

A Case Study of the Call of Moses

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METHOD IN THIS CASE STUDY

A method of Bible study at Asbury Theological Seminary is the inductive or discovery method. This method has been used primarily to lead students into the structure and content of the Scripture as translated into the English language. It is equally useful for studying the Scriptures written in Hebrew or Greek.

A primary emphasis of this method is that a student should read and grapple with the biblical text as objectively as possible. The biblical text is those books which make up the canon of the Old and New Testaments. When trying to understand the text, meanings of words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs and literary units should not be assigned to them, but discovered in them.

The biblical text should be read as whole units, whole books, and groups of books as a whole. Their inner composition may be grasped by outlines of their contents, or by visualizing overall structure through the construction of charts or diagrams.

About fourteen years ago, I was on a committee assigned the task of forging a new curricular module called Supervised Ministry. There was much interest at the time in an educational tool called the case study which had been used effectively in several disciplines, especially business, personnel and counseling fields. The committee hoped it could be adapted for this new program.

Several guidelines served to adapt the case study for evaluating ministerial activity. The case study format adopted must help the student (a) deal with actual, recent incidents in the ministerial assignments of the student, (b) describe briefly and accurately what took place, (c) develop skills to observe and analyze personal, intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships on both the behavioral and spiritual levels, (d) isolate and state the key issue embedded in this event of ministry, (e) research the several bodies of knowledge and information in disciplines related to ministry relevant to this event, (f) integrate ministerial practice with

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theory and theology, (g) make judgments as to the validity of insights of other disciplines, especially in the light of biblical and theological issues, (h) assist the student in seeing personal strengths and weaknesses as a minister of the gospel, and finally, (i) confront the need to make necessary, though perhaps painful, decisions which would lead to positive change and improvement.

A case study format was developed and placed in the seminary curriculum in 1975 and has proved to be valuable as an effective means of preparing the student for ministry. Throughout the construction of this format, the inductive procedure used in the division of biblical studies (described above) was drawn upon heavily for ideas and skills.

This case study format is composed of several levels of reflection called Reflection I, Reflection II and Reflection III. Each level has several components.

The Reflection I level takes its clue from the definition "to bend back"; hence, information about the ministerial event under discussion is represented somewhat like a story. The first component, Focus, is a statement of the who, where and when information. It also includes a carefully crafted statement or question which brings to the fore the perceived issue embedded in the ministerial act. The second component, Background, is the placement of that act in the stream of life, with pertinent data about each participant, a resume of events that preceded the event and a timeline which connects all the episodes, and a brief description of significant cultural factors. The third component, Description, is a careful and accurate reconstruction of what took place in the event being discussed, sort of an instant replay. The description may either be a narrative, a verbatim of what was said, or a combination of the two. Actual words exchanged, emotions expressed and body signals are noted.

Reflection II is governed by the definition "to consider subject matter, ideas or purposes." This level is composed of Analysis and Integration-Interaction. This section challenges the student to engage in careful thinking.

Analysis is the process of identifying the several elements of the case and carefully scrutinizing each one in terms of personal, intrapersonal and interpersonal dynamics. Behavioral, psychological and spiritual factors are probed and examined. The basic interests are to find out what was going on in this event, why it happened and how it happened.

The information provided in Reflection II is divided into small blocks of observational data and questions are asked regarding the meanings of key words, phrases and body signals. The next questions start with "Why" and "How." Motivations and implications are probed and speculation seeks to determine what was going on beneath the surface.

The second component, Integration-Interaction, is the research section. After listing several significant issues embodied in the ministerial event, the student chooses the most important one and makes it the focus of the

research. Various theories in other academic disciplines which may bear upon this ministerial act and its focal issue are examined. These disciplines may be biblical, theological, psychological, sociological, behavioral, historical, ethical, etc. The student seeks to build a bridge from his practical ministerial activity to broader knowledge and theory. This reflection interacts with the concepts and proposed solutions (theories) that relate to the case. The goal is to gain some objectivity; and perhaps, a new perspective from which insight could result.

The third level, Reflection III, accentuates the definition "an image given back," and has three components: Judgments, Evaluations and Decisions. The mental activity of this level flows out of the other two levels of reflection, but here the student is a critic and decision maker.

The content of the Judgment component is made up of conclusions about the validity of the theories and insights of the several disciplines explored. From the vantage point of study and of matching theory with practice, choices are made in regard to which theory or parts of theories are valid. Value statements are accepted and fashioned into an improved understanding of ministerial action.

In the Evaluation component, the student engages in self-examination and lays out what are perceived as the strengths and weaknesses of his or her performance as a minister of Jesus Christ in the event discussed in the case.

The Decision component is often a difficult section to write. The student must declare in written statements what changes in attitudes, manner of approach, ways of relating to people, method of presenting the Gospel, will be made. The student must be honest at this point; the statements must be honest, forthright and firm in commitment.

For over a decade I have participated as a faculty leader in reflection seminars in the Supervised Ministry program. I began to wonder whether a case study format heavily influenced by a Bible study method might be brought full circle and adapted for an expositional method of understanding certain portions of the Scriptures. Since my teaching field has centered in the Old Testament, with special interest in the Hebrew prophets, I began to explore this possibility during several Sabbaticals. I determined that in the Old Testament there were at least fifty incidents, involving various Hebrew prophets, that would be suitable for case studies. I decided to select four "call" experiences, those of Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and develop six case studies based on them. My treatment of Moses's call experience is presented here.

In applying the case study format to the above mentioned prophetic experiences, I had to make some adjustments. My presentation shows my adaptation of the case study method. Obviously, the experiences of the prophets were not mine, hence, the study could not be a "slice" of my experience. I must approach the incidents from the perspective of a critic who was not a participant. I was not personally acquainted with

the time and culture of the prophets. Furthermore, the accounts of the prophetic experiences are very old and are not the original documents.

No adaptations are made in the Focus paragraph, but the information in the Background component often is limited by the scant data about the participants in the biblical text. The Description is basically the biblical text, with preference given to passages largely made up of conversation. Some narrative summary is also provided.

In Reflection II, the Analysis begins with blocks of observational data, a group of questions and some speculation about the literary structure of the selected passages and their context. This probing is not exhaustive. Those with literary interests can pursue this “digging” more extensively. The same limitation and exhortation applies to the remainder of the Analysis as well. Hopefully, enough has been said to alert the reader to the value of this procedure.

In the Integration-Interaction component, a basic issue has been selected for limited research. This issue is also stated in the Focus component. I searched for information that relates to the basic issue as stated, and a limited number of scholars, who have published their research in areas related to the basic issue, are named and their theories summarized. My own research is in this section.

