

We continue the account of Moses before the fiery presence of the Angel JHWH in the burning bush. Moses is barefoot and his face is hidden because he is on holy ground. Considering the other encounters with the glorious Presence recorded in Scripture (Isaiah 6:5; Daniel 10:7-8), we can surmise that Moses is trembling, and probably on his face in the dirt. The awareness of God's holiness accentuates Moses' shortcomings. I believe that Moses' initial excuses are not so much defiance as they are his understanding how incapable he is of doing what God is asking. In other words, Moses knows himself, his weaknesses, and the size of the task to which God is calling him.

God's answer to his concern is, "I will be with you!" (Exodus 3:12) God is our sufficiency for whatever task He assigns us to do. So Moses next concern is the Israelites. "OK, You will be with me, but what about the people; what if...?"

<sup>1</sup> *Then Moses answered, "But behold, they will not believe me or listen to my voice, for they will say, 'The LORD did not appear to you.' "* Moses didn't have a great reception the first time he tried to liberate them. (Exodus 2:14) He's wondering why they would be receptive this time. In fact, he sounds like he may still harbor some bitterness and is certain that they won't believe him. After all, he was raised Egyptian. He's been gone for 40 years. Suddenly he is going to show up and say God appeared to him, like He did to their forefathers. Why would they believe him? But God said they would! (Exodus 3:18) Moses was considering his past experience to be more reliable than the revelation of God. Be careful not to make the same mistake.

<sup>2</sup> *The LORD said to him, "What is that in your hand?" He said, "A staff."*  This is the voice of YHWH speaking to Moses. God could have just skipped this verse and gone right on to verse three. Why ask what He already knows? Why not just say throw your staff on the ground?

We have seen that Moses' own abilities and own ideas were a disaster. That does not mean that God is not able to sanctify ordinary things and use them for His purposes. **What is in your hand?** This passage will go on to talk about supernatural gifts and abilities, but God can also take the ordinary and use it in extraordinary ways, like the little bush that is ablaze with His presence. (James 1:17) What is in your hand? Name it right now in your mind. What are the natural things that God has given you? Will you let Him sanctify them for His use? Will you let them become signs, as God uses them in extraordinary ways, to draw people to believe?

God showed Moses how to use it as a sign. He had him throw the staff on the ground and it turned into a snake. It frightened Moses. You'd be frightened too,

**Commented [Paul Wall1]:** Isaiah 6:5 (NIV)  
5 "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."

**Commented [Paul Wall2]:** Daniel 10:7-8 (NIV)  
7 I, Daniel, was the only one who saw the vision; the men with me did not see it, but such terror overwhelmed them that they fled and hid themselves.  
8 So I was left alone, gazing at this great vision; I had no strength left, my face turned deathly pale and I was helpless.

**Commented [Paul Wall3]:** Exodus 3:12 (ESV)  
12 He said, "But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain."

**Commented [Paul Wall4]:** Exodus 2:14 (NIV)  
14 The man said, "Who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian?" Then Moses was afraid and thought, "What I did must have become known."

**Commented [Paul Wall5]:** Exodus 3:18 (NIV)  
18 "The elders of Israel will listen to you. Then you and the elders are to go to the king of Egypt and say to him, 'The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us. Let us take a three-day journey into the desert to offer sacrifices to the LORD our God.'

**Commented [Paul Wall6]:** James 1:17 (ESV)  
17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

if you threw down a stick and it turned into a rattler or some other venomous snake.

The snake was worshiped in Egypt as a symbol of wisdom and healing. The spitting cobra was a sign of sovereignty, deity, and authority and was worn on the Pharaoh's headdress. The Pharaoh's scepter was often in the form of a cobra. **This miracle of the snake declared that God is the real sovereign deity, even over Pharaoh, and greater still, over the ol' serpent, Satan. (1 Corinthians 15:27)**

Apparently, God knew the people would need a sign to help them believe. How gracious of God to give the unbeliever not one sign, but as we shall see, three! And is He any different toward the rest of mankind? Doesn't His desire to see that none perish cause Him to give signs to each and everyone to help them believe, if they are willing to receive it? (2Peter 3:9) I know He was faithful to deliver me from accidents, to arrange incidents, and to bring godly influences at the time I needed them the most. I bet you can say the same.

