

OBSTACLES OF MOSES

PLEASE do not read these comments until you have read the Scripture for this lesson. First let the Holy Spirit teach you directly from His Word.

Moses and Aaron had been officially recognized as the representative heads of Israel (4:29-31). Acting in this capacity and under the commission of the LORD, they were ready to confront Pharaoh. Much to the chagrin of Moses and Aaron, Pharaoh responded by intensifying Israel's bondage and thereby placing them in an extremely difficult situation with the elders of Israel. With Pharaoh opposing them from one side and the elders of Israel from the other, these two obstacles gave little hope for Moses and Aaron to bring a successful culmination to this diplomatic venture. As they skeptically pondered this hopeless situation, God reassured them of His sovereign presence with the words, "I am the LORD" (6:2, 6, 7, 8). Armed with this assurance, Moses tried to enlist the patient cooperation of Israel, but he was rebuffed in his efforts (6:9).

At this point (6:14ff), a genealogical table is included in the narrative which identifies Moses and Aaron as legitimate human representatives of Israel. The events narrated thus far in the first six chapters have been carefully orchestrated to convey a very significant and climactic truth: Israel was in such complete bondage that no human leader could ever effect her deliverance! Only the LORD, the covenant God of Israel, could accomplish such a glorious salvation.

The miraculous signs and plagues, which ultimately compelled Pharaoh to let Israel go, began with Aaron's rod when God turned it into a serpent. Although the sorcerers and magicians of Egypt were able to imitate this miracle with relative success, God's superiority was plainly demonstrated when Aaron's rod swallowed up all of the others. Like all of the other signs and plagues, this act was a direct challenge from Jehovah to the gods of Egypt, because serpents were extensively represented among Egyptian deities. Moreover, the first plague, when the Nile River and the waters of Egypt were turned into blood, dealt a mortal blow to the entire religion of Egypt, because the Nile was, in the strictest sense, regarded as their god and was worshipped under several names.

I. Moses' and Aaron's First Confrontation with Pharaoh — 5:1-6:13

A. Rejected by Pharaoh — 5:1-14

5:1 — "Thus says the Lord God of Israel" - One explanation for the ease with which Moses gained access to Pharaoh may have been the fact that he represented God. The Egyptian Pharaohs were considered gods themselves and delighted in communication with other deities.

"Let my people go that they may hold a feast" — The word translated "hold a feast" literally means "to keep a pilgrim feast." The same word is used for the three annual pilgrim feasts which male Israelites were required to observe in Jerusalem (Ex 23:14). This request was not unreasonable since it was common for natives to observe festivals in honor of their gods. It was generally understood that the gods themselves determined the plan and the manner in which these feasts were held. Furthermore, the Israelites could not make their proper sacrifices in the presence of the Egyptians since some of their sacrificial animals were considered sacred in Egypt. This request, presented on behalf of the LORD, was so natural and understandable that Pharaoh could not have refused it if he had any vestige of respect for Israel's God.

5:2 — "I know not the LORD" - It is possible that Pharaoh was not even familiar with the name, "LORD" (Yahweh or Jehovah). In the ego of this pagan monarch the power of Israel's God would naturally be measured by the existing conditions of His people. His unjustifiable reaction was a mixture of impiety and pride. The pharaohs considered themselves to be gods on an equal plane with all national deities and, therefore, not subject to them.

5:3 — Moses and Aaron were not silenced by Pharaoh's initial refusal but persisted with strong arguments for their cause.

5:4, 5 — Pharaoh viewed the request of Moses and Aaron simply as a ploy to obtain a vacation for Israel as a respite from their labors. Since the people were numerous it would constitute a considerable and unaffordable drain on their labor force.

5:6-9 — Pharaoh wasted no time in his attempt to guarantee that the Israelites would not have time to meet and discuss alternative plans. By forcing them to gather their own straw it is estimated that he doubled their work! Straw and stubble, left standing after the grain was reaped, were crushed and mixed with the clay to give it greater durability.

5:13 — "The taskmasters hastened them" - Literally, "the slave drivers pressed them." Certainly the purpose of this merciless treatment was to dash Israel's hope of freedom. Once again the purposes of God were served in that He was able to demonstrate His ability to lead His people out of "hopeless" bondage.

