

CHAPTER 7

In this chapter,

I. The dispute between God and Moses finishes, and Moses applies himself to the execution of his commission, in obedience to God's command (v. 1-7).

II. The dispute between Moses and Pharaoh begins, and a famous trial of skill it was. Moses, in God's name, demands Israel's release; Pharaoh denies it. The contest is between the power of the great God and the power of a proud prince; and it will be found, in the issue, that when God judgeth he will overcome.

1. Moses confirms the demand he had made to Pharaoh, by a miracle, turning his rod into a serpent; but Pharaoh hardens his heart against this conviction (v. 8-13).

2. He chastises his disobedience by a plague, the first of the ten, turning the waters into blood; but Pharaoh hardens his heart against this correction, v. 14, etc.).

EXODUS 7:1-7

MOSES RECEIVES A FRESH COMMISSION

Here,

I. God encourages Moses to go to Pharaoh, and at last silences all his discouragements.

1. He clothes him with great power and authority (v. 1): *I have made thee a god to Pharaoh*; that is, my representative in this affair, as magistrates are called *gods*, because they are God's vicegerents. He was authorized to speak and act in God's name and stead, and, under the divine direction, was endued with a divine power to do that which is above the ordinary power of nature, and invested with a divine authority to demand obedience from a sovereign prince and punish disobedience. Moses was a god, but he was only a *made* god, not essentially one by nature; he was no god but by commission. He was a god, but he was a god only to Pharaoh; the living

and true God is a God to all the world. It is an instance of God's condescension, and an evidence that his thoughts towards us are thoughts of peace, that when he treats with men he treats by men, whose terror shall not make us afraid.

2. He again nominates him an assistant, his brother Aaron, who was not a man of uncircumcised lips, but a notable spokesman: "He shall be *thy prophet*," that is, "he shall speak from thee to Pharaoh, as prophets do from God to the children of men. Thou shalt, as a god, inflict and remove the plagues, and Aaron, as a prophet, shall denounce them, and threaten Pharaoh with them."

3. He tells him the worst of it, that Pharaoh would not hearken to him, and yet the work should be done at last, Israel should be delivered and God therein would be glorified, v. 4, 5. The Egyptians, who would not know the Lord, should be made to know him. Note, It is, and ought to be, satisfaction enough to God's messengers that, whatever contradiction and opposition may be given them, thus far they shall gain their point, that God will be glorified in the success of their embassy, and all his chosen Israel will be saved, and then they have no reason to say that they have laboured in vain. See here,

(1.) How God glorifies himself; he makes people know that he is Jehovah. Israel is made to know it by the performance of his promises to them (⁴⁰⁶⁸Exodus 6:3), and the Egyptians are made to know it by the pouring out of his wrath upon them. Thus God's name is exalted both in those that are saved and in those that perish.

(2.) What method he takes to do this: he humbles the proud, and exalts the poor, ⁴⁰⁶⁹Luke 1:51, 52. If God stretch out his hand to sinners in vain, he will at last stretch out his hand upon them; and who can bear the weight of it?

II. Moses and Aaron apply themselves to their work without further objection: *They did as the Lord commanded them*, v. 6. Their obedience, all things considered, was well worthy to be celebrated, as it is by the Psalmist (⁴⁰⁷⁰Psalms 105:28), *They rebelled not against his word*, namely, Moses and Aaron, whom he mentions, v. 26. Thus Jonah, though at first he was very averse, at length went to Nineveh. Notice is taken of the age of Moses and Aaron when they undertook this glorious service. Aaron the elder (and yet the inferior in office) was eighty-three, Moses was eighty;

both of them men of great gravity and experience, whose age was venerable, and whose years might teach wisdom, v. 7. Joseph, who was to be only a servant to Pharaoh, was preferred at thirty years old; but Moses, who was to be a god to Pharaoh, was not so dignified until he was eighty years old. It was fit that he should long wait for such an honour, and be long in preparing for such a service.

EXODUS 7:8-13

MAGICIANS OF EGYPT

The first time that Moses made his application to Pharaoh, he produced his instructions only; now he is directed to produce his credentials, and does accordingly.

