



EXODUS 3-4 MOSES' CALLING AND DEPARTURE TO EGYPT

In this study, we begin with the flight of Moses to the land of Midian. He was 40 years old and was now considered an outlaw and traitor by the Egyptians. He thought he would never return to Egypt. Acts 7:25 mentions the circumstances that led him to this predicament. "For he supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them *by his hand*, but they did not understand...Moses fled and became a dweller in the land of Midian where he had two sons."

Moses made the mistake of thinking by "his hand" and not by "God's hand" that this liberation would take place. Apparently, he trusted more on his fame and power than in God's strength. But, in the desert, as would happen with so many other men God would use, his impetuous ambition would be tamed. His worldly outlook would be purified through repentance and humility to become a useful and yielding instrument of God.

The Critical and Expository Commentary mentions: "It was by the staff and not the sword—by the meekness, and not the wrath of Moses—that God was to accomplish that great work of deliverance. Both he and the people of Israel were for forty years more to be cast into the furnace of affliction, yet it was there that He had chosen them." So from an impulsive and self-absorbed man, Moses became "very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth" (Numbers 12:3).

Forty years in Midian

Midian is located east of the Gulf of Ezion Geber or Aqaba and covered the rich pastures east of the Sinai peninsula. "They were virtually the rulers of Arabia, being the dominant tribe. Like all Arabians, they were a nomad people. They early engaged in commercial pursuits. It was to one of their caravans that Joseph was sold" (Ibid.).

Without a doubt, being a pastor for 40 years in the area made him very familiar with most of the Sinai peninsula, and this would be of great help when the Israelites would dwell there for 40 years. So Moses spent almost 80 years in this region. He married a Midianite named Zipporah, who was the daughter of the Midian priest, Jethro or Reuel, and she bore him two sons, Gershom, which means "a

stranger there" (2:22) and Eliezer, that signifies "My God is Help" (18:4). The Midianites descended

from Abraham and Keturah (Gen. 25:1-2), and they probably had many similar traditions and beliefs with the Israelites. This probably explains why Jethro could so easily give Moses one of his daughters and treat him as a son for 40 years.

After nearly 40 years of being a simple shepherd, God called Moses to the most incredible job any human being ever had—writing the first five books of the Bible, freeing the Israelites from abject slavery by miracles, leading more than two million of them for 40 years in the wilderness, and then taking them on to Canaan, the Promised Land.

Moses is called through a flaming bush

The Bible says, "Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. And he led the flock to the back of the desert, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God." Horeb means "dry desert," a general name for the mountainous district in which Mt. Sinai is situated.

"And the Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed. Then Moses said, 'I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn'" (3:1-3).

"The wild acacia or thorn bush, with which that desert abounds," explains *The Critical and Explanatory Commentary*, "and which is generally so dry and brittle that at certain seasons, a spark might kindle a district far and wide into a blaze. A fire, therefore, being in the midst of such a desert bush was a 'great sight.' It is generally supposed to have been symbolic of the Israelites condition in Egypt—oppressed by servitude and persecution, and yet, in spite of the cruel policy that was bent on annihilating them, they continued as numerous and thriving as ever. The reason was God was in the midst of them. The symbol may also represent the present state of the Jews, as well as of the Church generally in the world."

"So when the Lord saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, 'Moses, Moses!' And he said, 'Here I am.' Then He said, 'Do not draw near this place. Take

your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground.’ Moreover 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 upon God. And the Lord said, ‘I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows. So I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites...Come now and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt” (3:4-10).

What a commission! But was Moses still the brash, self-confident man of long ago? No, he wasn’t. He said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?” (3:11). In his eyes, he was just a simple shepherd with no other goal in life than to tend sheep. So God would have to provide a deep and godly confidence. This would be crucial, for now Moses would have to *totally* rely on God for instruction and not depend on his faulty Egyptian knowledge of fore. Why is this so important?

Dr. S.I. McMillen writes in regard to the medical instructions given in the Bible: “God proceeded to give Moses a number of commandments, which form part of our Bible today. Because these divinely given medical directions were altogether different from those in the *Papyrus Ebers* [a foremost medical book of the time], God surely was not copying from the medical authorities of the day. Would Moses, trained in the royal postgraduate universities, have enough faith to accept the divine innovations without *adding* some of the things he had been taught? From the record we discover that Moses had *so much faith* in God’s regulations that he did not incorporate *a single current medical misconception* into the inspired instructions. If Moses had yielded to a natural inclination to add even a little of his modern university training, we would be reading such prescriptions as ‘the heel of an Abyssinian greyhound,’ or ‘the tooth of a donkey crushed in honey,’ not to mention the drugs the leading physicians were compounding out of the *bacteria-laden dung* of dogs, cats and flies” (*None of These Diseases*, p. 10).

The meaning of God’s second name--Yahweh

Yet, Moses was very faithful in what he wrote and God would continually encourage him: “So He said, ‘I will certainly be with you. And this shall be a sign to you that I have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.’ Then Moses said to God, ‘Indeed, when I come to the children of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they say to me, ‘What is His name? What shall I say to them?’ And God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM.’ And He said, ‘Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you...This is My name forever, and this is My memorial to all generations’ (3:12-15).

