

LET MY PEOPLE GO EXODUS 5:1-7:7

Exodus 3 & 4 records the call of Moses to act as God's agent as He redeems the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. Several important points were made in those chapters. Of primary significance is Yahweh's fidelity to the Abrahamic Covenant He entered into with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. We have to remember that God created Israel; He did not simply choose Israel out of the nations of the world to be His chosen nation. He created Israel to be the vehicle of revelation through which He would become known to the world beyond what the rest of the world could see in the created order. God prepared three signs for Moses to use in order to authenticate God, God's message, and both Moses and Aaron, His servants. Signs, miracles, and wonders always have a purpose and that purpose is to authenticate the message and the messenger. We noted that Pharaoh hardened his heart and refused to obey God. God also hardened Pharaoh's heart but that situation seems to be a part of God's dealings primarily with the Exodus and with Israel. Outside of the Exodus story, the Bible records only four times that God hardened hearts and three of them are connected to Exodus events and one is connected with the rebellious Israelites much later in the history of the nation. People harden their own hearts but God doesn't seem to harden hearts except in connection with the Israelites. We also noted that once Moses and Aaron spoke to the Israelites in Egypt, they believed and worshiped Yahweh.

One thing to keep in mind when studying the Exodus story in Egypt is that the story is not about a contest between Moses and Pharaoh or a contest between the Israelites and the Egyptians; it is the story of the titanic contest of the ages between Yahweh and Satan represented by, in this case, Egypt and the pagan deities of that nation.

After convincing the Israelites he was from Yahweh and that he was going to lead the people out of slavery, Moses and his brother Aaron went to Pharaoh. It isn't recorded here that the Israelite elders accompanied them, but in Exodus 3:18, God said they would all go together.

Exodus 5:1-4 ¹And 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.'" ²But 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." ³Then 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, otherwise He will fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword." ⁴But 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!"

This Scripture records the initial meeting between Pharaoh and the Jewish men of God, Moses and Aaron. Immediately, they invoke the covenant name of God, Yahweh, and proclaim Him to be the God of Israel. Pharaoh may have known of the Israelite God, although that is questionable because he had forgotten Joseph and the history of the Jews when they first came into Egypt. Whatever the case, he wasn't going to acknowledge Yahweh as any sort of authority to be obeyed. Pharaoh was thought to be a god himself and he proba-

bly didn't want any competition from some God he didn't know or at least rejected. Most of the Israelites may have forgotten their God after so many years in Egypt and were only reintroduced to Him through Moses and the signs he performed. We also know they took the concept of at least some of the Egyptian gods with them when they left the country which is an indication they adopted the worship of false gods in Egypt to some extent. They probably adopted those pagan deities in large measure because this was a problem that plagued the nation for centuries. Vestiges of Egyptian worship of a bull were with Israel until the Assyrian and Babylonian exiles. It manifested itself in the creation of the golden bull at Mt. Sinai very early in the Exodus (Ex. 32:4) and Jeroboam set up golden bull idols in Israel after the nations split (1 Kings 12:28) much later in the history of Israel. Egyptian idolatry was with the Israelites for a very long time.

Exodus 32:4 ⁴He took this from their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool and made it into a molten calf; and they said, "This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt."

1 Kings 12:28 ²⁸So the king consulted, and made two golden calves, and he said to them, "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem; behold your gods, O Israel, that brought you up from the land of Egypt."

Moses seems to be confrontational in his first address to Pharaoh whereas God's command to Moses was to act in a more courteous and diplomatic manner.

Exodus 3:18 ¹⁸"They will pay heed to what you say; and you with the elders of Israel will come to the king of Egypt and you will say to him, 'The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us. So now, please, let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God.'

Moses uses an imperative mood verb, "go," meaning "send away." It's a command; it is not a request. In verse 3, Moses is much less confrontational and requests rather than demands when he says, "Please, let us go...".

In the end, for whatever his reasons, Pharaoh did not acknowledge the God of Israel as any God he should acknowledge and obey. In defiance to the command of the God of Israel, he emphatically stated he would not let Israel go into the wilderness to worship their God. Interestingly, many ancient records have been recovered detailing how much and how often Egyptian workers left work for religious reasons. They would stop working to honor various deities on an annual basis in various communities or for travel to make an offering to some god. The Israelite's request was not unheard of or out of the ordinary in Egyptian society. Pharaoh was not going to honor their request because it was really much more than a simple request to go worship and he knew it.

