

The Acts of the Holy Spirit and the early church

May 25th, 2014 Stephen's message, Part 9

Stephens Speech: The Rejection of the Lord, God:



Acts 7:35-39 New International Version

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. He led them out of Egypt and performed wonders and signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea and for forty years in the wilderness. "This is the Moses who told the Israelites, 'God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your own people.' 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. "But our ancestors refused to obey him. Instead, they rejected him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt.

This encounter with God and His people both in the desert as well as at Mount Sinai should remind the members of the Sanhedrin that were facing down Stephen, that wherever in the universe that God chooses to make himself known, there is holy ground. Here we see that outside the Holy Land, God once again had appeared to a person of his own choosing (**Moses**) and made known a portion of his covenant promises and saving will.

This presents an extreme challenge to many of the first-century Jews, who were so jealous for "this holy place, the temple", and to all others who cling to certain sacred spaces of their religious heritage. These Jewish leaders grew up with the same notions of traditions as their paternal heritage had taught them, than when Jesus came on the scene, it shattered their long held beliefs to the point that it literally drove them mad, note the following conversation between Jesus and these Jewish leaders:

Mark 7:1-9 (NASB)

The Pharisees and some of the scribes gathered around Him when they had come from Jerusalem, and had seen that some of His disciples were eating their bread with impure hands, that is, unwashed. For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, thus observing the traditions of the elders; and when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves; and there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots. The Pharisees and the scribes asked Him, "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?" And He said to them, "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written:

THIS PEOPLE HONOR ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.

Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.” He was also saying to them, “You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition.

The Indictment of the Jewish Leadership:

Here Stephen changes style and begins a passionate, rhetorically heightened indictment of these Jewish leaders just prior to them ending his life here on earth. Stephen is pointing out that this very same Moses, that he is accused of speaking against, is the same man that Stephen points out that was instrumental in the leading out of Egypt the Holy remnant of God.

Now sure enough it was the miracles provided by God Himself that accomplished that fact, but nevertheless it was God who chose Moses to accomplish His will in showing all the wonders and power of God through the desert wandering for 40 years. Lest we be too quick to pass over all the wonders God performed, let’s briefly look at these many wonders:

Plague of Blood

Aaron, at the command of Moses, raised his staff over the Nile River. The water turned to blood causing the fish to die and fill the land with an awful odor. To prove his own power, Pharaoh had his sorcerers turn more water into blood. They eventually had to dig wells to get fresh water. The plague lasted a week.

Plague of Frogs

Aaron raised his staff again over the streams and rivers causing frogs to come out of the river. The frogs overran the country. The Bible says that frogs were in their bedrooms, beds and kitchens. The Egyptian sorcerers also made more frogs appear. Pharaoh consented to letting the Israelites go. Moses allowed Pharaoh to choose when he wanted the frogs to disappear. Pharaoh chose the next day. I don’t know about you, but I would have asked for them to be gone immediately. The frogs were gathered and piled up making the land of Egypt stink once again.

Plague of Lice

The next plague was brought on by Aaron striking the dust with his staff. This caused the plague of lice. The Egyptian sorcerers were not able to reproduce this one. It caused them to finally declare that the plagues were brought on by God.

Plague of Flies

The Bible says that this plague only effected the land of the Egyptians and not the land of Goshen where the Israelites lived. Pharaoh again offered to let the people of Israel free if the plague was removed. However, when the plague was gone, Pharaoh refused to let them go.

Plague of Pestilence

This plague only affected the Egyptian's cattle, not the Hebrew's. Exodus 9:3 says, "Behold, the hand of the LORD is upon thy cattle which is in the field, upon the horses, upon the asses, upon the camels, upon the oxen, and upon the sheep: there shall be a very grievous murrain." Verse 6 says that "all" the cattle of the Egyptians died. But, again, none of the Israelites' cattle were harmed.

Plague of Boils

This was a skin disease that was brought about when Moses and Aaron spread the ashes from a furnace into the air. Not even the Pharaoh's magicians could come before him because of the pain caused from the boils upon their skin. The Bible says that it was not limited to only the people, but the beasts of Egypt as well.

Plague of Hail

Moses stretched his hands toward the sky and brought on hail. The hail was unlike any they had experienced before. The hail was mixed with fire of severe lightning as some historians believe. The people were not doomed to suffer this plague. It was made clear that anyone outside during the storm would be punished, but if they would go inside and take any animals in with them, then they would be spared the harshness of the storm. The storm destroyed many crops as well as people and animals in the fields. The land of Goshen was once again spared God's punishment.

