

9. Discussion (continued): ((b) How did Jacob's whole family end up in Egypt? [Note: Jacob was also called Israel.] (c) In this lesson Stephen was accused of spreading teachings that would lead toward abandoning the religious traditions that had been handed down from Moses. How did Stephen's defense, at this point, begin to prove that his accusers were lying about him? (d) If someone were to accuse you of promoting a false doctrine, as they did against Stephen, how well could you defend yourself? How would you go about it?

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An Interactive Life Application Bible Study of the Acts of the Apostles for Small Groups

Key: *Blue = New Testament* *Red = Words of Jesus*
Green = Old Testament Quotes

Lesson 8

1. Background: In lesson 7 Stephen was selected, along with 6 others, to help serve the needs of the Greek-speaking widows who had been neglected by the Church.

2. Stephen Is Arrested. ^{Acts 6:8-15} Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed amazing miracles and signs among the people. ⁹ But one day some men from the Synagogue of Freed Slaves, as it was called, started to debate with him. They were Jews from Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia, and the province of Asia. ¹⁰ None of them could stand against the wisdom and the Spirit with which Stephen spoke.

¹¹ So they persuaded some men to lie about Stephen, saying, "We heard him blaspheme Moses, and even God."

¹² This roused the people, the elders, and the teachers of religious law. So they arrested Stephen and brought him before the high council.

¹³ The lying witnesses said, "This man is always speaking against the holy Temple and against the law of Moses. ¹⁴ We have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy the Temple and change the customs Moses handed down to us."

¹⁵ At this point everyone in the high council stared at Stephen, because his face became as bright as an angel's.

3. Discussion: (a) Why do you think the Jews from Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia and the Roman province of Asia (today's Turkey) could not stand against Stephen's wisdom? (b) Why was Stephen's arrest unjust? (c) Why do you think Stephen's face was shining?

4. Stephen Addresses the Council.

Acts 7:1-7 Then the high priest asked Stephen, "Are these accusations true?"

² This was Stephen's reply: "Brothers and fathers, listen to me. Our glorious God appeared to our ancestor Abraham in Mesopotamia before he settled in Haran.^[a] ³ God told him, 'Leave your native land and your relatives, and come into the land that I will show you.'⁴ So Abraham left the land of the Chaldeans and lived in Haran until his father died. Then God brought him here to the land where you now live.

⁵ "But God gave him no inheritance here, not even one square foot of land. God did promise, however, that eventually the whole land would belong to Abraham and his descendants—even though he had no children yet. ⁶ God also told him that his descendants would live in a foreign land, where they would be oppressed as slaves for 400 years. ⁷ 'But I will punish the nation that enslaves them,' God said, 'and in the end they will come out and worship me here in this place.'

5. Discussion: (a) Why do you think Stephen began his defense by starting with the beginning to give the history of how God established the people of Israel? (b) Why is Abraham so important to the people of Israel and today's Jews? (c) Has the prophecy in verse 7 been fulfilled?

6. Stephen's defense continued. ^{7:8} "God also gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision at that time. So when Abraham became the father of Isaac, he circumcised him on the eighth day. And the practice was continued when Isaac became the father of Jacob, and when Jacob became the father of the twelve patriarchs of the Israelite nation.

7. Background Information: Perhaps circumcision served as a sign of the importance of blood sacrifice throughout the history of Israel and culminating in the cross of Jesus.

^{7:9-10} "These patriarchs were jealous of their brother Joseph, and they sold him to be a slave in Egypt. But God was with him ¹⁰ and rescued him from all his troubles. And God gave him favor before Pharaoh, king of Egypt. God also gave Joseph unusual wisdom, so that Pharaoh appointed him governor over all of Egypt and put him in charge of the palace.

8. Discussion: (a) What was the origin of the 12 Tribes of Israel? (b) Can you name those 12 Tribes? If not, look up Numbers 13:4-15. (c) Do you remember some reasons why Joseph's brothers were jealous of him? (d) Do you remember why the Pharaoh decided to appoint Joseph as governor over Egypt?

^{7:11-19} "But a famine came upon Egypt and Canaan. There was great misery, and our ancestors ran out of food. ¹² Jacob heard that there was still grain in Egypt, so he sent his sons—our ancestors—to buy some. ¹³ The second time they went, Joseph revealed his identity to his brothers, and they were introduced to Pharaoh. ¹⁴ Then Joseph sent for his father, Jacob, and all his relatives to come to Egypt, seventy-five persons in all. ¹⁵ So Jacob went to Egypt. He died there, as did our ancestors. ¹⁶ Their bodies were taken to Shechem and buried in the tomb Abraham had bought for a certain price from Hamor's sons in Shechem. [near Samaria]

¹⁷ "As the time drew near when God would fulfill his promise to Abraham, the number of our people in Egypt greatly increased. ¹⁸ But then a new king came to the throne of Egypt who knew nothing about Joseph. ¹⁹ This king exploited our people and oppressed them, forcing parents to abandon their newborn babies so they would die. [Note: It was then that baby Moses was put into danger]

9. Discussion: (a) What part did Joseph play in making sure Egypt would have food to sell when the famine came?