

Ministry of Grace

Exodus 3- Speaker Notes

Background

The children of Israel have been in Egypt for several generations and are now under severe oppression by the Egyptians because the current Pharaoh likes having a slave workforce and is afraid that they will join with his enemies and find a way to escape back to Canaan. In the previous chapter, we learned about the birth and the first 40 years of Moses's life where he was a very important person in Egypt. He was given the best education and military training as well as leadership experience with the full weight of Egypt behind him. Now, we are about to learn of the next 40 years leading up to the personal encounter with God at the burning bush in the wilderness of Sinai.

Since his escape from Egypt, Moses has been out of the public eye and he has learned how to tend a flock of mindless, faithless animals, which will prove to be even more valuable than his formal education and training. Now after 40 years, he is about to be thrust back into the public eye with no one to stand behind him except the creator of heaven and earth. Before Moses can take on this new responsibility, however, God needs to get his attention in a very dramatic way. Some may ask, "Why didn't God just appear to Moses and tell him what He wanted him to do?" As we will see in the following verses, Moses was not in a frame of mind to suddenly leave his sheep and face off with the man who was currently the most powerful man in the entire world. Our God has a way of getting our attention focused on Him when He needs us to serve Him.

Exodus 3:1-2

Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed.

There has been a lot of confusion caused by the statement here that Jethro is Moses's father-in-law. We talked about this briefly last week and noted that the translation could just as easily been "brother-in-law." The Hebrew word is *chāwthān*, the root of which literally means "to give away in marriage." It refers to the familial relationship that is created by marriage. In **Genesis 19:14** the same word is translated as "sons-in-law."

So Lot went out and said to his sons-in-law, who were to marry his daughters, ... (**Genesis 19:14**)

This word can mean "father-in-law," "son-in-law," or "brother-in-law." Since **Exodus 3:1** occurs some forty years after the events of Exodus chapter 2, it is possible (and quite likely) that Jethro is not the same person as Reuel, but his son (and brother of Moses's wife Zipporah.)

We are told here that Moses led the flock to the "west side of the wilderness." The original Hebrew says "the backside" of the wilderness. Today, we tend to think of the cardinal directions starting with North. This would have been completely foreign to the people in the days of the Exodus. To the Hebrews the east was to the front and west was to the rear, so the back of the wilderness (or the backside of the wilderness) implies a westerly direction. The coastal area of the western side of the Gulf of Aqaba is very barren, but the mountains to the West are conducive to feeding flocks, especially during the summer months.

Our text here says that Moses came “to Horeb” or, more accurately, “toward Horeb.” This is a mountainous region in the extreme southern area of the Sinai Peninsula that is often associated with Mt. Sinai. In fact, although it’s possible that Horeb and Sinai are two different peaks in the same mountainous area, it’s more likely that they both refer to the same mountain. Horeb is derived from the Hebrew word for “dry” or “desert.” The name Sinai is derived from the word that means “a bush.”

It is referred to here as “the mountain of God”, probably because of God’s declaration that this is a holy place, and because it was here that Moses would later receive the law from God.

We are also told here that the “angel of the LORD” appeared to Moses in the flames of the burning bush. This is no ordinary angel, as we learn from Him when He declares Himself to be the GOD (*YHVH*) of Israel. There is a distinction made in Scripture between **an** angel of the LORD and **the** Angel of the LORD. “An angel” refers to any messenger sent from God, whereas “the Angel of the LORD” refers to pre-incarnate Christ, the second person of the godhead.

Exodus 3:3-4

And Moses said, “I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned.” When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.”

This is a good place to begin talking about the various names of God. In most English translations, you will see it spelled as “god,” “God,” “Lord,” “GOD,” or “LORD.” Let me explain each of these here:

“god” is a reference to an idol or other false god. It is usually translated from the Hebrew word “*el*,” meaning “a possessor of power.”

“God” is translated from the Hebrew word “*Elohim*,” the plural form of *el*. Like the word “sheep” this can be a singular or plural noun. It is the name used of God in reference to His power and authority.

“Lord” is from the Hebrew word “*Adonai*,” meaning a lord or master.

“GOD” and “LORD” are both translated from the 4 Hebrew letters *yud, hei, vav, hei*. In English, this is spelled as *YHVH*, and is sometimes translated as “Jehovah,” “Yahveh,” or “Yahweh.” This is the personal name of God; the name which is used in His personal interactions with those whom He loves.

In the previous verse, God was called the Angel of the LORD (*YHVH*), he is here referred to as *YHVH*, Himself.

Upon seeing this miraculous burning bush that was not consumed, Moses was attracted to it and began to move closer to it so that he could inspect it. Notice that just as Christ used miracles to draw the crowds so they would listen to His message, so GOD used this miracle to attract Moses’s attention.

