

ENMERKAR AND THE HEAVY MOUTH (Ex. 4:10–16)

Among the objections Moses raised against his going to Pharaoh (Ex. 3:11) was that he considered himself “slow of speech and slow of tongue” (Ex. 4:10). In the Hebrew language this condition is expressed literally as “heavy of mouth” and “heavy of tongue.” Moses’ difficulties in speech are not unprecedented in ancient Near Eastern literature.

Enmerkar, the Sumerian king of Uruk and third successor to the famous Gilgamesh, is the main character of *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta*, an epic written in Sumerian near the end of the 3rd millennium B.C. In the brief passage, a messenger is unable to comprehend a message given to him by Enmerkar, and thus unable to verbally deliver it. Like Moses, Enmerkar was “slow in speech,” expressed in the epic as “heavy of mouth.” Therefore, the king of Uruk invented writing by putting the message on a piece of clay.

This epic seems to explain the origin of writing, implying that writing did not exist before Enmerkar (c. 2700–2500 B.C.). In actuality, writing preceded Enmerkar by at least 500 years.

God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you.”

⁶Furthermore the LORD said to him, “Now put your hand in your bosom.” And he put his hand in his bosom, and when he took it out, behold, his hand *was* leprous, like snow. ⁷And He said, “Put your hand in your bosom again.” So he put his hand in his bosom again, and drew it out of his bosom, and behold, it was restored like his *other* flesh. ⁸“Then it will be, if they do not believe you, nor heed the message of the first sign, that they may believe the message of the latter sign. ⁹And it shall be, if they do not believe even these two signs, or listen to your voice, that you shall take water from the river^a and pour *it* on the dry *land*. The water which you take from the river will become blood on the dry *land*.”

¹⁰Then Moses said to the LORD, “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.”

¹¹So the LORD said to him, “Who has made man’s mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? *Have* not I, the LORD? ¹²Now therefore, go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say.”

¹³But he said, “O my Lord, please send by the hand of whomever *else* You may send.”

¹⁴So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses, and He said: “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.

¹⁵Now 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. ¹⁶So 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. ¹⁷And you shall take this rod in your hand, with which you shall do the signs.”

Moses Goes to Egypt

¹⁸So Moses went and returned to Jethro his father-in-law, and said to him, “Please let me go and return to my brethren who *are* in Egypt, and see whether they are still alive.”

And Jethro said to Moses, “Go in peace.”

¹⁹Now the LORD said to Moses in Midian, “Go, return to Egypt; for all the men who sought your life are dead.” ²⁰Then Moses took his wife and his sons and set them on a donkey, and he returned to the land of Egypt. And Moses took the rod of God in his hand.

²¹And the LORD said to Moses, “When you go back to Egypt, see that you do all those wonders before Pharaoh which I have put in your hand. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go. ²²Then you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the LORD: “Israel *is* My son, My firstborn.” ²³So I say to you, let My son go that he may serve Me. But if you refuse to let him go, indeed I will kill your son, your firstborn.’”

²⁴And it came to pass on the way, at the encampment, that the LORD met him and sought to kill him. ²⁵Then Zipporah took a sharp stone and cut off the foreskin of her son and cast *it* at *Moses*^a feet, and said, “Surely you *are* a husband of blood to me!” ²⁶So He let him go. Then she said, “*You are* a husband of blood!”—because of the circumcision.

²⁷And the LORD said to Aaron, “Go into the wilderness to meet Moses.” So he went and met him on the mountain of God, and kissed him. ²⁸So Moses told Aaron all the words of the LORD who had sent him, and all the signs which He

TIME CAPSULE		1660 to 1633 B.C.
1660	Horse in use in Nubia (southern Egypt)	
1650	Hattusilis I makes Hattusa the Hittite capital	
1648–1540	The Hyksos dynasty controls Lower Egypt	
1646–1626	Ammisaduqa, king of Babylon	
1634	Hittite king Hattusilis I destroys Alalakh	
1633–1550	Egypt’s 17th Dynasty rules at Thebes	

4:9 ^aThat is, the Nile 4:25 ^aLiterally *his*