



"REASONS TO REJOICE"

"Your Words were found and I ate them, and Your Word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." Jeremiah 15:16

"RIDING THROUGH"

THE BOOK OF ACTS - LESSON 7

This week we will continue to examine Stephen's sermon as he preaches to the Jewish council, also known as the Sanhedrin. In Acts 6:11 Stephen was accused of blaspheming the law and the temple. Stephen gives them a brief overview of Jewish history to show them how unfounded these accusations are and to show them that they were guilty of a sin that was far worse than what they were accusing him of.

The nation of Israel had continually rejected God. Stephen reminds them that they had rejected Joseph, the one who was sent to deliver them. They didn't receive him until the "second time" (Acts 7:13). Now Stephen uses the examples of Moses and the prophets, whom they also rejected the first time.

First Day

1. Read Acts 7:1-60 in one sitting. It's important to understand what the Word is saying in context.

Because he was accused of speaking against the law and the temple, Stephen counter-attacks by accusing Israel of betraying God. Stephen accuses them of elevating the law and the temple above God Himself, causing them to fall into religious idolatry. Their "religious" system had grown cold and they had left their "first love" of God, substituting Him with man-made religion. They tried to limit His presence to a man-made temple where they could control Him themselves. Stephen reminds them that God had met Abraham, Joseph, and Moses apart from, and outside of, the temple.

Donald Sweeting, in his book The Acts of God says, "In Jesus' day the law and the Temple were key among Israel's institutions. They were pillars of the Jewish religion. Originally they were aids to preserve the covenant between God and His people. But in time the law was obscured by rabbinic traditions. The Temple became a national shrine, giving Israel a false security that God would always be with them. Not so, thundered Stephen! God, he said, is not bound to this building. Nor is He bound to this land. The religious leaders saw that as treason."

Keep Stephen's purpose for preaching in mind as you continue to read this chapter.

2. Read Acts 7:17-22. What is Stephen's main point? List any facts you find concerning Moses.

Stephen speaks highly of Moses, who was given the law on Mt. Sinai. He was rejected by Israel as their deliverer the first time, just as Joseph was (Exodus 2:11-22). He too was received the second time (Acts 7:35). Let's review the life of Moses, shall we?

3. Read Exodus 1:1-22 and answer the following questions:
 - a. What was the new king scared of? (vs 7-10)
 - b. What was his first plan? (vs 11-14)
 - c. Did it work? (vs 12)
 - d. What was his second plan? (vs 15-20)
 - e. Did it work? (vs 20) Why not?
 - f. What was his third plan? (vs 22)
4. Stephen brings up the birth of Moses in Acts 7:20. Read Exodus 2:1-10 to refresh your memory of how God saved Moses from being murdered. Briefly describe how he was delivered.
5. What does Hebrews 11:23 tell us about Moses' parents?
6. What were their names? Read Exodus 6:17-20.
7. What do their actions tell us about their character?
8. Do you think it was easy for them to give up their child? How do you think they would have felt?

9. Who else gave up their son? Read 1 Samuel 1:19-28. Why?

As a mother, my heart goes out to the parents of Moses. At least Hannah was giving Samuel over to Eli to be raised in the temple. I can't even imagine the fear the parents of Moses must have felt delivering their son into the hands of the pagan Egyptians, knowing that he would be brought up in a pagan, totally godless world. But the faith and trust they had in God outweighed any fears they must have had. They knew their son belonged to God and that He would protect their boy! Lord, help us trust You with our kids as we send them out in today's godless, pagan world.

This ends our lesson for today. Meditate on the fact that God has given His angels charge over you and your children. We can hide under the shadow of His wings for refuge, and His truth shall be our shield and buckler (Psalm 91:4 and 11). I'm rejoicing in that ... are you?

Memory Verse of the Week: "Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool. What house will you build for Me? says the Lord, or what is the place of My rest? Has My hand not made all these things?" Acts 7:49-50

Second Day

Review this week's memory verse.

Today we will continue in our review of the life of Moses. Remember why Stephen brings up the man Moses to the council. God did not meet Moses in a temple, but in a desert, in a burning bush. Stephen never spoke against Moses, but reminds them that Moses testified of Jesus, the one who was to come -- the one they killed.

