

July 8-14, 2019

Acts 6–9

“What Wilt Thou Have Me to Do?”

Summary: *The Apostles choose seven to assist them—Stephen is tried before the council.*

Stephen recounts the history of Israel and names Moses as a prototype of Christ—He testifies of the apostasy in Israel—He sees Jesus on the right hand of God—Stephen’s testimony is rejected, and he is stoned to death.

Saul persecutes the Church—Philip’s ministry in Samaria is described—Philip performs miracles and baptizes men and women—Peter and John come to Samaria and confer the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands—Simon seeks to buy this gift and is rebuked by Peter—Philip preaches about Christ and baptizes an Ethiopian eunuch.

Jesus appears to Saul—Saul is a chosen vessel—Ananias restores Saul’s sight—Saul is baptized and begins his ministry—Peter heals Æneas and raises Dorcas from death.

Supplemental Jewish and Holy Land Insights

What is the similarity in religious offices throughout time?

The organization and growth of the Church in the Meridian of Times parallels the organization of the Church in ancient and modern times. These were and are offices and the men who were called to fill them, in their respective times, who had authority from God to bring light and truth to the people. Anciently, Moses had a “First Presidency:” two assistants, Aaron and Hur. Additionally, he had an organization of Twelve and Seventy. “And he said unto the elders, Tarry ye here for us, until we come again unto you: and, behold, Aaron and Hur are with you: if any man have matters to do, let him come unto them.” (**Exodus 24:14**) “These are those that were numbered . . . and the princes of Israel, being twelve men: each one was for the house of his fathers.” (**Numbers 1:44**) “And he said unto Moses, Come up unto the LORD, thou, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel; and worship ye afar off.” (**Exodus 24:1**)

How was the Church of Jesus Christ of Former-day Saints organized?

The parallel organization is seen in the primitive Church with Peter, James and John appearing as a “First Presidency” within the original Twelve. “Now the names of the twelve apostles are these; The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother,” (**Matthew 10:2**) “And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles;” (**Luke 6:13**) “After these things the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before his face into every city and place, whither he himself would come.” (**Luke 10:1**) And, of course, we see a similar structure today in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

How is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints organized?

“Of the Melchizedek Priesthood, three Presiding High Priests, chosen by the body, appointed and ordained to that office, and upheld by the confidence, faith, and prayer of the church, form a quorum of the Presidency of the Church. The twelve traveling councilors are called to be the Twelve Apostles, or special witnesses of the name of Christ in all the world—thus differing from other officers in the church in the duties of their calling. And they form a

quorum, equal in authority and power to the three presidents previously mentioned. The Seventy are also called to preach the gospel, and to be especial witnesses unto the Gentiles and in all the world--thus differing from other officers in the church in the duties of their calling." (**Doctrine & Covenants 107:22-25**)

How does the Latter-day restoration help us understand the Former-day Church?

In that sense, the organization today may give us insight to what was happening in former days. "And it is according to the vision showing the order of the Seventy, that they should have seven presidents to preside over them, chosen out of the number of the seventy;" (**Doctrine & Covenants 107:93**) "Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint . . ." (**Acts 6:3**)

How do the offices of the Church compare to the parts of the body?

The appointment of officers and leaders was compared to parts of the body. All parts were needed and had to work together. The metaphor of the Church and the body was used in ancient times, the Meridian of Times, as well as today. Remember, there are two things necessary to understand the scriptures, the learning of the Jews and the spirit, the "still small voice," that reveals deeper meanings. This lesson deals with so many qualities of the Lord that it would be impractical to comment on each one. One beautiful attribute is His being, His body that He gave for us. Could Isaiah have been suggesting that everything around us can remind us of Him, that even "body language" refers to Him?

How does Isaiah reference the body?