The request to go three day's journey into the wilderness was a Semitic way of making a request. A request always asked for less than what was really desired and Pharaoh knew that. When they requested to go a three-day's journey, they were really saying, "We're leaving and we are not coming back." Moses' statement that they would suffer pestilence and the sword at the hands of Yahweh is not part of the instructions God gave Moses to present to Pharaoh. As the Exodus story plays out, the situation is actually the opposite. The Israelites were divinely protected from the plagues Yahweh inflicted on Egypt and they were divinely protected from Pharaoh's sword as they were leaving the nation.

They did suffer more hardship during their captivity as the result of Moses' request, but that isn't what he said he feared. Perhaps Moses was afraid God would punish them if they failed to go into the wilderness whatever the reason. At least one commentator, believes Moses was subtly suggesting to Pharaoh that he would lose his slave labor force if God killed off the Israelites [Victor P. Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary*, p. 89]. The fact is, it's quite unclear why Moses said this and what it meant. My thought is it simply may have been a bargaining tactic as the thought of losing the labor force suggests.

There is archaeological evidence of Semitic slavery in Egypt; the story of the Exodus is not a fable. At the tombs of Rekhmire at Thebes (15th century B.C.) there are illustrations of Semitic slaves working not only as brick makers but as bricklayers. There is an inscription with one such picture that reads, "The taskmaster says to the builders: 'The rod is in my hand; be not idle.'" [Hamilton, p. 89].

In verse 2, Pharaoh says, "Who is the Lord...?" This is likely an insult formula we see used in the Old Testament and it is very likely Pharaoh meant it to be insulting.

1 Samuel 17:26 ²⁶Then David spoke to the men who were standing by him, saying, "What will be done for the man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should taunt the armies of the living God?"

1 Samuel 25:10 ¹⁰But Nabal answered David's servants and said, "Who is David? And who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants today who are each breaking away from his master.

Whether he was expressing ignorance of Israel's God or not, Pharaoh, in his own mind, was god and he wasn't going to tolerate any competition from a God he didn't believe existed.

Pharaoh orders Moses to get the people back to work and accuses Moses of disrupting their work by wanting to take them away. He also accuses Moses of lying to the Israelites.

Exodus 5:5–9 ⁵Again Pharaoh said, "Look, the people of the land are now many, and you would have them cease from their labors!" ⁶So 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 so that they will pay no attention to false words."

Pharaoh increased the burden on the Israelites and made it much harder for them to make their bricks because he also made them responsible for gathering the straw necessary to make strong bricks suitable for construction purposes. Their quota of bricks was not reduced but the time and effort they needed to expend to make them was vastly increased. Rather than being released from slavery altogether, their hard labor was exponentially increased. There is also archaeological evidence that the Egyptians were very concerned about idleness among their slaves [John J. Davis, *Moses and the Gods of Egypt: Studies in Exodus*, pp. 82-83] presumably because idle slaves can plot and foment rebellion. That thought seems to be expressed here by Pharaoh when he said they were lazy.

The people directly in charge of the Israelite labor force relayed the new directives to them.

Exodus 5:10–14 ¹⁰So 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.’” ¹²So the people scattered through all the land of Egypt to gather stubble for straw. ¹³The taskmasters pressed them, saying, “Complete your work quota, your daily amount, just as when you had straw.” ¹⁴Moreover, 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?”

While the taskmasters were probably Egyptians, these foremen were fellow Israelites who were trying to make things easier on themselves at the expense of their kin. The foremen were beaten for the failure of the Israelites to meet their quota of bricks under the burden of the increased workload.

Exodus 5:15–19 ¹⁵Then 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.” ¹⁷But 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 will be given no straw, yet you must deliver the quota of bricks.” ¹⁹The 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.”

The foremen took their plight to Pharaoh but that was a lost cause before it ever started. Blaming the Egyptians for their problems was probably not a good strategy since they were operating on the orders of Pharaoh himself. He knew what he was doing to them. They knew they were in big trouble because the task assigned was a task impossible to successfully accomplish.

Then the Israelite foremen turned their wrath on Moses and Aaron. It is interesting to note, they did not blame or forsake Yahweh at this point for their problems. But they sure were unhappy with Moses and his brother.