1. Read Acts 7:22-36. Did you learn any new facts about Moses?

Acts 7:22 tells us that Moses was well-learned in the wisdom of the Egyptians and was mighty in word and deed. Egypt offered the greatest education possible at the time. Egyptians were taught about their religion, the law, medicine, literature, and poetry. Princes were also trained in battle.

History tells us that Moses was a great warrior. Moses wrote songs, acted as judge for the people, wrote the first five books of the Bible, and was a strong leader.

2. How did God use Moses' upbringing to prepare him to be the deliverer of Israel?

3. Looking back on your life, how was God preparing YOU for what He had planned for you? Isn't it wonderful to know that God has a plan for each one of us?

4. What happened to Moses when he was 40 years old? (Exodus 2:11, Acts 7:23, Hebrews 11:24)

Moses made a choice to return to his people. This choice did not seem to be impulsive, but seemed to be a mature, deliberate resolve of a 40-year-old man. He had nothing to gain, but everything to lose.

Moses sacrificed a lot to return to his people. He went from living in a palace of luxury, a life of respect and honor, owning the treasures of Egypt ... to living in some sort of a hut or tent, eating hard and coarse food, being hated and humiliated, and living in poverty. Hebrews 11:25-26 tells us that Moses counted this cost. He is a great example of one who was willing to die to self.

5. Why did Moses kill an Egyptian? (Exodus 2:11-12, Acts 7:24)

6. What happened when Moses tried to settle a dispute between two Hebrews? How did their reaction surprise him? (Acts 7:25-29, Exodus 2:13-14)

Moses feared the consequences of what he did, so he fled to the land of Midian, where he stayed for 40 years. He married a woman named Zipporah and had two sons (Acts 7:29, Exodus 2:14-22). God kept Moses in the desert for 40 years to teach him, humble him, and prepare him. He had much to learn. I believe that one of the greatest lessons he learned was the need to totally depend on God. He had to kill any pride, self, or self-confidence. Moses had to learn to cling to God for everything. He obviously learned this lesson by his statement to the children of Israel in Deuteronomy 30:20, "Love the Lord your God, obey His voice, and cling to Him, for He is your life..."

God appeared to Moses in a burning bush and called him by name (Exodus 3:4). God wanted Moses to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt and take them to the Promised Land (Acts 7:32-34, Exodus 3:1-12). Stephen doesn't talk about how Moses responded, but we read about it in Exodus 3 and 4.

7. What were the four ways that Moses responded to God's call?
 - a. Exodus 3:11
 - b. Exodus 3:13
 - c. Exodus 4:1
 - d. Exodus 4:10-13

8. Count how many times the word "I" is used in Exodus 3:7-12. What was God trying to remind Moses of?

9. Do you ever respond to God the same way? Be specific. Have you ever said, "I can't do it!" or "Who am I?" or "I don't know enough"?

10. If we respond that way, what does it reveal about our faith and trust in God? What do John 15:5 and Philipians 4:13 say about this?

Oswald Chambers said, "The call of God is not the echo of my nature. My personal temperament is not considered. As long as I consider my personal temperament and think about what I am fitted for, I shall never hear the call of God. The majority of us have no ear for anything but ourselves, we cannot hear a thing God says."

11. Think about the words of Oswald Chambers. Consider your own life. Who is your ear tuned to? God or yourself? After you meditate on this, write a prayer to the Lord asking Him to help you hear His voice and heart louder than your own.

This ends our lesson for today. I love the story and example of Moses, don't you? Moses loved God with his whole being. How about you? Is He your life? Are you clinging to Him? Can you find a "**Reason to Rejoice**" from today's lesson?

Third Day

Are you practicing your memory verse?

In this next section, Stephen continues to point out the rejection of God by the nation Israel.

1. Read Acts 7:37-43.

In Acts 7:37, Stephen quotes Moses from Deuteronomy 18:15. The Jews continued to look for that prophet spoken of by Moses. This explains the actions of the scribes and the Pharisees when John the Baptist came onto the scene. In John 1:21, they asked John if he was the Christ, or Elijah, or "the prophet." He answered in John 1:23, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness; make straight the way of the Lord." Jesus was the prophet of whom Moses spoke.

