

Moses and Jesus

Acts 7:17-36

Remember where we are in our study of Acts. This is actually week 4 of Stephen's defense against those who are threatening his life with their opposition to what he is teaching. They have accused him of blasphemy. So we read about those who were against him that...

Acts 6:10 "...they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke. 11 Then they secretly induced men to say, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God." 12 And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; and they came upon him, seized him, and brought him to the council. 13 They also set up false witnesses who said, "This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law; 14 for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us." 15 And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel. 7:1 Then the high priest said, "Are these things so?"

So defend yourself? And what does Stephen do? What does he say? He gives them a history lesson. But as I've noted, it is not JUST a history lesson. It's a redemptive-historical lesson, that is to say, Stephen is presenting to us the gospel, he is proclaiming the promise and hope of the gospel as that gospel is expressed and unfolded in the actual life experiences of the people of the nation of Israel. It's not just the history of Abraham—it's the gospel preached beforehand to Abraham, as Paul writes in Galatians 3:8. Namely, the promise of a great land which they would inherit, and a large number of descendants to inherit that land. And Paul's point in Galatians 3 is,

Gal. 3:8 "...that only those who are of faith are sons of

Abraham. 8 And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, "In you all the nations shall be blessed." 9 So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham."

And as we studied last week, it is not just the history of Joseph. Rather, it is the history of God's work of redemption and salvation that was made evident through the life of Joseph. Today we will see that it not just the history of Moses to which Stephen refers, but rather, again, it is the history of the saving work of God made evident under the leadership of Moses. So let's continue to study Stephen's history lesson, the history of God's work of salvation with reference to Moses.

Some Christians struggle when they come to this portion of Old Testament history, because they have come to believe that Moses represents some sort of departure from the gospel. Specifically, some have come to understand that the emphasis upon the law of Moses is actually a contradiction of the gospel, and while I disagree strongly with that idea, I understand where it comes from, which, I believe, is a misunderstanding of some Bible verses such as,

John 1:17 "For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."

I won't spend too much time refuting that error of thinking that the emphasis of law in the covenant with Moses somehow contradicts the gospel, except to say that the problem is not with the law but with the misuse of the law. Clearly, there were Jews who believed that they could use the law to accomplish their own righteousness, that they could become righteous through the law, that they could become acceptable to God by their law-keeping. That is the classic definition of legalism, sometimes referred to as the Judaizers, and they were the ones Paul is so strongly

rebuking in his letter to the Galatians, for they did not realize that such a commitment to the law brings them under the curse of the law. Going back to,

Gal. 3:10 “For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.” 11 But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for “the just shall live by faith.” 12 Yet the law is not of faith, but “the man who does them shall live by them.” 13 Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”), 14 that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.”

So Stephen doesn't bring up Moses in order to somehow emphasize that the law itself is in conflict with the gospel. Rather Stephen continues to preach the gospel through the history and circumstances of Moses to continue the same emphasis as with Abraham and Joseph. Namely this, that God was calling a people to himself, that he would be their God. Jesus is the fulfillment of that great covenant promise, and that is what was so offensive to Stephen's enemies. So let's see how that works out with reference to Moses. First, what is emphasized here with reference to Moses is,

I. THE GREAT DELIVERANCE.

In verse 17, Stephen refers to “the time off the promise.” That time drew near, Stephen explains. The time was at hand, we might say, the time when the covenant promise of God would be fulfilled, the time when the many descendants of Abraham would be established as the nation of God's people, the nation of Israel. It is the time of the promise when that nation would enter and inhabit their promised land.

That event, which we call the Exodus, is the event in the history of Israel that represents salvation itself. Outwardly, as a nation, Israel was saved. The event itself is a type and picture of the whole work of God's redemption. And that work was the work of deliverance. That's what salvation is. It is described and defined by the words of,

v.36 “He brought them out, after he had shown wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red Sea, and in the wilderness forty years.”

The great deliverance. That description explains what happened in God's providence to the nation of Israel in Egypt. They went to Egypt under Joseph's leadership, with the blessing of God given to him in finding such favor in God's sight. But then we read,

v.7 “But when the time of the promise drew near which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt 18 till another king arose who did not know Joseph. 19 This man dealt treacherously with our people, and oppressed our forefathers, making them expose their babies, so that they might not live.”

Stephen's words again summarize several chapters of the book of Genesis, and the point of emphasis is simply that Israel, in the land of Egypt, was now in a house of bondage. They were enslaved. And the reference is not simply to their political situation, but what it represented spiritually. They were living under oppression. And ultimately, under the sentence of death itself. So we read in,

Ex. 1:8 “Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. 9 And he said to his people, “Look, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we; 10 come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and it happen, in the event of war, that they also join our enemies and fight against

us, and so go up out of the land.” 11 Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh supply cities, Pithom and Raamses. 12 But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were in dread of the children of Israel. 13 So the Egyptians made the children of Israel serve with rigor. 14 And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage—in mortar, in brick, and in all manner of service in the field. All their service in which they made them serve was with rigor. 15 Then the king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, of whom the name of one was Shiphrah and the name of the other Puah; 16 and he said, “When you do the duties of a midwife for the Hebrew women, and see them on the birthstools, if it is a son, then you shall kill him; but if it is a daughter, then she shall live.”

