

EXODUS—WEEK 4

GOD TURNS UP THE HEAT



F. Michael Slay

A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

*The Cover Picture is Moses Turning Aaron's Staff into a Serpent
A Tapestry based on a painting by Nicolas Poussin (1593–1665)
On display in Manufacture des Gobelins, Paris (The painting is in the Louvre.)*

God sends Moses and Aaron back to Pharaoh, this time with some major tricks to convince Pharaoh that he's up against something he doesn't want to mess with. Still, Pharaoh isn't impressed.

So God starts hitting Egypt (and Egypt's gods) with cleverly targeted plagues. This is a great object lesson for Moses, Aaron, and us.

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Thank you.

Exodus 6:14–8:14 — God Turns up the Heat
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1 Exodus 6:14–27

These are the heads of their fathers' houses: The sons of Reuben, the firstborn of Israel, were Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi. These are the families of Reuben. And the sons of Simeon were Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jachin, Zohar, and Shaul the son of a Canaanite woman. These are the families of Simeon. There are the names of the sons of Levi according to their generations: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. And the years of the life of Levi were one hundred and thirty-seven. The sons of Gershon were Libni and Shimi according to their families. And the sons of Kohath were Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel. And the years of the life of Kohath were one hundred and thirty-three. The sons of Merari were Mahli and Mushi. These are the families of Levi according to their generations.

Now Amram took for himself Jochebed, his father's sister, as wife; and she bore him Aaron and Moses. And the years of the life of Amram were one hundred and thirty-seven. The sons of Izhar were Korah, Nepheg, and Zichri. And the sons of Uzziel were Mishael, Elzaphan, and Zithri. Aaron took to himself Elisheba, daughter of Amminadab, sister of Nahshon, as wife; and she bore him Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. And the sons of Korah were Assir, Elkanah, and Abiasaph. These are the families of the Korahites. Eleazar, Aaron's son, took for himself one of the daughters of Putiel as wife; and she bore him Phinehas. These are the heads of the fathers' houses of the Levites according to their families.

These are the same Aaron and Moses to whom the LORD said, "Bring out the children of Israel from the land of Egypt according to their armies." These are the ones who spoke to Pharaoh king of Egypt, to bring out the children of Israel from Egypt. These are the same Moses and Aaron.

Levi begat Kohath, who begat Amram, who begat Aaron and Moses. Kohath was born before Israel moved to Egypt (see Genesis 46:11). These few generations cannot span 430 years. There must be some more begats in there somewhere.

Hebrew genealogies often skip generations. This may seem odd, but don't forget that these genealogies only show a portion of a great tree. So, it's normal to focus on some parts of a genealogy while ignoring others.

Skipping generations is just part of that pattern.

Genealogy has a purpose, but people can turn it into just another way to claim that they're better than everyone else. Once again, something good is ruined by our sin.

Eventually, Paul tires of this.

And endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith. — 1 Timothy 1:4b

The descendants of Israel have now lost track of their connection to these genealogies.

Only a tiny minority even think they know which tribe they're from.

2 Exodus 6:28–7:5 (ESV)

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

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

Notice that the LORD does not say to Moses, “See, I have made you like a God to Pharaoh.” He says, “See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh.” He uses the word “Elohim” here—the Hebrew word for the monotheistic creator. But, since Pharaoh has no concept of a monotheistic creator, how can Moses be that to him already?

The answer is in the word “like.” God isn’t saying that Pharaoh perceives Moses as the creator; He’s saying that, to Pharaoh, Moses is *like God*. In other words, Pharaoh will view Moses as all-powerful. Moses should stop worrying about his inability to impress Pharaoh. Now he will be so powerful, he won’t be like just any old god, he’ll be *like God* (Almighty).

Moses needs to understand this because Pharaoh isn’t going to listen to him. But this isn’t because of Moses’ weaknesses. It’s because the LORD *will harden Pharaoh’s heart*. In other words, this isn’t going to go well for a while.

Moses needs to be ready for that and not let it discourage him.

