

# Exodus 4 Commentary

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Irving Jensen ([Online](#)) - Used by Permission  
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[View Chuck Swindoll's chart of Exodus.](#)

Summary Chart of The Book of Exodus	
<b>DELIVERANCE FROM OPPRESSION</b>	<b>PREPARATION FOR WORSHIP</b>
Redemption from Egypt Ex 1:1-18:27	Revelation from God Ex 19:1-40:38
Getting Israel Out of Egypt	Getting Egypt Out of Israel!
Narration	Legislation

Birth of Moses Ex 1-2	Call of Moses Ex 3-6	Conflict with Pharaoh Ex 7-10	Exodus from Egypt Ex 11-12	Red Sea Crossed Ex 13-15	Journey To Sinai Ex 16-18	Law Given Ex 19-24	Tent Plan Ex 25-31	Idol Worship Ex 32-34	Tent Built Ex 35-40
<b>Subjection</b>			<b>Redemption</b>			<b>Instruction</b>			
<b>Suffering and Liberation of People of God</b>			<b>Guidance of God</b>			<b>Worship of God</b>			
<b>Moses and Burdens of Israel</b>		<b>Pharaoh and Plagues Upon Egypt</b>		<b>Red Sea Deliverance</b>	<b>Wilderness Provision</b>	<b>Sinai Instructions</b>			
<b>Bondage and Oppression</b>			<b>Deliverance and Provision</b>			<b>Law Pattern and Construction</b>			
<b>Israel in Egypt Ex 1:1-13:16</b>			<b>Israel to Sinai Ex 13:17-18:27</b>			<b>Israel at Sinai Ex 19:1-40:38</b>			
<b>God's People Enduring Bondage</b>			<b>God's Grace Revealed in Redemption</b>			<b>God's Glory Manifested in Worship</b>			
<b>Egypt 430 Years (15% of Exodus)</b>			<b>Wilderness 2 Months (30% of Exodus)</b>			<b>Mt Sinai 10 Months (55% of Exodus)</b>			
<b>From Groaning</b>									<b>To Glory!</b>

- [Jensen's Survey of the Old Testament](#) - online

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- [Click for Excellent Map of Route of the Exodus](#)
- [Click another Exodus from Egypt](#)
- [Click for Events during the Sojourn at Kadesh-Barnea](#)

<b>GENESIS</b>	<b>EXODUS</b>
human effort and failure	divine power and triumph
word of promise	work of fulfillment
a people chosen	a people called
God's electing mercy	God's electing manner
revelation of nationality	realization of nationality

SUMMARY OF THE PENTATEUCH  
(from Believer's Study Bible)

**Exodus 4:1 Then Moses said, "What if they will not believe me or listen to what I say? For they may say, 'The LORD has not appeared to you.'"**

- Ex 4:31 Ex 2:14 Ex 3:18 Jer 1:6 Eze 3:14 Ac 7:25
- Exodus 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**MOSES' THIRD OBJECTION!  
HE QUESTIONS HIS CREDIBILITY**

**Thompson** reminds us "We are in a context in which Moses is making a bunch of excuses before God as to why he does not want the job or think he is the man for the responsibility. His first excuse was, "I am a nobody" (Ex 3:11-12). His second excuse was, "I don't know your name" (Ex 3:13-22). Moses is talking to God at a burning bush and there is a lot of interaction. Think of this, he is talking to a burning bush. You would think that in itself would be enough evidence." ([Sermon](#))

Some writers see this reaction as Moses expressing a sense of inadequacy, and have referred to him as the "doubtful deliverer!" (Hannah) They won't accept my "credentials." Now keep the context in mind -- Jehovah is still speaking from the burning bush and has just told him the elders "**will pay heed to what you say.**" (Ex 3:18+) And yet Moses persists by saying "what if they will not believe me?" Moses is now no longer just doubting himself, but he is calling into question the Word of God! It is like saying "But what if you are wrong, God?"

**THOUGHT** - In the spiritual life, it is not wrong to say "We can't." But we need to follow that statement with "God can." Here is the testimony of Major Ian Thomas - As a young evangelist, my love and enthusiasm for Christ as my Saviour kept me very, very busy until out of sheer frustration, I finally came to the point of quitting. That was the turning point which transformed my Christian life. In my despair I discovered that the Lord Jesus gave Himself FOR me, so that risen from the dead He might give Himself TO me, He who IS the Christian Life. Instead of pleading for help I began to thank Him for all that He wanted to be, sharing His Life with me every moment of every day. I learned to say "**Lord Jesus, I can't, You never said I could; but You can, and always said You would. That is all I need to know**". From that moment life became the adventure that God always intended it to be." Moses isn't doing that, but is saying "God, I can't and I really don't think You can either."

I like **Scott Grant's** sermon title for this section - ["The deliverer needs a Deliverer"](#)

**Then Moses said, "What if they will not believe me or listen to what I say?"** - Moses feared to do all that God was calling him to do; so he made a series of excuses beginning with what if they will not believe? There is some basis for Moses asking this question for we read in Acts that "he supposed that his brethren understood that God was granting them deliverance through him, but they did not understand." (Acts 7:25+). So if they did not understand the first time, why would they understand this time? Of course, there is a major difference, because in Moses' first attempt to be Israel's deliverer, he did it relying on his own strength, but in the present passage, God is commissioning him, so the results depend on God's power, not Moses' power. The problem with Moses' reasoning is that God had already told him "They will pay heed to what you say." (Ex 3:18+) So clearly Moses doubted God's word and fear crept into his mind. Doubt indulged soon becomes doubt realized. That's what happens when we begin to doubt. As someone has said "Never doubt in the dark what God told you in the light." In fact, what God teaches us in the light will become even more meaningful in the darkness. Spurgeon said "Doubt breeds distress but trust means joy in the long run." God did not fail Moses. And God will not fail you.

**THOUGHT** - What does Moses fear? Personal rejection. Does this sound familiar? Isn't this one reason we shy away from sharing the Gospel? We don't want them to reject us.

**Alan Redpath** - Fear is always the enemy of faith; this is the battleground of Christian experience. A man grows and triumphs as his faith overcomes his fear. To believe God, to rest in the Word of God, to enjoy the promises of God is to conquer our fear. But to doubt God and to question His motives cause our faith to shrink until literally we cease to be believers-we are believers in name, but not in practice or action (ED: REPATH IS NOT SAYING ONE CAN LOSE THEIR SALVATION, BUT ONLY THAT THEY CAN LIVE AS IF THEY WERE UNSAVED!). How is your faith overcoming your fear? If fear has its way in your life, what crazy things can you imagine happening in your life? "It takes but a moment to make a convert; it takes a lifetime to manufacture a saint."

**G Campbell Morgan** - We are ever prone, when God is calling us to some high service, to say 'But,' and this to introduce our statement of the difficulties as we see them."

The key word in this section is **believe**, which occurs five times (Exodus 4:1, 5, 9 twice in Exodus 4:8).

**Wiersbe** suggest that the phrase "**They will not believe**" really means "I do not believe."

**David Guzik** - It was not wrong for Moses to initially ask, "*Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh ?*" (Exodus 3:11); this was a logical question considering how great the task was. Yet God answered this question more than adequately in Exodus 3:12: *I will certainly be with you.* After that point, and in this passage, Moses' questions show unbelief more than sincere seeking....It was good when Moses had no confidence in the flesh; but it was bad that he then lacked confidence in God. In view of the burning bush, the voice of God, and the divine encounter, there was no place for Moses to say, "**But.**" (Ex 4:1KJV)

**For they may say, 'The LORD has not appeared to you** - Although God had told him they would heed him (Ex 3:18), one can imagine their reaction when he tells them he was speaking with a burning bush! While Moses may not have know what we know now, but as far as we can discern from the Biblical account, there is no record of God appearing to Israel during their 430 years in captivity. This would certainly make it more likely that they would be skeptical of Moses' claim of divine revelation. Moses knew what he saw was a revelation of God, but the Israelites might not accept his word. "As the sentence is a strong denial, we might paraphrase by saying 'our ancestral God never appeared to you'. Moses is still thinking of that bitter experience of Exodus 2:14+, 'Who made you a prince and a judge?'" (Cole)

**HCSB** - These three signs the Lord gave Moses pertain to areas of common human vulnerability—attack by other creatures, illness, and the need for water—all of which are under the sovereign power of the Lord. The signs begin a pattern in Exodus of actions that are intended to prompt faith and obedience.

**Cole** comments that "The promised sign of sacrifice at God's mountain (Ex 3:12+) will not be enough for them, for it demands initial faith (like the sign of Christ's resurrection, Matt. 12:39) and that very faith they will not have. He pleads for signs at a lower level, signs that may induce faith if not create it, and validate his call in the eyes of Israel. John the Baptist was never given the power to perform 'signs' of this sort (John 10:41); Christ refused to do them (Mt. 12:39+), but many Old Testament characters were granted such validating evidence (e.g. Isa. 7:11). (TOTC-Ex)

**CALVIN'S RESPONSE SIMILAR TO MOSES** - Calvin's call came unexpectedly when he was passing through the city of Geneva. He was a young man, but he had already made a name for himself with the publication of the first edition of the **Institutes of the Christian Religion**. And so when William Farrell learned that Calvin was in town he became very excited. William Farrell was the reformer who was at that time, leading the Reformation in the city of Geneva, but he understood that it needed a man like Calvin to carry it forward. And so he sought him out, he found him staying in an inn, and he urged him to stay in Geneva and minister there. Calvin, however, had other plans. He wanted to retire to a quiet life of reflection and scholarly pursuits. He had no interest in pastoring and teaching in a church and so he refused the offer. When Farrell persisted that Calvin stay, Calvin protested, pleading his youth, his inexperience, his need for further training and the fact that he was timid, he was shy, and thus was not suited for such a position. Finally Farrell threatened him with a curse of God if he preferred his studies over the Lord's work. With that threat, Calvin became so terrified that he agreed to stay. Some years later, he wrote that he felt as if God from on high, had stretched out his hand compelled him into the ministry.

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**ILLUSTRATION** - Back in 1987, [Oral Roberts](#) went on television and told people that God had appeared to him and told him that if his supporters did not send him 8 million dollars, God would take him home. He ended up getting 9.1 million dollars in donations. The man is a fraudulent religious charlatan, who quit high school and only took a few Bible classes part-time from Pentecostal places in Oklahoma. He is a Charismatic religious swindler. Now when Oral Roberts made this announcement, most believers recognized this guy is not telling the truth. Any person who knows the Bible and is of sound mind didn't believe a word he said. Moses feared that very thing happening to him. He said what if I go to the people and tell them that God appeared to me and told me to come get you and they do not believe me? It appears to be a reasonable response. That is until you remember what God told him in Exodus 3:18. God told Moses they will listen to you. They will believe you. They will follow you. **So this is, in all reality, a question of disbelieving God and His Word.** The real issue here is whether or not you can believe the Word of God and take it at face value. Moses is challenging God and he is questioning the very Word of God. ([Thompson](#))

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#### **Exodus 4:1KJV "BUT...! - J H Jowett**

WE know that "but." God has heard it from our lips a thousand times. It is the response of unbelief to the divine call. It is the reply of fear to the divine command. It is the suggestion that the resources are inadequate. It is a hint that God may not have looked all round. He has overlooked something which our own eyes have seen. The human "buts" in the Scriptural stories make an appalling record.

"**Lord, I will follow Thee, but**—" There is something else to be attended to before discipleship can begin. Obedience is not primary: it must wait for something else. And so our obedience is not a straight line: it is crooked and circuitous; it takes the way of by-path meadow instead of the highway of the Lord. We do not wait upon the Lord's pleasure; we make Him wait upon ours.

There need be no "buts" in our relationship to the King's will. Everything has been foreseen. Nothing will take the Lord by surprise. The entire field has been surveyed, and the preparations are complete. When the Lord says to thee or me, "**I will send thee,**" every provision has been made for the appointed task. "**I will not fail thee.**"

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#### **Exodus 4:1-17 God Enables Whom He Calls by Theodore Epp**

Moses gave seven reasons why he wasn't the man for God's task: lack of capability, lack of message, lack of authority, lack of eloquence, lack of fitness or adaptation, lack of previous success and lack of previous acceptance.

Instead of receiving God's approval, the excuses Moses gave only kindled God's anger. The Bible says, "The anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses" (Ex. 4:14).

This does not mean that God had a fit of temper; rather, it means that God was not pleased with the excuses Moses offered. In effect, God was saying, "Moses, you have no right to make these excuses, and if your faith were in the right place and Person, you would not be making them."

Just as God became angry with Moses because of his excuses, so He becomes angry with any believer who limits Him by a lack of faith. Actually, the excuses Moses gave were the exact reasons why God had selected him for the task.

For each lack that Moses expressed, God had a satisfying and abundant provision. What Moses failed to understand at this time was that when God calls, He always guarantees and furnishes all that is needed to accomplish His will.

This is also true of believers today. When God calls you to do something, He always guarantees and furnishes all you need to do what He asks.

"Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6).

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**ILLUSTRATION** - I recently read David McCullough's massive biography of President Harry Truman. He was a somewhat common man from the Midwest who unexpectedly became a U.S. Senator. Then, also unexpectedly, for his fourth term in office President Franklin Roosevelt chose Truman to be his running mate. Then, less than three months after Truman became Vice President, Roosevelt died. Truman took office with no briefings from the President, whom Truman hardly knew. The Japanese had not yet surrendered and Truman faced the history-changing decision of dropping the atomic bomb to end the war. Then he faced the Korean Conflict, which required many agonizing decisions. Whether you agree with Truman's political views or not, he did an admirable job with the overwhelming role thrust on him. That's what happened to Moses....Thankfully God doesn't call any of us to a task that challenging! But He does call all of us who know Him to serve Him in some way. And usually He calls you to serve in a situation that is beyond your natural abilities so that you are forced to depend on His strength. For example, we're all called to evangelize the lost and disciple the saved. Those tasks are rather daunting, even if you've had some training! Moses' story in Exodus 4 gives us some lessons in how to serve God effectively ([Serving God Effectively](#))

To serve God effectively,  
depend on His presence and strength,  
be ready for difficulty,  
be obedient to His commands,  
and work with willing people.  
-- Steven Cole

**Exodus 4:2 The LORD said to him, "What is that in your hand?" And he said, "A staff."**

- **staff** - Ex 4:17,20 Ge 30:37 Lev 27:32 Ps 110:2 Isa 11:4 Mic 7:14
- Exodus 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### **SIGN OF THE STAFF**

**The LORD said to him, "What is that in your hand?"** - Remember God is still speaking with Moses from the burning bush (if we can assume there is no break in the context) so the staff Moses held was his shepherd's staff which he used to manage the sheep.

**THOUGHT** - This reflects a precious principle regarding how God uses people – God used what Moses had in his **hand**. Moses' years of tending sheep were not useless. Those years had put into Moses **hand** things he could use for God's glory. God didn't use the scepter that was in Moses' royal hand when he lived in Egypt, but He did use the simple shepherd's staff. (Guzik)

**J Ligon Duncan** on "**What is that in your hand?**" - He already knows what is in Moses' hand. But Moses, and the people of God

need to be reminded of something. By asking Moses what is in your hand, he is confirming as Moses writes it down and as Moses retells it to the people of God, that all that Moses has in his hand is an ordinary staff. This isn't a secret voodoo stick. This isn't a mighty powerful something or other. It's just a staff. It's a shepherd's staff, and God wants Moses to say it out loud. And he does. "Well, Lord, it's a rod." Just like the one that David talks about in Psalm 23:4, it's the rod, the staff that comforts him. It's a shepherd's staff. That's all it is. There's nothing magical, supernatural or powerful about that staff that's important to know. Because God is going to use that very ordinary staff to conquer Egypt. God asks Moses, what is in your hand, in order to confirm that that staff is ordinary, and then God tells him to throw the staff on the ground, and suddenly the staff transforms itself into a serpent; or God, by His own might, transforms the staff into a serpent. And Moses flees away. Now you just learned something else. Moses is not a trickster. Moses is scared to death of the serpent on the ground. He throws the staff down, it turns into a snake, and he beats it, like any normal human being with an inkling of sense. In other words, God is telling you that Moses is not a magician. You see the people of God lived in a culture in Egypt where magic was rife. Egyptian magicians did these kind of tricks. Egyptians believed in these kind of methodology and magic. And God is confirming to you that His leader is no magician. ([Exodus 4:1-9 Signs and Wonders for Moses](#))

This is the first of 3 signs God gives Moses to give to the Hebrews. This recalls Paul's words in 1 Cor 1:22 that "indeed Jews ask for signs."

**And he said, "A staff."** - This **staff** would subsequently be used to part the Red Sea bring deliverance to Israel and death to Egypt. It would be used to strike the rock and bring forth life-giving water to Israel. It would be used when raised up to bring about victory for Egypt over her enemies. In Exodus 4:20 and Exodus 17:9 Moses' **staff** would be given the great name "the staff of God!"

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**David Guzik** - God likes to use what is in our hand.

- God used what was in Shamgar's hand (Judges 3:31).
- God used what was in David's hand (1 Samuel 17:49).
- God used the jawbone of a donkey in Samson's hand (Judges 15:15).
- God used five loaves and two fish in the hand of a little boy (John 6:9).

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## Exodus 4:2 The Little Things

"And the Lord said unto him, What is that in thine hand?" Exodus 4:2

Our Scripture reading for today contains Moses' response to God's call at the burning bush. Having just been commissioned to lead the children of Israel out of bondage, he was apprehensive about how the Egyptians, and even his countrymen, would react. But the Lord said to him, "What is that in thine hand?" "A rod," Moses answered. Then He said to him in Ex 4:17, "And thou shalt take this rod in thine hand, wherewith thou shalt do signs." Most of us are familiar with the great miracles associated with that rod when Moses obeyed the Lord. It was insignificant in itself, but it became a powerful instrument when committed to the Lord.

Writing on this theme, J. W. Johnson imagined the following conversation between God and some of His faithful servants down through the centuries: "'What is that in thine hand?' asked the Lord. 'A sling,' said David. 'It is enough; go up against the giant,' and the great Goliath fell before the shepherd boy. 'What is that in thine hand?' 'A sword,' answered Jonathan. 'It is enough,' and the brave youth, followed by his armor-bearer, went up against an army, and the Philistines were defeated....'What is that in thine hand?' 'A pen,' said John Bunyan, as he spoke from the arches of Bedford prison. 'It is enough,' and he wrote the story Pilgrim's Progress, which will live while the world endures."

Don't sell yourself short, friend! If God has called you to a task, He'll equip you for it. He merely asks, "What is that in thine hand?" Give it to Him, and you'll see what He can do with little things. - Richard W. De Haan

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## Exodus 4:1-5 What Is In Your Hand?

So the Lord said to [Moses], "What is that in your hand?" —Exodus 4:2

If you have a tendency to despair over lost opportunities or if you worry about the future, ask yourself this question: "What is right in front of me?" In other words, what circumstances and relationships are currently available to you? This question can get your focus off a past regret or a scary future and back to what God can do in your life.

It's similar to the question God asked Moses at the burning bush. Moses was troubled. Aware of his own weaknesses, he expressed fear about the Lord's call for him to lead Israel out of bondage. So God simply asked Moses, "What is that in your hand?" (Ex. 4:2). The Lord shifted Moses' attention away from his anxiety about the future and suggested he notice what was right in front of him—a

shepherd's rod. God showed Moses that He could use this ordinary staff to perform miracles as a sign for unbelieving people. As Moses' trust in God grew, so did the magnitude of miracles God worked through His servant.

Do you think about past failures too much? Do you have fearful thoughts about the future? Recall God's question: "What is that in your hand?" What current circumstances and relationships can God use for your benefit and His glory? Entrust them—and your life—to Him. By Dennis Fisher

Onward and upward your course plan today,  
Seeking new heights as you walk Jesus' way;  
Heed not past failures, but strive for the prize,  
Aiming for goals fit for His holy eyes.

—Brandt

**You can't change the past,  
but you'll ruin the present by worrying about the future.**

**Exodus 4:3 Then He said, "Throw it on the ground." So he threw it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from it.**

- **it became** - Ex 4:17 7:10-15 Am 5:19
- Exodus 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**Then He said, "Throw it on the ground." So he threw it on the ground, and it became a serpent**(Ex 7:8–12) - And from Moses' reaction, clearly this was not a harmless garter snake but undoubtedly a venomous snake. Ponder a moment -- A shepherd's staff is usually about 5-6 feet long. So in an instant Moses was in the presence of a large reptile! And he had no sandals on because he had removed them. And here is the reptile present on "holy ground," which is fascinating (considering the serpent in Genesis 3 in the sinless garden).

**And Moses fled from it** - In the desert shepherding the sheep, Moses surely frequently saw snakes. His reaction to flee is what we all do. And he had likely even seen venomous snakes, but this snake was especially frightening and could have been a large cobra (as long as his staff)!

**Exodus 4:4 But the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand and grasp it by its tail"--so he stretched out his hand and caught it, and it became a staff in his hand--**

- **Stretch out your hand** - Ge 22:1,2 Ps 91:13 Mk 16:18 Lu 10:19 Ac 28:3-6
- **so he stretched out his hand** - Joh 2:5
- Exodus 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## **FAITH IS OBEYING DESPITE THE CONSEQUENCES**

**But** - The LORD let him flee the snake, before he told him to feel the snake. Imagine what goes through Moses' mind as God gives this command.

**The LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand and grasp it by its tail** - Notice Jehovah does not tell Moses what will happen when he will take hold of the snake by **its tail**. He does not tell Moses "Do not fear." He does not tell Moses that when he touches it "The snake will become a staff." Moses is being given a huge challenge by God to walk by faith and not by sight! Grabbing a venomous snake by his tail is always dangerous for the snake will turn and strike! While we cannot be dogmatic, this was probably a **vicious cobra**, for this snake was symbolic of the cobra goddess in lower Egypt. "This snake is a killer. It was chosen by the Egyptians as a sign of power, as a menacing sign of power to their enemies, precisely because of its own dangerousness." (Duncan)

**Thompson** quips "We had a doctor in our church in Idaho and he told me the biggest number of emergency calls at the hospital came on weekends of people who would get drunk and try to pick up a rattlesnake and they would get bit." ([Sermon](#))

goddess [Meretseger](#). A stylised Egyptian cobra—in the form of the [uraeus](#) representing the goddess [Wadjet](#)—was the symbol of sovereignty for the [Pharaohs](#) who incorporated it into their [diadem](#). This iconography was continued through the end of the ancient Egyptian civilization (30 BC).

God had just told Moses **"I will stretch out My hand** and strike Egypt with all My miracles which I shall do in the midst of it; and after that he will let you go." (Ex 3:20+)

**So he stretched out his hand and caught it**- This is fascinating, for when snake handlers pick up snakes, they pick them up by the neck, right behind the head, so that the snake cannot swing around quickly (which they can easily do) and inflict a fatal bite. And despite this seemingly illogical, even potentially dangerous command, Moses obeyed. This time there was no arguing with God, no objecting, no excuses. This took faith, faith that he would not be bitten and die. Faith is obeying God in spite of the consequences. While Moses clearly had many objections regarding his role as the designated "deliverer," he does manifest trust by grasping the snake. Trust is not demonstrated by fearlessness but by obedience. God called Moses to obey, and to discover that when he focused on obedience, God would deal with his fear. God was teaching Moses that he was to obey what God commanded him to do even when it was uncomfortable.

**THOUGHT** - Paul learned exactly the same thing. In 1 Corinthians 2:3–4 he says, "I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power." So if as you obey God you sometimes feel fearful and weak, you are in good company. And when God calls us to do something uncomfortable, we need to trust Him for the results.

**J Ligon Duncan** - Later, Pharaoh will stretch out his hand and free Israel. God again is showing us His sovereignty over Egypt. God will stretch out His hand against Egypt. In transforming the rod into a snake, Moses is doing actually what Egyptians and magicians who do tricks of slight of hand could only dream of doing. His people have been surrounded by this magical culture. They have seen these kinds of feats done. Now God is going to really do it, but even more.

**And it became a staff in his hand**-- I hate snakes so it will be fascinating to speak with Moses someday about this frightening event and the courageous trust he must have mustered in order to obey! Surely great relief came over him when the snake became a staff! For most of us this would be all the sign I would need that God was in control, but God did not stop with one sign.

**Hannah** comments that "Because snakes symbolized power and life to the Egyptians, God was declaring to Moses that he would be able to overcome the powers of Egypt." (BKC)

**Dan Duncan** suggests the following meaning of this staff/serpent **"sign"** (Ex 4:8-9) - In Egypt that snake was a symbol of Royal and divine power the Pharaoh possessed, the Pharaoh being considered by the Egyptians to be a god. And the serpent that he wore on his crown was the testimony to his divinity. The scepter he held in his hand was emblematic of royalty and power. So Moses threw down a simple shepherd's staff in contrast to the Pharaoh's royal scepter and it turned into a serpent. And then it returned to his staff when he simply picked it up and picked it up by the tail, of all places. It would seem that it was signified that Moses had divine authority and divine power over what that serpent represented, Pharaoh himself. He had been given God's power over the Pharaoh. ([Sermon](#))

**POSB** - Now, why this sign? Why did God choose to demonstrate His power over a shepherd's rod and a serpent? To symbolize His power and authority over Pharaoh and his government. The snake was the animal chosen by Egypt to symbolize its authority and power just as nations today choose animals as the emblems of their authority and power (for example: the eagle chosen by America and the bear chosen by Russia). Pharaoh actually wore the emblem of a snake on his crown to symbolize the authority of Egyptian rule. God was giving a clear picture of His sovereignty, power, authority, and dominion over the nations of the world—even over the greatest of nations, Egypt, and its great ruler, Pharaoh himself. God could take rods and turn them into the feared serpents of this earth; similarly, He could take the feared serpents of this earth and turn them into rods. Egypt and its authority existed only as God willed and allowed. This sign would, of course, help convince the people that Moses was truly sent of God. God clearly states that this was His purpose for giving the signs to Moses: to stir the people to believe that Moses and his message of deliverance were true (v. 5, 8). God was able to deliver them from their enslavement.

1 Chronicles 29:12 "Both riches and honor come from You, and You rule over all, and **in Your hand is power and might; and it lies in Your hand to make great and to strengthen everyone.** (God had the power to strengthen Moses for the task to which he was called)

2 Chronicles 20:6 and he said, "O LORD, the God of our fathers, are You not God in the heavens? And are You not ruler over all the kingdoms of the nations? **Power and might are in Your hand so that no one can stand against You.**



Psalm 115:3 But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases.

