

Reformation Fellowship Notes • November 22, 2015
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Handout #7
Exodus 4:1-23

I. Introduction

A. Recap

1. Moses was torn between his two cultures:
 - a) Born an Israelite;
 - b) Raised as a member of the Egyptian elite.
2. Moses thought he had been appointed by God to lead his people out of Egypt.
 - a) He began to take action,
 - b) But he was rejected by the very people he sought to help.
3. Moses fled to Midian.
 - a) He lived as a shepherd; got married.
4. After 40 years, God appears to Moses in a burning bush.
 - a) A fire that does not consume the bush
 - (1) Eternal and pure
 - b) God announces that he has heard the cries and is going to rescue his people.
 - (1) He is sending Moses to lead them out.
 - c) Moses voices first concern: “Who am I?”
 - (1) God responds: “I will be with you.”
 - d) Moses voices second concern: “They will ask who sent me.”
 - (1) God responds: “I Am sent you.”
 - (a) The God whose area of power is all of creation
 - e) Go to Pharaoh and ask for permission to go worship me.
 - (1) He will not let you go.
 - (2) I will use works of power to force him to let you go.
 - (3) You will ask the Egyptians for wealth as you leave.

B. Now the interaction will continue.

II. Exodus 4:1-9

A. “And Moses answered and said. . .”

1. Marks the beginning of a new idea. (Cassuto, p. 45)

B. Moses voices third concern: They won’t recognize my authority.

1. Moses knows he cannot provide the Israelites with leadership if they refuse to recognize his authority.
 - a) He fears that they will never recognize his authority.
2. God gives no explanation.
3. God responds with three accrediting signs.
 - a) Perhaps they will listen to the voice of the signs.
 - b) Moses will be enabled to perform powerful, divine works.
 - (1) This will show he has been sent by God.

- (2) So these are not mere magic tricks; these are genuine wonder.
4. First sign: Staff turns into a snake.
 - a) Play on words:
 - (1) mazel—mateh.
 - b) Nature of the sign:
 - (1) Throw it on the ground.
 - (2) It turned into a snake.
 - (a) We don't know what kind of snake.
 - (3) Moses fled.
 - (a) It was real.
 - (b) I could have been poisonous.
 - (4) God says to grab it by the tail.
 - (a) This is the most dangerous way to grab it.
 - (b) This required great faith.
 - (5) It turned back into a staff.
 - (a) He raised it from the dust.
 5. Second sign: Arm become leprous.
 - a) Nature of the sign:
 - (1) Put arm in cloak.
 - (a) When he took it out, it was covered with leprosy.
 - (2) Put it back in cloak.
 - (a) When he pulled it out, it was restored.
 - b) This is the third of four opportunities "to heed the voice" (to believe that God has sent Moses).
 - (1) If they won't "heed the voice" of:
 - (a) You;
 - (b) The first sign;
 - (c) Maybe the second sign.
 - (d) If not even that, maybe the third sign.
 - (2) God is essentially offering four opportunities to respond positively.
 - (a) The mercy of God
 6. Third sign: Nile water to blood.
 - a) Nature of the sign:
 - (1) Take some water from the Nile.
 - (2) Pour it on the ground.
 - (3) It will turn to blood.
 - b) God does not demonstrate this sign.
 - (1) Water of the Nile is not available.
 - (2) Moses will have to trust that God will do it.
- C. Analysis of the signs
1. Why these signs?
 - a) These signs demonstrate that Moses has been sent by God.
 - (1) His power exceeds that of the magicians.
 - (a) The signs Moses was to perform were more than just magic tricks.
 - (2) Magicians were thought to be able to manipulate the gods.

- (a) Because they can manipulate the natural world.
- (3) Moses' signs were done solely to establish his authority. (Sarna)
 - (a) Moses only does wonder-working in times of crisis, and they are done at the instruction of God. (Sarna)

“In Egypt the magician manipulates the divine; in Israel it is the one God who manipulates man and nature.” (Sarna, p. 59)

- (4) Moses has been sent by the God, who controls nature.
- 2. Some observations
 - a) All the signs are changes into something bad.
 - (1) This is clearly true for the first two.
 - (2) Therefore I believe it is true for all.
 - (a) Scholars debate whether blood is symbolic of “life” or “death.”
 - (b) Here it seems to be “death.”
 - b) First two signs are changed back.
 - c) The first two signs are demonstrated at this time.
 - (1) These two demonstrations are for Moses' sake.
 - (a) He needs to witness the power of God.
 - d) These signs were to these people:
 - (1) To Moses
 - (2) To the Israelites
 - (3) To the Egyptians (Pharaoh, in particular)
- 3. How would they have been understood by their immediate audience?
 - a) Significance of first sign:
 - (1) The magicians could do this.
 - (2) But God can match the power of Pharaoh.
 - (a) Moses' demonstration is more impressive.
 - b) Significance of second sign:
 - (1) God has power over disease.
 - (a) Leprosy was considered to be incurable.
 - (2) No indication that magicians could do this.
 - c) Significance of third sign:
 - (1) The Nile was both a god and the source of life for Egypt.
 - (2) God has control over it.
 - (a) God has the power to bring death on Egypt.
 - (b) This sign will initiate the plagues which will result in the death of the first born.
- 4. Do they have a symbolic significance?
 - a) More about this later

