

The Book of Acts: Verse-by-Verse

Acts 7:30-41

We have been seeing Stephen's defense before the Jewish Council. Let me remind you that he does this by rehearsing several epochs of Israel's history.

- Verses 2-8: Abraham and the patriarchal era.
- Verses 9-19: Joseph and Israel's Egyptian bondage.
- Verses 20-44: The leadership of Moses & The Exodus/Wilderness wanderings.
- Verses 45-50: David, Solomon, and the start of Israel's monarchy.

- **A Repeating Story:**

"As the time drew near for God to fulfill his promise to Abraham, the number of our people in Egypt greatly increased."

"After forty years had passed, an angel appeared to Moses in the flames of a burning bush in the desert near Mount Sinai."

God was in charge of the process all along. Despite Moses' apparent failure, God's plan was still on track and on time.

It was highly unlikely that God would appear to Abraham in the one of the largest and most pagan cities of his world. It was also highly unlikely that God would appear to Moses in his exile in Arabia.

- **A Note Of Continuity: v. 30**

"I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."

That statement appears at least 12 times in the Bible. By calling himself “The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God is emphasizing the legitimacy and continuity of the covenant he made with Abraham – as well as the Israelites’ special role as God’s Chosen People.

God is underscoring his promises to give His people, the Land of Canaan, to make of them many nations, and to make them a blessing to the rest of the world’s nations. The repetition of these promises:

- Abraham – Genesis 12:1–3
- Isaac - Genesis 21:12 & 26:3–4
- Jacob - Genesis 28:14–15

When God revealed Himself to Moses at the burning bush, he called Himself “the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob”. He told Moses to use that Name when he met with the clans of the Israelites. There were a couple of important reasons for Moses to do this:

1. In calling Yahweh, “The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, he clearly distinguished God from the gods of Egypt which the Israelites would have recognized during nearly 400 years in Egypt.

2. Calling Yahweh, “The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob indicated the rationale behind the future exodus: God was keeping his vow to give Israel the land he promised Abraham.

- Jesus used that Name for God in Matthew 22:31–32
- Peter uses the same name for God In Acts 3
- Stephen invokes that name of God to demonstrate the legitimacy and continuity of God’s plan for Israel.

- **Holy Ground?**

When God appeared to Moses at the burning bush, he told him to take off his sandals because he was standing on “holy ground”.

When would anyone have identified any place in Gentile Midianite territory as “holy ground”? The only reason it was “holy ground” was because God was standing there!

No place on earth possesses an innate sanctity. The only reason any place on earth is called holy is because God has been there. See: Exodus 20:24

As God met with Moses that day at the burning bush, he made sure that Israel’s future deliverer and lawgiver understood God had not forgotten his covenant with the patriarchs. He was still acting as “The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”

- **This Same Moses: vv. 35-38**

Stephen draws corollaries to the stories of three people: Joseph, Moses, and Jesus.

Moses – The man his Israelite brothers had rejected 40 years before, was now made their ruler and deliverer.

Joseph: The man whose brothers rejected and got rid of him were later forced to accept him as their deliverer.

Jesus: The Messiah rejected the first time by his people will have to acknowledge him at the Second Coming.

Verse 36: After God appeared to Moses at the burning bush, He went back to Egypt with a clear mission and the power of God: “He led them out of Egypt and performed wonders and signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea and for forty years in the wilderness.”

“Was Moses a forerunner of Jesus, as Stephen appeared to claim?”
Look at Deuteronomy 18:14-15:

“The nations you will dispossess listen to those who practice sorcery or divination. But as for you, the Lord your God has not permitted you to

do so. The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him." - Deuteronomy 18:14-15

Moses promised the Israelites that one day God would raise up for them a prophet like himself. Peter uses that same quote in Acts 3 :19-23

- **Israel's Response To Moses' Leadership: vv. 39-42**

Stephen's narrative is taking a turn. John Stott: "Stephen anticipates how his defense will end. This greatly privileged nation refused to obey God. They not only in their hearts turned back to Egypt, but, rejecting Moses' leadership, commissioned Aaron to make them substitute gods to go before them into the promised land." – John Stott

The Exodus Israelites' Advantages:

1. A strong leader in Moses.
2. The Pillar of Cloud and Fire clearly leading them on their journey.
3. Continuous miracles ensuring their safe arrival to the Promised Land.

Israel's Response: "But our ancestors refused to obey him. Instead, they rejected him and, in their hearts, turned back to Egypt."

What had the witnesses charged Stephen with doing? They said he had spoken "blasphemies against Moses". They said he threatened to destroy the "customs which Moses handed down to them". Yet, as Stephen points out, their very ancestors rejected Moses. Indeed, at times, they despised him.

These descendants of that Exodus generation had forgotten that their very own ancestors had done these things, yet they were accusing Stephen of not respecting Moses!

So what did the ancient Israelites do? According to the Exodus and Numbers narratives, they decided to go back to Egypt – the very place the Bible calls the “iron furnace”.

After what might have been some 18 months of miracle judgments against the Egyptians – culminating in the Red Sea crossing, these people wanted to go back to Egypt. See: Exodus 16:3

- **Verses 40-41:**

“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!’ That was the time they made an idol in the form of a calf. They brought sacrifices to it and reveled in what their own hands had made.”

F.F. Bruce: “The invisible presence of God was not enough for them: they craved some form of divinity that they could see They persuaded Aaron to manufacture “gods to go before us.”

Next Time: Stephen recounts Israel’s history of idolatry and rejection of God’s warnings.