

Acts 7:15-60

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Tape #8096
By Chuck Smith

Let's turn now in our Bibles to the seventh chapter of the Book of Acts, as we continue our journey through the Bible, presently in the New Testament. In the sixth chapter we find that problems had arisen in the early church over the fact that those Jews that were following the Grecian culture, known as Hellenists, felt that the Hellenist widows were not given equal treatment when the church was giving out its welfare program. They thought that the Hebrew widows or the widows that were following the Hebrew culture were getting a better deal. They came to the Apostles with their complaints. It was decided they would appoint seven men, full of wisdom, full of the Holy Spirit, with good reputation, to take charge of the distribution of the welfare so that they might, the Apostles, continually give themselves to the Word of God and to prayer. Now there were the seven who were chosen and then Luke goes on to sort of showcase for us two of these men. They were not Apostles. They were men chosen for the task of administering the church's welfare program and yet when they were faithful in that area where God placed them, then God used them in greater ways. You know there are a lot of people that are just sitting around waiting for God to open the great doors of opportunity for them. And they spend their whole life waiting for God to open these great doors. They see themselves as another Billy Graham or you know, in some great work for God. Their whole life is spent waiting for God to open that door. Well, that isn't God's method. God opens up the smaller opportunities to us first. He allows us to prove our faithfulness in that which God has entrusted to us and as He sees fit that He will give us greater opportunities. It is important that I get started. That I begin to serve the Lord and it isn't always at the top rung of the ladder. It is usually at the bottom rung of the ladder, but promotion doesn't come from the east nor the west (Psalm 76:5), promotion comes from the Lord. And if you are just faithful and prove yourself faithful in that place where God has placed you, then God will give you greater opportunities if that be His purpose. If it isn't, you are very satisfied and happy where you are. You know it's almost an oxymoron to be ambitious for a place in the Kingdom of God. It's just being faithful where God has put me. You know that if you are in the will of God, you are happy and you are content. You are just as content ministering to twenty-five people, fifty people as you would be to twenty five thousand or fifty thousand people. If you are convinced this is where God wants me, this is where God has called me, then there is a contentment and a satisfaction. I will do my best where I am. I will do my best for God right here. So often as we then are diligent in the little things, then God gives us greater opportunities.

We do remember the parable that Jesus gave of the talents(Matthew 25:14-30). How that a couple of the fellows went out and increased the talents. They doubled them. They brought them back to the Lord. And they were commended. The fellow who just buried the talents was waiting, you know for, I don't know what, but didn't do anything with what God had entrusted to him. Ultimately that was taken away and given to the one who had increased the talent. And God said to him, "For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance, but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away." So God expects you to be faithful and to serve in whatever place or capacity He has opened the doors for you. And as I said when we are faithful in the little things then the Lord will make us a ruler over the bigger things, but faithfulness is important.

So in chapter seven, we have the ministry of Stephen, one of the seven. In chapter eight, we will look at the ministry of Philip, another one of the seven. And how God broadened their ministries from serving tables to doing marvelous exploits for God. So the story of Stephen, begins actually in verse eight of chapter six, where he, full of faith and power, God was using him in a gift of miracles. It created a controversy with certain of the different religious groups and they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spoke. And so they hired men to give false witness against him that they might bring their charges to the religious counsel. So

Stephen was brought before the counsel. These false witnesses gave their stories. The high priest said, "Are these things so?" That was all that Stephen needed, an open door. And he began to give witness. Jesus said to his disciples they are going to bring you before the kings. They are going to bring you before the magistrates. Don't take forethought what you will say in that hour, the Holy Spirit will give you the words. It will turn to you as an opportunity to testify. So we find that this is modeled for us through the Book of Acts. Every time they stood before the courts. Every time they stood before the kings or judges or whatever, they just used that as an opportunity to share the gospel. It served as a testimony. And as we move through Acts we will find how Paul, every time he had to face the court, the kings and all, he used that opportunity to testify for Jesus.

