Exodus Chapter Four

Exodus 3:1-4:17 records the Lord commissioning Moses on Mount Horeb to communicate to the Israelites that He will deliver them from their bondage in Egypt. This section of the Exodus narrative transitions the story of Moses from one of obscurity in Midian to center stage on stage of history. Moses goes from tending the flocks of his father-in-law Jethro to confronting the greatest world ruler of his time, Amenhotep II.

Exodus 3:1-4:17 reveals as does the rest of the exodus story that the God of Israel is the sovereign ruler of history. It teaches that God is not only transcendent of His creation and creatures but also immanent meaning that He involves Himself intimately in human affairs. It teaches He is particular concerned about Israel.

This chapter can be divided into five parts: (1) Moses circumstances at the time when the Lord introduced Himself to him (3:1-3). (2) The Lord introduces Himself to Moses and commissions him to tell Israel He will deliver them (3:4-10). (3) Moses asks two questions with regards to his commission (3:11-15). (4) The Lord instructs Moses to tell the Israelite leaders that He will deliver them from Egyptian bondage (3:16-22). (5) Moses makes excuses why he cannot fulfill his commission and the Lord commissions his brother Aaron to speak for him (4:1-17).

Review of Exodus Chapter Three

Exodus 3:1 states that Moses led Jethro’s flocks to the west side of the wilderness and came to Mount Horeb. Exodus 3:1 says that he drove his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Mount Horeb, which is another name for Mount Sinai (cf. Exodus 19:10-11 with Deuteronomy 4:10). Moses identifies Horeb as “the mountain of God” which reflects his view of this mountain after the events that took place there later (cf. 4:27; 18:5; 24:13).

The exact location of Horeb or Sinai is disputed by scholars. However, Deuteronomy 1:2 teaches that the mountain is an eleven day journey from Kadesh-Barnea, which tends to support a location in Sinai.

Exodus 3:2-3 reveals that the angel of the Lord appeared to Moses, which is a “theophany,” which is a theological term used to refer to either a visible or auditory manifestation of the Son of God before His incarnation in Bethlehem (Gen. 32:29-30; Ex. 3:2; 19:18-20; Josh. 5:13-15; Dan. 3:26). At this point we have a visible appearance but it becomes an audible one in verse 4. This theophany indicates that Moses was a prophet according to Numbers 12:6.

Exodus 3:4-5, we learned that before the Lord identifies Himself to Moses, He began to teach him about His holiness. The theme of God’s holy presence is a major topic in the book of Exodus. What Moses was being taught by the Lord is
that he was in the Lord’s house or presence and must show proper respect. The fact that Moses is told to remove his sandals out of reverence because he is own holy ground tells him that He is in the presence of God. In the ancient world, taking off one’s shoes was done when entering the home or the presence of a person of superior rank.

Exodus 3:6 records the angel of the Lord’s identifies Himself as the God who established an unconditional covenant with Abraham and reconfirmed it with his son Isaac and with Isaac’s son Jacob.

“Your father” is an acknowledgment that Moses’ biological father Amram was a believer in the God of the patriarchs. “The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob” indicates that Moses is a believer since He does not reveal Himself to unbelievers. This designation also indicates to the reader that God is about to fulfill His promises to these men to make of them a great nation. It also indicates that these men, though physically dead are still alive. The Lord quotes Exodus 3:6 to teach that God is the God of the living and not the dead (cf. Matthew 22:29-32; Mark 12:26-27). This identification of Himself by the Lord to Moses also links the promises made to the patriarchs to Moses and the descendants of these men who were in bondage in Egypt, the Israelites. They will not stay in bondage in Egypt since the Lord promised Abram that He would deliver his descendants after four hundred years of bondage in Egypt (Genesis 15:12-16). He also promises to these three men to make a great nation from them. He also promised these men that their descendants will inherit the land of Canaan. Thus, by the Lord identifying Himself as “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob,” the reader would be aware of the fact that the Lord is about to act upon these promises at this point in the narrative. The reader would recall this designation that was used in Exodus 2:24 where it was said that God remembered His covenant with these men. Coupled the use of this designation here with Moses, the reader would know that God was about to act and fulfill His promises to the patriarchs.

Moses’ response to the theophany expresses his awareness of his sinfulness and was an acknowledgement of God’s holiness. It was an acknowledgement that he did not measure to the holiness of God and was worthy of death because of it. It expresses his awareness that he was not worthy to be in the presence of God because of his sinfulness. It also indicates that Moses was not yet on intimate terms with God as he would later be (Exodus 33:7-11; cf. Numbers 12:8; Deuteronomy 34:10).

What was implicit in the reference to the patriarchs in Exodus 3:6 is now made explicit by the Lord in Exodus 3:7-9, namely the God of these patriarchs does care about the descendants of these men and would make good on His promises to them. This paragraph makes clear that the God of the patriarchs was faithful to His
promises to these men. It shows His compassion and that He is immanent meaning
He involves Himself in and concerns Himself with the affairs of men. It expresses
the fact that He is fully aware of the suffering of His people and will do something
about it. This pericope also indicates that God is well aware of injustice and will
act to bring about justice for the oppressed.

Verse 7 summarizes the situation with the Israelites in Egypt and verse 8
presents God’s plan to rescue them. Verse 9 reiterates both verse 7 and Exodus
2:23-35 emphasizing God’s concern and desire to act.

“The good and spacious land” refers to the land of Canaan and the promise of
land to the patriarchs that is a part of the Abrahamic covenant. It is sometimes
called the “Palestinian” covenant.

In Exodus 3:8, the Lord describes the land of Canaan as “a land flowing with
milk and honey” which describes the goodness of God’s provision for His people
in Canaan (cf. 3:17; 13:5). It indicates that the Israelite flocks will thrive in the
land of Canaan and is a place where honey bees were abundant. So in Exodus 3:8,
the Lord is promising Moses that He is going to bring the Israelites to the land of
Canaan where they will have plenty of land for their flocks and will proper there.
However, there are enemies they will have to overcome in order to take possession
of this land. Their faith in God’s land promises will appropriate the power of God
needed to take possession of the land. The same power that will deliver the
Israelites from Egypt will also enable them to dispossess the great nations already
in the land of Canaan.

Exodus 3:10 records the Lord commissioning Moses to go to Pharaoh and
demand the release of the Israelites to serve Him in the wilderness. The Pharaoh at
this time would be Amenhotep II.

In Exodus 3:11, we saw that Moses spoke to God according to the dictates of
his culture and not from a lack of confidence or faith. He is properly and
respectfully expressing his humility upon receiving such an important assignment.
His question “who am I?” is not an expression of a lack of confidence or lack of
faith. He was not trying to get out of the job. Rather, his question is expressing his
polite acceptance of the honor that God had given him and was not an attempt to
quote the honor. This is indicated by Moses’ statement in verse 13 where he
acknowledges that he was in fact going to the citizens of Israel. However, he
delays only because he wants to know what name he should to identify the Lord
when speaking to the Israelites.