B. Rebuked by Israel — 5:15-23

5:15 — "Cried unto Pharaoh" - This same verb was also used concerning Israel's cry unto God. In contrast to the calloused and unreceptive Pharaoh, God heard their cry and was in the process of answering them (2:23; 3:7).

5:20 — If Pharaoh's ultimate purpose was to turn the Israelites against Moses and Aaron, he was relatively successful at this point. The officers of Israel accused Pharaoh of injustice and pled for mercy without success and then turned to their previously accepted leaders with a bitter indictment.

5:21 — "You have made our savor to be abhorred" - Literally, "You have caused us to stink as far as Pharaoh is concerned."

"You have put a sword in the hand of his servants to slay us" — Those pessimistic Israelite foremen were looking at the worst possible results. This charge clearly demonstrated the weakness and inconsistency of their faith in the LORD. Notice, in one breath they appealed to God as a righteous judge, but in the next breath they denied His ability to preserve their lives.

5:22 — "Moses returned unto the Lord" - Without trying to defend himself or answer the charges leveled against him by the officers of Israel, Moses took the matter directly to God. Moses was not bitter against God but earnestly desired to know the mind of his Commissioner. Moses was unable to account for the turn in events.

C. Reassured by the LORD — 6:1-13

God was not offended by this prayer of Moses, but responded with a series of promises and comforting assurances intended to calm his fears and bolster his confidence for the future.

6:1 — "Now you shall see" - Moses' desire for understanding is answered with the word "now." Timing is never a casual consideration in God's providence. It seems that God intended Pharaoh to express his attitude in this first meeting in order that the stage might be fully set for God's intervention.

6:2, 3 — God introduces Himself to Moses as "the LORD," literally, "Yahweh," and then distinguishes that name from God Almighty (El Shaddai), by which He appeared to the patriarchs. This verse has been the basis for the documentary hypothesis which denies Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. The idea is not that the name LORD was foreign to the patriarchs, but that the full impact of that name had not been disclosed to them. God Almighty, the strong and powerful One, had established His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (6:4; cf. Gen 13:14-17; 15:13-16; 28:13; 46:1-4). This covenant had included possession of the land of Canaan. God now appears to Moses declaring His intent to manifest Himself as the LORD, the absolute being with unlimited power and resource to fulfill His covenant promises.

6:4-8 — By this name, the LORD pledged Himself to fulfill a threefold promise: (1) to lead Israel to Canaan and give them possession of it (6:4); (2) to redeem Israel out of their bondage in Egypt (6:6); and (3) to adopt Israel as His own people (6:7).

NOTE: Israel was formally adopted by God when He entered into a legal contractual relationship with them at Sinai (19:5, 6). The pillar of fire and cloud were a continual reminder to Israel of the fact that it was Jehovah Who led them forth from Egypt (13:21; 14:19, 20). With these two phases of Jehovah's promise visibly fulfilled before their eyes, they still doubted His ability to fulfill the third by giving them Canaan (Num. 14:2-4). Therefore, God allowed that faithless generation to die in the wilderness before He raised up Joshua to lead them into their promised possession (Josh 1:2-5).

6:9 — When Moses tried to communicate his renewed confidence to Israel, they refused to listen "for anguish of spirit," literally, "shortness of breath."

6:10-12 — God reiterated His command to approach Pharaoh, but Israel's rejection had once again depressed the spirit of Moses causing him to respond, "The children of Israel have not hearkened unto me; how then shall Pharaoh hear me, who am of uncircumcised lips," literally, "heavy or encumbered lips."

6:13 — "The LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, and gave them a charge for the children of Israel, and for Pharaoh king of Egypt, to bring the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt." This is the most comprehensive statement of Jehovah's command. It is directed to Moses and Aaron, Israel, and Pharaoh. There can be no escaping this direct imperative.

