

Stand Up for the Almighty, Anywhere, Anytime!
From Acts 6 and 7
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From Acts 6 and 7. STAND UP FOR THE ALMIGHTY, ANYWHERE, ANYTIME!
PART 1: THE HOSTILITY and THE PECULIAR LEVERAGE 6:10.

#1. Stephen was such a man who would stand up for the Almighty. Out of respect and honor, one mentions his cohorts by name: "Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicholas" 6:5. Here we have historical examples of men who ran the risks of faith in a hostile world.

#2. Standing up for God and for revealed truth begins in one's own mind. Biblical faith is never intermittently under attack, but rather perpetually. Each believer may deal with questions, fears and even personal doubts hostile to the Word of God. Family, persons of particular significance, and unbelievers of every category can supply the social hostility.

#3. "But some men...rose up and argued with Stephen" 6:9. In this case, the hostile minds ran into more than they could handle. "But they were unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking" 6:10.

#4. This necessarily means that the wisdom and the Spirit possessed by Stephen had put a peculiar leverage on the encounter. The advantage went to the Lord and revealed truth.

#5. The hostile minds reacted with determination, in concert, with lies and force 6:11-15.

#6. Stephen was not offering a defense of himself, but of something much greater. The integrity of the God of the Bible and of revelation held more importance to Stephen than his own life.

#7. Speaking up for the Lord is a moment of intersect between the mind of God and the mind of the believer. For the hostiles, it constitutes a point of contradiction between eternal reality and immediate experience. The clash is always dangerous.

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PART 2: THE FUNCTION OF ENVELOPMENT 7:1-50.

#1. Accusations were made against Stephen 6:11-15. The "high priest" himself led the examination 7:1. Stephen's explanation of events was presented in the form of a recitation of Israel's well-known Old Testament history.

#2. This form of response is itself instructive. The language manifold of these verses serves as an envelope. Within this envelope there are to be found essential revealed truths.

#3. At the behest of the Holy Spirit, Stephen presumed to teach the Jews how to read the Scripture and therefore how to comprehend their own history.

#4. More than that, one searches inside the *language envelope* in order to understand the purpose of God.

#5. The function of the envelope was not acknowledged by the Jews. Proof: "You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just what your fathers did" v.51.

#6. Stephen comprehended well the function of the language envelope. So, by inspiration he uses it to lead the thinking of the Jews beyond their preferred rationalized interpretations of Scripture.

#7. Rationalization of Scripture was a learned misuse of the word of God. It became traditional. "Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have become" v.52.

#8. The Jews of biblical times and the church in the present have amassed much learning. Theology is an intellectual discipline. It is not enough: ". . . you who received the law as ordained by angels, and yet did not keep it" v.53.

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PART 3: VEHICULAR TIME (a) v.1-8.

#1. All circumstances, situations, events and conditions mentioned in these chapters were clearly used by the Lord as a *staging for an unfolding history*. Time was vehicular; carrying people and conditions to an irresistible point and for a reason. *This is the phenomenon of vehicular time*.

#2. "The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran" v.2 --A supernatural intervention into one's personal experience.

#3. The patriarch was instructed, by God, to leave "your country" (v.3) and move elsewhere. This was a selected geography, a designated geography. Eternal purpose was mapped on to land mass. Paramount spiritual reality had come to bear on space and time. It was vehicular.

#4. The logic of this, the meaning of it, was not in the move, not in the geography, nor was it to be found in human will. The meaning was rooted in the mind of God and in His purpose. "From there, after his father died, God had him move to this country in which you are now living" v.4.

#5. The generalization: The Lord uses one's circumstances, situations, events and states of being. Absolute authority was generating a purpose, particular outcomes, and a determined history.

#6. The Almighty was fully involved in all of this. The will of God, Word of God and the power of God supplied the driving energy in control.

#7. Christians pray for the providence of God, for His intervention on their behalf, for His guidance. In such cases, their circumstances and temporal conditions become vehicular. The meaning of our circumstances is not rooted in nature, our flesh nor in economics. The meaning is rooted in the paramount spiritual reality.

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PART 4: VEHICULAR TIME (b) 7:1-8.

#1. Personal circumstances, situations, events and conditions become vehicular in the hands of the Lord -- even large scale land masses v.4.

#2. And then the *promise of God* entered into the situation. "But He (God) gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot of ground, and yet, even when he had no child, He promised that He would give it to him as a possession, and to his descendants after him" v.5.

#3. The question: What is the relation of the promises of God to time? The answer is astounding! *The promises of God are the energy of vehicular time, the energy of the future, the compelling force behind outcomes* v.6, 7. Our future, thus, is directly tied to eternal promises.

