

Exodus 6:10-7:13 “Signs and Wonders” February 19, 2017
Psalm 103
Matthew 16

Pharaoh sees Aaron’s staff become a serpent.

But Pharaoh is used to magic tricks
and his sorcerers are able to do the same thing!

What do we make of this?

In our modern age, we don’t believe that staffs can become serpents!

We need a “scientific” explanation:

Some Christians would say that that Aaron’s staff miraculously became a serpent,
but the staffs of the sorcerers were *really* serpents
which had been stiffened by some art known to the Egyptians.

But that is *not* what the text of Exodus says!

Exodus says that the Egyptian sorcerers “did the same by their secret arts.”

Certainly there are stories among the Egyptians of priests who had such powers.

The book of Exodus presents us with the way in which Moses and Aaron
challenge Egyptian religion and politics

precisely where Egyptian religion and politics is strongest.

The work of apologetics is never to uncover your opponent’s weak spot.

The gospel does not seek to exploit the weaknesses of other worldviews.

No, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ

meets the religions of the world at their *strong points*
and says, “I made that.”

I cannot help but think of the atheist feminist professor who converted to Christianity

not because she repudiated her concern for the weak and the helpless,

but because she realized (largely to her own horror!)

that the gospel does *better* at caring for the weak and helpless
than her atheist convictions did.

In the ancient world, Egyptian priests were the most powerful sorcerers around.

And so the LORD sends Moses and Aaron –

NOT to be *better sorcerers* (they only do one trick) –
but to demonstrate the *power* of God himself.

And that is at the heart of our Psalm of response.

Psalm 103 calls us to bless the LORD for who he is and what he has done –
ever since the days of Moses.

Sing Psalm 103

Read Matthew 16

In Matthew 16, Jesus talks about the purpose of signs and wonders.

The Pharisees and Sadducees ask for a “sign from heaven” –
probably something like the signs that Moses showed to Pharaoh.
Never mind that Jesus just fed the 4,000 with seven loaves in chapter 15,
and fed the 5,000 with five loaves in chapter 14.
These “signs” are not sufficient for those who do not have eyes to see.

Signs and Wonders do not produce faith.

Signs and wonders demonstrate the power of God –
but they are signs *for* faith:
they *confirm* faith,
they do not *produce* faith.

We’ve probably all had a friend who has said,

“I prayed for years that God would give me a sign –
but he never did,
so I finally gave up.
There is no God.”

But think about how that works:

If God has to do miraculous signs to get people to believe,
and then, of course, *keep* them believing –
since otherwise, their faith might waver! –
then God will do nothing else but a constant stream of miracles all the time!
In other words, it would look a lot like later in the book of Exodus,
when God provided the *daily* miracle of manna – bread from heaven –
the regular provision of water from the rock –
and was visibly present in the miraculous pillar of cloud and fire.

And what do we learn from the Exodus?

If daily miracles *produce* faith,
then the wilderness generation should be known to all history
as the great **champions of faith!!**

But what happened to the *only generation in all of human history that had daily miracles?*
They rebelled.
They refused to believe.
And they all died in the wilderness rather than enter the Promised Land!

Do you understand why God refuses to give you the miracle that you ask for?
It won't work.
That's not what miracles are for!

But in order to understand what miracles are for,
we first need to understand who Moses is.

1. Who Is Moses? Why Should Pharaoh Listen? (6:10-30)
a. The Charge to Moses and Aaron (6:10-13)

¹⁰ So the LORD said to Moses, ¹¹ "Go in, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the people of Israel go out of his land." ¹² But Moses said to the LORD, "Behold, the people of Israel have not listened to me. How then shall Pharaoh listen to me, for I am of uncircumcised lips?" ¹³ But the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron and gave them a charge about the people of Israel and about Pharaoh king of Egypt: to bring the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt.

We looked at verses 10-13 last week –
but we include them here because they are pretty much repeated in verses 26-30.

Verses 10-13 serve as the conclusion of the previous section
that narrated the first encounter with Pharaoh
and also serve to frame the genealogy of Moses and Aaron
which sets up the second encounter with Pharaoh in chapter 7.

