

Bethel Bible-Presbyterian Church

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DHW

LESSON 03

The Book of Exodus

Chapter 03

INTRODUCTION

In the course of our Christian life, some may think that God is calling them to give up their present job in the world and serve in the Lord's vineyard full-time. How can I know whether God is calling me? God's call of Moses in this chapter should help that person who is being challenged to give his life to be used by God. However, we may harbour certain ideas about God that are erroneous. There are a few reasons. Many of us have been brought up in a non-Christian environment and in the process of growing up we pick up some erroneous ideas about God. For example, "God does not care for us"; or "Who do you think you are?" or "God is 'chummy,' it does not matter at all whether you resign from your job and serve Him full-time."

There is much in this chapter we can learn about the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, who is the Almighty God the Creator of the universe. One salient truth, which He revealed to us in this chapter is that

although God is transcendent He is also immanent. He is in Heaven and yet He is near and in the midst of us. We are always in His presence. In this chapter He revealed His ever presence in the midst of His people and performed His deliverance of His people who were suffering in bondage.

God also revealed that He is a personal God. He knew the sufferings and sorrows of His people, who were slaves in Egypt, by now for about four hundred years. He remembered His covenant promises which He had made with the forefathers of the children of Israel. He intended to keep them and the time had come for Him to deliver them out of Egypt.

The following is a suggested outline of the chapter:

- 1) God appeared to Moses in the Burning Bush (Exodus 3:1-6);
- 2) God called Moses to lead Israel out of Egypt (Exodus 3:7-10);
- 3) God revealed His Name to Moses (Exodus 3:11-15);
- 4) God Instructed Moses what he should do (Exodus 3:16-18);
- 5) God forewarned Moses of Pharaoh's refusal to let Israel depart (Exodus 3:19-22).

STUDY HIS WORD

God Appears to Moses

Forty years had passed since Moses fled from Egypt. God had preserved and provided for him when he fled to Midian. In Midian, by helping the daughters of Reuel/Jethro he was rewarded with a home and even a wife. Jethro had given away one of his daughters, Zipporah, to him as his wife. During all those years Moses had been tending the flocks of Jethro.

Every day he would take the flock out to pasture. It was not the first time that he brought the flock to the *backside of the desert* in Midian, where he came to the foot of Mount Horeb. Moses was tending his father-in-law's flock in the land of Midian when he saw a strange phenomenon. A bush was enveloped with fire and yet the bush was not burnt (v.2). He went near to the burning bush. When the LORD saw him turning aside to draw near to the burning bush, He called Moses by name out of the burning bush, *Moses, Moses*, and he responded, *Here am I* (v.4).

The first thing that God said to Moses was to remove his shoes *for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground* (v.5). This did not mean that the place had some intrinsic qualities that made it holy. It was the presence of

God. There is a spiritual lesson here for all of God's children to learn. It is required of us to have a right attitude when approaching God. God is not someone whom we can casually pat on His back or shoulder. How many a Christian today have "domesticated" God and reduced Him to the level of a good friend who is expected to be always there to attend not only his needs but his wants.¹ Next God introduced Himself to Moses. He told him that He was the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob thus identifying that He is the true God who had appeared to his forefathers. Upon hearing this, Moses quickly hid his face afraid to look upon God.

God Calls Moses to lead Israel Out of Egypt

After identifying Himself to Moses, God revealed His closeness and concern for His people. God expressed, *I have surely **seen** the affliction of my people; and have **heard** their cry; for I knew their sorrows* (note the emphatic use of first person possessive pronoun). God was identifying with the sufferings and sorrows of His people. He felt the same as they. He firmly declared that He wanted to deliver them from their bondage in Egypt and to *a land flowing*

¹ Maxie D. Dunnam, *Exodus* (Texas, Waco: Word Books, Publisher, 1987), 61.

with milk and honey (v.7). These words echo what had been mentioned earlier about God (2:24-25). It emphasizes the wonderful truth that the Creator God of the heavens and the earth is not a God who is far away and detached from His creation. God is always near and in the midst of His people.

