

God calls Moses to go to Pharaoh

Steve Thompson

UUCF

April 3, 2024

Moses in the Four Texts

- The story of God calling Moses has text from J, E, P and is “recapped” in D
 - J and E were separate books for 2 centuries, then merged
 - P was written well after this merger of J and E
 - D was written even later; JE and P were merged while D remained (mostly) separate in the book of Deuteronomy (except for the death of Moses)
- Discrepancies of names and relationships
- The relationship of Moses, Aaron, and Miriam

Moses's Father-in-Law

- J and E disagree on the name of Moses' father-in-law
 - According to E, his name is Jethro
 - Exodus 3:1, Exodus 4:18, and Exodus 18:1,2,5,6,9,10,12
 - According to J his name is Reuel
 - Exodus 2:16-18 and Numbers 10:29

Moses, Aaron, and Miriam

- What is the “conventional” understanding of the relationship between Moses, Aaron, and Miriam?
 - Answer: Moses, Aaron and Miriam are siblings
- Do all three authors (J, E, and P) agree with this?

Moses, Aaron, and Miriam

- As far as I know, J does not indicate that Aaron is related to Moses and does not mention Miriam at all
- E: Aaron is not the brother of Moses
 - Exodus 4:24: Aaron is referred to as Moses' *Levite* brother, meaning that they are members of the same tribe; this is a term which would not have been used if Aaron were his real brother
- E: Miriam is the sister of Aaron, but not of Moses
 - Exodus 15:20: Miriam is identified as the sister of Aaron; had she been the sister of Moses, she would have been identified as his sister, or as the sister of both Moses and Aaron
- P: Aaron is the brother of Moses (Exodus 7:1)
 - Moses, Aaron, and Miriam all born to Amram's wife Jochebed (Numbers 26:59); so only P claims all three are siblings
- P's claim of Aaron's brotherhood to Moses is consistent with his effort to promote Aaron; but E links Miriam to Aaron and demotes both of them in Numbers 12

Triplet: God Sends Moses to Pharaoh

- Exodus 3:1-4:18a
 - Is an interleaving of J and E
 - J has a burning bush and an angel
 - E has a (non-burning) bush
- Exodus 6:2-11
 - P's version
 - Not interleaved with JE's burning bush story
 - No bush at all!

The Three Versions

- J (16 verses)
 - Exodus 3:2-4a, 5, 7-8, 19-22
 - Exodus 4:19-20a; 24-26; 5:1-2
- E (60.5 verses)
 - Exodus 3:1, 4b, 6, 9-18
 - Exodus 4:1-18; 20b-21a; 22-23; 27-31
 - Exodus 5:3 - 6:1
- R: Exodus 4:21b
- P
 - Exodus 6:2-11; 39
 - Exodus 7:1-5

Sequence of Three Stories

- Exodus 3-4 (merged JE version)
 - Moses meets God and receives an order to go to Pharaoh and tell him to let the people go
 - Moses leaves God, goes to Jethro and the people and demonstrates signs of having God's blessing
 - Aaron joins Moses
- Exodus 5 (merged JE version)
 - Moses and Aaron meet Pharaoh, but fail to free the people
 - Moses and Aaron return to God
- Exodus 6:2-11 (P)
 - P has God reveal his name (like E)
 - P's story of God commanding them to go to Pharaoh!
 - But they have already gone to speak to Pharaoh!

Differences of J and E Stories

- J and E have God say He will lead them to another land, but only E has God say to tell Pharaoh that they will go on a three day journey into the wilderness
- Only E has God reveal his name to be Yahweh (Lord)
- Only E has Moses doubt he can free the people and so only E includes signs of God's authority; in J's story, Moses does not say anything to God
- Only J has God say that Pharaoh will not let the people go and that He (God) will smite the Egyptians
- Only J has the odd story of God threatening to kill Moses, with his wife saving him by performing circumcision on their son (bizarre!)
- Moses is the greatest hero in Jewish history; no one can ignore him, but E promotes Moses the most, J has less about Moses than E, and P uses Moses to promote Aaron

Exodus 3:1-8 (J and E)

Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Mid'ian; and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. **2** And an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush; and he looked, and lo, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. **3** And Moses said, "I will turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt." **4** And the Lord saw that he turned aside to see. God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here am I." **5** And He said, "Do not come near; put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." **6** And He said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. **7** Then the Lord said, "I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters; I know their sufferings, **8** and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Per'izzites, the Hivites, and the Jeb'usites.

Exodus 3:9-15 (E)

9 “And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. **10** Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring forth my people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt.” **11** But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?” **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 forth the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God upon this mountain.”

The Divine Name Revealed

13 Then Moses said to God, “If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” **14** God said to Moses, “I am who I am.” And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I am has sent me to you.’” **15** God also said to Moses, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘The **Lord**, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you’: this is my name for ever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.