III. Exodus 4:10-13

- A. Moses voices fourth concern: He is not eloquent.
 - 1. Nature of the problem:

- a) Stuttering?
 - b) Forgot Egyptian or Hebrew?
 - (1) Did the Israelites speak Egyptian or Hebrew?
 - (2) Hebrew would be the more likely because it is the Israelites he is most concerned about.
 - c) Just slow and has trouble finding words, not eloquent?
2. This is in tension with what Stephen says in Acts 7:22:

“And Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians, and he was a man of power in words and deeds.”

3. He is assuming that eloquence will be needed to get cooperation of his people.
 - a) He does not think he is good enough with words to command the obedience of the Israelites.
 - b) But no one is!

B. God’s response

1. God does not reassure Moses that he is indeed eloquent.
 - a) This is irrelevant.
2. Whether one is eloquent is something that God controls.
 - a) Dumb, deaf, blind, seeing—
 - b) God controls all these things.
3. God will make Moses’ mouth adequate to the task.
 - a) “I will be with your mouth.”
 - b) “I will teach you what to say.”

“The chosen messenger conveys not his own word but the word of God, and he does so because he is irresistibly compelled to by a Force and a Will more powerful than his own. Prophetic eloquence is not a matter of native talent, but of revelation that derives from the supreme Source of truth that is external to the speaker. The facile talker, the golden-tongued, the consummate demagogue, is not the recipient of the prophetic word or the vehicle of its transmission. Prophetic eloquence is a divine gift bestowed for the purpose on him who is elected, often against his will, to be the messenger. In these circumstances, experience and talent are irrelevant qualities.” (Sarna, p. 61)

C. Moses urges God to send someone else.

1. This is close to a flat refusal.

IV. Exodus 4:14-17

A. God is angry.

1. These are not concerns; they are excuses.
2. God had responded to his concerns as real concerns.
 - a) But this is just disobedience.

B. God very graciously provides help, nevertheless.

1. Aaron is a good speaker.

2. He is coming out to meet Moses.
 - a) God has already put this in motion.
 - b) How did Aaron get out?
 - c) What moved Aaron to do this at this time?
 3. He will be glad to see you.
 4. He will speak to the people for you.
 5. He will be as a mouth to you.
 - a) You will be as a God to him.
 - (1) God (God)
 - (2) Prophet (Moses)
 - (3) Priesthood (Aaron)
- C. You will take your staff to perform the signs.
1. This staff is sometimes called Moses' staff, sometimes Aaron's staff, and sometimes God's staff.
 - a) It started as a symbol of Moses' lowliness:
 - (1) Shepherd's staff.
 - b) But it is turned into the symbol of the power of God.
- D. All of Moses' concerns are about the Israelites.
1. None of his concerns are about the most powerful man in the world (Pharaoh).
 - a) He knows he will make the Pharaoh mad.
 2. He is afraid the Israelites will not cooperate.
 - a) His last exchange with an Israelite must have really stung him.
 - b) No sign or wonder will change them.
 3. His request that they follow him as he leads them out of Egypt depends on the fact that God sent him.
 - a) Not on his inherent powers
 - b) They won't believe that God spoke to him.

V. Exodus 4:18-23

- A. The theophany is over.
1. Moses goes back to where Jethro is.
 - a) Is that in S. Sinai or is that in Midian?
 2. He asks permission to go to Egypt to check on his family.
 - a) This is not the main reason for leaving.
 - b) Why is he evasive?
 - (1) Does he not want his mission to be known to anyone yet?
 3. Jethro gives him leave.
- B. God tells Moses to go to Egypt.
1. Now is the time.
 - a) Presumably Moses was preparing to go.
 - (1) God informs him that now is the time to leave.

