

# GOD MAKING PEOPLE MUTE, DEAF, AND BLIND – EXODUS 4:11

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Exodus 1:8-14 reveals that after a new Pharaoh came to power, probably referring to Ahmose, the founder of the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty who began to rule around 1575 B.C.,<sup>1</sup> the Israelites in Egypt were subjected to harsh slavery. Moses, having been spared by the Hebrew midwives, was raised in Pharaoh's house as the son of Pharaoh's daughter (Ex. 1:15–2:10). When Moses was forty years old, he killed an Egyptian who was beating an Israelite and then fled to Midian to avoid being killed by Pharaoh (Ex. 2:15; Acts 7:23).

After many years, the Pharaoh who was intent on killing Moses died, and the Israelites cried out to God for relief from their slavery (Ex. 2:23). When Moses was eighty years old, God appeared to him in Midian as a flame in the midst of a bush and said to him, "Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt" (Ex. 3:10, 7:7; Acts 7:30).

Moses resisted God's mission for him. In Ex. 4:10, he pleaded inadequacy, stating, "Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent, either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and of tongue." Exodus 4:11 states, "And Yahweh said to him, who has put [*śîm*] a mouth in the man, or who makes [*śîm*] [him] mute or deaf or sighted or blind, if not I, Yahweh?" The point is that, since God is the one who endowed mankind with the capacity for speech and is the maker of all people (e.g., Job 10:11, 31:15, 34:19; Ps. 94:9, 139:13; Prov. 14:31, 17:5, 20:12, 22:2), those with physical handicaps as well as those without, he is able to overcome any speech limitation to use Moses for his purpose and glory. Moses' excuse holds no water. Thus, God commands him in 4:12, "Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak."

This raises the question of whether God is culpable for creating people with physical handicaps, whether it is wrong for him to create anyone (or so many) who cannot speak or hear or see, and by extension, who suffer from other defects. This is deep water, but I say the answer is "No" because God's ongoing creation through intermediate or secondary causes, like human procreation, takes place after the Fall. Once mankind unleashed the sin plague on the world, God imposed a curse on creation because in his omniscience he knew that mankind in this sin-infected world would have to be surrounded by dreadful consequences of sin for his appeal to them as sinners to be optimized. In other words, the pervasive reality of the curse – this temporary dystopian existence of birth defects, disease, pain, suffering, sorrow, and death – is needed in this sinful world to reinforce, subliminally if not consciously, the truth that choosing sin over God yields disaster. It serves to keep fresh before mankind the horror of sin, to provide an ongoing, visceral display of the tragic consequences of rejecting God. It is a way of communicating to the emotional and subconscious side of mankind that this world is not the way it is supposed to be, which impression is part of the backdrop, the epistemological environment, in which God calls sinners to choose him.

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<sup>1</sup> See, Ashby Camp, [Israel, Egypt, and the Exodus](#).

Creation continues to serve and glorify God, but because it now does so with the inclusion of remedial evil (harm and suffering) that was necessitated by sin's invasion,<sup>2</sup> its current functioning is at odds with God's initial provision and eternal vision. In that sense, the cursed creation can be viewed as an enemy, as something opposed to God, even though he is the one who cursed it and rules over it. The coexistence of these differing perspectives is made clear in the case of human death. God, in his righteousness, imposed death on mankind because of sin (Gen. 3:17-19; Rom. 5:21; 1 Cor. 15:21-22), and yet death is identified as "the last enemy" to be expunged from this corrupted creation (1 Cor. 15:26; Rev. 21:4). The same is true of all consequences of sin, including all physical handicaps.

Without knowing precisely how the curse functions as a necessary background for God's good purpose in this sin-invaded creation, we are in no position to assert that he is wrong to create (through human intermediates) people with physical handicaps. As difficult as some burdens are to carry and however tenuous their contribution to a good purpose may seem, we trust that the God who gave his Son for us desires only to bless us. In the end, we confess with Job that some works of God are simply beyond our capacity to perceive correctly (Job 42:2-6).

The principle is illustrated on an individual scale in the case of the man who was blind from birth in John 9. The disciples assumed that the blindness was punishment for the sin of either the man or his parents, but Jesus informed them that he was born blind, and thus had lived his entire life in that condition, "that the works of God might be displayed in him" (v. 3). In serving as the object of an amazing miracle by Jesus, the blind man had a role in opening the eyes of many, both at the time (Jn. 10:21) and throughout history by inclusion of the account in Scripture. What appeared to be pointless suffering and hardship was revealed in that instance to have a noble purpose in God's plan. And I have no doubt that the man who lived so many years in darkness, having come to believe in and worship Jesus (Jn. 9:35-38), is thankful for having been used that way by God.

Accepting that the curse was instituted by God in furtherance of his good purpose does not mean that one should forego preventing or relieving the suffering that flows from that curse. Just as Jesus' great healing miracles glorified God (e.g., Mat. 15:30-31) as a sign of Jesus' identity and a preview of the power that he will one day bring to bear in the transformation of all creation (Rom. 8:18-24), so our efforts to counteract the curse glorify God by reflecting his love and his ultimate purpose of complete healing and restoration. In other words, the curse serves God's good purpose as the epistemological environment for his call by being both a reminder of the horror of sin and a stage for reflecting God's love and ultimate purpose.

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<sup>2</sup> God's acts in light of the fact of sin's presence. It is consistent with God's omnipotence to believe it is *logically impossible* for him to optimize his appeal to sinners in a sin-invaded world without employing the background of the cursed creation. Logical impossibilities are not subject to power.