

**March 8 2020**

**Acts chapter 6 the apostolic ministry**

**Today, we're going to go through some Scripture to give you background before we get to the real topic of today's message.**

**Acts chapter 6: ready?**

**In those days when the numbers of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.**

**I'm sure you read the Scripture before and kind of skipped over the terms, Hellenistic and Hebraic. The definition of Hellenistic is a person who was Greek in language and Outlook and way of life but was not Greek in ancestry especially as a Hellenistic Jew. The Hebraic Jew was related to the language of Hebrews or Yiddish and/or culture. So, we recognize that there is a dispute about how each culture or language was being treated. Let us continue:**

**So the twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, it would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables.**

**Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the spirit and wisdom.**

**We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.**

**In other words, in the very early church, there were elders who are responsible for the well-being of the individuals and the church, and there were pastors given to prayer and ministry. We need to note that, because we have changed very little in that respect.**

**This proposal pleased the whole group.**

**Or as we would say, it was adopted unanimously.**

**They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism.**

**Note that Luke is making Theophilus aware of this fact.**

**They presented these men to the apostles who prayed and laid their hands on them.**

**And here we see, in the very early church, that they laid hands and prayed on people when they were given jobs to do within the framework of the congregation. This has been adopted in the church and is still done today. Amen?**

**So the word of God spread.**

**The numbers of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.**

**Interesting in the phraseology here that they quote (became obedient to the faith) which indicates that they had accepted teaching of the Messiah over the teachings of the law, not abolishing the law, but accepting the Messiah.**

**Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, perform great wonders and signs among the people.**

**Opposition arose, however, from members of the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called) Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia; who began to argue with Stephen.**

**Remember now, that they are still teaching in the synagogue area in the courts of the temple. The people we are talking about here are not converts but rather contentious contenders against Stephen, like we have today.**

**But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke.**

**How many of you, have witnessed to others, and words, ideas about conversion seem to flow through you as you spoke to the person, that is the Holy Spirit leading your conversation, and we should welcome it and realize that we can testify for the Lord Jesus Christ to others even though we may not feel that we are able. I can tell you personally that I have done that on many occasions.**

**Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, we have heard Stephen speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God.**

**What are we saying here? The same type of sin, that has been practiced against Peter and John.**

**So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law.**

**So they got reinforcements, from the elders who hate this religious sect we call Christianity. So they are at it again. Let us read further:**

**They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin.**

**They loved to do this, because you see they have the law at their disposal since they are quote “the judges.”**

**They produced false witnesses, who testified, this fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law.**

**For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us.**

**Nothing works better, than a half truth, half-lie.**

**All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an Angel.**

**I will ask you, if you had been there, and had seen his face shine like an Angel would it have disturbed you? I would be scared to death to make any decision against him.**

**We will now continue in acts chapter 7.**

**Then the high priest asked Stephen, “Are these charges true?”**

**The high priest doesn’t seem like a very good trial lawyer. Never ask a question you don’t know the answer to before hand. Look at what Stephen says: he is going to quote to them from the Pentateuch, the 1<sup>st</sup> 5 books of the Bible.**

**To this he replied: “Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Harran.**

**“Leave your country and your people,” God said “And go to the land I will show you.”**

**So he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Harran.”**

**What do we see here? Obedience to God!**

**After the death of his father, God sent him to this land where you are now living.**

**He gave him no inheritance here, not even enough ground to set his foot on.**

**But God promised him that he and his descendents after him would possess the land, even though at that time Abraham had no child.**

**Think about this portion of Scripture for a moment because Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness. Why did that happen? Because there was no law at that time and Abraham had faith in what God said and God appreciated that.**

**God spoke to him in this way: “For 400 years your descendents will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated.**

**But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, God said, and afterword they will come out of that country and worship me in this place.”**

**Another very important point, a prophecy made to Abraham that came to pass with the children of Israel living in Egypt as slaves before they entered Canaan.**

