

Tools in God's Hands (Exodus 7:1-24)

I In Chapter 7 we see the first of 10 Plagues, and Pharaoh's responses to them. (We may think that Pharaoh received Moses and Aaron with a kind of, *So, what do you two want now?* attitude. When he saw Aaron's rod become a snake he no doubt thought that Aaron had studied magic in the same school as his magicians. It was no problem for Pharaoh to command his magicians to do the same trick, and he might even have asked them, *So, what now?* He was no doubt impressed by the appetite of Aaron's snake, but he would have shrugged that off to co-incidence. He might even have expected Moses to come to the River the next morning. We should remember, God is using the abilities of the Egyptians to copy the miracles, to harden Pharaoh's heart against Moses. Yet it is the role of Aaron which we should notice in Exodus 7.)

A God was establishing Aaron's authority as Chief Priest. (While Moses and Aaron knew that God intended to deliver the Children of Israel from their slavery in Egypt, they would not have known any of the details of the plan. They also would not yet have known what God intended to do with the Israelites once they were free from Egyptian bondage. God is showing Pharaoh, Moses, and Aaron, one part of His plan. Moses was to stand in front of Pharaoh as God, Aaron was to stand beside Moses as Prophet. Then God did some amazing miracles, by which Pharaoh learned that there is a God in Heaven Whose powers exceeded his own. The Children of Israel, for the most part, would not have known what went on in the meetings at the Palace. They would have noticed only that some really bad things happened after the meetings. We should remember that Moses would not have been much more eloquent in front of the Israelites than in front of Pharaoh, and that Aaron would have been his spokesman there, too. They would have known only what Aaron explained to them. Thus, God helped Aaron establish some credibility with the Israelites as a prophet, which he would later need in his role as leader of the priesthood of Israel.)

B Everyone would have known that the real power behind Aaron was Moses; and that the power behind Moses was God. (Aaron never had any supernatural abilities before the return of Moses; who was born in a Levite family, raised in the Palace as son of Pharaoh's daughter, and that he had run away in fear for his life some 40 years earlier. They would have thought them to be just other Hebrews, except that they came with a message of deliverance from God. They may have even questioned whether the message was really from God, when Pharaoh simply increased their work-load. Moses could not persuade him to change his mind. So where did they think the miracles were coming from? At first they no doubt thought that Moses had learned some clever tricks and taught them to Aaron; but as the frequency and the severity of the plagues progressed, they would have come to understand that God was at work and Moses was His agent. Also, Moses never did tricks for the Israelites just to impress them. After his initial meeting with their elders, he did no more miracles for them until they were standing on the shores of the Red Sea. Gradually, then, the Israelites (and no doubt some Egyptians, too) started to suspect that Moses was using Power from God, without claiming that he was a god, as Pharaoh would have done.)

II The Nile River was the only source of water for all Egypt. (They drank it, bathed in it, washed their clothes in it, and watered their fields with it. When the Nile River turned into blood they would have been both shocked and disheartened; feeling as one might feel if he were betrayed by his only true friend. We should note that Pharaoh had slaves all around him, to bring him a glass of water when he was thirsty; and that he could have bathed in privacy in his Palace any time he pleased. Yet he went to the River every morning. God knew his schedule, and his motives. So did the Egyptian Priests, and no doubt most of the people in Egypt. We should remember that he is from a different group of people than was the Pharaoh whom Joseph had known in Genesis. This Pharaoh was an invader, and his government was a foreign imposition

on the Egyptians. He had to establish his own authority over Egypt in order to keep his position at the top. That meant that he had to persuade “the old guard” that he was smarter, stronger, and better connected with the gods than they were; so he must establish the supremacy of his authority over even traditional Egyptian gods, the most important of which was the Nile River.)

