

The Just shall live by Faith

Volume 1 - Study Acts 7:55 Stephen full of the Holy Ghost and faith was stoned and gazed into heaven and said 'Jesus receive my spirit'.

C. Ronald Johnson, Christian Wilderness Press: Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost. When they heard...they were cut to the heart...but he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven...and said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.

These are brief studies, not
"teachings" or "doctrines."

Volume 1, Study 1

Stephen's Sermon

Acts 7: 11 (KJV) is well into Stephen's final and fatal opportunity of sharing his heart with his beloved countrymen -

7:11-13) Now there came a dearth over all the land of Egypt and Chanaan, and great affliction: and our fathers found no sustenance. But when Jacob heard that there was corn in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first. And at the second time Joseph was made known to his brethren; and Joseph's kindred was made known unto Pharaoh.

Stephen is sharing what all of his hearers rightly know. And I am sharing to the reader what he should already know of this passage in Acts and also something of Israel's history in Egypt. I will be commenting as we go.

Here is the introduction of the Chosen Family to Egypt and Egypt to the Chosen Family. The time is well into God's Plan of the Ages. He began long ago with Adam and now He is going to bond, for a specific chosen period, the Family with the country of Egypt during Egypt's teenage years when she was blooming into her first flowering season as a great worldly nation. This occurred during the reign of Senwosret III of Egypt's 12th Dynasty.

7:14-20) Then sent Joseph, and called his father Jacob to him, and all his kindred, three-score and fifteen souls. So Jacob went down into Egypt, and died, he, and our fathers, And were carried over into Sychem [i.e. Shechem in Canaan], and laid [them] in the sepulchre that Abraham bought [several generations earlier] for a sum of money of the sons of Emmor the father of Sychem. But when the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn to Abraham [regarding a people Israel to enter the land promised], the people grew and multiplied in Egypt, Till another king arose, which knew not Joseph. The same dealt subtilly with our kindred, and evil entreated our fathers, so that they cast out their young children, to the end they might not live. In which [appointed] time Moses was born, and was exceeding fair, and nourished up in his father's house three months:

Joseph had been in Egypt (God using him) and he participated in Egypt's early "coming of age" years. He would live 120 years and serve each succeeding pharaoh, and in the process he would lead in the establishment of Egypt's bureaucratic foundations which carried her into and through the age of the great nations north and south of Palestine.

Moses lived forty years in Egypt in the house of one of the greatest Pharaohs in Egypt's history, Thutmosis III of the 18th Dynasty. Therefore, Moses was exposed to and trained in a great nation in its first great period of conquests. He witnessed and participated in some of her first great conquests from Ethiopia all the way north to the Euphrates River.

(The life of Moses and the Exodus Epoch is told in GOD'S ROCK. Facts of Thutmosis III and Moses, as general in leading in the conquest of Ethiopia, can be found in that book's Chronology, Appendix VI.) Very many churchmen, and thus very many Christians, have accepted the modern worldly notion that the time of the Exodus was during Egypt's 19th Dynasty and that the Pharaoh was Ramesses II.

In modern concepts of world history, Ramesses II is considered to be a token king representing the whole of Egypt's greatness, which consequently has led to the mistaken notion that the time of the Exodus occurred during the 19th Dynasty. But *Ramesses II was some 140 years after the actual event of the Exodus.* The successes of this "Ramessied

Dynasty” were due to a decline of power in Assyria which occurred during the earlier years of the Time of the Judges in Israel. In that period Israel was insignificant and was essentially ignored by the great powers to the north and south.

7:21-29) And when he was cast out, Pharaoh's daughter took him up, and nourished him for her own son. And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds. And when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel. And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian: For he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not. And the next day he shewed himself unto them as they strove, and would have set them at one again, saying, Sirs, ye are brethren; why do ye wrong one to another? But he that did his neighbour wrong thrust him away, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us? Wilt thou kill me, as thou diddest the Egyptian yesterday? Then fled Moses at this saying, and was a stranger in the land of Madian, where he begat two sons.

Just as scripture tells practically nothing of the years of Israel’s growth in her first 200 years in Egypt, or of the degradation and final enslavement of God’s chosen people in the latter 200 years, similarly scripture tells little of Moses’ life between verse 29 and 30.

