

Exodus Chapter Four

Read **Exodus 4:1-13 – Signs Given Moses**

v.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.”

With the number of false teachers, charlatans and outright thieves that we have in this world today touting some form of religion or another it easy for us to understand that someone who just shows up out of the Sinai Wilderness claiming to be sent by God might not be believed or accepted. Apparently in Moses’ day that possibility also existed as well.

His experience bore that out didn’t it?

Exodus 2:14 “AND HE SAID, WHO MADE THEE A PRINCE AND A JUDGE OVER US? INTENDEST THOU TO KILL ME, AS THOU KILLEDST THE EGYPTIAN? AND MOSES FEARED, AND SAID, SURELY THIS THING IS KNOWN.”

v.2 “AND THE **LORD** SAID UNTO HIM, WHAT *is* THAT IN THINE HAND? AND HE SAID, A ROD.”

As we learned in another study some time back. The shepherd usually carried two tools of his trade. One was the rod. It’s purpose was to be used as a weapon against predators such as wolves or in the case of David, a bear and a lion. The second tool was the staff, the shepherd’s tool that had the hook on it. It was used to guide the sheep or catch a wayward sheep and return it to the flock.

v.3 “AND HE SAID, CAST IT ON THE GROUND. AND HE CAST IT ON THE GROUND, AND IT BECAME A SERPENT; AND MOSES FLED FROM BEFORE IT.”

When God directs Moses to cast his rod upon the ground it turns into a serpent. We’re not told what kind of serpent. The Hebrew word that is translated is a general term corresponding to the English word snake without indicating type. We’re not told whether it was poison or not, or whether it was aggressive as some species are aggressive. It’s effect on Moses was that he was afraid of it, he knew enough to run when he saw it.

The Baker Commentary points out that if the serpent was a cobra; that particular snake is a symbol of royal and divine power and is found on the diadem of every Pharaoh. The diadem was a type of crown or headdress that was worn by the ruler of Egypt.

v.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:”

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Considering the Moses reaction when the rod turned into a snake, it took a considerable amount of faith to reach down and pick this thing up. But Moses was equal to the task.

We see another example of the power of faith in God. When we believe and obey the commandments of God, implicitly, without thought or question then we can overcome whatever difficulties we may encounter. In those kinds of situations we really have nothing to fear.

v.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.”

This miracle, as with all miracles in scripture, was given to generate belief and acceptance of God, of God’s law or of a man of God. We saw this in our recent study of the Gospel of John:

John 20:30-31 “AND MANY OTHER SIGNS TRULY DID JESUS IN THE PRESENCE OF HIS DISCIPLES, WHICH ARE NOT WRITTEN IN THIS BOOK: BUT THESE ARE WRITTEN, THAT YE MIGHT BELIEVE THAT JESUS IS THE CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD; AND THAT BELIEVING YE MIGHT HAVE LIFE THROUGH HIS NAME.”

v.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.”

Leprosy was one of the most feared diseases of ancient times. When it was present the skin took on a white scaly appearance and when the scales were rubbed off the skin appeared raw underneath. It has all but been eradicated from the world today, primarily due to attention to personal hygiene and cleanliness. Among most people of that age it was thought to be an affliction or curse caused by their gods and only their gods could remove it. God used it as punishment for sin. When Aaron and Miriam spoke against Moses because of his Ethiopian or Cushite wife God struck Miriam with leprosy:

Numbers 12:10 “AND THE CLOUD DEPARTED FROM OFF THE TABERNACLE; AND, BEHOLD, MIRIAM BECAME LEPROUS, WHITE AS SNOW: AND AARON LOOKED UPON MIRIAM, AND, BEHOLD, SHE WAS LEPROUS.”

Another example is when God struck the servant of Elisha with leprosy because he took the gifts that Naaman offered and Elisha had refused.

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v.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.”

