

MEETING GOD

Exodus 3

There is nothing so lonely as being in the wilderness. Perhaps you've been there. It is that place where all your dreams have been shattered, where all your plans have been rendered null and void. It is the dry and thirsty land where God's word does not seem to touch you as it once did. It is that desolate place where the fellowship of God's people does not warm you any longer.

If you have been a Christian for any length of time, then you have probably had your ups and downs. You've gone through both the mountaintop as well as the wilderness experience.

Wilderness experiences tend to last a long time. At least it feels like a long time when you are going through it. The wilderness experience of Moses lasted for forty years. Something happens when you are in the wilderness for that long. You begin to get used to it. You become acclimatized to the wilderness. When God says, "It is time to leave," you feel a strange reluctance to go.

This is what happened to Moses. He got used to being in the wilderness and when God finally called him to leave, he came up with five different excuses why he could not go. We will not see all of those reasons in this chapter. Some of them will be continued in Exodus 4. That in itself is a rather striking commentary. We are going to have two entire chapters devoted to excuses. But before we get to the excuses, we have an encounter. It is one of the most striking encounters in history. It is the encounter between Moses and God.

IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD

1. The Place of God's Presence: *Now Moses was pasturing the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock to the west side of the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. (Exodus 3:1).*

As our chapter opens, forty years have passed. Moses is still working as a shepherd for his father-in-law. He had never set out to obtain his own flocks like Jacob had done with Laban. I

The name **הָרֵב** is taken from a root meaning, "to be desolate."

imagine that Moses was content with the status quo. There had been a time when he saw himself as the liberator and leader of the Israelites from Egypt, but that was long ago and now he was only the leader of a flock of sheep.

It was in the course of taking the flocks to new pastures that he came *to the west side of the wilderness*, that is, the west side of Midian where it connected to the Sinai peninsula. The traditional location of Horeb is in the southern part of the Sinai and there is no good reason to doubt the accuracy of that tradition.

2. The Manifestation of God’s Presence: *And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed. (Exodus 3:2).*

I don’t believe the bush that Moses saw was anything out of the ordinary. It was one of thousands that dotted the landscape of that dry land. What was significant was what was happening to the bush. It was on fire, yet its leaves were not turning black and its branches were not being consumed. Had the fire gone out, there would have been no mark on the bush to tell there had ever been a fire there.

The burning bush harkens back to an earlier manifestation of the presence of God. It was the angel with the flaming sword that was stationed at the Garden of Eden to guard the way to the Tree of Life. In this case, the fire and the tree are combined. The tree of life has become a tree of light.

Genesis 3	Exodus 3
The tree of life	The bush of the presence of God
It was guarded by a cherub with a flaming sword	It was burning but was not consumed
The man and the woman were cast out from the garden because of their sin	Moses is told not to draw near and he is required to remove his sandals

The tree of life in Genesis 3 represented that from which Adam and Eve and the rest of the human race were removed. A cherub was stationed at the entrance of the garden to keep all men away. We also see an angel described with the burning bush. It is not merely a cherub. It is the angel of the Lord. It is the very messenger of God and his presence signifies the presence of God.

Jesus is our burning bush. God is described in the scriptures as a consuming fire, but Jesus is the One who came and who died in order that we not be consumed.

Moses is going to be called to return to Egypt. He is going to jump out of the frying pan and into the proverbial fire. That will be okay because, if God is with you, then you will not get burned. The God of the burning bush is able to preserve you in the midst of your fiery trials.

What are you facing that scares you to death? You can take comfort. God is still in control and His presence is still available. He has not changed. If you are one of His people, then He who was manifested in the burning bush has His presence within you.

3. The Determination to Discover God's Presence: *So Moses said, "I must turn aside now, and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up." (Exodus 3:3).*

I imagine that Moses could have said to himself, "That is interesting; there is a burning bush. But I don't have time for that sort of thing right now. There are sheep to be watched and fed and watered and the last time I got involved in this sort of thing I was run out of Egypt."

