

Exodus I – Notes

V. *The Reluctant Hero*

02-Jul-06 Exodus 3:16-4:17

Theme: Moses' reluctance in accepting the call of God points us to Jesus Christ, who was perfectly obedient to God's will; it also reminds us to submit to God's calling in our lives.

Key Verses: Exodus 3:18-20 ¹⁸Then they will heed your voice; and you shall come, you and the elders of Israel, to the king of Egypt; and you shall say to him, 'The LORD God of the Hebrews has met with us; and now, please, let us go three days journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God.' ¹⁹But I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not even by a mighty hand. ²⁰So I will stretch out My hand and strike Egypt with all My wonders which I will do in its midst; and after that he will let you go.

Review

Last week we started our two-week study of Moses at the burning bush. Forty years had passed since Moses had fled Egypt. He had learned humility in the desert, taking care of his father-in-law's sheep. The Israelites had learned to cry out to God in prayer because of their affliction in Egypt. God heard their prayers, saw their plight, knew their suffering, and remembered His covenant with the patriarchs. God then acts to call Moses through the miraculous appearance of a burning bush that is not consumed. God's plan is simple. He will deliver Israel out of Egypt and bring them into the Promised Land. And He wants to send Moses to accomplish this deliverance.

Perhaps gun shy from his last attempt at being the deliverer, Moses offered up the first two of a total of five objections to God's plan. At first he asks, "Who am I?", hiding his self-doubt and reluctance to obey God behind an appearance of humility. Although God knows Moses is not up to the task in his own strength, He encourages him by stating that God will be Moses. It is the strength of God, not the strength of Moses that matters. All Moses has to do is take God at His word. Moses' second objection is a matter of credentials. The Israelites didn't follow him the first time; why would they do so a second time? So Moses asks, "Who is God?" Who is the one who is sending him on this task? In response, God gives the answer: I AM WHO I AM. He is the great I AM, the eternal, self-existent, and unchangeable one. He is the LORD – YHWH or Yahweh – the covenant God who keeps His promises and redeems His people. Ultimately, He is Jesus Christ, the savior of sinners – the fullest revelation of the great I AM.

Introduction

In the 16th century, the image of the burning bush was used to describe the Reformation movement that was then newly under way. The motto associated with the burning bush was *post tenebras lux*. The symbol of the burning bush and this Latin phrase meaning "after darkness, light" were used by the Reformers to illustrate the light of the doctrines of grace being once again revealed to the Church, which at that time was teaching a doctrine of works.

The phrase—"after darkness, light"—is also an apt description of what happens to the exodus generation. The children of Israel have been enslaved in the darkness of Egypt. Their suffering and affliction have risen up to God, who has heard their cries. He is about to bring them "out of darkness and into His marvelous light" (*cp.* 1 Pe. 2:9). And it is at the burning bush that God

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reveals the plan of salvation. God’s grace and power are on display in the light of that self-sustaining flame.

Today’s lesson comes in two parts. First, the second half of Exodus chapter 3 is a “preview of coming attractions.” God lays out the entire plan of salvation for Israel. The next ten chapters of Exodus are nothing more than the unfolding of events that God reveals in chapter 3. This is a testimony of the knowledge and power of our God. Not only does He know the future, but He also has the power to predetermine it and cause it to come to pass. We will then conclude our study of the burning bush passage by looking at the first half of chapter 4. I call this section the “litany of ongoing objections,” because Moses picks up where he left off, doubting God’s call and challenging Him with increasingly irrelevant and irreverent excuses. Truly Moses is a “reluctant hero.”

A. Preview of Coming Attractions (3:16-22)

We pick up today’s lesson in mid-conversation. Remember, Moses had already asked God two questions. The first question was “Who am I?” Although it displayed a sense of humility and an appreciation of his own unworthiness, it also called into question God’s ability to use him for God’s glory. The second question was “Who are You?” Moses asked this question in the context of his credentials. He was worried that the children of Israel would reject him and his message. In response to Moses’ second question, God reveals His covenant name – YHWH. Moses is to tell the children of Israel that *YHWH Elohim*, the LORD God of their fathers, has sent Moses to them (3:15).

