

A Study of the Acts of the Apostles
Week Eight
Acts 7:18-43

Day One

17 "As the time drew near for God to fulfill his promise to Abraham, the number of our people in Egypt greatly increased. 18 Then another king, who knew nothing about Joseph, became ruler of Egypt. 19 He dealt treacherously with our people and oppressed our forefathers 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 in his father's house.

v. 17 – It had been more than 400 years since God made His promise to Abraham. And to think that I get impatient when I've been waiting for 20 years! This is why Abraham was such a special person to God; He consistently trusted God in spite of circumstances that seemed to the contrary.

What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about — but not before God. What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness" (Romans 4:1-3).

Why not spend some time studying Abraham's life? May I suggest that you study what the New Testament has to say about him and not go to the Old Testament for your study.

v. 18 – God used a cruel Pharaoh to position His people to depart Egypt. Have you lost favor with leadership recently? Then perhaps God is telling you it's time to move on?

The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases (Proverbs 21:1).

v. 19 – I've always been intrigued by this edict from Pharaoh. The Israelites were to kill all their male babies and let the girls live. How short-sighted! In one or two generations, the race would not be able to propagate and Pharaoh would lose his workers with this strategy. But leaders can often declare such policies that are counterproductive. **Do you work for leaders like this? Are you such a leader?** Contrast this Pharaoh with Joseph's Pharaoh who managed and led his people through a world famine. This shows the difference that good leadership can make. The Pharaoh in this verse probably seemed like a tough, strong leader, but he was a bad leader, and he led his country into mediocrity that still plagues Egypt to this day. Wow!

v. 20 – How did Moses' parents know that their baby was no ordinary child? Why didn't they discard their male baby like the other parents had to discard theirs? What did they see? I think they saw the hand of God's purpose on him. **What do you see when you**

look at your children? The young people around you? Purpose or problems?

Moses' parents saw that he was to deliver their people so they hid him for three months. They ignored the law because a higher law was working here. **What strategy do you have to release your children's purpose? Do you see their purpose?**

Day Two

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 fellow 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.

v. 21 – Moses' parents did eventually do what Pharaoh had ordered: They put their son in the river—with one major adjustment. They put their son in a waterproof basket, so he would float and not drown. That was ingenious. Again we see that they submitted but did not obey authority. And God rewarded their creativity and faith. Pharaoh's daughter found Moses and raised him as her own son. The king of Egypt raised the baby who would prove to be the downfall of Egypt. Pharaoh bankrolled the education for his own nemesis. God certainly does have a sense of humor.

v. 22 – I have often wondered how this verse connects with the statement that Moses made to God before the burning bush:

Moses said to the LORD, "O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue" (Exodus 4:10).

Moses said he couldn't speak but Stephen claimed he was powerful in word and deed. I don't think it's that important, but my guess would be that after 40 years in the wilderness tending sheep, Moses had lost many of his speaking skills and even familiarity with Hebrew and Egyptian. More important than what Moses said perhaps was God's answer:

The LORD said to him, "Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the LORD? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say" (Exodus 4:11-12).

Do you get nervous speaking? Then take courage from what the Lord told Moses. God understands speech because He created man's ability to communicate. God will help you if you must speak. He will teach you what to say, just as He did Jesus:

For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it (John 12:49-50).

vs. 23&24 – Unlike what is portrayed in the movie *The Ten Commandments*, it seems that Moses was familiar with who he was and what he was here to do from a young age.

One day he decided to go over and visit his countrymen. When he saw one being mistreated, Moses killed the Egyptian and buried him in the sand, thus depriving him, according to Egyptian theology, of eternal life because of the improper burial.

Many people are concerned that they move too quickly in the will of God, citing this story as an example of what can happen if you move too quickly and in your own strength instead of God's. But my response is that Moses killed someone! He had major issues and tendencies from which God had to deliver him. The New Testament model is found in Acts, where the apostles had been with Jesus for 3.5 years and then were thrust forth into ministry. **Have you known the Lord for more than three years?** If so, then it's time to get busy. Don't use this story of Moses as an excuse to delay. Get to work!

Day Three

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 Do you want to kill 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.

v. 25 – Moses knew his purpose was to rescue his people—he was a man on a mission. He misunderstood, however, how he was going to achieve this purpose. He obviously thought he would use his military skills to lead an armed rebellion, but that wasn't God's way. Moses also assumed that the people had the same revelation of his purpose as he did. He was wrong on that issue as well. One of the most difficult things in life is to trust that the God who revealed your purpose to you will also reveal it in due time to others.

v. 26 -- Notice how full of himself Moses was. Look at the verbs that are connected with these verses. Moses decided, went to his defense, killed, buried, thought, came upon, tried to reconcile, and fled. God had to deliver Moses from, well, from Moses himself. And God must do the same for you and me. But don't imagine that this will take 40 years, unless of course you have resorted to murder as a means to achieve your purpose. Then God has some serious work to do! God will use you and change you at the same time; the two aren't mutually exclusive. **Are you waiting for God to perfect you before He can use you?** Don't wait—it will never happen. So look to be used while God is working on you.

vs. 27&28 – Moses had the best intentions as he intervened to settle this dispute among the Israelites. This was his first encounter (the first of many) where he would see how stubborn and difficult the Jews could be. They didn't want rescued and certainly not by him. They threw back in Moses' face the fact that he had killed an Egyptian (news travels fast through the grapevine).

