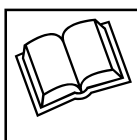


lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it" (Mt. 16:25). The words are clear and unambiguous, and illustrate the choice that lies before us as we exercise our free will.

In all ages it has only been a remnant that has sought to obey the laws of God and to heed the precepts of Jesus. It will be the same when Christ

returns, in the foreseeable future, to an unbelieving and troubled world, to rule the nations, as the prophets so beautifully portray: "Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness" (Isa. 32:1); "in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said, and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call" (Joel 2:32).



Exposition

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The Exodus

A commentary on Exodus 1-15

D. Moses' Commission – Exodus 3-4 (Part 3)

Mark Vincent

The format of the commentary

The narrative has been broken down into several **major sections**, of a chapter or two each; some of these will be covered in one month, others will take longer. An **Introduction** is provided for each of these major sections, which sets out the major events and themes dealt with in those chapters.

Each major section is broken into **subsections** or **episodes** (these are typically between five and twenty verses each). For each the **AV text** is followed by a **Comment**, which draws out the major lessons and items of interest from the text. The AV text also contains **Footnotes**, in which additional 'one-off' points are made for those wanting to work through Exodus more slowly.

Introduction

WE ARE currently halfway through Moses' dialogue with God at the burning bush, which stretches from 3:4 to 4:17. God has outlined to Moses what He wishes him to do, and Moses has raised two matters of concern. The first is about his own worthiness or suitability for the task, the second about how he will identify God to the Israelites when he speaks to them.

They are perfectly legitimate queries, and God responds to each with consideration. But in this month's passage Moses raises three more matters which are more like excuses—reasons why he should not go when God has told him that he should. From a human perspective this is perfectly understandable; few readers can salve their conscience by imagining themselves to be any different. Who would not have approached such a mission with trepidation and anxiety? Nevertheless, given the assurances that God gives him, Moses overplays his reluctance. Upon hearing the fifth objection raised by His servant, God becomes angry—a fact that proves Moses to be in the wrong.

The incident provides a good illustration of the way in which human nature tends to make excuses when it does not want to do something. To see this more clearly it is worth paraphrasing Moses' objections in more contemporary language:

- "What is so special about me that I should go? I am not worthy for so great a task".
- "But the Israelites won't know the name of the God Who is to save them".
- "The Israelites won't listen to me. They will say God hasn't sent me".
- "I'm no good with words. My public speaking skills aren't good enough".

- “Send anyone but me! I don’t mind who it is, but please don’t let it be me”.

It appears that Moses is getting increasingly desperate as the dialogue continues. The first two matters he raises are perfectly reasonable, but in the third and fourth he focuses increasingly on the human aspect of the mission rather than on the fact that God is with him. In the third it sounds as though it is the failure of the mission that Moses is concerned about, but lying behind this is the prospect of losing face and looking foolish before his people. Given his education, one would have to question the legitimacy of the fourth objection, and the fifth is surely a last resort now that all more rational objections have been put forward.

There is both something utterly commendable and something lacking in Moses’ attitude at this juncture. On one level his new-found humility, his ‘Who am I?’ awareness of his own insignificance, is absolutely right. Yet when God calls us and wishes to use us in His service we have both a duty and an authority to get on with the

work. Even if we are reluctant, God is able and willing to encourage us and to equip us for the work, just as He does with Moses. Five times Moses raises an objection, and on four of them God patiently shows Moses how he will be strengthened and prepared for the work.

But in the end God can discuss the matter no longer. Moses is to go, and there can be no more debating the point. God’s tolerance and His willingness to make things easier for us has its limits, and there are things that must be a certain way in our lives, things that God has ordained for us, over which there can be no negotiation. To continue to generate excuses or to prolong the discussion when this stage has been reached is to be stubborn and to provoke God’s anger. Every reader must sympathise with Moses’ dilemma, and recognise in themselves his facility for generating reasons for failing to do what he knows he should. But though we may smile in recognition at the way we make excuses over much less arduous tasks than he, there is a serious lesson to be taken on board.

