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## STEPHEN BEGINS HIS ELOQUENT DEFENSE

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS  
NUMBER 23  
ACTS 7:1-6

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In the closing verses of chapter six, we saw how Stephen had been arraigned into court by the Supreme Court of the land--The Sanhedrin. He is being tried on the basis of some of the things he had been saying concerning Jesus and his future kingdom.

ACTS 7:1 "Then said the high priest, Are these things so?" The phrase "Are these things so" really means "Do you plead guilty or not guilty?" Will Jesus destroy this Holy Temple and will he change the customs of Moses? Stephen, in this message, is going to defend himself and is going to very clearly proclaim the main doctrines of Christianity. He will show in his message that Moses spoke about the Lord Jesus Christ. He is also going to demonstrate that Jesus Christ is the Lord of Israel and that when Abraham was called out of Ur of the Chaldees, he was called out by Jesus Christ. Stephen is going to demonstrate that these people who are trying him are the very ones who crucified Jesus Christ. The Sanhedrin at first won't catch on, but before Stephen is finished they will become so infuriated they will do a very undignified thing--they will stone Stephen to death. Stephen does not attempt to give the complete history of Israel. He will give out certain facts to prove that he is not speaking against the Temple but for the Temple. The Temple reveals Jesus Christ, his work and his person. In the front of the Temple was the brazen altar and this spoke of the fact that Jesus died for the sins of the world. He offered himself up as a sacrifice. Behind the brazen altar is the laver, and this represents repentance and confession and rebound for the born-again believer. Once you get inside the Temple, you have certain furniture, all of which points to Jesus Christ.

First is the table of shewbread, which speaks of the fact that Christ is the bread of life. Then you have the candle sticks which tells that Christ is the light of the world. Then you come to the Golden Altar and this represents Christ as the High Priest, who makes atonement for all of our sins. Beyond the Golden Altar you have the second veil, which by this time had been rent from top to bottom, indicating that Christ had opened the door to Heaven for all the redeemed. Beyond this veil was the Holy of Holies. Here was the Ark of the Covenant, which spoke of the work of Jesus Christ in redemption. The Mercy Seat was on top of the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark of the Covenant was made of Acacia wood overlaid with gold. The wood refers to the humanity of Christ and the gold to his deity. Inside the Ark of the Covenant were three things: First, the Mosaic Law--pointing to man's sins and errors; second, Aaron's rod that budded, indicating man's rejection of God's order; third, the pot of Manna, representing man's rejection of God's provision. Everything inside depicted man's sins and the mercy seat above pointed to God's atonement for man's sins. The two cherubim represented righteousness and justice and in Christ the righteousness and justice of God were completely satisfied. Once a year the High Priest would spread blood over the mercy seat, pointing to the fact that the blood of Christ cleanses from sin. Stephen is going to demonstrate that he is not going to blaspheme the Temple, but in reality is presenting an exact interpretation of the life, work, and death of Jesus Christ.

ACTS 7:2 "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," He calls them "Men" and here it means public men. They were public men in authority. "Brethren" refers to the racial emphasis, that they were all Jews. "Fathers" refer to the fact that they were all members of the Sanhedrin. "Hearken" means "Listen intently". He is going to give them the gospel and let them see their guilt. He is not going to plead guilty or not guilty. He is going to identify himself with Jesus the Saviour. Stephen will stand or fall not on the law of the land, but on the basis of his relationship with Jesus Christ. He is going to present Jesus Christ as the only Saviour.

"The God of glory" is the Lord Jesus Christ. John 16:14 tells us that the ministry of the Holy Spirit is to glorify Jesus Christ. He is the Saviour, the head of the Church, and the founder of Israel.

The word "Appeared" is in the aorist tense and refers to a point of time in the past when Jesus appeared to Abraham in Ur of the Chaldees. Abraham responded with a positive volition and believed in Christ and was saved. There were no Jews on the earth when Jesus appeared to Abraham in Ur. In other words, Stephen is saying that the Jews were a new race, founded by Jesus Christ. Jesus appeared to Abraham when he was a Gentile, he was converted and became the first Jew.

(Let us insert a little Bible history here. Prior to Abraham's time God had visited man at the Tower of Babel and had there shown his contempt for the first United Nations, had destroyed their tower they were building and had confused the speech of man and had scattered man to go out all over the earth in many races, nations, and languages. Thus, God showed his pattern for mankind built on four divine institutions--VOLITION--MARRIAGE--THE FAMILY--NATIONS. God never meant for there to be one nation, but many nations. This is the way mankind would survive, by having a balance of power among nations. Man, because of his old sin nature, cannot survive under one world ruler. This is why God ordained nations and many rulers. The only time there will be one world ruler is when Jesus returns and becomes that ruler himself.)

