

Acts 7



The Gospel & the First Martyr

Life Group Leaders should read through this material and choose a few questions to talk over in your group. Your group will not have time to cover all the material. The guide is for personal study and for choosing a few questions that you and your life group would like to discuss.

This week we will look at a couple major themes of Acts Chapter 7 before we read the Scripture, then we will read aloud and see if we can pick up on the main points of Stephen's Sermon.

1 Stephen has a chance to preach the Gospel to the Jewish leaders, specifically those who are hostile to the Gospel. Stephen goes back to the beginning of the Israelite nation with Abraham. Stephen is attempting to show the Jews the "narrative pattern" that repeats in their history. The Jews viewed themselves as the people of God, and, therefore, holy and righteous. Stephen attempts to show them how the nation of Israel has predominantly disobeyed God and persecuted the prophets.

A Stephen's sermon culminates by elevating the person of Christ, preaching repentance towards God, and faith in Jesus Christ alone for salvation.

B It is also important to note that the Israelites were very familiar with the Scriptures. As Stephen gives an overview of the Israelites' history, it would have triggered the surrounding context in their minds. It was a common teaching practice at the time to quote a small key portion of Scripture that would lead the listener to consider the entirety of the passage. Again, this was common due to the Jews' knowledge of the Scripture.

2 Narrative Themes of Acts Chapter 7:

God's Grace and Calling on the Nation of Israel

Israel's Rejection of God's Ways

Israel's Persecution of God's Leaders

The Consequences of Israel's Actions

! Stephen is seeking to show the Israelites that, once again, God is giving them grace and a path to salvation but that judgment is also imminent for those who reject. The difference this time is God has not just sent a messenger, but THE Messenger, the Christ.

? **Question: Before we start this section, how familiar are you with the Old Testament?**

! Grasping all of the Old Testament is a lifelong process. However, the more familiar we are with it, the better and more in-depth we will be able to understand the New Testament and ultimately God's character. Do not be overwhelmed; it simply starts with repetition!

Stephen's Sermon

Abraham: Read Aloud Acts 7:1-8

Before we break down this section of Scripture, describe what is happening in your own words. (Being able to summarize Scripture is a great way to see if we are comprehending what we have just read.)

- God shows His grace in calling Abraham while he lived amongst idol worshippers.
- God gave Abraham a promise that could only be accessed by faith.
- God gave Abraham the Law to set the people of Israel apart (circumcision).
- God showed His power in that He gave Abraham a son despite Sarah being past childbearing years.
- Stephen confirms that the Israelites are the people of God as they were dwelling in the promised land of the Most High God.
- God foretells of Israel's deliverance from Egypt and judgment of Egypt.
This point reinforces the power and truthfulness of God's Word. He cannot lie.
Numbers 23:19, Titus 1:2, Hebrews 6:18



Question: What attributes of God's character stick out to you in this story?

Joseph: Read Aloud Acts 7:9-16

Describe what is happening in your own words.

- God shows grace and a step towards the promise as He births the 12 tribes of Israel through the line of Abraham.
- Joseph is the chosen one of God, giving grace for the purpose of the promise.
- Israel persecutes God's chosen leader.
- God showed grace to His chosen leader in the midst of persecution, raising him from the pit of persecution to a place of power and prominence in Egypt.
- God delivers Israel through His chosen leader by His power.
- God shows grace to the rebellious house of Israel through His chosen leader.



Question: If Abraham's section highlighted the grace of God, what new element is highlighted in this story?



Question: Persecution is not a sign of God's judgement, but often times can simply be a result of obedience. Has there ever been a time you were persecuted for your faith or doing the right thing for God? What was that experience like?



Moses & the Prophets: Read Aloud Acts 7:17-43

Describe what is happening in your own words

- God's promise was fulfilled as Israel was enslaved.
- God showed grace to His chosen leader, Moses by delivering him from the persecution of Egypt.
- God placed His chosen leader in a place of power in Egypt.
- God's chosen leader sought to help his brothers, but in turn, was rejected and threatened, being exiled to the wilderness.
- God showed grace to His chosen leader by giving Him divine revelation and direction to deliver the people of God according to His promise.
- God gave mercy to his people who had rejected His chosen leader, and by that, the leader led them out of slavery with power and signs and wonders.
- God promised another Prophet like Moses that would bring even further deliverance to His people (physical deliverance was not the end goal).
- Israel again rebelled against God's chosen leader and against God by worshipping idols.
- Israel was scattered in the wilderness, and the first generation of Israelites died in the wilderness.
- Israel continued to rebel through the time of the prophets by worshipping false gods.



Question: What themes do you see appearing? What seems to be the tendency of the people of God despite His grace?



Question: It is important to not simply look down on the Israelites. We are prone to the same mistakes. How can you ensure you are not deceived and fighting against the direction and plan of God?

The Kings & Tabernacle: Read Aloud Acts 7:44-53

Describe what is happening in your own words

- God gave the Israelites grace by giving them a place to worship (the Tabernacle).
- David desired to give the Tabernacle a place of rest, which was ultimately accomplished by his son Solomon.
- God never desired Israel to worship in a place but with their heart.
- Despite all of God's chosen leaders, Israel still went astray in their heart. Not only did they rebel in obedience, but restored to persecuting God's prophets and kings.
- Stephen declares that this pattern has continued now that they have killed God's most precious Chosen One; The Prophet, Priest, and King, the Messiah!



Question: What theme is further highlighted in this section?



Question: God is not after a checklist, but He is after our heart. How do you avoid falling into the trap of dead religion rather than walking in a living relationship with Jesus?

Read Aloud Acts 7:54-60

Describe what is happening in your own words

Acts 7:54

The Gospel cuts us to the heart. When we are cut to the heart; we will either experience repentance or often time resistance.

Hebrews 4:11-13, 1 John 3:9-10, John 15:18

Acts 7:55-60

In the midst of persecution, Stephen did not waiver. He was:

- A** Fueled by the Spirit
Stephen did not accomplish his boldness on his own. He was empowered by the Holy Spirit.
- B** Focused on the Promise
Stephen was assured of his salvation. He knew that Jesus had paid the full penalty for his sin and was ready to receive his spirit. Stephen was not focused on this life, but he was at peace with dying as he focused on eternal life.
- C** Filled with Grace
In the midst of death and persecution, Stephen prayed for and forgave his murderers. Stephen followed the exact example of His Savior.



Question: Responding like Stephen does not "just happen." God had prepared Stephen's heart to be ready for this moment. What are ways you can allow God to prepare your heart so you are ready to boldly stand on the truth of the Gospel in love?

Weekly Challenge

We saw Stephen give a comprehensive overview of the nation of Israel's history. This history, and ultimately, God's Word, was Stephen's platform to proclaim the good news about Jesus. The Old Testament is so powerful in helping us defend and proclaim that Jesus is the Messiah. If you have not read through the Old Testament in its entirety, consider making a commitment to do so. If you have read the Old Testament in its entirety, it can be a great practice to continue to do at least once every 2-3 years!

Memory Verse

Acts 9:31 ESV

So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.