

Don't Go There – Acts 6:8-8:3 (Part 2)

Acts 7. We're on a *journey* through the book of Acts, finding people just like us facing *problems* just like ours. People like Stephen. Who's confronted by the ruling council in chapter 6 over charges of blasphemy and falsehood, but turns the tables in chapter 7 to confront *them*. And in the midst of it all, we find some extremely valuable takeaways for our *own* lives.

The first of which, from last week, was . . .

Don't be surprised at the lengths people will go to oppose your witness. (6:8-15)

It's been going on for 2000 years, and it's not going to stop until Jesus returns.

From emotional and verbal opposition, to physical harm and murder.

It happened then and it happens now. Around the world and here at home.

Second, was . . .

Don't miss the point of God's blessing because you're complacent. (7:1-8)

God didn't bless us with salvation so that we would drift along and live for ourselves.

He saved us to live for *him*. He blesses us to bless others. That's the point.

And there's nothing like complacency to blind us and *keep* us from it.

That was last week.

- This week, we find another takeaway, from v9-50. Where Stephen makes one point, using 5 examples. And to see it, you need to keep his *main* point in mind. From v51. *As your fathers did, so do you*. That's the point of his entire speech. "They were sinful and so are you. You're just like them."

And the gist of v9-50, *supporting* his conclusion, is that they haven't learned a thing.

"You're just like them because you haven't learned a thing." That's what we're going to see. So let's jump in, starting with v9-16.

After just mentioning the 12 patriarchs, the 12 sons of Jacob who became the leaders and fathers of the 12 tribes of Israel, Stephen continues by saying . . .

[9] "*And the patriarchs, jealous of Joseph [the youngest of Jacob's sons], sold him into Egypt; but God was with him [10] and rescued him out of all his afflictions and gave him favor and wisdom before Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who made him ruler over Egypt and over all his household.*

[11] *Now there came a famine throughout all Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction, and our fathers could find no food. [12] But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent out our fathers [the other sons of Jacob, the patriarchs] on their first visit. [13] And on the second visit Joseph made himself known to his brothers, and Joseph's family became known to Pharaoh. [14] And Joseph sent and summoned Jacob his father and all his kindred, seventy-five persons in all.*

[15] *And Jacob went down into Egypt, and he died, he and our fathers, [16] and they were carried back to Shechem [a town about 30 miles north of Jerusalem] and laid in the tomb that Abraham had bought for a sum of silver from the sons of Hamor in Shechem [Canaanites who lived there.]*

Standing in front of the council and summarizing no less than 14 chapters of Genesis, Stephen not only nails the history, but the point.

That the council is just like Joseph's brothers. That's what he was saying. "They rejected *Joseph*, just like you rejected *Jesus*. You haven't learned a thing." The first of *many* comparisons and contrasts here.

Which leads us to our third takeaway:

Don't fail to learn from those who've gone before. (7:9-50)

And I'm not just talking about your parents or grandparents. I'm talking about the people of God in Scripture. The examples God has given *all* of us.

Which means it's critical that we *know* the history of God's people, and pay *attention* to it, learn from it. Critical that we *read* God's Word and *know* God's Word.

Otherwise, we'll be just like the Sanhedrin, the council; smug in our self-sufficiency and arrogant in our position. Thinking we're *different*, more enlightened . . .

Better educated than those who have gone before.

Thinking we need only learn from ourselves, only from *our* generation.

Don't go there. Don't fail to learn from those who've gone before.

Starting with . . .

• **Joseph's brothers (v9-16)**

They're the *first* example he cites to pound his point. Remember the story?

They hated Joseph because he was the favored one. Just like Jesus is *God's* favored one. And they rejected and persecuted *him*, just like the council rejected and persecuted *Jesus*. And sold him into slavery, just like Judas sold him into death.

They were just like Joseph's brothers – full of jealousy, full of hatred, and full of secrecy.

Don't go there. Don't fail to learn from their mistakes.

Jealousy will get you nowhere. Hatred leads to no good. Secret sin will be exposed.

Bad as it is, don't fail to learn from the example of Joseph's brothers.

➤ 2nd, don't fail to learn from . . .

