

The Book of Exodus

Lesson 4

Chapters 5 – 7

At the end of Exodus 4, after a 40 year absence, Moses had arrived back in Egypt and gained the support of the leaders of the twelve tribes. It was then time to obtain an audience with Pharaoh and deliver the message from the LORD as he was instructed. Because the stories of the first nine plagues are so well attested, we will touch on each one in this lesson, focusing on the rarely addressed details.

First Visit to Pharaoh

Exodus 5:1 And afterward Moses and Aaron came and said to Pharaoh, " Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ' Let My people go that they may celebrate a feast to Me in the wilderness.'" ² But Pharaoh said, " Who is the LORD that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and besides, I will not let Israel go." ³ Then they said, " The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Please, let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God, lest He fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword." ⁴ But the king of Egypt said to them, "Moses and Aaron, why do you draw the people away from their work? Get *back* to your labors!" ⁵ Again Pharaoh said, "Look, the people of the land are now many, and you would have them cease from their labors!" ⁶ So the same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters over the people and their foremen, saying, ⁷ "You are no longer to give the people straw to make brick as previously; let them go and gather straw for themselves. ⁸ "But the quota of bricks which they were making previously, you shall impose on them; you are not to reduce any of it. Because they are lazy, therefore they cry out, ' Let us go and sacrifice to our God.' ⁹ "Let the labor be heavier on the men, and let them work at it that they may pay no attention to false words."

“Let My people go that they may celebrate a feast to Me in the wilderness” brings the first missed detail in most Bible studies. The purpose of the journey into the wilderness was to “celebrate a feast” to the LORD. The original Hebrew actually means that Moses requested that they be allowed to go three days into the wilderness to make a *pilgrimage feast*.²³ Such feasts almost always involved a sacrifice and were located in the place where the LORD had revealed Himself in the past. A three days journey out of the capital of Egypt in Zoan/Tanis would take them to the



Map 10: Three day journey from Goshen

²³ Noted places of pilgrimage feasts/journeys in the Promised Land: Bethel (Gen. 28:10-22; 31:13; 35:9-15; Amos 4:4; 5:5); Gilgal (Josh. 4:19-24; Hos. 4:15; Amos 4:4; 5:5); Shiloh (Judg. 20:26-27; 1 Sam. 1:3,19); Beersheba (Amos 5:5; 8:14); Gibeon (1 Kings 3:3-5); Horeb (1 Kings 19:8).

border of the land of Beersheba where the LORD had last appeared to Jacob before he entered Egypt. In the literal sense of the word, *pilgrimage feast*, or ceremonial feast was almost always a reference to a destination place for which every intention was to return home after the celebration was completed. When questioned by Pharaoh, Moses answered **“that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God.”** Therefore, the ceremony in the wilderness was both a sacrifice and a feast, neither of which appears to bring concern to Pharaoh.

Pharaoh’s question of **“Who is the LORD that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the LORD”** indicates the focus of his concern. Who in this world is greater than Pharaoh? He knew of no other. If a king greater than Pharaoh existed, he would like to meet him, but he knew all the kings in the known world and the LORD was not one of them. Evidently, Pharaoh had never heard the name *Yhvh*, which is the transliterated word without the vowels for *Yehovah* (Jehovah) or *Yahveh* (Yahweh). It is the proper name of the LORD God of Israel.

It is interesting that in Moses’ second full response to Pharaoh he said, **“that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God, lest He fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword.”** Upon Moses’ arrival, the need for a sacrifice to the LORD was once again brought to light. It is quite possible that Jacob and his descendants had not made a sacrifice to the LORD in 430 years. Why? First, the animals that were sacrificed by the holy line from Adam through Jacob were held sacred to the Egyptians in their worship; they were held in high esteem as gods in Egypt. A customary Hebrew sacrifice was highly offensive to all Egyptians. Second, Moses had evidently conveyed to the Israelites that it was time to begin the sacrifices again or the LORD would send diseases upon them that would bring death or He would send their enemies to kill them with the sword. In either case, Moses understood the importance of the Israelites leaving Egypt to continue their proper worship of the LORD; however, that position made no difference to Pharaoh.