So Stephen began to rehearse for them their history, very patiently starting with Abraham, the call of God to leave Babylon and journey to a country that God would show him. And how that after his father had died, he left Haran and began to journey. God finally brought him into the land and said this is the land that I am going to give to you and to your seed after you. He promised him that when he didn't have any child. But then Abraham had an interesting encounter with God. God took Abraham out on a dark, desert night sky and said Abraham, look up. See the stars up there. Even as they can not be numbered, interesting thing that God should say that, way back in Genesis because in reality they, the ancients, thought that the stars could be numbered. They sat out and night and counted the stars. That would be a difficult project, indeed. No wonder they came up with different estimates. There were some who said there were 6,128 stars. Others that said, no, there were 6,218. And different counts were made, but the general average was there were about six thousand stars that were visible with the naked eye. Now they didn't have telescopes. And for the Lord to say even as the stars are innumerable, that was contrary to the science of that day. No doubt the scientists had a great kind of joking, saying the Bible says the stars are innumerable. We know there are only 6,218, you know. But God said as the stars are innumerable so shall your seed be. And so Abraham questioned the Lord. How can I know this? I don't have any child, in fact, Eliezer of Damascus, he is the one who is going to get all my inheritance. He is just a servant born in my house, but I don't have any child. And so the Lord promised Abraham a son.

Then the Lord said take a three old heifer, a she goat and a ram, a turtle dove and a pigeon and lay them out before Me. So he cut the heifer and the ram, the she goat in half, but he left the birds whole. He laid them out on the ground. The vultures came. So he spent the afternoon beating the vultures away. And at night as he fell asleep, there came a fear, a great fear of the darkness. The Lord spoke to Abraham. He there told Abraham that his descendants were going to go into a strange land where they would be mistreated. But after four hundred years the Lord would bring them out with great sustenance. And so the four hundred years in Egypt was predicted there in Genesis chapter 15.

So Stephen is rehearsing these parts of their history for them. He talks about God giving to them the covenant of circumcision. And how that Abraham finally begot Isaac, circumcised him the eighth day. Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot the twelve patriarchs. And the patriarchs, the Jews were always very proud of their ancestry. They talked in very glowing ways of our fathers, as though they were the most righteous men that ever lived. Stephen is going to burst that bubble. He's is going to show them how that history declares that their fathers weren't the nicest guys in the world. That they had some serious problems. So he speaks of the twelve sons of Jacob. The patriarchs were moved with envy and they sold Joseph, next to the youngest son, into Egypt but God was with him.

Joseph was the first son of Rachel. You remember the story of Jacob, how that he had fled from his brother Esau, who threatening to kill him. He came to his uncle Laban. He fell in love with his cousin Rachel. He didn't have any dowry to give for her so he went to his uncle. He said, hey, I love Rachel and I want to marry her, I don't have any dowry. What can I give? Laban said, serve me for seven years and you can have her as

your wife. He said that's a deal. He was so much in love the seven years just seemed like a moment of time. So came the day for them to get married. They went through the vows and so forth. They went in to the nuptial tent and in the morning by the morning light, when he looked over to see his beautiful bride, it wasn't a beautiful bride. It was the ugly sister Leah. Laban had pulled a switcharoo! That's why the tradition today when the father comes down, is to lift the veil. To make sure that you are getting the right, you know, merchandise. So of course Jacob went in with great consternation and Laban said well it's just the custom. Another seven years and you can have the other one. So, he said, the custom is that the younger daughter can't get married before her older sister, so he worked another seven years. You remember the story. There became a competition between the two daughters but it wasn't much of a competition because Rachel was barren because she couldn't bear children. And Leah seemed to be very prolific. So they were vying you know and bargaining for going to bed with Jacob. Leah seemed to bear a lot of children and Rachel couldn't have any. Then Rachel gave her handmaid so that Jacob might have sons through her hand maid. So Leah saw that that was working. So she gave her handmaid, I mean there was a real contest going. Finally, Rachel had a son. They named him Joseph. Because Rachel was his first love, it became obvious to the ten older brothers that Jacob's affection and love for Joseph was greater than his attention to them. It created quite a jealousy. Then Joseph started having dreams. He said to his brothers, you know, I dreamed that we were all gathering our sheaves and making our sheaves. We set them there and your sheaves all bowed down to my sheaves. Oh, that didn't set well with them. You runt, you think we're going to bow down to you. You've got another guess coming, you know. Then he had another dream. I dreamed the sun and the moon and the eleven stars bowed down to me. Even his dad got upset with that one, a bit. He said, you mean your mother and father, also? But the brothers became so envious they decided to kill him. And so the older brother Ruben said let's not kill him, we don't want to get blood all over us. Let's just throw him in the pit and let him starve to death. So they consented to that. Then just as they were sitting there, slave traders or traders came going to Egypt. They stopped and haggled with them and they sold Joseph for twenty pieces of silver to these traders heading for Egypt that they might in turn sell him in the slave market in Egypt. As Joseph was bound and being taken to Egypt, he cried to his brothers. He was weeping. He was wailing. Don't do this, you know! Goodbye kid, you know, see if we bow down to you. And so this deception, this move with envy, jealousy, horrible deeds. They took his coat that his father had made him. They killed one of the sheep and they put the blood over the coat. They took it back to Jacob, saying we found this bloody coat. Do you recognize it? He said that is the coat of Joseph. Some wild beast has certainly devoured him and he mourned over the loss of his son Joseph, thinking that he was dead. Well as the story goes, God was with him.

