

Acts 7:1-43

Old Testament Recap

Learning Objectives

- Look at how God displayed His faithfulness in the ongoing and connected narratives of the Bible.
- Look at how God's story prepares the way for Jesus' Gospel for the Israelites and for us.
- Explore how we can better trust in God's faithfulness in our own lives.

Pray to open your time together as a group.

? Has anyone ever told you to learn from someone else's mistakes? Explain.

Read Out Loud: Previously In Acts

The book of Acts shows how the Holy Spirit – working through early Christians – helped spread the Gospel and built the global church. The first few chapters of Acts show how the early church wrestled with Jesus' ideals among themselves, but Christians also faced opposition from the outside. At the end of chapter 6, a group of Christians comes into conflict with the Jewish religious leaders for spreading the Gospel. Stephen was a great early speaker and fierce prayer warrior, but the Jewish authorities wanted to accuse him of blasphemy (speaking disrespectfully/falsely about God). Chapter 7 is Stephen's response to these claims, before he eventually became the first Christian martyr.

Leaders' Note: We recognize this passage is quite long, however we believe that Stephen's speech gives a good overview and provides a recap of the Old Testament, therefore we'd recommend reading this entire passage in one sitting. If you have people who are less familiar with the Bible in your group, you may wish to take a few minutes following your reading to answer questions about any of the characters or stories mentioned to provide them with a better context for discussion.

Read Out Loud: Acts 7:1-43 (NIV)

¹Then the high priest asked Stephen, "Are these charges true?"

²To this he replied: "Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Harran. ³'Leave your country and your people,' God said, 'and go to the land I will show you.'

⁴"So he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Harran. After the death of his father, God sent him to this land where you are now living. ⁵He gave him no inheritance here, not even enough ground to set his foot on. But God promised him that he and his descendants after him would possess the land, even though at that time Abraham had no child. ⁶God spoke to him in this way: 'For four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated. ⁷But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves,' God said, 'and afterward they will come out of that country and worship me in this place.' ⁸Then he gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision. And Abraham became the father of Isaac and circumcised him eight days after his birth. Later Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob became the father of the twelve patriarchs.

⁹ “Because the patriarchs were jealous of Joseph, they sold him as a slave into Egypt. But God was with him ¹⁰and rescued him from all his troubles. He gave Joseph wisdom and enabled him to gain the goodwill of Pharaoh king of Egypt. So Pharaoh made him ruler over Egypt and all his palace.

¹¹ “Then a famine struck all Egypt and Canaan, bringing great suffering, and our ancestors could not find food. ¹² When Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our forefathers on their first visit. ¹³ On their second visit, Joseph told his brothers who he was, and Pharaoh learned about Joseph’s family. ¹⁴ After this, Joseph sent for his father Jacob and his whole family, seventy-five in all. ¹⁵ Then Jacob went down to Egypt, where he and our ancestors died. ¹⁶ Their bodies were brought back to Shechem and placed in the tomb that Abraham had bought from the sons of Hamor at Shechem for a certain sum of money.

¹⁷ “As the time drew near for God to fulfill his promise to Abraham, the number of our people in Egypt had greatly increased. ¹⁸ Then ‘a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt.’ ¹⁹ He dealt treacherously with our people and oppressed our ancestors by forcing them to throw out their newborn babies so that they would die.

²⁰ “At that time Moses was born, and he was no ordinary child. For three months he was cared for by his family. ²¹ When he was placed outside, Pharaoh’s daughter took him and brought him up as her own son. ²² Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action.

²³ “When Moses was forty years old, he decided to visit his own people, the Israelites. ²⁴ He saw one of them being mistreated by an Egyptian, so he went to his defense and avenged him by killing the Egyptian. ²⁵ Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not. ²⁶ The next day Moses came upon two Israelites who were fighting. He tried to reconcile them by saying, ‘Men, you are brothers; why do you want to hurt each other?’

²⁷ “But the man who was mistreating the other pushed Moses aside and said, ‘Who made you ruler and judge over us? ²⁸ Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?’ ²⁹ When Moses heard this, he fled to Midian, where he settled as a foreigner and had two sons.

³⁰ “After forty years had passed, an angel appeared to Moses in the flames of a burning bush in the desert near Mount Sinai. ³¹ When he saw this, he was amazed at the sight. As he went over to get a closer look, he heard the Lord say: ³² ‘I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.’ Moses trembled with fear and did not dare to look.

³³ “Then the Lord said to him, ‘Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. ³⁴ I have indeed seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their groaning and have come down to set them free. Now come, I will send you back to Egypt.’

³⁵ “This is the same Moses they had rejected with the words, ‘Who made you ruler and judge?’ He was sent to be their ruler and deliverer by God himself, through the angel who appeared to him in the bush. ³⁶ He led them out of Egypt and performed wonders and signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea and for forty years in the wilderness.

³⁷ “This is the Moses who told the Israelites, ‘God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your own people.’ ³⁸ He was in the assembly in the wilderness, with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our ancestors; and he received living words to pass on to us.