Exodus 5:20–21 ²⁰When they left Pharaoh's presence, they met Moses and Aaron as they were waiting for them. ²¹They 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."

The Israelites simply didn't understand the big picture. That's not a criticism; they just didn't get the spiritual ramifications of what was going on around them. It was God who was dealing with Pharaoh; Moses wasn't the source of their problems. They must have assumed Moses had mishandled his assignment because they implored Yahweh to judge Moses for his words to Pharaoh. Moses knew he had spoken to Pharaoh what God had commanded him to speak to the pagan king. Moses and Aaron were waiting for them after their meeting with Pharaoh so perhaps they thought they were there to offer their support to their Israelite brethren. If so, it didn't quite work out that way. Moses didn't defend himself at that time to his brethren but he did go to the Lord to express his concerns.

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

Obviously, Moses yet didn't fully grasp what was going on either. That isn't surprising. How many of us can possibly grasp the enormity of what God is doing in the world around us? All of us need time to mature and grow after we come

to faith and Moses was no different. Moses did have one advantage we don't have because he had direct revelation from God, but he still didn't know everything. But Moses had been warned that Pharaoh would not let the people go except under compulsion (Ex. 3:19; 4:21) so the fact that Pharaoh refused his initial request should not have been that surprising. The furious, evil response may have caught Moses off guard, but Pharaoh's refusal to let them go should not have been a surprise. In effect, Moses blamed God for the trouble Pharaoh visited upon the Israelites. What we don't know here is the time frame. There has probably been some period of time since Moses first approached Pharaoh which allowed time for the misery and the suffering to really take hold of the Israelites. Moses must have assumed the deliverance of the Israelites, even if delayed somewhat by Pharaoh's intransigence, would have moved at a faster pace. Perhaps Moses thought he could just march right into Pharaoh's throne room and demand freedom for the Israelites, but that wasn't how it was going to be just as God told him it was not going to be that way. But God's timing isn't according to what we think it should be; it is according to what God knows it must be. The entire Exodus journey will disclose that patience wasn't a strong suit of the Israelites once they came out of Egypt.

God didn't directly respond to Moses' criticism, but instead He answered Moses and gave him a history lesson along with the assurance that He was, in fact, going to be faithful to His Covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and He was going to bring His people out of their Egyptian bondage.

Exodus 6:1–9 ¹Then the LORD said to Moses, “Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh; for under compulsion he will let them go, and under compulsion he will drive them out of his land.” ²God spoke further to Moses and said to him, “I am the LORD; ³and I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God Almighty [אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹתַי], but by My name, LORD [יְהוָה], I did not make Myself known to them. ⁴“I also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they sojourned. ⁵“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 [גְּאוּלִים] 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“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.’” ⁹So Moses spoke thus to the sons of Israel, but they did not listen to Moses on account of their despondency and cruel bondage.

God assured Moses that He was about to act and Moses would see just what God was going to do to cause Pharaoh to send the Israelites out of Egypt. The whole Exodus story is a revelatory process not just for the Egyptians but for Moses and the Jewish people. Pharaoh wasn't just going to let them go; he was going to drive them out of his land. The word translated “compulsion,” [הִזְקָה] pertains to an act of power; the *JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh* translates it “greater might” and most versions translate it as a “strong hand.” This is an idiom meaning “by force.” Whether Pharaoh liked it or not, he was going to bend to the might of Yahweh and he was going to let God's people go. God never gave Moses a reason for allowing the suffering of the Israelites to not only continue but to increase. Instead, God's response to Moses was essentially be patient, keep the faith, believe that God is the God who keeps His Word and His Covenant,

and watch God's mighty hand at work as He set about freeing the Israelites from slavery and bringing them into the land according to the promises He made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

