

Message #6**Exodus 3:1-12**

Back in the year 1901, a young man named Hubert Booth went to see a supposed demonstration of a new railway car cleaner in London. The cleaner turned out to be like a leaf blower that blew the dirt out of a railway car. When Hubert Booth got home from watching this demonstration, he lay down on the floor with a handkerchief over his mouth and sucked in real hard. He observed that the handkerchief trapped the dirt on the inside instead of blowing it outside. From that simple little observation he invented the vacuum cleaner 25 years later. Now who would ever think that lying down on a floor with a handkerchief in your mouth would lead to one of the greatest commercial successes in history? One man went to see a demonstration at a railroad station and that ultimately led him to an invention that would change the world (*Strange Stories, Amazing Facts, Readers Digest*, pp. 202-203).

There is an amazing event that occurred in biblical history that is an amazing story that did change the whole world. It is the amazing story of Moses. Moses had fled Egypt as a fugitive on the run and ended up in Midianite land, some 200 miles away. He married his wife and he had a son. For the next nearly 40 years, he worked as a shepherd taking care of sheep and minding his own business. But all of that was about to change. He decided one day to lead his sheep to another area and his life was about to change forever. God was about to call Moses into His service that would lead to one of the greatest national and spiritual deliverances in the history of the world. It is an amazing story of God's sovereignty.

GOD SOVEREIGNLY SELECTS AND CALLS MOSES TO THE MINISTRY OF DELIVERING HIS PEOPLE FROM EGYPTIAN BONDAGE.

Carefully observe the first word of the text "now." That connects us back to the previous context. The sons of Israel are now in Egypt and they are finally crying out to God for help and God took notice of them and was about to help them, but the guy he was going to use was 200 miles away and his name was Moses.

There are four amazing sovereign realities we want to observe.

SOVEREIGN REALITY #1 – When God called Moses, he was shepherding a flock of sheep. **3:1**

Moses was working for a Midianite priest, who happened to be his father-in-law. We could say he was working for a heathen religious leader. He was tending the sheep. He didn't even have his own flock so it is obvious that he is not living life in the lap of luxury. The writer of Hebrews is careful to point out that Moses could have lived in total and complete Egyptian luxury and pleasure, but he turned that all down (Hebrews 11:24-26). Now he was shepherding some sheep 200 miles east of Egypt, way out of the loop of mainstream Hebrew life.

Moses' job was nothing glamorous, he was a shepherd. At this point he has been doing this job for about 40 years, so he is now nearing 80. This is a time when most people are thinking about their retirement. This is a time when most people are thinking about calling it quits. But that was not going to be the case with Moses. Moses had no inclination that at 80-years-old, God would use him in a most amazing way. He was simply doing his job which was shepherding sheep. He was not fasting or praying; he was not meditating or studying; he was doing a job that was not too exciting and lonely—he was shepherding sheep.

God would actually call others into his service who were shepherding sheep—David and Amos are two such examples. Just as the Lord turned men who fished for fish into men who would fish for men, he was going to turn Moses from a man who shepherded sheep into a man who would shepherd and lead the entire nation.

There have been some amazing stories of people who did some impressive things in later years. Robert G. Lee still preached in his church in Tennessee on a relatively consistent basis at age 84. John Wesley was still traveling by horse to preach in different places at age 86. John Miles was still preaching in a small church at age 90. John Walvoord was still speaking also when he was 90. Moses was going to be used by God in a remarkable way starting at age 80.

According to **verse 1**, Moses apparently knew that there was good pasture land on the west side of the wilderness in the southern part of the Sinai Peninsula and he led his sheep to “Horeb,” also called “Sinai,” which would become the sacred mountain of God.

