

Exodus 7

God had given Moses the power to turn his staff into a snake in Exodus 4:1-5. Moses performed that sign for the elders at 4:30 and they believed him and worshiped God (4:31). However, chapter 5 showed that Pharaoh was not going to be persuaded. In discouragement, Moses went back to Jehovah God for a word of encouragement (chapter 6). Moses is still doubtful that he will be successful in front of Pharaoh (6:28-30). Therefore, Jehovah repeats His message to Moses (7:1-7) who, along with Aaron, go back to Pharaoh before whom Aaron's staff turns into a snake (7:8-13). Pharaoh still does not believe, so God begins the "Ten Plagues" on the land of Egypt, by turning the Nile River and Egypt's water supply into blood (7:14-25; see 4:9).

TRANSLATION - 7:1-5:

1 And Jehovah said to Moses, "See, I gave you [to be] 'God' to Pharaoh and Aaron, your brother, will be your prophet. **2** You, yourself, will speak all which I command you and Aaron, your brother, will speak to Pharaoh; then he will send the sons of Israel from the land. **3** And I Myself will make difficult the heart of Pharaoh and I will increase My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt. **4** And Pharaoh will not listen to you all and I will give My hand over Egypt and I will bring out My host, My people, the sons of Israel from the land of Egypt, by great judgments. **5** And the Egyptians will know that I [am] Jehovah when I extend My hand against Egypt and I will bring out the sons of Israel from among them."

HEBREW WORDS:

"Prophet" (ver. 1) is found only here in Exodus. It was also found only once in Genesis (20:7). The noun is found 317 times while the verb is found 115 times. The noun is found most often in 1 Kings (50 times), 2 Kings (33 times), 2 Chronicles (26 times), and Jeremiah (95 times). A "prophet" is simply a spokesman for God; foretelling the future was only a small part of his message. Primarily, he simply told Israel what God wanted them to know and to do. In later Jewish history, he will call Israel to restore the Law of Moses to their hearts. "To command" (ver. 2) was used first at 1:22. "To make difficult" (ver. 3) is often translated "to harden." The verb is used 28 times in the OT; in Exodus, at 7:3; 13:15. The word "signs" was first used at 3:12; "wonders" was found at 4:21. See those passages for further thoughts. On "host" (ver. 4), see 6:26. This is a military term in certain contexts. On "judgments," see 6:6. "To know" (ver. 5), one of the key verbs in Exodus, was seen earlier at 1:8. "To extend" is used 216 times in the OT; in Exodus, 21 times.

COMMENTARY:

In 4:15-16, God told Moses that Moses would put his words into Aaron's mouth and God would put His words into Moses' mouth. In 6:29, God told Moses: "Speak...all that I speak to you." Just as God had authority over Moses (the prophet) to tell Moses what to say, so Moses (acting in God's place) would tell Aaron (as the prophet) what to say. This particular point may help explain the use of "angel of Jehovah" in Exodus 3:2, who was identified with "Jehovah" and "God" (ver. 4). That is, the "angel of Jehovah" spoke and acted with the authority of God, just as Moses did before Pharaoh. A prophet, to be true, was to speak *only* what Jehovah God told him to say (see Numbers 22:20, 35; 23:5, 12, 16, 26; 24:13).

In verse 2, Jehovah God continues, stating that Moses was to speak all which Jehovah commanded him and Aaron, his brother, would then speak that message to Pharaoh. At some point (God knows it will still take time), Pharaoh will send out Israel from Egypt. As one studies the life of Moses, he will find that Moses took the commands of God very seriously and obeyed the commands of God very closely and conscientiously.

In verse 3, God states again that He will harden Pharaoh's heart, just as He had said He would in 4:21. If Pharaoh had listened to Moses the first time, Moses would have been glorified, rather than Jehovah God. If Abraham and Sarah had become pregnant when God first

promised children (Gen. 12:1-3), God would not have been glorified. God does not want man to boast (see Judges 7:2). It will be through God increasing His signs and His wonders in the land of Egypt that will put pressure on Pharaoh's heart to the point that Pharaoh will send Israel out of Egypt (see 6:1). God will be glorified.

Pharaoh, however, will not listen to Moses (ver. 4), just as he had not listened before (5:2). From the perspective of Moses' interaction with Pharaoh, Moses' task will end in failure. Yet, God will set His hand over Egypt and He will bring out His army ("host") from the land of Egypt, with great "judgments," referring to the plagues as punitive acts of God (see 6:6).