It is puzzling that God said He had not revealed this Name, Yahweh, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In the previous lesson, I said that The Name had not been revealed before and that is obviously incorrect as these Scriptures will make clear. Eve (Gen. 4:1), Lamech (Gen. 5:29), and Noah (Gen. 9:26) all used The Name. Abram did know The Name and he used it in Genesis 14:22 and 24:3, 7. God identified Himself to Abraham with The Name in Genesis 22:16. Sara used The Name in Genesis 16:2, 5. Abraham's servant, used The Name in Genesis 24:12, 27, 42, 44, 56, and the servant worshiped Yahweh in Genesis 24:26, 48. Laban used The Name in Genesis 24:31; 30:27; 31:49 and Laban and Bethuel used The Name in Genesis 24:50. Isaac and Rebekah both prayed to Yahweh in Genesis 25:21-23. God identified Himself to Jacob using The Name, Genesis 28:13. Jacob made a vow to Yahweh in Genesis 28:20-22. Leah used The Name in Genesis 29:32-33, 35 in connection with her status in the eyes of her husband Jacob. Rachael used The Name to pray for a second son in Genesis 30:24. Jacob used The Name in Genesis 30:30 and prayed to Yahweh in Genesis 32:9. Clearly, the Patriarchs knew the name but apparently, they didn't entirely understand it or commit to the God of The Name. One evidence of that is when they left Laban, Rachael stole his family idols (Gen. 31:19) and took them with her. Later, Jacob had them hide their idols under an oak tree at Shechem be-

fore they went to live at Bethel (Gen. 35:1-4). There seems to be several possible explanations what is meant in Exodus 6:3. The most common explanation is that the Patriarchs knew The Name but they didn't know what it meant, but that explanation is a bit simplistic and doesn't quite explain the issue. It is true they did lack a complete understanding of The Name but they must have known more than just the existence of The Name. Another, more likely, thought is that the Patriarchs knew of the God who made the promises but the generation of Moses would be the generation who would know Him as the God who keeps His promises. Therefore, the better explanation is that God progressively revealed the meaning and the depths of meaning behind The Name as time passed and as He was going about the business of keeping His promises. In other words, progressive revelation was at play here. Part of this progressive revelation was doing things not done before as God formed the Israelites into a nation who was to experience things never before experienced with any other group of people before including their forefathers. The Patriarchs did not know Yahweh as the people of the Exodus were going to know and experience Him. This is a huge change in the way God is dealing with the Israelites. One Hebrew scholar interpreted Exodus 6:3 this way: "I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (in limited form) as El Shaddai (who makes covenantal promises). But I was not the object of (full) covenantal knowledge to them as conveyed by my name Yahweh (who keeps covenantal promises)" [W. R. Garr, "The Grammar and Interpreta-

tion of Exodus 6:3" in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 111:385—408 quoted in Victor P. Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary*, p. 102].

What is clear is this name was used in conjunction with God's Abrahamic Covenant plan for the Israelites that had to begin with establishing them first as a people—from Abraham to Isaac and to Jacob and his sons--and then forming them into a nation to whom the Covenant promises would be fulfilled. The Name, Yahweh, is the Covenant name binding God and Israel.

At this point, God is reminding Moses, and through him the people, that He made a Covenant with their forefathers and He is going to be faithful to bring it to fruition. Due to progressive revelation, we know the Abrahamic Covenant has never been completely fulfilled and won't be until a faithful Jewish generation comes to faith, but that's not an issue at this point in time. God is going to do great and marvelous things for the Israelites as He remembers the Abrahamic Covenant and His relationship with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. There are seven "I will" statements in verses 6-8:

1. I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians (v. 6).
2. I will deliver you from their bondage (v. 6).
3. I will also redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments (v. 6).
4. I will take you for My people (v. 7).
5. I will be your God (v. 7).
6. I will bring you to the land (v. 8).
7. I will give it [the land] to you for a possession (v. 8).

The "I will" promises in verse 6 involve redemption, in verse 7 they involve adoption, and in verse 8 they refer to settlement in a new home. Redeem, גָּאֹלִים, reminds us of purchasing something back. As Christians, we connect the substitu-

tionary death of Christ on the cross as the payment to redeem us from the slave market of sin. Yahweh is going to restore the fellowship He had with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to the Israelites who have been out of fellowship for four hundred years. God is bringing the Israelites to Himself; He is not just going to bring them into the land, He is going to carry on the already established Patriarchal relationship and enter into a more intimate familial fellowship with them.

God told Moses that He is Yahweh and He would do what He had promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob He was going to do. He is a promise keeping, Covenant keeping God. Concerning God and His promises that is a truth to and for us as well. If God doesn't keep His Covenant promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, then how do we know we are going to be saved based on our belief in the person and work of Christ Jesus? If God can abrogate His promises to the Patriarchs and to Israel, then He can abrogate His promises to anyone at any time, but we know He is a promise keeping God and He will save us just as He said He would bring the Israelites out of Egyptian slavery and establish them in the land in recognition of His Covenant promises to them and their forefathers.