For the student writing a case study in Supervised Ministry, the content of the components in Reflection III is intensely personal. In this adaptation of the case study format, this personal element still holds, for I, the critiquer, must wrestle with the impact of the analysis and research on my thinking. I must make value judgments about the insights provided by various theories and decide how previous views must be changed and unification of new concepts forged. The Evaluation component tends to be more objective for the prophet involved in the study that is under scrutiny. For the ministerial student this component is very personal. The same is largely true of the Decision component. One may perceive what decisions each participant in the call experience made, particularly the prophet. But, if application, the involvement of later generations, and especially the present-day reader, is to be taken seriously, something more must be said. A brief paragraph is included in the decision component to provide that contemporary thrust.

Some questions you might ask, are: Does this adapted case study format open new doors to a more complete understanding of the prophet's call? Does it add a helpful vantage point so that a somewhat different perspective can be gained? How may the procedure be modified so that it is more effective?

THE CASE STUDY: A MESSENGER COMMISSIONED

Scripture: Context: Exodus 2:1-15:21

Printed: Exodus 4:10-17; 6:28-7:7

Focus: At a burning bush on Mount Horeb, the Lord met Moses and commanded him to return to Egypt in order to bring the children of Israel out of Egypt. This event happened long ago. The issue: *How did the messenger system provide a framework for the prophetic task?*

Background: Lord is the name for the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and their descendents, the Israelites. The Lord had spoken to three men by various means on various occasions. The Lord is present in the Old Testament as the only true God and distinctly different from any of the deities of the polytheistic peoples of the ancient Near East.

The Lord God of the Hebrews presented himself as radically different from the alleged nature gods and goddesses of Egypt. Unlike the nature deities, the Lord was not visible to the human eye, nor located in a thing, or a place, nor was he fettered by time. He was and is distinctly other than nature; he is its Creator. He uses nature, any aspect of it, to display his power and to help him carry out his purposes. These characteristics of the Lord God of Israel are concisely summed up in the Ten Commandments (Exod 20:1-17; Deut 5:1-21) and in Deut 6:4.

The Lord was especially concerned about the welfare of the children of Israel because they were the descendents of Abraham. The Lord had made a covenant with Abraham and had given him definite promises (Gen 12:1-3,7; 13:14-18; 15:13-17; 17:1-22; 22:15-18; 26:2-5,24; 28:13-15; 31:11-13; 35:9-12; 46:2-4).

Jacob and his family had moved to Egypt, due to a famine in the land of Canaan, with the help of his son, Joseph, a powerful man in Egypt. As the years passed, the political situation changed in Egypt. The new rulers were unfriendly toward the Israelites who had become numerous in the land of Goshen, an area in the delta of the Nile River. Out of one of the tribes of Jacob (Levi) came Moses and Aaron. Both were born in Egypt in a time of severe persecution of the Israelites. Moses had been hidden from the Egyptians, but a princess had found him and claimed him for her own. Moses was trained by Egyptian teachers; but, one day he saw an Egyptian beating an Israelite slave and killed the Egyptian. Moses had to flee to the Sinaitic desert to escape punishment. Nothing is known of Aaron's life prior to his meeting Moses after Moses's experience at the burning bush.

The Pharaohs of the New Kingdom of Egypt (1550-1200 B.C.) were powerful persons at that time in the ancient Near East. The exact identity of the Pharaoh in the Exodus event is the subject of sharp debate. The text does not identify him. Whoever he was, he was an awe-inspiring individual. The monuments and buildings built by the Egyptian people still excite wonder and appreciation in those who view them. Their mummified bodies preserved in the Cairo Museum do not look impressive, but the cultural artifacts and extensive inscriptions that remain certainly are outstanding.

At first glance, the Israelites appear unlikely candidates for being a

God-chosen people, who were to serve as a beachhead in a polytheistic world. They were to be the ones through whom faith in one true God was to permeate the world. They were the ones who were to worship that God in spirit and in truth; they were to follow a way of life that embodied the holiness of God.

The Israelites had been slaves to the Egyptians, who treated them brutally. The Lord had promised Abraham and Jacob that their descendants would be brought back to the land of Canaan. It was time for God to fulfill his promise.

The following time line shows the sequence of action in these two passages and their literary context:

2:1-4	Moses born and hidden
2:5-10	Moses found and claimed by Pharaoh's daughter
2:11-15a	Moses kills an Egyptian and flees
2:15b-22	Moses had arrived forty years earlier
3:1-3	Moses sees a bush that does not stop burning
3:4-4:17	The Lord speaks to Moses
4:18-20	Moses goes to Egypt
4:21-23	The Lord speaks to Moses again
4:24-26	Moses circumcises his son
4:27-28	Aaron meets Moses
4:29-31	Both speak to the Israelites
5:1-9	Both speak to Pharaoh
5:10-21	The slavery worsens
5:22-6:13	Moses and the Lord talk together
6:14-27	Moses's family tree
6:28-7:7	Moses's commission renewed
7:8-12:30	The Ten Plagues described
12:31-15:20	The Exodus Event

Description: The Lord used a burning bush to attract Moses's attention. When Moses turned aside to inspect the bush, the Lord identified himself. The Lord told Moses of his decision to deliver Israel from their slavery in Egypt. The Lord commissioned Moses to be his messenger to the Pharaoh of Egypt. Moses, feeling inadequate for the task, complained that he was not qualified. Moses and the Lord talked about his problem on two different occasions.

The biblical record of these two conversations, as found in the New King James Version, follows:

Then Moses said to the Lord,

Moses 1 "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" (4:10). So the Lord said to him,

Lord 1 “Who has made man’s mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the Lord? “Now therefore, go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say.” But he said,

Moses 2 “O my Lord, please send by the hand of whom-ever else You may send.” So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses, and He said:

Lord 2 “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. 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. 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. And you shall take this rod in your hand, with which you shall do the signs” (4:10-17).

Read the section above describing the sequence of action for events spanning the end of this conversation and the beginning of the encounter printed below.

And it came to pass, on the day when the Lord spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt, that the Lord spoke to Moses, saying,

Lord 3 “I am the Lord. Speak to Pharaoh king of Egypt all that I say unto you.” But Moses said before the Lord,

Moses 3 “Behold, I am of uncircumcised lips, and how shall Pharaoh heed me?” So the Lord said to Moses:

Lord 4 “See, I have made you as God to Pharaoh, and Aaron your brother shall be your prophet. You shall speak all that I command you. And Aaron your brother shall speak to Pharaoh, that he must send the children of Israel out of his land. And I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt. But Pharaoh would not heed you, so that I may lay My hand on Egypt and bring My armies and My people, the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great judgments. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the children of Israel from among them.” Then Moses and Aaron did so; just as the Lord commanded them, so they did. And Moses was eighty years old and Aaron eighty-three years old when they spoke to Pharaoh (6:28-7:7).