When God does implement His acts of judgment on Egypt, then the Egyptians will know that He is Jehovah, the God of Israel, the God of the Hebrews, the Only True and Living God. He will extend His hand against Egypt and He will bring Israel out from their slavery (see 3:19; 6:1, 6).

APPLICATION:

Moses' contemporaries - While the word "prophet" is only used twice up to now, once in Genesis and once in Exodus, it will become an important role in God's dealings with Israel. Moses, himself, will be identified as a prophet to whom God will speak "face to face" and one who will have no successor in the history of Israel (Num. 12:6-8). Yet, Moses himself will predict the coming of One who was greater than he (Deut. 18:15-17). Pharaoh will, in fact, recognize Jehovah God at 9:27 and 10:16.

Later Jewish writers - David will claim to speak for Jehovah God (2 Sam. 23:2). God will send a multitude of prophets once the kingdom of Israel is established and men begin reigning as kings. Some of those prophets left writings, extensive writings (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel), and smaller writings (Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi). All of these men spoke as the Holy Spirit moved them to speak God's message to their contemporaries. Ezekiel will promise (36:26-27) that God will send the Holy Spirit to give Israel a heart of flesh so they might be faithful to God.

NT writers - The NT writers, the apostles and prophets, were guided by the Spirit of God just as Moses was: Luke 10:16; John 14:25-26; 15:26-27; 16:13; 1 Cor. 2:11-14; 14:37; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21.

Since preachers under the Law of Christ are not guided by the Holy Spirit as biblical prophets were, the only way preachers today can know they are speaking for God is to teach exactly what the NT teaches, citing book, chapter, and verse and interpreting each correctly in their respective contexts.

Jesus is the One who would be greater than Moses, fulfilling the anticipation of Deuteronomy 18:15-17, according to Peter in Acts 3:19-24 (see also Hebrews 3:5-6). Jesus was that prophet who was to come to the world (John 1:45; 4:25-26, 29; 9:17; Rev. 19:10). The Holy Spirit did come on Israel, in Acts 2, and is subsequently available to all those who obey the gospel of Christ (Acts 5:32).

TRANSLATION - 7:6-13:

6 So Moses did and Aaron just as Jehovah commanded them; thus they did. **7** And Moses [was] a son of eighty years and Aaron [was] a son of eighty-three years when they spoke to Pharaoh.

8 Then Jehovah spoke to Moses and to Aaron saying, **9** that "Pharaoh will speak to you [two] saying, 'Give from yourself signs.' And you will say to Aaron, 'Take your staff and cast before the face of Pharaoh and it will be for a serpent.'"

10 And Moses came and Aaron to Pharaoh and they did thus just as Jehovah commanded and Aaron cast his staff before the face of Pharaoh and before the face of his servants and it was a snake. **11** And even Pharaoh called to the wisemen and to the magicians and they did even they, the soothsayers of Egypt, by their magic thus. **12** And they cast, each, his staff and they became serpents but the staff of Aaron swallowed their staffs.

13 And the heart of Pharaoh was hardened and he did not listen to them just as Jehovah spoke.

HEBREW WORDS:

“Son of” (ver. 7) is a Hebrew idiom to note one’s age. It is seen frequently in the book of Genesis. “Signs” (ver. 9) was seen at 7:3. “Staff” was seen in 4:2, 4, 17, 20. The word will be used frequently in this chapter: 7:9-10, 12, 15, 17, 19-20. “To cast” was seen at 1:22 and 4:3. “Serpent” was seen at Gen. 1:21. It is used in Exodus only here: 7:9-10, 12. It is used 15 times in the OT, especially in the prophets and poetry. The generic word could be anything from a sea-monster to crocodile to snake. We translate the word “serpent” because the Hebrew word is used as a synonym for the more narrow word “snake” in verse 15. “Servants” (ver. 10) was first seen at 4:10; 5:15-16, 21.

This is the first use of “wiseman” (ver. 11) in Exodus; it was used three times in Genesis 41:8, 33, 39. The verb is used 28 times in the OT, “wisdom,” 153 times, and the adjective 138 times. The noun is used in Exodus at 7:11; 28:3; 31:6; 35:10, 25; 36:1-2, 4, 8. “Magicians” is only used five times: Exo. 7:11; 22:18; Deut. 18:10; Mal. 3:5; Dan. 2:2. It is a loanword from the Egyptian language. “Soothsayers” is used almost exclusively in an Egyptian context: Gen. 41:8, 24; Exo. 7:11, 22; 8:7, 18-19; 9:11; Dan. 1:20; 2:2. “Magic” is found only at Exodus 7:11, 22; 8:3, 14.