Signs for Moses

- 4:1 And Moses answered and said, But, behold, they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice: for they will say, The LORD hath not appeared unto thee.
- 4:2 And the LORD said unto him, What is that in thine hand? And he said, A rod.
- 4:3 And He said, Cast it on the ground. And he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent;¹ and Moses fled from before it.
- 4:4 And the LORD said unto Moses, Put forth thine hand, and take it by the tail. And he put forth his hand, and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand:
- 4:5 That they may believe that the LORD God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath appeared unto thee.
- 4:6 And the LORD said furthermore unto him, Put now thine hand into thy bosom. And he put his hand into his bosom: and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous as snow.
- 4:7 And He said, Put thine hand into thy bosom again. And he put his hand into his bosom again; and plucked it out of his bosom, and, behold, it was turned again as his other flesh.
- 4:8 And it shall come to pass, if they will not believe thee, neither hearken to the voice of

the first sign, that they will believe the voice of the latter sign.

- 4:9 And it shall come to pass, if they will not believe also these two signs, neither hearken unto thy voice, that thou shalt take of the water of the river, and pour it upon the dry land: and the water which thou takest out of the river shall become blood upon the dry land.

Comment

God answers Moses’ third objection in a very powerful way. He takes a look, as it were, at Moses standing there in his humble shepherd’s regalia and with his simple staff in his hand—and He asks Moses to look too. What is there that God can use to equip His servant for the task? This is no outfit for a foreign ambassador, surely! What, after all, is Moses to do with a rod? Challenge Pharaoh to a duel?

A human might well scoff along these lines. But God can use a rod. God can take whatever Moses has, and turn it to His service. If Moses obeys God’s command and casts the rod on the ground it will become something it has never been before. It will become a living thing. It will become a witness to the power and outstretched arm of God.

And so it is with us. God works with what we have, and presses it into service, provided we allow Him to do so. God does not ask what we do not possess. He will take what we have, and He will find a way of using it.

For Moses also has a hand. God can use that too; it will be Moses' second sign. Most of us are likewise blessed with hands, and we too may use them to bear witness to His Name.

With these exhortational thoughts in view, it is time to consider the nature of the signs in a more precise way.

- There is something alarming, grotesque even, about the rod-cum-snake and leprous hand. Familiarity, pure and simple, may prevent us from seeing the alarm on Moses' face as his rod begins to writhe on the ground. Evidently he was no snake handler, for he flees before it; he would have to think twice before reaching out to pick up his rod for quite some time after this event! So too with his leprous hand. From this point on he would never look down at his hand in quite the same way again. He would be less inclined to take his body parts for granted, for he has seen with his own eyes that God exercises ultimate power over them. It seems to me that at one level the signs were to shock or even horrify—both Moses, and the Israelites for whom they were intended, and ultimately Pharaoh too. For Pharaoh to toy with God's people as he decides to do is thus to play a dangerous game.
- The miracles illustrate that there are no barriers to God's power; one thing can spontaneously become another, human categories and physical givens can be transcended in an instant. He is supreme; He can make anything of anything He wishes. Any situation or set of givens may be transformed instantly by God into a whole new scenario.
- On another level, the serpent was an important creature in Egyptian myth and symbolism; Moses' first sign shows that this is no barrier to God. For Moses to produce a serpent was in a sense to throw down a gauntlet to the Egyptians.
- Moses also has to learn from the signs. He has to take hold of the serpent, facing his fears and laying them aside, instead trusting and obeying the commandment of the Lord. He has to look down at his leprous hand and accept it for what it is before calmly replacing it into his bosom again in obedience to God. (Note that God had not told him what would

happen to his hand when he brought it out the second time—it might have taken on yet another form for all he knew.) He would need such a spirit on many further occasions before his mission would finally be accomplished, and it was as well for him to start practising right away.