The Lord continued to explain how he would deal with the negative response of the Pharaoh; namely, by hardening his heart. He would deliver Israel from Egypt and cause Pharaoh to realize that He was truly God. After receiving this message from the Lord, both Moses and Aaron obeyed the divine command.

Analysis: The purpose of this component is to: (a) analyze the structure of the passage, (b) probe the significance of its literary placement, (c) evaluate the meanings of words and phrases that occur, and (d) delineate the dynamics of the dialogue. The first printed passage (4:10-17) is the final paragraph of a larger literary unit which begins at 3:1. The second passage (6:28-7:2) is the first part of a unit that extends to 7:7 and is much like the first passage in that the Lord gives Moses a task but Moses complains that he is not competent because he cannot speak well. The Lord then describes how Aaron would function as the speaker for God and Moses.

Why are two accounts of the Lord's call of Moses to this task present in book of Exodus? Did they come from two different Israelite communities centuries after the time of Moses; or is the second account in the text to tell us that Moses had severe inner struggles as he met opposition in Egypt? Both passages are narratives made up of conversations between the Lord and Moses. In the first, Moses speaks twice (10,13), offering reasons why he cannot be the Lord's spokesman. The Lord responds each time (11-12; 14-17), addressing Moses's reasons. In the second, the Lord speaks first (6:29) and then responds (7:1-7). Moses gives his reason for not being fit for the task in 6:30. Why are the narratives composed mostly of verbal interaction between the Lord and Moses? Does the presence of exchanges of words indicate that Moses actually could hear words being spoken by the Lord? Why preserve conversations that show Moses, the hero of the Exodus, as stubborn and intractable? Perhaps the presence of these conversations in the narrative implies that revelation is more than a thinking process, that it also includes the dynamics of an interpersonal relationship.

The first incident is said to have taken place in the presence of the burning bush on Mt. Sinai [Horeb] (3:1). The second took place in Egypt (6:28). A short but unspecified span of time separated the two incidents. What is the meaning of this change of place and this span of time? Possibly the writer consciously provided this data in order to make it clear that these incidents took place within the flow of a series of events. If so, how may this fact imply that the writer believed these conversations took place at two different times?

Let us now look at the placement of these passages in relation to the units of which they are a part and the placement of the units in relation to surrounding literary units.

As stated above, the first printed text is the last part of a story which

begins at 3:1. This story tells us that the Lord caught Moses's attention and then accosted him by means of a bush that burned but was not consumed. What follows is an interaction between the Lord and Moses cast in the literary form of a lively conversation. And, direct speech in the Old Testament often carries the essential content of a passage. The Lord spoke to Moses six times (3:4a, 5-10, 12, 14-22; 4:2a, 3-9) and Moses responded to the Lord five times (3:4b, 11, 13; 4:1, 2b) up to the printed portion. Within the printed portion, the Lord spoke four times and Moses spoke three times. Most of the statements of the Lord are much longer than Moses's responses. In the second printed portion, the Lord spoke twice and Moses only once. What does this distribution of words imply? Perhaps this phenomenon indicates the dominance of the Lord in the encounter, and the sense of inferiority Moses felt.

Chapter three is preceded by a series of literary units which prepare the reader for the location of the big event but not for the nature of the event itself. The book of Exodus begins with a short genealogy that ties it to the conclusion of the book of Genesis. The same people are involved, they are all descendents of Jacob. They had been in Egypt long enough to have become a populous community. Joseph is mentioned because he was instrumental in the move from Canaan to Egypt (1:1-7). The other units are narratives. The second unit (1:8-22) reveals that a new king in Egypt feared this foreign community and enslaved them as laborers. The king's concern became so great that he ordered the women who delivered Hebrew babies to kill all males. The third unit (2:1-10) tells the story of Moses's birth and remarkable deliverance from death, because a princess found him in a basket floating on the Nile River and reared him in her home. The fourth unit (2:11-25) is an account of Moses's crime, flight to Midian and marriage of a daughter of Jethro. Thus the human deliverer is introduced to the reader.

Why are these units so brief? Surely, the time span covered by these narratives contained many important events. Is it possible the writer's purpose was not to provide a full history; but rather, to present limited indicators of what the situation was prior to Moses's call? Conceivably this could imply that the author had a message about God's concern for Israel he wanted to convey to the reader. Between the two printed passages are several literary units that tell us of Moses's return to Egypt (4:18-31), involving a request for permission from Jethro, the circumcision of Moses's son, the reunion with Aaron, and the wholehearted reception of Moses by the Israelites. Why are only these incidents, and not others, recorded about this journey? What was the principle of selection which omitted description of the landscape, and the customs of the people observed along the way? How may each incident in the narrative have a theological purpose for being there?

The next narrative records the first audience of Moses and Aaron with Pharaoh and his angry refusal to grant their request (5:1-21). The chapter

ends with Moses agonizing before the Lord in prayer, to which the Lord answered with a command to deliver a message to the Israelites. This time they rebuff Moses (5:22–6:9). The Lord next told Moses to deliver a message to Pharaoh, though Moses protested he lacked the ability to do so (6:10–13).

Why is the throne name of Pharaoh omitted from the text? Surely, the presence of that name would greatly aid later scholars to date this event. Why is the Egyptian belief that Pharaoh was the sun god in flesh not mentioned? How might the author intentionally omit this kind of data in order to emphasize the humanity of this ruler? Perhaps this implies that the awesome power of Pharaoh was being exposed as a “paper tiger,” in order for the power of the true God to be understood more easily.

Another genealogy (6:14–27; cf. 1:1–7) of Jacob’s sons— Reuben, Simeon and especially Levi—has an emphasis on the family tree of Moses and Aaron. Why does this genealogy appear here? Why not somewhere else in the sequence of narratives, perhaps between 5:21 and 22? Probably this genealogy serves with the initial genealogy as literary brackets of a block of narratives that are centered on the beginnings of Moses’s prophetic task.

The second printed passage serves as an introduction to the plague/Exodus sequence and is tied to the first section by the complaint of Moses that he had “uncircumcised lips” (6:12, 30). This second passage also immediately precedes the first of a series of miracles that culminate in the successful crossing of the sea. The two printed passages present key events in the Lord’s dealings with a reluctant Moses. The entire context, (1:1–15:21) is prose except for the Song of Moses (15:1–18) and the Song of Miriam (15:21).

Why does this series of narratives concentrate on the Ten Plagues and the Crossing of the Sea and ignore a description of the polytheistic religion of Egypt? This may imply that the main concern of the author was to exalt the wonder-working power of the one true God. What was the essential difference between the Lord’s miracles done through the agency of Moses and Aaron, and the magical actions of the Egyptians? How was the authenticity of the display of divine power established by the results? Perhaps the alleged power of the magicians was thus exposed as a lie? There are several words and phrases in the two passages which are the core of this study and these need to be explained.

