

Sermon Title: Stephen Explains Moses
Scripture Text: Acts 7:17-43 (Acts #16)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 6-11-23

Today, we return to our adventures in the Book of Acts. And I want to bring you up to speed, since it has been a couple of weeks since we've been here. Two important aspects of context need to be on our minds.

First, of course, is the context of the Book of Acts. Jesus had died and risen again (1 Cor. 15:3-4). He promised that He would send the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-5; cf. Jn. 15:26; 16:7), and that His followers were going to be His "witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:8); and then, He miraculously "ascended to the Father" (Jn. 20:17; cf. Acts 1:9).

A matter of days later, the Holy Spirit arrived, just as He had promised (Acts 1:1-4); He came amidst a series of miraculous manifestations, and all one hundred and twenty of the believers who were gathered together were filled with His Spirit. The miracle sights and sounds that accompanied His arrival, along with the hundred and twenty of them supernaturally given the ability to "speak the mighty deeds of God" in languages they did not know (vs. 11)—well, that gathered a huge crowd, starting at "the upper room" where they were (1:13).

I just got back from Israel last week; I have to show you at least one picture: Here is the "upper room." We are a hundred percent sure of this—except that we are just about a hundred percent sure this is not *the* "upper room." I wasn't aware of this site in Jerusalem, but it actually has pretty good attestation that this is quite likely the location where the "upper room" was where Jesus had the Last Supper with His disciples (Mk. 14:15; Lk. 22:12), and possibly, then, the *same* "upper room" where those "hundred and twenty" were gathered (Acts 1:13, 15). You can see that space-wise, there is room for a hundred and twenty. I assure you that the only thing special about the hundred and twenty that are in there is that it happened to be some of our group and another couple of groups of tourists who were there that day. But it was a spacious place, and it was right near the Temple in Jerusalem.

After that miraculous arrival of the Holy Spirit, Peter preached the Gospel of the resurrected Christ, and "three thousand" of those who were there heard, repented, believed, and were "baptized" (Acts 2:41). And then, on the heels of that in the days to come, healings and more Gospel preaching continued (vs. 43).

That moves us unto Chapter 3, where Peter and John were arrested by the powers of the hierarchy of the unbelieving Jews (cf. Acts 5:21). They were threatened and released, but they refused to back down from preaching the risen Christ.

And soon, this fellowship of these new believers just flourished, and it was *profound*. They cared for each other as never before.

And in the midst of that, Satan mounted a different kind of attack; he tricked a couple into lying publicly about a large contribution they had made (5:1-4). And something you and I *probably* would not schedule if we were trying to build allegiance to a new group: God struck these two *dead* in front of the congregation (vs. 5, 10). He was making the point about His holiness among His people, but *that* did not stop the spread of the Gospel.

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Same chapter: Eventually, *all* the Apostles were arrested (5:18). They were harassed, they were interrogated, and then they were released, but they were "flogged" before they released them (vs. 40)—and that's what you do with innocent people who are falsely arrested, right?

But nothing could stop them from preaching, and the Gospel could not be stopped from reaching more and more people (cf. Col. 1:5-6). As this amazing fellowship grew to ten thousand or more, there were growing pains of logistics, which led to Chapter 6—the appointment of "seven men" as the first deacons, we believe (vs. 3). They were raised up to take care of the daily ministries to the widows; that's the main topic of Chapter 6.

And that is the context that brings us up to Stephen, and the second point of context is about one of those seven: Stephen. Stephen was raised up by God to perform miracles, just like the Apostles did, and to preach the Gospel with great power, just as the Apostles did (6:8). And the leaders of the Jews were offended by Stephen, just as they were offended by the Apostles; and so they manufactured false accusations against him (6:11); they persuaded people to make the accusations so that they could drag Stephen before the Sanhedrin (6:12)—the same place that Peter and John had been taken, the same place that all the Apostles had been taken.

