



ACM BIBLE STUDIES

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

The Record of the Beginning of Jesus' Reign

Chapter Seven

INTRODUCTION

NOTE: The churches and translators have done Stephen, and Christendom, a great injustice. Churches have attempted to change Stephen's image into a passive, mythical figure. They've redefined the point of his stand before the Sanhedrin. In doing this, they've twisted the message and purpose of the Gospel. The churches have their own agendas, and they don't reflect the agenda Stephen was following.

THIS CHAPTER features Stephen's sermon that he gave before the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem shortly before his death. As we study his words we find that his message was about conspiracy, corruption, organized crime and abuse – or in common vernacular, “government.” Stephen was on trial for blasphemy before the Sanhedrin: the government in Jerusalem. As he gave his defense before his accusers he exposed them as liars, thieves and murderers.

Stephen's sermon exposed the problem that plagued Jerusalem – namely, idolatry in the form of central government. The Sanhedrin's response illustrated the truth of his words.

His words hit home. They hit home so well, in fact, that the rulers were infuriated. Stephen exposed their motives publicly by relating historical examples of Sanhedrin-type government systems persecuting the prophets and Godly people, and destroying freedom.

Stephen further showed that the rulers in his day were following in the footsteps of the Babylonian system that persecuted Moses and the prophets, and his main proof was that they murdered the Son sent from God.

When the rulers heard Stephen's penetrating message, they realized their con game was being exposed. Their response was to put Stephen on trial ... but instead Stephen turned the tables and put them on trial. They responded further by violently murdering him. This act only added to the mountain of evidence to expose them by demonstrating the very things Stephen had been saying.

Through it all, Stephen was a vessel of Christ - a sharp sword in the hand of his King. Stephen's testimony, followed by his brutal slaying, caused a change in the world of those who were breaking away from the mental chains of slavery imposed upon them by the Beast System.

The religious/political establishment was being exposed. Through Stephen, Jesus was exposing wickedness in high places.

A GOVERNMENT FALLS

Centuries earlier, the prophets foretold that a great enlightenment would occur – one that couldn't be covered up by the government establishment. It was to be an exposure that would cast light in the dark places. That exposure/enlightenment was eventually manifested in the Reign of Jesus.

In Isaiah two, it was foretold that certain rulers and their system would be exposed and broken:

6. Truly You (YHWH) have forsaken your people the house of Jacob, because they are furnished from the East, and they conjure like the Philistines, and they revel with the children of strangers.

Isaiah 2:5,6

Israel had adopted eastern traditions and religions; they had become idolaters like the Philistines. They were trafficking with aliens to financially exploit their own people.

7. And their land is full of silver and gold, and there is no end to their treasures; and their land is full of horses, and there is no end to their chariots:

8. And their land is filled with idols; the work of their own hands; they worship that which they made with their own fingers.

9. And man bows down, and man is humbled: and you (YHWH) forgive them not.

Isaiah 2:7-9

False worship and political/religious hypocrisy is no way to avert the judgment of Yahweh.

10. Enter into a rock, and hide yourself in the dust, for the fear of Yahweh, and because of the honor of his majesty.

11. The haughty eyes of man are humbled, and the loftiness of men is bowed down, and Yahweh alone is exalted in that day.

12. For the day of Yahweh of hosts (i.e., of multitudes) will be against the proud and lofty, and all that is lifted up, and all will be abased:

Isaiah 2:10-12

This refers to people who are “proud and lofty” or are “lifted up” by power and money ... the two elements that generally go hand in hand. The richest people generally rule the country. That is how they get and keep their wealth.

13. And against all the cedars of Lebanon – the high and lifted up; and against all the oaks of Bashan,

14. And against all the high mountains, and against all the exalted heights,

15. And against every high tower, and every fenced wall,

Isaiah 2:13-15

Isaiah metaphorically refers to the rulers as high trees, mountains, and walls. He uses figurative language to describe the strongholds or branches of power ... being HIGH OVER the people. And, God’s judgment was going to fall upon them.

16. And against all the ships of Tarshish, and all craft of pleasure.

17. And the haughtiness of man shall be bowed down, and the pride of men shall be made low: and Yahweh alone shall be exalted in that day.

18. And the idols shall pass away.

19. And men will go into caves of rocks, and into holes of the earth for fear of Yahweh, and from the glory of his majesty, as He arises to shake the land.

20. In that day a man shall cast his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which they have made to worship, to the moles and to the bats;

21. To flee into the crevices of the rocks, and into the clefts of the cliffs, for fear of Yahweh, and for the glory of his majesty, when He arises to shake the land.

22. Cease from man (i.e., from worshipping man) whose breath is in his nostrils: for in what is he to be esteemed?

Isaiah 2:16-22

The message was clear: Israel was in judgment for following men and worshipping themselves in government (high places).

When God “shakes the land,” rulers with great money and power discover that their money and political prowess cannot save them. Their idols will no longer comfort them.

In Acts seven, we see an actual example of God “shaking the land.” It was called by the Greek word: “parousia” (presence), and “judgment.” The rulers saw that their political status and deceit could no longer keep the people asleep.

In his sermon, Stephen proclaims publicly that Jesus is now King, and that man’s government and laws can no longer enslave the minds of them that believe in Christ. This, of course, was sedition in the eyes of the rulers. They arrested Stephen and brought him before the court (the Sanhedrin Council). The account of Stephen’s appearance before the Sanhedrin is the subject of this lesson.

The prosecutors charged Stephen with blasphemy against Moses, God, the Holy Place, and the Law. That amounted to “sedition, treason, and anarchy.”

Stephen hadn’t actually spoken against God, Moses, or the Law. But he was speaking against what the Sanhedrin held up as “the Holy Place” (i.e., the priesthood) there in Jerusalem. In the eyes of the Sanhedrin, Stephen was guilty of the greatest offense to their system. He had blasphemed “their laws” – their man-made laws.

Of disdain and blaspheming central government, Stephen was truly guilty. STEPHEN HONORED GOD’S LAW, AND HE “BLASPHEMED” MAN’S LAWS. In fact, it is usually impossible to obey God without blaspheming some of man’s laws.

What does the Bible say concerning the system Stephen blasphemed?

7. And because the sons of Israel sinned against Yahweh their God ... and feared other gods,

8. And walked in the statutes of the kings of Israel that they made, and of the nations that Yahweh dispossessed from the presence of the sons of Israel;

9. And the sons of Israel did covertly things that were not right against Yahweh their God, and built for themselves high places (governments) in all their cities, from a tower of the watchers to the fenced city,

10. And set up for themselves standing-pillars and shrines on every high place, and under every green tree,

11. And made perfume there in all high places, like the nations that Yahweh removed from their presence, and did evil things to provoke Yahweh,

12. And served the idols, of which Yahweh said to them, "Do not do this thing."

16. And they forsook all the commands of Yahweh their God, and made to themselves a molten image ... to serve Baal (central government).

18. And Yahweh showed Himself very angry against Israel, and removed them from His presence: there was none left but the tribe of Judah only.

19. Also Judah kept not the commandments of Yahweh their God, but walked in the statutes of Israel which THEY made.

2 Kings 17:7-19

Notice carefully what this actually says. Judah kept NOT God's Law but kept the statutes of the kings of Israel which THEY made. The statutes THEY had made were NOT the statutes (laws) given to them by Moses! Judah, also, was keeping the laws created by the kings (lawmakers) and were

ignoring the laws of God!