Every Christian needs to expect, and be prepared for, hardened hearts. People aren’t just unreceptive to the gospel; many actively oppose it. I was once that way too.

While we can’t do the tricks Moses did, we are connected to unimaginable power. Our plans may be thwarted, but His never are. Take heart whenever *your* plans go awry. God is always up to something.

So, how do we prepare for hardened hearts? The same way we prepare for everything—through training.

The purpose of the church is to glorify God by fostering the growth and sanctification of people. There is a marvelous interplay between the individual growth of Christians and the growth of the organizations that foster that growth. Training grows Christians, and that grows the church.

Every Christian leader started out as a beginner. Great ministries have their roots in the hard knocks and the other trainings that these beginners went through early on.

3 Exodus 7:6–13

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

Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, “When Pharaoh speaks to you, saying, ‘Show a miracle for yourselves,’ then you shall say to Aaron, ‘Take your rod and cast it before Pharaoh, and let it become a serpent.’ ” So Moses and Aaron went in to Pharaoh, and they did so, just as the LORD commanded. And Aaron cast down his rod before Pharaoh and before his servants, and it became a serpent.

But Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers; so the magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments. For every man threw down his rod, and they became serpents. But Aaron’s rod swallowed up their rods. And Pharaoh’s heart grew hard, and he did not heed them, as the LORD had said.

This miracle is designed to show superiority. “My miracle can eat up your miracle.” This doesn’t even count as a plague—since no one got hurt.

But Pharaoh’s “wise men” and sorcerers are having a bad day, and it’s about to get worse. All of Egypt will end up suffering greatly because of Pharaoh’s intransigence. The “wise men” will actually come around long before Pharaoh does. Maybe they really are wise.

Pharaoh is missing a golden opportunity to settle this the easy way. Aaron and Moses just demonstrated that they have powers way beyond anything Pharaoh and his acolytes have ever seen. As the LORD said, “*I have made you like God to Pharaoh.*”

So far, they’re only asking for a three day trip to worship and sacrifice to YHVH. In the end, the cost to Egypt and to Pharaoh will be so great that one has to wonder how he can stay in power.

We spend a lot of time thinking about, and worrying about, who’s in power—maybe too much time. Don’t get me wrong; elections have consequences. It is good to participate in our political process, and to celebrate victories and mourn defeats.

But worldly power isn’t all that powerful. Imagine how you would have felt if you lived in 313 when Emperor Constantine issued the Edict of Milan, which ended the Roman persecution of Christians.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edict_of_Milan

Then later, in 380, the Edict of Thessalonica made Christianity the state religion. Wow. You would have been deliriously happy, right? Everything is awesome!

Well, not exactly. In retrospect, these “breakthroughs” were just cul-de-sacs along the path. The grand sweep of history isn’t defined by them. This is especially true of the advance of the gospel.

4 Exodus 7:14–24

So the LORD said to Moses: “Pharaoh’s heart is hard; he refuses to let the people go. Go to Pharaoh in the morning, when he goes out to the water, and you shall stand by the river’s bank to meet him; and the rod which was turned to a serpent you shall take in your hand. And you shall say to him, ‘The LORD God of the Hebrews has sent me to you, saying, “Let My people go, that they may serve Me in the wilderness”’; but indeed, until now you would not hear! Thus says the LORD: “By this you shall know that I am the LORD. Behold, I will strike the waters which are in the river with the rod that is in my hand, and they shall be turned to blood. And the fish that are in the river shall die, the river shall stink, and the Egyptians will loathe to drink the water of the river.” ’ ”

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, “Say to Aaron, ‘Take your rod and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt, over their streams, over their rivers, over their ponds, and over all their pools of water, that they may become blood. And there shall be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, both in buckets of wood and pitchers of stone.’ ” And Moses and Aaron did so, just as the LORD commanded. So he lifted up the rod and struck the waters that were in the river, in the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants. And all the waters that were in the river were turned to blood. The fish that were in the river died, the river stank, and the Egyptians could not drink the water of the river. So there was blood throughout all the land of Egypt.