A Egyptians worshipped the Nile out of gratitude for life. (Gratitude is being thankful for some favor. We express gratitude by saying *thanks* to people who do something for us. Yet there is a level of gratitude that lies deeper in the human spirit, than the simple superficial expressions we vocalize after receiving a present from a friend. The deeper variety of gratitude recognizes that something bigger and more powerful than we are is the source of all happiness, and again, this kind of happiness lies deeper within us than the smiles and laughter by which we generally express pleasure. That deeper kind of gratitude finds expression in reciprocal love, and if it is deep enough and strong enough, then our love does not even need to be reciprocated. Now the kind of love that needs no reciprocation is called worship. This is what God wants from us. Indeed, that was what God wants from everyone, including Pharaoh and the Children of Israel. Pharaoh wanted to receive worship too. In order to do so, he was obliged to ingratiate Egyptians to himself, and to do that, he would have had to demonstrate that he was supreme over all other gods that claimed their allegiance. The most important of those gods was the Nile River, and Egyptians worshipped it.

If Pharaoh wanted to transfer that worship to himself, he had to show that he had power over the Nile; that explains why God struck the Nile with the first of the 10 Plagues. The One True God in Heaven, the God of Moses, indeed had power over the Nile River. He was about to exercise that power, to demonstrate His own supremacy.)

B Pharaoh went to the River to bless it and to command it. (As noted previously, Pharaoh had slaves to bring him a glass of water and a bathtub in the palace; he went

to the River every morning for political and religious reasons, not for health or sanitation. Now Pharaoh surely knew that the River had flowed since before his time and would continue to flow after he was gone; he might even have suspected that there was a source of the Nile somewhere further upstream that was inaccessible to him. Yet average Egyptian peasants were uneducated and superstitious, and if the priests told them that the Nile flowed because Pharaoh allowed it, or commanded it, they would have believed it. We note that Pharaoh's magicians had power to imitate the miracle of turning the water into blood: do we also suppose that Pharaoh had a reason for keeping such magicians handy, to use that power from time to time, to compel Egyptians to accept some policy against which they might otherwise have rebelled? Again we note that Pharaoh had to demonstrate his supremacy over even the River. If the priests told people that the River made life good for them because of Pharaoh's blessing, or that the water level was low or fishing was bad because Pharaoh cursed it, uneducated, superstitious people would have believed it. Thus by using his position to bless or curse the River, Pharaoh could ingratiate people to himself because they were already ingratiated to the River, for as long as No One stronger or smarter than Pharaoh disrupted his illusion of control.)

C All life would die without water. (This is a fact of life that everyone knew. We might also note that the Land of Goshen was not immune from this plague, so the Children of Israel suffered from it too. Apparently the Egyptians also knew that sand and stone are good filters for polluted water, and so they got water by digging around the sides of the River, for the duration of the Plague. Let us note again that God is God of Life, not of Death, and that God is merciful and compassionate, even toward the enemies of His people. So this particular plague ended after seven days.)

III Aaron's role is both symbolic and practical. (We began by saying that we should note Aaron's role in Chapter Seven. In fact, his prominence will continue to rise for

several more chapters. His role is both symbolic and practical. It is symbolic because for the rest of the Old Testament, God acted through the Prophets, and as recently as Chapter Four, Moses is God's Prophet to the Children of Israel. Beginning in Chapter Seven, Moses acted less and less in the role of the prophet, and more and more in the role of God to the Prophet. Aaron rose, in this spiritual succession, from Moses' spokesman to the Israelites to the role of Prophet, becoming the agent of action, or we might say, the person through whom God's miracles manifested. His role remains practical, too, because Moses never quite learned elocution; and even if he had learned it, we should note his initial reluctance to speak to anyone, and God's assigning that role to Aaron. God never changes, and even if Moses had changed—and we have no reason to think that he did—even if he had got better at speaking, God would not have changed from His original decree that Aaron would speak for him.)