Is this not the same thing we see in America today?

20. And Yahweh rejected all the seed of Israel, and afflicted them, and delivered them into the hand of spoilers, until He had cast them (Israel) out from His presence.

2 Kings 17:20

This describes the system that that was in place in Jerusalem that was against Stephen. He told them they were obeying their own laws and rejecting God's law. This had been the cause of Israel's punishment.

Stephen's accusations hit home, and the rulers panicked. Their hatred and guilt fed their fear. They took up stones to kill him.

But remember, the cause of their hatred toward Stephen was NOT that he was just too nice of a guy who didn't cuss, or drink – as churchgoers are led to believe. No, they stoned him because he was exposing the ugly truth about them and their system of government. Their system of government enslaved the people by lying to them, robbing them, and murdering them if they didn't willingly submit to being deceived, robbed, and used. Jerusalem government was continuing the abominations that had destroyed Israel in years past.

QUESTION: Our present-day government system is wicked like the one described in 2 Kings 17. People keep saying that it must collapse soon, and then times will get better. But, decade after decade it keeps going. The beast system just keeps getting worse and worse, and bigger and bigger. When will it ever end? When will there be another "Day of the Lord" like the ones in Isaiah 2, and 2 Kings 17?

ACTS 7:1-8 ISRAEL HISTORY STARTING FROM ABRAHAM

Then the high priest asked, "Are these things so?"

And he (Stephen) answered: "Men, brethren, and fathers, hear this. The glory of God was seen by our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Harran,

And He said to him, 'Go you forth out of your land, and from your kindred, and come into the land which I shall show you.' Then, after the death of his father, He relocated him to this land where you now reside.

And He gave him no inheritance in it, not even for his foot to rest on: but He promised that He would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when he yet had no child.

And God said that his seed would be sojourners in a foreign land (Egypt); and they would enslave them, and persecute them four hundred years.

And the nation to whom they will be enslaved He will judge. And after these things they will come out, and serve Me in this place.

And He gave to him the covenant of circumcision: and so Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs.

BACK in chapter six, the prosecutors laid the charges against Stephen. Now, chapter seven begins with the high priest asking Stephen if he has anything to say in answer to the charges. Stephen's reply was an eloquent review of Israel history – touching upon events which, as we have said before, exposed the rulers for the villains that they were.

Stephen opened his discourse with the story of Abraham. He told how “the glory of God” appeared to Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Harran.

Stephen speaks of the God of Abraham. The land God promised to Abraham, and his seed, was the land of Canaan. But Abraham never possessed the land. So, although Abraham, himself, had no inheritance in the land, God promised that Abraham's seed would inherit it.

Verses six and seven obviously described Israel's captivity in Egypt.

Notice the word “patriarchs” in verse eight. Bible students realize that before Israel rejected Yahweh as their king the normal form of government was a patriarchal-type system. However, since their rebellion it seems that Israel has followed the pattern of the other governments of the world based on Babylonian Centralism.

Even now, after centuries of living under central government, our fellow kinsmen still cannot visualize any other form of government. They commonly equate “government” with “centralized Beast System.” Hearing only of that one form of government all their lives, they are blind to any other form. However, the patriarchal-type society IS a

viable system. It nurtures freedom, whereas man's central government destroys freedom and breeds tyranny.

In the nation of Israel there were twelve clans (tribes). They had no central ruler over the twelve tribes. Neither were there central rulers within each of the twelve tribes. The twelve patriarchs and tribes (Joseph and his brethren), as leaders or chiefs, could confer and cooperate with one another, but there was no contract, treaty, constitution or enforcement upon them as a unit.

(For a more detailed description of Patriarchal-type government see the sidebar “Patriarchal Government: the Ecclesia System” - page 10.)

QUESTION: Wasn't America originally a Christian nation started by our Christian forefathers? Why didn't they use the patriarchal system when they set up this government?

ACTS 7: 9-17

THE STORY OF JOSEPH IN EGYPT

And the patriarchs, having become jealous of Joseph, sold him into Egypt: but God was with him,

And He delivered him out of all his tribulations, and He gave him favor and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he (Pharaoh) appointed him governor over Egypt and all his house.

But famine came upon the whole land of Egypt and Canaan, and great tribulation, and our fathers could find no food.

But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent out our fathers the first time.

And again the second time; and Joseph was made known to his brothers; and Joseph's family was made known to Pharaoh.

Then Joseph sent out and called for Jacob, his father, and all his kindred, seventy-five souls.

So Jacob went down into Egypt, and died, he, and our fathers,

And were carried over into Shechem, and laid in the tomb that Abraham had bought for a price with silver from the sons of Hammor in Shechem.

But when the time of the promise drew near, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people were growing and multiplying in Egypt.

STEPHEN continues his defense. In verse nine he speaks of Joseph's brothers before they actually had patriarchies or tribes of their own. Notice, here, what happens when people conspire together to take advantage of others. The brothers, moved with envy, conspired together against one of their own. This kind of action has come to be called "politics." The nature of politics fits well with man's carnal nature.

Later on, these same brothers received inheritances as patriarchs over large families. But it seems that family rivalry and political intrigue were never far from their larcenous hearts.

Lies, frauds, thefts, and conspiracies are typical fare in the realm of government and politics. We see this regularly in U.S. politics.

God arranged for Joseph to have a position of power under Pharaoh. This was not for the purpose of launching Joseph into a career of politics. Rather, it was so that later, in God's time plan, Joseph could help his brothers survive during a time of need. Joseph had the foresight, and the means, to store up

grain in preparation for an upcoming famine.

When the famine came, Jacob and his sons were starving in Canaan, so they journeyed to Egypt to survive the famine. In Egypt they were reunited with Joseph, and Pharaoh discovered Joseph's real family. The next two verses record Israel's fateful introduction to life under central government.

Verse 14 told us that "the whole house of Israel" was comprised of seventy-five people at that time. Verse 15 says that Jacob and all of his generation died in Egypt. However, the family survived and grew in number.

In time, Jacob's family became victims of the Egyptian system and became slaves. Still, there was "a promise," spoken of in verse 17, of deliverance from Egypt. Stephen is referring back to this promise of deliverance ... which was fulfilled after Israel was in Egypt 400 years.

QUESTION: Isn't your conspiratorial theory of government a symptom of the "Joseph McCarthy" type paranoia that exists in right-wing extremist hate groups? How can we trust such a theory when its proponents are mostly this kind of mentally-disturbed people?

ACTS 7: 18-22 FROM JOSEPH TO MOSES

Till another king stood up, who did not know Joseph.

This one used cunning against our race, and pressed the fathers to disclose their infants so that they would not be born alive.

In which time Moses was born, and was comely to God and was nursed three months in his father's house:

But when he was discovered, Pharaoh's daughter took him up, and she reared him to herself into a son.

And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in his deeds.

STEPHEN'S review of Israel history sets the stage for his indictment against the Sanhedrin. Having touched upon Joseph and the patriarchs, he now proceeds chronologically to the time of Moses.

Let's examine verse 19 more closely. The direct translation gives it a distinct meaning which is lost in most Bible versions.

"This one (the new king) used cunning against our race and pressed the fathers to disclose their infants so that they would not be born alive."

According to the account in Exodus chapter one, government agents had to witness each birth, and if it was a male child it had to be killed. You may see a similarity between this and what we see today in America. Stephen accused the pharaoh of coercing the fathers to abort or abandon their newborn babies to die at the hands of the state. Obviously, abortion/ infanticide is nothing new among the crimes of man

kind. And, typically, government sanctions and supports abortion.

