

Ministry of Grace Church

Exodus 7 - Speaker Notes

In the previous chapter, we learned that God told Moses that he is the LORD (*YHVH* or *Yahweh*), which is the personal relationship, covenant name for God. He told Moses that He had made a covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob regarding Canaan, the land He promised to give to them. However, the patriarchs had not experienced possession of the land in their lifetimes, therefore they did not have intimate, experiential knowledge of God as *Yahweh*, the covenant keeper.

God then delivered seven “I will” promises to Moses, which he was to deliver to the Israelites, regarding their rescue from slavery to the Egyptians and reaffirming the promise made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. However, when Moses delivered this message to the Israelites, they refused to believe him because they were so discouraged by their bondage,

Unfortunately, Moses was also infected by the broken spirit of the children of Israel. As a result, when God gave him a command to go back to Pharaoh and demand that he release the Israelites, Moses once again refused God’s command, claiming that he was the wrong person for God to send. Think of this, Moses told God that He had made a mistake! Obviously, Moses did not yet have a complete understanding of who God really is. But, before we get too critical of Moses, we need to ask ourselves how many times we have accused God of having not answered our prayers or of having answered them in the wrong way.

Fortunately for Moses, and for us, our God is a merciful God, granting leniency to people who deserve retribution and not showing His wrath to those who rightfully deserve it. So, as we enter this seventh chapter of Exodus, we see God simply explaining the facts of life to Moses by giving him a glimpse into the future. Notice that God did not tell Moses, “I *will* make you like a God to Pharaoh,” but “I *have already* made you like a God to Pharaoh.” In presenting the situation to Moses in this manner, He removed from Moses the ability to question and argue with Him.

Now, before we go on, we need to talk about free will and we have to answer the question, “What was the root of the contest between God and Pharaoh?” Was it really a contest of monotheism versus polytheism? Or was it actually a contest about who or what is God. In reality it was both. We, as Christians know that our God is the all-powerful creator of heaven and earth (*Elohim*). But we’re also learning that He is the personal covenant God who values a relationship with his subjects (*Yahweh*). Keep in mind that at the time of the Exodus, Pharaoh and all his people, believed Pharaoh to be a god. Pharaoh and his subjects had a warped view of what a God really is. In the coming chapters of this drama, we will see the battle between God and Pharaoh played out in miracles and plagues that demonstrate that our God is *the* all-powerful God.

Now, back to the issue of free will, Notice, as we go through this contest between Pharaoh and God, that *Yahweh* never forces Pharaoh to admit that He is the real God. That realization must come from Pharaoh himself. If *Yahweh* comes down too hard on Pharaoh, he might just give-in due to expediency and that only proves that Pharaoh is lacking conviction and/or courage. In order for God to accomplish His goal, Pharaoh must admit *Yahweh’s* superiority and God-ness of his own free will. Only then will Egypt, and the whole world, recognize that *Yahweh* is the one and only *Elohim*.

This is where the subtle distinction between strength of heart versus hardness of heart becomes important. In this and some of the following chapters we will encounter two expressions. In Hebrew, these two expressions are *chizuk halev* (strengthening of heart) and *kibbud halev* (hardening of heart). We can think of “strengthening of heart” as Pharaoh gaining courage and personal resolve, whereas “hardening of heart” is Pharaoh becoming more obstinate and determined to resist. It’s like the difference between a person being “firm and resolute” versus being “stubborn.” To some degree, it is a matter of perspective, but it’s also a matter of doing what a person thinks is the right thing to do versus a person doing what he or she wants to do no matter whether it is right or wrong. One is based on absolute morality while the other is based on selfish pride.

Exodus 7:1

And the LORD said to Moses, “See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet.

When God told Moses that He had “made” him to be like a God to Pharaoh, He was not indicating a permanent position. God was not telling Moses that He had made him a god just like Pharaoh was a god. The Hebrew word for “made” is *natan*, which does not indicate creation or forming, rather it means “to give” or “to place.” Therefore, we see that *Yahweh* was giving God-like power and authority to Moses for a specific purpose and a specific set of circumstances. Also notice that the word He used for “God” is *Elohim*, which is the name indicating great power and authority.