**J Ligon Duncan** - Pull back and think: You've been a slave in Egypt for four hundred and something years. Perhaps you have seen taskmasters with a coiled snake of lower Egypt around their arm or on their head. You have seen magicians with their staffs do these kinds of conjuring tricks and slight of hand. And now God sends you His own messenger. And by the very signs of the power and authority of Egypt, he manifests your God's sovereignty over Egypt. Wouldn't that be an encouragement to you? Do you see how these signs are not just about doing something spectacular and spooky and miraculous. These signs speak to deep truths and realities about the experience of the people of God. They have been oppressed by Egypt, and God is now, through the sign of the shepherd's staff transformed into a snake, showing that He, the God of Israel, is sovereign over Egypt. Listen to what the Jewish commentary on these verses says. Here the signs which will be executed in Egypt possess a distinctly Egyptian coloration. This is not surprising, for magic was a pervasive ingredient of everyday life in Egypt, deeply imbedded in the culture. The signs taught to Moses are intended first and foremost to validate his claim to be the divinely chosen instrument for the redemption of Israel. On a secondary level, they also function to establish the superiority of Moses over the Egyptian magicians. And by extension to affirm the superior might of Israel's God over those whom the Egyptian's worshiped as gods. Moses, however, is not a magician. He possesses no super human powers. No esoteric knowledge. He is unable to initiate or perform anything except by the precise instructions of God. He pronounces no spells, he observes no rituals, he employs no occult techniques, and often he does not know in advance the consequences of the actions he is told to perform. What a difference....A prophet with a word from God and with power from God. That's the first thing we see. God's stretching out His hand against Egypt and giving Moses this sign of the shepherd's staff transformed.

**The shepherd's staff also showed Moses that that which is common and impotent in itself becomes powerful when yielded in obedience to the Lord.**

-- Steven Cole

**Steven Cole** - By miraculously changing Moses' staff into a snake and back again into a staff, the Lord was showing Moses that as he, the lowly shepherd, obediently depended on God's power, he would have dominion over even this fearful Egyptian tyrant. And, of course, the serpent goes back to the garden as the enemy of God and those made in His image. Ultimately, the seed of the woman (Christ) would crush the head of the serpent, who would bruise Him on the heel (Gen. 3:15). The shepherd's staff also showed Moses that that which is common and impotent in itself becomes powerful when yielded in obedience to the Lord. This is a foundational lesson for all who serve the Lord. He taught it to the disciples in the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000, the only miracle recorded in all four Gospels. After giving the disciples the impossible command, "You give them something to eat!" (Mark 6:37), Jesus asked them (Mark 6:38), "How many loaves do you have?" That's parallel to the Lord's question to Moses, "What is that in your hand?" After telling Jesus that they had five barley loaves and two fish, Andrew asked the obvious question (John 6:9), "But what are these for so many people?" The point is, the ordinary and impotent becomes sufficient and powerful when we yield it in obedience to the Lord. ([Serving God Effectively](#))

This is not the only time in Scripture where God utilized a **dangerous snake** to awaken the attention of people. Recall that Paul had just been shipwrecked on the island of Malta and it was a cold evening so they made a fire. Luke records the striking scene:

"The natives showed us extraordinary kindness; for because of the rain that had set in and because of the cold, they kindled a fire and received us all. 3 But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, **a viper came out because of the heat and fastened itself on his hand.** 4 When the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they began saying to one another, "Undoubtedly this man is a murderer, and though he has been saved from the sea, justice has not allowed him to live." 5 However **he shook the creature off into the fire and suffered no harm.** 6 But they were expecting that he was about to swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But after they had waited a long time and had seen nothing unusual happen to him, **they changed their minds** and began to say that he was a god. (Acts 28:2-6+)

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**ILLUSTRATION** - Obeying Despite Circumstances - When I was in high school, I learned a huge lesson about obedience. A high school retreat was coming up and \$15 was due that Sunday. All I had was \$15 when God said to me, "Put it in the offering." I debated and disobeyed because I could not see how I could go to the retreat and obey God, too. We had evening church in those days. All during the service, God kept saying, "When the offering plate comes by, put in the \$15!" I felt the press of God's Spirit, but I let the plate pass me by. Immediately after the service, a dear widow of little means came up to me. Her name was Mrs. Kline. She said, "All day long the Lord has been telling me to give this to you. I think you will need it for the retreat." She put some money in my hand and left. Any guesses as to how much it was? \$15!! It was a gracious rebuke from God. And I found an usher in a hurry. — Pastor Al Detter

Exodus 4:5 "that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you."

- **That they** - Ex 4:1 3:18 4:31 19:9 2Ch 20:20 Isa 7:9 Joh 5:36 11:15,42 20:27,31
- **the LORD** - Ex 3:15 Ge 12:7 17:1 18:1 26:2 48:3 Jer 31:3 Ac 7:2
- Exodus 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## THE CLEAR PURPOSE OF THE SIGNS

**That they may believe** (see [aman](#)) **that the LORD, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you** - God explains the purpose of the sign was to counter Israel's unbelief, the very thing about which Moses was in doubt and fear. The **sign** was to create belief in the sons of Israel that Moses had experienced a personal encounter with the God of the patriarchs, which as an aside was the first appearance of God in over 400 years. His appearance to Moses would in turn serve as affirmation/confirmation that the God, **the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob** had cut an unconditional covenant with the patriarchs, and had not forgotten them and was able to fulfill the promises of the covenant including the promise to deliver them from Egypt...

God said to Abram, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions. (Ge 15:13-14+)

Exodus 4:6 The LORD furthermore said to him, "Now **put** your hand into your bosom." So he put his hand into his bosom, and when he took it out, **behold**, his hand was leprous like snow.

- **leprous like snow** - Nu 12:10 2Ki 5:27
- Exodus 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## AGAIN INSTANT OBEDIENCE

The LORD furthermore said to him, "Now **put** your hand into your bosom." - Notice God does not tell him why he is to do this.

**Bosom** ([02436](#))(**cheq, heq**) is a "masculine noun referring to bosom. It indicates the upper part of a person's body where objects and persons of love are embraced (1 Ki. 3:20) or clasped with hands or arms: one's wife or concubine (Gen. 16:5; Deut. 28:54); one's husband, literally the man of her bosom (**heyqāh**) (Deut. 28:56). The Lord carries His people, His flock in His bosom (Isa. 40:11). The person, animal, or object that is held in one's bosom is cherished greatly. An adulteress is not allowed into this sacred arena of personal relationship (Prov. 5:20). What is attached to one's bosom affects a person deeply (Prov. 6:27). Fools permit anger to lie in their bosoms (Eccl. 7:9). The Lord repays the sins of the fathers into the bosoms of their children (Jer. 32:18). Those who are untrustworthy should not be trusted even if they are our cherished friends or companions (Mic. 7:5). In a more literal sense, the word refers to a fold in a garment just above the belt where one's hand can be held (Ex. 4:6, 7)." (Complete Word Study Dictionary – Old Testament)

**Vine** - The word represents the "outer front of one's body" where beloved ones, infants, and animals are pressed closely: "Have I conceived all this people? have I begotten them, that thou shouldest say unto me, Carry them in thy bosom, as a nursing father beareth the sucking child ..." (Num. 11:12). In its first biblical appearance, **hêq** is used of a man's "bosom": "And Sarai said unto Abram, My wrong be upon thee: I have given my maid into thy bosom; and when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her eyes ..." (Gen. 16:5). The "husband of one's bosom" is a husband who is "held close to one's heart" or "cherished" (Deut. 28:56). This figurative inward sense appears again in Psa. 35:13: " ... My prayer returned into mine own bosom" (cf. Job 19:27). In 1 Kings 22:35, the word means the "inside" or "heart" of a war chariot. **Hêq** represents a fold of one's garment above the belt where things are hidden: "And the Lord said furthermore unto him [Moses], Put now thine hand into thy bosom" (Exod. 4:6). Various translations may render this word as "lap": "The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord" (Prov. 16:33). Yet "bosom" may be used, even where "lap" is clearly intended: "But the poor

man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom ..." (2 Sam. 12:3). Finally, ḥêq means the "base of the altar," as described in Ezek. 43:13 (cf. Ezek. 43:17). ([Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament and New Testament Words](#) online)

**Gilbrant** - In 1 Ki. 22:35, chêq refers to the bottom of the chariot into which the slain king of Israel's blood flowed. Chêq is the location where blood collected at the bottom of an altar (Ezek. 43:13f). Some believe that chêq refers not to a hollow, ditch or reservoir into which blood drained, but to a foundation in the ground upon which the altar stood. More frequently, chêq refers to the folds or pockets in a garment. These were located above the belt, and hands or objects could be concealed there. Moses placed his hand inside such a bulge in his garment, and when he removed his hand, it became leprous. Moses' hand was healed when he placed it back into the garment (Exo. 4:6f). Psalm 74:11 figuratively refers to placing God's hand inside his garment, rather than striking out with it. This hiding of his hand is a symbol of nonaggression (compare with the baring of God's arm, Isa. 53:1). Proverbs 21:14 speaks of a secretive bribe, one which is in the bosom or fold of a garment. Fire, however, cannot be hidden in the bosom (Prov. 6:27). Chêq also refers to the literal lap or bosom of humans. This is sometimes seen as a symbolic place of intimate friendship or protection. Naomi carried Ruth's child in her lap (Ruth 4:16; cf. 1 Ki. 3:20; 17:19). In 2 Sam. 12:3, Nathan's parable contains an ewe which is metaphorically raised up as a child and lies in its owner's bosom (cf. Isa. 40:11). Lamentations 2:12 describes the truly lamentable condition of an infant dying at its mother's bosom in the aftermath of the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem. An intimate parenting image is also figuratively seen in the Lord's command for Moses to carry the people of Israel in his bosom as a nurse carries an infant (Num. 11:12). Intimate and sexual relations are also associated with chêq. In Gen. 16:5, Hagar lay in Abraham's bosom in order to become pregnant. A girl was brought to lie in David's bosom in his old age, although he did not have sexual relations with her (1 Ki. 1:2). Proverbs 5:20 speaks of the stupidity of the infatuation of a man with a loose woman, the metaphorical antithesis of wisdom, which would be to obey Yahweh's laws. Chêq may also refer to the intimate soul or interior being of humans (Job 19:27; Ecc. 7:9; Ps. 89:50). (([Complete Biblical Library Hebrew-English Dictionary](#)))

**Cheq/heq** - 38x in 34v - arms(1), base(3), bosom(26), bottom(1), care(1), cherish(1), cherishes(2), lap(2), within(1). Gen. 16:5; Exod. 4:6; Exod. 4:7; Num. 11:12; Deut. 13:6; Deut. 28:54; Deut. 28:56; Ruth 4:16; 2 Sam. 12:3; 2 Sam. 12:8; 1 Ki. 1:2; 1 Ki. 3:20; 1 Ki. 17:19; 1 Ki. 22:35; Job 19:27; Ps. 35:13; Ps. 74:11; Ps. 79:12; Ps. 89:50; Prov. 5:20; Prov. 6:27; Prov. 16:33; Prov. 17:23; Prov. 21:14; Eccl. 7:9; Isa. 40:11; Isa. 65:6; Isa. 65:7; Jer. 32:18; Lam. 2:12; Ezek. 43:13; Ezek. 43:14; Ezek. 43:17; Mic. 7:5

**So he put his hand into his bosom, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous like snow** - Moses again obeyed God's request. **Behold** ([hinneh](#)) expresses a sense of surprise and shock! One can only imagine Moses' shock. Leprosy was one of the most feared diseases in the ancient world and had no cure and resulted in social isolation.

**Exodus 4:7 Then He said, "Put your hand into your bosom again." So he put his hand into his bosom again, and when he took it out of his bosom, behold, it was restored like the rest of his flesh.**

- **it was restored** - Nu 12:13,14 De 32:39 2Ki 5:14 Mt 8:3
- Exodus 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## **MOSES OBEYS WITHOUT QUESTIONS**

**Then He said, "Put your hand into your bosom again."** - Moses does not ask why.

**So he put his hand into his bosom again, and when he took it out of his bosom, behold, it was restored like the rest of his flesh** - Note again the word **Behold** ([hinneh](#)) expressing this time undoubtedly a sense of awe and surprised relief! This is a better "behold" than the one in the previous passage!

One can only imagine Moses' shock. Leprosy was one of the most feared diseases in the ancient world and had no cure and resulted in social isolation. Moses' horror at the possibility of being marked with an loathsome disease changed to amazement and awe at God's power to heal what in the ancient world was considered incurable. In short, Moses was seeing God's power on display.

Notice that the first two signs were ones that Moses himself could see at this very time when doubt had crept into his heart and mind. These would (or should) serve to fortify his flagging faith.

**Dan Duncan** on the meaning of this sign - The sign of the leprosy being miraculously caused and cured also signified God's power, but it may also have a more specific meaning for the Israelites themselves. And the meaning would be something like a warning. A warning against unbelief. And we see this throughout the Scriptures. That when God shows his displeasure, sometimes it is expressed through the curse of leprosy. Let me give you a case in point, and there's more than one case to support this. But you remember the incident in Numbers chapter 12, when following the Exodus Miriam, and Aaron challenged the authority of Moses. And so it's put to the test. And God judged of Miriam and his displeasure, his judgment on her was evidence by the fact that she became a leprosy, as white as snow. So the second sign was a warning to the people. And to Moses as well that there were serious consequences to the disbelief of God's word. It may also be - and this has been a suggestion of some - that it indicates that the messenger of God was to be clean before he could serve, and that is certainly true as well.

**Exodus 4:8 "If they will not believe you or heed the witness of the first sign, they may believe the witness of the last sign."**

- **if they** - Ex 4:30,31 Isa 28:10 Joh 12:37
- **they** - De 32:39 2Ki 5:7 Job 5:18
- Exodus 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## AUTHENTICATING SIGNS

**If they will not believe you or heed the witness of the first sign** - The first sign was the staff to snake and back again. Keep in mind that a **sign** essentially serves to point to and aid perception or insight. The English definition of sign is something that suggests the presence or existence of a fact, condition, or quality. In simple terms, signs point to something. The question for all three of the signs is what is the specific meaning of these signs. We have alluded to the staff-serpent sign and the fact that the Egyptian rulers wore a crown that had the image of a serpent.

**They may believe the witness of the last sign** - The NLT paraphrases it "they will be convinced by the second sign." The NAS suggests a the possibility the Israelites might believe, but the Septuagint translation supports the NLT for it says "they will believe because of the voice of the second sign." **Witness** is the word for sound or word and so the Hebrew reads more literally "believe the voice of the latter sign,"

**Thompson** - What these signs were designed to do was to point out that God's power was with Moses and Moses was telling the truth of the Word of God. The three signs pointed to the fact that Moses was God's man and he was telling the truth and the nation needed to follow him. ([Sermon](#))

**Constable** has an interesting note on "witness" - Normally at least two witnesses were necessary to establish credibility under the Mosaic Law (Deut. 19:15; et al.). A third witness further strengthened the veracity of the testimony. Here God gave Moses three witnesses to confirm His prophet's divine calling and enablement. God entrusted Moses with His powerful word and endowed him with His mighty power. He was the first prophet with the power to work miracles.

**Guzik** - Each of the first two signs had to do with *transformation*. Something good and useful (a rod or a hand) was made into something evil (a serpent or a leprous hand), and significantly, they were then transformed back again. There was a real message in the first two signs. The first said, "Moses, if you obey Me, your enemies will be made powerless." The second said "Moses, if you obey Me, your pollution can be made pure." Doubts in each of these areas probably hindered Moses, and before those signs spoke to anyone else, they spoke to Moses. This is the pattern with all God's leaders. ([Enduring Word](#))

**Sign** (0226) (**'oth**) means a signal, a mark a miracle and is used to describe amazing events such as God bringing Israel out of Egypt (Ex 4:8, 9, Nu 14:22) or a sign serving to authenticate the message as from God (1Sa 2:34, 10:7, 9) in contrast to the signs from false prophets (Dt 13:1, 2). King Hezekiah received a **sign** from Jehovah that He would add fifteen years to his life (Isa 38:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8; Gideon - Jdg 6:17+) As an aside, while the Bible does record individuals asking for signs of divine approval or affirmation, this process is not to be the norm. In other words, it is usually not best to test God by asking Him for signs! Perhaps better is the prayer of the sick boy's father in Mark (Mk 9:24)! I like what **Delitzsch** says that "signs authenticate divine causality retrospectively or divine certainty prospectively."

The Hebrew word "sign" means God signifies or signals something to someone in order to inform them to

believe what they cannot see (William Gesenius, Hebrew Lexicon, p. 24). For example, if you are driving down the road and see a sign for a gas station, the purpose of the sign is to inform you that there is a gas station that you cannot presently see.

The [Septuagint](#) translates 'o t h usually with the Greek word [semeion](#) (from **sema** = sign) which describes something that serves as a pointer to aid perception or insight. In the NT a sign speaks of a token which has behind it a particular message to be conveyed. In secular use it came to mean the intervention of the deities in our world and this is the meaning the Bible attaches to miracles such as Moses would carry out for they represent God "breaking into" the natural world to accomplish a supernatural feat for a specific purpose and in Exodus that purpose is redemption or deliverance from slavery in Egypt!

**Skinner** comments that **sign** ('oth) "plays a very large part in OT religion and with considerable latitude of meaning. The most important cases are those in which a divine revelation is attested by some striking event within the range of immediate perception through the senses. Such a **sign** may be a supernatural occurrence conveying an irresistible persuasion of the divine agency (Isa 38:7, 22; Ex 7:8ff.; Jdg 6:17, 36ff.; 1Ki 13:1 ff.). But it may also be an ordinary event, which acquires significance through its having been foretold, or asked for (Ge 24:14; 1Sa 10:2ff.; 14:10; Luke 2:12). Thus of two predicted events the nearer may be made a "**sign**" of the more remote (1Sa 2:34; Jer 44:29f.). Or, in a still more general sense, the "**sign**" may be merely an incident of the fulfilled prediction, which carries the mind back to the time of the prophecy, when the **sign** was appointed (Ex 3:12; Is 37:30). That for which a sign is here offered to Ahaz is the certainty of divine help or (what is the same thing) the truth that God speaks to him through the prophet. ([The book of prophet Isaiah](#))

**Sign** - 79x in 77v - banners(1), omens(1), pledge(1), sign(43), signs(30), standards(1), witness(1), wondrous(1). Gen. 1:14; Gen. 4:15; Gen. 9:12; Gen. 9:13; Gen. 9:17; Gen. 17:11; Exod. 3:12; Exod. 4:8; Exod. 4:9; Exod. 4:17; Exod. 4:28; Exod. 4:30; Exod. 7:3; Exod. 8:23; Exod. 10:1; Exod. 10:2; Exod. 12:13; Exod. 13:9; Exod. 13:16; Exod. 31:13; Exod. 31:17; Num. 2:2; Num. 14:11; Num. 14:22; Num. 16:38; Num. 17:10; Deut. 4:34; Deut. 6:8; Deut. 6:22; Deut. 7:19; Deut. 11:3; Deut. 11:18; Deut. 13:1; Deut. 13:2; Deut. 26:8; Deut. 28:46; Deut. 29:3; Deut. 34:11; Jos. 2:12; Jos. 4:6; Jos. 24:17; Jdg. 6:17; 1 Sam. 2:34; 1 Sam. 10:7; 1 Sam. 10:9; 1 Sam. 14:10; 2 Ki. 19:29; 2 Ki. 20:8; 2 Ki. 20:9; Neh. 9:10; Job 21:29; Ps. 65:8; Ps. 74:4; Ps. 74:9; Ps. 78:43; Ps. 86:17; Ps. 105:27; Ps. 135:9; Isa. 7:11; Isa. 7:14; Isa. 8:18; Isa. 19:20; Isa. 20:3; Isa. 37:30; Isa. 38:7; Isa. 38:22; Isa. 44:25; Isa. 55:13; Isa. 66:19; Jer. 10:2; Jer. 32:20; Jer. 32:21; Jer. 44:29; Ezek. 4:3; Ezek. 14:8; Ezek. 20:12; Ezek. 20:20

**Exodus 4:9 "But if they will not believe even these two signs or heed what you say, then you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground; and the water which you take from the Nile will become blood on the dry ground."**

- **the water** - Ex 7:19
- **blood** - Ex 1:22 7:19-25 Mt 7:2
- Exodus 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### THE THIRD SIGN WATER TO BLOOD

The Nile River has been described as the "Lifeblood of Egypt" for without the Nile, there would be no crops produced, no hydration for their animals. So God directs His third sign at the heart of the nation's life and in so doing was showing that He could impose His will upon the nation of Egypt. And as the rest of the story shows, this sign was a foreshadowing of the 10 plagues that would soon come as definitive proof of God's power over Egypt.

**But if they will not believe even these two signs or heed what you say, then you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground; and the water which you take from the Nile will become blood on the dry ground** - This sign was one that would in fact occur as part of the first plague when Aaron hitting the Nile with the staff turned the water to blood (Ex 7:14-19, 20-25). Given the fact that the Egyptians considered the Nile a divine source of life (see [Hapi - the Nile god](#)), this sign would demonstrate that God had power over the Egyptians (and their false gods).

Moses performed the signs before all of the elders and people (Ex 4:29-30) and as God had promised, they believed (Ex 4:31).

**MacDonald** offers an interesting interpretation - They spoke of God's power over Satan (i.e., the serpent), and sin (pictured by the

leprosy) and of the fact that Israel would be redeemed from both of these through blood. (Believer's Bible Commentary)

**Guzik** has an interesting thought on the **third sign** - The third sign was simply a sign of judgment. Good, pure waters were made foul and bloody by the work of God and they did not turn back again. This showed that if the miracles of transformation did not turn the hearts of the people, then perhaps the sign of judgment would.

**J Ligon Duncan** - In all of these things, especially in the first and the last sign, God is reiterating to His people that He is sovereign over Egypt. You realize again that it's not just Moses performing these curious and almost bizarre signs that in and of themselves are convincing and compelling to the people of God. It's their realization of what the signs indicate. These signs indicate their God's sovereignty over their enemies. God, in His plan of redemption, is sovereign over all the enemies of His people....we struggle not with flesh and blood, but with powers and principalities. And God in this passage tonight is reminding us again that He is sovereign over all of those. We're no match for them, but God is sovereign. He has chosen His man. He will redeem His people, and He will reveal Himself, not only to His own people, but even to the enemies of His people. May God be praised.

**David Thompson** - (Observation #1) - These signs were performed by God through Moses. God uses men. He typically uses one specific person to lead. Moses was God's choice and he was the major individual God would use to accomplish His will. God still singles out individuals to use them for His will. God does still pick His leaders. (Observation #2) - These signs were very specific to this time in the program of God. The serpent sign showed that God was more powerful than any supposed deity of the Egyptian world. The Pharaohs wore crowns that had serpents on them that they believed were gods. The leprosy was a sign that only God can heal sin. Leprosy was often a punishment for sin and it was a sign that sin may only be forgiven by God. The Nile River sign was a sign that the river was not sacred, God was sacred. (Observation #3) - These signs are very applicable to us. We have all been snake-bitten by Satan and we have all committed leprous sins against God, and the only one who can take our sin and wash it away by blood is God, and that is exactly what He does when we believe on Jesus Christ. ([Sermon](#))

**Exodus 4:10 Then Moses said to the LORD, "Please, Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither recently nor in time past, nor since You have spoken to Your servant; for I am slow of speech and slow of tongue."**

- **eloquent** - Heb. a man of words, Ex 4:1 Job 12:2 1Co 2:1-4 2Co 10:10 11:6
- **neither recently nor in time past** - Hebrew = since yesterday, nor since the third day - Ex 6:12 Jer 1:6 Ac 7:22
- Exodus 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### **MOSES' FOURTH EXCUSE: "I CAN'T SPEAK WELL!"**

**Then** - This marks this declaration as subsequent to 3 remarkable signs, 2 which transpired and one which was promised. In the face of these miracles Moses still objects to God's charge to be Israel's deliverer. Lord, I'm not eloquent. You're appointing me to be a spokesman, and I'm not eloquent. I'm not suited for this. I don't have the right kind of speech patterns. I'm not a very good speaker.

**When God calls you to do something beyond your natural ability,  
don't make excuses for why you can't do it.**

-- Steven Cole

**J Ligon Duncan** puts Moses' call in perspective - Now that God, forty years after his time in the wilderness, has come to him again and made him aware that it is indeed his divine call for him to serve as His spokesman and deliverer, Moses is resistant. We've said over and over, Moses finds some other thing to raise about God's plan as God continues to press this commission on him. But even as he does that, God is making something clear to us. And that is, though Moses is indeed his chosen servant, and though Moses is indeed integral to God's plan for bringing about redemption for His people, Moses is not the main actor. God is the deliverer, God is the redeemer, God is the Savior. Moses is not perfect. Moses will not redeem Israel because he's an eloquent speaker. He won't redeem Israel because he never trembles in his faith as he faces great odds. He won't redeem Israel because he's sinlessly perfected, and he never makes a mistake. He'll redeem Israel because God has ordained it. And God has ordained that he will be used as His instrument. And that in and of itself is an important lesson. ([Exodus 4:10-17 A Spokesman for Moses](#))

**Moses said to the LORD, "Please** (KJV = "O") **Lord** (*'adonay*) - The word for **please** (*bi*) is a particle introducing earnest requests or petitions, complaints or excuses. and seeks permission to speak. This Hebrew particle is always followed by "my Lord." Moses uses this same word in Ex 4:13 to introduce his last request regarding his commissioning, this time invoking the anger of Jehovah. It is interesting that another "deliverer" of Israel introduced his excuses with the same Hebrew particle. That man's name was [Gideon](#) and he declared "O my lord, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our

fathers told us about, saying, 'Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?' But now the LORD has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian." (Jdg 6:13+) and "O Lord, how shall I deliver Israel? Behold, my family is the least in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my father's house." (Jdg 6:15+).

