

THERE'S A SNAKE IN MY STAFF

Blake and I were having one of our late night Bible studies recently and got to talking about the dawning of Moses' and Aaron's ministry. Because Yahweh operates in patterns and is always trying to teach us something, we should be able to learn a lot from their opening act. Let's take a look into their first moment in the limelight and see what we can learn.



The backdrop for this stage is Pharaoh's palace. Moses had grown up there but had been gone for forty years, having fled to Midian following his killing of the Egyptian taskmaster he'd seen beating a Hebrew slave. While there he had received extensive training in how to shepherd, training that was necessary before he would be allowed to lead the people of the Most High God. One could easily argue that Moses had to be deprogrammed from the Egyptian mindset and had to be taken back to his Hebrew roots. In doing so, the gods of Egypt in his life were killed and he met the one true God Yahweh. Once enough of Egypt was out of him and he knew where he came from (his roots) and what the Almighty desired of him, he was ready to be sent on his mission.

Before we move on to the next part of the story, I want to submit to you one more reason why Moses had to be gone for forty years after leaving when he was forty. The Father needed to completely cancel out, year for year, his cravings for the things of Egyptian royalty and replace them with a new royalty, a royalty straight from the throne of God. In other words, the God of Israel had to be 100% sure that if He sent Moses from his humble abode in Midian back to the palace he had grown up in that there would be no temptation as he stood in the great hall amid all the silver, gold, and every other conceivable thing that a man could desire. In short, Moses had left Egypt, but God needed to make sure that Egypt had left him.

Now back to our story. Moses and Aaron were sent to the house of Pharaoh and told to show him signs and wonders. Why is that important? Because in ancient Egypt, no one ever dared to come before Pharaoh from a foreign land without first stating who he was representing. Pharaoh might have asked, "By what authority do you come before me?" So when Moses and Aaron stood before the leader of all Egypt, it was all about authority. Moses was introducing himself to Pharaoh as the leader of all Israel and was going to display his new title by showing the signs of that authority. Before we break it down, let's take a look at the Scriptures where God tells Moses and Aaron what to do when they meet Pharaoh.

Exodus 7:8-9 "Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, 'When Pharaoh speaks to you, saying 'Show a miracle for yourselves,' then you shall say to Aaron, 'Take your rod and cast it before Pharaoh, and let it become a serpent.'"

So here's the million dollar question: Out of all the animals that the staff could have turned into, why on earth did Yahweh choose a snake? Wouldn't a lion have made far more sense and have made a much bigger statement? Why a serpent? To understand the answer to that question we have to explore why Yahweh sent the plagues that followed this initial encounter.

Each plague that God sent upon the Egyptians was a direct assault on one of their gods. The main Egyptian god was the sun god Ra and his arch enemy was Appepa, the water snake of the Nile. So when the staff turned into a snake and ate the magicians' two snakes, Yahweh could have been sending a very powerful message that Ra's enemy was now in the house and Ra and all his underlings had better start running. But that's only the Truth side of the coin. And while the literal, historical meaning *does* bring great depth to the text, what about the Spirit side of the coin? What was God's original intent in presenting this historical event?

In order to get the most out of the Scriptures, we always have to go to the original intent. What did the author mean when he penned it? When the author is God, many applications can explode from the text when we look past the black words on the page and into His heart. In this case, it is important to remember that this is both Moses' and Aaron's debut as leaders. So the original intent will be teaching us about leadership, what God is saying about it, and what needs to be done in order to wield that authority properly.

God told Aaron to throw down a wooden staff. He could have just put the authority inside of him but He chose to use a stick to represent it. And for good reason. This act allowed Moses and Aaron to physically understand that their authority came from outside of them. They were allowed to hold it, but it was not of them. This is an important fact that all those who are given

spiritual authority **must** internalize: they are no different than any other sheep in the flock of God; they're just a sheep that has been chosen to hold a staff. It's the *staff* that is the authority. Take the staff away and they are no different than any other sheep in the fold.

How do you know when someone has been given a staff of authority from God? Is it because they call themselves a pastor or leader? How did Pharaoh know that Moses was the leader of Israel? Because he witnessed the power of God through the stick (authority) Moses was given. You will always know who is anointed because you will *see* the power of God working through them. God endorses His chosen shepherds through signs, wonders, and a raw power that changes lives. Power means authority from God. No power, no anointing.

