

Acts 7:35-43 | “This Moses, whom they rejected, saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge?’—this man God sent as both ruler and redeemer by the hand of the angel who appeared to him in the bush. ³⁶ This man led them out, performing wonders and signs in Egypt and at the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years. ³⁷ This is the Moses who said to the Israelites, ‘God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers.’ ³⁸ This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our fathers. He received living oracles to give to us. ³⁹ Our fathers refused to obey him, but thrust him aside, and in their hearts they turned to Egypt, ⁴⁰ saying to Aaron, ‘Make for us gods who will go before us. As for this Moses who led us out from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.’ ⁴¹ And they made a calf in those days, and offered a sacrifice to the idol and were rejoicing in the works of their hands. ⁴² But God turned away and gave them over to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the prophets:

“ ‘Did you bring to me slain beasts and sacrifices,
during the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel?
⁴³ You took up the tent of Moloch
and the star of your god Rephan,
the images that you made to worship;
and I will send you into exile beyond Babylon.’

Acts 7:35-43 | Stephen’s Speech, Sinai

In order to keep our wits about us through Stephen’s long speech we have to return each Sunday to the charges that are laid out against him.

Acts 6:14 | for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us.”

You can hear two charges, on his Jesus’ destroying of the temple, and the second is changing the customs that Moses delivered to us. Last week Stephen challenged the accusation that he was the one who blasphemed against Moses, by demonstrating honor towards Moses as the one chosen by God to bring deliverance, and demonstrating that the Sanhedrin’s rejection of Jesus stands as evidence that they are of their father’s who rejected Moses.

Stephen will continue describing the events of Moses’ life but will take us right to the customs themselves that were delivered to Moses at Sinai. In order to grasp the importance of Moses to the present lives of the Sanhedrin we must grasp the events of Sinai. The truth of the accusations is that the Sanhedrin are pretending to not understand, because understanding is a threat to their whole way of life. Because at one level, Stephen is describing Christ’s destruction of the temple, and at another level he isn’t. At one level Stephen is advocating for changing the customs of Moses but at another level he isn’t. But first he must break down their own understanding of they think of themselves as the lineage of the ones who honored Moses. This is not their story.

1. This Moses

Having told the story of Moses' being preserved and chosen by God and called at the burning bush. Stephen then hammers home his honoring of Moses, and lays it in stark contrast to the rejection Moses himself faced from the Hebrew people he was sent to save.

Acts 7:35-43 | “This Moses, whom they rejected, saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge?’—this man God sent as both ruler and redeemer by the hand of the angel who appeared to him in the bush.

This Moses, the one sent to save, was rejected by his people. And the way they rejected him was by saying, who made you a ruler and a judge? Of course the answer to this question reveals the blasphemy inherent in the rejection of Moses, because God is the one who made Moses ruler and judge over the Hebrew people. But it is an even greater rejection than rejecting the ruler and judge, because Stephen clarifies, it was *this* man whom God sent as both ruler and redeemer, by the hand of the angel at the burning bush. The man who was sent on a redemptive mission of mercy towards the Hebrew people is the very one the Hebrew people rejected.

Moses being described as both ruler and redeemer, should ring a bell in the Sanhedrin's ear, because Jesus is of course the ruler and redeemer sent by God to his people. And Jesus as the ruler and redeemer was rejected by the men in the room.

Acts 7:36 | This man led them out, performing wonders and signs in Egypt and at the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years.

This man, you see it continues. Led the Hebrew people out of Egypt, and the way he did it was by performing signs and wonders at the Red Sea and during their 40 years in the wilderness. Just like, you guessed it, Jesus. What types of signs and wonders were performed. Well first was mastery over a serpent. Next was turning water into blood. Jesus did something like this, only it was better than blood it was water into wine. Moses brought water from the rock, Jesus is the living water that once you drink it you'll never be thirsty again. Moses received bread from heaven, Jesus is the bread from heaven that you eat and leads to eternal life. Moses lifted up the serpent on the staff so if you looked to it you would no longer be under the power of the serpents. Jesus was the serpent lifted up on the staff so that if you look to him you will be saved from the power of Satan.

Acts 7:37 | This is the Moses who said to the Israelites, ‘God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers.’