Our Savior came from the womb, a perfect body with attributes; eyes, ears, mouth, tongue, neck, shoulder, heart, arms, hands, belly, leg, knee, and foot. Isaiah references these body parts. "Lift up your eyes on high," (**Isaiah 40:26**); "To open the blind eyes," (**Isaiah 42:7**); "Bring forth the blind people that have eyes, and the deaf that have ears . . ." (**Isaiah 43:8**); Seeing many things, but thou observest not; opening the ears, but he heareth not." (**Isaiah 42:20**); ". . . thy neck is an iron sinew, and thy brow brass;" (**Isaiah 48:4**); ". . . for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it." (**Isaiah 40:5**); ". . . the hand of the LORD hath done this. . ." (**Isaiah 41:20**); "Hear, ye deaf; and look, ye blind, that ye may see." (**Isaiah 42:18**); ". . .for he hath shut their eyes, that they cannot see; and their hearts, that they cannot understand." (**Isaiah 44:18**); ". . .Thou hast heard, see all this . . ." (**Isaiah 48:6**); "Kings shall see . . ." (**Isaiah 49:7**); "And they shall be made perfect notwithstanding their blindness," **JST** (**Isaiah 42:20**); ". . . formed me from the womb . . . glorious in the eyes of the LORD," (**Isaiah 49:5**); "Lift up thine eyes round about," (**Isaiah 49:18**); ". . . say again in thine ears," (**Isaiah 49:20**); ". . . for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it." (**Isaiah 40:5**); ". . . the word is gone out of my mouth . . . every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear." (**Isaiah 45:23**); "I have declared the former things from the beginning; and they went forth out of my mouth, and I showed them . . . and they came to pass." (**Isaiah 48:3**); ". . . my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand hath he hid me," (**Isaiah 49:2**); ". . . their tongue faileth . . ." (**Isaiah 41:17**); ". . . yet he laid it not to heart." (**Isaiah 42:25**); ". . . considereth in his heart . . ." (**Isaiah 44:19**); ". . . a deceived heart . . . my right hand . . ." (**Isaiah 44:20**); thou didst not lay these things to thy heart," (**Isaiah 47:7**); "Then shalt thou say in thine heart, Who hath begotten me these, seeing I have lost my children," (**Isaiah 49:21**); ". . . He hath no hands . . ." (**Isaiah 45:9**); ". . . and concerning the work of my hands . . ." (**Isaiah 45:11**); ". . . my hands, have stretched out the heavens . . ." (**Isaiah 45:12**); "I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands . . ." (**Isaiah 49:16**); ". . . make bare the leg, uncover the thigh . . ." (**Isaiah 47:2**); ". . . the Lord GOD will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him:" (**Isaiah 40:10**); ". . . he shall gather the

lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom . . .” (Isaiah 40:11); “. . . his arm shall be on the Chaldeans . . .” (Isaiah 48:14); “. . . with the strength of his arms . . .” (Isaiah 44:12); “ I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people: and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders.” (Isaiah 49:22); “. . . with his feet.” (Isaiah 41:3); “And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers: they shall bow down to thee with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet;” (Isaiah 49:23); “. . . called him to his foot,” (Isaiah 41:2). This constant use of body language can be seen as a metaphor of the “body of Christ.” “Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.” (1 Corinthians 12:27)

How did the Prophet Joseph Smith emphasize the same principle?

“The Church is a compact body composed of different members, and is strictly analogous to the human system, and Paul, after speaking of the different gifts, says, “Now ye are the body of Christ and members in particular; and God hath set some in the Church, first Apostles, secondarily Prophets, thirdly Teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healing, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. Are all Teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?” It is evident that they do not; yet are they all members of one body. All members of the natural body are not the eye, the ear, the head or the hand - - yet the eye cannot say to the ear, I have no need of thee, nor the head to the foot, I have no need of thee; they are all so many component parts in the perfect machines -- the one body; and if one member suffer, the whole of the members suffer with it; and if one member rejoice, all the rest are honored with it.” (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Section Five 1842-43 Pg.244)

What is the biblical process of stoning?

