

UNIT 10
THE DIVINE AUTHENTICATION
OF THE WORD
(Exodus 6:28–7:13)

INTRODUCTION

Text and Textual Notes¹

¹ This section marks the beginning of the confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh. From here on the confrontation will intensify, until Pharaoh is destroyed. The emphasis here, though, is on Yahweh's instructions for Moses to speak to Pharaoh. The first section (6:28--7:7) ends (v. 6) with the notice that Moses and Aaron did just as (*ka'asher*) Yahweh had commanded them; the second section (7:8-13) ends with the note that Yahweh did just as (*ka'asher*) He had spoken. In short, the word of Yahweh is obeyed, and when it is obeyed it is fulfilled.

6:28 When² Yahweh spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt: **6:29** Yahweh spoke³ to Moses, saying, “I am Yahweh. Tell⁴ Pharaoh, king of Egypt, all that⁵ I am telling⁶ you.” **6:30** But Moses said before Yahweh, “Since I speak with difficulty,⁷ then how will Pharaoh listen to me?”

7:1 So Yahweh said to Moses, “See, I have made you a god⁸ to Pharaoh, and Aaron your brother will be your prophet.⁹ **7:2** You will speak¹⁰ all that I command you;¹¹ and Aaron your brother will speak to Pharaoh that he may

² The beginning of this temporal clause does not follow the normal pattern of using the preterite of the main verb after the temporal indicator and prepositional phrase, but a perfect tense following the noun in construct: *wayhi b^eyom dibber*. See GKC, par. 130d.

³ Literally, “and Yahweh spoke”

⁴ The verb is *dabber*, the *piel* imperative. It would normally be translated “speak,” but in English that verb does not sound as natural with a direct object as “tell.”

⁵ The clause begins with *'et kol-'asher* indicating that this is a noun clause functioning as the direct object of the imperative.

⁶ *dober* is the *qal* active participle; it functions here as the predicate: “which I [am] telling you.” This one could be rendered, “which I am speaking to you.”

⁷ See note on 6:12

⁸ The word *'elohim* is used a few times in the Bible for humans (e.g., Pss. 45:6; 82:2), and always clearly in the sense of a subordinate to GOD--they are His representatives on earth. The explanation here goes back to 4:16. If Moses is like God in that Aaron is his prophet, then Moses is certainly like God to Pharaoh. Only Moses, then, is able to speak to Pharaoh with such authority, giving him commands.

⁹ The word *n^ebi'eka*, “your prophet,” is to be connected to 4:16 as well. Moses was to be a god to Aaron, and Aaron to speak for him. This indicates that the idea of a “prophet” was one who spoke for God.

¹⁰ The imperfect tense here should have the nuance of instruction or injunction: “you are to speak.” The subject is made emphatic by the presence of the personal pronoun “you.”

¹¹ The clause (“all that I command you”) is a noun clause serving as the direct object of the verb. The verb in the clause, *'atsawweka*, is the *piel* imperfect. It could be classified as a future, except that Yahweh has already told him what to say. A nuance of progressive

release¹² the Israelites from his land. **7:3** But I will harden¹³ Pharaoh's heart. And although I will multiply¹⁴ my signs and my wonders in the land of Egypt, **7:4** Pharaoh will not listen to you.¹⁵ And I will lay my hand¹⁶ on Egypt and bring out my hosts,¹⁷ my people the Israelites, from the land of Egypt with great judgments. **7:5** Then¹⁸ the Egyptians will know that I am Yahweh, when I

imperfect fits better: "all I am commanding you."

The distinct emphasis is important. Aaron will speak to the people and Pharaoh what Moses tells him, and Moses will speak to Aaron what God commands him. The use of "command" keeps everything in perspective for Moses' position.

¹² The form is *w^eshillakh*, a *piel* perfect with a *waw* consecutive. Following the imperfects of injunction or instruction, this verb continues the sequence. It could be taken as equal to an imperfect expressing future ("and he will release") or subordinate to express purpose.

¹³ The clause begins with the emphatic use of the pronoun and a disjunctive *waw* expressing the contrast "But as for me, I will harden." They will speak, but God will harden.

The imperfect tense of the verb *qashah* is found only here in these "hardening passages." The verb (here the *hiphil* for "I will harden") summarizes Pharaoh's resistance to what God would be doing through Moses--he would stubbornly resist and refuse to submit; he would be resolved in his opposition. See Robert R. Wilson, "The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart," *CBQ* 41 (1979):18-36.

¹⁴ The form beginning the second half of the verse is the perfect tense with the *waw* consecutive, *wehirbeti*. It could be translated as a simple future in sequence to the imperfect preceding it, but the logical connection is not obvious. Since it carries the force of an imperfect due to the sequence, it may be subordinated as a temporal clause to the next clause that begins in verse 4. That maintains the flow of the argument.