Do people remind you of your past failures? If they do, do you run the other way as Moses did? Don't run from your past failures. Take responsibility for them, don't be defensive and focus on the lessons that the failures taught you. Of course, Moses feared for his life here because he would have been arrested and killed himself. He had no choice but to flee. But God was going to use his exile to prepare him for his ultimate return. Again we see the truth of what Paul wrote:

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28).

v. 29 – Moses went to Midian, abandoned any hope of fulfilling his purpose, settled down, got married and had two sons. Wow! He certainly did run the other way, just as Jonah tried to do when he got on a ship, trying to get as far away from Tarshish as possible. **Are you running from your purpose? Have you abandoned your PurposeQuest? Were you once zealot for achievement, only to have settled down into the normal, workaday life?** You may have forgotten about purpose, but God hasn't. And what's more, God is preparing you at this very moment and you aren't even aware of it. If God used Moses the murderer, He can use you as well. What's more, He wants to use you. It's not too late.

Day Four

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 look more closely, he heard the Lord's voice: 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; 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.'"

v. 30 – Moses had forgotten what he once knew—that he was to rescue his people. But God hadn't forgotten! And God hasn't forgotten you either. Keep preparing for your day of opportunity. Practice, equip and train for when you will fulfill what it is that God created you to do.

v. 31 – Moses was amazed that the burning bush kept on burning without being consumed. That is how purpose is where you are concerned. **What can you do with unlimited energy? About what are you most enthusiastic?** These are indications that you are doing what you were created to do. You burn like the bush and don't burn out. As you move more closely to who you truly are, you hear God's voice in ways that you previously did not. All kinds of good and helpful things take place in my life when I am working to fulfill my purpose, which is to create order out of chaos.

What do you that when you do it, you burn your brightest and hear the voice of God?

v. 32 – Stephen spent a lot of time talking about Moses to the council. This was because the Jews revered Moses and “romanticized” his life and their relationship to him when he was alive. While Stephen’s generation paid homage to Moses as a great prophet, Moses’ contemporaries gave him a hard time and resisted his work and word. Don’t expect to be given a parade in this life if you do God’s will. It is only after you are gone that people build statues and declare your virtue. While you’re here, they criticize and mistreat you.

For example, consider Martin Luther King. Today he is a hero, especially in the United States. But while he was alive, many people opposed and criticized him, even African Americans. But today he is bigger than the life he led because history now puts what he did in proper perspective. While he was here, there were many political and ethnic factions that worked to keep him from having too much power or success.

Are you being opposed as you seek to serve God and fulfill your purpose? Then join the ranks of God’s servants through the ages who have been treated just the same. Remember what Paul wrote and encourage yourself today:

In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it (2 Timothy 3:12-15).

vs. 33&34 – The Lord spoke to Moses from the burning bush and ordered him to take off his sandals. There was nothing special about that ground except for the fact that God spoke to Moses there. And that was the one and only time that God spoke to him like that and in that place. There is no such thing as a sacred place, only places where a sacred God makes Himself known. Plus to venerate a place because God revealed Himself there can lead to superstitions of how and where to receive something from God. I cannot think of any place that God has set aside as special, otherwise people would seek the place and not the God of the place. Do you agree or disagree?

I watch the Jews in Jerusalem try to get close to where they believe the Temple and Holy of Holies were. While it is a special place because it is so old and so much took place there, God isn’t contained or identified with geography. God is identified by and lives with His people. He even told David:

"Go and tell my servant David, "This is what the LORD says: You are not the one to build me a house to dwell in. I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought Israel up out of Egypt to this day. I have moved from one tent site to another, from one dwelling place to another. Wherever I have moved with all the Israelites, did I ever say to any of their leaders whom I commanded to shepherd my people, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?" (1 Chronicles 17:4-6).

Don’t try to build a place for God except for a place in your heart and will.

Day Five

35 "This is the same Moses whom 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 did wonders and miraculous signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea and for forty years in the desert. 37 "This is that Moses who told the Israelites, 'God will send you a prophet like me from your own people.' 38 He was in the assembly in the desert, with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers; and he received living words to pass on to us.

v. 35 – The Old Testament is full of what is called “types.” These are shadows or representations of what was yet to come in the New Testament, and most of the types or shadows point to Jesus. Moses was rejected by his people but God sent him back as their ruler. The same is true of Jesus. Can you think of other ways that Moses was a type of Jesus? I can think of one way that we already looked at in Acts 3 when Peter said:

For Moses said, “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from among his people” (Acts 3:22-23).

The entire Bible, both Old and New, is about Jesus. Almost every heresy is a perversion of who Jesus is. And Stephen was in trouble in these verses because of Jesus.

v. 36 – God was so patient with the Israelites as they wandered the desert with Moses leading them and God is patient today too. But don't mistake God's patience for approval or disinterest:

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:8-9).

