

Valley Bible Church
Sermon Notes for October 9, 2011

God's Promise Through Abraham
Acts 7:1-8

Stephen's appearance before the Jewish ruling council, the Sanhedrin, is the third of four times this council appears in Acts (4:1-22; 5:17-42; 23:1-10). Jesus was brought before most of these same people (Luke 22:66-71).

Hebrew Jews

From Judea
Spoke Aramaic
Used Hebrew Bible
Culturally Hebrew
Strictly followed Law

Hellenistic Jews

From Outside Judea
Spoke Greek Only
Used Septuagint
Culturally Greek
Casually followed Law

Stephen's defense against the charges of blasphemy of God (Acts 6:11) is found in Acts 7:1-16. His defense against the charge of blasphemy of the Law (Acts 6:13) is found in Acts 7:17-42. His defense against the charge of blasphemy of the temple (Acts 6:13) is found in Acts 7:43-53.

Stephen's defense is not merely a personal defense but is a defense of Christianity as God's plan for Israel, being consistent with and the culmination of the Old Testament.

1. God's promise of land (7:1-4)

Stephen begins his address to the Council by identifying himself with them (cf. Acts 22:1).

This long discourse begins with God's glory (7:2) and ends with God's glory (7:55).

Acts 7:3 is a quotation of Genesis 12:1. Genesis 12:1-3 includes all three aspects of God's promise: land, descendants, and blessing and is foundational to the Great Commission.

In contrast to God's promise to Moses, God's promise to Abraham was unconditional.

At first glance, Genesis 11:26, 32 and 12:4 seem to indicate that his father, Terah, lived for 60 years after Abraham's departure from Haran. Terah was 70 when his first son was born (Genesis 11:26), Abraham was 75 when he left Haran (Genesis 12:4, Terah would have been 70 + 75 or 145), and Terah lived to be 205 (Genesis 11:32).

The best solution to this apparent difficulty is that Abraham was not Terah's firstborn son but is mentioned first (Genesis 11:26) because he was most prominent. Abraham, then, would have been born when Terah was 130.

The father of Israel followed God's word to an unknown land, but the Jews were unwilling to do likewise.

God gave the land to the Jews, and the Hebrew Jews turned the land into a source of pride, looking down on Jews that were not native to the land. Ironically, the land at this time in history was under the control of the Romans, not the Jews, and did not include the entire Promised Land (Genesis 15:18).

2. God's promise of descendants (7:5)

Acts 7:5 quotes from Genesis 17:8, showing that God's promise of land was to all Abraham's descendants, not just the native Hebrews.

3. God's promise of blessing (7:6-7)

Acts 7:6 quotes Genesis 15:13 that prophesied that the Jews would live in a foreign land for 400 years before returning to the Promised Land.

It seems that 400 years covered time from the beginning of the enslavement in Egypt (1845 B.C.) until the time of the Exodus (1446 B.C.).

Acts 7:7 quotes Exodus 3:12 to show that their ancestors had returned after a period of exile 1,500 years earlier, just as the Greek Jews had also.

Stephen's point was that God would judge those who oppressed God's people, including the council (Acts 4:18; 5:40).

4. God's promise fulfilled (7:8)

The faithfulness of God in His promise to Abraham of descendants can be seen in Acts 7:8.

Circumcision was the sign of the covenant that Stephen spoke about in Acts 7:8. The true follower of God is not one circumcised in the flesh but one circumcised in the heart (Romans 2:28-29; Acts 7:51).

May we, by God's grace, commit our heart to the Lord so that we may have courage to follow Him when difficulties come our way.