¹⁵ Literally, "and Pharaoh will not listen"

¹⁶ The expression is a strong anthropomorphism to depict God's severest judgment on Egypt. The point is that neither the speeches of Moses and Aaron, or the signs that God would do, will be effective. Consequently, God would deliver the blow that would destroy.

¹⁷ "Hosts" is sometimes translated "armies" or "divisions." *ts^eba'ot* properly describes armies; the term may mean divisions or companies, but it is portraying the people of God in battle array.

¹⁸ The emphasis on sequence is clear because the form is the perfect tense with the *waw* consecutive.

stretch out my hand¹⁹ over Egypt, and bring out the Israelites from among them.

7:6 And Moses and Aaron did just as Yahweh commanded them; so they did. **7:7** Now Moses was eighty years old, and Aaron was eighty-three years old, when they spoke to Pharaoh.

7:8 Yahweh said²⁰ to Moses and Aaron,²¹ **7:9** “When Pharaoh speaks to you, saying, ‘Do²² a miracle,’ then you will say to Aaron, ‘Take your rod and cast in before Pharaoh, and it will become²³ a serpent.’” **7:10** When²⁴ Moses and Aaron went in to Pharaoh, they did so, just as Yahweh had commanded them--Aaron cast²⁵ his rod before Pharaoh and before his servants and it became a serpent.²⁶ **7:11** Then Pharaoh also summoned wise men and sorcerers,²⁷ and

The use of the verb “to know” (*yada‘*) underscores what was said with regard to 6:3. By the time the actual exodus took place, the Egyptians would have “known” the name Yahweh, probably hearing it more than they wished. But they will know--experience the truth of it--when Yahweh defeats them.

¹⁹ This is another anthropomorphism, parallel to the preceding. If God were to “lay” (*natan*), “extend” (*natah*), or “reach out” (*shalakh*) his hand on them, they would be destroyed. Contrast Exodus 24:11.

²⁰ Literally, “and Yahweh said”

²¹ Text includes “saying”

²² The verb is *t^enu*, properly “give.” The imperative is followed by an ethical dative that strengthens the subject of the imperative: “you give a miracle.”

²³ The form is the jussive *y^ehi*. Gesenius notes that frequently in a conditional clause, a sentence with a protasis and apodosis, the jussive will be used. Here it is in the apodosis: “then will it (not, then shall it) become a serpent” (GKC, par. 109h).

²⁴ The clause begins with the preterite and the *waw* consecutive; it is here subordinated to the next clause as a temporal clause.

²⁵ Literally, “and Aaron cast”

²⁶ The noun used here is *tannin*, and not the word for “serpent” used in chapter four.

the magicians²⁸ of Egypt by their secret arts²⁹ did the same thing. **7:12** Each man³⁰ cast down his staff, and they became serpents. And the staff of Aaron swallowed up their staffs. **7:13** And the heart of Pharaoh was hardened,³¹ and he did not listen to them, just as Yahweh had said.

EXPOSITORY DEVELOPMENT

This unit marks the beginning of the confrontation between Moses and

This noun refers to a large reptile, used in some texts for large river or sea creatures (Gen.1:21; Ps. 74:13) or land creature (Deut. 32:33). Driver thinks here it must be a large land-reptile, or even a small crocodile. This wonder paralleled Moses' miracle in 4:3 when he cast his rod down. But this is Aaron's rod, and a different miracle. The noun could still be rendered serpent here since the term could be broad enough to include it.

²⁷ These first two words refer to the wise men and the sorcerers. See for information on this Egyptian material, D. B. Redford, *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph* (Leiden: Brill, 1979), pp. 203-4.

²⁸ The *khartummim* seems to refer to the keepers of Egypt's religious and magical texts, the sacred scribes.

²⁹ The magicians were somehow capable of duplicating the wonder of Aaron. The Hebrew term *b^elahatehem* means "their secret arts"; it is from *lut*, "to enwrap". The Greek renders the word "by their magic"; Onkelos uses "murmurings" and "whispers" (*Sanhedrin* 67b); and other Jewish sources "dazzling display" or "demons" (see further Jacob, pp. 253,4). They may have done this by clever tricks, manipulation of the animals, or demon power. Many have suggested that Aaron and the magicians were familiar with an old trick in which they could temporarily paralyze the serpent and then revive it. But here Aaron's snake will swallow their serpents.

