

Bricks Without Straw

(Exodus 5:1-7:13)

Expository Lessons from the Book of Exodus

I. Review from Previous Lessons

- a. At the age of 80, while Moses is tending the sheep of his father-in-law at Horeb (Mount Sinai), “the Angel of the Lord” appears to him from a burning bush.
- b. The Lord calls Moses to return to Egypt and then lead God’s people out of Egypt, to Canaan. He provides Moses with three signs:
 - i. Moses’ rod turns into a serpent and back again.
 - ii. Hand turns leprous, “white like snow” and back again.
 - iii. Water from the river poured out onto the land will turn to blood.
- c. The Lord tells Moses that He plans to “harden Pharaoh’s heart”; that Pharaoh will not want to let the Israelites depart Egypt.
 - i. We noted how Calvinists have used this passage, in connection with taking a passage from **Romans 9** out of context, to support their idea that God arbitrarily hardens some people’s hearts apart from their will and control.
 - ii. We looked at how the early Christians like Origen viewed this “heart hardening” reference. They understood that God wants all to be saved, yet gives all free will to either choose or reject Him. As the same sun can harden mud but soften butter, the chastening of God will reveal (and advance) the inclinations of our hearts.
 1. We can choose whether to have a *butter or wax-like heart* (which will soften under the ‘heat’ of God’s chastening) or else a *clay or mud-like heart* (becoming hardened under the same ‘heat’).
- d. Moses informs his father-in-law Jethro (a/k/a Reuel), the Midianite priest, and begins the journey back to Egypt with his family.
- e. Moses and his older brother Aaron, who will be his spokesman, are reunited at Mount Sinai. They return to Egypt and show the miraculous signs to the Hebrew elders, who rejoice that the Lord has seen their affliction and plans to deliver them from Egypt.

II. Bricks without Straw

a. Read **Exodus chapter 5**.

b. Storyline:

- i. Moses and Aaron meet with Pharaoh and say what the Lord told them to say. It does not go well (also just as the Lord had foretold Moses).
- ii. Moses and Aaron request permission to take their people for a 3-day journey into the desert to have a sacrifice/feast to the Lord. He says that otherwise (if they don't go to do this), the Lord will likely kill the Hebrews.
- iii. Pharaoh's response:
 1. First: Pharaoh says, "I do not know 'the Lord'; nor will I let Israel go."
 2. Second: He accuses Moses and Aaron of *taking the Israelites away from their work* of brick-making.
 - a. He accuses the Israelites of being *lazy*, wanting to shirk their work.
 - b. He instructs the Egyptian taskmasters to make the work harder by no longer providing straw to the Israelites to make their bricks.
 - c. The Israelites must now scour the land to find their own straw-like stubble for brick-making. However, their daily brick-making quota will not be relaxed.
- iv. When the Israelites struggle under the new edict and can't keep up with their quotas, the Egyptian taskmasters have them flogged.
- v. The clerks for the Israelites approach Pharaoh about this new unjust treatment.
 1. Pharaoh is not sympathetic. He accuses the Jews of being lazy.
- vi. After departing from Pharaoh, the Israelite clerks meet with Moses and Aaron, and *blame them* for bringing this bad treatment upon their people.
 1. Then Moses complains to the Lord: "Why did you send me on this mission? Things have gotten worse, and You have not delivered your people!"

c. **Question:** Why did they need *straw* to make bricks?

- i. *Biblical Archaeology Review* published an article in the March/April 2014 issue on the modern effort to replicate the manufacture of Egyptian mud bricks for historical architectural restoration work in the Nile Delta area.
- ii. The steps to make this type of bricks are as follows:
 1. Mix local topsoil (containing clay and sand) with water to make mud paste.
 2. Add a half pound of straw-like material for every cubic foot of mud mixture. If using straw (as opposed to chaff from grain), chop it finely.
 3. Mix the mud-staw mixture (by stomping on it with your feet) for 4 days while it ferments, breaking down the organic material. Let it sit for a few more days.
 4. Knead the mixture again, and place into forms.
 5. Remove from the forms, and let the bricks dry in the sun for a week.
 6. If the straw is omitted from this recipe, the bricks are much weaker and crumble (do not hold together well).
 - a. The straw fibers appear to serve a similar purpose to the fibers in 'horsehair plaster' in the plaster walls found in older homes here in New England.
- iii. The expression "bricks without straw" has taken on a popular significance in the English language, based on this passage.
 1. When someone refers to a task being "like bricks without straw", they mean they are being asked to do something *without being given the tools or materials they need to accomplish the work*.
- d. Understanding Satan more clearly through this story
 - i. The Exodus journey foreshadows the Christian journey from spiritual bondage through baptism, our time of testing (the Christian life) and the Promised Land as final destination (heaven) for those who are faithful to the end.
 1. This connection is highlighted in three New Testament passages:
 - a. **1 Corinthians 10:1-13** (covering the Red Sea crossing through the Wilderness journey);

