

Bible Study #10

11 18 14

Acts 7

Administrative Information

- The Bible Study Class will be presented in the parish hall every Tuesday morning from **9:30 A.M. until 11 A.M.** from now until **May 19, 2015** except for the following Tuesdays related to a holiday:
 - Nov 11, 2014 – Veteran’s Day
 - **Nov 25, 2014 – Thanksgiving Week**
 - Dec 23, 2014 – Christmas
 - Dec 30, 2014 - New Year
 - Mar31, 2015 – Holy Week
- The same class will be given every Tuesday evening from **7:30 until 9:00 P.M.** in the parish hall
- Contact info (703) 644-5873; email roberteward3@verizon.net
- Inclement weather decision will be based on Fairfax County Public School announcements

Review Acts 5 & 6

- Ananias and wife lied about selling their property in contrast to the gift of Barnabas
- The people brought the sick into the streets so the shadow of Peter might pass over them and heal them
- Peter and John were taken before the Sanhedrin again but spared by the teaching of Gamaliel
- Peter and John were beaten and released

Review Acts 5 & 6 (Cont)

- First problem arises between the Hebrew Christians and the Hellenist Christians
- The selection of 7 Hellenist Deacons
- Stephen begins to preach in Hellenist synagogues resulting in him being reported to the Sanhedrin

Acts 7

- **Acts 7** presents the entire **sermon** of **Stephen** before the **Sanhedrin** in which (in about 10 to 15 minute) he provides a summary of **Salvation History!**
 - Sermons on Salvation History are both important and often missing today
 - One of the problems of the modern church is that most parishioners do not know Salvation History

Acts 7 (Cont)

- Salvation History is the story that tell us about God
 - We get to know someone by learning what he does
 - We want to learn more about someone by learning the stories about them
 - If we don't know who a person is, how can we have a relationship with him?
 - After getting to know someone we want to spend time with them which builds relationships

Acts 7

- **Acts 7:1-2** *“And the high priest said, ‘Is this so?’ And Stephen said: ‘**Brethren and fathers**, hear me. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran’”*
 - After the false accusations against Stephen the High Priest, acting as judge, interrogates him of having been accused by Hellenistic Jews of speaking against Moses, the temple, the Law, and even God
 - He responds by giving a summary of Salvation History, beginning with Abraham, in which his listeners were well versed in a way that is filled with typological hints and clues for interpreting the present time

Acts 7 (Cont)

- The term **brethren and father** have a multitude of meanings in the first century
 - Blood relatives
 - Cousins
 - Local friends
 - Elders
- Stephen, as a fellow Jew, acknowledges the kinship and common religious heritage he has with the Sanhedrin by calling them ***brethren and fathers***

Acts 7 (Cont)

- Stephen begins his account with an unusual title for God who he says appeared to Abraham as “the **God of glory**”
 - This only other place that this phrase is found is in **Ps 29:3***
 - God’s glory is a manifestation of his **holiness and majesty**
 - This can also be seen as a reference to God in the **Glory Cloud**
 - Stephen begins his discourse by reminding the Sanhedrin about Abraham, the father of Israel

Acts 7 (Cont)

- **Acts 7:2-21** *“And he said to him, ‘Depart from your land and from your kindred and go into the land which I will show you...Pharaoh's daughter adopted him and brought him up as her own son”*
 - Abraham demonstrates great trust and dependence in God as he sets forth from *Ur* at the direction of God not knowing where he was going (**Gn 12:1***)

Acts 7 (Cont)

- Throughout this process God continually tests Abraham's faith
 - Initially God did not give Abraham any inheritance to the land (**Gn 12:7***)
 - Abraham and Sarah were childless yet he was promised descendants as numerous as the stars (**Gn 15:2***)
 - God also told Abraham that his descendants would be enslaved for 400 years (**Gn 15:13-14***)
 - Only after centuries of hardship would his descendants inherit the land
 - Thus God's plan of salvation unfolds over a long period of time

Acts 7 (Cont)

- Stephen combines the promise of God to Abraham with a later promise to Moses
- “**This place**” can mean *Mt Sinai* or for Stephen and his listeners “this place” can mean **the temple in Jerusalem**
- God confirms his promises by giving Abraham the **Covenant of Circumcision** which is fulfilled in Isaac, Jacob and his 12 sons (**Gn 17:10***)
- A significant part of Stephen’s defense here is about the evil of the selling of **Joseph** into slavery by his brothers and how this evil act brought **salvation to his family** which is a foreshadowing of the evil that happened to Jesus at the hands of the Sanhedrin which will result in a far greater salvation
- Peter’s Pentecost speech in **Acts 2** demonstrates how God overcame the evil of Jesus’ murder along a similar line as the Joseph story

Acts 7 (Cont)

- Stephen then discusses the second trip to Egypt by Joseph's brothers seeking provisions
- This can be seen as Stephen giving his listeners clues to interpret the present situation: this second visit is reminiscent of Jesus coming a second time through the presence of his disciples armed with the Holy Spirit as they proclaim the Gospel
- Stephen's account is structured into periods of history according to God's promises and their fulfillment
 - After the Joseph story Stephen introduces the stories of Moses as the fulfilment of the promise made to Abraham hundreds of years earlier

