

## Exodus 4:18-31

### Introduction

Big Idea: when God calls us to His work, the cure for reluctant obedience is to step out on faith knowing that He has prepared us for the task and invited us to participate in His plan

- Moses obeyed God and set out for Egypt
- God prepared Moses for the mission
- Moses and Aaron share God's plan with Israel

### A. Moses obeyed God and set out for Egypt (READ 4:18-20)

1. It would be fair to say that up to this point Moses had been reluctant to accept the mission to which God had called him—and that's to put it mildly:
  - a. In 3:11, he objected by asking, **“Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?”**
  - b. In 4:1, he objected again by asking, **“What if they will not believe me or listen to what I will say? For they may say, ‘The LORD has not appeared to you.’”**
  - c. In 4:10, he continued to object claiming he didn't speak well, **“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.”**
  - d. The Lord was patient with him through all of this but finally got angry with him in 4:13-14 when Moses pleaded with him to send someone else, **“Please, Lord, now send the message by whomever You will.”**
2. Moses must have come to his senses and realized he wasn't going to win this battle with the LORD because he finally decided to obey and return to Egypt:
  - a. V. 18 tells us that he returned to Jethro and ask for his permission to return to Egypt:
    - 1) This was customary in the ANE because Moses was not only an employee of Jethro (caring for his herds) but a member of the family
    - 2) The reason he gave to Jethro was that he wanted to return to **“my brothers in Egypt and see if they are still alive”**:
      - a) It doesn't state whether he shared with Jethro about his encounter with God, what God had said, or the plan to deliver Israel from Egypt
      - b) **“my brothers”** here is likely a reference to relatives rather than all of Israel:
        - According to the genealogies in Exodus, Moses had siblings (Miriam and Aaron) and aunts, uncles and cousins in Egypt
        - But, like all of Israel they had been living under severe oppression and slavery and it had been 40 years since Moses had left Egypt
        - Under such conditions, it's reasonable that Moses would have wondered if they were still alive

- 3) Jethro honored Moses's request and sent him on his way with a blessing, "**Go in peace.**"
- b. One of the things Moses wouldn't have had to worry about going back to Egypt were the people who had been seeking to kill him 40 years earlier (4:19):
    - 1) In V. 19 the LORD informed him that they were all dead
    - 2) Thutmose III was Pharaoh when Moses killed the Egyptian and the one who sought to kill him in Exodus 2:15:
      - a. At the time, Moses was likely the third highest ranking official in Egypt, someone referred to in Egyptian historical records as Senenmut
      - b. Thutmose III was the step-son of Moses's adoptive mother, Hatshepsut, which essentially made Moses and Thutmose III step-brothers
      - c. Egyptian chronologies are all over the map and filled with controversy, but most conservative Biblical archeologists put the death of Thutmose III at around 1450 BC, just 4 years before the Exodus
      - d. So, Moses would have returned to Egypt just a few years after Thutmose III died
  - c. Two things in the text suggest Moses was fully committed to doing what God called him to do:
    - 1) The first is that he took his family with him (RE-READ 4:20a)
    - 2) The second is that he took the "**staff of God**" through which he would perform the signs and wonders (RE-READ 4:20b)
3. Takeaway: the solution to reluctant obedience is stepping out in faith
    - a) Moses may have initially been reluctant to do what God called him to do, but he ultimately obeyed and the author of Hebrews tells us it was an act of faith (READ Hebrews 11:24-29)
    - b) He was actually in good company because others like Gideon, Jonah, and Jeremiah were all hesitant and reluctant when God first called them, but they all ultimately obeyed and did what God called them to do
    - c) Are we really any different? Are we ever hesitant or reluctant to do what God calls us to do? Do we ever make excuses like Moses? How long does it take before we're willing to step out on faith, do what He calls us to do, and trust Him?

<b>B. God prepared Moses for his mission (4:21-28)</b>
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1. I believe much of what we see here in these verses is God equipping Moses to confront Pharaoh and lead His people out of Egypt
2. He does this in three ways:
  - a. The first thing God did to equip Moses was He told him exactly what to do, what to expect from Pharaoh, and what to say to him (4:21-23):

- 1) Back in chapter 4 when Moses tried to convince God that he wasn't the right man for the job because he wasn't very eloquent, God rebuked him and then promised two things:
  - a) He would be with Moses's mouth and instruct him in what he should say
  - b) He would call Aaron to come alongside Moses and speak on his behalf
  
- 2) We see both of these promises fulfilled in this passage but it begins with God first providing Moses with instructions:
  - a) He was to perform the signs and wonders in front of Pharaoh that God demonstrated for at the burning bush (RE-READ 4:21a); these are found in 4:2-7 (READ)
  - b) He also told Moses how Pharaoh would respond (RE-READ 4:21b):
    - "harden" here is a word that means to strengthen or make strong
    - The point is that God was going to give Pharaoh the strength and resolve to withstand the signs and wonders so that He could multiply His signs and wonders
  - c) Finally, He told Moses exactly what to say (RE-READ 4:22-23):
    - He was to inform Pharaoh that Israel was Yahweh's son, His firstborn son
    - He was to warn Pharaoh that because of his refusal to let Israel go Yahweh would kill his firstborn son
  - d) Before we move on, we need to take a moment to discuss what God meant by Israel being His firstborn son:
    - First and foremost, by calling Israel His son, Yahweh was declaring to Pharaoh that Israel belonged to Him just like children belong to their parents; Pharaoh was acting as if they were his
    - Second, in the ANE the firstborn son held a position of favor, honor, and privilege and this was certainly true regarding Israel; not only was Israel promised an inheritance like no other nation but Yahweh's favor and presence among them
    - Finally, Israel as Yahweh's firstborn is also a type (example) of Jesus Christ, the obedient Son who accomplished redemption for both Jew and Gentile, was the "**firstborn of creation**" (Colossians 1:15), "**firstborn among many brethren**" (Romans 8:29) and "**firstborn from the dead**" (Colossians 1:15)
  