In Pharaoh’s mind, Moses was a distraction for the people and their work. In a strategic move, Pharaoh changed the job requirements, most likely expecting the Israelites to rebel against Moses.

Taskmasters Afflict the Workers

Exodus 5:10 **So the taskmasters of the people and their foremen went out and spoke to the people, saying, "Thus says Pharaoh, 'I am not going to give you *any* straw.**

¹¹ **'You go *and* get straw for yourselves wherever you can find *it*; but none of your labor will be reduced.'**" ¹² **So the people scattered through all the land of Egypt to gather stubble for straw. ¹³ And the taskmasters pressed them, saying, "Complete your work quota, *your* daily amount, just as when you had straw."** ¹⁴ **Moreover, the foremen of the sons of Israel, whom Pharaoh's taskmasters had set over them, were beaten and were asked, "Why have you not completed your required amount either yesterday or today in making brick as previously?"**

As directed, the taskmasters instituted the new rules on the workforce and the Israelites were not able to complete their daily production goals.

Workers Cry to Pharaoh

Exodus 5:15 Then the foremen of the sons of Israel came and cried out to Pharaoh, saying, "Why do you deal this way with your servants? ¹⁶ "There is no straw given to your servants, yet they keep saying to us, 'Make bricks!' And behold, your servants are being beaten; but it is the fault of your *own* people." ¹⁷ But he said, "You are lazy, *very* lazy; therefore you say, 'Let us go *and* sacrifice to the LORD.' ¹⁸ "So go now *and* work; for you shall be given no straw, yet you must deliver the quota of bricks." ¹⁹ And the foremen of the sons of Israel saw that they were in trouble because they were told, "You must not reduce *your* daily amount of bricks."

"Then the foremen of the sons of Israel came and cried out to Pharaoh." We can only wonder why the foremen of Israel were allowed to approach Pharaoh. Did the taskmasters of Egypt bring them to Pharaoh? Had Pharaoh gone to one of the worksites to see how the labors of the Israelites were proceeding under his new instruction? We do not know how this meeting ensued but one thing is for sure, the foremen ignored Moses and Aaron and tried to handle the issue on their own. Surely, the foremen had a connection to the elders of Israel. Why did they not complain to them first? Perhaps they did. One thing is for sure, this passage indicated that the Egyptians organized the work and allowed Israelites to oversee Israelites on the worksite. Moses and Aaron had met with the elders to gain their support before all of them went to meet with Pharaoh, but were the foremen included? Although the elders knew the details of Moses' meeting with Pharaoh, it may have been that the foremen were hearing Pharaoh's side of the conversation for the first time. The foremen were probably offended that Pharaoh called them lazy, yet, they did not want to bring his fury upon them or their people.

Workers Meet Moses and Aaron

Exodus 5:20 When they left Pharaoh's presence, they met Moses and Aaron as they were waiting for them. ²¹ And they said to them, " May the LORD look upon you and judge *you*, for you have made us odious in Pharaoh's sight and in the sight of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to kill us."

Evidently, Moses and Aaron had heard that the foremen were in a meeting with Pharaoh and they went to speak with them. The foremen blamed Moses and Aaron for Pharaoh's attitude.

Moses Speaks to the LORD

Exodus 5:22 Then Moses returned to the LORD and said, " O Lord, why hast Thou brought harm to this people? Why didst Thou ever send me? ²³ "Ever since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Thy name, he has done harm to this people; and Thou hast not delivered Thy people at all."