At this point, God revealed to Moses that Israel will be a nation that belongs to Him (v. 7). He said, "I will take you for My people, and I will be your God" and they would then know that He is Yahweh their God. Verse 7 is presented in covenant form, specifically, marriage and adoption covenant form of the time. This was further evidence of the relationship God had with Israel. We know the Bible specifically identified Israel as the wife of Yahweh. The book of Hosea addresses

that very issue. God specifically created Israel to be His people. He didn't pick them out of everyone else; He created them to stand apart from everyone else. They went into Egypt a small, tribal band of kinsmen but they came out a nation formed by God to be used by God for God's purposes. God's call to Abram marks the beginning of the Jewish people as a nation and God's formation of them into that nation begins with the Exodus and was formalized at Mt. Sinai. In terms of the Covenants, relationship with God was established with the Abrahamic Covenant; guidelines for fellowship with God within the already established relationship with God were established through the Mosaic Covenant.

The Patriarchs knew Yahweh as the God who made promises to them. During and after the Exodus, the Israelites would know Him as the God who heard their groaning and had compassion on them and freed them from slavery. They would know Him as the promise keeping God who brought them out of bondage.

Exodus 6:10–13 ¹⁰Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ¹¹“Go, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the sons of Israel go out of his land.” ¹²But 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 [עֲרֵל שְׂפָהָה]?” ¹³Then 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.

The command Moses received from God this time did not mention going for a three-day's journey into the wilderness; instead, Pharaoh was to be told to let the Israelites go out of his land. But Moses questioned his ability to influence Pharaoh because not even his people were listening to him any longer. “Un-

skilled in speech," עֵרֶל שְׂפָתָה, is literally "uncircumcised lips." It is as though Moses is saying he has skin on his mouth that needs to be removed in order for him to clearly speak. Moses is probably truly discouraged but God's ways are not our ways and He has His reasons for freeing the Israelites in the manner unfolding before Moses and God didn't have a need to reveal to Moses just what His reasons were. Moses' argument is a lesser to greater argument. In other words, Moses is saying, "The Israelites won't listen to me, why should we expect this mighty king, Pharaoh, to listen to me?" Obviously, that's not a valid argument to present to the Creator God of the universe who can overcome any insignificant human king no matter how important or powerful he thinks he is. God's reaction to all this talk? He simply ignores Moses' whining and tells him and his brother to get back to work. It is also noteworthy that God doesn't explain Himself to Moses; He just tells Moses what to do and to get to doing it.

Next, a genealogy is presented that serves to firmly establish the position of Aaron and Moses in the line of Jacob and as members of this fledging nation to be, Israel. As with all the genealogies in the Bible, it is selective in what it presents and what it leaves out. It begins with the first three sons of Jacob, all born to Leah (Gen. 29:32-34), Reuben, Simeon, and Levi. It stops with these first three because the line of Levi is the emphasis of this genealogy.

Exodus 6:14–16 ¹⁴These are the heads of their fathers' households. The sons of Reuben, Israel's firstborn: Hanoch and Pallu, Hezron and Carmi; these are the families of Reuben. ¹⁵The 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. ¹⁶These are the names of the sons of Levi according to their gen-

erations: Gershon and Kohath and Merari; and the length of Levi's life was one hundred and thirty-seven years.

Once it is established that Levi is the son of Jacob, note in verse 14 Jacob is called Israel, Levi's line becomes the focus of the genealogy. Up to this point in Exodus, Jacob had been called Jacob, but now he is called Israel even though his name was changed to Israel long before. The transition from Jacob to Israel has obvious connections to the formation of the nation called Israel that was beginning to take place. Genealogy becomes crucial later in the history of the nation in terms of determining who could serve as a priest. This genealogy is the basis for eligibility to serve as priests.

Exodus 6:17–25 ¹⁷The sons of Gershon: Libni and Shimei, according to their families. ¹⁸The sons of Kohath: Amram and Izhar and Hebron and Uzziel; and the length of Kohath's life was one hundred and thirty-three years. ¹⁹The sons of Merari: Mahli and Mushi. These are the families of the Levites according to their generations. ²⁰Amram 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. ²¹The sons of Izhar: Korah and Nepheg and Zichri. ²²The sons of Uzziel: Mishael and Elzaphan and Sithri. ²³Aaron married Elisheba, the daughter of Amminadab, the sister of Nahshon, and she bore him Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. ²⁴The sons of Korah: Assir and Elkanah and Abiasaph; these are the families of the Korahites. ²⁵Aaron'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.