But God is not yet done answering the second question. The revelation of the covenant name describes *who* God is. Now God goes on in verses 16-22 to describe *what* He does. And in this description of His power, we are given a summary of the rest of this quarter’s study in the book of Exodus.

1. The Command of God (3:16-17)

God *commands* Moses to gather the elders of Israel together and pass along a message. This is the first reference to the “elders of Israel” in Scripture. It seems that by this time the tribes of Israel had already begun organizing themselves politically, with leaders who represented the people. Since it would have been impossible for Moses to speak to a gathered assembly of all Israelites in Egypt, he is to pass the word of God to their leaders, the elders of Israel.

The message that God gives Moses to pass to the elders of Israel is not new; it is a summary of what has happened up to this point. God once again refers to Himself as *YHWH Elohim*: “The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob” (3:16a). Furthermore, God tells the elders and reminds us that He hears and answers prayer. God *hears* prayer: “I have surely visited you and seen what is done to you in Egypt” (3:16b; *cp.* 2:24-25; 3:7, 9); and God *answers* prayer: “I have said I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, to a land flowing with milk and honey” (3:17; *cp.* 3:8).

2. The Demand of God (3:18)

When we come to verse 18, we begin to get new material – this is no long a review of the past, but a preview of the future. God reassures Moses that the elders of Israel will believe him. This

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is an important point, and we will come to it again when we pick up Moses' next complaint in chapter 4.

God tells Moses that he is to bring the elders of Israel along with him as he makes God's *demand* to Pharaoh: "The LORD God of the Hebrews has met with us; and now, please, let us go three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God" (3:18). Although Moses is told to make his request by saying "please," make no mistake about it; this is a real demand. The stakes are high – the future destinies of Israel (and Egypt) are in the balance.

There are several interesting features about this demand of God. First, the name of God, *YHWH Elohim*, is modified by the phrase "of the Hebrews." Although the elders of Israel should know who the LORD God is, there is no reason for Pharaoh to know or recognize this name. Thus, the explanatory note is given to inform Pharaoh the name of Israel's God. Second, the phrase "met with us" implies a sudden and unexpected encounter. The reason for this seemingly abrupt meeting with Pharaoh is because of the urgency of message recently revealed by God.

Commentators have a field day with the request for "a three-day journey into the wilderness." Some say that there was no real indication that Israel ever planned to go only three days away and then come back. All along, God intended to gather His people at Mt. Sinai (see 3:12), and so a three-day journey is sometimes seen as a ruse, or as a less than completely honest request. God wanted more than "a weekend retreat" for Israel, so why is the first request to Pharaoh for only three days?

The real issue at stake here is sovereignty – who is in control? Are the Israelites slaves of Pharaoh, or do they serve YHWH Elohim? Pharaoh considered himself divine. A request by his slaves to worship another "god" was an affront to himself and the gods of Egypt. "If Pharaoh allowed them to go out and worship God, he would basically be saying they were God's slaves instead of his" (Jordan). I believe that God starts out with a relatively easy request (three days of religious freedom) rather than a more difficult one (complete religious and political freedom) to alert us to the fundamental issue. Ultimately, this is a spiritual battle – how can God's people be redeemed when they are in bondage and darkness? Ryken puts it this way:

The real question was not how long the Israelites would be gone, but whether or not Pharaoh was willing to let them glorify God at all. Ultimately God intended to lead His people out of Egypt altogether; but by beginning with a more modest request, He was able to expose Pharaoh's deep hostility to His glory. Even if it would have been unreasonable to expect the king of Egypt to let his entire labor force leave the country, it was hardly unreasonable to ask for a few days of religious freedom. Yet Pharaoh was unwilling to give God even three days of glory. He wanted to keep all the glory to himself, and he knew that if he granted even this one simple request, it would show that the glory did not really belong to him at all. This is the choice every human being has to make: Will we live for God's glory or our own?