Using “cunning” means he (pharaoh) coerced them by intimidation and propaganda. He convinced them that they must cooperate with the state-sponsored baby killers. And, typically, the people cowed down and obeyed.

But, one father and mother refused to accept the state’s edict. That Egyptian abortion mill missed one child: Moses. His parents rebelled, and Moses was saved. He was born alive. And, through the leading of God’s hand, he survived. Pharaoh’s daughter took him in and raised him as her own. Moses then received an education and, according to verse 22, was a wise and powerful man.

QUESTION: If Moses’ parents disobeyed Pharaoh concerning their newborn child, and the Israelite midwives disobeyed Pharaoh to save babies (Ex. 1 :16-20), is it then correct for people today to disobey the government by attacking abortion clinics and blocking abortionists in order to save babies?

ACTS 7:23-29 GOD CALLS MOSES

And when his fortieth year was being fulfilled, it came into his heart to look upon his brethren the children of Israel.

And seeing one persecuted, he defended him, and avenged him that was abused, and struck down the Egyptian.

He assumed that his brethren would understand that God was saving them through his hand: but they did not understand.

And the next day he was seen by two who were fighting and tried to reconcile them into peace, saying: “Men, you are brothers; why do you wrong one another?”

But he that wronged his neighbor pushed him away, saying, “Who made you chief and judge over us?”

“Do you want to dispatch me in the manner that you dispatched the Egyptian yesterday?”

But at this word Moses fled, and became an alien in the land of Midian, where he fathered two sons.

VERSE 23 is very important. This verse provides valuable insight into the religious cliché, “receiving the call.”

The scripture says, “it came into his heart to visit his brethren.” When Moses was forty years old something changed inside him. He became convicted of the importance of his ties to his brethren. Verse 23 tells us that he decided to look upon the plight of his brethren. He wasn’t just going to “visit.” He was going to “consider.” It means that he had compassion for his brethren whom he had apparently ignored

for forty years.

Moses was forty years old before his grasp of reality and sense of priority came into focus. His first action was to defend one of his brethren who was about to be killed by an Egyptian. In the process Moses killed the Egyptian.

Moses slew a government man who was wrongfully abusing one of Moses’ fellow Israelites. Now, please understand that Moses’ actions, in this case, were precipitated by his turning toward God. Moses turned toward God ... and immedi-

ately found himself a fugitive from government.

Moses recognized the unrighteousness in the land, and in the government. He realized that the Egyptian system was wrongfully enslaving his fellow kinsmen. He was cognizant of the fact that these slaves were his people and he needed to help them find freedom.

So Moses, feeling the common bond of brotherhood, took the initiative. He supposed that his fellow kinsmen would understand that God would deliver them in this way. Unfortunately, the Israelites did not understand. They weren’t willing to

turn away from the Beast System.

Verse 26 says that Moses “was seen by two who were fighting,” and he tried to reconcile them. He would have drawn them together and formed a community with a singular spirit. Moses would have given them a single unifying purpose – but they weren’t interested. Moses was making himself a criminal in the Egyptian system. He was burning his bridges behind him.

Speaking to his Israelite brethren, Moses argued, in essence: “Why do you help the Egyptians enslave your own brethren? Why do you defend the government that is the enemy of the people? Why do you align yourself with the wrong side?”

We could ask this question of people today! United States citizens are slaves to the Beast System, and yet they resent any attempt to introduce them to freedom. If you attempt to discuss freedom with them, they will rattle their chains at you, disavow you, and label you a trouble maker ... all the while proudly proclaiming their undying patriotism to their government.

The biggest problem we face today is that our own people hate us and prevent us from forming an effective stand against the slave master with whom they’ve become accustom. They don’t want their lives disturbed. They want us to accept slavery as they have done. Of course, not all of them enjoy it. But, just try to make a stand for freedom and Christ, and against central government, and you’ll find your neighbors will be the first ones down on your back, siding with Big Brother against you.

This is the same problem Moses

faced. He tried to help his brethren, but they refused to see that they were wronging their own while defending their enslavers.

Moses rescued one of the brethren. The brethren then turned upon Moses and labeled him a murderer! Moses feared they would turn him over to the Egyptian government.

Does this fit our day and age? Yes, I’ve seen it many times. Faithless, idolatrous Americans siding with their slavemasters against their own brothers. This is the current state of the typical American’s mentality. This is also the reason no large work can be accomplished for Christ and freedom in our day. Our own people help the enslavers to continue oppressing and enslaving us.

When Moses realized that the Israelite people didn’t share his vision of freedom, he became a fugitive and fled to the land of Midian where he got a job on a sheep ranch in order to make a living. While he was there, he took a wife and fathered two children. He knew he couldn’t overcome the mental block in his people back in Egypt at that time. Perhaps he knew that things had to change before his brethren would listen and come to their senses.

In God’s time plan, events and deliverances don’t usually happen immediately. They develop over time. Sometimes we tend to get impatient. But, we should have patience and realize that the events and people involved in our lives are developing and maturing at the pace determined by God.

Moses was forty years of age when he began to see the light and make his move toward freedom. He then fled into

the hills and remained there for ANOTHER FORTY YEARS before his way was made clear to him. His mission was clarified and confirmed in the wilderness of Mount Sinai.

Moses had developed and matured. As it turned out, events in Egypt had also developed and matured. Israel had suffered an additional forty years of enslavement. By this time the captive Israelites weren’t quite as happy with their enslavement as they had been when Moses fled 40 years earlier. In fact, it says that they were crying to the Lord. Apparently, their slavemasters had become less popular, and the children of Israel decided that they needed some relief. But the problem now was that they couldn’t leave. The Egyptian government had also developed and matured and had become too large and powerful for the Israelites to escape.

QUESTION: Don’t men who choose to become pastors or religious leaders do so because they receive some kind of supernatural call or vision from God?

ACTS 7:30-35 THE BURNING BUSH - MESSENGER OF GOD

And when (another) forty years were fulfilled, there appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai a messenger in a flame of fire in a thornbush.

When Moses saw it, he wondered at the sight: and as he was approaching to observe it, the Lord’s voice came,

Saying, ‘I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob.’ Trembling, Moses dared not behold.

But the Lord said to him, "Put off your shoes from off your feet, for the place upon which you stand is holy ground.

"I observed and saw the abuse of my people in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you into Egypt."

This Moses whom they disavowed, saying, "Who made you a chief and a judge?" the same did God send to be chief and deliverer together with the hand of the messenger which appeared to him in the thornbush.

IN verse 32, as well as in Exodus, it says that Yahweh spoke to Moses from the burning bush. Yet, here in verses 30 & 35 it says clearly that it was a messenger of the Lord that appeared and spoke to Moses. So, who was it?

Bible students are well aware that no one has ever actually seen Yahweh.

That is a principle pointed out clearly in the Bible. And yet, when a voice is heard, or when a vision is seen, it is sometimes reported as "hearing" Yahweh, or as "seeing" Yahweh. But, in fact, scripture tells us that they saw and heard messengers who were representing Yahweh. Therefore, even the burning bush that Moses saw was not

actually Yahweh; it was a supernatural MESSENGER sent to be Yahweh's voice.

The message was relayed and spoken as if it were Yahweh Himself speaking to Moses and explaining the role he was to play in the upcoming deliverance from Egyptian captivity.

