

Sermon Title: **“It’s All About Redemption (Part 1)”**

Sermon Series: Acts: Kingdom Vision 20/20

Text: **Acts 7:1-8**

Speaker: Pastor Damian Mericka

I. Introduction

While the Mission of Jesus is still the banner which unites and guides these Spirit-filled believers, the Vision of how would continue to grow and develop is always evolving forward to look more and more like God’s Kingdom.

Jerusalem -> All Judea -> Samaria -> the End of the Earth (Acts 1:8)

Last week we saw how Stephen was full of four things:

1. Faith
2. Holy Spirit
3. God’s Grace
4. God’s Power

Fresh out of his anointing by the Apostles Stephen is found laboring in Gospel Ministry to the Greek speaking Jews. The enemy stirs up opposition as many try to no avail to show fault or error in Stephen and his message. Down but far from surrendering, these leaders drag Stephen before the Temple Sanhedrin with charges of Blasphemy worthy of death.

See -> **Leviticus 24:10-23**.

The Hebrew Speaking Jews felt they were superior because of being closer to God. Instead of helping people know God, they in fact were making it harder for people to draw closer to Him. They were driven by the fear of failure, pride, and self-righteousness.

Going Deeper: 1) *We are reminded from last week that Stephen was a man full of what four things? Are these available for all believers or a special few? To stand before the Sanhedrin on the charge of blasphemy was a serious and dangerous place to be. What is different here with the Greek speaking Stephen compared to the half Egyptian man who spoke God’s Name with a curse?*

II. “The God of Glory” (Acts 7:1)

As the Sanhedrin turned from the accusers to the accused, they beheld the face of Stephen shining with a glory not of his own. The High Priest then asks him if the charges against him are true. Stephen addresses them as his fellow brothers (Jewish) and fathers (Authorities).

Stephen, though Greek speaking and quoting the *Septuagint* throughout his sermon rather than the Hebrew text, is faithful to show how it was never meant to end with Moses and the Law.

This was important to the early church since those who would be the most receptive to the Gospel invitation would predominantly be those who could not speak / read Hebrew. The koine Greek was the most spoken and written language for many cultures beyond the Jewish context.

Remember the mission of Jesus!

The *Septuagint* was a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures that occurred around the 3rd Century BCE by order of the Greek King of Egypt, Ptolemy II. There were many Jews living in Egypt during this time, among other cultures, and the King desired sacred texts to be translated into Greek and made available in the famous *Library of Alexandria*. Because of this, there are variations in what Stephen quotes regarding chronological details that do not coincide necessarily with the Second Temple Era collection of Hebrew Scriptures.

Stephen's use of the Title, "*the God of Glory*", only appears here in the entire New Testament. This title affirms God's fullness- all His Divine Attributes in perfect harmony bringing forth the Redemption Stephen is about to proclaim that finds resolution in Jesus Christ alone.

See -> **Exodus 33:18-23 / Psalm 29:3**

Going Deeper: 2) *What is significant of the title, "God of Glory"? What is the Septuagint? Why would the Hebrew speaking Jews and Temple worship look down on its use for reading and quoting? Why would Stephen (and subsequently Paul later on) chiefly use and quote from this version?*

III. "God Calls Abraham, Twice!" (Acts 7:2-3)

Stephen then shows how God, in His Sovereign Glory, called their shared father Abraham to leave his country and people to follow God. He notes the call came to Abraham while still in Mesopotamia (Ur) before he lived in Haran. However, the Scripture attests that Abraham received his call from God in Haran. See -> **Genesis 12:1-4**.

Is there a discrepancy? The Sanhedrin did not call Stephen on it (remember they were hunting for error), and we know Stephen was full of the Holy Spirit who is the ultimate author of Scripture. *So, which was it, Ur, or Haran?*

Both.

