

Acts 7:9-15

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/acts/acts-7/acts-79-15/>

Stephen teaches how Joseph, the son of Jacob, was sold into slavery by his brothers. Joseph rose to power in Egypt, stored food for a coming famine, and was able to help his family who had rejected him. Jacob and his household moved to Egypt to be with Joseph.

Stephen is on trial before the Sanhedrin, the council of 70 Pharisees and Sadducees, and the High Priest. The charge against Stephen is that he is an enemy of the Temple and the Law of Moses. But Stephen is taking this opportunity, led by the Spirit, to confront these religious leaders. He gives a sermon that summarizes relevant sections of the Old Testament, answering the accusations against him concerning the Temple and Moses, then proceeding to confront the council's unbelief.

After describing the founding covenant between God and Abraham and the descendants of Abraham (Isaac, then Jacob/Israel), Stephen continues his history lesson. Joseph was one of the 12 sons of Jacob, and he is a type of Christ (Messiah, someone who God sends to do His will). Jesus was *the* Christ, but Joseph was a type, a forerunner representing what would come.

Stephen highlights how *The patriarchs became jealous of Joseph and sold him into Egypt.*

Joseph was Jacob's favorite son. He was gifted a coat of many colors, a princely gift that was likely intended to tap Joseph as the son having the birthright of the firstborn, which would give him the highest place of authority within the family. Joseph was not the firstborn son, but he was the firstborn son of Rachel, who was the wife Jacob chose (Genesis 29:18). So Jacob intended to elevate Joseph as the firstborn of his first-chosen. Even though Joseph was ordained of God (like Jesus) Joseph was despised by his *jealous* brothers, who rejected Joseph's authority. They later have to submit to Joseph's authority, even as the Sanhedrin will have to submit. But for now, they are like Joseph's brothers and are rejecting Jesus.

Joseph was given visions by God, indicating his future rise in prominence, where also his family would bow down to him (Genesis 37:5-7, Genesis 37:9). This, together with their father's choice to appoint Joseph as the firstborn inspired bitterness in his brothers, so that they became *jealous* of him, imprisoned him, and *sold him* to slavers on their way to *Egypt*. They thought they were eliminating Joseph, but he will return. Jacob believed Joseph to be dead, but Joseph will (from Jacob's perspective) come back to life.

Yet God was with Joseph. He would eventually have the opportunity to explain this to his brothers, "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good" (Genesis 50:20). While they cast their brother away out of hatred for him, *God* was at work. He *rescued Joseph from all his afflictions, and granted him favor and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh, king of Egypt*. This was to ensure that Joseph would rise to the position of power which he had dreamed of in his youth, so that his family would be saved from coming disaster. The *Pharaoh*,

impressed by Joseph's God-given *wisdom* in interpreting dreams, *made him governor over Egypt and all his household.*

Now a famine came over all Egypt, where Joseph lived, and Canaan, where his brothers and father were. With this famine came great affliction. Crops failed, and our fathers could find no food.

But then Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt. These grain reserves were created by Joseph's governance, thanks to the foresight given him by God that famine was coming, and preparations needed to be made (Genesis 41:49).

Jacob sent our fathers, the fathers of the tribes of Israel, there the first time. On the second visit Joseph made himself known to his brothers, and Joseph's family was disclosed to Pharaoh. Then Joseph sent word and invited Jacob his father and all his relatives to come to him, seventy-five persons in all. This was how Abraham's descendants came to Egypt, and would eventually be enslaved there for four hundred years, as God foretold to Abraham (v. 6).

And Jacob went down to Egypt and there he and our fathers died. Joseph's brothers rejected Joseph, but He delivered them anyway. Now they were in Egypt, where they will grow from a mere seventy-five persons into a nation of millions.

From there they were removed to Shechem and laid in the tomb which Abraham had purchased for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor in Shechem.

Genesis states that Jacob purchased a piece of land from the sons of Hamor at Shechem (Genesis 39:19). When Israel came out of Egypt, Moses carried out with them Joseph's bones, to fulfill a vow the sons of Israel made to Joseph (Exodus 13:19). They buried Joseph's bones in Canaan at Shechem, in the piece of ground Jacob had bought from the sons of Hamor (Joshua 24:32). It is not apparent why Stephen here states that it was Abraham who purchased the land from the sons of Hamor, rather than Jacob. It seems likely that Stephen's rendition includes some aspect of Jewish oral tradition, that is now added to scripture by way of Stephen's sermon. Given the hostile audience, they would have pounced on Stephen if he made an error. Perhaps Abraham had originally purchased the land, and it had to be repurchased since Abraham dwelt elsewhere.

Joseph's faithfulness brought him blessing out of difficulty. It provided survival for the descendants of Abraham. It also set the stage for fulfilling God's prophecy that Abraham's descendants would be in bondage for 400 years (v. 6). There were a mere *seventy-five persons* in the household of Israel when they immigrated to Egypt, and when they come out, there were possibly a couple of million ([see commentary on Exodus 12:37-41](#)).

Joseph was a type of Christ. He was appointed as the firstborn, but rejected and sent away from Israel. He was thought to be dead, but returned after a fashion and saved the people of Israel. This has a parallel with Jesus. Jesus is the firstborn, the ruler over all creation (Colossians 1:15). He was rejected (Acts 3:14-15). He has gone away to heaven (Acts 1:9). And when He returns, Israel will recognize Him (Revelation 1:7). Israel rejected Him, but He did not reject them; He will save His people (Romans 11:26).

Stephen has now covered from the time of Abraham until the time of Israel's exodus from Egypt. This is roughly a period of five hundred years. For convenience and simplicity, this can be considered roughly 2000 BC to 1500 BC.

Biblical Text

9 “The patriarchs became jealous of Joseph and sold him into Egypt. Yet God was with him, 10 and rescued him from all his afflictions, and granted him favor and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and he made him governor over Egypt and all his household. 11 “Now a famine came over all Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction with it, and our fathers could find no food. 12 But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our fathers there the first time. 13 On the second visit Joseph made himself known to his brothers, and Joseph's family was disclosed to Pharaoh. 14 Then Joseph sent word and invited Jacob his father and all his relatives to come to him, seventy-five persons in all. 15 And Jacob went down to Egypt and there he and our fathers died. 16 From there they were removed to Shechem and laid in the tomb which Abraham had purchased for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor in Shechem.