

Exodus, Part 3

In our last session, we saw Moses grow into a man and his preparation for the task of leading the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt. God spent some 80 years total preparing this man for that job. First, he was trained by the Egyptians for 40 years as he developed his leadership skills, and then he spent another 40 years developing his knowledge of the Sinai, how to survive in the wilderness, and his humility. Eighty years and Moses was as ready as he would ever be.

Exodus 3:1 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.

Leading his father-in-law's flock in search of grazing, Moses approached Mount Horeb (also called Mount Sinai 19:10–11). Why his father-in-law is here called Jethro instead of Reuel is uncertain. Perhaps Reuel thought his daughter's marriage to Moses, an Egyptian raised in the royal family, brought him (Reuel) prestige so he changed his name to Jethro, which means superiority or highness.

Moses' reference to Horeb as the mountain of God probably reflects his estimation of that mountain after the events that took place there later. Moses' communication from God here (3:1–3) is at the same mountain where God later gave him the Law (19:20; 24:13–18; cf. 3:12).

Exodus 3:2 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. ³ And Moses said, "I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned." ⁴ 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."

Moses' curiosity was captured by a bush that was aflame yet was not being consumed, and the Angel of the Lord called to him, "Moses, Moses!" And he replied, "Here I am."

The Angel of the Lord is, of course, a theophany or pre-incarnate appearance of the Second Person of the Trinity. This Angel of the Lord was referred to as “God” in verse 4. Fire is a symbol of God’s presence seen later when He descended upon Mount Sinai (Ex. 19:18).

Exodus 3:5 Then he said, “Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” ⁶ 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.

Though Moses was brought up in the court of Pharaoh, he didn’t know enough to take off his sandals and had to be admonished by the Angel of the Lord. The ground is not itself holy but is declared so by the near presence of God.

God announces Himself as the “God of his father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob”. And note that Moses hid his face from God. This was not a visionary or inner experience; it was real. He was afraid to look upon Him for fear he would die. Had he looked he would have seen the One we know as Jesus, God veiled in human form.

Exodus 3:7 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, ⁸ 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. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.”

Moses heard the voice of God speak six words:

1. A word of address. God called Moses’ name two times. Thus did God arrest the attention of the shepherd and at the same time indicate a personal acquaintance with him.

2. A word of warning. Moses must come no closer. He was standing on holy ground in the presence of God. He must show respect for the spot by removing his sandals. Sandals pick up dirt during a journey, and man must be clean when he approaches God!
3. A word of identity. The deity identified himself as the God of your father (singular), and the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Hearing this, Moses quickly covered his face, for he knew that it meant death to look upon God.
4. A word of compassion. Four precious indications of divine grace were given: “I have seen ... I have heard their cry ... I know ... I have come down.” God is always concerned about the welfare of his people.
5. A word of promise. God promised to bring his people out of Egypt and bring them into a land flowing with milk and honey.
6. A word of challenge. Moses was informed that he was being sent to redeem the Egyptians from bondage and lead them out of Egypt.

When God redeems, He not only redeems *from* something, but He redeems *unto* something. We have been saved *from* sin *unto* holiness and heaven. Paul describes this in Ephesians 2.

Ephesians 2:5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— ⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

God has raised us up and given us a position in Christ. If you are saved today, you are completely saved and will be just as saved a million years from now as you are today because God has identified us with Christ. We call this “positional sanctification”. You were brought *out of* Adam and *put in* Christ. You have been brought *out of* death and *into* life. You have been brought *out of* darkness and put *into* light. You have been brought *out of* hell to be put *into* heaven. That is redemption; it is *out of* and *into*.

God said He was going to take the children of Israel *out of* bondage in Egypt and *into* the promised land. Redemption!

“A land flowing with milk and honey” simply means that Canaan was ideal for raising sheep, goats, and cows. Feeding on good pastureland the goats, sheep, and cows were full of milk. Flowing with honey means that the bees were busy making honey. Milk and honey suggested agricultural prosperity. God intends to take the Israelites to a place where they can prosper. It is interesting to note that since occupying the land, whenever they are in the land it is fruitful and “flowing with milk and honey,” yet when they are not in the land it falls into a barren, unproductive wasteland.