Note that this is the first time Moses had spoken to the God he now knew as Jehovah, and he does not address Him as Jehovah but as Adonai (['adonay](#)) which is a title of both respect and deference conveying the nuances of lord, master, sir. In this context Moses is substituting Adonai for the [Tetragrammaton](#) (YHWH)

**Please** (0994)(bi) is used 14x in 12 v - beg (1), O (4), Oh (6), please (2), please (1). - Ge 43:20; Ge 44:18; Ex 4:10; Ex 4:13; Nu 12:11; Jos. 7:8; Jdg. 6:13; Jdg. 6:15; Jdg. 13:8; 1 Sa 1:26; 1 Ki. 3:17; 1 Ki. 3:26. The uses are followed by appeal to either God or humans. This Hebrew particle is generally considered a polite interjection, and it may carry the nuance of the speaker accepting the consequences which the speech may incur. **Baker** adds "The particle is intended to express politeness, pardon, deep concern with great respect toward the one spoken to. It is used in addressing noble men, such as Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Eli, Solomon (Gen. 43:20; 44:18; Num. 12:11; 1 Sam. 1:26; 1 Ki. 3:17, 26); divine beings, the angel of the Lord (Judg. 6:13, 15); but most often the Lord (Ex. 4:10, 13; Josh. 7:8; Judg. 13:8). (Complete Word Study Dictionary – Old Testament)

**Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither recently nor in time past**- Notice the "I's" in this passage -- Moses was focused on self, not Savior, something we all tend to do! Our flesh ever loves to throw us a "pity party!" **Eloquent** is literally in Hebrew "a man of words." The [Septuagint](#) translates this with the adjective [hikanos](#) which means **adequate** (cf Paul uses this in 2 Cor 3:5-6+ where a proper understanding of our "adequacy" is a good thing - but Moses seems to be using it in a differ way as his subsequent statement in Ex 4:13 proves) and here is preceded by the negative thus mean *absolutely not adequate!* Is Moses being truthful about his ability to speak? Or has he developed a case of selective amnesia? Stephen declared "Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians, and he was a man of power ([dunatos](#)) in words and deeds." (NLT = "he was powerful in both speech and action" KJV = "mighty in words and deeds") (Acts 7:22+) . **Power** in Stephen's description of Moses is the Greek word [dunatos](#) which describes that which has sufficient or necessary power, means, skill, or resources to accomplish an objective or task. Did he lose this power during his 40 years talking with the sheep? Did he forget how to speak Egyptian? Does he really just not want to go back to Egypt?

**Guzik** - Those years of eloquence in Egypt ended 40 years before this. For 40 years, Moses only seemed to speak to sheep. His self confidence was gone; but he needed God confidence instead.

**J Ligon Duncan** - Maybe he's saying that he's not very good at Egyptian any more. It's been forty years since he spoke it regularly in court. He knows what he's saying, but what he's asserting is that he's not eloquent, he's not up to the task. And Moses here, I want you to see this. Moses here begins to reflect the very unwillingness that he fears Israel will show about his leadership. You remember he's already said, "Lord, what if they don't listen to me?" But is Moses listening to God? He's worried that Israel won't listen to him. But here the spokesman of God to Israel is continually saying to the Lord, "Well, I'm not sure that I'm really willing to do this." You see the irony. Moses fears that Israel won't be willing. But he himself is not willing, and indeed he will see their unwillingness in coming days. Moses objection, he says, "Lord, I'm not a good speaker, and even my encounter with you hasn't helped." Look at how he says this. I have never been eloquent, neither recently or in time past. In other words, I don't have a track record for eloquent speech, and Lord, even this encounter with You hasn't changed things. It's almost like an accusation. Lord, I've never been an eloquent speaker. And you would think that if You're gonna call me to do this, that at least you'd do a miracle here in Sinai, and I'd be a good speaker. It's almost an accusation. He lays the blame with God. You see the sin of Moses here. This fear of Moses was real. It continued to dog him. If you were to turn forward to Exodus 6:12 he'll raise the issue again. Moses spoke before the Lord, saying: "Behold, the sons of Israel have not listened to me. How then will Pharaoh listen to me for I am unskilled in speech."...There have been suggestions this is a speech impediment. There have been suggestions that this is a loss of some of his linguistic skills, even though he'd grown up in Egypt. Even though he had grown up speaking their language, perhaps he was fearful that he had lost the pronunciation or the touch in his forty years in the wilderness. I don't know what it is, but the point is, Moses' worry misses the point. God has not chosen him because he's eloquent. Eloquence is not what is needed. A man who simply speaks the truth is that which is needed. And Paul recognized this in his own day. If you turn with me to 2 Corinthians 10:10, believe it or not Paul himself was accused by the Corinthians of being fairly unimpressive in his public speech when he was preaching amongst them. They apparently thought Apollos was a lot better preacher than Paul. I've always had a hard time taking that in. But apparently they thought Apollos was a lot better preacher than Paul. They say, 2 Corinthians 10:10, they say, "His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive and his speech contemptible." ([Exodus 4:10-17 A Spokesman for Moses](#))

**NET** - Now Moses took up another line of argumentation, the issue of his inability to speak fluently (Ex 4:10-17). The point here is that God's servants must yield themselves as instruments to God, the Creator. It makes no difference what character traits they have or what weaknesses they think they have (Moses manages to speak very well) if God is present. If the sovereign God has

chosen them, then they have everything that God intended them to have.

**NET on eloquent** (man) - When a noun clause is negated with al { (lo' = "never"), rather than !yae ('en), there is a special emphasis, since the force of the negative falls on a specific word. The expression "**eloquent man**" is 'ish dabarim (literally "a man of words"). The genitive may indicate a man characterized by words or a man who is able to command or control words. Moses apparently is resigned to the fact that he can do the signs, but he knows the signs have to be explained.

The prophet Jeremiah voiced a similar excuse declaring "Then I said, "Alas, Lord GOD!**Behold**, I do not know how to speak, Because I am a youth." (Jer 1:6) (Note - Of course as he writes this he is speaking, so to speak!)

**Nor since You have spoken to Your servant for I am slow of speech and slow of tongue- Slow of speech** is literally "heavy of mouth" and in the [Septuagint](#) is the adjective ischuophonos (not in NT) used only here in Scripture which the meaning of having a speech impediment, describing one who stutters or stammers. Here is the irony of Moses' excuses...

Moses was backward in speech, yet talked with God.

And God clearly had no difficulty understanding him!

**Ryken** - Like Moses, we are prone to place far too much reliance on natural ability, and not nearly enough on supernatural assistance. If God is with us, then we will be able to do his will, even in spite of ourselves. Remember that the "I" who promised to go with Moses—and who has promised to be with us forever—is the Great I Am, the eternal and all-powerful Lord. (Ibid)

**Walter Kaiser** explains that "Moses' complaint was not in defective articulation, but in his inability to take command of Hebrew and Egyptian (cf. Ezekiel 3:5, where 'heavy of tongue' = difficulty with a foreign language ...)." (EBC-Ex)

**F B Meyer** - "Cherish the lowliest thought you choose of yourself, but unite it with the loftiest conception of God's All-Sufficiency. Self-depreciation may lead to the marring of a useful life. We must think soberly of ourselves, not too lowly, as not too extravagantly. The one talent must not be buried in the earth."

**David Thompson** - Some have questioned whether or not Moses had a speech impediment. I am not sure we can conclude that based on this word. In fact, Stephen said that "Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians and he was a man of power in words and deeds" (Acts 7:22). It seems to me that the more probable argument Moses is making is that he is claiming that he is not really a great communicator. He was not a guy who would win oratorical contests. Now Moses was well-trained in Egyptian education and it is possible that he is struggling with the fact that he doesn't think he knows Hebrew well enough to lead the Hebrew nation. In light of what God says about Aaron in verse 14, that he speaks "fluently," this is a real possibility. Now let's face it. For the past 40 years, Moses has not been a public speaker; he has been a quiet shepherd. He has been working for a Midianite priest. He has not been polishing up on his Hebrew or for that matter he hasn't been talking too much of anyone. But all that was about to change. ([Sermon](#))

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## Exodus 4:2 The Little Things

"And the Lord said unto him, What is that in thine hand?" Exodus 4:2

Our Scripture reading for today contains Moses' response to God's call at the burning bush. Having just been commissioned to lead the children of Israel out of bondage, he was apprehensive about how the Egyptians, and even his countrymen, would react. But the Lord said to him, "What is that in thine hand?" "A rod," Moses answered. Then He said to him in Ex 4:17, "And thou shalt take this rod in thine hand, wherewith thou shalt do signs." Most of us are familiar with the great miracles associated with that rod when Moses obeyed the Lord. It was insignificant in itself, but it became a powerful instrument when committed to the Lord.

Writing on this theme, J. W. Johnson imagined the following conversation between God and some of His faithful servants down through the centuries: "What is that in thine hand?" asked the Lord. 'A sling,' said David. 'It is enough; go up against the giant,' and the great Goliath fell before the shepherd boy. 'What is that in thine hand?' 'A sword,' answered Jonathan. 'It is enough,' and the brave youth, followed by his armor-bearer, went up against an army, and the Philistines were defeated....'What is that in thine hand?' 'A pen,' said John Bunyan, as he spoke from the arches of Bedford prison. 'It is enough,' and he wrote the story Pilgrim's Progress, which will live while the world endures."

Don't sell yourself short, friend! If God has called you to a task, He'll equip you for it. He merely asks, "What is that in thine hand?" Give it to Him, and you'll see what He can do with little things. - Richard W. De Haan ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

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**Exodus 4:10-17 - Now Go!**



Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say. —Exodus 4:12NIV

More than 10,000 evangelists and Christian leaders sat in a giant auditorium in Amsterdam in 1986 listening to world-renowned evangelist Billy Graham. I sat among them, listening as he narrated some of his experiences. Then, to my surprise, he said, “Let me tell you: every time I stand before the congregation of God’s people to preach, I tremble and my knees wobble!”

What! I wondered. How can such a great preacher who has enthralled millions with his powerful sermons exhibit trembling and wobbling knees? Then he went on to describe not fear and stage fright, but intense humility and meekness as he felt inadequate for the daunting task to which God had called him. He relied on God for strength, not on his own eloquence.

Moses felt inadequate when God sent him to deliver the enslaved Israelites from their 400-year captivity in Egypt. Moses pleaded with the Lord to send someone else, with the excuse that he had never been a good speaker (see Ex. 4:10,13).

We may have similar fears when God calls us to do something for Him. But His encouragement to Moses can also spur us on: “Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say” (v.12 niv).

As Billy Graham said that day, “When God calls you, do not be afraid of trembling and wobbling knees, for He will be with you!”

What task does God have for you to do today? Depend on Him by asking for His help.

**Wherever God sends us,  
He comes alongside us.**

**INSIGHT:** When God called Moses to deliver His people from Egyptian bondage, Moses was reluctant to obey, giving various reasons why he was not qualified. He questioned his own identity and worthiness (Ex 3:11), his lack of authority (Ex 3:13), his credibility and acceptability (Ex 4:1), and his incapacities (Ex 4:10). Although God answered each of Moses’s excuses, God was angry with Moses for resisting what He had asked him to do (Ex 4:14). ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

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### **Exodus 4:10-17 He Trains My Hands**

Praise be to the Lord my Rock, who trains my hands for war, my fingers for battle. Psalm 144:1

When former NBA player David Wood was playing for Taugrés de Baskonia, I was with him at a Spanish Basketball Cup final. Before one game, he read Psalm 144:1: “Praise be to the Lord my Rock, who trains my hands for war, my fingers for battle.” He turned to me and said, “You see? It’s as if God has written this verse just for me! He trains my hands to catch rebounds and my fingers to shoot!” David felt called to play basketball and had learned that God takes us as we are and enables us to do what He calls us to do.

We can easily dismiss ourselves as having little use to God because we feel we have nothing to offer. When God appeared to Moses and assigned him the task of telling the Israelites that He would deliver them from the Egyptians (Ex. 3:16-17), Moses felt inadequate. He said to the Lord, “I have never been eloquent . . . I am slow of speech and tongue” (4:10). Perhaps Moses had some kind of speech impediment, or he was just afraid, but God overcame his inadequacy with His sufficiency. God said, “Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say” (v. 12).

All God wants from us is to follow His plans. He will sort out the rest. In His mighty hands, you can be a blessing to others.

Here I am, Lord, ready to serve You in whatever way You desire. Lead me.

Dr. Jaime Fernández Garrido is director of the evangelical radio and television program Born Again, author of various books, and composer of more than 400 hymns and choruses.

**God’s call to a task includes His strength to complete it.**

**INSIGHT:** When God called Moses to deliver the Jews from Egyptian bondage, Moses protested and offered various reasons why he was not the right candidate for the job (Ex. 3). He questioned his own identity (v. 11), his lack of authority (v. 13), and his credibility and acceptability (4:1). God responded by assuring Moses of His power and presence (4:1-9). Moses then continued his protest, saying he lacked eloquence and was “slow of speech and tongue” (v. 10). But God assured Moses He would enable him to speak powerfully and effectively (v. 12). Running out of excuses, Moses asked God to “send someone else” (v. 13). He was angry with Moses for his lack of trust and being unwilling to take up the assignment (v. 14). God told Moses that He would enable him to do what He called him to do. Sim Kay Te ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

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## Exodus 4:10-17 Absolutely Nobody

Surely I am more stupid than any man, and do not have the understanding of a man. —Proverbs 30:2

He wanted to be a nobody. In 1992, a Seattle man running for the office of Washington State's lieutenant governor legally changed his name to "Absolutely Nobody." As he entered the race, he said he wanted to greet the voters, saying, "Hi, I'm Absolutely Nobody. Vote for me." He later admitted that the purpose of his campaign was to abolish the office of lieutenant governor.

This man used a name as a gimmick, but the Bible has a lot to say to those of us who present ourselves to others as a nobody. The right kind of humility is healthy. The songwriters of Israel knew how important it is to see our foolishness apart from God (Ps. 73:22; Prov. 30:2). Jesus Himself showed us that without God we won't accomplish anything of lasting value (John 5:30; 15:5).

But we read a warning in the story of Moses. There's a downside to insisting that we are "nobody" if it is to avoid doing what God commands (Ex. 4:1-17). Our motives make us into somebody who resists the loving purposes of God.

We may treat ourselves and others as having no worth. But remember, God doesn't make nobodies. Like Moses, if we surrender to God, we can do anything God wants us to do—in His strength. By Mart De Haan ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Lord, take my life and make it wholly Thine;  
Fill my poor heart with Thy great love divine.  
Take all my will, my passion, self and pride;  
I now surrender, Lord—in me abide.  
—Orr

**Without Christ we can do nothing.**

**With Him we can do everything He wants us to do.**

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## Exodus 4:10-17 The Power Of Our Limits

Moses, on the occasion of his call by God, made excuses. "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).

The wording suggests that Moses had a speech impediment—perhaps he stuttered. But 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?" (Ex 4:11).

Our impairments, our disabilities, our handicaps are not accidents; they are God-designed. He uses every one of our flaws for His own glory. God's way of dealing with what we call "limitations" is not to remove them but to endow them with strength and use them for good.

In the New Testament, Paul the apostle referred to an unspecified "thorn in the flesh" that he repeatedly asked the Lord to take from him (2Co 12:7, 8). But God said, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2Co 12:9).

Paul even learned to "take pleasure" in his troubles. "Most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me," he said (2Co 12:9). "For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2Co 12:10).—David H. Roper ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

All faithful saints who walk with God  
Through weakness learn to trust His Word;  
They're not immune to pain or tears,  
But learn to rise above their fears.  
—D. De Haan

**God's strength is best seen in our weakness**

**Exodus 4:11 The LORD said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes him mute or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?"**

NLT Exodus 4:11 Then the LORD asked Moses, "Who makes a person's mouth? Who decides whether people speak or do not speak, hear or do not hear, see or do not see? Is it not I, the LORD?"

- Ge 18:14 Ps 51:15 94:9 146:8 Isa 6:7 35:5,6 42:7 Jer 1:6,9 Eze 3:26,27 33:22 Am 3:6
- Exodus 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## JEHOVAH'S RHETORICAL QUESTIONS

David's declaration parallels Jehovah's rhetorical question - "I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, And my soul knows it very well." (Ps 139:14)

**The LORD said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes him mute or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?"** - God asks questions which serve as a reproof of Moses' doubts. God does not say Moses does not have deficiency, but that He, God, has all sufficiency and can overcome Moses' deficiencies. God is also saying "I made you who you are." He is affirming His sovereignty.

**Ryken** - These rhetorical questions are a reminder that God made us exactly the way he wanted to make us. Who gave us our eyes, ears, and mouth? Obviously God did. If that is the case, then our abilities, inabilities, and even disabilities are ordained by him. God has equipped us with every talent we need to do his will. He made us the way that he made us for his glory. People often wish they had someone else's abilities instead of their own. An example of this kind of covetous thinking comes from the movie *Amadeus*, which despite its historical inaccuracies makes a compelling spiritual point. The film is about the extraordinary musical talents of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791), as viewed from the perspective of his fellow composer Antonio Salieri (1750–1825). Salieri was a fine musician in his own right, but he was no Mozart, and he knew it. Rather than using his own talents to glorify God, he envied the gift that God had given to Mozart. His resentment about Mozart led him to reject God, and in the end he became a bitter old man, the self-professed "patron saint of mediocrity." 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. When Moses said, "I don't know how to speak," God responded by saying, "Who gave man his mouth?" It was God's way of showing Moses that he was mouthing off. Every time we complain about our personal limitations, what we are actually doing is insulting the God who made us. (PW-Exodus)

**J Ligon Duncan** - God takes Moses in light of his objection, God takes Moses right back to the doctrine of creation, and He emphasizes His sovereignty. God is the one who gifts as He chooses. If God has called Moses, he can give Moses what Moses needs. God is capable of taking into consideration everything about Moses that needs to be taken into consideration as He calls him into service. And so notice what the Lord says. "Who has made man's mouth. Who makes him mute or deaf or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord." Moses, God reassures by reminding him that He is the one who creates, and He is the one who gives these gifts. ([Exodus 4:10-17 A Spokesman for Moses](#))

**David Thompson** - God responds to Moses concerning His sovereignty. Now God says to Moses, who do you think makes people the way they are? That word "made" or "makes" is one that means God actually designs and places or sets people up in exactly the way He wants (Ibid., pp. 370-371). So when we see someone who we think is born with a handicap, that person has been created by God and is here by God's sovereign decree. God determines if a person comes into existence not being able to talk. He determines if a person comes into existence who cannot hear. He determines if a person comes into existence who is blind. Now maybe you don't like that about God. Well, that is too bad. Our problem is we want God to fit in with the way we think about things; but God is a whole lot bigger than the way we think about things. He is God. So what we need to do is to recognize His great sovereignty in everything, including people who are handicapped. ([Sermon](#)) (See also [Why does God allow people to be disabled / handicapped?](#))

**Guzik** - There is not the slightest sense of fatalism in this declaration of God's sovereignty. It is never "God is so mighty we can't do anything," but it is always "God is so mighty, He can work through us if we make ourselves available."

**Hannah** - God's initial reaction to Moses' objection was to remind him, by a series of questions, that the LORD determines man's abilities or disabilities.

**Henry Morris** - Here is a direct claim that the human body was not developed by random processes, but by God's direct power.

**Or who makes him mute or deaf, or seeing or blind?** "Some think this is cruel of God. Nevertheless the point here was not to analyze the origin of evil, but to show that God is so mighty that He can even call the mute, deaf, and blind to do His work. Moses' perceived inadequacies didn't matter at all. If Moses was a poor speaker, was this news to God? Does God have trouble keeping track of who is deaf, who is blind, and who is mute? Does Moses really think God made a mistake here?. If Moses was a poor speaker, it didn't matter—the mighty God said, "I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say." By extension, God is sufficient for us, no matter what real or imagined inadequacies we have." (Guzik)

Your disabilities can be used to glorify God as is vividly shown in the life of [Joni Eareckson Tada](#). God mentions blindness as well as sight in order to show that every human being is called to serve him and this makes one think of [Fanny Crosby](#) ([movie](#)) who was

blinded in early childhood, but was used by God as one of the greatest hymn writers of all time. No excuses. Let God use you, just as you are and He will! If God is the one who makes a person deaf or blind, then even these limitations can be used for his glory.

**Is it not I, the LORD?** - Just in case Moses did not "get it" yet, Jehovah speaking to him from the burning bush reiterates Ex 3:12 "Certainly I will be with you" and that promise includes "when you speak!"

Jesus promised His disciples (and applicable to us) that "when they hand you over, do not worry about how or what you are to say; for it will be given you in that hour what you are to say. For it is not you who speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father Who speaks in you." (Mt 10:19-20+) The point is that while He won't give the words (those were "revelation" given to Moses), He will by His Spirit enable us to speak, even as He enabled thrice-denying Peter to speak boldly on Pentecost in Acts 2+!

**NET Note on Is it not I, the LORD?** - The final question obviously demands a positive answer. But the clause is worded in such a way as to return to the theme of "I AM." Isaiah 45:5–7 developed this same idea of God's control over life. Moses protests that he is not an eloquent speaker, and the LORD replies with reminders about himself and promises, "I will be with your mouth," an assertion that repeats the verb he used four times in 3:12 and 14 and in promises to Isaac and Jacob (Gen 26:3; 31:3)

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**ILLUSTRATION** - A good example of how God can be glorified in someone's disability comes from the ministry of Donald Grey Barnhouse, the famous pastor of Philadelphia's Tenth Presbyterian Church. Barnhouse had been conducting a week of services in another church, and there had been a good deal of banter about the host minister, whose wife was expecting their first child to be born at any moment. On the last night of services, when the minister failed to arrive, Barnhouse knew what had happened. What Barnhouse did not know, however, was that the child was born with Down's syndrome. The minister was devastated. "Dr. Barnhouse," he said, "our child is a mongoloid. I haven't told my wife, and I don't know what I'm going to tell her." Barnhouse replied, "My friend, this is of the Lord," and turning to the fourth chapter of Exodus, he read, "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?" The minister demanded to see the passage for himself, and as he studied it Barnhouse said, "My friend, you know the promise in Romans 8 that all things, including this mongoloid child, work together for good to those who love the Lord."

The minister returned to the hospital, where his wife was beginning to worry that something was wrong with the baby. He was able to say to her, "My precious darling, the Lord has blessed us with a mongoloid child." After she was finished crying, she said, "Where did you get that?" and he proceeded to show her what the Scripture said. Later, when she called her mother to tell her the news, she said, "Mother, the Lord has blessed us with a mongoloid child. We don't know the nature of the blessing, but we do know it's a blessing." On the following Sunday, when more than seventy nurses from the hospital attended that man's church, thirty of them came to faith in Christ! (Phillip Ryken)

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## God's Mouthpiece

Who gave human beings their mouths? . . . Is it not I, the Lord? Now go; I will help you speak. Exodus 4:11–12

Today's Scripture: Exodus 4:1–12

My nerves fluttering, I waited for the phone to ring and the radio interview to start. I wondered what questions the host would ask and how I would respond. "Lord, I'm much better on paper," I prayed. "But I suppose it's the same as Moses—I need to trust that you will give me the words to speak."

Of course I'm not comparing myself with Moses, the leader of God's people who helped them escape slavery in Egypt to life in the Promised Land. A reluctant leader, Moses needed the Lord to reassure him that the Israelites would listen to him. The Lord revealed several signs to him, such as turning his shepherd's staff into a snake (Ex. 4:3), but Moses hesitated to accept the mantle of leadership, saying he was slow of speech (v. 10). So God reminded him that He is the Lord and that He would help him speak. He would "be with his mouth" (as the original language translates, according to biblical scholars).

We know that since the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, God's Spirit lives within His children and that however inadequate we may feel, He will enable us to carry out the assignments He gives to us (Acts 1:8+). The Lord will "be with our mouths." Amy Boucher Pye ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Lord Jesus, You dwell with me. May my words today build up someone for Your glory.

As God's people we are His mouthpiece to spread His good news.

- Ps 25:4,5 Ps 32:9 143:10 Isa 49:2 50:4 Jer 1:9 Mt 10:19,20 Mk 13:11 Lu 11:1 12:11,12 21:14,15 Joh 14:26 Eph 6:19
- Exodus 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## THE CREATOR OF HIS MOUTH WOULD BE HIS DIVINE TELEPROMPTER!

**Now then go** - In view of the fact that God gives speech, Moses is called to **go**. This is not a suggestion but a command. God's longsuffering is being tested! Remember God's commandments always include His enablement, which in this case is described in the last part of this passage.

Don't miss that this is the fourth time God had told Moses to **GO** - Four times he commanded Moses to go (emphasis added): "So now, **go**" (Ex 3:10NET); "**Go** and gather" (Ex 3:16); "You and the elders are to **go** to the king of Egypt" (Ex 3:18NIV) and "Now then **go**" (Ex 4:12) Moses had run out of excuses!

**And I, even I, will be with your mouth, and teach you what you are to say**- In Ex 3:12 God had said "Surely I will be with you," indicating His presence. And here He reassures Moses that He will not only be with him but specifically with his mouth. See God working through speech of others in Deut 18:18; Jer 1:9. So God is saying that not only will He enable Moses' speech but will give him the very words to speak.

**J Ligon Duncan** - God is gracious with Moses, even after these questions. We're on the fourth one now. God graciously and patiently promises emphatically to Moses to be his mouthpiece, to be his teacher, to be his supplier of words. God is promising to be Moses teleprompter. He doesn't have to think of anything. God is going to supply the words that he needs. And it's not the eloquence of Moses that He's after. There are two things that stand out to me about this first section.