Verses 26-30 will take pretty much every phrase from verses 10-13,
and put them in a different order,
which serves to highlight the fundamental question:
"Who is Moses? Why Should Pharaoh Listen?"

And the answer is found, in part, in the genealogy.
Genealogies tell stories.

The genealogy here connects us back to the story of Jacob in the book of Genesis,
and also connects us forward to the stories of Leviticus and Numbers –
not to mention Judges, Ruth, and even our Lord Jesus Christ!

b. The Heads of the Fathers' Houses (6:14-25)

i. Reuben and Simeon (v14-15)

The genealogy starts off as though it will be a genealogy of the leaders of all the 12 tribes:

¹⁴ These are the heads of their fathers' houses: the sons of Reuben, the firstborn of Israel: Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi; these are the clans of Reuben. ¹⁵ The sons of Simeon: Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jachin, Zohar, and Shaul, the son of a Canaanite woman; these are the clans of Simeon.

Indeed, it is likely that this genealogy was taken from a list that included all 12 tribes.
(It starts off pretty much verbatim from Genesis 46 – where all 12 tribes are included).
You even have the extra comment in verse 15
that Shaul was the son of a Canaanite woman.

But there *are* no “extra” comments in Scripture!

In Genesis 46 we were told that these were the names of the sons of Jacob
who went down to Egypt with him.

Now we are told “these are the heads of their fathers’ houses.”

The Seed of Abraham was not supposed to intermarry with the Canaanites.

So when we hear that one of Simeon’s sons
was the son of a Canaanite woman,
that is a negative statement.

Either Simeon had married a Canaanite woman –
or he had had a son with her outside of marriage.

Either way, that’s not good.

But whereas in Genesis 46, there is a hint of disapproval in the words,
“the son of a Canaanite woman,”
here in Exodus 6, there is also a clear statement
that you do not penalize the children for the parent’s sin!

Why am I so certain of this?

Because Shaul – the son of a Canaanite woman –
is still called the head of a father’s house.

Think of the modern parallel:
a couple who have a child outside of wedlock.

The child is not a sin.

The sin was the fornication.

The sin happened when the parents had sex outside of marriage.

But the child is not a sin!

So just as Shaul went on to become a head of a father's house in Simeon,
so also the illegitimate child today should not be penalized for his parent's sin.
We should always call sin "sin" –
but we can do that without adding a stigma against the child.

ii. Levi (v16-25)

But then in verse 16, the genealogy takes a turn away from the text of Genesis 46.

¹⁶ These are the names of the sons of Levi according to their generations: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari, the years of the life of Levi being 137 years. ¹⁷ The sons of Gershon: Libni and Shimei, by their clans. ¹⁸ The sons of Kohath: Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel, the years of the life of Kohath being 133 years. ¹⁹ The sons of Merari: Mahli and Mushi. These are the clans of the Levites according to their generations.

First, in verses 16-19, we hear about the clans of the Levites –
the sons of Gershon (Libni and Shimei),
the sons of Kohath (Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel)
and the sons of Merari (Mahli and Mushi).

In the book of Numbers we will hear about the various responsibilities of the different clans
when the Levites are assigned their duties around the Tabernacle.
Here they are simply introduced.

Then, in verses 20-25, we get a detailed look at the Kohathites.

²⁰ Amram took as his wife Jochebed his father's sister, and she bore him Aaron and Moses, the years of the life of Amram being 137 years. ²¹ The sons of Izhar: Korah, Nepheg, and Zichri. ²² The sons of Uzziel: Mishael, Elzaphan, and Sithri.

Verses 20-22 focus on the three sons of Kohath who themselves had sons
(Hebron seems not to have had any sons):
Amram, Izhar, and Uzziel.

Probably the first thing that you noticed is that Amram married his aunt.
Only in the book of Leviticus will these marriages to close relatives be forbidden.
Abraham had married his half-sister, Sarai.
Isaac married his cousin, Rebekah.
Jacob married his cousin, Leah – and her sister, Rachel!

God had not yet forbidden these relations,
so they were not forbidden prior to the revelation at Sinai.
Obviously, when God created Adam and Eve,
the only way that their sons can be fruitful and multiply

is if Cain, Abel, and Seth marry their sisters!

