

Ministry of Grace

Exodus 4- Speaker Notes

We will now continue to look at Moses's interaction with YHVH at the burning bush. In the previous chapter we learned that when GOD asked Moses to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt, Moses complained that he was a nobody and certainly not a leader. His second complaint was that he didn't even know the proper name to use when telling the Israelites who it was that told him to take on this responsibility. If you recall, God's answer to Moses was, "I am who I am." In other words, God proclaimed that He is the self-existent one. He informed Moses that he is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Calling Himself the self-existent one is a significant statement given the fact that the Israelites have been living among the Egyptians for several generations. The Egyptians were polytheistic, believing in many Gods. They even believed that the Pharaoh was a god. We learned last time that the Hebrew word for this kind of a god is *el*, meaning "a possessor of power." The Egyptians believed there was a sun god, a moon god, a river god, an amphibian god, an insect god, a rain god, a fire god, and many others. Since none of these were all-powerful, having power in only one realm, it was easy for them to also think of the Pharaoh as a god of Egypt. We will learn as we go through the negotiations between Moses and Pharaoh that it was more than just a battle to release the Israelites. It was a battle to prove to Pharaoh, and the world, that there really is one all-powerful self-existing God who rules over all gods and all peoples.

Now we pick-up on the discussion between Moses and God as Moses expresses several other reasons why God has made a bad choice in selecting him to do this job.

Exodus 4:1-5

Then Moses answered, "But behold, they will not believe me or listen to my voice, for they will say, 'The LORD did not appear to you.'" The LORD said to him, "What is that in your hand?" He said, "A staff." And he said, "Throw it on the ground." So he threw it on the ground, and it became a serpent, and Moses ran from it. But the LORD said to Moses, "Put out your hand and catch it by the tail"—so he put out his hand and caught it, and it became a staff in his hand— "that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you."

Objection #3 – What if they won't believe me? – Moses's third objection is that he is not believable and the children of Israel will not accept Him as God's chosen leader. He claims this in spite of the fact that God has already told Moses that the Israelites would listen to him.

Then they will listen to your voice ... ([Genesis 3:18](#)).

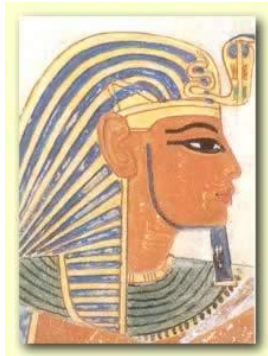
Why would Moses think this not believable? When you look at the evidence, it's fairly obvious. Since the time of Jacob (a period of some 200 years) we have no record of God manifesting Himself to any man directly. And, the last time Moses tried to assert his authority over the Israelites he was rejected.

When he went out the next day, behold, two Hebrews were struggling together. And he said to the man in the wrong, "Why do you strike your companion?" He answered, "Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" Then Moses was afraid, and thought, "Surely the thing is known." ([Exodus 2:13-14](#))

Miracle #1 – (Rod turned to serpent) – God's response to Moses was to give him several miracles to perform in front of the Israelites. The first of these miracles was to cast his staff (shepherd's crook) to

the ground whereupon God caused it to be transformed into a snake. This was not merely an illusion of a snake, for Moses fled from it. The second half of this “sign” miracle was that Moses was to reach out and grab the snake by the tail, whereupon it was transformed into his rod again. Notice that there was no incantation or any “magic” words spoken to cause the miracle, just a simple act of faith. Moses was also told by God to use this sign miracle in front of Pharaoh (**Exodus 4:21**), which he did (**Exodus 7:10-12**)

Symbol #1 – (The serpent) – Not only is this a symbol of Satan, who as a serpent deceived Eve in the Garden of Eden, but in Egypt the cobra (called Uraeus) was a symbol of sovereignty, royalty, deity and divine authority. One of the Egyptian crowns worn by their pharaohs had a cobra on it.



Moses’ showing of his power over the serpent was a supreme demonstration of his ultimate power and authority over anyone in Egypt at that time. Also, the crook was an Egyptian symbol of rule and authority as well. By performing this miracle with his shepherd’s crook, Moses demonstrated that he had been given authority over all men.

Exodus 4:6-8

Again, the LORD said to him, “Put your hand inside your cloak.” And he put his hand inside his cloak, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous like snow. Then God said, “Put your hand back inside your cloak.” So he put his hand back inside his cloak, and when he took it out, behold, it was restored like the rest of his flesh. “If they will not believe you,” God said, “or listen to the first sign, they may believe the latter sign.

Miracle #2 – (Leprous hand) – Without waiting to see if the children of Israel believed or not, Moses was to put his hand inside his outer coat and remove it again. When he did so, his hand was covered with the deadliest and most feared disease of the time, leprosy. This was a sure sign of death to anyone who contracted it. Moses was instructed to then put his hand inside his coat again and draw it out. When he did so it was completely healed.