- Perhaps the most interesting element of commonality between the two signs, however, is their illustration of God's control over life and death. God can take an inanimate rod and turn it in a trice into a living animal. But what an animal!—one of the most feared of all creatures, and one which in the Scriptures is symbolic of the power of sin and death. Moses has to reach out his hand to grasp the creature and render it harmless again. The second sign has similar associations of life and death. Moses' healthy hand is instantly rendered leprous. The symbolism of leprosy encapsulates the intrusion of death into life. Leprosy is a living death, and for an instant Moses sees himself as humanity really is before God. But once again God has the remedy. The second time Moses buries his hand into his bosom and removes it, it is restored and healthy. But only through God's command and the process He has decreed. His is the sentence, and His the cure.

Knowing His people to be stubborn, and suspecting that they might be blasé even about two signs as great as these, God gives yet one more (vv. 8,9). This sign is given "if they will not believe . . . neither hearken unto thy voice", showing that God was prepared for unbelief on the part of His people from the very first.

This climactic sign involved Moses taking the water of the river and pouring it out upon the ground, whereupon it would become blood. Once more the associations of life and death are there. Life-giving water, without which existence is impossible (note the importance of the Nile for Egyptian society) is to be poured out upon the ground. It would become blood, which is itself a symbol of life ("the life is in the blood"). But the pouring out of this blood upon the ground speaks more of shed blood, of life poured out in sacrifice, and of death. God has the keys of life and death; only He can give life, and it is He, ultimately, Who can take it away. All three signs thus speak of God's control of life and death, but the final one does so most powerfully of all. Unlike the other two, there were to be no trial runs of this sign; it was to be unique. Moses was

to carry it out only when the time came and the occasion necessitated. It was a most special sign.

A particularly poignant link emerges when we reflect on the New Testament associations of this sign. The Gospel of John is all about belief—just like this passage in Exodus—about those few who did believe and hearken unto God’s prophet, and about the vast majority who did not, just as they did not hearken unto Moses. The Gospel of John also records a climactic sign that involves precisely the same two elements of blood and water: “but one of the soldiers with a

spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water. And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe” (19:34,35).

The one who saw it bare witness; the sign had been effective, and some at last did believe more fervently than they had ever believed before. The wonder and comfort for Gentiles in all this is that it was not only Israelites who believed in the new prophet like unto Moses; it was a Gentile centurion too who said, “Truly this was the Son of God” (Mt. 27:54; Lk. 23:47).

Moses’ final excuses

- 4:10 And Moses said unto the LORD, O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since Thou hast spoken unto Thy servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue.²
- 4:11 And the LORD said unto him, Who hath made man’s mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the LORD?
- 4:12 Now therefore go, and I will be with³ thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say.
- 4:13 And he said, O my Lord, send, I pray Thee, by the hand of him whom Thou wilt send.⁴
- 4:14 And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses, and He said, Is not Aaron the Levite thy brother?⁵ I know that he can speak well. And also, behold, he cometh forth to meet thee: and when he seeth thee, he will be glad in his heart.
- 4:15 And thou shalt speak unto him, and put words in his mouth: and I will be with thy mouth, and with his mouth, and will teach you what ye shall do.
- 4:16 And he shall be thy spokesman unto the people: and he shall be, even he shall be to thee instead of a mouth, and thou shalt be to him instead of God.⁶
- 4:17 And thou shalt take this rod in thine hand, wherewith thou shalt do signs.

Comment

Moses now raises the question of whether his skill-set is suitable for the task to which he has been called. He is not “eloquent”, literally “a man of words”, and as if to prove the point he launches into a sentence which seems to be almost as convoluted in Hebrew as it is in English (v. 10, [see note 2](#); he shows himself to be simi-

larly inarticulate in verse 13, but we shall come to this shortly)! He may be referring to a physical difficulty, perhaps that he has a speech impediment, but it is equally possible that he simply feels that he does not express himself very well and is not a polished speaker.

But God’s answer is unanswerable. God has given to each one the physical and emotional make-up that they possess as is appropriate for their development and deployment in His sight. He bestows skills and blessings, and He withholds—but whichever He does, it is right and appropriate for each individual. What we are physically and emotionally, in all our weaknesses and strengths, is because God made it so.