Moses’s description of his speech impediment contains an interesting twist of meaning on an important Hebrew word (*kābôd*) usually translated as “glory.” The literal meaning of the word is “heavy,” but it is used in this literal sense only in 1 Sam 4:18 and 2 Sam 14:26. Often the word is used of parts of the body that are handicapped, or parts of the body that connote spiritual impairment. For examples of this use of the term, read Gen 48:10, Isa 6:10, 59:1, Zech 7:11. In sequence, the NJKV translates the word as “dim,” “heavy,” “heavy,” (in the sense of deafness) and

“stopped.” The word may serve as a figure of speech for severity of life experiences such as labor, slavery, warfare, etc. (Read Exod 5:9, Judg 20:34, 1 Kgs 12:10. Read also an article in *The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. I, pp. 426-428 for an excellent discussion of the word.)

In Moses’s case, was the handicap lisping, stammering, or difficulty speaking readily and at a normal speed? Since Moses had been away from Egypt so long, was he worried about his ability to speak Egyptian fluently, especially the kind used in a royal court? If so, probably Moses had legitimate grounds for bringing up the problem.

A striking idiom appears in verse 15: Moses was to “put words in his [Aaron’s] mouth.” What does this phrase mean? Since words are not physical objects, may this phrase refer to some sort of transfer of a message? Could this phrase be influenced by the then-current practice of the Pharaoh to designate one of his important officials as his mouth, with the task of relaying to others Pharaoh’s wishes? If so, would not the idiom indicate a very high status of Moses before the Lord—and, of Aaron before Moses—in communicating to others? Does not the word “spokesman” in verse 16, support this probability?

In the second passage, Moses says he has “uncircumcized lips” (see also 6:12). Elsewhere in the Old Testament, the adjective “uncircumcised” designates ears that do not listen and understand (Jer 6:10). When the word modifies heart, the inner being, it indicates defilement and disobedience (Isa 52:1, Jer 9:26). Other passages contain commands and exhortations that such a heart be circumcised, so undesirable traits are removed and desirable traits are added (Deut 10:16; 30:6; Jer 4:4; Rom 2:28-29; 15:8; Phil 3:3; Col 2:11). What does this phrase mean here? Can it be something like his tongue being slow (heavy, 4:10)? Could it be that since circumcision was a religious ritual that served as a symbol of obedient servanthood to the Lord, that uncircumcision represented lips that refused to obey Moses’s wishes? Very likely, this fact made Moses believe his lips were unfit for the Lord’s service. Why may Moses have hinted that he was defiled because of his speech handicap and that the Lord ought to correct it by an act comparable to the rite of circumcision?

The Lord told Moses he was to have the status of “God to Pharaoh.” It is known from Egyptian literature that all Egyptians regarded the Pharaoh as a deity, a descendent of the sun which was the most important god above many gods and goddesses. The Old Testament nowhere speaks of Pharaoh as a god. What does this placement of Moses as God over Pharaoh mean? How might God thus negate the claim that Pharaoh was a powerful god by elevating Moses above him? How could this kind of statement also establish in Moses’s mind that the Lord is the supreme God and that Moses had a high position before the Lord, higher than even the powerful position of Pharaoh in Egypt? In what way may this statement grant Moses great authority in transmitting the divine message to Aaron?

To extend the point further, how might this statement elevate even Aaron above the Pharaoh? Aaron was positioned as a “prophet” who received the divine message from Moses and delivered it orally to Pharaoh. Only Abraham is referred to as a prophet prior to Aaron in the Scriptures (Gen 20:7) and his task was to pray for Abimelech. Moses is called a prophet in Deut 34:10, and the word is used elsewhere in the Old Testament over 160 times of other people. What does it mean that Aaron was to serve Moses as his prophet? How may the word serve as a synonym of “spokesman” in 4:16? In what way may the reference to Aaron speaking to Pharaoh (7:2) serve as a support for that connection?

The Lord told Moses that he would “harden” Pharaoh’s heart. This word does not seem to mean that the physical organ had changed from being a soft muscle to some kind of hard substance. It is more likely that this verb represents a proud, stubborn attitude toward Moses’s request. Thus “heart” here seems to denote, not the physical organ, but a figure of speech for the inner being. Thus this hardening seems to represent a judgment on Pharaoh’s refusal to permit the Israelites to leave Egypt. The Lord promised Moses that he would do many “signs” and “wonders” to demonstrate his mighty power (7:3) to Pharaoh and the Egyptians. What were these signs and wonders? How might the ten plagues and the protection of the Israelites during the plagues, and the dividing of the waters qualify as signs and wonders? Since the Lord does not have a physical hand like humans, how might the word “hand” (7:4,5) function as a figure of speech for the acts of God in performing these signs and wonders?

The relationships apparent in these two passages center about: the Lord, Moses, Aaron, the Israelites and Pharaoh. What aspects of these relationships point to a network of communication which makes it possible for messages to flow from the source to addressee and back to the source? What implications can be drawn from the fact that these texts present the Lord as the invisible but authoritative source of the messages? Why did the Lord initiate the situation? What motivation did the Lord have in making contact with Pharaoh? Why did the Lord select Moses as his personal representative, and work with him until he obeyed? How was mercy expressed when he selected Aaron as Moses’s substitute voice? Why did the Israelites find it difficult to keep on believing, after Pharaoh intensified their suffering?

In regard to the humanness of Moses displayed in prayers of complaint, what implications can you draw about the Lord’s wisdom in selecting Moses for this task? What conclusions are justified in regard to Pharaoh sensing a challenge to his pride and power, when he heard the request? On what basis could Pharaoh have surmised that Moses acted like a greater god than he; and thus, should be taught a lesson of humility? How was Pharaoh, in fact, humiliated, when Moses approached him as a representative of a more powerful God, and treated him as not more than a human

king? How might Pharaoh feel justified for reacting harshly in putting down a potential rebellion?

This analysis is a selection from a number of blocks of observational data, questions and speculation that can be directed toward the passages quoted and their context. You may want to add questions that come to your mind.

Integration and Interaction: Among many issues that one may discover in this passage, some are listed below, with one selected for examination.

1. Why did the Lord not immediately punish Moses for his resistance to the Lord's commands?
2. When the Lord said he makes some people mute, deaf or blind, did he mean he commits unjust acts against innocent people?
3. Why should a God of love become angry at anyone?
4. Did the Lord reveal a mean streak in his character when he stated he would harden Pharaoh's heart?
5. How did the messenger system provide a framework for the prophetic task?

