

Acts 7:1-43

Old Testament Recap

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

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.

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. ¹²When Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our forefathers on their first visit. ¹³On their second visit, Joseph told his brothers who he was, and Pharaoh learned about Joseph's family. ¹⁴After this, Joseph sent for his father Jacob and his whole family, seventy-five in all. ¹⁵Then Jacob went down to Egypt, where he and our ancestors died. ¹⁶Their 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. ¹⁸Then '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 reveled in what their own hands had made. ⁴² But God turned away from them and gave them over to the worship of the sun, moon and stars. This agrees with what is written in the book of the prophets:

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

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. Rephan refers to the deity Kaiwan, a Babylonian name for the planet Saturn.

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."

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.

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

? Stephen's sermon gave him the opportunity to answer the charges against him. Instead of outright refuting them, he responded with a story that displays God's faithfulness. How is a recap of Jewish history a good defense of Stephen's faith?

? 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?

? 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?

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)

? Do you see any similarities to this kind of behavior in our culture today?

? How does Stephen believe that God's faithfulness – which is displayed throughout the Old Testament – finally culminate in the person of Jesus?

? 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?