#4. Geopolitics, geography, human relations, history, events and circumstances are shaped by the power of the promises of God. Marx and Hegel before him were wrong. There are no laws of history; no dialectic driving events.

#5. The promises of God are *teleological*. They have an end in mind. They determine the goal of events. "And He gave him the covenant of circumcision..."v.8.

#6. Circumcision is a cutting of the flesh and it is a symbol (Philippians 3:1-11). It is the unmistakable sign of one pledged to the revealed covenant made with God.

#7. This is important to Christians. Vehicular time, governed by the revealed promises of God, *overcomes all temporal obstacles to its realization*. This is why the Bible is so important. Stephen is teaching the Jews about how to understand the relation of God to time. To them that was a criminal offense.

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PART 5: VEHICULAR MOMENTUM (a) v.9-10.

#1. "The patriarchs (v.9) sought to commandeer the life of Joseph. "Sold into Egypt" (v.9), Joseph within the force of circumstance looked hopeless.

#2. "Yet God was with him" v.9. And that was the source of *vehicular momentum*. Because of the Lord nothing was as static as appearances implied. Therefore, we must separate *suggestive appearances* from the power of God.

#3. Joseph was "rescued" (v.10) from "all his afflictions," "granted...favor and wisdom" before "Pharaoh," "made governor over Egypt," and managed the royal household. *Vehicular momentum overrules suggestive appearances*.

#4. There is a law here: Vehicular momentum is always operating amid what may call suggestive appearances. One may feel depressed, one may agonize over great loss, one may register grand disappointment; but none of those personal conditions has any effect upon *the supernatural engine of vehicular momentum*.

#5. Why? Because biblical belief *suspends the credibility of suggestive appearances*. Pharaoh and all Egypt were subject to vehicular momentum. They just did not know it at the time.

#6. The Jews, to whom Stephen preached, became mired in *suggestive human lived experience*. But Joseph is proof of the superiority of vehicular momentum over suggestive influence; whatever the source.

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PART 6: VEHICULAR MOMENTUM (b) v.9, 10.

#1. The fact that " God was with him, and rescued him (Joseph) from all his afflictions" means a great deal about *reality*.

#2. Reality runs downward from the God who intervenes in time --> to the material/temporal part of reality below. This arrangement is captured in the following: "Heaven is my throne, and Earth is the footstool of my feet..." v.49.

#3. Joseph was a slave in Egypt, but the material part of reality was subject to vehicular momentum coming down from above. Joseph's material/temporal condition was a footstool of the Lord's feet. So are ours! – and strictly passive.

#4. This *structure of reality* changes the suggestive influence of practicality. Joseph trusted fully in the promises of God. This means that faith had displaced the idea that practicality was paramount.

#5. The revealed law of reality is declared in these verses: The law is that reality runs from greater --> to lesser. There can be no other way. It is only and always this way.

#6. Common enough is the human proclivity toward the presumption that the best perspective on reality is to be had from the material/temporal end of the arrangement. This is rationalism, and it is just about the biggest mistake one can make.

#7. The Jews made such a mistake in the extreme. In that idiom, the paramount spirituality (the Almighty) is not determinant in time; He's just there.

#8. We are to understand that in all our "afflictions" reality runs from the greater --> to the lesser.

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PART 7: PIONEERS OF THE SPIRIT v.11-16.

#1. The Lord is a strong commander. He customarily shakes things up. "Now a famine came over all Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction with it, and our fathers could find no food" v.11.

#2. Basic survival was in question. A remarkable revealed truth: Even and especially, times of desperation *become vehicular in the hands of the Almighty*. The hardship was the Lord's doing.

#3. A purpose of God was unfolding in their time of desperation and danger v.12. Joseph, his father and his brothers, were reunited in an alien land v.6. Pure astonishment must initially have overarched the occasion.

#4. Abraham, Jacob, Joseph and the brothers were pioneering in faith. The fathers died in Egypt and were buried in Shechem v.16. Their mission fulfilled.

#5. None of the patriarchs knew the whole story. They went out not certain of outcomes; unaware of the absolute greater meaning.

#6. And so the finding is: *Trust in God is the currency of the pioneers of the Spirit*. Distress and afflictions are unavoidable in this world. Shall we transit this plain of circumstance in fear and misguidance, or shall we comport ourselves as pioneers in faith?

#7. In Stephen's time the leaders of Israel had surrendered the courage and faith of the pioneer. They did not need them. They had become the establishment.

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PART 8: THE VEHICULAR VERSUS RATIONALISM v.17-29.

#1. Human rationalism (dependence upon human reason alone) cannot hope to cope with the mind of God. Yet the folly of believing it can persists (Genesis 3).