I cannot help but to wonder how often the presence of God is made manifest before us in one way or another, but we do not turn aside to see His hand in our lives. Have you seen Him and ignored Him? Make a determination that you are going to look for His presence when it comes. You may find out He is already there.

GOD'S REVELATION OF HIMSELF

In verse 4, God calls to Moses from the bush. Up to this time, Moses may have considered this to be merely an unusual physical phenomenon. Now he is confronted with the supernatural presence of God.

1. The God who Knows your Name: *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." (Exodus 2:4).*

As God speaks to Moses, there is an interesting echo that resounds up and down the halls of time. We can think of a number of times when God has done this, each time with the double call of a person's name.

“Abraham, Abraham” (Genesis 22:11).
“Jacob, Jacob” (Genesis 46:2).
“Moses, Moses” (Exodus 3:4).
“Samuel, Samuel” (1 Samuel 3:10).
“Saul, Saul” (Acts 9:4).

The teaching of Christianity is rooted in the truth that God has spoken to man. This is not merely an understandable communication. It is personal in nature. This is the God who knows your name. This is the God who has created you and who knows all about you.

2. The God of Holy Ground: *Then He said, “Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” (Exodus 3:5).*

There are two commands given here. The first command was that Moses not draw near: *Do not come near here*. That is striking because we are told repeatedly in the New Testament to draw near to God.

Draw near to God and He will draw near to you (James 4:8).

Why is there a distinction? It is because, with the coming of Christ, the way has been opened for us to draw near. Hebrews 7:25 says that *He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them*.

The second command given here is for Moses to remove his sandals. This was holy ground. That does not mean there was anything special about the sand and rocks in that particular area of the Middle East. What made it holy ground is that God was here. This is a picture of the holiness of God. The Lord is so holy that you don't walk with your dirty sandals on the ground where He is revealing Himself. To treat His presence with irreverence is to be consumed.

What significance does that have in your life? It means that, if you are one of God's people, then you have become holy ground. This has an impact upon how you see yourself and how you carry yourself.

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? (1 Corinthians 6:19).

When you come to Christ in faith, something tremendous takes place. The Spirit

of God comes and takes up residence inside you. You become special. You become holy ground. Because of this, nothing is ever the same. No matter where you go, you are never truly alone. The Spirit of God is within you. He sets you apart and His presence means that you must now act differently.

3. The God of Your Fathers: *He said also, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. (Exodus 3:6).*

The significance of the reference to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is that God had promised each of these men that He would take His people out of Egypt and bring them to the Promised Land. Moses was not going to be starting a new religion. He had not dreamed up the idea of God while leading sheep in the wilderness. God is a lot older than Moses. He is older than Abraham. He is older than everything. He is eternal.

This means that if you are a Christian, then you are part of a tradition. You have not joined a cult that started last week. You are a part of something that goes back four thousand years to Abraham. And it goes back before Abraham to the first ancestor of the human race. And it goes back before that to the eternal God.

Moses realized all of this. How do I know this? I know it because of his reaction to God's words. He hid his face because He was afraid to look at God. He realized that he was standing before the God of his fathers. His reaction was the same as the reaction of anyone who has ever found himself in the presence of God. There is coming a day when every knee shall bow and every tongue will confess that He is Lord.

4. The God who Sees: *The LORD said, "I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings" (Exodus 3:7).*

God is not cold and separated in the heavens. He is not only a consuming fire. He is also a loving fire. He relates to your sufferings. The Lord is the God who sees. He is separate and distinct from all those deities that were worshiped in Egypt. They were nothing but blind and dumb idols of wood and stone. He is the God who sees. When you suffer, He says, "Ouch!" He calls us to do that, too.

5. The God who Saves: *"So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite" (Exodus 3:8).*

The Lord states His intention to deliver the people of Israel. This was to be a complete deliverance. It was a deliverance that would take them out of one land and that would plant them in another land.