7:30-34) And when forty years were expired, there appeared to him in the wilderness of mount Sina an angel of the Lord in a flame of fire in a bush. When Moses saw it, he wondered at the sight: and as he drew near to behold it, the voice of the Lord came unto him, Saying, I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Then Moses trembled, and durst not behold. Then said the Lord to him, Put off thy shoes from thy feet: for the place where thou standest is holy ground. I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people which is in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send thee into Egypt.

The ‘flame of fire in a bush’ occurred in the southern region of the Sinai Peninsula where, not long after, the escaped Israelites would encamp in front of that same mountain for nearly a year, and where the tabernacle (i.e. tent) would be constructed, and where the first remembrance of Passover and the Week of Unleavened Bread would be celebrated.

7:35-36) This Moses whom they refused, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge? the same did God send to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the angel which appeared to him in the bush. He brought them out, after that he had shewed wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red sea, and in the wilderness forty years.

Note how Stephen says that Moses ‘...brought them out, after that he shewed wonders and signs’. In this, Stephen shows how connected God was to Moses and Moses was to God in the early developing of *God’s Plan of the Ages*. Indeed, when Moses spoke to the people after a conversation with God, it became very clear to the people that as far as they were concerned it was God speaking to them. In other words, their hearing from Moses was a report of the hearing of Moses from God. (This is very clear in GOD’S ROCK.) Stephen spoke his sermon in leading up to his attempt to convenience the Israelites of his day that similarly God was connected to Jesus and Jesus was connected to God in the days that Jesus walked among them. These Israelites, and especially the Jews, greatly honored Moses and the Mosaic Law; and so the apostles always quoted scripture from their Bible (the Old Testament)...as did Jesus on a regular basis.

7:37-39) This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear. This is he, that was in the church [i.e. meeting] in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and [also] with our fathers: who received the lively [i.e. life-giving] oracles to give unto us: To whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt,

Stephen connected their knowledge of how their fathers in the wildernesses of Sinai rejected Moses in their desire to return to a worldly Egypt. And so Stephen infers (amid the infilling of the Holy Spirit) that they were doing the same to the One of whom Moses prophesied.

7:40-41) Saying unto Aaron, Make us gods to go before us: for as for this Moses, which brought us out of the land of Egypt, we wot not [i.e. have not the slightest idea] what is become of him. And they made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifice unto the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands.

7:42-3) Then God turned, and gave them up to worship the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets, O ye house of Israel, have ye offered to me slain beasts and sacrifices by the space of forty years in the wilderness? Yea, ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, figures [i.e. little manufactured items] which ye made to worship them: and I will carry you away beyond Babylon.

The words of God imply: “Yes, you worshipped me in offering slain beasts and sacrifices...but you worshipped me not nearly as much as you worshipped your little crafted gods in your tents brought with you from Egypt.”

Here Stephen joins together what the Israelites did in the wildernesses in Sinai with the prophesying of God’s prophets in later years when God declared that He would send the Israelites of Judah and Jerusalem into exile in Babylon.

Stephen’s hearers knew all of this very well. They knew just how sinful the people were in those times and how God had accomplished according as He had said. Stephen implied: “And what has God been doing in your midst even as this Jesus walked among you performing by God in heaven all of the marvels and signs which you have witnessed at his hand?”

7:44-5) Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as he [i.e. God] had appointed, speaking unto Moses, that he should make it according to the fashion that he had seen. Which [tabernacle] also our fathers that came after [i.e. the sons of the generation that escaped Egypt with Moses] brought in with Jesus [i.e. Joshua] into the possession [i.e. lands] of the Gentiles [i.e. the nations of Ammon, Moab, the Amorites, and Canaan], whom God drave out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David;

Stephen has introduced the concept of the tabernacle that was made in Sinai and taken into the lands conquered by Israel because he will speak of the temple in Jerusalem. And he has introduced into his sermon the fact that Joshua took over from Moses when the fathers entered the land of promise. The people well know that ‘Joshua’ in the Hebrew language is also “Jesus”; both are “Jehoshua”; Stephen has emphasized the significance of the name as applied to Joshua...and now to Jesus.

