

STEPHEN AND HIS STORY

Acts 7:2 This was Stephen's reply: "Brothers and fathers, listen to me. Our glorious God appeared to our ancestor Abraham in Mesopotamia before he settled in Haran. ³God told him, 'Leave your native land and your relatives, and come into the land that I will show you.' ⁴So Abraham left the land of the Chaldeans and lived in Haran until his father died. Then God brought him here to the land where you now live.

⁵"But God gave him no inheritance here, not even one square foot of land. God did promise, however, that eventually the whole land would belong to Abraham and his descendants—even though he had no children yet. ⁶God also told him that his descendants would live in a foreign land, where they would be oppressed as slaves for 400 years. ⁷"But I will punish the nation that enslaves them," God said, "and in the end they will come out and worship me here in this place.'..."

¹⁷"As the time drew near when God would fulfill his promise to Abraham, the number of our people in Egypt greatly increased. ¹⁸But then a new king came to the throne of Egypt who knew nothing about Joseph. ¹⁹This king exploited our people and oppressed them, forcing parents to abandon their newborn babies so they would die.

²⁰"At that time Moses was born—a beautiful child in God's eyes. His parents cared for him at home for three months. ²¹When they had to abandon him, Pharaoh's daughter adopted him and raised him as her own son. ²²Moses was taught all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was powerful in both speech and action. ...

³⁷"Moses himself told the people of Israel, 'God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from among your own people.'³⁸Moses was with our ancestors, the assembly of God's people in the wilderness, when the angel spoke to him at Mount Sinai. And there Moses received life-giving words to pass on to us. ³⁹"But our ancestors refused to listen to Moses. They rejected him and wanted to return to Egypt. ...

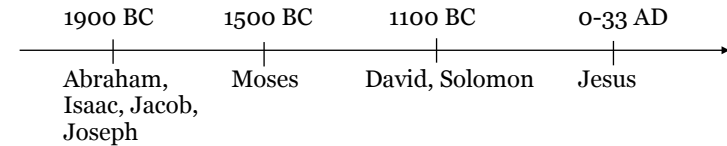
⁴⁴"Our ancestors carried the Tabernacle with them through the wilderness. It was constructed according to the plan God had shown to Moses. ⁴⁵years later, when Joshua led our ancestors in battle against the nations that God drove out of this land, the Tabernacle was taken with them into their new territory. And it stayed there until the time of King David. ⁴⁶"David found favor with God and asked for the privilege of building a permanent Temple for the God of Jacob. ⁴⁷But it was Solomon who actually built it. ⁴⁸However, the Most High doesn't live in temples made by human hands. ...

⁵¹"You stubborn people! You are heathen at heart and deaf to the truth. Must you forever resist the Holy Spirit? That's what your ancestors did, and so do you! ⁵²Name one prophet your ancestors didn't persecute! They even killed the ones who predicted the coming of the Righteous One—the Messiah whom you betrayed and murdered. ⁵³You deliberately disobeyed God's law, even though you received it from the hands of angels." ⁵⁴The Jewish leaders were infuriated by Stephen's accusation, and they shook their fists at him in rage. ⁵⁵But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed steadily into heaven and saw the glory of God, and he saw Jesus standing in the place of honor at God's right hand. ⁵⁶And he told them, "Look, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing in the place of honor at God's right hand!"

⁵⁷Then they put their hands over their ears and began shouting. They rushed at him ⁵⁸and dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. His accusers took off their coats and laid them at the feet of a young man named Saul. ⁵⁹As they stoned him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." ⁶⁰He fell to his knees, shouting, "Lord, don't charge them with this sin!" And with that, he died.

STUDY NOTES

The story of God's redemption did not start at the Resurrection:



Stephen was accused of "changing the customs" of Moses and this infuriated the religious leaders.

- Why do you think that infuriated them?
- What about today? Are people offended that Jesus might ask them to change their lives?

Abraham was asked by God to leave what he knew for an unknown land. God promised to do something through Abraham that would bless others. God did not provide Abraham with a clear plan as to how this would happen. God asked Abraham to trust him.

- Do you think God might ask you to "leave" what you know?
- How might that happen?
- Are you one who likes to have "all the answers" or know "all the details?"
- How can you balance this with the fact that God often asks us to trust Him with all the details?

Joseph was given great favor in Egypt and God used Joseph to save His people from famine even though Joseph's brothers were jealous of him and tried to do him harm. God tells us that He will use what others mean for evil, for good.

- Find the Scriptures that promise God will use what others mean for harm for the good of those who love Him.
- Have you ever seen this principle work itself out in your life?
- In light of this truth, how can we change the way we respond to the hurtful things people do?

- NEW CITY EASTER -

STUDY NOTES

Moses was born an Israelite, and God used the Egyptian Pharaoh's own household to raise Moses and educated Him. In the right time, God called Moses to lead His people. In Moses' zeal to lead, he killed an Egyptian in a fit of rage because of how the Egyptians were treating his fellow Israelites. After a 40-year period of waiting, God calls Moses to lead the people out of slavery into freedom. God uses Moses to give His people the Ten Commandments and to build a portable house of worship called the Tabernacle. We call this the time of the Old Covenant.

- *In Moses we learn that God often works miraculously in how He prepares others for His kingdom work. Have you seen examples of that?*
- *How might you be overlooking or misjudging someone who God wants to use?*
- *God asks Moses to lead at the ripe "old" age of 80. How might that change the way you view those older than you? Maybe they know more than you think?*

David was an unlikely leader - a last-born, diminutive child whose own father had overlooked him. Through many bloody battles, God uses David to defeat the evil that stood in the way of the movement of God. Subsequently, David's son, Solomon, the wisest man who's ever lived, built a permanent temple for prayer, sacrifice, and worship. The temple would later be destroyed, then rebuilt, and destroyed again, but the temple was the centerpiece of worship for the Israelites through the time of Jesus.

- *What is the significance of the temple?*
- *How do we hear Jesus talk about the temple when He is alive?*
- *Does the church building have any similar significance today?*

Jesus was the Prophet-Priest-King sent by God to redeem people once and for all. Like many, God had sent before Him, Jesus was overlooked and underestimated. He was born into the home of a carpenter, slighted constantly by those who knew Him, and abandoned by His closest friends. Ultimately, He was wrongfully accused, tried, convicted, and crucified. Yet, this was the plan of God: for Jesus to be the final sacrificial lamb and to usher His followers into a new promised land. The celebration of Good Friday and Easter signifies that we have a New Covenant that we remember through the Body and Blood of Jesus.

- *How do you see Jesus?*
- *Who is He to you? Do you believe that He is the Savior of the world who gives eternal life to all of those who love Him and do what He asks?*