

Having had to flee for his life from Egypt, Moses has now been spending the last forty years in Midian tending the flocks of his father-in-law. However, God has been preparing Moses for the task of leading the children of Israel out of bondage in Egypt. In this lesson we see the calling of Moses and how God would not accept the excuses that Moses gave for not obeying.

Exodus 2:11-25: As an adult (according to Acts 7:23 he was 40 years old), Moses went out one day to see how things fared with his Hebrew brethren and saw an Egyptian beating one of his Hebrew brothers. Moses killed the Egyptian and hid his body in the sand but apparently there was a witness that Moses did not know about. The next day Moses saw one Hebrew abusing another Hebrew and when he tried to intervene, the aggressor mockingly asked if Moses was planning to kill him like he did the Egyptian. When Pharaoh heard of the murder, Moses fled the country and ended up in Midian. He meets Jethro and eventually marries his daughter and apparently anticipated living the remainder of his life there in Midian. But God had other plans.

Exodus 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.

“Now Moses kept the flock of Jethro his father in law, the priest of Midian” – The previous chapter listed Moses’ father-in-law as “Reuel” (Ex. 2:18). Most commentators believe that Reuel and Jethro are just alternate names for the same man, although some suggest that Reuel was the father of Jethro and he gave Moses his [grand]daughter Zipporah to be his wife. Forty years later Moses is now working for his father-in-law as a shepherd at the age of 80 (Acts 7:23, 30). Apparently Jethro (and Reuel, whether the same man or not) were worshipers of the true God.

“and he led the flock to the backside of the desert” – Moses is in the southern part of the Sinai peninsula.

“and came to the mountain of God, *even* to Horeb” – “Horeb” is the Hebrew name for what the locals called “Sinai.” It would eventually be known as the “mountain of God” even though at this time Moses did not recognize it as such.

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.

“And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush” – In scripture, the expression “the angel of the LORD” sometimes refers to an angel sent to speak for the LORD and at other times it refers to occasions when the LORD Himself appears in physical form. What is said from the burning bush seems to indicate that this “angel” is actually the LORD Himself.

“and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed” – One commentator said that it was not unusual to see a burning bush in the Sinai desert. Even today there are certain bushes that excrete a flammable oil that can spontaneously ignite under a hot desert sun and burn briefly until the oily residue was consumed. However, what was unusual in this case was how long the bush burnt and the fact that the bush was not being consumed by the flame.

“And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt” – It seems that what drew Moses’ interest was the fact that the bush was not burning up despite the duration of the flames. The reason the bush was not being consumed is because this fire was not a natural flame (a chemical reaction between oxygen and a fuel) but was the presence of the LORD that appeared like fire.

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.

“And when the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush” – The LORD waited until Moses had approached the bush before speaking to him.

“and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here *am* I” – The LORD calls Moses by name and Moses responds. We don’t know what Moses was thinking at this point, but he recognizes that something unusual is happening since a bush is burning without being consumed and now a voice from that bush is calling him by name. He likely does not yet realize Who it is that is speaking to him.

“And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest *is* holy ground” – The LORD warns Moses not to get too close, preventing him from endangering himself by intruding into the holy presence of God. He also instructs Moses to remove his shoes, a common practice at the time when entering a sacred place. Removing the shoes was a confession of personal unworthiness and humility when approaching that which is sacred and holy. The LORD is informing Moses that he is experiencing an encounter with a holy God.

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.

“Moreover he said, I *am* the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” – By identifying Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the LORD is recalling the promises He made to each of these men and their descendants. Moses is probably remembering the experiences that each of these men had with God and the promises made to them.

“And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God” – When Moses realized that he was in the presence of the God of his ancestors he realized how sinful and unworthy he was to stand in the presence of God. As a result he hides his face in humility and shame, much like Elijah would later do when he heard the still small voice of the LORD on the mountain (1 Kings 19:13). Moses may have even felt like Isaiah would later feel when he saw the LORD “high and lifted up” and cried out “*Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts*” (Isa. 6:1-5). Moses had heard the stories of God’s dealings with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob but now he was having encounter himself with this 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;

“And the LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which *are* in Egypt” – The LORD is not oblivious when His people suffer. He sees our afflictions and when the time is right He will act to deliver us.

