

8/28/22 - Acts 7:2-8:3 - "Patterns of the World & Church, part 2"

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[0 : 00] So, I have three sections and a little bit of help for us today. I want to also highlight something new that I'm just doing today.

If it is any benefit to you to have sermon notes, some people have asked me if I can print something out, we're going to go green with sermon notes.

So, they're available online. So, all the points within the sermon are available there at our website. Just type that in and you'll see an archive of this entire series of past notes as well.

And so, I hope that this will benefit us as we come to our time to see how things are structured and as we reflect on things as we go forward that we can look back and see these patterns unfolding.

So, that's our website slash notes and you'll see that link. And so, we got the fourth pattern. We've had three patterns laid out last week. We have the fourth pattern today, which is the world habitually rejects God's promise.

[1 : 10] We have to remember before we dive into the verses, his audience, Stephen's audience. Because to think that Stephen, in highlighting all of this, all these Old Testament references, all these Old Testament allusions, to think that he's trying to give these religious leaders a biblical history lesson, is kind of foolish to think.

They knew the Bible from front to back, literally saying they were masters of the Torah. But could Stephen be possibly giving them a heart history lesson?

A heart history lesson. They knew the stories. They knew the references. They knew the characters. But might they be blind to where their activity and participating in all of that activity actually transpires?

Where their responsibility actually lies? And so, Stephen begins with this heart history lesson starting in verse 2 in his speech.

He is given the mic. The very suppressing efforts of the world are trying to make him stop talking, and essentially they give him the microphone, and he doesn't waste a bit of that mic time to say his speech in a thousand, more than a thousand Greek words.

[2 : 35] And we see here that he highlights three things within all of the sections we will be dissecting today. He highlights God's promise in each section we will highlight today.

He highlights also the second, how God brought about its fulfillment. And we also will see that man's rejection is continuous within that.

You see what I'm doing today? I'm breaking the passage up. I'm not reading it on the front end. I didn't want you to fall asleep yet. So, I'm taking the passage chunk by chunk because I think that it will be better to understand and understand what Stephen is saying and why he's saying it.

Okay? And so, Stephen begins refuting charges. It's a word similar to its counterpart of apologia, but he's not actually doing an apologia here.

It's a word known as refutatio. And that's a way of refuting charges put against you. And so, this refuting takes a very, very long course.

[3 : 52] And so, I want you to see this course of action here with this graphic. You'll see it on there. The live stream might be a little bit messed up. But there's three waves here within his speech.

And we're going to be going through each and every one of these sections to hit of what he's saying and why he's saying it. That God's promise was established, the promise was delivered, and the promise dwelt with man.

And so, we're going to look at that today because what we're going to see is that every promise, every promise, every encounter with God has been by way of rejection from man.

God has spoken. Man has rejected constantly. Within the people of God and outside the people of God. Meaning, all are without excuse.

And so, let's look at that fourth pattern. Let's begin in verse 2 where we meet Abraham, which is a foundational part of his argument, his refutatio of his arguments against the false charges.

[5 : 10] It says in verse 2, And Stephen said, Brothers and fathers, hear me. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia before he lived in Haran.

And he said to him, Promise, go out from your land and from your kindred and go into the land that I will show you.

There's something coming for Abraham. And then he went out from the land of the Chaldeans and lived in Haran. And after his father died, God removed him from there into this land in which you are living now.

Yet he gave him no inheritance in it. Not even a foot length. But promised. You see that, church? But promised, in verse 5, To give it to him as a possession and to his offspring after him, though he had no child.

And God spoke to this effect, that his offspring would be sojourners. This is the bad news. His offspring would be sojourners in a land belonging to others, who would enslave them and afflict them for 400 years.

[6 : 22] But a promise. But I will judge the nation that they serve, said God. And after they shall come out and worship me in this place.

And I will give them. And he gave them a covenant of circumcision. Another promise. Sign of the promise. And so Abraham became the father of Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day.

And Isaac became the father of Jacob and Jacob of the twelve patriarchs. Let's pause. What is Stephen saying in his refute to the charges? He's establishing the foundation of his refute.