In many cases, the bodies of the Lord’s appointed servants were hurt or killed, yet their testimonies and witnesses remained to strengthen the Church members. Stephen’s stoning was a dramatic example. Let us review stoning. A truer understanding of the process of stoning would give added insight to the New Testament account of a woman brought to Jesus. The procedure included causing death by precipitating the convicted over a cliff (like an abandoned stone quarry). That part included the participation of one of the witnesses. The second witness threw or placed the “first stone” on the body in a process of burying the convicted. The stoning was more a disrespectful burying, depriving the convicted of a grave marker, the mourning chamber and a burial chamber. “Our Rabbis taught: Whence do we know that it [the execution] was accomplished by hurling down? Scripture states, And he shall be cast down. And whence the necessity of stoning? Scripture states, he shall be stoned. And whence do we know that both stoning and hurling down [were employed]? From the verse, he shall surely be stoned or thrown down. And whence do we know that if he died through being hurled down, it is enough? Scripture states, or cast down. Whence do we know the same procedure is to be followed for [all subsequent] generations?” (Talmud - Mas. Sanhedrin 45a) It should be noted that the Hebrew rendition of stoning including “hurling” or “laying on hands;” to “cast” or “throw” down is not as recognizable in the English King James Translation of (Exodus 19:13) and (Leviticus 24:14).

What was biblical capital punishment?

Stoning is a capital punishment indicated in the Mosaic Law. Biblical punishments were based on the crime, unlike today’s punishments which are based on the person or the circumstances. Stoning was the punishment for a number of gross sins including murder (Numbers 35:30), adultery (Deuteronomy 22:22-24), blasphemy (Leviticus 24:16), breaking the

Sabbath (**Numbers 15:32-35**), Apostasy (**Deuteronomy 13:6-10**), and rebellion against parents (**Deuteronomy 21:18-21**). A better insight into capital punishment can be seen in the Talmud. Rabbinic interpretations of the ancient Jewish law of stoning indicate that it was required that the convicted be thrown over a cliff. One of at least two witnesses and thereby accusers was responsible to make sure the criminal was dead. If not, one of the witnesses had to take the first stone and break the convicted's heart. (**Talmud, Sanhedrin 45**) The intense aversion to directly taking another's life would motivate the accuser's success in having the fall cause the death of the accused. A witness/accuser always had to cast the first stone and then all others threw stones to begin covering the body (the burial). Abandoned quarries (where the stone was rejected) would be likely locations for such rare executions.

What happened at Stephen's stoning?

It is apparent that Stephen did not immediately die from the execution's hurdle. The power and glory of his vision of the Father and the Son transcended the cruelty of those who waited to witness his bloody broken body disrespectfully obscured with stones. The likely place of Stephen's execution is precisely where the Savior was crucified and where He transcended death, beginning a process of redemption of all mankind. It is still known by Jews in Jerusalem as the place of execution, stoning, and ultimately, two thousand years ago, crucifixion. Near the place known as The Garden Tomb is a "Place of a Skull." It is an abandoned stone quarry, rejected by builders thousands of years ago because the stone was too crumbly. Unbeknownst to most Jews, it is where the Lord's compassion and heavenly witness were rejected, as Pharisees and wicked priests urged His crucifixion.

What results came from Stephen's failed stoning?

Stephen's death, with his accompanying compassion and heavenly witness, was witnessed by Saul, a Pharisee. The "prick" of seeing and hearing this failed stoning and subsequent mass killing of Stephen (**Acts 7:57**), began a process leading to the redemption for Paul, the Apostle. Later, his own conversion would ultimately be followed by hurt, persecution, and even an execution attempt where the hurdle did not result in death. (That stoning will be considered in another lesson).

How do Ethiopians connect to the Jews?

Another of the seven leaders of the Seventy, Philip, bore witness to an Ethiopian. Today in Israel, we have a better insight as to whom this Ethiopian might have been. Recent developments in Israel have brought the name of King Solomon to the foreground again. The most interesting development is the influx of more than 130,000 of black Jews from Ethiopia. They feel they are descendants of King Solomon through one of his wives, the Queen of Sheba. "In Ethiopia, members of this group refer to themselves as Beta Israel . . . They practice an early form of Judaism; the chief rabbis of Israel have recognized them as Jews. Until brought to Israel, they lived in the provinces around Lake Tana. According to their tradition, their ancestors were Jerusalem notables who came with Menelik, the son of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, when he returned home." "They said that he brought Judaic customs and civil law to Ethiopia. The lion of Judah was the symbol of (Haile Selassie, 1892-1975) the emperor of Ethiopia (1930 to 1974)." (**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**)

How did African part of the "Gathering of Israel" begin?

