
The Church that Christ Built in the Old Testament

And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people. Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), and of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and disputed with Stephen. But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking. Then they secretly instigated men who said, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.” And they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes, and they came upon him and seized him and brought him before the council, and they set up false witnesses who said, “This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law, for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us.” And gazing at him, all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

And the high priest said, “Are these things so?” And Stephen said:

“Brothers and fathers, hear me. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, and said to him, ‘Go out from your land and from your kindred and go into the land that I will show you.’ Then he went out from the land of the Chaldeans and lived in Haran. And after his father died, God removed him from there into this land in which you are now living. Yet he gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot's length, but promised to give it to him as a possession and to his offspring after him, though he had no child. And God spoke to this effect—that his offspring would be sojourners in a land belonging to others, who would enslave them and afflict them four hundred years. ‘But I will judge the nation that they serve,’ said God, ‘and after that they shall come out and worship me in this place.’ And he gave him the covenant of circumcision. And so Abraham became the father of Isaac, and circumcised him on the eighth day, and Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob of the twelve patriarchs.

“And the patriarchs, jealous of Joseph, sold him into Egypt; but God was with him and rescued him out of all his afflictions and gave him favor and wisdom before Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who made him ruler over Egypt and over all his household. Now there came a famine throughout all Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction, and our fathers could find no food. But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent out our fathers on their first visit. And on the second visit Joseph made himself known to his brothers, and Joseph's family became known to Pharaoh. And Joseph sent and summoned Jacob his father and all his kindred, seventy-five persons in all. And Jacob went down into Egypt, and he died, he and our fathers, and they were carried back to Shechem and laid in the tomb that Abraham had bought for a sum of silver from the sons of Hamor in Shechem.

“But as the time of the promise drew near, which God had granted to Abraham, the people increased and multiplied in Egypt until there arose over Egypt another king who did not know Joseph. He dealt shrewdly with our race and forced our fathers to expose their infants, so that they would not be kept alive.

Sermon Outline:

I. Site

- A. God will fulfill His promises regardless of place or circumstance.
- B. The “God of glory” shows up wherever He desires.
- C. God pursues the most forsaken places to redeem His people.

II. Suffering

- A. Not even our suffering can annul the promises of God.
- B. In Genesis 3:15 — after Adam and Eve have first sinned — God gives us a promise and an explanation for all of redemptive history.

C. Recurring promise throughout Scripture: God will be our God and we will be His people.

Discussion Questions

1. How does this passage show that God's promises extend beyond our place and/or circumstance?
2. How do we know that God remains good and committed to His promises even when we experience times of suffering?
3. How does the story of Abraham in Mesopotamia show us that God pursues His people?
4. How does Joseph's life show that God works in and through His people despite their suffering?
5. What must we do when we find ourselves overwhelmed by our circumstances?
6. What particular places or circumstances in your life cause you to question the validity of God's promises?
7. What suffering and/or hardship cause you to question God's goodness?

Going Deeper

1. Share with your group or journal about past or present circumstance(s) which contributes to you to losing sight of God's faithfulness to his people throughout history. What promises can you claim and commit to memory to help remind you to trust in him when you're tempted to be feel hopeless, angry, or depressed?
2. How might God be pursuing your heart in the midst of hardship or suffering? What idols might he be exposing that you need to surrender and instead cling to him?

Francis Thompson's poem "The Hound of Heaven" illustrates the way God pursues us even when we find ourselves far away from him. Read the stanza below and reflect on how God's pursuit of you demonstrates his unwavering love and commitment to be your God. (Read the full poem [here](#)).

*I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways
Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears
I hid from Him, and under running laughter.
Up vistaed hopes I sped;
And shot, precipitated,
Adown Titanic glooms of chasmèd fears,
From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.
But with unhurrying chase,
And unperturbèd pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
They beat-and a Voice beat
More instant than the Feet-
'All things betray thee, who betrayest Me.'*