Exodus 3:11 But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?” ¹² 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.”

Moses was all up for freeing his people 40 years before, but having come face-to-face with his own weaknesses now he asks, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?” He doubted his ability to confront the new Pharaoh (Amenhotep II) successfully and to lead the nation out of bondage in Egypt. God responded to this objection with two promises:

1. The assurance of His personal presence (“I will be with you.”)
2. The promise of Moses’ return to Mount Horeb (“you” [pl., referring to Moses *and* the people] will worship God on this mountain)

Moses is about to learn what Paul spoke of in Second Corinthians.

2 Cor 12:10 ... For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Moses attempted to free the Israelites 40 years before in his own wisdom and power only to discover he had none. Now 40 years later he will learn that it is the power of God demonstrated *through* Moses that will free the Israelites. When we recognize our weaknesses, we are most inclined to recognize the power of God we can access through the indwelling Spirit. When we are weak is when we are truly strong.

The purpose of the deliverance was that Israel might “serve God.” This purpose is stated frequently in Exodus (4:23; 7:16; 8:1, 20; 9:1, 13; 10:3, 7–

8, 11, 24, 26; 12:31). The Hebrew word for “serve” (translated “worship” in some other translations) is the same word for “to be a slave” (*‘āḇaḏ*). Israel had been slaves (*‘ăḇōḏîm*) of Egypt (6:6), and was in slavery (*‘ăḇōḏâh*, 2:23) in Egypt (“the land of slavery,” lit., “the house of slaves,” *bēt ‘ăḇāḏîm*, 13:3, 14; 20:2). Having served as slaves to the Egyptians, Israel was now to serve the Lord, worshiping Him as His subjects.

This was accompanied by the promise of a sign, “And this will be a sign for you. When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain” (v. 12). God did not promise an instant miracle; Moses had to exercise trust first before seeing it fulfilled at Mt Sinai.

Exodus 3:13 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?” ¹⁴ 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.’ ” ¹⁵ 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.

In Moses’ second objection, he felt the Israelites would challenge his assertion that God had sent him to deliver them and would certainly ask what His name was. God told Moses to tell them, “I am who I am” (*‘ehyeh ‘ăšer ‘ehyeh*), and “I AM (*‘ehyeh*) has sent me to you”.

Moses’ request for God’s name is important because the Israelites believed that the name reflected an individual’s essence. In Genesis, different aspects of God’s nature are highlighted by the names used to designate him: *El Elyon* (God Most High; Gn. 14:18–20), *El Roi* (God who sees me; Gn. 16:13), *El Shaddai* (God Almighty; Gn. 17:1), *El Olam* (the Eternal God; Gn. 21:33).

‘Ehyeh is probably a wordplay on Yahweh (Lord) in verse 15. Thus, the name Yahweh, related to the verb “to be,” speaks of God’s self-existence. The statement emphasizes the timelessness of God. He is the self-existing one, the Eternal, the one without beginning or end. The God of Israel was

to be identified by the name Yahweh (He who is) throughout the generations. But it means more than that. It speaks of His relationship to His people. He redeemed them (6:6), was faithful to them (34:5–7), and made a covenant with them (Gen. 15:18).

Exodus 3:16 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, ¹⁷ 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.” ’

After answering Moses’ protest of ignorance regarding the divine name, God outlined the entire campaign against Egypt.

First, Moses was to go to the elders of Israel and tell them that God had appeared to him. He was to communicate to them God’s concern for their plight, and his promise to bring them out of Egypt to a wonderful land. The land promise which had been given to the patriarchs was now renewed through Moses. Thus, as with any true prophet, the message of Moses was in agreement with earlier revelation. God assured Moses that the elders would believe him.

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.’