• **The Israelites in bondage (v17-29)**

V17. They buried Jacob and his sons . . .

[17] "*But as the time of the promise drew near, which God had granted to Abraham [the promise of a land to dwell in, a nation to fill it, and an ongoing legacy], the people increased and multiplied in Egypt [18] until there arose over Egypt another king who did not know Joseph. [19] He dealt shrewdly with our race [the Hebrews] and forced our fathers to expose their infants, so that they would not be kept alive. [They made them throw their baby boys into the Nile.]*

[20] *At this time Moses was born; and he was beautiful in God's sight. [What a compliment. What a blessing.] And he was brought up for three months in his father's house [obviously concealed], [21] and when he was exposed [having been placed in a basket instead of thrown in the water], Pharaoh's daughter adopted him and brought him up as her own son. [22] And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in his words and deeds.*

[23] "*When he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brothers, the children of Israel. [24] And seeing one of them being wronged [one of the Israelites], he defended the oppressed man and avenged him by striking down the Egyptian. [25] He supposed that*

his brothers would understand that God was giving them salvation by his hand, but they did not understand. [Just like the council in Stephen's day didn't understand that God had given them *Jesus* for their salvation.]

"You're just like them," he was saying. "You haven't learned a thing."

[26] And on the following day he appeared to them [Moses did] as they were quarreling and tried to reconcile them, saying, 'Men, you are brothers. Why do you wrong each other?' [27] But the man who was wronging his neighbor thrust him aside [thrust Moses aside], saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge over us? [Oh, if he'd only known the answer to that question.] [28] Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?' [29] At this retort Moses fled and became an exile in the land of Midian [200 miles to the Southeast, on the other side of the Sinai Peninsula], where he became the father of two sons.

The Israelites in *bondage* didn't understand what God was doing, and neither did the council. The *Israelites* fought each other, and so did they.

The *Israelites* were distracted by the oppression at hand, and so was the council by the oppression of Rome.

And *both* rejected their God-appointed leader – Moses and Jesus.

It was a total fail. The lessons of the past were completely *lost* on the council.

Make sure they're not lost on you. Make sure you *learn* from those who've gone before.

➤ 3rd, don't fail to learn from . . .

• **Moses himself (v30-38)**

[30] "Now when forty years had passed [in Midian], an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in a flame of fire in a bush. [31] When Moses saw it, he was amazed at the sight, and as he drew near to look, there came the voice of the Lord: [32] 'I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob.' And Moses trembled and did not dare to look. [33] Then the Lord said to him, 'Take off the sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. [34] I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their groaning, and I have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt.'

God appeared to Moses through an angel in a burning bush, and spoke to him in his own voice. And Moses listened; believing what he said.

Don't fail to *learn* from him. He listened, he believed, and he obeyed. It's as simple as that.

And don't miss the unspoken *analogy* Stephen is making. That just like God came down to deliver the Israelites, he came down to deliver us.

He saw *their* affliction just like ours. He heard *their* groaning just like ours.

He did it then, and he's doing it now.

And he'll save you if you *too* listen to him, and believe him, and obey him.

➤ [35] "This Moses [v35], whom they rejected [the Israelites], saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge?'—this man God sent as both ruler and redeemer by the hand of the angel who appeared to him in the bush.

Who would have thought? After 40 years, God sent him back; to lead them and redeem them, rescue them and restore them. Sound familiar?

[36] This man led them out [out of the bondage of Egypt], performing wonders and signs in Egypt and at the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years. [37] This is the Moses who said to the Israelites, 'God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers [referring to Jesus; because nobody else even *compares* to Moses in the prophetic lineup].' [38] This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our fathers. He received living oracles to give to us.

➤ Moses was a type of Christ. A foreshadowing.

Just as *he* was sent to rule and redeem, so was Jesus.

Just as *he* was commissioned through a miracle, the burning bush, *Jesus* was commissioned through a miracle – the virgin birth.

Just as Moses spoke with God, so did Jesus. Just as Moses did miracles, so did Jesus.

The point being, don't fail to learn from him.

Don't fail to learn from his *attention* to the things of God. Don't fail to learn from his belief in the *word* of God. Don't fail to learn from his *obedience*.