What God was telling Moses was that he was being endued with God-like *power* and *authority to judge* Pharaoh and the land of Egypt. Moses was placed as a god before Pharaoh and Aaron was placed as a prophet. So, what is a prophet? In the Old Testament, the word *nabiy*, is used consistently to refer to one who is, “an inspired spokesman for God.” A true prophet is always one who is personally called by God to proclaim God’s message to men. What God was telling Moses was that he, Moses, would be given God-like power and authority to judge Egypt and Aaron was to be his spokesman delivering the God-like message to Pharaoh which Moses proclaimed to Aaron.

Exodus 7:2-3a

You shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall tell Pharaoh to let the people of Israel go out of his land. But I will harden Pharaoh's heart,

Though God had just told Moses that he had been given God-like power and authority over Pharaoh and Egypt, He makes it clear that he is not actually a god, but merely a prophet himself. Moses is to give Aaron the message to give to Pharaoh.

This time the message for Pharaoh is not a request to let the people of Israel go, but a command to Pharaoh to send the children of Israel out of Egypt. Pharaoh, like any dictatorial potentate of his time, was not about to submit himself to the demands of someone else. Believing himself to be an absolute ruler and a god, he would have resisted any demand made of him.

Like other prophets of the Old and New Testament, Moses is given information about things which have not yet come to pass. This, too, is a characteristic of a true prophet. Previously we learned what the Greek word for prophet (*prophētēs*) means, *pro*, meaning “before, in place or time”, and *phēmi*, meaning “to proclaim or to tell”. A prophet is one who is to proclaim a message from God

(tell in front of) and he is one who is to tell a message of things to come (tell beforehand). Also note that God does not give his prophets all the information!

As we have been saying, the words translated “harden his heart,” are not always the same Hebrew words. In the current verse, the words really do mean to “harden” Pharaoh’s heart. But – we will eventually see that God does not make Pharaoh more stubborn until after he has already declared that Yahweh is the true Elohim.

Exodus 7:4b-5

and though I multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, Pharaoh will not listen to you. Then I will lay my hand on Egypt and bring my hosts, my people the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great acts of judgment. The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring out the people of Israel from among them.”

God now reveals more of the future to Moses. He reveals to Moses that Pharaoh will act stubbornly and will not give credence to Moses’ message or his commands. He also reveals to Moses what His plan is in letting this happen (*I will lay my hand on Egypt*). There is a two-fold purpose in God revealing this to Moses. First, Moses will not be surprised when Pharaoh acts willfully and does not listen to Moses. This will serve to further strengthen Moses’ faith. Secondly, it will demonstrate to Moses who the real *Elohim* is, and who is really in control of the situation. This will serve to keep Moses humble as he sees God’s power at work in just the manner He foretold. And ... recognizing God’s ultimate supremacy over all of creation will further strengthen Moses’ faith.

God also reveals His ultimate goal to Moses and Aaron. This knowledge will allow these two to endure the hardships and mistreatment from Pharaoh and the children of Israel as they keep their eyes on the ultimate victory that God has promised.

This is not unlike God’s revelation to us today of his ultimate victory over sin and the Man of Sin. He has revealed to us that we will be taken out of the way before His judgments on this earth begins and that ultimately, He will return to destroy sin and judge sinners. It is this knowledge of God’s ultimate victory which helps us keep our eyes on “the prize, the upward calling of Jesus Christ,” as Paul described it to the Philippian church.

Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (*Philippians 3:13-14*)

Exodus 7:6-7

Moses and Aaron did so; they did just as the LORD commanded them. Now Moses was eighty years old, and Aaron eighty-three years old, when they spoke to Pharaoh.