1. It is taken for granted that Pharaoh would challenge these demandants to work a miracle, that, by a performance evidently above the power of nature, they might prove their commission from the God of nature. Pharaoh will say, *Show a miracle*; not with any desire to be convinced, but with the hope that none will be wrought, and then he would have some colour for his infidelity.
2. Orders are therefore given to turn the rod into a serpent, according to the instructions, ^{}Exodus 4:3. The same rod that was to give the signal of the other miracles is now itself the subject of a miracle, to put a reputation upon it. Aaron cast his rod to the ground, and instantly it became a serpent, v. 10. This was proper, not only to affect Pharaoh with wonder, but to strike a terror upon him. Serpents are hurtful dreadful animals; the very sight of one, thus miraculously produced, might have softened his heart into a fear of that God by whose power it was produced. This first miracle, though it was not a plague, yet amounted to the threatening of a plague. If it made not Pharaoh feel, it made him fear; and this is God's method of dealing with sinners — he comes upon them gradually.
3. This miracle, though too plain to be denied, is enervated, and the conviction of it taken off, by the magicians' imitation of it, v. 11, 12. Moses had been originally instructed in the learning of the Egyptians, and was suspected to have improved himself in magical arts in his long

retirement; the magicians are therefore sent for, to vie with him. And some think those of that profession had a particular spite against the Hebrews ever since Joseph put them all to shame, by interpreting a dream which they could make nothing of, in remembrance of which slur put on their predecessors these magicians withstood Moses, as it is explained, ~~scribb~~2 Timothy 3:8. Their rods became serpents, real serpents; some think, by the power of God, beyond their intention or expectation, for the hardening of Pharaoh's heart; others think, by the power of evil angels, artfully substituting serpents in the room of the rods, God permitting the delusion to be wrought for wise and holy ends, that those might believe a lie who received not the truth: and herein the Lord was righteous. Yet this might have helped to frighten Pharaoh into a compliance with the demands of Moses, that he might be freed from these dreadful unaccountable phenomena, with which he saw himself on all sides surrounded. But to the seed of the serpent these serpents were no amazement. Note, God suffers the lying spirit to do strange things, that the faith of some may be tried and manifested (~~scribb~~ Deuteronomy 13:3; ~~scribb~~ 1 Corinthians 11:19), that the infidelity of others may be confirmed, and that he who is filthy may be filthy still, ~~scribb~~2 Corinthians 4:4.

4. Yet, in this contest, Moses plainly gains the victory. The serpent which Aaron's rod was turned into swallowed up the others, which was sufficient to have convinced Pharaoh on which side the right lay. Note, Great is the truth, and will prevail. The cause of God will undoubtedly triumph at last over all competition and contradiction, and will reign alone, ~~scribb~~ Daniel 2:44. But Pharaoh was not wrought upon by this. The magicians having produced serpents, he had this to say, that the case between them and Moses was disputable; and the very appearance of an opposition to truth, and the least head made against it, serve those for a justification of their infidelity who are prejudiced against the light and love of it.

~~scribb~~ EXODUS 7:14-25

THE PLAGUES OF EGYPT

Here is the first of the ten plagues, the turning of the water into blood, which was,

1. A dreadful plague, and very grievous. The very sight of such vast rolling streams of blood, pure blood no doubt, florid and high-colored, could not but strike a horror upon people: much more afflictive were the consequences of it. Nothing more common than water: so wisely has Providence ordered it, and so kindly, that that which is so needful and serviceable to the comfort of human life should be cheap, and almost every where to be had; but now the Egyptians must either drink blood, or die for thirst. Fish was much of their food (⁴¹¹⁵Numbers 11:5), but the changing of the waters was the death of the fish; it was a pestilence in that element (v. 21): *The fish died*. In the general deluge they escaped, because perhaps they had not then contributed so much to the luxury of man as they have since; but in this particular judgment they perished (⁴¹⁵⁹Psalms 105:29): *He slew their fish*; and when another destruction of Egypt, long afterwards, is threatened, the disappointment of those that make sluices and ponds for fish is particularly noticed, (²³⁹⁰Isaiah 19:10. Egypt was a pleasant land, but the noisome stench of dead fish and blood, which by degrees would grow putrid, now rendered it very unpleasant.

2. It was a righteous plague, and justly inflicted upon the Egyptians. For,


(1.) Nilus, the river of Egypt, was their idol; they and their land derived so much benefit from it that they served and worshipped it more than the Creator. The true fountain of the Nile being unknown to them, they paid all their devotions to its streams: here therefore God punished them, and turned that into blood which they had turned into a god. Note, That creature which we idolize God justly removes from us, or embitters to us. He makes that a scourge to us which we make a competitor with him.

(2.) They had stained the river with the blood of the Hebrews' children, and now God made that river all bloody. Thus he gave them blood to drink, for they were worthy, (⁶⁶⁶Revelation 16:6. Note, Never any thirsted after blood, but, sooner or later, they had enough of it.