- b. **Hebrews 3-4**; and
- c. **Jude 5**: “But I want to remind you, though you once knew this, that the Lord, having *saved the people out of the land of Egypt*, afterward destroyed those who did not believe.” (**Jude 5**, NKJV)
 - i. Jude warns that that the Israelites were “saved” but later destroyed (demolishing in one sentence the false doctrine of “once-saved-always-saved”).
 - ii. Here we see that Egypt represents what we have been saved out of (the world, the kingdom of Satan).
 - iii. The *ruler of the Egyptian kingdom* (that God’s people were saved out of) foreshadows *our adversary*. Therefore, the character of Pharaoh is a *type* or allegorical representation of *Satan*.
- ii. Most Christians see very few references to Satan in the Old Testament (**Genesis 3**, **Job**, and maybe a couple other places). However, I believe this story in **Exodus** provides an additional, critical insight into the character and tactics of Satan.
- iii. Most Christians today do not think very much about Satan. However, he is discussed extensively throughout the New Testament.
 - 1. Jesus counsels us to include in our daily prayers, “...And do not lead us into temptation, but *deliver us from the evil one...*” (**Matthew 6:13** and **Luke 11:4**, NKJV)
- iv. Things we learn about Pharaoh (and Satan also) include:
 - 1. Both were *murderers and liars from the beginning*. (The first Pharaoh in **Exodus 1** killed the Hebrew baby boys and dealt deceptively with the Israelites.)
 - 2. Both were *cruel oppressors, who refuse to let their subjects go*. They do not want to allow them to escape from kingdoms, to worship God.
 - 3. Both rulers want to occupy all their time and attention of their subjects with their worldly activities and agendas.
 - 4. Both, when their subjects they show intention to depart their kingdom, want to *double-down on the oppression!*
 - a. When people today start striving to be released from Satan’s oppressive grip, and the oppression

unexpectedly increases, they are often perplexed. As a result, unfortunately, they can *blame the Lord or His messengers* for their increased troubles (rather than blaming the real culprit, Satan).

5. Both lead armies of slave-drivers under their rule, who impose unreasonable burdens on their slaves. They keep their subjects enslaved and make their lives miserable.
- v. Consider how the following Scriptures also would apply to Pharaoh, who foreshadows Satan.
1. “Again, the devil took Him [*Jesus*] up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, ‘All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me.’” (**Matthew 4:8-9**, NKJV; see also **Luke 4:5-6**)
 - a. Satan is *ruler over the kingdoms of this world*, and possesses their glory.
 2. Jesus says to his enemies: “You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was *a murderer from the beginning*, and does not stand in the truth, because there is *no truth in him*. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for *he is a liar* and the father of it.” (**John 8:44**, NKJV)
 - a. The devil is a liar, the father of lies; and was a murderer from the beginning.
 3. Paul wrote: “And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and *escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will*.” (**2 Timothy 2:24-26**, NKJV)
 - a. Satan takes people captive to do his will; we must come to our senses and escape his snare.
 4. In his letter, Peter admonishes the Christians: “Be sober, be vigilant; because *your adversary the devil* walks about like a roaring lion, *seeking whom he may devour*. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.” (**1 Peter 5:8-9**, NKJV)