Having recognized God’s calling on their lives, Moses and Aaron are seen as totally dedicated to serving God and performing whatever actions He declares to them. From this point on, we do not see Moses as an insecure person giving out excuses as to why he can’t do what God tells him to do. Instead, we see a confident leader performing God’s will as he is instructed by God’s word. Now, we see Moses forming a personal relationship with Jehovah, talking to Him and obeying Him, seeking His advice, and even standing-up to Him in a righteous manner at times (see *Numbers 11:15*)

“Moses was eighty years old” – We see here the end of the second third of Moses life. The first third of his life terminated when he left the protection of Pharaoh and went out to visit his brethren ([Acts 7:23](#)) followed by his flight out of Egypt.

Exodus 7:8-9

Then the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “When Pharaoh says to you, ‘Prove yourselves by working a miracle,’ then you shall say to Aaron, ‘Take your staff and cast it down before Pharaoh, that it may become a serpent.’”

God now speaks to both Moses and Aaron, indicating what they are to do. He knew ahead of time that Pharaoh would demand a miracle from the ones giving a demand to him. The miracle that Aaron was to perform is the same miracle which Moses had already performed before the leaders of the Children of Israel to demonstrate to them that Moses was indeed sent by God. The leaders of the children of Israel believed because of the miracle. As we are about to see, Pharaoh did not.

Exodus 7:10-12

So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did just as the LORD commanded. Aaron cast down his staff before Pharaoh and his servants, and it became a serpent. Then Pharaoh summoned the wise men and the sorcerers, and they, the magicians of Egypt, also did the same by their secret arts. For each man cast down his staff, and they became serpents. But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs.

Having received their commission and their marching orders, Moses and Aaron approached the ruler of Egypt confidently and Aaron performed the sign miracle by casting down the Moses’ staff in front of Pharaoh just as God had commanded him.

Sign Miracle #1 – Shepherd’s Rod Becomes Serpent

When Aaron threw down his staff, it became a serpent. The word translated “serpent” is *tanniyn*, meaning “a serpent, a dragon, or a creature living in the water.” Some have claimed that it is used here to mean a crocodile because of its ability to swallow up the others. There is little basis for this, however. It is best to think of this as a serpent. You may recall from our study of chapter four, that in Egypt the cobra (called Uraeus) was a symbol of sovereignty, royalty, deity and divine authority. One of the Egyptian crowns worn by their pharaohs had a cobra on it.



By performing this miracle in Pharaoh’s presence, Moses was claiming God’s authority to rule over the children of Israel. Pharaoh, like those who ruled before him, believed himself to be a god and believed that he possessed the authority to rule over all who were in Egypt. As a demonstration of his own authority, in defiance of Moses’ apparent claim of authority to rule over the children of

Israel, Pharaoh had his enchanters perform the same miracle demonstrating his authority to rule. According to the Targum of Jonathan, these two enchanters were named Jannes and Jambres. In his second letter to Timothy, Paul also refers to these two by the same names:

Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses ... (2Timothy 3:8)

Finally, as a demonstration to Pharaoh that the God of Moses and Aaron was greater than Pharaoh or any of his gods, Aaron's snake swallowed the snakes of the sorcerers. This was not a natural thing and would have been seen by the sorcerers and by Pharaoh as a clear indication that Aaron had indeed performed a supernatural sign.

It is fairly certain that Pharaoh and his enchanters would have looked carefully at Aaron's rod after he retrieved it and they would have seen that it was, indeed, a shepherd's rod. As was pointed out earlier, this had been Moses shepherd's rod and was quite possibly a shepherd's crook. If this was the case it would have further demonstrated a symbol of Moses' ruling authority and would have proven to all who were there that it was an actual shepherd's crook. In any case, Aaron's miracle was a clear and undeniable statement that he and Moses had been sent with supernatural powers by the God of the Israelites and that *Yahweh* was greater than all the gods of Egypt.

Exodus 7:13-14

Still Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the LORD had said. Then the LORD said to Moses, "Pharaoh's heart is hardened; he refuses to let the people go.

This is the first instance where the translators of the Old Testament mis-translated the Hebrew text. The Hebrew says *chizuk halev*, which should be translated as "Pharaoh's heart was strengthened." The same exact expression is used again in verse 22 of this chapter.