In 1 Samuel 18:18, David did spoke this way to King Saul when the latter
offered his older daughter as a wife if he fought the Philistines. In 2 Samuel 7:18,
king David spoke in this manner to God after the latter promised that a descendant
of his will sit on his throne forever.
Exodus 3:12 records the Lord promises that He will be with Moses, He means that He will guide and direct Moses. This verse also records a fulfillment sign. This means that the Lord is telling Moses that when he and Israel worship Him on the very same mountain which they were conversing on, that this event will confirm that God had sent him. This sign was fulfilled three months later according to Exodus 19:1. So the Lord is promising Moses that proof of His being with him will follow after an interval of time rather than immediately. The Lord does this to encourage faith in Moses. It would require faith on the part of Moses in the sense that he would have to take God at His Word in order to arrive at Mount Horeb with Israel to worship Him.

In Exodus 3:13, “behold” is the interjection הינำ(hin·nē(h)), which the ESV, NET, and NRSV render “if” even though this usage of the word is only found in a few instances in the Old Testament. NIV translates the word “suppose.” The NKJV renders the word “indeed” and the KJV translates it “behold.” Therefore, this is a major problem because if הינำ(hin·nē(h)) means “if” or “suppose” then this would indicate that Moses has yet to accept God’s commissioning him to go Israel and Pharaoh as His representative. Again, this use of the word does not appear often however the meaning “behold, indeed” or “now” is the word’s primary usage. Here if we render the word with its normal sense then this would indicate that Moses has accepted this commission.

The interjection היננה(hin·nē(h)) means “now” since it used in direct speech and is introducing a fact upon which a following statement or command is based. In other words, the word is introducing Moses’ acceptance of God’s command. This is indicated by the fact that if Moses was not willing or was hesitating, he would not have asked the Lord what name he should use to identify Him to the Israelites. Or he would say to God what he said in Exodus 4:13 that there must be someone better qualified than him. His question in Exodus 3:13 is an implicit acceptance of the task assigned to him by the Lord. Why would he ask this question if he was not convinced he could do what God commanded him to do?

Moses’ question indicates that God’s identification of Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was sufficient for him. He does not ask for himself what name God wants him to use when addressing the Israelites because He identified Himself to Abraham and Jacob as El Shaddai, “God Almighty” (Genesis 17:1; 35:11). He was also known as Yahweh to Noah.
(Genesis 9:26), Abraham (Genesis 12:8) and Isaac (Genesis 26:25). He was known as El Elyon, “God Most High” (Genesis 14:18–22). Lastly, God was called by Jacob El Bethel, “God of Bethel” (Genesis 31:13).

This use of the interjection hin·nē(h) in Exodus 3:13 would make the qal participle form of the verb bō(ʾ) (בּוֹא), which the NASB95 renders “I am going” a temporal participle meaning “when I go.” Therefore, in Exodus 3:13 Moses is not saying “if” or “suppose” I go but rather “now when I go” indicating that Moses is not shrinking from the task given to him by the Lord but rather he has accepted the task. It indicates that he was quite willing to do what God asked him.

Now, as we will note in Exodus 4:1-12, we will see Moses speaking with typical Near Eastern humility when speaking to God but in Exodus 4:13, he comes right out and says to God that there must be someone better qualified to speak to Pharaoh and the Israelites. Then God gets mad at him.

In Exodus 3:14, “I AM WHO I AM” translates the Hebrew expression ʾěh·yě(h) ’āšēr ʾěh·yě(h) (אֶֽהְיֶ֖ה אֲשֶׁ֣ר אֶֽהְיֶ֑ה). “I AM” is the first person qal imperfect form of the verb hā·yā(h) (הָיָה), which means “to exist (in an absolute sense).” “WHO” is the relative particle ʾāšer (אֲשֶׁר).

The qal imperfects of the verb hā·yā(h) (הָיָה) connotes a continuing, unfinished action. These imperfects are iterative meaning that they describe an action as one that is done continually. Here it refers to infinite actions since we are speaking in the context of God’s existence. Therefore, the imperfects indicate that God exists continually or without end.

The idea with this expression “I am existing that I am existing” or in other words “the one who always exists, the eternal one.” This is indicated by God’s statement in verse 15 where He states to Moses that this name ʾěh·yě(h) ’āšēr ʾěh·yě(h) (אֶֽהְיֶ֖ה אֲשֶׁ֣ר אֶֽהְיֶ֑ה) is ʿō·lām (עֹלָם), which means “forever, eternity.” The Septuagint uses the articular present active participle form of the verb eimi, which means “the one who continually exists.” Thus, the idea with this Hebrew expression is “the Eternal One.” Therefore, we see here in verse 14 that God has made Moses his ambassador to Pharaoh and the Israelites. He would not be speaking on his own authority but based upon the authority given to him by God.

In verse 15, we have God reiterating to Moses what has been revealed to him by the divine name with respect to the patriarchs. He does this because want the Israelites in Egypt to come to the conclusion that Moses was coming to them on behalf of a God who did great things for their ancestors and if so, then He could be counted to do great things for them.

In Exodus 3:16-17, we have God instructing Moses to communicate to the leaders of Israel that He intends to act on behalf of the nation of Israel. He wants Moses to communicate to the Israelite leaders that He is indeed concerned about the nation of Israel.
Again, God emphasizes His relationship to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob telling Moses to communicate this when speaking to the Israelite leaders so that they can draw encouragement. If God fulfilled His promises to their ancestors, He certainly could be counted on to fulfill His promise to them of delivering them from the bondage of Egypt.

God also wants Moses to emphasize His relationship to the patriarchs because His promise to the Israelites to deliver them from Egypt and bring them to the land of Canaan is a fulfillment of the promise He made to the patriarchs.

Verses 16-17 repeats much of the language that is found in verses 7-9, much of it is verbatim. This repetition is a narrative method called “command-fulfillment style” in which the narrator tells what was commanded and then using much of the same language tells either how it was to be fulfilled or how it actually was fulfilled.

In Exodus 3:18, God from His omniscience, assures Moses of success at convincing the leaders of Israel that he was sent by God. He also assures Moses of success in getting these leaders to accompany him in confronting Pharaoh with God’s demands. God instructs Moses to identify the Israelites as Hebrews when confronting Pharaoh in order that Pharaoh might understand.

God also instructs Moses to request that Pharaoh let Israel go a three days’ journey into the wilderness to worship the Lord God. In the Near East, this would be tantamount to making a request to permanently leave Egypt. It is a polite way of saying let us leave Egypt altogether and we will never return. In people in many Eastern societies prefer to use gentle and restrained ways of making requests instead of coming right out and saying what they want.

Then, we saw Exodus 3:19, God, from His omniscience, revealing to Moses that He knows that Pharaoh will refuse to let the Israelites leave Egypt except under compulsion. Pharaoh fears that if Israel departs that she will join forces with Egypt’s enemies in order to wage war against his nation. By continuing to enslave the Israelites, Pharaoh would prevent them from joining forces with Egypt’s enemies and waging war against Egypt.

If they were in bondage to Egypt, the Israelites could not wage war with other nations against Egypt. Pharaoh’s stubbornness will lead to the destruction of the nation by God.

These two verses summarize what God will do to Egypt with the ten plagues. As ruler of the most powerful nation on earth at the time, Pharaoh would not be intimidated by any human being. Thus, he will remain stubborn.

