

CALL OF MOSES

PLEASE do not read these comments until you have read the Scripture for this lesson. First let the Holy Spirit teach you directly from His Word.

When Moses took matters into his own hands and delivered one of his countrymen (1:22, 2), he acted independently of God and the authority of Egypt. The consequence of this presumptuous act was forty years of banishment from Egypt on the backside of the desert. After this extended period of time, it is unlikely that Moses entertained any prospects of returning to any kind of public life, much less being an advocate for his own oppressed kinsmen. Those desert years greatly matured Moses and developed his patience and sensitivity to the will of God. These leadership qualities, added to his academic and administrative training in the Pharaoh's court, culminated in God's advance preparation for the gigantic task of leading God's covenant people out of Egypt.

Moses' self-confidence as a leader had been shattered back in Egypt and he was reluctant to accept this awesome responsibility. As Moses desperately tried to convince God that he was not the man for the job, he failed to realize that God was not impulsive and ignorant in His choice of a man. It is interesting to note that God does not debate Moses' assessment of himself, but simply assures Moses that He will compensate for his personal weaknesses (3:12).

Finally, convinced of his commission, Moses requested permission of Jethro to leave Midian and return to Egypt. Moses left for Egypt with God's warning that Pharaoh would not willingly release Israel. Instead, God would have to slay Pharaoh's first-born son before he would release God's first-born son, Israel (4:22, 23).

There was yet one more thing he needed to do to be blessed of God. He needed to circumcise his son which he had neglected to do (4:24-26). If Moses was to lead God's covenant nation, he himself had to be obedient to the demands of this covenant (Gen 17:7-14).

I. Moses Hears God's Call — 3:1-10

A. God Reveals Himself — 3:1-6

3:1 — The setting for this spectacular event was at Horeb, an elevated fertile plain ideal for grazing livestock. It surrounded a cluster of mountains including Jebel Jusa (mountain of Moses) which is traditionally identified as Mt. Sinai. Since Sinai had no sacred connotations before the giving of the law, it is referred to here as the "mountain of God" in a proleptic sense (cf. I Kgs. 19:8).

3:2 — "The angel of the Lord appeared" - The fact that this is a visible manifestation of God (theophany) and not an ordinary angelic messenger is evident from the subsequent references to Him as Lord (Yahweh) and God (Elohim). No angel could ever say "I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (3:6). Since God the Father and the Holy Spirit cannot be seen by the human eye, this must be the pre-existent Christ, who did appear to other people. He appeared Adam and Eve in the Garden (Gen 3:1-10), to Abraham (Gen 18:1; Jn 8:56-58) and to Gideon (Jud 6:12-24) to name a few other times that He appeared to people.

3:4 — "Here am I" - (literally, "Behold me!") These same words are used on other occasions in the Old Testament to express a readiness to listen and obey (cf. Gen 22:1; I Sam 3:4; Isa. 6:8).

3:5 — "Put off your shoes" - This command was consistent with the oriental custom of servants showing respect to their master by removing their shoes in his presence; likewise worshippers did the same when they entered their sacred places. Both aspects apply here: God's presence makes any place holy and He deserves the reverence of all men.

3:6 — Jehovah's reference to Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob identified Him as the God Who had entered into covenant with the patriarchs and signals a message fulfilling that

promise. Moses hid his face since sinful men cannot bear the sight of a holy God (cf. Isa. 6:5; Ezek. 1:28; Ex 33:20; Judges 13:22).

B. God Reveals His Plan — 3:7-10

3:7 — "My people" - This is the first time in the Scripture that God used this term. Later on, when plagued by apostasy and disobedience, He referred to them as "this people."

3:8 — "A good land and large" - the term "good" has reference to the fertility (Deut. 8:7-10) and is elucidated by the subsequent and oft repeated expression "a land flowing with milk and honey." The word "large" indicates broadness and stands in contrast to the narrow limits of their settlement along the Nile.

3:10 — There is no contradiction between God's declaration, "I am come down to deliver them" (v. 8) and His commission of Moses "that you may bring forth my children" (v. 10). God normally works through human agency to accomplish His purposes.

II. Moses Resists God's Call — 3:11-4:17

A. I Have No Ability — 3:11-12

3:11 — With youthful rashness Moses had once thrust himself on Israel as deliverer and judge. His failure and the years of a shepherding life in Midian had humbled him and taught him to distrust his own abilities.

3:12 — "I will be with you" - Humility does not disbar a man from noble service but rather is the prerequisite to that bold faith by which great works are accomplished in God's service. This answer, which should have silenced all of Moses' objections, is the same one Christ left with His disciples in the Great Commission (Matt 28:20). God confirmed His promise to Moses again with, "You shall serve God upon this mountain." This sign in itself required faith but was designed to inspire faith and courage to persevere.

B. I Have No Authority — 3:13-22

3:13 — Having been promised God's presence, all further objections became raw unbelief (which is sin). Moses probably feared that he would once again be asked, "Who made thee a prince and a judge over us?" (2:4). Moses knew God's name (1:6), but wanted a descriptive title which would have a strong impact on the people of Israel.

3:14 — "I AM THAT I AM" - This is not so much a name as it is a commentary on "Jehovah," the title of Israel's covenant-keeping God. The word can be translated, "I Will Be." Either way, it becomes a reiteration of God's promise to Moses, "I will be with thee" (v. 12). It emphasizes the fact that God's faithfulness is unlimited as to quality or time. However real the problems connected with the exodus may have been from the human perspective, they can all be met with the same assurance, "I AM THAT I AM." He is fully able to keep His unconditional covenant with Israel.

