



GRACE

REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

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THE BOOK OF ACTS

Sermon Notes

The Defense of Stephen, Part II

Moses: The Rejected Deliverer

Acts 7:17-43

May 27, 2007

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I. **God Protected and Promoted Moses [His First Forty Years]**

- In **Verse 17**, Stephen states, ‘But as the time of the promise was approaching which God had assured to Abraham...’
 - This was an appointed time that the Sovereign LORD had established to accomplish His purposes.
- Stephen continues, ‘...the people increased and multiplied in Egypt, until THERE AROSE ANOTHER KING OVER EGYPT WHO KNEW NOTHING ABOUT JOSEPH.’ [taken from Exodus 1:8]
- Again, Stephen states, ‘It was he who took shrewd advantage of our race and mistreated our fathers so that they would expose their infants and they would not survive.’
 - As the Hebrew people increased in number, they no doubt became a threat to the Egyptian population, as well as the established leadership of the nation.
 - As a result, they were forced into labor and their infants were ‘exposed.’
 - The term ‘expose’ in this context specifically refers to the abandonment of an infant to die, specifically by drowning them in the Nile River (Exodus 1:22).

- Even the injustice and cruelty of Pharaoh can be seen as God's grace. For, as F.F. Bruce writes, 'But for his policy they [the Hebrews] might have found Egypt so comfortable that they would never have thought of leaving it.'
 - In other words, God has something much greater than Egypt for His people; just as, today, this world is not our ultimate home, but our citizenship is in heaven.
 - It is, indeed, by God's grace that we, as Christians, are uncomfortable here, thus pointing to a greater home.

- 'It was at this time,' Stephen states, 'that Moses was born...'

 - This dramatically foreshadows the events surrounding the birth of Jesus.
 - In Matthew 2:16-18, Herod 'sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and all its vicinity, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the magi.'
 - Yet, like Moses, God providentially protected Jesus so that He would not be slain.
 - Ironically, it was into Egypt that Joseph and Mary fled to escape the fury of Herod.
 - The means of Moses' protection was his own family who hid him for three months until they finally did expose him. Yet, as detailed in Exodus 2:1-10, they did not throw him into the Nile, but '...when she [Moses' mother] could hide him no longer, she got him a wicker basket and covered it over with tar and pitch. Then she put the child into it and set it among the reeds by the bank of the Nile. His sister stood at a distance to find out what would happen to him.' [Exodus 2:3-4]

- Stephen also adds that Moses 'was lovely in the sight of God...' [Verse 20]
 - This further underscores Moses' role as God's chosen deliverer for His people, Israel.

- Then, in **Verses 21-22**, Stephen says, 'And after he had been set outside, Pharaoh's daughter took him away and nurtured him as her own son. Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians, and he was a man of power in words and deeds.'
 - Once again, this foreshadows the account of the young Jesus in Luke 2. When Jesus was twelve years old, His parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover. On their return trip, they could not find Him and eventually found Him 'sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His

answers... [Verses 46-47]'. Then, in Verse 52, Luke writes, 'And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor of God and men.'

- By the time Jesus was a young man, like Moses, Matthew states, 'the crowds were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.' Matthew 7:28-29

