

A MINISTRY FOR HUNGRY SAINTS

UNDER THE EXALTED CHRIST, THE GOSPEL BEGINS TO SPREAD

THE ACTS

† THE BOOK OF ACTS

OF THE APOSTLES

An overview of the Book of Acts, by Given O. Blakely

ACTS 5:31-32

"Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are His witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey Him."

"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." (Acts 4:12)

Lesson #28

COMMENTARY ON: 7:1-8

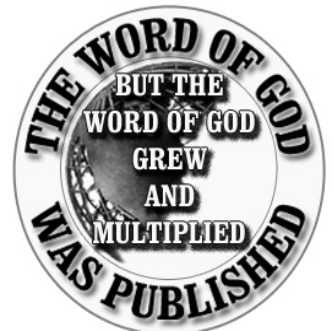
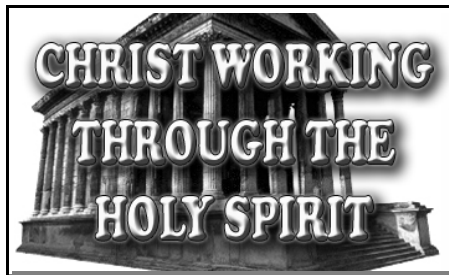
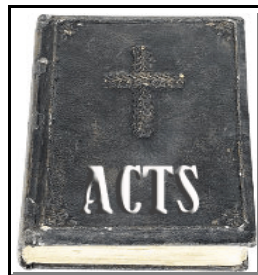
STEPHEN'S DEFENSE #1

Stephen has been falsely charged, and now appears before the Jewish council to be tried. He has been arraigned as one who has spoken against both God and Moses, thus disrupting the religious life of the community, and blaspheming God in the process. This is a capital offence, and thus they require more than one witness. In order to ensure that this requirement is met, some "men" – more than one – are bribed to bear witness against Stephen. Before Stephen is brought before the council, these witnesses have stirred up the people with their lies, thereby stacking things in their favor. Now, the charges have been officially made, and an opportunity will be given to Stephen to defend himself. His defense will testify to his character. It will also reveal how he thought about the workings of the Lord. His wisdom will glow brightly as he is able to correlate the history of the Jews with the present circumstance, and draw a telling conclusion. In this, we are witnessing a sanctified mind and mouth that brings glory to the Lord.

ACTS 17:26-27

"And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us."

" . . . and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

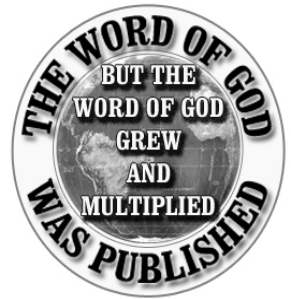


Since May, 1993, a ministry instituted for the encouragement of believers in Christ



The Book of Acts

Lesson Number 28



A MINISTRY INITIATED IN MAY 1993, AND DEDICATED TO STRENGTHENING THOSE WHO ARE IN CHRIST, BY BUILDING THEIR FAITH, ENHANCING THEIR JOY, AND STABILIZING THEIR HOPE, ENABLING THEM TO WORK OUT THEIR SALVATION WITH FEAR AND TREMBLING.

TRANSLATION LEGEND: ALT = Analytical-Literal Translation (2005), AMPLIFIED = Amplified Bible (1965), ASV = American Standard Version (1901), BBE=Bible in Basic English (1949), DRA = Douay-Rheims (1899), ERV = English Revised Version (1885), ESV = English Stand Version (2001), GNB = Good News (1966), GWN = God's Word (1995), IE = International English, ISV = International Standard Version (1967), JPS = Jewish Publication Society (1917), KJV = King James Version (1611), L.LITV = Literal Translation of the Bible ((1976), LIVING = Living Bible (1971), MKJV = Modern KJV (1962), MONTGOMERY = Montgomery's New Testament (2001), MRD = Peshitta-James Murdock Translation (1852), NAB = New American Bible (2002), NASB = New American Standard Bible (1977), NAU = New American Standard Bible (1995), NIB = New International Bible, NIV = New International Version (1984), NJB = New Jerusalem Bible (1985), NKJV = New King James Version (1979), NLT =New Living Translation (1996), NRSV = New Revised Standard Version (1989), PHILLIPS = J B Phillips New Testament (1962), PNT = BISHOP'S New Testament (1995), RSV = Revised Standard Version (1952), TNK = JPS Tanakj (1985), Webster = The Webster Bible (1833),WEYMOUTH = Weymouth's New Testament (1903), WILLIAMS = William's New Testament (1937), TYNDALE = Tyndale's Bible (1526), WYCLIFFE = Wycliffe New Testament (1382), YLT =Young's Literal Translation (1862).

----- Lexicon and Bible Translation Codes with Identification -----

LEXICON LEGEND: FRIEBERG = Friberg Lexicon, UBS = UBS Lexicon, LOUW-NIDA = Louw-Nida Lexicon, LIDDELL SCOTT = Liddell Scott Lexicon, THAYER = Thayer's Greek Lexicon, LEH = LEH Lexicon, GINGRICH = Gingrich Lexicon

THE INSPIRED RECORD OF HOW THE ENTHRONED CHRIST, BY MEANS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, WORKED THROUGH HIS HOLY APOSTLES AND GODLY MEN, TO SPREAD THE WORD OF THE GOSPEL THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE WORLD, AND TO BRING EDIFICATION AND STABILITY TO MEMBERS OF CHRIST'S BODY.

DISCLAIMER: The quoting of other translations is not to be taken as a condoning of them. My purpose is rather to show the remarkable diversity, and sometimes outright contradictions that exist among these various versions of Scripture. Our understanding of the Word of God ultimately depends upon our comprehension of the Lord Himself and His eternal purpose. Where this understanding is not present, we are shut up to scholasticism and conjecture, both of which are of the world, not of God.

STEPHEN'S DEFENSE, #1

“ 7:1 Then said the high priest, Are these things so? 2 And he said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran, 3 and said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall show thee. 4 Then came he out of the land of the Chaldaeans, and dwelt in Charran: and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell. 5 And he gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child. 6 And God spake on this wise, That his seed should sojourn in a strange land; and that they should bring them into bondage, and entreat them evil four hundred years. 7 And the nation to whom they shall be in bondage will I judge, said God: and after that shall they come forth, and serve me in this place. 8 And he gave him the covenant of circumcision: and so Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs.” (Acts 7:1-8)

INTRODUCTION

Stephen has been falsely charged, and now appears before the Jewish council to be tried. He has been arraigned as one who has spoken against both God and Moses, thus disrupting the religious life of the community, and blaspheming

God in the process. Blasphemy was a capital offence, as defined by the law of Moses. **“And he that blasphemeth the name of the LORD, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him: as well the stranger,**

as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name of the LORD, shall be put to death” (Lev 24:16). This was based on one of the Ten Commandments: *“Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain:*

Stephen begins his defense by tracing the nation of Israel to its origin, showing its relation to God – by Given O. Blakely

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for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain" (Ex 20:7). An actual example of the sentence being carried out by Divine direction is provided in Leviticus 24:11-24. There, the son of an Israelitish woman, whose husband was an Egyptian, fought with a man of Israel. In the process, the son "blasphemed the name of the Lord and cursed." They incarcerated the boy, as Moses waited for a word from the Lord. God spoke to Moses, "Bring forth him that hath cursed without the camp; and let all that heard him lay their hands upon his head, and let all the congregation stone him. And thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel, saying, Whosoever curseth his God shall bear his sin. And he that blasphemeth the name of the LORD, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him: as well the stranger, as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name of the LORD, shall be put to death" (Lev 24:14-16). Moses delivered the word to the people, "And the children of Israel did as the LORD commanded Moses" (Lev 24:23).

Furthermore, offenses worthy of

death required more than one witness. One witness was not enough. As it is written, "At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death be put to death; but at the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death" (Deut 17:6).

CAPITAL OFFENSES

It might be profitable to briefly mention capital crimes, or crimes that were punishable by death. The Law was "the ministration of death" (2 Cor 3:7), as is confirmed in these laws. Deeds that incurred the death penalty included:

- ⇒ Murder (Num 35:16-21; Lev 24:17).
- ⇒ Adultery (Lev 20:10).
- ⇒ Incest (Lev 20:11,12,14).
- ⇒ Bestiality (Ex 22:19; Lev 20:15-16).
- ⇒ Sodomy (Lev 20:13).
- ⇒ Incontinence (Deut 22:21-24).
- ⇒ Rape (Deut 22:25).
- ⇒ Kidnapping (Ex 21:16; Deut 24:7).
- ⇒ A priest's daughter committing fornication (Lev 21:9).
- ⇒ Witchcraft (Ex 22:18).
- ⇒ Offering human sacrifice (Lev 20:2-5),
- ⇒ Striking or cursing mother or father (Ex 21:15).
- ⇒ Disobedience to parents (Deut 21:18-21).
- ⇒ Blasphemy (Lev 24:11-23).
- ⇒ Sabbath desecration (Ex 31:14-15; 35:2).

- ⇒ Prophesying falsely, or propagating false doctrines (Deut 13:1-10).
- ⇒ Anyone offering their children to the false God Molech (Lev 20:2)
- ⇒ A man or woman with a familiar spirit, or who was a wizard (Lev 20:27).
- ⇒ Sacrificing to false gods (Ex 22:20).
- ⇒ Refusing to abide by the decision of the court (Deut 17:12).

AN OBSERVATION

Here are twenty offenses that were capital crimes, resulting in the death of the individual. Remember, that blasphemy was the same charge that was leveled against the Lord Jesus Himself (Mk 14:64), and that under the Law of Moses, this death was the punishment for the offense. This meant that two or three witnesses were required to validate the charges against Stephen.

In order to ensure that this requirement is met, some "men" – more than one – are bribed to bear false witness against Stephen. Before Stephen is brought before the council, these witnesses have stirred up the people with their lies, thereby stacking things in their favor.

The point to be seen is that none of the other capital offenses were charged against Stephen – even by false witnesses. His life was so exemplary that even his enemies knew charges of immorality could not be substantiated against him – not even by lying.

It ought to be noted that those who are in Christ Jesus have undergone a fundamental change. They are no longer what they once were. Their

It ought to be noted that those who are in Christ Jesus have undergone a fundamental change. They are no longer what they once were. Their character has been so impacted that their loves and hates have been transformed, as well as their desires and ambitions.

character has been so impacted that their loves and hates have been transformed, as well as their desires and ambitions. Some of the affirmations of this change are as follows.

- ⇨ *“Therefore if any man be in Christ, **he is a new creature**: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new”* (2 Cor 5:17).
- ⇨ *“For we are his workmanship, **created in Christ Jesus** unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them”* (Eph 2:10).
- ⇨ *“And that ye put on the new man, which after God is **created in righteousness and true holiness**”* (Eph 4:24).
- ⇨ *“For ye were sometimes darkness, but **now are ye light in the Lord**: walk as children of light”* (Eph 5:8).
- ⇨ *“And have put on the new man, which is **renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him**”* (Col 3:10).
- ⇨ *“**Being born again**, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever”* (1 Pet 1:23).

It is inconceivable that such language could be applied to a people who did not undergo a fundamental change. It is equally unimaginable that those who experienced such a change would show no evidence of it. The evidence of the change is the confirmation that it has, in fact, taken place. The lack of evidence throws the whole matter of identity with Christ into question. Thus those lacking satisfactory evidence of the work of God within are admonished, *“Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?”* (2 Cor 13:5).

Actually, no one lacking the evidence of real change should be in a place of prominence or responsibility within the church. That, of course, is precisely why the apostles told the early church to choose men who were “full of

the Holy Spirit and wisdom” (Acts 6:3). The only possible way to substantiate the existence of those traits is by means of outward expression that can be perceived by others.

CONFIRMED IN STEPHEN

All of this is confirmed in the approach of the council to Stephen. It is obvious they knew gross immorality could be neither found nor successfully fabricated against this man of God. He was “blameless”—a quality that must be found in those holding prominent places in the body of Christ (1 Tim 3:2,10; Tit 1:6-7). In fact, this is the state in which all believers are to be found (1 Cor 1:8; Phil 2:15; 1 Thess 5:23; 2 Pet 3:14). **Nothing is to be found in the people of God that promotes suspicion, or suggests they are no different than unregenerate men.**

THE TRIAL PROCEEDS

Now, that the charges have been officially made, an opportunity will be given to Stephen to defend himself. His defense will testify to his character. It will also reveal how he thought about the workings of the Lord. His wisdom will glow brightly as he is able to correlate the history of the Jews with the present circumstance, and draw a telling conclusion. **In this, we are witnessing a sanctified mind and mouth that bring glory to the Lord.**

Remember, Stephen has been charged with speaking against both Moses and the Lord. His defense will be a magnificent refutation of those charges.

A KINGDOM MANNER

Scriptural accounts such as this reveal the manner in which God works among men. They confirm how He reveals Himself, and carries out His purpose. **This is because the manner of His Kingdom permeates all of God’s dealings with men.** That is why the Scriptures – all of them – are relevant to us. Men often fasten upon the experiences of men in Scriptural accounts, without giving due regard to what is made known of God and His Kingdom in those records. **One of the chief reasons seeking first the Kingdom of God is so pertinent is that so much of its manner is revealed in inspired history.** Some of the more evident things

include the following.

- ⇨ God’s hatred of sin (the world of Noah’s day, Sodom and Gomorrah, Israel).
- ⇨ The Divine manner of judging sin (Israel, Belshazzar, Herod. Ananias and Sapphira).
- ⇨ The Lord’s inclination to those who have humble and contrite hearts (David, John).
- ⇨ His longsuffering (David).
- ⇨ God’s preference for mercy (Israel).
- ⇨ How He allows sin to go on for a seemingly long time, then breaks forth against it when there is no repentance (The world of Noah’s day).
- ⇨ How He can be turned against those with whom he has worked extensively (Israel).
- ⇨ How the Lord honors faith (Abraham).
- ⇨ How He can shape circumstances to favor those who trust in Him (Joseph).
- ⇨ How He raises up wicked men through whom He obtains glory (Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar).
- ⇨ His propensity to bless people upon the basis of another (Abraham, David, and now Jesus).