Even in those difficult circumstances of life that we don't understand, God is with us. The prophet said to King Asa the Lord is with you while you will be with Him(2 Chronicles 15:2). Now not always do the circumstances dictate that God is with us. There are times when it would seem that God has forsaken us. Certainly that must have been the case with Joseph. Because not only did his brothers sell him to these traders going to Egypt, he was sold on the slave market in Egypt to one of the head men, Potiphar, who was one of the king's counselors. And then Potiphar's wife got a crush on him. She tried to force him to go to bed with her. When he steadfastly refused, hell has no fury like a woman's scorn. She cried rape and accused him of raping her. He was put in prison and was several years in prison. I mean, this? You say well God is with you. Oh man. Hard to see. It's hard to see God in these circumstances. That's true with us so many times, we're going through very trying, dark times. It's hard to see that God is with us. And yet when you get the whole story, you see, yes indeed, God was there directing all the time. You see our problem is that we are prone to judge in the midst of the mystery before we get to the final chapter and it is all, you know, unsolved and then resolved for us. We are prone to judge when we are in that interim period.

But God was with him ¹⁰and delivered him out of all his troubles, and gave him favor and wisdom in the presence of Pharaoh, king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house. ¹¹Now a famine and great trouble came over all the land of Egypt and Canaan, and our fathers found no sustenance. ¹²But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first. (the brothers of Joseph) ¹³And the second time (Notice, the second time) Joseph was made known to his brothers, Now, what Stephen is building up to, is extremely clever in that historically the Jews seemed to miss it the first time around. Joseph was ordained by God to be ruler over his brothers. The dream, your sheaves bowed down to mine. It upset them. They were determined that that would not happen. They would get rid of him. And so they sold him, thinking that's the end of Joseph, the end of his dream. It will never be.

Now when his brothers came down to Egypt, it was seventeen years later. Joseph was no longer a young teenager. He had matured. He probably had the Egyptian hair cut. He spoke Egyptian. He did not speak to his brothers in Hebrew, but spoke through an interpreter. He gave them a rough time. He sort of was getting even. He said you fellows are spies. You say you are all brothers. That's not true. You're spies. You've come down to spy out the land. You're with the CIA. I can recognize you. They protested. No, we are all the sons of the same father. And we have another yet another brother at home, a younger brother. And one of our brothers is gone. So Joseph said, no, you guys are spies. The only way you can prove that you're not spies is when you come back again, if you've got another younger brother, you had better bring him with you or you won't see my face. I'll know you are spies.

So they went back and they said, dad, that guy in Egypt is mean. I mean he is tough. We were lucky to get out of there. But when they opened their sacks they found Joseph had ordered the servants to put their money all back in their sacks. And they opened their sacks and saw their money and said, oh no! How did the money get there? They are going to think we ripped them off. You know they were really frightened. So the famine continued. They were needing more supplies. Jacob said okay guys, you have to go back. They said, oh, no way! We don't want to see that guy again. The only way we'll go back is to take Benjamin. No, no, you can't take Benjamin. You know, he's my only son left from Rachel. If he would die it would bring me down to the grave with grief. No you can't do that. Well, we're not going. Finally they were running out of food and they had to go. Jacob said, okay, take him, but, you know. And as they left, Jacob cried all things are against me. That's because he didn't see the whole picture. He was only looking at a part of the whole. From his position it looked like all things were working against him, but God was at work. He didn't know that.

