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STEPHEN CONTINUES HIS AMAZING DEFENSE

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS
NUMBER 24
ACTS 7:14-29

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In these verses in the seventh Chapter of Acts, Stephen is standing before the Sanhedrin and is presenting to them Jesus Christ and his salvation. Stephen is using some Jewish history about Abraham and Moses to show the Sanhedrin how God has been working to produce a nation from whom Christ would be born into the world.

ACTS 7:14 "Then sent Joseph, and called his father Jacob to him, and all his kindred, threescore and fifteen souls." Joseph and these seventy-five Jewish souls being in Egypt tells us more about faith and trust in God and the importance of knowing doctrine than anything else in this whole passage. Joseph had been sold into Egypt years before, now his old father, Jacob, and a total of seventy-five in all have come into Egypt. For thirty years, they will enjoy the fat of the land, and then for four hundred years, they will suffer in abject slavery. And in those four hundred thirty years, they increased from seventy-five to over two million adults. It took an amazing nation of people to do that. This never happened before in the long history of the human race. When people go into slavery, they usually decline. The pressures alone forced on slaves usually destroy them. People do not live normal lives in slavery. In slavery people live lives of bitterness, torture, misery, and heartache. Yet in this instance in four hundred thirty years, these seventy-five people had become over two million. They had become very strong, very energetic, very independent, very powerful. They put slavery into reverse. They learned how to live normal lives in abnormal conditions. They lived by the doctrine God had implanted in their minds and hearts. The written word of the Bible was yet to be produced. Some of this information is found in Genesis 15. They responded in a normal way to abnormal conditions. This tough slavery made the Jews into a great strong nation. Illustration--In life, in the process of growing up, or in military service, the only way you develop is through hard, tough experience. Yet, a mother actually wrote her boy who had gone off to the Air Force, "Son, be sure to fly low and slow". Let us hope he didn't take her advice, for if he did, he didn't last long in the war.

These Jews down in Egypt were being prepared for greatness. They married, had children, trained their children, and in spite of slavery, lived very happy lives. They illustrate that you can live in the midst of pressures, hardships, and still be gloriously happy. You see, people can't find happiness aside from the plan of God. So, this is the story Stephen is telling the Sanhedrin--That these Jews started off as a clan of Patriarchs and became a great nation.

ACTS 7:15 "So Jacob went down into Egypt, and died, he, and our fathers," Jacob and the others died in Egypt.

ACTS 7:16 "And were carried over into Sychem, and laid in the sepulchre that Abraham bought for a sum of money of the sons of Emmor the father of Sychem." Their bodies were taken to Shekem but the body of Joseph didn't get there until four hundred years later, when they brought his bones with them when they were liberated.

Please notice something here--Though the land had been given to Abraham, he didn't walk in and make all kinds of demands on the people. He waited on God, and he also bought this land as a graveyard.

ACTS 7:17 "But when the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt," Now we skip over a period of four hundred years of slavery. But the Sanhedrin didn't know any doctrine so the details of those four hundred years were not important to the study Stephen is relating. But Genesis 15:13 was here fulfilled and the people multiplied.

ACTS 7:18 "Till another king arose, which knew not Joseph." They didn't really grow until they went into slavery. This is a great principle of life. Obstacles and pressures and difficulties develop character and produce great men.

ACTS 7:19 "The same dealt subtilly with our kindred, and evil entreated our fathers, so that they cast out their young children, to the end they might not live." This verse is saying that the Egyptians got more than they expected. They thought they were getting a nation of slaves, but they soon found they had an emerging nation of powerful men on their hands. So, the Egyptians set out to kill all the Hebrew male children. It was right at this point in the Egyptian bondage when Moses was born.

ACTS 7:20 "In which time Moses was born, and was exceeding fair, and nourished up in his father's house three months:" Moses is not a Jewish name. It is an Egyptian name. Thutmose I was the Pharaoh, and Egyptian name. He was the Pharaoh and there was also Hatshepset and Thutmose II. Hatshepset didn't like Thutmose III and when she saw this little baby in the basket, immediately her mind began to think and plan how she might make him her son and one day the Pharaoh. "Thut" means, "The one who came from the water", but she dropped that part of the name and just called him "Moses", which was Egyptian for "Out of the water".

Moses was the most beautiful baby she had ever seen. Both Moses and later David would grow up to be two of the finest looking men that would ever live in the world. God worked a miracle in sparing Moses. Remember, God's plan is always greater than man's devices. It was man's device to eliminate all the male children. But God overruled. When it says, "Was exceedingly fair", it meant he just kept on being beautiful--at five or seven or ten or thirteen--Moses was goodlooking at any age. Jews had a tendency to look on the appearance of a man, and Moses was magnificent to look upon.

He was only kept in that Jewish home for three months. Hatshepset wanted her new son, and she took him to the palace when he was three months old. Thutmose was to become the greatest Pharaoh Egypt ever had, but if Moses had become the Pharaoh, he would have far surpassed Thutmose III. Moses was a genius and Thutmose III was just brilliant.