Plague of Locusts

Moses came to Pharaoh once again, but he refused to let the children of Israel free, not even at the request of his servants who were ready to be done with the plagues. Pharaoh did consent to let the men of Israel go, but not the women and children. Moses raised his rod over Egypt and brought on a strong east wind for a day. After the wind came the plague of locusts. These are liken to what we call grasshoppers today which came in and ate the rest of the crops and trees which were not destroyed by the hail in the previous plague, however locusts are slightly larger and more aggressive when it comes to devouring their food.

Plague of Darkness

The plague of darkness was described as being so dark that it could be felt. The darkness lasted three days. Even the oil lamps in Egypt would not work, however the Israelites had light in their houses. After a time Pharaoh requested an end to the plague by offering to let the Israel go, but they would have to leave their cattle. Moses refused to accept the offer.

Plague of the Death of the Firstborn

The tenth and final plague was the death of the firstborn of all the people and animals. This was a plague on the Israelites and the Egyptians. The plague consisted of the firstborn being killed on a certain night. To avoid the punishment the people would kill a sacrificial lamb (sheep or goat) and paint the door posts of the house with the blood of the lamb. When the Lord passed

through the land, He would not kill the firstborn of the houses that had shown their trust in His provision of salvation, ie: Passover. Pharaoh's son was killed as well as many children of the Egyptians. They feared themselves to be the next to be killed and gave all they could to get the Israelites out of their land.

The forty years of God's provision in the wilderness:

Next we see that Stephen relates that God also performed wonders while leaving Egypt as well as during the next 40 years in the wilderness. One of the greatest chapters in the Bible relating to this time Israel spent in the open is in the book of Psalms. Let's read for a better understanding of the time of wandering:

Psalm 78:13-40 New International Version

He divided the sea and led them through; he made the water stand up like a wall. He guided them with the cloud by day and with light from the fire all night. He split the rocks in the wilderness and gave them water as abundant as the seas; he brought streams out of a rocky crag and made water flow down like rivers. But they continued to sin against him, rebelling in the wilderness against the Most High.

They willfully put God to the test by demanding the food they craved. They spoke against God; they said, "Can God really spread a table in the wilderness? True, he struck the rock, and water gushed out, streams flowed abundantly, but can he also give us bread? Can he supply meat for his people?" When the Lord heard them, he was furious; his fire broke out against Jacob, and his wrath rose against Israel, for they did not believe in God or trust in his deliverance.

Yet he gave a command to the skies above and opened the doors of the heavens; he rained down manna for the people to eat, he gave them the grain of heaven. Human beings ate the bread of angels; he sent them all the food they could eat. He let loose the east wind from the heavens and by his power made the south wind blow.

He rained meat down on them like dust, birds like sand on the seashore. He made them come down inside their camp, all around their tents. They ate till they were gorged—He had given them what they craved.

But before they turned from what they craved, even while the food was still in their mouths, God's anger rose against them; he put to death the sturdiest among them, cutting down the young men of Israel. In spite of all this, they kept on sinning; in spite of his wonders, they did not believe. So he ended their days in futility and their years in terror. Whenever God slew them, they would seek him; they eagerly turned to him again.

They remembered that God was their Rock, that God Most High was their Redeemer. But then they would flatter him with their mouths, lying to him with their tongues; their hearts were not loyal to him, they were not faithful to his covenant. Yet he was merciful; he forgave their iniquities and did not destroy them. Time after time he restrained his anger and did not stir up his full wrath. He remembered that they were but flesh, a passing breeze that does not return. How often they rebelled against him in the wilderness and grieved him in the wasteland!

Moses prophecies about Jesus, look for a man like me:



Acts 7:37 (NIV)

This is the Moses who told the Israelites, ‘God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your own people.

In what must have appeared to be a ludicrous thought, Stephen now states that it was their hero, Moses, who himself stated over a millennia earlier, that this same man Jesus, that the leadership was guilty of murdering, was prophesied to be the shining light that they really should’ve believed in and listened too. Notice the words that Moses himself wrote about what God said about this new forthcoming prophet/Son of His:

Deuteronomy 18:15-19 (NIV)

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. For this is what you asked of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, “Let us not hear the voice of the Lord our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die.” The Lord said to me: “What they say is good. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites, and I will put my words in his mouth. He will tell them everything I command him. I myself will call to account anyone who does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name.