Since leprosy was considered a curse of the gods that could only be removed by the gods this was a sign that would prove that Moses was sent by God. For to be able to make this dread disease come and go, immediately, without any outside influence, was a miracle of the highest order. It was also the reason that one of the early miracles of Jesus was to cleanse a man of leprosy:

Matthew 8:3 “AND JESUS PUT FORTH HIS HAND, AND TOUCHED HIM, SAYING, I WILL; BE THOU CLEAN. AND IMMEDIATELY HIS LEPROSY WAS CLEANSED.”

v.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.”

So God gives Moses this second sign that he might persuade those who would not believe the first. But he still isn't done preparing Moses for his mission.

v.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*.”

There are some people who are very hard to convince of anything, we call them skeptics. So God gives Moses a third sign, the ability to turn ordinary river water into blood. Blood is significant because even during what we would call primitive times man recognized that blood was connected to the lives of all flesh. Blood was also used as a sacrifice to God and to pagan gods.

v.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.”

So God has given Moses three signs or miracles that could not be denied. But he still has an excuse for not being the man that God needs for His purpose. He says that he is not “ELOQUENT”, and the word translated “ELOQUENT” literally means “a man of words”. Well, how can that be since Stephan testified:

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“AND MOSES WAS LEARNED IN ALL THE WISDOM OF THE EGYPTIANS, AND WAS MIGHTY IN WORDS AND IN DEEDS.” Acts 7:22

From what we know the character of Moses it doesn't seem logical that he would give God an excuse that he did not feel was valid. He describes himself as both “SLOW OF SPEECH” and “OF A SLOW TONGUE” indicating that he was hindered both in finding and presenting the right words. To harmonize this scripture with **Acts 7:22** there are three things we might consider.

First of all Moses may have had a speech impediment of some sort. Twice in Exodus chapter six he describes himself as one who had “UNCIRCUMCISED LIPS”. Secondly since he spent most of his early years in Pharaoh's court and the last forty years in the Sinai Wilderness he may no longer have been fluent in the Hebrew language or even in the Egyptian language. Thirdly, and I find this to be very likely, Stephen was describing the Moses of Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. A man that, even though God allowed Aaron to be his spokesman at the beginning later spoke for himself and God in every record that I have found. God takes away this excuse as well.

v.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?”

God reminds Moses that His is the power that created man, His is the power that gave him the ability to speak, who can also strike him dumb or deaf. He is the one who gave man the ability to see. As the Psalmist declares:

Psalms 94:9 “HE THAT PLANTED THE EAR, SHALL HE NOT HEAR? HE THAT FORMED THE EYE, SHALL HE NOT SEE?”

All Moses needs to do is to trust in the Lord. His faith and God's power are an unbeatable combination. When John the Baptizer was in prison and his faith was faltering Jesus sent them these words:

Matthew 11:4-5 “JESUS ANSWERED AND SAID UNTO THEM, GO AND SHEW JOHN AGAIN THOSE THINGS WHICH YE DO HEAR AND SEE: THE BLIND RECEIVE THEIR SIGHT, AND THE LAME WALK, THE LEPERS ARE CLEANSED, AND THE DEAF HEAR, THE DEAD ARE RAISED UP, AND THE POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM.”

Likewise God can and will provide Moses with both the ability and the words to speak.

v.12 “NOW THEREFORE GO, AND I WILL BE WITH THY MOUTH, AND TEACH THEE WHAT THOU SHALT SAY.”

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God tells Moses much the same as Jesus tells his disciples when he sends them out to preach to Judea.

Luke 12:11-12 “AND WHEN THEY BRING YOU UNTO THE SYNAGOGUES, AND *unto* MAGISTRATES, AND POWERS, TAKE YE NO THOUGHT HOW OR WHAT THING YE SHALL ANSWER, OR WHAT YE SHALL SAY: FOR THE HOLY GHOST SHALL TEACH YOU IN THE SAME HOUR WHAT YE OUGHT TO SAY.”

But Moses is still not convinced.

v.13 “AND HE SAID, O MY **LORD**, SEND, I PRAY THEE, BY THE HAND *of him whom* THOU WILT SEND.”