- a. Satan is our cunning and powerful adversary, the one who is out to destroy us.
5. From the **Book of Revelation**: “So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who *deceives the whole world*; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, ‘Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for *the accuser of our brethren*, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down.” (**Revelation 12:9–10**, NKJV)
 - a. Satan deceives the world, accuses the saints of God; and has underlings (his angels) who do his bidding.
 - vi. Jesus spoke of our spiritual condition without him as being a form of *slavery*. He came to liberate us from that spiritual bondage. It is tragic that so many people today are blinded to think the exact opposite! They falsely believe that God is an oppressor who wants to control them, while they see Satan as offering them “freedom”! However, it is Satan who wants to enslave us to our own worldly passions and lusts.
 1. “Jesus answered them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin.” (**John 8:34**, NKJV)
 - a. We must never forget that *sin* is what enslaves us.
 2. “So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: ‘The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.’ Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, ‘Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.’” (**Luke 4:16–21**, NKJV)
 3. “knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin.” (**Romans 6:6–7**, NKJV)
 4. “Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of

sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness.” (**Romans 6:16–19**, NKJV)

5. Peter writes, regarding false teachers and sinful men who will come into the church: “For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error. While *they promise them liberty*, they themselves are *slaves of corruption*; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage. For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: ‘A dog returns to his own vomit,’ and, ‘a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire.’” (**2 Peter 2:18–22**, NKJV)
 - a. Those who have escaped from the world and get entangled in the lusts of it again: they promise liberty but actually have become slaves to depravity.
 - b. By whom a person is overcome (his own lusts and passions), he is brought into slavery.
 - c. Christians who later become entangled and enslaved again by the lusts of the world are like cleaned-up (washed in baptism) pigs that return to the mud. Or they are like dogs who vomit up something bad they ate, but later return to lick up the disgusting thing they had previously vomited.
- vii. Let us see the world *as it really is*.
1. The world is enslaved by sin. Whatever masters us (sin) rules us. The only free person is a man living *a self-controlled life* (**Acts 24:25, Galatians 5:23, 2 Peter 1:6**), free from being controlled by the lusts of the flesh and the lusts of this world.

2. The richest man in the world is the one content with what he has (**1 Timothy 6:6**); not enslaved by his passions for more, which like the slave-drivers are never satisfied.
3. Satan does not want to let any of his subjects go free. *Don't believe his lies; he is not your friend.*
4. Satan is a liar and a murderer. He oppresses everyone under him, and even more those who are trying to escape.
5. Do not be surprised if he increases the punishment and accuses you. Pharaoh accused the Jews of being lazy and not wanting to work), and he increased the workload of those who wanted to go to worship God.
6. When things get worse, don't blame God nor His messengers (as the friends of Job did). Put the blame where it belongs. Blame the adversary.

III. The Lord Sends Moses Back to Pharaoh for Round Two

- a. Read **Exodus 5:22-6:13**
- b. Storyline:
 - i. Moses tells God that the plan is not working; things are only getting worse (Pharaoh is oppressing the people, no deliverance from the Lord).
 - ii. In response the Lord doubles down, saying:
 1. I am the God of your forefathers. I will keep the covenant I made with them, to give Canaan to their descendants.
 2. I have heard the groaning of the Israelites.
 3. Tell the Israelites that they will be My people, and I will be their God.
 - iii. Moses tells this to the people; however, they are discouraged and disregard Moses.
 - iv. The Lord tells Moses to go back to Pharaoh to tell him to release the Israelites.
 1. Moses replies: *"My own people won't even listen to me. Why should Pharaoh will listen to me, since I am not a good speaker?"*
 - v. The Lord sends Moses and Aaron back to Pharaoh.

- c. God's desire and plan: *I will be your God, and you will be my people.*
 - i. An intimate and special, protected relationship. This is to be a *two-way* relationship.
 - ii. We will explore this theme further when we get to Mount Sinai in **Exodus 19**. However, please see that this vision is held out by the Lord from the beginning, even while the Jews were still in bondage in Egypt.
 - iii. This is the desire of God, which has been opened up to all people of all nations, and is carried forward in the church: God's own special people (**Titus 2:14, 1 Peter 2:9**).

