



Exodus - Chapter Seven

- I. Exodus 1:1-18:27 - The Exodus of Israel from Egypt (continues)
- I.c Exodus 5:1-7:7 - Moses and Aaron: The Initial Request (continues/concludes)
- I.c.iv Exodus 6:28-7:1-7 - Moses and Aaron Obey God's Commands (continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapter Seven

Because of the power of the Lord, Moses would be like God before Pharaoh and the words he spoke would be the words of God. When Pharaoh subsequently refused to heed those words then God would act in a way that all Egypt would know that he was the Lord.

God instructed Aaron to throw his staff on the ground before Pharaoh and it turned into a snake. Pharaoh told his magicians to do the same and their staffs too became snakes but Aaron's snake ate all the others. Despite this sign, Pharaoh's heart remained hardened.

The first plagues strikes Egypt when Pharaoh is encountered by Moses and Aaron at the Nile. Because of Pharaoh's hardened heart, God instructs Aaron to strike the water with his staff and it turns to blood, killing the fish, removing access to drinking water and causing a great stench. The bloodied water affected every source throughout the land. However, Pharaoh was not impressed as his magicians were able also to produce the same effect.

¹ The Lord said to Moses, 'See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet. ² You shall speak all that

I command you, and your brother Aaron shall tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go out of his land.

Exodus 7:1-2

The Lord said to Moses. God showed amazing patience with his servant Moses. After the outburst at the end of the previous chapter, it might be expected that God would have had enough of Moses' doubt. Yet God did not even chastise Moses; he simply told him what to do and set him to do it. This is another example of the richness of God's mercy.

I have made you like God to Pharaoh. Pharaoh had rejected any direct dealing with Yahweh, as he said in Exodus 5:2: *<<Who is the Lord, that I should heed him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and I will not let Israel go>>*. Therefore, God would then deal with Pharaoh through Moses. This idea carries over into the NT, especially when Paul wrote that believers are like letters written by Jesus that the whole world reads: *<<You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all; and you show that you are a letter of Christ, prepared by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts>>* (2 Corinthians 3:2-3). People that will not look to God look at those who do; those who will not read the Bible read about God through the lives of those who believe.

Your brother Aaron shall be your prophet. If Moses was to be like God to Pharaoh, then Aaron was to be Moses' prophet, i.e. his spokesman before Pharaoh. Just as Moses was not to act on his own initiative but to wait for God's direction, Aaron was not to act on his own initiative, but to wait for Moses' direction.

In Lystra the local population saw Barnabas as a god and Paul as the prophet: *<<When the crowds saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, 'The gods have come down to us in human form!' Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes, because he was the chief speaker>>* (Acts 14:11-12).

You shall speak all that I command you. God would not allow Moses to let the seeming failure of his first encounter with Pharaoh to discourage him. Moses is simply commanded to go.

³ But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and I will multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt.

Exodus 7:3

I will harden Pharaoh's heart. As in the previous statement of God hardening Pharaoh's heart (4:21), it should be remembered that God did not harden Pharaoh's heart against Pharaoh's own desire. God confirmed Pharaoh in his

wicked inclination against Israel. Pharaoh revealed his heart when he refused the humble request of Moses back at Exodus 5:1-4. Now, God would strengthen Pharaoh in the evil he had already chosen. God can do the same today. In their own rebellion, many may reach the place where God will strengthen them in the evil they desire: <<*Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever! Amen. For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind and to things that should not be done*>> (Romans 1:24-28), which goes beyond any and all sexual sin to the heart of human rebellion against God.

I will multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt. Even as God hardened Pharaoh's heart, he also gave him reasons to believe and surrender to God - if he wanted to.

⁴ When Pharaoh does not listen to you, I will lay my hand upon Egypt and bring my people the Israelites, company by company, out of the land of Egypt by great acts of judgement. ⁵ The Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring the Israelites out from among them.' ⁶ Moses and Aaron did so; they did just as the Lord commanded them. ⁷ Moses was eighty years old and Aaron eighty-three when they spoke to Pharaoh.

Exodus 7:4-7

When Pharaoh does not listen to you. God knew from the beginning that Pharaoh would not agree to Moses' request. It was no surprise to God that Pharaoh did not heed Moses.

The Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord. This statement recalls Pharaoh's earlier response <<*Who is the Lord?; I do not know the Lord*>> as recently noted and is repeated as an explicit purpose of the plagues; refer to 7:17, 8:10, 8:22, 14:4, and 14:18. In English, this phrase might seem simply equivalent to the Egyptians knowing "that I am God." While the plagues surely signify this, the Hebrew term translated as the Lord is the name by which God revealed himself to Moses at the Burning Bush (3:14-15) and thus refers to the Egyptians knowing who he is, namely, "that I am Yahweh," Israel's covenant God. While the successive plague narratives offer further descriptions of Yahweh, refer to 8:10, 8:22, 9:14,

9:29, and 11:7, their central purpose is to focus on his self-revelation through his mighty acts. This ‘recognition formula’ describes the Lord’s revealing himself as Israel’s God, to both Israel as confirmed by Deuteronomy 4:35 and 7:9, and Egypt. Outside of Exodus, the recognition formula is common in Ezekiel, where God vindicates himself, especially before his unbelieving people, but also before the nations, e.g. <<*and say, Thus says the Lord God: I am against you, O Sidon, and I will gain glory in your midst. They shall know that I am the Lord when I execute judgements in it, and manifest my holiness in it*>> (Ezekiel 28:22), and: <<*I will sanctify my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them; and the nations shall know that I am the Lord, says the Lord God, when through you I display my holiness before their eyes*>> (Ezekiel 36:23).

Moses was eighty years old and Aaron eighty-three when they spoke to Pharaoh. This is well past retirement age for most people, but Moses knew that God’s will was more important than retirement. It can also be seen from this that Aaron was Moses’ older brother, so God went against the conventional customs of that day by making the younger brother more prominent.

I.d. Exodus 7:8-15:21 - The Plagues and the Exodus

This section includes the initial sign that Moses and Aaron perform before Pharaoh (7:8-13), the nine plagues (7:14-10:29) leading up to the lengthy account and instructions surrounding the tenth plague and the exodus (11:1-13:16), and the crossing of the Red Sea and subsequent celebration (13:17-15:21).

I.d.i Exodus 7:8-13 - Aaron’s Miraculous Rod

Although Moses and Aaron had already requested that Pharaoh let Israel go (5:1-3), they had not yet performed any of the signs the Lord had given them. This section narrates briefly an initial sign that precedes the plagues: Aaron’s staff turns into a snake.

⁸ The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, ⁹ ‘When Pharaoh says to you, “Perform a wonder”, then you shall say to Aaron, “Take your staff and throw it down before Pharaoh, and it will become a snake.”’ ¹⁰ So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did as the Lord had commanded; Aaron threw down his staff before Pharaoh and his officials, and it became a snake.

Exodus 7:8-10

When Pharaoh says to you, “Perform a wonder”. God always knows that people will demand to see signs before they will believe in him: <<*The Pharisees and Sadducees came, and to test Jesus they asked him to show them a sign from*

heaven>> (Matthew 16:1), and: <<The Jews then said to him, ‘What sign can you show us for doing this?’>> (John 2:18).

Take your staff and throw it down before Pharaoh. When God first gave Moses a similar sign in 4:1-9, it seemed those signs were primarily for the leaders of Israel. Now, Moses and Aaron brought the sign before Pharaoh.

The staff signifies for Moses and Aaron that God is the one working the signs through them on Israel’s behalf, refer back to 4:1-17, and it will continue to serve in this manner throughout the plagues to come.

So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did as the Lord had commanded. The first time Moses and Aaron went before Pharaoh everything seemed to go wrong (5:15-19). It took courage for them to stand before the mighty Pharaoh again, but Moses simply obeyed God and trusted in him.

Aaron threw down his staff before Pharaoh and his officials, and it became a snake. This was not exactly the same miracle that Moses experienced on Mount Sinai and performed before the elders of Israel (Exodus 4:2-5 and 4:29-30). That saw the staff of Moses turn into a serpent, but a different Hebrew word is used here - something like a crocodile, which was something of a symbol of Egypt itself. When the staff was cast down it became a *tannin*, i.e. ‘a great serpent,’ ‘dragon,’ or ‘crocodile’. The connection of the name *tannin* with the symbol of Egypt is clear from: <<*You divided the sea by your might; you broke the heads of the dragons in the waters*>> (Psalm 74:13), and: <<*Mortal, set your face against Pharaoh king of Egypt, and prophesy against him and against all Egypt; speak, and say, Thus says the Lord God: I am against you, Pharaoh king of Egypt, the great dragon sprawling in the midst of its channels, saying, ‘My Nile is my own; I made it for myself’*>> (Ezekiel 29:2-3).

¹¹ Then Pharaoh summoned the wise men and the sorcerers; and they also, the magicians of Egypt, did the same by their secret arts. ¹² Each one threw down his staff, and they became snakes; but Aaron’s staff swallowed up theirs.