Under Moses’ leadership, himself delivered from death at birth, the nation was delivered out of that bondage. It was...

A. A deliverance from death and oppression.

And that is what salvation is. Deliverance from death, death as the consequence of sin, the condemnation of God. And deliverance from oppression, the oppression of sin. That’s salvation. So we read,

Ex. 3:7 “And the LORD said: “I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows. 8 So I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites. 9 Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel has come to Me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. 10 Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring

My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.”

That’s the promise of the gospel I will continue to preach to you. Deliverance. As Paul puts it,

Gal. 1:3 “Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, 4 who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, 5 to whom be glory forever and ever.”

Or in the painfully personal words of,

Rom. 7:22 “For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. 23 But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. 24 O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? 25 I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!”

That’s the cry of salvation! “O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” The answer, the only answer, is Jesus.

Col. 1:13 “He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, 14 in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.”

That’s what we learn from Moses, that God “has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.” And don’t miss the very obvious emphasis that it was,

B. A deliverance according to God’s plan.

That’s why we read Stephen’s words in,

v.20 “At this time Moses was born, and was well pleasing to God; and he was brought up in his father’s house for three

months. 21 But when he was set out, Pharaoh's daughter took him away and brought him up as her own son. 22 And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds."

God did it. God planned it. God brought it about. Every detail demonstrates just that. And, in that plan of God, the emphasis of Stephen in giving us this redemptive-historical explanation, this great deliverance is...

II. DELIVERANCE BY THE POWER OF GOD, NOT THE POWER OF A MAN.

It was God's plan. And it was God's power. So we see Moses' failure to enable the people to understand God's power in deliverance, reading,

v.23 "Now when he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the children of Israel. 24 And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended and avenged him who was oppressed, and struck down the Egyptian. 25 For he supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand."

That didn't work out as Moses might have thought. It would. And Moses didn't live out his life under the privileges of Pharaoh's household. He defended the Israelites, and gave up his rights as an Egyptian in Pharaoh's house. And the explanation of all that is made clear in,

Heb. 11:24 "By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, 25 choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, 26 esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward."

Moses represents all of us, all of God's people,

A. Choosing to suffer affliction.

That is our station in life as well, our calling, to suffer affliction rather than "to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin." We as God's people are called to self-denial, to give up our lives, to lose our lives.

Mat. 16:24 "Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. 25 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it."

That's the path Moses chose, along with,

B. Choosing to live by faith.

v.26 "And the next day he appeared to two of them as they were fighting, and tried to reconcile them, saying, 'Men, you are brethren; why do you wrong one another?' 27 But he who did his neighbor wrong pushed him away, saying, Who made you a ruler and a judge over us? 28 Do you want to kill me as you did the Egyptian yesterday?' 29 Then, at this saying, Moses fled and became a dweller in the land of Midian, where he had two sons."

He lived in the land of Midian, by faith, rather than trusting in the privileges of Pharaoh and all Egypt. Going back to Hebrews 11 again, where we have the inspired explanation of all of this.

Heb. 11:27 "By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible. 28 By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest he who destroyed the firstborn should touch them. 29 By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land, whereas the Egyptians, attempting to do so, were drowned."

By faith he left Egypt! That was his choice, his commitment. God delivered him, to be sure, but because he was compelled to live by faith, the obvious reality is that he didn't deliver the people

of Israel out of Egypt by his own power, but by the power of God himself. And in that context, we see his faith to trust in the power of God to accomplish exactly what God had promised. “By faith he forsook Egypt,” choosing to live by the faith to believe that God would deliver him. This is what we read about the exercise of that faith,

Ex. 14:19 “And the Angel of God, who went before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud went from before them and stood behind them. 20 So it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel. Thus it was a cloud and darkness to the one, and it gave light by night to the other, so that the one did not come near the other all that night. 21 Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea into dry land, and the waters were divided. 22 So the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea on the dry ground, and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. 23 And the Egyptians pursued and went after them into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh’s horses, his chariots, and his horsemen.”

But Stephen isn’t done. His redemptive-historical explanation of the life of Moses isn’t yet complete. There is more to learn, more to emphasize, about this great deliverance, for it is...

III. DELIVERANCE BY THE PERSONAL INTERVENTION OF GOD.

This shouldn’t have been controversial among the Jews, but Stephen’s point clearly emphasizes that history of Israel, this deliverance, is the work of God. Personally! So he emphasizes,

A. The personal presence of God.

v.30-32

Again, this shouldn’t have been controversial, but it was. Because it was so personal! God is so personal! Stephen is not talking about some man-made religion. He is not referring to popular religious tradition. Rather, he is emphasizing that God himself is personally involved. God himself is personally revealed. First, through the so-called “angel of the Lord,” in verse 30, though there is some question of whether or not the reference is just to angel or to the angel of the Lord. Either way, the reference in Exodus 3 is to “the angel of the Lord.”

v.30 “And when forty years had passed, an Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire in a bush, in the wilderness of Mount Sinai.”