The time had arrived for Him to deliver His people out of the oppressing *hand of the Egyptians* and *bring them to a land flowing with milk and honey* (v.8). Then God called Moses and told him that He would send him to Pharaoh to lead the children out of Egypt (v.10). God wanted to use Moses to fulfil His covenant promises with the children of Israel. Previously, Moses had a burning desire to do something to save his brethren from oppression and bondage. But he failed in his own way. Forty years had passed since he fled Egypt and came to the land of Midian. He was now eighty years old. People today do not call an octogenarian to lead a revolution for obvious reasons. But it was not the case with Moses. But God wanted to call him even at the age of eighty because He was able to give him strength and power to prevail over the mighty Pharaoh.

God knows the heart and ability of every man. Moses was now a changed man. Formerly, in Egypt he was like a wild horse, strong headed

and full of fury, burning with the fire in his heart to deliver his people who had been unjustly treated. His forty years in the quietness of the wastelands of Midian tending sheep, had tamed and humbled him, but his feelings for his people, to be with them and to deliver them still lingered in his heart. At that time he tried to do his way. But now God was going to use him to do it in God's way.

God Reveals His Name

God commissioned Moses to do the work of delivering the Israelites from their bondage and oppression by the Egyptians (vv.9-10). God could have done the work of deliverance directly. But He is not in the habit of using direct means to work out His plan and purposes. In fact He has a better way. God's way is always the best way. He called and commissioned Moses to do the job even though he was eighty years old, and had earlier failed when he tried to do it by himself. God wanted to act by using Moses.

Moses' initial response to God's call for him to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt was: *Who am I . . .* (v.11).² We should not be too critical of Moses that he was giving excuses or playing "hard to get." We remember

² This is the first of eight objections/questions Moses brought to God.

that he had tried on his own and his fellow brethren had refused to acknowledge him as their leader and deliverer. He still felt that rejection in his heart. Hence, we can understand his initial response to God's call, although by now Moses might have been a changed man.

Moses had matured. He was being realistic. He saw the magnitude of the work. It was a mission in which he had to return to Egypt and confront Pharaoh and all the might of Egypt. Moreover, he had to face the children of Israel, who would expect a great deal from him. His question to God was genuine and sincere. The job was too great for him. However, God said to him, *Certainly, I will be with thee*. God assured him with a token (sign) that he would bring the people to Mount Horeb the very place where he was now having the dialogue with God (v.12). When God is with a person there is no need for any other help, just like God was with Joseph! Although in the initial stages, things might not seem to be heading in the right direction, the final outcome is always good. Indeed, if God be for us who can be against us!³

Continuing his conversation with God, Moses posed a legitimate problem.

He said that if he returned to his people, he would tell them the God of their fathers had sent him (v.13). They might ask him the name of God. So Moses question was: *What shall I say to them?* God promptly answered Moses: *I AM THAT I AM. . . . I AM hath sent me unto you* (v.14). Observe that God reassured him to tell the children of Israel what His name was (v.15). This name of God shall be forever and to all generations.⁴

When Moses asked for the name of God, he was not asking for his identity. Moses was asking for the authority by which he could present himself to the children of Israel. In the original Hebrew יהוה the name is called a “tetragrammaton” which consists of four letters: “Y-H-W-H.” It is akin to the verb “to be” that is, “I am.” John, in Revelation, describes the Lord Jesus Christ as *Him who is, and who was, and who is to come* (1:4).⁵ This is a divine exposition of the tetragrammaton, YHWH.⁶ It denotes the meaning that God is the Self-Cause, Self-Existing, Eternal God. The name

⁴ In Heb. (read from right), אֱהִיָּה אֲשֶׁר אֲהִיָּה

⁵ Revelation 1:4 John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne.

⁶ The tetragrammaton YHWH combined with Adonai, the word for “LORD” gives the word “YAHWEH” or the English translation, JEHOVAH.