Exodus 7:11-12

This is the first of three times where the magicians of Egypt see the sign that Aaron performs and then did the same by their secret arts; refer also to v.22 and 8:7. The Hebrew word translated magician is most likely derived from an Egyptian title that refers to a lector priest: someone who acted as a magician in service to the gods of Egypt and was also considered a teacher of wisdom. Egyptian texts are filled with descriptions of priests performing extraordinary feats, including turning inanimate objects into animals. Talc 2 of the Westcar Papyrus tells of a priest who made a wax crocodile that came to life when he threw it in a lake. The narrative

of Exodus does not seek to provide any further explanation of the means by which the magicians performed these signs, i.e. whether by trickery, evil supernatural powers or a combination of these methods, etc. In each case, the description focuses instead on events that indicate that, although the magicians were able to wield or utilise power to perform the sign, they did not have mastery or authority over it. Here, this is shown by the fact that Aaron's staff swallowed up theirs.

It is clear from the warnings of Jeremiah to the envoys of various regional kings that it remained common for the courts to retain magicians and sorcerers to advise them, and that it was folly to listen to them: <<*You, therefore, must not listen to your prophets, your diviners, your dreamers, your soothsayers, or your sorcerers, who are saying to you, 'You shall not serve the king of Babylon.' For they are prophesying a lie to you, with the result that you will be removed far from your land; I will drive you out, and you will perish*>> (Jeremiah 27:9-10).

¹³ Still Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the Lord had said.

Exodus 7:13

The recurring references to the hardness of Pharaoh's heart signify that the Lord is sovereign over and governs the events, that Pharaoh is held responsible for his refusal to acknowledge what the signs reveal, and also that the readers or hearers of Exodus are being called to see these things and to keep from hardening their own hearts. Psalm 95 uses this phrase from the exodus narrative to warn Israel in its worship: <<*Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness*>> (Psalm 95:8), and subsequently, the Book of Hebrews uses Psalm 95 to call the church to continue in Christ by faith (Hebrews 3:7-4:13).

I.d.ii Exodus 7:14-25 - The First Plague: Water Turned to Blood

After separate instances in which Moses and Aaron made the initial request to let Israel go (5:1-3) and performed the first sign of the Lord's power (vv.8-13), the Lord now instructs them to warn Pharaoh that his failure to let Israel go will result in a sign that bears not only the evidence of the Lord's power but also the physical effects of the Lord's judgement on Egypt.

¹⁴ Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Pharaoh's heart is hardened; he refuses to let the people go.

Exodus 7:14

Then the Lord said to Moses. This phrase heads the narrative of each plague. It not only indicates the sequence of the plagues but also signifies that the events are governed by the word of the Lord spoken to and through Moses.

Pharaoh's heart is hardened. Even before the first plague, the Lord said he would harden Pharaoh's heart, and in response to the sign of Aaron's staff, Pharaoh signified the state of his heart by refusing to listen (v.13).

¹⁵ Go to Pharaoh in the morning, as he is going out to the water; stand by at the river bank to meet him, and take in your hand the staff that was turned into a snake.

Exodus 7:15

Since the River Nile was the water in which Moses was most likely placed by his mother and drawn out of by Pharaoh's daughter (2:1-10), there may be intentional irony in the fact that, through Moses, the first plague will affect the waters of the Nile first and then the other sources of water.

¹⁶ Say to him, "The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to you to say, 'Let my people go, so that they may worship me in the wilderness.' But until now you have not listened.

Exodus 7:16

The Lord, the God of the Hebrews. The Lord identifies himself with the people of Israel even though they are slaves, referring to them also as my people as confirmed by 3:7. To the king of a powerful nation like Egypt, the Lord's identification with an enslaved people would seem to indicate that he had no power or authority to make such a request. However, the Lord will reveal through the plagues and exodus that he has power over all the earth and that his deliverance of Israel stems from his steadfast love for them and faithfulness to his covenant promises and not to Israel's size, wealth, or power as a nation. This is later confirmed again by Moses: *<<For you are a people holy to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on earth to be his people, his treasured possession. It was not because you were more numerous than any other people that the Lord set his heart on you and chose you – for you were the fewest of all peoples. It was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath that he swore to your ancestors, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who maintains covenant loyalty with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations, and who repays in their own person those who reject him. He does not delay but repays in their own person those who reject him. Therefore, observe diligently the commandment – the statutes and the ordinances – that I am commanding you today>>* (Deuteronomy 7:6-11).

¹⁷ Thus says the Lord, ‘By this you shall know that I am the Lord.’ See, with the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water that is in the Nile, and it shall be turned to blood.

