

99-12-26a

So as we continue here, our scripture reading comes from Acts chapter 7. I have spent a few minutes here introducing the situation in Acts chapter 6, where Stephen comes to deliver these words. But in Acts chapter 7, the high priest, after hearing the false accusations of these men who could not counter Stephen's arguments, his interpretations from the Old Testament scriptures, which was the only Bible that they had, they could not thwart him, they couldn't put him to silence, so they've had to use other means. And whether by fair means or foul, they want to stop Stephen.

Why would they do this? Well, it's an erosion of their influence. Their congregations are dwindling away and going over to Christianity. Stephen is a convincing minister of the word of God, and they see their financial base and their influence and their standing diminishing.

And this is a very powerful inducement to try to put a stop to it. So they've brought these false accusations, twisted charges, and so forth. So the high priest says, well, Stephen, what do you have to say in your defense? Are these things so? Stephen, of course, this is like giving matches to a pyromaniac.

When you ask somebody with a communication gift to stand up and speak, they're going to speak. And so he's going to deliver a great sermon, which Luke has recorded for us here in Acts chapter 7. And chapter 7 has 60 verses because Stephen made great use of his time. So he says in verse 2, 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. This is a great place to start because he goes back and establishes common ground. Are we not all Israelites here? Are we not all descendants of our father Abraham? Remember Abraham's experience? God gave a supernatural call.

God spoke to Abraham and told him, You've got to come out from everything that's familiar to you and do something new and different. You've got to go to a place you haven't been before. And this is a wonderful place, Stephen, full of faith in the Holy Spirit.

It begins with an analogy to what's happening in the New Testament age because now the nation of Israel and the believers within Israel are being called to a new thing, out of the land of tradition, out of the land of history and subservience to the law and so forth, to come to a new place and God has issued the same type of supernatural call. And so he's appealing to something that they're intimately familiar with as an analogy. And what greater opportunity than to use the word of God to do the convincing.

Stephen doesn't stand up and give a lot of human arguments. He goes right to the word of God. So Abraham, in verse 4, 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. 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 400 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.

And Stephen has done an interesting thing here because he has sort of telescoped or combined, he's synthesized, we've been through these chapters in Genesis and we've spanned here about 12 or 13 chapters of Genesis in the life of Abraham, beginning at chapter 12, going all the way forward to the chapters in the mid-20s of Genesis. And he's actually combined some things that God said on separate occasions. He's just summarized and synthesized these things.

And this is important as we go forward in Stephen's account. Because in verse 8, now he's going to refer to chapter 17 of Genesis. He gave him the covenant of circumcision.

So Abraham begot Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day, and Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot the twelve patriarchs. Circumcision is something that's going to come up in our study this morning over in Genesis chapter 34. And the patriarchs, becoming envious, sold Joseph into Egypt.

Now we've leaped forward from where we are in Genesis all the way to where we're about to land, which is in the story of Joseph. But God was with him. So Joseph suffered at the hands of his brothers.

Now this is also something by analogy. Anybody in this crowd that has an ear to hear is going to stop and think, well, there have been godly men who have suffered persecution at the hands of their brothers in the past. This is biblical.

This is something that might could be happening today. And, of course, Stephen is about to suffer at the hands of his brothers in a similar way. But God was with him.

And you can imagine Stephen drawing comfort from this himself. And one of the great truths about communicating the word of God is the communicator gets the first dose, whether it is of rebuke or correction or instruction in righteousness, but also the comfort and the strength that comes from God's word. We're privileged to get that in the quiet hours of the night when we're studying.

So Stephen, in rehearsing these things on behalf of others, I'm sure is also drawing strength from it himself. 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. Here's Stephen standing before the council.

He's standing before the authorities. And he made him governor over Egypt and all his house. Now famine and great trouble came over all the land of Egypt and Canaan, and our fathers found no sustenance.

But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first. And the second time Joseph was made known to his brothers, and Joseph's family became known to the Pharaoh. Then Joseph sent and called his father Jacob and all his relatives to him.

Seventy-five people. So Jacob went down to Egypt and he died, he and our fathers. And they were carried back to Shechem and laid in the tomb that Abraham bought for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem.

Verse 16 here is the direct connection to our passage this morning because we are going to be studying the sons of Hamor and Shechem in the chapter that's before us in Genesis. Interestingly, we know because of the chronology of what we've studied that Abraham has already passed from the scene. So we're going to have to deal with what Stephen says here in verse 16.

