



Approaching God

Read this portion of Psalm 12 and begin with an opening prayer

Help, Lord, for the godly are no more; the faithful have vanished from among men. Everyone lies to his neighbor; their flattering lips speak with deception. (Psalm 12:1-2)

Sometimes it feels impossible to keep going when the undercurrent of the culture and the world around us seem opposed to a life of faith. Ask the Lord for help & strength, “daily gospel bread,” and lips that bring words of life & Christ-centered love with everyone you encounter today.

Acts 7:17-53

Passage Introduction:

By preaching the word, Stephen countered the false understandings of his listeners with the way Scripture itself presents Moses: as a foreshadowing of the One who would come and lead his people in a greater exodus: their redemption from bondage to sin. Stephen demonstrates how Christ was greater than Moses. The accusation that Stephen spoke against the law is the primary reason why most of his speech focuses on the life of Moses.

Bible Reading, Study & Meditation

Start with Engaging the Text: Take a few minutes to highlight, circle, or underline key words.

Use the space in the margin to jot down notes, or themes/ideas that stand out as important.

Acts 7:17-53 - 17 “As the time drew near for God to fulfill his promise to Abraham, the number of our people in Egypt had greatly increased. **18** Then ‘a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt.’ **19** He dealt treacherously with our people and oppressed our ancestors by forcing them to throw out their newborn babies so that they would die. **20** “At that time Moses was born, and he was no ordinary child. For three months he was cared for by his family. **21** When he was placed outside, Pharaoh’s daughter took him and brought him up as her own son. **22** Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action.

23 “When Moses was forty years old, he decided to visit his own people, the Israelites. **24** He saw one of them being mistreated by an Egyptian, so he went to his defense and avenged him by killing the Egyptian. **25** Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not. **26** The next day Moses came upon two Israelites who were fighting. He tried to reconcile them by saying, ‘Men, you are brothers; why do

Notes:

By turning the law and the temple into ends in themselves, and by failing to see the true purpose of the law and the temple, Israel had become idolatrous. Stephen makes this point in verses 39-43. When Israel rejected its leaders, the people invariably turned to idolatry. From the exodus to the exile, Israel was embroiled in the worship of idols.

you want to hurt each other?’ **27** “But the man who was mistreating the other pushed Moses aside and said, ‘Who made you ruler and judge over us? **28** Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?’ **29** When Moses heard this, he fled to Midian, where he settled as a foreigner and had two sons.

30 “After forty years had passed, an angel appeared to Moses in the flames of a burning bush in the desert near Mount Sinai. **31** When he saw this, he was amazed at the sight. As he went over to get a closer look, he heard the Lord say: **32** ‘I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.’ Moses trembled with fear and did not dare to look. **33** “Then the Lord said to him, ‘Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. **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.’

35 “This is the same Moses they had rejected with the words, ‘Who made you ruler and judge?’ He was sent to be their ruler and deliverer by God himself, through the angel who appeared to him in the bush. **36** He led them out of Egypt and performed wonders and signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea and for forty years in the wilderness. **37** “This is the Moses who told the Israelites, ‘God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your own people.’ **38** He was in the assembly in the wilderness, with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our ancestors; and he received living words to pass on to us. **39** “But our ancestors refused to obey him. Instead, they rejected him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt. **40** 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!’ **41** 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. **42** But God turned away from them and gave them over to the worship of the sun, moon and stars. This agrees with what is written in the book of the prophets:

*“Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings forty years in the wilderness, people of Israel? **43** You have taken up the tabernacle of Molek and the star of your god Rephan, the idols you made to worship. Therefore I will send you into exile’ beyond Babylon.*

Notes:

44 “Our ancestors had the tabernacle of the covenant law with them in the wilderness. It had been made as God directed Moses, according to the pattern he had seen. **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, **46** who enjoyed God’s favor and asked that he might provide a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. **47** But it was Solomon who built a house for him. **48** “However, the Most High does not live in houses made by human hands. As the prophet says:

49 *“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? 50 Has not my hand made all these things?”*

51 “You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit! **52** Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him— **53** you who have received the law that was given through angels but have not obeyed it.”

Questions for Reflection & Meditation

- Looking back on Acts 6:11-14, what were the specific charges made against Stephen? Why do you think Stephen recounts so much of the history of Israel in his response??
- Stephen was accused of being against Moses & the Temple. What does Stephen actually say about the Moses (vs. 35-39) and what does he say about the Temple? (vs. 44-50) How is his response a defense against his accusations?

Key Takeaway:

Are there any personal applications that are important for you to consider as a result of today’s study? What does this passage point to in your life and heart that needs attention?

Close in Prayer:

Ask God to examine you, and to reveal any areas in life where you might be “stiff-necked” or prone to ignoring the voice of the Holy Spirit. Ask that you would always be sensitive to his word. Is there anyone else in your life you can pray for God’s spirit to break through a hardened heart?