In Exodus 3:21-22, not only does God promise to deliver the Israelites from Egypt but He also promises that the Israelites will plunder the Egyptians without the use of military force but as a result of the exertion of God’s power manifested by the ten plagues. God is going to wage a war against Egypt in order to force
Pharaoh to release the Israelites. The Israelite will not fight but watch the Lord fight for them. The promises contained in verses 21 and 22 were fulfilled as recorded in Exodus 12:30-36.

Exodus Chapter Four

So Exodus chapter three records the Lord commissioned Moses to go to Israel and tell them of His plans to deliver them from Egyptian bondage. He also commissions Moses to go to Pharaoh to demand that he release Israel from her slavery so as to serve Him in the wilderness. Now, in Exodus chapter four, we have the continuation of the conversation between the Lord and Moses with regards to the former commissioning the latter as His representative before the Israelites and the Egyptians. Exodus chapter four is divided into three sections: (1) Exodus 4:1-9: The Lord delegates power to Moses to perform three sign-miracles to convince Israel that He has spoken to Moses. (2) Exodus 4:10-18: Moses’ expresses typical Near Eastern exaggerated humility when speaking to God followed by Moses’ actual rejection of the commission. (3) Exodus 4:19-31: Moses’ accepts commission and returns to Egypt with his family.

Exodus 4:1-5

Exodus 4:1 Then Moses said, “What if they will not believe me or listen to what I say? For they may say, ‘The Lord has not appeared to you.’” 2 The Lord said to him, “What is that in your hand?” And he said, “A staff.” 3 Then He said, “Throw it on the ground.” So he threw it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from it. 4 But the Lord said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand and grasp it by its tail”—so he stretched out his hand and caught it, and it became a staff 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.” (NASB95)

As we noted in Exodus 3:11 and 13, when responding to God’s commissioning him to be His representative to the Israelites and the Egyptians, Moses expresses typical Near Eastern exaggerated humility to express his polite acceptance of the commission that God had bestowed upon. However, in Exodus chapter 4, the questions that Moses asks God with response to this assignment reveal a great uncertainty in his mind with regards to this task. His questions in this chapter express his unbelief.

For example, his question in Exodus 4:1 expresses his unbelief because in Exodus 3:18, God explicitly tells Moses that the Israelites will in fact listen to him and will accept what God has told him to say to the Israelites. However, Exodus
4:1, Moses asks the question “what if they will not believe me or listen to what I say?” From His omniscience, God has told Moses that He knows they will accept Moses and in fact go with him to confront Pharaoh! So God in His grace, demonstrating great patience with Moses’ unbelief delegates power to him to perform a sign in the midst of the Israelites which is designed to convince them that God had indeed said what Moses claims to them He said.

In Exodus 4:2-5, we have the first of three miracles which God performs in front of Moses. All these miracles involve changing something into something else. Here in these verses, God changes the shepherd’s staff in Moses’ hands into a snake. God says I’ll give you power to perform this sign in the presence of the Israelite leaders so that they will believe I sent you to them. God commands Moses to throw his staff on the ground and then orders him to pick up the snake and he obeys. This demonstrates Moses’ faith in God since grabbing a snake by the tale was a dangerous thing to do. God tells Moses that the purpose of this miracle was so that the Israelites will know without a doubt that the God of the patriarchs had in fact spoken to Moses.

Interestingly, in Egypt, the snake symbolized power and life. Thus, God was telling Moses that he would overcome the power of Egypt with His omnipotence. This miracle demonstrated to Moses that the person he was speaking to had control over the animal kingdom.

Now, this first miracle like the two to follow are all designed to convince Moses to have faith in God’s ability to give him the capacity to carry out the commission that God bestowed upon him. With these miracles, God is saying to Moses that “you can trust me and if I can do these miracles, then I certainly can give you the power to perform the task I have assigned to you.”

At this point in his life, Moses does not know the character and nature of God. These three miracles are designed to teach Moses that the Person He is speaking to is in fact the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God is patient with Moses at this point in their conversation because He knows this about Moses. He is attempting to familiarize Moses with Himself or in other words, He is teaching Moses through the miracles that He is in fact the Sovereign Creator and the God of his ancestors. The Lord is instructing Moses through the miracles that if He says He can do something like use him as His instrument to deliver the Israelites from Egyptian bondage, then He can certainly do it.

Exodus 4:6-8

Exodus 4:6 The Lord furthermore said to him, “Now put your hand into your bosom.” So he put his hand into his bosom, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous like snow. 7 Then He said, “Put your hand into
your bosom again.” So he put his hand into his bosom again, and when he took it out of his bosom, behold, it was restored like the rest of his flesh. 8 “If they will not believe you or heed the witness of the first sign, they may believe the witness of the last sign.” (NASB95)

Right on the heels of the first miracle, God performs a second which like the first involved God turning something into something else. This second miracle involves God turning Moses healthy hand into a leprous one and then turning back into a healthy hand. God says that if they don’t believe the first miracle, they will believe this second one. Like the first miracle, this second one was designed to get Moses to trust in God. The purpose of this second miracle was to produce confidence in Moses that he could, with God’s power, carry out the task that God had assigned to him.

Leprosy was prevalent in Egypt and was considered as incurable. God is teaching Moses with this second miracle that the one who is speaking to him has power over the human body and was thus the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. No human being could change a healthy to a diseased and hand and back again. The purpose also was to convince the Israelites that God of their ancestors had in fact sent Moses to them.

Exodus 4:9

Exodus 4:9 “But if they will not believe even these two signs or heed what you say, then you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground; and the water which you take from the Nile will become blood on the dry ground.” (NASB95)

Verse 9 records the third and final miracle, which like the first two involved God changing something into something else. Here He changes the water from the Nile River into blood. The Egyptians regarded the Nile as the source of life and productivity. This miracle would show the Israelites that God had given to Moses power over the Nile. This sign would tell the Israelites that the one who sent Moses to them had power over the Nile and thus creation. It would tell the Israelites that indeed the Creator and God of their ancestors, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had sent Moses to them and was speaking through Moses. Therefore, these three miracles would first convince Moses that God had given power to carry out the task God assigned to him. Secondly, it would convince the Israelites that God had in fact sent Moses to them and was speaking through Moses.

Exodus 4:10-12
Exodus 4:10 Then Moses said to the Lord, “Please, Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither recently nor in time past, nor since You have spoken to Your servant; for I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.” 11 The Lord said to him, “Who has made man’s mouth? Or who makes him mute or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? 12 “Now then go, and I, even I, will be with your mouth, and teach you what you are to say.” (NASB95)

The statement made by Moses to the Lord is again typical Near Eastern exaggerated humility. It is figurative and not literal speech. When Moses says to the Lord that he was not eloquent in speaking and was slow in speech and slow of tongue he is not saying to God that he has a speech impediment or was unwilling to speak to the Israelites as God’s representative. Rather, he is speaking figuratively in the sense that he is politely accepting the assignment given to him by the Lord.

That Moses is speaking in figurative terms here and expressing typical Near Eastern exaggerated humility is indicated by the fact that Moses throughout the rest of the Pentateuch does most of the speaking to Israel and Pharaoh. Nowhere for the rest of Exodus do we see Moses showing the slightest hesitation in speaking to either the Israelites or to Pharaoh.

In fact, Stephen in Acts 7:22 says that Moses was a powerful speaker.