7:46-50) Who [i.e. David] found favour before God, and desired to find a [i.e. ‘discover a more proper’] tabernacle for the God of Jacob. But [it was] Solomon [who] built him [i.e. God] an house. Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples [i.e. the word is also ‘tents’ as was the tabernacle] made with hands; as saith the prophet, Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest? Hath not my hand made all these things?

Stephen wraps up the historical setting of what he will now speak in the fullness of the Holy Spirit. He has brought the ongoing topic a) to the ‘tabernacle of Moloch (verse 43) and then b) to the tabernacle [i.e. ‘tent’] built in the Wilderness of Sinai as Moses saw “the real tent in heaven”. The Israelites escaped from Egypt and so doing had made and carried with them little models of the real tent (or tabernacle) of “the real tent in Egypt”. Likely the model was a peculiar little tent that could be folded up, suck in their baggage, and carried with them in those 40 years in the wildernesses.

Much later, when God spoke to His people by His prophets in declaring that they would be taken exile into Babylon, a significant portion of Israelites still owned similar little

tent-models along with little manufactured ‘stars’ of the god Remphan. Now this ‘star’ was probably a specially shaped (after the god Remphan) luminary object like a candle that had its own special kind of incense emitted when it was lighted.

And so c) Stephen has brought his listeners to the tabernacle (i.e. a permanent temple) which the great David desired to build...whose prophetic spiritual son would be the Messiah sent from God. Stephen now brings into the sermon the great and wonderful temple built by Solomon (so it was in the eyes of all Israelites through the ages until the time of Stephen). In the time of Stephen and his hearers, the present temple had been rebuilt by King Herod. He was quite an ungodly man and only half Israelite and had been made king over Israel by the Romans and not by the God of Heaven.

Stephen’s listeners loved this latest temple; yet, they well understand all that Stephen was saying to them, for the Holy Spirit was speaking through Stephen and drilling the words piercingly into their hearts. They knew that the present temple was far more of man than of God...far more of a half-breed placed over them by their present conquerors. They were getting this message by God’s messenger, Stephen. Resentment had been building in his listeners and was near ready to strike.

7:51-52) Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain [many of] them which shewed before [i.e. afore time] of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers:

Modernly we think and speak in terms of the ‘Holy Spirit’ and not typically of the ‘Holy Ghost’, but the translators of the KJV in England (as well as the people in Europe) understood the word ‘spirit’ in the Bible to mean *wind with a specialized meaning*.

(At that time in England and Europe many people believed in ghosts, which they considered to be either somewhat visible at times or their presence evidenced in some other manner; that is, a ghost was making its presence known to a person or people.)

Also the people knew that Jesus, after he had risen from the grave, had *winded upon* his gathered disciples. In other words, he had *breathed upon* them. The word is used in a ‘hallowing’ manner, *implying an anointing for a set-aside, or for a called or sanctified work*. The word ‘spirit’ also signifies that the very *breath* within Jesus was *enbreathed* into his disciples who had recently been elevated to the position of apostles.

This is why the translators of the KJV used ‘Ghost’, which we think is “old fashion” or even “spooky”, but it was the only way they could get across the intent of ‘spirit’ in its New Testament meaning (as they thought of it). However, note that they did not always translate the word as ‘Ghost’ but also used ‘Spirit’. In a passage when it was obvious that God was doing something in an *outstanding and observable way*, the words *Holy Ghost* were used. When in a passage that *did not contain such observable action*, the words *Holy Spirit* were used. The reader can use a concordance and verify this. Look up every place in the KJV Bible that has Holy Ghost or Holy Spirit and observe its usage in the passage. The readers of the KJV Bible at the time of its writing understood what the translators were trying to accomplish.

In our passage, Stephen compares *the killing of the God-sent prophets* by ‘the fathers’ to *the killing of the God-sent Promised One* by the people listening to his sermon. Furthermore, he calls this One ‘Just’, which means that there was no sin in him (i.e. reason to justly kill him). Stephen points back to many prophecies of the ‘Just’ Messiah, prophecies which these hearers well knew and understood. Therefore, Stephen’s words were condemning them in their unjust action of killing the Just One.