II. Moses' and Aaron's Second Confrontation with Pharaoh — 6:14-7:25

A. The Position of Moses Clarified — 6:14-7:7

1. His Connection to Israel — 6:14-27

It appears that this genealogy was inserted to show the lineage of Moses and Aaron as it relates to the nation of Israel. The normal method of identification among the Hebrews was to give a genealogy. Consequently, the author starts with Reuben, the eldest, and works to Levi. Since Levi is the tribe being focused on, none of the subsequent ones are even mentioned. Within the tribe of Levi, the family of Amram is singled out along with his sons, Aaron and Moses. The focus then is narrowed to Aaron and his family since they would be priests for this covenant nation which was currently being formed.

2. His Commission to Israel — 6:28-7:7

6:28-30 — The narrative which was interrupted after 6:13 (cf 6:10-12) is picked up here and continued on through chapter 7.

7:1 — "I have made you a god to Pharaoh and Aaron shall be your prophet" - these words of the LORD give His remonstrance of Moses for his reluctance to speak to Pharaoh (6:12, 30). For a fuller discussion of this phrase, see notes on Exodus 4:16.

7:4 — "I will lay my hand upon Egypt" - Pharaoh's obstinacy would set the stage for a colossal display of Jehovah's power. By this act He would be glorified and a fear of "His people" would fall on other nations (cf. 15:14-16; Deut. 2:25; 11:25, etc.).

7:6, 7 — The call of Moses and Aaron has been completed and they are of the proper mind-set to fully follow the LORD in the performance of His service.

B. The Power of Jehovah Confirmed — 7:8-13

7:9 — The miracle of the rod was given to Moses as a seal of his divine authority.

7:11 — Secular records reveal that magic was commonly practiced in Egypt even among the priestly class. These magicians, among whom Paul names Jannes and Jambres (2 Tim 3:8), were not mere jugglers practicing slight-of-hand deceptions. Rather, they were highly educated and esteemed men

who were in many cases given over to Satanic influences. This is evident from the fact that they were able to reproduce the miracle "in like manner."

7:12 — The sign of the rod becoming a snake, like the subsequent ones, was a direct challenge from Jehovah to the gods of Egypt. The living symbol of the god of Pithar, a city in the Hebrew district, was a snake dignified with the name of "the magnificent." The god Kneph - creator and sustainer of the world was symbolized by the asp. Other Egyptian deities, such as Serzpis, also were represented by serpents. Therefore, the power to discredit this reptile discredited a multitude of Egyptian gods as impotent when compared to the LORD.

7:13 — "And he hardened Pharaoh's heart" - Literally, "But Pharaoh's heart was hard." The verb is passive and "heart" is the subject of the sentence. The sense is that Pharaoh's heart was already too hard to be impressed with this obvious visible manifestation of the LORD's superiority.

C. The Plagues on Egypt Commenced — 7:14-25

Because Pharaoh had already hardened his heart in rebellion against the LORD by refusing to let His people worship Him in the wilderness, Moses and Aaron were called upon to force him into compliance with a series of penal miracles. These were not just supernatural acts but symbols of the unlimited freedom and omnipotence by which the LORD ruled. Furthermore, they were produced and terminated at the word of Moses and Aaron as a testimony to the fact that they were the appointed agents of Jehovah to effect His will.

7:15 — Time and place were both significant in this act. Pharaoh went out in the morning to the Nile (7:16; 8:20). There is little doubt that the purpose of this excursion was to offer his worship to Egypt's supreme deity.

7:22-23 — "Pharaoh's heart was hardened" - It is not stated how Pharaoh's heart was hardened in verse 22, but in verse 23 it states that "he set his heart to do this." This indicates that he hardened his own heart. After the plague of blood, it definitely says that he hardened his heart against the LORD's demand (8:15, 32; 9:34). It is not said that the LORD hardened his heart until Pharaoh rejected the LORD's demand after the plague of hail (9:35-10:1). From these verses it appears that Pharaoh repeatedly hardened his own heart and after much patience, the LORD permanently sealed his heart in hardness.

NOTE: Orisis and many other divine names referred to the Nile which was the beneficent god of Egypt . . . the representative of all that was good. Its counterpart was Typhan who embodied all that was cruel, violent, and wicked. The touch or sight of blood was associated with this abhorred being. He himself was represented as blood-red and received sacrifices of red oxen and red-haired men. Blood, as the symbol of Typhan, rendered all unclean who came near or touched it. By turning the waters of the Nile into blood, then, God dishonored the supreme expression of Egyptian deity.