I also believe that the "three days" is highly significant. In Scripture, a three-day journey is often symbolic of a transition from death to life. Consider the three-day journey of Abraham and Isaac to Mt. Moriah, a journey that began with the anticipated death of Isaac, but ended with his life being spared through substitutionary atonement (Gen. 22:1-14, esp. v. 4). Joseph imprisons his brothers for three days to test them; obedience to the will of Joseph meant life for the brothers (Gen. 42:17-18). Rahab saves the spies from the officials of Jericho; they hid for three days before returning to Israel (Jos. 2:16-22). After David's sin of the census, God visits Israel with a three-day plague before it stops on the threshing-floor of Araunah, where the Temple would later

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be built (2 Sam. 24:12-25). Jonah has a “near-death” experience when he spends three days and nights in the belly of the great fish before being “resurrected” on the dry land (Jon. 1:17). Esther fasts three days and nights before approaching the king, not certain if she would live or die (Est. 4:15-16). Of course, the ultimate three-day journey was fulfilled by Jesus Christ in His death and resurrection on the third day (Mk. 8:31; Jn. 2:19-22).

The three-day journey of Israel into the wilderness is likewise a journey from death unto life. Notice that there is a purpose for the weekend retreat. It is not just time off for good behavior; it is for the purpose of *worship*: “that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God.” Here is the reason for our salvation, for our transition from death to life, for our own personal “three-day journey” – that we may serve the LORD (*cp.* Ps. 2:11; 100:2).

3. *The Wonders of God (3:19-20)*

God anticipates Pharaoh’s response to His demand: “But I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not even by a mighty hand” (3:19). In ancient Egypt, Pharaoh is often described as the one who possesses a strong hand and a mighty arm. Ironically, it is the “strong hand and mighty arm” of God which will overwhelm and destroy Egypt (Ex. 6:1; 7:4; 15:16). God will accomplish this by stretching out His own hand and striking Egypt with wonders (Ex. 3:20).

In verse 20, the stretching out of God’s hand is linguistically related to Pharaoh’s predicted release of Israel. In essence, God “sends out” His hand in order that Pharaoh “sends out” Israel. There is a cause and effect here. It is clear that in the coming conflict between the LORD God and the god Pharaoh, that our God has the upper hand (pun intended).

How will God strike Egypt and gain the upper hand? It is through the *wonders* of God. We often think of “wonders” in the Bible as miracles, as God stepping in to transcend, suspend, or reverse the natural order of things (Cole). Thus we see the plagues and the Red Sea crossing as supernatural manifestations of the power of God. However, a better, more Biblical view is to understand that all of Creation, all of the so-called “natural order” is upheld and controlled by God on a moment-by-moment basis. “In Him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). Thus, the “law of gravity” is the normal way that God controls our physical environment. But should God choose to suspend that law or reverse it, it would be totally within His right as the Creator and Sustainer of all things. It is God’s common grace to all of humanity that He usually chooses to act according to the so-called “natural laws” of science. But sometimes He chooses to act in a different way – and we will see that in the outpouring of His “wonders” upon Egypt.

4. *The Favor of God (3:21-22)*

God not only works “supernatural” actions upon the physical creation, but He also intervenes supernaturally into the hearts and affairs of men. The final element in this “preview of coming attractions” is the way in which God’s *favor* rests upon the children of Israel:

²¹And I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and it shall be, when you go, that you shall not go empty-handed. ²²But every woman shall ask of her neighbor, namely, of her who dwells near her house, articles of silver, articles of gold, and clothing; and you shall put them on your sons and on your daughters. So you shall plunder the Egyptians (Exodus 3:21-22).

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God had told Abraham hundreds of years earlier that Israel would depart the land of slavery with great possessions (Gen. 15:14). So the idea of Israel leaving Egypt with wealth is not new. The new element here is in where the wealth comes from, and how it is accumulated. The wealth is “plunder” of Egypt, but it is freely given plunder! God supernaturally gives Israel favor in the sight of Egypt, and the Egyptians willingly give them their wealth in order to get them to leave. This is as much as “wonder” as are the ten plagues themselves. In addition, notice who does the plundering – the women of Israel. It’s bad enough when a nation of warriors comes in, defeats you, and strips away your wealth through the right of conquest. How humiliating must it be, however, to realize that you have been plundered by women! (No offense, ladies!).

Some commentators have questioned whether or not it was right for this “plundering” to go on. To some, it sounds suspiciously like “looting” or “stealing.” To these objections, we have three arguments. First, it was commanded by God and ordained through the supernatural favor He gave to the women of Israel in the sight of the people of Egypt. There was no violation of the eighth commandment here!

