

## 20. Stephen Reviewed the Rebellion of Joseph's Brothers

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn how the Lord had developed new leadership in the early church. We saw that we want to help our children learn to reflect the glory of the Lord. That will only happen as they are being transformed into the image of Christ. We also saw that Stephen was falsely accused and brought before the Sanhedrin. In our topic today, and the next five topics, we will see how to help our children learn to understand and then apply lessons to their own lives from the answer of Stephen to the Sanhedrin.

In Acts 7:1-4, we read, “Then the high priest said, ‘Are these things so?’ And he said, ‘Brethren and fathers, listen: The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, and said to him, “Get out of your country and from your relatives, and come to a land that I will show you.” Then he came out of the land of the Chaldeans and dwelt in Haran. And from there, when his father was dead, He moved him to this land in which you now dwell.” The accusation that had been made against Stephen in Acts 6:13-14 says, “They also set up false witnesses who said, ‘This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law; for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us.’” Stephen did not immediately answer the question of the high priest. Instead, he began to give a review of the history of the nation of Israel. In this review, Stephen was going to show a history of the rebellion of Israel against God and show that the Jewish leaders were also in rebellion against God.

Stephen began by calling the Sanhedrin brethren and fathers. Since the accusers of Stephen were from the Synagogue of the Freedmen, he considered them as brothers in the family of Greek-speaking Jews. The men of the Sanhedrin were the spiritual leaders of the Jews and so they were considered fathers. Here, we see that Stephen shows great respect for these men even though he was being falsely accused. We want to help our children learn to show respect even to those who accuse them falsely.

This review of the history of Israel began with the call of God to Abraham to leave his nation and go to a new land to form a new nation. Genesis 12:1-3 says, “Now the Lord had said to Abram: ‘Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’” This call had come to Abraham when he was still in Mesopotamia while Abraham was still on the other side of the river. Joshua 24:2-3 says, “And Joshua said to all the people, ‘Thus says the Lord God of Israel: “Your fathers, *including* Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, dwelt on the other side of the River in old times; and they served other gods. Then I took your father Abraham from the other side of the River, led him throughout all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his descendants and gave him Isaac.’” This call had come to Abraham when his family worshiped idols.

Abraham had made this trip to the land of Canaan in two stages. Genesis 11:31 says, “And Terah took his son Abram and his grandson Lot, the son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, his son

Abram's wife, and they went out with them from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to the land of Canaan; and they came to Haran and dwelt there.” Abraham stayed in Haran until the death of his father and then he completed the move to the land of Canaan.

Acts 7:5-7 goes on to say, ““And *God* gave him no inheritance in it, not even *enough* to set his foot on. But even when *Abraham* had no child, He promised to give it to him for a possession, and to his descendants after him. But God spoke in this way: that his descendants would dwell in a foreign land, and that they would bring them into bondage and oppress *them* four hundred years. “And *the* nation to whom they will be in bondage I will judge,” said God, “and after that they shall come out and serve Me in this place.”” Abraham had no land in Canaan and even had to buy a piece of property as a place to bury Sarah when she died. Genesis 23:7-9 says, “Then Abraham stood up and bowed himself to the people of the land, the sons of Heth. And he spoke with them, saying, ‘If it is your wish that I bury my dead out of my sight, hear me, and meet with Ephron the son of Zohar for me, that he may give me the cave of Machpelah which he has, which is at the end of his field. Let him give it to me at the full price, as property for a burial place among you.’” Abraham bought that burial place for 400 shekels of silver.

Later, God told Abraham that his descendants would be in a foreign land for 400 years. This happened at the time that God made a blood covenant with Abraham. Genesis 15:13-14 says, “Then He said to Abram: ‘Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land *that is* not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions.’” Israel did suffer for many years in the land of Egypt. This suffering really began when there arose a king that did not know how Joseph had saved the land of Egypt from starvation. Acts 7:18-19 says, “Till another king arose who did not know Joseph. This man dealt treacherously with our people, and oppressed our forefathers, making them expose their babies, so that they might not live.” However, we will see that God used Moses to lead Israel out of Egypt.

God also promised Abraham that He would judge the nation of Egypt for the way that they made the people of Israel suffer. In Exodus 10:7, the servants of Pharaoh told Pharaoh, “Then Pharaoh's servants said to him, ‘How long shall this man be a snare to us? Let the men go, that they may serve the Lord their God. Do you not yet know that Egypt is destroyed?’” Later, Exodus 14:30-31 says, “So the Lord saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Thus Israel saw the great work which the Lord had done in Egypt; so the people feared the Lord, and believed the Lord and His servant Moses.” In these verses, we see that God first judged the land of Egypt and then He judged Pharaoh and his army.

God later promised Moses that the people would worship the Lord in the place where God had called him. God had told Moses in Exodus 3:12, “So He said, ‘I will certainly be with you. And this *shall be* a sign to you that I have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.’” Later, Moses saw God carry out that promise as well.

Acts 7:8-10 goes on to say, ““Then He gave him the covenant of circumcision; and so *Abraham* begot Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day; and Isaac *begot* Jacob, and Jacob *begot* the

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twelve patriarchs. And the patriarchs, becoming envious, sold Joseph into Egypt. But God was with him and delivered him out of all his troubles, and gave him favor and wisdom in the presence of Pharaoh, king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house.” Here, we see how God kept His promises to Abraham. Isaac had not been born when God made this promise to Abraham that Canaan would be the possession of his descendants forever.

When Abraham was 99 years old, God gave Him the promise that Isaac would be born to fulfill this promise. Genesis 17:8-10 says, “‘Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.’ And God said to Abraham: ‘As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. This *is* My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised.’” The Jews were reminded of the promise of God to give them the land every time they circumcised their sons. God did not want them to forget His promise to them.

Two generations later, Jacob had twelve sons. The older ten sons all became envious when they saw that Jacob favored Joseph and gave him a coat of many colors. As a result, the brothers sold Joseph to some Midianites and Ishmaelites who in turn sold him as a slave in Egypt. Genesis 39:1 says, “Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. And Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him down there.” However, God was with Joseph in Egypt and protected him even when he was falsely accused.

God worked through the man in charge of the prison to give Joseph the opportunity to learn how to lead others. Then, the Lord worked to bring Joseph out of prison. God gave Joseph the ability to interpret the dreams of Pharaoh. Joseph also gave Pharaoh advice about how to prepare for the coming famine. Pharaoh replied in Genesis 41:38-41, “And Pharaoh said to his servants, ‘Can we find *such a one* as this, a man in whom *is* the Spirit of God?’ Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘Inasmuch as God has shown you all this, *there is* no one as discerning and wise as you. You shall be over my house, and all my people shall be ruled according to your word; only in regard to the throne will I be greater than you.’ And Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt.’” We see that God had a very different plan for Joseph than the plan of his rebellious brothers.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn that God will also work through difficult circumstances in their lives to prepare and equip them for the ministry that the Lord has for them. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children understand how the Lord works to carry out His will in spite of the rebellion of others.