Acts 7 (Cont)

- At the time Moses leads the descendants of Abraham out of Egypt they are as numerous as the stars (After 430 years in Egypt the Hebrews numbered some 600,000 men – **Ex 12:37***)
- Stephen recounts the life of Moses in three 40 year segments
- In his account Stephen emphasizes the biblical theme of the rejection of prophets by God's people
 - Remember the Sadducees do not accept the writings of the Prophets

Acts 7 (Cont)

- **Acts 7:22** *“And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in words and deeds”*
 - Stephen begins a favorable narrative about Moses as a means to refute the charge against him that he was speaking blasphemous words against Moses
 - He points out that Moses was brought up among the Egyptians and he was **mighty in words and deeds**
 - Who else is mighty in words and deeds?
 - **Jesus the Messiah**

Acts 7 (Cont)

- **Acts 7:23-29** *“When he was forty years old it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the sons of Israel... At this retort Moses fled, and became an exile in the land of Midian, where he became the father of two sons.*
 - Look at Stephen’s theme here:
 - God sends Joseph to Egypt but the people do not understand that he is their savior
 - God sends Moses but the Hebrew people do not perceive that he is the one ordained by God to do these things
 - Moses could be seen as a **prophetic savior** who is twice disowned by his own people

Acts 7 (Cont)

- **Acts 7:30-35** *“Now when forty years had passed an **angel** appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in a flame of fire in a bush...This Moses whom they refused, saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge?’ God sent as both ruler and deliverer by the hand of the **angel** that appeared to him in the bush”*
 - Remember the dynamic where God is doing one thing while the people are doing something else
 - Stephen reminds his listeners that the people had **rejected God’s leadership twice**
 - Their first rejection did not deny God the opportunity of sending Moses to them a second time
 - Also in the burning bush episode Stephen identifies God’s appearance as coming about through an angelic agent

Acts 7 (Cont)

- **Acts 7:35-39** *“This Moses who they refused, saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and judge? God sent as both ruler and deliverer by the hand of the angel that appeared to him in the bush had ordained a savior for them. He led them out, having performed wonders and signs in Egypt by the Red Sea... Our fathers refused to obey him.’”*
 - Stephen’s narrative is meant to **reveal Moses as a type of Jesus** who is the fulfillment of **raising up a prophet like Moses** from **Du 18**
 - Like Moses, Jesus took action to save his people **a second time** after the first rejection, this time through the witnesses who are empowered through the Holy Spirit after the resurrection (the Apostles)
 - Again Stephen depicts God interacting with an **angel** as seen in the Book of Exodus (**Ex 3:1-2***)

Acts 7 (Cont)

- **Acts 7:39-41** *“Our fathers refused to obey him but thrust him aside, and in their hearts they turned to Egypt, saying to Aaron, ‘Make for us gods to go before us; as for this Moses who led us out from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him...and rejoiced in the works of their hands”*
 - Stephen points out how their ancestors were unwilling to obey Moses and turned to Egyptian idolatry
 - Stephen’s speech links the people’s sin with God’ punishment after they “turned back” to Egypt through the worship of the golden calf
 - Stephen’s speech is not condemning the temple but is exposing the attempt by the Sanhedrin to domesticate God which is implied in some their attitudes toward the temple

Acts 7 (Cont)

- Here Stephen is charging the Sanhedrin of idolatry because they were choosing the works of their hands over the works of God
 - The preservation of their temple and their whole state under Rome was unlawful and they were not willing to disturb the status quo
 - This is why they put Jesus to death
 - “It is better that one man die rather than the whole nation perish at the hands of the Romans” (**Jn 11:50***)

Acts 7 (Cont)

- The Sanhedrin said that if they did not get rid of Jesus the Romans would come in and destroy this place
- Thus, they **made an idol out of the temple**
- Then they brought in false witnesses to speak against Stephen
- The things that Stephen was saying about the Laws of Moses and the temple were absolutely true as they had been preached earlier by Jesus

Acts 7 (Cont)

- **Acts 7:42-43** *“But God turned and gave them over to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the **book of the prophets**”*
 - This is from **Amos 5:25-27**
 - Stephen explains this idolatrous worship by citing the **book of the prophets** which was 1st century title for the 12 major prophets
 - Stephen is saying that because they chose to worship this way they had turned to idolatry when they said that **they had no king but Caesar**
 - **Du 17:15** States that they were not to have a foreign king ruling over them
 - So they had agreed to live under the authority of the Roman Empire with Caesar as their king

Acts 7 (Cont)

- Why would they choose to do this?
 - Because of their lack of faith in the one true God!
- So in the end what they were doing was idolatry and polytheism because they are trusting in the gods of the Roman Empire rather than the one true God who brought their ancestors out of Egypt
 - Israel trusted in the god of Egypt (Apis the golden calf) and murmured for a return to the security of Egypt

Acts 7 (Cont)