PONDER THIS: OK. The burning-bush messenger was not Yahweh Himself. But, how about another, later messenger? How about Jesus? Does the same thing apply in His case? The message is sent from Yahweh. He is Yahweh's representative. However, he is not Yahweh Himself.

This illustrates the simple truth of Jesus' individual identity. The whole question of the difference between Jesus and Yahweh is clear. There is a distinction between the Son and the Father; between the One who sends the message, and the One who delivers the message.

ACTS 7:36-37 ANOTHER DELIVERER LIKE MOSES

He (Moses) led them out, with portents and signs in Egypt, and in the Red Sea, and in the wilderness forty years.

This same Moses said to the sons of Israel, 'God will cause a prophet like me to stand up out of your brethren.

ANOTHER 40 years of Moses' life was depicted in Stephen's chronological history of Israel. Moses had turned 120 years old in Stephen's narrative.

Then, in verse 37, Stephen hits a

nerve. He subtly compares the Sanhedrin's reaction to Jesus with Israel's reaction to Moses 24 centuries earlier. He tells the Sanhedrin, "Just as Israel rejected Moses, who became the chief and the judge in Israel, so have

you also rejected "the prophet like Moses that Yahweh raised up of our own brethren."

With that, Stephen sealed his fate! The Sanhedrin would never allow Stephen to continue saying such things.

A comparison of these two deliverers – Moses and Jesus – requires that we first identify the kind of deliverer Moses was.

1. He miraculously survived the purge of infants in Egypt.
2. He was an educated man, knowing the ways of both Egypt and God.
3. He rejected Egypt's central government, and raised a new mindset, resulting in Pharaoh losing control over the Israel people.
4. Moses led Israel out of the slavery of Egyptian central government.
5. He taught law and liberty.

Now, the prophecy said that a new Deliverer would appear, and He would be like Moses. Of course, this prophecy was about Jesus.

1. Jesus, like Moses, survived the government's purge of infants.
2. Like Moses, Jesus was educated. He could reason with the "doctors" when He was only 12 years old.
3. Also, like Moses, Jesus rejected the central government of His time. He told the Sanhedrin they were thieves and serpents. And, as Moses, Jesus raised a new mindset in his followers.
4. Jesus, like Moses, showed Israel the path out of slavery.
5. Jesus taught law and liberty. He was the prophesied deliverer "like unto Moses."

Just imagine how the Sanhedrin bristled with hatred when Stephen accused them of being like those who rejected Moses centuries earlier.

QUESTION: Will God raise up another man during these troubled times to deliver us out of the captivity we are presently in?

ACTS 7:38 THE ECCLESIA IN THE WILDERNESS

This is he (Moses), that was in the ecclesia in the wilderness with the messenger speaking to him in the Mount Sinai, and about our fathers: who received living words to give to you:

THE King James version, and most English versions, incorrectly use the word "church" instead of "ecclesia," in this verse.

The Greek word for "church" is KURIAKON (refer to ACM special publication: *WHAT IS THE ECCLESIA*). But, the Greek word in this verse is not "kuriakon." It is "ECCLESIA." "Ecclesia" translated into English is still "ECCLESIA," and it means "community" or "body politic" – NOT "church." Over the centuries, the churches have conspired to replace the Biblical word, "ecclesia," with the religious word, "church." Thus Christians now assume the Bible talks about churches instead of communities. This is a great problem in America.

To some this may seem inconsequential. However, a big difference between the two terms can be observed if one looks closely at the institution Moses and the children of Israel developed in the wilderness. Acts 7:38 calls

this institution "the ecclesia in the wilderness."

The ecclesia in the wilderness was NOT a church! It was not a religious establishment. It was a self-governing community. They had a community (or society) free from central rulers, police forces, standing armies, corporations, banks, national debt, or government encroachment upon personal privacy. Israel was a political body – a nation – and it is described by Stephen as "an ecclesia." In fact, within the national ecclesia, there were 12 sub-ecclesias – i.e., tribes, clans, or communities.

(See the accompanying section on the next page for a more detailed description of an ecclesia.)

Also notice that the King James Version of the Bible uses the words "lively oracles" in verse 38. This is an obscure way of saying "living words," as we have correctly rendered it.

QUESTION: But aren't you forgetting that we have a more complex, technologically-advanced society than ancient Israel? A "patriarchal-type" government might possibly work for a more primitive society, but how could it possibly cover all the intricacies of modern civilization?

PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY: THE ECCLESIA SYSTEM

A Christian Ecclesia is a community, or unit of society, independent of other governments and under a patriarchal form of self-government.

It is **SELF-GOVERNING** in that its members are each independent, responsible and self-governing.

It is **PATRIARCHAL** in the way the tribes (communities) of Israel once functioned – independently and with patriarchs as leaders. Christian Ecclesias have patriarchs, not a rulers. Patriarchs lead their communities (tribes) like a husband leads a household – with Christ as its ultimate Head. Patriarchal society was the form organized by God among the families of Jacob Israel. Ecclesian society is built upon a similar civil structure.

This Godly government (based upon Christian Self-Discipline) is quite different from central government. Detractors try to say that self-government cannot work. They say it is insufficient by itself to keep order in a land. But the Bible says otherwise.

The civil association (co-op) of Israelite patriarchal societies is the type we find in the book of Judges when God was King in Israel, and there were no human kings, rulers or lawmakers. Each individual, and each family, were free and personally accountable to do what they believed to be right (Judges 21:25). Their leadership came from their patriarchs and judges. These leaders, in turn, depended upon direction from God and His law.

The patriarchs and judges were **NOT RULERS**. They were elders and statesmen; family men and farmers. They were community leaders. They had no policemen, no soldiers, no hired thugs to force bad laws or taxes upon a subjugated people.

The people were free. What little funding was required to facilitate the cooperative civil business between the tribe units was derived from freely-given donations (tithes) – as they were needed and deserved. There was no central enforcement agency to come and beat down their doors, weapons-in-hand, to force them to pay taxes, or to register their swords ... or their children. Tithes were given freely. They were not forcibly **TAXED!**

Rulers tax their citizens! Free societies voluntarily **TITHE** in obedience to God to support their leaders. There is a great difference. Tax is mandatory; tithe

is voluntary. The power to tax is the power to destroy. Any government with this power is the enemy of the people.

In a Christian Ecclesia, God is the only lawgiver, and the ultimate Judge. There can be no central legislature to create laws. The church system then would lose its government backing to stifle our thinking ability.

Patriarchs are leaders of large family-type units called clans or tribes. A clan, or tribe, may be large enough to constitute a whole community.

When Joshua took the Children of Israel into the Promised Land, it was divided into 12 large parcels and apportioned among the 12 Clans (the families of the 12 sons of Jacob). Each clan (tribe) was an independent community, and it inherited an apportioned parcel of land to be divided and used by each of its families. Each tribe, with its lands, was led by its own recognized patriarch. The patriarchs and judges of the various tribes periodically met in Jerusalem. These meetings were usually called “Feasts.” There, the leaders worked out details of cooperation with regard to national affairs. The independent clans cooperated with one another freely – NOT because of inter-tribal government and professional armies (federal police, central agencies, taxing agencies, etc.).

