



Tuesday Morning Bible Study with Ted

THE HEBREW STUDIES student notes

February 16, 2021. **Exodus 3:1-15**

IF YOU WERE IN CLASS LAST WEEK AND HAVE THE NOTES, WE'LL BEGIN ON VERSE 8 ON THE 16TH. IF YOU WERE NOT THERE, THESE ARE THE NOTES WE USED.

Exodus 3:1-6: Moses was keeping the flock—minding his business

1. Now Moses was keeping the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the back of the wilderness, and came to God's mountain, to Horeb. 2. The angel of Yahweh appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed. 3. Moses said, "I will turn aside now, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt." 4. When Yahweh saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the midst of the bush, and said, "Moses! Moses!" He said, "Here I am." 5. He said, "Don't come close. Take your sandals off of your feet, for the place you are standing on is holy ground." 6. Moreover he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look at God.

1. "Now Moses was keeping the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the back of the wilderness, and came to God's mountain, to Horeb"

I think "to the back of the wilderness," suggests that Moses led the flock beyond the usual grazing grounds. Maybe he is unfamiliar with the terrain or saw it from a distance and said... "I'm gonna go there today."

1b. "and came to God's mountain, to Horeb"

- The Hebrew word horeb means "a desolate region" or "ruin." Sinai and Horeb are different names for the same mountain.
- Where a distinction appears, the mountain itself is Sinai and the neighboring wilderness is Horeb".

- Also written as “God’s mountain” and “the mountain of God” (18:5) or “the Mount of Yahweh”
- Its location is uncertain, but thought to be southern part of the Sinai.
 - here's some reading for you from other references: Exodus 3:1; 4:27; 24:13 and Numbers 10:33.
- Contrary to what a lot of people want to believe, Moses wasn’t searching for the mountain of God.
- To the contrary, his surprise at seeing a bush burn without being consumed suggests that he was merely acting as a shepherd, seeking good grazing land for his father-in-law’s sheep.

2a. “The angel of Yahweh appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush”

In my opinion, the common image of an angel that looks like a man with wings is, at best, a feeble attempt to envision something beyond our experience or imagination.

- There is no record of this angel giving a message to Moses.
- God does speak to Moses directly, and the text gives no further indication of an angel.
- I agree with those who think the voice is the voice of God

2b. “He looked, and behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed”

- Note that there is no sign here that Moses notices the angel, but that burning bush gets his attention.
- A true shepherd, and I think that’s all he is at this time, would be concerned about brush fire spreading and threatening the sheep.
- When prairie fires swept through Kingsmill, it got our attention, and we did what we could to avoid it.

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

- The fact that the bush is not consumed by the fire gets Moses’ attention. In my experience, brush usually flashes up and is quickly consumed...I would also be amused.
- Some people have actually searched for desert bushes that might burn for a very long time.

- To my way of thinking, this burning bush is no natural phenomenon, but rather a manifestation of God. The bush there to get Moses' attention—and it works.

4a. “When Yahweh saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the midst of the bush, and said, ‘Moses! Moses!’”

- The repeated name is not unusual in scripture.
- Repeated names signal an especially important moment in God's dealings with humans:
- “Jacob, Jacob” (Genesis 46:2)—“Samuel, Samuel” (1 Samuel 3:10) — “Simon, Simon” (Luke 22:31)—“Saul, Saul” (Acts 9:4). I think it is a message of endearment...just me?

4b. “He said, ‘Here I am’”

- At the least, God has his full attention.
- At the most, he is standing by for his marching orders (see Isaiah 6:8; 53:6; Luke 1:38).
- In this instance, Moses is most likely announcing that he is both present and listening carefully.

5. “He said, ‘Don’t come close. Take your sandals off of your feet, for the place you are standing on is holy ground’”

Okay, most of you have heard my interpretation of this verse multiple times over the years...Theologians don't disagree with me, but most suggest two commands from God:

- The first is for Moses to come no closer.
- The second is for him to remove his sandals.
 - Most offer the rationale that Moses is standing on holy ground
 - that this is a holy place and a holy moment
 - and Moses needs to honor the moment and the one who makes it holy. He needs to show respect and reverence.
- This time and place are holy because of Yahweh's presence.
- Yahweh is holy—unique—wholly other—righteous—and he radiates glory.

I think it is possible that Yahweh orders Moses not to come closer because it's dangerous.

I'm a little simple on this matter, but I think it is what was expected in the Hebrew culture. A guest would take off his/her shoes when entering a host's

home, and because of that face, I think Yahweh's command for Moses to take off his shoes with an invitation to hospitality.

6a. "Moreover he said, 'I am the God of your father (I think it is good to note, that this reference is singular), **the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob"**

I like this very personal approach. Moses would know of the great historical figures, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—but he would be touched by this mention of his own father.

6b. "Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look at God"

Moses' fear is well-founded.

- It is the fear of the inferior in the presence of the superior.
- It is the fear of the unholy in the presence of the holy.
- It is the fear of a man who knows that this is an important moment with no idea what is coming next.

Exodus 3:7-12: I have seen the affliction of my people

7. Yahweh said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows. 8. 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 large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey; to the place of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite. 9. Now, behold, the cry of the children of Israel has come to me. Moreover I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. 10. Come now therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh, that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt." 11. Moses said to God, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" 12. He said, "Certainly I will be with you. This will be the token to you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain."

