

The Call of Moses

Exodus 3

Exodus 3 – *“Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. And he led the flock to the back of the desert, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² And the Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed. ³ Then Moses said, ‘I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn.’ ⁴ So when the Lord saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, ‘Moses, Moses!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’”*

⁵ Then He said, “Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground.” ⁶ Moreover He said, “I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God.

⁷ And the Lord said: “I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows. ⁸ So I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites. ⁹ Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel has come to Me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. ¹⁰ Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.” ¹¹ But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?”

¹² So He said, “I will certainly be with you. And this shall be a sign to you that I have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.” ¹³ Then Moses said to God, “Indeed, when I come to the children of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they say to me, ‘What is His name?’ what shall I say to them?”

¹⁴ And God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And He said, “Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” ¹⁵ Moreover God said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: ‘The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is My name forever, and this is My memorial to all generations.’ ¹⁶ Go and gather the elders of Israel together, and say to them, ‘The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared to me, saying, “I have surely visited you and seen what is done to you in Egypt; ¹⁷ and I have said I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, to a land flowing with milk and honey.”’”

¹⁸ Then they will heed your voice; and you shall come, you and the elders of Israel, to the king of Egypt; and you shall say to him, ‘The Lord God of the Hebrews has met with us; and now, please, let us go three days’ journey into the wilderness,

that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God.’¹⁹ But I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not even by a mighty hand.²⁰ So I will stretch out My hand and strike Egypt with all My wonders which I will do in its midst; and after that he will let you go.²¹ And I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and it shall be, when you go, that you shall not go empty-handed.²² But every woman shall ask of her neighbor, namely, of her who dwells near her house, articles of silver, articles of gold, and clothing; and you shall put them on your sons and on your daughters. So you shall plunder the Egyptians.”

Background Notes

The time had come for God to deliver His people out of Egypt. God’s chosen leader, Moses, had been in training for eighty years—forty years in Egypt and forty years in the land of Midian. God revealed Himself to Moses in a burning bush, and gave Moses a specific call.

Verse 1 says that Moses was pasturing the sheep of his father-in-law. He led the flock to the back of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. Mt. Horeb is another name for Mt. Sinai, as we learn in Deuteronomy 5. There’s a lot of debate as to the location of this mountain -- the traditional Mt. Sinai may not be the actual Mt. Sinai. When we hike the traditional Mt. Sinai on my Holy Land tours, I don’t tell the people that they may have hiked the wrong mountain until the hike is over! It’s quite a hike, and I don’t want them to be discouraged!

It was at the base of Mt. Sinai (wherever that exact location may be) that Moses observed the burning bush—a bush that was on fire but was not consumed. Moses was curious, and said to himself, “I’ve got to check this out! Why isn’t that bush burning up?” I’m sure we would have checked it out, too -- I know I would! By the way, if you visit St. Catherine’s Monastery at the base of the traditional Mt. Sinai, you will be shown “The Burning Bush”! Of course, it’s not the real burning bush -- it’s only a bush with red berries, and it doesn’t even look like it’s on fire! I’m sure Moses didn’t mistake red berries for flames of fire. No -- the burning bush was a miracle.

Can you imagine Moses’ surprise when the burning bush became a talking bush? God spoke to Moses from the midst of the bush. God told him to take off his sandals, because God’s presence meant this was holy ground. In that culture, removing your sandals was a sign of respect or honor for a higher authority. Certainly there is a lesson here in showing reverence to the Lord. Too many people, including some Christians, treat the things of God in too casual a way—even making jokes about holy things – even the Lord Himself! We need to ‘take off our shoes’ and show proper respect when we’re speaking of God and to God.

Doctrinal Points

1. God is aware of the sufferings of His people.

God is aware of the sufferings of His people. Israel had been in Egypt now for more than 400 years, and they had been under bondage for more than 275 years. It certainly didn't seem that God was aware of the sufferings of His people -- but He was!

There were reasons why God had His people remain in Egypt for so many years. First of all, as we've already seen, God was forming and forging His people as a nation in Egypt, and that took some time.

Furthermore, God was longsuffering and patient with the various pagan peoples in the land of Canaan: the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, the Jebusites, and the rest of the Canaanites (v8, 17). Although God waited patiently for these peoples to turn away from their idolatrous and immoral ways, they did not do so. As a result, God's axe of judgment would fall on them at the time of Israel's conquest of Canaan, and Israel would be God's axe.

So God was well aware of the sufferings of His people. In fact, this is probably one reason why God chose to speak to Moses from a burning bush. Here was a bush undergoing fire, and yet it was not consumed. In the same way, God's people were undergoing the fires of oppression in Egypt, but they were not consumed. And as God was present in the midst of the burning bush, so God was present in the midst of His suffering people.

God was well aware of His suffering people then, and God is aware of His suffering people today. It may look like God is not aware of your problems and hurts, but God is aware of the sufferings of His people.

2. God is active in the salvation of His people.

In verses 8 and 17, God specifically told Moses that He would deliver His people out of Egypt, and He would bring them into a good land. A land that "flowed with milk and honey" is a productive land, a land good for grazing flocks and herds and growing crops. But how was God going to do this impossible task, humanly speaking?

Well, first of all He was going to use Moses, who had now been in training for the job for eighty years. We see in verse 11 that Moses had some doubts: *"But Moses said to God, 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?'"* Sounds like something we would say, doesn't it?

But God said, "I will be with you -- and guess what, Moses? Here's a sign for you: You'll not only bring all my people not only out of Egypt, but you'll bring them right here to this mountain in the wilderness to worship and serve me!" Wow! What a sign! Can you imagine?

“Furthermore,” said the Lord, “I’ll soften Pharaoh up with some miraculous plagues. He won’t let you leave Egypt at first, even for a three-day journey, but eventually he’ll let you go. And you won’t go out empty handed. I will grant my people favor with the Egyptian people, and they’ll give you silver and gold and clothes for the asking!”

By the way, in verse 22, the word *ask* is a better translation of the word translated *borrow* in the King James Version. There’s no idea here of Israel being required to return these materials. No! These gifts were actually only partial wages for their many years of slave labor.

The fact that God is active in the salvation of His people is focused here in how God revealed Himself to Moses: in His name, **I AM**. When Moses wanted to know God’s name, the Lord responded, “**I AM WHO I AM**.” God was not playing games, or telling Moses that He wouldn’t tell him His name. No, **I AM WHO I AM** emphasizes God’s **dynamic and active self-existence**. This is the inner meaning of the name Yahweh, the name of God that is translated LORD (with all capital letters) in our English Bible translations. This name of God emphasizes His dynamic and active self-existence as the Redeemer of His people, and as the God who keeps His covenant with His people. God is active in the salvation of His people.

Practical Application

Be a burning bush for God.

I believe there are a number of spiritual lessons from the burning bush that we can apply to ourselves in a personal way. Here are three of them in question form:

1. Do people pause to see what makes us unique? As Moses turned aside to examine this unique sight, so people should pause to ask us what makes us different. This becomes a great opportunity to witness for the Lord.
2. Are we on fire for the Lord? As Christians we should continually burn for the Lord—not burn up or burn out—but continually be on fire without being consumed! Look at 2 Corinthians 4:8-10: “*We are troubled on every side, but not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.*”
3. Can God speak through our lives? As God spoke from the midst of the burning bush, so God wants to speak to others through our lives. Can He? He can when we let Him. So, let’s be like the burning bush. Be a burning bush for God.