


The Acts of the Apostles

The Journey – 2020
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The Acts of the Apostles

We all know what happens at the end of this chapter – Stephen becomes the church’s first martyr, but have you ever thought about what you would do if threatened with death for being a Christian?



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If someone holds a gun to your head and says, “deny Jesus and I will let you live” – if you deny him are you lost for eternity?

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- Let's consider what Jesus had to say in Matt 10:33 **"But everyone who denies me here on earth, I will also deny before my Father in heaven."** NLT
- Ephesians 2 tells us we are saved by grace and not by works – how does that square with Matthew 10?
- What about Peter?– he denied Jesus 3 times in one night, but he went on to be a key spokesman for the Lord in the New Testament and eventually was martyred because he held fast to Christ.

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- When the plain sense makes common sense, seek no other sense. This is one of those times when the plain sense does not make common sense.
- 1st John 2:3 And we can be sure that **we know him if we obey his commandments.** NLT
- 1st John 3:9 **Whoever has been born of God does not sin,** for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God. NKJV

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- At the end of chapter 6 Stephen is accused of speaking ill of God and against Judaism.
- False charges, distorted facts, but no matter – when powerful people turn into evil people bad things happen to lots of people.
- Acts 7:1 Then the high priest asked Stephen, "Are these accusations true?" – and at this point Stephen gives the answer of his life for his life, and for his accusers.

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- Luke 12:11 So you can anticipate that you will be put on trial before the synagogues and religious officials. Don't worry how you'll respond, and don't worry what you should say. **12 The Holy Spirit will give you the words to say at the moment when you need them.** NLT
- So right on queue, just as Jesus promised, the Holy Spirit fills the mouth of Stephen with exactly what to say – powerful words and convicting words that would also cost him his life.
- And so, he unloads starting with a history lesson for his accusers.

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We see the prophetic fulfillment of Jesus' words fulfilled rather quickly in what happened to Stephen.

Have you ever considered that Jesus' prophecy could also apply in your circumstances some day?

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Short Lessons from Israel's History

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- Last week we covered what Stephen had to say about Abraham and Joseph – Abraham was led by God to the land of Canaan.
- Joseph was mistreated by his brothers, sold into slavery, but God was walking him through various steps down in Egypt so as to have him in place when needed. (what a blessing to the Egyptians)
- A famine comes, Jacob (Joseph’s father) and his “tribe” of seventy-five souls go down to Egypt where lo and behold Joseph is in the right place at the right time to keep the promise alive. 😊

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- Acts 7:14 Then Joseph sent for his father, Jacob, and all his relatives to come to Egypt, seventy-five persons in all. 15 So Jacob went to Egypt. He died there, as did our ancestors.
- Just 75 people went into Egypt (tribulation and pain), but 2 million or so came out – God can bless and prosper in the oddest of times.
- The people of God are now in a foreign land under a pagan king, but God will see to it that they prosper and grow in numbers despite the enemy’s efforts to kill off the promise.

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- Acts 7:17 “As the time drew near when God would fulfill his promise to Abraham”.
- Wait, what? Abraham is dead and now is the time God will fulfill His promise? Abraham is dead, or is he?
- Remember the text from last week – Mark 12:26b **Long after Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had died, God said to Moses, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’. 27 So he is the God of the living, not the dead.”** NLT

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• Acts 7:20 "At that time Moses was born—a beautiful child in God's eyes. His parents cared for him at home for three months. 21 When they had to abandon him, Pharaoh's daughter adopted him and raised him as her own son. 22 Moses was taught all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was powerful in both speech and action." NLT

• Moses, the most important man of the OT to the Jews, was abandoned by his parents and raised by unsaved Gentiles.

• And it's even worse – Moses, like Joseph was going to be subjected to the kind of affluence that could have captured his heart. 13

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• Acts 7:29 When Moses heard that, he fled the country and lived as a foreigner in the land of Midian. NLT

• The deliverer of Israel kills an Egyptian with the best of intentions, but has to go on the run and ends up living in the midst of more gentiles and he even marries a gentile wife.

• Wow, evidently this plan of God's isn't going very well. ☹️

• But, God's strength is made perfect in weakness.!

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• Acts 7:30 "Forty years later, in the desert near Mount Sinai, an angel appeared to Moses in the flame of a burning bush." NLT

• Forty years! God never seems to be in a hurry – when you are sovereign you don't need to rush.

• We've all heard the phrase "on the backside of the desert" as a metaphor for the times when God sort of sets us aside to work with us and form his character in us – yep, that is what Moses was experiencing. 15

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- Acts 7:34 I have certainly seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their groans and have come down to rescue them. NLT
- God moves on his own timetable – his exact words, “I have heard their groans and have come down to rescue them.”
- Was it omitted here but found in other scriptures is that Israel had been oppressed and were groaning for 400 years so the next time you think your answers aren’t coming – take heart!

