

Approximately 45 minutes expository



Heaven Opened and a Faith That Stands

Acts Chapter 7

Opening Prayer:

Father God, we come before You in the mighty name of Jesus. Thank You for Your Word that strengthens us and prepares us to stand firm. As we open Acts chapter 7, give us courage like Stephen. Give us clarity in truth. And give us hearts that are fully surrendered to You. If there is anyone listening who does not yet know You, draw them into saving faith today. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Historical Setting:

The early Church in Jerusalem is growing rapidly. Thousands have come to faith in Jesus Christ. The apostles are preaching boldly. Miracles are happening. Opposition has intensified.

In Acts chapter 6, Stephen **.... a man "full of faith and of the Holy Spirit...." (Acts 6:5)** was arrested on false charges of blasphemy.

Now in Acts 7, Stephen stands before the Sanhedrin the highest Jewish ruling council the same body that condemned Jesus.

He is accused of speaking against the temple and the law of Moses.

Instead of defending himself with fear, Stephen delivers one of the most powerful sermons in the New Testament.


Acts chapter 7 is the longest recorded sermon in the Book of Acts. And it costs Stephen his life.

But it also launches the Church into its next phase of expansion.

1. God Is Not Confined (Acts 7:1-16):

Let us look into God's Word....

Acts 7:1-16(NIV) Then the high priest asked Stephen, "Are these charges true?"

² 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,  mess-uh-puh-TAY-mee-uh before he lived in Harran. ³ 'Leave your country and your people,' God said, 'and go to the land I will show you.'

4 “So he left the land of the Chaldeans

👉 kal-DEE-unz and settled in Harran. After the death of his father, God sent him to this land where you are now living. 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. 6 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. 7 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.’ 8 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.

⁹ “Because the patriarchs were jealous of Joseph, they sold him as a slave into Egypt. But God was with him ¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ “Then a famine struck all Egypt and Canaan, bringing great suffering, and our ancestors could not find food. ¹² When Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our forefathers on their first visit. ¹³ On their second visit, Joseph told his brothers who he was, and Pharaoh learned about Joseph’s family. ¹⁴ After this, Joseph sent for his father Jacob and his whole family, seventy-five in all. ¹⁵ Then Jacob

went down to Egypt, where he and our ancestors died. ¹⁶ Their bodies were brought back to Shechem 👉 SHEK-um and placed in the tomb that Abraham had bought from the sons of Hamor at Shechem for a certain sum of money.

Okay so let us re-cap.....

The high priest asks Stephen:

“.....Are these charges true?” (Acts 7:1)

Stephen begins by recounting Israel’s history.

He starts with Abraham:

“....The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia....” (v.2)

- Notice God appeared before there was a temple.
- Before there was Jerusalem.
- Before there was the Law.

- 👉 God is not confined to buildings.
- 👉 He is not limited by natural features.

Stephen reminds them that God called Abraham, promised land, and raised up Joseph.

He recounts how Joseph was rejected by his brothers:

“Because the patriarchs were jealous of Joseph, they sold him as a slave into Egypt. But God was with him.” (v.9)

Rejection did not cancel God’s purpose. Stephen is steadily building that theme.

2. Moses: Rejected Deliverer (Acts 7:17-43):

Acts 7:17-43 (NIV) ¹⁷ “As the time drew near for God to fulfill his promise to Abraham, the number of our people in Egypt had greatly increased. ¹⁸ Then ‘a

new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt.’¹⁹ He dealt treacherously with our people and oppressed our ancestors by forcing them to throw out their newborn babies so that they would die.

²⁰ “At that time Moses was born, and he was no ordinary child. For three months he was cared for by his family.²¹ When he was placed outside, Pharaoh’s daughter took him and brought him up as her own son.²² Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action.

²³ “When Moses was forty years old, he decided to visit his own people, the Israelites.²⁴ He saw one of them being mistreated by an Egyptian, so he went to his defense and avenged him by killing the Egyptian.²⁵ Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did

not. ²⁶ The next day Moses came upon two Israelites who were fighting. He tried to reconcile them by saying, ‘Men, you are brothers; why do you want to hurt each other?’