In a patriarchal society – without central lawmakers, and without government-hired police thugs – society would thrive. Commerce, creativity and enterprise would not be shackled down and starved as it is by today’s central-government environment. Cooperation between people and communities would happen freely. Natural cooperation and planning would make central bureaus obsolete, and men would be prevented from organizing “governments” to conspire, monopolize, control, defraud and create banking laws to take advantage of individual families.

The same is true with regard to a defense system. Temporarily banding together for the purpose of helping and defending each other is a function of the Ecclesia System. But, a professional, government-funded army is the first sign of a tyrannical government system.

ACTS 7:39-41 OVERCOMING THE SLAVE MENTALITY

Which (living words) our fathers were unwilling to obey, but pushed away, and turned their hearts back again toward Egypt,

Saying to Aaron, Make us gods to go before us: for this Moses, who led us out of the land of Egypt, we know not what has become of him.”

And they made a calf in those days, and brought up sacrifice to the idol, and reveled in the works of their own hands.

STEPHEN continues his defense, and increasingly infuriates the Sanhedrin. They understood that he was comparing their faithless with the faithlessness of those who rejected Moses. They turned back to Egypt ... and now the priests were again doing the same in Jerusalem.

In other words, the Sanhedrin was repeating the past sins of Israel ... rejecting the laws of God – the laws that produce freedom. The Sanhedrin had opted for the laws that produce slavery. They preferred the Beast System ... the same as all predators prefer it ... because they intend to be the predators and not the prey.

Freedom intimidates slaves. Once the Children of Israel were freed, it took a while for them to grow out of their slave mentality. The fresh air of freedom smelled wrong in their slavish noses. They had escaped from the slavery of Egyptian central government and claimed that they wanted freedom. But their minds were still in the slave paradigm. They were still thinking in terms of human “rulers” being necessary for civilized society. They still thought they needed men to rule them ... as gods rule. They thought they wanted freedom, but they didn’t understand what freedom really was. Thus, they tried to place Moses on a pedestal as a ruler ... as they had been programmed to think in Egypt.

They thought Moses was going to be their ruler! They looked to Moses – rather than Yahweh – as the one who had delivered them from Pharaoh.

They were still equating society with Centralism. As a result, when Moses didn’t return from the mountain

quickly, they feared he was lost, which left them with no ruler – no government – no god.

They still had their ecclesia, and their freedom. But their minds were still darkened and unable to reason rightly.

This is the problem you face when you rely on men. Men-gods can get lost. They can stumble, and they can die. But, when you rely on Yahweh, your God never gets lost or dies. The Israelites, however, weren’t relying on Yahweh. When Moses didn’t return right away, they wanted another god to hold before them. (*“These be thy gods, O Israel ... “ Exodus 32:4)*

As stated above, it takes a while for freed slaves to lose their slave mentality. You can relate this to people today. Americans, and subjects of central governments all around the world, find it hard to conceive of life without central rulers. Living under slavery naturally begets a slave mentality.

We must learn to stop thinking like slaves. Some of us learn more slowly than others. But we must work our way out of the slave mentality. Don’t be impatient with others. And don’t be critical of others who disagree with you as to small details, or what methods we should be using. None of us are doing this totally right. We’re all groping for answers. But as we come out, and as the fog clears, we increasingly see things more correctly. God willing, the process will continue, and liberty will clarify in our minds. But, we must first learn to stop looking to rulers as a viable form of government.

In verse 41, Stephen reminded the Sanhedrin that the ancient Israelites wrongly rejoiced in the gods (works)

of their own hands – a reference to man-made laws and governments – precisely our national problem today. Of course, verse 41 focuses on the golden idol that the Israelites sculpted with their hands. That golden idol was the symbol of their centralized, enslaved mentality. Man-made government is the ultimate and perennial idolatry of fallen societies: the crux of this series of lessons, and the theme of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation.

Men’s natural tendency is to want to rejoice in themselves – their own laws – the works of their own hands. They think they can make laws that will protect them! They think they can make laws that will save them! They think they can muster an army that will save them, and preserve their fortunes, their constitutions and their governments!

But, this is not the way of God! In a Christian ecclesia, God provides order and the laws under which to live. He would not have us making our own laws and governments. Centralized professional armies are forbidden since they are only mercenaries hired by government to force its will upon its subjects.

Yes, God’s way allows, and even provides, for defense – on the personal level as well as the national. However, God does not condone a professional standing army. Free men may band together, voluntarily, and cooperate in a united defense against enemies. They may even band together, voluntarily, for an attack upon enemies if it is rightfully needed. But, a godly military (militia) must be of free men – not men hired and/or conscripted by central government with its own evil agenda.

God’s laws help the people. Man-made laws help only the politicians and bankers.

God’s plan for personal and national defense protects us. Armies organized and owned by central governments protect only the politicians and bankers.

God saves the people. Man’s government saves only itself.

Truth exposes those who would hurt us. We will survive only if we quit worshipping man’s government. When our people learn that central government is idolatry then we will begin to accomplish the works that truly benefit us, our

land, and our posterity. Only then can we enjoy real liberty, blessings, and fulfillment of life.

QUESTION: Aren't you confusing "idolatry" with people simply seeking security in a leader they can see and hear? People can't see or hear Jesus.

PONDER THIS: The situation described by Stephen is very similar to one we have today in America. When a new president comes into office the voters expect great things from him. Then, after the novelty period wears off, the people begin to realize their new god is just another crook, and he is doing what elected crooks have always done - i.e., he breaks all his campaign promises, he raises taxes, and forgets about the needs of the people. So the people want the "bum" thrown out.

Their new "god" is actually "a bum" - so they wish they could have a new god to replace him.

Thus, every four years, for the last 200 years, the American people have elected a new set of bum gods. (*"Make us gods to go before us."* Acts 7:40)

To this day, our people still have not learned to trust Yahweh instead of "bums".

ACTS 7:42-43 GOD TURNED ISRAEL OVER TO ADVERSARIES

Then God turned and gave them up to worship the host (multitude) of heaven (government), as it was written in the book of the prophets, "Your offerings and sacrifices were not to Me the forty years in the wilderness, House of Israel.

"And you took up the tent of Moloch, and the star of the god Rompha, the figures which you made to worship them: and I will deport you beyond Babylon."

WHAT is meant by, "God turned?" Simply this: Yahweh resigned as Israel's husband. This is recorded in I Samuel 8.

A husband protects his wife and family from enemies. But a good husband will not ignore his family's errors and/or sins. He won't ignore their need for correction. But, at the same time he won't let the adversary come in and harm them even if they are making errors.

Yahweh was Israel's husband and protector for a time ... but then He "turned". He turned and gave Israel up to worshipping the host of heaven (multitudes in government), because Israel had rejected Him and His laws. Israel

proved to be an unfaithful wife - a harlot - and so God gave her over to the things she desired. He, in effect, let her go so she would learn the hard way that the things she lusted after were harmful. God's way was to step back and let Israel reap what she was sowing. He divorced her and quit protecting her from the natural consequences of her sins ... just as fathers must do with their own children at times.

Modern political definitions of "king" and "kingdom" are somewhat different from their use in scripture. Modern man sees a king as a ruler, and his kingdom as his conquered, or inherited, domain. This also corresponds to the Babylonian approach to govern-

ment. Scripture, however, relates "king" and "kingdom" as husband and wife. Israel was Yahweh's wife. He was King, and she was His kingdom. But, she committed adultery and took up foreign lovers - the gods (government systems) of foreign nations. She consorted with Moloch and Rompha: the governments and customs of neighboring nations whose systems were based upon heathen religious and political principles.