In a promise that was long, long ago in a galaxy far, far away. Right? So, what's he saying? Stephen begins with Father Abraham.

Remember the child song, Father Abraham? You know, we'll stop there. I'm trying to wake you up. You'll see this occurring frequently here. So, the beginning of this promise to Abraham is God's directive to go.

[7 : 36] Abraham, leave. And go to a new land that would be given to his offspring. In which that they would be oppressed for 400 years.

God then established his covenants. This promise. This is a legal contract of God's dedication to his offspring. I want us to remember this as we go through this.

It's the foundation of his arguments. Why is he saying this? Receiving God's promise, as it were for Abraham, was not geographical.

Why is Stephen saying this? It wasn't bound to, well, I'll just, spoiler alert, the temple. These Jewish, this council of Sanhedrin.

It's not bound to a temple. As it were for Abraham, it was not geographical. And he wouldn't even see it. But it was received by faith.

[8 : 38] You see, devotion to that promise was not just external. It wasn't just a sign of circumcision on male children. But it was internal. Which consequently produces obedience.

A sign of the promise. And this is a good reminder for us today as a church in the New Testament. On this side of the cross. That faith is by hearing.

Not by sight. That faith is actually affirmed. Our affirmation of that promise is found in our obedience to that promise. Our obedience isn't a way of receiving that promise.

It's a consequence of the promise. We don't live and believe in a works-based faith. It is a faith-based faith. Okay?

So that is an important thing for us to even see through this text so quickly. And so as Stephen, imagine Stephen standing there, arrested, chains, jiggling, falsely accused.

[9 : 47] Seems like the world's against him. It's compelled by the Holy Spirit. He directs the Sanhedrin to when God's promise began. A promise of delivering God's people and also dwelling with God's people.

Delivering and dwelling. Truly. To stand in front of the Sanhedrin and thinking about all they know.

Those are the guys. They know front and back. They're masters of the Torah. Stephen is quite filled with wisdom and power. Just as it was described in his appointment.

And this is the basis upon which his entire refutatio is rested upon. And so let's see where he takes it after that. His foundation is established.

Let's look in Acts chapter 7 verse 9 continuing. So he goes from Abraham to his offspring all the way to the patriarchs.

[10 : 50] And Joseph being one of them. And he focuses in on Joseph and the patriarchs. Joseph's brothers. And the patriarchs jealous of Joseph sold him into Egypt.

But God, look at this promise. But God was with him and rescued him out of all his affliction. And gave him favor and wisdom before Pharaoh, king of Egypt.

Who made him ruler over Egypt and over all the household. And now the bad news. There came a famine in the land. Throughout all Egypt and Canaan. And great affliction in our fathers could find no food.

But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent out our fathers on their first visits. Verse 13. And on the second visit, Joseph made himself known to his brothers.

And Joseph's family became known to Pharaoh. And Joseph sent and summoned Jacob, his father, and all his kindred. And 75 persons in all. And Jacob went down into Egypt.

[11 : 50] And he died. He and our fathers. And they were carried back to Shechem. And laid in the tomb that Abraham had bought for a sum of silver from the sons of Hamor in Shechem.

Let's pause. What is Stephen saying? What is he saying here? Abraham's offspring. Abraham's offspring. The offspring of the promise. The great-grandchildren.

Jealously sold the one of whom God saw favor into slavery. The one who they were jealous of. And God kept his promise with Joseph.

Even amid their rejection of Joseph. Joseph was rescued from slavery because of God. And Abraham's offspring were also rescued because of God's promise to Joseph.

Even amid their rejection. And so, why is he saying that? Stephen, that's great. They probably know the story. Why is he saying it? Don't you see this theme unveiled between adversity and blessing?

[13:04] You see, on one side, Joseph's betrayal by his brothers. And on the other side, you see God's blessing to Joseph. On the one side, you see trouble comes to the offspring of Abraham.

But guess what? God's blessing comes through Joseph. You see, the promise of Abraham is being fulfilled. That was established.

They're in that 400 years of just sojourning. Lost. People. They're in that 400 years. He says, you will be strangers in a country not of their own.