Moses is still saying not me. The commentators tell us that the translation here is somewhat difficult but tell us that when the Hebrew Old Testament was translated into the Greek in 300-200 BC this verse was translated to read:

“ELECT ANOTHER POWERFUL PERSON, WHOM THOU WILT SEND.”

Or, in other words, send someone else.

Read **Exodus 4:14-17** – Aaron to Speak for Moses

v.14 “AND THE ANGER OF THE **LORD** WAS KINDLED AGAINST MOSES, AND HE SAID, *Is* NOT AARON THE LEVITE THY BROTHER? 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.”

All of Moses' excuses have been answered, but he is being stubborn. As a result God is angry with him. So as a consolation God gives Moses a spokesman, his brother, Aaron.

v.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.”

Moses will speak to Aaron and tell him what to say and then Aaron will be responsibility for serving as his spokesman. At the same time God will tell Moses what he wants said. This is not the only time that God has to deal with a reluctant spokesman. We find that Jeremiah was just as hesitant to accept God' mission as was Moses:

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Jeremiah 1:6 "THEN SAID I, AH, LORD **GOD!** BEHOLD, I CANNOT SPEAK: FOR I **am** A CHILD." **v.9** "THEN THE **LORD** PUT FORTH HIS HAND, AND TOUCHED MY MOUTH. AND THE LORD SAID UNTO ME, BEHOLD, I HAVE PUT MY WORDS IN THY MOUTH."

v.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."

So the arrangement is made. Aaron will be the spokesman for Moses. God will tell Moses what to say and then Moses will tell Aaron what to speak and serve as the mediator, or go between, between Aaron and God.

v.17 "AND THOU SHALT TAKE THIS ROD IN THINE HAND, WHEREWITH THOU SHALT DO SIGNS."

Moses would retain the ability to perform the three signs that God gave him to verify the source of his words. In fact the rod that Moses carried served many more purposes than just as a shepherd's rod. It was used to part the Red Sea and carried by Moses throughout his tenure as leader of Israel.

Read **Exodus 4:18-26** – Moses Leaves Jethro

v.18 "AND MOSES WENT AND RETURNED TO JETHRO HIS FATHER IN LAW, AND SAID UNTO HIM, LET ME GO, I PRAY THEE, AND RETURN UNTO MY BRETHREN WHICH **are** IN EGYPT, AND SEE WHETHER THEY BE YET ALIVE. AND JETHRO SAID TO MOSES, GO IN PEACE."

Moses has his commission from God so now he returns to Jethro and asks permission to return to Egypt to visit with his kinsmen. There, obviously, was a better relationship between Moses and Jethro than there was between Jacob and Laban. One asks permission to depart and it is graciously given. The other waits until his father-in-law is gone out to his flocks and will be gone for several days and then packs up his family and leaves.

Someone may wonder why Moses sought the permission of Jethro to leave but when Moses married Zipporah he came under the laws of her tribe. Since Jethro or Reuel, as he is called in other scriptures, is the prince and priest of patriarch of that group of people his permission was required.

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v.19 “AND THE **LORD** SAID UNTO MOSES IN MIDIAN, GO, RETURN INTO EGYPT: FOR ALL THE MEN ARE DEAD WHICH SOUGHT THY LIFE.”

God now assures Moses that those who sought to punish him for killing the Egyptian are now dead. In fact in the Septuagint and in the Coptic versions of the Old Testament a sentence is added to verse 18 that reads “AFTER THESE MANY DAYS, THE KING OF EGYPT DIED.” But those scholars who compiled the “Textus Receptus” that constitutes the 1000’s of manuscripts and manuscript fragments from which reliable translations are made rejected it as a footnote, rather than part of the text.

v.20 “THEN MOSES TOOK HIS WIFE AND HIS SONS AND SET THEM ON A DONKEY, AND HE RETURNED TO THE LAND OF EGYPT. AND MOSES TOOK THE ROD OF GOD IN HIS HAND. (NKJV)”

As Moses prepares for his journey back to Egypt we see that he now has sons. The Hebrew text has only referred to his first born, Gershom, but we know from later verses that there is also Eliezer.