When the brothers came back with Benjamin, Joseph saw his full brother. Oh, he wanted to grab him and hug him, but he restrained himself. And so he invited them over to his quarters for dinner. His servants had the whole thing all set out. They were amazed at the placards. Joseph had set them according to their age around the table. That's weird. How did he know which ones were the older? They were amazed that he had set it out, just in order of their age around the table. And so Joseph then ordered the servants to fill their bags with grain but to take the silverware and put it in the youngest fellow's sack. So when they sent them off. The guys headed down, all of their money was back in their sacks, but in Benjamin's sack was silverware from the table. So after they got down the road, Joseph sent the officers after them. And they said, why would you return evil for the good that our master has done for you? They said, what are you talking about? Well, you ripped off the silverware from the table. They said, no way, we wouldn't do that. Well, we are going to search and in whose bag we find it in, we'll have to take him back. So they opened the bags and here in Benjamin's bag was the silverware. Oh, Benjamin what did you do, man? They said, well, we can't go home without him. And so we'll all come back. So they all came back. They were standing there in the room and they were talking in Hebrew to each other. Joseph was there. They were talking in Hebrew to each other. You know, we are

getting what we deserve. You remember how Joseph was crying, you know, and man we didn't have any mercy on him. You remember that? We didn't have any mercy. You know, guilt. Here it is years later but you know, it still goes back. It is something that doesn't go away easily. And Joseph heard them talking. It was more than he could handle. He began to weep. He revealed himself. I'm Joseph, your brother. They couldn't believe it! And then they were really frightened because what they had done. But at the end Joseph said, I know that you intended it for evil, but God intended it for good. He saw the plan of God through the whole thing. He could see the hand of God. A beautiful story.

So the first time they refused and rejected Joseph. We won't have him to rule over us. But the second time they bowed down before him. And they were all there bowing, doing their obeisance and all, he remembered the dream of the sheaves. Their bowing down to his. He was reminded of that. The second time, here he is, recognized as the ruler. So with Jesus, the first time He came they said we will not have this man to rule over us. The builders rejected the stone. But the same has become the chief cornerstone. And when Jesus comes again He will come to rule and to reign over the earth. And at His second coming He will be received and recognized by the Jews. But here their fathers, that they are always bragging about, they made the same mistake with Joseph.

15 So Jacob went down to Egypt; and he died, he and our fathers (and He said of course, I don't want to be buried in Egypt. Take me back.) *16* And they were carried back to Shechem and laid in the tomb that Abraham bought for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem. *17* "But when the time of the promise drew near which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt *18* till another king arose who did not know Joseph. *19* This man dealt treacherously with our people, and oppressed our forefathers, making them expose their babies, so that they might not live. The pharaoh ordered the midwives if it's a girl let it live. If it's a boy, kill it of the Hebrew children that are being born. And the midwives they honored God. They had a respect and fear of God. So they didn't obey the pharaoh. So the pharaoh finally got angry and brought them in and said, how come? You know, I've told you to kill the boy babies. Why aren't you doing that? They said those Hebrew girls are different from the Egyptian girls. They are very lively. I mean they have their babies and they are up and gone before we can even get there. So the pharaoh said, okay, if it's a boy, throw it in the river, you know in the Nile River.

20 At this time Moses was born, and was well pleasing to God; and he was brought up in his father's house for three months In Genesis it said he was a goodly child, which meant he was a very beautiful child. In fact there are legends, stories of the beauty of Moses that when he would walk down the street, he was so handsome and all, the people would just stop and stare. When his mother saw he was such a beautiful child, she hid him for three months and then he was getting too big to hide. She made this little basket out of the bulrushes. She dabbed it with mud, put tar over in and set it afloat in the Nile river. *21* But when he was set out, Pharaoh's daughter took him away and brought him up as her own son. The pharaoh's daughter came down to bathe with her maidens. She heard the baby crying. She ordered her maidens to fetch the baby from the reeds there. She saw this beautiful little boy and fell in love with him. She said one of the Hebrews had put this baby in the river here, but it's going to be mine. She took Moses home. He was raised in the courts of Egypt. He was educated there in the schools of Egypt.

22 And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds. *23* Now when he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the children of Israel. Moses' life was divided into forties. Forty year old becoming something. Being trained groomed in the schools of Egypt. The next forty years he was nothing. Just a shepherd out in the wilderness, watching the sheep of his father in law.