**Then he gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision.**

**And Abraham became the father of Isaac and circumcised him 8 days after his birth.**

**Abraham was obedient to God in all things, a lesson for us as the first-order of being a Christian to obey our creator.**

**Later Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob became the father of the 12 patriarchs.**

**The 12 patriarchs, the 12 tribes of Israel, both are the same.**

**Because the patriarchs were jealous of Joseph, they sold him as a slave into Egypt.**

**But God was with him and rescued him from all his troubles.**

**He gave Joseph wisdom and enabled him to gain the goodwill of Pharaoh king of Egypt.**

**Remember, through an interpretation of dreams he was able to tell Pharaoh about a coming famine and Pharaoh believed him, and made him ruler so he could gather during the 7 years of plenty what they would need during the 7 years of famine.**

**So Pharaoh made him ruler over Egypt and all his palace.**

**Then a famine struck all Egypt and Canaan, bringing great suffering, and our ancestors could not find food.**

**When Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our forefathers on their 1<sup>st</sup> visit.**

**Think about the story, of Joseph and his coat of many colors which his brothers tore and poured blood on and told his father that he had been killed by a wild**

**animal. This same Joseph they are now coming to see to buy grain.**

**On their 2<sup>nd</sup> visit, Joseph told his brothers who he was, and Pharaoh learned about Joseph's family.**

**At this point, Pharaoh is so enamored with Joseph that he allows him to bring his whole family down to Egypt for the duration of the famine.**

**After this, Joseph sent for his father Jacob and his whole family, 75 in all.**

**And from this family of 75 people will come a nation numbering over 1 million a few centuries later.**

**Then Jacob went down to Egypt, where he and our ancestors died.**

**Here Stephen is making these Jewish leaders understand that he knows the past and is going to bring them to account for what they have done. Let us continue to listen to his statement of where the Jewish nation is at this day:**

**Their bodies were brought back to Shechem and placed in the tomb that Abraham had bought from the sons of Hamor at Shechem for a certain sum of money.**

**Here Stephen has brought them full circle from the time of God telling Abraham to leave the land of the Chaldeans and go to the land of Canaan which God will ultimately give to his children.**



**As the time drew near for God to fulfill his promise to Abraham, the number of our people in Egypt had greatly increased.**

**Then, a new King, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt.**

**He dealt treacherously with our people and opposed our ancestors by forcing them to throw out their newborn babies so that they would die.**

**All these things that Stephen is speaking about is recorded in history and the leaders know that history very well. As he continues to make his defense let us listen to what he says:**

**At that time Moses was born, and he was no ordinary child.**

**For 3 months he was cared for by his family.**

**When he was placed outside pharaoh's daughter took him and brought him up as her own son.**

**Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action.**

**All part of God's plan, for Moses to ultimately become a great leader.**

**When Moses was 40 years old, he decided to visit his own people, the Israelites.**

**What this is really saying, is he came down from the palace, out into the area where the slaves were working building huge edifices.**

**He saw one of them being mistreated by an Egyptian, so he went to his defense and avenge him by killing the Egyptian.**

**Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not.**

**The next day Moses came upon 2 Israelites who were fighting.**

**He tried to reconcile them by saying, “Men, you are brothers, why do you want to hurt each other?”**

**But the man who was mistreating the other pushed Moses aside and said, “Who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?”**

**Think about what kind of affect that statement had on Moses, he thought the people would flock to him instead they despised him. But see what he does:**

**When Moses heard this, he fled to Midian, where he settled as a foreigner and had 2 sons.**

**After 40 years had passed, an Angel appeared to Moses in the flames of a burning bush in the desert near Mount Sinai.**

**Remember Mount Sinai, a very important area in the workings and wonders of God. Believed to be the**

**place that Abraham took his son Isaac when God asked him to sacrifice Isaac back to him but God stayed Abraham's hand so that he did not harm Isaac. God wanted to know if Abraham loved him more than his only son. Back to Moses:**

**When he saw this, he was amazed at the sight.**

**As he went over to get a closer look, he heard the Lord say: "I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."**