But God will sovereignly provide, essentially. And we see that even Joseph had this perspective that could speak to even our adversity in this life today.

In verse 5 of chapter 45 of Genesis. Joseph says that it was to save the lives that God sent me ahead of you. It's almost like, thank you for kicking me out and exiling me, brothers.

[14:10] Because guess what? God had seen fit that I go to Egypt first. So that I would provide for our offspring. And God saw it all fit.

God's promise is displayed quite often through rejection. It is a paradox. But it is true. But still yet, we see, you can hear the chains rattling as Stephen is bound up and arrested.

Falsely charged. And so Stephen takes it from the account of Joseph and begins to get into the bulk of his speech. We see quite a length of his speech dedicated to Moses.

Well, he's refuting the charges. One of the charges was against his opinion, it seems, of Moses. And so he goes into Moses.

In verse 17, it kind of transitions from Joseph to Moses. Verse 17, look with me. At that time, but as the time of promise drew near. Think about that.

[15:13] As the time of promise drew near, which God had granted to Abraham. Back to the foundation. The people increased and multiplied in Egypt. I love that increase and multiply.

That's Acts language, isn't it? God's people increased and multiplied in Egypt. Until there arose over Egypt another king who did not know Joseph.

Here's the bad news. We had the promise of increase and multiplication in Egypt. But here's the bad news. This king, he dealt shrewdly with our race and forced our fathers to expose their infants so that they would not be kept alive.

Verse 20, at this time, Moses was born and promise. He was beautiful in God's sights. This was the man whom God had favored.

And he was brought up for three months in the father's house. And then, when he was exposed, Pharaoh's daughter adopted him and brought him up as her own son.

[16:19] Verse 22, another promise. Pause. And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians. And he was mighty in his words and deeds.

Pause. What is Stephen saying here in his refute to the charges? The 400 years of affliction that was promised to Abraham for his offspring is in full bore.

You're in that 400 years of not so living your best life in the Israel life. As Israel grew, though, Egypt became a land of oppression, not provision.

And God saw favor in Moses, Abraham's great-great-grandson, who was instructed with wisdom and was mighty in word and deed.

Sound familiar with this man chained up and shackled? Stephen recalls the first 40 years in Moses' life and will continue through Moses' account, accounting for each 40 years.

[17 : 28] Because Moses lived in Deuteronomy 34, 7 to 120. And so, he accounts for the entire scope of Moses' life for a certain purpose. And we see a comparison, though.

Between Joseph and Moses, God was devoted to his promise to Abraham. Both were used as instruments of God's sovereign providence to lead God's people back to Canaan.

The very welfare of God's people hung in the balance between rejection from inside the walls of God's people and oppression from outside the walls of God's people.

But why is he saying this? It's great, great, Stephen. You got a great recollection of details, but why? Why are you saying this, Stephen? Stephen, God's promise was on display.

Could this be the one? It's like anticipating what's to come. God is choosing Moses. Israel is expanding in Egypt. Could this be the one to bring about God's promise?

[18 : 38] And so, you hear the shackles. Stephen chained up, wrists chained up, bound and shackled. He goes a little bit further into his refute and enters into the second portion, the next 40 years of Moses' life in verse 23.

Look with me. When he was 40 years old, it came into his heart to visit his brothers, the children of Israel. And seeing one of them being wronged, he defended the oppressed man and avenged him by striking down the Egyptian.

He supposed that his brothers would understand that promise here, right? God was giving them salvation by his hand. But the bad news, they did not understand.

Verse 26, And on the following day, he appeared to them as they were quarreling and trying to reconcile them, saying, Men, you are brothers. Why do you wrong each other?

But the man who was wronging his neighbor thrust him aside, saying, Who made you ruler and judge over us? Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?

[19 : 43] And verse 29, At this retort, Moses fled, became in exile in the land of Midian, where he became the father of two sons. Pause. What's Stephen saying here?

Moses, chosen by God, is exiled. Similar to Joseph. He was appointed by God to deliver, but was rejected by his own people.

Sound familiar? Why is he saying that, though? The habitual problem of history showcases that even God's own people could not recognize salvation, even if it hit them in the head.