And the setup for Chapter 7 was at the end of Chapter 6, where we saw this in Verses 10 through 14—"But they were unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking. Then they secretly induced men to say, 'We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God.' And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes, and they came up to him and dragged him away and brought him before the Council. They put forward false witnesses who said, 'This man incessantly speaks against this holy place"—the Temple—"and the Law; for we have heard him say that this Nazarene, Jesus, will destroy this place and alter the customs which Moses handed down to us.' " (NASB-1995—and throughout, unless otherwise noted)

Well, this was going to be a bad day for Stephen. His fate was sealed; he was going to be killed—and I'm sure he knew that. This mob of pseudo-spiritual hypocrites was about to show their true colors.

I'm sure that a lot more was said than is recorded in Acts 6 and 7, but we have a very succinct summary that launched Stephen to state his case. Chapter 7, Verse 1—"The high priest said, 'Are these things so?' " "Have you talked about destroying the Temple and blaspheming Moses and blaspheming God?"

When we dove in last time, I labeled this chapter "Best Last Words, Ever"—and I think I can stand by that. Stephen did nothing less than summarize the Old Testament. His example here is the pinnacle of examples of declaring one's faith in the face of death for the sake of Christ (cf. Matt. 10:17-39).

He began with Genesis, and we saw that part of his spectacular statement of faith last time. I commend it to you for your review, if you haven't heard it: Chapter 7, Verses 1 through 16.

Sermon Title: Stephen Explains Moses
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Today, we are going to bite off the next 28 verses, and zero in on another part of the false accusations. Remember: "We have heard him speak blasphemous words *against Moses* and against God" (6:11). This is Stephen preaching truth about Moses, showing that it is not *him*, it's his *accusers* who are against Moses.

This amounts to an overview of the life and ministry of Moses in 694 words. I counted them carefully...well, I used the word count on my computer. It is perfectly appropriate, though, that we take this as a shining example of knowing God's Word so *well* that you could summarize nearly four books of the Bible on one page (cf. Prov. 22:18). Can you do that? Well, maybe not—so, let's work on getting better toward doing that. If it sounds a little convicting, and you'd like to take some steps in that direction, I gave *great news* for you: You can join in the next session of our very popular Bible Survey class, which will be offered during this service in July. You can really, actually have a working knowledge of every book of the Bible. We will help you learn those things; we'll even give you some mnemonic devices to help you remember them. And now I realize, I have to give you a mnemonic device to remember what "mnemonic device" means: It is something to help you remember. We will actually give you a deck of cards—not playing cards, Bible book cards. That was a commercial, free of charge.

But let's see today: "Stephen Explains Moses." Moses' life is easy to describe in three periods of forty years each. Here it is:

Forty Years Developing (vss. 17-28)
Forty Years Hiding (vs. 29) and then,
Forty Years Leading (vss. 30-43).

Let's start with Forty Years Developing,

We left off with Stephen mentioning Joseph and his generation with his brothers, the sons of Jacob—the heads of the twelve tribes of Israel. Keep studying Genesis with me in our daily e-mail studies, and you are going to see that this passage in Acts syncs up with our studies in the end of Genesis.

So we jump in at Acts Chapter 7, Verse 17. Stephen says: "But as the time of the promise was approaching which God had assured to Abraham, the people increased and multiplied in Egypt." Now, he just went approximately 400 years in one verse there.

What is this "time of the promise...which God had assured to Abraham"? That refers back to something that Stephen already quoted—it's in Verses 6 and 7 of Acts 7—and that comes directly from Genesis 15, Verses 13 and 14. It was the promise from God to Abraham that his "descendants" would not only become prolific, but they would be "enslaved" for "four hundred years."

When Jacob arrived in Israel with his family, there was a total population of "seventy-five" among the Israelites (Acts 7:14): Jacob and his family and his kids and their wives. They went to Egypt in the days of Joseph, starting with seventy-five people. By the time of the Exodus, it's two or two and a half million, four hundred years later.