**Moses trembled with fear and did not dare to look.**

**Then the Lord said to him, "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground."**

**"I have indeed seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their groaning and have come down to set them free.**

**Now come, I will send you back to Egypt."**

**This is the same Moses they had rejected with the words, "who made you ruler and judge?"**

**He was sent to be their ruler and deliverer by God himself, through the Angel who appeared to him in the bush.**

**He led them out of Egypt and perform wonders and signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea and for 40 years in the wilderness.**

**This is the same Moses who told the Israelites, God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your own people.**

**He was in the assembly in the wilderness, with the Angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our ancestors; and he received living words to pass on to us.**

**Now he is getting, to the crux of the story, he will tell them what all this means. Let us continue:**

**But our ancestors refused to obey him.**

**Instead, they rejected him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt.**

**They told Aaron, “Make us God’s who will go before us.**

**As for this fellow Moses who led us out of Egypt; we don’t know what has happened to him!”**

**That was the time they made an idol in the form of a calf.**

**They brought sacrifices to it and reveled in what their own hands had made.**

**But God turned away from them and gave them over to the worship of the sun, moon and stars.**

**This agrees with what is written in the book of the prophets:**

**“Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings 40 years in the wilderness, people of Israel?**

**You have taken up the tabernacle of Molek and the star of your God Rephan, the idols you made to worship.**

**Therefore, I will send you into exile beyond Babylon.”**

**Again another prophecy written by the prophets that came to pass and the Jewish leaders know about it. Stephen continues his final accusation of them.**

**Our ancestors had the tabernacle of the covenant law with them in the wilderness. It had been made as God directed Moses, according to the pattern he had seen.**

**After receiving the tabernacle, our ancestors under Joshua brought it with them when they took the land from the nations God drove out before them.**

**It remained in the land until the time of David, who enjoyed God’s favor and asked that he might provide a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. But it was Solomon who build a house for him.**

**However, the most high does not live in houses made by human hands.**

**As the prophet says: “Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me?”**

**Says the Lord.**

**Or where will my resting place be? Has not my hands made all these things?**

**Now comes Steven’s accusation!**

**You stiff necked people!**

**Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised.**

**You are just like your ancestors.**

**You always resist the Holy Spirit!**

**Surely they will repent now! Stephen continues:**

**Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute?**

**They even killed those who predicted the coming of the righteous one.**

**And now you have betrayed and murdered him: you who have received the law that was given through Angels but have not obeyed it.**

**And that is the accusation, that they have all this history, and all this information, and they have searched diligently in the Scriptures to know when and where the Messiah would come, and they have missed him completely, not just missing him but crucified him, and they cannot admit that. Watch what happens:**

**When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnash their teeth at him.**

**Wow! Their ears are absolutely turned off and their hearts are stone cold. They have been indicted by the Holy Spirit and all they can do is anger and rage. But see what happens next:**

**But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.**

**“Look,” he said, “I see heaven opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”**

**More than they can bear! And so there is only one thing they can do in their rage. Look at this!**

**At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him.**

**Their rage, against these upstarts, is so great they cannot contain themselves, they may even bring the Romans down upon them, but so be it. There is another interesting aspect to this; notice in the next verse what happens.**

**Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.**

**Saul will figure very prominently in the very near future and how God is going to bring the message of the Messiah to the rest of the world. Let us finish with this part about Stephen:**

**While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”**

**Then he fell on his knees and cried out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.”**

**When he had said this, he fell asleep.**

**And Saul approved of their killing him.**

**And so, just as we saw sin enter into Ananias and his wife, we see Saul a Pharisee among Pharisees approving of their killing of Stephen.**

**Next week, we will look at the persecution of the church and the scattering of the believers, as God fulfills His desire to have the gospel preached throughout the world.**

**As we continue forward, I will be bringing to you some historical documentation of what is going on in the early church and in the different areas with the ministry of the gospel and how we came to be called Christians.**

**But let us close this part of the service in prayer.**