God originally called Abraham in Ur; but his obedience came at God's second invitation at Haran. There are times God invites us into His Will in ways that require radical change, and as children we struggle to give up what it costs to say yes to God.

Consider -> **Jeremiah 15:19-21**.

Going Deeper: 3) *What is significant of God calling Abraham twice? Have you ever felt God move with invitation in your life but retract, ignore, or flat out say no? What caused you to choose this? Has God ever pressed in multiple times with the same invitation? How does this affect your sense of value with God?*

IV. “Without Faith it is Impossible to Please God” (Acts 7:4-7)

Hearing the voice of God twice now, Abraham realizes that he has not lost grace with this *God of Glory* because it was never sourced in him. It is sourced with God Himself, as is His Glory.

Stephen affirms where God led Abraham was the very land he now stands on trial upon. Stephen notes two things God promised Abraham that he has not seen yet:

- 1) An inheritance of this land
- 2) Descendants to inherit and occupy this land

The birth of his son Isaac was the closest that Abraham ever came to seeing this promise of God fulfilled. Yet in this faith, we see Abraham trusts and obeys God as the author of this Redemptive story. Abraham recognizes he is a part of the narrative, not the author. Nothing happened as he willed, but all things as God has willed.

“And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”

-Hebrews 11:6

Further, in between Abraham’s ancestors and their inheritance would be servitude / subjection in a land not their own. Think about this- the moment Abraham left Haran he had no home. He wandered. His sons wandered. Up until Joseph in Egypt they were a people on standby.

They were strangers in a strange land, *Pilgrims*.

“Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.”

-I Peter 2:11-12

Stephen affirmed that God would punish Egypt, who would be recipients of God’s Blessing through Joseph as well as His Curse through Moses- all conditioned by how they acted before God.

400 years Israel would be slaves in Egypt.

But they will come to this country, this place, and worship God.

God declares the end from the beginning because He is *Sovereign, full of Glory*.

Going Deeper: 4) *What evidence did Abraham receive regarding the promise of land or ancestors in his own lifetime? What is needed to please God? What is the first attribute noted that Stephen was strong in? 400 years of slavery- do you ever feel that God is absent, not*

powerful, or uncaring in present circumstances? How does this speak into our circumstances today?

V. “The Sign of Circumcision” (Acts 7:8)

Of all the things God could have chosen as a sign for Abraham, *why circumcision?*

Before the Temple and even the Law, this Covenant between God and Abraham was symbolized by the cutting off the male’s foreskin. While circumcision was not unique to Israel, the symbolism it carried was. For any to walk in Abraham’s line as descendants and choose not to be circumcised, *they would be cut off from His Body and cast off from the Lord like the foreskin forever.*

See -> **Genesis 17:1-14**

The Law would later arrive to remind Israel what Abraham knew- God desires a circumcision of the heart.

See -> **Romans 2:17-29**

Our actions are to be the fruit of who we are in God- chosen, loved, forgiven, and resourced to be His children now and forever. Our life in this world is to be a maturing into the calling over our lives through Faith in Jesus Christ, God’s Redemption for Humanity and means to Restore all things from sin. *Even those who are not physically circumcised but come to God through the obedience of Repentance for Grace and Mercy will inherit the promises of Abraham in His Heavenly Kingdom!*

See -> **Colossians 2:6-23**

By faith in Jesus who is the Head over every power and authority, our sin has been circumcised from us (male & female)- from death to life we are alive with and in Him.

Stephen’s message is the transitional bridge between two Covenants- one that *prepared us for Jesus* and the other that *brings us into Jesus!*

Going Deeper: 5) *Why did God choose circumcision for Abraham? Was Israel the only nation to administer this? In light of Romans 2:17-29, was it ever just about the flesh with God or always about the heart? Do we as believers need to be physically circumcised today according to Colossians 2:6-23? Can people see your Covenant relationship with God through Jesus Christ in how you are living and maturing in Him today- despite the circumstances that now surround your life?*