Going on now in verse 17, When the time of the promise drew near which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt, 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. At this time Moses was born and was well-pleasing to God and he was brought up in his father's house for three months.

But when he set out, Pharaoh's daughter took him away and brought him up as her own son. Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was mighty in words and deeds. Now when he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the children of Israel.

And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended and avenged him who was oppressed and struck down the Egyptian. For he supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand. In the next day he appeared to two of them as they were fighting and tried to reconcile them, saying, Man, you are brethren, why do you wrong one another? But he who did his neighbor wrong pushed him away, saying, Who made you a ruler and a judge over us? Do you want to kill me as you did the Egyptian yesterday? At this saying Moses fled and became a dweller in the land of Midian, where he had two sons.

Once again you have a harking back to Scripture for the situation in which Stephen now is, where there is conflict and there is misunderstanding. There is deliverance from God at hand and people can't see it because they are too caught up in their own petty squabbles. They don't recognize the deliverance of God when it comes.

This is Stephen's interpretation of these events. So Moses leaves and that deliverance is not available and will not be available to Israel for another 40 years. So in verse 30, when 40 years had passed, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in the flame of fire in a bush in the wilderness of Mount Sinai.

When Moses saw it, he marveled at the sight. As he drew near to observe, the voice of the Lord came to him, saying, I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses trembled and dared not look.

Then the Lord said to him, Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground. I have surely seen the oppression of my people who are in Egypt. I have heard their groaning and have come down to deliver them.

And now come, I will send you to Egypt. This Moses, who they rejected, saying, Who made you a ruler and a judge, is the one God sent to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the angel who appeared to him in the bush. He brought them out after he had shown wonders and signs in the land of Egypt and in the Red Sea and in the wilderness for years.

This is that Moses who said to the children of Israel, The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear. This is he who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai and with our fathers, the one who received the living oracles to give to us, whom our fathers would not obey but rejected.

Remember the charge that's brought against Stephen, that he's somehow attacking the law and that he's against the things of the Old Testament? They said back in 613, This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against the holy place and the law. We've heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us. So, Stephen has gone back and beginning with the call to Abraham and God's dealing with the nation of Israel is showing the continuity and the progress and that these things are a part of the forward progress of God's plan.

And he is also reminding them that there has been a history of misunderstanding and rejection within and among the brethren in Israel. So, when he says in 38, that the one who received the living oracles to give to us, whom our fathers would not obey but rejected, and in their hearts they turned back to Egypt, saying to Aaron, Make this gods to go before us. As for this Moses who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.

And they made a calf in those days, offered sacrifices to the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands. This is exactly what these people who are accusing Stephen and resisting Christ and Christianity are doing. They're glorying in the works of their own hands.

We have a lot of that going on today. Then God turned and gave them up to worship the host of heaven as it is written in the book of the prophets. Did you offer me slaughtered animals and sacrifices during forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? You also took up the tabernacle of Moloch and the star of your God, Rimphan, images whom you made to worship.

I will carry you away beyond Babylon. Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness as he appointed, instructing Moses to make it according to the pattern that he had seen. Israel has been given a pattern in the tabernacle that was to speak to them of the reality of spiritual truth.

And now Stephen is harking back to the Old Testament as the pattern of the reality that's been fulfilled in Christ. But he says in 45, Our fathers, having received it in turn, also brought with Joshua into the land possessed by the Gentiles, whom God drove out before the face of our fathers until the days of David, who found favor before God and asked to find a dwelling for the God of Jacob. But Solomon built him a house.

However, the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands, as the prophet says. Heaven is my throne, earth is my footstool. What house will you build for me, says the Lord? Or what is the place of my rest? Has my hand not made all these things? You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears.

You always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, who have received the law by the direction of angels or messengers and have not kept it.

When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart and they gnashed at him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God and said, Look, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears and ran at him with one accord.

They cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, Lord, do not charge them with this sin. And when he had said this, he fell asleep. What an amazing attitude Stephen has in

delivering these words, in not being afraid to challenge them with the full truth of the word of God, not only rehearsing the glorious history of God's mercy and grace in Israel, but also rebuking and correcting and instructing them with the word of God.