In addition to these, we are given to see several things regarding men. Here is a small sampling.

- ⇨ The unimaginable capacity of men without faith to do wickedness.
- ⇨ The invincibility of faith.
- ⇨ The blinding effect of unbelief.
- ⇨ The impact of the Gospel upon the hearts of men – both the believing and the unbelieving.
- ⇨ How men speak who are filled with the Holy Spirit.

Scriptural history is not a series

of accounts related to, and reflecting the impact of human culture. Rather, its purpose is for us to become familiar with the outworking of Divine purpose. **You may be sure Scriptural records are not given to buttress the movements of men, but rather to instruct us more perfectly in the ways of the Lord.** If we fail to see this, historical books like Genesis through Second Chronicles, Job, Esther, Nehemiah, Jonah, the Gospels, and the book of Acts, will soon become monotonous to us.

This is because they will not

appear to have much to do with us. Because they are relating to us the experience of other people, the carnal mind soon tires of them, and comes to view them as relatively worthless. At the very best, the static religious mind will see them as something like spiritual museum pieces – epitaphs to those of the past.

The people of God must zealously avoid this tawdry view of things. **Such a view is the result of the proliferation of the wisdom of the world within the professed church.** It has now carved out

rooms of considerable size for psychiatrists, dieticians, motivators, statisticians, and cunning administrators. In all of Divine history, God has never replied on the world's wisdom to do His work – never!

The incident before us is a case in point. God will use a man full of the Holy Spirit, wisdom, faith, and spiritual power, to deliver His message to the religious leaders. **Stephen will further make no attempt to covert them, but rather to convict them.** Much will be revealed through all of this.

ARE THESE THINGS SO?

^{47:1} **Then said the high priest, Are these things so?** Other versions read, "Are these charges true?"^{NIV} "Is this so?"^{RSV} "Are these accusations true?"^{CJB} "Is this true?"^{GWN} "Is it even so?"^{TNT} "Are these statements true?"^{WEYMOUTH} "Do you so hold these [things]?"^{ALT} "Are they telling the truth about you?"^{CEV} "Tell me then if you thus hold these things?"^{LITV} "Then do you so hold these things?"^{MKJV} and "Is this statement true?"^{PHILLIPS}

THE ORDAINED MINISTRY OF THE HIGH PRIEST

Like Jesus was, Stephen is now in court, and the high priest is presiding over it. In this we see that a marked deterioration had occurred in the office of the high priest. As ordained by God, this office had to do with the things relating to God and offerings for sin. Thus it is written, "For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men **in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins: who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity. And by reason hereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins**" (Heb 5:1-3).

When this office was put into place, the Lord told Moses the purpose of the high priest was "that he may minister **unto Me** in the priest's office" (Ex 28:3). This statement is made no less than eight times in the instructions

concerning the priests (Ex 28:1,3,4,41; 29:1; 30:30; 40:13,15).

The high priests were never intended to become involved in all the affairs of the people. Special judges were chosen for that purpose (Ex 21:6,22;

necessary. When offenders stood before priests and judges, it was the judges that inquired of the circumstances, not the priests (Deut 19:17-18).

We have no examples of a God-ordained high priest holding a court, or

Our situation is very similar to that of our text. Religious leaders have managed to carve out little empires for themselves. Like Caiaphas, they have palaces and large staffs, all of which are devoted to things other than the Kingdom of God.

22:8,9; Num 25:5; Deut 1:15; 16:18; 19:18; 21:2; 15:1). When settling the differences among the people became too burdensome for Moses, the Lord instructed him to select seventy men who were "elders of the people" and bring them to the tabernacle. God then took "of the Spirit" which was upon Moses, and put it upon these men so they could "bear the burden of the people" with Moses (Num 11:16-17, 24-25). These men were not priests, for God never intended the priests to become involved in such matters, even though they were

engaging in the judgment of the people. That was not included in the scope of his responsibility. His role was to represent the people before the Lord as he ministered unto the Lord.

THE DETERIORATION OF THE OFFICE

Now, however, the high priest has left off ministering unto the Lord, and is holding a court like the judges were to do. In fact, during this time the high priest, and the "chief priests" even had an army. The soldiers – "a great multitude" – that

came to arrest Jesus in the garden were “from the chief priests and elders of the people” (Matt 26:17). The high priest, Caiaphas, also was dwelling in a “palace,” or mansion (for so the word “palace” means (Matt 26:3,57). It was also the high priest that examined Jesus (Matt 26:63-65). Already, the high priest has opposed Peter and John in a legal setting (Acts 4:6), did the same with the apostles, even incarcerating them (Acts 5:17,21,24,27). Now the high priest initiates an examination of Stephen, after he has been forcefully taken and brought before him.

THE DAYS ARE EVIL

Believers are solemnly admonished, “See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord

is”(Eph 5:15-17). A major contribution to the wickedness of the days is that “**evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived**” (2 Tim 3:13). Our situation is very similar to that of our text. **Religious leaders have managed to carve out little empires for themselves.** Like Caiaphas, they have palaces and large staffs, all of which are devoted to things other than the Kingdom of God.

It should not be difficult to see that when men do not live by faith, their religion inevitably deteriorates. By “religion,” I mean one’s piety, or the expression of ones spiritual persuasion. The word “religion” is used in this manner in Scripture (Acts 13:43; 26:5; Gal 1:13-14; James 1:26-27).

In our text, the high priest, occupying an office that was devoted to

things “*pertaining to God,*” is now judging a man because he is contradicting their traditions, and adhering to Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom they had summarily rejected.

ARE THESE THINGS SO?

Now, in an open court, the high priest asks Stephen if what the witnesses have testified against him is true. **The events that follow will confirm that this was not an inquiry into the truth of the matter.** It was a formal question, but not an honest one. Yet, even though ignoble motives drove this request, Stephen seizes the opportunity, taking the kingdom by violence.

Being filled with the Spirit, faith, wisdom, and power he turns the occasion to his advantage. He will so preach as to make known the counsels of the hearts of his listeners.

MEN, BRETHREN, AND FATHERS, HEarken

“^{2a} **And he said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken . . .**”

In his answer, Stephen will

fathers . . .” Other versions read, “Brethren and fathers”^{NKJV} “Hear me,”^{NASB} “Brothers and fathers,”^{NIV} “My brothers and fathers,”^{BBE} “Ye men,

is that none of the words spoken or written by Spirit-filled men are useless, or redundant, and mere space-fillers. Those are characteristics of rhetoric and oratory, but not of inspiration. It is necessary to make this observation because of what Jesus promised concerning speaking in His name. “*But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you*”(Matt 10:20).

One of the principles of sound interpretation is that none of the words spoken or written by Spirit-filled men are useless, or redundant, and mere space-fillers. Those are characteristics of rhetoric and oratory, but not of inspiration.

confirm that he is not an opponent of the Jews, set out to destroy the customs delivered to them by Moses – something with which he has been charged. He will also confirm that he was not preaching a Jesus that had been noted for doing these things (Acts 6:14). He will speak with respect, candidness, and an insight that was more characteristic of someone who was a caring father among them.

MEN, BRETHREN, AND FATHERS

“*And he said, Men, brethren, and*

brethren, and fathers,”^{DOUAY} “Men, brethren, and our fathers,”^{MRD} “My brothers, my fathers,”^{NJB} “*This was Stephen’s lengthy reply,*”^{LIVING} “*Sirs - brethren and fathers,*”^{WEYMOUTH} “and “*Men, brothers and fathers.*”^{ALT}

Although several translations do not use the three terms – “men, brethren, and fathers” – they are in all of the accepted Greek manuscripts, and thus ought to have been duly translated. **One of the principles of sound interpretation**

Being filled with the Spirit, the words that now proceed out of Stephens mouth have been given to him from heaven. The Holy Spirit is speaking through him. As his words will confirm, however, he was not speaking as a mere robot, or channel. **His understanding was woven into the fabric of his words.** In other words, he was truly “*a vessel unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the master’s use, and prepared unto every good work*”(2 Tim 2:21).

Men

Stephen addresses the council as

“men” – taken from the Greek word ἄνδρες. The word means “men” in general, particularly as the offspring of Adam. This distinguishes them from angels and higher orders of created personalities. **In the flesh, Stephen is speaking to them as his peers, not his superiors.** In saying this, Stephen is also drawing attention away from his person to his words. It is something like Peter saying to Cornelius, “*I myself also am a man*” (Acts 10:36).

Brethren

He also speaks to them as fellow Israelites – offspring of Abraham, and of the nation to whom God has revealed Himself. In this he is confirming that he has not renounced his natural lineage, just as Paul did not renounce his when he said, “*I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham*” (Rom 11:1). While he had “*no confidence in the flesh*” (Phil 3:3), he did acknowledge that the uniqueness of the Jewish people was owing to God’s deliberate choice of, and involvement with, them.

Fathers

Here Stephen spoke with respect for the “*elders*” among the council, who had a better understanding of the Scriptures, being more familiar with them. In doing this, he is summoning them to give the more attention to what he is saying. **As he speaks, they should be able to see that the charges leveled against him are totally false.**

In using these three terms, Stephen is handling the people gently. It is equivalent to “*a soft answer*” that is designed to “*turn away wrath*” (Prov 15:1). As he progresses through this speech, their hardheartedness will become more evident, and he will speak more sternly. However, he does not begin that way, but employs wisdom, so as to give every advantage to his hearers to perceive the truth of his words.

HEARKEN

“... *hearken*...” Other versions read, “*listen*,”^{NKJV} “*Hear me*,”^{NASB} “*listen to me*,”^{NIV} “*give hearing*,”^{BBE} “*hear ye*,”^{MRD} “*listen to what I have to say*,”^{listen to me},^{WEYMOUTH} and “*pay attention!*”^{ALT}

The word “*hearken*” is a strong one. First, it implies the **ability** to understand, and second, the **necessity** of doing so. The word used here has a lexical meaning of, “to attend to, consider what is being said... to understand, perceive the sense of what is being said,”^{THAYER} “to pay attention to,”^{FRIBERG} “to give a judicial hearing” (as in drawing a valid conclusion from what is said).^{UBS}

Thus Stephen summons his hearers to employ their hearts and minds and understand what he is saying. He is not speaking as an entertainer, or as one who displaying oratorical skills. There is a message in his words – they are not simply an historical review.

A Particularly Relevant Word

In a hedonistic society such as ours, this kind of exhortation is particularly in order. Whole generations have been cultured to be entertained by what they hear instead of gain an understanding – particularly when it comes to the “*things of the Spirit of God*” (Rom 8:5; 1 Cor 2:14). When the words appear to be too challenging for them, they simply dismiss them by saying they are *too deep*, or are *not relevant*, or that they are not yet ready to receive them. **The number or church people who dismiss truth because it is not easily discerned is staggering.** It has come to the point where the status quo in the professing church marvels that the Bible is discerned by anyone. Rather than being challenged to apprehend the truth, they assume that only a few especially gifted and wise people can do so.

But all of this is so much nonsense. **Man has been created in the**

image of God, and consequently possesses a capacity to understand. Even though the Divine image has been marred, men are still responsible to employ the capability of understanding – to “*hearken*” – just as surely as the council in our text was obligated to do so. **Salvation is an economy of knowledge,** for within the New Covenant, which is the context of salvation, God says, “*they shall all know Me*.” In fact, that “*knowledge*” is the means through which we receive all things pertaining to life and godliness (2 Pet 1:3). Grace and peace, so sorely required by those en route to heaven, are also acquired “*through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord*” (2 Pet 1:2).

Stephen will therefore speak in such a way as to promote spiritual understanding and insight. Therefore he tells his listeners to “*hearken*,” listening carefully to what he says. He is not entertaining them but instructing them.

An Observation

Over the years, I have noticed a marked tendency in *Christian* preachers and teachers to avoid speaking to be understood. There is a very evident inclination toward entertaining the people and offering juvenile solutions to cursory difficulties. One senses that often such men really have nothing to say, and thus they preach to please and speak to entertain. This climate has invited everyone from economists and motivators, to psychologists and organizers into the Christian community.

Every person who speaks in the behalf of the Lord should make it an aim to advance the understanding of the people – to enable them to obtain a better grasp of the things of God, and to see the spiritual sense of it all. Sometimes, as in the case of Stephen, this involves calling upon the people to “*hearken*” – to listen intently to understand.

THE GOD OF GLORY APPEARED TO ABRAHAM

“^{2a} *The God of glory appeared in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in unto our father Abraham, when he was Charran . . .*”

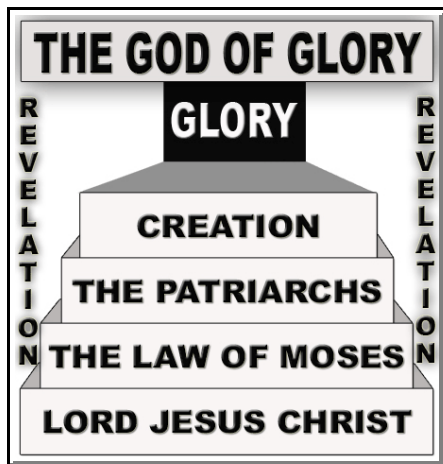
A review of the various speeches of Scriptural record will confirm the

Stephen begins his defense by tracing the nation of Israel to its origin, showing its relation to God – by Given O. Blakely

remarkable absence of elaborate introductions, or the employment of attention-getting verbal mechanisms. That is a tactic that is being taught to speakers today. It is an attempt to reach a distracted society, whose weakest point is their thought-life. I am not sure that such attempts are actually fruitful. The people to whom Stephen was speaking were, in a sense, distracted by hatred, prejudice, and an acute sense that Stephen was disrupting their whole manner of thought. Yet, Stephen employs three terms of identity – “Men, brethren, and fathers” – and one word of challenge – “hearken” – to commence his defense.