- **Acts 7:44-49** *“Our father had the tent of witness in the wilderness, even as he who spoke to Moses directed him to make it according to the pattern that he had... or what is the place of my rest?”*
 - This quote is from **Is 66:1-2**
 - Again, we need to look back to **2 Sam 7** which lays out the ascendancy of David
 - This is where the promise of God that a son of David will sit on his throne forever and that a son of David will build a house for God (the temple)

Acts 7 (Cont)

- Throughout his sermon Stephen referred to “our ancestors,” **emphasizing his solidarity with his listeners** (the Sanhedrin)
- However, in his conclusion he **suddenly separates himself from them** and applies to them Moses’ prophetic criticism which he gave to the desert generation
- His accusation that they were **uncircumcised in heart** implied that although they were circumcised in the flesh as belonging to God their hearts remained alienated from God’s ways
- His accusations now ring out the words echo from **Is 63:10**

Acts 7 (Cont)

- **Acts 7:51** *“You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit”*
 - This is not very ecumenical- so what is going on here?
 - Stephen is quoting from **Du 30:6*** where it says that they should circumcise their hearts
 - Circumcising the flesh means to have the outward trapping of being an *Israelite* but not necessarily inwardly
 - Moses tells the people that they must keep the Law both outwardly and inwardly
 - They must obey God not only by their actions but also in their minds and thoughts
 - He calls them to be faithful to Yahweh and circumcise their hearts

Acts 7 (Cont)

- **Acts 7:52-53** *“As your father did, so do you. Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? ...and did not keep it”*
 - What happened to the people when Moses received the Law on Mt Sinai?
 - The people built the golden calf breaking the 1st commandment
 - “I am the Lord your God and you shall have no other gods before me”

Acts 7 (Cont)

- This was similar to Jesus' indictment of the scribes in **Lk 11:47-48**
- Stephen's speech affirms the holiness and authority of the law and the gravity of sin against it
- But he points to their failure to observe the law as seen especially in their persecution of the prophets to include those who foretold of Jesus
- He thus turns their accusation that he disrespected the law back against them

Acts 7 (Cont)

- **Acts 7:54-55** *“Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth against him... and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God”*
 - What does this image make us think of?
 - We should harken back to **Dan 7:13** where it describes one like the son of man riding in the clouds going to the ancient of days to receive all power dominion and glory
 - This means they are about to experience the fulfilment of this prophesy
 - **Dn 7** is one of the most important chapters in the Old Testament to help explain the New Testament
 - This is the blueprint on which the early Christians understood their own time, their present situation

Acts 7 (Cont)

- The people of that day understood that they were living out the time of the 4th beast of **Dn 7**
- It was during this period that the **son of man** would arise and come in the ancient of days and the Kingdom of God would be established
- Remember the five kingdoms of **Dn 7**
 - Babylon
 - Persia
 - Greek
 - Rome
 - The Kingdom of God which will come about by a different kind of war, one without swords and chariots

Acts 7 (Cont)

- It will be fought by the power of God and the Word of God and the power of the Holy Spirit through the proclamation of the Gospel
- In this war there will be casualties (martyrs) who in the end will be victors because they will **rise from the dead**
- Look at the language in **Dn 7:13** which is borrowed from the dream of King Nebuchadnezzar in **Dn 2** and **Dn 3:4** where we see the completion of the new Kingdom of God that will be more powerful and permanent than all the previous kingdoms
- **Dn 7:19** which contains the truth about the 4th beast
- **Dn 7:21** where we see Nero making war on the **saints**
 - Members of the kingdom of God (Christians)

Acts 7 (Cont)

- Stephen is saying that the Roman Empire has more power than all previous empires but he (and we) know that the kingdom of God will conquer the Roman Empire in a different way than ever before
- Luke presents this because he wants the reader to know that **Dn 7** is now being played out
- The Son of Man has come on a cloud in the ancient of days and now the kingdom of God is established
- Now the war begins and there will be casualties but God and his kingdom will prevail in the end

Acts 7 (Cont)

- **Acts 7:57** *“But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together upon him...and stoned him”*
 - Just like Jesus, Stephen will be executed outside the city

Acts 7 (Cont)

- **Acts 7:58** *“and the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul”*
 - Paul explains in his own words what he was doing here (**Acts 22:20**)
 - By placing their garments at his feet means that he was the one in charge who was commanding them to kill Stephen
 - He was the overseer of the stoning
 - Paul was the first major persecutor of the Church
 - Stephanos means crown – the crown of martyrdom
 - St Stephen, the crown, was the first martyr of the Church

Acts 7 (Cont)

- **Acts 7:59-60** *“And they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, ‘Lord Jesus receive my soul...Lord do not hold this sin against them’”*
 - This is the same language we heard from Jesus on the cross
 - Luke is showing us that Stephen in dying a martyr’s death for the kingdom as he dies like Christ the King
- **Stephen, like Jesus**
 - Indicts the Jewish leaders for the hard-heartedness
 - Casts out of the city for his martyrdom
 - Was filled with the Holy Spirit
 - Asks for forgiveness for his murderers
 - Asks God to receive his spirit
 - Rose from the dead

Transition

- We will now look at **Acts 8**