Second, the elders and Moses were then to go to Pharaoh to announce the appearance of God. Moses and the elders were simply to request permission to leave Egypt for a short trip (three-day journey) for religious purposes. He deliberately said nothing about them returning. But Pharaoh would not listen.

The phrase “God of the Hebrews” was used by Moses when he spoke to Pharaoh; it is a term polytheistic people could understand.

Exodus 3:19 But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand. ²⁰ 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 told Moses that Pharaoh would not respond to his request except by divine imposition. God would stretch out His hand and strike Egypt, suggesting His firmness and strength in action. This is also referred to in 6:1 [twice]; 13:14, 16; 32:11; Deut. 4:34; 5:15; 6:21; 7:8, 19; 9:26; 11:2; 26:8.) God would perform wonders in the form of 10 plagues to persuade Pharaoh to let them go.

Exodus 3:21 And I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and when you go, you shall not go empty, ²² 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.”

The plagues on Egypt would cause the Egyptians to be “favorably disposed” toward the Israelites, according to one commentary. I am not sure “favorably disposed” is the best choice of words in this situation. After all the plagues, I would think “good riddance” would more accurately describe how the Egyptians felt toward the Hebrews. Regardless, according to the Scriptures, when asked, the “favorably disposed” Egyptians would give silver, gold, and clothing to the Israelites. God’s people were not to leave empty-handed; perhaps this was partial compensation for the 400 years of slavery. Later this same gold and silver would be used in constructing the Tabernacle and articles of worship (35:5, 22).

Exodus 4:1 Then Moses answered, “But behold, they will not believe me or listen to my voice, for they will say, ‘The Lord did not appear to you.’ ”

Despite these divine assurances, Moses continued to drag his feet by raising another problem. What if the Israelites did not believe him? How would he convince them that God had indeed appeared to him? Such fear that the Israelites might not believe God had appeared to him is reasonable

because God had apparently not ever appeared to the Israelites during their sojourn in Egypt.

Exodus 4:2 The Lord said to him, “What is that in your hand?” He said, “A staff.” ³ And he said, “Throw it on the ground.” So he threw it on the ground, and it became a serpent, and Moses ran from it. ⁴ But the Lord said to Moses, “Put out your hand and catch it by the tail”—so he put out his hand and caught it, and it became a staff in his hand— ⁵ “that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you.” ⁶ Again, the Lord said to him, “Put your hand inside your cloak.” And he put his hand inside his cloak, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous like snow. ⁷ Then God said, “Put your hand back inside your cloak.” So he put his hand back inside his cloak, and when he took it out, behold, it was restored like the rest of his flesh. ⁸ “If they will not believe you,” God said, “or listen to the first sign, they may believe the latter sign. ⁹ If they will not believe even these two signs or listen to your voice, you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground, and the water that you shall take from the Nile will become blood on the dry ground.”

The Lord’s answer to the still doubtful Moses was to enable him to perform three supernatural tasks, two immediate (vv. 3–5, 6–8) and one in the future (v. 9).

1. The first of the signs to Moses was the turning of his shepherd’s staff into a snake and back into a staff. Grabbing a snake by its tail was normally a dangerous thing to do! To follow the Lord’s directive took courage and faith. Because snakes symbolized power and life to the Egyptians, God was declaring to Moses that he would be able to overcome the powers of Egypt. This miracle, God said, would cause the Israelites to believe that He, the God of the patriarchs (cf. 2:24; 3:6, 15–16) had spoken to Moses.
2. The second sign was his hand becoming leprous and its healing. This disease, though perhaps not the same as what is today called leprosy, was prevalent in Egypt and was considered incurable. Moses had run in fear from the snake (4:3). Now he must have been horrified when he withdrew his smitten hand from his garment. But

then he was probably filled with reverential awe when it was suddenly cleansed. This sign, God said, might be more effective with the people than the first one (v. 8). Thus Moses' fear that no one would believe he was commissioned by God was placated.