THE GOD OF GLORY

“The God of glory . . .” Other versions read, “The God who reveals his glory,” ^{GWN} “That God of glory,” ^{GENEVA} “Our glorious God,” ^{NLT} “The glorious God,” ^{LIVING} “Our glorious God,” ^{IE} and “God Most Glorious.” ^{WEYMOUTH}



The employment of the article “the” is important: “the God.” This is the true God, totally unlike “the gods of Egypt” (Ex 12:12), “gods of silver . . . and of gold” (Ex 20:23), “the gods of these nations” (Deut 29:18), “the gods of the Amorites” (Josh 24:15), and “the gods of Syria” (Judges 10:6). There were “the gods of Edom” (2 Chron 25:20), “the gods of Damascus” (2 Chron 28:23), and “the gods of the earth” (Zeph 2:11). These were all “no gods” (2 Kgs 19:18; 2 Chron 13:9), “but were the works of men’s hands” (Isa 37:19). It can be said of them all, “They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: they have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not: they have

hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat” (Psa 115:7).

By way of contrast, the true God is “the God of glory” – that is, the God of self-expression, revelation, and of manifestation. False gods are the creation of men, and thus have nothing to communicate. The true God is known because – and only because – He has made Himself known. He is “the God of glory.”

What Is Glory?

The glory of a thing is what can be seen, or perceived, of it. It is what makes the thing unique or discernible – what can be seen of it. Therefore, we read of “terrestrial” bodies having a differing “glory” from “celestial” bodies. As it is written, “There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory” (1 Cor 15:40-41). All of these bodies look different because they are different. They have unique properties that are made evident when they are seen.

Something that is itself glorious has qualities of its own that can be displayed, and thus perceived by others. These qualities can be observed when they are displayed, and lend themselves to a better understanding of the thing possessing the glory. In nature, something glorious is a sunrise, or a sunset. They have a nature of their own, and therefore can be studied, analyzed, and discerned.

With God, “glory” obtains a whole new dimension. With Him, the only “glory” that can be beheld is what He Himself makes known. If He does not reveal an aspect of Himself, it can never be known. Therefore, when we speak of the glory of God, we are speaking of something He has done – some aspect of His Person or purpose that He has deliberately made known. It is only when God in some way makes Himself known that an individual is aware of His presence. Thus, after he had dreamed of a ladder set up upon earth, whose top reached into heaven, Jacob awoke and

confessed, “Surely the LORD is in this place: and I knew it not” (Gen 28:16). That dream, together with the words spoken by the Lord to Him during it, was a portion of Divine glory. It provided some insight to Jacob concerning God’s Person and purpose.

The expression “the God of glory” emphasizes that it is God’s nature to make Himself known. For example, even in the creation of the worlds He revealed some of His glory – “His eternal power and Godhead” (Rom 1:20). When He speaks, God is showing His glory. As it is written, “The voice of the LORD is upon the waters: the God of glory thundereth: the LORD is upon many waters. The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is full of majesty” (Psa 29:3-4). In such things, He is making Himself known in what He accomplishes.

To put it another way, “glory” is not associated with mystery, but with revelation. It deals with what can be known of God, not what cannot be known. An approach to the Lord that mystifies what He does, and fails to promote profitable understanding, cannot possibly glorify God. Furthermore, the word “manifestation” has to do with understanding – when something is “made known” (Mk 4:22). A manifestation is not a mere appearance. For example, when Jesus turned water into wine, it is said that He “manifested forth His glory” (John 2:11). He was the better understood. Throughout the Gospels, Acts, and the epistles, the concept of manifestation always has to do with understanding (John 1:31; 3:21; 9:3; 14:21-22; 17:6; Acts 4:16; Rom 1:19; 3:21; 8:19; 10:20; 16:26; 1 Cor 3:13; 4:5; 11:19; 12:7; 14:25; 15:27; 2 Cor 2:14; 4:2, 10-11; 5:11; 11:6; Gal 5:19; Eph 5:13; Phil 1:13; Col 1:26; 4:4; 2 Thess 1:5; 1 Tim 3:16; 5:25; 2 Tim 1:10; 3:9; Tit 1:3; Heb 4:13; Heb 9:8; 1 Pet 1:20; 1 John 1:2; 2:19; 3:5; 8, 10; 4:9; Rev 15:4).

The point here is that it is God’s nature to manifest Himself, or make Himself known. That manifestation is what constitutes His glory.

No other purported gods are on the initiative to make themselves known. They are always surrounded by secrecy, whereas “the God of glory” dwells in the

light (1 Tim 6:16), so that the more men are exposed to Him, the more they know of Him. In fact, "God is light" – the epitome of revelation. Not only does He reveal Himself, but in His presence everything else is illuminated for what it really is.

Jewish history contains many revelations of Divine glory. Here are a few of them, well known to Stephen's audience.

- ⇨ "And in the morning, then **ye shall see the glory of the LORD**; for that he heareth your murmurings against the LORD: and what are we, that ye murmur against us?" (Ex 16:7).
- ⇨ "And it came to pass, as Aaron spake unto the whole congregation of the children of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and, behold, the glory of **the LORD appeared in the cloud**" (Ex 16:10).
- ⇨ "And Moses and Aaron went into the tabernacle of the congregation, and came out, and blessed the people: and **the glory of the LORD appeared unto all the people**" (Lev 9:23).
- ⇨ "But all the congregation bade stone them with stones. And **the glory of the LORD appeared in the tabernacle** of the congregation before all the children of Israel" (Num 14:10).
- ⇨ "And ye said, Behold, the LORD our God hath **showed us his glory** and his greatness, and we have heard his voice out of the midst of the fire: we have seen this day that God doth talk with man, and he liveth" (Deut 5:24).

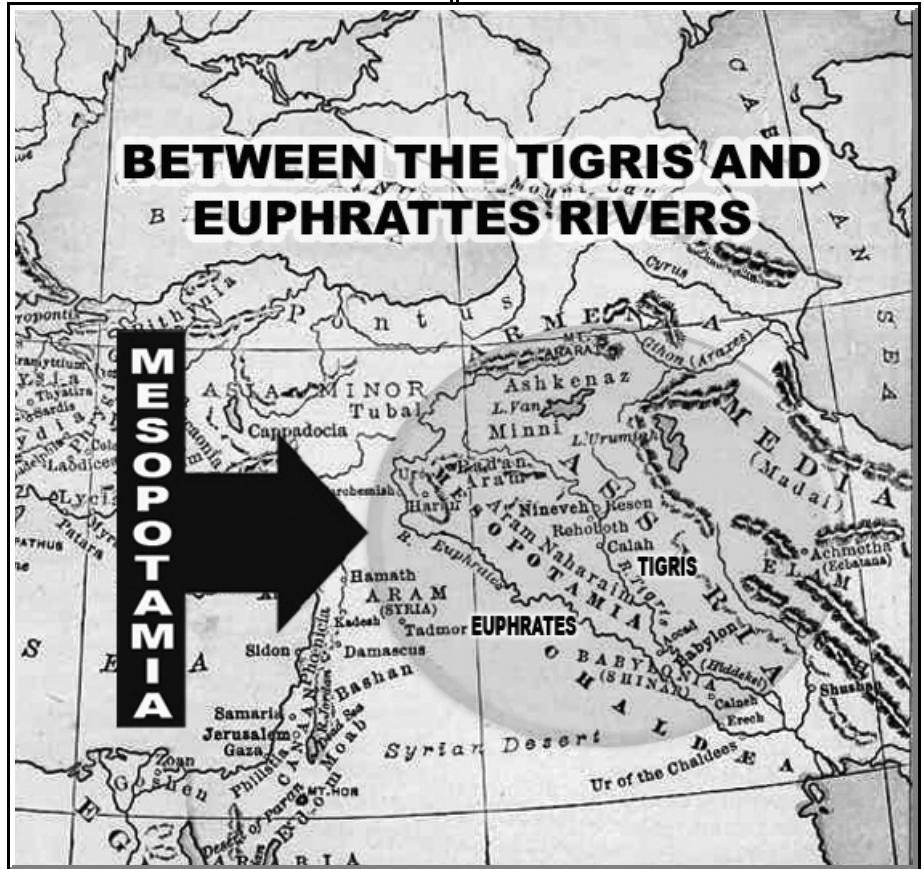
Now, after mentioning "the God of glory," Stephen will recount what God revealed to Abraham, and how He was on the initiative to do so.

APPEARED TO OUR FATHER ABRAHAM

"... appeared unto our father Abraham . . ." Other versions read, "appeared to **our ancestor** Abraham,"^{NRSV} "came to our father Abraham,"^{BBE} and "appeared to **our forefather** Abraham,"^{PHILLIPS}

Notice how the God of glory "appeared," or was made apparent. Remember, we are speaking of a God who is "invisible," or cannot be perceived with any natural sense or aptitude (Col 1:15;

17:27). Here the word "haply" does not mean that, perchance, the seeker may stumble upon God through His research. **It rather means God may very well make Himself known to the earnest seeker.** In



1 Tim 1:17; Heb 11:27). In fact, all of His qualities are "invisible" (Rom 1:20). **That is, they are of a transcendent nature, so that men cannot behold them unless they are unveiled by the Lord Himself.**

By saying God "appeared" unto Abraham, Stephen means that the patriarch, owing strictly to Divine initiative, **became aware of the presence of the Lord.** This was not the result of Abraham searching after God, God cannot be found "by searching" (Job 11:7). This inaccessible and indiscernible aspect of God is declared by the Psalmist: "Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known" (Psa 77:19). Even when God is within the proximity of men, they must still "seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us" (Acts

fact, it is God's nature to do such a thing, for He is "the God of glory."

The phrase "the Lord appeared" occurs nineteen times in the Old Covenant Scriptures. Those vouchsafed such Divine accommodations include Abraham, Isaac, Israel, Moses and Aaron, Samuel, Solomon, and David (Gen 12:7; 17:1; 18:1; 26:2,24; Ex 3:2; 16:10; Lev 9:23; Num 14:10; 16:19,42; 20:6; Deut 31:15; 1 Sam 3:21; 1 Kgs 3:5; 9:2; 2 Chron 3:1; 7:12).

In all of these cases, and especially with Abraham, **God initiated the contact.** None of the revelations were the result of human inquiry – unless it be time the time when Moses asked, "Show me thy glory" (Ex 33:18). Even then, however, the request was driven by the revelation of Himself that God had already given (Ex 24:32). Comprehending

something of the nature of God in that revelation, Moses concluded there was more to be known of Him. Therefore, knowing he could not determine such things through human analysis, He asked God to show him his "glory." When God did reveal His glory to Moses, He actually defined His character more fully to Him (Ex 34:6-7).

When "the God of glory" appeared to Abraham, **He made certain Divine determinations known to him.** He did not offer prognostications like a diviner, but revealed what He Himself had determined, and would cause to come to pass.

What Stephen Is Doing

Stephen is providing an assessment of the children of Israel. In this he is confirming why they should have received the Messiah, and embraced the Gospel that proclaimed Him. **He knew that the way of assessing a people is by tracing them back to their source.** The human race, for example, can be traced back to Adam. That is reason enough to know their propensity is to sin, and that they require a Savior. **The church is traceable back to Christ Jesus. That is reason enough to expect it to be holy, walking in the light and living by faith.** Now Stephen will set the progenitor of the Jewish people before them, showing that they should have followed him and reflected his manners. The fact that they did not will confirm they have resisted the Holy Spirit.

WHEN HE WAS IN MESOPOTAMIA

" . . . when he was in

Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran . . . "Other versions read, "And he said, *"when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran,"*^{NKJV} "And he said, *"he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran,"*^{NASB} "while *he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran,"*^{NIV} "when he was *between the rivers, before he came to reside in Charran,"*^{MED} "while he was in Mesopotamia, before he had settled in Haran,"^{NAB} "while he was *yet in Mesopotamia before he dwelt in Charran,"*^{TNT} "in *Iraq before he moved to Syria,*^{LIVING} and "in Mesopotamia. *This happened before Abraham lived in Haran.*"^{GW}

Mesopotamia was designated as the land "between the rivers" – the rivers being the Tigris and Euphrates. The Euphrates river is mentioned twenty-one times in Scripture, and was the fourth branch, or tributary, of the "river that went out of Eden to water the garden" (Gen 2:14). This river formed one of the boundaries of the land God promised to Abraham and his descendants, the other boundary being "the river of Egypt," which is the Nile river (Gen 15:18). "Tigris" is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew "Hiddekel," which was the third river branching off from the river flowing through Eden. It flowed "toward the east of Assyria" (Gen 2:14). Later versions read "Tigris."^{NASB/NIV/NRSV} The area between the rivers was unusually fertile.

The strange prophet Balaam was also from Mesopotamia (Deut 23:4). On one occasion, when God was angered with Israel, "He sold them into the hand of Chushanrishathaim king of Mesopotamia: and the children of Israel

served Chushanrishathaim eight years" (Judges 3:8). On the day of Pentecost, there were devout Jews from Mesopotamia present when Peter preached (Acts 2:9).

Stephen says that God "appeared" to Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia. The Genesis record says Abraham was in "Ur of the Chaldees" (Gen 11:31). That period of time was prior to the area being called "Mesopotamia" (Gen 24:10). Stephen is pointing out what they already knew, that Abraham was in the place that was later called Mesopotamia. Ur of the Chaldees was a place within the larger region of Mesopotamia. The Chaldeans were the people with whom Nebuchadnezzar was identified (2 Kings 25:10-11). Today, Mesopotamia is called Iraq.

Before He Dwelt In Charran

The appearance of God to the patriarch Abraham took place "before he dwelt in Charran," which is a form of the word Haran, as used in Genesis 11:12-32. Abraham moved there upon leaving Mesopotamia.

