

Thoughts on Acts Chapter Seven

In the Book of Acts, Chapter Six concludes as Stephen is seized and taken before the Sanhedrin. They see his face *"like the face of an angel"* (Acts 6:15). The scriptures do not tell us what the council saw or imagined. But Solomon gives us an insight with these words. *"Who is like the wise man and who knows the interpretation of a matter? A man's wisdom illumines him and causes his stern face to beam"* (Ecclesiastes 8:1). We can see his knowledge of truth in Acts chapter seven as Stephen delivers a sermon of defense. Stephen's sermon details Hebrew history from Abraham to Jesus. He ends the sermon by charging the council members with unbelief and killing God's Righteous One. The chapter concludes with the murder of Stephen and a vision of Christ receiving His faithful servant into paradise.

Some people ask the question, "If you could only deliver one message, what would it be? Stephen was in that position as he spoke to the High Priest and the gathered council. We know that Stephen, *"full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people"* (Acts 6:8). But the scriptures do not say he prophesied. The implication is that the things Stephen said came from his heart and memory, *"Full of the Spirit and of wisdom"* as Acts 6:3 states. Of the 39 books of the Old Testament, Stephen chose to mention the portions that define God's plan to create a people that would allow the Christ to be born. He also pointed out that God's chosen people had always opposed and rejected God's plan. Their ancestors, as they were doing, killed the prophets who explained God's will.

It is interesting that as Stephen speaks of building the nation through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, he brings up Joseph. Joseph was not in the promised line to the messiah. The eleven brothers hated him because their father Jacob gave Joseph responsibility above them. The brothers wanted to put him to death. Instead, they sold him into slavery. Through their unrighteous act, Joseph was raised to a position to save his family from starvation and complete God's plan for the nation. As Stephen faced the High Priest, the Sanhedrin had been jealous of Jesus because He had power and authority over them. They hated Him, wanted Him dead, and convinced Rome to crucify Him. But God raised him from death to a position where He can save all people from their sins. (Acts 4:8-12). Paul writes about the result of the Jew's lawless act toward Jesus *"who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds"* (Titus 2:14).

Stephen also shows the comparisons between Moses and Jesus. The one who performed many incredible works and gave Israel the Law was despised by those who grew tired of waiting at Mount Sinai (Exodus 18) and in the wilderness. Even his brother and sister complained about him in Numbers 12, and Numbers 16 tells of Korah's rebellion. Jesus did many miraculous works, exceeding those that Moses and the prophets performed, and the people hated him because they wanted something else. He points out that Moses spoke of a prophet God would send, like himself, (Deuteronomy 18:15-19).

The pride the Sanhedrin had in themselves was only equaled by their pride in The Temple. They viewed it as something that would be with the Jews forever. It was almost like they considered God to be locked up in the Most Holy Place under their control. They considered the destruction of this Temple as a past happening that could never happen again. Part of Stephen's defense showed that even Solomon wrote that God could not live in a building. The Temple would only be needed until

God established His Kingdom with all people from all nations (Isaiah 66:18-23). Jesus mentions this to the Samaritan woman in (John 4:21-24).

Stephen also recalls, as recorded in Acts 7:43, the sins of Israel in the wilderness and under men like Manasseh who burned their children in the fires of Moloch and followed the sun, moon, and stars of the heavens. He reminds his listeners of idolaters who carried tents for their idols and set them in temples in their cities and homes. Although Solomon built the Temple for God, His abode remained in heaven. *"But it was Solomon who built a house for Him. 'However, the Most High does not dwell in houses made by human hands; as the prophet says: 'Heaven is My throne, and earth is the footstool of My feet; what kind of house will you build for Me?' says the Lord, 'Or what place is there for My repose? 'Was it not My hand which made all these things?'"* (Acts 7:47-50).

When people cannot defeat truth and refuse to listen and believe, they allow their emotions to turn to anger, hate, and rage. In their rage, the Sanhedrin killed the righteous messenger of Christ (Acts 7:54-60). Stephen's final words remind us of Jesus' words (John 14:1-3).

Why would a man deliver that message, knowing it would result in his death?