The word "congregation" in verse 38 is used to designate "the gathering of Israel, summoned for a specific purpose." The Angel referred to in verse 38 is the same one referred to in verse 30. This was an appearance of Jesus Christ in His pre-incarnate state.

2. What were the Israelites doing while Moses was meeting with God on the mountain? (Exodus 32:1-6)

The people were rejecting Moses, and by doing this, they were rejecting God Himself.

3. What two commandments were the Israelites breaking by making the calf? (Exodus 20:1-17)

4. Who should have been keeping them in line? (Exodus 32:1) What job had God given him to do? (Exodus 4:14-16)

Egypt had rubbed off on the Israelites. These practices were common in Egypt and had become familiar to them. The Israelites needed a god that they could see; something tangible. The oxen was one of the many gods worshipped by the Egyptians.

5. How did Moses respond? (Exodus 32:19-20)

6. What was God's response? (Exodus 32:9-14)

7. What arguments did Moses use with God when he interceded for Israel?
(Exodus 32:11-14)

The Israelites continued to look back at their past, which became a lot more appealing than it was in reality (Acts 7:39, Exodus 15:24, Numbers 11:4-5, and Exodus 16:2). Amazing how this can happen, don't you think?

8. What can be the danger of always looking at our past? What does Paul say about this in Philippians 3:13-14?
9. Egypt is a type of the world. How often we are also tempted to "go back to Egypt"? What about you? Have you gone back to any of your old ways? Allow God to search your heart on this one.

John Phillips said, "No insult offered to God could have been greater than to make an Egyptian idol and worship it as the author of salvation."

10. Are there any other gods in your life? Is there something that's more important to you than the Lord? How do you spend most of your time? Have you been looking to other "things," or "rejoicing in the works of your own hands?"
(Acts 7:41)

Acts 7:42 describes the judgment of God when He removes His hands and allows sinners to have their own way. This should be compared to Romans 1:18-28.

The "**host of heaven**" in Acts 7:42 refers to the sun, moon, and stars. There is no reference in Exodus to the Israelites worshipping the sun and the moon, but Jeremiah (19:13) accuses the people of this type of idolatry. Stephen quotes from the prophet Amos, accusing the Israelites of mixing with pagan gods. Yes, they had worshipped Jehovah and made sacrifices to Him, but they were in sin because they had welcomed other foreign gods as well.

Acts 7:43 refers to a god called Moloch. During the time of Amos, this god was known as the god of prosperity and success. People would offer their firstborn child to him as a living sacrifice by putting them through fire. The families believed that this would make them more prosperous and successful. Many believe that abortion is a type of present-day sacrifice to the god of Moloch.

11. How does abortion compare to this practice? How do people today use the same excuses? (It's not good timing right now -- I have a career.)

In Acts 7:43, Stephen also refers to the god of Remphan. This was possibly the Egyptian name for Saturn and was the god of the planets. A modern-day type of this worship could be astrology, where people search the stars as a means to foretell the future. God considers astrology an abomination. (Deuteronomy 4:19, 17:3, 18:9-14, Isaiah 47:12-15, 2 Kings 23:5)

12. Why is it so wrong for a Christian to have anything to do with astrology? Who holds their future, and whom should they be consulting?

That's it for today. Stephen's words were totally anointed by the Holy Spirit!
Go, Stephen, go!

Fourth Day

Review your memory verse.

1. Today begin by reading Acts 7:44-50.

The Council was accusing Stephen of speaking against the temple. Stephen now accuses them of distorting the purpose of the tabernacle, which Moses built while in the wilderness.

2. God gave Moses the blueprints for building the tabernacle (Exodus 25:9).
What was the purpose of the tabernacle? (Exodus 25:8)

Inside the tabernacle was the Ark of the Covenant. It was the most sacred possession of the Israelites. A detailed description of the Ark is given in Exodus 25:10-22. It was a box made from acacia wood. Inside were the two stone tablets given to Moses by God, a golden pot of manna, and Aaron's rod that budded (Hebrews 9:4-5). The Jews believed that God dwelt between the cherubim, which sat on the lid of the Ark, or the mercy seat. The mercy seat was made of all gold. God spoke to Moses from this place (Numbers 7:89).