Or someone else's, as Moses' oppressor laid dead, of the Egyptians. But could Stephen, we won't be so subtle here of what might be hinting, could Stephen be not so subtly hinting to this Sanhedrin, the link between the rejection of Moses to the rejection of Jesus Christ?

I think that the anger and the internal state of the Sanhedrin council is probably like, I know where you're going with this. You know, when people are giving you a refute or you're in a debate, you know where people are going with it.

[21 : 08] I guarantee that they knew where he was going with it. Because as Luke says, this council, they rejected the gospel out of ignorance, Acts 3, 17.

Even though Jesus offered them salvation, Acts 4, 12. This is exactly what is happening in the life of Moses before seeing through God's promise.

And so we see, for Moses, he was exiled, but God's promise remains. We, too, can argue that time away that he had from the people of Israel actually providentially preserved that promise.

Because guess what? God often uses our own pride to give us a lesson, doesn't he? And so they kick out their Savior, and guess what happened?

Their oppression only increased. And so we see God's people wanted salvation, but they didn't want a Savior. And that is the pattern.

[22 : 16] God's promise is on display. They could not understand. And here we have Stephen, bound and shackled, refuting charges. And so he goes into the last 40 years of Moses' life in verse 30.

And now when 40 years had passed, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in the famous kids' Bible story, in the flame of a bush, flame of fire in a bush.

When Moses saw it, he was amazed at the sight, and he drew near to look. And there came a voice of the Lord. And God says, I am the Lord, I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and of Jacob.

And Moses trembled and did not dare to look. Then the Lord said to him, Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.

Verse 34, For I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their groaning, and the promise.

[23 : 26] I have come to deliver them. The promise. And now, come, I will send you to Egypt.

Pause. As Abraham was called to go, and wait those 400 years, God says, The time of deliverance is now. Once I said go, now I say, Come.

Be my, be the Savior, my Savior for the people. And what is Stephen saying? During Moses' exile, God reinforced his promise.

God himself reinforced his promise that he had with Abraham to Moses. And that it is time to have his people delivered from affliction that Abraham was foreshadowed upon.

This becomes like a Joseph-like exile, doesn't it? Until God personally commissions Moses in what's known as a theophany, a visible manifestation of God to mankind through a burning bush.

[24 : 38] And so, a couple things are significant as Stephen is saying to the Sanhedrin. Again, he's focusing in on geography. Location.

God's revelation came from outside of his land. And so, Moses' reaction reveals the authority of this theophany that actually, holy ground is anywhere that God is.

it's not bounds necessarily. And so, we see that this revelatory God is the same God of Abraham, of Isaac, of Jacob.

And God's commissioning to Moses, this fulfilling of the promise of Abraham from verse 6 and 7, God will personally come to his people of Israel to rescue them.

And Stephen omits a couple details of that rescue. Obviously, this isn't the full account, but just some cliff notes, some spark notes, if you will. And focuses solely upon Moses' commission by God that the promise begins now.

[25 : 47] Why is Stephen saying this? You see what he's saying, why is he saying it? Because this is huge. The time now is for deliverance.

Moses, which was once a call to go, is now a time to come. Moses is God's instrument for deliverance, who was rejected and despised by men.

Sound familiar? We must remember all of this is occurring due to Moses being ejected.

We have to remember this pattern. And so, Stephen kind of gets a little bit direct. The history is laid out and he gets a little bit direct here and directly refutes some of the charges.

He says in verse 35, this Moses whom they rejected saying, who made you a ruler and judge?

[26 : 58] This man God sent as both ruler and redeemer by the hand of the angel who appeared to him in a bush. This man led them out performing wonders and signs in Egypt and at the Red Sea and in the wilderness for 40 years.

This is the Moses who said to the Israelites, God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai and with our fathers who received oracles to give to us.

Verse 39, our fathers refused refused to obey him but thrust him aside and in their hearts they turned to Egypt.

They turned to oppression. They didn't want salvation because they didn't want a savior. They wanted to be chained. They wanted to be shackled.

Verse 40, saying to Aaron, make for us gods who will go before us. As for this Moses who led us out from the land of Egypt, we did not know what has become of him.