Israel was determined in her harlotry, refusing to repent and return to her Husband (Yahweh). Thus, Yahweh had to put her away (divorce her) in accordance with his own law. He put her away (i.e., divorced her), removed

His personal presence and protection, allowing her to experience the degrading results of the ways which she sought. He gave her over to the political/religious captivity of Moloch and Rompha – a journey which would eventually carry her into Babylon (and even be-

yond the old Babylon ... to the modern Babylon of confusion and the one-world system referred to as “Babylon The Great.” Rev. 17:5)

By the way, in Acts 7:42 Stephen refers to an additional forty years – making a total of 120 years in the saga

of Moses. This time frame covers the whole life span of Moses comprised of three periods of forty years – forty years in Egypt, followed by forty years in Midian, and then forty years in the wilderness after the exodus.

ACTS 7:44-50 GOD IN A BOX

To our fathers in the wilderness, the tent of witness was made as ordered by the One speaking to Moses, according to the figure that he had seen.

Which also, having received it, our fathers brought with Joshua into the possession of the nations, whom God drove out from the face of our fathers, until the days of David;

Who found grace before God, and desired to find a tent (physical dwelling) for the God of Jacob.

But Solomon built Him a house.

But the Most High dwells not in houses made with hands; as said the prophet,

“To Me, heaven is the throne, and earth is the footstool of my feet: what house or place of resting will you build Me?” says the Lord?

“Has not my hand made all these things?”

THE King James Version chose the word “Jesus” rather than “Joshua” in verse 45. The Hebrew word “Yashua” became “Iasou” in Greek and “Iasus” in English. In translating into English, the Greek “Y” and “I” were anglicized to “J.” Thus, the Hebrew “Yashua” became “Joshua,” and “Iasus” became “Jesus.” Thus, “Yashua,” “Joshua,” “Iasou,” and “Jesus” are all the same names. For reasons unknown, the KJV inserted “Jesus” instead of “Joshua” in verse 45. However, Joshua (Moses’ successor) is the actual one intended.

The “tent of witness” in verse 44 refers to the tent which housed the Ark of the Covenant in which were the laws of God. The tent of witness was, first, with our fathers in the wilderness. It then went into Canaan when they took possession of that land. Thus, it remained in their possession – up to the time of David.

Keep in mind that Stephen’s trial before the Sanhedrin was probably held in the building they called “the temple” – or in other words, the perverted, Babylonian-style counterfeit of that ancient “tent of meeting.” So, when Stephen said that Solomon built God a house (temple), he is actually jabbing the Sanhedrin in another sensitive place. It must have been obvious that Stephen was drawing a correlation between Solomon’s sins and the Sanhedrin’s sins.

Stephen then dropped the bomb! He reminded them, “The Most High dwells not in houses made with hands”...

Solomon, also, emerges from this looking bad. He made some big errors.

One of the errors he made, according to Stephen, was thinking that God could be contained in a house. Solomon, himself, was forced to admit, later, that the whole heaven and earth couldn’t contain Yahweh. Granted, Solomon was “wise,” but he still made some bad misjudgments. Solomon went astray even worse than his father, David. He lost grace in the sight of God. His name became synonymous with the institution of Monarchy in Israel ... and all the wealth, abuse, and idolatry that accompanies it.

But the important point Stephen was making is that the Sanhedrin’s temple could not house God ... even if He was willing to enter it (which He was not). Yahweh does not live in man-made temples. God hates centralized temples – like those on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C.

Man repeatedly attempts to harness God’s essence and confine it inside his own personal temples, or organizations. This, he hopes, will give him power over others. Men who attempt to conquer other men through this method are called sorcerers, priests, politicians, rulers, pharaohs, etc..

QUESTION: What about separation of Church and State? Should religion and government be allowed to mix?

ACTS 7:51-53 THE SUMMATION

You stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the holy spirit: as your fathers did, so do you.

Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed them who predicted the coming of the Righteous One, of whom you have now become the betrayers and murderers:

You who received the law by the dispensation of messengers, and have not kept it.

THERE was the dramatic climax of Stephen's defense. He finishes boldly by clarifying his indictment of them in terms no one could miss. He told them that they were unrepentant stiffnecked liars whose fathers murdered the prophets. He didn't mince words. He told them they were the betrayers and the murderers of the Just One (Jesus). He told the members of the Sanhedrin, "Your fathers chose man's law over God's law, and so have you. Your fathers killed the prophets and suppressed the truth about government, and so have you. You are fulfilling the sins of your fathers!"

He said "You received God's laws but rejected them."

That wicked generation in Jerusalem still had the option of following the written laws of God. But, the rulers continually rejected God's laws and replaced them with legislation to suit themselves.

By the end of Stephen's disertation the Sanhedrin had had their fill of him ... and you can see why they slew him.

This trial was somewhat public, and there may have been spectators in the temple ... watching. The government's dirty laundry was being aired by Stephen. He had successfully turned the tables on the rulers. What

started out as a trial of Stephen actually ended up being a trial of the Sanhedrin. And they didn't like being exposed.

QUESTION: Wasn't it unwise of Stephen to anger the establishment since they were looking for an excuse to condemn him?

ACTS 7:54-60 GOVERNMENT RESPONDS

But, hearing these things they were cut through to their hearts and they gnashed their teeth at him.

But he, being full of holy spirit and fixed upon heaven (Christ's Reign), and perceiving God's glory, with Jesus at the right of God,

He said, "Lo, I perceive the heavens having been opened, and the Son of man standing at the right of God."

They cried out in a great voice together and held their ears, and in unison they rushed upon him,

And having cast him out of the city, they were stoning him: and the witnesses laid off their cloaks beside a young man's feet, who was called Saul.

And they stoned Stephen, who was calling upon Lord Jesus, saying, "Receive my spirit."

And kneeling down he cried with a loud voice, "Lord, let not this sin stand to them." And having said this, he fell asleep

IN verse 54 "gnash" actually means to grate the teeth in rage. They may have literally frothed at the mouth over the ugly truth exposed by Stephen's sermon.

Stephen had hit his target. His verbal spear sunk deep into the hearts of the Sanhedrin.

Reading verses 55 and 56, from the traditional religious standpoint, one may be left with the impression that Stephen looked upward to the ceiling of the temple and caught sight of Yahweh with Jesus standing there at his right ... in spite of the fact that 1 Jn. 4:12 says that "no man has seen God."

The churches, presumably, suppose this was to comfort him while he died. If Hollywood was making a movie about Stephen, this presumed scenario would no doubt appear on the screen.

But, let us not get carried away with the strange imaginations of the churches.

Stephen wasn't having a mystical, other-worldly experience, as the churches teach. He wasn't gazing into the sky in order to escape reality ... like a monk in a monastery, or an ecstatic shaman. Rather, Stephen was boldly making his closing statement. He looked right in the face of these so-called priests and told them that they weren't his rulers. He stated the fact that Jesus was reigning on the throne of David. This was God's true Kingdom, which stood opposed to the Sanhedrin's government system.

Again, this sermon, this conflict – the whole scenario that we are studying in the book of Acts – is dealing with the Kingdom of God versus the governments of men. Stephen left the Sanhedrin, and the spectators in the temple, with that statement ... telling them that the Sanhedrin government was unlawful, and it was not acceptable to God. Jesus was at the right of God, and He alone was the Great Shepherd over Israel – man-made governments and laws have no place in God's Kingdom.

