

18—Acts 7.1-53—Promises and Patterns

- I. Introduction
 - a. Here's how the Ten Commandments begin: (Exod. 20:2-5) ² "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. ³ "You shall have no other gods before me. ⁴ "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. ⁵ You shall not bow down to them or serve them.
 - b. Do you struggle with the fact that God is invisible? This is part of the reason for the Ten Commandments. It's not that the people fail to worship someone or something. But rather, they fail to worship God alone as he commands. Therefore, when they cannot see him or hear him, the people make carved images who can be seen but cannot speak, can be touched but cannot hear.
 - c. If this was their tendency, what is ours? What do we make idols out of in our day? What are our patterns and evidences of worshipping the wrong thing? May the Holy Spirit make known to us what we need to see.
- II. Main Point
 - a. Stephen answers the high priest concerning the charges against him.
 - b. Stephen reminds them of the promises of God and shows the patterns of they respond and how God responds back to them.
- III. Outline
 - a. The God of Glory
 - b. The Promise to Abraham (land for his seed)
 - c. The Jealousy of the Patriarchs (Pattern)
 - d. The Deliverance through Joseph (Pattern)
 - e. The Rejection of Moses (Pattern)
 - f. The Deliverance through Moses (Pattern)
 - g. The Misplace Love of the Holy Place and the Holy Law
 - h. What will you do with Jesus the Messiah?
- IV. Exposition
 - a. I can't possibly cover every verse but we will walk through Stephen's defense and see what he is trying to prove and bear witness to. I'm going to start where Stephen begins—the God of Glory.
 - i. We rightly affirm that God has made himself known. One way he does that is through his creation. Indeed, (Ps. 19:1) The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.
 1. But we cannot know everything we need to know by general revelation.
 - a. For example: you cannot know a person by simply observing them. This is inadequate at best.
 - ii. However, we also believe that God has made himself known by speaking which we call special revelation.
 1. These are things we would not have known if he had not spoken.
 2. He is the God who speaks!
 - iii. The God of glory makes himself known to Abraham. Joshua does something very similar to what Stephen does here in Joshua 24 when they seek to renew the covenant. Joshua saw the same patterns of God and the people.
 1. He also began with the Lord appeared to Abraham who was worshipping false gods and took him and led him to the land.
 2. This is the only, true and living God who makes his glory known to Abraham. None of those false gods that Abraham worshipped ever appeared to him, ever spoke to him,

- ever promised him land as an inheritance for his offspring (that he didn't have yet), indeed the birth of Isaac was impossible apart from God's promise and work.
3. As Nehemiah said in (Neh. 9:7) ⁷ You are the LORD, the God who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and gave him the name Abraham.
 - a. ...which means father of a multitude nations!
- b. If God made him the father of a multitude of nations, they would need a place to live. Land is a big deal in the Bible because that is our habitation.
- i. God had created the heavens and earth—land! He had blessed his creation by commanding that they be fruitful and multiply and fill the land. That was the intent that God would dwell with his people and they would worship him as he deserved as they temporarily did in the Garden—working and keeping it.
 1. But sin nearly destroyed that. Indeed, the whole plan of redemption will accomplish this one day. The new heavens and the new earth—land—will inhabit God's Kingdom forever ruled by his Son, the Righteous One, the Messiah and Redeemer.
 2. Abraham can only be the father of many nations by way of a promise. It is not by mere fathering sons and daughters. To be in God's family and Kingdom is not by family ties but by faith in Abraham's seed who is Jesus.
 3. This promise God gave Abraham was to give him the land to his descendants.
 - ii. However, along with that promise came "a threat of exile and postponement of the blessing" (Sailhamer 500).
 1. God said to Abraham, (Acts 7:3) 'Go out from your land and from your kindred and go into the land that I will show you.'
 2. Stephen clarifies the promise in (Acts 7:5) ⁵ He gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot's length, and promised to give it to him as a possession and to his offspring after him, though he had no child.
 - iii. Well, as Abraham observed, there's not much need of land if he had no one to give it to. That's a problem for Abraham but not for God. If God makes a promise he will provide everything needed—especially a son—a ram...a Lamb!
 1. The blessing of the promise eventually passes on to Isaac then Jacob not Ishmael or Esau. It must be those according to the promise and God's own choosing.
 2. That promise was marked by the sign of circumcision. Note in (Acts 7:8) ⁸ And he gave him the covenant of circumcision. And so Abraham became the father of Isaac, and circumcised him on the eighth day, and Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob of the twelve patriarchs.
- c. But as you know, something happened to the delay the promise. The Patriarchs' jealousy of Joseph lead to the delay. This is a pattern we need to see.
- i. The God who knows all things told Abraham about what was going to happen and promised to deliver them.
 1. (Acts 7:6-7) ⁶ But God spoke to this effect-- that his offspring would be sojourners in a land belonging to others, who would enslave them and afflict them four hundred years. ⁷ 'And I will judge the nation that they serve,' said God, 'and after that they shall come out and worship me in this place.'
 - ii. Why does this happen? Notice in (Acts 7:9) ⁹ "And the patriarchs, jealous of Joseph, sold him into Egypt
 1. This sets in motion the delay. (Acts 7:11-12) ¹¹ Now there came a famine throughout all Egypt and Canaan...
 2. This isn't the first exile—Adam and Eve were exiled from the Garden—but this was the first exile within the family that God had promised to give the land to.