The last issue has been selected because the Lord wanted Moses to deliver messages for Him and He indicated that Aaron could perform the same messenger function for Moses. This suggests that the characteristics of the messenger mode of communication between humans may be much like the way the Lord chose to reveal his will to his people.

The basic words and idioms of the call of Moses are that of transferring a message from one person to another by using a messenger. This was an age-old mode of communication among many of the peoples of the world and at every level of society.

Several stories that appear earlier in the book of Genesis suggest a messenger mode of transferring a message which involved a spiritual being. When Hagar and her son Ishmael were ejected from Abraham's encampment, an angel of the Lord appeared to her and gave a promise of a fruitful future (Gen 16:7-12). Verse 13 suggests Hagar understood the angel to be the Lord himself, or at least the representative of the Lord. Note that at the end of verse 11, the Lord is referred to as another person. Note another appearance of an angel to Hagar (Gen 21:17-20). There are other instances where an angel of the Lord conveyed a message to people: Gen 22:11-12; 31:11-13; Num 22:31-35; Judges 2:1-4; 6:11-23; 13:3-22; 1 Kgs 19:5-8; 2 Kgs 1:3; 1 Chron 21:18; Zech 1:9-19; 2:3-5; 3:6-10; 4:1-7; 5:5-11; 6:4-8. In the instances involving Elijah and Zechariah, the messenger statement, "Thus says..." indicates the message was to be relayed to an audience.

An example of a person using a messenger is found in Genesis 32:3-6. Jacob had returned to the highlands east of the Jordan River with a large family, many servants and a multitude of sheep and cattle. Many years before he had wronged his brother Esau and fled north to his Uncle

Laban's to escape Esau's wrath. He knew that Esau lived to the south in Edom, but did not want to meet him face to face. He selected messengers from among his servants and sent them with a verbal message to deliver to Esau. An important phrase in the message is, "Thus your servant Jacob says," for it denotes the source and authenticity of the message the messengers delivered to Esau. The messengers reported back that Esau was on his way with 400 men to meet Jacob.

The second recorded instance is in Gen 45:9-13,25-28. Joseph had just revealed his true identity to his astounded brothers when he ordered them to deliver a message to their aged father, Jacob. He was now the chief officer of the Pharaoh, and wanted his father and all the family to come live in the land of Goshen. Joseph used a phrase similar to Jacob's, "Thus says your son, Joseph." However, there was a problem in delivering the message. The brothers, years before, had told Jacob his son Joseph had been killed by wild beasts; now they had to tell Jacob his son was alive and a very powerful leader in Egypt. It was difficult for Jacob to believe the message, but the presents Joseph had sent and a word from the Lord (46:1-4) persuaded him the message was authentic. Later events in Egypt verified the truth of the message.

Compare these incidents with Num 20:14-20; 21:21-23; 22:5-19; 1 Kgs 22:26-27; 2 Kgs 18:17-35; 19:2-4; 9-14a. Note also that this same messenger method and messenger statement, with God as the sender, begins with Moses (Exod 3:14) and is used many times in their interpersonal relationships as recorded in Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers. They also appear in the Lord's messages to his prophets throughout the Old Testament.

An incident in the life of Abraham is also of interest. Abraham sent his representative, his oldest servant, to Laban to obtain a wife for Isaac (Genesis 24). This servant, when he met Laban, simply identified himself as Abraham's servant and did not use the phrase, "Thus says Abraham." The servant did not have a specific message to deliver, but had freedom to negotiate within guidelines. The story does, however, illustrate an ancient practice of using others to convey information and desires to selected people. Compare with Gen 37:13-17; 42:16; 46:28; Josh 2:1-23; 7:22-23; Judg 6:35; 7:24; 9:31-33; 11:12-28, and many others.

In recent years, an abundance of evidence for the practice—especially among government leaders—of choosing messengers to relay messages to others has come to light. Predominantly, the evidence has been letters, decrees and commercial invoices written in several kinds of scripts on clay or stone. These materials have survived the ravages of time, but evidence from Egypt and the eastern coastal regions of the Mediterranean Sea indicate the widespread use of a paper-like papyrus which was easily destroyed by moisture. Rulers sent messages on clay or papyrus with the messengers. These were written duplicates of messages delivered orally. A normal feature of these messages was some variation of the statement,

“Thus says (personal name).” This statement designated the sender, whose authority extended to the person who delivered the message.

Such written messages have been found on clay tablets by the thousands at such places as Ebla (2400-2250 B.C.) in the northwestern corner of modern Syria; at Nippur (1800-1700 B.C.) in the southern part of the Mesopotamian Valley; at Mari (1800-1700 B.C.) on the south bank of the Euphrates River; at Nuzi (1500-1200 B.C.) in the highlands east of the Tigris River; at Hattusas (1500-1200 B.C.) in the central part of modern Turkey; at Ugarit (1500-1200 B.C.) near the site of Ebla; and, at Nineveh (670-650 B.C.) by the Tigris River. Many more such messages, mostly on clay but some on papyrus, have been unearthed by archaeologists or found scattered on the ground. These documents span many centuries of time.

Pertinent to this study is a cache of about thirty clay tablets found at Mari. Various individuals from various places near Mari reported to representatives of the king that in a trance or a dream they received messages from idols of the storm god Baal or the mother goddess Ishtar. The representative wrote the message on a clay tablet which was delivered to the king. Typical of these messages is the statement. “Thus says Baal (or Ishtar) to...” These are the only records of prophetic messages found before 1000 B.C. apart from the Old Testament, and associated with a nature deity of a polytheistic religion.

In governments of the ancient Near East, a high official of the governing body was the herald who received messages from the ruler or council and delivered them to whomever designated. The herald could in turn delegate his task to subordinates. The messages were delivered orally, combined with a written message, or consisted simply of the delivery of an inscribed piece of clay or sheet of papyrus. This was common during the time span of the Old and New Testaments.

The establishment of a messenger system between God, his prophets and those addressed was thus not an introduction of a new mode of communication, but an adaptation of a well-known and widely employed method. The mode was an “earthen vessel” by which the “treasure” of divine reality and power was made known to human beings. It was a communication system and vocabulary they understood. The research of several scholars is summarized below to indicate how significant this mode was for the biblical prophets.

Since the biblical record places Moses in a close relationship with the Egyptian culture, one may wonder whether the herald was important in the government of that land. One reference (Gen 41:43) obliquely refers to messengers who proclaimed to the people the importance of Joseph. But A. S. Yahuda provides more precise information from Egyptian inscriptions. Drawing from inscriptions of the New Kingdom, contemporary with Moses, Yahuda shows that the word “mouth” is a literal equivalent to the title of a high official of Pharaoh’s court. Usually this person was heir to the throne and ranked immediately after the king. The task of the

Egyptian “mouth,” or “chief mouth,” was to see that the messages of Pharaoh, who the Egyptians regarded as the sun-god in human flesh, were properly delivered to the intended audience. (See bibliography.)

