



January 13, 2016
Acts 7:1-60
Pastor Gary Hamrick

Exegetical Study

1. **Acts 7:1** - *“Then the high priest asked him, ‘Are these charges true?’ ”*
 - a. In **Acts 6:8-14** we read that Stephen was brought before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Ruling Council, on false charges of blasphemy.
 - b. Sanhedrin is a Greek word formed by two words: sun, which means together, and hedra, which means seat.¹
 - c. The Sanhedrin was modeled after the 70 elders Moses appointed to help administrate Israel. (See **Exodus 18:17-26**)
 - d. The actual total would have been 71, including the high priest who presided over the meetings.

2. Pastor Gary said, “[Stephen] made his defense [not about himself, but in regard to the truth]. ... He [covered] about eleven hundred years of Jewish history...”

3. **Acts 7:2-16** - *“To this he replied: ‘Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran. “Leave your country and your people,” God said, “And go to the land I will show you.” So he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. After the death of his father, God sent him to this land where you are now living. He gave him no inheritance here, not even a foot of ground. But God promised him that he and his descendants after him would possess the land, even though at that time Abraham had no child. God spoke to him in this way: ‘Your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves,’ God said, ‘and afterward they will come out of that country and worship me in this place.’ Then he*

¹ <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongsg=G4892&t=NIV>

gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision. And Abraham became the father of Isaac and circumcised him eight days after his birth. Later Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob became the father of the twelve patriarchs. Because the patriarchs were jealous of Joseph, they sold him as a slave into Egypt. But God was with him and rescued him from all his troubles. He gave Joseph wisdom and enabled him to gain the goodwill of Pharaoh king of Egypt; so he made him ruler over Egypt and all his palace. Then a famine struck all Egypt and Canaan, bringing great suffering, and our fathers could not find food. When Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our fathers on their first visit. On their second visit, Joseph told his brothers who he was, and Pharaoh learned about Joseph's family. After this, Joseph sent for his father Jacob and his whole family, seventy-five in all. Then Jacob went down to Egypt, where he and our fathers died. Their bodies were brought back to Shechem and placed in the tomb that Abraham had bought from the sons of Hamor at Shechem for a certain sum of money."

a. Abraham

- i. Abraham was a Gentile who did not worship God.
- ii. Abraham was from Ur, in what today is southern Iraq, on the Euphrates River.
- iii. Abraham set out from Ur, and he journeyed northwest, along the Euphrates River.
- iv. Abraham settled in Haran, in what today is the region of Syria and Turkey.
 1. Bible scholars estimate that he lived there twenty-five years.
- v. Haran was not where God wanted him to stay because it certainly wasn't the promised land.
- vi. Abraham left Haran and made his way to Shechem in Israel.



b. Joseph

- i. Joseph's story, starting when he was about seventeen years old, is found in [Genesis 37-50](#).
- ii. Jacob, unfortunately, made it known that he loved Joseph more than his brothers.
- iii. Joseph shared a dream with his brothers in which his brothers bowed down to him.
- iv. The brothers wanted to kill Joseph, but his older brother, Rueben,

- intervened, deciding instead to sell him into slavery to the Midianites.
- v. Joseph ended up in the household of Potiphar, a very influential man in Egypt.
 - vi. Potiphar's wife falsely accused Joseph of what amounted to attempted rape.
 - vii. Joseph was falsely imprisoned for approximately seventeen years.
 - viii. What is remarkable about Joseph's character, integrity, and patience is seen in the fact that we don't read about his complaining about his situation and circumstances one time in the Bible.
 - ix. Joseph was released from prison when he was about thirty years old.
 - x. Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dream, which led to his being promoted to what we might understand as Prime Minister of Egypt.
 - xi. Based on the lies his sons told him about a wild animal killing their brother, Jacob was under the assumption that Joseph, who was now about forty years old, had been dead about twenty-two years.
 - xii. A severe famine came upon the land of Israel, so Jacob sent ten of his sons to Egypt to purchase food.
 - xiii. As Providence would have it, the brothers ended up coming before Joseph!
 - xiv. Joseph's character is clearly seen when he revealed his identity to his brothers and offered forgiveness to them.
 1. **Genesis 50:20** - *"You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives."*
4. Stephen's speech intended to drive home the point that God's plan was not about a patriarch.
- a. It wasn't about Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob, nor was God's ultimate plan about the twelve sons of Jacob.
5. **Acts 7:17-19** - *"As the time drew near for God to fulfill his promise to Abraham, the number of our people in Egypt greatly increased. Then another king, who knew nothing about Joseph, became ruler of Egypt. He dealt treacherously with our people and oppressed our forefathers by forcing them to throw out their newborn babies so that they would die."*
- a. The Egyptians enslaved the descendants of Jacob for four hundred years.
 - b. The Egyptians forced the killing of babies as a way to keep the people enslaved by not allowing them to become too numerous.
6. **Acts 7:20-43** - *"At that time Moses was born, and he was no ordinary child. For three months he was cared for in his father's house. When he was placed outside, Pharaoh's daughter took him and brought him up as her own son. Moses was*

educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action. When Moses was forty years old, he decided to visit his fellow Israelites. He saw one of them being mistreated by an Egyptian, so he went to his defense and avenged him by killing the Egyptian. Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not. The next day Moses came upon two Israelites who were fighting. He tried to reconcile them by saying, 'Men, you are brothers; why do you want to hurt each other?' But the man who was mistreating the other pushed Moses aside and said, 'Who made you ruler and judge over us? Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?' When Moses heard this, he fled to Midian, where he settled as a foreigner and had two sons. After forty years had passed, an angel appeared to Moses in the flames of a burning bush in the desert near Mount Sinai. When he saw this, he was amazed at the sight. As he went over to look more closely, he heard the Lord's voice: 'I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.' Moses trembled with fear and did not dare to look. Then the Lord said to him, 'Take off your sandals; the place where you are standing is holy ground. I have indeed seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their groaning and have come down to set them free. Now come, I will send you back to Egypt.' This is the same Moses whom they had rejected with the words, 'Who made you ruler and judge?' He was sent to be their ruler and deliverer by God himself, through the angel who appeared to him in the bush. He led them out of Egypt and did wonders and miraculous signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea and for forty years in the desert. This is that Moses who told the Israelites, 'God will send you a prophet like me from your own people.' He was in the assembly in the desert, with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers; and he received living words to pass on to us. But our fathers refused to obey him. Instead, they rejected him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt. They told Aaron, 'Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who led us out of Egypt - we don't know what has happened to him!' That was the time they made an idol in the form of a calf. They brought sacrifices to it and held a celebration in honor of what their hands had made. But God turned away and gave them over to the worship of the heavenly bodies. This agrees with what is written in the book of the prophets: 'Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings forty years in the desert, O house of Israel? You have lifted up the shrine of Molech and the star of your god Rephan, the idols you made to worship. Therefore I will send you into exile' beyond Babylon."

- a. Pastor Gary said, "[From what started out as seventy-five people ends up being] 600,000 fighting men, and when you add women and children to that [total], it ends up being about 2.5 million people... in about four hundred years. ... [God heard the cries of the enslaved Israelites and he raised] up the prophet Moses. ... [It's a miraculous story about how Moses was saved out of the Nile River and was then raised by Pharaoh's daughter. He was educated in Egypt and became very influential. The Israelites did not see [Moses] as

the deliverer or a prophet sent from God. Moses' time had not yet come.] Moses, unfortunately, got the timing wrong. He thought that his own people would see him as the deliverer. ... Moses was forty years early... and he [would] need to spend forty years in the wilderness of Midian for God to turn him into a shepherd and to teach [him]. ... Moses understood the 'what' of God's will [but the 'when' of God's will was what he had wrong.] God's will is not just about what; it's also the timing. Sometimes we get frustrated [about knowing God's will and doing God's will]. What God might put on your heart in terms of his will might only be half of the equation. The other half is waiting for his perfect timing. It won't be until [Moses] was eighty years old that God says [to him, 'Now is the when']. ... God had to prepare him. ... David [didn't become king until he was thirty years old.] ... [The time from when] Paul got saved on the road to Damascus until his first ministry opportunity was ten years! ... We have lost the art of waiting on God. ... There has to be a seeking of the Lord and not rushing [things]."