“To swallow” (ver. 12) was used at Genesis 41:7, 24. It is used only here and 15:12 in Exodus. The word is found 42 times in the OT. For the verb “to harden,” see at Exo. 4:4, 21.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

The Hebrew word for “soothsayers” (ver. 11, 22) referred to a scribe which was skilled in magic and interpreting dreams. “Magic” translates a term suggesting something hidden, or closely guarded secrets. Supposedly, even in modern Arab countries, snake charmers can press on the nerve of a cobra’s neck to induce a catatonic state, thus making it rigid. Even spectators can hold such a cobra. When it is dropped to the ground, it is startled back to consciousness.

COMMENTARY:

Verse 6 illustrates the humility and submissive hearts of both Moses and Aaron; they did what Jehovah God commanded. Verse 7 notes the age of Moses (80 years) and Aaron (83 years) when they stood before Pharaoh. Aaron will die in Numbers 20:23-29 at the age of 123 years (Num. 33:39) and Moses will die at the age of 120 years, in Deuteronomy 34.

Once again, Jehovah God speaks to Moses and Aaron and states that Pharaoh will require of them a “sign” (ver. 9). At that point, Moses is to tell Aaron to throw his staff to the ground in front of Pharaoh, at which point it will become a “serpent,” a different word than “snake” used in 4:1-5 and 7:15. This staff apparently is Aaron’s staff, which means God chose to work through his staff as well as Moses’ staff.

The two brothers appear before Pharaoh (this is appearance #2; see 5:1-2) and did just as Jehovah God told them to do. Aaron cast down his staff before Pharaoh and his servants and the staff became a serpent (ver. 10). Subsequently, Pharaoh called his sycophants, his wisemen, magicians, and soothsayers who did a similar thing with their “magic.” But the “magic” of the Egyptians is contrasted with the simple act of God’s spokesman. These men likely performed elaborate rituals and incantations they had studied from books. Some suggest that this power was performed by demons; we believe they were charlatans and performed false miracles (see 2 Thess. 2:9). They threw their staffs on the ground, just as Aaron had done. But then Aaron’s “staff” (note that Moses writes the “staff” ate the other “staffs,” not the “serpents” ate the other “serpents”) ate the Egyptians’ staffs. This was a clear, visible indication that Moses and Aaron’s God was superior to the Egyptians’ gods. God is “playing Pharaoh’s game and beating him by his own rules.” It is comical that the magicians, who used their staffs to perform their “magic rituals” now have no staffs!

But Pharaoh refused to humble his heart. He hardened his heart and refused to listen to Moses and Aaron, as he had done in 5:1-2, as God had predicted in 3:19 and 4:21.

APPLICATION:

Moses' contemporaries - There will be an emphasis on Moses' obedience throughout the Law: Exo. 7:10; 12:28, 50; 39:1, 5, 7, 21, 26, 29, 31, 43; 40:19, 21, 23, 25, 27, 29, 32; Lev. 8:4, 9, 13, 17, 21, 29; 9:10; 16:34; 24:23; Num. 1:19; 2:33; 3:42, 51; 4:49; 8:3, 22; 15:36; 17:11; 20:27; 27:11, 22; 31:7, 31, 41, 47; 36:10. The Law of Moses considered a man an adult who had reached the age of 20 years (Exo. 38:26).

Later Jewish writers - The prophet Ezekiel (29:3) will refer to Pharaoh as a "serpent," using the Hebrew word translated "serpent" here in verse 9. There will still be an emphasis on "just as the Lord had commanded" in later writings: Josh. 11:15, 20; 14:5; 2 Sam. 5:25; 24:19. Moses himself will write Psalm 90, in which he writes that 80 years is a "full life."

NT writers - Paul identifies the names of two of the Egyptian men who opposed Moses and Aaron as "Jannes and Jambres" (2 Tim. 3:8-9). Obedience to Jesus Christ is absolutely necessary and will determine one's destiny, whether in heaven or hell. The word "to obey" is used 21 times in the NT; see Matt. 7:21-23; John 14:15; 2 Thes. 1:7-9; Heb. 5:8-9.

TRANSLATION - 7:14-19:

14 So Jehovah said to Moses, "Heavy [is] the heart of Pharaoh. He refuses to send out My people. **15** Go to Pharaoh in the morning, behold he is going out toward the water. And you will stand to meet him at the edge of the Nile and the staff which turned into a snake, you will take in your hand. **16** And you will say to him, 'Jehovah, the God of the Hebrews has sent me to you saying, 'Send out My people and let them serve Me in the wilderness, and behold you have not listened until now. **17** Thus says Jehovah, 'In this you will know that I [am] Jehovah. Behold I Myself am striking by the staff which [is] in My hand against the waters which [are] in the Nile and they shall be turned to blood. **18** And the fish which [are] in the Nile will die and the Nile will stink and the Egyptians will grow weary to drink water from the Nile."