Symbol #2 – (Leprosy) – A symbol of sin and death. A Leper was considered as one who is already dead (**Numbers 12:12**). The identifying characteristic of leprosy was the whiteness and scaly appearance of the skin with white hairs.

and the priest shall examine the diseased area on the skin of his body. And if the hair in the diseased area has turned white and the disease appears to be deeper than the skin of his body, it is a case of leprous disease. When the priest has examined him, he shall pronounce him unclean. (**Leviticus 13:3**)

By performing this miracle, Moses was demonstrating that he had been given authority over diseases of the body.

Exodus 4:9

If they will not believe even these two signs or listen to your voice, you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground, and the water that you shall take from the Nile will become blood on the dry ground.”

Miracle #3 – (**Nile River water turned to blood**) – This miracle is one that Moses will later have to perform by faith, since he could not do it in the presence of God at the burning bush on Mt Sinai, as he has with the first two. Notice that God has now given Moses three sign miracles that serve as testimony that God has sent him. It will later be commanded as part of the Law that a cause against a man is to be testified by two or three witnesses, which even Jesus Himself referred to during His ministry:

A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed. Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established. (**Deuteronomy 19:15**)

If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. (**Matthew 18:15-16**)

Moses was given the testimony of three sign miracles as clear evidence that God had sent him to bring the Israelites out of Egypt.

Symbol #3 – (**The Nile River**) – The Nile was considered the source of all life in Egypt and was identified with their god Osiris. Moses’ turning this water into blood indicated that he had power over the Egyptian gods and that he could turn their life-giving force into death.

Exodus 4:10-12

But Moses said to the LORD, “Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent, either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and of tongue.” Then the LORD said to him, “Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak.”

“eloquent” – Literally, “a man of words.”

“slow of speech and slow of tongue” – Literally, “heavy in mouth and heavy in tongue.”

Objection #4 – Resistance to God’s call – (**I’m not a gifted communicator**) – Whereas the first three objections could possibly be seen as modesty and uncertainty on Moses’ part, this is nothing short of resistance to his calling. We know from Stephen’s description of Moses that he was, in fact, mighty in words:

And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in his words and deeds. (**Acts 7:22**)

Moses was, in effect, saying, “I have never been a gifted speaker and I still am not.” Perhaps, Moses’s objection was that he had not spoken Egyptian or Hebrew in forty years and was no longer fluent in either language. However, it is more likely that Moses wanted God to make him eloquent, believing that he needed this gift to perform his calling. God responded to Moses in a manner that emphasized that He was the one in control, not Moses. God is the one who decides what gifts we need and it is God who uses the gifts that He has given us to bring glory to Himself. God’s message to Moses was, in effect, “Don’t worry about your speaking ability, I will take care of it all. Just trust me!”

Exodus 4:13-17

But he said, “Oh, my Lord, please send someone else.” Then the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses and he said, “Is there not Aaron, your brother, the Levite? I know that he can speak well. Behold, he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart. You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth, and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth and will teach you both what to do. He shall speak for you to the people, and he shall be your mouth, and you shall be as God to him. And take in your hand this staff, with which you shall do the signs.”

“Lord” – Hebrew *adonai*, meaning “master.” Moses does not here refer to Him as YHVH (God’s personal name, a description of who God is), or as Elohim (Powerful one, a description of what God is). Instead, Moses simply calls Him “master.”

Objection #5 – Refusal to submit to God’s call – (Send someone else, not me) – Moses now moves from “resistance” to “refusal.” This is a rare but dramatic example of one of God’s chosen vessels rejecting God’s call on his life. It is reminiscent of Jonah’s refusal to go to Nineveh and, instead, heading for Tarshish (in the opposite direction). Throughout the centuries, some have said that Moses was suggesting to God that He send the Messiah at this point, though there is little, if any, evidence to support this. Moses was simply asking God to choose someone else.

“the anger of the LORD” – God is merciful and longsuffering, but he became angry with Moses’ refusal to believe what he had been told. This is an insightful glimpse of our God who will one day pour out His wrath on those who refuse to believe the truth about Him.

“Aaron the Levite” – Both Moses and Aaron were Levites, being brothers. The implication in this verse is that Aaron would become the high priest of Israel, a post originally intended for Moses perhaps, had he been obedient.

“he is also coming out to meet you” – We will find out later (**Exodus 4:27**) that God specifically instructed Aaron to go meet Moses in the wilderness. Jewish tradition has it that Aaron is the one who originally counseled Moses to flee Egypt in the first place, but knowing that he is to be the one to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, he comes now to bring him back. Whether that is true or not, it appears that Aaron is acting from a deep sense of God’s calling on his own life as well as on the life of his brother.