From history we know that in fact most every Jewish person knew this passage in Deuteronomy, because everyone was waiting for the Messianic deliverer. The idea of Moses saying to be on the lookout for someone like him, should have made it all the easier for people to spot Jesus as the Messiah. But after so long a time, only a few ((**Simeon and Anna**)) were actually waiting for the long ago promised prophet like Moses, that of none other than Jesus Himself.

If only these Jesus leaders would have looked at the facts they'd see that Christ paralleled Moses in every way. Now do you see? That's the point of Stephen's address, that they knew all the facts of the life of Moses and they should have seen Jesus in that light. Here are a few examples, but for a much more comprehensive list, please see the last four pages of this message.

- A. Moses was a deliverer from among his own people, a Jew. So was Jesus Christ.
- B. Moses came down from a palace to release men in bondage. He condescended. So did Jesus.
- C. Moses offered himself to Israel and was rejected and then went and raised up seed among the Gentiles. So did Jesus, didn't he? Rejected by Israel, he turned and raised up seed in the church, the Gentiles ((US!!))

Note the following comments by Bible teacher and preacher, **Dr. John MacArthur**:

You can talk about Moses as a type of Christ over and over and over. So Moses said, "You look, and when you see one like me, you listen to him. He's your Messiah." And they had looked, and they had not seen. And Jesus said of them, "You are blind leaders of the blind." They couldn't see anything! So the history of Moses is the foreshadowing of the history of Christ. So, you see, Stephen is so masterful in his presentation. He defends himself against the charge, at the same time holding their interest by reciting their history. And he also portrays that Moses is a picture of Jesus Christ, and he lets them fill in the details.

Stephen clearly respected Moses, but he noted that Moses himself had predicted that a prophet like himself would appear. Therefore the Jews should not have concluded that the Mosaic Law was the end of God's revelation to them. The fact that Stephen spoke of the Mosaic Law as "living oracles" suggests that he viewed it more in its revelatory than in its regulatory aspect. Stephen understood that preaching Christ was not disloyal to an ancient tradition of the high up pedestal that they put Moses on, but rather its fulfilment.

The Bible teaches us many resemblances between the life of Moses and that of Jesus. At the end of this lesson, there is a fairly exhaustive list of the parallels of their lives. Notice that Stephen himself, draws the final comparison between these two, and that both were rejected by Israel. What a great point to try and get across to these men who with stones already in their hands figuratively, were just waiting for the opportunity to release the rocks upon the precious head of Stephen. The late, great Biblical expositor of years past, **Matthew Henry** relates:

This is spoken of as one of the greatest honors God put upon Moses, that by him he gave notice to the children of Israel of the great prophet that should come into the world, raised their expectation of him, and required them to receive him. Stephen was so far from blaspheming Moses that really he did him the greatest honor imaginable, By showing how the prophecy of Moses was accomplished, which was so clear, that, as Christ told them himself: ((see Scripture on next page))

John 1:43-45 (NIV)

*The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me." Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one **Moses** wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."*

Moses, in God's name, told them that, in the fullness of time, they should have a prophet raised up among them, one of their own nation, that should be like unto him, that being a ruler and a deliverer, a judge and a lawgiver, like him,--who should therefore have authority to change the customs that he had previously delivered, and to bring in a better hope, as the Mediator of a better testament.

In Closing:

Dr. Peter Pett, who in writing many commentaries on the Word of God, relates the following on this message of Stephen when it came to Moses saying to get ready for Jesus:

And it was at this point that Stephen introduced his next telling blow to his listeners. He pointed out that Moses had also promised that there would arise another Prophet like himself whom also they should obey. There was thus another who was promised and was to be waited for, another who would come as ruler and judge and would perform signs and wonders, as Moses had and who should as a result be responded to. His implication was that the Prophet like Moses had indeed come, and that they had again behaved in the same way as they had done previously by also rejecting Him, in spite of the signs and wonders He had done. The final conclusion to be obtained from this was that as with the previous deliverers, there would be a second opportunity, and that they should now seize it by responding to Jesus.