[28 : 19] And they made a calf in those days. We know the story. And offered a sacrifice to the idol and were rejoicing in the works of their hands.

But God turned away and gave them over to their worship of the host of heaven, the stars, the moon, as it is written in the book of the prophets.

This is from Amos 5. Did you bring to me slain beasts and sacrifices during the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? You took up the tent of Moloch and the star of your god Raphael and images that you made to worship, and I will send you into exile beyond Babylon.

Let's pause. What's Stephen saying? He gets pretty direct. The promise of God as being witnessed through the life of Moses. Yeah, this Moses delivered the Israelites from external affliction, but they themselves were found afflicting themselves through rejection of salvation and idol worship.

Why is Stephen saying this? Because Stephen affirms his high regard for Moses. a direct refute to the charges.

[29 : 43] Moses was, as Stephen says, the ruler and redeemer. He led God's people out and who mediated God's word to his people. If anybody needs to be charged, it ought to be the Sanhedrin because they are following in the patterns of their fathers.

Deliverance just wasn't good enough though. They wanted something tangible, these Israelites. Yeah, they're leaving their slavery, right?

But it's often the problem even in this life, if we don't, if things aren't matching up the way we want them here, we try it here. You know, we see it a lot in churches.

If something isn't right here, so we just jump over here. And it's as if, like, through all of this, they wanted similar to that attitude of wanting something tangible because God's word just wasn't enough.

They wanted something to hold. They wanted something that meant value to them that they can cherish. You can go to every church that you want, but you still cannot escape the evil within your heart, the problem of the heart, that cries for me.

[31 : 07] And that is what this nation does all throughout this time. It's a tragic heart problem. And they rejected both Moses and God. But guess what?

God is true to His promise. He essentially says, you want something tangible to worship? Here I come, says God.

We see this in verse 44. Our fathers had the tent of witness in the wilderness, just as He spoke. He who spoke to Moses directed Him to make it according to the pattern that He had seen.

And we see a promise. Our fathers in turn brought it in with Joseph when they dispossessed the nations that God drove out before our fathers.

A promise. And so it was until the days of David who found favor in the sight of God and asked to find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob.

[32 : 08] But it was Solomon who built a house for Him. Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made of hands. Another direct kind of geographical refute using the prophet Isaiah says in verse 49, heaven is my throne and earth is my footstool.

What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest? Did you not make, did not my hand make all these things?

Pause. What's he saying? God made His presence available. He made His presence accessible throughout the promised deliverance of God's people.

From Joshua all the way up through David and Solomon where God took a permanent residence in a temple, in temple worship. This is all God's plan.

And within this conglomeration of desires of the human hearts, we should see that mankind is torn. We are torn of worshipping something other than God.

[33 : 16] It's God or sin. You can't serve two masters, right? So in the scope of what God has promised to Abraham, the nation of Israel is experiencing deliverance.

The promise of God is being experienced. God's people through the kingship of David and the craftsmanship of Solomon made God's residence permanent with the temple.

And this lasted for 300 years. Think about that. But why is he saying this? Why is Stephen saying this? Stephen refutes another charge that was brought against his opinion of temple worship, talking about destroying temples and everything.

He refutes this charge. He doesn't accuse Israel of false worship of wood and stone, but those in Jerusalem are misunderstanding where God's presence is now based on progressive revelation.

Because where God's presence is, there God will be. Where God declares the land holy is where God is. And where is God now through the power of the Holy Spirit?

[34 : 39] Not in the temple made by hands, but a temple of flesh. And so, God is not constrained to wood or stone, geographic borders or ancestry.

Isaiah 66 truly proclaims, as the prophet confronted Israel with the danger of restricting the presence of God to the temple, which was a problem in Isaiah 66.

Stephen is not degrading Moses, he's not degrading temple worship, but affirming the progressive revelation of God's promise to Abraham to deliver and dwell.

And boy, things get heated, don't they? In verse 51, look with me. You stiff-necked people. Try to gain some credibility with that, right?

You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in hearts and ears. You always resist the Holy Spirit as your fathers did, so do you.

[35 : 43] Verse 52, which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute, and they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the righteous one, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it.