²³ Aaron took as his wife Elisheba, the daughter of Amminadab and the sister of Nahshon, and she bore him Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. ²⁴ The sons of Korah: Assir, Elkanah, and Abiasaph; these are the clans of the Korahites. ²⁵ Eleazar, Aaron's son, took as his wife one of the daughters of Putiel, and she bore him Phinehas. These are the heads of the fathers' houses of the Levites by their clans.

Then verses 23-25 focus on the cousins Aaron and Korah.

Korah is included, undoubtedly, because he will lead the great rebellion against Moses in chapter 16 of the book of Numbers.

And the line of Aaron is continued through his son, Eleazar
(the priest in the days of Joshua)

and his son, Phinehas (who as a young man took action against Baal worship in Num 25).

Why do I take the time to point out all these things?

It's just a boring genealogy, right?

I want you to understand that the genealogies of scripture are *important*.

This genealogy connects you back to the story of Jacob in Genesis 46
and forward to the duties of the Levites in Numbers 3
and the rebellion of Korah in Numbers 16,
and the faithfulness of Phineas in Numbers 25.

Genealogies in the Bible have the function of connecting people
and showing how stories are woven together.

In my junior high history class this week,

my students will give presentations that show

how *their families* lived through various events in American history:

what happened to my family in the Great Depression,

in the Civil War,

in World War I,

in the American Revolution.

If we had better genealogical records,

I would love to do the same assignment for medieval history!

But there is another part of this genealogy that we should notice:

Who is Aaron's wife?

Elisheba – the daughter of Amminadab and the sister of Nahshon!

At which point all of you are saying, “Wow! Isn’t that amazing!?”

Um, who is Amminadab?

Well, in the book of Ruth we are told that Judah fathered Perez,

Perez fathered Hezron,
Hezron fathered Ram,
Ram fathered Amminadab,
Amminadab fathered Nahshon,
Nahshon fathered Salmon,
Salmon fathered Boaz,
Boaz fathered Obed,
Obed fathered Jesse,
and Jesse fathered David.

So Aaron’s wife is the great-aunt of Boaz (her brother, Nahshon, is Boaz’s grandfather).

And yes, this means that the house of Aaron (the high priest)
is related to the house of David (the king).

This particular connection helps us see that the genealogy in the book of Exodus
is almost certainly incomplete.

For instance, this genealogy gets from Jacob to Moses in four generations:

Levi, Kohath, Amram, Moses.

In 1 Chronicles 7, it takes *twelve* generations to get from Jacob to Joshua.

And even in Ruth 4, it takes six generations to get from Jacob to Aaron’s brother-in-law,
Nahshon.

[And if Amram married his father’s *sister* –
that means that Jochebed must be a *younger* daughter of Levi.]

I bring this up as a caution to us to be careful not to take the numbers of the Bible too literally.

For instance, when we went through the book of Numbers,
we heard that there were 600,000 Israelite *men* who left Egypt –
not counting women or children.

This would mean that there were around 2 million people who left Egypt.

But when we went through the book of Numbers
we saw that the book of Numbers itself points to a much smaller group –
because there were only 23,000 firstborn sons in the whole of Israel.

Likewise, the book of Exodus – in chapter 23, verse 29 –
says that Israel is too small to inhabit the whole promised land at once.

If Israel had 2 million people, they would have been one of the largest
and most powerful of ancient nations.

But God himself says that they are smaller and weaker than other nations.

Numbers in the Old Testament have symbolic functions.

They are rarely intended literally.

And so we should be careful to understand them in the way that God inspired them.

c. THIS Moses and Aaron (6:26-30)

But the point of all of this is brought out in verses 26-27:

²⁶ These are the Aaron and Moses to whom the LORD said: “Bring out the people of Israel from the land of Egypt by their hosts.” ²⁷ It was they who spoke to Pharaoh king of Egypt about bringing out the people of Israel from Egypt, this Moses and this Aaron.

The genealogy highlights the place of Aaron.

Aaron, after all, is at the heart of the genealogy.

His line is the line that continues.

(Moses’ offspring fade into obscurity –
but Aaron’s sons continue as high priests until the coming of Christ).