A So Aaron was to be Moses' Prophet. (This part of the story began with God speaking directly to Moses, and giving him a message for the Children of Israel. Moses hesitated, but did not refuse, to do so; so God told him to tell Aaron and Aaron would do the speaking. That worked so well that Aaron begins his career as a Prophet, by hearing God's Word from Moses and then delivering it to Pharaoh. Moses was to be to Aaron *as God was to him*, and Aaron was to be to Pharaoh *as the Prophet of God*. God would guarantee that he was accepted in that role by the means of signs, which, as we noted, are symbols only, for some other, very real, Power of God. As we noted previously, signs are not the reality which they signify. A sign is only a sign, to let us know where we are, or in Aaron's case, *who he was*. Let us remember this well: neither Moses nor Aaron was God; they worked *for* God to do His Will. Each had his work to do, and as long as they did God's Work in God's Way, they were successful. That arrangement of Power-sharing, among God and men, only works when men are humble enough to serve God's Purpose, and it begins to break down when the men

are so arrogant as to attempt to ingratiate people to themselves by the exercise of Powers that properly belong to God, as Pharaoh did; and as too many leaders in modern churches, and even some of the ordinary members, still try to do.)

B Aaron's tribe (Levites) was to become priests in the Kingdom of Israel. (As of yet, the Israelites had no priesthood. Their knowledge of God came only from oral traditions passed down from generation to generation around campfires. Their religious experience was limited to the animal sacrifices that they made, and their understanding of the significance of the sacrifice was limited to a collective memory of the Covenant God had established with Adam and Eve, Noah, and the Patriarchs. Whereas we have Bibles to read and read them rarely, mostly only on Sundays, and whereas we have unlimited access to God through Jesus Christ in prayer, they had only as much of the Word of God as God spoke directly to men individually, as He did with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, and finally, Moses. No doubt some prayed, but without any assurance that there was Anyone Up There listening. They only understood the misery of their present situation and wanted God to help them, if He could. When Moses came along and told them that God had heard their prayers and had seen their misery, they worshipped, but without a temple, a common altar, or a priesthood to lead the worship. God was to establish an institutional priesthood to tend the altar in a Community Tabernacle later, in the Tribe of Levi, with Aaron and his descendants as the Chief Priests, but no one other than God knew that yet.)

C Aaron's descendants were to become Chief Priests. (Now let us understand the distinction between the Chief Priest and the Ordinary Priest. The role of a priest, as we have seen, is to represent God to men and men to God. Any priest might do that, and Melchizedek, Ruel, and Moses himself probably did. Yet the One True God of Heaven is not an ordinary god, and so His Priesthood could not be ordinary either. God is separated from Man by an unbridgeable chasm called Sin; and God is only

One God, so God has only one mind and one thought about bridging that chasm. The fact that God will establish a priesthood with only one Chief Priest at a time, but many subordinate priests, is also a symbol for us, of how God intends to bridge the chasm of Sin. From our New Testament perspective, we see that there is *One Body, and One Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—One Lord, one faith, one baptism; One God and Father of all, Who is over all and through all and in all* (Ephesians 4:6-8). Ephesians 4:3 tells us to *make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace*. Similarly, there is but one Gospel, which we receive by our faith in the only Begotten Son of God, and we are warned against receiving any other Gospel, either from the Apostles or even from an angel from Heaven (Galatians 1:8). The institutional priesthood that God was to establish in Levi and the descendants of Aaron is a symbol for the Israelites, of this New Testament truth. We should see it in that light as well. The Israelites needed to learn that there was but One God in Heaven, because there were so many other gods in so many temples that the Egyptians, indeed, all gentiles, were worshipping; and which would finally attract the allegiance of the Children of Israel too, because of their humanism. What is the perversion of religion, then, that attracts contemporary men due to our humanism?

It is the false hope people place in the institutional church. The contemporary church tries to ingratiate us with entertainment and showmanship, and by offering a platform where young men who need haircuts and wear earrings, and young women who dress like street-walkers, (which is, incidentally, symbolic of the *absence of separation from worldliness in their own lives*) can entertain each other with song-and-dance routines and other night-club performances. Jesus is no more part of that foolishness now than He was 500 years ago when the Protestant Reformation tried to purge secularism and worldliness from the church! They set themselves (that is, the

leaders) up as a kind of junior gods, even saying that obeying them is the same as obeying God, because God has entrusted the leadership of the church to them. Such leadership diverts attention from God by interposing people between men and God, and calling their game of *Follow the leader* a worship service. The truth is that the only service is to human egos, and the only worship is the honor erroneously given to such a leader.