Six generations from Levi to Phinehas are identified and this genealogy contains women which was an unusual feature of a Jewish genealogy. This is particularly noteworthy here because women could not serve as priests and the bloodline for the Israelites was traced through the father. The Israelite bloodline is not pure; there is a Canaanite woman in Simeon's genealogy and we know the

genealogy of the Lord contained non-Jewish women: Tamar, Rahab, and Ruth. This genealogy emphasizes Aaron and his line but it also reveals that Moses is from the priestly line as well and thus he functioned not only as the prophet of God to Israel but at times as a priest to Israel. He built the Tabernacle and he could enter it to meet with God which only a priest could do. He also performed the ordination ceremony for Aaron and his sons in order that they could serve the nation as its priests.

Some of the men in the priestly line proved unfaithful and were removed. Korah attempted to supplant Moses and Aaron and he was destroyed by God as a result of his insubordination (Num. 16:1-40). Korah was of the same generation as Moses and Aaron so it seems he thought he had an equal right to leadership. The problem Korah had and failed to recognize was the appointment of Moses and Aaron to their leadership positions was God's decision, not Korah's and not the decision of Moses and Aaron. Theirs was a divine appointment and not a self-appointment. Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, were killed for offering strange fire before the Lord (Lv. 10:1-2).

Leviticus 10:1-2 ¹Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took their respective firepans, and after putting fire in them, placed incense on it and offered strange fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them. ²And fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD.

While there are a lot of theories about the strange fire, no one really knows what it means. The most likely scenario is they used fire from a place other

than the altar. They obviously were disobedient to God in some fashion and their disciplinary deaths were used as an object lesson for the Israelites and for Aaron.

Phinehas was a faithful priest who was jealous for God and during the Exodus put to death a man and a woman sinning in the camp. This stopped the disciplinary plague against the people and for his loyalty, God promised Phinehas a perpetual priesthood (Num. 25:10-13). This line fell away from the position of High Priest for a time with Eli serving as High Priest and it wasn't until Solomon replaced Abiathar with Zadok that the line of Phinehas was restored to being High Priest (1 Kings 2:27, 35). Abiathar was removed by Solomon because he supported David's son Adonijah to be king succeeding David instead of supporting Solomon to succeed his father (1 Kings 1:7, 2:22).

Numbers 25:10–13 ¹⁰Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ¹¹“Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned away My wrath from the sons of Israel in that he was jealous with My jealousy among them, so that I did not destroy the sons of Israel in My jealousy. ¹²“Therefore say, ‘Behold, I give him My covenant of peace; ¹³and it shall be for him and his descendants after him, a covenant of a perpetual priesthood, because he was jealous for his God and made atonement for the sons of Israel.’”

1 Kings 2:27, 35 ²⁷So Solomon dismissed Abiathar from being priest to the LORD, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD, which He had spoken concerning the house of Eli in Shiloh.... ³⁵... and the king appointed Zadok [from the line of Phinehas] the priest in the place of Abiathar [from the line of Eli].

Through Zadok, the line of priests descended from Phinehas will be the priests of the Messianic Kingdom (Ezek. 40:46, 43:19, 44:15, 48:11) and Zadok will be the Millennial High Priest. Ezekiel 44:15 and 48:11 reference the fact that Zadok remained a faithful priest serving under David and Solomon.

Ezekiel 40:46 ⁴⁶but the chamber which faces toward the north is for the priests who keep charge of the altar. These are the sons of Zadok, who from the sons of Levi come near to the LORD to minister to Him."

Ezekiel 43:19 ¹⁹'You shall give to the Levitical priests who are from the offspring of Zadok, who draw near to Me to minister to Me,' declares the Lord GOD, 'a young bull for a sin offering.

Ezekiel 44:15 ¹⁵"But the Levitical priests, the sons of Zadok, who kept charge of My sanctuary when the sons of Israel went astray from Me, shall come near to Me to minister to Me; and they shall stand before Me to offer Me the fat and the blood," declares the Lord GOD.

Ezekiel 48:11 ¹¹"It shall be for the priests who are sanctified of the sons of Zadok, who have kept My charge, who did not go astray when the sons of Israel went astray as the Levites went astray.