Furthermore, and this may be more to the point, if God has made man’s mouth, the blind, the deaf and the dumb in the first place, then He is quite capable of choosing the man He wants for His work. We may get it wrong in our response, but He does not get it wrong in the choosing. When God chose Moses for that particular task He knew what He was doing. He did not choose him mistakenly, thinking him to be a better speaker than he really was, He chose him as Moses, with all that it entailed, positive and negative. He did not choose Moses thinking him to be somebody else, He chose him, complete with limitations, because he was the right choice. Too often we can assume that God has put the wrong person in the wrong place at the wrong time, when the exact opposite is probably true.

After all, if God made man’s mouth, then He is not to be limited by the limitations of a man’s mouth. And so He promises to be with Moses’ mouth and to teach him what he will say (here is the famous ‘I will be with you’ promise again

from chapter 3, only this time in a more specific form).

Moses, now at his most desperate, responds: "O my Lord, send, I pray Thee, by the hand of him whom Thou wilt send". This certainly does not mean, "So be it, then; if I am the one who is chosen then I will go", for if it did God would have no reason to be angry in the following verse. Instead, it appears to be a rather fumbling, inarticulate way of saying, "O Lord, send by the hand of somebody-or-other—anyone at all (only please don't let it be me!)" (see note 4). It is a contrast with Isaiah's later attitude, "Here am I; send me" (6:8).

It is at this telling juncture that Aaron is introduced into the narrative for the first time. Even now, despite His anger, God is prepared to make concessions to help His servant, offering to allow Aaron to take a leading, public role as a spokesman for Moses. Little did Moses know the problems to which Aaron's position would lead later in the episode of the Golden Calf and in the murmuring of Aaron and Miriam against him. But no doubt God knew. For Moses' sake God is prepared to involve Aaron as a helper, but He also knows the price that will one day have to be paid. On Moses' account God condescends to involve the 'natural' orator, but presumably He would not have done so had Moses not raised this fifth objection; and the ensuing complications that Aaron introduced might have been avoided. God may well respond graciously to our weaknesses and allow us to plough furrows that are alternative to the ideal, but there may be a cost to this, as there seems to be here.

The respective roles of Moses and Aaron are laid out at some length in verses 14-16. Moses is to put words into Aaron's mouth (compare the way in which God speaks through Jesus), and Aaron is to be Moses' spokesman to the people (perhaps we may draw a parable with the apostles and other preachers of the gospel). Aaron is a kind of intermediary between Moses and the people; in fact there is a chain of mediation as God speaks to Moses, Moses speaks to Aaron, and Aaron speaks finally to Israel at large.

The phraseology of verse 16 is particularly striking: "[Aaron], even he [note the emphasis] shall be to thee instead of a mouth, and thou shalt be to him instead of God". The last part of this reads literally, "as/instead of God", using the usual Hebrew word *elohim*. It illustrates the tremendous responsibility involved whenever we pass on God's Word to others and speak on His

behalf; we become representatives or ambassadors in the fullest sense. But it illustrates more particularly the great honour and responsibility that God was prepared to bequeath on Moses, and would one day bequeath more fully on His Son the Lord Jesus Christ.

Finally, God's instructions to Moses conclude with a reference to that rod which was in his hand. After all the remarkable things that God has said in chapters 3 and 4, it might seem strange that He should choose to finish on this note. But He does. Moses is to take his ordinary rod, the one he had used day by day and never given so much as a thought to, and it is to become an instrument of sign and salvation to the Israelites. How unusual are the ways of God!

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1. **v. 3. [the rod] became a serpent.** Further remarks on this miracle will be made in the commentary upon Exodus 7:12.
 2. **v. 10. I am not eloquent, neither heretofore.** A literal translation of the Hebrew of this passage might be helpful: "O my Lord, I am not a man of words, neither previously [or, yesterday], neither the day before yesterday [or, neither the day before that], neither since You have been speaking to Your servant—for a man of heavy [dull, slow] mouth and heavy tongue am I". Moses may not have been a man of words normally, but he is quite verbose in depicting his lack of verbosity! There is something pathetically touching about his words. Most of us have moments like this!
 3. **vv. 12,15. I will be with thy mouth.** Here is a repetition of God's crucial *ehyeh* promise from chapter 3 that He *is* and *will be* with His servant (vv. 12,14). The repetition of God's remarkable Name revealed in 3:14 is deliberate. God is demonstrating a specific, practical example of the general promise which He made in the earlier chapter. God does not merely help by the issuing of general theological principles; He becomes practically involved in the specifics of the lives of His servants, particularly when they are in need.
 4. **v. 13. send, I pray Thee, by the hand of him whom Thou wilt send.** This phrase is awkward in Hebrew, as it is in English, and this awkwardness may convey the extent of Moses' desperation to find a way to escape the mission. He has been rendered almost inarticulate, as if in confirmation of his previous observations, "I am not eloquent", and, "I am slow of

