

How Well Should You Know the Story of God's People?

Acts 7:1-22

Pastor Jason Van Bommel, Forest Hill Presbyterian

"And the high priest said, "Are these things so?" And Stephen said:

"Brothers and fathers, hear me. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, and said to him, 'Go out from your land and from your kindred and go into the land that I will show you.' Then he went out from the land of the Chaldeans and lived in Haran. And after his father died, God removed him from there into this land in which you are now living. Yet he gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot's length, but promised to give it to him as a possession and to his offspring after him, though he had no child."

- Acts 7:1-5, ESV

If someone asked you to explain how Jesus' coming was the climax and fulfillment of the story of God and His people, would you know how to summarize and explain that? How well do you know the story of God and His people? Could you effectively tell the story, from the calling of Abraham to the sojourn in Egypt to the Exodus and conquest of the Promised Land and how all of these events relate to the coming of Christ?

When Stephen was put on trial and was accused of speaking words of blasphemy against the Temple and against the customs handed down from Moses, he did not immediately respond by defending himself. Instead, he recounted the history of God's dealing with His people. Now why would Stephen give a Bible history lesson to the Sanhedrin?

First, he was being accused of being against Moses and against the Jewish traditions. So, it makes sense that he would clarify his commitment to the Scriptures, to Moses in particular, and to the Jewish people by demonstrating his knowledge of the Books of Moses and the history of God's dealings with His chosen people.

Second, Stephen is drawing out a pattern for the leaders to see: God raised up chosen men to bring deliverance to His people, and these men were often rejected or were outsiders or were betrayed by their own people:

- Abraham was a pilgrim and a stranger in the Promised Land, called to leave his father's house and never given his inheritance in this life.
- Joseph was sold into slavery in Egypt by his jealous brothers.
- Moses was exposed as an infant before he was brought up by Egyptians.

These deliverers set a pattern that is ultimately fulfilled in Jesus:

- He lived His life as a pilgrim and stranger, walking through the Promised Land, teaching in towns and villages, without a real settled home. He never came into His kingly inheritance during His earthly life.
- He was sold by Judas and betrayed by His Jewish brothers into the hands of pagan gentiles who beat and crucified Him.
- Jesus also, like Moses, was under threat as an infant from a wicked king and spent time in Egypt.

So, Stephen is showing the Jewish leaders the story of Jesus, foreshadowed in their own sacred history. We'll see more of this tomorrow.

Here's the bottom line for us: We can be tempted to think that studying Biblical history and church history is boring and irrelevant to our lives. But a careful study of the history of God and His people

will show us valuable patterns that will help us understand Christ better and understand how we ought to live as God's people today. The study is worth the labor, as it bears fruit in our lives for God's glory.

Heavenly Father, You have always been faithful in Your dealings with Your people, even when we have been faithless. You have kept Your promises, even at times of great darkness and confusion. Give us the mind to understand Your dealings with Your people and the heart to follow after You, no matter the cost. May we not look for our treasure, acceptance or inheritance in this life, but look to You for Your promises fulfilled in the life to come. In Jesus' name, Amen.