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- As hard as it may be to take in what we view as God delaying and leaving us to languish in our pain, it is never because God is heartless and mean.
- Yes, Israel was waiting and waiting, but so was God – he was waiting for the Amorites (a synonym for Canaanites) to repent.
- Gen 15:16 After four generations your descendants will return here to this land, for the sins of the Amorites do not yet warrant their destruction. NLT

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- Acts 7:35 “So God sent back the same man his people had previously rejected when they demanded, ‘Who made you a ruler and judge over us?’ **Through the angel who appeared to him in the burning bush,** God sent Moses to be their ruler and savior.” NLT
- Exodus 3:1 One day Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian. He led the flock far into the wilderness and came to Sinai, the mountain of God. 2 **There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire** from the middle of a bush. Moses stared in amazement. Though the bush was engulfed in flames, it didn’t burn up. NLT

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- Acts 7:36 **And by means of many wonders and miraculous signs,** he led them out of Egypt, through the Red Sea, and through the wilderness for forty years. NLT
- God does not do miracles on whims – he always has a purpose.
- God is not interested in putting on a show – he uses his power to advance his agenda. Luke 23:8 Herod was delighted at the opportunity to see Jesus, because he had heard about him and had been hoping for a long time to see him perform a miracle. NLT

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- Acts 7:38 Moses was with our ancestors, the assembly of God’s people in the wilderness, when the angel spoke to him at Mount Sinai. And there Moses received life-giving words to pass on to us. 39 “But our ancestors refused to listen to Moses. They rejected him and wanted to return to Egypt”. NLT
- Israel rejected God’s word in the wilderness and longed for the meager and the temporary comforts of Egypt.
- Throughout history men have been willing to trade freedom for security and have mostly ended up with neither.

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- Acts 7:42 Then God turned away from them and abandoned them to serve the stars of heaven as their gods! In the book of the prophets it is written, ‘Was it to me you were bringing sacrifices and offerings during those forty years in the wilderness, Israel?’ NLT
- God gave them up.. rightfully abandoning the people to their sin and their idolatry of the host of heaven.
- Israel’s idolatrous worship of the sun, moon, and stars began in the wilderness and lasted in varying degrees through the Babylonian captivity

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- Acts 7:44 “Our ancestors carried the Tabernacle with them through the wilderness. It was constructed according to the plan God had shown to Moses. 45 Years later, when Joshua led our ancestors in battle against the nations that God drove out of this land, the Tabernacle was taken with them into their new territory. And it stayed there until the time of King David.” NLT
- Slowly and carefully God is working with his people and moving them along as the nation through whom he would give the world his word, and his Messiah.
- The 4,000 years between the fall and the cross were necessary for God to prepare the world for the Living Word.

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- Acts 7:48 However, the Most High doesn't live in temples made by human hands. As the prophet says, 49 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Could you build me a temple as good as that?' asks the Lord. 'Could you build me such a resting place? 50 Didn't my hands make both heaven and earth?' NLT
- Psalm 116:12 What can I offer the Lord for all he has done for me?
- Answer – Psalm 116:13 I will lift up the cup of salvation and praise the Lord's name for saving me..... I will offer an empty cup to be filled again with the most satisfying person in the universe.

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- Acts 7:51 “You stubborn people! You are heathen at heart and deaf to the truth. **Must you forever resist the Holy Spirit?** That's what your ancestors did, and so do you! 52 Name one prophet your ancestors didn't persecute! They even killed the ones who predicted the coming of the Righteous One—the Messiah whom you betrayed and murdered. 53 You deliberately disobeyed God's law, even though you received it from the hands of angels.” NLT
- Resistance to the Holy Spirit always comes with consequences – it was true when we were unsaved, and it is also true for the believer.

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- The consequences to the lost is a hard heart and deaf ears so far as the gospel is concerned.
- The consequences to the Christian can be two pronged – we could quench the Spirit or grieve the Spirit.
- 1st Thes 5:19 Do not **quench the Spirit**. NKJV
- Eph 4:30 And do not **grieve the Holy Spirit** of God. NKJV

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- Do not quench the Spirit - do not grieve the Holy Spirit?
- As a general rule, we “quench” Him when we disobey Him, and we “grieve” Him when we sin.
- There is a subtle distinction between quenching and grieving as seen above, but the energy behind both is the same – the root cause is a coldness towards leading a life that honors God.

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- Acts 7:54 The Jewish leaders were infuriated by Stephen's accusation, and they shook their fists at him in rage. ⁵⁵ But **Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit**, gazed steadily into heaven and saw the glory of God, and **he saw Jesus standing in the place of honor at God's right hand**. ⁵⁶ And he told them, “Look, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing in the place of honor at God's right hand!” ⁵⁷ **Then they put their hands over their ears and began shouting**. They rushed at him ⁵⁸ and dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. **His accusers took off their coats and laid them at the feet of a young man named Saul**. ⁵⁹ As they stoned him, Stephen prayed, “**Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.**” ⁶⁰ He fell to his knees, shouting, “Lord, don't charge them with this sin!” And with that, he died. NLT

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- **Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit** – the pattern continues, filled with the Spirit and the one filled speaks boldly for the Lord.
- **He saw Jesus standing in the place of honor at God’s right hand** – no less than 8 times in the New testament Jesus is placed at the right hand of God.
- Someone at the right hand of a dignitary is credited with equal dignity and authority – John 16:5 “But now I am going away to the one who sent me” – John 16:7 “then I will send him to you.” (The Father sent the Son, the Son will send the Spirit)

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- **“As they stoned him, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”** ⁶⁰ He fell to his knees, shouting, “Lord, don’t charge them with this sin!” And with that, he died.”



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- **His accusers took off their coats and laid them at the feet of a young man named Saul** – a new character enters the story.
- This man, Saul, will be so horrific in his zeal to persecute the church that no one reading the story would ever guess what his next role would be.
- Saul’s next role will be so unbelievable that the only way the audience will be able to handle the change is to have his identity so altered that even his name will have to change! ☺

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Acts 8:1 Saul was one of the witnesses, and he agreed completely with the killing of Stephen. A great wave of persecution began that day, sweeping over the church in Jerusalem; and all the believers except the apostles were scattered through the regions of Judea and Samaria. 2 (Some devout men came and buried Stephen with great mourning.) 3 But Saul was going everywhere to destroy the church. He went from house to house, dragging out both men and women to throw them into prison. NLT

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Questions

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