

Eternity Daily Bible Study - No. 375
Series: The Primal Church - Acts Chapters 1-8
Verses: Acts 7:1-10
Topic: Stephen's Sermon – part 1
Date: 8th December 2004

Correspondence can be sent to John Edmiston at johned@aibi.ph
Instructions for subscribing and unsubscribing are at the bottom of this email.

Acts 7:1-10 ISV Then the high priest asked, "Is this true?" (2) Stephen replied, "Listen, brothers and fathers! The glorious God appeared to our ancestor Abraham while he was in Mesopotamia before he settled in Haran. (3) He said to him, 'Leave your country and your relatives and go to the land I will show you.' (4) So he left the country of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. Then after the death of his father, God had him move to this country where you now live. (5) He gave him no property in it, not even a foot of land, yet he promised to give it to him and his descendants after him as a permanent possession, even though he had no child. (6) This is what God promised: His descendants would be strangers in a foreign country, and its people would enslave them and oppress them for 400 years. (7) 'But I will punish the nation they serve,' said God, 'and afterwards they will leave and worship me in this place.' (8) Then he gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision, and he became the father of Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day. Then Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob of the twelve patriarchs. (9) "The patriarchs became jealous of Joseph and sold him as a slave into Egypt. However, God was with him (10) and rescued him from all his troubles. He allowed him to win favor and show wisdom before Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who appointed him ruler of Egypt and of his whole household.

The high priest asks the question "is this true?" about the charge raised at the end of chapter 6 which was: Acts 6:14 ISV For we have heard him say that this Jesus from Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs that Moses handed down to us." Thus the whole of Stephen's speech is an answer to whether Christianity is a departure from Judaism.

Stephen's answer "it is a departure from current tradition but a return to its roots." Stephen argues that Jesus of Nazareth reintroduced the universal "faith of Abraham" and that God was a universal God available to all, that the law of Moses had finished its time and was being replaced by the voice of the Holy Spirit which the traditional Jews were resisting and a Messiah that they had rejected just as they rejected Moses.

The key to this change was a change from the Levitical priesthood (of Aaron) and a return to the Melchizedek priesthood of the time of Abraham, foreshadowed in Psalm 110 and proved by Jesus now being at the right hand of God – which we partly addressed in an earlier study.

We will take a few days to make our way through Stephen's argument that the true worship of God is universal, Abrahamic and spiritual but the journey will be worth it. Try to hold on to your hat as we encounter first-century Jewish logic!

The opening argument is stunning: "Listen, brothers and fathers! The glorious God appeared to our ancestor Abraham while he was in Mesopotamia before he settled in Haran." This verse tells us that Abraham was a Gentile, from Ur of the Chaldees and God spoke to him there – not in Jerusalem and not in any temple. The God that appeared to Abraham was the glorious God, the true God. This God spoke, individually, to a person Abraham, in a foreign land.

Jumping ahead a bit - there is a bit of important history about the promise being given then a statement that must have been like a karate chop: "Then he gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision, and he became the father of Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day." In other words God's promises about the land came to an uncircumcised man! The promise had come to someone who was not a "proper Jew".

Back to the narrative: "He said to him, 'Leave your country and your relatives and go to the land I will show you.' So he left the country of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. Then after the death of his father, God had him move to this country where you now live." In other words the Abrahamic faith that was fundamental to Judaism, was an import from outside Israel. The faith had developed in Arabia, before becoming Jewish. Thus Israel was not the centre of God's locus of action.

After a very brief time in Israel the faith again moves outside its borders and grows to maturity there: "He gave him no property in it, not even a foot of land, yet he promised to give it to him and his descendants after him as a permanent possession, even though he had no child. (6) This is what God promised: His descendants would be strangers in a foreign country, and its people would enslave them and oppress them for 400 years. (7) 'But I will punish the nation they serve,' said God, 'and afterwards they will leave and worship me in this place.'" In other words the birthplace of Judaism was Arabia and the cradle of Judaism – was Egypt.

This theme of the universal faith continues: Then Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob of the twelve patriarchs. (9) "The patriarchs became jealous of Joseph and sold him as a slave into Egypt. However, God was with him (10) and rescued him from all his troubles. He allowed him to win favor and show wisdom before Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who appointed him ruler of Egypt and of his whole household.

And a new theme is introduced of the "return of the rejected one". The Jews always reject their Messiah, who saves them anyway! As we shall see tomorrow the brothers reject Joseph, who saves them from famine, Moses is initially rejected in Egypt and spends 40 years in the wilderness before returning to save them from Pharaoh. Jesus of course is rejected and crucified – but will return to save them. The jealousy of the brothers towards Joseph is a clear shot at the jealousy of the Sanhedrin towards Christ. Despite their rejection God blesses and prospers Joseph. By clear analogy since God is where the blessing is and the blessing is obviously on the new Christian community then the God of Abraham is with the disciples.

So we see that the true faith is universal, personal, Abrahamic, outside the temple, Arabian and Egyptian as well as Jewish, is prior to circumcision, and involves a series of rejected Messiahs and a God of blessing who works outside human systems.

More on this tomorrow.

Blessings,

John Edmiston

Eternity DBS web-site: <http://www.aibi.ph/eternity/>

You are receiving this email because you either subscribed on the website, or sent an email to the subscribe address. We do not subscribe people without their consent.

To subscribe - send a blank email to:

eternity-dbs-subscribe@strategicnetwork.org

To unsubscribe - send a blank email to:

eternity-dbs-unsubscribe@strategicnetwork.org

Donations are always appreciated: <http://www.aibi.ph/aibi/donate.htm>