3. The third sign would be Moses' miraculous ability to turn water from the Nile into blood (v. 9). The Egyptians regarded the Nile River as the source of life and productivity. So Moses' showing the people that he had power over the Nile would prove that God had given Moses the ability to overcome the Egyptians. Later Moses performed these miracles before the Israelites (vv. 29–30) and as God predicted (vv. 5, 8), the people believed (v.31). Interestingly the first plague was similar to the third sign: When Aaron hit the Nile River with his staff the water turned to blood (7:17–21).

In verse 6, we have the statement “Put your hand inside your cloak” and in verse 7 “Put your hand back inside your cloak” (ESV). In some other translations, it is translated more literally as “put your hand into your bosom”. That is likely figuratively referring to the heart. Back in verse 4, Moses was told to pick up the rod that had been turned into a snake, “Put out your hand and catch it by the tail.” With the snake, God was telling Moses He wanted to use his hand. With the reference to putting his hand “in his bosom,” God is telling Moses He wants his heart also.

Luke 6:45 The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks

God uses the hand and the heart, but the hand is subject to the heart, therefore if the heart isn't right, then neither will be the hand. God wanted that rod in the hand of a man yielded to Him.

Exodus 4:10 But Moses said to the Lord, “Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent, either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and of tongue.”

This statement, “I am slow of speech and of tongue,” by Moses and how to translate and interpret it has caused much debate among Biblical scholars. Some ancient Hebrew writings assert that the passage should be

understood that Moses had damaged his tongue and spoke with a pronounced stutter. Other ancient rabbis believe Moses spoke with a lisp. Still, others believe the passage should be understood that Moses had difficulty pronouncing certain consonants like “z,” “s,” “sh,” and “ts”. Needless to say, anyone with so many speech difficulties would be all but incomprehensible, which Moses quite obviously wasn’t.

There were yet other rabbinic commentators who denied that Moses had any speech impairment at all and took “slow of speech and of tongue” to indicate verbal slowness and deliberateness so that what Moses was saying to God was that he could not talk glibly or smoothly enough to successfully express himself. This is more likely the way we should understand the problem. Moses simply did not feel he could express himself in a way that honored God. Apparently, Moses was downplaying his own abilities because Stephen later said he was “powerful in speech” (Acts 7:22).

Exodus 4:11 Then the Lord said to him, “Who has made man’s mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? ¹² Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak.” ¹³ But he said, “Oh, my Lord, please send someone else.” ¹⁴ Then the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses and he said, “Is there not Aaron, your brother, the Levite? I know that he can speak well. Behold, he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart. ¹⁵ You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth, and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth and will teach you both what to do. ¹⁶ He shall speak for you to the people, and he shall be your mouth, and you shall be as God to him. ¹⁷ And take in your hand this staff, with which you shall do the signs.”

God is telling Moses that not only does He want his heart and hand, but He wants his mouth also. He counters Moses’ protest with the question, “Who has made man’s mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak.” God’s initial reaction to Moses’ objection was to remind him, by a series of questions, that the Lord determines man’s abilities or disabilities.

When Moses suggested God get a replacement (v. 13) God became angry. How could Moses continue to refuse? As a final gesture of divine patience, God promised him the assistance of his brother Aaron. With this, Moses resigned himself to returning to Egypt. The fact that Moses did not reveal to his father-in-law the true reason for his departure to Egypt possibly suggests that he remained unconvinced of God's ability to accomplish his plans. God's call of Moses is a vivid reminder of how we are all called to serve the living God.

Moses' hesitant response has a familiar ring to it! Speaking from personal experience, when it became obvious to me that God was calling me to teach His Word, my first and very powerful thought was, "You gotta be kidding!" My resistance to that call, like for Moses, lasted until I could resist it no longer. One thing standing in the way of my answering that call was my love of deer hunting. God took that impeding pleasure away, and I came to no longer enjoy the experience as I had before. For two deer seasons – two winters, I sat in deer stands on cold winter mornings and thought to myself, "Are you having fun?" The answer kept coming back, "No." Studying the Word of God and preparing these lessons gives me far greater joy than any I experienced in those deer stands. Like Moses, I did not feel prepared to teach, but God has connected me to two men whom I consider fantastic Bible teachers, Bob Theime in Houston, Texas, and Dave McPhearson in River Ridge, Louisiana. Theime is deceased and Dave is retired, but I still keep in touch with Dave.