speech"! The AV gives a pretty close approximation of what the Hebrew literally says, and it does not seem to make a huge amount of sense ("send . . . by the hand You will send"; "of the one whom" is most likely implied, as similarly in the AV). Even though the phrasing is clumsy and inarticulate, the meaning and implication of the phrase seems clear enough, and might be paraphrased idiomatically as follows: "Lord, send the hand of somebody-or-other", implying, "I don't care who but please don't let it be me!"

5. **v. 14. Aaron the Levite.** This is the first mention of Aaron.
6. **v. 16. instead of God.** The Hebrew preposition used here is *l*, so that the phrase reads *l'elohim*. Prepositions never precisely correspond across languages, so it is difficult to put forward one

'absolute' translation. The 'usual' meaning of *l* is 'to' (in the sense of direction, 'towards', or possession, 'belonging to'), or 'for' (or 'with reference to'). The idea seems to be that Moses operates on God's behalf—for God, in respect of Him. In this sense the AV's translation 'instead of' is appropriate. One might also go for 'in the place of', or 'as', or even, more periphrastically, 'representing'. Particularly interesting is the Septuagint's translation of the phrase, *pros ton theon*, which is the exact phrase used to describe the relationship of the Word to God in John 1:1,2, and translated "with God" in the AV. Indeed, this passage in Exodus may lie behind the usage in John 1, the relationship between God and Moses helping to illustrate or define the relationship between God and the Word.

David and Goliath (1)

Geoff Henstock

IN 1 SAMUEL 16 David is anointed as successor to Saul. The same chapter sees Saul plunging into depression, which remains a feature of the record for the rest of his life. The fine warrior who promised so much becomes a pathetic shadow of a king.

Chapter 17 opens with what might be a consequence of Saul's emotional incapacity: the Philistines invade Israel. Perhaps Saul's tragic and obsessive condition robbed the nation of the leadership needed to keep the Philistines at bay.

The scene of the battle

In verses 1 and 2 considerable geographical detail is provided, enabling us to pinpoint the site of the drama. The Philistines camped at Shochoh, on one side of the valley of Elah, whilst the Israelites were almost opposite them on the other side of the valley, which at this point is about sixteen miles southwest of Jerusalem. The Philistines commanded the way to the west, whilst the Israelites commanded the eastern approach, two armies arraigned against each other at the border between their nations.

That this point marked the border may be inferred from the name given to the spot, Ephes-dammim, meaning 'boundary of blood'. Verses 1 and 2 present a picture of two armies facing one another in stalemate. Both occupied

strong defensive positions, and for the present neither side was willing to risk an attack on the other.¹

The name 'Elah' signifies a large tree, possibly a type of oak. Its use to name the valley might indicate that the area was once heavily forested. The word for 'valley' in verse 2 is *emek*, meaning a broad depression between higher ground on either side.

That is significant, because in verse 3 a different word is translated as valley, *gai*, which signifies a narrow gorge having lofty sides. It would appear that at the bottom of the valley there was a small ravine-like stream bed. Colonel Conder describes the scene:

"In the middle of the broad open valley we found a deep trench with vertical sides, impassable except at certain places—a valley in a valley, and a natural barrier between the two hosts . . . Here then we may picture to ourselves the two hosts, covering the low rocky hills opposite to each other, and half hidden among the lentisk bushes; between them was the rich expanse of ripening barley

1. G. A. Smith describes the site in *The Historical Geography of the Holy Land*, pp. 161-2, Harper Torchbooks, New York, 1966.