Let's use our sanctified imagination here for a moment. Imagine the comments of Pharaoh's two enchanters when Aaron first threw down his staff.

"Not to worry, my Lord. This is nothing but a magic trick. We can do the same thing!"

Then Jannes and Jambres threw down their staffs and they, too, became snakes. At that point in time, Pharaoh was reassured that his magicians could duplicate the trick of Moses. When Aaron's rod ate up the other two rods, he apparently was not impressed, and he encouraged himself that the God of Moses wasn't anything greater than he and all the other gods of Egypt.

Now we see an amazing statement! "Then the LORD said to Moses, "Pharaoh's heart is hardened." This is actually the correct translation this time. Did God misunderstand Pharaoh's actions? Don't be concerned. God was fully aware that Pharaoh had strengthened his heart against *Yahweh*. The difference here is one of perspective. To Pharaoh, he simply reassured himself that his gods were just as good as the God of Moses. However, the effect was that Pharaoh actually set himself more firmly against Moses and Aaron, Thus, God declares that he had hardened his heart.

Exodus 7:15-18

Go to Pharaoh in the morning, as he is going out to the water. Stand on the bank of the Nile to meet him, and take in your hand the staff that turned into a serpent. And you shall say to him, "The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to you, saying, "Let my people go, that they may serve me in the wilderness." But so far, you have not obeyed. Thus says the LORD, "By this you shall know that I am the LORD: behold, with the staff that is in my hand I will

strike the water that is in the Nile, and it shall turn into blood. The fish in the Nile shall die, and the Nile will stink, and the Egyptians will grow weary of drinking water from the Nile.”””

It is possible that it was Pharaoh’s practice to go down to the river each day, or on specified days, in the morning hours to bathe or to offer a sacrifice to the Nile River god. It is well known that the Nile was worshipped by the Egyptians as one of their supreme deities. Some even believe that the Nile was thought to be the embodiment of their supreme god, Osiris, himself.

At the time, there was an annual phenomenon of micro-organisms brought about by the rising of the Nile every year that caused the river to turn from a sickly green color to clear water, then yellow, and then gradually to become reddish in color. This was part of the renewal process of the river which brought life to the entire Nile delta. The god of the Nile was considered to be a god of life because all of life in Egypt revolved around the Nile and its ability to bring life to the land. God’s warning to Pharaoh, however, was that instead of the river producing life, that it would become a river of blood (not simply a red color) and that it would produce death because the fish would die and the water would become unfit for human consumption or to be used for irrigation.

Exodus 7:19

And the LORD said to Moses, “Say to Aaron, ‘Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt, over their rivers, their canals, and their ponds, and all their pools of water, so that they may become blood, and there shall be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, even in vessels of wood and in vessels of stone.’”

Egyptian Plague #1 – Rivers, streams, lakes, and ponds turned to blood.

As proof to Pharaoh that this was not simply the annual reddening of the river Nile but something altogether different, God declared that not only the river and its tributaries, but all ponds and other pools of water were to become blood. Even the water that was in the communal wood and stone storage containers, to be used by the poor, was about to be turned into blood.

Exodus 7:20-21

Moses and Aaron did as the LORD commanded. In the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants he lifted up the staff and struck the water in the Nile, and all the water in the Nile turned into blood. And the fish in the Nile died, and the Nile stank, so that the Egyptians could not drink water from the Nile. There was blood throughout all the land of Egypt.

Pharaoh would have been accustomed to seeing the river gradually rise and go through its sequence of colors until it flowed red. This process would normally take days or even weeks to complete. Here, on the other hand, we see the miraculous changing of the river, not just to a red color, but to blood itself in a very short period of time. Instead of the change in the river giving life, it now took life. The fish died and the Egyptians could not drink the water. And the water was turned to blood not just in the Nile but throughout all the land of Egypt. “**And the fish in the Nile died**” This was probably as great a plague on the people of the land as the water became undrinkable since many of the people subsisted largely on the fish from the river. Now their source of protein was gone!

Exodus 7:22-23

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. Pharaoh turned and went into his house, and he did not take even this to heart.