As Moses approached the burning bush, GOD called out to him by name, “Moses, Moses!” The significance of this is that God knows all of His children by name. It is indicative of a personal relationship that He desires to have with each one of us. Moses’s response was, “Here I am,” indicating that he was willing and ready to hear what God was about to say to him.

Exodus 3:5-6

Then he said, “Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” And 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 at God.

Moses was told to stop moving toward the bush and was told to remove his sandals from his feet because it was a holy place. This is the first time that the word “holy” is used in the Bible. It signifies

something that is sacred, that is it is “set-apart” for sacred purposes. Both in the Old Testament and the New Testament, holiness indicates that which is set-apart from sin and defilement.

God introduces himself to Moses as the “God of your father.” Though the singular is used here, when Steven quotes this passage in [Acts 7:32](#) he expresses it in the plural (fathers).

When Moses saw it, he was amazed at the sight, and as he drew near to look, there came the voice of the Lord: ‘I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob.’ And Moses trembled and did not dare to look. ([Acts 7:31-32](#))

In the gospels, Christ uses this very passage ([Exodus 3:6](#)) as proof of the resurrection. He is the God of the living. That is, He is the God of those who have died, yet are still alive.

And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God: ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not God of the dead, but of the living.” ([Matthew 22:31-32](#))

When Moses returns to the children of Israel, he will not be bringing a new God to them but a fuller revelation of the living God. Throughout history God has been progressively revealing Himself to those who are His.

Exodus 3:7-8

Then the LORD said, “I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

God is not blind to the events happening to His children. He sees all that happens to us and He hears our lamentations whether they are directed to Him or they are simply a result of our pain and sorrows. To the Israelites, who were at the time confined to the land of Goshen on the Nile delta, the land to which God was about to lead them was, indeed, a good and large land.

God described this new land to Moses as, “a land flowing with milk and honey.” The Israelites were primarily an agrarian society, living off their flocks and the fruit of the land. One sign of a healthy flock was that it produced offspring abundantly and, therefore, produced much milk, both for their young and for the people. Additionally, a land that produces much fruit will, necessarily, have lots of bees to fertilize the fruits and vegetables. Hence, it would also be a land that has an abundance of honey. The fact that God referred to the Promised Land as a land flowing with milk and honey implied that it was fertile and rich in the things which would bless the people the most.

Exodus 3:9-12

And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.” But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?” He said, “But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.”

God made it abundantly clear that he was well aware of the plight of the Hebrews. Therefore, He informs Moses that He is now sending him to Pharaoh and that God expects him to bring His people out of Egypt.

Objection #1 – (Who am I?) – Moses’s first objection to God’s call on his life was that he was not a leader; “But God, I’m a nobody, why send me?” In the first forty years of Moses’s life, he was taught to believe that he was important, powerful, and capable of leading people.

In the second forty years of his life, God taught Moses that he was nothing more than a lowly shepherd, whom the Egyptians considered the lowest of human beings. Remember when Joseph first invited the sons of Jacob to come to Egypt? As he was about to introduce them to Pharaoh, he instructed them how to act:

you shall say, ‘Your servants have been keepers of livestock from our youth even until now, both we and our fathers,’ in order that you may dwell in the land of Goshen, for every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians.” (Genesis 46:34)

Consider this: God has changed Moses from a VIP in the eyes of the leaders of Egypt into an abomination. God’s response to Moses’s objection was simply that He would be present with Moses. It is clear from this verse, taken in light of the first forty years of Moses’s life, that God is not interested in those who have worldly wisdom, greatness, or power. Instead, He is interested in those who have learned to humble themselves before Him and to rely on God to accomplish what man cannot do. Here’s what Paul told the Corinthians:

But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. (1 Corinthians 1:27-29)

God’s guarantee of His message to Moses was that he, Moses, would return to this mountain (Mt. Sinai), where Moses beheld the burning bush, and that it would also be the place where he would later receive the Ten Commandments and the rest of the Law from God.

Exodus 3:13-15

Then Moses said to God, “If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” God also said to Moses, “Say this to the people of Israel: ‘The LORD, the 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 thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.

Objection #2 – (Who are You?) – what shall I say to them?” – Moses’s second objection to God’s calling in his life was that he was not a theologian. He couldn’t even proclaim to the people the name of the God who was sending him to do His bidding.

“I AM WHO I AM” - *Ehyeh asher Ehyeh*. This means, I Am because I Am. The Septuagint translates this as “I am He who exists.” Compare this with the name that God used of Himself to Abraham in Genesis 15:7 - LORD (*YHVH* – “Jehovah” or “Yahweh.” – Self Existent). This name proclaims God as self-existent, self-sufficient, eternal, and sovereign.

