

Scripture Lesson Text

EXOD. 3:1 Now Moses kept the flock of Jethro his father in law, the priest of Midian: and he led the flock to the backside of the desert, and came to the mountain of God, *even* to Horeb.

2 And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed.

3 And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt.

4 And when the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here *am* I.

5 And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest *is* holy ground.

6 Moreover he said, I *am* the God of thy 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 affliction of my people

which *are* in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows;

8 And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto 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 is come unto me: and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them.

10 Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt.

11 And Moses said unto God, Who *am* I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?

12 And he said, Certainly I will be with thee; and this *shall be* a token unto thee, that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain.

NOTES

Obedience in Leadership

Lesson Text: Exodus 3:1-12

Related Scriptures: *Joshua 1:1-9; Judges 6:11-16; I Samuel 15:10-26; I Chronicles 17:1-14; John 17:1-5*

TIME: 1445 B.C.

PLACE: Mount Sinai

GOLDEN TEXT—"I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt" (Exodus 3:10).

Lesson Exposition

BURNING BUSH—Exod. 3:1-3

Moses, the shepherd (Exod. 3:1). Near the end of the book of Genesis, Jacob and his family came to live with Joseph in Egypt (46:6-7). Jacob's descendants, the Israelites, remained in Egypt for more than four hundred years (cf. Acts 7:6). At some point the Egyptians saw the Hebrews as a threat and enslaved them (Exod. 1:8-11).

By the time of Moses' birth, the number of Hebrews had greatly increased. In an effort to diminish the number of males in the population, the Egyptian pharaoh commanded the midwives to kill all Hebrew baby boys at birth. However, they refused to do this (vss. 15-22).

In such a time as this was Moses born. In an effort to keep him from being killed, his parents hid him for three months. Perhaps because of a search being made by Egyptian soldiers, Moses was placed in a basket and hidden among the reeds along the Nile River (2:1-4).

It was there that little Moses was found by the pharaoh's daughter and then raised as her adopted son. Given all the amenities of the palace (cf. Acts

7:22), Moses could have remained in Pharaoh's court and possibly even ascended to the throne one day. All that changed when he witnessed how cruelly his people were being treated. Casting his lot with God's people (Heb. 11:24-25), Moses attempted to deliver the enslaved Israelites (Acts 7:23-25). This was not God's time, however.

As Exodus 3 opens, Moses was a shepherd in the land of Midian and had been for the past forty years (Acts 7:30). At age eighty, Moses no longer envisioned himself as a deliverer of slaves. He was apparently content to take care of the flocks of his father-in-law and to live in relative obscurity.

The area known as Midian had no definite borders, but it apparently extended into the southeastern portion of the Sinai Peninsula. Since the Midianites were descendants of Abraham (Gen. 25:1-2), Moses had actually married into a family to which he was distantly related.

"Horeb" (Exod. 3:1) was another name for Sinai, "the mountain of God," to which Moses would later lead the Hebrews. It became a holy place because God appeared to Moses there and later gave the law from this moun-

tain. “The “backside of the desert” simply meant the west side.

Interestingly, the two earlier periods of Moses’ life—forty years in the palace and forty years in the desert—actually prepared him for the final forty years of his life as Israel’s deliverer (Acts 7:23, 30).

Angel of the Lord (Exod. 3:2-3). Much speculation surrounds the identity of the “angel of the Lord.” At whatever conclusion one arrives, it is clear that the Angel of the Lord speaks for God and as God (cf. Gen. 16:10; 22:11-18; Judg. 2:1-5). For this and other reasons, some believe that the Angel of the Lord was the preincarnate Christ (cf. John 1:18; I Cor. 10:4; Col. 1:15).

For Moses to have witnessed a burning bush in the desert would not necessarily have been an unusual event. What was unusual, though, was the fact that the bush burned and was not consumed. Curious, Moses decided to get a closer look at this strange phenomenon (Exod. 3:3).

HOLY GROUND—Exod. 3:4-6

God’s call (Exod. 3:4). With Moses attracted to the unique sight of an unconsumed burning bush, God now had his undivided attention. That the voice speaking from the bush knew Moses by name must have been both disconcerting and awe-inspiring.

Having heard the voice of God, Moses responded with a familiar “Here am I” (Exod. 3:4; cf. Gen. 22:1; 31:11; I Sam. 3:4; Isa. 6:8).

Take off your shoes (Exod. 3:5). As Moses stood before the bush, the voice spoke again. This time the voice cautioned him about moving any closer and said he should remove his sandals, for he was standing on “holy ground.”

Of course, the soil on which Moses was standing was not sacred in and of itself. It was made holy by the pres-

ence of the One who was now speaking at this place.

The removal of one’s shoes in a place recognized as holy goes back to very ancient times. Even today, in various cultures and religious traditions, the removal of one’s shoes in holy places is a common expression of respect.

God revealed (Exod. 3:6). Though Moses recognized that he was standing in the presence of no ordinary being, he now became fully aware of the One who was addressing him. The voice identified Himself as the God of the great patriarchs of Hebrew history: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. “Moses brings no new or unknown God to his people, but a fuller revelation of the One they have known” (Cole, *Exodus*, InterVarsity).

Even though Moses had been raised in the Egyptian palace, he was aware of his ancestry and of the true God. He most likely was taught this by his own natural mother, who nursed him as an infant and may have continued to care for him as he grew to manhood (2:7-10).