A Picture of Our Own Calling

The calling of Abraham was similar to our own calling. He was called out of one place to go to another. He was summoned from a foreign land to the land of promise, to be reached by Divine direction. He was made conscious of God and his will before he was blessed by him. Thus we see the Divine manner in dealing with humanity. He prepares men for involvement with himself.

GET THEE OUT OF THY COUNTRY, AND COME INTO THE LAND!

⁴³ . . . and said unto him, **Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall show thee.**"

The call of God involves two things – leaving and entering; going from one place to another. This will be lived out in the experience of Abraham. **We will also learn from this that the appearing of the Lord is the prelude to**

change. The Lord makes Himself known in order to bring something about that is of His own origin.

A Technicality

Stephen states that the Lord appeared to Abraham while he was in Mesopotamia, and before he came into Haran. The language of Genesis is very precise at this point. The text from which

Stephen now quotes is found in Genesis 12:1-3. Following that record, the text says Abram departed out of Haran (Gen 12:4), which may seem as though he was in Haran when the Lord appeared to him, thus contradicting what Stephen says. However, Genesis 12:1 speaks in the past tense: "Now the Lord HAD said to Abram . . ." That is, He had spoken to Abram prior to the time when he actually left

Haran. Stephen therefore speaks with clarity and understanding, pinpointing that the time of the appearance was before he left Mesopotamia.

The Genesis record provides some additional details about Abraham while he was in Mesopotamia.

⇨ Terah, in the lineage of Shem (Gen 11:11), begat three sons after he was seventy years of age: Abram, Nahor, and Haran (Gen 11:26).

⇨ Abraham's original name was "Abram," which means "high father." Later, after he had received the promise that he would be the father of many nations (Gen 17:5-6), his name was changed by God to "Abraham," (which means "father of a multitude"): "Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee" (Gen 17:5).

⇨ Abraham's brother Haran died before his father while the clan remained in Mesopotamia, or Ur of the Chaldees (Gen 11:28).

⇨ Abram took "Sarai" (which means "my princess") as his wife while in their native land, and she was found to be barren, and therefore could have no child (Gen 11:29-30). Later, after the promise made to Abraham, God also changed her name to "Sarah" (which means "princess of the multitude"): "And God said unto Abraham, As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be. And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her" (Gen 17:15-16).

⇨ We then read that Terah took Abram and his wife, and Lot, and left Ur to go to Canaan. Upon arriving in Haran, they settled there. "And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter in law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and

they came unto Haran, and dwelt there" (Gen 11:31).

⇨ We learn from Scripture that Terah was an idolater. This was revealed through Joshua. "And Joshua said unto all the people, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: and they served other gods" (Josh 24:2).

When the call of God came to Abraham, it appears that was the incentive for Terah gathering the clan and heading for Canaan. The details of why Terah took Abram and Lot, with Sarai, and did not take Nahor Abram's brother, are not provided. Later, we know that Isaac's wife, Rebecca, was the daughter of Nahor (Gen 24:24), and was found in Mesopotamia (Gen 24:10). Furthermore, Rachel, who would be married to Jacob, was the daughter of Laban, who was one of Nahor's sons, and Rebecca's brother (Gen 24:29; 29:29-30). She also was found in Haran (Gen 29:4).

Thus we see the providence of God at work in this whole matter, setting the stage for events that would take place years later.

and (from) your kinsfolk,"^{NAB} "Leave your country, your kindred and your father's house,"^{NJB} "Leave your native land and your relatives,"^{NLT} and "leave his native land, to say good-bye to his relatives."^{LIVING}

Here was a two-fold command. Abraham was to leave the land in which he was living, and his kindred, or relatives, as well. He was to leave the environment and its associations. Some have speculated as to why Abraham's relatives came with him. Why did he not leave them as he was told. First, the ones intended to be left – Nahor and his family – were left behind. Secondly, He did get out of the country, and eventually did leave all of his kindred. The fact that he did not leave them instantly does not mean he would not eventually move a way from them – which the record confirms he did.

Before men stand in criticism of Abraham, it is well to see how God viewed the situation. Later in Abraham's life, God refers to the time he left Ur of the Chaldees, or Mesopotamia. After He had reaffirmed His promise to Abram, it is written, "And He said unto him, I am the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it" (Gen 15:7). God, therefore, considered Abram's coming out to be His own doing, and not an act characterized

Here was a two-fold command. Abraham was to leave the land in which he was living, and his kindred, or relatives, as well. He was to leave the environment and its associations.

GET THEE OUT

"... and said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred ... "Other versions read, "get out of your country and from your relatives,"^{NKJV} "Depart from your country and your relatives,"^{NASB} "Leave your country and your people,"^{NIV} "Depart from your land and from your kindred,"^{RSV} "Go out of your land, and away from your family,"^{BBE} "Leave your land and your family,"^{CJB} "Come out of thy country, and from thy kindred,"^{GENEVA} "Go forth from your land

by some form of disobedience. That is also how Stephen will view it, and it is comely that we do so as well.

The point of emphasis is that his kindred would not inherit the land of promise. The promise would be through Isaac and Jacob his own sons, and not his father or brothers. As a matter of fact, the Moabites and Ammonites, consistent enemies of Israel, were the descendants of the sons of Lot through his daughters (Gen 19:36-38) – and Lot was the son of Haran, Abraham's brother. Of the whole family of Terah, therefore, only Abraham

was intended to inherit the promised land. That is why he had to leave them.

INTO A LAND

“. . . and come into the land which I shall show thee.” Other versions read, “and go to the land I will show you,” NIV “and come into the land to which I will be your guide,” BBE “to start out for a country that God would direct him to,” LIVING “Go to another country. I will show you where to go.”^{1E} “and go into whatever land I point out to you,” WEYMOUTH “and come to Whatever country I may show you,” WILLIAMS and “and come into the land (region) that I will point out to you.” AMPLIFIED

The Significance of the Land

This “land” will become an important consideration throughout the Scriptures. Names ascribed to it are as follows.

- ⇒ “The land of Canaan” (Gen 11:31; 17:8; 23:2).
- ⇒ “The sanctuary” (Ex 15:17)
- ⇒ “The land of Israel” (1 Sam 13:19).
- ⇒ “The land of the Hebrews” (Gen 40:15).
- ⇒ “The land of the Jews” (Acts 10:39).
- ⇒ “The land of promise” (Heb 11:9).
- ⇒ “The holy land” (Zech 2:12).
- ⇒ “The Lord’s land” (Hos 9:3).
- ⇒ “Immanuel’s” land (Isa 8:8).
- ⇒ “Beulah” (Isa 62:4).
- ⇒ God referred to it as “My land” (2 Chron 7:20; Isa 14:25; Jer 2:7; 16:18; Ezek 36:5; 38:16; Joel 1:6; 3:2).
- ⇒ Referring to the Lord, it is called “His land” (Deut 32:43; Job 37:13; Psa 10:16; Ezek 36:20; Joel 2:18; Zech 9:16).

This land was not merely a personal possession of Abraham. Rather, it was the place in which God would localize His works. Here is where He would culture a people to bring forth the

Messiah. It is where the Messiah would be born, raised, minister, die, be raised from the dead, and from which He would ascend into heaven. It would also be a land for which His people would be accountable. They were not to pollute the land by learning the way of the heathen, lapsing into idolatry, or living in a state of moral and spiritual defilement. If they defiled the land, God said He would judge them for doing so (Lev 18:25,28; Num 35:33; Deut 21:23; 24:4; Jer 2:7; 3:9; Jer 16:18; Ezek 36:17). The heathen were to be driven out of this land (Ex 23:30,31; Num 22:6; 33:52; Deut 4:38; 9:4-5; Josh 17:12; ; 23:5). If the heathen were not driven out of the land, the Lord said they would become a source of vexation and stumbling (Num 33:55; Josh 23:13).

Abraham Had to Leave His homeland

Abraham, then, was required to leave his homeland and sever his ties with his family, yet had no idea where he was going. God simply told him “I will show thee” the land. The book of Hebrews makes a point of this: “By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, **not knowing whither he went**” (Heb 11:8).

Keep in mind that Abraham had come from an idolatrous background, and had extremely limited exposure to the true God. Many years later, it appears that Nahor was still worshipping another God, as we read of “the God of Nahor,” as well as “the God of their father,” Terah (Gen 31:53). These were the words of Laban to Jacob, but Jacob did not honor such a description of God, but rather “swear by the fear of his father Isaac” (Gen 31:54), thereby rejecting Laban’s oath, which represented the natural heritage of Abraham.

Yet, with only a single word from God, and that very limited, it was sufficient to move Abraham out of his homeland and away from his family to an unseen and unknown land.

It is apparent that a person does not require an abundance of revelation to believe and trust in the Lord. An extensive understanding is not required when there has been limited revelation, and yet there is enough understanding to

compel thorough submission to the word of the Lord.

Among other things, we see in this that the Kingdom of God is not driven by an academic approach to the word of the Lord. Such an approach was not possible in this case. The carnal mind would reason adequate preparation could not be made if Abraham did not know where he was going, or how long it would take to get there. The flesh would respond that this was an unreasonable request, and that more needed to be understood concerning the whole matter. **The carnal mind, however, is enmity against God, and is always wrong.** Even during the spiritually primitive times of Abraham, he knew enough to subordinate any doubts that may have come to his mind. **What possible excuse can be offered for men hesitating to obey the Lord during this time when the Sun of righteousness has risen, and we are standing in the greater glory of the New Covenant?**

The Principle of Divine Guidance

The words “I will show thee” indicate the manner in which Divine guidance is realized. God did not provide Abraham with a map and a precisely designated place on the map. That is not the manner in which the Lord directs the steps of a man – by giving all of the answers up front, so to speak. To be sure, the Lord **does** direct His people. It is written, “He shall direct thy paths” (Psa 3:6). Again it is written, “the Lord directeth his steps” (Prov 16:9). And again, “as for the upright, He directeth his way” (Prov 21:29). The prophets also spoke of this direction: “I will direct all of his ways” (Isa 45:13), “I will direct their work in truth” (Isa 61:8), and “it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jer 10:23). The Lord is said to “lead” people (Isa 48:17), and to “order” their steps (Psa 37:23). But how does the Lord direct or lead the individual? What is the manner of that leading?

It was in the process of Abraham’s journey that he was directed. When he left his homeland, the direction began. It is after we trust in the Lord and lean not to our own understanding that he directs our paths (Prov 3:5-6). It is the “upright” that are directed by God (Prov 21:29), and the “steps of a good man” that

are “ordered” by Him (Psa 37:23). It is within the context of “righteousness” that heavenly guidance is realized (Isa 45:13). Those whose lives are directed in truth are those who are not displeasing Him in their conduct or manners (Isa 61:8).

It is necessary that the appointed journey be commenced before the direction will be given. Those who refuse to walk in the ways of the Lord forfeit the privilege of being directed by God. Oh, men may philosophize about this matter, and say that God in love has a plan for every life, and earnestly wants to lead them into it. **But the truth of the matter is that all people, like Abraham, must cut loose from the domain in which they cannot remain!** If God is going to direct a

person’s path to heaven, it is imperative that they be on their way there – obviously disconnected from a world that is perishing.

Those who attempt to cling to their old ways, yet thinking they are on the way to the promised land, are only deceived. That would be like Abraham staying with his brother Nahor, who chose to live in Mesopotamia, all the while thinking God was going to give him an inheritance **there. Today, people who glibly preach a health and wealth gospel are asking people to stay in Mesopotamia, promising that God is going to give them the inheritance there.** There is no possible way to overstate the

seriousness of such a perverted gospel. It causes people to never start out on the journey, entering the strait gate, and choosing the narrow way. That very circumstance means that Divine direction is shut off, for such leading only occurs when men have left the world and are walking on the “highway” that has been raised up for sojourners (Isa 35:8).

If Abraham, so far removed from the day of salvation, saw the necessity of moving toward the promised land instead of settling down in the present land, what possible justification can there be for neglecting to see that truth today? **More light demands a greater and more extensive response!**

ABRAHAM CAME OUT

^{4a} **Then came he out of the land of the Chaldeans, and dwelt in Charran . . .** Other versions read, “Then he came out of the land of the Chaldeans and dwelt in Haran,”^{NKJV} “Then he departed from the land of the Chaldeans, and settled in Haran,”^{NASB} “So he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran,”^{NIV} “So he left the land of the Chaldeans and lived in Haran, in Syria,”^{LIVING} “Thereupon he left Chaldea and settled in Haran,”^{WEYMOUTH} “So he left the country of the Chaldeans and for a time made his home in Haran,”^{WILLIAMS} and “That was how he came to leave the land of the Chaldeans and settle in Haran.”^{PHILLIPS}

Here Stephen is given some additional insight concerning the exodus of Abraham from Mesopotamia. The Genesis record states that “Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son’s son, and Sarai his daughter in law, his son Abram’s wife; and they went

forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there” (Gen 11:31). For whatever reason Terah may have appeared to make this move, Stephen says it was really Abraham who “came out.” It is possible that Terah had some other motive. However, the promise was given to Abraham, not to Terah, and thus the whole matter is credited to him. If Terah did have some other motive, Abraham would have seen it as an open door to do what God had required of him.

We know that the move described in Genesis 11:31 is the one to which Stephen refers, for both records say the move resulted in the pilgrims settling down in Haran.

Some have the audacity to say that Abraham was disobedient at this point – that God had not told him to settle in Haran, but to go to the land to

which God would direct him. In such a statement they betray their own carnality. They imagine that God had directed Abraham to move forward, but instead he settled down. As the text progresses, we will find how false such a view is, and how it reproaches both God and Abraham.