When you speak to some professing Christians, you get the idea that they want to be saved from the consequences of sin, but they do not want to be saved from the power and from the presence of sin. The salvation God provides is all-inclusive.

6. The God who Sends: *“Now, behold, the cry of the sons of Israel has come to Me; furthermore, I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians are oppressing them. ¹⁰ Therefore, come now, and I will send you to Pharaoh, so that you may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt.” (Exodus 3:9-10).*

God does not talk to people merely to satisfy their curiosity. He doesn't talk to people to impress them or because He is lonely. He calls them that they might serve Him. He has called you. He has given you His word and He has given you the message of the cross. He has done this for a reason. He has done it because He wants you to serve Him.

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. (Ephesians 2:10).

The reason God saved you is so that you might do good works. It is so that you might serve Him. Is that your purpose in life? If it is not, then it is because you are not one of His people.

THE RESISTANCE OF MOSES

Robert Deffinbaugh entitled his sermon on this passage: “Beating around the burning bush.” I rather like that as an accurate description of the actions of Moses in the rest of this chapter and in all of chapter 4 of Exodus. As Moses first encountered the presence of God and heard of God's plan to deliver Egypt, I imagine that Moses nodded in agreement. But now he does a reversal. Moses is going to come up with five different excuses why he is not the man for the job.

Moses' Excuse	God's Answer	God's Sign
“I am not qualified”	“I will be with you”	“You shall worship God at this mountain”

“I don’t know enough—I don’t even know your name”	“I am that I am”	“You will plunder the Egyptians”
“They will not believe me”	“Throw down your rod”	“The witness of the signs”
“I am not eloquent”	“Who made men’s mouths?”	“I will be your mouth”
“Send someone else”	“Aaron will go with you”	“He is coming to meet you”

Each of these excuses will be answered by the Lord and each answer will subsequently be followed by a sign that will assure Moses of the truthfulness of the answer.

11 But Moses said to God, “Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?” 12 And He said, “Certainly I will be with you, and this shall be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain.” (Exodus 3:11-12).

Someone rather cleverly entitled this first excuse as “Moses the unknown” and the following excuse in verse 13 as “God the unknown.” But the problem of Moses is not that he is unknown. Rather it was that he is known all too well. He is a wanted man in Egypt. He is a fugitive from the law. He has a price on his head and there is an unfriendly administration in power. If there is any place on earth where Moses does not want to go, it was to Egypt.

Furthermore, Moses hasn’t the proper credentials. He has not been to seminary. He does not have a Bible college degree. He has not taken Theology 101. It is a common excuse. There are a lot of Christians who seem to have the idea that only the pastor can do the work of ministry; that he is paid to be good while the rest of us are good for nothing. God has an answer to this excuse. It is the answer to all who feel they are unqualified. It is the argument of His presence.

Notice that God does not argue with Moses. He does not say that Moses is qualified for the job. To the contrary, He seems to agree with Moses. Moses is not qualified for the job at hand. That is okay because God always uses unqualified men.

Look at the disciples of Jesus. If you were going to start a corporation whose goal was to change the world, those would be the last twelve men you would pick to be the top executives. They were totally unqualified for the job.

God uses unqualified men. That is the only kind of men He uses. That is good because it means He can use me. It means He can use you, too. The only qualification that will be needed is that God go with him. The presence of God is the answer to the problem of qualification.

THE NAME OF GOD

13 Then Moses said to God, "Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you.' Now they may say to me, 'What is His name?' What shall I say to them?" 14 God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM"; and He said, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" 15 God, furthermore, said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'The LORD, 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-name to all generations." (Exodus 3:13-15).

This is the second objection of Moses. He points out that he does not know enough theology to be a spokesman for God. "Lord, when I get to Egypt I might face some liberal seminary students who will ask me what is your name and I don't know the answer."

