

Week of May 20-26

## **HISTORY LESSON**

**Scripture Reading:** Read Acts chapter 7

For many folks, history is boring. It's just a series of dates and names that had to be memorized to pass a social studies class in school. It certainly doesn't have relevance to real life, or at least that is what many people believe. Spanish philosopher, poet, and novelist, George Santayana, would beg to disagree. For those not familiar with the man, it was Santayana who coined the familiar statement, *"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."*

In today's chapter reading, Stephen conducts a history class for the religious leaders of his day to remind them of their past. Oh, I know it wasn't actually a class but he does provide a lesson in history for them. Stephen had been arrested on false charges and hauled before the Sanhedrin for questioning. The high priest wanted to know if the charges of speaking against the law and the temple were true. In response, Stephen traces the history of the Jewish people.

Why the history lesson? It comes as a response to the allegations of the false witnesses in Acts 6:14: *"For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us."* Three main points of Stephen's speech are: 1) God had watched over his people, provided for them, delivered them and made promises to them from Abraham on; 2) Israel, for the most part, kept failing to obey Him or follow those he raised up to deliver them. 3) God's plan has always been bigger than the land or the temple, contrary to the prevailing beliefs of the religious leaders. Indeed, as Stephen points out by quoting from the prophet, Isaiah, if heaven is God's throne, what temple could actually contain Him. Stephen's history lesson was clear as he drives home his point in verse 51-53 to these "stiff-necked" leaders. Israel's pattern of rebellion, in spite of God's blessings, and the refusal to accept God's redemptive plan when it didn't fit their expectations had continued to the present day when the religious leaders had put Jesus to death. Needless to say, this charge by Stephen did not go over very well with the Sanhedrin: *"When they heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him."* Shortly afterwards, they stoned him to death. Stephen, like Jesus before him, prayed for his persecutors as he was put to death.

Today, 20 centuries later, we too are challenged through Stephen to remember the past lest we be condemned to repeat it. Paul reminds us of this, as well, in I Corinthians 10:11: *"These things happened to them [i.e. Israel] as examples and were written down as warnings for us...."* The God who made us is Sovereign Lord. We're challenged to stop trying to fit him into our lives and, instead, let him fit us into His. He has graciously given us so many blessings in Christ. In response to this, we are called to offer our lives as living sacrifices to God (Romans 12:1) rather than living in rebellion to his Word.

**Action Step & Prayer Focus:** When you look back at the past, both Israel's and your own, what lessons do you see that you need to remember? Ask the Lord to remind you of his lessons and to apply his truth in your life today.

**Take-a-way:** *History lessons today can prevent us from repeating past mistakes tomorrow.*