Pause. You can't get more blunt than that, can you? I mean, you want to draw some attention, say that to some folks who are opposing you and that are putting you on trial, right?

You can't get more blunt than that. The Holy Spirit boldens the church in ways that we can't even fathom. And that is true. But what's he saying? He's saying that God's initiatives and intervention have historically been rejected all throughout history, whether it being deliverance or God dwelling.

It's never good enough for mankind. But you want to know the real problem? It is the inescapable reality of the heart. The listening.

The listening of the law. The listening to the prophets. If you don't like what God's word says, you shut the book. If you don't like what the prophets are saying, you just cut their heads off, essentially.

[36 : 58] Every time God spoke, His words were rejected and exiled. Jesus Christ being the greatest of all.

all has been given and they habitually reject. But why is He saying that? He's making that so crystal clear that the closer God's proximity became with mankind, the stronger their rejection, the stronger their resistance.

This, you see, is something that is like the garden all over again in Genesis 3 of God dwelling with mankind mankind, after they disobeyed His words.

Him going there and mankind hiding in shame. This is the garden all over again and it has been a pattern throughout all of this mess.

God has always been good. Man has always been guilty. God has always been full of holiness and man has always been full of hatred. God has been calling His people to true worship since the Garden of Eden.

[38 : 14] This involves both acceptance in His Word, in His revelation, and obedience to it. You see that through God's Word, through Abraham, Moses, the prophets, and Jesus Christ.

And Stephen, bound in chains, can you hear his chains clinging? He clarifies his refute. The great resistance to God is the basis of His refute.

That God came, Joseph came, He was exiled by the patriarchs, Moses came, He was exiled by the Israelites, God came, and God's people exiled Him with false worship.

You see, the Sanhedrin pride themselves in their Torah knowledge and their Torah obedience. But Stephen accuses them of failing to see how their resistance and rejection play into key habits in Israel's history.

It's the greatest tragedy found in Jesus Christ in that rejection. And so we get into sort of an emphasis, the fifth pattern.

[39 : 27] He lays out His refute, and we see that the world's rejection verifies their guilt. The world's rejection verifies their guilt.

This is pattern five. In verse 54, it says, now when they heard these things, when they heard these things, they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at Him.

I want you to think about this in like a theatrical commentary. Luke finds it beneficial to not just give Stephen's speech from beginning to end. He decides right at the end of his speech to actually propose an insight into how they're responding at this time.

what's their response? Similar to how theatrical films, you know, you can kind of pan and see different angles and everything. It's hard to do that in literature, but Luke does that by inserting a commentary.

And what's the commentary? The corruption of their hearts has been tilled. Stephen's bluntness, Stephen's directness of Israel's guilt in the matter has stirred up fruit of their corrupt hearts.

[40 : 51] It's revealed. And Stephen has become a vessel of truth of which the world rejects, has rejected long ago, and is enraged. Look at the words that are used. It's a glimpse of hell.

Gnashing of teeth at him. And he jumps back into Stephen. The camera pans back to Stephen in verse 55. But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, saw Jesus standing at God's right hand. Standing, not sitting.

Standing, prepared to take action. As standing at, this is a judicial remark, that to be at God's right hand is to have the authority to judge.

And if the judge is standing, you better show honor. Something's about to happen. He is standing ready for action.

[42 : 02] Could it be action against their rejection? And then Stephen ends his speech to communicate this final plea to the Sanhedrin in verse 56.

And he said his last words to the Sanhedrin, Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.

Not just Jesus, but the Son of Man. Jesus is alive. mercy and justice are within his hands.

Stephen verbally affirms that God has fulfilled the greatest aspect of his promise to Abraham through Jesus Christ.

And Jesus Christ is exalted at God's right hand and his presence, once bound to a temple of stone, now resides within the body of flesh.

[43 : 05] flesh. And he gives a sighting, a sighting here, cross-reference to Daniel 7 using Son of Man. This is heaven, the clouds, the sky opening up.

We don't know exactly what he said, but something happens. The sky, heaven declared that this is the Son of Man. Revealed the Son of Man, the Ancient of Days, as Daniel 7 says, who has given dominion and glory and a kingdom standing ready to judge.

