

The Acts of the Apostles

Chapter Seven

Learning the Lessons of History

Focus Verse: **Acts 7:51**

“Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye.”

I. Study Introduction

- A. The Bible stands alone in its ability to teach people how to understand its contents! Nobody has to write a book “about” the Bible - really! People are supposed to be Bible **readers**! The Bible is its own interpreter, and explains itself better than any *theologian* or *scholar*!
- B. Here in Acts 7, God reviews history, and shows us some great truths that maybe we miss when we go through the Bible! What you are about to see is how God presents truth
 1. He uses preachers - not great educators or teachers
 2. He teaches history - HIS-story
 3. There is one thing that we learn from history - and that is, as a general rule, people **never** learn from history!
 4. Those who do not learn the lessons of history, are destined to repeat them! Israel going around in the wilderness for 40 years...
- C. God’s preachers throughout the Bible spend a lot of time going back over history, and showing God’s hand. History is usually the most boring subject taught in school - but only because people believe there is no meaning to history - no God behind the scenes. But when you see the Author of history at work behind the scenes, it comes alive
- D. Stephen, a servant of the church in Jerusalem is about to be used of God to teach some highly educated *ignoramuses* some Bible history - and it would do us all some great good to sit in on the “class!”

II. Background

- A. Remember, Stephen has been caught, and brought before a religious council for preaching on the street some “heretical” things (6:13-15):
 1. The second coming of Christ was _____ - at any moment!
 2. Jesus, (not a nuclear bomb) will *Himself* destroy the Temple!
 3. The “customs” of the Jews will be changed!
 4. That Jesus changes lives! Not the catechism class!
- B. The high priests asks Stephen to begin his defense (7:1)
- C. Notice that Stephen wastes no time defending his actions, but takes up the challenge of preaching the gospel, and defending Christ’s desire to save a bunch of religious sinners headed for hell!

III. Study Outline - Learning the Lessons of History

A. God’s Work Throughout History

1. History begins with ____, not with man (7:2)
2. Stephen focuses on Jewish history to make it relate to the Jews
3. Stephen reminds them of God’s hand in the life of Abraham (7:2-7)
 - a. Started while he was in Mesopotamia - unsaved, surrounded by an ungodly society
 - b. God calls Abraham to leave everything: home, family, religion, plans
 - c. God challenges Abraham to follow Him to a land he had never seen before - real faith
 - d. Abraham obeys, and arrives in Canaan - the promised land
 - e. But Abraham is not GIVEN anything yet (7:5) only promises
 - 1) The land
 - 2) Children (Abraham has no child yet)
 - 3) Bondage and struggle - part of the promise
 - 4) Redemption - the Passover - freedom
 - f. The covenant of circumcision (7:8) - God made a promise to Abraham and to his children forever that was identified by the act of circumcision - a mark of ownership (Christians also are owned; 1 Cor 6:19,20)
4. Stephen reminds them of God’s hand in the lives of Isaac, Jacob, and the twelve patriarchs (7:8)
5. Stephen reminds them of God’s hand being with Joseph (7:9-16)
 - a. God was with him when he was sold into slavery (7:9)
 - b. God was with him when he was delivered from all his afflictions (7:10)
 - c. God was with him when Joseph was made governor (7:10)
 - d. God was with him, using Joseph to prepare for all of his family to come to Egypt according to God’s plan (7:11-15)

- 1) Used Joseph's affliction for good (Gen 50:20; Rom 8:28)
 - 2) God uses trouble to get sinners to repent
 - 3) God uses trouble to get Christians back right
 - 4) God used WW2 to get the Jews back into Palestine
 - 5) God is doing stuff in your life as well to get you right - I would give in early, and not resist Him!
- e. 75 souls were saved from starvation, and were prepared for God's next phases of history - a continual building upon the past (7:14-16):
- 1) The birth of a mighty nation IN Egypt (2 million people)
 - 2) The development of the need of that nation for God - only develops when under bondage
 - 3) Their blood redemption - at Passover
6. God's hand was with Jacob's children - known as the _____ (7:17-27) - *Israel* was Jacob's new name
- a. The time of the promise (Gen 15:13-16) drew near (7:17-18)
 - b. God allowed persecution to begin in order to prepare the hearts of Israel to rely on the Passover Lamb!
 - 1) A king who knew not Joseph - not ignorance, but no interest in knowing a Jew! **Mind control**. Same with TV, education, politicians - don't want to know!
 - 2) Slavery of the people - **Will control**
 - 3) Systematic murdering of male children - **birth control**
 - c. The persecution also helped Israel to "_____" to leave!
 - d. God provided a deliverer - Moses (7:19-27) - always does!
 - 1) Miraculous protection at birth (7:19,20)
 - 2) Taken into Pharaoh's house - in spite of Pharaoh's death sentence (7:21)
 - 3) He learned all the world's wisdom and knowledge (7:21,22) and became mighty in words and deeds (7:22)
 - 4) But he sensed something was wrong
 - a) Something was wrong with how own people - Jews
 - b) His heart was not right (7:23) - felt out of place
 - c) All the education and money and power in the world wont fix the heart!
 - 5) He takes action - gets ahead of God (7:23-26) and fails!
 - 6) He is totally misunderstood by the Jews (7:27)