Acts 7:22 “Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians, and he was a man of power in words and deeds.” (NASB95)

This passage makes clear that Moses did not have a speech handicap. His statement to God in Exodus 4:10 is in the style of Near Eastern exaggerated humility. Moses is being self-deprecating and mannerly according to the manners of his day. He is expressing in verse 10 is polite and humble acceptance of the task God has given him.

There are many examples of this style in the Old Testament:

1 Samuel 9:21 Saul answered, “But am I not a Benjamite, from the smallest tribe of Israel, and is not my clan the least of all the clans of the tribe of Benjamin? Why do you say such a thing to me?” (NASB95)

1 Samuel 18:23 David said (to Saul), “Do you think it is a small matter to become the king’s son-in-law? I’m only a poor man and little known.” (NASB95)

1 Samuel 24:14 “Against whom has the king of Israel come out? Whom are you pursuing? A dead dog? A flea?” (NASB95)

1 Samuel 26:20 “Now do not let my blood fall to the ground far from the presence of the Lord. The king of Israel has come out to look for a flea—as one hunts a partridge in the mountains.” (NASB95)

2 Samuel 9:8 Mephibosheth bowed down and said, “What is your servant, that you should notice a dead dog like me?” (NASB95)
1 Kings 3:7 “Now, O Lord my God, You have made Your servant king in place of my father David, yet I am but a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in.” (NASB95)

Notice David in 1 Samuel 18:23 saying to Saul that he was a poor man and “little known.” David was in fact very well-known. In fact the women in Israel sang of his exploits on the battlefield. King Solomon says to God that he was “but a little child” when in fact he was at least thirty years old at the time he became king.

All of these parallels indicate that Moses in Exodus 4:10 is not speaking literally of himself but rather figuratively. He is responding to a great and awesome assignment that God has given him with proper exaggerated humility and self-deprecation that was considered proper speech when receiving a great honor from a sovereign.

Also, interestingly, notice that in response to Moses’ polite acceptance, God says not only that He has power over human speech but also power of the human ability to see and hear. Moses never said that he had a problem with his hearing or seeing. This is a further indication that Moses was speaking to God in figurative terms rather than literal. Thus, God’s response was designed to simply encourage Moses since Moses’ hearing and eyesight were not issues in dispute.

Exodus 4:13-17

Exodus 4:13 But he said, “Please, Lord, now send the message by whomever You will.” 14 Then the anger of the Lord burned against Moses, and He said, “Is there not your brother Aaron the Levite? I know that he speaks fluently. And moreover, behold, he is coming out to meet you; when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart. 15 You are to speak to him and put the words in his mouth; and I, even I, will be with your mouth and his mouth, and I will teach you what you are to do. 16 Moreover, he shall speak for you to the people; and he will be as a mouth for you and you will be as God to him. 17 You shall take in your hand this staff, with which you shall perform the signs.” (NASB95)

God’s angry response to Moses plea to send someone else to the Israelites rather than himself indicates that Moses was no longer using figurative language but rather he is literally rejecting the commission given to him by God. Thus far in this conversation God has not gotten angry with anything Moses has said to him. However, now in verse 14, God gets angry with Moses. He was angry with Moses because Moses had no excuse for turning down the commission after being given sufficient proof with the miracles that God would give him the ability to carry out his commission to go to the Israelites and the Egyptians.
“Please, Lord, now send the message by whomever You will” translates the statement בִּ֣י אֲדֹנָ֑י שְֽׁלַֽח־נָ֖א בְּיַד־תִּשְׁלָֽח (בִּי אֲדֹנָ֑י שְֽׁלַֽח־נָ֖א בְּיַד־תִּשְׁלָֽח). “Please" is the particle of entreaty בִּ֣י (בִּי), which means “please” and is a marker of discourse for polite address to a superior and is always followed by the noun אֲדֹנָ֑י (אֲדֹנָ֑י), “Lord,” which here is a term of respect for God. The first person singular pronominal suffix בִּ֣י אֲדֹנָ֑י (אֲדֹנָ֑י) refers of course to Moses and functions as a possessive pronoun meaning “my.” The qal imperative form of the verb שָׁלַח (שָׁלַח) means “you must send” referring to God dispatching a messenger. Then we have the emphatic particle נָא (נָא) which is a marker of emphasis with a focus on the desire of the speaker and is used to heighten a sense of urgency. It is modifying the imperative form of the verb שָׁלַח and means “now.” Then, we have the preposition בְּ־ (בְּ־), which is a marker of agency and means “by.” Its object is the noun יָד (יָד) which means “hand” and is used by way of metonymy meaning the hand is put for the person. Then, once again we have the verb שָׁלַח but this time in the qal imperfect form and means “you will send.”

Thus, this statement literally means “Please my Lord, you must send now by the hand you want to send.” He is saying “Please my Lord, you must send now someone you want to send.” In effect, Moses is saying to God, “I don’t want to do it” or “Please my Lord, you must know someone you can send other than me!” He is politely declining and is speaking to God in way that he would think would not be offensive to God. Like Jonah, he declines his commission from the Lord. However, unlike Jonah, he accepts the commission after rebuke from God.

Even though God is angry with Moses’ rejection of his commission, He treats Moses in grace by providing his brother Aaron to accompany him to meet with the Israelites. God drafts Aaron to accompany Moses to encourage him in the task. God does not enlist Aaron as co-speaker to the Israelites because Moses could not speak well but rather to encourage Moses in carrying out his task of going to the Israelites. Exodus 4:30 and 5:1 indicate that initially Aaron spoke for Moses when dealing with the Israelites and then together they spoke to Pharaoh. However, after that Aaron is never said to speak for Moses. Evidently, after these initial encounters with the Israelites and Pharaoh, Moses gained in confidence that God was with him and did not enlist the services of his brother again. There is no mention of Aaron speaking for his brother after Exodus 4:30 and 5:1.

Exodus 4:15-17 indicate quite clearly that Aaron would be Moses’ spokesperson but that Moses was the direct recipient of divine revelation and God was the revealer. So Moses was the prophet and not Aaron since Aaron was only communicating to the Israelites that which Moses told him to say to the Israelites and the message to Israel was ultimately from God.

God tells Moses to his staff which would serve as assurance that God was with him. It would also be used by God to perform miracles in the presence of the
Israelites and the Egyptians. Moses’ staff as well as Aaron’s had no inherent power. These staffs were symbols of divine authority delegated to these two brothers. They also were symbols of God’s presence and provision. They spoke of God’s sovereign authority over Egypt and Israel and all of creation.