Fire in his eyes, blood dipped robe. It's a declaration from heaven as the sky opens up. Verse 57, but they cried out with a loud voice and stomped their ears and rushed together at him.

and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. Once again, exiled God's deliverance.

A profound moment that should have brought the greatest revival seen to the Sanhedrin Council unfolded in the greatest rejection.

[44 : 25] rejection. I won't say the greatest rejection because I believe that it is found in Jesus Christ, but this is a significant rejection. They exile the truth of Stephen's refutes and affirm the charge of blasphemy and hostility to the gospel.

Stephen experiences the habitual pattern of God's people since their deliverance. Habitual, cyclical pattern of rejection.

The end. And we see the verse continues, and the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. Who's Saul? You might ask.

We'll see in a couple weeks too. Verse 59, and as they were stoning Stephen, he called out. He prays, he intercedes for those who are stoning him. Lord Jesus received my spirit and falling to his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, Lord, do not hold this sin against them.

And when he had said this, he fell asleep. Dead. We meet a man for the first time named Saul, a man that Stephen uses his last dying breath to pray for.

[45 : 43] This is a call of Jesus Christ to pray for those who persecute you. And we have this Western Christianity society like, yeah, they can do all they want, but you know, I'm going to be the last guy standing, but Jesus has called us to proclaim the gospel at all costs, and he lays on the ground last dying breath.

Interceding for his enemies. That's not to say that we shouldn't practice self-defense if possible or protect our loved ones, but this calls into check our priorities in this nation, right?

A call from Jesus Christ that is directly to pray for our enemies. Surely God hears these prayers because we see God's promise remains even for those who are rejected with or without Stephen, with Moses or without Moses, Joseph or without Joseph.

His promise remains. But will we remain under the hands of the Lord? Will we trust God's promises even when all hell seems to stand against us?

Will the promise of Abraham that was fulfilled in Jesus Christ root us in faith to stand when we ought to stand? This, in turn, should end the reign of carnal Christians, fleshly Christians who worship God based on convenience, right?

[47 : 25] Or desire. Where obedience is a consequence of God proving Himself worthy of being worshipped. It's like that energetic, just seeking all these experiences of God and you're only a Christian unless God keeps giving you a reason to be a Christian.

He has given us a reason to be a Christian. He gave us the cross. He gave us forgiveness. And guess what? He gave us a promise from long ago in Genesis.

How could we be so carnal in our Christianity? This is profound. And with Stephen's last breath, can you hear the chains falling off?

the moment that the chains fell off of Stephen is the moment that the gospel also was bound of its chains in Jerusalem, which ends the first part of this series.

But we see one extra pattern occur in this expansion here, and this will be just a quick note of that. We're about 48 minutes into this sermon, so hang with me.

[48 : 35] And we see this last pattern. The world's adversity propels churches' expansion. We see in verse 1 of chapter 8, we see the bad news.

Saul, this guy, approved of his execution, and there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except for the apostles.

Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. But Saul was ravaging the church and entering house to house. He dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.

And there is where we will stay in our message today. But we see one thing is clear. The cycle of sin, rejection, hostility, continue, but God's promise remains.

This is a promise to Acts 1.8. You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, to the ends of the earth.

[49 : 45] And look what happens. The promise is occurring by way of persecution. The gospel is dispersed through their persecution, through the world's efforts to destroy it.

the word departs Jerusalem. The word of God is unstoppable. And part two of the series will begin next week. But as we come to a close, seeing the scope of God's promises clearly laid out in Stephen's speech, we can remember something about suffering.

Within trials and hardships that Paul makes sure that we know in verse 3-5 and chapter 5 of Romans, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope.

What James says in verse 2-4 in chapter 1, he doesn't even get two, three verses into his book, and James makes this clear. Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds.

You see the patterns of the world and the church are this. The church proves faith in Christ in our contentment in Him alone.

[51 : 02] This is the promise. We are content in the promise. In the world, the world proves lostness constantly in their cyclical, habitual, historical rejection of Jesus.

