

Acts 7:17-34 | “But as the time of the promise drew near, which God had granted to Abraham, the people increased and multiplied in Egypt ¹⁸ until there arose over Egypt another king who did not know Joseph. ¹⁹ He dealt shrewdly with our race and forced our fathers to expose their infants, so that they would not be kept alive. ²⁰ At this time Moses was born; and he was beautiful in God’s sight. And he was brought up for three months in his father’s house, ²¹ and when he was exposed, Pharaoh’s daughter adopted him and brought him up as her own son.

²² And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in his words and deeds.

²³ “When he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brothers, the children of Israel.

²⁴ And seeing one of them being wronged, he defended the oppressed man and avenged him by striking down the Egyptian. ²⁵ He supposed that his brothers would understand that God was giving them salvation by his hand, but they did not understand. ²⁶ And on the following day he appeared to them as they were quarreling and tried to reconcile them, saying, ‘Men, you are brothers. Why do you wrong each other?’ ²⁷ But the man who was wronging his neighbor thrust him aside, saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge over us?’ ²⁸ Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?’ ²⁹ At this retort Moses fled and became an exile in the land of Midian, where he became the father of two sons.

³⁰ “Now when forty years had passed, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in a flame of fire in a bush. ³¹ When Moses saw it, he was amazed at the sight, and as he drew near to look, there came the voice of the Lord: ³² ‘I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob.’ And Moses trembled and did not dare to look. ³³ Then the Lord said to him, ‘Take off the sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. ³⁴ I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their groaning, and I have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt.’

Acts 7:17-34 | Stephen’s Speech, Moses

The two central charges against Stephen are that he has proclaimed the destruction of the Temple by Jesus of Nazareth, and he has advocated for changing the scriptures handed down from Moses. Behind these particular charges are the lies of the smear campaign hatched against Stephen which claim he had blasphemed Moses and God.

Acts 6:11 | Then they secretly instigated men who said, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.”

That is why Stephen spends the central part of his history relaying the story of Moses. First he is showing how he honors Moses. Second he is showing that, like the story of Joseph, you cannot tell the story of Moses without hearing the same pattern as the story of Christ. Third he is exposing the Sanhedrin for standing in line with their lineage as the ones who rejected Moses.

Throughout his whole speech, Stephen is revealing this hidden proof of Christ which is in his rejection by the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin reject Jesus, and they think their testimony against Jesus is proof that Jesus is not the Christ, in reality it is evidence Jesus is the Christ.

1. Born like Christ

Acts 7:17-18 | “But as the time of the promise drew near, which God had granted to Abraham, the people increased and multiplied in Egypt ¹⁸ until there arose over Egypt another king who did not know Joseph.

Stephen calls us to remember that all that is unfolding is hanging on the promises of God. The plot of scripture hinges upon the promises of God. The reason we speak so much of faith is because faith is the mechanism by which we relate to a promise. These promises take particular form throughout scripture, and our responsibility to God is to relate to his promises by faith. This structure of a promise given by God and received in faith is a covenantal structure. Like a marriage. There are the promises. If those are honored, then the marriage exists, if breached, marriage annulled. But it isn't exactly like a marriage because this is not two equals agreeing to terms. This is God relating to creatures.

Chapter 7 of the Westminster Confession of Faith titled, “Of God’s Covenant with Man” begins with this statement.

WCF 1.1 The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of him as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God’s part, which he hath been pleased to express by way of a covenant.

God’s forming a covenant with humanity is fundamentally a condescension on his part to us. We cannot come up to him to initiate a covenant, he must come down to us. The covenant that God initially establishes between us is the covenant of works. In this covenant of works, God requires perfect obedience of Adam and his posterity in the Garden. The perfect obedience is shown in not eating from the Tree of Knowledge. This covenant is broken by Adam and therefore plunges all of his posterity, that’s us, out of the covenant into death.