J. S. Holladay notes that the Assyrian Empire of the eighth and seventh centuries B.C. had a high official, with heraldic duties of receiving messages from the emperor and seeing that they were delivered. He saw this practice as a communication model for Old Testament prophecy. (See bibliography.)

Ann M. Vater provides an exhaustive description of eight patterns of stories in two hundred and thirty texts in the Old Testament. Overall these follow the messenger-communication model common in ancient times. (See bibliography.)

T. Y. Mullins shows that comparable narrative forms are found in the New Testament, especially in Luke and Acts. (See bibliography.)

B. S. Childs observes that limiting one’s interest just to the system as a model for the call of Moses and all future prophets can be artificial. He stresses the need to see the theological dimensions of this event in the life of Moses. Primarily this involves the dominance in this call of the reality of the one true God intervening in the affairs of an enslaved Israel and their oppressor, mighty Egypt, to redeem his people and bring them to the land of promise. Also to be considered must be the reality of Moses as a real human being, gripped with doubts and fears. (See bibliography.)

The observations made by these scholars are helpful, but there are several factors which seem to be overlooked. I would like to offer additional information that has arisen from my personal study of these narratives depicting Moses’s call. (See bibliography.)

In terms of narrative structure, the account in 3:1-4:18, and other discussions of the call (5:22-6:13; 6:28-7:7) are made up of similar components. In the first instance the components are (a) the theophany in the burning bush (3:1-5), (b) God’s identity and purpose (3:6-9), (c) commissioning (3:10), (d) objections and assurances (3:11-4:12), (e) request (4:13), (f) help provided (4:15-17), and (g) obedience (4:18). The second section (5:22-6:13) has these components: (a) objection (5:22-23), (b) God’s identity (6:1-5), (c) commissioning (6:6-8), (d) obedience (6:9), (e) commissioning (6:10-11), (f) objection (6:12), and (g) command (6:13). The third section (6:28-7:7) has the following components: (a) God’s identity (6:28-29a), (b) commissioning (6:29a), (c) objection (6:30), (d) help provided (7:1-2), (e) assurance (7:3-5), and (f) obedience (7:6-7).

Not all components appear in these three sections, nor are they completely in the same sequence. They do, however, provide a vivid series of encounters between the Lord and Moses which offer some basic insights about what the Lord wanted to accomplish, and the means he had decided to use to attain his goals.

The messenger system has several phases in its mechanism for communicating information. These phases are, (a) the decision of the sender to

select a messenger, (b) the awareness of the messenger of being selected, (c) the sender giving a message, and the messenger receiving it, (d) the messenger carrying the message, (e) the messenger delivering the message, (f) the audience, hearing or seeing the message, (g) the auditor, or audience, responding to the message, (h) the messenger hearing or seeing the response, (i) the messenger returning and delivering the response to the sender, and (j) the sender reacting to the response. From this point, the sequence may be repeated many times.

Taking the phases in the order listed, one may illustrate each by the following passages:

- (a) Exod 2:24-25, "So God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God acknowledged them."

Exod 3:7-9, "And the Lord said: 'I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows. So I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites. Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel has come to Me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them.'"

- b) Exod 3:10-11, "'Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.' But Moses said to God, 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?'"

- (c) Exod 3:15-17, "Moreover God said to Moses, 'Thus you shall say to the children of Israel:....'"

Exod 6:6-8, "Therefore say to the children of Israel:...."

Exod 6:13, "Then the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, and gave them a command for the children of Israel and for Pharaoh king of Egypt, to bring the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt."

The chief indicators of this phase of the messenger system are terms such as "send," "go," "speak," and the statements "Thus you shall say to...", or "Thus says the Lord."

- (d) Exod 4:29, "Then Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the children of Israel."

Exod 7:10a, "So Moses and Aaron went in to Pharaoh,

and they did so, just as the Lord commanded.”

- (e) Exod 4:30, “And Aaron spoke all the words which the Lord had spoken to Moses. Then he did the signs in the sight of the people.”

Exod 5:1, “Afterward Moses and Aaron went in and told Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the Lord God of Israel: “Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness.”’”

Exod 6:9a, “So Moses spoke thus to the children of Israel;...”

Exod 7:10b, “And Aaron cast down his rod before Pharaoh and before his servants, and it became a serpent.”

- (f) Exod 4:30, [implies hearing plus seeing] “...in the sight of the people.”

Exod 5:1, [hearing evident in this verse].

Exod 7:9-10, [hearing and seeing evident in these verses].

- (g) Exod 4:31, “So the people believed:...then they bowed their heads and worshiped.

Exod 5:4, “Then the king of Egypt said to them, ‘Moses and Aaron, why do you take the people from their work? Get back to your labor.’” [See also 5:5-19.]

Exod 5:20-21, “Then, as they came out from Pharaoh, they met Moses and Aaron who stood there to meet them. And they said to them, ‘Let the Lord look on you and judge, because you have made us abhorrent in the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to kill us.’”

Exod 6:9, “...but they would not heed Moses, because of anguish of spirit and cruel bondage.”

Exod 7:11-13, “But Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers; so the magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments. For every man threw down his rod, and they became serpents. But Aaron’s rod swallowed up their rods. And Pharaoh’s heart grew hard, and he did not heed them, as the Lord had said.”

- (h) [The passages given above all assume that Moses and Aaron heard and/or saw the responses of their several audiences.]

- (i) Exod 5:22-23, “So Moses returned to the Lord and said, ‘Lord, why have You brought trouble on this people? Why is it You have sent me? For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has done evil to this people; neither have You delivered Your people at all.’”

(j) Exod 6:1-8, "Then the Lord said to Moses,..."

These phases are reflected in the composition of many literary units in Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers. Other passages that are similar in emphasis are, Exod 7:14-18, 25-8:4; 9:13-21; 14:1-8; and 25:1-30:10. There are nine such units in Numbers: 5:5-10, 11-31; 6:1-21, 22-27; 15:1-16, 36-40; 18:25-32; 35:1-8, 9-34. All of these have in them mostly short, sometimes long, portions of the message content. They are concerned primarily with phases (a), (b) and (c).

Other narratives cover all phases from (a) through (g). Consider the organization of the following: Exod 9:1-7; 10:1-6; 12:1-42; 19:1-8a; 20:18-24:3; Num 17:1-19; 34:1-15.

Another set concentrates on phases (d) through (g). They are Exod 11:4-10; 32:25-29; 35:1-3, 4-29, 35:30-39:43.