3:15 — "Let us go, we beseech you, three days' journey" - God was not instructing Moses to deceive Pharaoh into thinking their departure was temporary. God knew the hardness of Pharaoh's heart (v. 19) and, therefore, instructed Moses to begin with a request reasonable enough to allow Pharaoh to display his hardness. Once Pharaoh had scorned this simple request (5:4ff), Moses was instructed to demand the complete exodus (6:10). Actually, the approach Moses was to take was sheer diplomacy since Pharaoh had no right to detain Israel but merely to consent to their departure.

3:22 — "Every woman shall borrow of her neighbor" - This is not divinely ordained grand larceny. The word translated "borrow" literally means "to ask" or "to beg." The success of this operation did not depend on the deceptiveness of Israel but the providential overruling of God giving Israel "favor with the Egyptians" (v. 21).

C. I Have No Credibility — 4:1-9

4:1 — This excuse, like the others, was a cogent one by human standards. Since Jehovah had not appeared to any Israelite in 430 years, why would they believe that He had appeared to Moses? The power of divine presence once again answered Moses. God gave Moses three accrediting signs:

4:2-5 — First sign: rod turned into a serpent.

4:6-8 — Second sign: hand turned leprous.

4:9 — Third sign: water turned to blood.

NOTE: Much effort has been expended in trying to determine the symbolism of these signs. The basic stated intent, however, was not to instruct, but to promote belief among the Israelites by giving Moses credibility.

D. I Have No Eloquence — 4:10-12

4:10 — Moses now protests that he is not gifted in the use of words, but "slow of speech and slow of tongue." Literally, he was "heavy" of speech and "heavy" of tongue, implying difficulty in the free use of both.

4:11 — Moses overlooked the fact that the ability to use the mouth and tongue was dispensed by the very God Who created these organs of speech.

E. Please Send Someone Else — 4:13-17

4:13 — Having exhausted his excuses, Moses was forced to admit that he really did not want to do the job. His tactful response can be reduced to "Send... some other person." Understandably, God's anger was aroused (v. 14).

4:14 — God dealt mercifully with Moses' unbelief and, to an extent, granted his request by co-commissioning Aaron. Yet God did not allow His prepared man to escape his duty.

4:16 — "He shall be to you instead of a mouth and you shall be to him instead of God" - Aaron would assume the same relationship to Moses that a prophet would to God -- speaking only the words he received by direct revelation. Moses would be as God to Aaron in the sense that he would receive all that he should speak from Moses who would have received it directly from God.

III. Moses Obeys God's Call — 4:18-31

A. Moses is Counseled by God — 4:18-23

4:18 — Moses was under orders from God to return to Egypt, yet he observed the normal oriental rule of deference to the head of the family by checking with Jethro before he left. Moses did not reveal all of the details of his mission to Jethro lest he use his patriarchal influence to try to dissuade him.

4:20 — "Moses took the rod of God in his hand" - this staff which for 40 years had identified Moses as a shepherd is about to take on awesome significance. It is no longer the rod of Moses, but the rod of God, indicating the actual source of the power associated with it from now on.

4:21 — "Do all those wonders before Pharaoh" - All the wondrous signs given to Moses are viewed by God as constituting a whole. Moses is to deliver the entire package in order that Pharaoh's obstinacy might be completely revealed.

"But I will harden his heart" — The controlling agency of God did not restrict the free exercise of Pharaoh's will or force him to sin. God did this because Pharaoh had already grievously sinned against Israel and demonstrated a mind-set that was decidedly anti-God. By way of judgment, God withdrew the eternal restrictions which had hitherto kept his sin in bounds and placed him in circumstances which would have influenced a more sensitive man to do right, but which God foreknew would set Pharaoh on the course of action which he ultimately pursued. God hardened Pharaoh's heart in three ways: (1) by allowing him to harden his own heart; (2) by revealing His power and will to him, which

he refused to heed, thus opening the way to greater sin (Rom 1:21-23); and (3) by judicially abandoning Pharaoh after proving his rebellion, thus making it morally certain, but not necessary, that he would continue his evil course (Rom 1:24, 26, 28). Although Pharaoh was completely responsible for his sin, God continued to manipulate his surroundings so as to direct the expression of his evil toward the accomplishment of His divine purposes!

4:22, 23 — In order that Pharaoh might be duly impressed with the solemnity of God's demand, Moses was to reveal the intimate relationship which existed between the LORD (Yahweh) and Israel. Israel was the honored son of the LORD (Yahweh) by virtue of His choosing them as His own special possession (Deut. 14:1, 2). This gracious adoption of Israel was a relationship involving the father's love, protection and provision as well as the son's obedience, reverence, and confidence (Mal 1:6). So intensely earnest was the LORD that if Pharaoh would not release His first-born son, Pharaoh would suffer the loss of his own first-born son (cf. 12:29).

B. Moses is Chastened by God — 4:24-26

4:24-26 — As the leader of God's covenant people, Moses must first prove himself to be faithful to that covenant in his own home. Circumcision was given to Abraham as a sign of the covenant (Gen 17:10, 11), with the instruction that those who refused it should be killed as covenant breakers (Gen 17:14). Moses had probably neglected the rite in deference to his Midianite wife, but that excuse did not mitigate his guilt.

C. Moses is Prospered by God — 4:27-31

4:27-28 — Following this harrowing experience at the inn, Moses received a token of God's renewed favor through the meeting of his brother, Aaron. To him, Moses told everything.

4:29-31 — God blessed Moses again in Egypt by the favorable reception he and Aaron had from Israel. The worshipful response of Israel was proof that God's covenant promise to their fathers had not died in their hearts. Faith in that promise would be revived and kindled to a much greater extent when they would witness the LORD'S stupendous display of supernatural power in the plagues that He would perform to deliver them from Egypt.