Exodus 3:16-22 (J and E)

16 Go and gather the elders of Israel together, and say to them, ‘The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, “I have observed you and what has been done to you in Egypt; **17** and I promise that I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt, to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Per’izzites, the Hivites, and the Jeb’usites, a land flowing with milk and honey.”’ **18** And they will hearken to your voice; and you and the elders of Israel shall go to the king of Egypt and say to him, ‘The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us; and now, we pray you, let us go a three days’ journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God.’ **19** I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand. **20** So I will stretch out my hand and smite Egypt with all the wonders which I will do in it; after that he will let you go. **21** And I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and when you go, you shall not go empty, **22** but each woman shall ask of her neighbor, and of her who sojourns in her house, jewelry of silver and of gold, and clothing, and you shall put them on your sons and on your daughters; thus you shall despoil the Egyptians.”’

Exodus 4:1-9 (E)

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.’” **2** 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** But the Lord said to Moses, “Put out your hand, and take it by the tail” —so he put out his hand and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand— **5** “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.” **6** Again, the Lord said to him, “Put your hand into your bosom.” And he put his hand into his bosom; and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous, as white as snow. **7** Then God said, “Put your hand back into your bosom.” So he put his hand back into his bosom; and when he took it out, behold, it was restored like the rest of his flesh. **8** “If they will not believe you,” God said, “or heed the first sign, they may believe the latter sign. **9** If they will not believe even these two signs or heed your voice, you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it upon the dry ground; and the water which you shall take from the Nile will become blood upon the dry ground.”

Exodus 4:10-17 (E)

But Moses said to the Lord, “Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent, either heretofore or since thou hast spoken to thy servant; but I am slow of speech and of tongue.” **11** Then the Lord said to him, “Who has made man’s mouth? Who makes him dumb, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? **12** Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak.” **13** But he said, “Oh, my Lord, send, I pray, some other person.” **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; and behold, he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you he will be glad in his heart. **15** And 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 what you shall do. **16** He shall speak for you to the people; and he shall be a mouth for you, and you shall be to him as God. **17** And you shall take in your hand this rod, with which you shall do the signs.”

Exodus 4:18-26 (J, E, R)

Moses went back to Jethro his father-in-law and said to him, “Let me go back, I pray, to my kinsmen in Egypt and see whether they are still alive.” And Jethro said to Moses, “Go in peace.” **19** And the Lord said to Moses in Mid’ian, “Go back to Egypt; for all the men who were seeking your life are dead.” **20** So Moses took his wife and his sons and set them on an ass, and went back to the land of Egypt; and in his hand Moses took the rod of God.

21 And the Lord said to Moses, “When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles which I have put in your power; **but I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go.** **22** And you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the Lord, Israel is my first-born son, **23** and I say to you, “Let my son go that he may serve me”; if you refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay your first-born son.’”

24 At a lodging place on the way the Lord met him and sought to kill him.

25 Then Zippo’rah took a flint and cut off her son’s foreskin, and touched Moses’ feet with it, and said, “Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me!” **26** So he let him alone. Then it was that she said, “You are a bridegroom of blood,” because of the circumcision.

Exodus 4:27-31 (E)

The Lord said to Aaron, “Go into the wilderness to meet Moses.” So he went, and met him at the mountain of God and kissed him. ²⁸ And Moses told Aaron all the words of the Lord with which he had sent him, and all the signs which he had charged him to do. ²⁹ Then Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the people of Israel. ³⁰ And Aaron spoke all the words which the Lord had spoken to Moses, and did the signs in the sight of the people. ³¹ And the people believed; and when they heard that the Lord had visited the people of Israel and that he had seen their affliction, they bowed their heads and worshiped.

Sequence of Three Stories

- Exodus 3-4 (merged JE version)
 - Moses meets God and receives an order to go to Pharaoh and tell him to let the people go
 - Moses leaves God, goes to Jethro and the people and demonstrates signs of having God's blessing
 - Aaron joins Moses
- Exodus 5 (merged JE version)
 - Moses and Aaron meet Pharaoh, but fail to free the people
 - Moses and Aaron return to God
- Exodus 6:2-11 (P)
 - P has God reveal his name (like E)
 - P's story of God commanding them to go to Pharaoh!
 - But they have already met Pharaoh!

Exodus 5:1-9 (J and E)

Afterward Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness.’” ² But Pharaoh said, “Who is the Lord, that I should heed his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and moreover I will not let Israel go.” ³ Then they said, “The God of the Hebrews has met with us; let us go, we pray, a three days’ journey into the wilderness, and sacrifice to the Lord our God, lest he fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword.” ⁴ But the king of Egypt said to them, “Moses and Aaron, why do you take the people away from their work? Get to your burdens.” ⁵ And Pharaoh said, “Behold, the people of the land are now many and you make them rest from their burdens!” ⁶ The same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people and their foremen, ⁷ “You shall no longer give the people straw to make bricks, as heretofore; let them go and gather straw for themselves. ⁸ But the number of bricks which they made heretofore you shall lay upon them, you shall by no means lessen it; for they are idle; therefore they cry, ‘Let us go and offer sacrifice to our God.’ ⁹ Let heavier work be laid upon the men that they may labor at it and pay no regard to lying words.”