“he himself shall be as a mouth for you, and you shall be to him as God” – This is not saying that Moses was going to be worshipped as a god. It means that Aaron will act as Moses’ mouthpiece, speaking what Moses tells him to speak, and Moses will be the representative of God to Aaron and all the Israelites

“And you shall take this rod in your hand, with which you shall do the signs.” – Though Moses was concerned with his speaking ability, God knew that it was not with his words that he would convince Pharaoh to let the Israelites go, but by the miracles. Moses still had to learn that God was the one who was going to bring the children of Israel out of Egypt, not Moses. When we serve God, we need to always recognize that it is God’s work and God’s working that accomplishes God’s will. We are but His servants who represent Him in His great work!

Exodus 4:18

Moses went back to Jethro his father-in-law and said to him, “Please let me go back to my brothers in Egypt to see whether they are still alive.” And Jethro said to Moses, “Go in peace.”

“father-in-law” – as we learned in the previous chapter, the word translated father-in-law can also be translated as brother-in-law. It was Jethro, his brother-in-law for whom Moses was now working, so it was from him that Moses needed release so that he could carry on the work of God.

Exodus 4:19-20

And the LORD said to Moses in Midian, “Go back to Egypt, for all the men who were seeking your life are dead.” So Moses took his wife and his sons and had them ride on a donkey, and went back to the land of Egypt. And Moses took the staff of God in his hand.

“Now the LORD said to Moses in Midian” – It was not until after having been granted permission to leave from Jethro that Moses received this command to return. He had not been sent by God thus far, but was told that he would be sent:

Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.”
(Exodus 3:10)

The reason for his return to Egypt at this point is that the Pharaoh who sought to kill Moses was now dead and a new Pharaoh was in power.

“the rod of God” – Though this is the shepherd’s crook that Moses has hitherto used in his work with the sheep, it is here referred to as “the rod of God” because it is with this instrument that Moses will work many of the miracles. From man’s viewpoint, especially the Egyptians, this was the primary tool of a lowly, despicable shepherd. In the hands of a man of faith called by God, even common things become God’s instruments. It is not how we see things that makes them valuable to God, but how He sees them:

But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, (1 Corinthians 1:27-28)

Exodus 4:21-23

And the LORD said to Moses, “When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles that I have put in your power. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go. Then you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the LORD, Israel is my firstborn son, and I say to you, “Let my son go that he may serve me.” If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son.’”

“When you go back to Egypt” – God now gives Moses instructions in how things will occur in the future.

“do all those wonders before Pharaoh which I have put in your hand” – This is not a reference to the three miracles he was to perform in front of the elders of the Israelites, but the wonders that will later be known as the plagues.

“harden” – The Hebrew word is *chizuk*, meaning “to fasten upon” or “to strengthen.” It is the same word used by Joshua:

Only be thou strong ... (Joshua 1:7)

There has been much debate over the centuries whether God caused Pharaoh to sin by hardening his heart. This particular Hebrew word, however, does not mean to make more obstinate. It should probably be translated, “strengthened.” There are times in the various dialogues between Moses and Pharaoh in which God “strengthened” Pharaoh’s heart and there are other times when God “hardened” his heart. The difference can be seen in the Hebrew. The Hebrew words *chizuk halev* (strengthen his heart) and *kibbud halev* (harden his heart) will be key in understanding God’s interaction with Pharaoh. A careful examination of the differences will be forthcoming as we go through the book of Exodus.

“My son, My firstborn” – Though the expression here technically refers to the son who was born first, it is an expression referring to the one who is first in the heart of the father just as Isaac was referred to as

Abraham's first-born even though he was born after Ishmael. In the New Testament the expression "only begotten" is used in this sense:

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, ([Hebrews 11:17](#))

Exodus 4:24-26

At a lodging place on the way the LORD met him and sought to put him to death. Then Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin and touched Moses' feet with it and said, "Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me!" So he let him alone. It was then that she said, "A bridegroom of blood," because of the circumcision.

This is a very obscure passage with little detail. It is clear, however, that one of Moses' sons had not been circumcised. Some speculate that it had not been done because Zipporah was repulsed by the bloody ritual but that Moses, as the father, was the one held guilty by God. And, though it does not say so, many believe that Moses was taken ill and at the point of death when his wife realized their lack of obedience and immediately performed the circumcision. Her exclamation that Moses was a "husband of blood" is most likely a reference to the bloody circumcision.