(1) The first one is this. **Simply, that God uses sinful and weak vessels to accomplish His purposes** Moses displays the same kind of weakness, the same kind of unwillingness that Israel has displayed and will display. The story of God's servants in the Bible is not the story of sinlessly perfected servants. You can look at Abraham, you can look at Isaac, you can look at Jacob, you can look at Joseph, you can look at Moses, you can look at David, all of them, save one, are filled with faults, and foibles and flaws. God is the Savior. He's the true Savior. Moses is His instrument. **But it's not through Moses' courage, it's not through Moses' eloquence, it's not through Moses' native abilities that the people of God are going to be saved. So even in this instance of Moses failure of faith God is just reminding us again that in the final analysis it's He who saves us.**

(2) **Secondly, God is showing to us here that His message is powerful apart from the way that it is delivered. We live in a culture where the method is the message. We care more about the way you deliver the information, than the information itself.** We want it snappy. We want it easy. We want it accessible. We'd like it with a tune, and maybe with a video as well. God, however, gives us words which in and of themselves are powerful (1 Cor 1:18, 1 Cor 2:4, 1 Th 1:5, Heb 1:3). They are His words. They are creative. They never return void (Isa 55:11). And usually He deliberately delivers them to us without any flashiness, without any eloquence. You know, it's interesting, we are told that Egyptian magicians were usually thought to be very eloquent in their speech, and it seems here that God has deliberately chosen an ineloquent spokesman so that **the message stands out more than the messenger. And so that the message itself is not lost in eloquence, but stands out more starkly.** Paul, himself, having been thought of by the Corinthians as not much of a preacher, understood this very point. Turn with me to I Corinthians, chapter 1. Paul says this: "Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech that the cross of Christ should not be made void." Notice there that Paul suggests that cleverness of speech can actually make void the cross of Christ, can drown it out, can garble the message. It's not to be delivered in cleverness of speech, for the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. And so he goes on to say, "We preach Christ crucified," verse 23, "to the Jews, a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men."

This plain-spoken man, this ineloquent man, because he speaks the truth, in the very simplicity of that speaking will exalt God's sovereignty, he will rebuke man's vanity, he will make the truth less palatable to those who are wise in their own eyes, and he will make the truth more easily graspable by the humble. And all by choosing an ineloquent messenger. Listen to what the Jewish commentator on this passage says: Whatever the circumstances of Moses in eloquence, whatever caused it, whatever Moses was referring to, whatever the circumstances, it is certain that the underlying idea is that prothetic eloquence is not a native talent, but an endowment granted for a special purpose. The message originates with God, not the prophet.

I often tell seminarians that the ones who are most natively gifted in their speaking abilities are the ones who will have to work hardest not to get out in front of the word. It is not the messenger. It is not the method. It is the message. Moses, in and of himself, reflects the weakness of God's servants, and so the sovereignty of God in salvation, and he reminds us that God's message is powerful in and of itself. ([Exodus 4:10-17 A Spokesman for Moses](#))

We see this same truth in the NT in Lk 12:12 and Jn 14:26

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### **Now Go!**

Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say. —Exodus 4:12 (niv)

Today's Scripture & Insight: Exodus 4:10-17

More than 10,000 evangelists and Christian leaders sat in a giant auditorium in Amsterdam in 1986 listening to world-renowned evangelist Billy Graham. I sat among them, listening as he narrated some of his experiences. Then, to my surprise, he said, "Let me tell you: every time I stand before the congregation of God's people to preach, I tremble and my knees wobble!"

What! I wondered. How can such a great preacher who has enthralled millions with his powerful sermons exhibit trembling and wobbling knees? Then he went on to describe not fear and stage fright, but intense humility and meekness as he felt inadequate for the daunting task to which God had called him. He relied on God for strength, not on his own eloquence.

Moses felt inadequate when God sent him to deliver the enslaved Israelites from their 400-year captivity in Egypt. Moses pleaded with the Lord to send someone else, with the excuse that he had never been a good speaker (see Ex. 4:10,13).

We may have similar fears when God calls us to do something for Him. But His encouragement to Moses can also spur us on: "Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say" (v.12 niv).

As Billy Graham said that day, "When God calls you, do not be afraid of trembling and wobbling knees, for He will be with you!"  
By: Lawrence Darmani

What task does God have for you to do today? Depend on Him by asking for His help. Wherever God sends us, He comes alongside us. ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

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### **Speak What He Teaches Spurgeon - Faith's Checkbook**

"Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shall say."—Exodus 4:12

MANY a true servant of the Lord is slow of speech, and when called upon to plead for his Lord, he is in great confusion lest he should spoil a good cause by his bad advocacy. In such a case it is well to remember that the Lord made the tongue which is so slow, and we must take care that we do not blame our Maker. It may be that a slow tongue is not so great an evil as a fast one, and fewness of words may be more of a blessing than floods of verbiage. It is also quite certain that real saving power does not lie in human rhetoric with its figures of speech, and pretty phrases, and grand displays. Lack of fluency is not so great a lack as it looks.

If God be with our mouths and with our minds, we shall have something better than the sounding brass of eloquence or the tinkling cymbal of persuasion. God's teaching is wisdom; His presence is power. Pharaoh had more reason to be afraid of stammering Moses than of the most fluent talker in Egypt, for what he said had power in it; he spoke plagues and deaths. If the Lord be with us in our natural weakness, we shall be girt with supernatural power. Therefore, let us speak for Jesus boldly, as we ought to speak.

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### **John Henry Jowett MOUTH AND MATTER**

"Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth." Exodus 4:12

AND what a promise that is for anyone who is commissioned to proclaim the King's decrees. Here can teachers and preachers find their strength. God will be with their mouths. He will control their speech, and order their words like troops. He does not promise to make us eloquent, but to endow our words with the "demonstration of power."

"And I will teach thee what thou shall say." The Lord will not only be with our mouths, but with our minds. He will guide our thoughts as well as our words. He will be as sentinel at the lips. He will be our guide in our processes of meditation and judgment, and He will bring us to enlightened ends. All of which is just this: He will give us mouth and matter.

This does not put a premium upon idleness. The Lord guides when men are honestly groping. He gives us fire when we have built the altar. He works His miracle when we have provided the five loaves. He sends His light through diligent thinking. The divine power

is given through the consecrated strength.

**Exodus 4:13 But he said, "Please, Lord, now send the message by whomever You will."**

BGT Exodus 4:13 κα ε πεν Μωυσ ς δ ομαι κ ριε προχε ρισσι δυν μενον λλον ν ποστειλε ς  
NET Exodus 4:13 But Moses said, "O my Lord, please send anyone else whom you wish to send!"  
LXE Exodus 4:13 And Moses said, I pray thee, Lord, appoint another able person whom thou shalt send.  
NLT Exodus 4:13 But Moses again pleaded, "Lord, please! Send anyone else."  
KJV Exodus 4:13 And he said, O my Lord, send, I pray thee, by the hand of him whom thou wilt send.  
ESV Exodus 4:13 But he said, "Oh, my Lord, please send someone else."  
NIV Exodus 4:13 But Moses said, "O Lord, please send someone else to do it."  
ASV Exodus 4:13 And he said, Oh, Lord, send, I pray thee, by the hand of him whom thou wilt send.  
CSB Exodus 4:13 Moses said, "Please, Lord, send someone else."  
NKJ Exodus 4:13 But he said, "O my Lord, please send by the hand of whomever else You may send."  
NRS Exodus 4:13 But he said, "O my Lord, please send someone else."  
YLT Exodus 4:13 and he saith, 'O, my Lord, send, I pray thee, by the hand Thou dost send.'  
NAB Exodus 4:13 Yet he insisted, "If you please, Lord, send someone else!"  
NJB Exodus 4:13 'Please, my Lord,' Moses replied, 'send anyone you decide to send!'  
GWN Exodus 4:13 But Moses said, "Please, Lord, send someone else."

- **send** - Ex 4:1 23:20 Ge 24:7 48:16 Jdg 2:1 1Ki 19:4 Jer 1:6 20:9 Eze 3:14,15 Jon 1:3,6 Mt 13:41 Joh 6:29
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## SEND ANYONE BUT ME!

The previous 4 excuses had been addressed by God. The truth of Moses' objections and excuses finally "rises to the top" - he was unwilling to obey! Like the old hymn says "[Trust and obey](#), for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus than to trust and obey." Moses was essentially rejecting his call from God which accounts for God's vigorous response in the next verse!

**But** - A "dangerous" term of contrast in context! Don't we all too often respond to with the Most High God "Please send the message by somebody else!"

**He said, "Please, Lord, now send the message by whomever You will."** - At least Moses says **Please!** This passage is a difficult to translate in the Hebrew but the NET probably picks up the gist of Moses' request - "O my Lord, please send anyone else whom you wish to send!" The NLT paraphrases it "Send anyone else!" Send anyone but me! What a contrast with Isaiah who declared "Here am I. Send me!" (Isaiah 6:8+) Moses in effect says "Here I am. Send someone else!" Moses is still resisting God's call. He had run out of excuses, so he now had to admit the truth: he just did not want to go.

**Please** ([0994](#)) (see above on **bi**) is used by Moses in Ex 4:10; Ex 4:13 appealing to God and is generally considered a polite interjection, and it may carry the nuance of the speaker accepting the consequences which the speech may incur. **Baker** adds "The particle is intended to express politeness, pardon, deep concern with great respect toward the one spoken to."

**David Thompson** - Moses is saying to God, "I do not want your will for my life." Moses is standing in front of a burning bush talking to Jesus Christ, who has just done and said all the things we have looked at and Moses says to God, get someone else. He says I am not your guy. You need to find someone else. ([Sermon](#))

**J Ligon Duncan** - Moses does say please. That is usually a key word to indicate Lord, I and I alone, am guilty of what I'm about to say. So, your condemnation fall upon me, the speaker. He knows that what he is saying is out of order, and he says it fairly nicely. And it sounds like he's being spiritual. "Lord, send whoever you will." Switch to the Isaiah scene in Isaiah 6. "Here I am, Lord, send

me." Well, Moses is saying, after God has already told him over and over 'you're My man,' Moses is saying this: "So be it Lord, please send whoever you will." Well Moses, He's told you four times 'you're him.' So send whoever you will is not a spiritual acquiescence to the providence of God, it's Moses begging again, "Lord, send somebody else." But in choosing an unwilling and doubting deliverer, God is showing Himself to be the true Savior of His people. **Against the backdrop of this kind patience of God, God continues to give reasonable and helpful and encouraging answers to Moses; even though you or I would be tiring of this a long time ago, he continues to give reasonable and helpful answers to Moses.** And Moses has the audacity to say, "Please send somebody else." ([Exodus 4:10-17 A Spokesman for Moses](#))

**Guzik** - Finally, Moses was done with excuses and showed the real state of his heart. Simply, he would much rather that God send someone else. His problem wasn't really a lack of ability; it was a lack of willingness. "It's common for men to give pretended reasons instead of one real one." (Benjamin Franklin)

**Phillip Ryken** - In 1718 a Norwegian pastor's wife named Giertrud Rask received God's call to become a missionary. Her husband, Hans Egede, was preparing to leave their homeland and take the gospel to Greenland. But Giertrud was not ready to go, and with good reason. She was forty-five years old at the time, with four children to care for and the youngest barely a year old. It would be a dangerous journey for all of them, and Giertrud herself did not have a strong constitution. The family's biographer reports that when Hans announced his plans, "his own and his wife's friends wrote to express their severest reprobation.... His mother-in-law further inflamed the feeling against him, and even his wife began to hint that she repented having attached herself to a man who by such plans was going to ruin himself and those belonging to him." Giertrud must have felt much the same way that Moses felt when God called him to lead Israel out of Egypt. "Send someone else, Lord! Let somebody else do it ... anybody but me!" (Preaching the Word-Exodus)

**Exodus 4:14 Then the anger of the LORD burned against Moses, and He said, "Is there not your brother Aaron the Levite? I know that he speaks fluently. And moreover, behold, he is coming out to meet you; when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart.**

- **anger** - 2Sa 6:7 1Ki 11:9 1Ch 21:7 Lu 9:59,60 Ac 15:28 Php 2:21
- **coming** - Ex 4:17 1Sa 10:1-7 Mk 14:13-15 2Co 2:13 7:6,7 1Th 3:6,7
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## **RIGHTEOUS ANGER AGAINST MOSES**

**Then** - **Then** is an important [expression of time](#) - a close encounter with this conjunction should prompt Spirit enabled consideration of the "**5P's**" - **Pause to Ponder** the **Passage** (including the **Preceding**) and "**then**" **Practice** it in the **Power** of the Spirit. One question you can always ask your Teacher (the Spirit) is "*When is then?*" or "*What happens?*" Sometimes the answer is easy to observe but others texts are not so easy. This one is fairly easy! Our longsuffering God is through suffering long with his unwilling servant Moses!

This is a most fascinating passage for it is a combination of burning anger on one hand and wise, gracious patience on the other! Even in His anger, God addresses Moses' fears! It is reminiscent of the words of Habakkuk's prayer "in **wrath** remember **mercy**," (Hab 3:2+) which is exactly what God did for Moses in this passage. I would suggest this is Moses second "near death" experience (first being when Pharaoh sought to kill him in Ex 2:15+) and his third comes as he is returning to Egypt as God sought to put him to death for failing to circumcise his son (Ex 4:24-26+).

**The anger of the LORD burned against Moses** - This appears to be the first time in the Bible that this phrase is used. Yes, God was angry with Sodom and Gomorrah and with others in Genesis, but this phraseology is not used until Moses' recalcitrance and unwillingness fans God's anger into full flame! Now think about this a moment. Where is God speaking from? A bush that is already burning! And now His anger burns! Woe! Did Moses see a manifestation of God's anger burning? Did the bush become a bonfire? The text does not say, but one thing is fascinating -- Moses' mouth is shut! He does not speak again, so that the dialogue becomes a divine monologue! So God was not just angry but it was anger that was kindled! We see some other references to God's anger in the book of Exodus - Ex 15:7 = "burning anger"; Ex 22:24 = "My anger will be kindled"; mentioned **three** times in Ex 32:10-12 = "let Me alone, that My anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them"; Ex 32:19, 22 (Compare events that caused Jehovah's anger to burn - Nu 11:1ff, Nu 12:9, Nu 32:10-12, 13, 14, Dt 13:17, Dt 29:20, 27, Dt 32:22, Josh 7:1, Josh 23:16, Jdg 2:14, 20, Jdg 6:39, Jdg 10:7, 2 Sa 24:1ff, 2 Ki 22:17, 2 Ki 23:26, 2 Chr 25:15, 2 Chr 28:11, 13, 2 Ch 29:10, 30:8, etc - the last use in the OT refers to the [Great Tribulation](#) when the LORD will gather all the nations for judgment - Zeph 3:8+). As you can discern from the other references in Exodus divine anger that is even burning anger is a very serious matter! For example when "the anger of the LORD



burned against Uzzah" because he "reached out toward the ark of God and took hold of it" (2 Sa 6:6), God "took hold" of his life (2 Sa 6:7, cf 1 Chr 13:10,11). Beloved, we never want to have God's anger burning against us.

**THOUGHT** - I wonder how many times my presumptuous, willful, rebellious sins have caused the anger of the LORD to burn? Doubtless, many times! I think a good prayer to remember in the context of God's anger which burns is the prayer of David -- Ps 38:1 (A Psalm of David, for a memorial.) O LORD, rebuke me not in Thy wrath; And **chasten me not in Thy burning anger.**" And the prayer of Psalm 19:13 = "Also keep back Your servant from presumptuous sins; Let them not rule over me; Then I will be blameless, And I shall be acquitted of great transgression. "

**Thompson** - WHEN GOD GIVES CLEAR EVIDENCE OF WHAT HE WANTS US TO DO AND WE DISBELIEVE AND MAKE EXCUSES FOR NOT DOING WHAT HE WANTS US TO DO, IT ANGERS HIM AND ULTIMATELY COSTS US.

**J Ligon Duncan** on the anger of the Lord. That's very interesting. What does that mean? Does God sort of have sudden bursts of fits and rage like we do? Can we sort of tweek Him and push Him a little too far and, and then He blows up? Does He have an emotional life like ours that's actually to a certain extent controlled and is a response to things outside Himself? If so, how can He be sovereign? Let me introduce a few terms to you. In the Bible, in the Old Testament especially, there are figures of speech called [anthropomorphisms](#). In those figures of speech we often refer to God, or to some activity of God, using figures of speech as if God had a body like we do. Sometimes we'll speak of the ear of God, or the arm of God, or the hand of God, or the face of God, or the back of God. It's very clear that those are metaphors. That's symbolic speech, because the Old Testament as well is very clear that God is a spirit. He doesn't have a body like we do. He is totally different. He is in an entirely different category from us. He doesn't have a body. And so those are figures of speech in order to describe things which are really beyond the capacity of human language to describe. Then there's a category of things in the Old Testament which we call [anthropopathisms](#). That's a nice little word. It simply means not only are anthropomorphisms, like the body of the human, but there are anthropopathisms, like the emotions of a human, where human emotions are ascribed to God. What do we do with those? Is his emotional life, just like our emotional life? And again the Old Testament and the New give the answer no, His emotional life is not like our emotional life. God is a God who is deeply concerned for His people, He loves His people, but His love and what we would call His emotional life or His affective life is different from ours in that it is not vacillating, and it's not controlled from the outside. **So what do you do with a passage like this, where it says, the anger of the Lord burned.** And you can almost see the picture, you've told the child for the fourteenth time not to swing his elbows at the table and off goes the milk again, and the father goes, "I told you not to do that." The anger of the Lord burns. And it seems like that anger is produced by the circumstances in which the Lord found Himself. But again, I want you to see here what we have is actually an anthropopathism using human words to describe God's activity and action, and how do I know that? Well, the Hebrew doesn't say the Lord burned here.. Here is what the passage says. The passage literally says, "**The nose of the Lord heated up.**" That's literally what the passage – if you want to be literal about it, it's the nose of the Lord heated up. He burned with anger. My ears usually turn red. That's what gives me away. "The nose of the Lord heated up." Notice that's an anthropomorphic symbol. It's a term which uses human body figures to describe God. That's a clear tip off that this is an anthropopathism. It's an ascription of human emotional activity to God to express what? His displeasure with Moses. **It doesn't indicate that God is vacillating in his emotional life like we are, inconsistently controlled from the outside. But it does it does indicate that God is not an unmoved, unfeeling being. He is a God that deeply cares about right and wrong and obedience. And so His divine displeasure is described in that he burned.** [Exodus 4:10-17 A Spokesman for Moses](#))

**Phillip Ryken** - There is a time when it is appropriate to ask the kinds of questions Moses had been asking: "Who am I, Lord?" "Are you really the God you say you are?" "Can I trust you to go with me and help me?" But once we know what God wants us to do, it is time to stop asking and start obeying. We are the only ones who can do what God has called us to do. So if you have been wrestling with God's claim on your life—trying to decide whether Jesus is the only way to God, for example, or evaluating some new opportunity for ministry—once you know the answer in your heart of hearts, you must follow God. Otherwise you are standing in rebellion against him. (Ibid)

**And He said, "Is there not your brother Aaron the Levite?"**- God's anger apparently resolves quickly, at least to the point that He does not take Moses' life! God asks a rhetorical question, but Moses is not allowed to answer and he says nothing else. Or another way to look at it as alluded to in the previous paragraph, is that Moses realized he had crossed the line with God and it "shut his mouth!" He had no more excuses or arguments. Why does God call him **Aaron the Levite** since Moses knows he is a Levite? Commentaries offer their conjectures but the bottom line is we simply don't know. One fact that would become obvious to Moses with God's question is that his brother Aaron is still alive (remember Moses has been in the desert for 40 years).

**I know that he speaks fluently**- **Speaks fluently** in Hebrew is actually repetition of *dabar* (*dabar dabar*) conveying the idea he speaks well.

**J Ligon Duncan** - But look not only at God's displeasure, look at the graciousness and patience with which He deals with

Moses. God gives him a wise, gracious, patient response. Three things that he does to help Moses. First, he says, "Moses, there is Aaron, your brother. He's a Levite." The Levites were amongst the educated elite in Israel already at this time, by the reckoning of many. They were already teachers amongst Israel. And so He says, "Well, there's your brother. He's a Levite, he's a teacher, he's an educator." Secondly, He says, "And he speaks well. Moses, there's your brother. He's an educator, he's a teacher, he's respected amongst the community of Israel, and he's a good speaker. He speaks well. And let me tell you something else that you don't know, Moses. He's coming to you right now, and he's going to be glad to see you when he sees you." **God encourages Moses, even though Moses tests his patience.** ([Exodus 4:10-17 A Spokesman for Moses](#))

**NET Note** - Moses had not dared openly to say "except me" when he asked God to send whomever he wanted to send. But God knew that is what he meant. Moses should not have resisted the call or pleaded such excuses or hesitated with such weak faith. Now God abandoned the gentle answer and in anger brought in a form of retribution. Because Moses did not want to do this, he was punished by not having the honor of doing it alone. His reluctance and the result are like the refusal of Israel to enter the land and the result they experienced (see U. Cassuto, Exodus, 49–50)...Now Yahweh, in condescending to Moses, selects something that Moses (and God) did not really need for the work. It is as if he were saying: "If Moses feels speaking ability is so necessary (rather than the divine presence), then that is what he will have." Of course, this golden-tongued Aaron had some smooth words about how the golden calf was forged!

**Guzik** - God was angry when Moses was just plain unwilling....the basic truth was that Moses was unwilling, not unable. When God brought Aaron to help lead with Moses, **it was an expression of His chastening to Moses, not of His approval or giving in to Moses.** Aaron was more of a problem to Moses than help. Aaron did turn out to be a source of problems for Moses. Aaron instigated the worship of the golden calf, fashioning the calf himself and building the altar himself (Exodus 32:1–6). Aaron's sons blasphemed God with impure offerings (Leviticus 10:1–7). At one time, Aaron openly led a mutiny against Moses (Numbers 12:1–8).. As these episodes unfolded, Moses surely looked back at why the LORD gave Aaron to Moses as a partner—because God was angry at Moses' unwillingness. (Bolding added)

**Thompson** adds that "God puts up with Moses' insecurities for awhile and Aaron, his brother, who speaks fluently, comes to his aid. But here is the problem. This will cost Moses and cost Israel. Moses will share his calling with Aaron, who is a good speaker, and because Aaron has oratorical skills and this connection to Moses, he will be able to convince Israel to move in a direction of idolatry (Ex. 32)." ([Sermon](#))

**And moreover, behold, he is coming out to meet you; when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart - Behold ( hinneh)** is interjected to get Moses' full attention about the following two facts - (1) reunion (2) gladness. This is clearly an example of God's providential (mysterious) working behind the scenes to stir the heart of Aaron to leave Egypt and even to lead him to the designated meeting spot, the Mountain of God (Horeb, Mt Sinai)(see Ex 4:27). Notice the phrase glad in heart which of course could be just from the reunion of the two long separated brothers. It is also conceivable that Aaron was joyful because he realized God was "up to something," in bringing Moses back to Egypt and that God was about to provide deliverance for His people in keeping with His promises in the Abrahamic covenant.

**NET** agrees that "It is unlikely that this simply means that as a brother he will be pleased to see Moses, for the narrative has no time for that kind of comment. It is interested in more significant things. The implication is that Aaron will rejoice because of the revelation of God to Moses and the plan to deliver Israel from bondage."

**THOUGHT** - God may call us to what seem to be impossible situations. But when God calls, not focus on the circumstances but on our God Who is sovereign over circumstances. Like Moses we may be tempted (and may actually make) to make excuses. We need to remember that the results do not depend on our competence, our leadership skills, etc. Our inadequacy actually showcases and highlights God's sufficiency! If God calls, He will empower. We are simply to obey. That sounds simple and easy but will usually be associated with a crisis of belief. Can I really trust God? If we have heard clearly what He wants us to do, then we can truly trust Him to complete the good work He began.

**Exodus 4:15 "You are to speak to him and put the words in his mouth; and I, even I, will be with your mouth and his mouth, and I will teach you what you are to do.**

Exodus 4:15 Talk to him, and put the words in his mouth. I will be with both of you as you speak, and I will instruct you both in what to do.

- **put** - Ex 7:1,2 2Sa 14:3 Isa 51:16 59:21
- **and I** - Nu 22:38 23:5,12,16 De 18:18 Isa 51:16 Jer 1:9 Mt 28:20 Lu 21:15 1Co 11:23 15:1

- **will teach** - De 5:31
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## MOSES' MOUTHPIECE

**You are to speak to him and put the words in his mouth-** In other words Moses is to tell Aaron what to say and Aaron speaks forth Moses' words, which in turn are actually God's words as the rest of the passage indicates. Moses' job was to instruct Aaron. He was to teach him God's Word God is saying "You speak to Aaron about what we've been talking about and you tell him exactly what I told you."

**And I, even I, will be with your mouth and his mouth, and I will teach you what you are to do-** In the Hebrew the "you" in teach you is plural, so God is saying He supernaturally oversee (teach) both Moses and Aaron what they must do. Thus the NET (ESV, NLT) accurately renders the last phrase "I will teach you **both** what you must do.' While God did discipline Moses and take away some of the prestige by allowing Aaron to be the mouthpiece, most of the actual miracles/signs were wrought by Moses.

**Durham** - "The mouth of Moses may well be heavy and clumsy, slow and halting in speech. It would not matter if it were dumb altogether, and Aaron's mouth, as well. Yahweh will be there, and Yahweh will take responsibility for both the message and the messengers. The staff in the hands of Moses and Aaron is a symbol of this powerful Presence."

**Exodus 4:16** "Moreover, he shall speak for you to the people; and he will be as a mouth for you and you will be as God to him.

- Ex 7:1,2 18:19 Ps 82:6 Joh 10:34,35
- Exodus 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## AARON IS NOW THE SPEAKER

**J Ligon Duncan** - And then in verses 15 and 16 after those commands, God immediately follows those commands with a series of four encouragements. He says again, "I will be with you. I'll be with your mouth, I'll be with his mouth." Secondly, he says, "I will personally teach you what to do and say." Thirdly, he says, "He, Aaron, will be your spokesman to the people." He'll speak for you to the people. And fourthly, he says, "You will tell him My words and only then will he speak to the people." Now if you're looking at the passage, you're saying, well, where did you get that from? Oh, I got it from right here. Look at what he says. "He'll be a mouth for you," end of verse 16. "And you will be as God to him." ([Exodus 4:10-17 A Spokesman for Moses](#))

**Moreover, he shall speak for you to the people; and he will be as a mouth for you and you will be as God to him-** Although Aaron was the speaker, Moses was still the key man because he received the Word of God and communicated it to Aaron who then tells the people. **As God to him** means that Moses was speaking directly the Word of God to Aaron, just as God had spoken it to him. Remember that all of this is sadly necessary because Moses kept making excuses including the lame excuse that he could not speak.