The accounts that center on phases (h) through (j) are set up as prayer situations in which Moses discussed with the Lord problems that arose from negative reactions of the addressees. The first such situation arose from the twin negative reactions of Pharaoh and the Israelites (5:19-6:1). Others are Exod 8:8-15; 10:16-20; 14:9-25; 15:22-27; 17:1-7; 31:18-32:16; 32:30-35; 33:7-23; Num 9:6-23; 11:1-3; 11:4-25; 12:10b-16; 21:4-9.

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Judgments: As they presently stand in the biblical text, the passages selected for this case study have geographical and chronological continuity with the episodes which precede, come between and follow them. These passages are important because the call of Moses is the first such incident recorded in the Scriptures. Remarkably, the experience of Moses at the burning bush served as a model for all future prophetic calls.

The main character, Moses, is placed in this continuity by a series of

short narratives in one brief chapter. These stories recount his birth, growth to manhood, his crime, his flight to the vast deserts east of Egypt, and his new life in the family of Reuel, also known as Jethro.

The several authors mentioned in the Integration and Interaction section—Yahuda, Holladay and Vater—provide important information about various aspects of the messenger system in the ancient Near East. Ann Vater especially deals with the composition of the narratives related to prophets in the Old Testament, and many of her observations are helpful. However, there are some features of Moses's call narratives that seem to be overlooked. These features are briefly described here.

The call account in 3:1-4:18, and the other discussions of the call (5:22-6:13; 6:28-7:7) are made up of similar components. In the first instance, the components are: (a) the theophany in the burning bush (3:1-5), (b) God's identity and purpose (3:6-9), (c) commissioning (3:10), (d) objections and assurances (3:11-4:12), (e) request (4:13), (f) help provided (4:15-17), and (g) obedience (4:18). The second section (5:22-6:13) has these components: (a) objection (5:22-23), (b) God's identity (6:1-5), (c) commissioning (6:6-8), (d) obedience (6:9), (e) commissioning (6:10-11), (f) objection (6:12), and (g) command (6:13).

We have here an example of adaptation of human structures of person-to-person communication, the messenger system, which was well known throughout the ancient Near East and thus familiar to Moses, his people and to the Egyptians.

In Moses's service for the Lord, there was more than a messenger responsibility. A goal of the Lord was to forge a national covenant with the descendents of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob which would fulfill promises made to those patriarchs. The event which accomplished this goal took place at Mt. Sinai after the Exodus from Egypt. A complete coverage of the life and work of Moses must include the significance of this national covenant and the legal, military and religious laws and rites that combined to make the freed slaves into one people under one God. Such coverage will not be attempted in this case study, but it should be noted that the tasks of messenger, covenant mediator, lawgiver and military leader intertwined with common concepts about God, nature, nation and humanity.

B. S. Childs is right in his caution that over-attention on the mechanics of the messenger system and the forms of oral and literary composition can be artificial. There must be a grasp of the theological tenets that infused mode and form.

A basic feature of the two passages before us, in fact in all of the Scriptures, is the dominance of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He had remembered his covenant with them and decided the time had come to redeem their descendents from slavery. The implementation of the divine decision was the sudden impact of his presence by means of the bush that would not burn up. The mode of contact was person-to-person

conversation, a form of communication well known to Moses.

Though a bush was used in catching Moses's attention, the Lord did not identify himself as this natural object or as any natural force. He identified himself as the God of ancestors who had lived elsewhere and at a different time. When pressed for a name, the Lord gave the enigmatic, "I am who I am," which suggests he is the Creator, the one who is dynamic being. With the command that Moses go to Egypt, the Lord gave the promise, "I will certainly be with you" (3:12). He further promised that he would bring the Israelites out of Egypt and lead them into the land of Canaan, the promised land. He was not the shepherd's rod that changed to a snake and back to a rod, nor the leprosy that afflicted Moses's hand and then was healed. These items were not the Lord; rather, they were signs that indicated the Lord was present in an awesome way.

The sovereignty of the Lord was apparent in the mystery of the bush that was not consumed, in the signs and in the commands, promises, anger and provisions evident in the Lord's dealings with Moses. His sovereignty came into the foreground vividly in the series of encounters with the Pharaoh of Egypt.

The narratives associated with the Exodus do not give the slightest hint that the royal court, the religious establishment and the common people believed fervently that Pharaoh was the great sun-god in human flesh. The Pharaohs did not disagree; rather, no effort or expense was spared to keep this belief strong in the hearts and minds of all Egyptians. Pharaoh was not only regarded as a god, he was the State, the absolute ruler of his people. (Although this situation varied during Egypt's history.)

The Egyptians were polytheists, believing in many nature gods of lesser powers than the sun and Pharaoh. This much is acknowledged in the phrase, "gods of Egypt" (Exod 12:12). Magicians at the royal court were also recognized as having a measure of power (Exod 7:11,22; 8:7,18,19; 9:11).

In the Exodus narratives, the God of the enslaved Israelites fearlessly and powerfully challenged Pharaoh (he is depicted as merely a human ruler), the might of the State, and the faith of every Egyptian. Audaciously, he chose an old shepherd, a murderer who had a combined Hebrew and Egyptian heritage, as his human agent. By instructing Moses and his brother Aaron, and displaying his power, "...by trials, by signs, by wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great terrors..." (Deut 4:34), the Lord invaded Egypt, brought Pharaoh to his knees and delivered the Israelites from slavery.

To emphasize Pharaoh's inferiority, the Lord appointed Moses "as God to Pharaoh" (7:1), an ironic twist in that Pharaoh regarded himself as deity. Moses was to have a position of power and authority over this king, and even Aaron was to have a superior position. As Moses's "mouth," Aaron was his brother's deputy spokesman and thus at a level higher than Pharaoh. The Lord was dramatizing his own sovereignty by elevating his

servants to these high levels and thus demoting Pharaoh.

The other participants in the call experience and the events that followed were the Israelite people. The burning bush experience did not happen in order to give Moses a spiritual high or a good feeling. The significance of the experience was that the Lord commissioned Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, to form them into a nation, and to settle them in the land of Canaan.

Moses's first contact with his fellow Israelites would have encouraged him to believe they would respond positively, but the aftermath of the first encounter with Pharaoh was suffering. Their attitudes radically changed toward their would-be leader and Moses fled to the Lord to pour out in prayer his deep disappointment. The fluctuations of the Israelites between exemplary faith, with accompanying obedience, and apostasy (in calf worship) or just nasty complaining, were hallmarks of the Exodus and the wanderings in the wilderness. They knew the exhilaration of salvation from bondage and flood and could sing with enthusiasm the Song of Moses, part of which reads:

Who is like You, O Lord, among the gods?
 Who is like You, glorious in holiness,
 Fearful in praises, doing wonders?
 You stretched out Your right hand;
 The earth swallowed them.
 You in Your mercy have led forth
 The people whom you have redeemed;
 You have guided them in Your strength
 To Your holy habitation.—Exod 15:11-13

In contrast, when the people suffered hunger and thirst in the desert, **they were** quick to blame the Lord and Moses and considered returning to Egypt. Numbers chapters 11 and 14 are examples of their rebellion in the wilderness.