“and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows” – The LORD hears when we cry out to Him in prayer and He knows what we’re going through. **Heb. 4:15** *“For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.”*

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.

The time is approaching when the LORD would fulfill His promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to give their descendants the land of Canaan. He had seen the affliction of the people for a while but now the time has arrived to set things in motion to deliver them.

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.

“Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me” – The LORD repeats the fact that He has heard the cry of desperation of the Hebrews.

“and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them” – The LORD is also aware of who it is that is oppressing His people.

“Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt” – The LORD now reveals that He intends to use Moses to deliver the children of Israel out of Egypt. Rarely does God deliver people without using human instruments. He has placed the gospel of Jesus Christ in our hands to spread it to the whole world.

Verses 11-12: Moses doesn’t understand why the LORD would choose to use him for such an important task and asks “Who am I?” The LORD assures Moses that He will be with him and that the token or sign that He has been with Moses will be the fact that that after they leave Egypt, he will bring the people back to this mountain to serve the LORD.

13 And Moses said unto God, Behold, *when* I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What *is* his name? what shall I say unto them? 14 And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.

Moses’ uncertainty and self-doubt is evident because he’s anticipating what will happen when Moses comes back to Egypt after 40 years and claims that the God of their fathers has sent him. They will want to know the name of this God and Moses asks what he should tell them. The LORD then identifies Himself as “I AM THAT I AM.” God is declaring Himself to be the self-existent One that can say “I AM” in the past, present and future. He exists outside of time. The name of God is “Yahweh” in Hebrew although it is often translated into English as “Jehovah.” The Jews considered the name of God too sacred to pronounce and so they combined the consonants from Yahweh (YHWH) with the vowels from Adonai (Lord or Master) when speaking the name of God. In many versions of the Bible (especially the KJV) this name is translated as “LORD” (in all capital letters) to distinguish it from the name “Lord” (Adonai).

Verses 15-22: The LORD outlines what He wants Moses to do and warns him that Pharaoh will not let the people leave until after the LORD smites Egypt with wonders. Only then will the people be able to leave and the LORD will ensure that they will leave with gold, silver, jewels and clothing “borrowed” from the Egyptians.

Exodus 4:1-9: Moses makes the excuse that the children of Israel will not believe him without some proof that the LORD has sent him and the LORD gives him three signs: turning his walking stick into a snake, turning his hand leprous, and turning water from the Nile river into blood by pouring it on the ground.

Exodus 4

10 And Moses said unto the LORD, O my Lord, I *am* not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I *am* slow of speech, and of a slow tongue. 11 And the LORD said unto him, Who hath made man’s mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the LORD?

Moses is still making excuses, this time pointing out that he is not skilled at public speaking, a fact that has not changed since the LORD started talking to him from the burning bush. However, the LORD states that He is well aware of what Moses’ capabilities because He is the One Who designed a man’s mouth. If a man can speak, hear or see, it’s because the LORD created him that way. So the LORD can enable Moses to exceed his limitations because He is the Creator of man.

12 Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say.

Moses’ inability to speak in public is not a problem because the LORD will accompany and empower Moses and tell Him what to say.

Verses 13-31: The LORD becomes angry when Moses still resists obeying the mission He has for him, for Moses essentially says “Lord, please send whoever You choose as long as it’s not me.” The LORD then instructs Moses to use his brother Aaron as a spokesman. The LORD will speak to Moses and then Moses will tell Aaron what to say. Moses then leaves for Egypt, taking his wife and children. However, the LORD will not let Moses proceed until all his sons have been circumcised. Moses meets up with Aaron and the two of them go to the children of Israel and tell them all that the LORD has said.