**Thompson** - God would speak to Moses; Moses would speak to Aaron and Aaron would speak to the people. Moses was the key man. Don't miss this. Moses is getting the Word of God and communicating to Aaron and Aaron is communicating to the people. Moses is God's man. Moses was "as God" to Aaron because he was speaking directly the Word of God to him. ([Sermon](#))

**J Ligon Duncan on you will be as God to him** - Now that's a very strange thing to say, isn't it? "You will be as God to him." What in the world is God talking about. How does God deal with his prophets? God speaks, His prophets listen, and they improvise. No. God speaks, His prophets listen, and they say exactly what God said. God literally puts the words in their mouths. Now listen to what He says. "You will be as God to him." God, you see, is teaching Moses about what a prophet is here. He's teaching us about what a prophet is here, and he's saying, "Moses, you're going to put my words into Aaron's mouth, and then he is going to speak exactly what I have told you to tell him to say." And so even in giving him Aaron, God is explaining how prophecy works. Prophecy is not according to the opinion of the prophet. Peter tells us this. The inspiration of the prophet is not born of his own creativity. The prophet speaks God's word. He's carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Pe 1:20-21+) He speaks only that which God has given him to speak. God has, in fact, given us a window on the doctrine of inspiration here. The Bible is revelation. It's God's revelation of Himself to us in written form. The words of the prophets are not their reflections upon an encounter with God. They are God's words given to them to describe the encounter that they have had with Him and His word for His people. ([Exodus 4:10-17 A Spokesman for Moses](#))

**THOUGHT** - Beloved, there is a lesson here. God may call us to accomplish something for Him and we

hesitate and make excuses. And if we delay (remember delay is not "delayed disobedience" but is overt disobedience!), God may choose someone else to carry out His objective. We need to be like young Samuel - "Then the LORD came and stood and called as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for Your servant is listening." The LORD said to Samuel, "Behold, I am about to do a thing in Israel at which both ears of everyone who hears it will tingle." (1 Samuel 3:10-11) Samuel initially did not recognize God's voice (keep the context in mind that "word from the LORD was rare in those days, visions were infrequent." - 1 Sa 3:1) Of course, this illustration from the life of Samuel is not to suggest we will hear an audible word from God, but we can still hear through His Word, led by His Spirit, and bathed in prayer.

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**ILLUSTRATION** - One woman who refused to miss out on the blessing was Queen Esther. In the providence of God, when the Jews were in mortal danger Esther was in a position to save them by interceding with the king. Her cousin Mordecai urged her to help, even though doing so would place her own life in danger. Mordecai knew that God would save his people one way or another, but he did not want Esther to miss God's blessing by rejecting her calling. He said to her, "If you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish" (Esther 4:14a). Through her courageous obedience, Esther not only saved her people, the Jews, but also received God's abundant blessing. (Ryken)

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### **THE SURRENDER OF MOSES Exodus 4:16–31 - James Smith**

Moses, as a servant of God, was slow to believe all that God was willing to do for him and to be to him. His reluctance to obey caused him to lose a great honour (v. 14). For the same reason many Christians cease to grow in grace, they fail, through unbelief, to take advantage of all the fullness offered them in Christ Jesus. This honour have all the saints.

I. His Decision Manifested. "He said to Jethro, Let me go, I pray thee" (v. 18). His mind is now fully made up to go back to Egypt, not as before, but as one sent of God. Have we not been taken out of the Egypt of this world, and are we not sent back into the world (John 17:6–18)? To obey this command Moses had to separate himself from the wilderness connection. Has our decision to sanctify ourselves been as clearly declared?

II. His Purpose Strengthened. "The Lord said unto him, Go, for all are dead which sought thy life" (v. 19). When the will is yielded up to God how graciously does He smooth the beginning of our way that our faith may be encouraged. Christian worker, God can easily remove every obstacle out of your way of accomplishing the work to which He hath called you. Only believe, and they will be as dead men.

III. His Journey Pursued. "Moses took his wife and his sons, and he returned into the land of Egypt" (v. 20). His great commission he carried in his heart still as a secret. Who would believe that he was going to deliver all the children of Israel out of the mighty hand of the despotic Pharaoh. Where is the man who is doing a great work for God who has not gone through experiences of soul of which he dare not speak? All his possessions were on an ass, but the rod of God was in his hand. Poor in this world, but rich in faith. Hold fast the rod of His promise.

IV. His Work Explained. "The Lord said unto Moses, See that thou do all these wonders before Pharaoh, which I have put in thine hand, and say, Israel is my son, let my son go that he may serve Me" (vv. 22, 23). The thought here is this: As we go in by faith on the Word of God His mind will be more fully revealed to us. By simple obedience we grow in grace and in the knowledge of God. Let us see that we use the gifts and opportunities the Master has put within our reach.

V. His Progress Arrested. "The Lord met him, and sought to kill him.... So He let him go" (vv. 24–26). This is very singular language, and indicates some severe dealing that God had with Moses. Had he been refusing to circumcise his son merely to please his wife? Was the hand of sickness laid on him, so that he was nigh unto death? And did he then remember his sin and folly? In any case, the man who would be mightily used of God must not fail in the little secret things of his own house. When all was put right "He let him go."

VI. His Heart Cheered. "The Lord said to Aaron, Go to the wilderness and meet Moses; and he went and kissed him" (v. 27). It was surely a happy meeting after forty long years of separation. The good Lord plans many a sweet surprise for His weary and tired servants while in the wilderness. God knows where our Aaron brother is, and when to send us the kiss of Christian help and fellowship. The killing of God and the kissing of our true brethren in the Lord are not usually far apart.

VII. His Mission Declared. "Moses and Aaron went, and Aaron spoke all the words which the Lord had spoken unto Moses" (vv. 29–31). What a story they had for the poor oppressed people of Israel! It was to them the Gospel of God. How was the good news received?

1. THEY BELIEVED. "God hath commanded men everywhere to repent" and believe the Gospel (Acts 17:31). Every true servant of God has such a message for the down-trodden slaves of sin. Alas, that so few believe it!

2. THEY BOWED. The bowing of the head may indicate the yielding up of the will. This should always accompany faith in the Gospel of Christ.

3. THEY WORSHIPPED. Adoration and thanksgiving well becomes those who have been favoured with such a great salvation. Bless the Lord, O my soul!

“By grace are ye saved through faith, though not of yourself, it is the gift of God” (Eph. 2:8).

#### Exodus 4:17 "You shall take in your hand this staff, with which you shall perform the signs."

- Ex 4:2 7:9,19 1Co 1:27
- Exodus 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### YOU WILL NEED TO "LEAN ON" THE STAFF

**You shall take in your hand this staff, with which you shall perform the signs** - Don't forget the staff! Moses is reminded to bring along the simple **staff**, which reminds us that God uses the weak, seemingly inferior things (and people) to assure that the glory goes to Him! While it is true that God uses what little we have when surrendered to Him in order to do great things, in the case of Moses He still used him even though he was resistant and unwilling. Now this is surely a miracle of grace and mercy! It is far better to surrender to Him than resist! It does seem that after Moses realized he had caused the anger of the LORD to burn, he becomes a bit more "pliable" and acquiesces to the LORD's call without complaining (at least prior to departing for Egypt).

#### **God is not looking for our great ability, but our great availability!**

Little is much when God is in it.

**POSB** - Rejecting God's call is serious business. Note that God chose Aaron to replace Moses in a significant area, that of being God's spokesman and messenger to the people. Moses lost the great privilege of being God's spokesman to the people—all because he had rejected God's call for so long. He also lost the wonderful privilege of being the father, the first of God's priests (AND BEING A LEVITE, MOSES COULD THEORETICALLY HAVE BEEN A PRIEST), the very first of God's messengers and spokesmen to Israel. All because he had argued so much against God's call.

**Staff** (04294)(**matteh, mattah**) is a masculine noun that means rod, staff, branch ( the non-fruit part of a plant Eze 19:11), tribe. A Staff or rod , walking stick which is a thick stick of wood that the hand can grasp, of a length that the body can use as a support for walking, used for various functions of work or discipline (Ge 38:18). It can refer to a scepter, ruling staff, an ornamental stick as a symbol of governmental authority (Ps 110:2). Figuratively of an arrow used for discipline (Hab 3:9NET+). A spear in Hab 3:14+. A food supply = a staff (matteh) of bread (lehem) (Lev 26:26; Ps 105:16; Ezek 4:16; 5:16; 14:13) Another meaning is tribe, clan, i.e., a group of a nation, usually organized around the name of a clan leader from a former generation (Nu 1:16)

**Gilbrant** - The noun has three primary meanings. The first is "staff." Second, the noun was also used with the meaning of "tribe," often attributed to the wielding of a scepter as a position of leadership. Such was the most common meaning of the noun, appearing in nearly two-thirds of the occurrences. Third, the notion of "scepter" becomes dominant in later literature.

The usage of the noun to denote a staff probably originally referred to a shepherd's staff, the instrument used to assist in goading and separating the animals as well as for support while walking (Exo. 4:2). However, matteh also refers to instruments which convey magic powers, evidenced by the Egyptian court magicians (Exo. 7:12). Likewise, Yahweh's divine power was demonstrated by means of a staff (Exo. 7:10; Num. 17:9).

Non-divine authority was also demonstrated by possession of certain types of staffs. Jonathan, the crowned prince, possessed a staff which was not just an ordinary stick (1 Sam. 14:27). Likewise, it is stated that each tribal leader possessed a staff (Num. 17:2), which means the object at least possessed a symbolic significance. Ezekiel's lament concerning the young rulers of Judah compares the stock of their mothers to a strong vine which produces royal scepters (Ezek. 19:11). Yahweh called the coming messianic Ruler the "scepter coming out of Judah" (Ps. 110:2). Judah's staff must have been distinctly marked if it could have been used as evidence on par with his signet ring (Gen. 38:18).

There are some miscellaneous usages of the noun, generally denoting some straight stalk of plant growth,

suitable for producing a staff or scepter. The noun can also denote the shaft of an arrow (Hab. 3:9). It is used to describe the object used for flogging (Exo. 17:9). It is used to denote either a stalk of grain or the sticks one placed bread upon to elevate it above the ravagings of vermin (Ezek. 5:16). (Complete Biblical Library Hebrew-English Dictionary)

**Matteh-mattah** - 247x in 205v - branch(3), branches(1), half-tribe\*(13), rod(18), rods(6), scepter(2), spears(1), staff(33), staffs(1), supply(1), tribal(8), tribe(140), tribes(20). Gen. 38:18; Gen. 38:25; Exod. 4:2; Exod. 4:4; Exod. 4:17; Exod. 4:20; Exod. 7:9; Exod. 7:10; Exod. 7:12; Exod. 7:15; Exod. 7:17; Exod. 7:19; Exod. 7:20; Exod. 8:5; Exod. 8:16; Exod. 8:17; Exod. 9:23; Exod. 10:13; Exod. 14:16; Exod. 17:5; Exod. 17:9; Exod. 31:2; Exod. 31:6; Exod. 35:30; Exod. 35:34; Exod. 38:22; Exod. 38:23; Lev. 24:11; Lev. 26:26; Num. 1:4; Num. 1:16; Num. 1:21; Num. 1:23; Num. 1:25; Num. 1:27; Num. 1:29; Num. 1:31; Num. 1:33; Num. 1:35; Num. 1:37; Num. 1:39; Num. 1:41; Num. 1:43; Num. 1:47; Num. 1:49; Num. 2:5; Num. 2:7; Num. 2:12; Num. 2:14; Num. 2:20; Num. 2:22; Num. 2:27; Num. 2:29; Num. 3:6; Num. 7:2; Num. 7:12; Num. 10:15; Num. 10:16; Num. 10:19; Num. 10:20; Num. 10:23; Num. 10:24; Num. 10:26; Num. 10:27; Num. 13:2; Num. 13:4; Num. 13:5; Num. 13:6; Num. 13:7; Num. 13:8; Num. 13:9; Num. 13:10; Num. 13:11; Num. 13:12; Num. 13:13; Num. 13:14; Num. 13:15; Num. 17:2; Num. 17:3; Num. 17:5; Num. 17:6; Num. 17:7; Num. 17:8; Num. 17:9; Num. 17:10; Num. 18:2; Num. 20:8; Num. 20:9; Num. 20:11; Num. 26:55; Num. 30:1; Num. 31:4; Num. 31:5; Num. 31:6; Num. 32:28; Num. 33:54; Num. 34:13; Num. 34:14; Num. 34:15; Num. 34:18; Num. 34:19; Num. 34:20; Num. 34:21; Num. 34:22; Num. 34:23; Num. 34:24; Num. 34:25; Num. 34:26; Num. 34:27; Num. 34:28; Num. 36:3; Num. 36:4; Num. 36:5; Num. 36:6; Num. 36:7; Num. 36:8; Num. 36:9; Num. 36:12; Jos. 7:1; Jos. 7:18; Jos. 13:15; Jos. 13:24; Jos. 13:29; Jos. 14:1; Jos. 14:2; Jos. 14:3; Jos. 14:4; Jos. 15:1; Jos. 15:20; Jos. 15:21; Jos. 16:8; Jos. 17:1; Jos. 18:11; Jos. 18:21; Jos. 19:1; Jos. 19:8; Jos. 19:23; Jos. 19:24; Jos. 19:31; Jos. 19:39; Jos. 19:40; Jos. 19:48; Jos. 19:51; Jos. 20:8; Jos. 21:1; Jos. 21:4; Jos. 21:5; Jos. 21:6; Jos. 21:7; Jos. 21:9; Jos. 21:17; Jos. 21:20; Jos. 21:23; Jos. 21:25; Jos. 21:27; Jos. 21:28; Jos. 21:30; Jos. 21:32; Jos. 21:34; Jos. 21:36; Jos. 21:38; Jos. 22:1; Jos. 22:14; 1 Sam. 14:27; 1 Sam. 14:43; 1 Ki. 7:14; 1 Ki. 8:1; 1 Chr. 6:60; 1 Chr. 6:61; 1 Chr. 6:62; 1 Chr. 6:63; 1 Chr. 6:65; 1 Chr. 6:66; 1 Chr. 6:70; 1 Chr. 6:71; 1 Chr. 6:72; 1 Chr. 6:74; 1 Chr. 6:76; 1 Chr. 6:77; 1 Chr. 6:78; 1 Chr. 6:80; 1 Chr. 12:31; 2 Chr. 5:2; Ps. 105:16; Ps. 110:2; Isa. 9:4; Isa. 10:5; Isa. 10:15; Isa. 10:24; Isa. 10:26; Isa. 14:5; Isa. 28:27; Isa. 30:32; Jer. 48:17; Ezek. 4:16; Ezek. 5:16; Ezek. 7:10; Ezek. 7:11; Ezek. 14:13; Ezek. 19:11; Ezek. 19:12; Ezek. 19:14; Mic. 6:9; Hab. 3:9; Hab. 3:14

**Sign** (0226) see note above on **'oth**

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### David Thompson - Parting Thoughts -

- 1) It is not wrong to doubt your own abilities to accomplish things, but it angers God when you doubt His ability.
- 2) Our perspective of God needs to be what God's Word reveals Him to be, not what we want Him to be.
- 3) You don't need much in your hand to be greatly used by God. You may think you don't have anything to offer God. What did Moses have? A shepherd's staff. It is not about what we have, it is all about the power God has. We all have handicaps, but those handicaps should never be excuses for not doing God's will.
- 4) We are all leprous with sin and we have all been snake-bitten by Satan, and the only way to be clean is to turn, by faith, to Jesus Christ

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### Exodus 4:1-9,17 The Tales Of Two Sticks

You shall take this rod in your hand, with which you shall do the signs. —Exodus 4:17

Conventional wisdom questions how much can be accomplished with little. We tend to believe that a lot more can be done if we have large financial resources, talented manpower, and innovative ideas. But these things don't matter to God. Consider just a couple of examples:

In Judges 3:31+, a relatively unknown man named **Shamgar** delivered Israel from the Philistines single-handedly. How? He won a great victory by killing 600 Philistines with nothing more than an **oxgoad** (a stick sharpened on one end to drive slow-moving animals).

In Exodus, when God asked Moses to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt, Moses was afraid the people wouldn't listen to him or follow him. So God said, "What is that in your hand?" (Ex 4:2). Moses replied, "A rod." God went on to use that rod in Moses' hand to

convince the people to follow him, to turn the Nile River into blood, to bring great plagues on Egypt, to part the Red Sea, and to perform miracles in the wilderness.

Moses' rod and Shamgar's oxgoad, when dedicated to God, became mighty tools. This helps us see that God can use what little we have, when surrendered to Him, to do great things. God is not looking for people with great abilities, but for those who are dedicated to following and obeying Him. ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

If you use what little you may have  
To serve the Lord with all your heart  
You will find that He can do great things  
When you begin to do your part.  
—Sper

Little is much when God is in it.

**Exodus 4:18 Then Moses departed and returned to Jethro his father-in-law and said to him, "Please, let me go, that I may return to my brethren who are in Egypt, and see if they are still alive." And Jethro said to Moses, "Go in peace."**

- **Jethro** - Ex 3:1
- **Let me go** - 1Ti 6:1
- **and see** - Ge 45:3 Ac 15:36
- **Go in peace** - 1Sa 1:17 Lu 7:50 Ac 16:36
- Exodus 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## MOSES' COURTEOUS REQUEST OF JETHRO

I like **J Ligon Duncan's** summary of Exodus up to this point as it gives us a good review -

If you have Bibles, I'd invite you to turn with me to Exodus, chapter 4, verse 18. In Exodus 1 God's sovereignty was emphasized. In Exodus 2 Moses, the future deliverer of Israel, is introduced to us and put in a favorable light. In the end of Exodus 2:23-25 we learn that the redemption of Israel is rooted in God's prior commitments to Abraham. In other words God's redemption of Israel out of Egypt is rooted in the covenant promise that God had made to Abraham more than 430 years before. When we get to Exodus 3, God reveals Himself to Moses, via the burning bush at Sinai. He announces His concern for His people, He tells Moses that He is going to appoint him to be the deliverer of those people, and God tells Moses that He is going to deliver His people in order that they might worship Him.

And so we see that great emphasis in Exodus 3 that God delivers His people in order that they might worship. We are saved, in other words, in order to worship. And that term worship or service appears over and over throughout the rest of the story of Exodus. Beginning in Exodus 3:11 Moses fires five questions to the Lord. He even perhaps presents these questions as objections to God's divine plan. In Exodus 3:11, he asks the Lord, "Well, who am I to be the deliverer of Your people?" In Exodus 3:13, he asks the question, "Well, who do I say commissions me? Who is the One who has sent me to speak to the people of Israel and to Pharaoh?" And in answer to both of those questions, the Lord defines Himself, and not that we haven't seen this from Exodus 1, but especially here in Exodus 3 we see that God Himself is the center of the story of Exodus. We might be tempted to see Moses as the protagonist. Moses is the central character. But as a matter of fact, Moses is a spokesman for the central character of the Exodus who is the God of Israel Himself. That, by the way, will become even clearer tonight as we look at this particular passage. So two objections or questions from Moses in Exodus 3. When you get to Exodus 4:1-9, you come to yet another question from Moses. He asked, "Well Lord, what do I do if they don't believe me. What do I do if they don't pay attention to me?" And in answer to that question the Lord gives him three miraculous signs. And He says, "You go show this to the elders and to the people of Israel, and they will believe you." Although Pharaoh would not be moved by this sign, as God will tell Moses in the passage we read tonight.

Then in Exodus 4:10-17 we see two final objections of Moses. He first protests to the Lord that he's not eloquent, he's not a good speaker, and secondly, he says, "Lord, send the message by whomever you desire

to send it." Which, being translated, means "Lord, please send somebody else. I hear what you're saying. Please send somebody else." It's the famous, "Here I am, Lord, send somebody else" response. And in that passage, we see God using Moses who is a sinful, weak vessel to accomplish His purpose. We see that God's message is powerful, even apart from the messenger, and that God Himself is always and only our Savior. He may use Moses, He may use men, but God Himself is our Savior. Vanderwaal says this: "Thus you can see that we have no right whatsoever to depict Moses as a hero of superhuman proportion who draws on his immense abilities and dynamic personality to lead Israel out of bondage in Egypt. Here as elsewhere the Bible is painfully honest in showing us the weaknesses and shortcomings of its central figures." [Exodus 4:18-26](#)  
[Hardening Pharaoh's Heart](#)

**Then** - **Then** is an important [expression of time](#) and marks progression in the sequence of events, in this case Moses responding without objection to God's commissioning.

The **POSB** has an interesting (and somewhat interpretative) title for Exodus 4:18-31 calling it "The Surrender of Moses to God's Call: The Fruit of Obedience." (The Preacher's Outline & Sermon Bible)

**Guzik** comments that "When the fire faded from the burning bush and when the voice of God was silent across the desert, then it was upon Moses to obey, and to do what God told him to do. More than one person has had a spectacular burning bush type experience and then gone on to live as if nothing really happened."

**Moses departed and returned to Jethro his father-in-law and said to him, "Please, let me go, that I may return to my brethren who are in Egypt, and see if they are still alive." And Jethro said to Moses, "Go in peace."** - Jethro = Reuel (Ex 2:18, Ex 3:1) Note my brethren shows even after 40 years absence, his heart was still fond of his Hebrew brethren. "Even the call of God did not erase the need for human courtesy and respect for one's father-in-law." (Kaiser) This would have been a significant request of Jethro, for Moses had been tending his herds for 40 years. Who would replace him when he left? The text does not say, but Jethro does not hesitate to give Moses his affirmation and blessing. God had undoubtedly moved in Jethro's heart to open the door for Moses to take his family back to Egypt. However Moses does not seem to explain that he had encountered God in a burning bush, nor did he explain that the real purpose for returning to Egypt was to deliver the nation of Israel from bondage to the Egyptian Pharaoh, the most powerful king in the world at that time. This return was not to be a social visit but a rescue mission! And finally his phrase **see if they are still alive** is at least slightly confusing because God has already told him that Aaron would come to meet him. The implication would be if Aaron was alive, others were also alive. Jethro gives Moses his blessing **Go in peace**.

**Return** (turn away or back, bring or go back, restore) (07725)(**shub/sub**) is a common verb (over 1000x) meaning to turn, to return, to go back, to do again, to change, to withdraw, to bring back, to reestablish, to be returned, to bring back, to take, to restore, to recompense, to answer, to hinder. Here are the uses in Exodus and notice **shub/sub** is a **KEY WORD** in **Exodus 4!** - Exod. 4:7; Exod. 4:18; Exod. 4:19; Exod. 4:20; Exod. 4:21; Exod. 5:22; Exod. 10:8; Exod. 13:17; Exod. 14:2; Exod. 14:26; Exod. 14:27; Exod. 14:28; Exod. 15:19; Exod. 19:8; Exod. 21:34; Exod. 22:26; Exod. 23:4; Exod. 24:14; Exod. 32:12; Exod. 32:27; Exod. 32:31; Exod. 33:11; Exod. 34:31; Exod. 34:3

**MacArthur** agrees writing "Exactly how much was explained of the encounter at the burning bush remains unknown, but the purpose for the return, **"and see if they are still alive,"** suggests that specific details of the call for him to be leader/deliverer were left unsaid, in contrast to the full explanation given to Aaron (Ex 4:28)." (MSB)

**POSB** - God's call demands first loyalty, even before family. But we must always be loving, kind, and respectful to our families when we are called to be away from them. And we must help them understand God's call as well as we can. (cf Mt 10:37-38, Lk 9:23+).

**Ryken** - **Jethro** was his father-in-law, and in those patriarchal times family members needed permission from the head of the household before leaving. For another thing, Jethro was his employer, and Moses needed to return the sheep that he had taken to Mount Horeb. In some ways, Moses serves as an example for Christians who are trying to follow Christ and love their families at the same time. Our commitment to Christ comes first. Jesus said, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26+). Jesus meant that following him is a total life commitment. It demands an absolute allegiance that sometimes conflicts with family expectations. Even the people we love most should not prevent us from doing what God has called us to do. But Jesus did not mean that we should be hostile to our families, any more than he meant that we should take our own lives. On the contrary, Christians should treat their families with respect. This is especially important for Christians whose parents are not Christians. Because they do not share our commitment to Christ, they will not understand some of the choices we make. But even if we cannot compromise our calling, we still have a responsibility to love our parents, and that means discussing our plans with them patiently and respectfully. (Ibid)



**Exodus 4:19** Now the LORD said to Moses in Midian, "**Go back** to Egypt, for all the men who were seeking your life are dead."

- **for all** - Ex 2:15,23 Mt 2:20
- Exodus 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## NO NEED TO FEAR REPRISAL

**Now the LORD said to Moses in Midian, "Go back to Egypt, for all the men who were seeking your life are dead** - This is not God from the burning bush, but how God manifest Himself to Moses is not clear. We know that the Pharaoh had died from the words in Ex 2:23+ that "the king of Egypt died." Notice the word Now. When is "now?" What had Moses just done in the preceding verse? Clearly Moses was now acting in obedience. He could have asked God what happens if I go back and they try to kill me, but he does not do that. He finally takes God at His Word. And what was the result? **Wiersbe** nails it -- "As Moses stepped out by faith, God spoke to him and encouraged him." Perhaps Moses' hesitation and repeated excuses were based on fear of death at the hands of the Pharaoh who had sought to kill him after killing the Egyptian (Ex 2:15+). That evil Pharaoh had died and so had **all the men who were seeking** to kill him.

This declaration by God reminds us of the angel's message in the New Testament to Joseph "But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, and said, "Get up, take the Child and His mother, and go into the land of Israel; for those who sought the Child's life are dead." (Mt 2:19-20+) . **Cole** comments that "As Moses is also God's chosen instrument, and has had a miraculous deliverance from death, the parallel is the more appropriate." (TOTC-Ex)

**Exodus 4:20** So Moses took his wife and his sons and mounted them on a donkey, and returned to the land of Egypt. Moses also took the staff of God in his hand.

- **the staff of God** - Ex 4:2,17 17:9 Nu 20:8,9
- Exodus 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## THE RETURN TO EGYPT

**So** - This normally functions as a term of conclusion. In this case Moses had just been given the good news that those who sought to kill him were dead. Based on God's command to **go back** and this truth that it was "safe" to return, Moses obeys God, this time without hesitation or excuse. He walks forth in faith, but his faith is not a leap into the darkness, but a walk into the light of God's Word of truth. It is the same for all believers, which is why it is so vital that we are daily in His Word, that our faith might be nourished and invigorated by the Spirit (cf 2 Cor 3:18+).