IV. Families Explained (Exodus 7:14-27)

- a. Lineage of the leaders of the tribes of Reuben, Simeon and Levi are given here.
- b. Levite tribe (family of Levi) has three branches: Gershon, Kohath (from which Amran, Moses and Aaron come) and Merari.
 - i. This is significant, since all the priests will be descendants of Aaron, from the Kohathite branch of the tribe of Levi.
 - ii. Aaron (who will be the first high priest), a Kohathite, is father to Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar.
 - iii. Nadab and Abihu will offer unauthorized fire before the Lord, and be struck dead as a consequence, in **Leviticus 10**.
- c. Eleazar, the son of Aaron is the father of Phinehas, the heroic zealot who will skewer two people involved in immorality, in **Numbers 25**. This action stopped the plague of death caused by the Israelite men committing immorality with the Moabite women.
- d. Korah the son of Izhar was also a Kohathite, of the tribe of Levi. This Korah ends up leading a rebellion against Moses and Aaron as told in **Numbers 16**.

V. Aaron's Rod Swallows Up the Others

- a. Read **Exodus 6:28-7:13**.
- b. The Lord sends Moses and Aaron back to Pharaoh. The events that transpire:
 - i. He says Moses will be "god" to Pharaoh, and Aaron will serve as Moses' "prophet" (*in other words, his spokesman*).

- ii. Only through mighty works will the Lord reveal His power and exact vengeance on Egypt, and bring out Israel. Through those actions, all Egypt will know that *He is the Lord*.
 - iii. When Pharaoh asks for a sign, Aaron is to cast down his staff, which will become a serpent. Aaron does so.
 - iv. Pharaoh then calls in his “sorcerers and charmers”. They also cast down their rods which turn into snakes.
 - v. Aaron’s snake swallows up the snake/rods of the others.
 - vi. Pharaoh’s heart is hardened; he does not let Israel depart.
- c. **Question:** How were the *Egyptian sorcerers* able to change their rods to serpents? I can’t be sure, but the two obvious options are:
- i. Perhaps the Egyptian sorcerers were simply *master illusionists*, similar to what we might see today in a stage performance by a ‘professional magician’. (“Look this way...nothing up my sleeve...voila!”).
 1. Tertullian (c. 160-230 AD), a fiery Christian writer from North Africa, commented: “...sorcerers ...with their juggling illusions, they make a pretence of doing various miracles”.
 2. (Source: Tertullian, *Apology*, chapter 23; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 3, p. 37)
 - ii. The other possibility is that this (actually transforming their rods to snakes) was something they were able to do, employing the demonic powers of the occult.
 1. “The coming of the lawless one is according to the *working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders,*” (2 **Thessalonians 2:9**, NKJV)
 2. It appears that Satan and those with him do have some limited ability to perform “signs and wonders”.
- d. **Question:** What is the spiritual significance in this story of *one snake swallowing up the others*? Is there any? As discussed in an earlier lesson, we can see a possible Scriptural association between snakes with sin (or Satan); between the rod and the cross (or Christ).
- i. Justin Martyr, in his *Dialogue with Trypho, A Jew* (written c. 160 AD) provides an extended discussion about the significance of wood in the Old Testament as often foreshadowing the cross of Christ. That discussion begins:

1. "Chapter 86 – [entitled] There are Various Figures in the Old Testament of the Wood of the Cross by Which Christ Reigned.
 2. "And when I had quoted this, I added, 'Hear, then, how this Man, of whom the Scriptures declare that He will come again in glory after His crucifixion, was symbolized both by the tree of life, which was said to have been planted in paradise, and by those events which should happen to all the just. *Moses was sent with a rod to effect the redemption of the people*; and with this in his hands at the head of the people, he divided the sea.'"
 3. (Source: Justin Martyr, *Dialogue of Justin with Trypho, a Jew*, chapter 86; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 242)
- ii. Gregory of Nyssa, writing c. 390 AD in *The Life of Moses*, discussed the significance of the rod/serpent sign. While his writings certainly are not inspired, I found his perspective very interesting, and at least worth consideration.
1. "The change from a rod into a snake should not trouble the lovers of Christ – as if we were adopting the doctrine of the incarnation to an unsuitable animal. For the Truth Himself though the voice of the gospel does not refuse a comparison like this, saying: 'and the Son of Man must be lifted up as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert' (**John 3:14**).
 2. "The teaching is clear. For the father of sin is called a serpent by Holy Scripture and what is born of the serpent is certainly a serpent, it follows that sin is synonymous with the one who begot it. But the apostolic word testifies that the Lord was made into sin for our sake (**2 Corinthians 5:21**) by being invested with our sinful nature.
 3. "This figure therefore is rightly applied to the Lord. For if sin is a serpent and the Lord became sin, the logical conclusion should be evident to all: by becoming sin He became also a serpent, which is nothing other than sin. For our sake He became a serpent that He might devour and consume the Egyptian serpents produced by the sorcerers."
 - a. (Source: Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses*, sections 31-33)
 4. Points that Gregory of Nyssa is making here:
 - a. It might strike some Christians objectionable that Christ would be foreshadowed by a serpent. (Perhaps naturally thinking, "He is represented in prophecy by a lion and a lamb...but as a *snake*? Wouldn't a snake refer to Satan?")