Secondly, this “plundering” of Egypt anticipates the law, rather than violates it. In Deuteronomy 15:12-18 we have the laws of slavery. In Israel, a slave could only be owned for six years. In the seventh year, the Sabbath year, the slave was to be set free. But even more than that, the slave was not to be sent away “empty-handed”; he was to be given gracious gifts and blessings. What is the basis of this law of giving liberally to the freed slave? The exodus: “You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God redeemed you; therefore I command you this thing today” (Dt. 15:15). In the case of Israel, they had served hard labor for many decades, well over 100 years. However, the pharaohs did not honor the Sabbatical principle of releasing slaves after six years and giving them “lovely parting gifts.” Thus, God has to intervene supernaturally in order to compensate His people for their oppression.

In the third place, consider the end use of the Egyptian wealth. In God’s providence, this act of “plundering” Egypt was used for His own glory. The gold, the silver, the fine linen, and all the wealth of Egypt were ultimately used to build and decorate the tabernacle, the house of God. God ordained the plundering of Egypt for His own glory.

This same principle is applied to our redemption through Jesus Christ. When Jesus redeems us from slavery to sin, He lavishes gifts upon His people for His own glory. Our spiritual gifts are an outpouring of God’s goodness to us and are used to build up His people, the Church:

⁷But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift.

⁸Therefore He says: “When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men” (Ephesians 4:7-8).

This ends God’s preview of coming attractions. Basically, He has anticipated all of the major events we will cover for the rest of this quarter. God’s *command* (3:16-17) to have Moses go to the elders of Israel is obeyed at the end of chapter 4. God’s *demand* (3:18) is delivered to Pharaoh in chapter 5. Pharaoh’s refusal to comply (3:19) is first given in chapter 5 and is an ongoing theme throughout chapters 7-11, which describe the ten plagues – God’s *wonders* (3:20). Finally God’s *favor* (3:21-22) is fulfilled in chapter 12, when the people of God finally leave the land of slavery carrying the wealth of Egypt.

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B. Litany of Ongoing Objections (4:1-17)

As we continue on into chapter 4, Moses once again has the opportunity to pursue his litany of ongoing objections. We have already discussed the first two, and now we have before us the final three objections. Here is a chiasmic overview of all five objections (outline by Motyer):

- A **Objection 1:** I am not the person you need: unfitness (3:12)
- B **Objection 2:** I have not the necessary gift: knowledge (3:13)
- C **Objection 3:** I have not the required effectiveness (4:1)
- B' **Objection 4:** I have not the necessary gift: eloquence (4:10)
- A' **Objection 5:** I am not the person you need: unwillingness (4:13)

1. *Objection 3 – What if They Don't Believe? (4:1-9)*

Moses begins his third objection with a hypothetical. “Okay God, I hear what you are saying. But *suppose* the children of Israel don't believe me; *suppose* they challenge my message. What if they don't believe me? What then?”

I seriously doubt if Moses actually was hearing what God was saying. At the very least, Moses doesn't seem to believe what God has just told him. Just a few verses previously, God had told Moses that the elders of Israel “will heed his voice” (3:18). And now here is Moses “supposing” that they will not do what God has just finished saying they will do! Do you notice the irony? Moses is implying that the elders of Israel will do the very thing that he himself is doing – not trusting in the words of God! Ryken says that Moses' third objection “sounds almost reasonable” until you realize that it was actually “the height of impertinence. By asking what would happen if the elders refused to listen to him, Moses was flatly rejecting God's promise.”

Now, if I had just got through telling somebody something, and they threw it back in my face the way Moses did, I might get a tad upset. I might not respond with reason. I might not respond in a kind and loving manner. God's gracious response to Moses in the light of this objection is all the more amazing because it is so unlike the natural (sinful) response of man. God condescends to answer Moses' objection, not by scolding him for his sinful attitude, but by encouraging him with three signs. Ostensibly, the signs were given by God to strengthen the faith of the elders of Israel, but I think they were given primarily to strengthen Moses' weak faith.