7. "Yahweh said, 'I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows'"

The three verbs are a repeat of scripture I didn't add by skipping Chapter 2: *I have seen... I have heard... I have known.* ... Walter Brueggemann notes that these are the three actions God characteristically takes toward Israel, for "Israel is the object of God's intense attentiveness"

8a. "I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians"

Yahweh has “come down” to “deliver them up.” He has entered the human world to correct the plight of his people.

8b. “and to bring them up out of that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey”

Remember that Gerald pointed this out in his Imagineering session last week... In the covenant with Abram, Yahweh promised that he would give his descendants the land “from the river of Egypt, to the great river, the river Euphrates” (Genesis 15:18).

Now God adds—“a land flowing with milk and honey.” This is the first mention in the Bible of a land of milk and honey, but it will not be the last (3:17; 13:5; 33:3; Leviticus 20:24, etc.).

Gerald also pointed out that they were enslaved in the Land of Goshen, a fertile location, so they will thrive in the new land.

8c. “to the place of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite”

With this list of peoples, Yahweh shows where he will settle the Israelites, and even lets them know who their adversaries will be. Nice to know, but a little frightening.

9. “Now, behold, the cry of the children of Israel has come to me. Moreover I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them”

Yahweh heard their distress cries and their prayers for deliverance and has seen the injustices.

10. “Come now therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh, that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt”

- I have his mental picture of Moses waiting for the big proposition. He knows Yahweh has not just dropped in for a casual visit, and then Yahweh reveals the purpose of this little gathering.
- I’m guessing Moses got a little woozy when he heard Yahweh’s desire for him to deliver his people. Moses probably got nauseous when the instruction comes for Moses to negotiate with Pharaoh.

Can you imagine if you were in Moses shoes (or his bare feet) and you hear something like: “Come now, and I will send you.” The time is here. The waiting is over. It is time to act. Moses, the shepherd of Jethro’s sheep, will become Moses, the shepherd of Yahweh’s people.

11. “Moses said to God, ‘Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?’

- “Who am I?” echoes Moses’ understanding of his modest resources and the magnitude of the task.
- “Who am I?” mirrors Moses’ recollection of his earlier attempt to help the Israelites in chapter 2:11-22. His efforts on that occasion resulted in the death of an Egyptian.
- Moses might be the first to express his understanding of his woeful inadequacy, but he won’t be the last.
 - For your reading pleasure, check out what other Biblical authors who wrote commentary on Moses leadership issues: Gideon (Judges 6:15)—Saul (1 Samuel 9:21), and Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:6).

This is just the first of five objections that Moses will raise in chapters I chose to skip, including his final plea, “O Lord, please send someone else” (4:13).

12a. “(Yahweh) said, ‘Certainly I will be with you’

This is the answer to Moses’ objection. It doesn’t really matter who Moses is, because Yahweh will empower his work. Yahweh will be there with Moses, and Yahweh will not let Moses fail.

12b. “This will be the token to you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain”

What is the sign? There are two theories. One is that the sign was the burning bush. The other is that the sign will be when Moses brings the Israelites back to Horeb/Sinai to worship God there.

While the original Hebrew text allows each of these possibilities, most scholars favor the second theory, and that is the interpretation behind the NRSV and CEB translations which are the last two translations of choice of the United Methodist Church universal.

Exodus 3:13-15: I am who I am

13. Moses said to God, “Behold, when I come to the children of Israel, and tell them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you;’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ What should I tell them?” 14. God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM,” and he said, “You shall tell the children of Israel this: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” 15. God said moreover to Moses, “You shall tell the children of Israel this, ‘Yahweh, 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 this is my memorial to all generations.

13. “Behold, when I come to the children of Israel, and tell them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you;’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ What should I tell them?”

In verse 11, Moses asked, “Who am I?” Now he asks, “Who are you?”

- People of that day considered a person’s name to be more than a simple label to identify that person and believed the person’s identity was tied up in the name
- The name expressed something of the person’s essential character. As is obvious from this verse, they also assumed that a name—at least some names—possessed something of the power of the one who wore that name.
- That is at least part of the reason for the prohibition in the Ten Commandments against misusing God’s name (Exodus 20:7).
- Don’t miss the fact that this request for God’s name is also a stalling tactic. Perhaps an attempt to slow down the process until... until what?
- Moses probably doesn’t know “until what?”
- Maybe, just maybe, if he can delay the action a bit, he will come up with a persuasive reason why God should call someone else.

14. “God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM,’ (‘ehheyeh ‘asher yahweh) and he said, ‘You shall tell the children of Israel this: “I AM has sent me to you”

It is from this answer that we get Yahweh as God’s name. In Hebrew, it is four letters—YHWH.

FYI: In many English translations, YHWH is often translated “the Lord,” in part because the Septuagint (Greek) version of the Old Testament uses the Greek word kyrios (Lord) to translate the Hebrew YHWH into Greek.

AND ANOTHER FYI: Because Jews considered YHWH too holy to say aloud, they substituted Adonai (Lord) for YHWH in public readings of the scriptures. Pious Jews today sometimes substitute “the Name” for YHWH.

15. “God said moreover to Moses, ‘You shall tell the children of Israel this, ‘Yahweh, 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 this is my memorial to all generations’

Yahweh identifies himself as the God of Moses’ ancestors—the God of the patriarchs. This will be meaningful to the Israelites, who know and revere these names. They know of Yahweh’s dealings with these patriarchs in the past, which should reassure them with regard to Yahweh’s dealings with the Israelites in the present.

God announces that this name (YHWH or Yahweh) will be his name forever.

Bibliography:

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