- b. However, Jesus Himself made the point (in **John 3:14**) that He was foreshadowed by the bronze serpent that Moses lifted up on a pole in the Wilderness (pointing back to the story in **Numbers 21:4-9**). So this connection should not surprise us.
 - c. Furthermore, we know from the New Testament Scriptures that Jesus “became sin” for our sake, as Paul states in **2 Corinthians 5:21**.
 - d. Therefore, this story of Aaron’s rod/snake devouring the others foreshadowed Jesus, who *became sin* for our sake, consumed (and destroyed) the power of the sin and evil of this world.
- e. **Another Question:** Is there any further significance for us in this confrontation? Is this story referred to *anywhere in the New Testament*, to provide a lesson for Christians?
- i. There is a very old tradition in both Jewish and Christian circles that the Egyptian sorcerers who opposed Moses were named “Jannes and Jambres”. Although there is nothing in the Old Testament (including the Deutero-canonical books, a/k/a Apocrypha) that states this, Paul *does mention* that Moses was opposed by two people named “Jannes and Jambres”.
 - ii. John Chrysostom (c. 347-407 AD, bishop of the church in Constantinople), in a series of expository sermons going through **2 Timothy**, quoted the passage from Paul and commented:
 - 1. “Now as *Jannes and Jambres* withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth.’ (**2 Timothy 3:8**) *Who are these?* The magicians in the time of Moses. But how is it their names are nowhere else introduced? Either they were handed down by tradition, or it is probable that Paul knew them by inspiration.”
 - 2. (Source: John Chrysostom, *Homily No. 8 on 2 Timothy*; found in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, vol. 13)
 - iii. **Question:** What is *the point* that Paul is making to Christians when he refers to Jannes and Jannes opposing Moses?
 - iv. Let us read **2 Timothy 3:1-4:5**.
 - 1. What Paul argues here.
 - a. False teachers will come into the church “in the last days”.
 - b. They will have a form of godliness, yet will be corrupt.

- c. They will influence gullible people, especially women.
 - d. They will resist the truth, “*as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses*”.
 - e. Godly men will be persecuted, while evil men and imposters will grow worse, deceiving and being deceived.
 - f. What you must do in order to make it: continue in the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation!
 - g. Therefore, it is critical to preach the word, “in season and out of season”.
 - i. In context, this admonition to “preach the word” is directed toward confronting heretical teachings that will enter the church, rather than about evangelism.
 - h. People will heap up for themselves teachers who will tell them “what their itching ears want to hear”.
- v. Lessons for us to consider today, based on what Paul says regarding Jannes and Jambres resisting Moses:
1. From the beginning, those who spoke the truth (like Moses) faced entrenched, powerful opposition.
 2. As Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, influential people will come into the church who will oppose the truth.
 3. We should not be surprised to see things like this happening. *It has been like this from the beginning.*
 4. Our job is to hold onto the Holy Scriptures which can make us wise for salvation, and to convince, rebuke, exhort and teach the truth with patience and perseverance, when it is popular and when it is unpopular.
 5. False teachers will come, who will tell people what their itching ears want to hear. We must be prepared, with the courage and knowledge to oppose them.
 - a. They will teach that you can be saved without living a life of holiness and obedience.
 - b. They will teach that we can bend the teachings of Christ and the apostles to match the culture around us.

- c. They will teach that Jesus came to give you a good life here and now (popularity, wealth, comfort, etc.), with no persecution.
- d. They will teach that we no longer need to fear God.