

Acts #41

“Opening Argument for the Defense” *Acts 7:1-10*

Two accusations have been made against Stephen:

1. Speaking against the temple and 2. Changing the customs of Moses.

This question from the high priest creates a real crisis for Stephen; either he must defend himself or make the issue

of the Gospel clear because the indictment is worded in a way that he cannot do both.

*It's more important to Stephen to make the issue clear and he's going to do so in a powerful way in which he wisely defends himself against the charge that he alone is changing the customs of Moses.*

And he'll do that by showing that Moses spoke about the Lord Jesus Christ, prophesying His First Advent and he'll demonstrate that Jesus Christ is the God of Israel.

Stephen stands accused but in reality he will judge the Sanhedrin.

The ruling body of Israel have crucified Jesus Christ and are now being given yet another gracious chance to hear

the Gospel and be saved.

*Stephen's message is actually going to judge the judges rather than defend the defendant; so instead of pleading guilty or not guilty, he simply presents facts on which they can form their own opinion.*

Stephen has chosen to identify himself with the Lord Jesus Christ, his Savior and since he is in union with Jesus Christ, he must stand or fall on the basis of the judges' attitude toward Jesus Christ, not on the basis of the laws of the land.

Stephen is explaining to the Sanhedrin that the Jews who represent the leadership of the land are a new race, a brand new group of people.

There was great pride of race among the Jews but they failed in one significant area.

*The only basis for any heritage that was meaningful was their spiritual heritage and the God of glory appeared to Abram when Abram was a Gentile.*

Families can be a great hindrance in the spiritual life.

Abram's father dominated his adult life and so he had a dried-up life, spiritually.

Stephen's message is still relatable to us today; Harran represents the human viewpoint of life and Abram started out with a huge failure but he eventually became one of the greatest believers of all time and the reason he did is because of what God did in his life.

Jesus Christ is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and when Stephen says: *this land where you are now living*; he's referring to a place where they should be living under Abraham's spiritual heritage; where there are abundant spiritual blessings available.

The rulers of Israel were not using the available spiritual blessings because they would not accept Jesus Christ as their Savior and Stephen is telling them something else: You keep this up and you won't be living here for long.

*Once you get to Canaan, everything isn't perfect and the reason is simple: Canaan has never represented Heaven; Canaan always represents the faith-rest life.*

God promised Abraham the land, so all he had to do was recognize that it was the land that God promised and then stand on faith.

**God has provided a lot of promises at this time because it's hard to understand the plan of God if people do not grow up spiritually.**

The promises help to declare the plan of God because they say:

You don't understand the overall plan yet, so you need this for right now; you're in a difficult situation or a tight spot with its frustrations and problems, so here's a promise.

*Promises are the way we get started, so eventually we'll begin to see that a promise is like muscle on the bones and if the skeletal structure is the grace of God, the bones are the Word of God.*

One of the most important things involved in orienting to the plan of God is to know prophecy as well as understanding our own status in time.

This promise was given to the Jews a long time before they went into bondage.

**The covenant of circumcision was to remind the Jews that God had separated the Jewish race for a particular reason;**

**it is a physical reminder of a spiritual purpose.**

The Jews were the custodians of the Word of God, so they were responsible for spreading the Word to the nations

of the world.

*Circumcision is separation of the flesh and they had a marvelous heritage where they were reminded of their responsibility but you can have the best of heritage and unless you're born again, it becomes a useless factor.*

As long as we live, there's a purpose for our lives because we are a part of the plan of God but our recognition of the plan of God depends upon our understanding of the Word of God.

**Joseph did something in dying that was greater than anything he did while living: he gave the Jews a Bible lesson for 400 years before Moses even came onto the scene.**

He gave them Gospel doctrine, the plan of salvation in his death.

*So, in Hebrews 11:22 when the Holy Spirit summarizes the accomplishments of Joseph, his life is omitted!*

Joseph is mentioned for two reasons by Stephen; 1. He's the one who continued the spiritual heritage of his great-grandfather, Abraham and 2. He provided the basis for Bible teaching during the Egyptian bondage.

It was his coffin which was not buried that became the basis of declaring the promises of God to Israel during their slavery.