**Moses took his wife and his sons and mounted them on a donkey, and returned to the land of Egypt. Moses also took the staff of God in his hand** - Note this is not called the "Staff of Moses" but the '**Staff of God!**' God is practical and will use what you have, often the simpler, the better, for then the glory clearly goes to the One Who deserves it! Moses now trusts God and takes action based on his trust, even being willing to take his entire family. And he also obeyed God's instruction to take in his "hand (the) staff, with which (he would) perform the signs." He had his wife and his weapon, and as we shall see it was a good thing he took his wife Zipporah with him!

Regarding **his sons** we had previously only learned of Gershom (Ex 2:22+, Ex 18:3+), but in 40 years in Midian the couple obviously had another son whose name we later learn is **Eleazar (Eliezer)** (Ex 18:4). The **NET Note** adds "Only Gershom has been mentioned so far. The other son's name will be explained in chapter 18. The explanation of Gershom's name was important to Moses' sojourn in Midian. The explanation of the name Eliezer fits better in the later chapter (Ex 18:2-4+)." As **Cole** quips "Here is an earlier 'holy family' going by donkey to Egypt (cf. Matt. 2:13+)." (Ibid) (See [Did Moses have children?](#))

**Staff** ([04294](#)) see above on [matteh, mattah](#)

Jesus mentioned the staff in His instructions to His 12 Disciples when He sent them out, Mark recording "He instructed them that they should take nothing for their journey, except a mere **staff**—no bread, no bag, no money in their belt—" (Mk 6:8+) The **staff** He referred to was a common walking stick, and was used by most ancient travelers. Jesus' mention of **a mere staff** reminds one of the

[accoutrements](#) of Moses as he was preparing for spiritual battle with Pharaoh and the spiritual forces of darkness in Egypt, God telling him "you shall take in your hand **this staff** with which you shall perform the signs." (Ex 4:17+).

**THOUGHT** - Of course the purpose of the **staff** for the disciples was not the same as it was for Moses, but it is nevertheless an interesting parallel for both were sent on mission by God and both were entering the spiritual battle of a lifetime. When God uses a man, He does not need anything but the man. Wholly His instrument, holy, set apart, useful to Him and prepared for every good work (2 Ti 2:21+). Are you that man or woman? If He calls and commands, then go, for you will be entering into the adventure of a lifetime. Today we go not with dependence on a staff, but in complete dependence on supernatural power of God's grace (1 Cor 15:10+) and the Spirit of Jesus (Acts 1:8+, cf Col 1:29+), Who gives us everything necessary for life and godliness (2 Pe 1:3+) to accomplish the will of our Father (Jn 4:34+).

**Ryken** - It is tempting to think of God's staff as a magic wand and to wish that we could have one ourselves. But what the staff represents is available to us! The staff was a visible sign of God's saving power, and now God's saving power comes through the cross. The place to find God's power is not in some supernatural wonder but in the message of the cross where Christ was crucified for sinners. The cross is God's sign...It is through the cross of Christ that God has accomplished the greatest exodus of all, leading sinners out of bondage to sin and into relationship with him. The divine power represented by God's staff is available to everyone who lays hold of Jesus Christ.

For the **word of the cross** is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is **the power of God**. (1 Cor 1:18)

**Exodus 4:21 The LORD said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders which I have put in your power; but I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go.**

BGT Exodus 4:21 ε πεν δ κ ριος πρ ς Μωυσ ν πορευομ νου σου κα ποστρ φοντος ε ς Α γυπτον ρα π ντα τ  
τ ρατα δωκα ν τα ς χερσ ν σου ποι σεις α τ ναντ ον Φαραω γ δ σκληρυν τ ν καρδ αν α το κα ο μ  
ξαποστε λ τ ν λα ν

NET Exodus 4:21 The LORD said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the wonders I have put under your control. But I will harden his heart and he will not let the people go.

LXE Exodus 4:21 And the Lord said to Moses, When thou goest and returnest to Egypt, see-- all the miracles I have charged thee with, thou shalt work before Pharaoh: and I will harden his heart, and he shall certainly not send away the people.

NLT Exodus 4:21 And the LORD told Moses, "When you arrive back in Egypt, go to Pharaoh and perform all the miracles I have empowered you to do. But I will harden his heart so he will refuse to let the people go.

KJV Exodus 4:21 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.

ESV Exodus 4:21 And the LORD said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles that I have put in your power. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go.

NIV Exodus 4:21 The LORD said to Moses, "When you return to Egypt, see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders I have given you the power to do. But I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go.

ASV Exodus 4:21 And Jehovah said unto Moses, When thou goest back into Egypt, see that thou do before Pharaoh all the wonders which I have put in thy hand: but I will harden his heart and he will not let the people go.

CSB Exodus 4:21 The LORD instructed Moses, "When you go back to Egypt, make sure you do all the wonders before Pharaoh that I have put within your power. But I will harden his heart so that he won't let the people go.

NKJ Exodus 4:21 And the LORD said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt, see that you do all those wonders before Pharaoh which I have put in your hand. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the

people go.

NRS Exodus 4:21 And the LORD said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt, see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders that I have put in your power; but I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go.

YLT Exodus 4:21 And Jehovah saith unto Moses, 'In thy going to turn back to Egypt, see -- all the wonders which I have put in thy hand -- that thou hast done them before Pharaoh, and I -- I strengthen his heart, and he doth not send the people away;

- **wonders** - Ex 3:20
- **I will harden** - Ex 7:3,13 9:12,35 10:1,20 14:8 Ge 6:3 De 2:30-33,36 Jos 11:20 1Ki 22:22 Ps 105:25 Isa 6:10 63:17 Joh 12:40 Ro 1:28 9:18 Ro 11:8-10 2Co 2:16 2Th 2:10-12 1Pe 2:8
- Exodus 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## JEHOVAH PREDICTS HARDENING OF PHARAOH'S HEART

God gives Moses a "preview of coming attractions" in Exodus 4:21-23.

**The LORD said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders** - Moses is given clear instructions from God and this time does not make any excuses or express any doubt. **All the wonders** suggest that Jehovah has already revealed to Moses the 10 plaques. **Wonders** ([mopet](#)) is synonymous with **sign** and refers to a marvelous (and/or frightening as would prove to be the case for the Egyptians) event manifesting a supernatural act of a divine power (Jehovah in this case) with the emphasis on communicating a message, in this case a divine message to Pharaoh, the message being to "Let My people go."

**Which I have put in your power** - "all the wonders I have put under your control." (NET) The Hebrew word for **power** is **yad** which means **hand** and is used metaphorically in this context to signify strength or power (cf Dt 32:36, Isa 37:37). The **KJV** renders it more literally as "**all those wonders...which I have put in thine hand.**" Once again we see the juxtaposition of man's (Moses') responsibility with God's sovereignty (power). God's power flowing through Moses' hands (staff). We have to be amazed that God still trusted Moses with His **power** after Moses repeatedly tried to [beg off](#) the divine commission of the deliverer of Israel!

**THOUGHT** - While believers today do not have the same type of power as God bestowed on Moses to enable him to deliver Israel from enslavement to the Egyptians, we do have power to live a supernatural life because of the indwelling Holy Spirit, Who empowers us to speak (Acts 1:8+, 1 Th 1:5+) a Gospel message that itself has intrinsic power (Ro 1:16+ - The Gospel "is the **power** [[dunamis](#)] of God for [salvation](#) to everyone who [believes](#)") to deliver souls from harsh, oppressive enslavement to sin and Satan!

**But I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go** - The signs Moses would perform with the staff would not result in belief but unbelief in Pharaoh and increasing hardening of his heart. The hardening of Pharaoh's heart is described throughout Exodus 4 through Exodus 14. Moses is to go to Pharaoh but he is to know Pharaoh will not respond positively (he has already been told in Ex 3:19). The idea of **harden his heart** is to make it stubborn so that he would refuse to change his attitude toward Moses' request for deliverance of Israel.

**THOUGHT** - How many ministries are told at first you won't succeed, but then you will succeed? Perhaps you feel you are truly doing God's will and yet you are experiencing opposition and what seems like little progress or spiritual fruit? If so, you are joining "Club Moses!" He could commiserate with your experience!

God does not harden men by putting evil into them, but by not giving them mercy.

-- Augustine

In the table below notice that the **hardening is described in three ways** - Pharaoh would harden his heart, God would harden Pharaoh's heart and Pharaoh's heart was hardened without any indication of who was the hardening agent.

**Ryken** - Taken together, what these statements show is that Pharaoh's heart was doubly hard. He hardened his own heart; nevertheless, God hardened his **heart** for him. Both of these statements are true, and there is no contradiction between them. Pharaoh's will was also God's will. God not only knew that Pharaoh would refuse to let his people go, but he actually ordained it. This is the paradox of divine sovereignty and human responsibility, which is not a puzzle to be solved but a mystery to be adored. As human beings made in the image of God, we make a real choice to accept or reject God, but even the choice we make is governed by God's sovereign and eternal will. The Old Testament scholar S. R. Driver rightly observed, "The means by which God hardens a man is not necessarily by any extraordinary intervention on His part; it may be by the ordinary experiences of life, operating through

the principles and character of human nature, which are of His appointment." The writer of Exodus understood this, which is why he described the hardening of Pharaoh's heart as both the will of Pharaoh and the will of God. (Ibid)

**Peter Enns** writes, "The deliverance of Israel from Egypt is entirely God's doing and under his complete control. The impending Exodus is a play in which God is author, producer, director, and principal actor." (NIV Application Commentary-Exodus)

**John Hannah** has an interesting note on **hardening Pharaoh's heart** - Another factor in God's hardening of Pharaoh's heart is that it was a reversal of an Egyptian belief. Egyptians believed that when a person died his heart was weighed in the hall of judgment. If one's heart was "heavy" with sin, that person was judged. A stone beetle scarab was placed on the heart of a deceased person to suppress his natural tendency to confess sin which would subject himself to judgment. This "hardening of the heart" by the scarab would result in salvation for the deceased. However, God reversed this process in Pharaoh's case. Instead of his heart being suppressed so that he was silent about his sin and thus delivered, his heart became hardened, he confessed his sin (Ex. 9:27, 34; 10:16-17), and his sinfully heavy heart resulted in judgment. For the Egyptians "hardening of the heart" resulted in silence (absence of confession of sin) and therefore salvation. But God's hardening of Pharaoh's heart resulted in acknowledgment of sin and in judgment. (Ibid)

**Harden his heart** (See [Table below](#)) - The word **harden** as it relates to Pharaoh's **heart** is found 18 times - Exod. 4:21; Exod. 7:3; Exod. 7:13; Exod. 7:22; Exod. 8:15; Exod. 8:19; Exod. 8:32; Exod. 9:7; Exod. 9:12; Exod. 9:34; Exod. 9:35; Exod. 10:1; Exod. 10:20; Exod. 10:27; Exod. 11:10; Exod. 14:4; Exod. 14:8; Exod. 14:17

**ESV Study Bible** - Though one might conclude that, if God hardens someone's heart, the latter is not answerable for his actions, this is not the biblical view, and certainly here the narrative is also careful to point out that Pharaoh also hardened his own heart (Ex 8:15, 32; 9:34).

**Hand** ([03027](#)) (**yad**) is feminine noun meaning hand and figuratively meaning strength.

**Vine** has a lengthy discussion of **yad** - "hand; side; border; alongside; hand-measure; portion; arm (rest); monument; manhood (male sex organ); power; rule." This word has cognates in most of the other Semitic languages. Biblical Hebrew attests it about 1,618 times and in every period.

The primary sense of this word is "hand": "And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life..." (Gen. 3:22, the first biblical occurrence). Sometimes the word is used in conjunction with an object that can be grasped by the "hand": "And if he smite him with throwing a stone [literally, "hand stone"]..." (Num. 35:17). In a similar usage, the word means "human": "...He shall also stand up against the Prince of princes; but he shall be broken without hand [i.e., human agency]" (Dan. 8:25; cf. Job 34:20).

In Isa. 49:2, "hand" is used of God; God tells Moses that He will put His "hand" over the mouth of the cave and protect him. This is a figure of speech, an anthropomorphism, by which God promises His protection. God's "hand" is another term for God's "power" (cf. Jer. 16:21). The phrase "between your hands" may mean "upon your chest": "And one shall say unto him, What are these wounds in thine hands [upon your chest]?" (Zech. 13:6).

Yād is employed in several other noteworthy phrases. The "lifting of the hand" may be involved in "taking an oath" (Gen. 14:22). "Shaking" [literally, "giving one's hand"] is another oath-taking gesture (cf. Prov. 11:21). For "one's hands to be on another" (Gen. 37:27) or "laid upon another" (Exod. 7:4) is to do harm to someone. "Placing one's hands with" signifies "making common cause with someone" (Exod. 23:1). If one's hand does not "reach" something, he is "unable to pay" for it (Lev. 5:7, rsv). When one's countryman is "unable to stretch out his hand to you," he is not able to support himself (Lev. 25:35).

"Putting one's hand on one's mouth" is a gesture of silence (Prov. 30:32). "Placing one's hands under someone" means submitting to him (1 Chron. 29:24). "Giving something into one's hand" is entrusting it to him (Gen. 42:37).

A second major group of passages uses yād to represent the location and uses of the hand. First, the word can mean "side," where the hand is located: "And Absalom rose up early and stood beside the way of the gate..." (2 Sam. 15:2). In 2 Chron. 21:16, the word means "border": "Moreover the Lord stirred up against Jehoram the spirit of the Philistines, and of the Arabians, that were near [literally, "by the hand of"] the Ethiopians." A similar use in Exod. 25 applies this word to the "banks" of the Nile River: "And the daughter of Pharaoh came down to wash herself at the river; and her maidens walked along by the [Nile]..." In this sense, yād can represent "length and breadth." In Gen. 34:21 we read that the land was (literally) "broad of hands":

"These men are peaceable with us; therefore let them dwell in the land, and trade therein; for the land, behold, it is large enough for them...." Second, since the hand can receive only a part or fraction of something, the word can signify a "part" or "fraction": "And he took and sent [portions] unto them from before him: but Benjamin's [portion] was five times so much as any of theirs" (Gen. 43:34).

Third, yād comes to mean that which upholds something, a "support" (1 Kings 7:35ff.) or an "arm rest" (1 Kings 10:19). Fourth, since a hand may be held up as a "sign," yād can signify a "monument" or "stele": "...Saul came to Carmel, and, behold, he set him up a place [monument], and is gone about, and passed on, and gone down to Gilgal" (1 Sam. 15:12). Fifth, yād sometimes represents the "male sex organ": "...And art gone up; thou hast enlarged thy bed, and made thee a covenant with them; thou lovest their bed where thou sawest it [you have looked on their manhood]" (Isa. 57:8; cf. v. Isa. 57:10; Isa. 6:2; Isa. 7:20).

In several passages, yād is used in the sense of "power" or "rule": "And David smote Hadarezer king of Zobah unto Hamath, as he went to stablish his dominion by the river Euphrates" (1 Chron. 18:3). "To be delivered into one's hands" means to be "given into one's power": "God hath delivered him into mine hand; for he is shut in, by entering into a town that hath gates and bars" (1 Sam. 23:7; cf. Prov. 18:21).

"To fill someone's hand" may be a technical term for "installing him" in office: "And thou shalt put them upon Aaron thy brother, and his sons with him; and shalt anoint them, and consecrate them [literally, "fill their hands"], and sanctify them, that they may minister unto me in the priest's office" (Exod. 28:41).

Yād is frequently joined to the preposition b(e) and other prepositions as an extension; there is no change in meaning, only a longer form: "For what have I done? or what evil is in mine hand?" (1 Sam. 26:18). ([Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament and New Testament Words](#). online)

- See also 4-5 page discussion on the Biblical images of **HAND** - from [Dictionary of Biblical Imagery](#) (online)

**Ralph Alexander** has a helpful discussion of hand as used idiomatically -

**Significant theologically is the manifold way in which the word "hand" is employed idiomatically**

These idioms arise from the versatility of the hand. The phrase "into (or "under") someone's hand" conveys authority involving responsibility, care, and dominion over someone or something. One may be under the custody of this authority. In the Amarna letters, the Canaanite gloss ba-di-ú means "in his hand." Mankind is to have the rest of creation "under his dominion" (Genesis 9:2). Sarah's authority over Hagar (Genesis 16:6, 9), Joseph's over Potiphar's house (Genesis 39:3-8), that of Moses and Aaron over Israel (Numbers 33:1), and David over Aram (1 Chron. 18:3) are all expressed by this phrase. Yahweh is to have authority over our lives. We place our hearts and spirits into his care, sovereignty, and judgment (Psalm 31:5, 15; [H 6, 16]; 2 Samuel 24:14). Moreover, this idiom portrays "victory over someone" when one is "delivered into one's hands." Deliverance, on the contrary, is described as being "delivered out of one's hands." Often Yahweh promised Israel that he would "deliver her enemies into her hands" (Genesis 49:8; Joshua 6:2) and that he would deliver Israel "out of her enemies' hands" (Exodus 3:8). Refuge cities provided "deliverance" for the innocent slayer "from the hand" of the revenger of blood (Numbers 35:15).

**The hand symbolized "power" or "strength"** (Deut. 8:17). Deut. 32:36 described Israel's loss of power by saying "their hands were gone." Moses' hand was poignantly used to portray power in the plagues against Egypt (Exodus 10:12-25). The most notable use of this metaphor is its conveyance of God's power. 1 Chron. 29:12 declares that in Yahweh's hand is power and might (cf. Psalm 89:13 [H 14]). His hand is not "short" (or "weak") (Isaiah 59:1), but mighty. A predominant demonstration of his power was his deliverance of Israel from Egypt (Exodus 13:3-16; Numbers 33:3). All the world witnessed Yahweh's power through this event (Joshua 4:24). His hand created the world (Psalm 8:6; Psalm 95:5) and works truth and justice (Psalm 111:7). He upholds and guides the righteous with his hand (Psalm 37:24; Psalm 139:10). He continually lifts up his hand on our behalf (Psalm 10:12). A corollary idea is that of "ability" to accomplish a task. The phrases "hand reaches" or "hand finds" denote the ability to do or obtain something (Leviticus 14:21-32).

**"Possession" is a common function of the hand.** Therefore, "in one's hands" often bears that connotation. The Ishmaelites had Joseph in their possession ("hands," Genesis 39:1). Yahweh declared that he would take David's kingdom from his son (1 Kings 11:12, 31-35).

**"Submission" is indicated by the phrase "to give one's hands under" someone else.** Solomon's officials "submitted" to him (1 Chron. 29:24). Yahweh exhorted Israel to "submit" to him and not rebel.

**"To stretch out the hand" conveys two ideas.** It expresses the "attacking" of an object (Joshua 8:19, 26); second, it describes the psalmist's yearning for the Lord (Psalm 143:6).

**"Putting one's hand to" something expresses "work" and the activity in which that person is involved (Deut. 2:7; Deut. 30:9).** "Strengthening the hands" is helping someone (cf. Jonathan helping David, 1 Samuel 23:16).

**Obstinate rebellion is described by the phrase "high hand" (Numbers 15:30).** Contrarily, the same expression conveyed God's mighty deliverance of Israel from Egypt (Exodus 14:8). "Shaking the hand" symbolized God's warning and destruction of judgment (Isaiah 10:32; Isaiah 19:16). Contempt is likewise visualized by this symbol (Zeph. 2:15).

**"Laying hands on" has four basic connotations.** First, this phrase was employed to depict killing (Genesis 37:22, 27). Second, it was used in the ritual ceremony of blessing (cf. Genesis 48:17). Third, commissioning for a specific office or task was normally accompanied by the laying on of hands (cf. Moses' inauguration of Joshua and Acts 13:1-3). Fourth, the important theological concept of substitution was continually portrayed through the laying of hands upon a sacrificial animal. On the Day of Atonement, the high priest transferred the nation's sins to the goat ("substitution"), by laying his hands upon the goat. Individuals depicted their sins as transferred to and borne by the sacrificial animal through this expression (Exodus 29:10-19; Leviticus 1:4). Ultimately this figure was fulfilled in Christ's bearing of our sins upon the cross (Col. 2:14).

**The "uplifted hand" expressed several nuances.** First, it symbolized prayer as one lifted up his hands toward the sanctuary (Psalm 28:2). Second, the uplifted hand periodically accompanied a public blessing (Leviticus 9:22). Third, it was common for one to lift up his hand in an oath. When Abram vowed not to take spoils of war, he lifted up his hand to the king of Sodom. Another means of expressing a vow was to place the hand under the thigh of the other person as Abram's servant did when swearing that he would be faithful to Abram's charge (Genesis 24:2, 9). The most significant vows of scripture are those anthropomorphically made by God. The oath most remembered in the scripture by this accompanying sign is God's unconditional and eternal covenant promise to make a nation from Abram and bless the world through that nation, Israel (Genesis 12:1-3; cf. Exodus 6:8; Numbers 14:30). God also swore to avenge the blood of his servants (Deut. 32:40).

**Consecration was depicted by the idiom "fill the hands."** Some suggest that the sense of filling means the hands were full and had no time for other business, though others think that "filling" was with a sacrificial portion since this phrase was predominately used in the commissioning of priests (Exodus 29:9-35; Exodus 16:32). Ritual cleansing was portrayed by "washing the hands" (Leviticus 5:11), making the person ritually righteous (2 Samuel 22:21). This symbolic action also denoted "absolution from guilt" (Deut. 21:6-7; cf. Matthew 27:24).

**To give to one was to "open the hand"** (Deut. 15:8, 11), whereas to "shut the hand" was to withhold (Deut. 15:7). God opens his hand to satisfy the desire of every living thing (Psalm 145:16).

**One who "slacks his hand" (or withdraws his hand) "gives up" (Joshua 10:6);** the slothful "buries his hand in a dish" (Proverbs 19:24). The silent places the "hand to the mouth" (Proverbs 30:32).

**"Hand" is interestingly employed to mean an "ordinance" (Ezra 3:10) or a "monument"** (cf. ritual stelae at Hazor) used perhaps to establish a covenant or as religious commemorations (1 Samuel 15:12; Isaiah 56:5). The Law was symbolically placed on the hand of the Israelite to remind him of its centrality in life (Deut. 6:8). The instrumentality of giving ordinances and God's word was expressed with "by the hand of."

Perhaps the joining of hands led to the use of *yād* to denote "axles" which held the wheels of the molten sea together (1 Kings 7:32-33) and the "stays" (tenons) to fasten the boards of the tabernacle or temple (Exodus 26:17-19; 1 Kings 7:35-36). The hand hanging at the side most likely precipitated the use of *yād* for "side, coast, or border" (Exodus 2:5; Numbers 2:17; Numbers 34:3). The spreading of the hands denoted "space" (Genesis 34:21), while "hand" also meant "part" or "time" (Genesis 43:34; Genesis 47:24). A different root, *ydd*, "to love," may be the basis for translating *yād* "penis" in the context of Isaiah 57:8, 10 (cf. UG 19: no. 1072). (From [TWOT](#) online)

**NIDOTTE** - The metaphorical use of **yad**, יָד, covers a wide range of the concept of "power." In this respect there is no essential difference whether the word is related to God or humankind. יָד is used about 200x in

connection with God, in most cases combined with the name Yahweh, and rarely combined (about 13×) with a form of El or Elohim (1 Sam 4:8; 5:11; 2 Chron 30:12; Ezra 7:9; 8:18, 22, 31; Neh 2:8, 18; Job 19:21; 27:11; Ps 10:12; Eccl 2:24; 9:1). The theological metaphor of God's hand (comp. arm) seems to have its roots in Israel's experience of God's redeeming them from slavery in Egypt. In the Exodus reports the outstretched arm of God and of Moses play a decisive role (Exod 3:20; 4:17; 6:1 [2×]; 7:19; 13:3). J. K. Hoffmeier has demonstrated that the OT idioms with "hand" and "arm" (#2432 ;אָרְמֵי) were already known in Canaan of the fifteenth century BC (Amarna letters), denoting the conquering arm of the pharaoh. Probably the biblical writers used expressions like אֶרְמֵי הַיְהוָה and אֶרְמֵי מִצְרַיִם consciously and polemically against the Egyptian concepts that were concentrated on the pharaoh (Hoffmeier, 386). **2. יָד can be used metonymically to describe God's mighty acts**, either for the salvation or for the judgment of his people: "the great power (הַיָּד הַגְּדוֹלָה) [of] the LORD" (Exod 14:31; cf. Deut 34:12 with Moses as subj.; Ps 78:42). "God's good hand" protected the Israelites returning from the Exile (cf. Ezra 7:9; 8:22; Neh 2:18). But God also swings his hand of judgment over his people or over other peoples (יָד הַיְהוָה, e.g., Isa 19:16; Zech 2:9 [13]), lifts up his hand (רָם הַיָּד, Isa 49:22; to swear, Deut 32:40; Ezek 20:5) or stretches out his hand (אֶרְמֵי הַיָּד, Exod 7:5; Isa 14:26–27; Jer 6:12; אֶרְמֵי only being used in a negative connotation). His punishing hand is heavy on Israel's enemies (1 Sam 5:6, 11). **3. "The work of his hands" testifies to God's creating power** (Ps 19:1 [2]; Isa 48:13; 64:8 [7]). The pl. of יָד in the formula מַעֲשֵׂה יָדָיו, or מַעֲשֵׂה יְדָיו, hints at God's activity in creation, e.g., Isa 19:25; 45:11, 12 (פִּעַל יְדָיו); 60:21 **4. Not to note or not to see God's actions is a sign of deep spiritual darkness** (Isa 5:12 and Ps 28:5 מַעֲשֵׂה יְדָיו). His hand is lifted up for punishment (רָם הַיָּד), "but they do not see it" (Isa 26:11). People are capable of recognizing God's deeds in creation and in history and are obliged to draw conclusions out of these: to praise, fear, and trust him. **5. God's hand falls** (נָפַל), is (הֵיטָל), or comes (בּוֹא) upon a prophet (e.g., 1 Kgs 18:46; 2 Kgs 3:15; Isa 8:11; Jer 15:17; Ezek 1:3; 3:14, 22; 8:1; 33:22; 37:1; 40:1). These expressions have their origin in prophetic traditions. Jeremiah experienced God's hand, separating him from his contemporaries and their superficial lifestyle (Jer 15:17). Especially in the book of Ezek the formula יָד הַיְהוָה על יהוה means a special experience of God's power upon the prophet, which is similar to the actions of God's רִחַם upon certain judges of Israel. Each of the four great vision-cycles of Ezek is introduced by this formula (Ezek 1:3; 8:1; 37:1; 40:1). God's irresistible call not only reaches the prophet, but also during his lifetime the Lord seizes him on special occasions. He receives messages, but he also experiences on a physical, psychic, and social level that as a prophet he lives his life in bondage; Ezekiel grows silent for seven days (3:14–15); after receiving the message of Jerusalem's fall, his mouth was opened again (33:22). In 2 Kgs 3:15 יָד and רִחַם are exchangeable.