The *first sign* God gives Moses is the sign of the rod being turned into a snake (4:2-5). This sign is later duplicated in front of Pharaoh as the prelude to the ten plagues (7:8-13). Moses does as God commands; he casts down his shepherd's crook, and it changes into a deadly serpent. We can surmise its venomous nature from Moses' response: “Moses fled from it.” Moses was no dummy. He knew that a bite from this serpent would likely be lethal. That's what makes the sequel to the “serpent-ification” of the rod so instructive.

God tells Moses to grab the snake by its tail. When dealing with a poisonous snake, that is not a good handling strategy. You need to grab the snake by its head, to keep its fangs from being free to strike. The same principle is applied when you grab a “bull by the horns.” You want to control the dangerous part of the animal. So when God tells Moses to grab the snake by its tail, He is essentially saying, “You need to trust me to take care of you, to prevent that serpent from striking you.” In other words, the command to grab the snake's tail is a test of faith. And to Moses' credit, he overcomes his fear and obeys God. He grabs the snake by the tail, and it changes back into his shepherd's rod.

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This sign is given so that “they” (the elders of Moses’ hypothetical) would believe that God had sent Moses. Thus, God addresses Moses’ spoken question. But He does more than that. He begins to address Moses’ unspoken questions and doubts. God has promised that He will “stretch out His hand” in wonders to force Pharaoh to let Israel go (3:20). Now God has told Moses to “stretch out his hand” and see the wonder of God’s power working through him. Moses is going to need more encouragement (and a kick in the pants!), but at least it’s a start.

This first sign is full of spiritual significance. The pharaohs of Egypt had a crown adorned with the “uraeus” or raised cobra as a symbol of their power and authority. The sign of the rod turned into a snake (and back into a rod) speaks of God’s sovereignty over the snakelike pharaoh of Egypt. Furthermore, the sign speaks to victory over the Serpent, the enemy of God. The word “serpent” here in Exodus 4 is the same as the serpent of Genesis 3, the tempter in the Garden of Eden. Thus, this sign reminds us that the power of God is greater than the power of the Serpent (Satan). In the coming spiritual battle with Egypt, Satan will be defeated.

The *second sign* was the hand of Moses being converted into a leprous hand and then back again into a clean hand (4:6-8). This sign may anticipate one of the later plagues: the boils of plague number 6 (9:8-12). Leprosy in the Bible is unlikely the same as the modern disease of the same name, but it was a serious skin affliction with no known cure. Leprosy was a clear sign of uncleanness and contamination due to sin. The symbolism seems to be that Israel is leprous and unclean in the land of Egypt. They not only have a slavery problem; they have a sin problem. “God will take an unclean nation and make it clean” (Enns).

The purpose of this second sign is insurance; in case the elders don’t believe the first sign, a second sign is given (4:8). Currid interprets this as a lack of faith by the children of Israel:

God equips Moses with more than one miraculous sign because the people are living by sight, not by faith. The Hebrews are in need of physical confirmation, and God provides it. Living by sight, and not by faith, becomes a central theme of the exodus event from now until it is over.

The *third sign* cannot be performed at the burning bush in the Sinai wilderness, since it requires water of the Nile River (4:9); it can only be performed in Egypt. This sign, which is a backup to the backup sign, will become the first of the ten plagues (7:15-25). We will discuss this sign more when we get to the first plague, but suffice it to say for now that it is an attack upon the culture and religion of Egypt. The Nile was considered the “life blood” of Egypt (pun again intended), so much so that it was worshiped as a god. When the LORD God turns the Nile River into blood, He is attacking the very foundation of Egyptian society.

Thus, Moses’ third objection is answered. If the children of Israel doubt his credentials, he can whip out his snaky staff, his leprous hand, and the bloody river of Egypt. But more importantly, these signs are given by God to challenge Moses’ own faith. Moses was no fool – he knew he could not take on the might and power of Egypt in his own strength. But God has now given Moses just a foretaste of His own power; power that will soon be unleashed upon Pharaoh and the land of Egypt. Moses makes progress in grabbing the serpent’s tail, but as we will see by his next two objections, it was more of a matter of “one step forward, two steps backward.”

2. Objection 4 – I Cannot Speak! (4:10-12)

Now we come to Moses’ fourth objection:

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¹⁰Then Moses said to the LORD, “O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue” (Exodus 4:10).

