

Exodus 4: 1-31
Session 4 – Study Notes
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Exodus 4: 1-9

1. Will Israel accept Moses as their leader? And will Moses trust God and accept the leadership role God has assigned?
2. God has chosen to be in partnership with Moses.
3. Moses is presented as ill equipped for the task.
4. Salvation is God's, not ours. Incompetence may be the essential qualification.
5. Moses is not convinced that what God says about the future will be realized.
6. God is nonauthoritarian in nature in his relationship with Moses.
7. God acknowledges the uncertainty of the people's response by repeatedly using conditional language. *"If they do not believe."*
8. In God's own words, God does not know how the people will respond.
9. Egyptian literature abounds with tales of magicians and their wonder-working powers. This genre of activity would have been very familiar to Israel and significant to the Egyptians.

Exodus 4:10-17

10. Moses tries once more to get out of God's assignment, this time with a plea of speech impediment. God responds with an argument of divine creation and providential activity.
11. This encounter with Moses provides insight into the theological issue of "calling into ministry." God does not call perfect individuals. God works with raw material. **See 1 Corinthians 1:26-29**
12. God is pushed to anger with Moses because of his lack of trust but continues to work with him towards acquiescence.
13. The staff as an extension of the hand is a symbol of authority and surrogate for the divine hand, that is an instrument which God works in and through.

Exodus 4: 18-23

14. It is best to understand this text as a circling around the subject and is used to transition Moses and the readers from Midian to Egypt.

15. Moses asks leave from Jethro, with the excuse of checking on his kinfolk.
16. Taking the “staff” of God indicates an openness to the divine commission but the absence of direct speech to this effect is striking.
17. While the shape of the future is probable, it is *not finally certain* that this will include the killing of the firstborn. There is therefore in the final analysis an openness to the future.

Exodus 4:24 – 26

18. The strange story of Yahweh’s unprovoked attack upon Moses makes little sense in its’ context. Few texts contain more problems for interpreters than these few verses. What makes sense is to see at as a symbolic foreshadowing of the coming plague, the killing of the first born.

Exodus 4:27-31

19. Aaron now enters the story and the direct divine speech places Aaron’s decision within a divine perspective.
20. We are immediately thrust into the gathering of the elders and the giving of the signs and its effect on the people. They believe.
21. The people worship in response to hearing one message “God as seen your affliction and become active on your behalf.” This word of God ties Passover and the sea crossing together.

REFLECTION

- 1. What strikes you most about the relationship God has with Moses? How does this measure up with the assumptions you have about God’s relationship with you?**

- 2. Share a time when God called you to engage in something you did not feel you were equipped or experienced enough to do. Share how you made your decision.**

3. Talk about ways it has been demonstrated to you that God is trustworthy.

4. How do you reconcile the notion that God is all powerful and yet, in this story, does not appear to know what the outcome of Moses and Aaron's presentation of signs and wonders to the people will be. (Note the conditional word *If*)

Heka Ancient Egyptian Magic

By Dr Geraldine Pinch

"To me belonged the universe before you gods had come into being.

You have come afterwards because I am Heka."

Coffin texts, spell 261 First Intermediate Period to Middle Kingdom

All religions have a magical aspect, ancient religions like the Egyptian, according to which all of creation was animated to some extent, perhaps more so than many others. Through magic the creation had come into being and was sustained by it. Thus, magic was more ancient, and consequently more powerful, than the gods themselves

"I am one with Atum when he still floated alone in Nun, the waters of chaos, before any of his strength had gone into creating the cosmos. I am Atum at his most inexhaustible - the potency and potential of all that is to be. This is my magic protection and it's older and greater than all the gods together!"

Book of the Dead, New Kingdom



From everyday healing to treachery in the court of King Ramesses III, magic pervaded every aspect of ancient Egyptian life.

Magicians

In Egyptian myth, magic (heka) was one of the forces used by the creator to make the world. Through heka, symbolic actions could have practical effects. All deities and people were thought to possess this force in some degree, but there were rules about why and how it could be used.

The most respected users of magic were the lector priests...

Priests were the main practitioners of magic in pharaonic Egypt, where they were seen as guardians of a secret knowledge given by the gods to humanity to 'ward off the blows of fate'. The most respected users of magic were the lector priests, who could read the ancient books of magic kept in temple and palace libraries. In popular stories such men were credited with the power to bring wax animals to life or roll back the waters of a lake.



Real lector priests performed magical rituals to protect their king, and to help the dead to rebirth. By the first millennium BC, their role seems to have been taken over by magicians (hekau). Healing magic was a specialty of the priests who served **Sekhmet, the fearsome goddess of plague (see picture).**

Lower in status were the scorpion-charmers, who used magic to rid an area of poisonous reptiles and insects. Midwives and nurses also included magic among their skills, and wise women might be consulted about which ghost or deity was causing a person trouble.

Amulets were another source of magic power, obtainable from 'protection-makers', who could be male or female. None of these uses of magic was disapproved of - either by the state or the priesthood. Only foreigners were regularly accused of using evil magic. It is not until the Roman period that there is much evidence of individual magicians practicing harmful magic for financial reward.

Only a small percentage of Egyptians were fully literate, so written magic was the most prestigious kind of all. Private collections of spells were treasured possessions, handed down within families. Protective or healing spells written on papyrus were sometimes folded up and worn on the body.

Angry deities, jealous ghosts, and foreign demons and sorcerers were thought to cause misfortunes such as illness, accidents, poverty, and infertility. Magic provided a defense system against these ills for individuals throughout their lives.

Stamping, shouting, and making a loud noise with rattles, drums and tambourines were all thought to drive hostile forces away from vulnerable women, such as those who were pregnant or about to give birth, and from children - also a group at risk, liable to die from childhood diseases.