**There are over 1385 uses of yad in the OT, so only the uses in Genesis and Exodus will be listed**

- Gen. 3:22; Gen. 4:11; Gen. 5:29; Gen. 8:9; Gen. 9:2; Gen. 14:20; Gen. 14:22; Gen. 16:6; Gen. 16:9; Gen. 16:12; Gen. 19:10; Gen. 19:16; Gen. 21:18; Gen. 21:30; Gen. 22:6; Gen. 22:10; Gen. 22:12; Gen. 24:2; Gen. 24:9; Gen. 24:10; Gen. 24:18; Gen. 24:22; Gen. 24:30; Gen. 24:47; Gen. 25:26; Gen. 27:16; Gen. 27:22; Gen. 27:23; Gen. 30:35; Gen. 31:29; Gen. 31:39; Gen. 32:11; Gen. 32:16; Gen. 33:10; Gen. 33:19; Gen. 34:21; Gen. 35:4; Gen. 37:21; Gen. 37:22; Gen. 37:27; Gen. 38:18; Gen. 38:20; Gen. 38:28; Gen. 38:29; Gen. 38:30; Gen. 39:3; Gen. 39:4; Gen. 39:6; Gen. 39:8; Gen. 39:12; Gen. 39:13; Gen. 39:22; Gen. 39:23; Gen. 40:11; Gen. 40:13; Gen. 41:35; Gen. 41:42; Gen. 41:44; Gen. 42:37; Gen. 43:9; Gen. 43:12; Gen. 43:15; Gen. 43:21; Gen. 43:22; Gen. 43:26; Gen. 43:34; Gen. 44:16; Gen. 44:17; Gen. 46:4; Gen. 47:24; Gen. 47:29; Gen. 48:14; Gen. 48:17; Gen. 48:22; Gen. 49:8; Gen. 49:24; Exod. 2:5; Exod. 2:19; Exod. 3:8; Exod. 3:19; Exod. 3:20; Exod. 4:2; Exod. 4:4; Exod. 4:6; Exod. 4:7; Exod. 4:17; Exod. 4:20; Exod. 4:21; Exod. 5:21; Exod. 6:1; Exod. 6:8; Exod. 7:4; Exod. 7:5; Exod. 7:15; Exod. 7:17; Exod. 7:19; Exod. 8:5; Exod. 8:6; Exod. 8:17; Exod. 9:3; Exod. 9:15; Exod. 9:22; Exod. 9:35; Exod. 10:12; Exod. 10:21; Exod. 10:22; Exod. 10:25; Exod. 12:11; Exod. 13:3; Exod. 13:9; Exod. 13:14; Exod. 13:16; Exod. 14:8; Exod. 14:16; Exod. 14:21; Exod. 14:26; Exod. 14:27; Exod. 14:30; Exod. 14:31; Exod. 15:9; Exod. 15:17; Exod. 15:20; Exod. 16:3; Exod. 17:5; Exod. 17:9; Exod. 17:11; Exod. 17:12; Exod. 17:16; Exod. 18:9; Exod. 18:10; Exod. 19:13; Exod. 21:13; Exod. 21:16; Exod. 21:20; Exod. 21:24; Exod. 22:4; Exod. 22:8; Exod. 22:11; Exod. 23:1; Exod. 23:31; Exod. 24:11; Exod. 26:17; Exod. 26:19; Exod. 28:41; Exod. 29:9; Exod. 29:10; Exod. 29:15; Exod. 29:19; Exod. 29:20; Exod. 29:25; Exod. 29:29; Exod. 29:33; Exod. 29:35; Exod. 30:19; Exod. 30:21; Exod. 32:4; Exod. 32:11; Exod. 32:15; Exod. 32:19; Exod. 32:29; Exod. 34:4; Exod. 34:29; Exod. 35:25; Exod. 35:29; Exod. 36:22; Exod. 36:24; Exod. 38:21; Exod. 40:31

**Related Resources:**

- Summary List of Every Use of Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart in Exodus
- Table Summarizing the 10 Plagues and the Egyptian Deities they were probably directed against

- Table Comparing the Plagues of Exodus and the Revelation
- [Why did God harden Pharaoh's heart?](#)
- [Why was Pharaoh so resistant to Moses' pleas to "let my people go"?](#)
- [Who was the Pharaoh of the Exodus?](#)
- [What was the meaning and purpose of the ten plagues of Egypt?](#)

THE HARDENING OF PHARAOH'S HEART			
Declaration	Hardening		
	I [Yahweh] will harden Pharaoh's heart.	Yahweh hardened the heart of Pharaoh.	Pharaoh's heart was hardened. Pharaoh hardened his heart.
Ex 4:21			
Ex 7:3			
		Ex 7:13	
		Ex 7:14	
		Ex 7:22	
			Ex 8:15
		Ex 8:19	
			Ex 8:32
		Ex 9:7	
	Ex 9:12		
			Ex 9:34
		Ex 9:35	
	Ex 10:1		
	Ex 10:20		
	Ex 10:27		
	Ex 11:10		
Ex 14:4			
		Ex 14:5	
	Ex 14:8		

**Harden** (02388)(**chazaq**) conveys the basic meaning of to be or become strong, to make strong or strengthen, in the Hiphil to take hold of or seize ("retain His anger" - Mic 7:18+), in the Hithpael to strengthen oneself (to take courage 1 Sa 30:6). To be courageous. To overpower. **Chazaq** describes strength - severity of a famine (a "strong" famine) (2 Ki 25:3, Jer 52:6), strength of humans to overpower (David and Goliath 1 Sa 17:50, cf 1 Sa 17:35 = seized; Amnon and Tamar = 2 Sa 13:14), in a battle, to capture (2 Chr 8:3), Samson's last demonstration of supernatural strength he prays "please **strengthen** me" (Jdg 16:28). Used in the charge "**Be strong** and courageous" (Josh 1:6, 7, 9,18, Josh 10:25, "be firm" = Josh 23:6; "**Be strong** and courageous" = Dt 31:6-7, 23). **Chazaq** used 12 times in Ex 4-14 of hardening Pharaoh's heart (cf similar use in Josh 11:20). In a great passage in Da 11:32+ we read ""By smooth words he will turn to godlessness those who act wickedly toward the covenant, but **the people who know their God** will display **strength (chazaq)** and take action.""

**TWOT** - Other resultant meanings include "be sure" (Deut. 12:23), "be steadfast" (Joshua 23:6, RSV), "catch hold" (2 Samuel 18:9, Absalom's head in the oak; the causative of this is common usage in the Hiphil), "recover" (Isaiah 39:1, Hezekiah from sickness), "stout," (of peoples' words against God, Malachi 3:13). The Qal form of the verb is used twice (2 Chron. 28:20; Isaiah 28:22) in the Piel sense of "strengthen." The basic meaning of the Piel stem (used sixty-four times) is causative of the Qal, to "make strong," "strengthen." As with the Qal it is used often in the context of battle or combat. Often the object of the verb is the hands or the arms of an individual. "To strengthen the hands" may mean "to aid" (Ezra 1:6), or, more often, "to encourage" (1 Samuel 23:16). The person encouraged may be the object of the verb (2 Samuel 11:25; Isaiah 41:7). Strengthen may be translated simply "help" (2 Chron. 29:34). The Piel is used sixteen times in the sense of repair" (2 Kings 12:5f.). As in the Qal, when the object of the verb is the



heart (ten times), the verb is translated "harden" (Exodus 4:21f.). It is used twice in the sense of "fasten" (or "support") as with nails (Isaiah 41:7; Jeremiah 10:4). The Hiphil frequently (sixty-three times) means "take hold," i.e. "grasp," "seize." It is used thirty-four times in Nehemiah in the sense of "repair," referring to the rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem. Other uses are varied: "prevail" (Daniel 11:7), "support" (Leviticus 25:35), "receive" (2 Chron. 4:5), retain" (Judges 7:8), "constrain" or "urge" (2 Kings 4:8), confirm" (Daniel 11:1), "strengthen" (2 Samuel 11:25), "aid", i.e. "strengthen the hand" (Ezekiel 16:49), "join" (Neh. 10:29), "hold" (Neh. 5:16). The Hithpael (used twenty-seven times) is translated in a variety of ways but is usually reflexive of some use of the Qal stem, i.e. "strengthen oneself," "encourage oneself." (Carl Weber)

**Vine** - "to be strong, strengthen, harden, take hold of." This verb is found 290 times in the Old Testament. The root also exists in Aramaic and Arabic.

The word first occurs in Gen. 41:56: "...And the famine waxed sore in the land of Egypt" (nasb, niv, "was severe"). The strong form of the verb is used in Exod. 4:21: "...I will harden his [Pharaoh's] heart..." This statement is found 8 times. Four times we read: "Pharaoh's heart was hard" (Exod. 7:13, 22; Exod. 8:19; Exod. 9:35, niv; kjv, rsv, nasb, "was hardened"). In Exod. 9:34 Pharaoh's responsibility is made clear by the statement "he sinned yet more, and hardened his heart..." In the sense of personal strength *hāzaq* is first used in Deut. 11:8 in the context of the covenant: "Therefore shall ye keep all the commandments which I command you this day, that ye may be strong, and go in and possess the land..." Moses was commanded to "charge Joshua, and encourage him" (Deut. 3:28). The covenant promise accompanies the injunction to "be strong and of a good courage": "...For the Lord thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee" (Deut. 31:6). The same encouragement was given to the returned captives as they renewed the work of rebuilding the temple (Zech. 8:9, 13; cf. Hag. 2:4).

If in the above examples there is moral strength combined with physical, the latter is the sense of Judg. 1:28: "And it came to pass, when Israel was strong, that they put the Canaanites to [forced labor]..." Israel sinned and the Lord

"strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel" (Judg. 3:12). The word is used in reference to a building: "... The priests had not repaired the breaches of the house" (2 Kings 12:6), or to a city: "Moreover Uzziah built towers in Jerusalem ... and fortified them" (2 Chron. 26:9). In battle *hāzaq* means: "So David prevailed over the Philistine ..." (1 Sam. 17:50).

As the prophet said, "For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them [nasb, "to strongly support them"] whose heart is perfect toward him" (2 Chron. 16:9). To His Servant, the Messiah, God said: "I ... will hold thine hand ..." (Isa. 42:6); and to Cyrus He said: "... Whose right hand I have holden ..." (Isa. 45:1).

Other noteworthy uses of the word are: "... Thou shalt relieve him [a poor Israelite]..." (Lev. 25:35); and "... [Saul] laid hold upon the skirt of his mantle, and it rent" (1 Sam. 15:27).

In summary, this word group describes the physical and moral strength of man and society. God communicates strength to men, even to the enemies of His people as chastisement for His own. Men may turn their strength into stubbornness against God. (Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament and New Testament Words.)

**Chazaq** - 267v - adopted(2), applied(1), became(1), became mighty(1), became powerful(1), became strong(2), became...strong(1), been arrogant(1), captured(1), carried out repairs(12), caught(1), caught fast(1), caught hold(1), collected his strength(1), courageous(3), detained(1), devote(1), display great strength(1), display strength(1), encourage(4), encourage\*(1), encouraged(2), encouraged\*(3), encouragement(1), encouragements(1), established himself securely(1), fasten(1), fastens(1), fierce(1), firm(2), firmly(2), firmly in his grasp(1), forces(1), fortified(1), gain ascendancy(1), gave him strong support(1), grasp(1), gripped(3), grow strong(1), harden(4), hardened(9), held(2), held them fast(1), help\*(1), helped(1), hold(4), hold his own(1), hold fast(5), holding(3), holds fast(3), joining(1), laid hold(1), louder(1), made(1), made himself secure(1), made their harder(1), made repairs(12), made stronger(1), maintain(1), make(1), make an effort(1), making himself strong(1), overcome(1), persuaded(1), post a strong(1), prevailed(4), prevailed over(1), put(1), received strength(1), recovered(1), rely(1), repair(12), repaired(14), repairers(1), repairing(1), resist(1), resolutely(2), retain(1), retained(1), seize(4), seized(6), seizes(2), severe(5), show ourselves courageous(2), snaps shut(1), stands firmly(1), strengthen(12), strengthened(19), strengthening(1), strong(31), strong support(1), stronger(6), strongly support(1), support\*(1), supported(1), sure(1), sustain(1), take(1), take courage(6), take courage and be courageous(1), take hold(7), taken(2), taken hold(1), takes(1), takes hold(2), tie your securely(1), took(2), took courage(2), took hold(5), upholds(1), urged\*(1).

Gen. 19:16; Gen. 21:18; Gen. 41:56; Gen. 41:57; Gen. 47:20; Gen. 48:2; Exod. 4:4; Exod. 4:21; Exod. 7:13; Exod. 7:22; Exod. 8:19; Exod. 9:2; Exod. 9:12; Exod. 9:35; Exod. 10:20; Exod. 10:27; Exod. 11:10; Exod. 12:33; Exod. 14:4; Exod. 14:8; Exod. 14:17; Exod. 19:19; Lev. 25:35; Num. 13:20; Deut. 1:38; Deut. 3:28;

Deut. 11:8; Deut. 12:23; Deut. 22:25; Deut. 25:11; Deut. 31:6; Deut. 31:7; Deut. 31:23; Jos. 1:6; Jos. 1:7; Jos. 1:9; Jos. 1:18; Jos. 10:25; Jos. 11:20; Jos. 17:13; Jos. 23:6; Jdg. 1:28; Jdg. 3:12; Jdg. 7:8; Jdg. 7:11; Jdg. 7:20; Jdg. 9:24; Jdg. 16:26; Jdg. 16:28; Jdg. 19:4; Jdg. 19:25; Jdg. 19:29; Jdg. 20:22; 1 Sam. 4:9; 1 Sam. 15:27; 1 Sam. 17:35; 1 Sam. 17:50; 1 Sam. 23:16; 1 Sam. 30:6; 2 Sam. 1:11; 2 Sam. 2:7; 2 Sam. 2:16; 2 Sam. 3:1; 2 Sam. 3:6; 2 Sam. 3:29; 2 Sam. 10:11; 2 Sam. 10:12; 2 Sam. 11:25; 2 Sam. 13:11; 2 Sam. 13:14; 2 Sam. 13:28; 2 Sam. 15:5; 2 Sam. 16:21; 2 Sam. 18:9; 2 Sam. 24:4; 1 Ki. 1:50; 1 Ki. 2:2; 1 Ki. 2:28; 1 Ki. 9:9; 1 Ki. 16:22; 1 Ki. 20:22; 1 Ki. 20:23; 1 Ki. 20:25; 2 Ki. 2:12; 2 Ki. 3:26; 2 Ki. 4:8; 2 Ki. 4:27; 2 Ki. 12:5; 2 Ki. 12:6; 2 Ki. 12:7; 2 Ki. 12:8; 2 Ki. 12:12; 2 Ki. 12:14; 2 Ki. 14:5; 2 Ki. 15:19; 2 Ki. 22:5; 2 Ki. 22:6; 2 Ki. 25:3; 1 Chr. 11:10; 1 Chr. 19:12; 1 Chr. 19:13; 1 Chr. 21:4; 1 Chr. 22:13; 1 Chr. 26:27; 1 Chr. 28:7; 1 Chr. 28:10; 1 Chr. 28:20; 1 Chr. 29:12; 2 Chr. 1:1; 2 Chr. 7:22; 2 Chr. 8:3; 2 Chr. 11:11; 2 Chr. 11:12; 2 Chr. 11:17; 2 Chr. 12:13; 2 Chr. 13:7; 2 Chr. 13:8; 2 Chr. 13:21; 2 Chr. 15:7; 2 Chr. 15:8; 2 Chr. 16:9; 2 Chr. 17:1; 2 Chr. 19:11; 2 Chr. 21:4; 2 Chr. 23:1; 2 Chr. 24:5; 2 Chr. 24:12; 2 Chr. 25:3; 2 Chr. 25:8; 2 Chr. 25:11; 2 Chr. 26:8; 2 Chr. 26:9; 2 Chr. 26:15; 2 Chr. 26:16; 2 Chr. 27:5; 2 Chr. 27:6; 2 Chr. 28:15; 2 Chr. 28:20; 2 Chr. 29:3; 2 Chr. 29:34; 2 Chr. 31:4; 2 Chr. 32:5; 2 Chr. 32:7; 2 Chr. 34:8; 2 Chr. 34:10; 2 Chr. 35:2; Ezr. 1:6; Ezr. 6:22; Ezr. 7:28; Ezr. 9:12; Ezr. 10:4; Neh. 2:18; Neh. 3:4; Neh. 3:5; Neh. 3:6; Neh. 3:7; Neh. 3:8; Neh. 3:9; Neh. 3:10; Neh. 3:11; Neh. 3:12; Neh. 3:13; Neh. 3:14; Neh. 3:15; Neh. 3:16; Neh. 3:17; Neh. 3:18; Neh. 3:19; Neh. 3:20; Neh. 3:21; Neh. 3:22; Neh. 3:23; Neh. 3:24; Neh. 3:27; Neh. 3:28; Neh. 3:29; Neh. 3:30; Neh. 3:31; Neh. 3:32; Neh. 4:16; Neh. 4:17; Neh. 4:21; Neh. 5:16; Neh. 6:9; Neh. 10:29; Job 2:3; Job 2:9; Job 4:3; Job 8:15; Job 8:20; Job 18:9; Job 27:6; Ps. 27:14; Ps. 31:24; Ps. 35:2; Ps. 64:5; Ps. 147:13; Prov. 3:18; Prov. 4:13; Prov. 7:13; Prov. 26:17; Isa. 4:1; Isa. 22:21; Isa. 27:5; Isa. 28:22; Isa. 33:23; Isa. 35:3; Isa. 35:4; Isa. 39:1; Isa. 41:6; Isa. 41:7; Isa. 41:9; Isa. 41:13; Isa. 42:6; Isa. 45:1; Isa. 51:18; Isa. 54:2; Isa. 56:2; Isa. 56:4; Isa. 56:6; Isa. 64:7; Jer. 5:3; Jer. 6:23; Jer. 6:24; Jer. 8:5; Jer. 8:21; Jer. 10:4; Jer. 20:7; Jer. 23:14; Jer. 31:32; Jer. 49:24; Jer. 50:33; Jer. 50:42; Jer. 50:43; Jer. 51:12; Jer. 52:6; Ezek. 7:13; Ezek. 13:22; Ezek. 16:49; Ezek. 22:14; Ezek. 27:9; Ezek. 27:27; Ezek. 30:21; Ezek. 30:24; Ezek. 30:25; Ezek. 34:4; Ezek. 34:16; Dan. 10:18; Dan. 10:19; Dan. 10:21; Dan. 11:1; Dan. 11:5; Dan. 11:6; Dan. 11:7; Dan. 11:21; Dan. 11:32; Hos. 7:15; Mic. 4:9; Mic. 7:18; Nah. 2:1; Nah. 3:14; Hag. 2:4; Zech. 8:9; Zech. 8:13; Zech. 8:23; Zech. 14:13; Mal. 3:13

## Exodus 4:22 Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD, "Israel is My son, My firstborn.

- **Israel** - Ex 19:5,6 De 14:1 Jer 31:9 Ho 11:1 Ro 9:4 2 Co 6:18 Heb 12:23 Jas 1:18
- Exodus 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## ISRAEL IS GOD'S FIRSTBORN

**Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD, "Israel is My son, My firstborn** - This is the language of a family relationship. The nation of **Israel** was figuratively called God's **first-born** here (and Jer 31:9+) Though the nation of **Israel** clearly was not the first people born, they held first place or the place of pre-eminence in God's sight among all the nations (cf Dt 7:7-8). Jehovah's point is that the sons of Israel belong to God and are not Pharaoh's possession.

**Currid** - In the Bible, when a prophet invokes that expression he is employing a common Near-Eastern formula to preface the commands of a deity. The Egyptians would have been well aware of that idiom because many of their own texts, such as the Book of the Dead, introduce the directives of the gods with the words: 'Thus says ...' It is an introductory formula that signifies that the words following it derive directly from the deity, and they are not to be altered or changed in any manner. The role of the prophet is to communicate that word without modification. Such phraseology helps to underscore the idea that the confrontation about to occur in Egypt is between the **gods of Egypt** (including Pharaoh) and **the God of the Hebrews**. (EPSC-Ex) (bolding added)

**Wiersbe** - God also assured Moses of His special love for Israel, His firstborn son (Jer. 31:9; Hosea 11:1). In the ancient world, the firstborn in every family had special rights and privileges, and God would see to it that Israel, His firstborn, would be redeemed and rewarded, while the firstborn of Egypt would be slain. (Bible Exposition Commentary - Old Testament)

**MacArthur** has an interesting note on **firstborn** - To the ancient Egyptians, the firstborn son was special and sacred, and the Pharaoh considered himself the only son of the gods. Now he heard of a whole nation designated as God's firstborn son, meaning "declared and treated as first in rank, preeminent, with the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of being actually the firstborn." The Lord pointedly referred to the nation collectively in the singular in order to show that He was a father in what He would do, i.e., bring a nation into existence, then nurture and lead him (cf. Dt 14:1, 2). Divine sonship, as in the pagan world's perverted concept of a sexual union between the gods and women, was never so much as hinted at in the way God used the term to express His

relationship with Israel, who were His people, a treasured possession, a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation (cf. Ex 6:7; 19:4-6). (MacArthur Study Bible)

It is interesting that God instructed Moses to tell Pharaoh that Israel was God's son, His **firstborn**, for Pharaoh believed that he alone was the "son of the gods." There is a bit of "in your face" implied in this declaration by God.

**Firstborn** (01060)(**bekor**) means an offspring who came first in the order of birth (animals Ge 4:4) or persons (Ge 25:13). Swanson adds that **bekor** means "firstborn, usually, the first male offspring, the oldest son, with the associative meaning of prominence in the clan and privileges pertaining to clan and inheritance (Ge 43:33; Ne 10:37)." The firstborn of clean animals were sacrificed to the Lord (Dt. 12:6, 17), but the firstborn males of unclean animals could be redeemed (Nu 18:15)

**Currid** - Yahweh calls Israel his 'first-born son'. He uses the language of a family relationship. The status of the first-born in antiquity was one of great privilege. In the laws of Israel, the first-born had the right of headship of the family after the father died, and the right of receiving a double portion of inheritance (Deut. 21:17). It was a position of prominence and pre-eminence.

The [Septuagint \(Lxx\)](#) translates **bekor** with Greek word [protokos](#) (from **protos** = first, foremost, in place order or time; rank dignity + **titko** = beget, to bear, bring forth) can mean **first-born chronologically** (Lk 2:7), but refers primarily to position, rank, priority of position and emphasizes quality or kind, not time with the idea of "preeminence". So in Colossians 1:15± Paul writes that Christ "is the image of the invisible God, the **firstborn** of all creation." In this passage the emphasis is on the priority of Jesus' **rank** as over and above creation. In both Greek and Jewish culture, the **first-born** was the son who had the right of inheritance. He was **not** necessarily the first one born chronologically.

**Vine** writes **bekor** "represents the "firstborn" individual in a family (Gen. 25:13); the word can also represent the "firstborn" of a nation, collectively (Num. 3:46). The plural form of the word appears occasionally (Neh. 10:36); in this passage, the word is applied to animals. In other passages, the singular form of *bekôr* signifies a single "firstborn" animal (Lev. 27:26; kjv, "firstling") or collectively the "firstborn" of a herd (Exod. 11:5). The "oldest" or "firstborn" son (Exod. 6:14) had special privileges within the family. He received the special family blessing, which meant spiritual and social leadership and a double portion of the father's possessions, or twice what all the other sons received (Deut. 21:17). He could lose his blessing through misdeeds (Gen. 35:22) or by selling it (Gen. 25:29-34). God claimed all Israel and all their possessions as His own. As a token of this claim, Israel was to give Him all its "firstborn" (Exod. 13:1-16). The animals were to be sacrificed, redeemed, or killed, while the male children were redeemed either by being replaced with Levites or by the payment of a redemption price (Num. 3:40ff.). Israel was God's "firstborn"; in an idiom meaning a deadly disease (Job 18:13); the "first-born of the poor" is the poorest class of people (Isa. 14:30). [Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament and New Testament Words](#). online)

**Gilbrant** - The references to first born animals, those that "open the womb," are found in a ritual sense. These animals are sacrificed to Yahweh, symbolic of his both his procreative and his sustaining powers. The latter is understood in that one could trust him to supply future animals as compensation. The former is understood in the context of redemption, as nonsacrificial animals must be redeemed by substitution (Num. 18:14). "But the firstling of a cow, or the firstling of a sheep, or the firstling of a goat you shall not redeem; they are holy..." (Num. 18:17).

Some pagan religions around Israel extended this practice to first born humans. Notably this was the case with the deity Molech, which some note should actually be pronounced Milcom. Many assume this vowel change in Hebrew was deliberate, as the authors inserted the vowels for the noun *bôsheth*, "shame" (HED #992). It is assumed that this was an epithet or a local (in this case, the royal court) manifestation of a god, presumably Athtar (the same deity which was the national god of Moab under the epithet Chemosh). This god was worshipped by (among others) the Phoenicians, becoming a prime god in the Punic and Neo-Punic colonies. It is best known in the Hebrew Bible as the national god of the Ammonites.

The ritual is spoken of with contempt, as the epitome of pagan practice (cf. 2 Ki. 16:3). Meshah, king of Moab, does this in face of the threat of an invasion from Israel (2 Ki. 3:27). The practice existed in Israel until the reform of Josiah, as Tophet (the site of the sanctuary for human sacrifices) was desecrated and all sanctuaries for Chemosh and Milcom were destroyed (2 Ki. 23:10, 13). Prophetic condemnation continued throughout the monarchy (e.g., Jer. 19:4-9; Eze. 16:20; Mic. 6:7).