³⁹ “But our ancestors refused to obey him. Instead, they rejected him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt. ⁴⁰ They told Aaron, ‘Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who led us out of Egypt—we don’t know what has happened to him!’ ⁴¹ That was the time they made an idol in

the form of a calf. They brought sacrifices to it and returned away from them and gave them over to the worship of what is written in the book of the prophets:

“Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings forty years in the wilderness, people of Israel?

⁴³ You have taken up the tabernacle of Molek and the star of your god Rephan, the idols you made to worship. Therefore I will send you into exile’ beyond Babylon.”

Who Were Molek and Rephan?

At the end of this chapter, Stephen quotes from Amos 5:25–27, which talks about two gods that were popular in the ancient Middle East. Molek comes from the semitic root word meaning “king,” and is the name of an ancient god associated with child sacrifices, who was worshiped by the Canaanites, Phoenicians, and Ammonites.

God
with

Discussion Questions



Stephen's speech is basically a brief synopsis

of the Old Testament. Does reading this abbreviated version of God's story give you insight into His character? Discuss.

Possible Answers: God is faithful in how He keeps His promises to Abraham and Moses. We see His goodness in how He rescued Joseph from slavery in Egypt. God is sovereign in how He carries His plan forward in spite of the Jewish people's disobedience. He is caring and provisional in the way He takes care of His people in the midst of famine and war.



How might Stephen's view of the Old Testament have been different from that of the Jewish leaders of the day?

Possible Answers: The Sanhedrin viewed the Old Testament as the story of how God set them apart as His chosen people. They used their history and Old Testament law to set themselves above others and highlight their own (false) righteousness. Stephen acknowledged the Old Testament as God's story of salvation for His people, throughout which Jesus was always the answer.



Stephen's sermon gave him the opportunity to answer the charges against him. Instead of outright refuting them, he responded with a

Typology Trendsetter

Stephen was looking back at scripture in a way that modern theologians might call typology. For example, “when we say that someone is a type of Christ, we are saying that a person in the Old Testament behaves in a way that corresponds to Jesus' character or actions in the New Testament. When we say that something is ‘typical’ of Christ, we are saying that an object or event in the Old Testament can be viewed as representative of some quality of Jesus.”

(<http://www.gotquestions.org/typology-Biblical.html>)

In verse 35, Stephen highlights how the people rejected Moses even though God appointed him to be their leader and deliverer. This parallels Psalm 118:22 “the stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,” which again foretold of Jesus' rejection by His people. (John 1:11)

story that displays God's faithfulness. How is a recap of Jewish history a good defense of Stephen's faith?
Possible Answers: Stephen criticizes Israel for its historical failure to live in accordance with God's design. Stephen educates the Sanhedrin and highlights that God's plan was for Jesus to be humanity's redemption from the beginning. Jesus is the culmination of God's salvation plan. Israel has misunderstood the nature of the law from the very beginning.

? Stephen repeats these well-known Jewish stories to the Sanhedrin because he knows they've missed an important element of God's story. How do we as modern Christians miss elements of God's story?
Possible Answers: We sometimes put religion before Jesus. God desires justice, not external acts of worship. We often fight over the way we worship. When we do these things we miss the main point of the Gospel. We miss the point by saying "Jesus and" instead of "just Jesus"!

? In the second half of Acts 7 it becomes clear that Stephen is comparing modern Jewish leaders to the disobedient Israelites. How are the Israelite's actions towards Aaron in verses 39-42 similar to the Jewish culture of Stephen's day?
Possible Answers: The Jews of Aaron's day turned away from God and worshipped other gods. Likewise, Stephen believed that the first century Israelites were turning away from God and worshipping their own righteousness and adherence to the law. Stephen wants to show them that they are committing the same mistakes and sins as their ancestors. He is highlighting that Jesus is the one to follow but revealing to them that they are placing other gods ahead of the true God.

? Do you see any similarities to this kind of behavior in our culture today?
Possible Answers: We all struggle with idolatry. Whether it be the American dream, food, job success, or comfort, we often place more importance upon things than we do on Jesus. Like the Israelites, we even sometimes ask our leaders, or Jesus Himself, for help in establishing our idols through misguided prayer or organized religious practices.

? How does Stephen believe that God's faithfulness – which is displayed throughout the Old Testament – finally culminate in the person of Jesus?
Possible Answers: God promised Abraham that a great nation would descend from him, and Jesus is the ruler of that nation (Genesis 17). God promised Moses that he would free his people (Exodus 5-6), and Jesus' sacrifice provided that freedom for all (Matthew 27). God promised His people that He would provide and care for them, and Jesus has gifted us all living water.

? In what ways have you experienced God's faithfulness in your life?

For Accountability And Discussion

? In what areas of my life do I need to trust that God is being faithful?

? How can reflecting on God's faithfulness in my own past help me to love and trust God in the future?