#2. "But as the time of the promise was approaching which God had assured to Abraham, the people increased and multiplied in Egypt..." v.17. We sense time to be similar to a line moving toward the future. However, Stephen conceived of the passage of time as events, circumstances and conditions *contracting back upon the word of God*. So our sense of time and history may be experiential, but the *meaning of it is found in its contraction back upon the revealed truth*. Because of this, human reasoning is beyond its competency to assign meaning to time, life and history. Rationalism fails.

#3. The Lord was generating vehicular circumstances in Egypt. The Israelites, at first, flourished in Egypt v.17. But that was interpreted as a threat to Egyptian security (rationalism) v.18, 19. Israel was oppressed up to and including the horror of infanticide (rationalism).

#4. Moses was born under such immediate danger v.20. Vehicular momentum put the infant in danger and into the royal palace v.21.

#5. Moses was trained in Egyptian ways v.22. At age 40, Moses intervened, "striking down the Egyptian" v.24.

#6. He rationalized the event as did his brother Israelites v.25-28.

#7. People think what they think. But the Lord drove Moses as an "alien" into "the land of Midian" v.29. So, we should not be presumptive.

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PART 9: VEHICULAR INTERVENTION INTO TIME COMPROMISES THE HUMAN STATE OF AFFAIRS v.30-34.

#1. Moses, driven out of Egypt and forced to relinquish his privileged position in society, spends 40 years in Midian v.29.

#2. Suddenly, Moses was reintroduced to vehicular history. "After forty years had passed, an angel, appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in the flame of a burning thorn bush" v.30.

#3. As would anyone, Moses "marveled" (v.31) at the approach of God. At that particular moment, at the burning bush, the predictive power of 40 years crumbled and vanished.

#4. The Almighty identified Himself as "the God of your fathers" v.32. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are examples of those whose lives were compromised by the Lord's will and words.

#5. Moses' independence was sacrificed to the eternal purpose. Every Israelite enslaved in Egypt was suffering for the Lord's purpose of human redemption. "Moses shook with fear..." v.32 --which tells us that he instantly believed it.

#6. "I have come down to rescue them; come now, and I will send you to Egypt" v.34. Moses became an instrument of vehicular time, and his personal state of affairs was compromised by its meaning and force.

#7. Biblical faith has a compromising effect upon one's personal state of affairs. However, the entire world is always compromised by the leveraging force of vehicular time. Israel had depreciated this revealed truth of the gospel.

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PART 11: INVETERATE IDOLATRY and THE MIRACLES v.35-43.

#1. "This man led them out, performing wonders and signs in the land of Egypt and in the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years" v.36. History cannot become vehicular without the attendant and compelling power of God; in those days or in our own. There are too many elements or pieces of the composite that must fit exactly and timely.

#2. The miracles account for direct outcomes, in Egypt, at the Red Sea and in the wilderness. And there is something else. The miracles explain the meaning that motivates events.

#3. The Lord is moving, unseen, yet detectable in the affairs of men in time. Proof: "This is the Moses who said to the sons of Israel, 'God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren'" v.37. This was no natural outcome.

#4. The miracles *serve as symbols*; with the *power of eliminating ambiguity*. The recalcitrant Israelites could make no case that historical events, unfolded in the Exodus, could cast any sense of ambiguity.

#5. The point being that vehicular time was discredited by the inveterate idolatry of the people.

#6. Idolatry is a ruse to wrest the control of time, life and history away from God. The deception is to justify the rejection of vehicular time and history.

#7. The logic of idolatry: Disregard the meaning of the miracles in Scripture. Disregard the power of God in the contemporary. Do that, and then there can be no vehicular time. And so time can be safely left to the wisdom of man. And so we have done.

#8. The modern church, like the Israelites, has shifted the onus of ambiguity from human wisdom to the Word of God. We are almost cooked.

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PART 12: INVETERATE IDOLATRY and ABSOLUTE CAUSATION v.44-50.

#1. The central theme of this segment has to do with *absolute causation*. All causation is positively rooted in God, in the spiritual. The spiritual realities are the source of what we call causation.

#2. Human reason and experience locate causation in things, in the physical/material. Causation, they believe, is a temporal phenomenon, nothing more.

#3. The Israelites built the tabernacle, by the Lord's design v.44, 45. Solomon built the temple v.47. Those sacred places demonstrated the powerful relation between God and Israel.

#4. The structures were imposing but not overarching in their relation to God. "However, the Most High does not dwell in houses made by human hands, as the prophet says" v.48.

#5. The Almighty is too big for that. He is pure spirit. The Jews were enamored by imposing materiality. Stephen cites Isaiah 66:1, 2; in v.49-50. But they did not like nor treasure God, *the absolute causation*.