Notice how Moses addresses God as “Lord.” In Hebrew, this is the word *Adonai*. It is a term of respect, a term a servant would call a master. Thus, Moses is showing respect, but instead of calling Him *YHWH*, he has opted for the “lesser” title of *Adonai*. This “demotion” of title, along with the objection itself, is an ongoing indication that Moses has still not submitted himself fully to God’s authority.

What exactly is the content of Moses’ fourth objection? He says he is “not eloquent” and that he is “slow of speech and slow of tongue.” In Hebrew, this last phrase is literally “heavy of mouth and heavy of tongue.” Obviously, Moses is trying to indicate that he is an unfit mouthpiece for the word of God. But the exact content of his complaint remains hidden. Stephen describes Moses as “powerful in speech” (Acts 7:22), thus contradicting Moses’ claim about eloquence. The subsequent history of Moses also tends to cast doubt on his inability to speak. The main theories for the substance of Moses’ complaint are: 1) he was shy and afraid to speak in public; 2) he lacked confidence after his earlier failure in Egypt; 3) he has a speech impediment, such as a stutter or lisp; or 4) after 40 years in the wilderness he has forgotten the Egyptian language, or at least the finer points of conversation in royal Egyptian. Regardless of the exact nature of Moses’ perceived inability to speak, he certainly had no trouble talking back to God! As Ryken puts it, “What Moses had was not so much a speech problem as an obedience problem.”

Once again, God responds to Moses more kindly than I would have. But there is an edge to God’s response. God is beginning to lose patience with Moses’ complaints.

¹¹So the LORD said to him, “Who has made man’s mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the LORD? ¹²Now therefore, go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say” (Exodus 4:11-12).

God is essentially saying that He is sovereign over creation. He is one who is responsible for giving gifts to men. If God chooses to use a “heavy-mouthed” man to speak for him, so be it. God gave Moses the skills he had and the weaknesses he had. The success of Moses wasn’t dependent on his oratory gifts, it was dependent on God’s power to equip Moses with the right words. “God never evaluated Moses’ speaking ability” (Ryken). Instead, He told him the only thing that mattered, which is that God would be with him.” This is one of the great mysteries of how God works in the world. He chooses to work through weak vessels – humans – to accomplish His sovereign will. The apostle Paul puts it this way: “For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor. 12:10). Why does God do this? So that it is clear that all the glory belongs to Him and not to us.

There is a lesson here for us, summarized by Ryken:

If it is true that God made us exactly the way he wanted, then we cannot complain about our lack of ability without grumbling against God. The thing to do instead is to serve God as well as we can. Even if our gifts are limited — as everyone’s gifts are, in one respect or another — they should be used for God’s glory. Do the same thing with your disabilities, which can also be used to glorify God. God mentions blindness as well as sight in order to show that every human being is called to serve him.

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3. *Objection 5 – Send Someone Else! (4:13-17)*

Finally, in 4:13 we rub off all the veneer of Moses' objections and get to the core, the central reason for his complaining: he doesn't want to go! In some translations, verse 13 may come off as weary resignation: "Okay Lord. You win, I'll go." But the sentiment is more along the lines of: "Here I am, Lord, send someone else!"

It is finally at this point that God gets angry. Please note that this is not sinful anger, like I would have already exhibited a long time ago had I been involved in this conversation. Rather, it is a righteous anger that burns against the sin of Moses. But notice how even in His wrath, God is gracious to Moses. Moses has just said, "I can't speak. I can't do it. Send someone else." While God is not going to let Moses completely off the hook, He still condescends to send Moses help. If Moses can't do it by himself, if Moses can't speak by himself, then God will send him a spokesman. In fact, God has already put this plan into motion – sending Moses' brother Aaron out to meet him.

Notice the qualifications of Aaron. First, he is a Levite. That designation seems odd here, but it becomes important later. Just as Moses' parents are called Levites, Aaron is called a Levite to highlight his future role and importance. The Levites will become the priestly tribe, serving at the sanctuary of God, and Aaron will become the first high priest. Second, he can speak well. This overcomes the more immediate problem of Moses' heavy-mouth syndrome. And third, Aaron will be "glad in heart." I wonder if this is not a rebuke to Moses. Moses has been anything but "glad in heart" by this encounter at the burning bush. He has been reluctant to the point of recalcitrance. Yet contrast that with his brother – Aaron is happy to be of service, even if it is of lesser service than the call of Moses.

