



Study Guide: Acts – Chapter 7

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This study guide provides an educational overview of Acts Chapter 7 using a verse-by-verse structure, theological context, and application-oriented insights grounded in Scripture.

Introduction

Acts chapter 7 serves as a pivotal moment in the Book of Acts, marking the first major speech of Stephen, one of the early Christian deacons. This chapter contributes significantly to the narrative by providing a comprehensive recounting of Israel's history from Abraham to Solomon, highlighting God's faithfulness and Israel's repeated rejection of His messengers. Readers should watch for Stephen's bold defense before the Sanhedrin, his theological interpretation of Israel's past, and the escalating tension that leads to his martyrdom. This chapter bridges the early church's outreach with the deep-rooted Jewish heritage and sets the stage for the widening of the gospel beyond Jerusalem.

Context

The immediate literary context of Acts 7 follows Stephen's arrest after accusations of blasphemy. The chapter is set before the Jewish council, the Sanhedrin, where Stephen defends himself against charges that he spoke against the temple and the law. Historically, this speech is framed within the covenantal history of Israel, tracing God's promises from Abraham through the patriarchs, Moses, and the building of the temple by Solomon. Stephen, a Hellenistic Jew and a leader in the early church, addresses a predominantly Jewish audience steeped in tradition. His speech challenges their understanding of God's work and their identity as God's chosen people, highlighting a pattern of resistance to God's messengers.

Outline

The chapter begins with Stephen's address to the Sanhedrin, where he recounts God's call to Abraham and the patriarchal promises. It then moves through the history of Joseph and the migration to Egypt, followed by Moses' birth, calling, and leadership in delivering Israel from Egypt. Stephen highlights Israel's rejection of Moses and God's laws, emphasizing



their resistance to God's appointed leaders. The narrative culminates in the construction of the temple under Solomon, which Stephen contrasts with God's transcendence beyond any physical dwelling. The chapter closes with a direct accusation against the Jewish leaders for resisting the Holy Spirit and betraying and murdering the Righteous One, leading to Stephen's stoning.

Verse-by-Verse Study

Verses 1-3: Stephen is questioned by the high priest and asked to defend the accusations against him. His calm demeanor sets the tone for a reasoned historical defense rather than a mere personal rebuttal.

Verses 4-16: Stephen begins his speech by recounting the call of Abraham, emphasizing God's revelation and promises that extend beyond the land of Canaan. He traces the patriarchal narrative, focusing on God's guidance and the faith of the ancestors.

Verses 17-43: The focus shifts to Moses, highlighting his birth, divine commissioning, and leadership. Stephen recounts Israel's repeated rejection of Moses and God's laws, illustrating a pattern of disobedience and resistance to God's messengers. The speech also touches on the tabernacle and the temple, underscoring the difference between God's presence and human-made structures.

Verses 44-50: Stephen addresses the temple, affirming its significance but reminding the council that God does not dwell in houses made by human hands. This challenges the prevailing Jewish emphasis on the temple as the exclusive locus of God's presence.

Verses 51-53: Stephen directly confronts the Sanhedrin, accusing them of resisting the Holy Spirit, betraying, and murdering Jesus, the Righteous One. This indictment reveals the spiritual blindness and hardness of heart among the Jewish leaders.

Verses 54-60: The chapter concludes with the violent reaction of the council, who stone Stephen. His final words echo Jesus' forgiveness, demonstrating his faith and the cost of discipleship. This martyrdom marks a turning point in the early church's mission.

Key Themes

One key theme is the faithfulness of God throughout Israel's history, contrasted with human rebellion and rejection of His messengers. Stephen's speech reveals a pattern of resistance that culminates in the rejection of Jesus. Another theme is the transcendence of



God beyond physical temples or structures, challenging narrow religious views. The chapter also highlights the role of the Holy Spirit in guiding and empowering God's people, and the cost of faithful witness, as seen in Stephen's martyrdom. Finally, the theme of divine justice and mercy is present in Stephen's forgiveness of his persecutors, modeling Christlike love amid persecution.

Cross-References

Stephen's recounting of Abraham's call aligns with Genesis 12, emphasizing God's promises to the patriarchs. His focus on Moses parallels Exodus 3 and 5, where God commissions Moses and Israel resists him. The theme of God not dwelling in temples built by hands echoes 1 Kings 8 and Isaiah 66, underscoring God's transcendence. Stephen's accusation against the Jewish leaders resonates with Jesus' warnings in Matthew 23 about rejecting prophets and messengers. His final words mirror Jesus' prayer on the cross in Luke 23, demonstrating forgiveness amid suffering. These cross-references deepen understanding of Stephen's message and its theological significance.

Application

Modern disciples can apply Stephen's example by embracing boldness in proclaiming the gospel, even in hostile environments. His speech encourages believers to understand their faith within the grand narrative of God's redemptive work and to recognize patterns of resistance that may still exist today. The reminder that God's presence is not confined to buildings challenges Christians to seek God's presence in community and personal relationship rather than mere ritual. Stephen's forgiveness of his attackers calls believers to extend grace and love to those who oppose them. Lastly, his martyrdom invites reflection on the cost of discipleship and the power of the Holy Spirit to sustain faithfulness under trial.

Summary

Acts chapter 7 presents Stephen's comprehensive defense before the Sanhedrin, tracing Israel's history to reveal a consistent pattern of rejecting God's messengers culminating in the rejection of Jesus. The chapter challenges traditional views of God's presence, highlights the role of the Holy Spirit, and illustrates the cost of faithful witness through Stephen's martyrdom. This pivotal moment in Acts advances the early church's mission by exposing spiritual blindness and calling for repentance, setting the stage for the gospel's expansion beyond Jerusalem.