²⁷ “But the man who was mistreating the other pushed Moses aside and said, ‘Who made you ruler and judge over us? ²⁸ Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?’ ²⁹ When Moses heard this, he fled to Midian, where he settled as a foreigner and had two sons.

³⁰ “After forty years had passed, an angel appeared to Moses in the flames of a burning bush in the desert near Mount Sinai. ³¹ When he saw this, he was amazed at the sight. As he went over to get a closer look, he heard the Lord say: ³² ‘I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and

Jacob.’ Moses trembled with fear and did not dare to look.

³³ “Then the Lord said to him, ‘Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. ³⁴ I have indeed seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their groaning and have come down to set them free. Now come, I will send you back to Egypt.’

³⁵ “This is the same Moses they had rejected with the words, ‘Who made you ruler and judge?’ He was sent to be their ruler and deliverer by God himself, through the angel who appeared to him in the bush. ³⁶ He led them out of Egypt and performed wonders and signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea and for forty years in the wilderness.

³⁷ “This is the Moses who told the Israelites, ‘God will raise up for you a

prophet like me from your own people.’³⁸ He was in the assembly in the wilderness, with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our ancestors; and he received living words to pass on to us.

³⁹ “But our ancestors refused to obey him. Instead, they rejected him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt.⁴⁰ They told Aaron, ‘Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who led us out of Egypt—we don’t know what has happened to him!’⁴¹ That was the time they made an idol in the form of a calf. They brought sacrifices to it and reveled in what their own hands had made.⁴² But God turned away from them and gave them over to the worship of the sun, moon and stars. This agrees with what is written in the book of the prophets:

**“Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings forty years in the wilderness, people of Israel?
43 You have taken up the tabernacle of Molek and the star of your god Rephan, the idols you made to worship. Therefore I will send you into exile’ beyond Babylon.**

So let us recap....

- Stephen moves to Moses.
- Moses was raised up to deliver Israel.

But **verse 25** says:

“Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not.”

Rejected.

Verse 35:

“This is the same Moses they had rejected with the words, ‘Who made you ruler and judge?.....’”

Stephen is building his argument carefully.

- Joseph was rejected.
- Moses was rejected.
- The prophets were rejected.

And now?

- Jesus.

Verse 37 points forward:

“....God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your own people.”

👉 That prophet is Jesus.

Stephen also reminds them that Israel repeatedly turned to idols.

Verse 39:

“.....In their hearts they turned back to Egypt.”

Even though they had physically left Egypt, **their hearts** were still **attached to the old life.**

- Outwardly they were free,
- but inwardly they were still in bondage.

They had been brought out of slavery, yet slavery had not fully been driven out of them.

👉 That is a strong warning for us today.

- A person can look free on the outside, and yet still be longing for the old life within.
- God does not just want to bring us out of bondage; **He wants to change our hearts.**

👉 That is a warning for us today.

3. The Temple and God's Presence (Acts 7:44-50)

Acts 7:44-50 (NIV)⁴⁴ “Our ancestors had the tabernacle of the covenant law with them in the wilderness. It had been made as God directed Moses, according to the pattern he had seen. ⁴⁵ After receiving the tabernacle, our ancestors under Joshua brought it with them when they took the land from the nations God drove out before them. It remained in the land until the time of David, ⁴⁶ who enjoyed God's favor and asked that he might provide a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. ⁴⁷ But it was Solomon who built a house for him.

⁴⁸ “However, the Most High does not live in houses made by human hands. As the prophet says:

***49 “Heaven is my throne,
and the earth is my footstool.
What kind of house will you build for
me?
says the Lord.
Or where will my resting place be?
50 Has not my hand made all these
things?’***

Okay... Let us look into God’s Word....

The charge against Stephen was that he had spoken against the temple.

So he addresses it directly.

He explains that the tabernacle traveled with Israel.

Later Solomon built the temple.

But then he quotes Isaiah (66:1-2):

“Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will

you build for me? says the Lord....”

(Acts 7:49)

God cannot be contained in stone walls.

The temple pointed to **God’s presence**.

👉 But **Jesus** (the Messiah) is now the true meeting place between God and man.

