to justify themselves by the law and not by the Lord's grace.
- Paul in three passages alludes to circumcision of the heart, that being a spiritual circumcision. While physical circumcision is cutting off a small part of the flesh, circumcision of the heart is cutting off the fleshly nature of our heart. Circumcision of the heart is a cutting away of anything and everything that prevents us from fearing the Lord, loving him with all our heart, serving him with wholeheartedness, and obeying his principles and precepts. It includes removing anything we love more than Him. Repentance and faith are the only requirements; anything else such as works must be removed. Colossians 2:11 especially illustrates this circumcision. "In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self-ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ." This circumcision is not done by human hands but by Christ. And it is not just males. All believers have experienced this circumcision of the heart by Christ.

And Abraham became the father of Isaac and circumcised him eight days after his birth.

- Abraham obeyed God and circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old.
  - Issac would later circumcise his son Jacob.
  - Jacob would later circumcise his twelve sons.
  - This obedience was passed down through all the generations in the history of Israel.

7:9 Because the patriarchs were jealous of Joseph, they sold him as a slave into Egypt.

- His brothers out of jealousy sold him into slavery where for seventeen years he was a prisoner in bonds, but a free man in the Lord.
- Stephen mentioned the story of Joseph because he is a picture of Jesus, in that the sons of Israel rejected Joseph, who later became a savior to them (and the only possible savior). Jesus too was rejected by the Jews. And of course we know that Jesus is the way of salvation.

But God was with him.

- Again, Stephen emphasized the spiritual presence of God with Joseph all the time. Joseph did not need to go to the temple to be close to God – there was no temple. Instead, God was with him all the time.

7:10 and rescued him from all his troubles.

- After suffering for many years, Joseph was freed from his bonds to be the rescuer of his family. Never do we read that Joseph ever doubted God.
  - He was hauled away to Egypt.
  - He was purchased by Potipher where he eventually ran his master's household until Potipher's wife falsely accused him.
  - He was then imprisoned where he eventually became a trusted prisoner.
  - Pharaoh's wine bearer forgot about him for two years.
  - He was brought before the king. Never did Joseph doubt God.
    - **We too should never doubt God no matter what our circumstances are or how bad it seems!**
      - It is times like these that we should draw as close to God as possible.

He gave Joseph wisdom and enabled him to gain the goodwill of Pharaoh king of Egypt. So Pharaoh made him ruler over Egypt and all his palace.

- God gave Joseph wisdom and enabled him to gain the goodwill of Pharaoh king of Egypt.
  - Pharaoh made him ruler over Egypt and all his palace.
  - He was second in command of the entire nation.
  - His walk with God not only saved Egypt, but it also saved his family.
  - And he never harbored ill will towards his brothers. Remember his words to them in Genesis 50:20, "*You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.*"

## Conclusion

In Stephen's defense, he quoted from Scripture. Our greatest defense is to do likewise. Using the wisdom and words of God is far more intelligent than speaking from our own ignorance. No one can dispute or challenge God's wisdom and knowledge and expect to win. Only the most foolish person would try such a thing. But it happens every day. We see people challenge the authority of Scripture even in churches today. False teachers try to mislead by teaching heresy and unfortunately leading many people astray. The same thing was taking place with the Sanhedrin. People since the advent of Christianity have denied Christ as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. The task before is the same as Stephen. We must proclaim the truth no matter where we are and what our circumstances happen to be at the time.

My challenge to you today is to ask yourself, "Would I stand as faithful as Stephen or would I cower in my situation and not do as the Holy Spirit of God was leading me to do?" My prayer for each of us is that we would stand as faithful as Stephen.

Let's close in prayer.

Our prayer here at Sports & Rec Plus for you is that every message we send out is an inspiration and blessing in your personal walk with the Lord. Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions about this or any of our messages. And take a few minutes to visit our website and see how we can come alongside you, as you take the Gospel to your community and the world. Here is our contact information:

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