- d. How did Egypt have grain? God delivered them through Joseph. This is God's pattern of response—steadfast love.
- i. God! Notice v. 9. God was with Joseph. God rescued him out of his afflictions. God gave him favor. God gave him wisdom. Therefore, Pharaoh made him ruler over Egypt. Planned for the famine. Stored grain. Saved his jealous family.
 - ii. Though the family attempted to thwart God's promises to give the land to Abraham's offspring by selling off one of the offspring to Egypt, God saved him and saved the whole family.
 1. God works in such a way to keep his promises even when we fail.
 2. We will never be able to say that God did not keep his promises.
 - iii. Joseph was made known to his brothers there in v. 13 and then in v. 14 Jacob was summoned along with all his kindred. There they were cared for by God in this foreign land.
 1. Though Jacob and his kindred died in Egypt, they were carried back to the land!
 - a. All the while, Israel continues to fill the land of Egypt until another king arose who did not know Joseph. This king became afraid due to the number of them in their land. Israel's problems are not over. They haven't returned to the land.
 - i. This king took advantage of Abraham's kindred and mistreated them by forcing them to abandon their infants—their kindred who are to inherit the land.
 - ii. That's one way to abort the population is Israel. Just abandon them.
 - iii. Wicked are the nations who abandon their babies and value all life.
- e. Guess where deliverance comes from for Israel as the king of Egypt enslaves them? Well, God raises up a deliverer from one of those babies that was not abandoned. His name is Moses! But before we see the deliverer, we need to see the rejection of God's salvation through Moses.
- i. But even before that, we need to see the deliverer being delivered! Moses, which means drawn out of waters, needed to be saved from Pharaoh abandonment policy.
 1. God has his eye on Moses from the beginning—it's says "he is beautiful to God!"
 2. How will he live?
 - a. He was brought up 3 months in his father's house.
 - b. He was abandoned but Pharaoh's daughter adopted him and brought him up as her own son.
 - c. He was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians.
 - d. All of this was part of God's plan of salvation.
 - ii. When Moses turned 40, it came into his heart to visit his brothers v. 23.
 1. Seeing them being taken advantage of and treated cruelly, he defended his brothers and avenged the oppressed man by striking down an Egyptian.
 - a. Moses saw this as God delivering his people but they did not understand it.
 - b. In fact, another example is given were Moses attempts to reconcile two Israelites.
 - i. But they rejected his help and asked in v. 27 "Who made you ruler and judge over us?"
 - ii. These men knew about what happened the day before and asked if he planned to kill one of them like he did the Egyptian.
 - iii. At this word, Moses fled and becomes and exile in Midian.
 - iv. God's promise of the land is delayed again because of rejection.
 - iii. Again and again, we see God raising up a deliverer but Israel's unfaithfulness delaying fulfillment of the promise. Again, God is not bound by Israel's unfaithfulness. God remains faithful.
- f. Some might want to charge the Lord with unfaithfulness because his deliverance is sometimes slow. Not that he cannot work faster than he does but he chooses to work on his timeframe.