- After briefly describing his rearing and education in the house of Pharaoh, Stephen recalls two episodes with Moses and his fellow Israelites [These accounts follow closely to that given in Exodus 2:11-15]:
 - **[Verses 23-25]**: 'But when he was approaching the age of forty, it entered his mind to visit his brethren, the sons of Israel. And when he saw one of them being treated unjustly, he defended him and took vengeance for the oppressed by striking down the Egyptian. And he supposed that his brethren understood that God was granting them deliverance through him, but they did not understand.'
 - According to Stephen, Moses was God's instrument of divine judgment and vengeance on the Egyptian who was treating the Israelite unjustly. [This perspective is absent in the Exodus account]
 - Stephen continues by stating that Moses 'supposed his brethren understood that God was granting them deliverance through him...' In the Greek it literally states, '[Moses supposed his brethren understood that] God was giving them deliverance **through his hand.**'
 - Once again, this foreshadows the rejection of Christ by His people. John 1:11 states, 'He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him.'
 - Then, in **Verses 26-28**, Stephen states, 'On the following day he appeared to them as they were fighting together, and he tried to reconcile them in peace, saying, 'Men, you are brethren, why do you injure one another?' But the one who was injuring his neighbor pushed him away, saying, 'WHO MADE YOU A RULER AND JUDGE OVER US? YOU DO NOT MEAN TO KILL ME AS YOU KILLED THE EGYPTIAN YESTERDAY DO YOU?'
 - In this second account, Moses was attempting to **reconcile** his brethren as a **mediator** between them.
 - Once again, Stephen is demonstrating how Moses was a type of Christ in terms of being a **reconciler** [Ephesians 2:13-18] and **mediator** [1 Timothy 2:5]; for Jesus reconciled Jew and Gentile and man [both Jew and Gentile] and God, and also He is the one mediator between God and man.

- Then, after Moses' attempt to reconcile his brethren as a mediator, one of his fellow Hebrews asked, 'Who made you a ruler and judge over us?'
 - To the modern-day Christian, the answer to this question is obvious: God did. Yet, once again, Moses was not the ultimate ruler and judge. He foreshadowed Christ, the Son of Man, who has the authority, from the Father, to execute judgment [John 5:27]. Further, He is not just any ruler or king, He is the King of Kings [Philippians 2:11]
- Finally, the Hebrew asked, 'You do not mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday do you?'
 - At this, Moses realized that word was out about his killing of the Egyptians. He knew he had no choice but to flee.
 - Just as Joseph had been, and Jesus would be, rejected by their own people, only to later save them, so Moses was.

John Polhill writes, 'They [the Israelites] rejected their divinely chosen leader, put his life in danger, and forced him to flee.'

II. God Prepared Moses [His Forty Years in the Land of Midian]

- 'At this remark, Stephen says, 'MOSES FLED AND BECAME AN ALIEN IN THE LAND OF MIDIAN...'
- Moses went from being royalty, in the house of Pharaoh, to an alien in the desert wilderness of the Sinai Peninsula.
 - Hebrews 11:24-26 states that 'Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt.' In the same way, Christ, 'did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant...and humbled Himself [Philippians 2:5-11].
 - Midian is the area around the Gulf of Aqabah. According to Genesis 25:1-6, it was here in the 'land of the east' where the children of Abraham's second wife, Keturah, settled.
- It was during this period of forty [40] years that God prepared Moses for his ministry of deliverance.
- In the same way, after His baptism, the Holy Spirit led the Lord Jesus Christ into the wilderness for forty [40] days.

- Also, just as Moses was an ‘alien’ in the wilderness, so Christ was an alien here on earth.
 - Stephen also notes that, during His wilderness wanderings, Moses became the father of two sons.
 - Interestingly, Moses’ firstborn son was named Gershom, meaning ‘a sojourner there.’

III. God Worked Through Moses [His Last Forty Year from the Exodus to the Wilderness]

□ In **Verses 30-33**, Stephen says, ‘After forty years had passed, AN ANGEL APPEARED TO HIM IN THE WILDERNESS OF MOUNT Sinai, IN THE FLAME OF A BURNING THORN BUSH. When Moses saw it, he marveled at the sight; and as he approached to look more closely, there came the voice of the Lord: ‘I AM THE GOD OF YOUR FATHERS, THE GOD OF ABRAHAM AND ISAAC AND JACOB.’ Moses shook with fear and would not venture to look. ‘BUT THE LORD SAID TO HIM, ‘TAKE OFF THE SANDALS FROM YOUR FEET, FOR THE PLACE ON WHICH YOU ARE STANDING IS HOLY GROUND.’

- The final forty years of Moses’ life begins with God’s revelation of Himself to Moses through the burning bush at Sinai.

John Gill writes that the ‘angel of the Lord...was no other than the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob...and was the second person in the Trinity, the Son of God, the angel of the divine presence, and of the covenant, an uncreated angel.’