We also see that the simple shepherd’s rod that Moses carried has now become the “ROD OF GOD”. It continues to serve as a “shepherd’s rod” but in an entirely different sense. As Adam Clarke points out in his commentary it has become the rod with which Moses will feed, rule and protect, i.e. shepherd the children of Israel. We see it in use:

Exodus 17:9 “AND MOSES SAID UNTO JOSHUA, CHOOSE US OUT MEN, AND GO OUT, FIGHT WITH AMALEK: TO MORROW I WILL STAND ON THE TOP OF THE HILL WITH THE ROD OF GOD IN MINE HAND.”

v.21 “AND THE **LORD** SAID UNTO MOSES, WHEN THOU GOEST TO RETURN INTO EGYPT, SEE THAT THOU DO ALL THOSE WONDERS BEFORE PHARAOH, WHICH I HAVE PUT IN THINE HAND: BUT I WILL HARDEN HIS HEART, THAT HE SHALL NOT LET THE PEOPLE GO.”

This verse has probably given the commentators problems from the time it was written. Adam Clarke calls them “strange and conflicting opinions”. God says that He will harden the heart of Pharaoh so that he will not let Israel go. We see these words repeated in **Exodus 9:12**, **Exodus 10:1, 20** and **27**; **Exodus 11:9**, and verse **10**.

The question becomes, did God harden the heart of Pharaoh and prevent him from allowing Israel to go? Or did God simply allow the king of Egypt to follow his own natural tendencies to reject and resist any authority over his kingdom that was not his own? The scripture frequently uses language that would have God doing things that God simply allowed or tolerated but didn’t actually do. Whatever the explanation might be, and I believe that He simply allowed Pharaoh to follow his own natural course, there are two things we need to keep in mind.

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First of all, many times adversity and tribulation that does not soften us will harden us instead. We become cynical, stubborn and determined to resist whatever trouble we have.

Second, God needs to impress upon Israel and upon Egypt His power, might and majesty. Israel needs to have faith in Him, they need to follow Him, and in order to do that they need to understand the nature of their God. God also needs to bring Egypt to its knees, for two reasons. They need to be punished for their treatment of the children of Israel and they need to be humbled and their power depleted to protect Israel later. This is exactly what God did with the plagues attacking their gods, showing his power over them and then life itself in the death of the firstborn. Then God went even further by destroying the Egyptian army in the Red Sea.

v.22 “AND THOU SHALT SAY UNTO PHARAOH, THUS SAITH THE **LORD**, ISRAEL IS MY SON, EVEN MY FIRSTBORN:”

God give Moses language for Pharaoh that he cannot misunderstand. In the Egyptian religion the Pharaoh was considered the son of the their principle god Ra. There have been numerous inscriptions that have been found referring to Pharaoh in this manner. So God tells Moses to “SAY UNTO PHARAOH” that Israel, all Israel, are his sons, “EVEN MY FIRSTBORN”. In his writing to Israel upbraiding them for their ingratitude toward God Hosea reminds them of this:

Hosea 11:1 “WHEN ISRAEL *was* A CHILD, THEN I LOVED HIM, AND CALLED MY SON OUT OF EGYPT.”

Pharaoh would understand this relationship and then know that Israel was God’s people.

v.23 “AND I SAY UNTO THEE, LET MY SON GO, THAT HE MAY SERVE ME: AND IF THOU REFUSE TO LET HIM GO, BEHOLD, I WILL SLAY THY SON, EVEN THY FIRSTBORN.”

God continues that Pharaoh is to let “MY SON GO” and then promises that the consequences of his refusal will be the death of Pharaoh’s firstborn son. A promise that in the proper span of time was kept as are all God’s promises:

Exodus 12:29 “AND IT CAME TO PASS, THAT AT MIDNIGHT THE **LORD** SMOTE ALL THE FIRSTBORN IN THE LAND OF EGYPT, FROM THE FIRSTBORN OF PHARAOH THAT SAT ON HIS THRONE UNTO THE FIRSTBORN OF THE CAPTIVE THAT *was* IN THE DUNGEON; AND ALL THE FIRSTBORN OF CATTLE.”