19 Then Jehovah said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Take your staff and strike with your hand against the waters of Egypt, against their rivers, against their canals, and against their ponds and against all the reservoirs of their waters and they will become blood and blood will be in all the land of the Egyptians and in the wood and in the stone."

HEBREW WORDS:

"To refuse" (ver. 14) is used 41 times in the OT; it was seen first at 4:23. "To stand" (ver. 15) was used earlier at 2:4; 5:20. "To turn" is used 95 times in the OT. In Exodus, it is used at 7:15, 17, 20; 10:19; 14:5. "To send" (ver. 16) was used earlier at 2:5 and extensively in chapter 3: verses 10, 12-15, 20. "To serve" was used earlier at 1:13-14. On "Nile" (ver. 17), see 1:22. "Blood" was used earlier at 4:9, 25-26. "Fish" (ver. 18) was used at Gen. 1:26, 28. It is only used in Exodus in this context: 7:18, 21. The word is found 15 times in the OT. The verb "to stink" was used earlier at 5:21. "To grow tired" is only found here in Exodus. It is found 19 times in the OT.

"River" (ver. 19) is only used in Exodus here and 8:5. It is used 119 times in the OT. "Canals" is used especially in Ezekiel 29-30. The word is used in Exodus here and 8:5, out of a total of 64 times. "Ponds" is found 9 times; only in Exodus at 7:19 and 8:5. "Reservoirs" is found at Gen. 1:10; Exo. 7:19; Lev. 11:36; Is. 22:11.

COMMENTARY:

The plagues are battlefronts between Jehovah God and the gods of the Egyptians (12:12; Num. 33:4).

Jehovah spoke to Moses (this phrase is found 56 times, beginning at 4:4, through Deuteronomy). The phrase is only used in Leviticus twice (16:2; 21:1) and Deuteronomy twice (31:14, 16). The other occasions are in Exodus and Numbers. Jehovah told Moses that

Pharaoh's heart was hardened; he refuses to send out Israel from Egypt. Subsequently, Jehovah told Moses to go to Pharaoh in the morning, as he was going toward the Nile River. Perhaps Pharaoh was going to bathe, as his daughter did in 2:5; perhaps he was going to engage in rituals to worship the god Hapi, or Osiris, each of which was associated with the Nile. Moses was to "stand to meet him," in other words, he was to place himself squarely in front of Pharaoh, at the edge of the Nile. Moses was to take his staff which had turned into a snake in 4:1-5.

Then Moses was to inform Pharaoh that Jehovah God, the "God of the Hebrews" (3:18; 5:3), had sent him with the message to let God's people go, so they could serve Him in the wilderness (3:12, 18; 5:1, 3, 8, 17). However, Pharaoh has not yet listened to Moses and God (ver. 16). Therefore, Jehovah God said (ver. 17), Pharaoh will know who Jehovah is (compare 5:2), when God strikes by the staff of Moses the waters which were in the Nile River and they would be turned into blood. God has said "I am Jehovah" to the patriarchs (Gen. 15:7; 28:13), to Moses (Exo. 6:2, 29), and to the Israelites (6:6-8). Now a non-Israelite will hear His message. The verb "to turn" or "to change" is a strong verb, denoting there was a literal, physical change in the nature of the water, just as there was a change from the staff into a snake. Subsequently, the fish in the Nile would die (ver. 18) and the Nile will stink with death (compare 5:21) and the Egyptians would weary themselves trying to find water from the Nile which was potable.

Jehovah God continued speaking to Moses, to tell Aaron to take his staff and strike the waters of Egypt, the Nile River, so that the waters in their rivers, their canals, their ponds, and their reservoirs would all become blood (ver. 19). To emphasize just how comprehensive this plague was, Moses writes that blood was in all the land of the Egyptians, in both wood and in stone. The "wood" and "stone" could be either their wooden vessels and stone utensils or it could be their gods made out of wood and stone.

APPLICATION:

Moses' contemporaries - Israel, at first, believed Moses' message and worshipped Jehovah God (4:30-31). But when Pharaoh refused to submit and humble himself (chapter 5), Israel turned against Moses (5:15-21). Now, they will see the works God had done through Moses in their presence, performed in front of Pharaoh. Yes, he will refuse to change, at first. Eventually, he will send Israel out, with their arms full, and Israel will know who Jehovah God really is. The word translated "serpent" is not necessarily something larger than a snake, such as a crocodile or "sea monster." The word is used as a synonym for "cobra" in Deut. 32:33; Psalm 91:13.

