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### The Origin of Moses's Stutter in Priestly Literature

The non-Priestly accounts of the call of Moses describe the prophet as having two unusual characteristics. First, the short and puzzling “Bridegroom of Blood” narrative in Exodus 4:24-26 implies that Moses is uncircumcised, which angers God so much that the deity seeks to kill Moses. Second, when God drafts Moses to be God’s spokesman, Moses protests that he is inelegant and “heavy” or “slow” of mouth and tongue (Exod. 4:10). Rabbinic and modern commentators often interpret this passage to mean that Moses stutters or has some other speech impediment. In the Priestly version of Moses’s calling, on the other hand, Moses also protests that his speech is disabled, but the terminology has changed: he is now “uncircumcised of lips” (Exod. 6:12, 30).

This paper proposes that the Priestly author(s) were familiar with popular traditions that Moses was uncircumcised and sought to counter such traditions with a new narrative that merged Moses’s lack of a circumcision with his impeded speech. In accord with other passages where P attempts to turn a negative account of Israelite ancestors into a more flattering version, P appears to reject the idea that Israel’s most famous prophet would not be a member of God’s covenant people (as enjoined on Abraham in Genesis 17). Unable or unwilling to ignore the tradition entirely, though, the Priestly source elegantly redefines Moses’s foreskin from the physical to the metaphorical, from uncircumcised of body to “uncircumcised of lips.” Metaphorical uses of *‘ārēl* and *‘orlā* in Deuteronomy, Jeremiah, the Community Rule (1QS), and Peshar Habakkuk (1QpHab) help contextualize P’s non-literal usage.

Ultimately, an examination of Moses’s speech and speaking ability across multiple Pentateuchal sources will demonstrate the extent to which a speech impediment affects other episodes in the prophet’s life. This paper will also explore the literary and psychological effect of introducing Moses as someone who stammers.