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But the situation in Egypt changed drastically. The king of Egypt—called the "Pharaoh"; "Pharaoh" is not a name of a person, it's a position, it's a title—the Pharaoh who knew and loved and trusted Joseph had long since died. So, Verses 18 and 19—"until there arose another king over Egypt who knew nothing about Joseph. It was he who took shrewd advantage of our race and mistreated our fathers so that they would expose their infants and they would not survive."

So, not only was there the slavery, there was this death edict. That refers to Exodus 1:15-22, where the pharaoh tried to get all the midwives to kill all boy babies among the Israelites when they were born, and let only the girls live.

Well, it's kind of like King Herod trying to kill Jesus; it didn't work (Matt. 2:16). God, in His providence, saw to it that that murderous plan was thwarted. So, Verse 20—"It was at this time that Moses was born; and he was lovely in the sight of God, and he was nurtured three months in his father's home." They hid him as long as they could. "And after he had been set outside"—and you know the story: they put him in the basket and put him in the river—"Pharaoh's daughter took him away and nurtured him as her own son" (vs. 21). There, the reference is to Exodus Chapter 2, Verses 5-10.

And again, the providence of God assures that Moses was preserved; and further, that he would know the ways of the Egyptians. He was *specialy prepared* by God for the one-of-a-kind-in-history position that he would eventually hold as God's man to deliver Israel from Egypt. So, Verse 22, skimming through those forty years: "Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians, and he was a man of power in words and deeds."

Now notice, it says that, and that's a quote. When Moses was before the "burning bush," which we will get to in a little while, remember, he gave the excuses? "Oh, G-G-G-G-God, I don't—I don't talk so good!" No, he was a man "mighty in his words and deeds" (vs. 22, ESV); he was making an excuse, and he was doing exactly what *I* would have done: "No, You have the wrong guy!" He was trying to get out of it.

Notice here that Moses is not a poster boy for homeschooling and for being sheltered from the culture of the unbelievers. Quite the opposite: He was, by the plan of God, *totally immersed* in all the ways of the Egyptians. It was an Egyptian princess—the "daughter" of "Pharaoh"—that overrode the death decree of her father, and she unknowingly wound up playing a crucial role in protecting and developing God's chosen leader.

The text doesn't state it in so many words, but you are going to see that it is obvious from what we are going to keep reading this morning: Somehow, Moses grew up *aware* that he was an Israelite, and that awareness led him to a turning point: Acts 7:23—"But when he was approaching the age of forty"—there's the first break of forty years—"it entered his mind to visit his brethren, the sons of Israel."

Remember, they lived in "Goshen," up to the north (Gen. 45:10); God caused them to be separated from the main body of the Egyptians, and preserved them in that way (cf. Gen. 46:34).

Sermon Title: Stephen Explains Moses
Scripture Text: Acts 7:17-43 (Acts #16)

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Date: 6-11-23

Don't let it bother you that you are not given all the details here. It is okay to wonder how Moses came to know about his ancestry (cf. Ex. 2:7-10). It is okay to wonder how he got the idea that he was going to be some kind of a deliverer for his people. It is okay to wonder what provoked him to go "visit" the Israelites. It is okay to wonder all of that—but you have to accept the fact that we have everything we need to know for our "life and godliness" recorded in God's Word (2 Pet. 1:3), and there are details we are not privy to until we are with the Lord. I often quip: I have this every-growing list of things that I want to ask when I get to Heaven. I have a feeling that when I get there, I'm not going to give a *rip* about my list of things that I wanted to ask when I'm in the presence of my Lord and my Savior.

Moses went "to visit his brethren"; he saw something he didn't like: Verse 24—"And when he saw one of them"—one of "his brethren"—"being treated unjustly, he defended him and took vengeance for the oppressed by striking down the Egyptian." *Yikes!* Did you know Moses murdered somebody?

And again, we don't know for sure exactly what Moses knew at that time, or how he interpreted what he knew. But one thing that *is* clear is that *assumed* he was going to be welcomed by his fellow Israelites. He probably thought [they would think], "Hey, here's a guy that's been under the hands of the Egyptians. He still cares about us. Woohoo, we're glad he's here! Come on in, Moses!"