And as a result, he suffers this rejection. It's quite interesting. We don't have time to turn there, but you can compare the sermon of Peter to a similar group of Israelites, and it says that they also were cut to the heart.

But their response is different. They say, what should we now do? And the confrontation in their souls under the ministry of God the Holy Spirit is either going to produce response or rejection. In Stephen's case, it's when they're cut to the heart by that sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, it is rejection.

And Stephen, you know, you get an unsavory message and you slay the messenger. It's quite a famous episode in Roman history where the messenger comes in bringing bad news and the king slays the messenger. And that's what happens to Stephen here.

But in verse 60, echoing the attitude of the Lord Jesus Christ himself on the cross, he says, Lord, do not charge them with this sin. And when he had said this, he fell asleep. Wonderful and refreshing account of a great man of God.

But the interesting thing here is that in this one short sermon, Stephen, under the ministry of the Spirit, sweeps the entire span of Israel's history from Abraham up to the present and shows them the pattern of God coming and presenting them with opportunity, with truth. And so often there has been rejection and so often there has been suffering at the hands of those who deliver it. And Jesus promised his own disciples as they went forth into the world as witnesses that they would also encounter opposition and rejection and would stand before kings and would in many cases drink of the cup and the baptism that he himself suffered.

And Stephen, of course, here follows that pattern. We find ourselves in our study of Genesis at a crossroads for Jacob. The identity of the nation that God has promised to make of him is at stake.

And Jacob, at the point of decision, is indecisive. At the point of commitment, at the point of making application of the Word of God that has been delivered to him, he's inactive. He's been very active.

He's been the manipulator, the heel grabber. He's been Jacob the supplanter and forging forward and making sure that he gets the blessing in so many ways. But in the chapter to which we now turn over in Genesis 34 this morning, we find that at a critical juncture, he suffers a lapse.

And this, if it were possible to derail the plan of God, this is about as close as it gets for Jacob. Genesis 34, we resume now. We have seen Jacob meet his brother Esau.

He has bowed before him seven times, which was the custom of a vassal or a subject to a king. And he treats him in every case. Esau calls Jacob, my brother.

But Jacob never does call Esau my brother. He always says, My Lord, I am your servant throughout this. But after parting on good terms, Esau returns to the land of Seir.

Jacob does not accompany him, does not take him up on the offer to come dwell in the land of Edom. Why? He doesn't tell Esau this, but in the back of his mind, his inheritance, which is by fair means or foul, rightfully his, is the land promised to Abraham and the land promised to Isaac. It's not the land of Edom.

And he is going to return, but he doesn't want to bring this up to Esau, from whom he feels he has big dealt this away. So he says, well, you go on ahead. Don't leave any men behind until I come to Seir.

Well, that until is a very indefinite amount of time. And in fact, he never does go to Edom. He will, in fact, in verse 18 of chapter 33, come to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, where he came from Paddan-Aram and he pitched his tent before the city.

He bought the parcel of land where he pitched his tent from the children of Hamor, Shechem's father, for 100 pieces of money. He erected an altar there and called it El Elohei Yisrael. El.

The God of Israel. Or God, the God of Israel. And this sets the stage, this 18 through 20, is a transitional device in the narrative to take us from the things that are preceded forward to what is about to take place in chapter 34.

Because when he comes, you remember in verse 17, where we left off last time, he had come to Sukkot and built himself a house and made booths for his livestock. And Sukkot, of course, means booths. The feast of Sukkot in Israel or in Jewish practice even today, that is the feast of booths.

But that Sukkot is still outside the boundaries of the land that God has promised. And he apparently dwelt there for some time. So a delay has... There's an indefinite period of time, but it's long enough for him to build barns or what we would call in Oklahoma a loafing shed for his animals.

This is usually a barn that may only have one side or one wall as sort of a windbreak and then an overhanging roof, but it's open. You store hay or grain or feed there. It provides a shelter from the weather.

But these booths or shelters, Jacob not only built one for himself, but also for his animals. In the Marine Corps, we would say he strong-backed his tents. He didn't just pitch his tent on a temporary basis, but he put a framework inside.

When you strong-back a tent, it's a canvas tent, it's a temporary dwelling, but you put a framework inside that makes it more sturdy. You can put a floor in. We used to use pallets that the equipment and chow and so forth might be used, a forklift to move around.