God’s response to our covenant breaking is to establish the covenant of grace. Which is his promise to freely offer life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring faith in him to be saved. This is because Jesus Christ fulfills the requirements of the covenant of works perfectly on behalf of mankind, and reconciles us to God. He is sufficient for this task because he is fully God and fully man. But let’s return to the story of Moses. Because it becomes the story of Jesus. This is Stephen’s brilliance. The Sanhedrin accuse him of dishonoring Moses, he will show that the story of Moses is fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Acts 7:19-20 | He dealt shrewdly with our race and forced our fathers to expose their infants, so that they would not be kept alive. ²⁰ At this time Moses was born; and he was beautiful in God’s sight. And he was brought up for three months in his father’s house,

The story of Moses should sound familiar, because it begins in the same place as the story of Jesus. Like Jesus, Moses is born under a king who mandated murder of the infant Hebrew boys. This Pharaoh is just like King Herod. It is typical of a pagan culture to practice infanticide. You can tell because abortion is healthcare. Like Moses, Jesus is spared. Like Moses Jesus is spared by being hidden in Egypt. Jesus' father is named Joseph. Probably doesn't mean anything.

2. Rejected Like Christ

Acts 7:23-24 | "When he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brothers, the children of Israel. ²⁴ And seeing one of them being wronged, he defended the oppressed man and avenged him by striking down the Egyptian.

Stephen then relays the story of Moses choosing the Hebrew people over his adopted family the Egyptians as he sympathizes with their oppression. He leaves his royal dwelling to identify with the oppressed Hebrews. He avenges the Egyptian to free his Hebrew brothers.

Acts 7:25 | He supposed that his brothers would understand that God was giving them salvation by his hand, but they did not understand.

The Sanhedrin look back and consider that they would have obviously recognized the deliverance brought by Moses' hand. But the evidence is to the contrary. The promised one would be rejected by his brothers he came to save. They did not understand. The misunderstanding of the Sanhedrin is evidence of the legitimacy of Christ. They do not understand Christ at his arrival. Just like Moses wasn't understood. But of course more than misunderstanding it is rejection, and a particular type of rejection, it is a turning point the brother over to die at the hands of those who are not his brothers.

Acts 7:28-29 | Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?' ²⁹ At this retort Moses fled and became an exile in the land of Midian, where he became the father of two sons.

When Moses comes to free his people he is threatened by his people to be turned over to their oppressors. Just like when Joseph was rejected by his brothers and sold to the Egyptians. Just like when Jesus was rejected by his brothers and given over to the cross of the Romans. Moses is turned over to exile.

3. Called like Pentecost

Acts 7:30 | "Now when forty years had passed, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in a flame of fire in a bush.

After 40 years in the wilderness, Moses sees the angel of the Lord in the burning bush in the wilderness of Sinai. Speaking to him from the burning bush is the form of a man, and he declares himself to be the God of Moses fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Moses trembles at the sight and dares not to look. The declaration of God as the God of Abraham Isaac and Jacob is God's description of his covenantal fidelity to his people. The ones God made the promise too is the very name that God takes upon himself.

Acts 7:33 | Then the Lord said to him, 'Take off the sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.'

Moses is in the wilderness of Sinai. Outside Jerusalem in a place that was just wilderness before. But now because the presence of God has come down in the form of fire and spoken to him, he is standing on holy ground. What made the ground holy? Was it being in Jerusalem? No it was the presence of God which came down in the form of a fire. What we are witnessing is a picture of pentecost. That day in recent memory when the fire came down from heaven and at the falling of the Holy Spirit sent by Christ the news of Jesus spread into the world. It is in perfect alignment with Moses' own pentecost where Moses heard from God.

Acts 7:34 | I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their groaning, and I have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt.'

Let us return to the accusation of the Sanhedrin against Stephen. Stephen is the one on trial for the rejection of Moses and the Sanhedrin view themselves as the ones defending Moses. But look the true Moses has come to deliver his people. And it is his people who reject him. Stephen has seen the true Moses and accepted him, that is why he is on trial from his own brothers who rejected him.

Acts 7:35 "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.

The ruler and redeemer is the rejected one. To come to Christ is to come to the one we've rejected to be saved. But of course I'd be able to see that. Like Stephen I'd be able to see that. Well do you know what it would be like to have to come to Christ through a culture that celebrated the murder of children? It would feel exactly like this. My point is, you wouldn't recognize Christ, we wouldn't recognize Christ, because we all fell in Adam's first transgression. The covenant made with Adam to bring us life in God we have all rejected. We are all hopeless unless the Holy Spirit raises us from the dead. This can happen right there, in the trial among the Sanhedrin. It is right there that Stephen will gaze upon the glory of God, just like Moses at the burning bus, and he will declare with his last breath forgiveness of sins for the ones stoning him. How? The covenant of Grace means for sinners who reject Jesus there is forgiveness of sins. This is our good news to all of you. Come to Christ, the murdered child who sets you free.