And they must have felt this one coming because it is the very statement made by Peter to this very council as Stephen quotes Moses' own statement in Deuteronomy. Who is this prophet like Moses who was raised up from their brothers. Of course.

2. Sinai

Acts 7:38 | This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our fathers. He received living oracles to give to us.

This Moses is the one who was with the congregation, and received from the angel at Mt. Sinai living oracles. These are the customs which were handed down by Moses that the Sanhedrin view themselves as so zealously protecting. This gathering of the people at Mt. Sinai is the first instance of congregation language in scripture. Moses is among the congregation just as the Holy Spirit has attended the congregation of the church. And Moses receives living oracles. This means a law which will not be put to death and will lead to life and godliness. This is the law that the Sanhedrin think of themselves in the lineage of honoring. But their in the lineage of their fathers.

Acts 7:39-40 | Our fathers refused to obey him, but thrust him aside, and in their hearts they turned to Egypt, ⁴⁰ saying to Aaron, 'Make for us gods who will go before us. As for this Moses who led us out from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.'

Moses and the customs he received from God were thrust aside by their fathers. Instead they turned their hearts away from the promised land and back towards Egypt. They immediately turned to a practice of idolatry, violating the ten commandments and making idols for themselves. They say of Moses they do not know what has become of him, as they refuse to hold to him by faith, having seen him ascend the mountain from which they heard the voice of God.

Here we must talk about what the Mosaic Covenant is. The Mosaic covenant is often misunderstood as a covenant of works. That is if they did these works then they would be saved. This misunderstands the nature of the covenant with the administration of the covenant. Or to use Aristotelian terms, this misunderstands the substance of the covenant with the accident of the covenant. In these categories we understand that substance is that which is essential to somethings nature while an accident is that which can change without violating somethings nature. A red car does not cease to be a car when painted green. The Mosaic covenant is not a republication of the covenant of works, it is an administration of the covenant of grace. Here is how it is explained in the confession.

WCF 7.5. This covenant was differently administered in the time of the law and in the time of the gospel: under the law it was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews, all fore-signifying Christ to come, which were for that time sufficient and efficacious, through the operation of the Spirit, to instruct and build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah, by whom they had full remission of sins and eternal salvation; and is called the Old Testament.

All of what you associate with the Mosaic covenant, referred to here as the time of the law, is all fore-signifying Christ. These were given to a church underage to support their faith looking forward to the fullness of time when the shadow would be replaced by the substance. This is evident because the people of God are not given the mosaic covenant so they might prove themselves worthy of deliverance from Egypt but they are given it after God by his grace alone delivered them from Egypt.

Therefore these features of the Mosaic administration of the covenant of grace have transformed because they have been fulfilled in Christ. But this is not to say that the substance of the covenant has changed. The substance is unchanged but the administration in the New Covenant outshines this mosaic covenant in glory.

3. Called like Pentecost

Acts 7:41-42 | And they made a calf in those days, and offered a sacrifice to the idol and were rejoicing in the works of their hands. ⁴² But God turned away and gave them over to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the prophets:

They made a golden calf to worship in place of the living God. They violated the 1st and second commandments immediately. And it is for their idolatry that they will be driven from the promised land. But notice that God gives them over to worship the desires of their heart. He shows his wrath upon them in giving them up to the desires of their heart. Just as Paul says in Romans 1. They worshipped their own works as the mechanism of their salvation in place of God who freely gave them salvation as a gift. The Sanhedrin in holding to the accidents as the Mosaic administration now that Christ has arrived still cling to the dead works of their hands, worshiping the gods of the people around them, rather than receiving the one Moses himself promised would come.

Acts 7:42-43 | “ ‘Did you bring to me slain beasts and sacrifices, during the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? ⁴³ You took up the tent of Moloch and the star of your god Rephan, the images that you made to worship; and I will send you into exile beyond Babylon.’

Stephen sums up his narrative of Moses by quoting from Amos 5. Did they bring sacrifices while in the wilderness? The answer is yes! But they did not do so in faith, they did so with a divided heart, continuing to serve with their hearts other gods. Denying the true God who saved. Will they deny him once again as he has offered salvation in Jesus Christ?