And one last time we hear the central theme of this opening section of the book of Exodus:

²⁸ On the day when the LORD spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt, ²⁹ the LORD said to Moses, “I am the LORD; tell Pharaoh king of Egypt all that I say to you.” ³⁰ But Moses said to the LORD, “Behold, I am of uncircumcised lips. How will Pharaoh listen to me?”

I am the LORD.

I am Yahweh.

I am faithful to my promises – and I do great and mighty deeds.

So what if you are of uncircumcised lips?

2. The Second Audience with Pharaoh (7:1-13)

a. A God to Pharaoh: the Purpose of Signs and Wonders (v1-7)

And so God sends Moses and Aaron back to Pharaoh a second time:

⁷ And 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 people of Israel go out of his land.

And in chapter 7, verse 1, there is no “like” in the Hebrew.

The LORD does not say “I have made you *like* God.”

Who is Moses?

The LORD says, “I have made you *God* to Pharaoh.”

In Egypt, Pharaoh was considered a God.
So the LORD does not send a *prophet* to speak to a god.
A prophet would be a messenger of lower status.
Moses does not come as a prophet.
He comes as a *god* to Pharaoh – with Aaron as his prophet.

The Angel of the LORD had appeared to Moses in the form of the burning bush.
Now the LORD will appear to Pharaoh in the form of Moses.

Many have wondered, “Why did Pharaoh put up with Moses? Why not just kill him?”
The reason is found in verse 1 of chapter 7.
“I have made you a God to Pharaoh.”
Pharaoh would have the same chance of quenching Moses
as Moses would have had of quenching the burning bush!

Also, think about what this means:
If Moses comes to Pharaoh as a god to a god
then what is Yahweh?
The LORD does not accept any sort of rival to his supreme deity!
This is not a case of Yahweh “challenging” Pharaoh.
Yahweh is asserting his supremacy –
as the Great King who rebukes his erring vassal.

Moses will govern the elements – the earth, the waters, the air, even the heavenly bodies!
(All under the LORD’s command, of course –
but with respect to *Pharaoh*, Moses is God!)

In this way, Moses looks an awful lot like a second Adam.
Adam had been given dominion over the creatures.
Adam was created as the Son of God, who was supposed to look like God.
Now Moses becomes what Adam was supposed to be –
at least in part.
And in this way, Moses points us to the true and final Second Adam –
our Lord Jesus Christ,
the incarnate Son of God who truly embodies God –
because he is God in the flesh!

But *why* is the LORD making Moses a God to Pharaoh?
In order that *the LORD* might make *himself* known to Egypt.

The LORD states the purpose of his great signs and wonders in verses 3-5:

³ But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and though I multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, ⁴ 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. ⁵ 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."

The purpose of these great signs and wonders
will be twofold:

judgment against Egypt for their sin,
and salvation for "my people the children of Israel."

But at the heart of God's purpose is this:

"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."

Yes, it is possible to "know that I am the LORD" merely in judgment.

Satan *knows* that God is one – and trembles!

But when you *know that I am the LORD*, it becomes possible to repent!

Exodus 12 will tell us that a "mixed multitude" went up from Egypt.

Caleb, for instance (one of the two faithful spies),
was a Kenizite – not an Israelite.

The people of Israel were *never* pure by birth.

It was *never* about biological descent from Abraham.

Yes, the promise of the *Seed* requires a *birth* –

so there was always a healthy emphasis on childbirth –

but all those who share the faith of Abraham

will also share in his blessing

(as God had said to Abraham,

"Those who bless you will be blessed,
and those who curse you I will curse.")

As we'll see in a few chapters,

anyone who believes God's promises, and heeds his warnings
would be saved in the Exodus.

And Moses and Aaron serve as our prime examples of those who hear, believe, and obey.

⁶ Moses and Aaron did so; they did just as the LORD commanded them. ⁷ Now Moses was eighty years old, and Aaron eighty-three years old, when they spoke to Pharaoh.

Abraham had died at the age of 175.

Isaac was 180.

Jacob was 147.

Levi was 137 – and Joseph was a youngster at 110.

Kohath was 133, and Amram was 137.

