

The Acts of the Holy Spirit

Acts 7:1-53

Stephen is not an apostle at all but a deacon/minister/servant, someone appointed to distribute food to widows. How in the world did he end up in the situation that Acts 7 has him in? When he delivers his 52-verse speech (longer than any of Paul's sermons in Acts), to what charges is Stephen responding?

The first long block of the speech (7:2-16) provides a summary of some of the events in Genesis. Which characters in that book does Stephen emphasize in this treatment? What do those characters have in common that is important in this moment?

In Acts 7:17-29, what events in the early life of Moses dominate Stephen's retelling? What is the character of Moses's relationships with the Hebrews as Stephen relates those relationships? In Acts 7:30-36, when the focus turns to the Exodus proper, how does Moses fare, as far as moral status goes, in Stephen's estimation? Who doesn't fare as well?

Acts 7:37-43 wraps up this section of the speech with a quote from Amos. Once again Stephen's focus is on how the people treated Moses and his teaching. How does this treatment parallel the Joseph section of the speech, and why is this emphasis particularly fitting for Stephen's moment?

As Stephen wraps up his speech in Acts 7:44-53, he rapidly turns from Moses in particular to Israel's history with prophets more generally. How does his treatment of the Jerusalem temple differ from his treatment of Moses? How does that difference reflect the character of the larger Christian tradition as we've received it?