- i. Moses was forty years old when he went into Midian. After another forty years, God says it's time to bring my people out of Egypt.
- ii. Notice in (Acts 7:34-36) God said, ³⁴ I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their groaning, and I have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt.' ³⁵ "This Moses, whom they rejected, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge?'-- this man God sent as both ruler and deliverer by the hand of the angel who appeared to him in the bush. ³⁶ This man led them out, performing wonders and signs in Egypt and at the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years.
 1. While they may have been rescued from slavery in Egypt, they will not immediately cross over the Jordan into the promised land because, well, they are still enslaved to sin.
- iii. Moses receives the living oracles—the Ten Commandments—the law of God—at Mount Sinai there in v. 38.
 1. But guess what? What has been their pattern?
 2. They refused to obey. (Acts 7:39-41) ³⁹ Our fathers refused to obey him, but thrust him aside, and in their hearts they turned to Egypt, ⁴⁰ saying to Aaron, 'Make for us gods who will 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.' ⁴¹ And they made a calf in those days, and offered a sacrifice to the idol and were rejoicing in the works of their hands.
 - a. No sooner are they delivered; they reject the Lord. Another forty-year delay in the wilderness.
 3. This is one of the scariest statements you will find in Scripture. It happens in Romans 1 as well.
 - a. It says in (Acts 7:42-43) ⁴² But God turned away and gave them over to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the prophets: "'Did you bring to me slain beasts and sacrifices, during the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? ⁴³ You took up the tent of Moloch and the star of your god Rephan, the images that you made to worship; and I will send you into exile beyond Babylon.'
 - b. This is God's way of judgment to let them naturally go wherever they want to.
- iv. God makes a promise. The people are unfaithful. God sends a deliverer. The people reject him. God sends them the living word. The people disobey it. God pitches his tent among them.
 1. Let's see what they will do now. (Acts 7:44-47) ⁴⁴ "Our fathers had the tent of witness in the wilderness, just as he who spoke to Moses directed him to make it, according to the pattern that he had seen. ⁴⁵ Our fathers in turn brought it in with Joshua when they dispossessed the nations that God drove out before our fathers. So it was until the days of David, ⁴⁶ who found favor in the sight of God and asked to find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. ⁴⁷ But it was Solomon who built a house for him.
 - a. I guess they never expected to disobey God again. They have a permanent, fixed house. They never plan to move again. God's house stands with us.
 - b. As we know and have already heard Stephen say, "I will send you into exile beyond Babylon."
 - c. God's house stood alone while his people were in exile. Why? Because they disobeyed God. Because they presumed upon his house in their midst. Was God even there? Did he not leave in Ezekiel and they didn't even know it?
 - d. What they need is full atonement so that God's presence can reside IN them wherever they are!
- g. Stephen proves without a shadow of a doubt that it is not himself who has—and let me quote them-- (Acts 6:13-14) "This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law." NO! It's not

Stephen. It is the high priest. It is the council. It is Israel. The patterns are clear and they are happening again. They have a misplaced love toward this holy place and his holy law. They worship a man made building and have man made traditions instead of the law.

- i. Stephen makes clear what the prophet have said in Isaiah 66:1-2--(Acts 7:48-50) ⁴⁸ Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands, as the prophet says, ⁴⁹ "'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest? ⁵⁰ Did not my hand make all these things?'
- ii. Indeed, God is all-present! He cannot be contained. He is the God who is God in Mesopotamia, the land of the Chaldeans, in Haran, in Egypt and Canaan at the same time, in Midian in the burning bush, in the wilderness, and in the promised land.
- iii. The temple cannot hold God. Like the golden calf that was hand-made or the images they made to worship in the tent of Moloch and the star of Rephan so too God does not dwell in handmade houses!
- iv. There is only one God.
- v. From the promises made to Abraham to the Ten Commandments, the people have proven that they are not interested in obeying the Lord.
- vi. They say they love the holy temple. They say they love the law of Moses. Their actions say something different.
 1. They loved the temple but they did not love God. They loved to make their own law.
- h. The final point—What do you think they will do with Jesus and Stephen after seeing this pattern?
 - i. This is what he has tried to prove. Here is Stephen's indictment in (Acts 7:51-53) ⁵¹ "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. ⁵² Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, ⁵³ you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it."
 - ii. The same pattern. God promised to send the Messiah who would be their ruler and redeemer. But they were content with their building their book.
 - iii. The clearest revelation of the God of glory: (Jn. 1:14) ¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.
 1. (Jn. 1:11) ¹¹ He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.
 2. (Jn. 1:12-13) ¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

V. Response

- a. What will you do with Jesus?
- b. It's very possible for us to love this building and not Jesus. It's possible for us to love the book and not Jesus. It's possible for us to love our community and religion but not love Jesus.
 - i. Let's not turn the good gifts of God into idols
- c. Will you receive him or reject him? What are our patterns?
- d. Don't be content with a building and book. Yes, the bible is the way we know God but it is not a god to be worshipped.
- e. Jesus paid it all—not this building and not this book. All to him I owe!