Again, numbers in the Bible can be used in symbolic ways.

The gradually shrinking ages of the patriarchs
may well be communicating the way in which sin
gradually constricts humanity and shortens our life.

The wages of sin is death –
and so from the Fall until Mt. Sinai,
death continues to shorten life.

So when you hear that Moses was 80 years old,

you should think of him as being about the same stage of life as a 50 or 60 year old today.

He wasn't a feeble old man –

he was still in the prime of life,
with another 40 years ahead of him!

Moses had been forty years old when he fled from Egypt into the wilderness of Midian.

Now he is eighty years old when he speaks to Pharaoh.

He had spent forty years in the wilderness.

Before Moses led Israel for forty years in the wilderness,
Moses had done it first alone.

Yes, Moses' faith wavers a couple of times –
but we should not see Moses primarily as a waverer.

After all, as verse 6 says,

“Moses and Aaron did so; they did just as the LORD commanded them.”

Faith always responds to God's commands with obedience.

When you believe God,
then you *do* what God says.

And Moses, as Hebrews 3 tells us, was faithful as a servant in all God's house.

b. The Signs and the Magicians: How to Think about Pagan Signs (v8-13)

⁸ *Then the LORD said to Moses and Aaron,* ⁹ *“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. ’’ 10 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. 11 Then Pharaoh summoned the wise men and the sorcerers, and they, the magicians of Egypt, also did the same by their secret arts. 12 For each man cast down his staff, and they became serpents. But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs.

And so when Pharaoh asked for a miracle,
Moses and Aaron did just as the LORD commanded.

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

Back in chapter 4, Moses threw down his staff, and it became a serpent
(and in chapter 4, the word translated “serpent” was the ordinary word for serpent –
the one used in Genesis 3 to speak of the tempter who came as a serpent).

Now when Aaron throws down his staff, it becomes a *tannin*.
The word “tannin” is generally used in scripture to refer to the great “sea monsters.”
(Indeed, in Ezekiel 29, Pharaoh is called a “tannin”
lurking in the midst of the Nile River).

When Moses was performing this sign before the LORD – and before Israel –
it was a snake (like the one that had deceived Eve in the Garden).
But now that Moses and Aaron are before Pharaoh –
the staff becomes a *tannin* – a sea monster!

(You have to wonder, did Moses jump back a little?
“Woah! Woah! That’s bigger than last time!”)

But God knows how to communicate to each audience.
You want a sign?
Okay, fine, I’ll give you a sign!
We won’t just do a little desert snake –
we’ll go for the great sea monster
(the image of chaos and destruction in the ancient world).

But Pharaoh is not impressed.
He summons his wise men and sorcerers and magicians,
and they also turn their staffs into serpents.

Do not try to “explain away” pagan magic as mere parlour tricks.
Every religion has its signs and wonders.
Jesus told us that “false christs and false prophets will arise
and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible,
even the elect.” (Matt 24:24)

In other words, signs and wonders *are not supposed to be* guides for action.
Just because you see a sign or wonder does not mean that you should follow that person!

Pharaoh's magicians did the *same sign* as Aaron.

And notice the result (verse 13):

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

Signs and wonders do not change hard hearts.

You cannot change the hearts of your friends and neighbors.

But you *are* called to be God to your friends and neighbors!

You have been united to the life of God himself – in his beloved Son.

You have been restored to the image of God –

so that you are being conformed to what *true humanity* really is.

And when your friends and neighbors say “Prove yourselves by working a miracle,”
what sign have you been given?

What did Jesus tell you?

What was the “Sign of Jonah”?

“that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things...and be killed,
and on the third day be raised.” (Matt 16:21)

And then what did Jesus say for you to do?

What sign do you give them?

“If anyone would come after me,

let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” (Matt 16:24)

God has restored humanity to his own image in the resurrection of Jesus –
and all those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ are conformed to his likeness.

In Jesus – and in his people – humanity is restored to the likeness of God.

So you may be the only God-like person that your friends ever meet.

And the hallmark of the Christian is the way that you bear the cross –
the way that you handle unjust suffering for Christ's sake.

Indeed, the greatest of all the signs and wonders that God ever performed
was the cross of Jesus.