

## The Reluctance of Moses to Respond to God's Call, and the Lord's Gracious Response

### Exodus 4:1-17

Exodus 4:1-17 - *"Then Moses answered and said, "But suppose they will not believe me or listen to my voice; suppose they say, 'The Lord has not appeared to you.'" 2 So the Lord said to him, "What is that in your hand?" He said, "A rod." 3 And He said, "Cast it on the ground." So he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from it. 4 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Reach out your hand and take it by the tail" (and he reached out his hand and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand), 5 "that they may believe that the Lord God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you."*

*6 Furthermore the Lord said to him, "Now put your hand in your bosom." And he put his hand in his bosom, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous, like snow. 7 And He said, "Put your hand in your bosom again." So he put his hand in his bosom again, and drew it out of his bosom, and behold, it was restored like his other flesh. 8 "Then it will be, if they do not believe you, nor heed the message of the first sign, that they may believe the message of the latter sign. 9 And it shall be, if they do not believe even these two signs, or listen to your voice, that you shall take water from the river[a] and pour it on the dry land. The water which you take from the river will become blood on the dry land."*

*10 Then Moses said to the Lord, "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." 11 So 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?"*

*12 Now therefore, go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say." 13 But he said, "O my Lord, please send by the hand of whomever else You may send." 14 So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses, and He said: "Is not Aaron the Levite your brother? I know that he can speak well. And look, he is also coming out to meet you. When he sees you, he will be glad in his heart. 15 Now you shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth. And I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and I will teach you what you shall do. 16 So he shall be your spokesman to the people. And he himself shall be as a mouth for you, and you shall be to him as God. 17 And you shall take this rod in your hand, with which you shall do the signs."*

### Background Notes

In Exodus 3 the Lord revealed Himself to Moses from the burning bush, and at that time He called Moses to lead God's people out of Egypt. Moses' reaction to God's commission was not joyful! He didn't jump up and down and shout, "Hallelujah!" or "Praise the Lord!" No! Instead Moses said, *"Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?"* (3:11). And Moses continued his reluctant attitude In Exodus 4. Even after the Lord had said, *"Certainly I will be with you,"* and then backed up His promise with His name, "I AM," Moses was still hesitant to step out as God's leader.

By the way, God's revelation of Himself as the great **I AM** is the name that Jesus claimed for Himself when He said, "*Before Abraham was, I AM*" (John 8:58). When Jesus claimed that holy Name for Himself, the Jews picked up stones to throw at Him. They immediately realized that Jesus was claiming to be GOD! Jesus certainly claimed to be God!

Back to Moses. In spite of God's promises to be with Moses, and His assurance that He would bring the children of Israel out of Egypt under his leadership (even with silver and gold and clothing) to the safe haven of Mt. Sinai — Moses was still reluctant! Verse 1: "*Then Moses answered and said, 'But suppose they will not believe me or listen to my voice; suppose they say, 'The LORD has not appeared to you.'*" So the Lord patiently and graciously condescended to Moses' reluctance, and gave him three miraculous signs to give him confidence and confirmation that he was indeed God's chosen leader.

## **Doctrinal Points**

### **1. The Lord provides confirmation for His chosen servants.**

For the first confirming sign, God told Moses to throw his shepherd's staff on the ground, and the staff became a snake. Moses ran from the snake—and so would I! How about you? (By the way, I hate snakes, even little ones. Does anybody here like snakes? Surely you can't be spiritual if you like snakes -- can you? Oh well, you know I'm only kidding!) Then the Lord told Moses to grab the snake by its tail. Did you ever try to grab a snake by the tail? At this point I know I would have told the Lord to please choose another leader! But Moses obeyed. He picked up the snake and it became a staff again. The second confirming sign from God was that Moses' hand became white with leprosy -- and then it was restored to health again.

For the third confirming sign, Moses was told that if the people would not believe the first two signs, then Moses would be enabled to turn water from the Nile River into blood. In Exodus 7 this became one of the plagues that God brought on the land of Egypt. And we see in Exodus 4:30-31 that Moses performed all of these signs before the people of Israel. "*... Then he did the signs in the sight of all the people, and they believed.*"

Why did God use these three signs to confirm the divine commission of Moses? First of all, these signs showed God's power over the gods of Egypt. The snake was an object of worship in Egypt. In fact, the image of a snake was featured on many of the royal crowns of Egypt. And God's miraculous cure of leprosy would certainly show God's power over the many diseases of Egypt. In Exodus 15:26 God said that He would protect His people from the diseases of Egypt. And of course the Nile River was the "life blood" of Egypt. If the God of the Hebrews could control the Nile, than He was more powerful than any god in Egypt.

Do you see the spiritual symbolism in these three confirming signs? The serpent represents Satan: Satan is under the control of God. Leprosy represents sin throughout the

Bible: God can cleanse a person from sin. And the Nile River represented life: God is the source of **all** life -- physical and spiritual. As God confirmed His chosen servant Moses with these signs, so God confirms His chosen servants today. In your walk of faith and ministry, when the Lord overturns the work of Satan, and when unbelievers come to Christ to be cleansed from the leprosy of sin, and when your life and the lives of others are blessed as the result of your ministry, you can be sure that God is confirming you as His servant! The Lord provides confirmation for His chosen servants.

## **2. The Lord provides assistance for His chosen servants.**

Apparently Moses was not an eloquent speaker -- but so what? God called him! The Lord was angry with Moses for using this excuse, and for having the audacity to tell God to choose another leader! But once again we see God's patient and gracious tolerance of Moses' reluctance. In verse 14 the Lord told Moses that He would give him Aaron his brother as a spokesman before the people. Moses would do the signs and give the word of the Lord to Aaron, but Aaron would do the speaking.

The Lord provides assistance for His chosen servants—even when the Lord has to tolerate the hang-ups of those servants! This should be very encouraging to us, because we are all called to be the Lord's servants, and many times we come up with lame excuses. We can be sure that the Lord will give us the assistance we need for whatever He calls us to do—even when we are reluctant to serve. The Lord provides assistance for His chosen servants.

By the way, the Lord's response to Moses' in verse 11 is very significant: *"Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the LORD?"* Do you see the significance of that verse? People who justify abortion on the grounds that an unborn child is handicapped need to read this verse. One more time: *"Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? **Have not I, the LORD?"** [emphasis added].* This verse shows that God is in charge of all these matters.

### **Practical Application**

#### **Use whatever you have to serve the Lord.**

The Lord asked Moses, *"What is that in your hand?"* The Lord asks us the same question: *"What is that in your hand?"* We can use whatever the Lord has given to us in service for His glory.

Moses had a shepherd's staff in his hand. He used it to serve the Lord, as the Lord directed. Notice that this staff was called "the rod of God" once Moses began to use it in service for the Lord. *"And Moses took the rod of God in his hand"* (v20).

So what is it that is in **your** hand? Do you have a musical instrument, a pen, a paintbrush, a hammer, the steering wheel of a van, a financial statement of your investments, a weekly planner with a couple of free hours -- or some hours that should be freed up? All of these things can be used to serve the Lord! What is that in your hand? **Use whatever you have to serve the Lord!**