You can take those and make yourself a floor out of that that you can walk around on so that you stay up out of the wet. So this tells us in verse 17 that when he came to Sukkot, which is still outside the land, he stopped. He built himself a shelter.

He made booths for his livestock, and that's why the place is called Sukkot. But he stayed there for a while. Remember the episode of wrestling with the messenger and the encounter with Esau.

Jacob stops and has some time to think before he comes back into the land. He was at kind of a crossroads there. And God seems to have slowed him up with this encounter with the messenger.

In the same way that God slowed up Moses as we saw when he was about to go back to Egypt and deliver the people. And it gives Jacob time to pause and reflect on the significance of reentering the land. It is going to entail some responsibility because with that privilege, just like in the service, along with authority goes responsibility.

When you take possession of the land, later on the nation of Israel is going to go into the land of Canaan. The land flowing with milk and honey that God has promised them, that God has delivered them out of bondage. And He says, I will take you to this land of prosperity.

But in coming into that land, there's also responsibility. There's some obedience involved. You've got to drive out the enemies.

Don't intermarry with them. Don't take up their pagan idolatry and heathen practices and Molech worship and so forth. You remember in Stephen's sermon, he says they didn't adhere.

They didn't fulfill that responsibility. God slows Jacob down with this wrestling incident, with the renaming incident. You're no longer going to be Jacob the manipulator.

You're going to be Israel. God rules. From sarah, the Hebrew word which means, sarah means to rule and sarar means to, I'm sorry, sarah means to wrestle and sarar means to rule.

And there's a word play there when God changes his name to Israel and says it's God who rules. You need to pay attention to what God, the responsibility that God gives you along with this blessing. Well, we're going to see now in chapter 34 that when Jacob does, actually at the end of chapter 33, Jacob comes safely to the city of Shechem which

is in the land of Canaan.

Now, after spending some time there in Sukkot, he kind of falls back and regroups here. Now he's going to go on back into the land. And he pitched his tent before the city.

So he's going to come in contact with the inhabitants of the land, the current inhabitants. And this is the city of Shechem. Shechem is a man at this point.

This is an individual. He is probably a middle-aged man. He's probably in his 30s.

He might be as much as 40 years old at this point because he is pretty much the chieftain of the people. But his father, Hamor, is still around and is still the figurehead, the senior patriarch as it were. But Shechem is driving the train here.

He's the big wheel. He's the shaker and mover and the main influence. And he has built this city.

And this city is going to be like they had in feudal times where there's a city-state. And he's at the center and there's all these other people who are shepherds and servants and people that have come to associate themselves. And so there's a village that has built itself up around this man Shechem who is great and prosperous.

And when Jacob crosses over the Jordan and comes back into the land of Canaan here, this is where he settles. He's outside the boundary of this little city-state that Shechem runs with Hamor, his father. And he buys a piece of land.

And this is where he pitched his tent. God has promised him this land, but much like Abraham earlier had to buy the field and the cave of Machpelah from the Hephites or the Hittites, the sons of Heph, Jacob here buys this parcel of land from the Shechemites. And actually to do that, the legal transaction has to go through Hamor, Shechem's father.

So it gives him 100 pieces of money. And this particular measure of money is unknown. We don't know what the monetary value was in terms of shekels.

But another place in the Old Testament where this is used is over at the end of Job. And keep your finger in Genesis at the beginning of 34, but turn over to the end of the book of Job because there is a passage here that suggests to us, this is in Job chapter 42. You remember after the dialogues and all of the things that happen in the book of Job, you remember that famous verse where it says that the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning.

For he had 14,000 sheep, 6,000 camels, 1,000 oxen, and 1,000 female donkeys. Double what he had when the book started. He also had seven sons and three daughters.

And it's very interesting that everything else doubled but he winds up with the same

number of sons and daughters as he had before he started. And this is another subtle hint about resurrection because in the resurrection Job will have double the sons and daughters just as he had double everything else in his life. But the verse I want to look at is just before this.

And we don't always remember the fact that Job had siblings. Job had a family. They don't show up when his grief is very great and the three friends, actually the four friends, show up.

But look at verse 11 of chapter 42. It tells us in verse 10 that the Lord restored Job's losses when he prayed for his friends and the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before. But look at verse 11.