7:53) [You] Who have received the law [of God] by the disposition of angels [i.e. as God parceled it out by His ‘messengers’ through the ages], and have not kept it.

Here was that “last straw”: To these listeners, this ‘law of God’ (given to them by the great Moses and expounded upon by the prophets and in the Psalms) was the most sacred

thing. It was more sacred even than the temple and the sacrifices, because the Mosaic Law was in each person by lifelong training; and should they desire it, they could buy copies of it for their homes so as to teach it to their children. No matter what the teachers taught in the synagogue, they at home could have their personal ideas and concepts. The Law and how they personally interpreted it to themselves gave them a sense of personal holiness even if their neighbors did not quite see the Law in the same understanding.

“What do you mean ‘...and have not kept it’,” they were surely thinking as they were listening to Stephen. “Moses is the great One sent from God to our fathers and we have the very words of Moses in hallowed places in our homes.”

Dear reader, is any of our little study striking home to you just a little bit?

7:54) When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him [i.e. Stephen and his words] with their teeth. But he, being [already] full of the Holy Ghost [i.e. Holy Breath], looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.

What Stephen saw in heaven (**‘the Son of man standing on the right hand of God’**) and what he *breathed* outwardly in these *Spirit filled words* were the death of him. That is, in the same “spirit” that “righteous Israelites” shouted regarding Jesus ‘Crucify him’, in that same “spirit” Stephen’s hearers took up stones and began stoning Stephen.

7:57) Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, And cast him out of the city [i.e. where stones were littered about for such things], and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. And they stoned Stephen, [even as he was] calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

‘...he fell asleep’. It reminds me of Jesus on the cross when ‘...he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the *ghost* [i.e. his hallowed or hallowing *spirit*].



The little tents and luminary objects kept by many Israelites in their travels in the wildernesses (and continued to keep with them in the land of Israel) were personal items kept secretly. Such things were not ever shown to others, for the Law ordered such persons be killed so that the majority would not become influenced by such things. God’s people were to be ‘holy’, ‘sanctified’, and thereby ‘set-apart’ from the world...but also ‘set-apart’ even from other brethren who might be sinning by such secret things. The concept for having such “secret things” is this:

“I worship the One True God and my life is in keeping with His Word (for Israelites it was the Law). I keep the faith and march along among my brethren and together we stand for God and His purpose in this world. Even so, there are times when God seems not to be listening and therefore I have these things which over the years have proved steady and successful for me. Of course, I do not confess them as things to be counted upon, but they do work for me.”

Such “things” may include a particular congregation that prays for its members. Therefore: “Working with this group of brethren has proved a steady and success-inspiring thing in my life. Indeed, when God is not listening then I know that the group will compassionately listen.”

Or such a “thing” might be a job which “God helped me to get and the job has proved so successful and stable and motivating and...well, I find that over the years I have been able to count on it ...also on the savings it has provided...also on the nice house...and...”

Or such a “thing” might be “the education that has proven to have been quite a wise investment of my time in the labor of going through it.”

Or such a “thing” might be “parents who love so much and have worked so hard and

have left a good inheritance to me”. Or “it” might be “children who so love their parents that they fall over themselves in promising to take of me”. Or “it” might be “my physical strength or mental strength or spiritual strength or scriptural understanding or...” It might even be “a good luck charm” or “a lucky pair of socks” or “a special friend’s prayer” before I go to do something out of the ordinary, for it is then that “I need all the help I can get”. Maybe “it” is “a special little book through which God has helped me, which spiritual friends had recommended and sure enough it proved out to be *just what the doctor ordered*”.

The job, the friend, the church group, the little book...all might have been used of God to your good and proved to you how good God can be when you are in need. However, over time has “proven things” taken over as “things to be counted on”?

The God that inspired or gave or led or promised and provided those “things”...just how precious have those “things” become to you? More precious than the Giver? It is so easy to count on “what has proved to be good”, which can be *observed and understood*, which surely seems to be there even when God, whom you worship and would die for, is so very *invisible* and perhaps *so very hard of hearing* at times.