- ❖ It may be no coincidence that Moses heard the **voice**, the **Word of God**. In the New Testament, the LORD reveals Jesus Christ as the eternal Logos [John 1:1], the Word who became flesh.
- ❖ Further, in the Gospel of John, Jesus gives seven I AM statements that were most certainly intended to cause the reader and the hearer to associate the identity of Christ with the identity of the One speaking to Moses in the burning bush. It is as though in the burning bush, God said, ‘I AM _____’; and in the Gospel of John, Jesus filled in the blank – I AM the Way, the Truth, and the Life; I AM the Bread of Life; I AM the Resurrection and the Life, etc.

- Stephen writes that the voice identified Himself, stating, **I AM THE GOD OF YOUR FATHERS, THE GOD OF ABRAHAM AND ISAAC AND JACOB.**
 - Such an identification revealed that the same God who had established a covenant with Abraham was renewing it with Moses.

- Furthermore, it demonstrated a continuity with Moses and the Patriarchs.
- One of the main points for Stephen, here, is this: **Just as God revealed Himself to Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, so God revealed Himself to Moses in a land outside of Canaan.**
 - This truth reveals that God cannot be ‘tied down’ to a specific place.
 - Furthermore, God, speaking through the burning bush, told Moses to take off his sandals, ‘for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.’
 - In other words, as John Polhill writes, ‘Stephen’s inclusion of this detail may have been a subtle reminder to his hearers that there was holy ground elsewhere, far from the temple in Jerusalem.’
 - In fact, as God is holy, anywhere He is is holy.
 - This would also be the place, at Mt. Sinai, where God would reveal Himself to His people through Moses by giving them the Law.
- Stephen concludes the account of Moses and the burning bush by quoting God’s words, ‘I HAVE CERTAINLY SEEN THE OPPRESSION OF MY PEOPLE IN EGYPT AND HAVE HEARD THEIR GROANS, AND I HAVE COME DOWN TO RESCUE THEM; COME NOW, AND I WILL SEND YOU TO EGYPT.’

The ancient historian Philo wrote: ‘the burning bush is a symbol of the oppressed, the flaming fire, of the oppressors; and whereas that which was burning was not burnt, it shows, that they that are oppressed shall not perish by those who attempt it; and that their attempt shall be in vain, and they shall escape safe.’

- There is also possibly a parallel to the burning bush and the Book of Acts, specifically, Pentecost. During the account of Pentecost, in Acts 2, tongues of fire rest on the heads of those who spoke in tongues. Yet, the fire did not consume them. It is as though Christ was consumed by the fire of God’s wrath; therefore, all believers in Him would be spared from it. In the same way, the burning bush, although on fire, was not consumed by it.

- Stephen concludes his summary of Moses’ encounter with God at the burning bush by quoting the LORD saying, ‘...And I will send you to Egypt.’
 - Moses was an ancient, Old Testament Apostle – a ‘sent one.’ Just as Christ was sent into the world to save sinners, so Moses was sent into Egypt to deliver God’s people.