Well, that wasn't quite the way that it went: Verse 25—"And he supposed that his brethren understood that God was granting them deliverance through him, but they did not understand."

Now, clearly, Moses took matters into his own hands when he killed the Egyptian who was abusing the Israelite. "Never take your own vengeance"; let the Lord do that (Rom. 12:19; cf. Prov. 20:22). But it was all part of God developing Moses into the man that He wanted him to be, and it was all in His providence that this happened (cf. Prov. 20:24; Eph. 1:11).

Do not forget that although God is *never* the cause or the author of sin (Jas. 1:13)—I love this phrase—He uses sin *sinlessly* to accomplish His will on Earth. He works through everything *in spite of* what we might do (cf. Gen. 50:20; Prov. 16:9; Acts 2:23).

The consequences of killing the abusive Egyptian came down immediately on Moses. Look at Verses 26 and following: "On the following day he appeared to them as they were fighting together"—now he comes upon two Israelites who were squabbling—"and he tried to reconcile them in peace, saying, 'Men, you are brethren, why do you injure one another?' But the one who was injuring his neighbor pushed him away, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and judge over us? You do not mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday, do you?' " (vss. 26-28) News travelled fast! And notice again that along the way, Stephen was able to quote several key passages from memory. This time, the quote is from Chapter 2 of Exodus, Verses 14 and 15. You'll notice that it's in all-caps in the New American Standard translation.

Sermon Title: Stephen Explains Moses
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Date: 6-11-23

Well, there's the first forty years of Moses' life; it took us twelve verses. The next forty go *much faster*: Forty Years Hiding. Verse 29—"At this remark, Moses fled and became an alien in the land of Midian, where he became the father of two sons." Now, I commend to you: Look at the 68th book of your Bible. 66 is "Revelation"; 67 is "Concordance"; 68 is the Book of Maps. Find Midian. Moses spent forty years there, and he came away with a wife and "two sons." This is all covered in Exodus 2, Verses 15 through 22. Moses met and married his wife, Zipporah—he called her "Zippy," I'm sure—and they had two sons: "Gershom and Eliezer" (1 Chr. 23:15).

And in the meantime, the woes of the Israelites in Egypt continued to worsen. Remember, we are sneaking up on the end of that promised "four hundred years" of Israel being enslaved, and it was getting bad. The second chapter of Exodus ends this way: "So God heard their groaning; and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God saw the sons of Israel, and God took notice of them" (vss. 24-25).

Now, it wasn't that God had *forgotten* His covenant (cf. Ps. 9:12). It wasn't that God *had not* heard His people groaning. This is just an anthropomorphic, anthropopathic way of saying that God was faithful to His own promise—and so, it was time for them to be delivered.

Well, this is Stephen Explaining Moses: Forty Years Developing; Forty Years Hiding; and now: Forty Years Leading.

You can again marvel at Stephen's grasp of the flow of the plan of God. He doesn't get mired in the details, but he continues to give this marvelous testimony; and he is going to build the case for the spiritual culpability of the ones that were accusing *him* and were intent on killing *him*. *They* were the bad guys here, and the way that Stephen sets that up is absolutely brilliant.

Look at Verses 30 through 32, and you'll see how he brings this to his point. Starting at Verse 30—"After forty years had passed"—that's the forty that he spent in Midian—"an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in the flame of a burning thorn bush. When Moses saw it, he marveled at the sight; and as he approached to look more closely, there came the voice of the Lord: 'I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.' Moses shook with fear and would not venture to look."

There is a whole bunch of silly stuff today about people going to and fro to Heaven, and having encounters with angels and all that, and talking to them as buddies. No, when people really see "the angel of the Lord" (Gen. 22:11; cf. Is. 63:9; Zech. 12:8), they are absolutely *scared to death* (e.g., Jdg. 6:22; 13:20-22)—and Moses was.

