

Chapter 7

Stephen's speech.

Some have claimed this is the most important speech in Acts. Speeches in Acts typically respond to a theological mistake.

Stephen's accusers are mistaken concerning him.

Stephen does not respond to the charges.

He is not defending himself or using Scripture to proclaim Jesus. He is telling tales of an unrepentant Israel. In retelling the story in detail and in the way that he does, teaches his point. He is telling the Jews he is one of them who knows the old old stories. Pretty in your face. He knows the stories and he would not do anything to change them or blaspheme.

He is reminding them that God is the point of the story. God is the principle subject of Israel's story. God cares for the chosen people.

He further points out that God grants wisdom, special insight and God produces "signs and wonders". God produces them through people chosen by God. Stephen is saying if you can do signs and wonders, it is because God grants you the power. Stephen does signs and wonders, God does this.

He also is saying Israel is unrepentant and a "stiff-necked people"

Lastly Stephen is saying that the Lord God's activity on behalf of Israel is not bounded by a particular place of worship or a particular time.

For Stephen the resurrection of Christ has proven his Messiahship and becomes the central symbol of faith and life. The Temple no long holds that place.

Stephen begins his narrative with the promise to Abraham. Makes sure the rulers hear this promise is for more than Abraham but to all the people of the Earth.

The movement takes us to Moses. This is the longest section of the speech. Moses is a prototypical Messiah in Stephen's eyes. It is his defense of blasphemy.

Moses and Abraham are connected for Stephen.

Know that the problem for Stephen with the Temple authority is his similarity to Jesus in their eyes. He does signs and wonders,, has wisdom and is full of

the Spirit. He is a continuation of Jesus ministry. Stephen is faithful until and unto death.

For Stephen – salvation is found in no one else but Jesus, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.

The promise to Abraham is a pivotal moment for salvation history. This is not a political promise but a promise for the powerless.

God's salvation is "brokered" by prophets like Moses. This salvation promise is a covenant that requires the people to respond.

It is easy to turn from God and that is what Stephen is accusing the leadership of the Temple.

Stephen sees his prophetic role as a mediator between God and the leadership and God and all people.

Stephen is clear the Most High does not dwell in a place made of human hands. Stephen is basically proclaiming the truth that Jesus fulfilled the law and the old ways of Judaism are not relevant for salvation any longer.

In the face of persecution (while being stoned) Stephen prays. Costly obedience.

Stephen prays for forgiveness for those killing him.

Saul is present at the stoning --- in a way this sets the stage for the importance and earnestness of his conversion.

Who do we pray for today?

For what do we wish God to intercede?