The heart of Moses was cut to the bone because of the words of the foremen. Wisely, instead of trying to answer the concerns of the foremen, Moses approached the LORD for an answer. Notice also that Moses blamed the LORD for the trouble between Pharaoh and the Israelites. Even with Moses' pity-party before the LORD, Moses had every right to approach the LORD with these thoughts. The LORD understood Moses' plight just as He understands ours when we are facing overwhelming struggles.

LORD's Response to Moses

Exodus 6:1 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh; for under compulsion he shall let them go, and under compulsion he shall drive them out of his land." ² God spoke further to Moses and said to him, "I am the LORD; ³ and I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God Almighty, but *by My name, LORD, I did not make Myself known to them.* ⁴ "And I also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they sojourned. ⁵ "And furthermore I have heard the groaning of the sons of Israel, because the Egyptians are holding them in bondage; and I have remembered My covenant. ⁶ "Say, therefore, to the sons of Israel, ' I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage. I will also redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. ⁷ 'Then I will take you for My people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. ⁸ 'And I will bring you to the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you *for* a possession; I am the LORD.'" ⁹ So Moses spoke thus to the sons of Israel, but they did not listen to Moses on account of *their* despondency and cruel bondage

"... but *by My name, LORD, I did not make Myself known to them.*" For the first time in the Scripture we discover that none of the patriarchs in the book of Genesis ever knew the name of the LORD. We must wonder what Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob called Him. Surely they called Him Yehovah or Yehweh, yet they did not know His eternal name for all generations, "I AM THAT I AM."

"Moses spoke thus to the sons of Israel, but they did not listen to Moses on account of *their* despondency and cruel bondage." Moses' message to the leaders of the Israelites was not successful. Something had happened that made life in Egypt so bad that the Israelites began to cry out to the LORD; now, with Moses' involvement, things had become worse than before.

Moses Responds to the LORD

Exodus 6:10 Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ¹¹ " Go, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the sons of Israel go out of his land." ¹² But Moses spoke before the LORD, saying, "Behold, the sons of Israel have not listened to me; how then will Pharaoh listen to me, for I am unskilled in speech?" ¹³ Then the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, and gave them a charge to the sons of Israel and to Pharaoh king of Egypt, to bring the sons of Israel out of the land of Egypt.

"Behold, the sons of Israel have not listened to me; how then will Pharaoh listen to me, for I am unskilled in speech?" For those who use the King James Version, this passage says, "for I am uncircumcised of lips." For the second time, Moses complained of his inability to speak clearly. Obviously, no one had ever circumcised a tongue, but "uncircumcised" is the best translation of the original Hebrew word. Did Moses have a natural speech impediment? Because the Midianites did not speak a pure Hebrew dialect, did Moses struggle with his initial contact

with the Israelites? Such logic could hardly be the case because within two years the books of Genesis, Exodus and Leviticus would be written in perfect Hebrew. Had the 40 years out of Egypt hampered his ability to speak his original tongue in the presence of the Pharaoh? Possibly! For whatever reason, Moses felt inadequate for the job assigned to him. The LORD did not allow Moses and Aaron to withdraw.