The Ark was carried ahead of the Israelites when they left Mt. Sinai (Numbers 10:33) and when they crossed the Jordan River (Joshua 4:9-11). After traveling many other places, the Ark was placed in Solomon's temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 8:1-9). The Ark served as a visible reminder of God's presence.

3. Read Acts 7:45-47. Explain these verses using 1 Chronicles 28:2-10 for help with your answer.

God's glory definitely came to the temple, but eventually the worship in the temple ceased. It became more of a formality and idolatry. The presence of God cannot be restricted to one place. Moses knew it, Joshua knew it, David knew it, and Solomon knew it.

4. Stephen quotes the prophet Isaiah in Acts 7:49-50. Where does Isaiah say that God dwells?
5. What were Solomon's words of wisdom on this subject? Read 1 Kings 8:27.

**We've all heard the phrase, "You can't keep God in a box."
(Although they sure tried!)**

6. How do people today keep "God in a box"? Why are they scared for Him to get out?
7. How do you keep "God in a box"? Do you like to keep Him right where you want Him?

Stephen reminds them that God is much bigger than the temple! They wanted to enshrine His presence. What a **"Reason to Rejoice"** it is, that we have a God whose glory cannot be contained in a building.

Fifth Day

Write out your verse from memory. What does it mean to you?

We will wrap up this lesson by looking at the reaction of the Jewish council to Stephen's sermon. Pray for the Holy Spirit to give you understanding of the Scripture and the knowledge to know how to apply it to your life.

1. Read Acts 7:51-60.

Stephen brings it home with these last few verses. He now directs his accusations straight for their hearts and they didn't like it!

2. What does Stephen call them in Acts 7:51? Who else was called that in Exodus 32:9?

3. What does it mean to be stiff-necked?

The Jews insisted on circumcision of the flesh, but had failed to respond with their hearts and minds to God's revelation (Acts 7:51).

4. Stephen uses the phrase "our fathers" throughout his whole sermon. In verse 51, what does he change that phrase to, and why?

5. What does Stephen accuse them of in Acts 7:51?

The word **"resist"** in verse 51 means to **"strive against."** It's amazing to see that the men who were resisting the Spirit were persecuting the man who was "full" of the Spirit!

6. What does Stephen accuse them of in verse 52?

7. Describe the Jews' response. (Acts 7:54 and 57)

**** The phrase "cut to heart" means to be "sawn asunder." The word "gnashed" means to grind teeth or chew (Acts 7:54).**

8. God was so gracious to Stephen. He no longer saw the angry mob. He no longer saw the hate. What did he see? (Acts 7:55)

Stephen calls Jesus the Son of Man. This is the title that Jesus usually gives for Himself. This title is found nowhere else in the New Testament, except in the Gospels.

Jesus was usually spoken of as "being seated at the right hand of the Father." Here we see Jesus standing! Both symbolize the authority of the risen Christ. What a blessing for Stephen to see Jesus standing to welcome him into His presence.

Acts 7:58 says that they cast him out of the city to stone him. Stoning was the punishment for blasphemy (Leviticus 24:10 -23). Usually the prisoner was stripped, thrown into a pit, and stoned from above. The witnesses did the actual stoning. Their outer robes would be removed so they could move around more freely. (New Century Bible Commentary)

9. Who was standing by watching? (Acts 7:58)

We meet Saul, whose name is later changed to Paul. Paul never seemed to be able to forget how Stephen died (Acts 22:17-21). It made a huge impact on his life.

10. Stephen's last words were very similar to Christ's. What were they?
Acts 7:59-60 and Luke 23:34 and 46.

When a believer dies, we "fall asleep" (1 Thessalonians 4:13). When we awake, we will be in the arms of our Savior!

The story of Stephen is a humbling one. We see him as such an example of courage, faith, and obedience. Here is an example of a man who truly followed the example of Jesus Christ. I'm sure he heard those words, "**Well done my good and faithful servant!**" (Matthew 25:21-23)

11. What does the story of Stephen mean to you personally? What lesson did you learn?

12. How was Stephen's love for God evident to those around him? Is yours?

13. What changes would you like to make in your life as a result of this study?

Thank you, God, for so many **"Reasons to Rejoice!"**
See you ladies next week.