Then the following forty years, God showing that He can take nothing and make something out of it, he became the great leader of the people, leading them out of their bondage in Egypt. So when he was forty years old, he decided to go visit in the Hebrew camp ²⁴*And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended and avenged him who was oppressed, and struck down the Egyptian.* He killed him. And it is interesting that it says here, ²⁵*For he supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand.* Moses thought surely they know that God is going to use me to set them free. Surely they know this. But they didn't. ²⁶*And the next day he appeared to two of them as they were fighting, and tried to reconcile them, saying, 'Men, you are brethren; why do you wrong one another?'* So the next day when he was out again, there were two Hebrews fighting with each other. Moses went in to break it up. He said look guys, you're brothers you ought not to be fighting with each other. ²⁷*But he who did his neighbor wrong pushed him away, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge over us?'* ²⁸*Do you want to kill me as you did the Egyptian yesterday?* So the one that Moses thrust aside said, are you going to kill me like you did the Egyptian, yesterday? ²⁹*Then, at this saying, Moses fled and became a dweller in the land of Midian, where he had two sons.* And Moses when he found out that his action of killing the Egyptian was known, knew that if word gets to the pharaoh, he's in big trouble, so he fled from Egypt. He went out into the desert area of Midian and there married the daughter of one of the priests out there and became just a shepherd watching the sheep of his father Jethro, for the next forty years.

³⁰*And when forty years had passed, an Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire in a bush, in the wilderness of Mount Sinai.* ³¹*When Moses saw it, he marveled at the sight; and as he drew near to observe, the voice of the Lord came to him,* ³²*saying, 'I am the God of your fathers--the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.'* And Moses trembled and dared not look. ³³*'Then the LORD said to him, "Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground.* Then these beautiful words of the Lord, ³⁴*I have surely seen the oppression of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their groaning and have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt."* I have seen the affliction. I have heard their groaning. I have come to deliver. Comforting words of the Lord. So often times we feel that God doesn't see. We feel that God doesn't hear our prayers. We've cried unto the Lord and it seems like nothing is happening. But God said I have seen. I have heard and best yet, I have come to deliver.

So God sent Moses to be the deliverer. Moses and then verse thirty five. ³⁵*This Moses whom they rejected, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge?' is the one God sent to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the Angel who appeared to him in the bush.* So again, the first time Moses came as their deliverer, began to act in the position of a deliverer. They refused him. They didn't know. They didn't recognize this is God's deliverer. The second time he came they did recognize that he had been sent by God to deliver. Can you see the picture of what Stephen is doing? You guys are just like your fathers. The first time that God sends someone along, you don't recognize him. The second time around, you see, you recognize him. And of course, the whole background is Jesus. He was sent by God but you, like your fathers, did not recognize Him. But He is going to come again and He will rule. He will reign. But you refused His reign, but he's going to come to rule and reign and establish the kingdom of God the second time. So they are following the pattern of their fathers in their blindness to the first revelation of God's deliverance, but yet God will work His purposes and in God's time Jesus will come again and will be recognized and they shall look upon Him who they have pierced, it says (Zech. 12:10). And so they will recognize. They will mourn for their folly of their rejection of Him for so long.

So ³⁶*He brought them out, after he had shown wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red Sea, and in the wilderness forty years.* A little interesting side note. Moses was endeavoring to do what he knew God wanted him to do, deliver the people. But in endeavoring to do it in the ability and the energy of his own flesh. In the ability of his own flesh he could not bury one Egyptian successfully. But when led and directed by God he buried the whole army in the Red Sea. Yes, God called you to be a deliverer, but, you know, you try to do the work of God in the ability and the energy of your flesh, you are going to fall on your face, but when guided and directed by the Holy Spirit, it's amazing what God can do through such as us, when we just yield and surrender ourselves to Him!

³⁷*"This is that Moses who said to the children of Israel, 'The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear.* Like unto me, you didn't recognize me the first time. You refused me the first time, but now I've come to deliver and have brought you out of Egypt. This is when Moses is getting towards the end of the road (Duet. 18:18.) He is prophesying now of this prophet that is going to come, "Like unto me." And to him you shall hear. Moses gave the people the word of God. They said we don't want to go near that mountain. It was terrifying. The fire, the thunder, the trumpet blast, the shaking, no you go up. You talk to God. You come down and tell us what God said and we'll listen to you, but we don't want to hear that again. That's too terrifying. So Moses went up and he would come down and tell them the Word of God. He would give them the Word of God. So he gave to them the ten commandments. He gave to them the Word of God. Now Moses is saying there is going to come another prophet like unto me who will give to you the Word of God. And so Jesus, when He came said, the words that I say, I speak not of Myself but the Father (John 14:10). These are the words of God, Jesus is saying. And so the prophet like unto Moses and Him you shall hear.