3. It was a significant plague. Egypt had a great dependence upon their river (³⁴⁸Zechariah 14:18), so that in smiting the river they were warned of the destruction of all the productions of their country, till it came at last to their firstborn; and this red river proved a direful omen of the ruin of Pharaoh and all his forces in the Red Sea. This plague of Egypt is alluded to in the prediction of the ruin of the enemies of the New-Testament church, (⁶⁶⁶Revelation 16:3, 4. But there the sea, as well as the rivers and fountains of water, is turned into blood; for spiritual judgments reach

further, and strike deeper, than temporal judgments do. And, *lastly*, let me observe in general concerning this plague that one of the first miracles Moses wrought was turning water into blood, but one of the first miracles our Lord Jesus wrought was turning water into wine; for the law was given by Moses, and it was a dispensation of death and terror; but grace and truth, which, like wine, make glad the heart, came by Jesus Christ. Observe,

I. Moses is directed to give Pharaoh warning of this plague. “Pharaoh's heart is hardened (v. 14), therefore go and try what this will do to soften it,” v. 15. Moses perhaps may not be admitted into Pharaoh's presence-chamber, or the room of state where he used to give audience to ambassadors; and therefore he is directed to meet him by the river's brink, whither God foresaw he would come in the morning, either for the pleasure of a morning's walk or to pay his morning devotions to the river: for thus all people will walk, every one in the name of his god; they will not fail to worship their god every morning. There Moses must be ready to give him a new summons to surrender, and, in case of a refusal, to tell him of the judgment that was coming upon that very river on the banks of which they were now standing. Notice is thus given him of it beforehand, that they might have no colour to say it was a chance, or to attribute it to any other cause, but that it might appear to be done by the power of the God of the Hebrews, and as a punishment upon him for his obstinacy. Moses is expressly ordered to take the rod with him, that Pharaoh might be alarmed at the sight of that rod which had so lately triumphed over the rods of the magicians. Now learn hence,

- 1.** That the judgments of God are all known to himself beforehand. He knows what he will do in wrath as well as in mercy. Every consumption is a consumption determined,  Isaiah 10:23.
- 2.** That men cannot escape the alarms of God's wrath, because they cannot go out of the hearing of their own consciences: he that made their hearts can make his sword to approach them.
- 3.** That God warns before he wounds; for he is *long-suffering, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*

II. Aaron (who carried the mace) is directed to summon the plague by smiting the river with his rod, v. 19, 20. It was done in the sight of Pharaoh and his attendants; for God's true miracles were not performed, as

Satan's lying wonders were, by those that peeped and muttered: truth seeks no corners. An amazing change was immediately wrought; all the waters, not only in the rivers but in all their ponds, were turned into blood.

1. See here the almighty power of God. Every creature is that to us which he makes it to be, water or blood.
2. See the mutability of all things under the sun, and what changes we may meet with in them. That which is water to-day may be blood to-morrow; what is always vain may soon become vexatious. A river, at the best, is transient; but divine justice can quickly make it malignant.
3. See what mischievous work sin makes. if the things that have been our comforts prove our crosses, we must thank ourselves: it is sin that turns our waters into blood.

III. Pharaoh endeavours to confront the miracle, because he resolves not to humble himself under the plague. He sends for the magicians, and, by God's permission, they ape the miracle with their enchantments (v. 22), and this serves Pharaoh for an excuse not to set his heart to this also (v. 23), and a pitiful excuse it was. Could they have turned the river of blood into water again, this would have been something to the purpose; then they would have proved their power, and Pharaoh would have been obliged to them as his benefactors. But for them, when there was such scarcity of water, to turn more of it into blood, only to show their art, plainly intimates that the design of the devil is only to delude his devotees and amuse them, not to do them any real kindness, but to keep them from doing a real kindness to themselves by repenting and returning to their God.

IV. The Egyptians, in the mean time, are seeking for relief against the plague, digging round about the river for water to drink, v. 24. Probably they found some, with much ado, God remembering mercy in the midst of wrath; for he is full of compassion, and would not let the subjects smart too much for the obstinacy of their prince.

V. The plague continued seven days (v. 25), and, in all that time, Pharaoh's proud heart would not let him so much as desire Moses to intercede for the removal of it. Thus the hypocrites in heart heap up wrath; *they cry not when he binds them* (~~scrib~~ Job 36:13); and then no wonder that his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.