John 5:45-47 (NIV)

*((In speaking to the Jewish leaders, Jesus said)) But do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is **Moses**, on whom your hopes are set. If you believed **Moses**, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?"*

For your perusal, the following is a summary of some of the parallels between Moses and Jesus:

Moses, The first mediator Jesus , The final mediator

Moses was born as a Hebrew	Jesus was born as a Hebrew
Moses was chosen by God to be a leader	Jesus was chosen by God to be a leader

Moses was born while his people were suffering under a cruel leader. (Pharaoh)	Jesus was born while his people were suffering under a cruel leader. (Herod)
Moses hid in Egypt as a child.	Jesus hid in Egypt as a child.
The leader of the land that Moses was born into tried to kill all of the babies when he was born.	The leader of the land that Jesus was born into tried to kill all of the babies when He was born.
Moses turned water into blood.	Jesus turned water into wine.
Moses died on a hill.	Jesus died on a hill.
Moses fasted 40 days and faced a spiritual crisis on a mountain	Jesus fasted 40 days and faced a spiritual crisis on a mountain.
Moses told people about the need for a Passover lamb.	Jesus became the Passover lamb.
Moses founded a new religion	Jesus founded a new religion
Moses communicated directly with God	Jesus communicated directly with God
Moses performed miracles	Jesus performed miracles
Moses revised an existing religion	Jesus revised an existing religion
Moses was a law giver – gave the ten commandments	Jesus was a law giver – gave the great commandments.
Moses was hated by the ruling party (Egyptians)	Jesus was hated by the ruling party (Pharisees)
Moses had brothers and sisters who misunderstood him.	Jesus had brothers and sisters who misunderstood him.
Moses chose 12 leaders to follow.	Jesus chose 12 leaders to follow.

Moses gave his people a new identity as a people.	Jesus gave his people a new identity as a people.
Moses had followers who strayed from his teachings.	Jesus had followers who strayed from his teachings.
Moses is arguably the lead figure of the Old Testament.	Jesus is the lead figure of the New Testament.
Moses taught his followers how to pray.	Jesus taught his followers how to pray.
Moses chose people to carry on when he was leaving.	Jesus chose people to carry on when he was leaving.
Moses led his people to the promised land.	Jesus leads his people to the promised land.
Moses sent 12 spies to Canaan so he could bring people to the promised land.	Jesus sent 12 disciples to the world so he could bring people to the promised land.
Moses appointed 70 rulers over Israel	Jesus appointed 70 disciples to the nations.
The people picked up stones to stone Moses but they did not succeed.	The people picked up stones to stone Jesus, but they did not succeed.
Moses controlled the waters of the Red Sea	Jesus controlled the Sea of Galilee
Moses brought living water out of the Rock	Jesus brings living water to all of his believers.
The face of Moses shown with glory on Mount Sinai.	The face of Jesus shown with glory on the mount of Transfiguration.
Moses lifted the brazen serpent up in the wilderness to heal people	Jesus was lifted up on the cross to heal us from our own sins.
Moses was a shepherd	Jesus was the good shepherd

Moses subdued an attacking army by raising his arms high on the top of a hill. (with two other people)	Jesus subdued sin and death with arms raised high on a hill. (with two other people)
Moses said another prophet would come (Jesus)	Jesus said another would come (Holy Spirit)
Those who did not follow Moses died in the wilderness because of their lack of faith.	Those who refused to follow Jesus died in the siege of Jerusalem in 70 AD. Jesus had warned them it was coming, and history shows that the Christians left right before the siege started because of the remembrance of the words of Jesus. Those who did not believe Jesus stayed and were either killed or sold to slavery.
Moses fed thousands supernaturally with bread.	Jesus fed thousands supernaturally with bread.
Moses took a gentile bride	Jesus took a gentile bride (the church)
Moses led the Israelites in a victory song after the victory in Egypt.	This song will be repeated at the end as a victory song for Jesus. (see Rev. 15:2-3)
There is a long period of silence in the story of Moses from the time he was a child until adulthood.	There is a long period of silence in the story of Jesus from the time he was a child until adulthood.

Moses showed compassion to a woman getting water at a well.	Jesus showed compassion to a woman getting water at a well.
Moses' mission was to redeem Israel from slavery to Egypt	Jesus' mission was to redeem mankind from slavery to sin.
Moses was loved and supported by his sister Miriam (which is Miryam in Hebrew)	Jesus was loved and supported in his ministry by His mother Mary (which is also Miryam in Hebrew)
Moses gave God's law on a mountain.	Jesus gave the new law from the Mount of the Beatitudes. (sermon on the mount.)
Moses offered his life for the salvation of his people after the sin of the golden calf.	Jesus offered His life for the salvation of the world.
Moses rejected a lavish, ruling lifestyle in the house of the Pharaoh. Instead, he chose a humble life.	Jesus rejected the offers of Satan to be the ruler of this world and instead chose a humble life
Moses washed Aaron and his sons with water.	Jesus washed the feet of his disciples with water.