When Moses led his sheep into this area, he had no idea what God was going to do. He had no clue as to what God had in store. He had no thought that my life is about to dramatically change by the sovereign election of God. All he knew is that this area had good vegetation for his sheep so he moved them there. **Moses is about to go from the obscurity of a Midianite shepherd to the limelight of God's national leader.**

God calls people into ministry when they are faithfully doing the job he has given them to do. John Darby, the dispensational premillennialist, was working as a very successful attorney when God called him. D. L. Moody was working as a shoe salesman when God called him. Moses was working as a shepherd when God called him.

Now the fact that Moses was traveling around this land and learning it for 40 years was no coincidence, because he was going to go get Israel and bring her right back to this area. So even though he was just doing his job of tending sheep, God was sovereignly at work even in that. If you want to be used by God, just do your job and do it well. That is what Moses was doing.

SOVEREIGN REALITY #2 – When God calls Moses, God visibly appeared to Him in a miraculous way. **3:2**

There is nothing that we have seen to this point in Moses' life that would demonstrate the miraculous and supernatural power of God.

We have certainly seen the sovereignty of God in protecting and leading Moses, but there were no supernatural miracles that overturned normal laws of physics and nature. But that was about to change. At this point, God has not spoken for over 400 years.

Now the first thing we want to see is that we are introduced to a being identified as “the angel of the LORD.” Now this particular angelic person is not a normal angel, but is in fact God, Himself, appearing to humans. **We know from verses 4 and 6 that this being is God, because He is specifically called God, by Moses (v. 4), and by God Himself (v. 6).**

Now we know that this being is different than God the Father, because He is given the title “the angel or messenger of Jehovah.” Since it is not the Father and since the Spirit is not seen, the only member of the Trinity this can be is Jesus Christ in a pre-incarnate state. In other words, this is an appearance of Jesus Christ, the second member of the Trinity, before He would be born as a human in Bethlehem. After Jesus Christ was born as a human, the angel of the LORD never appears again. The theological name for this is a “Theophany.” So what we have here is Jesus Christ appearing to Moses to call him into service.

Now this appearance is miraculous because it was a bush that was burning with fire, but it was not burning up. Now a burning bush in a wilderness is no big deal. Lightning causes many wilderness fires. The thing that made this such a big deal was the fact that the bush was not burning up; it was burning on and on.

The word “bush” (seneh) describes a relatively small, thorny type of bush shrub that was just a few feet in diameter. Jewish history claims this was a bramble bush. Now this is the kind of bush that would typically burn up quickly. When fire is used in Scripture pertaining to God, it is used two ways: 1) Destructive judgment; 2) Purifying development. I like what Victor Hamilton said, God is not interested in putting on some “pyrotechnic display”; when He sends fire, He means something specific by it (*Exodus*, p. 46). He certainly is using the purifying element in this context.

Why did God use a bush? The ultimate contextual answer is this would get the attention of Moses and draw Moses to Himself. There were two physical objects on the side of a mountain you could use, a rock or a bush. God chose to use the bush. Many interpreters believe this illustrates Israel—under fire but cannot be destroyed.

SOVEREIGN REALITY #3 – When God called Moses, the non-burning bush drew him to take a close look at it. **3:3**

Apparently Moses spotted this phenomenon from a distance and it boggled his mind. He was so intrigued that he decided he had to turn aside to see this amazing thing. Moses saw this and said, “I have to go look at this.” I think any person who would have seen this from a distance would have done the same thing. This is a very strange circumstance, but God often uses strange circumstances to draw people to Himself.

Now we learn here one key purpose of a miracle, and that is to capture a person's attention so that person will be drawn to listen to the Word of God. God uses miracles as signs to cause people to realize they need to listen to what He has to say in His Word.

Now when Moses decided to turn to go see this bush, he is not saying I need to surrender my life to God and do His will. He has no idea what is about to happen. He has no knowledge as to what God is about to call him to do. This is all being orchestrated by the sovereignty of God. God is creating the circumstance that He wants in order to draw Moses to Himself. Moses isn't doing this, God is doing this. By the way, don't overlook this fact; the only thing Moses had to do was to "see" or "look" at the bush.

