**Stephen’s Defense Before the Sanhedrin**

*Acts 7*

**Introduction**

1. **In Acts 7**, after being falsely accused of blasphemy, Stephen gave a defense before the Sanhedrin council that provoked them to stoning him to death. (Stephen’s death is the first record of a Christian dying a martyr’s death.)
2. There are several things that can be learned and applied from the account of Stephen’s defense and death.
3. Note first however:
   1. **Stephen’s defense is a summary of Jewish history. There are some minor differences with his historical recitation from the Old Testament writings. THIS DOES NOT MEAN STEPHEN TAUGHT WRONGLY, AND WAS UNINSPIRED.**
      1. His audience was Jewish, and was very familiar with their history. If he said something wrong, they would have used it against him.
      2. There are reasonable explanations for the differences that can be considered. (This lesson is not for such a purpose.)
   2. **Stephen’s speech was from God:**
      1. **(6:8)** – Wonders and signs attested that the word was from God.
      2. **(6:10)** – ***“the Spirit”*** may indicate that He was under the guidance of the HS. (Also could indicate the fervor and sincerity with which he taught.)
      3. **Regardless, he was inspired of God, and these words were the words of God, for the miracles he performed attest to such, and Luke’s record is for our learning.**
4. Stephen Accused of Blasphemy
5. Stephen Accused of Blasphemy **(6:8-11)**
   1. **(v. 10)** – they were ***“disputing with Stephen,”*** not because what he said was untrue, but because they rejected the truth. ***(“not able to resist”*** = it was irrefutable)
   2. **(v. 11)** – The accusation was unwarranted. They had to “induce” men to say such.
6. Stephen Brought Before the Council **(6:12-7:1**)
   1. **(vv. 12-14)** – They set up false witnesses to testify against Stephen before the Sanhedrin.
      1. **Words possibly refer to:**
         1. ***“Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up’” (John 2:19*** – Jesus concerning His death, and resurrection – ***“temple of His body”***). (*STEPHEN – Speaking of Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection?)*
         2. **Cf. Matthew 24:1-2** – Destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 prophesied by Jesus. (LIKELY WHAT STEPHEN WAS TALKING ABOUT, CONSIDERING THE CONTENTS OF HIS DEFENSE. ESPECIALLY TOWARD THE END.)
            1. **Cf. Luke 19:41-44** – This is God’s judgment upon Jerusalem because they ***“did not know the time of [their] visitation.”***
            2. **I.e. rejected the prophesied Messiah, so God would bring judgment upon them in the destruction of Jerusalem.**
         3. Either way, they were ***“false witnesses”*** because Stephen could not have said Jesus would destroy the temple, for neither account has Jesus saying HE would do so, but that it simply would happen.
      2. ***“and change the customs which Moses delivered to us” – “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (Romans 10:4*** – not blasphemous to preach that the Law was fulfilled by the Christ who was prophesied to fulfill it.)
   2. **(vv. 15-7:1)** – The ***“high priest”*** then let Stephen explain himself 🡪
7. Stephen’s Defense
8. Jewish History to the Point of the Exodus **(7:2-22)** (MENTION BRIEFLY)
   1. Abraham called out, promise of land, covenant of circumcision, Isaac, Jacob, 12 Patriarchs – Jacob’s sons – **(vv. 2-8)**
      1. Note: ***“God gave him no inheritance.”***
      2. It was promised to be fulfilled in the Exodus **(vv. 6-7).**
   2. Fulfillment of prophecy – ***“would dwell in a foreign land”*** – Joseph sold, rose to power (God with him), famine brings Jacob, patriarchs, and relatives (75 people) to Egypt – **(vv. 9-16).**
      1. **NOTE: Here Stephen begins to note the Jew’s rejections of God in the past. (Of God, and the people He used.)**
      2. **(v. 9) – Joseph was one God chose to work through (dreams), and they rejected him. (*Then to Moses, and lastly and ultimately Christ.*)**
   3. Fulfillment of prophecy – ***“they would bring them into bondage and oppress them four hundred years”*** – Israelites multiplied, different Pharaoh arose (didn’t know Joseph), killed Israelite babies, Moses ***“set out”*** and raised by Pharaoh’s daughter – **(vv. 17-22).**
9. Jewish History from the Exodus to the Christ **(7:23-53)**
   1. Moses visits his brethren **(vv. 23-29):**
      1. **(v. 25)** – His reasoning is not recorded in the OT. (However, we aren’t told why he thought this, but he thought they would understand he was their deliverer.)
      2. **(vv. 27-29)** – They reacted poorly to Moses, and he fled to Midian.
         1. **Note: (v. 35)** – this was them rejecting Moses.
         2. **Moses would be the one to deliver the Israelites, but they rejected him.**
   2. Lord appears to Moses, and sends him **(vv. 30-36):**