Good is good and hard is hard and only a fool would ever want the hard over the good. But only the Christian fool would foolishly mistake the gift for the Giver. Ah, but we do. We fools really do. Isn’t God great to put up with all of our foolishness? The God who chose a family to become a Chosen Nation also put up with His foolish, wayward, rebellious people...chastising them at times, even harshly at times. But they were never ‘not His people’. Stephen, in his last words, respoke the very works of Christ on the cross regarding the brethren who were killing him. God loves! and there has been, and I am persuaded there still are, some among us who loves (agapes) very nearly as God loves.

Let us humbly ask of the Father that He help us identify perhaps a few of our “little tents” and “stars” so that we might more consistently rely on the Solid and Steady One as our foundation, so that He might help us place in faith each foot on our path in a manner to be pleasing to Him.

Go back to the beginning of this little writing and note where I was getting out of bed still depressed. I had no idea how much I would enjoy this day, but I had a hint of it as the notion came to me to pick up my Bible and open it at random and read, as so often I do. Not always do I receive what I did today, but often enough to keep at it, especially when depressed and when a similar notion strikes me.

What can I say? The Faithful One is faithful.



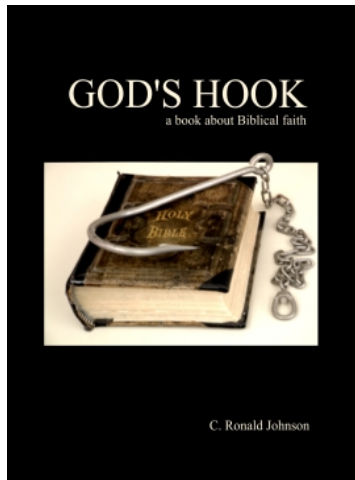
As this is the first short Bible study, let me give a short blurb of how it is usually done. I had put these two paragraphs at the beginning of the study, but to help the Internet’s browsers find this study for searchers of the topic I have placed them here -

May 1, 2008 I have nearly finished setting up the website and have just yesterday put the book together of Mamama’s three stories and will upload it to Lulu.com soon. Our spring since March has been quite humid and in March my throat became somewhat raw from walking in near-dawn as I had been doing all winter. Since then my walking has been put on hold due to the sore throat. I have had strep throat five or six times over the course of our living in these mountains and so I am trying to stay well. However, the lack of walking and the damp spring going on and on has been depressing at times; and so it was this morning before getting out of bed. I woke at the normal time to walk, but with three inches of fresh snow on the ground I stayed in bed for an hour and a half depressed. Upon rising I took a hot shower and my body loosened up some, but I was still depressed. I did not want to sit before the computer for another day of working on the

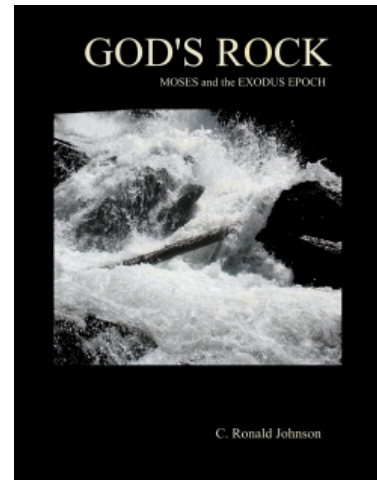
website... (The last of April 08 I began working on this website).

Working so much on Bible things in my writings to get them into proper shape for the website I have let go of just opening my old friend for a personal visit as often as is normal for me. Therefore, depressingly I reached over to its resting place next to my living room chair and turned on the lamp. Then I remembered that in my self indulgent depression I had prayed only brokenly in bed and did not even finish. So I turned off the lamp and went into my little cluttered computer room to pray. After prayer I opened the Word at random, as I do when not in study, and in the top left page began Acts 7:11. I read and talked to the Lord through the end of that chapter. Then for the first time ever, with the thought of perhaps writing of it for the website, I turned in my chair from the passage to face the computer screen. And here I sit sharing:

These are short Bible studies by C. Ronald Johnson at Christian Wilderness Press



a book
about
Biblical
Faith



the life of
Moses
and the
Exodus