- b) God tells him that the men who sought to kill Moses are dead.
 - (1) Pharaoh and his advisors have died.
 - (a) It was customary for Pharaohs to declare amnesty when they came into office.
 - (b) There may have been an sense of excitement among Israelites, hoping for improved conditions.
- C. Moses leaves for Egypt.
 - 1. Takes his family—
 - a) His wife and sons.
 - (1) At least one more child, a son, has been born to Moses.
 - (2) Why does he take his family?
 - (a) Dangerous and difficult,
 - (b) But presumably God will be looking out for them.
 - (c) He is taking his family to identify fully with the Israelites.
 - (i) That is what this phrase suggests. (Stuart, p. 145)
 - (ii) It is not clear that his family actually ends up going all the way to Egypt. (cf. Exodus 18:1-5)
 - 2. Took the staff of God.
 - a) Moses is trusting that God will do what he said he would do.
- D. Gradual revelation
 - 1. Moses has already been told that Pharaoh will not let them go until forced to do so.
 - a) God will strike Egypt with miracles to force Pharaoh.
 - 2. Now it becomes clearer.
 - a) Moses must perform all the signs.
 - (1) But God is going to harden Pharaoh's heart.
 - b) God will take Pharaoh's first-born.
 - (1) Because Israel is the first-born of God.
 - (a) First born was dedicated to God.
 - (i) Required to serve father until double blessing.
 - (ii) For God to claim this bunch of slaves as his first born must have seemed pathetic to Pharaoh.
 - (b) Pharaoh refused to let God's first-born serve him.
 - (i) Someone will have to die before Israel can leave.
 - (ii) There will be war!
 - 3. God just lets out a little new information at a time.
 - a) He never lays out the whole picture before it happens.

VI. Conclusion

- A. Symbolism of the signs
 - 1. How do we know if the signs are symbolic?
 - a) Is there a track record of symbolic meaning?
 - (1) ISIS and Al Qaeda both like to pick targets with symbolic value.

- (a) We know because of their track record.
 - (b) So now we look for it.
- 2. Should we look for symbols in the things that God does?
 - a) The Old Testament is packed with symbols.
 - (1) Temple, sacrificial system, rainbow, etc.
- 3. When we interpret the symbolism in what God does, what happens to authorial intent?
 - a) Moses may not have known the symbolism in the signs.
 - b) But we are not looking for Moses' intent here.
 - c) We are trying to interpret the "book of history."
 - (1) What did God intend when he gave these three signs?
- 4. How do we interpret the "book of history?"
 - a) Much like we would interpret a novel
 - b) Make sense of all the pieces
 - (1) In light of what we know from what the Bible teaches
- 5. I have described how I think the Israelites at the time of Moses could have understood the signs.
 - a) But as history has unfolded, we have more data to determine what God intended by those signs.
- 6. What did the signs symbolize?
 - a) Commentators suggest all kinds of things.
 - (1) Most find Jesus in everything in the Old Testament.
 - (a) On one hand, I object to this.
 - (i) It does not value the OT.
 - (ii) I have seen abuses: people read Jesus in where he can't possibly fit.
 - (b) On the other hand, Jesus is the person in whom history culminates and to whom everything leads.
 - (i) So it is appropriate to find associations to him everywhere.
- 7. My humble offering
 - a) These signs all point in one way or another to the resurrection of Jesus and the work of the cross.
 - b) First sign is a picture of Jesus' death and resurrection.
 - (1) We begin with a shepherd's staff of no particular significance.
 - (2) The staff became a snake; Jesus became the essence of evil. (2 Corinthians 5:21)
 - (3) The snake/Jesus was raised from the ground and turned into the very power of God.
 - c) Second sign is picture of God's ability to take that which becomes wicked and corrupted by sin and make it whole.
 - (1) The witness of those who believe
 - d) Third sign is a picture of God's ability to take that which we think is the source of life and turn it into the source of death.
 - (1) The witness of futility in our experience

B. Moses as a human being

1. I have always thought of Moses as almost Jesus.
 - a) Nearly perfect
2. But he clearly had his personal problems.
 - a) He was a remarkable person.
 - b) But he had been beat up by life.
 - (1) He had insecurities.
 - (a) He has lost his self-confidence.
 - (2) He had lost his sense of purpose.
 - (3) He was alienated from his people.
 - (a) More about this next week
 - (4) His faith in God has been shaken.
3. When God appeared to him, he really did not want to go to Egypt.
 - a) Moses does not think he is prepared for the task.
 - (1) We are not very good judges of when we are prepared for a task.
 - (2) People are often other-prepared.
 - (a) David is an example (shepherd who defeated Goliath).
 - (3) God had gifted him, but he does not have the gifts that are typically necessary for this task.
 - (a) God does not magically change him.
 - b) God sees what is coming far in advance.
 - (1) He shapes history to set the stage for what will happen.
 - (2) Events don't sneak up on God.
 - (3) He has prepared people the way he wants to prepare them for what happens.
 - (a) The real issue is God's competence.
 - c) In reality, Moses was gaining valuable education in the desert.
 - (1) But Moses couldn't see that.
 - d) Wrestling with his problems was a necessary hiatus to enable him to provide the necessary leadership to bring Israel out of Egypt.
 - e) God will be teaching Moses who he is at the same time he is teaching the Israelites.