Clearly, however, the burning bush emphasizes the presence of God. It can mean nothing else. And this wasn’t just an appearance. This wasn’t just an illustration or an analogy. It was an actual bush with actual fire. So we read,

Ex. 3:1 “Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. And he led the flock to the back of the desert, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2 And the Angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed. 3 Then Moses said, “I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn.”

This is a personal intervention of God himself, the God of the universe, the God of creation. This is a declaration of God that came to Moses, renewing and reinforcing the covenant promise of God made to Abraham and then to Joseph.

v.31-32

Reading from,

Ex. 3:6 “Moreover He said, “I am the God of your father—the

God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God.”

That’s serious! Moses is serious about God. Moses is confronted with the reality of the presence of God, his personal presence. And with that we see,

B. The glory of the presence of God.

Interesting, this is what people today continue to ignore, or reject—the sense of God’s glory. People then and now want God to be comfortable. They want God to be casual. They want God to be like one of us. But that is not how God reveals himself.

v.33 “Then the LORD said to him, “Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground.”

We can never dare forget, that God is NOT like one of us. God is not a fellow creature. He is almighty God, the maker of heaven and earth. And his presence is glorious. That is why we approach him in worship with reverence, reverence and awe. That is why we offer him sacrifices of worship, acknowledging his glory above anything and everything else. That’s why we call this room a sanctuary, not there is anything spectacular about this room or this building, except for this one great thing—that God promises to meet with us here. So, “Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground.”

And in that holy ground, in the presence of the glory of God, we hear the promise of the gospel again, the covenant promise.

C. The covenant promise of God made clear.

I will deliver you. I will save you. That’s the meaning of Stephen’s words to which I have already referred,

v.34 ‘I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt; I have heard their groaning and have come down to

deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt.”

Psalm 105 recounts these same historical events, and then concludes,

Ps. 105:42 “For He remembered His holy promise, And Abraham His servant. 43 He brought out His people with joy, His chosen ones with gladness. 44 He gave them the lands of the Gentiles, And they inherited the labor of the nations, 45 That they might observe His statutes And keep His laws. Praise the LORD!”

Let me draw all of this together with this great and dramatic climax, from,

v.35 “This Moses whom they rejected, saying, Who made you a ruler and a judge?’ is the one God sent to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the Angel who appeared to him in the bush. 36 He brought them out, after he had shown wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red Sea, and in the wilderness forty years.”

God sent Moses to be a ruler and a deliverer. But I think you already realize this, that it wasn’t just Moses whom God sent, it was Jesus, “the prophet like Moses” as we will see next time in verse 37. The promise of God to which Stephen appeals is not the promise of Moses, but,

D. The promise of Jesus.

Jesus would be the “ruler deliverer” which the Angel of the Lord promised in that burning bush! Going back to Exodus 3 one more time,

Ex. 3:4 “So when the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.” 5 Then He said, “Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place

where you stand is holy ground.” 6 Moreover He said, “I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God. 7 And the LORD said: “I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows. 8 So I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites. 9 Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel has come to Me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. 10 Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.” 11 But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?” 12 So He said, “I will certainly be with you. And this shall be a sign to you that I have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.” 13 Then Moses said to God, “Indeed, when I come to the children of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they say to me, ‘What is His name?’ what shall I say to them?” 14 And God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And He said, “Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, I AM has sent me to you.’ ” 15 Moreover God said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: ‘The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is My name forever, and this is My memorial to all generations.’”

That is perhaps the greatest self-revelation of God prior to the incarnation of Jesus, and the promise is of Jesus. God told Moses his name, “I AM WHO I AM.” And that is the name which Jesus so consistently claimed for himself, the name “I am.” “I am

who I am.” Only God can claim such self-existence, an eternal self-existence. And so we read,

Rev. 1:8 “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,” says the Lord, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”

Rev. 22:13 “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last.”

That’s why Stephen’s words were so hated and despised by his enemies, because he was proclaiming Jesus to them! He wasn’t just telling them about Moses, he was telling them about Jesus. And we will pick up at that point next week.

Let me end this morning with this emphasis, as I preach to you the covenant promises of God as fulfilled in Jesus, that Jesus is the eternal son of God, eternally God. He is the great “I am.”

Heb. 13:8 “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.”

Let that be your great hope and confidence in this life, as you look forward to the completion of your own salvation, the great and final deliverance that comes at the end of the age, when you who believe in Jesus will be raised from the dead with him. That deliverance is yours, not by works, but by faith. By trusting in Jesus, who says of himself,

John 14:6 “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”

John 11:25 “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. 26 And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?”

So great is our deliverance in Jesus.