The witnessing spectators in the temple watched the enraged Sanhedrin members go berserk, seize Stephen, take him to the city edge and murder him. They then laid their cloaks at the feet of Saul.

Now Saul, was the man who was to become Paul – perhaps, the second greatest spokesman for Christianity ... second only to Jesus Himself. Paul would later be called-out and appointed to be an Apostle. But here, he was still Saul – a government operative.

In verse 59, “commend my spirit” means “let me die.” Stephen wasn't looking forward to dying, but he was already mortally wounded and had no choice. He therefore prays, “Let death come quickly.”

Verse 60 says that Stephen “fell asleep” (i.e., he died).

The second part of verse 60 may seem a little puzzling. What did Stephen

mean by, “let not this sin stand to them”? The King James Version rendered it: “... lay not this sin to their charge.” But, it is hard to believe that Stephen was attempting to exonerate the same Sanhedrin that, only minutes earlier, he had viciously attacked and condemned in his sermon. It is more plausible that the KJV rendering is incorrect, and Stephen actually meant “... let not the Sanhedrin's sin stand for the whole people.” Or, he may have meant, “... let not this sin (this idolatry) remain among this people” (i.e., purge it from them). That would have been more consistent with the theme of Stephen's message.

Centuries earlier, the prophet Jeremiah, finding himself in a somewhat similar predicament, complained to God about his fellow countrymen who were destroying the nation. His prayer is recorded in the book of Jeremiah, chapter 18:

19. Give heed to me, O Lord, and hearken to the voice of them that contend with me.

20. Shall evil be recompensed for good? for they have digged a pit for my soul. Remember that I stood before you to speak good for them, and to turn away your wrath from them.

21. Therefore deliver up their children to the famine, and pour out their blood by the force of the sword; and let their wives be bereaved of their children, and be widows; and let their men be put to death; let their young men be slain by the sword in battle.

22. Let a cry be heard from their houses, when you shall bring a troop suddenly upon them: for they have digged a pit to take me, and hid snares for my feet.

23. Yet, Lord you know all their counsel against me to slay me: forgive not their iniquity, neither blot out their sin from your sight, but let them be overthrown before you; deal thus with them in the time of your anger.”

In Jeremiah, chapter 19, Yahweh responds to Jeremiah's prayer:

11. ... Thus says the Lord of hosts; Even so will I break this people and this city (Jerusalem), as one breaks a potter's vessel, that cannot be made whole again: and they shall bury them into Tophet (Gehenna; i.e., refuse pit), till there be no place to bury.

12. Thus will I do to this place, says the Lord, and to the inhabitants thereof, and even make this city as Tophet (Gehenna).

In light of this clear example of how to deal with men like those who stoned Stephen, the traditional church interpretation of Stephen's last statement is not likely. God prefers to turn their city into Gehenna – a burning pit of refuse. “*The wicked shall be turned into hell (Gehenna), and all the nations that forget God.*” Psalm 9:17.

Stephen had been brutally murdered. But he had forced the murderers to act out their formerly concealed and disguised hatred for God. They exposed themselves publicly by stoning Stephen – an innocent man – and by openly showing their hatred for God.

Does this happen today? Do powerful men in government disguise themselves to appear to be upright, decent folk ... while they hide and disguise their hatred for God? Then when a crisis happens, pushing them to react without thinking or controlling themselves, suddenly that venom, that hatred for God and His laws, comes forth. We have seen it in politics and the media. Well, that is what happened also there in Jerusalem.

Within just a few months, the Sanhedrin had made at least two huge political mistakes. Their first huge mistake was murdering Christ. The second mistake, also of great consequence, was murdering Stephen. Why were they committing such errors? Had they suddenly lost their wisdom? This wasn't good policy for a central government that wanted to keep control of the people and the land.

HOW ONE RULES A THOUSAND

A ruler is a tyrant by definition. Western culture is programmed to accept a “ruler” while rejecting a “tyrant” ... but in fact they are the same.

In order to better understand the sins of the Sanhedrin, or any ruling government, let’s consider some principles of rulers. We’ll start with the basics.

One man alone cannot rule a multitude of people. It is physically impossible. One man, alone, cannot force a multitude to do his will. One man, alone, cannot force one hundred people to submit to him. In fact, one man, in most cases, unless he’s very exceptional, cannot force even ten men to do his bidding and serve him. Therefore, a ruler needs help if he is to control large numbers of people.

Help comes in the form of “supporters.” The supporters (citizens) join ranks because they hope to share in the spoils taken by the ruler. Rulers are supported by banks, the military, bar associations (i.e., lawyers), churches, and individuals with depraved minds. They support because they hope to profit from their affiliation with the criminals at the top..

These supporters are the corporations, bankers, military, police, businessmen and common citizens who are without scruples and are not opposed to participating in thievery and murder. Supporters enjoy special privileges (charters, government contracts, monopolies, police protection, tax exemption, etc.).

Rulers are professional thieves who have learned how to steal and murder without the normal risks and reprisals. By controlling and perverting the laws and the courts they legally steal the wealth that the people produce and reduce them to slaves

The rulers’ circle of friends protects them from wrath should any of their

victims ever grow tired of being robbed.

Because of the tenuous nature of this adventure (i.e., legalized thievery) where a few men control many, rulers cannot allow their thievery and murder to be defined as “thievery” and “murder.” Exposure could cause them to lose credibility, public support, and eventually cause them to also lose their private circle of powerful friends necessary to their existence.

Rulers must maintain a front of public credibility. This they do by lies, brainwashing, carefully practiced oratory, and complete control of public media. They must preserve the illusion that they are necessary. If they don’t maintain credibility they risk losing their public support, and their ability to rule.

Rulers rule by recruiting small criminals (citizens) into a conspiracy of organized crime called “government.” They bribe unscrupulous citizens by offering to share power, wealth and property taken from the public.

So you can see why the Sanhedrin, or any government, panics at the thought of public exposure. They invent cover-ups. They implement damage-control measures. We’ve seen this many times in our day. Cover-ups abound in Washington D.C.. Military actions, wars, elections, and bank failures are covered up and spun to create the desired effect and prevent unwanted exposure.

The cover-up of the assassination of John Kennedy, for example, was sufficient to illustrate government policy in such adventures. Anyone who was half awake could see through the cover-up. Yet, the faked story is the official government explanation of the incident still today. Governments have perfected the art of cover-up since the time of Stephen.

But, exposure was what Jesus and Stephen brought to the criminals in gov-

ernment in Jerusalem. The rulers and their circle of backers were losing their illusion of credibility.

That was why the Sanhedrin overreacted. That was why they stumbled and erred. They acted out of character, exposed themselves and their true motives which they could not cover up.

Stephen exposed them. Moreover, the effect of Stephen’s message continued, and has continued on through the ages. It was an important event at the time, and its effect is felt even today. It was one of the turning points of history.

QUESTION: There are many exposés by newspapers and patriotic newsletters about the current evils in government, which, appear to be against the government ... like Stephen’s expose was against the government in his day. Yet, these modern exposés never have any effect upon our modern rulers. Their circle of backers remain strong and they get away with murder! What was different about Stephen’s expose that made it successful?

END OF LESSON SEVEN. FOR ANSWERS AND NOTES SEE ENCLOSED “ANSWER SECTION.”

