

Exodus 4

Preceding Text

(Where are we? Chapters 1-15 **Redemption - Prelude**)

Moses has left Egypt and is now a shepherd in the service of his father-in-law. He has traveled to Midian. In chapter 3 Moses is on the far side of the wilderness at Mount Sinai. In this barren landscape with the hot sun blazing down on thick layers of exposed black flint that, spontaneous fires are not unusual. In this text, notice how it is not the fire that is unusual. It is the fact that the bush is not consumed by the fire that grabs Moses' attention. There is an interaction between Moses and God, so when we get to chapter 4, we are only ½ way through the conversation. Moses balks at God's instructions saying, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" God says "I will be with you." Moses says, "what if they ask me who sent me?" God says, "I am." – and this is a nice "Well, you are not the one who will bring the people out of Egypt; I am." But this personal name of God is powerful (and in Hebrew, a bit flexible).

Current Text:

The conversation between Moses and God continues from the previous chapter – we are still before the burning bush (that is not consumed!).

Moses: What if no one believes me? He is worried about being rejected by his own people. Why? Go back and read 2:11–14 where it is not just the Egyptians rejecting Moses but also his people. God responds with signs, and notice verse 5, the signs are so that the Israelites believe that YHWH, the God of their ancestors, appeared to Moses [and sent him!]

Notice the three signs. These are the creator God using the natural world. God uses the ordinary to do the extraordinary. **Fun fact:** the snake represents Egyptian royal authority – to grab it by the tail so it turns into a staff? Equivalent of spiritual and political authority that God imposes through Moses on Egypt. Same with the third sign that can only be done in Egypt. The Nile is the life-blood for Egyptian existence and it was deified.

Moses puts forth his final objection – his claim of inadequacy to the task of being God's spokesperson before the Egyptian court. This literally says "I am heavy (dull?) of mouth and heavy of tongue." What this means is unknown. Did he have a speech impediment? Does it connote a loss of fluency in the Egyptian language? God's response suggests that speaking on behalf of the Divine (prophetic eloquence) is not a native talent but is one given for a specific purpose. The message originates with God and not the prophet!

It is the final time that Moses makes a desperate and final appeal. While God makes provision for Aaron to speak on behalf of Moses, he does not allow him off the hook. Moses has nothing left to utter and succumbs to this calling on his life (see Jeremiah 20:7, 9)

Also of great significance in this chapter is how God refers to his people. Read 4:21–23.

Engage the Text: Discussion Questions

1. What did you hear as the main point of the sermon? Or what was your primary takeaway?
2. What can be the function and the importance of these particular signs?
3. Remind yourself of what God's name is and what it means to use it (and how it is normally written in English translations). Now re-read 4:13. What title/name does Moses use (Hint: compare with how God's name is written in vs. 14). Discuss some reasons for God's anger.
4. Read Jeremiah 20:7–9 and compare/contrast Jeremiah's experience with that of Moses. What does this tell you about God's calling on the lives of his prophets? What can we learn from this give and take between Moses and God?
5. What is the text telling us about God's character, God's revelation, and God's mission in the world?

Additional Resources:

- Egyptian Snake God & Pharaoh:
<https://www.imagininghistory.co.uk/post/pharaohs-obsessed-with-the-cobra>