We say that the Levitical Priesthood was to be a symbol for Old Testament Israel of New Testament truth. The symbol is that God intruded into human affairs in the Book of Exodus to accomplish the deliverance of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, as God would intrude into human affairs in the New Testament to deliver all humanity from bondage to Sin. One man (Moses) represented God to Aaron, Pharaoh, and Israel; and one prophet (Aaron) proclaimed God's Will and Word to them all. In the New Testament, Jesus Christ would be the one Son of God Who accomplished God's deliverance of all humanity from Sin, and His original apostles preached that message to the rest of the world. Moses represented the life and work of Christ; Aaron represented the lives and work of the Apostles. After Aaron, the Levitical Priesthood would represent God to men by teaching the Will and Word of God to all Israel, and Israel would be God's Kingdom of Priests (Exodus 19:6), which would teach the rest of the world. After the passing of the original apostles, the clergy of the Church (that is, the Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors, and Teachers) would be to the Church as the Chief Priests were to the Levitical Priesthood, and the Church—with Jesus as our Chief Priest—would be the Royal Priesthood of the Kingdom of God (Hebrews 9:23-25 and 1 Peter 2:5). Only self-serving liberals try to change that; *Jesus Christ the same yesterday today and forever* (Hebrews 13:8) will not change it.)

IV The real Power behind Aaron was Moses. (Every observer would have known that

Aaron was only another insignificant Hebrew slave until Moses returned, and that Moses would have been just another Midianite shepherd if he had not returned. Yet when Moses returned to Egypt, his message of God's interest in the plight of the Hebrews revived their hope; and when Aaron stretched out his rod over all the waters of Egypt, the water became blood. As Moses heard from God, he spoke to Aaron, and as Aaron heard from Moses, he did what God commanded. Let us learn this simple lesson from Moses and Aaron, that we can do the Will of God only by performing His Word, as it is revealed to us in the Scriptures.)

A The real power behind Moses was God. (We have seen that at least one reason God chose Moses was that He knew (*fore-knew*, if you will) that Moses would do the job that God gave him to do. Now we see another of God's reasons, perhaps a little more clearly than before. According to 1 Peter 5:5, *God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.* God uses humble men and women to do His Work, because humble men and women give glory to God rather than seeking it for themselves. Humble men, like Moses, find grace with God; proud men, like Pharaoh, find only God's judgment against their humanism. Moses never thought of himself as God, and he was clearly uncomfortable in the role of God's spokesman; he thought of himself and of Aaron only as tools by which God would accomplish His Will. If we, as a church, think of ourselves as only tools in the Hands of God, then we will be very circumspect about how we present ourselves to the rest of the world. Let us learn humility; for *The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise* (Psalm 51:17).

B The real power behind Church is Jesus. (A moment ago we considered an analogy by which we could understand our roles as members of the Body of Christ, to be like the role of the Kingdom of Israel in the Old Testament world; at least that was God's plan, for both Old Testament Israel and for the New Testament Church. Now

let us note that there was a priesthood in Israel, as there is a clergy in the Church; that the leadership of the Levitical Priesthood was vested in the descendants of Aaron, as the leadership of the Church is vested in the clergy; and that neither Aaron and the Levitical Priesthood would have meant anything without Moses, nor would the church and its clergy would mean anything now without Jesus. In other words, neither the institutional church nor any of its activities has any meaning if Jesus is not present. We ought to be very careful then, about what we say and do “*in the name of Jesus*”, because it implies His presence in places, and His participation in activities, where He is nowhere near them. For example, if we were to meet for the purpose of committing sin, and then say that we were meeting *in the name of Jesus*, we would be lying, because Jesus is about repenting and forsaking sin, forgiving us for sin, and delivering us from sin. The name *Jesus* means, *He shall save His people from their sin* (Matthew 1:21). The Holy Spirit sanctifies believers according to the Will and the Word of God. Therefore, unsanctified people and their worldliness are not under the authority of *the name of Jesus*; and no activity that they perform will bring anyone any closer to God than they are, regardless of which institutional church calls the activity evangelism. It is *not* evangelism, it does *not* edify the Body of Christ, and Jesus is nowhere near the lies with which liberals deceive themselves and their friends about the Grace of God. The Power of God puts new, spiritual life, the life of Jesus Himself into believers; and the Holy Spirit starts *re-making* us on the model of the character of Christ from that moment. We had better remember that the regeneration comes first, reformation is later, and it is a life-long process. *That* is the Power of God in the life of the believer; it is the only power that gives church any meaning.)