Oh Lord, is there anything with which you are patient that is offensive to you? If so, show it to me, Lord and then grant me repentance to turn my back on it and obey you with all my heart. Amen.

v. 37 – Peter mentioned the fact that Moses had predicted Jesus and now Stephen mentioned it as well. While this was a hard message for the Jews to hear, both men were trying to win some to the Lord by showing how their most venerated character, Moses, was pointing the way to Jesus. The Jews were so devoted to Moses that they couldn't see him pointing the way to Jesus.

One must be impressed with Stephen's command of Scripture. I want that same familiarity with the ability to teach others not what I think God said, but what God actually said. Pray with me the prayer found in Psalm 119:

Teach me, O LORD, to follow your decrees; then I will keep them to the end. Give me understanding, and I will keep your law and obey it with all my heart. Direct me in the path of your commands, for there I find delight. Turn my heart toward your statutes and not toward selfish gain. Turn my eyes away from worthless things; preserve my life according to your word. Fulfill your promise to your servant, so that you may be feared (Psalm 119:33-38).

In fact, take some time to read all of Psalm 119. You will see that it is about God's word and it is in the exact center of the Bible. The Bible is the center of God's work and the crown of His work is Jesus.

v. 38 – Moses received living words to pass on to the people, but those words were meant to lead the people to Jesus:

So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law (Galatians 3:24-25).

Yet many preferred to stay under the Law even after they came to Jesus. That is a battle that Paul fought in almost all the churches he planted, and that is why he wrote Romans and Galatians—to show that the Law was inferior to faith in Christ. **How about you? Are you putting your faith in Christ, or the Law? Do you now follow a legalistic system, having been set free by faith?** Paul wrote to the Colossians warning them about this:

Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ. Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. He has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow. Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"? These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence (Colossians 2:16-23).

Day Six

39 "But our fathers 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 held a celebration in honor of what their hands had made.

v. 39 – And many of the Jews refused to obey Jesus and didn't turn back to Egypt, but maintained their dead ways of the Law. I urge you not to do the same thing but continue in faith:

All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country — a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them (Hebrews 11:13-16).

Have you thought about returning to your previous futile lifestyle, even if it had a semblance of holiness or religion to it? Don't! Continue to follow Jesus in faith.

v. 40 – Stephen was ruining any romantic concepts his listeners may have had about Moses and his relationship with his followers. Someone once said, “The good old days seldom are.” **Does that make sense to you? Do you have a nostalgic yearning for the past, a past that, if you're honest, wasn't that good or preferable to what you have today?** If you are, stop and give thanks for where you are today, even if it is in a difficult place.

v. 41—I used to think that an idol could only be something you could touch or see. But I have since come to realize that people can have idols in their hearts. I also realized that I could worship a false god in my heart, a god fashioned after who I wanted him to be. When I realized that, I determined to learn who God was and what He wanted, not who I wanted Him to be. I would often hear people say, “I think God would honor this or that behavior, faith or attitude.” I began to ask myself, “Would He really?” I had to come to the conclusion that I couldn't figure God out to the extent that I could say “God will honor that.” I stopped harboring an impression or interpretation of what I wanted God to be like and started worshipping Him as He was.

Day Seven

42 But God turned away and gave them over to the worship of the heavenly bodies. This agrees with what is written in the book of the prophets: "Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings forty years in the desert, O house of Israel? 43 You have lifted up the shrine of Molech and the star of your god Rephan, the idols you made to worship. Therefore I will send you into exile beyond Babylon."

v. 42 – I know I may get in trouble for this (especially after what I wrote yesterday), but I think pride and idolatry are two sins that are particularly offensive to God. When the Jews turned to idolatry, God gave them over to more idolatry and they began to worship created things, like the sun, moon and stars. And these were the people who had seen the Red Sea part and manna come down from heaven! Yet it wasn't enough to prevent them

from lapsing into gross idolatry. While I enjoy signs and wonders, I don't crave them, nor do I think they are the answer to the church's problems today. I hear many say, "We need the power of God. We need to see more miracles!" While I agree that the Church needs more manifest power, I don't think that is the answer for the lack of discipline or discipleship that is so prevalent today.

v. 43 – Stephen referred to Amos 5:25 and considered the book of Amos the inspired words of one of God's prophets. Once again we see how skilled Stephen was with the word of God. When I was 37, I returned to school and earned a doctorate by the time I was 45 in pastoral ministries. Every course improved my understanding of the word of God. Today I'm writing these devotional commentaries because I have spent a good portion of my adult life reading and studying God's word. **Are you willing to pay the price and put in the time necessary to become familiar with the Bible?** God will help you, but you must still do the work!

You don't necessarily have to return to school, but you do need to take some classes and read some books (the right kind of books by scholarly, godly authors). But as you learn, you will become less and less able to say, "I think this is what this passage means," or "The Lord showed me this hidden meaning of this verse." Study will free you to teach but it will restrict what you can teach to what the Holy Spirit meant when He inspired His word.