- Moses was in the wilderness because he was rejected by his own people, yet, God chosen him to go back to Egypt.
- Just as Jesus had gone into the wilderness prior to His ministry, so Moses had. Now, Moses prepared to return to Egypt to deliver God's people.
- Furthermore, one of the most profound parallels between Moses and Christ is that Moses, like Christ, had two 'natures.' First, Moses was royal, raised as an adopted son in the house of Pharaoh. He had to have such a 'nature' if he was to gain access to the court of Pharaoh in order to demand that he led God's people go. Secondly, he was an Israelite, a representative of his people. Had he not be like them, he could not have redeemed them as a kinsman-redeemer-type.
 - Similarly, Christ was fully God and fully man. He had to be fully God in order to fulfill the requirements of an infinitely holy God and to fully satisfy the wrath of the Father on the cross. Secondly, He had to be fully man in order to represent us as our vicarious sacrifice on the cross of Calvary.
- Now, Stephen, in **Verse 35**, gives his own [albeit, inspired] commentary of the life and purpose of Moses, 'This Moses whom they disowned, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge?' is the one whom God sent to be both a ruler and a deliverer with the help of the angel who appeared to him in the thorn bush.'
 - It is here that Stephen begins to reveal the clear parallels between Moses, Joseph, and Christ.
 - This is most certainly a common theme throughout all of Scripture: a man or woman of God is rejected by his or her people, yet he or she is chosen by God..
 - Just as Joseph had been rejected by his brethren, only to deliver them later, so Moses and Christ, though rejected by their kinsmen, were appointed by God to deliver His people.
- Then, in **Verse 36**, Stephen says, 'This man led them out, performing wonders and signs in the land of Egypt and in the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years.'
 - The 'signs and wonders' which accompanied Moses' work of deliverance further authenticated that he was, in fact, God's chosen leader and deliverer for the nation of Israel.
 - In the same way, Jesus was 'a man attested...by wonders and signs which God performed through Him...' [Acts 2:22]
 - Furthermore, the similarities concerning the nature of the signs and wonders performed through and by both Moses and Christ are astounding.

- Polhill writes, ‘The reference is surely to the plagues in Egypt, the parting of the waters, and the many miracles in the wilderness...’
 - Not only did Christ Himself perform miraculous signs and wonders during His ministry, but as He hung on the cross, the sky went black [paralleling the ninth plague – a sign of God’s judgment on sin] and then the firstborn died [Christ, being the first-born of all creation].
- Quite possibly, the climax of this section occurs in **Verses 37-38**, when Stephen says, ‘This is the Moses who said to the sons of Israel, ‘GOD WILL RAISE UP FOR YOU A PROPHET LIKE ME FROM YOUR BRETHREN.’
 - In other words, what Stephen is saying is that **Moses spoke of Christ**. Therefore, it would be foolish to speak of Stephen blaspheming Moses because he [Stephen] exalted Christ. Christ fulfilled the very words of Moses. Thus, what would truly be blasphemous to Moses would be to reject Christ – the One to whom Moses pointed. Once again, the Word of God puts the Sanhedrin, rather than Stephen, on trial.
 - This Old Testament prophecy concerning a ‘prophet like me’, taken from Deuteronomy 18:1, was also used by Peter in his sermon in Acts 3.
- Then, in **Verse 38**, Stephen says, ‘This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness together with the angel who was speaking to him on Mount Sinai, and who was with our fathers; and he received the living oracles to pass on to you.’
 - Stephen says that Moses was ‘in the congregation in the wilderness...’
 - The word for ‘congregation’ or ‘assembly’ here is *ekklesia*. This is the word often used for church. In other words, just as Moses was the mediator between God and the assembly in the Old Testament, so Christ is the perfect mediator between the Church and God, for Christ is the Head of the Church, its Chief Shepherd.
 - Also, Stephen says that Moses ‘received living oracles to pass on to you.’
 - Once again, these words powerfully foreshadow Christ, as the phrase, ‘living oracles’ literally means, **‘living WORDS’**. Recall, that it is Christ who is the LIVING WORD!
- Yet, in **Verse 39**, Stephen continues by saying, ‘Our fathers were unwilling to be obedient to him, but repudiated him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt...’
 - Just like the fathers of Israel had rejected God’s leader for them, and turned their hearts back to the pagan land of Egypt, so the Sanhedrin had rejected Christ, the very One to whom Moses pointed!