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v.24 “AND IT CAME TO PASS BY THE WAY IN THE INN, THAT THE **LORD** MET HIM, AND SOUGHT TO KILL HIM.”

The Lord sought to kill Moses??!! This would be a strange turn of developments wouldn't it? And since the scripture doesn't seem to give us an explanation, other than what we find in these few verses we can only work with what we have to understand what this scripture tells us. Something Moses did nor did not do had caused God to send upon Moses what the commentators call a dread disease.

v.25 “THEN ZIPPORAH TOOK A SHARP STONE, AND CUT OFF THE FORESKIN OF HER SON, AND CAST IT AT HIS FEET, AND SAID, SURELY A BLOODY HUSBAND *art* THOU TO ME.’

According to the covenant that God made with Abraham all male children that were descendants of Abraham were to be circumcised. If that was not done then that son would not be considered a child of God.

Genesis 17:14 “AND THE UNCIRCUMCISED MAN CHILD WHOSE FLESH OF HIS FORESKIN IS NOT CIRCUMCISED, THAT SOUL SHALL BE CUT OFF FROM HIS PEOPLE; HE HATH BROKEN MY COVENANT.”

So those who were not circumcised would be “CUT OFF”; would not be acceptable to God.

v.26 “SO HE LET HIM GO: THEN SHE SAID, A BLOODY HUSBAND THOU ART, BECAUSE OF THE CIRCUMCISION.”

So it would seem that Moses, who was to be instrumental in bringing God's people into a new covenant with Him was not keeping the old one that God made with Abraham and under which Moses lived. It would also appear that Zipporah had objected to the rite of circumcision and that Moses had let her have her way. So God has now righted that wrong and both Moses and his sons are ready to enter into the family of God made up of the Israelite nation.

Read **Exodus 4:27-31** – Aaron Sent to Moses

v.27 “AND THE **LORD** SAID TO AARON, GO INTO THE WILDERNESS TO MEET MOSES. AND HE WENT, AND MET HIM IN THE MOUNT OF GOD, AND KISSED HIM.”

Now God goes to Aaron and tells him to meet Moses. So they meet at the “MOUNT OF GOD”. Which mountain do you think this verse is referring to? Mount Sinai.

v.28 “AND MOSES TOLD AARON ALL THE WORDS OF THE **LORD** WHO HAD SENT HIM, AND ALL THE SIGNS WHICH HE HAD COMMANDED HIM.”

The meeting of Aaron and Moses gives them the opportunity to review all that God had told Moses, the signs that Moses has been given and the task that they have at hand. They are now prepared to bring these things to the people of Israel.

v.29 “AND MOSES AND AARON WENT AND GATHERED TOGETHER ALL THE ELDERS OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL:”

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Apparently Moses and Aaron waste no time but take the words of God to the elders of Israel.

v.30 “AND AARON SPAKE ALL THE WORDS WHICH THE **LORD** HAD SPOKEN UNTO MOSES, AND DID THE SIGNS IN THE SIGHT OF THE PEOPLE.”

During our discussion several weeks ago we could not remember any situation where Moses had Aaron speak for him rather than speaking for himself. It would appear that we just hadn't studied far enough to find this verse. As God had promised, Aaron is the spokesman, speaking what God and Moses had told him to speak.

v.31 “AND THE PEOPLE BELIEVED: AND WHEN THEY HEARD THAT THE **LORD** HAD VISITED THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL, AND THAT HE HAD LOOKED UPON THEIR AFFLICTION, THEN THEY BOWED THEIR HEADS AND WORSHIPPED.”

The words of God and the signs that God has given have convinced the children of Israel that God is aware of their oppression. Moses and Aaron are going to go to Pharaoh and present God's demand that he let Israel go. At this point they are humbled and they are grateful. They express that humility and thankfulness in worship to God as we all should. They because they are to be released from the bondage of Egypt, us because we have been released from the bondage of sin.