#6. Israel did not trust in that which they could not see. The Almighty is not impressed with the fruit of human hands. He holds important the faith of the one consecrated to God, the absolute cause, and to vehicular time and its purposes.

#7. The Israelites denied a foundational revealed truth, which is that *the spiritual precedes time and supersedes time*. The Israelites were naturalists, empiricists. That, is inveterate idolators. And this is a modern interest.

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PART 13: THE WITNESS OF VEHICULAR HISTORY and THE PRESENT v.51-53.

#1. The relation between the ancient text of the Bible --> and the present is a persistent concern for readers of scripture. It is *the "so what?"* question.

#2. Stephen, speaking under the influence of the Holy Spirit (6:5, stipulates the relation of the word of God to time.

#3. *Many have chronicled* the events of history; but Stephen's account and focus is different. "You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did" v.51.

#4. Stephen's recitation of vehicular history *stood as WITNESS of the thought, speech and behavior of men in time, situation and circumstance*.

#5. The biblical past is gone forever. But the eternal meaning of it, the inspired language about it, remains. *Time cannot make any claim on the witness of Scripture and its meaning.*

#6. To resist the revealed language of vehicular history is to resist the Holy Spirit Himself. Such resistance is characterized by blatant human indifference and disregard: "stiff-necked," "uncircumcised in heart and ears".

#7. The problem is not in the revelation; it's in the hearers. Circumcision is an indelible marking of the flesh: rebellious human minds willing to bow to the word of God; bearing in their bodies the revealed constraints and living by faith in its truths.

#8. But "the fathers" were not willing. They wanted a religion without the Word. What has changed in all these centuries?

From Acts 6 and 7. STAND UP FOR THE ALMIGHTY, ANYWHERE, ANYTIME. PART 14: VEHICULAR MOMENTUM and THE UNITY OF THE WORD OF GOD v.51-53.

#1. "Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become" v.52.

#2. The Israelites demonstrated an almost constant dismissal of the unity between the Almighty --> and the Word of The Almighty. To dismiss and disregard that unity is identical to dismissal of the relevance of God, Himself.

#3. Furthermore, Stephen was insistent that the word of the Old Testament prophets is in a state of unity with the gospel of Christ. *The Bible is to be read as a unity; one piece.*

#4. But the unbelievers in Israel, representing many generations, had, in their hearts, broken the unity between God and His words. That *breakage* justified their persecution of the preachers.

#5. Human rational will was *intersticed*, or inserted, between the Lord and the revelation. And that is precisely how it is done, when revealed meaning becomes subject to rationalism.

#6. Stephen levels the explanatory condemnation: "You who received the law as ordained by angels and yet did not keep it" v.53. Rationalism has the power to displace conscience and even revealed truth. *Rationalism is inherently dismissive of the language manifold of Scripture.*

#7. This text instructs that there must be a direct and causal relation between the language of the Bible --> and the human mind. This is a unity between the Word of God --> and our thinking that reflects the unity between God --> and His Word.

#8. This kind of disobedience began in Genesis 3. If we, as readers, do not like what the Bible teaches, if it is too "radical," if it is too "dangerous," if it is too close to the bone or too counter cultural, then we can rationalize it away. And then – we persecute, to the point of violence, those who do believe it.

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PART 15: CONSEQUENCES v.54-60.

#1. The confluence of vehicular time, orchestrated by the Lord to achieve His purposes and one's willingness to stand up for the Almighty, anywhere, anytime, will always have personal consequences.

#2. Stephen gave up his temporal life in the service of God, v.58-59. Vehicular momentum had brought Stephen to that consequence.

#3. But he saw beyond the material world and beyond his personal sacrifice. "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" v.59.

#4. Revealed truth teaches us that the Christian life is an unbreakable unity between the Almighty --> and a person of faith who, all the while, stands in time and circumstance.

#5. The conception that the Lord would never put one in such *inescapable situations* is debunked. He can, He has, He does, He will.

#6. How shall we live then, in this world? The Lord is generous, but He draws us into His temporal purposes. That establishes *the conditions of our lives*.

#7. Abraham, Joseph, Moses, the prophets and the "Lord Jesus" were called to and were put into *vehicular conditions*. The Israelites never liked this fact and so generally were "resisting Holy Spirit" v.51.

#8. What do you think? Shall we sit this one out? Or shall we step up to the Lord's expectations? The envelope of vehicular history shows the way.

#9. We are not alone here. Let us decide: To stand up, stand up, anywhere, everywhere, anytime, all the time! This is our time, and these are our moments to prove faith and greatness of soul.

#10. And then?! We will "fall asleep," with hearts full of hope and trust; that the world could never touch.