³⁸*This is he (that is Moses) who was in the congregation (the church or the called out ones) in the wilderness with the Angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers, the one who received the living oracles to give to us,* ³⁹*whom our fathers would not obey, but rejected.* (You are bragging about your fathers, but look at your history. Your fathers didn't obey the Word of God. They said to Moses, you tell us what God says and we will listen. But they didn't. They did not obey the Word of God.) *And in their hearts they turned back to Egypt,* They longed for Egypt. You remember they lusted after the meat of Egypt. They said we are sick of this manna. We are tired of it. It's bland, no flavor. Oh, if we only had some garlic and onions to mix with it. Oh, I'm so hungry for meat. I haven't bitten into a steak for so long, you know. And here they were just really murmuring and complaining over the angel food that God had given to them. Tired of manna. Manna splits, manna cotti, manna... you know just tired of this stuff. ⁴⁰*saying to Aaron, 'Make us gods to go before us; as for this Moses who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.'* (He's been gone forty days, we don't know what's happened to him, make us gods.)

⁴¹*And they made a calf in those days (These are your fathers, your glorious patriarch that you are always bragging about), offered sacrifices to the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands.* The gods that they had made themselves. And it's always so, man, you either have a man made god or you have men being made by God. You have gods that have been created by man and you have men who have been created by God.

⁴²*Then God turned and gave them up to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the Prophets: 'Did you offer Me slaughtered animals and sacrifices during forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel?*

⁴³

*You also took up the tabernacle of Moloch (the god of pleasure),
And the star of your god Remphan,
Images (their little idols) which you made to worship;*

And I will carry you away beyond Babylon.' These people, their fathers, turned away from God and they got into idolatry and they began to worship Moloch, Astoreth, Baal, Mammon. God said I'm going to let you be carried away beyond Babylon as captives.

⁴⁴*"Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as He appointed, instructing Moses to make it according to the pattern that he had seen, They had this tabernacle. And the tabernacle when God gave to him the specifications, God said, be very exact. Make it exactly like I have told you. Why? Because the tabernacle was a model of heaven. The holy of holies, the presence of God surrounded by the Cherubim. It was model of heaven. These things were a type of the heavenlies, what's in heaven. And God gave them this tabernacle, this place where they could come and meet with God. Where the high priest could go into the holy of holies. Where there was that Shekinah glory and presence of God! And they had that tabernacle of witness in the wilderness. In the tabernacle they had of course, in the holy of holies, the little ark of the Covenant and in it the two tables of stone upon which God had engraved the ten commandments. This witness of God.*

⁴⁵*which our fathers, having received it in turn, also brought with Joshua (Jesus. As we have previously discussed, Jesus is the Greek word for the Hebrew word, Joshua. So Joshua let them into the promised land. The Greek name is Jesus. So the name Jesus is the Hebrew name Joshua. And the name Joshua in Hebrew means "Jehovah is salvation") into the land possessed by the Gentiles (the land of Canaan, occupied by the Gentiles), whom God drove out before the face of our fathers until the days of David, (David more or less completed the occupation of the land) ⁴⁶who found favor before God and asked to find a dwelling for the God of Jacob. (That is David, he desired to build a temple for God) ⁴⁷But Solomon built Him a house. ⁴⁸However, the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands, as the prophet says:*

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*'Heaven is My throne,
And earth is My footstool.
What house will you build for Me? says the LORD,
Or what is the place of My rest?*

⁵⁰*Has My hand not made all these things?' (It's almost pathetically humorous when a person thinks that he is doing a great thing in giving to God. God says it all belongs to Me anyhow. We want to make so much over, ...I gave so much. God says it all belongs to Me. You build Me a house to dwell in? Listen, the heavens of heavens, Solomon, when he built the house, when he dedicated the house, he said, Lord, the heavens of heavens cannot contain you. How much less this house that we've built? We haven't built this really as to limit You to a place. We recognize that You are omnipresent. You're throughout the universe. We cannot escape you. But we want a place to come and meet with You. So that's the purpose of this place just so that we might have a place to gather to meet with You. It is important I think, for us to become aware and conscious of the presence of God wherever we are. I think that sometimes that we give sort of a false impression even in our prayers at the beginning of a service, Oh Lord it's so good to gather here in Your presence. We thank You, Lord, that we can come into Your presence this evening. Wait a minute! You've been in His presence all day long. When you were yelling at your kids, you were in His presence! Telling them how stupid, you were in His presence then. David said (Psalms 139:7-10) Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me and Your right hand shall hold me. So they had that awareness that God is omnipresent. That God is everywhere present. And we need that awareness too. The consciousness of the presence of God is one of the most important things for us as Christians, to have. Lord, You are with me. You never leave me. I cannot escape Your presence. You go with me. You go before me. You go behind me. I'm enveloped by Your presence. God said has not My hand made all of these things?*