Exodus 5:10-17 (E)

So the taskmasters and the foremen of the people went out and said to the people, “Thus says Pharaoh, ‘I will not give you straw. **11** Go yourselves, get your straw wherever you can find it; but your work will not be lessened in the least.’” **12** So the people were scattered abroad throughout all the land of Egypt, to gather stubble for straw. **13** The taskmasters were urgent, saying, “Complete your work, your daily task, as when there was straw.” **14** And the foremen of the people of Israel, whom Pharaoh’s taskmasters had set over them, were beaten, and were asked, “Why have you not done all your task of making bricks today, as hitherto?”

15 Then the foremen of the people of Israel came and cried to Pharaoh, “Why do you deal thus with your servants? **16** No straw is given to your servants, yet they say to us, ‘Make bricks!’ And behold, your servants are beaten; but the fault is in your own people.” **17** But he said, “You are idle, you are idle; therefore you say, ‘Let us go and sacrifice to the Lord.’”

Exodus 5:18-23 (E)

Go now, and work; for no straw shall be given you, yet you shall deliver the same number of bricks.” **19** The foremen of the people of Israel saw that they were in evil plight, when they said, “You shall by no means lessen your daily number of bricks.” **20** They met Moses and Aaron, who were waiting for them, as they came forth from Pharaoh; **21** and they said to them, “The Lord look upon you and judge, because you have made us offensive in the sight of Pharaoh and his servants, and have put a sword in their hand to kill us.”

22 Then Moses turned again to the Lord and said, “O Lord, why hast thou done evil to this people? Why didst thou ever send me? **23** For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in thy name, he has done evil to this people, and thou hast not delivered thy people at all.”

Elements of the Three Versions

- J: Circumcision of son (not in E or P)
- E describes three signs
 - Staff becomes a snake
 - Leprous hand
 - Nile water becomes blood on the ground
- E says staff belongs to Moses and he will use it, but P says the staff belongs to Aaron and he will use it (Exodus 7), an example of P promoting Aaron
- P says God says he was known to the patriarchs as El Shadday, but not as Yahweh
- E takes a dig at Solomon (whom J supports) by using the same term to describe the Egyptian taskmasters that was used in Solomon's reign to describe the bosses who supervised the compulsory labor of the ten northern tribes in building the temple (these tribes broke away from Judah when Solomon died; J wrote his/her text to support the Davidic Monarchy, and in response, E wrote his version of events to support the North)

Sequence of Three Stories

- Exodus 3-4 (merged JE version)
 - Moses meets God and receives an order to go to Pharaoh and tell him to let the people go
 - Moses leaves God, goes to Jethro and the people and demonstrates signs of having God's blessing
 - Aaron joins Moses
- Exodus 5 (merged JE version)
 - Moses and Aaron meet Pharaoh, but fail to free the people
 - Moses and Aaron return to God
- Exodus 6:2-11 (P)
 - P has God reveal his name (like E)
 - P's story of God commanding them to go to Pharaoh!
 - But they have already met Pharaoh!

Interleaving of Three Stories

- P's story of God commanding them to go to Pharaoh is in Exodus 6:2-11
 - It comes *after* they have already met Pharaoh!
 - P's story of Moses's *first* encounter with God (his “burning bush” story but with no bush) was inserted by the Redactor into JE's story of Moses's *second* encounter with God
 - Notice how God “repeats” what He said before about hearing the cry of the people and wanting to rescue them!
 - But it is not a repeat – it is P's version of the story inserted in a later place!

E's Signs Relate to Later Stories

- Two of the signs God gives Moses, according to E, are
 - His hand can become leprous and then be restored
 - His staff becomes a snake, then a staff again
- Later, two consecutive E stories (when the intervening J and P texts are removed to reproduce E as it was originally) are:
 - Miriam becomes leprous as snow when she and Aaron are critical of Moses (Numbers 12)
 - Being leprous was considered evil, suffering God's disapproval
 - God releases fiery snakes upon the people, killing many of them, and Moses makes a bronze snake on a pole that saves them when they gaze upon it (Numbers 21:5-9)

Exodus 6:1-11 (P)

1 But the Lord said to Moses, “Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh; for with a strong hand he will send them out, yea, with a strong hand he will drive them out of his land.”

2 And God said to Moses, “I am the Lord. **3** I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by my name the Lord I did not make myself known to them. **4** I also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they dwelt as sojourners. **5** Moreover I have heard the groaning of the people of Israel whom the Egyptians hold in bondage and I have remembered my covenant. **6** Say therefore to the people of Israel, ‘I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment, **7** and I will take you for my people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. **8** And I will bring you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; I will give it to you for a possession. I am the Lord.’” **9** Moses spoke thus to the people of Israel; but they did not listen to Moses, because of their broken spirit and their cruel bondage. And the Lord said to Moses, **11** “Go in, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the people of Israel go out of his land.”