4. The Bold Confrontation (Acts 7:51-53):

Acts 7:51-53(NIV) ⁵¹ “You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit! ⁵² Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him— ⁵³ you who have received the law that was given through angels but have not obeyed it.”

- Now Stephen shifts from history to defiance.

“You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised.....”

(Vs.51)

Wow... very bold.

He continues: (Vs.51)

“You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit!”

- That is the core issue:
 - 👉 Resisting the Spirit.

Verse 52:

“Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One.....”

And then the direct statement:

👉 **“And now you have betrayed and murdered him.”**(Vs.52) **(JESUS)**...

👉 The “Righteous One” is **Jesus Christ**. Stephen is saying, “Your fathers rejected the prophets who spoke of the Messiah, and now you have rejected and killed the Messiah Himself.”

- Stephen is not angry. He is fearless.

👉 Truth spoken in love is still truth.

5. Heaven Opened (Acts 7:54-56):

Acts 7:54-56(NIV) ⁵⁴ When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. ⁵⁵ But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ⁵⁶ “Look,” he said, “I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”

- The council is furious.

Verse 55 says:

“But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.”

- Standing.

Usually Scripture says Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father.

- Here He stands.

As if welcoming His faithful servant home.

Stephen says:

“Look... I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” (v.56)

- Even as stones are about to fly, He sees glory.

When you live with eternity in view, the pain of this life is real, but it is no longer final.

6. The First Martyr (Acts 7:57-60):

Acts 7:57-60(NIV) ⁵⁷ At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, ⁵⁸ dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.

⁵⁹ While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” ⁶⁰ Then he fell on his knees and cried out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he fell asleep.

- They drag him out of the city and stone him.

Verse 59:

“While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’”

Then he says:

“....Lord, do not hold this sin against them....” (Vs.60)

- Those words echo Jesus on the cross.

And then:

“....When he had said this, he fell asleep.”(Vs.60)

- Stephen dies
- But the **gospel does not.**

At the end of the chapter, we are introduced to a young man named **Saul**.

- The man who would become the **apostle Paul.**
- Paul is **traditionally credited with writing 13 books of the New Testament.**

That is **13 out of 27 books**, which is **about 48% of the New Testament books.** Some

people also include **Hebrews**, which would make it **14 books**, but the authorship of Hebrews is debated.

👉 Paul wrote nearly half of the books of the New Testament.

👉 Stephen remained faithful, and God used his witness to plant seeds that would later help change the world.

What Acts chapter 7 Teaches Us:

1. **God Is Bigger Than Buildings**
He is not confined by tradition or structure.
2. **Rejection Is Not Failure**
Joseph was rejected.
Moses was rejected.
Jesus was rejected.
Faithfulness matters more than approval.

3. Don't Resist the Holy Spirit
Soft hearts receive truth.
Hard hearts reject it.
4. Heaven Is Real
Stephen saw it.
It gave him courage.
5. Forgiveness Is Powerful
Even while dying, he forgave.

Salvation Invitation:

Maybe you feel conviction right now.

Stephen said, **"....You always resist the Holy Spirit!"** (Vs.51)

 Don't resist Him today.

Jesus Christ is the Righteous One.

- He died for your sins.
- He rose again.
- He stands ready to forgive you.

The same Savior who welcomed Stephen is ready to receive you.

If you are ready to be **born again**, pray this (or something like this) sincerely:

Let us Pray...

“Lord Jesus, I believe You died for my sins and rose from the dead..... Forgive me..... Soften my heart..... I surrender my life to You..... Be my Lord and Savior..... Fill me with Your Holy Spirit.... In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

“If” you meant that prayer and believe in your heart,.... you are saved.

Romans 10:9(NIV) ⁹ If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

- Heaven is open to you.
- You belong to Him.

Let us Pray.....

Closing Prayer:

Father God, thank You for Acts chapter 7. Thank You for Stephen's courage. Thank You for showing us that heaven is real and that Jesus reigns.

Give us boldness.

Give us faithfulness.

Give us soft hearts that do not resist Your Spirit.

Help us stand firm in truth.

Help us forgive others like Jesus.

Help us live with eternity in view.

Lord God, We give You all the glory.

In Jesus' mighty name, Amen.



Matthew 28:19-20