Through Phinehas, the priestly line is traced from its beginnings in the Exodus and on into the Promised Land during the time of the Judges (Judg. 20:28).

Exodus 7:1–7 ¹Then the LORD said to Moses, "See, I make you as God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet [נְבִיאָ]. 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 does not listen to you, then I will lay My hand on Egypt and bring out My hosts [צָבָא], My people the sons of Israel, from the land of Egypt by great judgments. ⁵"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." ⁶So Moses and Aaron did it; as the LORD commanded them, thus they did. ⁷Moses was eighty years old and Aaron eighty-three, when they spoke to Pharaoh.

Yahweh is obviously not saying that Moses is God like He is God. He would be as God to Pharaoh because he is the person who has been charged by God to reveal His divine will to this pagan king through his brother acting as his prophet or spokesman. A prophet, נְבִיא, is a person who is a mouth for someone

else. A true prophet is commissioned by God and he can only speak forth that which God wants spoken. He cannot contradict God's commands and he cannot say what he thinks he can or should say; he can only speak what he is commanded to speak. Moses and Aaron will speak what God wants them to speak and God will be authenticated when He does exactly what Moses said He would do. Moses and Aaron will be instruments through whom God is going to reveal Himself to Pharaoh, to the Israelites, and to the world.

The effectiveness of God's dealings with the Israelites and with Pharaoh will become known throughout the region and produce great fear of the Lord among the Canaanites. Rahab revealed that truth to the Israelites spies at Jericho.

Joshua 2:8-11 ⁸Now before they lay down, she came up to them on the roof, ⁹and said to the men, "I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you. ¹⁰"For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. ¹¹"When we heard it, our hearts melted and no courage remained in any man any longer because of you; for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.

Aaron is commanded to tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go out of his land. After this incident, however, Aaron no longer speaks to Pharaoh; Moses does all the talking to the king. Through Moses, God has Aaron participate in initiating some of the plagues, but Aaron no longer speaks. Aaron threw down his staff and it turned into a serpent, he stretched out his staff over the waters of Egypt and they turned into blood, he stretched out his staff over the waters again and

they produced the plague of frogs, and he stretched out his staff over the land and the plague of gnats resulted, but he didn't speak to Pharaoh again. It is possible the appointment of Aaron as Moses' prophet was simply to overcome any lingering resistance Moses still harbored over doing God's will in freeing the Israelites from slavery. God was again negating Moses' argument that he was slow of speech.

The land is characterized as Pharaoh's land, "his land." It is not the land of the Israelites; it is the land of Pharaoh and the Egyptians and the Israelites are to get out of it to go to the land God is going to give them. They don't belong in the land of the Egyptians.

God is going to harden Pharaoh's heart but we know from other parts of the narrative, Pharaoh hardened his own heart first. In the previous chapters, I suggested that God hardens hearts only in connection with Israel but people are constantly making their own hearts hard as they rebel against God. Hardening Pharaoh's heart would provide the opportunity for God to perform more signs and wonders which would make them all the more significant and powerful. Signs and wonders are performed for the purpose of authenticating not only the message and the messenger but, in the case of these plagues, of God Himself as set against the false gods of Egypt. Not only will God be authenticating Himself in the sight of the Israelites, but the Egyptians are going to know He is the Lord, Yahweh. After that, He will bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt. The word used here to identify the Israelites as a whole is "hosts," **צְבָא**, which means armies.

God apparently looked upon them as His army. As they were being led out in Exodus 13:8, they were described as being in martial array, **תְּמֻשָׁיִם**, which means armed, arrayed for battle, or in orderly array. Even if the word refers only to an orderly array, it still carries the notion of some military precision in how they were grouped for mass movement out of Egypt. They were not a disorderly mob fleeing from Pharaoh and his land.

Moses and Aaron will do as Yahweh commanded them to do and they will lead the people out of Egypt once God frees them from Pharaoh's control.

It's unclear why the ages of Moses and Aaron were mentioned. Perhaps it was because elderly men were more revered in that time and in that culture and this information served to validate them. D. L. Moody reportedly said, "Moses spent forty years in Pharaoh's court thinking he was somebody, forty years in the desert learning he was nobody, and forty years showing what God can do with somebody who found out he was nobody." Perhaps that's a good lesson for all of us to learn.

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