Douglas Stuart gives an excellent comment regarding the staff in ancient Israelite society, he writes, “In ancient Palestinian-Israelite society, one’s staff was an essential personal possession, a means of protection and identification and even a symbol of one’s power. Various Hebrew terms are translated ‘staff.’ It is possible to use them rather interchangeably here in light of their semantic overlap and render them all with the English word ‘staff’ just as ‘rod,’ ‘staff,’ ‘big stick,’ and ‘walking stick’ can all be used largely interchangeably in English. From the point of view of identifying oneself, a staff was in certain ways the equivalent in ancient culture of what a passport, wallet, or driver’s license would be today. From the point of view of protection, it was the ancient equivalent of what a sidearm would be today. From the point of view of its function as a symbol of one’s personal power, a modern analogy might be one’s photo ID pass or even, in some situations, one’s parking pass. It is likely that women often carried staffs; however, as it happens, the only references to staffs in the Bible involve men. A staff was so basic and prized a possession that it might be the mentioned metaphorically as the only thing a person possessed, or the first thing in a short list of very basic possessions, as reflected in Gen 32:10 (‘I had only my staff when I crossed this Jordan, but now I have become two groups’) or Luke 9:3 (‘Take nothing for the journey—no staff, no bag, no bread, no money’). In many cases a person’s staff apparently was carefully carved with various markings and/or words to make it uniquely identifiable both by the owner and by others who might be familiar with the owner. An example of this practice is reflected in Gen 38:18 (“He said, ‘What pledge should I give you?’ ‘Your seal and its cord, and the staff in your hand,’ she answered”; cf. Num 17:2, 9; 2 Kgs 4:29). The habit of carrying a staff may have originated in connection with its usefulness as both a weapon and a tool, that is, as a weapon against wild animals and human foes and as a tool for keeping animals under one’s control or manipulating objects.”

Exodus 4:18

Exodus 4:18 Then Moses departed and returned to Jethro his father-in-law and said to him, “Please, let me go, that I may return to my brethren who are in Egypt, and see if they are still alive.” And Jethro said to Moses, “Go in peace.” (NASB95)

This verse brings to a conclusion the first theophany in the book of Exodus. Moses’ departure from the presence of God and his request of Jethro to let him go in peace to Egypt to return to his brethren as well as Exodus 4:29-30, which record Moses and Aaron speaking to the Israelites, indicate that he has accepted the commission bestowed upon him by God.

The phrase “see if they are still alive” is again Moses being polite giving his father-in-law a socially appropriate reason for his leaving. Moses doesn’t need permission to leave. However, he is being polite and requesting permission because this was considered appropriate speech in that day. Furthermore, Jethro had been very gracious with Moses as demonstrated by giving his daughter in marriage to him and employing Moses as a shepherd over his flocks.

This verse brings an end to the second chapter of Moses’ life and inaugurates the third and final chapter. He is eighty years old at the time of his departure from Jethro in Midian. He will now spend the next forty years serving God and the Israelites faithfully. His years of preparation for service have ended and now he begins the work for which God called him.

Exodus 4:19-23

Exodus 4:19 Now the Lord said to Moses in Midian, “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 mounted them on a donkey, and returned to the land of Egypt. Moses also took the staff of God in his hand. 21 The Lord said to Moses, “When you go back to Egypt see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders which I have put in your power; but I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go. 22 Then you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the Lord, “Israel is My son, My firstborn. 23 So I said to you, ‘Let My son go that he may serve Me’; but you have refused to let him go. Behold, I will kill your son, your firstborn.’””

The men who were seeking Moses’ life refers to Thutmose III as well as his relatives and members of his administration who would have been aware of Moses murdering one of their number in defense of a Hebrew slave.

Verse 20 says that Moses took his wife and sons. Thus far in the narrative of Exodus, only one son of Moses is mentioned. The other was Eliezer according to Exodus 18:4. The text mentions Moses also taking along his staff in obedience to God’s command. This staff is mentioned here again because Moses wants the reader to see the connection between the miracles performed by God before Moses at Sinai and the miracles that will take place in the presence of the Israelites and the Egyptians.
In verses 21-23, we have God instructing Moses to perform in the presence of Pharaoh, the miracles that He showed Moses on Sinai. God is telling Moses that He has delegated power to Moses. He then warns Moses that Pharaoh will not obey him when he demands that Pharaoh let the Israelites leave Egypt. In Exodus 3:10-22, God instructed Moses to perform the three miracles in the presence of the Israelites but now He is commanding to do them in the presence of Pharaoh. Exodus 7:8-24 records Moses performing first and the third of the miracles God showed him on Sinai. It doesn’t record him performing the second miracle in the presence of Pharaoh.

God prophesies to Moses that He will harden Pharaoh’s heart. In the Old Testament hardening results from the sinner’s persistence in rejecting God’s call or command. From this arises a state in which the sinner is no longer able to hear and in which he is irretrievably enslaved to sin and the devil.

Nowhere in Scripture is God said to harden anyone who had not first harden themselves.²

The greatest example in Scripture of this hardening is that of Pharaoh of Egypt who refused to obey the command of the Lord through Moses and Aaron to release the nation of Israel from her bondage in Egypt.

The Scriptures teach that God hardened Pharaoh (Exodus 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:8). There were prophecies that God would do this to Pharaoh (Exodus 4:21; 7:3). However, the Scriptures also teach that Pharaoh would harden himself (Exodus 7:13, 14, 22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7, 34, 35).

God’s hardening of Pharaoh is the result of Pharaoh first hardening himself in the sense of rejecting over and again God’s command to release the nation of Israel from her bondage to him in Egypt.

God permitted Pharaoh to exercise his volition repeatedly to reject His command to release the nation of Israel from her bondage in Egypt. Pharaoh was responsible for his evil actions. God’s hardening was His response to Pharaoh’s hardening or in other words, it was in response to Pharaoh’s repeatedly rejecting His command to release the nation of Israel from her bondage in Egypt. Thus, God’s hardening is a manifestation of His wrath, i.e. righteous indignation towards sin and is an expression of His holiness.

God used Pharaoh’s evil actions and negative volition to glorify Himself in the sense that through Pharaoh’s disobedience to His commands, God manifested His omnipotence in delivering Israel from her bondage to Pharaoh’s Egypt.

Repeated sinning as in Pharaoh’s case hardens the conscience so that it becomes “seared” like scar tissue (1 Timothy 4:2). To continually reject God’s truth as Pharaoh did causes the conscience to become progressively calloused,

hardened and less sensitive to sin, as if covered with layers of unspiritual scar tissue.

In Romans 9:18, Paul uses this example of God hardening Pharaoh because in context in Romans 9-11 he is speaking of the nation of Israel’s rejection of Jesus of Nazareth as their Messiah in his day and is defending God’s righteousness in rejecting the nation for rejecting Jesus Christ. In Paul’s day God had hardened unregenerate Israel for her rejection of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, as their Messiah just as He hardened Pharaoh’s heart for Pharaoh rejecting His revelation of Himself and command to release the nation of Israel.

This prediction of Pharaoh’s hardening in Exodus 4:21 was based upon God’s omniscience in the sense that He saw down the corridors of time that Pharaoh would reject His revelation of Himself and His command to release Israel.

In His foreknowledge, which is based upon His omniscience, God can see if a person is going to accept His Son or reject Him. In the case of Pharaoh, He could see that Pharaoh would reject Him, thus His response to Pharaoh’s rejection of Himself was to harden Pharaoh or in other words, give Pharaoh over to his own negative decisions in judgment. This is just what Paul in relation to unregenerate Gentiles in Romans 1:18-32.

God always had Pharaoh’s best intentions, however He permitted Pharaoh to exercise his volition against Him when throughout His entire encounter with Pharaoh, He desired that Pharaoh get saved and come to the knowledge of the truth as He desires for all men. He desires all men to be saved because He loves all men (1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9; John 3:16).