³⁰ The verb is plural, but the subject is singular, "a man--his staff." This noun can be given a distributive sense: "each man threw down his staff.":

³¹ The text literally says, "and he hardened the heart of Pharaoh." But who is the subject? It is possible that it is Yahweh--but that is not stated. It is better in a case like this to make it passive since the subject is not expressed. Jacob has it: "the heart of Pharaoh remained hard." For more on this subject, Jacob has a lengthy excursion in his commentary from page 241 to page 249. Driver helps by noting that when this word (*khazaq*) is used it indicates a heart or will or attitude that is unyielding, firm; but when *kabed* is used, it stresses the will as being slow to move, unimpressionable, slow to be affected (Driver, p. 53).

Pharaoh. From this point on the conflict will intensify until Pharaoh is destroyed. Here, **however, the story is that of the LORD's instructions** for Moses to speak to Pharaoh and do the sign before him. The emphasis of the passage can be seen in that the first section ends with the report that Moses and Aaron did just as the LORD commanded, and the second with the note that the LORD did just as he had spoken. In short, the word of the LORD is obeyed, and when it is obeyed it is fulfilled.

I. God instructs his servant to proclaim his word (6:28–7:7).

The first half of the narrative (6:28-7:7) begins with a familiar problem (6:28-30): God commands Moses to speak and Moses is not sure Pharaoh will listen. I would again stress the use of the covenant formula here: “I am the LORD, speak. . . .” After all that has been said about this name it would seem that Moses would have no misgivings. In fact, the commission is to “speak . . . all which I am speaking to you.” Moses simply was a reporter. It was God's word through him. (Why God chose to do it this way seems to be a calculated approach, i.e., that is, throughout the Bible he graciously chooses servants to use to confound these mighty ones).

Moses’ response that he is untrained as a speaker (uncircumcised of lips) misses the point. He assumes that the communication of the word of God depends on the quality of the vehicle. God can effectually communicate through any means (even the rocks could cry out); what he desires is a willing servant.

The LORD answers this worry by reminding him that he had made Moses a god to Pharaoh and Aaron a prophet. “God” and “Prophet” are crucial terms in the theocratic world of Israel. The first could designate divinely appointed judges to rule the people of God, and the second referred to the spokesmen of the LORD. The point is that both were representatives of the LORD. Their words were God’s words. Their power was from above, even though their authority was over men—in this case Pharaoh. They had nothing to fear from human despots.

So there was to be no reason for Moses to feel that he would be ineffective—at least not from his perspective. There would be a failure of sorts, but it would have nothing to do with Moses' abilities. God would harden Pharaoh's heart. The two elements in the section are common in the later Old Testament: God’s messenger must go and speak the message but God would prevent its

producing results (the same was said for Isaiah and Ezekiel). The point is that if the messenger of God fails (i.e., does not see response to the message) while obediently discharging his duty, his failure is part of God's plan. The plan here is to harden Pharaoh's heart so that the signs can be done in Egypt that they might know it is the LORD God of Israel (trace "know" in these passages: Israel would know the name of their God in receiving the promises, and Pharaoh, who knew not the LORD, would know it was the LORD who destroyed him).

Verses 6 and 7 record the obedience of the messengers: they "did . . . just as the LORD commanded . . . so they did. The inclusio strengthens the idea of their obedience. The message was not their's, it was God's. The effectiveness did not depend on them, but on God. They simply had to obey the LORD.

*II. God instructs his servant to authenticate the message
with evidence of the power of God (7:8-13).*

In the second half of this passage there is the working of a miraculous sign before Pharaoh. If Pharaoh demands a sign, then Aaron is to cast down the rod and it will be (literally, "let it be," as in creation) a snake. After this instruction is given, the text reports that "they did so, just as the LORD had commanded"

Interestingly, the magicians seemed also to do this miracle (whether by deceit or by Satanic power one cannot say). But the rod of Aaron (it does not here call it a snake) swallowed up their rods. The sign of this event was that ultimately the power of Pharaoh would be overcome by the God of the Hebrews--especially since the serpent was venerated as the symbol of Pharaonic power.

The result of it all is the Pharaoh hardened his heart, "just as the LORD had spoken." So not only did Moses and Aaron obey the word of the LORD (in righteousness), so also did Pharaoh "obey" (but in the hardness of unbelief).

CONCLUSION

This passage stresses that the work from beginning to end is the LORD's. He chooses the messengers, he gives them the words, he does the authenticating signs, and he effects the results. All that the servants of God must do is obey the

divine commission. When those who minister the word of the LORD faithfully discharge their duties, then the LORD produces the intended effect of his word. We know that the word of God must be presented in this generation also. God alone can produce miraculous results, convictions, conversions, or a hardening condemnation through his word. The sower sows the seed; the LORD prepares the ground.