- In order to demonstrate how ‘their hearts turned back to Egypt’ Stephen, in **Verses 40-41**, quotes, again, from the Old Testament (Exodus 32:1-6): ‘SAYING TO AARON, ‘MAKE FOR US GODS WHO WILL GO BEFORE US; FOR THIS MOSES WHO LED US OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT – WE DO NOT KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM.’ ‘At that time they made a calf and brought a sacrifice to the idol, and were rejoicing in the works of their hands.’
 - F.F. Bruce writes, “The invisible presence of God was not enough for them: they craved some form of divinity that they could see. When Moses was absent [receiving the Law]...they persuaded Aaron to manufacture ‘gods’ to go before us...The long history of Israel’s lapsing into idolatry...and at last brought them into exile, had its beginnings in the wilderness, when they paid sacrificial homage to the golden calf and held high festival in honor of their own handiwork.”
 - Calf worship was a significant part of Egyptian religion. Thus, in turning their hearts back to Egypt, they turned away from YHWH, the One true and living God, to the false gods of Egypt.
 - Stephen emphasizes that the Fathers of Israel **were rejoicing in the works of their hands**. In other words, they worshipped that which had been created rather than the ultimate Creator!
 - Once again, this is the essence of idolatry. We are idolatrous when anything that we can see, touch or feel, becomes that object of our worship.
 - According to the writer of Hebrews, only Christ is the radiance of the Father’s glory, the ‘exact representation of His nature...’ [Hebrews 1:3]. Christ and Christ alone is due our worship. Regardless of how ‘pure’ the motive, any physical representation of God that is intended to ‘facilitate’ worship is idolatrous – for it will always become the object of our worship.

- As a result of the idolatrous hearts of His people, **Verse 42** ‘God turned away and delivered them up to serve the host of heaven...’
 - This act of God demonstrates one of His most dramatic and severe acts of judgment: Giving people over to their own sinful desires. This is what the Apostle Paul is referring to in Romans 1:24, 26, 28.
 - Stephen says that God delivered them up to serve the **host of heaven** [Deuteronomy 4:19; 17:3; 2 Kings 21:3-5].
 - Specifically, Stephen is referring to the planetary powers, the sun, the moon, and the stars – the objects of pagan [and Egyptian] worship.

- Then, Stephen quotes from Amos 5:25-27 **Verses 42-43**, saying, ‘It was not to me that you offered victims and sacrifices forty years in the wilderness, was it, o house of Israel? You also took along the tabernacle of Moloch and the Star of the God of Rompha, the images which you made to worship. I also will remove you beyond Babylon.’

- The prophecy in Amos was particularly referring to the Northern Kingdom [Israel] and its destruction at that hands of Assyrian, and the adoption of its pagan worship practices.
- However, for Stephen, he expands the reference to encompass also the Southern Kingdom [Judah] who was later deported to Babylon.
- The ultimate point is that all twelve tribes of Israel would eventually embrace the pagan religion they so desired. However, they would do so, once again, as prisoners in a foreign land.
- ‘For Israel the worship of the heavenly bodies seems to have come into wide practice under Assyrian influence, though the practice is found as early as 1370 B.C. in Palestine. It is frequently referred to in the Old Testament: Deuteronomy 4:19; 17:3; 2 Kings 21:3-5; 23:4; 2 Chronicles 33:3, 5; Jeremiah 7:18; 8:2; 19:13; Zephaniah 1:5.

The Hebrew text speaks of Sakkuth your king and Kaiwan your star-god. Sakkuth was the Akkadian god-king, the god of the planet Saturn. Kaiwan seems to be the Babylonian name for Saturn, so the two terms are parallel. The LXX [the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament] is completely different. ‘Tent of Moloch’ seems to derive from Sakkuth being translated as ‘tent’ and *melek* ‘king’ being translated Moloch, the Canaanite-Phoenician sun god. Rephan is totally uncertain but may come from Repa, the Egyptian same for Saturn.’
 John Polhill

- This same sort of idolatry is what marked the accusers of Stephen as he stood before the Sanhedrin.
- One of the greatest points of irony in Stephens testimony is that he began with Abraham’s call in Mesopotamia; and, now, he speaks of Judah’s deportation back to Mesopotamia.
- In a very real sense, the Sanhedrin, although they revered Abraham, is back to the pagan world in which Abraham lived when he was in Mesopotamia.
- Surely God’s judgment would fall upon them as well, and all who exchange the truth of God for a lie and worship the created things rather than the Creator.