

Nathan Smith  
OT611 – Russell  
Module 3

## Dual Commissioning of Moses

Exodus 3:1-4:17, 6:2-7:6

After several readings of the *Source Criticism* essay by David Baker, and looking at the color-coded text provided in the course center from 3:1-4:17 and 6:1-7:6, I gained a clearer understanding of what some Old Testament scholars consider to be evidence of multiple sources of the Pentateuch. What bothers me is not the possibility of multiple sources, but the notion of the seemingly arbitrary points at which the text has been carved by source criticism. For instance, the two portions of verse 3:4 seems like quite an odd place for a editor/steward of canonical text to splice a sentence together.

A more likely candidate for a break-point in textual flow might be 4:24-26, which seems conspicuously out of place, given the context of the verses which precede and follow the passage. It is almost as if the circumcision story is either injected into the storyline, or there is something crucial missing between verses 23 and 24. While this is outside the scope of the assignment, I read the corresponding portion of the Fretheim book, simply hoping to find some sort of clarification on the matter. I digress.

Some of the ways Fretheim framed his descriptions of 3:1-4:17 struck me as a bit odd. In several instances, he insinuated that God saw in Moses a certain gifting for leadership, without which God's plan would not have been possible; For instance, the way that Moses' protests were met by God suggesting alternative a work-around for each. Theologically, I think it is incorrect to assume that God "needs" any of us in order to accomplish his divine will on the Earth.

While I agree that God has a plan, and a path which he would have each of us walk, I do not think that we as human beings can ever thwart his plan simply by being uncooperative. God's divine will marches on, whether or not we are walking in-step. Rather, I would say the dialog near the burning bush was Moses' opportunity to take God at his word, that God would be with him and provide the wherewithal. This opportunity was squandered via disbelief, yet God gave to him Aaron as a co-ambassador. With the benefit of 20/20 foresight, God plans for contingency, so even though we might not "get it" the first time he gives us instruction, he still uses us for his purpose.

A parallel story is told in 6:2-7:6. Depending on one's view of source criticism, this could either be a re-telling of the same event, or a recurrence of doubt on Moses' part after having an unfavorable response from the Israelites due to the increased workload imposed by Pharaoh. Either way, this interchange is decidedly more militaristic, with more frequent use of phrases such as "outstretched arm" and "mighty hand." Aaron here is depicted as more of a lieutenant carrying out a co-commission, rather than a side-kick employed to help Moses with a stuttering problem. This is reinforced by the genealogy, as if to bolster the legitimacy of an authoritative bloodline, proving their claim as the hand-picked representatives of the chosen people.

The calling of 3:1-4:17 is more provisional, with God reassuring Moses of deliverance into the promised land of his ancestors. It is interesting that when he saw the bush, he continued to look at it, yet shielded his eyes only when he realized it was the God of his father and forefathers whom was speaking. In 3:14, God reveals his name as *I AM WHO I AM*, the self-existent one, whereas in 6:3 God tells Moses his personal name *YHWH*, not previously known to any of the patriarchs, who knew him only as "God

Almighty.” Another point of interest is that in the 4:16 commission, Moses is as God to Aaron, and Aaron operates as prophet of Moses, yet in 7:1 Moses is God to Pharaoh.

While the core message is the same throughout, that of a merciful and mighty God hearing the cries of his people and remembering his promise to them, the delivery varies enough between these two passages that the question of authorship begs an answer. While we cannot say with any degree of certainty who the original author was, I do believe that there were multiple sources which were later edited together. What leads me to this assumption though, is not so much the inconsistencies in language or names of God, but the re-telling of passages such as these, which appear to be the same story.