AN INTERESTING POINT

In leaving Ur of the Chaldees, Abraham was leaving the land in which Nebuchadnezzar would be raised up to chasten his own disobedient offspring. The twenty-fifth chapter of Second Kings records the plundering of Judah and the city of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, referring to “the Chaldees” seven times (2 Kgs 25:4,5,10, 13,24,25,26). Isaiah refers to the city of Babylon as the “beauty of the Chaldees” (Isa 13:19). He also states the land of the Chaldees was “founded” by an Assyrian (Isa 23:13). Long before that history, Abraham dwelt in that land.

WHEN HIS FATHER DIED, HE CAME INTO THIS LAND

^{4a} . . . and from thence, when his father was dead, He removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell.”

Stephen is tracing the working of the Lord through Abraham, confirming that he is an Israelite indeed, and is not seeking to disrupt the people. He has

stated that Abraham has left Ur of the Chaldees as commanded, and is now residing in Haran. Terah, his father, is with him and Sarai, as well as Lot, his

nephew.

WHEN HIS FATHER WAS DEAD

“ . . . and from thence, when his father was dead . . . ” Other versions read, “and from there, when his father was dead,”^{NKJV} “and from there, after his father died,”^{NASB} “and from thence, after the death of his father,”^{YLT} “until his father died,”^{LIVING} and “After Abraham’s father died.”^{IE}

The record in Genesis reads, “*And the days of Terah were two hundred and five years: and Terah died in Haran*” (Gen 11:32). We do not know how old Terah was when the clan left Ur. We do know that his three sons, Abram, Nahor, and Haran were born after he was seventy years old. We also know that Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran. That means that 135 years passed between the birth of Terah’s three sons and the departure of Abraham from Haran. **Although the details are not specified, this should confirm that we are speaking of a significant period of time the clan spent in Haran.** According to Divine purpose, they were awaiting the death of Terah, who himself had no part in the promise. The rest of the verse will confirm that this was all by God’s intent.

HE REMOVED HIM INTO THIS LAND

“ . . . He removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell.” Other versions read, “He moved him to this land in which you now dwell,”^{NKJV} “God removed him into this country in which you are now living,”^{NASB} “God sent him to this land where you are now living,”^{NIV} “God had him move from there to this country in which you are now living,”^{NRSV} “he was guided by God into this land, where you are living now,”^{BBE} “God made him move to this land where you are living now,”^{CJB} “God removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell,”^{ERV} “God brought him from thence into this land, wherein ye now dwell,”^{GENEVA} “He made him migrate to this land where you now dwell,”^{NAB} “Then God brought him here to the land where you now live,”^{NLT} “Then God brought him here to the land of Israel,”^{LIVING} “God caused him to remove into this country where you now live,”^{WEYMOUTH} “[God] transferred him to this country in which you are now dwelling.”^{AMPLIFIED} and “God moved him

into this very land where you are living today.”^{PHILLIPS}

God promised He would show Abram the land, directing him to it, and that is precisely what He is doing. **In all of this, there is also the matter of timeliness, for all of this must allow for God’s predetermined timetable.** Coming into the land of Canaan must be synchronized with the following events that will take place by Divine appointment.

- ⇨ The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, with which Lot was associated.
- ⇨ The birth of Joseph, youngest son of Jacob, who will become the ruler of Egypt.
- ⇨ The selling of Joseph as a slave, which would bring him into Egypt at

the Egyptians, after a Pharaoh arose who had no regard for Joseph.

⇨ There was also the deliverance of Israel from Egypt that would take place on the fourteenth day of the month of Abib, around B.C. 1500.

It is apparent that a person does not require an abundance of revelation to believe and trust in the Lord. An extensive understanding is not required when there has been limited revelation, and yet there is enough understanding to compel thorough submission to the word of the Lord.

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the proper time.

- ⇨ Joseph arriving in Egypt at the time of Potiphar who would make him the head of his house.
- ⇨ Joseph must be in Potiphar’s house while his wife was there, who would be the occasion of him going into prison, from which he would be exalted.
- ⇨ Joseph had to be in prison at the same time as Pharaoh’s butler and baker, who would inform Pharaoh of Joseph’s ability to interpret dreams.
- ⇨ The coming of seven years of plenty, and seven years of famine, that would pave the way for Joseph’s exaltation.
- ⇨ Consideration must be given to the time Israel would be oppressed by

compel thorough submission to the word of the Lord.

ABRAHAM CAME INTO THE LAND

Stephen affirms that God moved Abraham “*into the land*,” thus confirming that he finally arrived there. The exact distance to the land is not known, nor whether the route was straight there. Judging from the map, it was several hundred miles – probably a minimum of three hundred. Genesis 12:5 gives the account of their arrival: “*And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother’s son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came*” (Gen 12:5).

At that time, Abraham passed through the land, as though surveying it. We are told that “*the Canaanite was in*

the land” (Gen 12:6). We are also told “there was a famine in the land” at that time (Ex 12:10). Years later, when Isaac

was in the land, there was also a famine there (Gen 26:1). Years after that, when Jacob was in the land, there was yet

another famine (Gen 42:1-5). For a long time, the land did not seem to be a good place to live.

GOD DID NOT GIVE ABRAHAM ANY INHERITANCE IN THE LAND

“^{5a} And He gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on . . .”

Here again we are exposed to the ways of the Lord. They are not like the ways of men, and do not at all conform to human standards. Those who view the Scriptures with a carnal mind will be in a constant state of confusion.

In the original promise given to Abram, there was no mention of God giving Abram the land to which he was journeying. At that time, the Lord promised, “And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing; and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed” (Gen 12:2-3). At that

be blessed.

However, there was no promise at that time of inheriting the land, or of it becoming his own.

After arriving in the land, the Lord appeared unto Abram again and said, “And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, **Unto thy seed will I give this land**” (Gen 12:7). Shortly after that, Abram and Lot separated, with Lot choosing the area near Sodom, and Abram choosing to dwell “in the land of Canaan” (Gen 13:12). At that time, the Lord again spoke to Abram, “after that Lot was separated from him” (Gen 13:14a). “Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: For all the land which thou seest, **to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. And I will make thy seed as**

⇒ His seed would “be a stranger in a land that is not theirs” (Gen 15:13a).

⇒ That nation would afflict them for four hundred years (Gen 15:13b).

⇒ God would judge the nation that afflicted them (Gen 15:14a).

⇒ Abram’s seed would come out of the nation that afflicted them “with great substance” (Gen 15:14b).

⇒ Abram would die in peace, and be buried in a “good old age” (Gen 15:15).

⇒ In the fourth generation, Abram’s seed would enter the promised land again, for the iniquity of the Amorities” was “not yet full” (Gen 15:16).

⇒ That same day, the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, “In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, **Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates: the Kenites, and the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites, and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Rephaims, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Girgashites, and the Jebusites**” (Gen 15:18-21). As you can see, the land would be occupied by ten different nations, seven of which were greater and mightier than Israel (Deut 7:1).

⇒ Still without any offspring from Sarah, who remained barren, Abram, following the advice of Sarah, had a son through Hagar, Sarai’s handmaid. That son, Ishmael, was born when Abraham was eighty-six years old (Gen 16:16).

⇒ When Abraham was ninety-nine

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time, the Lord promised Abram the following.

- ⇒ God would make a great nation of Abram.
- ⇒ He would make his name great.
- ⇒ Abram would be a blessing.
- ⇒ Those who blessed Abram would be blessed, and those who cursed him would be cursed.
- ⇒ In him, all nations of the earth would

the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered. Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it: for **I will give it unto thee**” (Gen 14b:15-17)

Some years later, “the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision.” In that word God said, “I am the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, **to give thee this land to inherit it**” (Gen 15:7). It was at this time that God revealed several things to Abraham.

BORDERS OF THE PROMISED LAND

The extent and boundaries of Canaan are given with tolerable exactness in the Bible. On the west the sea was its border from Sidon to Gaza (Genesis 10:19). On the south it was bounded by a line running from Gaza to the southern end of the Dead Sea, including the Judaeen hills, but excluding the country of the Amalekites (Genesis 10:19; Numbers 13:29). The Jordan was the eastern boundary; no part of Canaan lay beyond that river (Numbers 33:51; Exodus 16:35, with Reland, *Palest.* p. 3 sq.). On the north, Canaan extended as far as Hamath, which was also the utmost boundary of the "land of promise" (Genesis 17:8; Numbers 34:8). The coast from Sidon northward to Arvad, and the ridge of Lebanon, were inhabited by Canaanites, though they do not appear to have been included in Canaan proper (Genesis 10:15-19).^{McCLINTOK STRONG}

years old, God again appeared to him and said, "I will establish My covenant between Me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. **And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God**" (Gen 17:7-8).

NONE INHERITANCE

"And He gave him none inheritance in it, no . . ." Other versions read, "gave him no inheritance here,"^{NIV} "did not give him any of it as a heritage,"^{NRSV} "God didn't give Abraham anything in this land to call his own,"^{GWN} "God did not give him any property in this land,"^{NJB} "God did not give Abraham any of this land,"^{IE} "He gave him no inheritable property in it,"^{AMPLIFIED} and "God gave him no part of it as an inheritance."^{PHILLIPS}

Even though God gave Abram promise after promise that this land would be given to him, whole he was in the world, Abraham did not receive any portion of it. Here again, we are being introduced to a Divine manner that is reflected in the salvation that is in Christ Jesus.

NOT SO MUCH AS TO SET HIS FOOT ON

" . . . not so much as to set his foot on . . ." Other versions read, "not even

enough to set his foot one,"^{NKJV} "not even a foot of ground,"^{NASB} "not even a foot's length,"^{NRSV} "not even enough to put his foot on,"^{BBE} "not even space for one foot,"^{CSV} "not even what his foot could stand on,"^{DARBY} "not the breadth of a foot,"^{GENEVA} "not even a place to rest his feet,"^{GWN} "or even a foothold,"^{NJB} "not even one square foot of land,"^{NLT} "not even a footstep,"^{YLT} "not one little tract of land,"^{LIVING} "not a single square yard of ground,"^{WEYMOUTH} and "not a foot that he could call his own."^{PHILLIPS}

The land given to Abraham was extensive. That is why this verse is of such importance. The extent and borders of the land are specified several times.

⇨ Genesis 15:18-21: "In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, **from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates:** the Kenites, and the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites, and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Rephaims, And the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Gurgashites, and the Jebusites."

⇨ Exodus 23:31: "And I will set thy bounds **from the Red sea even unto the sea of the Philistines, and from the desert unto the river:** for I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand; and thou shalt drive them out before thee."

⇨ Deuteronomy 11:24: "Every place whereon the soles of your feet shall tread shall be yours: **from the wilderness and Lebanon, from the river, the river Euphrates, even unto the uttermost sea shall your coast be.**"

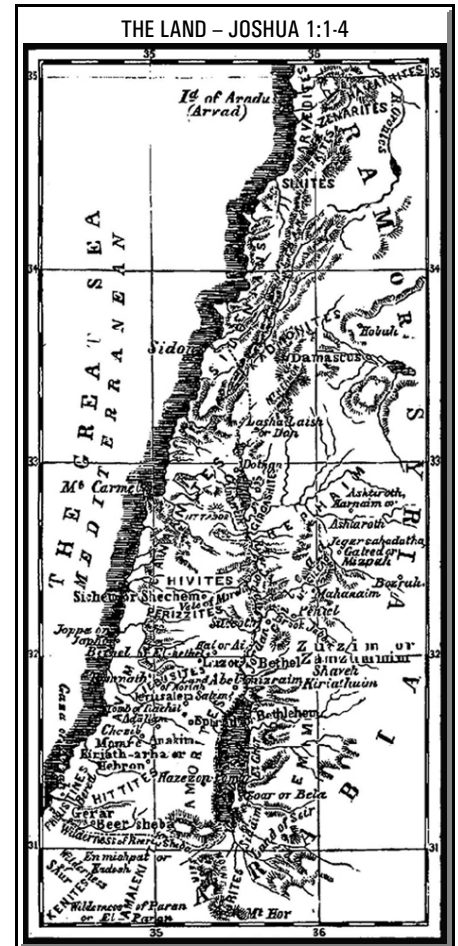
⇨ Joshua 1:2-4: "Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses. **From the wilderness and this Lebanon even unto the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and unto the great sea**

toward the going down of the sun, shall be your coast."

When Israel entered the land, this territory was divided by Lot to them by their tribes. The allotment is specified in the fifteenth through seventeenth chapters of Joshua.

The Scriptures make a point of the fact that Abraham, together with Isaac and Jacob, were actually strangers in the land that was promised to them. "By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise" (Heb 11:9).

When Abraham arrived in the land, God told him he was a "stranger" in it, yet would it be given to him as an "everlasting possession": "And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land **wherein thou art a stranger**, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God" (Gen



17:8).