The practice of sacrificing one's first born was the backdrop of Gen. 22:1ff, as Yahweh tests Abraham by

demanding he sacrifice Issac. The principle of substitution for first born humans is established in this narrative, as Yahweh provides a wild sheep for the sacrifice. The substitution became standardized as a payment of five shekels (Num. 3:47).

Symbolically, the Levites are dedicated to Yahweh as an atonement for the first born (Num. 3:12; 8:14ff). These contexts go on to remind the people that all the first born belong to Yahweh, consecrated from the day he killed the first born among the Egyptians. The Levites and the firstling laws are a perpetual reminder of this act. The firstlings support the priesthood, composed of the symbolic first born of the people.

The most important societal concept associated with the first born of humans is that of inheritance. The passing down of property to descendants is one of the prime problems that every society faces. The option selected by the Israelites for the process was the methodology known as primogeniture, that the first-born receives special consideration in the inheritance process. In Israelite law, the first born received special consideration, gaining a double portion of the inheritance, and other benefits in order to produce the next generational head of the patriarchal house.

The right of the first born could be forfeited. This is a recurring theme among the patriarchs, as the concept of divine selection eradicates the societal mechanism. Reuben, committing incest by sexual activity with his father's (Jacob's) concubine Bilhah, is denied his right (Gen. 49:3f). Esau sells his right (Gen. 25:29ff), which is inadvertently confirmed by Issac his father orally (and legally) awarding the double portion to Jacob (Gen. 27:1ff). Other examples include Joseph over his half brothers and Solomon over Adonijah.

Symbolically, Elisha, among the prophetic guild known as the "sons of the prophets," receives a double portion of Elijah's spirit, asserting his succession as leader of the guild (2 Ki. 2:9).

The noun is also used metaphorically to underscore the degree of a concept. For example, the "first born of the poor" simply means "the poorest" (Isa. 14:30).

There are examples when the word does not connote rights of being the first born. It is used to describe the eldest, both sons and daughters (Gen. 19:31).

The significance of the first born is the backdrop to understanding the role of Jesus as Son with God the Father. Jesus was the possessor of all God had, as heir (and all humanity has the opportunity to become joint heirs). He is the "first born of creation" (Col. 1:15), and the "first born of the dead" (Col. 1:18). ([Complete Biblical Library Hebrew-English Dictionary](#))

**Bekor** - 123x in 101v firstborn(118), firstlings(1), most(1), oldest(3) - Gen. 4:4; Gen. 10:15; Gen. 22:21; Gen. 25:13; Gen. 27:19; Gen. 27:32; Gen. 35:23; Gen. 36:15; Gen. 38:6; Gen. 38:7; Gen. 41:51; Gen. 43:33; Gen. 46:8; Gen. 48:14; Gen. 48:18; Gen. 49:3; Exod. 4:22; Exod. 4:23; Exod. 6:14; Exod. 11:5; Exod. 12:12; Exod. 12:29; Exod. 13:2; Exod. 13:13; Exod. 13:15; Exod. 22:29; Exod. 34:20; Lev. 27:26; Num. 1:20; Num. 3:2; Num. 3:12; Num. 3:13; Num. 3:40; Num. 3:41; Num. 3:42; Num. 3:43; Num. 3:45; Num. 3:46; Num. 3:50; Num. 8:16; Num. 8:17; Num. 8:18; Num. 18:15; Num. 18:17; Num. 26:5; Num. 33:4; Deut. 12:6; Deut. 12:17; Deut. 14:23; Deut. 15:19; Deut. 21:15; Deut. 21:16; Deut. 21:17; Deut. 25:6; Deut. 33:17; Jos. 6:26; Jos. 17:1; Jdg. 8:20; 1 Sam. 8:2; 1 Sam. 17:13; 2 Sam. 3:2; 1 Ki. 16:34; 2 Ki. 3:27; 1 Chr. 1:13; 1 Chr. 1:29; 1 Chr. 2:3; 1 Chr. 2:13; 1 Chr. 2:25; 1 Chr. 2:27; 1 Chr. 2:42; 1 Chr. 2:50; 1 Chr. 3:1; 1 Chr. 3:15; 1 Chr. 4:4; 1 Chr. 5:1; 1 Chr. 5:3; 1 Chr. 6:28; 1 Chr. 8:1; 1 Chr. 8:30; 1 Chr. 8:39; 1 Chr. 9:5; 1 Chr. 9:31; 1 Chr. 9:36; 1 Chr. 26:2; 1 Chr. 26:4; 1 Chr. 26:10; 2 Chr. 21:3; Neh. 10:36; Job 1:13; Job 1:18; Job 18:13; Ps. 78:51; Ps. 89:27; Ps. 105:36; Ps. 135:8; Ps. 136:10; Isa. 14:30; Jer. 31:9; Ezek. 20:26; Mic. 6:7; Zech. 12:10

**Exodus 4:23 "So I said to you, 'Let My son go that he may serve Me'; but you have refused to let him go. Behold, I will kill your son, your firstborn."**

- Ex 11:5 Ex 12:29 Ps 78:51 105:36 135:8
- Exodus 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## **A DIRE WARNING TO PHARAOH**

**So I said to you, 'Let My son go that he may serve Me'; but you have refused to let him go. Behold, I will kill your son, your**

**firstborn** - This is a serious warning to give to the ruler of the most powerful nation on earth. It could easily result in losing one's head. Yet despite the "risk" Moses did not make any excuses or try to get God to soften the message. The Pharaoh had killed many of Israel's firstborn sons and this would be an "eye for an eye" judgment on Egypt and a direct assault on the royal line as the firstborn of Pharaoh was likely the one who assume the throne when Pharaoh died. These verses look forward to the final plague against Egypt describes in Exodus 11 and Exodus 12, the plague that would force Pharaoh to drive Israel from his sight (and site!)

Note that this warning to Pharaoh appears to be given at the beginning of Moses' interactions with Pharaoh.

**John Hannah** - Egyptians prized their firstborn sons, treating them as special. Strikingly Israel is God's son (cf. Hosea 11:1) and therefore sacred to Him. (Ibid)

**Exodus 4:24 Now it came about at the lodging place on the way that the LORD met him and sought to put him to death.**

- **the lodging place** - Ge 42:27 Ge 17:14
- **the LORD** - Ex 3:18 Nu 22:22,23 1Ch 21:16 Ho 13:8
- **sought** - Ge 17:14 Lev 10:3 1Ki 13:24
- Exodus 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### MOSES' BRUSH WITH DEATH

**Now it came about at the lodging place on the way that the LORD met him and sought to put him to death-** This may be Moses' third "near death experience," (so to speak) - Ex 2:15, Ex 3:14 (not mentioned but clearly a risk as Uzzah discovered), and here in Ex 4:24-26. I say "may be" because "him" is not specifically stated to be Moses. Moses himself was circumcised, but Gershom was not and theoretically he would have been the one at risk of being cut off.

One reason most commentaries suggest it was Moses whose life was at risk is because some of the translations have added "Moses." For example, the excellent NET (NLT, NIV are similar) has "Now on the way, at a place where they stopped for the night, the LORD met Moses and sought to kill him." Note that the NAS (ESV, CSB) does not add "Moses. " Note however that although Moses is not in the Hebrew text in the next verse (Ex 4:25), almost every version inserts it.

How did the LORD manifest Himself in seeking to put him to death? How did Zipporah know there was a life or death situation? How did she know that the issue in question was her uncircumcised son Gershom? We simply do not know. One has to wonder why does this somewhat mysterious event occur at this point. Clearly God is addressing a episode of significant disobedience in His servant Moses! Circumcision is to be performed at 8 days of age, and presumably his son was considerably older by this time.

**Exodus 4:25 Then Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin and threw it at Moses' feet, and she said, "You are indeed a bridegroom of blood to me."**

- **took a flint** Jos 5:2,3
- **blood** - 2Sa 16:7
- Exodus 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### ZIPPORAH CUTS AND THEN CHARGES MOSES

**Then Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin and threw it at Moses' feet, and she said, "You are indeed a bridegroom of blood to me** - Zipporah gives new meaning to the passage in Genesis which describes Adam's wife as his "helpmate" (Genesis 2:18)! This is a mysterious passage. We know circumcision was a **sign** of the Abrahamic Covenant (see Ge 17:10-14). We know God is very serious about circumcision. Note especially God's sobering warning in Genesis 17:14 (Context = Ge 17:9-14) "**But an uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off** ([karath](#); Lxx = [exolothreuo](#) = utterly destroyed, completely cut off; see only NT use in Acts 3:23+) **from his people; he has broken My covenant.**"

Obviously the son's failure to obtain circumcision was not his fault but was Moses' fault, so it may have been Moses who would be punished, not his son. Moses surely must have known the divine command to circumcise every male of one's household, thus this

represents clear disobedience! Somehow Zipporah grasped the gravity of the situation and immediately grasped her son's foreskin and carried out the circumcision. Where was Moses? Was he asleep? Did he see Zipporah carry out the circumcision? One has to believe the son cried when this action was carried out and that Moses would have been awoken (if asleep)! The text simply does not tell us. We will have to wait until Heaven to ask him!

**John Currid** offers an interesting alternative suggestion - But what does one do with the word **bridegroom** that is used in so many translations? Why would she call her son by that term? The Hebrew word is used in the Old Testament not only to refer to a bridegroom, but to a son-in-law, a father-in-law and even a mother-in-law. It is used of Jethro in 3:1 and 4:18 to describe his family relationship to Moses. The basic idea of the word stresses that a person has been made part of a family, that he or she has become a blood relative through a covenant relationship. Thus, Moses' son has been circumcised as a symbol of his entrance into the covenant community/family. Zipporah then takes the blood of the foreskin and places it on the child's feet. On occasion the term for 'feet' can be used of genitalia (Judg. 3:24; 1 Sam. 24:3), and that is perhaps where Zipporah smeared the blood of the circumcision. This act may serve as a precursor or preview of the forthcoming exodus event, in which God passes over the houses of his people who have blood smeared on their doorposts. The blood, in both cases, serves as a protective sign against Yahweh's wrath. (EPSC-Ex)

**Got questions** suggests "The Bible does not explicitly explain why the Lord desired to kill Moses (ED: AGAIN THAT IS A PRESUMPTION), but it was probably because Moses had not performed the rite of circumcision. Circumcision was an important symbol of the [Abrahamic Covenant](#), and the lack of circumcision would mark a person as cut off from God's people (Genesis 17:9–14). For Moses to neglect to circumcise his son was an affront to God, as if he were saying that he and his family did not truly belong to God. How could Moses be an effective leader of God's people if he were in violation of God's clear command? Zipporah's words to Moses are puzzling, but the text explains that "she said '**bridegroom of blood**,' referring to circumcision" (Exodus 4:26). It seems that Zipporah was angry at having to perform the rite, which should have been completed by Moses. Sometime after this incident, Moses sent Zipporah and his two sons back to Midian to stay with Zipporah's father (see Exodus 18:2–3).

**Exodus 4:26 So He let him alone. At that time she said, "You are a bridegroom of blood"--because of the circumcision.**

- Exodus 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### **MOSES' BRUSH WITH DEATH AND A DIVINE DEPARTURE**

**So He let him alone** - He is Jehovah. God Himself was preparing to take out Moses, His deliverer. What would "Plan B" for delivering Israel have looked like? Fortunately for Moses we did not need a "Plan B!" Zipporah clearly saved Moses' life. The Hebrew verb **raphah** means to abandon an objective (in this case to kill Moses) and in the Septuagint is translated with [apechomai](#) which means to go away or depart (as in Jas 1:24+). This same verb is used by Pharaoh in the next chapter several times in describing the Hebrew slaves as "lazy, lazy" (Ex 5:8, 17, cf Josh 18:3, Pr 18:9)

**At that time she said, "You are a bridegroom of blood"--because of the circumcision** - "When she said "a bridegroom of blood," she was referring to the circumcision." (NLT)

**Currin** - In support of the idea that this little episode is a paradigm of the later Passover event is the fact that after the son is circumcised and the blood-sign is put on him, the Lord 'let him alone'. In regard to the tenth plague, God promises: 'And the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live; and when I see the blood I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt' (Exod. 12:13). The Lord simply passes by the Israelite homes that have the blood-sign on them: that is the same as Moses' son. Zipporah then repeats her statement to her son ('Then she said') from verse 25, 'a covenant-relation of blood'. And the reason is stated directly why the son is now considered part of the blood-covenant: 'because of the circumcision'. The symbol of the covenant is performed on the son, and so he is considered a member of the covenant. God thus passes over him. The immediately preceding context of verses 22–23 supports this interpretation. There it is dealing with the distinction between the first-born of Yahweh and the first-born of Pharaoh. The physical symbol of those who are in covenant with Yahweh, and are his first-born, is circumcision. Moses' son now bears the sign of belonging to Yahweh.

**NET Note** on phrase "**referring to the circumcision**" (Ex 4:26NET) - The Hebrew simply has *lammulot*, "to the circumcision[s]". The phrase explains that the saying was in reference to the act of circumcision. Some scholars speculate that there was a ritual prior to marriage from which this event and its meaning derived. But it appears rather that if there was some ancient ritual, it would have had to come from this event. The difficulty is that the son is circumcised, not Moses, making the comparative mythological view untenable. Moses had apparently not circumcised Eliezer. Since Moses was taking his family with him, God had to make sure the

sign of the covenant was kept. It may be that here Moses sent them all back to Jethro (Ex 18:2) because of the difficulties that lay ahead.

**Let alone** (07503)(**raphah**) means to sink, to become slack, to relax, to cease (Jdg. 8:3; 2 Sa 24:16; Neh. 6:9; Ps. 37:8), to desist or leave alone (Ex. 4:26; Dt. 9:14; Jdg. 11:37; Job 7:19), to become discouraged, to become disheartened, to become weak, to become feeble, to let drop or let go (Job 27:6; = figuratively; Pr. 4:13 = figuratively; Song 3:4 = literally), to discourage, to leave alone, to let go, to forsake or abandon someone (Deut. 4:31; 31:6, 8; Josh. 1:5; 10:6; Ps. 138:8), to be lazy (Ex. 5:8, 17; Josh. 18:3; Prov. 18:9). **Raphah** is used 14x with **yad** = hand (Josh 10:6 = do not abandon = "slack not thy hand", 2 Sa 4:1KJV, 2 Sa 24:16, 1 Chr 21:15, 2 Chr 15:7KJV, Ezra 4:4KJV, a (good) prayer in Neh 6:9, Isa 13:7 = in the Tribulation; Jer 6:24 read Jer 6:24KJV; Jer 38:4 read Jer 38:4KJV, Jer 50:43 = hands **hang limp**, Ezek 7:17, Ezek 21:7 = hands will be **feeble**; Zeph 3:16+)

**Raphah** - 50x in 45 verses - abandon\*(1), alone\*(2), become helpless(1), become\*(1), cease(2), collapses(1), courage\*(1), discouraged\*(2), discouraging\*(1), drawn(1), dropped(2), fail(5), fall limp(2), feeble(1), forsake(1), hang limp(2), lazy(3), leave(1), let(2), let her alone(1), let him alone(1), let him go(1), let it go(1), let me alone(1), let us alone(1), let go(1), limp(1), loosens(1), lose courage\*(1), lost(1), put off(1), relax(2), slack(2), subsided(1), wait(1). Exod. 4:26; Exod. 5:8; Exod. 5:17; Deut. 4:31; Deut. 9:14; Deut. 31:6; Deut. 31:8; Jos. 1:5; Jos. 10:6; Jos. 18:3; Jdg. 8:3; Jdg. 11:37; Jdg. 19:9; 1 Sam. 11:3; 1 Sam. 15:16; 2 Sam. 4:1; 2 Sam. 24:16; 2 Ki. 4:27; 1 Chr. 21:15; 1 Chr. 28:20; 2 Chr. 15:7; Ezr. 4:4; Neh. 6:3; Neh. 6:9; Job 7:19; Job 12:21; Job 27:6; Ps. 37:8; Ps. 46:10; Ps. 138:8; Prov. 4:13; Prov. 18:9; Prov. 24:10; Cant. 3:4; Isa. 5:24; Isa. 13:7; Jer. 6:24; Jer. 38:4; Jer. 49:24; Jer. 50:43; Ezek. 1:24; Ezek. 1:25; Ezek. 7:17; Ezek. 21:7; Zeph. 3:16

**Exodus 4:27 Now the LORD said to Aaron, "Go to meet Moses in the wilderness." So he went and met him at the mountain of God and kissed him.**

- **Go to** - Ex 4:14-16 Ec 4:9 Ac 10:5,6,20
- **the mountain** - Ex 3:1 19:3 20:18 24:15-17 1Ki 19:8
- **kissed him** - Ge 29:11
- Exodus 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## **GOD KEEPS PROMISE OF REUNION WITH AARON**

**Now the LORD said to Aaron, "Go to meet Moses in the wilderness."** - **Go** carries the idea of a command, not a suggestion. In Ex 4:14 God had told (prophecy) Moses his brother Aaron "**is coming out to meet you.**" This was not just a trip across town but was some distance across a barren wilderness. Clearly God in some way had spoken to Aaron and paved the way for him to make this journey to Mount Horeb, **the mountain of God**. The text does not tell us whether God told Aaron why he was to meet Moses. What are the odds that after 40 years 2 brothers are going to meet at some remote mountain in the desert wilderness at the same time? It follows that this reunion is an example of God's providence, of God behind the scenes but orchestrating the scenes He is behind. And what a coincidence that it is at the same mountain Moses met his best Friend in time and eternity, the LORD Himself! (Ex 3:14-15) And it is the very mountain that will be the confirmatory sign to Moses as the Lord had promised in Ex 3:12+ "Certainly I will be with you, and this shall be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God at **this mountain.**"

**F B Meyer** - "Aaron, who came to meet Moses, could speak well; but he was a weak man, whose alliance with Moses caused his nobler younger brother much anxiety and pain."

**So** - Moses is in a good place after his brush with death and has a good spiritual "rhythm" now **-Go...so**, whereas before it was **Go...whoa** (so to speak).

**he went and met him at the mountain of God and kissed him** - Aaron obeyed without hesitation. The **mountain of God** was Mount Horeb or Mount Sinai, where Moses received God's call (Ex 3:1+ = **Horeb, the mountain of God**.) And then when Moses asked assurance from God regarding his call, God said, "Certainly I will be with you, and this shall be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God **at this mountain.**" (Ex 3:12+)

The phrase **mountain of God** is used 7x in the OT but only here refers to Mount Horeb - Exod. 3:1; Exod. 4:27; Exod. 24:13; 1 Ki.

**Exodus 4:28 Moses told Aaron all the words of the LORD with which He had sent him, and all the signs that He had commanded him to do.**

- **told Aaron** - Ex 4:8,9,15,16 Jon 3:2 Mt 21:29
- **and all** - Ex 4:11-13
- Exodus 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## MOSES BRINGS AARON "UP TO SPEED"

[Up to speed](#) idiomatically means fully informed.

**Moses told Aaron all the words of the LORD with which He had sent him, and all the signs that He had commanded him to do** - In short, Aaron now knows Moses has been sent to deliver Israel and that he would do so only after God had brought 10 plagues on Egypt (aka **all the signs**).

**J Ligon Duncan** - Facing the enormity of the challenge before him, Moses was surely encouraged by this indication of God's [providence](#) that He was with him. That He was looking out for him. That he was going to provide for him every step of the way. And we, too, ought to peruse God's providence and study encouragement and thanksgiving in it. Do you look at God's providences? Do you seek to see the encouragement that God has unfolded in your own experience? Whether He has called you to a specific mission or whether He has called you to study faithfulness. Are you looking for the signs of God's encouragement in that? As you do, I think you will find ample opportunity for thanksgiving to God. And if you don't, you will miss opportunities for thanksgiving to God which will actually slacken your faith, because in the very process of thanking God for His encouragements and providence, we are reminded how actively He is involved in our everyday experience. God encourages Moses this way. God continues to encourage His people by providence today. That's the first thing we see. God manifesting Himself for encouragement in providence.

**THOUGHT** - Again we see that God is the power behind the signs (implied in this passage) but Moses is His instrument who in turn has God's instrument (staff of God) in his hand! God's sovereignty intimately integrated or juxtaposed with Man's Responsibility. This pattern is good to remember when we are doing some spiritual work for the Lord (we need to be mindful of His power and grateful for His provision of that power). In fact, this pattern is eminently applicable to ALL of our spiritual life EVERY day! Truly in Him we live and move and have our being. Truly we are always [100% Dependent and 100% Responsible](#)" (100/100)! If that truth is a bit humbling to you, then perhaps you need to be humbled a bit! (cf Jas 4:6b+).

**Exodus 4:29 Then Moses and Aaron went and assembled all the elders of the sons of Israel;**

- Ex 3:16 24:1,11
- Exodus 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## ELDERS OF ISRAEL GATHERED

Presumably Moses and Aaron came into Egypt together but there are no details of this journey. One can imagine it would be quite a time of swapping stories about their ups and downs in the previous 40 years.

The Septuagint for **assembled** is the Greek verb [sunago](#) which is the root of the Jewish word **synagogue** ([sunagoge](#)). One might say this was the first "Jewish Synagogue" meeting!

**Then** - **Then** is always an important [expression of time](#) and is always worth pausing to ponder and query asking questions like "What time is it? What happens next? Why does this happen now?, etc". When **then** is used (as determined by the context) to be an **expression of time** or "time phrase", it usually indicates [sequence](#) and thus marks that which is next in order of time, soon after that, following next after in order of position, narration or enumeration, being next in a series ([See English definitions](#)).

**Moses and Aaron went** - Moses leaves out their journey from Mount Horeb to Egypt. The point is that Moses is now obediently



moving forth in the center of the will of God, always a safe place to be!

**And assembled all the elders of the sons of Israel** - In the preceding chapter God had commanded Moses "'Go and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, "I am indeed concerned about you and what has been done to you in Egypt." (Ex 3:16+) God had predicted/promised/guaranteed Moses that the leaders of Israel would heed his words - "**They will pay heed to what you say**; and you with the elders of Israel will come to the king of Egypt and you will say to him, 'The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us. So now, please, let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God.'" (Ex 3:18+) Now, what God did not forewarn Moses about was the fact that Pharaoh would "ratchet up" the oppression on his Hebrew slaves because of Moses and Aaron's request to take a "long weekend trip" (so to speak).

**J Ligon Duncan** - the biggest challenge is not going to be Pharaoh, it's not going to be the taskmasters, it's not going to be keeping up with a quota in unreasonable settings, the biggest challenge that the children of Israel face is to believe God's word. That's the biggest challenge that they have before them. And I want to suggest to you that you see that in verses 29 through 31.

**Exodus 4:30 and Aaron spoke all the words which the LORD had spoken to Moses. He then performed the signs in the sight of the people.**

- **And Aaron** - Ex 4:16
- **performed the signs** - Ex 4:2-9
- Exodus 4 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### **AARON FUNCTIONS AS MOSES' "PROPHET"**

A prophet is one who speaks for another the words that they receive from that person. Here Moses is like a "human teleprompter" (so to speak) for Aaron.

**And Aaron spoke all the words which the LORD had spoken to Moses**- Recall Moses' unwillingness in Ex 4:14 results in God passing the baton for most of the speaking engagements to his brother Aaron (Ex 4:15-16). Moses received the word from God but it had to be spoken to the elders by his brother Aaron because he had resisted the LORD's commission. It reminds me of the priest Zacharias who was the father of John the Baptist and who was struck mute by the angel after expressing doubts (Lk 1:18+) regarding John's birth (Lk 1:11-19,20+)

**He then performed the signs in the sight of the people** - The three **signs** that validated that Moses had indeed seen a revelation of Jehovah are described in Ex 4:2-9. Note signs is plural, suggesting that one miracle was not sufficient to gain their trust, which is in fact hinted at the Jehovah's words twice mentioning "If they will not believe." (Ex 4:8,9+). The elders and people were walking by sight not by faith, which becomes a repeated theme in exodus - living by sight, not by faith!

**Exodus 4:31 So the people believed; and when they heard that the LORD was concerned about the sons of Israel and that He had seen their affliction, then they bowed low and worshiped.**

- **believed** - Ex 4:8,9 Ex 3:18 Ps 106:12,13 Lu 8:13
- **was concerned** - Ex 3:16 Lu 1:68
- **He had seen** - Ex 2:25 3:7
- **they bowed low** - Ex 12:27 Ge 17:3 24:26 1Ch 29:20 2Ch 20:18
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### **ISRAEL BELIEVES AND WORSHIPS**

**So** - Term on conclusion - On the basis of the speech and the signs, the following results.

**The people believed** - This fulfills the promise God made to Moses in Ex 3:18 that "they will pay heed to what you say." Surely each fulfilled promise would serve to fortify and undergird Moses' trust in Jehovah. Moses and Aaron had initially appeared to the assembled elders (Ex 4:29) but this now refers to **the people**, presumably as many of the 2 million who could see the signs. They

**believed** God had spoken to Moses regarding deliverance from Egypt.

**THOUGHT** - Notice the principle that what you **believe** determines how you **behave**. And what you believe about God is the most important belief you will ever have! In this case their belief led to worship. Tozer said it this way "What comes to mind when we think about God is the most important thing about us!" (Or paraphrased "it is the most important thinking about us!")

**And when they heard that the LORD was concerned about the sons of Israel and that He had seen their affliction, then they bowed low and worshiped** - Note that **heard** is not just detecting "sound waves" but responding in obedience to what is heard. The reaction by Israel was proper and was a response to their appreciation of (belief in) Jehovah's concern for their affliction. Sadly their belief and spiritual high was quickly changed to disbelief and a spiritual low (despondency Ex 5:9+) in Ex 5:15-19+ and Ex 5:20-21+.

**THOUGHT** - This same truth in the believer's life should prompt our heart-felt, loving response, for truly He daily bears our burdens (Ps 68:18), daily gives us new mercies (Lam 3:22-23), daily walks with us wherever we go (Heb 13:5+) and daily enables us live life on a higher (closer to Heaven) plain (Php 2:13+)! How's your walk today beloved? (Perhaps you need to pray Colossians 1:9-12+).

Currid comments that "We are witnessing in the exodus event a contest between the God of Israel and the god of Egypt—that is, Pharaoh. It is a good example of what Paul declares in Ephesians 6:12+: 'For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.' Thus, in the book of Exodus we are viewing something much greater than a simple national struggle against oppression. We are witnessing a heavenly, divine combat."