Stephen gets to the root of the problem. It's the heart. It's always been the heart. The heart is deceitful above all things. Jeremiah 17, 9. It's the wellspring of life, Proverbs 4, 23.

The heart is not only the target of Satan, but guess what? The heart is the target of the Holy Spirit as well. And we can't miss that.

That through faith in Christ, it's a promise of Ezekiel 36, He will give us a new heart. A heart not made of stone, but a heart of flesh. Might we not be surprised when the lost act like they're lost, right?

We're reminded of that daily. But rather, let's attend a great concern when the church acts like they're lost. That is a concern. And so, in this, I believe we can have three takeaways from that real quick.

[52 : 12] Three, encouragement, correction, and a challenge today. I encourage us to persevere in faith, to stand firm in the lost world. It's not popular, the least bit.

It might not get you that promotion at work. It might not get you that job that really pays well. And if you would just silence the gospel a little bit in your life, you might get that raise.

It's not meant to be popular. It's not meant to be personal in its attack. against us. The world simply hates God.

The world hates God. And this is the promise of Jesus in John 16. In the world you're going to have trouble, but take heart because I have overcome the world. These are words to stand on.

God's promises, you see, are revealed by way of opposition. It's like the wet blanket of the world is trying to extinguish the fire of God's promise, and within that same motion of extinguishing with that blanket, it fans the flame just before it hits the ground and just disperses that fire.

[53 : 24] It's paradoxical, yes, but is it true? Yes. One, encouragement. Second, I believe that we can be corrected. A correction to restore true worship in the message.

I hope that we can repent of anything that may become idolatry. Idolatry being that anything that takes the place that belongs to God.

That God gets first place, that He's supreme in all things. That before ourselves, we place God supreme. We place God's status over our status.

We don't idolize knowledge, our status, ourselves, our patriotism, our materialism, even our marriage, kids, and family, which is a big Western problem, all of which are subtle and not so subtle acts of idolatry.

Not idolatry, not adultery. Idolatry. I think your marriages are well-tuned. We'll do a series on marriage. But Christianity is founded in contentment.

[54 : 40] Contentment because all of our needs as a church are found in the gospel of Jesus Christ. There's nothing this world can offer. There's nothing my kids can offer to me that I don't already have in Christ.

My wife, she offers a lot to me, but she cannot offer as much as Jesus Christ has provided in my life. My family, my happiness is not contingent upon circumstance or situations or those who I'm around.

It is in Jesus Christ. And this is important. So I ask us to be corrected into true worship. This is a reminder that God's promise of forgiveness remains all of our days.

If it's true for Paul, this man who's approving of this execution, it's true for all. Don't beat yourself up constantly. You repent and God restores.

It is the power of His word that comes alive in our hearts that remains true. You repent, God restores regardless of how you feel about it. This is good news and the truth of the gospel.

[55 : 43] Maybe you're not a Christian though. Maybe you're here like, man, I thought I had to do all these things to be closer to God. This should be pretty good news to you.

God has went to great lengths to be very close to you. And He came and dwelled in human flesh. And His mission? To die upon a cross.

That baby wrapped in a swaddle in the manger had a mission to die on the cross on your behalf. So if you are not a Christian, by your faith, God's word says that you will receive forgiveness, complete pardon, atonement for your sin.

Once it was through the blood of bulls and calves and all these complicated things, Jesus was the supreme sacrifice on the cross on your behalf, the sinless Son of God who died.

By placing your faith in Him alone, you are promised forgiveness. And so the urgency of faith comes because this ticker in here that all of us have beaten, it is not promised to beat longer than this sermon may last.

[57 : 05] So, there is urgency, but great promise for the record of sin to be removed. And I challenge us to persevere, preserve the gospel, not persevere, to preserve the gospel.

Because one thing that leaders of God would have benefited greatly back in the Sanhedrin is a two-way accountability. Right? A little church discipline, a little regular gathering with God's people, Acts 2, 42 model.

Corporate accountability is how the call of the church is meant to preserve the gospel. We do it together, and so I just want to leave you with this.

Despite the world's cyclical rejection of the gospel, God's promise remains through faith in Christ. This is God's word, and so the church, the church carries on.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Thank you.