What is that in your hand? May God use it as He wills <sup>5</sup> *"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."*

But just because God uses that thing in your hand as a clear sign, don't expect people to fall on their knees and give their life to God. We humans can be pretty obstinate. So God gave Moses a second sign, the leprous hand. Stick your hand in your robe, pull it out, and it looks like you have the awful disease of leprosy. Put it back in and take it out, and it is normal again. Why this sign? Leprosy was a dreaded disease. If we won't take the first sign God gives, He has to make His warning a little more severe. Notice that these signs are things people fear. Signs to wake up the unbeliever of necessity need to be fearful.

I know a number of people that came to the Lord when they heard in their spirit the voice of God tell them that He was not giving them any more chances. The sign is a warning of judgment, but also of the ability to heal what was considered incurable.

It may also have been a picture of how the Hebrews felt as a nation and of their desire to be whole. They surely felt leprous as they were daily abused. God may have been declaring through the sign that they can continue in that condition or be made whole by the hand of God. (Isaiah 1:18)

<sup>9</sup> *If they will not believe even these two signs or listen to your voice, you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground, and the water that you shall take from the Nile will become blood on the dry ground."* The Nile was

**Commented [Paul Wall7]:** 1 Corinthians 15:27 (ESV) 27 For " God has put all things in subjection under his feet." But when it says, "all things are put in subjection," it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him.

**Commented [Paul Wall8]:** 2 Peter 3:8-9 (ESV) 8 But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. 9 The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

**Commented [Paul Wall9]:** Isaiah 1:18 (ESV) 18 "Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.

one of Egypt's most revered gods and considered to bring life. This miracle showed that God could take the life right out of it.

Blood should remind the Hebrews of the covenant with Abraham. (Genesis 15:10-11) When God promises, God delivers. He can't deny His word. He promised to give Abraham's descendents the land, to make them a great nation, and to bless the world through them. (Genesis 15:5-6)

What is more important, the blessing of the Nile that regularly watered their fields and pastures and gave them some sense of security, or the promises of Almighty God? Psalms 46:4 (ESV) *4 There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High.* John 7:37b-38 (ESV) *Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. 38 Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.' "* Which river will you choose? The worldwide blessing promised in that covenant with Abraham is the blessing of Jesus, the source of living water. (Acts 3:25-26) He is the river that makes our hearts glad. It was His blood spilled upon the ground that is our real security and provision. (Revelation 1:5)

I don't think the Hebrews understood all this in that miraculous sign. It was enough for them to remember the blood covenant with Abraham and the promises of God. (Genesis 15:13-14)

God gave three gracious signs full of meaning and warning. Together they declared that the people better listen to Moses, because he is the spokesman for Almighty God.

*10 But Moses said to the LORD, "Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent, either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and of tongue."* "Let's say the people are convinced by the signs, what about my stuttering problem?" I'm surprised God didn't say, "That's why I picked you!" (1Corinthians 1:28-29)

One of the greatest American preachers was D.L. Moody. When he was young, he tried his hand at preaching. One of the elders talked to him afterward and told him that he just did not have that gift and that he should find some other way to serve the Lord. Well, most of you know the rest of the story. He went on to hold great revivals, and was in great demand in Scotland and England. It wasn't so much his eloquence as it was the power of God that came with his words. (Acts 7:22) It was same with Moses as well as the Apostle Paul. (1Corinthians 2:4)

Moses' questions were beginning to cross the line from lack of self- confidence to the lack of God- confidence. You can discern that in the way God answered him.

**Commented [Paul Wall10]:** Genesis 15:10-11 (ESV)  
10 And he brought him all these, cut them in half, and laid each half over against the other. But he did not cut the birds in half.