e. The Jews complain, "**WHO MADE THEE TO BE A JUDGE AND A _____ OVER US?**" (7:27) - *This is Stephen's focus!!!*

7. This is where humanity begins to always resist and reject God's hand in their lives - always consider it a bother!

B. Man's Failure Throughout History (7:25-30) Illustrated by _____

1. Moses got ahead of God's timetable - three responses to God
 - a. Man seems to either get ahead of God - usually happens at a young age, and produces disillusionment
 - b. We _____ God as He attempts to work in a person's life we find ourselves always kicking and screaming (Ps 78:40-42)
 - c. We totally reject God - never listening to God at all!
2. Moses supposed _____ would understand his intentions (7:25)
3. Moses supposed that God would work everything out - *which He will*, but you are not to _____ God or force God's hand (Mt 4:6,7)
4. Moses feared man (_____) more than he feared God (7:29)
5. Moses shut out God for __ years (7:30) - out of bitterness, and disappointment - he let 40 years go wasted because of his own attitude (he supposed that things should have been different - we all think this same thing)! This is a great sin!

C. God's Plan All Through History Has Been to _____ (7:30-50)

1. He tried to Save Israel through Moses (7:30-36)
 - a. God always goes looking for us - calling us back (7:31; Gen 3:7-10). We can't get back, so God comes to us!
 - b. God never _____ (7:32,33) - things happen that seem like set-backs, but God can't change, and His plans don't change
 - c. God _____ and is well aware of the events in our lives (7:34; Heb 4:14-16)
 - d. God can use _____ (who allows God to transform them; Rom 12:1,2):

- e. A _____ here - Moses - if he would get saved - trust the Lord instead of his own intelligence, and abilities
- f. A _____ - Abraham - if he would just learn his lesson
- g. A _____ - Peter - if he would just devote all his energy to serving his risen Lord!
- h. God uses some people (7:34,35; like Moses here) simply because He knows that it will require _____ on the part of the Jews to follow him (stammering, unsure, not quite polished).
- i. God's work in history is always evident by the _____ - God likes to make it plain that He is behind things, and not just "chance" (7:36)
- 1) Signs and wonders started with Moses to Israel - Jewish
 - 2) Signs and wonders are for confirmation of God's word
 - 3) True signs and wonders are unquestionable
2. Moses prophesied of a coming Prophet like himself that people are to hear, and follow (7:37-44; Dt 18:15,18,19)
- a. This Person would be _____ like Moses - He would speak the words of God, and of things to come (John 1:21,25; 6:14)
 - b. This Prophet would be "of your brethren" (_____)
 - c. This Prophet would deal directly with the _____ (Mt 15:24; 10:5,6)
 - d. This Prophet would have a _____ like Moses did (7:38)
 - 1) A church is an _____ group. It means "an assembly that has been called together" - specifically, "called OUT of the world, and INTO an assembly" (Heb 10:25)
 - 2) An Old Testament church was an assembled group of Bible believers - they formed *synagogues*. The Jews were called OUT of Egypt, and assembled first in the wilderness, and then later, as a nation in Canaan
 - 3) A New Testament church is an assembled group of Bible believers - they formed *churches*. The Christians are called OUT of the world, and assemble "in the wilderness" right now (non-impressive buildings sometimes), but later they will assemble in _____ (Heb 12:22,23)
 - e. This Prophet would deliver *lively* oracles - _____ - N.T. just as Moses delivered to Israel the Old Testament.
 - f. This Prophet would NOT be followed by everyone, just as Moses was not followed by all the Jews (7:39-44)
 - 1) The Jews preferred to set up their own religion - same with all peoples - they worshipped "Egypt" (the world)
 - 2) They didn't like a leader who was not predictable
 - 3) The people preferred only _____ (2 Tim 3:1-4)
 - 4) God fixed it so that the people didn't just dabble a bit in false religions, but went "all the way!" (7:41-44) - Idolatry is like a landslide, continuously getting worse!
 - 5) Jewish idolatry (7:41-44):
 - a) First they worshipped a golden ____ - *holy cow*!
 - b) It is only after God has offered the truth, and been rejected that God turns (repents) and leaves them alone (7:42)! The worst place to be is without God!
 - c) They were not satisfied, and so worshipped all the "*host of _____*" (astrology, Stonehenge, Newgrange, spiritism, *beings from outer space*, modern evolutionary astronomy) - Dt 4:19; Jer 7:18
 - d) This was all during the Israelite's trek through the wilderness for 40 years! Still going on today!
 - e) They carried in their hearts the tabernacle of the sun-god _____ - Ammonite demon that required people to _____ their children in human sacrifice!
 - f) They worshipped a star related to a Babylonian god named **Rempham** - an obscure god - a passing fad!
 - 6) And God fixed it so that they "reaped" just what they sowed (Gal 6:9) - they ended up captives, carried away into Babylon for ____ years!
 - 7) Even though they had the tabernacle of witness all along
3. The Tabernacle (7:45-50).
- a. Built by _____ under God's instructions (Ex 25-40)
 - b. It was to be a "witness" (it testified to the people of God's presence among them - reminded them)
 - c. It was to be the place that all sacrifices were brought; all tithes; and all worship was to be held.
 - d. It had the following components:
 - 1) An Outer Court - anybody could enter
 - a) An Altar of Sacrifice
 - b) A Brass Washtub - Brazen Laver (lavatory)