- b. The second thing God did to equip Moses was to discipline him for not honoring the Abrahamic covenant (RE-READ 4:24-26):
  - 1) This is probably one of the strangest passages in all the Bible which brings up a ton of questions:

- a) Why did God want to kill Moses when He just got done calling Him and sending Him to Egypt?
  - b) What does it mean that God “**met him and sought to put him to death**”; couldn’t God have just killed him?
  - c) Why did Zipporah circumcising their son assuage God’s anger, and how did she know that would do it?
- 2) There are also some interpretive challenges to these verses that add to some of the difficulties and/or confusion:
- a) Moses isn’t actually mentioned in these few verses: rather, it’s just the words “him” and “his” which could refer to Moses or his son; however, because the context suggests these are references to Moses some translations just insert Moses’s name
  - b) Another challenge is what Zipporah meant when she called Moses a “**bridegroom of blood to me**”, in part because “bridegroom” generally referred to a son-in-law or possibly a close relative
- 3) We’re not going to be able to resolve all these things because scholars haven’t been able to for centuries, but we can get the gist of what happened:
- a) Nearly everyone agrees that the issue was Moses’s failure to circumcise his son in obedience to God’s command to Abraham (READ Genesis 17:10-14)
  - b) This was not only disobedience on Moses’s part but put his son in jeopardy of being cut off from Israel
  - c) As we will see in Exodus 12:43-49, in order for any male to participate in the Passover during the final plague they had to be circumcised
  - d) So this begs the question, how could Moses lead Israel and be expected to uphold Yahweh’s command, especially when it came to circumcision, when he hadn’t obeyed and circumcised his own son?
  - e) So it appears Yahweh was chastising Moses for not taking His command regarding circumcision seriously and not fully understanding the consequences
- d. The third thing God did to equip Moses was to send Aaron to be His mouthpiece (4:27-28):
- 1) You may remember when Moses was trying to wiggle out of God’s call he said he was not an eloquent speaker, and he begged God to send someone else
  - 2) God responded by saying that Aaron would come to him and speak to Pharaoh on his behalf—problem solved!
  - 3) We see God make good on that promise here by telling Aaron to go meet Moses in the wilderness at the Mountain of God and Moses shared with him all that God had said and done

3. Takeaway: Just as God commissioned Moses for a task and prepared him for it, Jesus commissioned us to be His witnesses and prepared us for the mission:
  - a. He's told us what to say and do: we are to go into all the world sharing the Good News that Jesus died for our sins, rose from the dead, and offers salvation for all who believe in His name
  - b. He's told us what to expect: some will hate and persecute us for it, but many will believe and be saved
  - c. He's even given us our own Aaron of sorts, someone to speak on our behalf (Luke 12:11-12): "**When they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not worry about how or what you are to speak in your defense, or what you are to say; for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.**"
  - d. Just like Moses, we have no excuse for not doing what God calls us to do because He has prepared us to do it

C. Moses and Aaron share God's plan with Israel (READ 4:29-31)
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1. These verses are the culmination and results of Moses's obedience and God's preparation
2. Moses was worried that he wasn't adequate for the job, that Israel might not listen to him, that he wouldn't be eloquent enough...but none of that mattered
3. Look at what happened:
  - a) Moses and Aaron went to the elders just as God had commanded
  - b) Aaron spoke all the word which Yahweh had spoken to Moses
  - c) He performed the signs Yahweh told Moses to perform—these would have been the signs from chapter 4 (staff turning into a snake, hand turning leprous, and water from the Nile turning to blood when it was poured onto the ground)
  - d) As a result, two things happened: they believed and they worshiped (RE-READ 31)
4. Takeaway: When we obey God and do what He calls us to do, He makes us participants in His amazing redemptive work:
  - a) Can you imagine what it must have been like for Moses and Aaron to be a part of what God was doing with Israel?
  - b) Israel has been in Egypt nearly half a millennium, spent hundreds of years of in oppression and slavery, they were crying out for help, and then all of a sudden Yahweh shows up and tells you He's going to use you to deliver them, take them to a land flowing with milk and honey, and promises to fulfill His promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.
  - c) And, to think Moses initially didn't want any part of it and came up with excuse after excuse to avoid it, but he ultimately chose to obey and now he's watching the leaders of Israel bow down and worship Yahweh—what an amazing experience that must have been

- d) It's no different today: God is still saving and delivering people through the Gospel and invites us to participate in what He's doing, but we must choose to do what He calls us to do
- e) We miss out on so much when we instead choose to sit on the sidelines