Let's stop for a second with our text. Before we continue with Stephen and Moses, I want you to see an important application from the lips of Jesus about the verses that Stephen just quoted. It's over in Luke Chapter 20, Verses 37 and 38. Jesus says: "But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the burning bush, where he calls the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Now He is not the God of the dead but of the living; for all live to Him."

Sermon Title: Stephen Explains Moses
Scripture Text: Acts 7:17-43 (Acts #16)

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Jesus is making a subtle exegetical point there. His point in the text is that it uses the present tense verb "I am" to describe God's relationship with *three dead guys*: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—they had all died. And that is a powerful affirmation of life after physical death: God is their God. They *live*! Everyone *has* eternal existence (Matt. 25:46; Acts 24:15). Your eternity will be either with God—in the "new heaven" and "new earth" (2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1)—or you will be eternally separated from Him, "tormented" in "the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:10, 14-15; cf. 2 Thess. 1:9). Consider that. Your eternal destiny depends upon your response to the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Jn. 3:18, 26).

And I urge you, please, hear the invitation of Jesus: "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you...rest for your souls" (Matt. 11:28-29; cf. Is. 45:22; 55:1, 6-7; Acts 26:18; Rom. 6:23; Rev. 22:17). "He is not the God of the dead," He is the God "of the living."

Now back to our passage. This "burning bush incident" is the dramatic call of Moses for what to do with his retirement years. You would think, at 80—he had been a shepherd; he had done all of these things—it would surely be time to kick back a little bit. But again, you are going to see the incredible riches of the sovereignty and the providence of God, and you are going to see Stephen's marvelous understanding of God's plan explained here. He continues to quote from Exodus Chapter 3.

Acts 7:33-34—"But the Lord said to him, 'Take off the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.'" When God appears physically, it is "holy ground." He said, " 'I have certainly seen the oppression of My people in Egypt and have heard their groans, and I have come down to rescue them; come now, and I will send you to Egypt.' " Can you *imagine* what is going on in Moses' mind? "Um, God, I *tried* that, and I kind of biffed it. Do You really want me to go *back* there?"

Well, Stephen keeps going; he's going to resume his commentary on the life of Moses. And you are about to see why Stephen chose to recite all of this. As I said, he is going to bring this to the payoff. Watch how Stephen emphasizes the uniqueness of Moses. Remember, they said, "He speaks blasphemously against Moses!" He is telling the *true* story of Moses.

Pick it up at Verse 35—"This Moses whom they disowned, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge?' is the one whom God sent to be both a ruler and a deliverer with the help of the angel who appeared to him in the thorn bush. This man led them out, performing wonders and signs in the land of Egypt and in the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years. This is the Moses who said to the sons of Israel, 'God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren.' This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness together with the angel who was speaking to him on Mount Sinai, and who was with our fathers; and he received living oracles to pass on to you" (vss. 35-38).

See, he's building his case. "I'm telling you the *true* story of Moses, and what he *really* did, and the One that *he* said would come after him! Oh, by the way, that's the Jesus that you want to kill me for preaching." Remember, they brought false witnesses accusing Stephen of "blasphemous words against Moses and against God" (6:7).

Sermon Title: Stephen Explains Moses
Scripture Text: Acts 7:17-43 (Acts #16)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 6-11-23

So Stephen, now, is beginning to show a *parallel* between how Israel treated Moses and how the Sanhedrin treated Jesus, and was treating the Apostles; and *this time*, he weaves in words from Exodus Chapter 32.

Let's go on, starting at Verse 39—"Our fathers were unwilling to be obedient to him, but repudiated him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt, saying to Aaron, 'Make for us gods who will go before us; for this Moses who led us out of the land of Egypt—we do not know what happened to him.' At that time they made a calf and brought a sacrifice to the idol, and were rejoicing in the works of their hands" (vss. 39-41)

So here's Stephen, further setting up the parallel. God turned away from the ones who spurned His grace and their deliverance from slavery in Egypt, and the whole generation died out, delayed forty years getting to the Promised Land. The parallel is that the Sanhedrin of Stephen's day was doing *exactly* the same thing by rejecting the Messiah and His messengers.