And don't fail to learn from his *message*, the living oracles he gave us in the Law.

Don't fail to learn from Moses himself.

➤ 4th, don't fail to learn from . . .

• **The Exodus generation (v39-43)**

[39] Our fathers refused to obey him [still referring to Moses], but thrust him aside [again], and in their hearts they turned to Egypt, [40] saying to Aaron, 'Make for us gods who will go before us. As for this Moses who led us out from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' [Referring to the 40 days and 40 nights Moses spent on Mt. Sinai receiving the Law.]

When Stephen says, "Our fathers" in v39, he's referring to those of the Exodus generation; those who escaped from the bondage of Egypt . . .

And started the journey to the Promised Land.

And when they got to Mt Sinai, they lost faith. Or maybe never had it. Because faith is the assurance and *conviction of things not seen*. (Heb 11:1)

And up to that point, all of God's work on their behalf was *seen*, visible – the Red Sea crossing, the pillars of cloud and fire, bread from heaven, water from a rock . . .

God's work and God's presence was visible. And the 1st time it *wasn't*, they threw in the towel.

Don't go there. Learn from their example. Just because you can't *see* God at work, just because it's not obvious, doesn't mean he's absent.

➤ [41] And they made a calf in those days, and offered a sacrifice to the idol and were rejoicing in the works of their hands. [They were *happy* in their apostasy, their rejection of God.] [42] But God turned away and gave them over to worship the host of heaven [the demonic gods *behind* the idols, then *and now*], as it is written in the book of the prophets [the prophet Amos]:

"Did you bring to me slain beasts and sacrifices, during the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? [No, they didn't.] [43] You took up the tent of Moloch [a Canaanite god, small "g;" you worshipped him] and the star of your god Rephan [probably an Egyptian god; you embraced], the images that you made to worship; and I will send you into exile beyond Babylon.'

The Exodus generation exchanged the truth for a lie, the worship of God for idols; and suffered for it. God left them to their own devices . . .
And they lost their entire nation and way of life; when the Babylonians conquered them and carried them away.

Choose to sin, choose to suffer. That's what we can't fail to learn from *them*.
Forsake God, like the Exodus generation, or reject him in the first place, like the council, and you're in trouble.
Don't go there. Don't fail to learn from those who've gone before.

➤ And last, don't fail to learn from . . .

• **The prophets (v44-50)**

[44] "*Our fathers had the tent of witness in the wilderness* [the tabernacle, the pre-cursor to the temple as a mobile place of worship], *just as he who spoke to Moses directed him to make it, according to the pattern that he had seen.* [God told Moses about the tabernacle, and showed him how to make it.]

[45] *Our fathers in turn brought it in with Joshua when they dispossessed the nations that God drove out before our fathers* [when they conquered the Promised Land]. *So it was until the days of David* [they worshipped in the tabernacle]. [46] *who found favor in the sight of God and asked to find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob* [a permanent place of worship]. [47] *But it was Solomon who built a house for him.*

[48] *Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands, as the prophet* [Isaiah] *says* [recording God's thoughts], [49] "*Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest?* [50] *Did not my hand make all these things?*"

➤ The temple wasn't *wrong* as a place of worship – Stephen actually affirmed it. Just like a *church* building isn't wrong. It's good and useful and helpful.
It's just not the place of God's presence. And neither was the temple anymore.

In fact, it never was. Not exclusively. That's why Isaiah *quoted* God to that effect. And Stephen quoted Isaiah, in v49.
He was telling us in no uncertain terms that no building could *ever* contain his presence.
No building could *ever* suffice as his place of rest.

Especially not now. The Holy Spirit had *come*. A new age had dawned. The temple *served* its purpose.

Now, our *heart* is where God resides here on earth. *We* are his temple. Individually and together. Don't fail to *learn* from the prophets in that respect. **(Summary)**

➤ One point, made 5 ways. With 5 examples.
Don't fail to learn from those who've gone before. Especially the people of God found in his Word. Yet another reason to read it and know it.

Pray – Lord, forgive us for thinking we know it all or can figure it out on our own. Open our eyes to see what we're missing, and open our hearts to learn all we can. For your glory. In Jesus name, amen.