Now Stephen has been pretty sharp. I mean he's really very cleverly taken his time. He's gone through their history and all. But suddenly, I don't know, maybe someone was starting to sleep or something. He suddenly said, ⁵¹*"You stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you."* I mean he was really getting ticked off with them. You stiffnecked, uncircumcised in heart and in your ears. You don't hear the things of the Spirit. You're not following after the Spirit. You are just as bad as your fathers.

⁵²*Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?* Name one prophet that they received. And look at the history. Read in Hebrews chapter 11:32-40, concerning the prophets. Some they stoned, others they imprisoned. Isaiah was sawed in two. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? *And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One (Jesus), of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers,* (I mean you are even worse than them. They were all prophesying of the coming of Jesus. They killed those prophets and persecuted those prophets who told of Jesus. But you killed Jesus! I mean, man, you are worse off than your fathers!) ⁵³*who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it."* ⁵⁴*When they heard these things (Truth hurts) they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed (They began to just, ooh, they were really stirred up) at him with their teeth.* ⁵⁵*But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God,* (Now Jesus had said, henceforth you will not see Me until you see Me sitting at the right hand of the Father. But Stephen saw Him standing. Someone has said that He stood always to receive the martyrs as they came into the kingdom.) ⁵⁶*and said, "Look! I see the heavens opened* (He had a vision, he looked up and he saw Jesus standing there at the right hand of God. And he begins to share the vision. I see the heavens opened) *and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!"* (They didn't want to hear it. They wouldn't hear it. They cried out with a loud voice. They stopped their ears. They began to scream. And they closed up. We don't want to know the truth. We don't want to hear the truth.) ⁵⁷*Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord;* ⁵⁸*and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.* ⁵⁹*And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."* ⁶⁰*Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.* Or he died.

Now the Bible usually says "fell asleep" because what happens to the Christian is different than what happens to the sinner, and so to try to show the difference between, they usually say he went to sleep. Which endeavor is to show that they are not really dead. There is a transition that has taken place. They are still alive. Jesus said (John 11:26), And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. So it would be wrong to say that they died. Because if they lived and believed in Jesus, the promise is that you will never die. The promise is not that you are going to live forever in this body, thank God!! Paul said we'll be changed in a moment, in a twinkling of an eye. This corruption has to put on incorruption. The mortal has to put on immortality. Someday if the Lord should tarry, you'll perhaps pick up the morning news and it will say Chuck Smith, pastor of Calvary Chapel, died last night. Don't believe it. Typical reporting. Wrong. They will have to write if they report it accurately. Chuck Smith moved last night out of an old worn out tent into a beautiful new mansion. A building of God not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. So the Bible tries to indicate what happens to the believer in contrast to what happens to the unbeliever when the Spirit leaves the body. So it always makes the reference to those that sleep in Christ. And that isn't teaching soul sleep, it's only giving a separation between the Christian and the non believer when the Spirit departs.

Saul, now another character is introduced to us. He is a young man. He was watching the robes of those that were stoning Stephen. And he was consenting unto Stephen's death as we read in the very next verse in

chapter eight. So we just have a short introduction to Saul here. And then we are going to look at Philip, another one of the seven, chosen to wait tables. Faithful in that, God uses him for a tremendous revival in Samaria. And then to go down and share the gospel with the Ethiopian eunuch, who took the gospel back to Ethiopia. There is a church in Ethiopia today that traces its roots to the Ethiopian eunuch. So we'll get into the eighth chapter next time and see the further history of the early church.

Father, we thank You for the opportunities of learning more about You, of studying the Word and having this time, Lord, of just opening our hearts to You in the things of the Spirit. Lord, we look forward to that day when You shall come again. The day when You will be recognized by all as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Lord, we pray that You will help us to be faithful in the little things that You set before us. Content, Lord, to be just what You have called us to be and to do what You have required of us to do. Lord, may we be freed from self ambition. And with Paul may our chief desire be to bring glory to You and to Your name. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.