Exodus 7:17

By this you shall know that I am the Lord. If Pharaoh really recognised and honoured the God of Israel, he would have freed the children of Israel. Pharaoh sinned against Israel because he sinned against the Lord. Although this statement and the others like it are most often spoken to Pharaoh and Egypt, it first appears in Exodus where the Lord is speaking to Moses about Israel (6:7).

It shall be turned to blood. It was revealed to John that God’s power would be used in this way in a time yet to come: <<*They have authority to shut the sky, so that no rain may fall during the days of their prophesying, and they have authority over the waters to turn them into blood, and to strike the earth with every kind of plague, as often as they desire*>> (Revelation 11:6), and: <<*The third angel poured his bowl into the rivers and the springs of water, and they became blood*>> (Revelation 16:4).

¹⁸ The fish in the river shall die, the river itself shall stink, and the Egyptians shall be unable to drink water from the Nile.” ¹⁹ The Lord said to Moses, ‘Say to Aaron, “Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt – over its rivers, its canals, and its ponds, and all its pools of water – so that they may become blood; and there shall be blood throughout the whole land of Egypt, even in vessels of wood and in vessels of stone.”’

Exodus 7:18-19

So that they may become blood. This is the first of the plagues. There are nine in total - the tenth is the slaying of the firstborn, which is in a class by itself - and they are grouped together in threes. In this structure of threes, the first two plagues only come after warning and a call to repentance; the third plague in each set comes without warning.

Even in vessels of wood and in vessels of stone. The extent of the first plague shows that it cannot be explained simply as the result of natural causes.

²⁰ Moses and Aaron did just as the Lord commanded. In the sight of Pharaoh and of his officials he lifted up the staff and struck the water in the river, and all the water in the river was turned into blood, ²¹ and the fish in the river died. The river stank so that the Egyptians could

not drink its water, and there was blood throughout the whole land of Egypt.

Exodus 7:20-21

There was blood throughout the whole land of Egypt. Specifically, this first plague was directed against the numerous Egyptian river deities. The Nile itself was virtually worshipped as a god by the Egyptians, and the Lord God shows that he has complete power over the Nile, not some river god. God's actions here call to mind the words of a later prophet: <<*Was your wrath against the rivers, O Lord? Or your anger against the rivers, or your rage against the sea, when you drove your horses, your chariots to victory?*>> (Habakkuk 3:8).

The Egyptian god Khnum was said to be the guardian of the Nile, and this showed he was unable to protect his territory. The god Hapi was said to be the spirit of the Nile, and was brought low by this plague. The great god Osiris was thought to have the Nile as his bloodstream; in this plague he truly bled. The Nile itself was worshipped as a god, and there are papyri recording hymns sung in praise of the river. There is a significant mention of something like this in a papyrus from this general period known as the Ipuwer Papyrus. It actually says in Ipuwer 2.10 that the Nile was blood and undrinkable. The same papyrus repeatedly mentions that servants left their masters.

²² But the magicians of Egypt did the same by their secret arts; so Pharaoh's heart remained hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the Lord had said. ²³ Pharaoh turned and went into his house, and he did not take even this to heart. ²⁴ And all the Egyptians had to dig along the Nile for water to drink, for they could not drink the water of the river.

²⁵ Seven days passed after the Lord had struck the Nile.

Exodus 7:22-24

This is the second time that the magicians are described as having done the same by their secret arts. The repeated vocabulary highlights the effects of this on Pharaoh, whose heart remained hardened and who did not take the sign or what it signified to heart. The description of the Egyptian people digging for water and the time frame of seven days indicate what was being shown to Pharaoh: although the magicians repeated the sign, they did not have the power to reverse the effects of the plague or to cleanse the water of the Nile. Jesus warns that people with such abilities will appear again: <<*For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce great signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, even the elect*>> (Matthew 24:24).

Seven days passed after the Lord had struck the Nile. God was allowing time for Pharaoh and indeed all of Egypt to reflect on what had befallen them before the next plague would come upon them.

Exodus records the instructions and events of the plagues for the purpose of showing how the Lord revealed both his person and his power through delivering Israel from Egypt. The plagues fall on areas of life supposedly protected by Egypt's gods, thus demonstrating the Lord's power over the gods of the world's mightiest nation. The narrative of the plagues is therefore not necessarily an exhaustive account of everything that happened but is shaped in order to communicate the aspects of each plague that are necessary for its purpose. For example, the section describing the third plague (8:16-19) does not record either the instruction or the event of Moses and Aaron going before Pharaoh, but the fact that the magicians seek to reproduce the sign indicates that it is likely they performed it initially in the presence of Pharaoh and his court. Each of the sections on the third, sixth, and ninth plagues are similar in their brevity and style, which also lends to the shape of three cycles of three plagues leading up to the tenth and final plague.