Now the non-burning fire illustration is one that is very fitting for Jesus Christ. Because it is only by faith in Him that one will escape eternal burning. The only thing a person must do to escape the everlasting fire of God is to by faith look at Jesus Christ on that cross. So this is a "marvelous sight."

SOVEREIGN REALITY #4 – When God calls Moses, God takes all the initiative for the calling and the conversation. **3:4-12**

There are seven historical facts we want to observe:

Fact #1 - God called Moses from the middle of a burning bush. **3:4a**

It was the bush that drew Moses, but it is the calling of God and the Word of God that becomes the whole point of the bush burning and drawing Moses. Moses is not looking for God to speak to him and he is not looking for the call of God on his life. God sovereignly used the bush to draw Moses to Himself. It is His election and His choosing. You cannot know the will of God without the Word of God.

Fact #2 - God identified Moses by name twice. **3:4b**

This is a very personal and individual and specific call of God. God knows each of us individually. God knows each of us intimately. He knows us by name. He calls each of us to do different assignments for Him. Your assignment is not mine and my assignment is not yours, and Moses assignment is not ours.

Fact #3 - God reveals to Moses that He is holy. **3:5**

One of the first lessons that Moses needed to learn about God was that He is a Holy God. This point will become a major theme for the rest of the book of Exodus. Every true leader of God must start at this point. God is holy. Our feet have walked in the filth of this world and God will not greatly use or fellowship with anything dirty.

In the book of Genesis, there are some glimpses of the holiness of God, but not much data on the subject. In fact, the word “holy” (qados) does not even show up.

God sanctified the seventh day (Gen. 2:3); Noah was called righteous (saddiq) and blameless (tamim), but not holy. But now we see that God reveals Himself as a Holy God, who is capable of making the ground holy by virtue of His presence.

This is a very important biblical point; because God is able to make ground into holy ground, He is able to make the city of Jerusalem holy (Is. 52:1) and He is able to make the Promised Land a holy land habitation (Ex. 15:13). He is also able to make a mountain a holy mountain by virtue of His presence (Is. 11:9). **Now if God can make dirt holy, think what He is capable of doing with an unholy and dirty life. If God can transform unholy places into holy places, He can certainly transform unholy people into holy people.**

God is a Holy God and because of that there are two things He demands Moses do:

(Demand #1) - “Do not come near here.” **3:5a**

There is a vast chasm between God and the best of his servants. This was an important lesson for Moses to learn and one that would stick with him the rest of his life (Ex. 40:35). God is totally separate in His holiness in a very unapproachable way.

(Demand #2) - “Remove your sandals.” **3:5b**

The sandals were made of animal skins and were worn on the feet and they literally walked through the dirt of this world. Before God would even speak to someone and have fellowship with someone, the dirt and filth of this world must be removed and the sandals illustrate that.

Fact #4 - God identified Himself as the God of four Hebrew men. **3:6**

Don’t miss this fact. God is the God of Israel. He identifies Himself as that. By saying that “I am” the God of these men named, it means He is still their God, which implies these men are still alive because God is the God of the living, not the dead.

(Man #1) - He is the God of Moses’ father - his father’s name was Amram.

(Man #2) - He is the God of Abraham.

(Man #3) - He is the God of Isaac.

(Man #4)- He is the God of Jacob.

What we have here is a covenantal link to Israel. God was not only the God of Moses’ father; He was also the God of all the patriarchs. He is not “a God”; He is the only true God

and He is the God of Israel and He has a specific land that He has promised to her.

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The response of Moses to this encounter with God and His Word is seen at the end of verse 6 in that Moses immediately sensed his own unworthiness and sinfulness. He hid his face and did not even dare look at God.

Moses was a sinner like all of us, plus he had actually killed a man. So the moment he came into the presence of God, he realized how far short of God's glory he truly was.