Now recognizing that he was in the presence of the God of the Hebrews, “Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God” (3:6). The kind of fear experienced by Moses was both a reverential awe and an awareness of his own mortality (cf. Isa. 6:1-5).

ISRAEL’S CRY—Exod. 3:7-12

Israel’s affliction (Exod. 3:7). Even though the people of Israel had suffered for many years at the hands of their cruel taskmasters, they were not forgotten by their God. He declared to Moses, “I know their sorrows.”

Generations of slavery had been experienced by Israel before God sent them a deliverer.

Promise of deliverance (Exod. 3:8-9). God was going to “come down” in the sense that He would be

active in their deliverance.

God's purpose was not only to rescue Israel from slavery but also to fulfill the promises made to the patriarchs. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had been sojourners in the "land of promise" (Heb. 11:9). The land in which they once lived was pledged to their descendants (Gen. 13:15; 17:8; Exod. 6:8).

The place to which the people of Israel were to be led was a "land flowing with milk and honey" (Exod. 3:8). This proverbial expression indicated a land that was agriculturally productive. As it stood now, Israel had no land of their own.

The six nations mentioned in Exodus 3:8 (cf. Deut. 7:1) occupied the region generally known as Canaan. "Israel," "Palestine," and "Canaan" all refer to the same general geographic area. These nations would be displaced by Israel once God responded to "the cry of the children of Israel" (Exod. 3:9; cf. 2:23; Deut. 7:1-4).

Moses' commission (Exod. 3:10). Considering the fact that Moses had once desired to rescue his people, we might think that he would have welcomed the task before him.

As those who are older know, what one was willing to do forty years ago may not have the same attraction today. Besides, Moses had previously been unsuccessful in getting the people of Israel to submit to his leadership. Why should they do so now?

God was going to send Moses to Pharaoh himself. "Pharaoh" means "great house" and was a title for the Egyptian monarchs. The pharaoh of the Exodus was probably Amenhotep II.

Excuses offered (Exod. 3:11). Moses now offered the first of five excuses for not going back to Egypt. He asserted that he was unqualified for such a task.

The other excuses offered by

Moses were related to his authority (Exod. 3:13-14), the unwillingness of Israel to accept him as a leader (4:1-5), his perceived lack of eloquence (vs. 10-12), and his own reluctance to return to Egypt (vs. 13).

I will be with you (Exod. 3:12). The greatest resource Moses possessed for the task before him was the assurance that the Lord God was with him.

The "token," or sign, of God's presence with Moses was that Moses would lead the people back to "this mountain" (Exod. 3:12). After being liberated from bondage, the infant nation would encamp at the foot of Sinai (19:1-2).

—John A. Owston.

QUESTIONS

1. What was Moses' occupation for the past forty years? Whom did he work for?
2. What is another name for Mount Horeb?
3. What do we know about the Angel of the Lord?
4. What was strange about the bush Moses saw at Mount Horeb?
5. Why was the area around the burning bush considered holy ground?
6. How did God identify Himself to Moses?
7. What did God reveal to Moses about His people's suffering?
8. Why was God going to lead the Hebrew slaves to Canaan? What promise did this fulfill?
9. Before whom would Moses appear when he returned to Egypt?
10. What excuse did Moses offer for not going back to Egypt?

—John A. Owston.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. We may never encounter what Moses saw here, but God still has ways of getting our attention (Exod. 3:1-3).
2. The Lord often waits till we are receptive to His intervention in our lives (vs. 4).
3. To enter God's presence requires a reverent acknowledgment on our part (vs. 5).
4. We can be assured that God knows and cares about every difficulty His people are going through (vss. 6-9).
5. If we long for a remedy to some problem, we should be ready to be part of God's solution (vss. 10-12).

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. Why did Moses need such an attention-getting sign in order for the Lord to address him (Exod. 3:1-2)?
2. If God is omnipresent, what made the area before the flaming bush "holy ground" (vs. 5)? Are there any places that might be "holy ground" for us?
3. Why was Moses afraid to look at God (vs. 6)? Does his fear imply any prior wrongdoing on his part?
4. How do you think Moses felt when God told of His plans to deliver the people of Israel (vss. 7-9)? How must he have felt when God declared His plan to use him in that deliverance (vs. 10)?
5. Why did Moses think he was so singularly unqualified for the task (vs. 11)? Was he right?

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

Golden Text Illuminated

"I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt" (Exodus 3:10).

The descendants of Abraham went into Egypt because God providentially led them there, but eventually they became slaves. Their life as slaves was oppressive; yet, amazingly, when hard times came after their deliverance, many of them expressed a desire to return to Egypt. They preferred being in bondage to the Egyptians to the hardships of the desert.

The people complained about their situation all the way to the Promised Land. In fact, as the New Testament book of Hebrews tells us, many of them did not enter the land because they refused to believe. They refused to act in faith and enter the land (3:16-19).

To make matters worse, Moses was a reluctant leader. Beginning at the burning bush and continuing through some of the ordeal with Pharaoh, Moses made every effort to convince God that he was not the right man for the job.

When Moses confronted Pharaoh with the idea of the people leaving, Pharaoh made life even harder on the Israelites to discourage any thought of gaining their freedom. Even Moses questioned whether God was, in fact, going to deliver them.

The Israelites did not enter the land as soon as they could have because they lacked faith. As a result, they wandered in the wilderness for forty years. Today, many wander in the wilderness of sin instead of entering the land God has promised.

—James Jordan.