So, read on: Verse 42—"But God turned away and delivered them up to serve the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets..." Good grief, the guy has already quoted a bunch from Genesis; he has already quoted a bunch from Exodus; *now* he even knows a *Minor Prophet*?!? This is what you need to know! He is going to quote now from Amos Chapter 5—"as it is written in the book of the prophets, 'It was not to Me that you offered victims and sacrifices forty years in the wilderness, was it, O house of Israel? You also took along the tabernacle of Moloch and the star of the god Rompha, the images which you made to worship. I also will remove you beyond Babylon' " (vss. 42-43).

Here is what he is saying: "serving the host of heaven"—that refers to Israel's idolatry associated with worshipping the sun and the moon and the stars. And by the way, the sun and the moon and the stars have *absolutely no power whatsoever* over people! Astrology is false religion! It is false worship—don't go there; don't toy with it. "God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1); He made [the sun and the moon and the stars] "for signs and for seasons" (vs. 14) of His plans. It has *nothing to do* with any power over you! It is false to worship that. That was just part of the package of bad doctrines, both brought from Egypt and borrowed from the pagans in Canaan. Likewise, "Moloch" and "Rompha" are the names of pagan Gods.

This is another brilliant use of Scripture that Stephen used—Amos' quote about idolatry in Israel. And notice, God also said, "I also will remove you beyond Babylon." In other words, He is warning and predicting that the Babylonian Captivity was just and correct and right because God promised that if Israel disobeyed, they would forfeit their place in the Land, and they would be taken off to captivity for "seventy years" of chastisement (Jer. 29:10; cf. 2 Chr. 36:20-21).

And the parallels are building. You have one strand: Israel being delayed forty years from getting to the Promised Land. Another strand is Israel *persisting* in idolatry, and being taken off in captivity. And parallel to those ways that God dealt with people in history, Stephen is going to make the point now that the Sanhedrin, which is condemning him to death, is similarly rejecting God's message and rejecting God's people.

Sermon Title: Stephen Explains Moses
Scripture Text: Acts 7:17-43 (Acts #16)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 6-11-23

And by the way, it was *exactly* as Jesus said it would be! Matthew 21:42-44—"Jesus said to them"—referring to leaders of the Jews—"Did you never read in the Scriptures, 'The stone which the builders rejected, this became the chief corner stone; this came about from the Lord, and it is marvelous in our eyes'? Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it. And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust."

Stephen is saying, "Guys, you can tell me that I am misrepresenting Moses, but the fact is, here's the true story: *You* are siding with the ones who have opposed God!"

And as you know, this is not going to end well, on Earth, for Stephen. He understood. One of the reasons this is here is not just so we can see the development of the early church—and there are going to be *huge* implications of what happens here with Stephen—but this is here for us to understand: Stephen *is* an example (cf. Rom. 15:4).

It was like Jesus said in Matthew 10, Verse 22—"You will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved." So literal with Stephen: "the one who endures to the end" without compromising, without caving in, without denying the Lord. And Stephen is doing *just* as he should have done, doing *as I would hope* that we would do if we were in a similar situation.

By the way, he is also doing what Jesus did. Maybe you thought of this parable; it occurred to me this week: Remember, after His resurrection, one of Jesus' appearances was with two guys who were on the road to Emmaus. And Luke 24:27 says, "Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures."

I know there is a famous pastor with a massive television ministry who encourages us to "unhitch from the Old Testament" and stop quoting the Bible. He is *not* a pastor; he is a *pseudo*-pastor. He is a wolf in sheep's clothing. He is a *false* teacher. He is *absolutely* in *total* opposition to Jesus! (Jn. 5:39; cf. 2 Pet. 3:2).