Fact #5 - God informs Moses what He has seen happening to His people in Egypt. **3:7-9**

Now God had always seen and known everything, so this is not new news to God. What God means by the fact that "I have seen" and "I am aware" is that this has all reached the time for Me to respond. God has a timing for everything and one of the lessons we need to learn is that "God's delays in answering us are not necessarily God's denials." Things happen in His time and are answered in His ways. God reveals to Moses exactly what He has observed:

(Observation #1) - God has seen the affliction of His people in Egypt. **3:7a**

(Observation #2) - God has seen the affliction of the Egyptian taskmasters. **3:7b**

(Observation #3) - God has seen the suffering of His people in Egypt. **3:7c**

(Observation #4) - God has come down to deliver His people from the Egyptians. **3:8-9**

God has "come down," which means "Some member of the Trinity has literally left the splendor and glory of heaven to come down here to deliver My people from the Egyptians." When God deals with man, it is always a descent to Him. God comes down to us before we can ever go up to Him. But do not overlook this; God calls the Hebrew nation "My people."

All nations of the world better see this. God reveals Himself to be the God of the nation Israel. He will always honor those who honor Israel and He will curse those who curse Israel. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

God says I am going to bring them geographically out of Egypt and bring them up north to a Promised Land that is spacious and blessed. It is a land that is flowing with milk and honey. This statement concerning the land being wonderful, plush fertile land shows up about 20 times in the Bible. Now has Israel's land ever looked like this? Not yet. But you have God's Word on it that one day it will.

But then He informs Moses at the end of **verse 8** that this land that I am going to give you is presently occupied by six godless powers. These powers are all anti-God and they are all opposed to God's Word and will and people. The implication is I have already given this land to My people and the godless powers are eventually going to leave this land one way or another. In

fact, what Moses would see God do in delivering Israel from the Egyptians would mean it would be nothing for God to futuristically deliver them from all opposing powers in their land.

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Now in **verse 9**, God reinforces the fact that Israel had cried out to Him and He has seen the oppression.

Fact #6 - God informs Moses that He is going to use him to deliver Israel. **3:10-11**

God was going to do something great, but as is the case in anything God does, He will use a person in the process. In other words, God was going to do the delivering, but Moses would be the agent He would specifically use to get the job done. God uses people to do His will.

Now at this point, Moses responds to God and basically says, “Who in the world am I that I should do this big job?” Moses did not consider himself to be adequate for this job. Now 40 years prior to this, he fought against an evil taskmaster without consulting God, but now that he is 80-years-old, he is fully aware that he cannot do anything in and of himself.

It is interesting that when Moses tries to come up with the first of five excuses why he cannot do the job (Ex. 3:13; 4:1; 4:10; 4:13), God does not rebuke him or tell him to stop talking in a foolish way.

Fact #7 - God responds and informs Moses that He will be with him and gives him a sign.
3:12

Moses felt totally insecure so God reveals two things to Moses to eliminate the fear:

- 1) He would be with him and help him and guide him (**3:12a**)—realizing God’s presence is a great way to cope with things that make you afraid. The key to doing things for God is not to be self-focused, but God-focused.
- 2) He would fulfill a sign (**3:12b**).

Now some have said that the sign may refer to the burning bush Moses was looking at. However, the pronoun “you” is plural, which means this sign will include Moses and many others. **What this sign would be was the fact that God would bring both Moses and the nation Israel right back to this very spot to worship Him.**

What this would mean is that in order for Moses to see God fulfill this sign to Him, he would have to step out by faith in obedience. Moses would not see God fulfill this incredible sign if he did not step out by faith and move forward.

In all reality, this very mountain would be the exact place where God would bring them. The fact is just three months after God brought Israel out of Egypt, this became a reality (Exodus 19:1-2).

Now this sign would suggest to Moses that he would not be hurt in any way, because he was going to end up back here worshipping God after he had gone and led the nation out of Egypt.

The Egyptians were not going to exterminate Moses or the Hebrews. God was going to deliver them and the sign would be they would be back at this very spot worshipping God. This whole thing started when Moses took some sheep to find some good pasture. He ends up discovering the will of God for his life.