Now what Stephen is saying here they did not catch at first, but later on it would dawn on them and this is why they would kill him.

So here is Abraham, living in rank heathenism, but when Christ appeared to him he responded, believed, accepted Christ, and became a regenerated man.

GENESIS 15:6 explains it this way--"And he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness." Thus the Jewish race was the last race to be formed. From the sons of Shem came these Semitic peoples. Abraham was one of them and he was born again and though he at first was a Gentile, he became the first Hebrew. THE JEWISH RACE IS UNIQUE IN ALL THE EARTH. THE JEWISH RACE WAS FOUNDED ON REGENERATION. They were founded on faith in Christ. Jesus founded the Jewish race for a purpose. Later on Jesus will be called the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Here in Ur, Jesus appeared personally to Abraham. One of Abraham's sons named Ishmael will be by a slave girl named Hagar. He will not be regenerated and will be a Gentile. The other son will be converted and his name will be Isaac and he will be converted and he will be a Jew. Isaac will have two sons named Esau and Jacob. Esau will not be regenerated and will be a Gentile, from whom the Arab people of the earth will come. Jacob will be regenerated and will be a Jew. Please remember, the true heritage of the Jewish race is regeneration.

Stephen goes on to say, "Our Father Abraham being in Mesopotamia". That is a word for the Tigris and Euphrates river valley. It means the land of the two rivers. Ur was in the extreme southern part of that valley.

"Before he dwelt in Haran"--The Hebrew word here for "dwelt" means that he dwelt in Haran on human viewpoint. God didn't want him there, but he stayed there because of the influence of his old father. Abraham made his first mistake when he dwelt in Haran and didn't go on into Canaan. Haran means "The dried up place". It is in the northern part of that two-river valley and when his old father said, "Son, we better stop and settle here" that is exactly what Abraham did.

ACTS 7:3 "And said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall shew thee." This is a message from Jesus to Abraham.

Notice--From thy country  
From thy kindred

To the land which I shall shew thee.

Abraham obeyed the first command, but he delayed on the second one, and Abraham got into trouble because he took his family with him.

ACTS 7:4 "Then came he out of the land of the Chaldeans, and dwelt in Charran: and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell." It should read, "Came out of the land of the Chaldeans, BUT dwelt in Haran". It is a conjunction of contrast. Abraham got out of fellowship with God immediately. He disobeyed God's command. He was saved, but out of fellowship because he allowed his father to be the dominant influence in his life. And it was in "the dried up place". When we are where God does not want us, it is always the dried up place.

Let me throw in a question here. Are you living under the domination of some person when you ought to be under the domination of God? Are you living in Haran when you ought to be in Canaan? Ignorance of Bible doctrine will keep you in Haran and out of Canaan. You can appear to be religious, sing all the songs just right, say "Amen" and "Hallelujah" and be just as pious as you can be and still it doesn't mean a thing in God's sight unless you are being directed by the plan and purpose of God. You see Abraham was saved but he was out of the geographical will of God. Abraham lived in Haran long enough to become a wealthy man. He stayed there until his father died. It took a catastrophe to get him out. You see, Abraham was satisfied and contented and was getting extremely rich and God had to blast him out.

Then at the death of his father, Abraham finally got back in fellowship with God, moved out of Haran and got into Canaan. Canaan would have a fantastic history and heritage and destiny.

You see, this was in 30 A.D. when Stephen was saying these words. Forty years from that date Jerusalem would be destroyed. That Sanhedrin didn't realize that if they were going to do anything for God, they would have to do it quickly, for forty years from that time, the city of Jerusalem would be destroyed and the Jews would be scattered to the whole earth. (The reason I don't get excited about the State of Israel and the Jews back in Palestine is this--Five times Isaiah says that when the Jews come back to Palestine that Jesus will call them back and they will come back because of him. They are not going back now because of Christ.)

ACTS 7:5 "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." For many years Abraham tried to do it himself. He went down into Egypt when a famine came and got into lots of trouble down there. He brought Hagar back with him as a slave girl, and from this came Ishmael later on and nothing but trouble for Abraham. He tried to take things out of God's hands many times, but finally came to realize that God would do it his way and by his power.

ACTS 7:6 "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." You see, in the sovereignty of God the iniquity of the Ammorites was not yet full. And God took that family of seventy-five from the loins of Abraham and took them four hundred years down into Egyptian slavery, to toughen them, to get them ready for the work he wanted them to do for him. God's plan is perfect and Stephen is telling them that God has been doing all these things so one day he could produce Jesus Christ the Saviour of the world.

We will continue with this defense of Stephen next Wednesday night.