C Ecclesiastical tyranny is incompatible with the Grace of God. (We say again, that Moses and Aaron were humble men; but we cannot say that for many of the clergymen in contemporary churches. As Pharaoh attempted to ingratiate people to

himself by appearing to bless or curse the Nile River, so the contemporary clergy attempts to ingratiate people by their soft-and-fluffy compromising of the Grace of God with the worldliness of secular men; that is, they pronounce the blessings of God *in the name of Jesus*; saying things like, *Go in peace; God be with you; God bless you; God will make a way when there seems to be no way*; when they should be using the Word of God to rebuke sins and challenge the sinners to repent, *in the name of Jesus!* Of course the ministry that really honors the Word of God will never build opulent buildings or increase the size of church congregations or the amount of money in their collections; but such a ministry will not lead people into Hell while promising them the Grace of God and His eternal Kingdom, either.)

V Moses and Aaron confronted Pharaoh and demonstrated the Power of God. (In Matthew 18:20, we see: *Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.* The name of *Jesus* has power, as we noted. It is power to deliver people from sin; and *the preaching of the cross is the power of God to them who are saved.* It is powerful because it is God's plan of Redemption; and it is not powerful for anything else, like making sinners feel good about sins they don't want to repent, for example. Together, the Body of Christ has the Spirit of God, which works out His perfect Will in our lives. We have the kind of unity in the Holy Spirit that reveals the Will of God to us, as we help one another become better Christians. That *building up one another in the faith* is one of only two legitimate reasons for church. The other is evangelizing unbelievers. And before we leave this point, let us be sure that it is the Word of God that we follow, rather than the word of men, and let us be certain that it is the Will of God which we perform *in the name of Jesus*. The only way to understand the Will of God is to read His Word and pray about its application to our lives. We must do so until we love what God loves (righteousness), and hate what He hates (worldliness); either in our own lives or in the corporate, institutional church.)

A Moses and Aaron accomplished the Will of God by doing just as the Lord commanded them. (In Numbers 22:18 a prophet told a king that he could not go beyond the Word of the Lord, to do more or less; in the New Testament, two Apostles told their judges, *We ought to obey God rather than men* (Acts 5:29) – even if they were to be imprisoned and flogged for it. No one can do the Will of God without obeying His Commandments, to *Love the Lord thy God... and love thy neighbor as thyself.* (Matthew 22:35-40). If we have this godly love for our neighbors in our hearts, then the activities which make the church a real (Capital C) Church will become second nature; without that love, everything that we call *service to God* which we do *in the name of Jesus* will be only sham, deception, and hypocrisy.)

B The Church delivers the Grace of God by doing just as the Lord commanded us, or not at all. (How does God communicate His Grace to the Church? We receive the Grace of God only by our faith in Jesus Christ. This faith is comes only from God; we cannot conjure it or manufacture it. It is also hidden from most people, until the Spirit of God reveals it: *The Word is near us, even in our hearts and in our mouths, that is, the Word of Faith, which we preach* (Romans 10:9). Then let us, the Church, deliver the Grace of God to the world by preaching the Word of God, in its entirety, so that they who have no faith can receive it from God. *Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God* (Romans 10:17). We say that we must deliver the Grace of God *just as the Lord commanded* or not at all. There is no other way for someone who has no faith to get the faith that will save them; and nothing we design to do that does not fit with what the Lord commanded will communicate the Grace of God. The priest who would be a useful tool in the Hands of God must represent men to God by prayers for the Salvation of sinners; and represent God to men, by proclaiming the immutable Word of God, which will both convict men of sin and offer them the only hope for Salvation from it. Friends, Jesus assigned that task to us.