Then the magicians of Egypt did so with their enchantments; and Pharaoh’s heart grew hard, and he did not heed them, as the LORD had said. And Pharaoh turned and went into his house. Neither was his heart moved by this. So all the Egyptians dug all around the river for water to drink, because they could not drink the water of the river.

These plagues aren’t random; they are designed to systematically crush the Egyptian gods. The first god to get taken out is Hapi, the god of the Nile—the one they worship most.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hapi_\(Nile_god\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hapi_(Nile_god))

The Nile is so central to Egyptian life that Moses can count on Pharaoh going out to the Nile in the morning. There, Moses will say to him, ‘*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 LORD wants Pharaoh to know who He is, but Pharaoh’s hard heart makes him a slow learner.

We like to think that we’re not slow learners like Pharaoh, but the truth is that our hearts are hard too.

Only with God’s help can we go beyond pretending to forgive people. Ask the Holy Spirit to fuse, deep into our hearts, the lesson that we are no better than those who need our forgiveness.

For some, this opens an even greater door—truly understanding God’s forgiveness of our own sins.

5 Exodus 7:25–8:14 (ESV)

Seven full days passed after the LORD had struck the Nile. Then the LORD said to Moses, “Go in to Pharaoh and say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD, “Let my people go, that they may serve me. But if you refuse to let them go, behold, I will plague all your country with frogs. The Nile shall swarm with frogs that shall come up into your house and into your bedroom and on your bed and into the houses of your servants and your people, and into your ovens and your kneading bowls. The frogs shall come up on you and on your people and on all your servants.”’” And the LORD said to Moses, “Say to Aaron, ‘Stretch out your hand with your staff over the rivers, over the canals and over the pools, and make frogs come up on the land of Egypt!’” So Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt, and the frogs came up and covered the land of Egypt. But the magicians did the same by their secret arts and made frogs come up on the land of Egypt.

Then Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron and said, “Plead with the LORD to take away the frogs from me and from my people, and I will let the people go to sacrifice to the LORD.” Moses said to Pharaoh, “Be pleased to command me when I am to plead for you and for your servants and for your people, that the frogs be cut off from you and your houses and be left only in the Nile.” And he said, “Tomorrow.” Moses said, “Be it as you say, so that you may know that there is no one like the LORD our God. The frogs shall go away from you and your houses and your servants and your people. They shall be left only in the Nile.” So Moses and Aaron went out from Pharaoh, and Moses cried to the LORD about the frogs, as he had agreed with Pharaoh. And the LORD did according to the word of Moses. The frogs died out in the houses, the courtyards, and the fields. And they gathered them together in heaps, and the land stank.

This time, God hits the Egyptian god Heqet (or Heket or Heqt), the goddess of fertility and childbirth.

<https://ancientegyptonline.co.uk/heqet/>

Frogs were considered manifestations of Heqet and were so revered that killing one was a crime. Cleaning them out of ovens would have been difficult to do properly. At last, Pharaoh shows signs of weakening. He asks Moses and Aaron to, *“Plead with the LORD to take away the frogs from me and from my people, and I will let the people go to sacrifice to the LORD.”*

They do this, but the Egyptians have to shovel piles of dead frogs. Given how much they are revered, this must have been stomach-turning.

Heqet is trashed.

There’s a twist here that must have been especially hard on Moses and Aaron, but should encourage us. Not only does God take His own sweet time releasing Israel from its bondage, but in this passage Pharaoh acts like he’s about to come around. He’s not, and God has made it clear that he’s not, but Moses and Aaron should be forgiven for getting their hopes up. That’s gonna be tough.

If God seems to be teaching you patience, take heart. He takes these advanced lessons very seriously.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. Who is your most famous ancestor?
2. What training programs had the most impact on you?
3. If worldly power wasn't the key to advancing the gospel in the past, what **is** the key now?
4. Give an example when someone seem to have mastered the art of forgiving? If this is a group discussion, avoid mentioning someone in the room.
5. When are you most impatient?