³ **Romans 8:31** *What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?*

means “I am that which I will be, and I will be that which I am; the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Hebrew 13:8).⁷

God Instructs Moses

God gave Moses specific instructions. He told Moses that when he would meet with the children of Israel, he was *to gather the elders of Israel together* (v.16). The elders of the congregation of Israel were not those who were merely of old age. They were the leaders or rulers of the community. They were influential men, who were experienced and wise.

Moses was to tell them that *the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, appeared unto me*. God had visited them and had seen their affliction. He would deliver them out of their bondage in Egypt to the Promised Land (v.17). God assured Moses that the children of Israel would listen to him. He should lead the elders of Israel to go before Pharaoh and say to him (v.18): *The LORD God of the Hebrews hath met with us: and now let us go, we beseech thee, three days' journey into the wilderness that we may*

⁷Hebrews 13:8 Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever. John 8:58 Jesus used this name of Himself (compare John 18:5-8).

*sacrifice to the LORD our God. YHWH, the LORD their God.*⁸

God Forewarns Moses of Pharaoh's Response

God forewarned Moses that Pharaoh would not let them go unless he was forced to in a great way (v.19). God said that He would smite Egypt with great wonders. After that Pharaoh would agree to let them go (vv.19-20). God promised to do these mighty wonders so that Moses would not abandon the mission but stay on although at the outset it would seem to fail. This prediction was necessary so that Moses would not be discouraged. God told him in order to encourage and strengthen him for Pharaoh would ultimately let them go.

God further told him that He would give His people favour in the sight of the Egyptians. The Egyptians would not send the children of Israel off empty handed. This means that they would be given gifts by the Egyptians! God was able to move the hearts of the enemies to be favourable to His people.

⁸ A three-day journey would be far enough from the boundaries of Egypt where they could worship the LORD their God. While this distance is not that far to Mt Sinai, the expression indirectly means that they would be far enough to be completely cut off from the cultic life of Egypt. This explains why Pharaoh would not release them, for if he allowed the children Israel would not return to Egypt. Jacob had separated his flock from Laban's flock at a distance of a three days journey so that the two flocks of sheep would not wander into each other (Genesis 30:36).

Every woman would *borrow* from her Egyptian neighbours, who would give the children of Israel the things they asked for. The word *borrow* should be translated “to request” or “to ask as a favour.”⁹ The giving would be so liberal that it was as though they would have “plundered” the Egyptians.

PRACTICAL VALUE

The theme of this chapter is clearly that God cares and He is concerned for His people. He is not a God who is so distant that He does not know what happens to His people. Neither does God relate to His people through an intermediary. Scripture teaches us that God speaks to His people personally. There is no need to go through a priest. The only person we approach and pray to Him is through the Lord Jesus Christ, and no one else, not even Mary, the earthly mother of Jesus. We are taught that God is near, even *in the midst of His people*. **He sees, He hears, He knows, He empathizes with His people, He acts** on behalf of His people by preserving, protecting, and providing for their needs. In connection with this, we learn that God hears our prayers. Should we not pray often to

Him? Has He not called on us to cast our burdens upon Him?

God also chooses someone to carry out His will. He worked in and through Moses to deliver His people from bondage in Egypt. The person whom He calls will be enabled by Him to accomplish His plan and purposes. God even does not force that person. In calling the person, God allows him to express his mind and heart concerning the matter. This is shown in His dialogue and dealing with Moses. God was patient with Moses. In this way we learn more about Him, and in the process we will be encouraged and strengthened.

Is God calling you to serve Him? If you hear the still small voice or the chords of your heart pulling you towards serving God, do not brush it aside. Face and meditate on it. Talk to God about it. He will hear. He will answer. Have a dialogue with Him like Moses. AMEN

⁹ The Hebrew שאל (*sha'al*) is used 173 times; only 6 times it is translated borrow. More than 99 times it is used to mean “to ask.” The context determines the right meaning.