

Sufficiency in the Calling: *Moses and the Burning Bush (part two)* – Exodus 4:1-17

“Revelation is not information about God and his nature, but an invitation to trust in the one whose self-disclosure is a foretaste of the promised inheritance. The future for the community of faith is not an unknown leap into the dark because the Coming One accompanies the faithful toward the end.”

~ B. S Childs, *Exodus*, 89

I. Investigation: An Examination of Exodus 4:1-17

A. Introduction

In Exodus 3:1-4:17, we find the first interchange between God and Moses. In this extended dialogue, God commissions Moses three times, while Moses raises five sets of objections. The speeches of God are skillfully delivered, remaining patient, but resolute. Whereas Moses’ speeches are not logically connected. One commentator observes that “each time in which the objection is fully met, a new one springs up, unconnected with the latter. No visible gain is ever made . . . in the end he [Moses] is trapped and his real doubt emerges” (Childs, *Exodus*, 71). Ultimately, God’s interchange with Moses reveals a God who cares deeply for His people, a God who keeps His Word, and a God who demonstrates unbelievable grace.

B. God Demonstrates His Sufficiency (4:1-9)

v. 1- Despite the Lord’s promise in 3:18, Moses remains skeptical. Fear, doubt, and disbelief cloud Moses’ perspective on exactly who the Lord is and what the Lord can accomplish.

As noted by one commentator: “Moses’ objection would be persuasive were it not for the fact that it was an explicit contradiction of God’s word, a denial of divine revelation. Back in Exodus 3:18 God made this promise: ‘The elders of Israel will listen to you.’ . . . God not only promised that the elders would believe Moses, but he also promised that they would make his testimony their own. When they went to Pharaoh, they would say, ‘The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us’ (Exod. 3:18b)” (Ryken, *Exodus*, 108).

vv. 2-9 - The Lord gives three signs to expel Moses’ doubt: that which is supportive becomes useless (i.e., Moses’ rod), that which is healthy becomes harmful (i.e., Moses’ hand), and that which is pure becomes putrid (i.e., the Nile) (cf. Hamilton, *Exodus*, 71).

The object lesson of the rod turning to a snake occurs later in 7:8-13. While a cobra is considered extremely dangerous and should never be provoked in any culture, the cobra was also seen as extremely important in Egyptian culture. In particular, Reenutet was a cobra-goddess who served as guardian of the pharaoh; and Wadjyt was a cobra-goddess who functioned as the patron deity of Lower Egypt. So significant was the cobra, that the Egyptian kings wore this protective emblem on their crowns.

Skin diseases were often associated with a punishment for pride (cf. Num 12:1-12; 2 Kgs 5:22-27; 2 Chron 26:16-21). This sign most likely demonstrated God's intention to punish Pharaoh (cf. Walton and Matthews, *Gen-Deut*, 88).

The third sign of turning the Nile into blood is the only sign not immediately fulfilled. This final sign becomes the first plague (7:1-13). The significance of this event is that the Egyptians viewed the Nile as the source of life.

B. God Provides Aaron (4:10-17)

vv. 10-12 - "I am not an eloquent man" (also, cf. 6:12, 30) - The precise nature of his deficiency in speech could entail one of the following:

- Moses struggled with a speech defect, such as stuttering.
- Moses was uncomfortable speaking in public.
- Moses lost his fluency in conversing in Egyptian.

The Lord's response in v. 11 suggests that Moses did have a speech defect (cf. Eek 3:5-6). Ironically, Moses proves to be a capable debater in his interaction with the Lord. Moses is the only person who acknowledged his own supposed disability. Even the New Testament indicates that Moses was "powerful in speech and action" (Acts 7:22).

Note: In reference to the Lord taking full responsibility for the suffering that some people experience, the text does not deny there are "proximate" causes for some kinds of suffering (e.g., injuries, infections, human sin). "The text is focused on the ultimate cause, God, and does not shrink from affirming that God is in control of all that happens" (Garrett, *Exodus*, 215). God's sovereignty should bring comfort, patience, and hope.

Interestingly, the Hebrew plays off of the first person pronoun "I am". Moses declares that "*I am* slow of speech," and the Lord's rebuttal claims "*I am* the Lord" and "*I am* will help you speak".

v. 13 - With no other excuses, Moses simply begs the Lord to find a replacement. Without a legitimate objection, the Lord reacts in anger to Moses' refusal to go.

vv. 14-16 - To call Aaron "the Levite" "suggests that he is, among the Hebrews, the Levite par excellence, or the first among equals" (Garrett, *Exodus*, 210). Certainly, the reference to "Levite" foreshadows Aaron's roll as high priest.

In light of Moses' questioning of God and his desire to shirk his calling, the Lord provides Aaron. But at what a cost! "Aaron can indeed speak so compellingly, so persuasively, that later he will successfully engineer the golden-calf debacle (chap. 32)!" (Hamilton, *Exodus*, 76).

That Aaron is *already* coming indicates that the Lord is all-knowing and in control.

“be glad in his heart” - This “gladness” is most likely the joy of hearing of God’s upcoming deliverance of His people from Egypt.

v. 17 - Similar to a parent instructing their child to pick up their toys prior to going upstairs to bed, The Lord commands Moses to take the staff. This piece of wood will serve as a constant reminder of God’s presence and ability to work through people for His glory. This rod symbolizes the fact that “salvation comes from the LORD” (Jonah 2:9).

II. Intersect

A. The Lord knows the future; He ordained it! Everything happens according to His plan. Consequently, nothing happens that is outside of His plan.

Isaiah 46:8-10 -

B. Our imperfections can become the means through which God’s purpose will be advanced.

John 9:1-3 -

C. As believers, we need to avoid excuses and simply trust God as He guides and provides.

Jeremiah 33:3 -

“Consider the mighty ways in which God used a dead stick of wood. ‘God so used a stick of wood’ can be a banner cry for each of us. Though we are limited and weak in talent, physical energy, and psychological strength, we are not less than a stick of wood. But as the rod of Moses had to become the rod of God, so that which is me, must become the me of God. Then I can become useful in God’s hands. The Scripture emphasizes that much can come from little if the little is truly consecrated to God.”

~ Francis Schaeffer