

# ***International Bible Lessons Commentary***

## ***Acts 7:1-3, 8-10, 17, 33-34, 45-48, 53***

**New International Version**

***International Bible Lessons***  
**Sunday, September 27, 2015**

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The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, September 27, 2015**, is from **Acts 7:1-3, 8-10, 17, 33-34, 45-48, 53**.

Please Note: Some churches will only study **Acts 7:2-3, 8-10, 17, 33-34, 45-47, 53**.

**Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** discusses *Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further* to help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the **International Bible Lessons Commentary** website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. A podcast for this commentary is also available at the **International Bible Lesson Forum**.

## ***International Bible Lesson Commentary***

### **Acts 7:1-3, 8-10, 17, 33-34, 45-48, 53**

**(Acts 7:1) Then the high priest asked Stephen, “Are these charges true?”**

Stephen was “a man full of God’s grace and power.” He “performed great wonders and signs among the people.” The Holy Spirit gave Stephen wisdom and when he spoke “his face was like the face of an angel.” He was falsely accused before the Sanhedrin of speaking blasphemous words against Moses and God, “and against this holy place (the temple) and against the laws.” His false accusers said, “We have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place (the temple, where they were meeting) and change the customs Moses handed down to us.” Before the Sanhedrin, the high priest confronted Stephen and asked if these charges were true.

**(Acts 7:2) To this he replied: “Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Harran.**

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Stephen replied to the Sanhedrin in the longest speech in the Book of Acts. Stephen identified himself with his listeners and respectfully addressed the Sanhedrin and crowd as “brothers and fathers.” He then gave them a short version of the history of the Jews from the time of Abraham to his present day. In doing so, he demonstrated that the charges against him were false. As he concluded his speech, he said his listeners were the ones who disbelieved God and the Scriptures. When they

stoned Stephen to death they disobeyed Roman law—an action motivated by their rage at his true accusations against them—and they proved once again that they killed the true prophets of God.

**(Acts 7:3) ‘Leave your country and your people,’ God said, ‘and go to the land I will show you.’**

Stephen’s speech described two types of people. The first type believes God, obeys God, and acts in faith, trusting in God. The second type disbelieves God, disobeys God, and acts without true faith in God. Their father or ancestor Abraham was of the first type. He heard from God, believed God’s words, and did what God commanded. He obeyed God, his God and King, and he trusted God would lead him to a better land, a land God promised to give him and his descendants. When God said go, Abraham went.

**(Acts 7:8) Then he gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision. And Abraham became the father of Isaac and circumcised him eight days after his birth. Later Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob became the father of the twelve patriarchs.**

God made a covenant or agreement with Abraham based on the promise of a son whose descendants would bless all nations on earth. Isaac was the first son God promised him. The Messiah was born from the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The visible sign of this covenant with circumcision of the flesh, which every Jew or convert to Judaism received. But some of those who were circumcised in the flesh did not also have a “circumcised heart,” a heart that loved God, believed God, and sought to obey God and His laws and words. Moses wrote: “The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live” (Deuteronomy 30:6). Paul wrote: “No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person’s praise is not from other people, but from God” (Romans 2:29).

**(Acts 7:9) “Because the patriarchs were jealous of Joseph, they sold him as a slave into Egypt. But God was with him**

Joseph had a “circumcised heart,” which included love and respect for God, God’s law, his father, and even his brothers as the Book of Genesis shows. Joseph obeyed God’s law and his father; therefore, Jacob trusted him and expressed his love and trust in ways that influenced his older brothers to be jealous of him. Though they sold Joseph as a slave into Egypt, God was with Joseph and God blessed his entire family and God saved the nation of Egypt from starvation through seven years of famine.

**(Acts 7:10) and rescued him from all his troubles. He gave Joseph wisdom and enabled him to gain the goodwill of Pharaoh king of Egypt. So Pharaoh made him ruler over Egypt and all his palace.**

Joseph treated his captors with respect and always obeyed God when tempted. What God did through Joseph to save his family and Egypt from starvation, God did and still

does through those with circumcised hearts. Joseph obeyed God and sought to do what was best to others; therefore, God gave Joseph wisdom and grace. God also influenced the mind and will of Pharaoh; therefore, Pharaoh gave Joseph authority over all Egypt, which led to the salvation of Egyptians and Hebrews.

**(Acts 7:17) “As the time drew near for God to fulfill his promise to Abraham, the number of our people in Egypt had greatly increased.**

This week’s lesson skips ahead about 400 years, the length of the Hebrews’ stay in Egypt before God would free them and lead them into the Promised Land, a land their inhabitants would forfeit because of their idolatry and immorality: “In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure” (Genesis 15:16). During their time in Egypt, the Hebrews themselves had been led into idolatry, and God would need to teach them again about His nature and laws through His servant Moses.