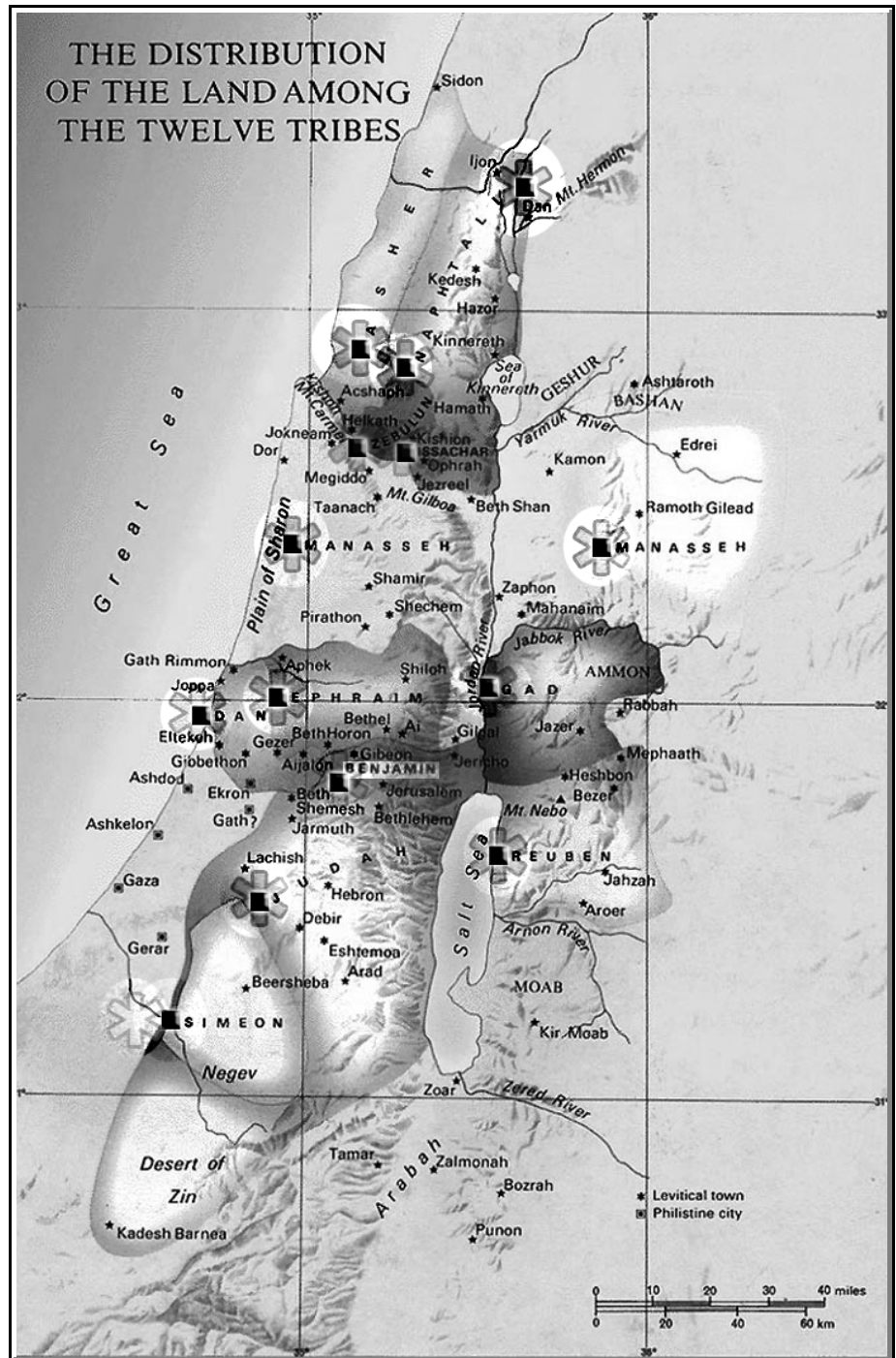
When Sarah died at 127 years of age in Hebron, which was in the land of Canaan (Gen 23:2), Abraham stood up "from before the dead" and confessed, "**I am a stranger and a sojourner with you:** give me a possession of a burying place with you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight" (Gen 23:4). He did not even own a plot of land large enough to bury his wife. It was at that time that he refused to take the land for nothing, but insisted before Ephron the Hittite, "**I will give thee money for the field**" (Gen 23:13). He then gave the amount of money the land was worth – "**four hundred shekels of silver, current money with the merchant**" (Gen 23:16). In so doing, he confessed he was a "**stranger and pilgrim in the earth**" (Heb 11:13), **and even in the land that was promised to Him by the Creator.** Scripture goes on to say that Abraham was actually looking "**for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God**" (Heb 11:10).

Thus, even though he did not receive any land, not even a square foot, so to speak, he sojourned in it "**by faith,**" **seeking the fulfillment of the promise, which he sensed, involved much more than the real estate in which was walking.**

It was Abraham's exposure to God, even though that exposure was limited, that compelled him to live in such a manner. **He did not seek more of this world, because He had been with the Lord who had made the world.** I conclude, therefore, that those who attach the New Covenant to health and wealth have not actually seen the Lord or had extensive dealings with him. I know this is the case, because Abraham is "**the father of all them that believe**" (Rom 4:11). **It is not possible that any of his true progeny possesses a faith that is opposed to his own.**

THE PARALLEL WITH BELIEVERS

Because Abraham is "**the father of us all**" (Rom 4:16), there is a parallel between his experience and our own. Jesus said of those who partook of His own nature – the meek – "**Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth**" (Matt 5:5). The Psalmist also prophesied, "**But the meek shall inherit the earth;**



and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace" (Psa 37:11). He also said of the seed of the man who is taught by God, "**his seed shall inherit the earth**" (Psa 25:12). Again, he said of those who wait upon the Lord, "**they shall inherit the earth**" (Psa 37:9). And again he said, "**For such as be blessed of Him shall inherit the earth**" (Psa 37:22). Isaiah prophesied, "**Thy people also shall be all**

righteous: they shall inherit the land for ever, the branch of my planting, the work of My hands, that I may be glorified" (Isa 60:21). When speaking of the promise made to Abraham, Paul said, "**For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith**" (Rom 4:13).

Stephen begins his defense by tracing the nation of Israel to its origin, showing its relation to God – by Given O. Blakely

We also know that “*the world to come*,” involving “*a new heavens and a new earth*” (2 Pet 3:13), will be put into the charge of redeemed men. In some extensive reasoning about this matter, the Spirit establishes that the co-regents of the world to come will **not** be angels, but men. “*For it was not to angels that God subjected the habitable world of the future, of which we are speaking. It has been solemnly and earnestly said in a certain place, What is man that You are mindful of him, or the son of man that You graciously and helpfully care for and visit and look after him? For some little time You have ranked him lower than and inferior to the angels; You have crowned him with glory and honor and set him over the works of Your hands, For You have put everything in subjection under his feet. Now in putting everything in subjection to man, He left nothing outside [of man’s] control. But at present we do not yet see all things subjected to him [man]. But we are able to see Jesus, Who was ranked lower than the angels for a little while, crowned with glory and honor because of His having suffered death, in order that by the grace (unmerited favor) of God [to us sinners] He might experience death for every individual person. For it was an act worthy [of God] and fitting [to the Divine nature] that He, for Whose sake and by Whom all things have their existence, in bringing many sons into glory, should make the Pioneer of their salvation perfect [should bring to maturity the human experience necessary to be perfectly equipped for His office as High Priest] through suffering*”^{AMPLIFIED} (Heb 2:5-10).

In this text, several considerations are articulated.

- ⇨ The angels will not be in charge of the world to come – the “*new earth*.”
- ⇨ The subject of apostolic proclamation, from this point of view, was the world that is coming, not the world that now is.
- ⇨ It is man that was created to have the dominion of “*the world to come*.”
- ⇨ For a while, redeemed humanity remains in a state that is “*a little lower than the angels*” – a state in

which, rather than ruling, they require continual care and sustenance.

- ⇨ It has been determined that everything will be in redeemed man’s control.
- ⇨ In this world, however, that control is not yet being realized. That is why it is not yet seen.
- ⇨ There is, however, a key Man, who also, for a time, was made a little lower than the angels. Unlike the rest of humanity, who were made a little lower because of sin, He was made a little lower for the suffering of death – a death that was in the behalf of the appointed joint-heirs.
- ⇨ As the Representative of redeemed

than He promised him. We know this is the case, for it is written, “*And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise*” (Gal 3:29).

THIS EXPOSES A MODERN ERROR

Those who preach that the inheritance of the saints of God has to do with worldly possessions and status are not only in error, they are at a fundamental variance with the Scriptures in general, and the salvation of God in particular. It is not possible for them to be more wrong. **When they set before us their resources and possessions, they must at the same time confess they will have to give them up.** They cannot be transported to the other side of death. In fact, such possessions cannot even exist in the presence of the

Those who preach that the inheritance of the saints of God has to do with worldly possessions and status are not only in error, they are at a fundamental variance with the Scriptures in general, and the salvation of God in particular. It is not possible for them to be more wrong.

humanity, everything is presently under the control of the Man Christ Jesus. This is a confirmation that the world to come will also be in the control of the heirs of the promise.

An inheritance, as used in this reasoning, is something that will be kept, and will never be forfeited. Thus God promised Abraham, “*For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever*” (Gen 13:15). Therefore, while he was increasing in age and decreasing in the span of life, **Abraham knew the inheritance could not be worldly real estate.** He knew that the inheritance would only be realized after he died, and not before.

It is the same with us, who are his children. God does not give Abraham’s children a different kind of faith and a different kind of inheritance

Lord, from before whose face “*the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them*” (Rev 20:11).

What these lying prophets have actually acknowledged is that they are driven by lust – the lust that will pass away with its object. As it is written, “*And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever*” (1 John 2:17). **It simply is not possible to integrate worldly possessions and health with “for ever.”** These men – false prophets – are drawing people into their lucrative empires with covetousness, just as the Scriptures affirm. Like it or not, the word of God says they are appointed to damnation. “*But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that*

bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of

you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not” (2 Pet 2:3).

There is no room for the slightest bit of tolerance of an emphasis of life in this present evil world. **The justified ones**

live in prospect of the coming world, in which all things will be made new. Like Abraham, they are looking for something that will survive the fiery conclusion of this world, and everything that is in it.

YET HE PROMISED THE LAND TO ABRAHAM AND HIS SEED, WHEN HE HAD NO CHILD

“^{5b} . . . yet He promised that He would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child.”

Stephen now accents the time in which the promise was made, accenting that Abraham’s seed, or offspring, would also inherit the land. Again, the promise was that God would give the land to Abraham and his offspring “for a possession”—a land that he would occupy as its owner.

YET HE PROMISED

“ . . . yet he promised that He would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him . . .” Other versions read, “and to his descendants after him,”^{NKJV} “and to his offspring after him,”^{NASB} “he and his descendants after him would possess the land,”^{NIV} “and to his posterity after him,”^{RSV} “ but He gave him an undertaking that he would give it to him

bestow the land as a permanent possession on him and his posterity after him,”^{WEYMOUTH} and “promised that it should eventually belong to him and his descendants.”^{PHILLIPS}

The promise to which Stephen refers was stated several times.

⇒ **WHEN NAMED ABRAM** – “And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land. . .”(Gen 12:7).

⇒ **WHEN NAMED ABRAM** – “For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever”(Gen 13:15).

⇒ **WHEN NAMED ABRAM** – “In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, **Unto thy seed have I given this land . . .**”(Gen 15:18).

thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I swear unto Abraham thy father” (Gen 26:3).

⇒ **TO JACOB** – “And, behold, the LORD stood above it, and said, I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: **the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed”**(Gen 28:13).

Notice that the promise was that the land would be given to Abraham AND his seed, or offspring. The promise was renewed to the other part of this sanctified trio: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This is why God is frequently referred to as “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob”(Ex. 3:6,15,16; 4:5; Matt 22:32; Mk 12:26; Lk 20:37; Acts 3:13; 7:32). **It was with them that this covenant was made.** Israel was, therefore, blessed because of their association with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It was God’s covenant with them, and their faith in Him that often proved to be the cause for Israel being blessed (Gen 26:5; Lev 26:42; 2 Kgs 13:23; Mic 7:20; Lk 1:54-55,72-73).

WHEN AS YET HE HAD NO CHILD

“ . . . when as yet he had no child.” Other versions read, “when Abraham had no child,”^{NKJV} “though at the time Abraham had no child,”^{NIV} “even though he was childless,”^{CSB} “when as yet he had no son,”^{MRD} “childless though he was,”^{NJB} “even though he had no children yet,”^{NLT} “This was before Abraham had any children,”^{IE} and “even though at the time he had no descendant at all.”^{PHILLIPS}

The Holy Spirit makes a point of the fact that the promise was given to Abraham **before** he had any offspring.

The Holy Spirit makes a point of the fact that the promise was given to Abraham before he had any offspring. Scripture confirms that at that time Abram’s wife, Sarai, through whom the offspring would come, was barren. “But Sarai was barren; she had no child”

and to his children after him,”^{BBE} “He promised that He would give it him, as an inheritance to him and to his seed.”^{MRD} “God did promise, however, that eventually the whole land would belong to Abraham and his descendants,”^{NLT} “God promised that eventually the whole country would belong to him and his descendants,”^{LIVING} “He promised to

⇒ **AFTER NAMED ABRAHAM** – “And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God”(Gen 17:8).

⇒ **TO ISAAC** – “Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless

Scripture confirms that at that time Abram's wife, Sarai, through whom the offspring would come, was barren. "But Sarai was barren; she had no child" (Gen 11:30). At the time of the original promise, Abraham was seventy-five years old, and Sarah was sixty-six. Twenty-four years later, God appeared to Abram when he was ninety-nine years old (Gen 17:1). It was at that time that he changed Abram's name to Abraham, and Sarai's name to Sarah (Gen 17:5,15-16). At that time, not only was Sarah still barren, but Abraham was past the age of betting children. He therefore, "said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear?" (Gen 17:17). He then asked the Lord for Ishmael to qualify to be the promised seed (Gen 17:18). At that time, the Lord confirmed, "Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant,

Thus the triumph of faith is demonstrated in both Abraham and Sarah. We conclude, therefore, that the promises of God are to be believed, even when they contradict the full scope of human knowledge.

and with his seed after him" (Gen 17:19).

Reasoning on the birth of Isaac, the book of Hebrews says, "Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised. Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable" (Heb 11:11-12). Also, commenting on the occasion when God announced the "seed" would come

through Sarah, Paul writes, "And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb: he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God" (Rom 4:20).

Thus the triumph of faith is demonstrated in both Abraham and Sarah. We conclude, therefore, that the promises of God are to be believed, even when they contradict the full scope of human knowledge.

HIS SEED WOULD SOJOURN IN A STRANGE LAND

"6 And God spake on this wise, That his seed should sojourn in a strange land; and that they should bring them into bondage, and entreat them evil four hundred years."

God divulged to Abraham that the possession of the promised land would be preceded by a period of sorrow and hardship. **In Christ we are enabled to see with even greater clarity that suffering precedes the fulfillment of the promise, and that obtaining the inheritance follows the testing of one's faith.** While the fulness of this circumstance was not revealed to Abraham, the kernel of it was given to him, and was substantiated by his own experience.