Moving along ... So God told Moses He would let his brother speak for him. He would serve as Moses' mouth. Moses, however, would be "as God" to Aaron, i.e., he would be the ultimate human leader of the nation. With his staff, he would be able to perform miraculous signs, and that staff would be his symbol of authority. God then said He would help both of them speak before Pharaoh and the people.

Then God told Moses to take the staff that had become a snake (4:2–4) as a means for achieving the wonders that were to follow (cf. 7:9–10) and get on with it. This staff would later be called "the Staff of God" in 4:20. Though assured of God's enabling power the magnitude and difficulty of the task frightened him.

40 Year Old Moses vs 80 Year Old Moses

Do you see what has happened here? Forty years before, Moses was filled with confidence that he was being called to deliver the Israelites out of Egypt. Now 40 years later he is expressing a complete lack of confidence. Before he was “strong” with a false sense of his own power, but 40 years later he has been humbled and feels he is weak and unqualified to fulfill the mission he is being called to. God has been patiently demonstrating to Moses that, despite his weaknesses, God will be with him and give him the power to persuade Pharaoh and accomplish the mission. That promise is seen in 3:12 when God told Moses they (he and the Israelites) would later worship at Mt Sinai and again in 3:17 when God promised to deliver them. “For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor 12:10).

It is easy to say, “I rely on God.” But doing it is another matter entirely. We often have a strong tendency to rely on our own cleverness and abilities in challenging situations. And often, we discover we are not really up to the task and fall short of success, or even “botch it up royally,” as they say. In Moses, we have a good example of how to “botch it up royally” and how to do it right.

At 40 years old, Moses was educated and trained by the Egyptians. He is strong, smart, and skilled. Furthermore, he has political clout and military knowledge. He is physically gifted and has a deep sympathy for his people. He has a sense of mission that he is the one who will deliver the Hebrews out of slavery in Egypt.

But it all unraveled. He killed an Egyptian. He got in a confrontation involving two of his own brethren only to be told to butt out. The Hebrews did not see him as their deliverer. And now Pharaoh wants him dead. So with his dreams smashed and probably quite discouraged, he bailed out of Egypt to the wilderness of Midian in the Sinai Peninsula where he lives the life of a shepherd and marries the daughter of a nomad who took him in. Moses then began 40 years of obscurity in that wilderness. But as is often the case, God does some of his best work in the wilderness.

Four decades later God met 80-year-old Moses at a burning bush. His dreams of 40 years before have faded into his distant past. But God wants to use *this* Moses, not the earlier version.

Moses responds, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?” (Ex 3:11). Eighty-year-old Moses is weak. He can’t even talk well. Why would God choose him—and why now? Moses has gone from *It makes sense that God would use me* to *Who am I that God would use me?* And in that change, he demonstrates he’s now ready.

God deconstructs Moses’s strength so that he’ll learn who is really in charge. God doesn’t need Moses; Moses needs God. And Moses’ game plan reflects his new attitude. He doesn’t march into Egypt with an elaborate military strategy. He doesn’t waltz in with an arsenal of sophisticated weapons to arm an enslaved nation for rebellion. Moses limps in with a speech impediment and a stick—but through him, God will overthrow the world’s mightiest nation and redeem his people. The Lord chooses the 80-year-old, not the 40-year-old because the older Moses comes to know that his weakness is a platform for God’s strength.

When Moses asked, “Who am I that you would use me?” it’s there—in that confession of weakness—that God’s power is perfected, His glory revealed, His grace radiant. “For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor 12:10). It is when we embrace weakness that we experience real power – God’s power.