How Pharaoh's enchanters were able to duplicate the feat is not told us. Perhaps there was a source of water or a container of water that had been protected from the effects of the plague. Or, perhaps the sorcerers dug a hole near the river and allowed the dirt to filter it out, as the people did in verse 24. Whatever the source of the clean water, the magicians were able to produce blood from water as Aaron had just done. Note that a truly convincing miracle on the part of the sorcerers would have been to have turned the bloody river back into fresh water, which they apparently were unable to do. Instead, they were simply able to mimic Aaron's miracle and deceive Pharaoh in the process.

Let's go back to our sanctified imagination and listen in on the comments made to Pharaoh by his sorcerers after this miracle.

"Not to worry, my lord. Once again, it is nothing but a magic trick. We can do the same trick, see!"

As a result, Pharaoh refused to believe that this miracle was anything greater than what his own sorcerers could do and that Jehovah was not a greater god than he was. So, we are told that "Pharaoh's heart remained hardened." Actually, once again it is the words, *chizuk halev*, meaning "Pharaoh's heart remained strengthened."

Exodus 7:24-25

And all the Egyptians dug along the Nile for water to drink, for they could not drink the water of the Nile. Seven full days passed after the LORD had struck the Nile.

Due to the un-drinkable condition of the water, the people of Egypt were forced to produce drinkable water by digging shallow wells along the edges of the river by which the blood was filtered out producing water fit for drinking. Some commentators would have us believe that the river was turned to blood for seven days before it returned to drinkable water. This is not what the text says, however. This last sentence in chapter seven is simply a lead-in to the next chapter which starts out, "Then the LORD said to Moses..." This simply indicates that it was a week later when God once again spoke to Moses.

So What?

Refusing to submit to God's authority often produces in us a feeling of, "I am OK even when I don't submit to God." This confidence (strengthening of our heart) can easily turn into stubbornness (hardness of heart), which sabotages our fellowship with God. On the other hand, submitting to God's authority and being obedient to Him promotes communion and fellowship with God. It produces peace, spiritual fruit, and blessing in our lives.

So, let me ask you, "Do you **crave** fellowship with God? Do you have an **insatiable desire** to read and study His word and to **hear Him** speak to you? Are you currently experiencing the peace of God that is beyond all understanding?"

- OR -

Do you lack the time (or the desire) to read your Bible? Do you know about God, but not really know God, personally. Are you worried about your finances, or what the future may bring? Does the peace of God seem elusive or non-existent?

The answer to these questions probably indicates the degree to which you have or haven't submitted your will to God's. If you are still trying to run your own life and to do it your way, then you may feel confident about what you are allowing into your life, but you are probably not feeling

at peace. If you have not fully vacated the throne of your own life then God will not sit on it. He will not share it with anyone.

We see here in the life of Aaron and Moses that once they were completely submitted to God, they were not concerned about the apparent failure of their actions to produce the results wanted from Pharaoh. They knew that God was in control and kept their eyes fixed on Him, being submissive and obedient to Him. This produced a lack of concern in the outcome because they knew who would ultimately have the victory. They believed God's message and trusted in His truth. They simply focused on Him and obeyed what He told them to do.

Pharaoh, on the other hand, trusted only in himself and in what he and his sorcerers were able to accomplish. He maintained the deluded belief that he was in control of his own life. Pharaoh refused to submit to the will of *Yahweh* because he didn't want to, and he didn't think he had to. Pharaoh allowed his heart to be progressively strengthened against God until it became hardened and he no longer had a choice.

Only by completely submitting to God will you know the peace that He promises. You can't have it both ways and you can't have it part way. But remember, even complete and absolute submission of yourself to God will not produce a life without sin. As long as we have a sin nature we will succumb to the temptation. As James said:

But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin ... (James 1:14, 15a)

Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. ... But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing. (James 1:21, 22, 25)

So don't let sin sidetrack you. When you slip, confess it and recommit your submission to, and commitment to, the true Lord of your life. **Keep your heart soft!**