ACTS 7:21 "And when he was cast out, Pharaoh's daughter took him up, and nourished him for her own son." Moses was adopted by Hatshepset. He became the heir. He was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians. And remember, Egypt led the world in learning and achievement at that time. Moses was mighty in word and deed. Moses was one of the world's greatest public speakers. So, you have to laugh when Moses told God in Exodus 4:10 that he couldn't speak. God punished Moses for that untruth and gave him that mouse Aaron to be his spokesman. There is no way you can punish a great speaker more than to have someone else do the speaking for him. As the plagues began in Egypt, you will find Aaron at first doing the speaking, but before very long, Moses just pushed him out of the way and took over himself. He just couldn't stand to have that stammering, stuttering Aaron speaking in his place. Moses was a great musician, an amazing general, a great mathematician, one of the world's greatest speakers, a great writer, and a natural leader of men.

ACTS 7:23 "And when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel." The great turning point came at forty. Moses was now fully matured. Turn now to Hebrews 11:24.

HEBREWS 11:24 "By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter;" "By faith" means that Moses made his decision on the basis of his faith in God. Moses chose to go God's way. He rejected the Egyptian throne. At that moment, he had the possibilities for becoming the greatest leader the world had ever known. Those Jews were tough and strong and rugged. Four

hundred years in slavery had gotten them ready for the future. Remember, the Bible says Moses was the humble man--More so than any other man who ever ever lived. And though he had an old sin nature, he did not allow ego lust and approbation lust to rule him. When Thutmose died, Hatshepset persuaded them to hold off on making a new Pharaoh until Moses could be ready for the task. And when Moses refused, then Thutmose III stepped in and became the greatest Pharaoh of history.

HEBREWS 11:25 "Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season;" He cast his lot with those slaves and turned his back on the pleasures of sin--Please notice that word is singular and refers to the old sin nature. It is not referring to all kinds of sins.

HEBREWS 11:26 "Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward." The reproach of Christ is to enter into his suffering. And the phrase "Recompence of the reward" doesn't refer to money or position or statue in life. It rather refers to the inner peace and contentment God gives to those who follow his leadership in their lives.

What kind of wages does God pay the believer? Inner peace, happiness, contentment. A realization that life is in the hands of God and that God is guiding, directing, leading your life. This is real peace and happiness. And this is the reward God gives to those who obey him. Moses is happy for he is deserting the leadership of an empire, but he is stepping into the role of leadership God had designed for him.

HEBREWS 11:27 "By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible." Moses was occupied with the person of Christ. Moses had been in training in the palace of Pharaoh for forty years. Now God will take him into the desert and train him for forty years in seclusion and quietness.

Now turn back to Acts 7.

ACTS 7:23 "And when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel." It came into the frontal lobe, the mind of Moses, to visit his own people.

ACTS 7:24 "And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian:" A Jewish slave was being beaten to death by an Egyptian taskmaster. Moses couldn't stand it. Being big and strong, he struck one blow and killed the taskmaster who was bullying the Jewish slave.

ACTS 7:25 "For he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not." This verse really means this--Moses kept on assuming how these Jewish slaves understood that God had chosen him to deliver them. But look at this "THEY UNDERSTOOD NOT". This is why God had to wait forty more years and train Moses more and wait until the time was fully ripe for God to move in and liberate this nation of slaves. These Jews failed to understand doctrine. The greatest hindrance to the plan of God on the part of Christians is the lack of understanding doctrine. So many use sincerity as the great cover-up. Some people believe just as long as you are sincere, then everything is just fine. NOT SO! You can be sincere and yet not know the doctrine of God and be completely wrong. Sincerity is nothing as compared to an accurate knowledge of God's laws and God's doctrines. Learn the Word of God and depend on it and rely on it. So, the very next day, these Jewish slaves got into a fight, and when Moses tried to stop them, they reminded him of what he had done the day before. Here is a principle--The abused will abuse someone else once they get a chance. We have seen this illustrated recently in the Congo and in Nigeria. Slaves fighting slaves. Natives fighting natives. Now since this bully of an Egyptian taskmaster is dead, they start bullying each other. They just kept on beating each other up.

ACTS 7:27 "But he that did his neighbour wrong thrust him away, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us?" This Jewish slave says in substance to Moses, "Since you killed the chief bully, now I'm the chief bully, and I'm going to take over". And he thrust Moses aside. With just one day of freedom, these Jews became bigger bullies than the Egyptian taskmasters had been.

Please notice what Stephen is trying to say to these men on the Sanhedrin. You've killed the Lord of glory and now you have turned around and are trying to play the part of the big bully. For you are acting like you want to kill me.

ACTS 7:29 "Then fled Moses at this saying, and was a stranger in the land of Madian, where he begat two sons." So Moses got out. God will wait forty more years before he can free those slaves. Here is an analogy. The treatment of those Jews for their brethren is an exact picture of the way the Sanhedrin is trying to treat them.

Please notice in closing that in this part of Stephen's defense, the principle is this--The plan of God cannot go forward on ignorance. Moses didn't flee because he killed the Egyptian, that was only incidental. Moses fled because those Jews were not ready to be led, and he would have to wait forty more years before they would be ready.

We will continue the defense of Stephen next Wednesday night.