The Scriptures teach that God hardened Pharaoh (Exodus 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:8) and that Pharaoh would harden himself (Exodus 7:13, 14, 22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7, 34, 35).

Hannah writes, “The first two references to God’s hardening Pharaoh’s heart (4:21; 7:3) were actually predictions that He would do it in the future. Then in the next seven references Pharaoh is said to have hardened his own heart (7:13-14, 22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7) before God is said to have hardened it (9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8). God’s first hardening came after the sixth plague. Pharaoh hardened his own heart six times by his refusals. Then later he hardened it again in response to the seventh plague, and God hardened his heart after each of plagues 8-10. God confirmed Pharaoh’s defiant willful obstinance by then judicially hardening his heart (cf. Deut. 2:30; Josh. 11:20)... Another factor in God’s hardening of Pharaoh’s heart is that it was a reversal of an Egyptian belief. Egyptians believed that when a person died his heart was weighed in the hall of judgment. If one’s heart was ‘heavy’ with sin, that person was judged. A stone beetle scarab was placed on the heart of a deceased person to suppress his natural tendency to confess sin which would subject himself to judgment. This ‘hardening of the heart’
by the scarab would result in salvation for the deceased. However, God reversed this process in Pharaoh’s case. Instead of his heart being suppressed so that he was silent about his sin and thus delivered, his heart became hardened, he confessed his sin (Ex. 9:27, 34; 10:16-17), and his sinfully heavy heart resulted in judgment. For the Egyptians ‘hardening of the heart’ resulted in silence (absence of confession of sin) and therefore salvation. But God’s hardening of Pharaoh’s heart resulted in acknowledgment of sin and in judgment.”

Exodus 4:22-23 records for the first time in Scripture God describing Israel corporately as His “first-born son.” In the ancient world, the firstborn had a privileged status (See Genesis 43:33; 49:3) and the right of succession (2 Chronicles 21:3) and received a double portion of his father’s inheritance (Deut. 21:17). The father’s inheritance was divided among his sons and the firstborn always has right to two of these portions. If there are ten sons, the firstborn receives two portions and the other nine split eight portions. If there are only two sons then the firstborn inherits everything. With this privileged status came responsibility in that the firstborn was the protector of the family and leader. Thus, God was bestowing upon Israel a privileged status among the nations of the world. Also, by conferring this status on Israel, God was saying that the Israelites no longer serve Pharaoh but Him and Him alone. This first-born status also meant that Israel would have a responsibility to serve and represent God in a fashion that was pleasing to God. It meant that they were to be devoted to God. This first-born status meant that God was identifying with Israel as His personal possession.

Stuart writes, “The firstborn son in the ancient world was the one specially favored with inheritance, the one who would represent the father in many ways as he came into maturity and the father gave him more and more responsibility. Moreover, in ancient Israelite society the firstborn son, as the firstfruits of a marriage, was devoted to God—he belonged specially to God and could not even be taken and raised by his parents without the payment of a special redemption or ‘buy back’ fee that symbolized the family’s recognition that the son was by rights Yahweh’s and not theirs (see comments on 13:2, 13). Until entering into his special, double inheritance (Deut 21:17), the firstborn son ‘served’ his father. The verb in 4:23 of the niv translated as ‘worship’ (‘Let my son go that he may worship me’) is ʿābad, normally translated as ‘work, serve’ elsewhere. The Israelites had been serving Pharaoh; now God told Pharaoh that the Israelites were going to serve him. Their liberation came not in being freed from having to work but in being freed from working for the wrong master.”

Exodus 4:23 is a prophesy referring to the tenth and final plague. God would put Pharaoh’s first-born son to death for not releasing His first-born son, Israel to serve Him in the wilderness of Sinai.

Exodus 4:24-26

Exodus 4:24 Now it came about at the lodging place on the way that the Lord met him and sought to put him to death. 25 Then Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son’s foreskin and threw it at Moses’ feet, and she said, “You are indeed a bridegroom of blood to me.” 26 So He let him alone. At that time she said, “You are a bridegroom of blood”—because of the circumcision.

This passage has been very difficult for interpreters not because of a difficulty translating the text, which is not, but rather because of what it is communicating. Why would God seek to kill Moses after He just commissioned him to go to the Israelites and the Egyptians? The issue at stake is circumcision. God sought to kill Moses because he hadn’t circumcised his boys. Thus, God’s attempt to kill Moses was the direct result of not practicing circumcision in his family. So we must understand that God attached great importance to circumcision.

Circumcision refers to the ritual act of cutting of the foreskin of the male’s penis and was given as a sign of God’s covenant with Abraham and his biological descendants that they were set apart by God and yet was not given to justify or saved them.

Genesis 17 records Abram receiving circumcision as a sign of the covenant that God had established with him and his descendants. Genesis 17:9-14 records that the Lord gives Abraham and his descendants the ritual of circumcision to observe as a sign to ratify the covenant that He established with Abraham when he left Haran.

Genesis 17:9, God said further to Abraham, “Now as for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. 10 This is My covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: every male among you shall be circumcised.” (NASB95)

“My covenant” is a reference to the unconditional covenant that the Lord established with Abraham when he left Haran as recorded in Genesis 12:1-3 and was enlarged upon in Genesis 13:14-17, 15:1-6 and 17:1-8 and which covenant is called by theologians, the “Abrahamic” covenant.

In Genesis 17:1-8, the Lord enumerates His promises to Abraham and now in Genesis 17:9-14, the Lord presents the responsibilities of Abraham and his descendants.
“You shall keep” is the verb shamar, which means, “to observe conscientiously” in the sense that Abraham and his descendants were to be careful, thoughtful, heedful, attentive, and meticulous in conforming their actions in compliance with the practice of circumcision.

“Your descendants” refers to Abraham’s “biological” descendants, the nation of Israel.

Genesis 17:11 “And you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin, and it shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you.” (NASB95)

“Circumcised” is the verb mul, which refers to the act of cutting of the foreskin of the male’s penis and was given as a sign to Abraham and his biological descendants that they were set apart by God and yet was not given to justify or saved them.

Circumcision was not exclusive to Israel but was also performed by several Asian Oriental groups such as the Muslims as well as the Edomites, Moabites, Ammonites, and was also practiced by Egyptian priests and those who wanted to be initiated into their sacred mysteries.

Circumcision among these nations was a rite of passage but was not performed on infants, thus the sign of circumcision given to Abraham to be performed on infants eight days old was unique in the ancient world.

The ceremony of circumcision consisted in cutting away the foreskin, the hood or fold of skin covering the head of the male organ, which was generally done by means of a sharp knife, but in more primitive times sharp stones were used (Ex. 4:25; Josh. 5:2, flint knives). As a rule this act was performed by the father (Gen. 17:23), although it might be done by any Israelite, and, if necessary, women as well (Ex. 4:25), but never by a Gentile.

In later times, in the case of adults, a doctor performed circumcision and the Jews of the present day entrust it to a person called a mohel appointed especially for the purpose.

At first, this requirement seems to be strange but the Lord gave it to Abraham and his biological descendants as a “sign” of His covenant with Abraham and his descendants.

Circumcision would symbolize in a distinct way the purpose and results of the Abrahamic covenant. The emphasis of the covenant was on the Promised Seed, the Lord Jesus Christ and on the abundance of progeny, which would accrue to Abraham (Henry M. Morris, The Genesis Record, page 333).