GOD SPAKE ON THIS WISE

"And God spake on this wise . . ." Other versions read, "God spoke in this way,"^{NKJV} "God spoke to this effect,"^{NASB} "God spoke in these terms,"^{NRSV} "God spoke thus,"^{DARBY} "God conversed with Him,"^{MRD} "God spoke as follows,"^{NET} "The actual words God used when He spoke to him,"^{NJB} "God also told him,"^{NLT} "God

verily spake on this wise,"^{TNT} "This is what God said to him,"^{IE} "God declared,"^{WEYMOUTH} "This is what God promised,"^{WILLIAMS} "this is [in effect] what God told him,"^{AMPLIFIED} and "this is the way in which God spoke to him."^{PHILLIPS}

Those who choose to make their personal lives the center of their existence must pay close heed to this text. The Lord speaks to Abraham about something that does not concern him personally – at least, not as an occupant of this world. Rather than divulging what was going to happen to Abraham, God reveals what will happen to His progeny. He even speaks of something that will take place several generations in the future. That is the way, or manner, in which He communicated with the patriarch.

An Application

Fellowship with the Father does not focus on the human designs and objectives, but on Divine objectives. While this may appear something very obvious, men have a great deal of

difficulty accepting it. Sin has made men self-centered, for sin is always about self. Temptation has to do with self. Unlawful lusts center in the one possessing them. However, if a person desires companionship with God, it must be recognized that the person will not be the focus of the fellowship. If this is too difficult to bear, there simply will be no fellowship, for God does not conduct business with men upon the basis of their agenda. He rather moves and speaks to bring men into involvement in what He is doing. This is seen in Abraham, through whom an intentional example is being set before us.

HIS SEED SHOULD SOJOURN IN A STRANGE LAND

" . . . That his seed should sojourn in a strange land . . ." Other versions read, "that his descendants would dwell in a foreign land,"^{NKJV} "his offspring would be aliens in a foreign land,"^{NASB} "his descendants would be strangers in a country no their own,"^{NIV} "residents aliens in a country belonging to others,"^{NRSV} "his seed would be living in a strange

land.”^{BBE} *“his descendants would be foreigners living in another country.”*^{GWN} *“his descendants would be exiles in a land not their own.”*^{NJB} *“descendants of his would leave the land and live in a foreign country.”*^{LIVING} and *“his descendants would be aliens (strangers) in a land belonging to other people.”*
AMPLIFIED

To the carnal mind, this makes no sense. First, God promises Abraham he and his offspring would inherit a land. Then He tells them his offspring would leave the land of promise, and dwell in a foreign land that belonged to others, and not to themselves. **However, we are witnessing the ways of the Lord here, and we do well to exercise ourselves to discern what He is doing.**

First, God is stripping away anything and everything that would suggest this was going to be a human achievement. We know from later

old and barren. He then gives a land to this man and his offspring that is occupied by other inhabitants who are greater in number and power than the people whom God has chosen to drive them out. As if that was not enough, He leads Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to sojourn in the land He has given them, and do so as strangers and pilgrims. Then he takes the chosen race, and causes them, through a famine, to go into a foreign land that belongs to others, and will never belong to them. It is in **that** land that God will prepare the people to inhabit the land He has promised them.

Now, that is the manner in which God works! He does not take those who are apparently significant and unusually gifted, and employ them for His purposes. Rather, he takes those who are old, barren, few, and without a land of their own, and with them cultures a people for Himself.

When the small company first went into Egypt, they did so because there was a famine in the land. Joseph had been placed in charge of the land, and therefore the Israelites were treated kindly. They were given their own section of the land – Goshen – and they fared well. This proved to be *“the best of the land.”* Pharaoh even told Joseph *“if thou knowest any men of activity among them, then make them rulers over my cattle”* (Gen 47:1-6). They certainly got off to a good start. However, it did not stay that way.

Eventually, Moses records, *“there arose a new king over Egypt which knew not Joseph”* (Ex 1:8). The outcome of it all was that Israel entered into a period of oppression and bondage. During the time that followed harsh taskmasters were set over them, *“to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh treasure cities, Pithom and Raamses”* (Ex 1:11).

AND ENTREAT THEM EVIL

“... and entreat them evil four hundred years.” Other versions read, *“oppress,”*^{NKJV} *“mistreated,”*^{NASB} *“ill-treat them,”*^{RSV} *“be cruel to them,”*^{BBE} *“oppressed,”*^{CJB} *“afflict them,”*^{ESV} *“do it evil,”*^{YLT} and *“do evil things to them.”*^{IE}

The accent of the oppression is on the state of the Israelites when they came out of Egypt. From the very first, they were not liked by the Egyptians because they were shepherds (Gen 46:32; 47:3), and *“every shepherd is an abomination unto the Egyptians”* (Gen 46:34). However, as time progressed they were afflicted more and more, with their lives *“being made bitter with hard bondage”* (Ex 1:14). The circumstance was so grievous that the children of Israel *“cried, and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage”* (Ex 2:23).

God told Abraham his seed would be afflicted for *“four hundred years”* in this strange land (Gen 15:13). Moses says they sojourned in the land for *“four hundred and thirty years”* (Ex 12:40-41). Paul says that the time from the covenant made with Abraham to the giving of the Law was *“four hundred and thirty years”* (Gal 3:17). Some have struggled with this seeming disparity, but there is no need to do so.

To the carnal mind, this makes no sense. First, God promises Abraham he and his offspring would inherit a land. Then He tells them his offspring would leave the land of promise, and dwell in a foreign land that belonged to others, and not to themselves.

revelations that it is God’s nature to *“destroy the wisdom of the wise, and [He] will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent”* (1 Cor 1:19). By Divine intent, He has *“made foolish the wisdom of this world”* (1 Cor 1:20). He chooses rather to use *“the foolish things to confound the wise,”* and *“the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised,”* and *“things which are not, to bring to nought things that are”* (1 Cor 1:27-28). He does this so that *“no flesh should glory in His presence”* (1 Cor 1:29).

God begins to build this race, through whom the Deliverer will come – the race that will give us the Scriptures, and all of the prophets, and all of the apostles – **with a man that is incapable of begetting a child, and a woman who is**

The land in which Abraham’s offspring would sojourn is Egypt. When went into the land their entire nation was only seventy in number. Sixty-six came with Jacob into the land, and three (Joseph and his two sons) were already there. That made seventy altogether (Gen 46:26-27).

THEY SHOULD BRING THEM INTO BONDAGE

“... and that they should bring them into bondage . . .” Other versions read, *“they would be enslaved,”*^{NASB} *“they will be enslaved,”*^{NIV} *“who would enslave them,”*^{NRSV} *“they would make them servants,”*^{BBE} *“they will be in slavery,”*^{CJB} *“the people there would make them slaves,”*^{GWN} *“they will reduce them to servitude,”*^{MRD} and *“they would be oppressed as slaves.”*^{NLT}

First, they were afflicted for four hundred years – but they were not afflicted for all of the time they were in the land. The four hundred and thirty years are calculated from the time the covenant was made with Abraham, as Paul affirms in Galatians 3:17. Exodus also cites this number, stating that the “sojourning of the children of Israel” was “four hundred and thirty years.” The point being made there is that from the promise to the Jews becoming a people

and headed for the promised land, was four hundred and thirty years. The “four hundred years” are from the perspective of their suffering. The “four hundred and thirty years” are from the perspective of the promise.

During their stay in Egypt they were never truly received. As time progressed, things got worse and worse, until they could bear it no longer. **In all of this they were being weaned, as it**

were, from Egypt. Their souls were being cultured to long for the land that had been promised to Abraham four centuries before. Such are the ways of the Lord, to make the foreign land intolerable in order that the home land be appreciated. As is apparent, the Lord is still doing this. Through life’s experiences. He is teaching us this world is not our home. It is to us what the wilderness was to Israel. We are, in fact, sojourners.

GOD WOULD JUDGE THEIR OPPRESSORS

“7 And the nation to whom they shall be in bondage will I judge, said God: and after that shall they come forth, and serve me in this place.”

Four centuries of suffering, with the least being at the beginning, and the worst being at the conclusion! Someone from the twentieth century might have concluded God had “forgotten to be gracious” (Psa 77:9). It certainly appeared that way. Imagine people coming to America like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, living all their lives here without possessing any part of it, yet claiming it had been given to them and their offspring by God. Then their offspring spend 400 years in another country as abject slaves. Would it not appear as though they were mistaken about being led to the land? How could such a people claim that God was their God.

Now that religious charlatans have become popular (2007), it is being preached through the media that prosperity is a sign of being the real people of God. It is, they say, the evidence of the blessing. What shall we say of our text, where the real people of God are being oppressed for four hundred years, with no apparent intervention by God. Their oppressors dominate them, and make lives miserable for them. Further, there is no particular sin registered against them, unless it be that during the latter time, when they were ignorant of the fact that God was going to deliver them through Moses (Acts 7:25).

Behind the scenes, the oppression of His people had been duly noted by the Lord, and He will not let Egypt continue their oppressiveness. They will pay the penalty for the maltreatment of the offspring of Abraham.

commence their journey to the promised land. Not only did God judge the Egyptians themselves, but he executed judgment “against all the gods of Egypt” (Ex 12:12). Those false gods were unable to protect the Egyptians as the Lord

A genuine fellowship with the Lord involves Him divulging what He was going to do, thereby establishing that He is a God who cannot lie, and is thoroughly capable of fulfilling His promises to the most exacting degree. No one can stop Him from doing this.

THIS NATION I WILL JUDGE

“And the nation to whom they shall be in bondage will I judge . . .” Other versions read, “I Myself will judge,” ^{NASB} “I will punish.” ^{NIV} “I will bring judgment on.” ^{NAB} and “I will pass sentence on.” ^{WILLIAMS}

God revealed Himself to Moses, declaring some of His attributes. One of them is that He will “*by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children’s children, unto the third and fourth generation*” (Ex 34:7). Thus God told Abraham He was going to judge Egypt for what they would do after Abraham himself had died in a good old age.

The judgment took place as a prelude to the deliverance of Israel, and when they crossed the Red Sea to

judged them with ten grievous plagues.

- ⇨ Their water was turned to blood (Ex 7:14-25).
- ⇨ Frogs filled the land (Ex 8:1-15).
- ⇨ The dust was turned into lice that plagued all the land (Ex 8:16-19).
- ⇨ Flies filled the land (Ex 8:20-22).
- ⇨ A grievous plague came on all of their cattle (Ex 9:1-7).
- ⇨ The people were stricken with festering and spreading boils (Ex 9:8-12).
- ⇨ A plague of hail came, pounding down all of their crops (Ex 9:18-34).
- ⇨ A horde of locusts invaded the land,

consuming every bit of vegetation that had not been destroyed by the hail (Ex 10:1-20).

- ⇒ Gross darkness fell upon the land, being so thick that it could be “felt” (Ex 10:21-23).
- ⇒ The first born every house, including both man and beast, were stricken dead (Ex 11:4-7; 12:29-30).
- ⇒ Pharaoh and his armies were uttering destroyed, being drowned in the Red Sea (Ex 15:4).

Suffice it to say, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb 10:31).

THEY SHALL COME FORTH AND SERVE ME

“ . . . said God: and after that shall they come forth, and serve me in this place.” Other versions read, “worship Me in this place,”^{NIV} “worship Me in this land,”^{MRD} “do me service in this place,”^{YLT} and “worship Me on this very spot.”^{WILLIAMS}

God revealed to Abraham that his offspring would come out of Egypt – but they would do so to **serve Him**, not merely to get away from their oppressors. When God revealed Himself to Moses at the burning bush, telling him he was being called to deliver Israel, this is what He told him. “When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, **ye shall serve God upon this mountain**” (Ex 3:12).

God told Moses he was to appear before Pharaoh, giving him this message: “Thus saith the LORD, Israel is My son, even My firstborn: And I say unto thee, Let My son go, **that he may serve Me**: and if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy son, even thy firstborn” (Ex 4:23). When Moses prepared to turn the water into blood, God told him to say: “The LORD God of the Hebrews hath sent me unto thee, saying, Let my people go, **that they may serve Me in the wilderness**” (Ex 7:16). Six more times, Moses told Pharaoh God said to let His people go, “that they may **serve Me**” (Ex 8:1,20; 9:1,13; 10:3,7). When the hour of deliverance arrived, “He called for Moses and Aaron by night, and said, Rise up,

and get you forth from among my people, both ye and the children of Israel: and **go, serve the LORD, as ye have said**” (Ex 12:31).

Thus Israel was released from serving the Egyptians in order that they might serve the Lord. That was the reason for their deliverance. That was the reason for God choosing them – “to be a peculiar people **unto Himself**, above all the nations that are upon the earth” (Deut 14:2). **Once again, it is made clear that the Lord is not working to simply make human conditions more pleasant.**

These insights were delivered to Abraham in order to fuel his faith, and cause his hope to flourish. It also served the purpose of confirming to later generations that God is faithful to His word, and cannot lie.

A genuine fellowship with the Lord involves Him divulging what He was going to do, thereby establishing that He is a God who cannot lie, and is thoroughly capable of fulfilling His promises to the most exacting degree. No one can stop Him from doing this.

HE GAVE ABRAHAM THE COVENANT OF CIRCUMCISION

“^{8a} **And He gave him the covenant of circumcision . . .**” Other versions read, “agreement of which circumcision was the sign,”^{BBE} “circumcision to confirm his promise,”^{GWN} “the ceremony of circumcision at that time, as evidence of the covenant between God and the people of Abraham,”^{LIVING} “an agreement with Abraham; was circumcision,”^{IE} “the sacred compact of circumcision,”^{WILLIAMS} “a covenant of circumcision, and under this covenant,”^{MONTGOMERY} and “a covenant (an agreement to be religiously observed)”^X of which circumcision was the seal.”^{AMPLIFIED}

Here again is a working of the Lord that reveals something of His nature. First, He does not forget His covenant, because He “cannot deny Himself” (2 Tim 2:13) – and His covenants are an expression of His

Person.