List of the Heads of the Tribes

Exodus 6:14 These are the heads of their fathers' households. The sons of Reuben, Israel's first-born: Hanoch and Pallu, Hezron and Carmi; these are the families of Reuben. ¹⁵ And the sons of Simeon: Jemuel and Jamin and Ohad and Jachin and Zohar and Shaul the son of a Canaanite woman; these are the families of Simeon. ¹⁶ And these are the names of the sons of Levi according to their generations: Gershon and Kohath and Merari; and the length of Levi's life was one hundred and thirty-seven years. ¹⁷ The sons of Gershon: Libni and Shimei, according to their families. ¹⁸ And the sons of Kohath: Amram and Izhar and Hebron and Uzziel; and the length of Kohath's life was one hundred and thirty-three years. ¹⁹ And the sons of Merari: Mahli and Mushi. These are the families of the Levites according to their generations. ²⁰ And Amram married his father's sister Jochebed, and she bore him Aaron and Moses; and the length of Amram's life was one hundred and thirty-seven years. ²¹ And the sons of Izhar: Korah and Nepheg and Zichri. ²² And the sons of Uzziel: Mishael and Elzaphan and Sithri. ²³ And Aaron married Elisheba, the daughter of Amminadab, the sister of Nahshon, and she bore him Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. ²⁴ And the sons of Korah: Assir and Elkanah and Abiasaph; these are the families of the Korahites. ²⁵ And Aaron's son Eleazar married one of the daughters of Putiel, and she bore him Phinehas. These are the heads of the fathers' households of the Levites according to their families. ²⁶ It was *the same* Aaron and Moses to whom the LORD said, "Bring out the sons of Israel from the land of Egypt according to their hosts." ²⁷ They were the ones who spoke to Pharaoh king of Egypt about bringing out the sons of Israel from Egypt; it was *the same* Moses and Aaron.

For some reason, only the descendants of the first three sons of Jacob are mentioned in this passage, Reuben, Simeon and Levi. Verses 14-15 are almost a direct copy of the following passage.

Genesis 46:8 Now these are the names of the sons of Israel, Jacob and his sons, who went to Egypt: Reuben, Jacob's first-born. ⁹ And the sons of Reuben: Hanoch and Pallu and Hezron and Carmi. ¹⁰ And the sons of Simeon: Jemuel and Jamin and Ohad and Jachin and Zohar and Shaul the son of a Canaanite woman. ¹¹ And the sons of Levi: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari.

The rest of the passage completes the details of the ancestry of Moses and Aaron to Levi. It is within the context of this passage that the dilemma occurred concerning the life spans of Kohath, Amram and Jochebed leading to the lives of Moses and Aaron. That dilemma was covered in the

first lesson, Exodus 2:1. It seems that the purpose of this passage was solely to identify and summarize the heritage of Moses and Aaron.

LORD's Call to Moses

Exodus 6:28 Now it came about on the day when the LORD spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt,²⁹ that the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "I am the LORD; speak to Pharaoh king of Egypt all that I speak to you."³⁰ But Moses said before the LORD, "Behold, I am unskilled in speech; how then will Pharaoh listen to me?"

This passage that begins with "Now it came about on the day when the LORD spoke to Moses" seems out of place in this sixth chapter. It seems to belong to the beginning of chapter 7. Verse 27 of chapter 6 completes a thought about the heritage of Moses and Aaron. With verse 28, Moses seems to be recording a new conversation with the LORD. In this passage Moses mentions for the third time his inadequate speech.

Moses Empowered by the LORD

Exodus 7:1 Then the LORD said to Moses, "See, I make you *as* 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 speak to Pharaoh that he let the sons of Israel go out of his land."³ "But I will harden Pharaoh's heart that I may multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt."⁴ "When Pharaoh will not listen to you, then I will lay My hand on Egypt, and bring out My hosts, My people the sons of Israel, from the land of Egypt by great judgments."⁵ "And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the sons of Israel from their midst."

"See, I make you *as* God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet" does not mean that Moses was God, but Pharaoh will think that he was God. God will tell Moses what to say, Moses will tell Aaron what to say to Pharaoh and God will perform the miracle. Pharaoh will think that Moses performs it. "When Pharaoh will not listen to you, then I will lay My hand on Egypt" proves that the LORD will be the one making the miracles happen which includes the plagues. Moses was not excused to withdraw from the plans of the LORD.

Ages of Moses and Aaron

Exodus 7:6 So Moses and Aaron did *it*; as the LORD commanded them, thus they did.
⁷ And Moses was eighty years old and Aaron eighty-three, when they spoke to Pharaoh.

The statement, "And Moses was eighty years old and Aaron eighty-three" tells the difference in the ages of Moses and Aaron for our benefit.