- 2) An Inner Court - Only the priests could enter
 - a) A seven-branched _____
 - b) A Table with twelve “shewbreads” (loaves of bread)
 - c) An Altar of Incense
- 3) A Holy of Holies - only the high priest, once a year could enter
 - a) The “_____” (box) of the covenant
 - b) The covering “mercyseat” - covered by Cherubs
- e. This was no ordinary “tent - it matched the pattern of the true tabernacle in heaven (Heb 8:5; 2 Cor 12:2)
- f. Carried by _____ (Jesus) into Canaan
- g. King David wanted to make God a permanent testimony of His power and presence in Jerusalem - a _____ (7:45,46).
- h. But David’s son, _____ was to be the builder (7:47).
- i. All the while God kept reminding Israel that God really doesn’t live in Temples (7:48-50)
- j. But Israel wanted to build it anyway

D. But Man Through it all does nothing but “_____” God (7:51-53)

1. People are “stiffnecked” - _____, unrepentant (7:51; Ex 32:9)!
2. People are “uncircumcised” in heart and ears - untransformed, unchanged (Rom 2:28,29)
3. People are consistent - always resisting (7:51)
4. Notice it is the Holy Ghost that has been at work (7:51)
5. All the prophets were persecuted and hated by the Jews!
6. The Jews even killed the very prophets who foretold of the coming Just One (the Messiah)
7. Just like they murdered and betrayed the Messiah Himself (7:52)
8. All in the face of receiving God’s word, and not living it (7:53)

E. Stephen’s Altar-Call

1. They were cut to the heart - not just an intellectual exchange
2. They were only full of anger - either make people glad, or mad!
3. But Stephen remained full of the Holy Ghost - never lost his temper
 - a. He saw the glory of God - Moses saw this; David saw this
 - b. He saw Jesus there next to God the Father
4. So the crowd **stones** Stephen - the first martyr of Jesus Christ
 - a. Note the “_____ of spirit” - wrong spirit
 - b. Note the rejection of his “words” - Stephen fought with Scripture, and the people resisted! He did not fight with swords and guns!
 - c. Note the carefulness of the crowd - must have “witnesses” to verify the people’s actions that day (7:58)
 - d. This turns out to be the influencing of the greatest Christian to ever live - Saul of Tarsus (7:58)!
5. Up to the very last, Stephen’s heart is broken for his people (7:59,60)
 - a. His whole focus was continually on the Lord
 - b. He trusted to the end in the Lord to “receive his spirit”
 - c. He wished that Israel would not reap anymore for their sins!
 - d. A Christian’s death is only a falling asleep

IV. Conclusion and Study Questions