

Bible Study #07 Exodus 4.1–17 02–15–2021

Moses raised another objection regarding his mission, for he was concerned that his own people would not believe him or pay attention to his message. Lack of faith was shown to be a characteristic of Israel. Unbelief would mark the history of God's people (cf. Ps. 78:22, 32). He was also worried his own people would deny he had received revelation from God.

This third question completes the three questions Moses asked as he tried to get out of doing what God had called him to do. concerns. The first question, "Who am I . . . ?" (3:11–12) concerned Moses. The second question, "Who are you?" (3:13–15) concerned God. His next is a "What if" question, concerned the elders.

God had answered this question before he asked it, in 3:18, where God assured Moses that they would listen to him. Moses wasn't sure that providing the elders with notice of the name would be enough to convince them. We see Moses' growing anxiety about leading the people. The key word in this section is believe, which occurs five times (4:1, 5, 9 and twice in v. 8).

The issue is "What if they do not believe me" and say, 'The LORD did not appear to you'?" The "What if" questions are the most dangerous about God's call on our lives. They reveal our own lack of faith, not the lack of faith of others. You are the first person asking that question.

The Lord took Moses' concern seriously and was ready to provide three signs in Exodus 4:1–9. God's response was to perform two miracles in order to convince him, and all Israel, that the Lord had indeed appeared to, and spoken with, him. The first was through the command to throw his staff on to the ground, where it became a snake. Moses ran in fear from it (v. 3).

The next instruction to Moses was to reach out and take the snake by the tail, and when he did so it became again a staff in his hand. It reverted to its normal form. God's power was able to change its character and then change it back to its original status.

The purpose of this miracle was related to Moses' question in verse 1. It had been performed 'in order that' Israel might believe that the God of the patriarchs had indeed appeared to Moses. The miracle was intended to confirm the message that Moses was to deliver.

As elsewhere in the Bible, God's miracles were not only designed to display his characteristics but are given in order to propel people to a specific course of action, or to point forward to later revelation of God's omnipotence.

Once again God is identified as 'the LORD', the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The God who was directing Moses and the people was none other than the God who had entered into binding commitments first to Abraham (Gen. 12, 15, 17) and then renewed with Isaac (Gen. 26:24) and Jacob (28:13-15).

The 2nd miracle given in case the first one did not produce faith asked Moses to put his hand inside his cloak (lit. 'in his bosom'), and when he did so it was 'leprous, like snow'. The Hebrew word used here for 'leprosy' is not restricted to what is strictly leprosy (Hansen's Disease) but it can denote a variety of skin diseases. Then Moses' hand was restored like the rest of his skin. Again, God's omnipotence was displayed in this sign.

Further provision was made by God in case of persistent unbelief on the part of Israel. The incidents relating to the staff and to Moses' hand were the first and second 'signs'. In 3:20, God promised to perform miraculous deeds, now the word for a sign is used. A sign could either be intended, as here, as a stimulus to immediate action, or else, something to confirm later that what had happened was divinely planned.

If these signs had not convinced Israel, then a further one would be added. If Moses took some water from the Nile and spilled it on the ground, it would become blood. Later, changing water into blood occurred in the second major sign (Exod. 7:14-17).

Now Moses brings the question back to himself where he had started: 'Who am I?' Now Moses cites his lack of eloquence as the reason why he should not be the spokesman of God. He acknowledged God's relationship to him as that of sovereign to a servant, but claimed that he was never a fluent speaker, despite being called to his present mission.

'Slow of speech and tongue' is a fine descriptive phrase for lack of eloquence. Similarly, lack of fitness to speak on God's behalf was cited by both Isaiah (Isa. 6:5-7) and Jeremiah (Jer. 1:4-8), while the apostle Paul's opponents derided his speaking ability (2 Cor. 10:10). Paul himself disclaimed being eloquent (1 Cor. 2:1) and denied speaking with 'wise and persuasive words' (1 Cor. 2:4).

The answer that God gave rested on His all wise creative power that determines a man's speech, or hearing, or sight. There was no need for any response from Moses to the questions, 'Who gave ...?'; 'Who gives ...?'; 'Who makes...?' The Lord Himself claimed the prerogative of bestowing such abilities, and He emphatically drew attention to His own self-existence: 'Is it not I, the Lord?'

He reassured his servant that he would graciously provide for his task by both offering assistance and giving the necessary words to speak. Moses showed that he was still reticent to accept the role. In spite of promised grace he requested that someone else be sent by the Lord on this mission to Pharaoh. In effect, he asked for a substitute to do it.

For the first time in the account of Moses' life, it is recorded that God was angry with him (for later incidents, see the references in Deut. 1:37; 4:21; 9:18). The alternative that God proposed was that Moses' brother Aaron should be his 'prophet' (as he is later called, 7:1). The reference to him as 'the Levite' should not be overlooked. As became clear later, Aaron was given the privilege of heading the order of priests, not Moses.

The three reasons advanced here were that Aaron was a good speaker, he was already on his way to meet Moses, and that Aaron was going to be joyful in spirit when the meeting took place. The implication was that Aaron would be a ready spokesman in Moses' place.

The process was established whereby what Moses wished to say would be communicated to Aaron. This passage is very helpful in understanding the later role of the prophets who were not the originators of their messages but rather served as covenantal enforcement mediators. What was promised was divine assistance to both Moses and Aaron.

The Scriptures make this plain by saying that the teaching would be of the two of them ('will teach you (pl.) what to do'). The form of words here, 'And I will be with your mouth and with his mouth' is a reference back to 3:12 with its assurance of continuing divine presence and aid.

Aaron's role was to be the communicator of God's word to the people. The way in which this is expressed is significant both for the situation in Egypt and for the wider implications for God's revelation of Himself. What was to happen in Aaron's ministry was analogous with the way in which God was to reveal Himself to Moses.

In effect, Moses would be God to his brother ('as if you were God to him'). This provision ended Moses' reluctance to speak to Pharaoh and it concluded his questioning of God's directive to go in His name. Proclamation of God's word to Pharaoh was to be accompanied with signs. The same staff that Moses had thrown down on the ground at God's direction was to be used again.

There is enough in these 17 verses for a whole sermon series on God's call on our life. I'll list a few of my suggested sermon titles: When God calls we have false questions! (Moses is correct as you and I are when we ask, "Who am I to represent God?") God is not an inventor, He is Creator.

An inventor (like Thomas Edison) tried over 3,000 different ways to create the filament for the light bulb. God the creator simply spoke and said, "Let there be light and there was light." I am thankful for inventors, but I worship the Creator. When he called Moses, he said nothing about the qualifications of Moses. He only spoke of his promise to be present and to give him the words to say.