

Review

This morning, we were learning about the stoning of Stephen, one of the first seven deacons of the early church. We skipped over the sermon he preached, essentially just abbreviating it down to, "You Jews never see your deliverer or deliverance coming the first time, and you've just done the same thing with Jesus."

But tonight, I wanted to go back and revisit Stephen's sermon, because there are details in it which we are given nowhere else in Scripture. Thus, it becomes an essential commentary on the Old Testament, which we normally are studying on Sunday nights at this time.

7:2-8 Abraham's Calls

In Genesis 12, we read about God's calling of Abraham.

Gen. 12:1-4 Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you; And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; And I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed." So Abram went forth as the LORD had spoken to him; and Lot went with him. Now Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

As you read this, it seems that God told Abram, "Go to Canaan", and he went. But Stephen now tells us that this isn't the first time God told Abram to do this.

Stephen tells us that Abram was living in Mesopotamia, Ur of the Chaldeans. God appeared and said "Depart from your country and your relatives, and come into the land that I will show you." Abram says, "Great idea, God. I'll go. But I'm going to bring my relatives along with me." And he did. Abram & Sarai brought his dad Terah and his nephew Lot. They left, and...

Gen. 11:31 ...went out together from Ur of the Chaldeans in order to enter the land of Canaan; and they went as far as

Haran, and settled there.

They didn't go to Canaan. They only got as far as Haran, and settled there. It was in Haran that Abram's father Terah died (Gen. 11:32). And after that, God said to Abram again...

Gen. 12:1 ...“Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father’s house, to the land which I will show you”

That's a detail only Stephen tells us - that God had told Abram this once already. And, in true form...

Gen. 12:5 ...Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his nephew...

So even the second time, Abram wasn't completely obedient. But he did go to the land of Canaan.

7:9-16 Joseph's Time In Egypt

Abraham's great-grandsons through Isaac and Jacob would ultimately become the fathers of the 12 tribes of Israel. So, they are called the patriarchs. These men were very jealous of their younger brother Joseph, because he seemed to be their dad's favorite. Plus, he'd been having dreams that indicated he would rule over them. They didn't like this, and attacked him, selling him into slavery.

He was taken down to Egypt, and through a series of events, solved a troubling problem for the Pharaoh. He was made the governor of Egypt, and not only saved the people from a long famine, but enriched the nation by selling food to people of surrounding countries. Ultimately, Pharaoh ended up owning all the land of Egypt (Gen. 47:20).

Joseph moved his family down to Egypt from the land of Canaan.

7:17-19 Another King Over Egypt

When the Israelites moved down to Egypt, they began to increase in number. This would not have been an issue except that...

Ex. 1:8 ...a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph.

We would assume that Pharaoh would have communicated to his sons what Joseph had done for Egypt. However, when Stephen says "an-

other king arose," he uses the Greek word "heteros." This word means "another of a different kind, the other one of two." From this one word, we discover that the king who arose over Egypt was not of the ancestry of the Pharaoh that appointed Joseph to power.

And this king...

Ex. 1:9 ...said to his people, "Behold, the people of the sons of Israel are more and mightier than we. Come, let us deal wisely with them, or else they will multiply and in the event of war, they will also join themselves to those who hate us, and fight against us and depart from the land." So they appointed taskmasters over them to afflict them with hard labor...

But the Jews continued to increase in number, so this Pharaoh commanded that their baby boys must be put to death at birth.

7:20-36 Moses

Most of us are familiar with the account of Moses being put in a basket and sent down the Nile River, only to be discovered by Pharaoh's daughter.

But what you may not realize is that God was prepared to use Moses as the Jews' deliverer forty years earlier than it happened. That's because when we read the story in Exodus chapter two, we only hear of the events themselves. It's only from Stephen's sermon that we gain the insight that Moses' motivation for defending the man being treated unjustly and for trying to bring reconciliation to the two fighting was that he felt a calling of God to grant his people deliverance from Egypt.

Of course, since they refused to recognize it, they would have to wait another 40 years before the Exodus. But God did use Moses then, as both their ruler and deliverer.