The account of the giving of this covenant is found in Genesis 17:9-14. “And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep **My covenant** therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations. This is **My covenant**, which ye shall keep, between Me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised. And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be **a token of the covenant** betwixt Me and you. And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed. He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, **must needs be circumcised**: and **My covenant shall be in your flesh** for an everlasting covenant. And the uncircumcised man child whose

flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people: he hath broken **My covenant.**”

This, Stephen declares, was “the covenant of circumcision.” Paul declares that this was a sign of the righteousness Abraham had prior to his circumcision: “And he received the sign of circumcision, **a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised**: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised: that righteousness might be imputed unto them also” (Rom 4:11).

Thus we have three perspectives of the circumcision of which Stephen spoke.

- ⇒ It was a “token of the covenant” that God made between Abraham and Himself (Gen 17:11).

⇨ Because it is a *“token of the covenant,”* it is, in a sense, equated with the covenant itself. It therefore becomes the evidence of the covenant, and a means of assuring the heart that it will be fulfilled (Acts 7:8).

⇨ Because Abraham had believed God, the covenant was also a pledge that he had been made righteous, for God cannot make a covenant with unrighteous people (Rom 4:11).

The covenant itself, of which circumcision was the token, is spelled out in Genesis 17:2-8. Remember, this covenant was made before Abraham had any offspring. The following promises are made in the covenant.

⇨ He would multiply Abraham *“exceedingly”* (verse 2),

⇨ Abraham would be the *“father of many nations”* (verse 4-5).

⇨ God would make him *“exceedingly fruitful”* (verse 6a).

⇨ He would make nations of him (verse 6b).

⇨ Kings would come out of him (verse 6c).

⇨ He would establish His covenant with Abraham’s offspring after him (verse 7a).

⇨ It would be an *“everlasting covenant,”* that is, it would not fail of fulfillment (verse 7b).

⇨ He would give the land of Canaan to Abraham and his seed (verse 8a).

⇨ The land would be for an *“everlasting possession,”* that is, it would never cease to be identified with them (verse 8b).

⇨ God would be the God of Abraham’s seed (verse 8c).

Those words were spoken to Abraham when he was ninety-nine years old (Gen 17:1), was impotent because of his age (Heb 11:12), and was *“childless”* (Gen 15:2). To further complicate things, his wife was ninety years old (Gen 17:17),

had always been barren (Gen 11:30), and it had ceased to be with her after the manner of women – that is, giving birth was a biological impossibility (Gen 18:11).

And what proof does Abraham carry with him confirming that this remarkable covenant is valid, and will surely come to pass? Perhaps it will be

⇨ There is some discomfort associated with it (Gen 34:24-25).

⇨ It involves the removal of something (Ex 4:25).

⇨ It produces sensitivity.

⇨ It is something that is permanent.

⇨ It is something that is personal and

And what proof does Abraham carry with him confirming that this remarkable covenant is valid, and will surely come to pass? Perhaps it will be some miraculous sign he works, as Moses did with he put his hand in his bosom, pulled it out, and it was leprous – then put his hand again into his bosom and removed it, and it was “turned again as the other flesh”

some miraculous sign he works, as Moses did with he put his hand in his bosom, pulled it out, and it was leprous – then put his hand again into his bosom and removed it, and it was *“turned again as the other flesh”* (Ex 4:6). Surely something like that would be a great confidence-booster! But, alas, in this matter, the *“token”* must be more personal than that.

The token was Abraham’s circumcision – something that was done when he was *“ninety years old and nine”* (Gen 17:24). How do you boast about something like that? Who would believe you if you said that was the token, or confirmation of a covenant God had made with you. You are ninety-nine years old, and you say a lot of nations are going to come from you – that even kings will come from your loins. Your offspring will become a great multitude, and they will be given a special land by God himself. Furthermore, your circumcision is the proof of it all - but it is proof to Abraham, not to the world. He is the one who needed the confidence, not those who were living around him.

There are several things that can be noted about circumcision, and they all have some significance to those who are in Christ Jesus.

private.

⇨ It is not something in which men can boast.

⇨ It has a humbling effect upon the individual.

⇨ It is something that is always with the individual.

THE PARALLEL

Thus you have a picture of the circumcision of Christ (Col 2:11), in which the foreskin of the heart is removed (Deut 10:16). There is a part of humanity that cannot remain if Christ is to be embraced. This speaks of the removal of *“body of the sins of the flesh”* (Col 2:11). That is, the totality of what made us unacceptable to God, and fully justified our condemnation, has been completely disassociated from *“the new man”* (Eph 4:24), or the *“new creature”* (2 Cor 5:17). It is said of the new man, *“which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness”* (Eph 4:24). He is *“renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him”* (Col 3:10). The *“flesh”* has no part whatsoever with him. It has been *“circumcised with the circumcision of Christ.”*

Allow me to translate this glorious circumstance into something

that makes for confidence and assurance. **The incompatibility of the old with the new is your token of the covenant, as affirmed in Romans seven.** The fact that the flesh is an offense to you, and cannot blend with your renewed heart, is your proof that you have been born of God. Do not doubt this for a moment. This is the exact point that Paul makes in the seventh and eighth chapters of Romans. In Romans seven, he establishes the conflict between the flesh and the spirit, confirming the circumcision of Christ has, in fact, taken place. He affirms that

sinful inclinations are temptations, not the expressions of the real child of God. *"It is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me . . . I find then a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me . . . I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind . . . who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"* (Rom 7:14-25).

That is the painfulness of *"the circumcision of Christ."* However, that is not the end of the matter. **That very condition is the token that we have, in**

fact, been justified. It is the confirmation that, in Christ Jesus, we are not condemned. We have been liberated from condemnation, as well as the defilement that caused it.

That is why Paul draws a grand conclusion from this experience. *"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit"* (Rom 8:1). No one but a child of God can appreciate such a marvelous token – and it is all pictured in Abraham.

AND THUS THE NATION WAS BORN

"8a . . . and so Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs."

AND SO

" . . . and so . . ." That is, according to the promise of God, and in justification of the faith of Abraham, God began building a nation using a man and a woman who were naturally impotent. Neither of them could bring anything to the table – no ability, no wisdom, no input whatsoever. Their inability, however, had nothing to do with the fulfillment of God's promise. It was His covenant. He made it, and He is the One who caused it to come to pass.

ABRAHAM BEGAT ISAAC

" . . . Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day . . ." Abraham begat Isaac when he was one hundred years old. The lad was born at the exact time God had specified – at *"the set time in the next year"* (Gen 17:21). God had told Abraham to circumcise every male child when it was *"eight days old"* (Gen 17:12). Abraham did precisely

what the Lord commanded, at the specified time. As it is written, *"And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac being eight days old, as God had commanded him. And Abraham was an hundred years old, when his son Isaac was born unto him"* (Gen 21:4-5).

ISAAC BEGAT JACOB

" . . . Isaac begat Jacob . . ." The lineage continues, as Isaac begets Jacob, being sixty years old when he was Jacob with his twin, Esau (Gen 25:26). Isaac's birth was also miraculous, as his mother Rebekah was also barren. As it is written, *"And Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah to wife, the daughter of Bethuel the Syrian of Padanaram, the sister to Laban the Syrian. And Isaac entreated the LORD for his wife, because she was barren: and the LORD was entreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived"* (Gen 25:21).

JACOB BEGAT THE TWELVE PATRIARCHS

" . . . and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs." With Jacob, the offspring

begins to spread exponentially. Abraham had one son through whom the nation came, and Isaac had one as well. Jacob, however, had twelve sons. Coincidentally, his favored wife, Rachel, was also barren (Gen 29:31). Jacob's sons are called *"the twelve patriarchs"* because they were the heads of *"the twelve tribes of Israel"* (Gen 49:26). The sons through whom the tribes came were Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Zebulun, Issachar, Dan, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Joseph, and Benjamin.

When it came to an inheritance, Levi was omitted because that tribe belonged to the Lord Himself (Num 3:12,45; 8:14; 18:13,24). To fill his place, Joseph received a double portion, which was divided between his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh (Gen 48:20,22).

Thus the stage has been set for the multiplication of many people from an impossible circumstance, with absolutely no fleshly advantages. This is the people from whom the promised Messiah will come. The very nation is like a sign and a wonder, the result of Divine initiative and power. Truly their presence is the working of the Lord!

CONCLUSION

In his defense, Stephen will show the prevalence of God throughout the history of Israel. A valid people must have a valid beginning – and Israel is

confirmation of that. There is no way to account for their origin or presence upon the basis of human wisdom or aptitude. We also see that valid beginnings are

brought about through faith, not human works. There is no basis for worldly boasting in any work of Divine origin. All such boasting *"is excluded"* (Rom 3:27).

Stephen begins his defense by tracing the nation of Israel to its origin, showing its relation to God – by Given O. Blakely

We will find through Stephen's defense a marvelous example of handling the Word of God aright (2 Tim 2:15). Of course, such a use of the Word can be expected when one is filled with the Spirit, wisdom, power, and faith.

Our next Hungry Saints Meeting will be held on Friday, 5/25/2007. We will continue our current series of lessons on the book of Acts. The Twenty-ninth lesson will cover verses 9 through 16 of the seventh chapter: "STEPHEN'S DEFENSE, #2." Stephen traces the miraculous rise of the nation of Israel, how it began its sojourn in Egypt, and what occasioned their departure from it. Our meeting will begin at 7:00 P.M. You are invited to bring your family and friends for fellowship around the Word of God. Refreshments are served afterward, with a time of extended fellowship for everyone.

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A place where believers can meet, fellowship, be edified, and express themselves.

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COMMENTARY on Revelation: <http://wotruth.com/revelationindex.htm>

COMMENTARY on First John: <http://wotruth.com/1stjohnindex.htm>

COMMENTARY on Romans: <http://wotruth.com/Romans.htm>

COMMENTARY on Daniel: <http://wotruth.com/Daniel.htm>

COMMENTARY on Colossians: <http://wotruth.com/Colossians.htm>

COMMENTARY on Second Corinthians: <http://wotruth.com/2Corinthians.htm>

COMMENTARY on Acts: <http://wotruth.com/Acts.htm>

BROTHERS AND SISTERS
SPEAKING/LEADING IN THE ASSEMBLY
DURING APRIL 2007

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| <p>1. <i>Given O. Blakely</i> (Teach AM Class, AM Scripture and Benediction, AM Exhortation, Teach AM Class, PM Message, PM Message, PM Lord's Table, PM Message).</p> <p>2. <i>Aaron Hutchcraft</i> (AM Exhortation, AM Message, Teach AM Class, AM Message, PM Lord's Table, PM Message, PM Exhortation).</p> <p>3. <i>Ricky Sims</i> (Teach AM Class, Lead AM Songs, AM Exhortation, Teach AM Class, Lead PM Songs, PM Lord's Table, PM Exhortation, PM Lord's Table).</p> <p>4. <i>Robert Cobb</i> (AM Message, AM Exhortation, AM Message (Table In the Wilderness, AM Message, PM Exhortation, Lead PM Singing).</p> <p>5. <i>Jeremy Williams</i> (AM Opening Word, PM Opening Word, PM Message).</p> <p>6. <i>June Blakely</i> (AM Opening Word, Teach AM Class).</p> <p>7. <i>Tony Parker</i> (AM Opening Word, AM Opening Word).</p> <p>8. <i>Barbara Hutchcraft</i> (AM Calling, PM Intro).</p> | <p>9. <i>Jonathan Blakely</i> (AM Calling, AM Lord's Table, AM Lord's Table, PM Exhortation).</p> <p>10. <i>Benjamin Blakely</i> (Lead AM Scripture Shower)</p> <p>11. <i>Matthew Cobb</i> (AM Lord's Table, PM Lord's Table).</p> <p>12. <i>Tasha Sims</i> (Leading AM Singing, AM Opening Word, Leading PM Singing, PM Intro).</p> <p>13. <i>Levi Miller</i> (Lead Scripture Shower, Lead AM Songs).</p> <p>14. <i>Mattie Blakely</i> (Lead Scripture Shower, AM Calling, Lead PM Singing).</p> <p>15. <i>Michele Cole</i> (PM Intro)</p> <p>16. <i>Melissa Parker</i> (Lead AM Songs).</p> <p>17. <i>Judah Hutchcraft</i> (AM Closing Scripture and Prayer, AM Closing Scripture and Prayer, Reading PM Sermon Text).</p> <p>18. <i>Logan Williams</i> (AM Closing Scripture and Prayer, Read AM Scripture Text, Lead Scripture Shower, Read PM</p> | <p>Sermon Text).</p> <p>19. <i>Amanda Miller</i> (Lead Scripture Shower).</p> <p>20. <i>Baylie Sims</i> (Read AM Sermon Text, Read AM Sermon Text, AM Closing Scripture and Prayer).</p> <p>21. <i>Annie Sims</i> (Read AM Sermon text)</p> <p>22. <i>John Hill</i> (PM Intercession and closing Prayer).</p> <p>23. <i>La Vaine Murphy</i> (AM Lord's Table).</p> <p>24. <i>Tobiah Murphy</i> (PM Intro)</p> <p>25. <i>Micaela Murphy</i> (Read PM Sermon Text)</p> <p>26. <i>Mariah Murphy</i> (Read AM Sermon Text, Read PM Sermon Text, Read PM Sermon Text)</p> <p>27. <i>Gene Hutchcraft</i> (AM Message (Table In the Wilderness), AM Lord's Table)</p> <p>28. <i>Debbie Hutchcraft</i> (Lead AM Songs)</p> <p>29. <i>Eva Blakely</i> (Lead PM Singing)</p> <p>30. <i>Preparing Lord's Supper</i> (Various sisters).</p> |
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