This is where we get the term for God, YHWH, or Yahweh. This is God’s Covenant name. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* says, “Yahweh is the only truly personal name of God in Israel’s faith; the others are titular or descriptive expressions...The pronunciation of YHWH in the O.T. *can never be certain*, since the original Hebrew text used only consonants. The vowel points added in the Massoretic Text are not those of the name itself. The English form ‘Jehovah’ arose by a Latinized combination of the four consonants (YHWH) with the vowel points that the Massoretes used to show that they meant the reader to say ‘Adonai’...the term YHWH means ‘the self-existent one, or ‘He who will continue to be’...Yahweh’s character and acts as Israel’s *redeeming, covenant* God, not His role as Creator, are indicated”

“The term YHWH,” explains Andrew Jukes, “describe One who, without excluding being *love*, is also *justice*, and has to judge what is evil wherever it exists and at whatever cost...With only the term Elohim, there isn’t an adequate concept of justice or sin. It signifies the One whose love conquers all and who will overcome whatever inconvenience or obstacle in the way. But this does not cover everything, especially what concerns justice and sin, and how it not only inflicts pain and offence on other human beings, but also on God. All of this is revealed in the God’s second name, Yahweh” (*The Names of God*, p. 38).

Moses leaves Midian and returns to Egypt

God tells Moses to go to Egypt and tell the elders of Israel that God has sent him to free His

people. But Moses is still doubtful he can do the task or be accepted. He asks, "But suppose they will not believe me or listen to my voice; suppose they say, 'The Lord has not appeared to you.' (4:1).

So God tells him to throw his rod down, "and it became a serpent, and Moses fled from it." Then God told him to grab it by the tail, and again it became a rod. Then God gave Moses a second miracle to do which is to make his hand leprous, and putting his hand inside the robe again, became normal. If they did not believe those two miracles, God said to pour on the ground some water from the Nile river and it would become blood.

Still, Moses was skeptical he could do the job. He said, "O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue" (4:10). God said He would cure that as well. But Moses still did not want to go. He said, "O my Lord, please send by the hand of whomever else You may send.'...So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses, and He said: 'Is not Aaron the Levite your brother? I know that he can speak well. And look, he is also coming out to meet you. When he sees you, he will be glad in his heart. Now you shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth. And I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and I will teach you what you shall do. So he shall be your spokesman to the people. And he himself shall be as a mouth for you, and you shall be to him as God. And you shall take this rod in your hand, with which you shall do the signs" (4:13-17).

In Moses' long forty years as a pastor, nothing much had happened, and now suddenly, he is cast into the world scene. He feels so inadequate, but through God's encouragement, finally musters the faith to truly trust in God. With this trust in God, Moses is ready for one the greatest adventures in world history. First, as was the oriental custom, he dutifully asks and receives permission from his father-in-law to leave the tribe and go to Egypt with his family. God then gives him further encouragement by telling Moses all those Egyptians who sought him as a traitor and an outlaw have died in these long forty years. A new pharaoh rules and he can go back. "Then Moses took his wife and his sons and set them on a donkey, and he returned to the land of Egypt. And the Lord said to Moses, 'When you go back to Egypt, see that you do all those wonders before the Pharaoh which I have put

in your hand. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go. Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the Lord, 'Israel is My son, My firstborn. So I say to you, let My son go that he may serve Me. But if you refuse to let him go, indeed, I will kill your son, your firstborn.'" (4:20-23).

The mission was clearly stated, and now Moses must show the faith and courage to carry out this daunting task. But at the outset there is something Moses had forgotten to do that almost cost him his life. On his way to Egypt, "it came to pass...that the Lord met him and sought to kill him. Then Zipporah took a sharp stone and cut off the foreskin of her son and cast it at Moses's feet, and said, 'Surely you are a husband of blood to me'" (4:24-25).

Why did this happen? "To please his wife," notes *The Critical and Explanatory Commentary*, "Moses had postponed or neglected the circumcision of one of his sons, probably the younger. To dishonor that sign and seal of the covenant was criminal in any Hebrew, peculiarly so in one destined to be the leader and deliverer of the Hebrews...So, concerned for her husband's safety, Zipporah overcomes her maternal feelings of aversion to the painful rite, performs it herself by means of one of the sharp flints with which that part of the desert abounds."

We see here that although God intended to use Moses, He is not a respecter of persons. Moses had to give an example to the Israelites of having first obeyed God's laws before he could teach them to the people, and circumcision was a part of God's law as mentioned in Genesis 17:14.

Once Moses overcomes the trial, God then instructs Aaron to meet Moses on Mt. Sinai, the mountain of God. They then went to Egypt and Moses performed the miracles as God instructed him before the elders and people, and Aaron was his spokesman. "So the people believed" (4:31).

So begins one of the "greatest story ever told" in the Old Testament. The next time, we will see how things turn out for Moses as he confronts the powerful and haughty Pharaoh.