An evaluation of Moses's call is not complete without taking the participation of the people seriously. They were the objects of the Lord's redemptive mercy and experienced the trials and triumphs of interacting with divine guidance and grace under the leadership of Moses.

What the Lord did in and through Moses became the model for measuring prophets and their activities in Israel. Deuteronomy 18:15-22 is a summary of this modeling role. Not only would all true prophets be marked by being commissioned to speak words commanded by the Lord, but they were also to separate themselves from idolatry and what they may predict would come to pass.

The role modeling of Moses would extend even further. God would raise up a Prophet and place "words in His mouth." The message spoken by this Prophet would call people to decision; if they rejected the mes-

sage, the result would be death.

Jesus commissioned all his disciples to be witnesses (messengers) throughout the world (Acts 1:8); who, after Pentecost, “went everywhere preaching the word” (Acts 8:4). It has been typical of fervent Christians to be messengers of the word of salvation through Jesus Christ.

Paul had this sense of being sent with a message to the Gentiles (Acts 22:21; 26:17; 1 Cor 1:17); and, as he testified before King Agrippa, “I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision” (Acts 26:19).

Through the centuries, many Christians of all ages, of every status of life, of every nation, have experienced the command of the Lord to witness and preach the gospel.

Evaluation: One should not be surprised that Moses had difficulty accepting his appointment to the prophet/messenger status. The surprise should arise from the moderations of Moses’s response. Moses could have rejected what he heard as utterly ridiculous and stubbornly refused to consider the matter further.

A justification for such action could have been thought out easily. When one looks at Moses’s objections, each seems convincing and his final obedience to the Lord’s call quite foolhardy.

Moses comes through as strikingly human. He is not enshrouded with a hero legend or a divinity halo; he is only a shepherd in the wilderness. Nevertheless, memories of earlier years caused him to realize immediately how dangerous this divinely appointed task really was. He also was deeply religious and feared whatever suggested the presence of the God of his fathers.

Moses harbored a pain-filled fear of Pharaoh; the murder he had committed in Egypt forty years before surely would be remembered at the royal court should he appear there in person.

Moses had doubts about his own people, the Hebrews, by whom he would most likely be regarded as an apostate from the traditional faith and thus ignorant of the name of the true God.

To each of these concerns, the Lord had an answer, mixed with explanations and promises.

Moses knew that a key factor in a successful project of the sort the Lord proposed could be convincing evidence of authority and power. A dusty shepherd coming directly from the desert would not impress either Israelite or Pharaoh as being a powerful person. Nor would an invisible God identified with neither nature objects (sun, moon, etc.) or an idol, be regarded as believable. Nevertheless, Moses courageously traveled to Egypt to galvanize his people into action and gain permission from Pharaoh to let the Israelites go into the desert.

The Lord gave three signs to Moses to convince him, and then to convince the Israelites and Pharaoh. *First*, Moses’s shepherd rod changed to a snake and back to a rod. *Second*, Moses’s hand became diseased and

then healed; and, *third*, Moses was authorized to change water to blood, if need be. Of these measures, the first was to be used frequently in Egypt, the second was purely personal and the third was a measure of last resort (cf. Exod 7:19-21). Answers to Moses's objections seem to have been provided convincingly. Yet, doubts about his capability to carry out his task gripped him and caused profound fear.

When Moses began to base his objections on his internal problems, he soon got into trouble with his Lord. Moses's speech handicap did not match the normal qualification of a messenger, the ability to speak clearly and effectively. This mismatch deeply troubled Moses and created a sense of helplessness in the face of the messenger task. Moses's assessment may be classed as realistic, but it was self-demeaning and evidenced a low self-esteem.

He refused, at the moment, to be impressed by the creative power of God to provide him with words. Moses took the first step of rejection when he requested that someone else be sent to Egypt. More serious than the speech handicap was this display of stubbornness and unbelief that the Lord could really help him.

The sting of experiencing divine anger, and then the wonder of divine grace in designating Aaron as his "mouth," changed Moses's attitude quickly. To Moses's credit, he saw the error of hiding behind personal shortcomings and yielded to the divine call.

Moses exhibited considerable courage when he returned to Egypt, knowing he could be in danger of losing his life. Reunited with Aaron, who readily accepted his new role as Moses's assistant, Moses was successful in gaining the support of his fellow Israelites for the proposed trip to the desert. He was able to gain an audience with Pharaoh, who seemed to know nothing of Moses's earlier crime in Egypt, and boldly presented his request.

The result was angry rejection by Pharaoh and immediate hardship for the Israelites. Their anger and accusations shocked Moses and the imminent failure of his mission sent him, filled with self-pity and despair, to the Lord with a bitter complaint. Moses not only was humiliated by his failure, he was blaming the sad turn of events on his speech defect; and, by implication, accusing the Lord of lack of wisdom regarding the project of convincing Pharaoh to release the Israelites. One must give Moses credit for his quick recovery from despondency, as he listened to the Lord's instructions and promises.

With the help of his Lord, Moses had passed through the first major crisis of his prophetic ministry.

Decisions: In spite of Moses's several arguments against the Lord's call to return to Egypt and lead the Israelites out of slavery, he did obey (4:18) by requesting and receiving permission to go to Egypt. Moses then set out with his wife and family (4:20). He obeyed the Lord: (a) by circumventing

his son (4:24-26), (b) by enlisting Aaron as his spokesman (4:28-29), (c) by speaking to and receiving the support of the enslaved Israelites for the exit from Egypt (4:30-31), (d) by presenting the Lord's message to Pharaoh (5:1-5), (e) by encouraging the frightened Israelites to continue to believe and obey (6:9), and (f) by continuing to convey the Lord's messages to Pharaoh (7:6). All of these actions imply that Moses, and Aaron as well, consciously made decisions to respond positively to the Lord's command and conform their lives to those decisions.

Making decisions and putting them into action, even at great risk, was typical of the remainder of Moses's life, with the exception of the second miracle of bringing water from the rock (Num 20).

Indeed, deciding to conform life to the Lord's commands was typical of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, after the Lord appeared to each of them. Both the Old and New Testaments provide numerous examples of individuals and groups making decisions to yield themselves completely to the Lord's commands and live accordingly. Throughout history since the biblical times, such obedience has occurred again and again.

What of the present? Are individuals and groups still called to listen to the Lord's will and then make a decision to obey him by conforming all activities to the Lord's command to tell others of salvation and judgment?