11 And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

**Commented [Paul Wall11]:** Genesis 15:5-6 (ESV)

5 And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."

6 And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

**Commented [Paul Wall12]:** Acts 3:25-26 (ESV)

25 You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, "And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

26 God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness."

**Commented [Paul Wall13]:** Revelation 1:5 (ESV)

5 and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood

**Commented [Paul Wall14]:** Genesis 15:13-14 (ESV)

13 Then the LORD said to Abram, "Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years.

14 But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions.

**Commented [Paul Wall15]:** 1 Corinthians 1:28-29 (ESV)

28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are,  
29 so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

**Commented [Paul Wall16]:** Acts 7:22 (ESV)

22 And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in his words and deeds.

**Commented [Paul Wall17]:** 1 Corinthians 2:3-4 (ESV)

3 And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling,  
4 and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,

*11 Then the LORD said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?"*

Most of you know that my grandson was born with a cleft lip and palate. It is a fairly common deformity that affects about 1 in 600. I remember not long after his birth reading this passage. I had held the opinion that all such problems were just the result of living in a fallen world. But this passage indicates that God is the One behind these problems. Deformities and handicaps do not make us any less a person. They give the individual more to deal with, or, in some cases, less to deal with. In His wisdom, He makes, or at least allows, the differences for His own reasons.

It was a relief for me to understand this, because I thought we were dealing with the results of the fall, when in reality, God declares here in this verse that He is behind it. If God is behind it, it will surely be one of those blessings in disguise. (Psalm 30:11)

That is what God was saying to Moses. "I made your mouth the way it is for my own purposes." We humans are so arrogant that we think God owes us a perfect body or perfect health. It's all about God, not you or me. His love for us may be expressed in a difficulty because it is what we need. (Psalm 119:71)

According to Jesus, some afflictions are the result of sin (John 5:14), and others are for the glory of God to be manifest. (John 9:2-3) You can't put all problems down to the same cause.

I can only guess that the purpose for Moses' problem with speech was that God would get the glory and people wouldn't overrate Moses and his abilities. (1Corinthians 4:7) This deliverance of the Israelites has little to do with Moses. Moses didn't come up with the miracles and plagues. God does it all. It's all the grace of God, like our own deliverance.

*12 Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak.* God already promised to be with Moses, but now God specifically says He will be with his mouth. Not only will God help Moses to overcome his handicap, but He'll teach him what to say. God is pretty much saying that He'll do everything if Moses will just obey and go.

*13 But he said, "Oh, my Lord, please send someone else."* Now he has crossed the line. God promises to do it all, and Moses is still trying to get out of it. Moses is uttering that great oxymoron, "No, Lord!" (Acts 10:14) If He is your Master, you don't say, "No!" No and Lord just don't go together. If He is Lord you say, "Yes!", to whatever He asks. "No", means He isn't Lord.

In survey after survey, the number one fear of the average person is public speaking. For most of us it is the fear of saying something stupid or

**Commented [Paul Wall18]:** Psalms 30:11 (NIV)  
11 You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy,

**Commented [Paul Wall19]:** Psalms 119:71 (ESV)  
71 It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes.

**Commented [Paul Wall20]:** John 5:14 (NIV)  
14 Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, "See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you."

**Commented [Paul Wall21]:** John 9:2-3 (NIV)  
2 His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"  
3 "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life."

**Commented [Paul Wall22]:** 1 Corinthians 4:7 (ESV)  
7 For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

**Commented [Paul Wall23]:** Acts 10:14 (ESV)  
14 But Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean."

embarrassing ourselves in front of a lot of people. I've done it so many times that I found out it isn't deadly. It looks like Moses had a fear we all share, but he also may have had the fear of being executed by the current Pharaoh. (Proverbs 29:25)

**Commented [Paul Wall24]:** Proverbs 29:25 (ESV)  
25 The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is safe.

I'm so glad that the Bible tells us stories about people like us. Isaiah said, "Here am I; send me." (Isaiah 6:8) But most of us are more like Moses. "Oh my Lord, please send someone else." If you don't want to face God's anger, may I suggest that you humbly follow the Isaiah model.

