

Moses and Jesus  
Acts #10 | 6:8-15  
October 12, 2020

### Pre-Sermon Remarks

- Pray for me, traveling to SoCal for another network trip
- Network re-named | Harbor Network

## PRAYER

### Introduction | MISUNDERSTANDING

- Nobody likes being misunderstood, particularly when it's \*so close\*
- Jesus was misunderstood during his earthly ministry | **Matthew 5** <sup>17</sup> Don't think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.
  - Why would Jesus need to say "don't think that" unless people thought that?
- Last week, we met a man named Stephen | Hellenistic Jew living in Jerusalem
  - Early church deacon, in charge of food distribution to widows
  - But, he's also used in miraculous ways, and one heck of a preacher
- Like Jesus, he is misunderstood in a particular way, let's dive in and see what I mean

### Opposition to Stephen

<sup>8</sup> Now Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people. <sup>9</sup> Opposition arose, however, from some members of the Freedmen's Synagogue, composed of both Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and some from Cilicia and Asia, and they began to argue with Stephen.

**David Peterson** It may seem strange to modern readers to learn that there were synagogues in Jerusalem, where the temple was clearly the focus of attention and theologically at the centre of Jewish religion. But there is evidence from archaeology and from Rabbinic writings that at least one synagogue building existed in the city before its destruction in AD 70. Furthermore, synagogues had a different, though related function in Judaism. There was no sacrificial ritual, but the primary object was instruction in the law of God, which meant the study of Scripture, together with the oral law, which, in Talmud and Midrash, finally was written down. An endeavour was made to educate the whole community in its faith, applying the words of God to every area of life, working out the implications of covenant obedience. This was done, not merely through Sabbath gatherings, but through the use of synagogues more generally as places for elementary education and more advanced studies.

### Synagogue of Freedmen

- Hellenistic former slaves | (*Libya, Egypt, Turkey*)
- Likely one synagogue, possibly a network
- Possible-to-likely Stephen's home synagogue
  - Saul's as well? Either way, very devout people | (immigrant communities)

## From Debate to Deception

<sup>10</sup> But they were unable to stand up against his wisdom and the Spirit by whom he was speaking. <sup>11</sup> Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, “We heard him speaking blasphemous words against Moses and God.” <sup>12</sup> They stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; so they came, seized him, and took him to the Sanhedrin. <sup>13</sup> They also presented false witnesses who said, “This man never stops speaking against this holy place and the law. <sup>14</sup> For we heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs that Moses handed down to us.”

- Their charge: Stephen is anti-temple, Moses, and law.

<sup>15</sup> And all who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at him and saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

## Stephen’s Response

“Hey, you’ve not only misunderstood me, you’ve misunderstood the whole storyline”

- The land | Acts 7:1-16 (God’s promises to Abraham)
- The leader | Acts 7:17-36 (God’s call on Moses)
- The law | Acts 7:37-43 (the breaking of the law, the oracles of God)
  - All comes together in David, Solomon, and the Temple

## Brief Excursus: The Law and Angels

*Why does it say Stephen had the face of an angel?*

1. **Acts 7** <sup>53</sup> You received the law under the direction of angels and yet have not kept it.
2. **Hebrews 2** <sup>2</sup> For if the message spoken through angels was legally binding...
3. **Deuteronomy 33** <sup>2</sup> The Lord came from Sinai...with ten thousand holy ones.

**Big question: What can we learn from the opposition that Stephen faced?**

## 1. Like Stephen, we must embrace the challenge of Scripture

- Freedmen: trying to prove their Jewishness, in a context of secular Sadducees
  - The most intense, conservative, back-to-basic types (like some immigrants)
  - **No wonder** that they were opposed to some radical-sounding new teaching
- Focus on the temple
  - Jesus made some radical claims about the temple | **Matthew 26** <sup>21</sup> This man said, ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to rebuild it in three days.
  - Think about how radical Stephen’s teachings would have sounded
- Yes, Jesus changes everything, but it’s all the fulfillment of the blueprints
  - Years later, apostles were able to communicate how Jesus changes the temple
  - The book of Hebrews deals with it at length, and it’s still hard to grasp
  - **Analogy:** my remodeled childhood home | familiar but very different
- We still struggle with these types of tensions and challenges today
  - Error #1: ignore the tensions and challenges (play dumb, stay shallow)
  - Error #2: flatten all the tensions and challenges (post-enlightenment rationalism)
  - Error #3: reject the tensions that don’t fit (highly personal)

What if the Bible is challenging and hard to understand by God's very design? What if these challenges actually invite us, like Jacob, to wrestle with God?

- I think that Stephen knew this, and this is why he comes back to the storyline of the Bible

## **2. Like Stephen, we must recognize the half-truths of the enemy.**

<sup>13</sup> This man never stops speaking against this holy place and the law. <sup>14</sup> For we heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs that Moses handed down to us.

- They argue, they can't refute, so they resort to twisting Stephen's words
  - How frustrating that must have been for Stephen!
  - He's trying to explain complicated truths, a massive story that takes a dramatic turn in Jesus, comes to an unexpected climax.
  - Their response: "he hates Moses!"
- The best lies are ones that have a good amount of truth to them
  - Old analogy: rat poison is 99% good food, but 1% poison
  - Pre-shredded cheese has wood pulp in it
- At the church level, this is one of the reasons why we love going through books of the Bible
  - I'm not perfect, nor are any others who preach or lead
  - But by going through books of the Bible, we get exposed to more truth
- At the personal level, there are two ways we join in the enemy's work:
  - Halfway honesty and confession | only sharing part of the sin, it was "just this"
  - Halfway representation of opponents | politics in particular

## **3. Like Stephen, we must keep Jesus at the center of the conversation.**

*Their focus is on Stephen: he's anti-Moses, anti-temple, anti-law*

- Jesus isn't anti-Moses, he's the prophet and leader that was promised by Moses
- Jesus isn't anti-law, he fulfilled the law perfectly and was the perfect sacrifice
  - Death on the cross
- Jesus isn't anti-temple, his body is the new temple where God and man meet
  - Resurrection, ascension, promised return

Some of these things in the Bible are just difficult to understand, we won't understand all mysteries until the day that we see Jesus face to face.

- Until then, if we keep Jesus at the center, we'll be OK
- God loves us, Christ died and rose again, we can repent and come to him in faith
  - Yeah, but what about the Nephilim? Not sure, let's dig in...with Jesus at the center

## **Four Commitments**

1. Committed to God's word (even the messy and challenging parts)
2. Committed to nuanced thinking (so many cultural forces against this now)
3. Committed to full-truths, not half-truths (for yourself, for your
4. Committed to keeping Jesus at the center (even when we don't fully understand)