Circumcision was a sign only to the individual concerned, his parents and his wife and was not to be shown to people in general, but was uniquely personal.

Henry M. Morris, writes, “To his parents it would confirm that they had been faithful in transmitting the seed to the son with whom God had blessed their union and that they were trying to follow God’s will in training him. To his wife, it
would give assurance that he indeed was a descendant of Abraham, to whom she could joyfully submit in the marriage relation, in faith that God would bless their home and their children. To the man himself, it would be a daily testimony that he and his family were consecrated to the God of Abraham and that they shared in his calling and ministry to the world”.

The sexual act and reproductive organs and processes were created by God to be enjoyed by both the man and the woman in marriage and received the full blessing of God (Gen. 1:28; 9:1). But with the Fall of Adam and the Woman, the sex organs and sex act became vehicles of sin and corruption since Satan led man into sexual debauchery, corrupting the institution of marriage in every conceivable way in order to stop God’s purpose for man and his redemption. Therefore, we see that another symbolic meaning of the act of circumcision where the cutting of the foreskin spoke of a surgical removal, a complete separation, from the sins of the flesh so widely prevalent in the world around Abraham and his descendants.

The nations and tribes around Abraham were involved in sins largely centered in the misuse of the male organ in adultery, fornication and sodomy. Circumcision symbolized to the Jewish man that he was a member of an elect nation, a peculiar people, distinctly holy before God, in relation to sexual conduct, so it came indirectly to speak of holiness in every phase of life.

Therefore, the organ of the male body that was used for procreation is consecrated to God (cf. Deut. 30:6; Jer. 4:4) and failure to submit to circumcision demonstrated one’s overt unwillingness to obey the Lord. The penalty for failing to submit to circumcision meant exile from Israel and from any inheritance in it and in fact resulted in capital punishment.

Circumcision has hygienic value since cancer of the penis has a much higher incidence in uncircumcised males.

Henry M. Morris, “If the nation so formed was indeed to endure and to be a witness for God through all generations to come, then it must be physically strong and clean”.

“Sign” is the noun ‘oth, which refers to the distinguishing mark upon the organ of procreation among Abraham’s biological descendants who had entered into the Abrahamic covenant and served as confirmation of Abraham’s lineage to fulfill their covenantal responsibility.

**Genesis 17:12** “And every male among you who is eight days old shall be circumcised throughout your generations, a servant who is born in the house or who is bought with money from any foreigner, who is not of your descendants.” (NASB95)
The phrase “every male” indicates that there were to be no exceptions, every male who was a biological descendant of Abraham was required to be circumcised.

The phrase “every male” also exempts females for circumcision of females in ancient times was a regular custom among some races or tribes.

All infants who were descendants of Abraham were to be circumcised on the eighth day after birth. Modern medicine has discovered that blood-clotting agents do not take full effect until eight days after birth. Of course, God knew this all along since He is omniscient and is the One who designed and created the human body.

**Genesis 17:13** “A servant who is born in your house or who is bought with your money shall surely be circumcised; thus shall My covenant be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant.” (NASB95)

Also, notice that any slave bought by a descendant of Abraham would also have to be circumcised, thus the servants and slaves were also brought into covenant relation with God and became part of His people.

**Genesis 17:14** “But an uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant.” (NASB95)

Genesis 17:14 records that there were to be no exceptions, any biological descendant of Abraham would have to be circumcised otherwise, he would be separated from those who were circumcised among Abraham’s biological descendants.

Genesis 17:23-27 records Abraham obeying the Lord’s command to circumcise himself and all the males in his household.

The ordinance of circumcision could not save man but was to be the distinguishing sign of the Jewish nation from the other nations. God has not commanded circumcision of the flesh for Christians.

The first church council in Jerusalem that is recorded in Acts 15 deemed that a person does not get saved through the practice of circumcision but through faith alone in Christ, thus the Gentiles were not required to be circumcised.

Paul consented to circumcision in the case of Timothy “because of the Jews” (Acts 16:3). Paul had Timothy circumcised after he asked him to become his co-worker (Acts 16:3).

According to the text Paul did this not out of deference to Timothy’s mother but on account of local unregenerate Jews who knew Timothy had not been circumcised. Timothy’s thoughts about the matter are not mentioned but evidently he willingly complied with Paul’s request.

Paul’s refusal to have Titus, a Gentile by birth, circumcised (Gal. 2:1-5) is not inconsistent with his decision to have Timothy, a Jew by birth, circumcised; both decisions accord with his theology and missionary strategy. Paul considered
circumcision per se as nothing, and the same was true of uncircumcision (Gal. 5:6; 6:15). If someone insisted that circumcision was necessary for salvation, Paul fought against this as false doctrine and refused to permit the uncircumcised person to be circumcised. But in Timothy’s case circumcision was simply a matter of expediency; and since Paul himself was prepared to become all things to all people so as to win some (1 Cor. 9:19-23), he did not hesitate to ask the same of Timothy.

Paul would not risk impeding the gospel’s progress among the Jews by having an uncircumcised Jewish-Christian as his associate. Had he obstinately done so, he would have alienated his audience immediately and forever. Therefore, Paul regarded Timothy’s circumcision not as a means of salvation but as a legal act to remove a serious obstacle to the presentation of the gospel to unregenerate Jews.

In Galatians, Paul refutes the Judaizers and states that a man is saved by faith and not through circumcision. The Judaizers originated with the Pharisees and those who adhered to their teaching and were composed of both believing and unbelieving Jews who taught strict adherence to the 613 mandates found in the Mosaic Law as well as the oral traditions of the Rabbis, which are now, documented in the Mishna and the Talmud. Many of the Judaizers were believers since Acts 6:7, 15:5 and 21:20 state that many of the priests and Pharisees who were teachers of the Mosaic Law believed in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation but after salvation they still adhered to the Mosaic Law rather than the mystery doctrine for the church age that Paul was teaching.

The Judaizers taught that one had to observe and practice the Mosaic Law in order to get saved whereas Paul taught that salvation by grace through faith in Christ and not through the works of the Mosaic Law (Eph. 2:8-9; Gal. 2:16). The Judaizers followed Paul throughout his missionary journey’s seeking to discredit and destroy his ministry (Acts 13:45; 17:5). Paul denounces their teaching of the Judaizers in the book of Galatians since they taught a “different gospel” according to Gal. 1:6 and “distorted the gospel of Christ” (Gal. 1:7).

In Philippians 3:2-3 Paul issues a warning to the Philippians to beware of the Judaizers and their legalistic teaching, in which they taught that man must be circumcised in order to be saved.

God is concerned about the condition of the heart and not the male phallus.

1 Corinthians 7:19 Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God. (NASB95)

Circumcision of the flesh is useless unless there is a circumcision of the heart.