**Commented [Paul Wall25]:** Isaiah 6:8 (ESV)  
8 And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me."

*14 Then the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses and he said, "Is there not Aaron, your brother, the Levite? I know that he can speak well. Behold, he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart.* Moses was more worried about talking to Pharaoh than Almighty God. If you want to get God riled up, just tell Him you don't think He can do it. After looking at the wonder of the human body, and the stars in the sky (Psalm 19:1), the beauty of flower, and any number of the wonders of creation, God expects us to understand that nothing is too hard for Him. (Genesis 18:14)

**Commented [Paul Wall26]:** Psalms 19:1 (ESV)  
1 The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.

God can see that Moses will not place his faith in God's ability, so he points to Moses' brother. Apparently God knew the Moses respected his brother's ability to give a speech. God told Moses what he needed to hear to get him to start cooperating. God knew Moses will do most of the speaking, but at this point Moses just needed to have the assurance that he wouldn't HAVE to speak.

**Commented [Paul Wall27]:** Genesis 18:14 (ESV)  
14 Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son."

Aaron will be glad to see him and know he is alive after a 40 year separation. He will speak if Moses doesn't, but God is really helping Moses take the first step by lowering the bar of expectation about what he has to do.

I think the Lord is angry because it is an insult to our mighty Creator when we refuse to believe He can do what He promises to do. Faith pleases God. (Hebrews 11:6) Lack of faith can anger God. Heed the warning!

**Commented [Paul Wall28]:** Hebrews 11:6 (ESV)  
6 And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

*15 You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth, and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth and will teach you both what to do.*

*16 He shall speak for you to the people, and he shall be your mouth, and you shall be as God to him.* Sounds like what happens when we share Jesus with others. If we just won't fear, but will look to God, He'll put the words in our mouths and teach us what to do. We will be the voice of God to the unbeliever.

*17 And take in your hand this staff, with which you shall do the signs.*" When you see the busts of the Pharaoh, you see crossed over his chest a whip in one hand and a shepherd's staff in the other. It symbolically represents that he punishes and guides his people. God anointed the shepherd's staff in Moses' hand to be the real staff of sovereign power.

It is no coincidence that God chose his staff to be the instrument of miracles. It was saying to Pharaoh that the authority over people belongs to God. God is the Great Shepherd. When Jesus declared He is the Good Shepherd (John 10:11), He reminded us that He is the true guardian and guide of all mankind for our good.

**Commented [Paul Wall29]:** John 10:11 (ESV)  
11 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

What is in your hand, fellow believer? Look at a few good examples in our fellowship of people that used what was in their hand. Thelma sows, so she makes dolls for the Christmas boxes and parachutes to drop Bibles into guerilla controlled areas of Columbia. Jane is gifted with design and theater, so she and Lynne do Potter's Hand Productions. Don Matthieu is gifted with financial savvy, so he helps with Young Life. We could go on and on.

What is that in your hand? How does God want you to use it? **If you are worried about your inability, let God reassure you of His ability** and willingness to work through you. (Matthew 4:19) Are you expressing a lack of faith in God? Let Him send along someone to help, but don't be surprised if you end up doing what you thought you could never do. Do you still say, "Send someone else"? What is that in your hand? Trust in God's ability to anoint and use it for His glory. That is the only reason why you can!

**Commented [Paul Wall30]:** Matthew 4:19 (ESV)  
19 And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."

Questions:

- 1 What was Moses' fear? Application?
- 2 Why was it wrong headed?
- 3 How can we relate to verse 2?
- 4 Explain what the first sign meant to Egyptians? Hebrews?
- 5 What was sign 2 and meaning?
- 6 What was sign 3 and meaning?
- 7 What was Moses other excuse? Ours?
- 8 What can we learn from God's response?
- 9 What made God angry?
- 10 Why use a staff for signs and plagues?