ANSWERS & COMMENTS

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES CHAPTER SEVEN:

POINTS TO REMEMBER:

1. Stephen followed in the footsteps of Jesus. He promoted Christ's Reign. The government in Jerusalem was opposed to the Christ's Reign and anyone who promoted it. The politicians and priests murdered Stephen to shut him up because he was exposing their system. They murdered Stephen for similar reasons that they murdered Jesus.

2. Stephen was a threat to government because truth is always a threat to government. The government in Jerusalem resented truth.

3. The murder of Stephen was one of many mistakes Jerusalem made to contribute to its own downfall. The prophets had declared that Jerusalem would fall, and it did. In 70 AD, the Roman general Titus invaded and razed Jerusalem.

4. Those who follow the laws of God usually find themselves at enmity with the governments of men. Man-made governments are almost always centralist. Central rule is prohibited by the laws of God.

5. God's judgment upon Jerusalem was destruction.

6. Many innocents are hurt and/or murdered by evil government systems. For a while a government may seem unanswerable to God. But judgment does eventually come, even though we might wish it to come sooner.

7. Stephen drew a parallel between the faithlessness of the Sanhedrin (his accusers) and the faithlessness of Israelites who forsook Moses and worshipped the golden calf.

8. Moses' parents, as well as Jesus' parents, elected to disobey their rulers and save their babies. Think of that next time some cowardly church-goer parrots the stupid excuse, "God commands us to obey government!"

9. In defending one of his own kindred, Moses killed an Egyptian. Today, such an action would bring a response of condemnation from the churches the same as it brought from Moses' fellow Israelites in Egypt. Churches are creatures of the state, and they condemn anyone who "defies government."

10. The Israelites in Moses' day resented his attempt to help them. The majority in Stephen's day resented him as well. The same is true again today in America.

11. Neither Jesus nor Stephen received a fair trial from central government. We should not expect fairness from heathen government.

12. Yahweh God does not appear to man. Rather, He sends messengers to appear and speak his words.

13. Stephen called the nation of Israel "the ecclesia in the wilderness." This clearly establishes an ecclesia as a social body politic.

14. Moses was neither a ruler nor a president. He was a patriarch ("chief").

15. When Israel rejected the patriarchal system, choosing to appoint a king (ruler) like the other nations, she abandoned her husband Yahweh.

16. God does not dwell in buildings (temples) built by man, whether religious, or political.

ANSWERS:

pg.3

Most of us have hoped for a collapse of the central powers, or a judgment from God that will remove their power. However, a mere collapse would not solve the problem – it would only alter the course. A true "day of the Lord" will bring with it, not only (A) a collapse of central powers, but also (B) a change of heart in the general public. "B" is required before "A" will do any good.

When will it happen? God only knows. But we should focus our efforts on learning to recognize it when it happens, and join it. Those who are not spiritually prepared will likely be blind to it when it happens. They may even fight against it.

pg.4

This land (America), in the early years, could have been called "a Christian land" ... only in the narrow sense that before the government establishment grew to huge proportions the people had the freedom to follow Christ. But the Colonial, State, and Federal governments themselves, were never Christian in nature.

pg.5

I'm no fan of Joseph McCarthy ... or of any politician living or dead for that matter. McCarthy was probably a Fascist. But the "conspiratorial theory of government" is no THEORY! Central Government can be described by no more accurate term than "criminal conspiracy."

The labels "conspiracy nut" and "hate group" are inventions of government propagandists to discredit dissenters and anyone who exposes the criminals in government.

Politicians (like McCarthy) often conspire one against another. It is all political gaming for elections, positions and power. But they never expose real crime. McCarthy, for

example, was only interested in witch hunts looking for “Communists” and demonizing political rivals.

pg. 6

God’s law does not protect abortion clinics and abortion doctors. However the Beast System does.

We live as strangers in this system, and therefore we must be aware of government powers and methods. Being aware of government is not the same as honoring it.

In God’s view, abortion clinics and abortion doctors are “without the law.” That is to say, they are “outlaws” – meaning that they operate under the protection of the Beast System. Thus, if they suffer damage they have no recourse to God’s law – but they do have the Beast System’s protection.

Living in this system, our option (as was the Israelites’ in Egypt) is to not voluntarily participate in its evils. It is not always easy to know where to draw the line between non-conformity and violence.

By the way, the crime of abortion is not just the doctors’. The mothers who consent to kill their babies are just as bad. If the father agrees, then he too is guilty.

The same applies to all who support abortion.

pg. 7

Not usually. As a rule, men become preachers for the same reasons as men become politicians – to seek power and/or celebrity. Preachers and politicians seek their offices for money, or riches, or sometimes merely to get attention. Some get started because they are just too lazy to work. But usually they “aspire” to these positions because they get a taste of criminal activity and they like it enough to make a career out of it. This certainly is no “call from God.”

Leaders whose motives are pure and noble, and who receive their calling for the right reasons, are so rare as to be almost non-existent.

There have been a few. There are still a few. But these are NOT in the government system, or the church system.

pg. 9

a) Possibly, but, not necessarily.

God gives us leaders as we need them, and as He sees fit. However, the magnitude of change that will be required to get our people headed back the right direction will require more than just a man to lead. It will require a supernatural act of God to turn the hearts of the common people.

b) With respect to law and government, all the intricacies of society, modern or otherwise, are covered by the same principles God gave to Israel approximately 2,500 years ago. These principles, originally listed in 10 parts, are summed up in saying, “Do no harm to your neighbor, and do not dishonor God.”

In other words, we can put it this way. The law of God prevents man from harming another (i.e., physically hurt him, deprive him of his property, or slander him). These principles apply to property, personal well-being, and society. They cover family, community, and national interests. What more could be needed?

pg. 12

“Idolatry” is when men (and men’s governments) are confused with God. Men are to be leaders, not gods (not lawmakers). The key to knowing the difference is this: God makes laws. Men don’t! When that line is crossed it is idolatry.

pg. 13

The mere existence of “Church” or “State” is irrefutable proof of idolatry. Whether or not they combine is another concern in that it contributes to building their power structure. The more power they have, the more trouble the people have.

“Church” and “State” are BOTH bad! Neither provides the RIGHT way to conduct society.

BOTH “Church” and “State” are creations of anti-Christ systems. BOTH are elements of Babylon.

Godly society falls under a completely different heading. Don’t be confused by propaganda and popular notions of modern government.

pg. 14

Stephen was not guilty of acting “unwise.” Rather, he found himself caught in the jaws of the Beast and had to choose from a limited number of options that were available to him. In either case, the Beast was going to hurt him – or kill him (as was the case in the end). But, Stephen didn’t ask for this. He only responded to it.

You, or I, may someday find ourselves in a similar position. With God driving your spirit, you may be surprised at how you will respond.

pg. 16

Modern “patriot” rallies and demonstrations usually fail to have the effect upon government that Stephen had ... because they lack accuracy. Patriots appeal to their captors (government) for fairness ... an inaccurate and fruitless appeal.

TRUTH is what sets men free ... not patriotism. The closer to truth we can get, the more powerful are our efforts. Stephen was accurate and on-point. If modern efforts lack power it is simply because they lack accuracy and truth.

However, men of good character fight the best they know how ... even if they are not totally accurate. The point is, their hearts are in the right place even if their minds aren’t fully purged of the old patriotic paradigms. So they make mistakes – mistakes which the Beast System uses against them to stifle them. But it is to their credit that they are doing the best they know how.

There is no shame in trying and failing. Doing nothing is a shame.
