

## Bible Study #05 Exodus 3.1–10 02–12–2021

The fascinating story of The Burning Bush, which did not burn up introduces this chapter and leads Moses into the 3rd forty year period of his life. The expression ‘the mountain of God’ (v. 1) does not indicate that there was only one mountain on which God revealed Himself.

Various mountains were places of revelation (cf. Moriah, Gen. 22:2; Perazim, 2 Sam. 5:20; Carmel, 1 Kings 18:20-39) but Horeb/Sinai was particularly known as ‘the mountain of God’ because of its connection with covenant-making and also because of God’s self-revelation of Himself there.

What Moses saw was the angel of the Lord ‘in flames of fire from within the bush’. The angel of the Lord, who is called elsewhere ‘the angel of God’ (Judg. 13:6, 9), appeared first in the patriarchal narratives (see Gen. 16:7-13; 22:15-18). He claimed on the one hand to be God’s messenger, declaring His word, while on the other hand claiming to exercise the prerogatives of God Himself.

That Moses was looking at a revelation of God is made plain in verse 4 where the angel is called God. Here the angel of the Lord appears in the bush, and then in v. 4 God calls to Moses from the bush. The word for bush only occurs in this chapter and in Deut. 33:16, where the promise is made concerning the tribe of Joseph that it would have the blessing of the presence of the God of the covenant who revealed Himself to Moses.

No identification can be made of the bush with any specific species. The emphasis is not on the particular type of desert shrub but on the revelation that takes place by sight and hearing. The phenomenon of the burning bush was a means chosen by God to demonstrate his power and holiness. It also produced in Moses a proper sense of reverence towards God as he is commissioned to go back to Egypt on his mission of redemption.

Fire is often used in the Bible in connection with the holiness of God (cf. Exod. 19:18; 24:17; Lev. 9:24). The fact that the bush was burning, yet not consumed by the flames, is only one of a number of miraculous happenings in the Mosaic era. A similar cluster of miracles occurred in the ministry of Jesus, in a period when the old covenant gave way to the new.

It is worth noting that the tetragram (YHWH) is used in verses 2, 4, 7 before the matter of the name of God comes up. Remember to watch for “LORD,” (printed in all caps or small caps) in the majority of Bible Translations. It is apparently already in use, even though they didn’t fully understand it. It always points to redemption and is almost considered as a personal name for God.

The words spoken are a call from God. ‘Moses, Moses,’ probably intending the repetition to indicate urgency (cf. 1 Sam. 3:10). The response of Moses is that of Isaiah much later (Isa. 6:8): ‘Here I am.’ The call is answered by immediate readiness on Moses’ part. When God speaks in power, those called respond with willingness to His command, as demonstrated in the calling of the disciples by Jesus in the Gospel accounts.

The instruction immediately follows to Moses not to come any closer and to remove his sandals, for the place where he was standing was holy ground. This same instruction to remove the sandals was given later to Joshua by the commander of the Lord’s army (Jos. 5:15). In both passages the idea was not that the ground was intrinsically holy but made so because of God’s immediate presence there.

God again identified Himself to Moses as ‘the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’ (see 2:24). The singular, ‘your father,’ may seem strange at first sight because of the listing of multiple names. It points to Abraham as the one to whom the promises were originally given, and those promises were repeated to Isaac and Jacob.

The successive covenants were not altogether new covenants, but rather reaffirmations of the basic one given to Abraham. Jesus quoted v. 6a in relation to his teaching on marriage at the final resurrection (Matt. 22:23-33//Mark 12:18-27).

His use of the passage seems to reflect on the fact that the wives of the three patriarchs all had difficulty in conceiving. It was only by God's power and faithfulness that children were born, and so He remains the one who can give life from the dead. Moses' reaction was to hide his face, for he feared to look on God.

In v. 7 we have a wonderful expression of God's tender care for his afflicted people in Egypt. He had indeed seen their affliction, heard their cries, and understood their suffering. The prophet Isaiah, in his ministry to Judah, referred to the exodus experience of redemption, saying that he was going to tell of all the many good things that the Lord had done for the house of Israel, in love and mercy redeeming them (Isa. 63:7-9).

The use of the word 'my people' is significant. God was no longer dealing with just a family, but a group who had become a nation. Out of all nations they were His 'treasured possession' (Exod. 19:5), chosen not because they were more numerous than other nations, but simply because the Lord loved them (Deut. 7:7-8).

God's saving work was not just something for the future, but he reassured Moses that he had already come down to rescue the people (lit. 'to deliver him', i.e., the nation). While He had appeared to others earlier in patriarchal history, he had come down and appeared in the burning bush.

The redemptive mission was twofold. On the one hand, it involved release from the slavery in Egypt, while on the other hand it involved bringing Israel up out of Egypt to the land that God had, by solemn oath, sworn to give them.

The verb 'bring up' became one of the standard terms used to describe either the Lord's or Moses' actions in leading the people out of Egypt (for the Lord, see Exod. 33:15; Lev. 11:45; Num. 21:5; Deut. 20:1; Josh. 24:17; for Moses, see Exod. 17:3; 32:1, 7, 23; 33:1).

The land to which Israel would be brought is described as 'a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey.' These expressions also became standard ones in relation to the nature of Canaan, especially in the Book of Deuteronomy (for 'the good land', see Deut. 1:25, 35; 3:25; 4:21, 22; 6:18; 8:7, 10; 9:6; 11:17; for 'the land flowing with milk and honey', see 6:3; 11:9; 26:9, 15; 27:3; 31:20).

The use of the reference to 'milk and honey' parallels a similar expression in Ugaritic (another Semitic language). On a tablet found on the Mediterranean coast to the north of Israel Baal is said to send fertility and abundance in the form of fat/oil and honey.

These expressions were a way of denoting the bounty that was to be available to them. The land that the Israelites were to inherit was 'the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites'. This list of the inhabitants of Canaan is one of several that occur in the Old Testament.

The fullest list in Genesis 15:18-21 names ten Gentile nations, while others give varying numbers (see Gen. 10:15-17; Deut. 7:1; Josh. 3:10; 11:3; 24:11). No explanation is given why the variation occurs from passage to passage, but there is a parallel with the description of the land promised to Israel.

The boundaries are stated in different ways (cf. Gen. 15:18-21; 28:13-14; Exod. 23:31; Josh. 1:2-5), probably indicating that the promised land was a concept, not a piece of territory to be marked out with arithmetical precision. It was enough to know that these were the representative nations who would have to be disinherited before Israel could occupy the land.

Twice in vs. 9–10 the expression ‘and now’ appears. It forms a marker to indicate a change in the dialogue; the first occurrence links in with the preceding account, while the second one at the start of verse 10 indicates the consequence. The NIV captures the meaning well with the translation, ‘And now ... so now.’

The Lord’s word reiterates what had already been declared in verse 7 regarding the cry of the Israelites reaching Him. He had heard them and also seen how the Egyptians were maltreating them. The word for ‘oppression’ here is used almost exclusively of the oppressive treatment meted out to the Israelites by the Egyptians.

The Israelites were always to remember their experience in Egypt and hence they were commanded not to oppress foreigners (Exod. 22:21; 23:9). The second ‘and now’ introduces the action required to remedy the situation. Moses was instructed that he was being sent to Pharaoh to bring God’s people out of Egypt. Again Israel is identified as ‘my people’ though with the qualifying phrase, ‘the sons of Israel.’

Tomorrow we will study 3:11–22 and hear Moses’ attempt to avoid the Call God is giving him and then hear how the oppressed slaves are able to leave with the wealth of Egypt without a fight.