Deuteronomy 30:6 “Moreover the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live.” (NASB95)
Colossians 2:11 and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ. (NASB95)

Romans 2:25 For indeed circumcision is of value if you practice the Law; but if you are a transgressor of the Law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. 26 So if the uncircumcised man keeps the requirements of the Law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? 27 And he who is physically uncircumcised, if he keeps the Law, will he not judge you who though having the letter of the Law and circumcision are a transgressor of the Law? 28 For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. 29 But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God. (NASB95)

Your faith in Christ is what is important to God and not whether you are circumcised or not. Abraham was first justified by his faith and then he was given circumcision as a badge or a mark that he was saved and set apart by God. The Jews in Paul's day believed that because they were physical descendants of Abraham that they could ride into heaven on the coattails of Abraham. They believed that they were sons of Abraham by right of circumcision, when in reality those who believe God are the true sons of Abraham.

So the key to understanding why God sought to kill Moses is found in Genesis 17:14.

Genesis 17:14 “But an uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant.” (NASB95)

“Cut off” is the verb קָרַת (kā·rāṯ), which means “to kill” since God sought to kill Moses for not circumcising his boys. God wouldn’t hold the boys accountable but rather Moses since he was responsible for having the boys circumcised. This usage of the verb appears in Genesis 9:11, 41:36, Exodus 31:14, Leviticus 18:29, and 20:17 to name a few.

In Exodus 4:25, we see that Moses’ wife, Zipporah circumcises her boys but she does so grudgingly. She expresses her disgust with the ritual indicating that she had prevented Moses from practicing this ritual. She was raised in a different tradition in Midian, even though her father was a priest and worshipper of Yahweh. Evidence demonstrates that the Egyptians practiced circumcision but was performed at the age of twelve. Abraham’s descendants, the Israelites were to perform the ritual on the child when he was eight days old. This is quite different than the custom of the Midianites. Thus, Zipporah thought it repulsive to circumcise an infant. She thought it cruel. Thus, her statement “you are a
bridegroom of blood” is not a term of endearment as some suggest but rather in fact a derogatory statement.

So what Moses did was to keep the peace in his home and keep his wife happy, he compromised. However, he was living in disobedience to the commands that God gave the Israelites. If he were to be the leader of the Israelites this reproach must be removed. Thus, God forced Moses to have his boys circumcised. Zipporah did it to save her husband’s life. But she did not agree with the practice. Evidently, Moses was too sick to perform the ritual, thus it fell to his wife. Therefore, God wanted to teach Moses that he was to be totally and completely dedicated to obeying all His precepts and commands including circumcision.

Moses was circumcised by his parents since the text doesn’t say that Zipporah circumcised Moses, but rather it says she circumcised their boys. He was being put to death by God because he wasn’t circumcised but because his boys weren’t.

Exodus 4:27-31

Exodus 4:27 Now the Lord said to Aaron, “Go to meet Moses in the wilderness.” So he went and met him at the mountain of God and kissed him. 28 Moses told Aaron all the words of the Lord with which He had sent him, and all the signs that He had commanded him to do. 29 Then Moses and Aaron went and assembled all the elders of the sons of Israel; 30 and Aaron spoke all the words which the Lord had spoken to Moses. He then performed the signs in the sight of the people. 31 So the people believed; and when they heard that the Lord was concerned about the sons of Israel and that He had seen their affliction, then they bowed low and worshiped. (NASB95)

While God was giving instructions to Moses, He was also doing the same way with his brother Aaron. God tells Aaron to go meet Moses in the wilderness where they reunite. The fact that Aaron obeys God indicates that Aaron was a believer and the fact that he accompanies Moses indicates also that he was in total agreement with God’s plan. Remember, God had arranged for Aaron to accompany Moses when he confronted the Israelites and the Egyptians.

In verses 29-31, we have the account of Aaron being Moses’ spokesperson and the Lord performing the miracles through Moses in the presence of the Israelites who responded by worshipping the Lord in thanksgiving for His concern for them and the great revelation they had received from Him through Moses and Aaron. This response of the Israelites expresses their faith in the Lord. God’s prophesy to Moses that they would respond to his message from Him has been fulfilled as recorded in verse 31.
This worship of the Lord by the Israelites and was the appropriate response by them to the manifestation of the Lord’s grace and mercy as well as His omnipotence as demonstrated by the miracles performed in their presence.

There are four English words, “reverence,” “respect,” “awe,” and “wonder,” which express the concept of worshipping God.

Webster’s New Universal Unabridged Dictionary defines the noun “reverence”: “A feeling or attitude of deep respect tinged with awe; veneration.”

Therefore, paraphrasing this definition we would say that the Israelites’ response to the miracles and promise of deliverance from Egyptian bondage was to possess an attitude of deep respect and awe for God.

Webster’s New Universal Unabridged Dictionary defines the noun “respect”: “esteem for or a sense of the worth or excellence of a person, a personal quality or trait, or something considered as a manifestation of a personal quality or trait.”

The Israelites’ response to the miracles and the guarantee of deliverance from Egyptian bondage was to esteem the excellence of the Person of God as manifested through His personal qualities or attributes such as love, faithfulness, mercy, compassion, justice, righteousness, truth, omnipotence, omnipresence, omniscience, immutability, and sovereignty.

Webster’s New Universal Unabridged Dictionary defines the noun “awe”: “an overwhelming feeling of reverence, admiration, fear, etc. produced by that which is grand, sublime, extremely powerful or the like.”

The Israelites’ response to the miracles and the message of deliverance was to possess an overwhelming feeling of reverence, admiration for the Lord.

Webster’s New Universal Unabridged Dictionary defines the noun “wonder”: “to be filled with admiration, amazement or awe; marvel.”

The Israelites’ response to the miracles and the message of deliverance was one of being filled with admiration, amazement and awe.

Warren Wiersbe writes, “True wonder reaches right into your heart and mind and shakes you up. It not only has depth, it has value; it enriches your life. Wonder is not cheap amusement that brings a smile to your face. It is an encounter with reality, with God, which brings awe to your heart. You’re overwhelmed with an emotion that is a mixture of gratitude, adoration, reverence, fear-and love. You’re not looking for explanations; you’re lost in the wonder of God” (Real Worship, page 43, Baker Books).

Therefore, paraphrasing this comment by Wiersbe on wonder we would say that the Israelites’ response to the miracles and the message of deliverance reached right into their hearts and shook them up and enriched their lives. It overwhelmed them with an emotion that was a mixture of gratitude, adoration, reverence, fear and love for the Lord. They weren’t looking for explanations since they were lost in the wonder of God. Therefore, the Israelites worshipped the Lord in the sense
that they were manifesting an attitude of deep reverence, respect and awe of the Lord for such a magnificent display of His power and promise of deliverance. Therefore, when the Israelites worshipped the Lord they were expressing thanks to Him.

Worship is adoring contemplation of God as He has been revealed by the Holy Spirit in the Person of Christ and in the Scriptures and is also the loving ascription of praise to God for what He is, both in Himself and in His ways and is the bowing of the soul and spirit in deep humility and reverence before Him.

Warren Wiersbe defines worship, “Worship is the believer’s response of all that they are – mind, emotions, will and body-to what God is and says and does. This response has its mystical side in subjective experience and its practical side in objective obedience to God’s revealed will. Worship is a loving response that’s balanced by the fear of the Lord, and it is a deepening response as the believer comes to know God better” (Real Worship, 26).

If we paraphrase Wiersbe’s definition, we could say the following: The Israelites worshipped the Lord in the sense that they were responding in their minds, emotions, and bodies to what the Lord is and did for them through the miracles and said to them with the message of deliverance.