- b. In [Acts 7:37](#), Stephen quoted Moses when Moses spoke prophetically about Jesus, who would lead people out of the slavery of sin.
 - i. Moses was the one who would lead the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land.
 - ii. [Deuteronomy 18:15a](#) - *"The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your brothers."*
- c. In [Acts 7:42-43](#), Stephen quoted the prophet Amos.
 - i. [Amos 5:25-27](#) - *"'Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings forty years in the desert, O house of Israel? You have lifted up the shrine of your king, the pedestal of your idols, the star of your god - which you made for yourselves. Therefore I will send you into exile beyond Damascus,' says the LORD, whose name is God Almighty."*

7. [Acts 7:44-53](#) - *"Our forefathers had the tabernacle of the Testimony with them in the desert. It had been made as God directed Moses, according to the pattern he had seen. Having received the tabernacle, our fathers under Joshua brought it with them when they took the land from the nations God drove out before them. It remained in the land until the time of David, who enjoyed God's favor and asked that he might provide a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. But it was Solomon who built the house for him. However, the Most High does not live in houses made by men. As the prophet says: 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me? says the Lord, or where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things?' You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him - you who have received the law that was put into*

effect through angels but have not obeyed it.”

- a. Thus far Stephen has made it clear that it's not about a patriarch, a prophet, or a place.
 - i. Patriarch – Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, or the twelve sons of Jacob
 - ii. Prophet – Moses
 - iii. Place – Tabernacle or the Temple in Jerusalem
 - iv. Person – Stephen boldly stated that it was about Jesus Christ!
- b. The Bible teaches about the circumcision of the heart.
 - i. **Deuteronomy 30:6** – *“The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live.”*
- c. Pastor Gary said, “[The circumcision of the heart has] the idea of cutting away that which is ‘fleshly,’ so that your heart is more devoted, and [you have a greater desire] to walk after the Lord.”
- d. Stephen made the charge, and rightly so, that all of the prophets God had sent to minister to the people were persecuted, and those he addressed were guilty of killing the Righteous One, Jesus!
- e. Pastor Gary said, “[Stephen said,] ‘You killed the prophets, you don’t obey God, you’re proud, you’re arrogant, and you’re fleshly!’ ”

8. **Acts 7:54–60** – *“When they heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ‘Look,’ he said, ‘I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.’ At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’ Then he fell on his knees and cried out, ‘Lord, do not hold this sin against them.’ When he had said this, he fell asleep. And Saul was there, giving approval to his death.”*

- a. Scripture that tells us that Jesus is seated at the right hand of God.
- b. Pastor Gary said, “[This is a demonstration] of Jesus giving Stephen a standing ovation. [Jesus was standing with Stephen, saying,] ‘You stood up for me and you told the truth and I stand with you.’ ”
 - i. **Colossians 3:1** – *“... Christ is seated at the right hand of God.”*
 - ii. **Hebrews 1:3b** – *“... [Jesus] sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.”*
- c. Bible scholars believe that the gate they dragged Stephen through was the Sheep Gate.
 - i. This gate is known by three different names: Sheep Gate, Lion’s Gate, and now, St. Stephen’s Gate.

9. Pastor Gary said, “I don’t agree with this, but there’s a doctrine that says that Jesus only died for a certain elect group of people, and that because you are already predetermined and prechosen to be saved, that [means] that you have no say in the matter because it was already designed and orchestrated and predetermined by God. I want you to know what Stephen [said about this]. Tragically, a person is able to resist the Holy Spirit. [We] have a choice. ... God has given us a will, and he desires that none should perish but that all should come to repentance. But tragically, people can resist the Holy Spirit. ... You see, the Holy Spirit is the one who works on us to bring us to that place of surrender. [God] does not force himself upon us, and he doesn’t violate the very will he’s given us to exercise. We have to choose him. God pursues us, [loves us, died for us, initiated the plan of salvation for us and on our behalf, and in response to him he wants us to come to him... yielding and surrendering to his lordship.”
- a. **Acts 7:51** - *“You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: **You always resist the Holy Spirit!**”* (Emphasis added)
 - b. **Matthew 23:37** - *“[Jesus said,] ‘O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but **you were not willing.**’ ”* (Emphasis added)

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the 1984 New International Version (NIV)