7:37-38 A Prophet Like Moses

The "Prophet Like Moses" had been promised by Moses before he died.

Deut. 18:15 "The LORD your God will raise up for you a proph-

et like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him."

The Jews had waited and waited. But none of the prophets were ever the fulfillment of this promise. Even when John the Baptist came on the scene, the Jews wanted to know if he was one of three people:

John 1:20-21 And he confessed and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." They asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" And he *said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No."

John wasn't the Prophet Like Moses. But that Prophet was about to arrive - it was Jesus Christ. Peter preached this in Acts chapter three, explaining,

Acts 3:22 "Moses said, 'THE LORD GOD WILL RAISE UP FOR YOU A PROPHET LIKE ME FROM YOUR BRETHREN; TO HIM YOU SHALL GIVE HEED to everything He says to you."

Unfortunately, they were no more obedient to Jesus than they were to Moses.

7:39-41 The Golden Calf

While Moses was receiving the Law of God up on top of Mount Sinai, the people grew impatient. They complained, and came to Moses' brother Aaron, saying

Ex. 32:1-4 ..."Come, make us a god who will go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." Aaron said to them, "Tear off the gold rings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." Then all the people tore off the gold rings which were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. He took this from their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool and made it into a molten calf; and they said, "This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt."

God sent Moses back down the mountain, and...

Ex. 32:19-24 It came about, as soon as Moses came near the camp, that he saw the calf and the dancing; and Moses' anger burned, and he threw the tablets from his hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain. He took the calf which they had made and burned it with fire, and ground it to powder, and scattered it over the surface of the water and made the sons of Israel drink it. Then Moses said to Aaron, "What did this people do to you, that you have brought such great sin upon them?" Aaron said, "Do not let the anger of my lord burn; you know the people yourself, that they are prone to evil. "For they said to me, 'Make a god for us who will go before us; for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' "I said to them, 'Whoever has any gold, let them tear it off.' So they gave it to me, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf."

God would replace the tablets, but the Jews still would not be consistent in their obedience to His Law.

7:42-43 Israel's Idolatry

As Stephen tells the Sanhedrin about their ancestors' idolatry, he also points out that it didn't end with the golden calf. As a matter of fact, it didn't start there, either. He quotes God from Amos chapter five...

Amos 5:25-26 "Did you present Me with sacrifices and grain offerings in the wilderness for forty years, O house of Israel? "You also carried along Sik-KOOTH your king and Kee-YOON, your images, the star of your gods which you made for yourselves."

(The false gods known as Sik-KOOTH and Kee-YOON in Babylon were apparently also called Mol-OKH and Hrom-FAH-yah.)

Israel's idolatry dated back to their time in Egypt. They had carried their false gods with them into the wilderness, and continued their idolatrous worship and practices into the Promised Land.

Ultimately, God would send them into captivity for 70 years in Babylon.

7:44-50 Building The Temple

While the Jews were worshipping false gods, they also had the tabernacle. Eventually, King David wanted to build a more permanent structure as a temple to God, but he was not allowed. He explained,

1Chr. 28:2-3 "...I had intended to build a permanent home for the ark of the covenant of the LORD and for the footstool of our God. So I had made preparations to build it. But God said to me, 'You shall not build a house for My name because you are a man of war and have shed blood.'"

Although he couldn't build it, his son Solomon was allowed. And after the temple was completed, it was dedicated by Solomon, who prayed,

1Kings 8:27 "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You, how much less this house which I have built!"

Stephen quotes a similar passage from Isaiah 66...

Is. 66:1-2 Thus says the LORD, "Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool. Where then is a house you could build for Me? And where is a place that I may rest? For My hand made all these things, Thus all these things came into being," declares the LORD. But to this one I will look, To him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My Word."

God is not stuck within the confines of the temple. Or of this church building for that matter. He is omnipresent - dwelling everywhere at once.

Be comforted today, knowing that God is not left behind when you leave church tonight. The God of all comfort is with you, wherever you go.