"Operation Solomon" was the name of a remarkable plan to bring these Jews to Israel. In the early Nineties, fifteen thousand Ethiopian Jews were airlifted to Israel in thirty-one

hours. One 747 Jumbo had more than eleven hundred Ethiopian Jews on one flight. In order to keep count and due to the basic illiteracy of Hebrew, each had a number stuck to his clothing. When they landed, two unnumbered disembarked - newborn babies in an old/new land.

How do we get a closer glimpse of ancient “Judaism?”

The Ethiopian’s Judaism differs from the Western Rabbinical Judaism that most Jews relate to. It is possible, through anthropological studies, to catch a closer glimpse of Judaism as it might have been three thousand years ago. References to Enoch appear in several apocryphal works. The Ethiopian Jews who claim to be descendants of King Solomon (and the Queen of Sheba) have brought their holy books from Ethiopia to Israel. Although they are recent in terms of age (less than two thousand years old), they do contain two apocryphal books, one of which is the Book of Enoch.

What are the highlights of Ethiopian Jews in Israel?

- In 1999, Ethiopian youth joined the Israeli Scouts and the first Ethiopian Jew became a doctor.
- In 2012, Israel appointed its first Ethiopian Jewish ambassador.
- In 2013, an Ethiopian-Israeli won the Miss Israel Pageant.
- In 2016, Lt. Col. Avi Yitzhak became the first Ethiopian Israeli to graduate from the IDF's Brigade Commander course. He was also the first Ethiopian Israeli to ever serve as a combat doctor, and is a graduate of Ben-Gurion University's medical program. Yitzhak emigrated to Israel at age 19 in 1991, and prior to entering the Brigade Commander course he led the Combat Medical Branch of the IDF Medical Corps. In another first, Yitzhak became the first Ethiopian-Israeli to attain the rank of Colonel in the IDF in November 2016.
- In 2016, the Israeli Bar Association announced that for the first time in history the Israeli Judicial Committee had selected two Ethiopian women, Adenko Sabhat Haimovich and Esther Tapeta Gradi, to serve as judges. Haimowitz will serve on the Central District Magistrate’s Court and Gardi was appointed to serve on the Haifa District Traffic Court.
- In 2017, an Ethiopian-Israeli IDF officer, Major Yaros Shigot, lit the torch at Israel's national Independence Day ceremony.
- Seventeen-year-old Ethiopian-Israeli Eden Alene won the 2018 Edition of Israel's X Factor singing contest television show in January 2018.
- In November 2018, Israel’s first male Ethiopian judge, Bialin Elazar, was appointed to Jerusalem Magistrate’s Court.
- In December 2018, the Israeli Air Force’s first Ethiopian pilot completed his training.
- The International Center for the Study of Ethiopian Jewry at Ono Academic College launched a Chair for Research of Ethiopian Jewry, the first such academic position in the country and likely the world. **(The Israel Association for Ethiopian Jews (IAEJ))**

What other references indicate the loyal and ethnic Ethiopian connection to Israel?

“And Miriam and Aaron spake against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married: for he had married an Ethiopian woman.” **(Numbers 12:1)** “Then the king commanded Ebedmelech the Ethiopian, saying, Take from hence thirty men with thee, and take up Jeremiah the prophet out of the dungeon, before he die.” **(Jeremiah 38:10)** “And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship,” **(Acts 8:27)** The conversion of the Ethiopian Queen Candace’s

Minister of Finance brought him from his ancient Israelite connection to the restoration of the covenant in his own time. Through his reading, searching and letting his eyes be opened, he received the promised gift of forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Ghost.

How did the “Light of Truth” spread?

Great things were happening in those days. Great and influential men from each end of the Crossroads of the East, Ethiopia, and Damascus were being touched by the light of truth. Men with worldly experience had their eyes touched with the greater heavenly light which was once again available. Saul’s “brighter than the midday light” experience on the way to Damascus blinded him physically so that his spiritual eyes would be opened. His experience of watching Stephen’s stoning, holding the witnesses’ clothes, ultimately became his own. As his eyes were opened, his commission as one of the Twelve was to open the eyes of the Jews and the Gentiles, to give them light and truth. “But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.” (Acts 26:16-18) As the truth went forth, more and more people were enveloped in its light, and asked, “What wilt thou have me to do?” (Acts 9:6)