TRANSLATION - 7:20-25:

20 And Moses and Aaron did just as Jehovah commanded and he raised by the staff and hit the waters which [were] in the river before the eyes of Pharaoh and before the eyes of his servants and all the waters turned which [were] in the Nile to blood. **21** And the fish which [were] in the Nile died and the Nile stank and the Egyptians were not able to drink water from the Nile and it was blood in all the land of Egypt.

22 And the soothsayers of Egypt did the same by their magic and the heart of Pharaoh was hardened and he did not listen to them just as Jehovah had spoken. **23** And Pharaoh turned and came to his house and he did not put his heart even to this. **24** And all Egypt dug around the Nile water to drink because they were not able to drink from the waters of the Nile. **25** And there was fulfilled seven days after Jehovah struck the Nile.

HEBREW WORDS:

"To dig" (ver. 24) is used 23 times in the OT, only here in Exodus. "To fulfill" (ver. 25) is used 252 times in the OT, 23 times in Exodus.

COMMENTARY:

Moses and Aaron obey Jehovah God just as He explained to them; see verses 6, 10 for other references to their obedience. “He” raised the staff; this seems to be Aaron (ver. 19). He hit the waters of the Nile in front of Pharaoh’s eyes and the waters turned to blood. This sign was originally intended for Moses to use to gain the Israelites’ trust (4:9). Here, God uses it as the first strike (“plague”) against Egypt. Just as God had promised in verse 18, the fish died and the Nile stank. The Egyptians were not able to drink from the Nile River. Some scholars want to suggest that this was some kind of natural phenomenon, but the natural reading of the text (without any anti-supernatural bias) shows that the water turned to blood. It did not simply *look* like blood.

Pharaoh’s soothsayers, just as they did earlier at verse 11, imitated Aaron’s sign and Pharaoh hardened his heart. Where did the soothsayers get their water, if all the water turned to blood? The text does not answer that; perhaps God intentionally left some water plain in order for the soothsayers to “turn” it into blood. Perhaps they used the bloody water and only made it *appear* as if it had been normal first. We do not know; but Pharaoh was sufficiently impressed with his own soothsayers that he hardened his heart and chose not to listen to Moses and Aaron, just as God had predicted (7:3-4). For more comments on Pharaoh hardening his heart, see 4:21. This is the second reference to Pharaoh hardening his heart (see 7:13-14).

Pharaoh turned from the presence of Moses and Aaron and went to his house, without putting this matter into his heart (ver. 23). This illustrates where Pharaoh’s problem lies: he was not willing to submit his heart to God’s word. Moses emphasizes the extent of God’s plague by stating that “all Egypt” began digging around the Nile to find water to drink, but as deep as they dug, apparently they still could find no potable water.

Before Jehovah God struck Egypt a second time, He allowed seven days to pass. We do not know how long God left the Nile River bloody. Between verse 14 and verse 25, the word “water” is used ten times; “Nile” is used thirteen times. The plagues were “judgments” against Egypt (7:4; 6:6).

The score: Jehovah God - 1; gods of Egypt - 0.

APPLICATION:

Moses’ contemporaries - The Israelites who lived through these plagues against Egypt should have realized how powerful God is and how intolerant He is of idolatry. The Israelites should have “put” these things into their hearts. They largely did not. The plagues will be mentioned later, in Deut. 11:3; 13:2.

Later Jewish writers - The plagues will be mentioned also by Joshua (24:5) and Ezra (Neh. 9:10). Psalm 78:44-52 and 105 especially repeat the plagues as the authors (Asaph wrote Psalm 78) encourage the Israelites of later generations.

NT writers - Jesus’ mother, Mary, guarded the words of the angel in her heart (Luke 2:19), as well as the words of her Son (2:51). Jesus will have John use the imagery of this first plague, turning water into blood, to picture one of His plagues against the nation of Rome in Revelation 16:3-7. Stephen mentions the “wonders” and “signs” performed by Moses, in Acts 7:36.

Free¹ helpfully gives these ways in which the plagues were miracles:

- 1) They were natural phenomenon intensified under God’s hand.
- 2) God (through Moses) predicted either the beginning or the end of the plagues.
- 3) God discriminated in some plagues between Egypt and Israel (8:22; 9:4, 26).
- 4) The plagues followed an order, as God was leading up to killing Pharaoh’s firstborn.
- 5) There was a spiritual purpose behind the plagues, for Israel and Pharaoh to “know”

Jehovah God.

¹ Free, 95.