This is the last mention of Zipporah until Exodus chapter 18 where Jethro brings her and Moses' two sons to him at Mt. Sinai after the children of Israel had been led out of Egypt. It appears that there was disagreement between Moses and Zipporah because in chapter 18 it indicates that Moses had "sent her back" to Jethro:

Jethro, the priest of Midian, Moses' father-in-law, heard of all that God had done for Moses and for Israel his people, how the LORD had brought Israel out of Egypt. Now Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, had taken Zipporah, Moses' wife, after he had sent her home, along with her two sons. The name of the one was Gershom (for he said, "I have been a sojourner in a foreign land"), and the name of the other, Eliezer (for he said, "The God of my father was my help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh"). Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, came with his sons and his wife to Moses in the wilderness where he was encamped at the mountain of God. ([Exodus 18:1-5](#))

Exodus 4:27,28

The LORD said to Aaron, "Go into the wilderness to meet Moses." So he went and met him at the mountain of God and kissed him. And Moses told Aaron all the words of the LORD with which he had sent him to speak, and all the signs that he had commanded him to do.

If we are to read this chapter chronologically, in verse fourteen we were told, "he is also coming out to meet you," which would indicate that Aaron began his journey to meet Moses while Moses was still in the presence of the burning bush. Moses then returned to Jethro to secure his leave and was on his way back to Egypt when he met up with Aaron at Mt. Sinai (the mountain of God). It was here that Moses related to Aaron all that had transpired on this very mountain.

Exodus 4:29-31

Then Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the people of Israel. Aaron spoke all the words that the LORD had spoken to Moses and did the signs in the sight of the people. And the people believed; and when they heard that the LORD had visited the people of Israel and that he had seen their affliction, they bowed their heads and worshiped.

As instructed by God, Moses and Aaron gathered the elders of Israel together. Aaron, as the spokesman, delivered the message. It is likely that Aaron was at this point more fluent in the Hebrew tongue than

Moses because Moses has been living among the Midianites who, though their language may have been similar, spoke differently than the sons of Jacob.

All three of the miracles that Moses had been instructed to do were done in the presence of the leaders of Israel and, just as God had promised, they believed. Upon believing in God's message, they all bowed their heads.

“worshiped” – This is the Hebrew word *shawkhaw*, meaning “to prostrate oneself in submission and reverence.” The immediate reaction of the Israelites upon believing God's word was to humble themselves before God.

So What?

Notice how willing Moses was to listen to all that God had to tell him. Moses expressed no sense of doubt regarding the truths that were being told to him. And yet, when God called him to action, he developed excuse after excuse as to why God's plan would not work. Moses was too focused on himself. “But,” you may say, “He was a lowly shepherd. He was no longer a member of Egypt's elite. How could he be focused on himself too much?” We can tell by Moses's responses to God that he didn't think himself to be someone great. Instead, he thought of himself as being a nobody, even in God's eyes.

When God had demonstrated that the excuses could and would be overcome, he claimed his own weakness as a reason why God's plan would not work. Moses's focus remained on himself instead of on the God who created man. He saw his own weaknesses and assumed that God was either not willing or not able to overcome these weaknesses. If Moses had been focused on God, he wouldn't even consider his own weaknesses – or his own strengths, for that matter.

Now, lest we become too judgmental with regard to Moses, we have to ask ourselves if we are not guilty of the same exact thing. We say we believe God and His Word. We listen to all we are taught and accept it as truth. And yet ... how many times have we used the excuse of our own weakness, or our own inabilities, as a reason for not doing what God asks (or calls) us to do? Instead, we do what we want to do.

When Moses insisted that God had made the wrong choice and that he should send someone else it clearly made God angry. Compare Moses' attitude with Abraham's when he pleaded with God for the people of Sodom after being told that God was going to destroy the city and all who lived there:

Then Abraham drew near and said, “Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city. Will you then sweep away the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it? Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?” And the LORD said, “If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake.” Abraham answered and said, “Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes. Suppose five of the fifty righteous are lacking. Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five?” And he said, “I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there.” Again he spoke to him and said, “Suppose forty are found there.” He answered, “For the sake of forty I will not do it.” Then he said, “Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak. Suppose thirty are found there.” He answered, “I will not do it, if I find thirty there.” He said, “Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord. Suppose twenty are found there.” He answered, “For the sake of twenty I will not destroy it.” Then he said, “Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak again but this once. Suppose ten are found there.” He answered, “For the sake of ten I will not destroy it.” And the LORD went his way, when he had finished speaking to Abraham, and Abraham returned to his place. (**Genesis 18:23-33**)

The difference between the conversations of Moses and Abraham with God is one of attitude. Abraham pleaded, even argued, with an attitude of humility, recognizing who he was talking with. Abraham knew his God. He knew that God is righteous and cares about the little guy. Moses simply rejected God's plan because of a self-centered attitude, not fully recognizing who it was that he was talking with.

How is your attitude when you talk to God? Where is your faith when He calls you to action?