All his brothers and all his sisters and all those who had been his acquaintances before came to him and ate food with him in his house. You have to kind of wonder about these brothers and sisters and acquaintances because they apparently kind of got well away. They thought, boy, you know, there's a ground zero there around Job.

And they seem to have kind of retreated away. And only the three friends entered this bombed out area to spend time with Job or the four friends. But now they come back.

After God is doubling everything and Job is kind of on the mend, now they kind of come back in. And you have to wonder, well, are these fair weather friends or what? But they came to him and ate food with him in his house. And they consoled him and comforted him for all the adversity that the Lord had brought upon him.

Of course, the adversity is now over. So now they can commiserate and say, boy, that was a terrible stretch you had there, Job. It's nice to see your flocks increasing again and your wife bearing children once more and so forth.

But look at the end of the verse. Each one gave him a piece of silver and each a ring of gold. And you get the idea that these were fairly prosperous people and this piece of silver, this is the same word that's used back here when it says that Jacob gave these 100 pieces of money to Hamor, Shechem's father.

And we get the idea that this is a pretty substantial, this might be an ingot of silver, a pretty big, like a bar of silver. And so this is probably much more than a shekel. And this is a very handsome price that Jacob is paying for this piece of land.

So why is this important? Well, because in entering into this transaction, Jacob is bringing himself into contact and into relationship with the people from whom he's bought the land. You remember these sons of Heth that Abraham bought his land from were his allies and they went forth to battle together when Lot was captured and kidnapped. They joined up and accompanied him.

Abraham and his 318 men, I think it was, went out there and attacked the 5 king federation and delivered the captives and delivered the Sodom dwellers and so on. Well here, Jacob seems to be following the pattern of his grandfather Abraham, but these men are a different sort. They don't seem to be the character and the quality that Abraham associated himself with.

And Jacob does not appear to have done much evaluating before he picked this spot to settle, a place where he would need to purchase this land and be close by. You wonder if he has really benefited from that time spent in Sukkot, where he had the opportunity to contemplate his responsibilities as he goes back into the land. But this is sowing the seeds of later trouble when he enters into this.

But he erects an altar there and calls it El Elohe Yisrael. God is the God of Israel. God is the God of Jacob.

It's quite interesting because the divine name, they say there is no mention of the Trinity in the Old Testament. There are three references to God's name in this name of the altar. El Elohe Yisrael.

You have three El's there, which I find to be quite interesting. The God of Israel is God. There are different ways you can translate this phrase.

It's also interesting because the verb that's used here, you'll notice even in the English, it says he erected an altar. It doesn't say he built an altar. This is a verb that has been used two previous times for turning a stone up on its end.

It's different than the word for build. Normally you build an altar. This is quite an unusual combination.

But he erects here an altar and calls it El Elohe Yisrael. Some of the scholars who feel comfortable messing with the Word of God think that this may have originally been another stone pillar that he erected and it was changed to an altar because of the naming episode here. But the Bible says it was an altar.

I think it was an altar. Why does it use a different verb? Well, it's kind of like things aren't quite right. You remember God gave some specific instructions on how to build an altar to Israel in the wilderness in the Law of Moses.

This was apparently knowledge that went all the way back to Adam and Seth and Abel and those who were building altars. They knew the difference way back in Abel's day between clean and unclean animals and what constituted a proper sacrifice. This was Cain's great guilt is that he wasn't obedient to the fact that it needed to be a blood sacrifice and a lamb from the flock.

So a lot of this knowledge was known by the patriarchs going all the way back to Adam

but isn't necessarily set down how did they come by that knowledge. But there's something just a little bit off in this altar because it's not a built altar the way the others are. It's an erected altar.

It's like things are a little bit out of sync and this foreshadows the fact that all is not going to be well in what's about to take place here in Jacob's relationship with the Shechemites and Hamor their father. We're at a good stopping place here as we embark into chapter 34. Let's pause here and take our break.

And when we come back we will see why we have this little bit of a foreboding. It's kind of like in the movies when the girls ask me and they say, Dad is that warning music? Why has that got that minor key? Why is that troubling undercurrent of music coming up under this seemingly harmless scene in the movie? Well, we sort of have warning music here in this transitional period here because Jacob is paying a lot of money for land that God has already promised him. He's settling near the Shechemites and he has erected an altar and he's given it the threefold name of God but he didn't build the altar.

What's going on here? Well, we'll come back here in a moment and find out.