**(Acts 7:33) “Then the Lord said to him, ‘Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.**

Moses was born in Egypt 80 years before he met God at the burning bush (see Exodus 7:7). God was with Moses from the day of his birth. God saved Moses from death in the Nile River and God arranged for Moses to be raised in Pharaoh’s household. Moses learned the ways of the Egyptians and the heritage of the Hebrews. He learned to read and write. He fled Egypt after he murdered an Egyptian to help his people. After fleeing from Egypt, marrying, and raising sheep for 40 years, Moses met God and God told him to go and free His people from slavery in Egypt. From the first moment Moses met God, God taught Moses to respect Him as holy. Moses learned that God expected him to obey Him in everything and uphold the conditions of the covenant that God made with Abraham and his descendants. On the way to Egypt, his son was circumcised in the flesh, which saved Moses’ life (Exodus 4:24-25). Moses believed God and obeyed God because God circumcised his heart.

**(Acts 7:34) I have indeed seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their groaning and have come down to set them free. Now come, I will send you back to Egypt.’**

God came down to save His people from physical slavery in Egypt and from slavery to the gods and demons of Egypt. God did that through Moses. God made a new covenant and new beginning through His Son, Jesus the Messiah. God sent Jesus to save His people from slavery to sin, demons, and Satan. Just as Abraham and Moses believed and obeyed God, though not perfectly, so Jesus believed and obeyed God perfectly as God’s Messiah and Jesus became the perfect sacrifice for our sins.

**(Acts 7:45) After receiving the tabernacle, our ancestors under Joshua brought it with them when they took the land from the nations God drove out before them. It remained in the land until the time of David,**

God showed Moses how to build the tabernacle, where God dwelt with the Hebrews spiritually. The tabernacle was a tent that contained the Ark of the Covenant, the law of God, and the mercy seat. This week's lesson skips to the time when Joshua brought the Ark into the Promised Land. Both Joshua and David had circumcised hearts; they loved God and wanted to obey God in everything, though they were not perfect. Stephen has shown conclusively that he knew his Hebrew history and that he was not blasphemous.

**(Acts 7:46) who enjoyed God's favor and asked that he might provide a dwelling place for the God of Jacob.**

Preferring an older manuscript, the *New Revised Standard Version* translates "house of Jacob;" however, "house of God" or "dwelling place for the God of Jacob" is the better translation. David, with good intentions, wanted to build a temple or "house" for God to dwell in the city of Jerusalem. God did not want David to do this, so David obeyed God. God said David's son would build a house for Him, this could have meant primarily Jesus the Messiah, for when Jesus came to earth God indwelt Him and by His Spirit God indwells Jesus' followers, for our bodies are the temple of God. However, David's son, King Solomon, built a physical temple for God in Jerusalem and God descended into that temple to show His presence with His people.

**(Acts 7:47) But it was Solomon who built a house for him.**

When Stephen came to King Solomon, in his reply to the Sanhedrin, he came to a king who began well, built the temple, and then led his people into idolatry through the temples he built on the high places around Jerusalem for his many foreign wives—all in disobedience to God and His law. Solomon learned by experience the sad consequences of not believing and obeying God, which led to the destruction of his kingdom after he died and the division of the kingdom into the Kingdom of Israel and the Kingdom of Judah.

**(Acts 7:48) "However, the Most High does not live in houses made by human hands. As the prophet says:**

At this point, it seems that Stephen is speaking against the temple, but he continued to prove his point and right beliefs. God does not live in any place or thing that is built with human hands. A building cannot contain God because God's throne is in heaven and the earth is His footstool. Stephen quoted the Scriptures to prove his point: "'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me?' says the Lord. 'Or where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things?'" (Acts 7:49-50). God cannot be contained and controlled by priests or people. When Stephen quoted the Scriptures and the prophets, he accused the Jewish leaders of rejecting the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit, and Jesus the Messiah. He declared, "You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit!" (Acts 7:51). His truthful speech resulted in Stephen becoming the first Christian martyr. He was murdered by those with uncircumcised hearts.

**(Acts 7:53) you who have received the law that was given through angels but have not obeyed it.”**

In the temple courts and when on trial before the Sanhedrin, the apostles before him and now Stephen called listeners to repent of their sins and turn to Jesus the Messiah for salvation from sin. Stephen was murdered before he could complete his message, but he began where he needed to begin. First, he needed to convince his listeners that they were sinners who needed a Savior to save them from their sins (as Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost). When Stephen described their sins, however, his listeners did not repent, but became so furious they rushed to murder him. When someone recognizes in their heart that they have not obeyed God's law, they will usually look for the way to get right with God. The apostles and Stephen preached that faith in Jesus Christ was the way to a saving relationship with God. Saul listened to Stephen's speech and Saul approved his murder. Later, when Saul met Jesus on the road to Damascus, he came to faith in Jesus as his Savior and Lord, God forgave his sins, and he became the Apostle Paul.

### **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further**

1. What might you say to someone who said, “It is a waste of time to study the Old Testament”?
2. Give some reasons why Abraham was important.
3. Why did Joseph succeed in Egypt? How might this reason encourage others?
4. From what kind of slavery did Moses and Jesus save God's people?
5. Why is it important sometimes to study more than one English translation of the Bible?

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson*.

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