Aaron has limitations; this is true. He will later prove to be weak in the matter of the golden calf incident (Ex. 32-34). He is not the leader that Moses is and will become. His role is secondary – he is to be the mouthpiece of Moses. God gives an interesting analogy. Moses is to be the prophet of God, and Aaron is to be the prophet of Moses. This gives us some insight into the prophetic gift. A prophet does not speak his own words, but only the words of the one who is in authority over him.

God gives Moses Aaron. He gives Moses a crutch to help his weakness. Although Moses gained the help of his brother, notice what he gave up through his lack of faith. Moses still had to speak for God (4:15), but now had to share the glory and honor, such as it was, with his brother. Moses also had to put up with his brother's error with the golden calf. Later on, Aaron (and their sister Miriam) would rebel against Moses' authority (Num. 12:1-15). The lesson here is an old one: Be careful for what you ask for – you just may get it!

God effectively ends the interview at the burning bush by commanding Moses to pick up his staff. No more complaints, no more arguing, no more stalling. God had issued the call. It was time now for Moses to obey it.

Conclusion

1. *Theological*

We've touched on several theological matters in this text: the power of God to perform wonders, the sovereignty of God to control the future, the providence of God to predispose the Egyptians to be plundered by the Israelite women, the way God uses flawed human vessels to fulfill His

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will on earth. However, in this conclusion I want to focus just briefly on the grace of God displayed to Moses.

The burning bush is a glorious picture of the grace of God bestowed upon man. God's holiness comes to this place, so much so that the very ground is made holy by the presence of God. God allows a sinful human access to this holy ground and continually showers blessings of grace upon Moses although he most definitely does not deserve it. Of course, we would have fared no better if we had been in Moses' shoes (I mean sandals). Despite the objections of Moses, consider these evidences of grace given to Moses: 1) the *promise* of God's presence (3:12); 2) the *privilege* of God's covenant name (3:14-15); 3) the *providence* of God's plan being worked out in the redemption of Israel (3:16-22); 4) the *practice* of God's power in the three confirmatory signs (4:1-9); 5) the *proclamation* of God's truth through Moses' heavy mouth (4:12); and 6) the *provision* of his brother Aaron to help him along the way (4:14-17). Moses didn't deserve any of these blessings; it was all due to the grace of God.

2. *Christological*

The call of Moses at the burning bush reminds us that however great a man Moses was, he was still a man flawed by sin. His obvious failings should remind us that we need someone greater than Moses. Moses was a great prophet, but God promised to send a greater Prophet than Moses (Dt. 18:18). Jesus Christ fulfills that type (Acts 3:20-23). Moses was a type of savior, but he pointed to the Savior to come. Moses was reluctant to accept the call of God; Christ came to do the Father's will (Heb. 10:7). If Moses was the "reluctant hero," then Jesus Christ is the "obedient hero," the one who always perfectly obeyed the will of God, the greater Moses:

¹Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus, ²who was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was faithful in all His house. ³For this One has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who built the house has more honor than the house. ⁴For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God (Hebrews 3:1-4).

3. *Practical*

Finally, consider the application of the call of Moses to your own lives. You have received two calls from God: the first call to salvation and the second call to service. Let us learn from Moses to accept God's call to kingdom service willingly, not reluctantly. Enns concludes:

The Lord does not simply call us to save us. He also calls us to be active in His kingdom, to be the salt of the earth to bring every thought captive under the universal rule of the risen Christ. We are all called in order to be sent out on a mission. We are ambassadors of King Jesus, and each of us has a task to perform. Of course God does not call each of us to the same task. God's call to kingdom is like that of Moses, is the Lord's doing. How successfully we fulfill the Lord's call in our lives does not depend on our ability to act, but on the sovereign Lord who is with us and acts through us. It is *His* work; we are His instruments.

Close in Prayer.

Next week: Lesson 6 – Three Steps Forward, Two Steps Back – Ex. 4:18-5:21