Remember this, from the story that Jesus told of the "rich man" and a man named "Lazarus" who died—and this was before the Cross; they were in the place of the dead. And the [rich man] was begging that his "brothers" would hear, and they would have a chance to be where Abraham was. Luke 16, Verses 29-31—"But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' " How important is it that we know the first three-quarters of our Bible? We call it the Old Testament. *It is essential!* It is *absolutely essential!* (cf. Matt. 4:4; 2 Tim. 3:16-17) And we are *without excuse* for not knowing it! " 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' But he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!' But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.' "

A resurrection won't even do it, unless you are willing to believe that this is from God (cf. Ps. 95:8-9; Jn. 12:9-10, 37).

Sermon Title: Stephen Explains Moses
Scripture Text: Acts 7:17-43 (Acts #16)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 6-11-23

And that is exactly what we are seeing Stephen do. He went back to Genesis! I quipped last time: Ken Ham was not the first one that thought the answers begin in Genesis. Stephen went back to Abraham. He went back to Moses. He went back to the Prophets.

Why did Stephen do this, this way? Well, he knew it would be futile to reply specifically to the false accusations, because the Sanhedrin held all the power; they were clearly willing to lie. They put forth false witnesses that they had recruited to further their lies, and they were even willing to murder. So Stephen didn't even *bother* with getting into an argument over the details of their accusations against him (cf. Prov. 23:9; 26:5; Matt. 7:6). He just took them face to face with God's Word—so that they would have to deal with Him, not just arguing with Stephen.

Stephen understood Jesus' words. We don't know if he had been with the disciples before Acts; we're just not told that. But he clearly understood this: John 5:45-46, where Jesus said, again to the Jewish leaders: "Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; the one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me." (Deut. 18:15, 18-19)

Stephen is going to live on one more week—at least in the life of Heritage Bible Church; he will be dispatched next Lord's Day. But as we stop here, please take the right lessons from this: Jesus *is* the one and only Savior (Jn. 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Tim. 2:5). God does not share His glory with anyone or anything (Isaiah 42:8; 48:11). You cannot have Jesus *plus* your favorite alternate way of worship, *plus* your other favorite idol—it doesn't work that way! It's all or nothing (Matt. 4:10; 6:24a). If you worship anything in addition to God, if you think there is anything that can add to your salvation other than Jesus, it will not go well for you! He will turn His back on you, as well (cf. Rom. 11:20-22).

But understand, there is *fantastic* good news: We can *believe* Moses! We can believe that this is all the seamless unfolding of the glorious plan of redemption.

Here is one way that the good news is stated: First John 2:1-2—"My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world." Jesus stands between you and God and says, "I died for that sin. I died for that sinner." (cf. 1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18) He gives us His righteousness in exchange for our unrighteousness (2 Cor. 5:21; cf. Is. 53:5-8; 61:10; Phil. 3:9), and He will do it for anyone, anywhere, anytime (Jn. 3:16).

No wonder Stephen would not compromise!

I wonder: What would be your final words if a mob of self-righteous hypocrites wanted to kill you today, unless you recanted your faith? I don't think any of us in this room would probably just spontaneously do what Stephen did as well as Stephen did it, but I sure hope we would be faithful to the end. Be encouraged: By God's grace, with the power of His Spirit, with His written Word that He has given to us, we can, *we must, we shall* be "faithful to the end."

Sermon Title: Stephen Explains Moses
Scripture Text: Acts 7:17-43 (Acts #16)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 6-11-23

And let's pray:

Father, thank You for this man, Stephen. I don't know if things will work out just that way, but oh, I would love to meet him! I would love to know what he was thinking as he put together these words. But Father, I know this is recorded in Your Word for our edification. May we follow Stephen's example of ever more, day by day, bit by bit, digging deeper and broader into Your Word. And Father, make us faithful, we pray. This culture in which we live is turning ever more steadily hostile to You, to Your Word, to Your people, to Your Church. Use us, we pray, that as many souls as You would bring into the Kingdom could be rescued; and let us be the ones who make the introduction to this glorious Savior, in whose grace we stand and in whose name we pray. Amen.