Permission to Work Miracle before Pharaoh

Exodus 7:8 Now the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying,⁹ "When Pharaoh speaks to you, saying, 'Work a miracle,' then you shall say to Aaron, 'Take your staff and throw *it* down before Pharaoh, *that* it may become a serpent.'"¹⁰ So Moses and Aaron came to Pharaoh, and thus they did just as the LORD had commanded;

and Aaron threw his staff down before Pharaoh and his servants, and it became a serpent.

The LORD told Moses and Aaron to **“Work a miracle.”** We must not fall into false teaching here. Moses and Aaron did not make the miracle happen, the LORD did. It was the same miracle that the LORD accomplished when Moses was with Him at the burning bush.

Magicians Copy Miracle – Staff to Serpent

Exodus 7:11 **Then Pharaoh also called for *the* wise men and *the* sorcerers, and they also, the magicians of Egypt, did the same with their secret arts. ¹² For each one threw down his staff and they turned into serpents. But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs. ¹³ Yet Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had said.**

“But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs,” was a surprise even for Moses and Aaron, but not the LORD. The magicians of Egypt must have performed this trick in the presence of Pharaoh before and that is why he called for them. The omnipotent LORD knew the conjurers of Egypt had this prestidigitation in their repertoire, but neither side expected the end result.

Magicians Copy Miracle – Water Turned to Blood

Exodus 7:14 **Then the LORD said to Moses, "Pharaoh's heart is stubborn; he refuses to let the people go. ¹⁵ "Go to Pharaoh in the morning as he is going out to the water, and station yourself to meet him on the bank of the Nile; and you shall take in your hand the staff that was turned into a serpent. ¹⁶ " And you will 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 behold, you have not listened until now." ¹⁷ 'Thus says the LORD, " By this you shall know that I am the LORD: behold, I will strike the water that is in the Nile with the staff that is in my hand, and it shall be turned to blood. ¹⁸ "And the fish that are in the Nile will die, and the Nile will become foul; and the Egyptians will find difficulty in drinking water from the Nile.'"" ¹⁹ Then the LORD said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt, over their rivers, over their streams, and over their pools, and over all their reservoirs of water, that they may become blood; and there shall be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, both in *vessels of* wood and in *vessels of* stone.'"" ²⁰ So Moses and Aaron did even as the LORD had commanded. And he lifted up the staff and struck the water that *was* in the Nile, in the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants, and all the water that *was* in the Nile was turned to blood. ²¹ And the fish that *were* in the Nile died, and the Nile became foul, so that the Egyptians could not drink water from the Nile. And the blood was through all the land of Egypt. ²² But the magicians of Egypt did the same with their secret arts; and Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had said.**

Why was Pharaoh going to the Nile that morning? It was for the same reason that Pharaoh's daughter went to the Nile, the day she found Moses in the basket - to bathe.

“I will strike the water that is in the Nile with the staff that is in my hand, and it shall be turned to blood.” At the burning bush, Moses was told by the LORD that turning the water to blood would be one of the miracles He would perform in Egypt with Pharaoh. He knew the magicians could do the same; however, with Moses, the water turned to real blood, with the magicians, it just looked like blood.

No Water Found

Exodus 7:23 Then Pharaoh turned and went into his house with no concern even for this. ²⁴ So all the Egyptians dug around the Nile for water to drink, for they could not drink of the water of the Nile. ²⁵ And seven days passed after the LORD had struck the Nile.

Obviously, Pharaoh did not bathe that morning. Furthermore, he did not expect that for seven days all the water would be blood. Fresh water was still flowing in the Nile from the mountains to the south but when it arrived in the capital city, it turned to blood. Pharaoh and his people had nothing to drink. The body can easily do without food for seven days but it cannot do without hydration. This miracle would get Pharaoh's attention, but he did not bend to the affliction. Notice that no mention of the blood turning back to water occurs. Perhaps that transpired when the next miracle came forth. We do not know of sure.