And he said to him, “I am the LORD who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess.” (Genesis 15: 7)

God provided to Moses the name that all of the children of Israel would recognize as the one who appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

At this point there was surely no doubt in Moses’s mind that he was conversing with the creator.

Exodus 3:16-17

Go and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, “I have observed you and what has been done to you in Egypt, and I promise that I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey.”’

God now repeats the instructions He gave to Moses in verses seven through ten. Moses is to proclaim to the leaders of the people all that God has just told him. This is the job of everyone who is to be a witness for God: we are to proclaim *His* words to the world, not our own.

Exodus 3:18

And they will listen to your voice, and you and the elders of Israel shall go to the king of Egypt and say to him, ‘The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us; and now, please let us go a three days’ journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God.’

Moses’s objection of, “Who shall I say has sent me?” was his way of saying, “But, they may not believe me.” God is now assuring Moses that they will believe him and that they will follow him.

Moses was to ask for a three days’ journey into the wilderness so that they could sacrifice to their God. This was supposedly the distance from Goshen to Mt. Sinai if the shortest route was taken. Whether this is true is impossible to determine now. It is more likely that Moses was to make a reasonable request of Pharaoh which would subsequently be refused.

Exodus 3:19-20

But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand. So I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with all the wonders that I will do in it; after that he will let you go.

God knew that Pharaoh would not let the children of Israel go and He knew exactly what it would take to convince Pharaoh. As we will see later, it involved a combination of Pharaoh hardening his heart against God and God hardening Pharaoh’s heart, which would eventually build up to the final judgment against Egypt, the death of all Egypt’s first born and the passing-over of the first born of all of Israel.

Exodus 3:21-22

And I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and when you go, you shall not go empty, but each woman shall ask of her neighbor, and any woman who lives in her house, for silver and gold jewelry, and for clothing. You shall put them on your sons and on your daughters. So you shall plunder the Egyptians.”

Not only was God about to liberate the children of Israel in a manner that would prevent the Egyptians from retaliating, He was about to bring them out of their servitude and bondage with great riches. This is reminiscent of Abram’s first foray into Egypt where he lied about Sarah being his wife but nonetheless leaving Egypt with great wealth.

So Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the Negeb. Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold. ([Genesis 13:1-2](#))

So What?

Moses spent the first forty years of his life learning the ways of the world and being told that he was someone important and special. He spent the next forty years being shown that he was not very important or special at all. It was only at the end of the second forty years, when he had fully learned his

lesson of humility, that God was ready to use the skills he had learned in his first forty years. It was only after Moses learned who God really is and had had a personal encounter with Him, that Moses was able to be obedient to Him. Without learning humility and without a proper knowledge of who God is and what He expects of us, we are as useless to Him as a hand without an arm. Like Moses, we need to learn who God really is and recognize that He is in control of our lives, not we ourselves. Like Moses we need to seek God's direction for our lives instead of expecting God to bless the direction that we have chosen. We need to be willing to change because God does not change!

I'm sure we all know people who have children who are constantly asking for things. Mommy, I want this. Daddy, I want that. Mommy and Daddy, I want, I want, I want, I want ... If you spend very much time around children like this, you probably eventually want to say, "Be quiet and just appreciate what you have!" They never seem to appreciate what they already have. They only complain about what they don't have.

We also know other people who have children who spend time with their parents asking for help to understand all of the complexities of their young lives. These children usually end up being much happier about life in general and gain a greater understanding of their parents. They learn to appreciate what they have and don't worry about what they don't have.

So, where do you fit in this analogy? Are you constantly asking God for things? Do you always have the "I wants" with God? Or, are you regularly searching His Word to help you understand this life you have been thrust into? Or, perhaps, you're somewhere in between.

Who are you relying on for your own achievements, yourself, or God? Are you in control of your own destiny or is God? Are you expecting God to do great things through you because you are so great? Or are you expecting to accomplish nothing in this life because you are so weak, small, and insignificant. Both are wrong attitudes. We must be wholly submitted to God in order to permit Him to accomplish what He wants through us. What God has planned for us may seem insignificant to us, but it is significant to Him, if it is part of His plan.

Are you willing for your life to be what God wants it to be? Are you willing to let God determine where you go and what you do. Are you willing to let God determine what you have and what you don't have? If so, how much time do you spend learning about who He really is and how much time do you spend listening to His still small voice?

Are you struggling with something in your life? Let's take a minute of silence right now and open our hearts to the one "who is because He is." I believe that if you listen very carefully, you *will* hear that quiet whisper deep within your heart. But - you have to want to hear it, and - you have to be willing to hear it!

Let's Pray