Now let's get to the meat of the matter. Why did Aaron have to throw the stick on the floor? Why not just touch the floor and create a snake? A miracle is a miracle. Why throw it down? And back to our original question: why a snake? The serpent represents the enemy of Yahweh: Satan himself. Why would God use a symbol of Satan as the very first sign to Pharaoh? I suggest to you that it was the serpent that stole the authority from Adam and in doing so, was now "inside" the authority of man. He was in the "stick," the staff of authority. Man's corruption had affected him so much that any authority God would give would be vulnerable to the snake's influence. Where did the snake come from when Aaron threw it down? It came from the stick. There was a snake in his staff!

The second Yahweh gave Moses authority, you can bet the serpent was right there ready to influence him and hijack it. When Blake said out loud that there was a snake in his staff, my spirit saw all kinds of things. Because if the truth be told, there is a snake inside every staff, inside every single authority structure out there. And the Father is trying to tell Moses and Aaron through this first miracle that even though He is the one giving them authority, because He is partnering with a fallible man, the snake is there and ready to rear its ugly head.

In order for a leader to truly come into his full potential and lead with all of God's power, he must first recognize that there's a snake hidden in his staff. Whether it's inside him, inside the staff assisting him, or inside the members of his own family, the snake is there and needs to be exposed. The only way to do this is to throw the authority down in the presence of the King and let Him reveal what's there.

When Moses and Aaron threw the staff down, they gave their authority up for a moment and the snake was instantly revealed. I believe the Father is telling us that whether you are a husband, an employer, a pastor, or anyone with authority, you must first find the serpent and take hold of it in order for the true power to come from the staff you've been given. As long as we're human, the serpent will be inside our staff and it is our job to recognize and control him so he can't devour us.

What did Yahweh tell Aaron to do once the snake was revealed? He had to pick it up by the tail. In doing so he was, prophetically speaking, taking full control over the serpent in his life. It would never show its ugly head again.

All of us have a snake hidden inside of us that is ready to destroy us and pollute the power of God in our lives. It is only when we come humbly before our God and are willing to “**throw down**” our authority and ask Him to reveal the snake inside of us and those around us that we can truly be safe from its venom. It is the leader’s job to protect and provide the right atmosphere for the power of God to operate. Sometimes we get so busy doing the work God has for us that we don’t even see the snake that is right in front of our face. How many marriages have failed because they never addressed the weaknesses – the “**snakes**” – that were there? How many churches have split because the pastor was so busy with his ministry that he didn’t see the snake in his own staff that desired more control and authority? How many pastors have run off with the secretary because that snake was never exposed? The list could go on and on.

Moses and Aaron were representative of the leadership of all Israel. The snake had to be exposed in front of another brother. It is not enough to recognize your own weaknesses or the potential snakes in the leaders around you; you *must* expose them by talking about them. It’s the same thing as throwing down the stick. Once the enemy is out in the open, you can take it by the tail and control its power in your life. No one wants to face the snake in their staff. They know it’s there but they keep it in the shadows, never exposing it. It is only when it is exposed that we can prevent it from doing the damage we all know it can do. Take a look at what the Scriptures have to say about what’s inside each of us.

1 Kings 8:37–40 “When there is famine in the land, pestilence or blight or mildew, locusts or grasshoppers; when their enemy besieges them in the land of their cities; whatever plague or whatever sickness there is; whatever prayer, whatever supplication is made by anyone, or by all Your people Israel, when each one knows the plague of [the snakes in] his own heart and spreads out his hands toward this temple: then hear in heaven Your dwelling place, and forgive, and act, and give to everyone according to all his ways, whose heart You know (for You alone know the hearts of all the sons of men), that they may fear you all the days that they live in the land which You gave to our fathers.” [My additions]

Did you catch all that? The Father says that we are to know the plague that is in our own heart and only He knows what’s in the heart of man. So in order to expose the snake, we need to come before our God in prayer and supplication and ask Him to reveal what we cannot see, that snake that is traveling with us just waiting for the opportunity to destroy whatever measure of authority we have been given. Many a kingdom has been destroyed by the smallest of snake bites.

The plagues that Moses and Aaron were about to unleash on Egypt were simply because of the plagues that were already inside Pharaoh’s heart. The Father was just trying to expose what was already there so He could give him chance after chance to repent. When it became clear he was not going to, God gave him over to what he truly desired. This is the true meaning of his heart being hardened. Pharaoh could not see the snake in his own staff. And because of his blindness, his authority was taken away and destroyed forever.

In the end, for a true leader (which we all are to varying degrees) to really see the power of God flow through him so he can receive His true blessings in his life, he must allow God to expose the plague, that serpent in his heart. He must then confess it to another and attempt to take it by

the tail with everything in him. When we do our part, the Spirit does His and forces the snake to become powerless in our hand.

Take time today and ask the Father to reveal what you cannot see. Don't ignore the elephant in the room because it's not really an elephant!

Shalom,
Jim Staley