      1. **(v. 34)** – prophecy to deliver them to be fulfilled in Moses.
      2. **(vv. 35-36)** – They rejected the one God had chosen to deliver them by!
         1. **Note: Stephen is showing a negative history of the Jews so he can compare the current Jews to them.**
         2. **(vv. 51-52)** – Likening the Sanhedrin and accusers to these Israelites of old.
         3. **(v. 36)** – The one who the Israelites rejected DID THESE GREAT THINGS.
   3. Lord gives the Law through Moses, and Israel rejects him (thus God) again by turning to idolatry **(vv. 37-43):**
      1. **(v. 37)** – Reference to the Christ.
         1. **Stephen was accused of dishonoring Moses, but in reality the Jews were dishonoring Moses.**
         2. ***As Stephen will point out later, they rejected Jesus whom Moses prophesied about, just as their ancestors rejected Moses!***
      2. (**vv. 38-43)** – They rejected Moses, **despite his lofty ministry**, and rejected him and God by going after idols:
         1. **(vv. 38-39a)** – *Despite God obviously being behind Moses, they rejected him.* (**LIKE CHRIST WAS REJECTED**)
         2. **(vv. 39b-43)** – The way they ***“turned back to Egypt”*** was to involve themselves in idol worship. (***As the Egyptians***)
         3. **Stephen then transitions from this to a discussion about the temple 🡪**
   4. Tabernacle in the wilderness, with Joshua to the promised land, then a permanent temple built by Solomon **(vv. 44-50):**
      1. **(vv. 44-45)** – God’s symbolic dwelling place, and the structure that HE REQUIRED they build, was the tabernacle. (**Tent – temporary, mobile**)
      2. **(vv. 45b-47)** – David wanted to build God a house (*thought it wrong that he dwelt in a house of cedar, and God in a tent)*, but God did not permit him to. God permitted Solomon to build the temple.
         1. **NOTE: These dwelling places of God are symbolic.**
         2. ***NOTE: These dwelling places of God can be, and have been supplanted by others at the will of God. (“Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father…But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.” John 4:21, 23 – Jesus to Samaritan woman at the well.)***
      3. **(vv. 48-50)** – Stephen then makes the point that God has no physical dwelling place. (You can’t contain God!)
      4. **NOTE: As the Israelites of old worshiped the calf made with hands (Idolatry), the Israelites of Stephen’s day developed an IDOLATROUS view of the temple made with hands.**
         1. Rejected Moses/God 🡪 turned to idolatry (calf)
         2. Rejected Jesus/God 🡪 held on to the temple, and Law, and traditions, etc. (idolatry – temple represents a big part of their pride as Jews)
         3. Concerning destruction of temple A.D. 70 – ***“they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation” (Luke 19:44*** – visitation of Messiah – they rejected Him, so God punished them.).
         4. **Stephen did not blaspheme the temple, but demonstrated their false view of such, as they rejected God’s Son! 🡪**
   5. Stephen’s final point – they are just like the Israelites before, as they rejected Jesus **(vv. 51-53):**
      1. ***“stiff-necked”*** – like a stubborn animal.
      2. ***“uncircumcised in heart and ears”*** – May be Jews, but your heart is in rebellion to God – you do not listen and obey!
      3. **(v. 53)** – Such a holy law you claim to love, you actually blaspheme yourself by rejecting the Messiah!
   6. **This angered them, and they killed Stephen** – especially angered when he said he saw Jesus who he just accused them of rejecting (**vv. 54-60).**

**What can we learn from this that we can apply to our lives? 🡪**

1. Applications
2. Negative Preaching is Necessary
   1. **The Gospel is for the purpose of pointing out sin and error so men can repent and be saved!**
   2. Stephen would have done them a disservice if he was not so straightforward. (THE TRUTH HURTS!)
   3. **We must have courage to “tell it like it is.”**
3. Preaching is to be Accompanied by Love (7:60)
   1. Stephen’s message may have been hard to hear, but it was not preached out of hate.
   2. **(7:60)** – Like Jesus at His death, Stephen asked God to forgive them. (Wanted their salvation!) (Obviously conditional upon repentance and obedience.)
4. We Must Take Heed How We Respond (cf. Acts 2:36-39)
   1. We must learn from the bad example of the Sanhedrin.
   2. **How will be respond when convicted by the gospel?**
   3. **Cf. Acts 2:36-39** – different response when convicted of sin.

**Conclusion**

1. Stephen’s defense helps us further understand the history of the Israelites as it pertains to their rejection of God, and His messengers. (Ultimately to the Messiah)
2. **Let us also understand the kind of preaching that is necessary, that it must be done out of love, that it must be done, and let us respond positively to the message always.**