The Egyptians had a god for every event. There were Isis and Ra and Osiris and Amon and Horus and Ptah. There were literally hundreds of god and goddesses and each had a different name and a different set of attributes. For Moses to claim that God had sent him would only bring the question: "Which god sent you?"

He asks the question, "What is your name? What sets you apart from all the other gods of Egypt?" This was a significant question. In the ancient world, the name of a person or a city or a deity was not without meaning. The name of a person would often describe an attribute of that person. Likewise, the name of a deity would usually indicate some specific attribute of that deity.

For example, the name "Jesus" is a Greek rendition of the Hebrew name "Joshua" and means "Yahweh saves." Thus, to believe in the name of Jesus is to believe in the saving work which His name implies (John 1:12; Acts 3:16). As Moses confronts God, he asks for a name.

God is going to respond, not with one answer, but with two. The first will be seen in the phrase in verse 14: "I AM THAT I AM." Notice in the following chiasmic chart that this

reply is given a place of central prominence. It is the central focus of the answer and placed so as to draw our attention to it.

Then Moses said to God, "Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I shall say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you.'" (3:13)

Now they may 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 sons of Israel,

"I AM has sent me to you."

And God, furthermore, said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you'" (3:15)

1. אהיה אשר אהיה ("I AM WHO I AM").

This first answer is the repetition of the verb "I AM." This is the Qal imperfect of היה ("to be"). The fact that the imperfect is used means that we could translate this as "I WILL BE WHO I WILL BE." The name indicates the attribute of continuing existence. He describes Himself as the Continuing God.

Only five examples of the older form of היה are found in the Old Testament Hebrew (Genesis 27:29; Nehemiah 6:6; Ecclesiastes 2:22; 11:3; Isaiah 16:4), although היה is regularly used in the Aramaic portions of the Bible.

1. יהוה ("THE LORD" or "YAHWEH").

It appears that the ך is preformative to the root word יהוה, the older form and rare synonym of הוה ("to be") which would make it a 3rd masculine singular Qal imperfect ("HE WILL BE"). This would be a reference to the previous phrase "I AM WHO I AM."

A problem arises in that יהוה is said to be the God of

Dr. Barton Payne suggests that this is to be taken as a paranomasia, a play on words rather than an etymology.

Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, even though in Exodus 6:3 the Lord says that He was not known to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob by the name יהוה.

God spake further to Moses, and said to him, "I am the LORD; 3 and I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God Almighty, but by my name, LORD, I did not make Myself known to them." (Exodus 6:2-3).

As early as Genesis 4:26 we read that "men began to call upon the name of יהוה." There also seem to be references where the name יהוה was spoken to Abraham (Genesis 18:14; 22:14). We can surmise one of two possibilities:

- This statement indicates that the Patriarchs had an incomplete understanding of the name and its relation to the verb אהיה which had just recently been revealed in Exodus 3:14.
- The name was not emphasized in the days of the Patriarchs. In favor of this latter premise, it is noted that, although יהוה is used often in Genesis, it USUALLY appears in the midst of a narrative rather than in a place where one of the Patriarchs is either speaking or is being addressed. On the other hand, Laban is pictured as using the term יהוה as he enters into a covenant with Jacob (Genesis 31:49). Indeed, even the mother of Moses has a name which consists of a compound with יהוה in its abbreviated form יה (Jokhebed).

The name יהוה is further described in Exodus 3:14-15 as the name of the Lord "forever" and as His "memorial name to all generations" (Exodus 3:15). The Hebrew text presents this as more of a parallel:

This is My name...	And	This way I am to be remembered...
Forever.		To generation after generation.

Over a thousand years after Moses, a Galilean rabbi stood in the temple in Jerusalem and boldly proclaimed, "Before Abraham was, I AM" (John 8:58), echoing the same εγω εμι of the Septuagint (the LXX reads εγω εμι ὁ ὄν, adding the present participle of εμι to say in effect, "I am the Existing One"). The use of the Greek present tense accords with the Hebrew imperfect of Exodus 3:14, both indicating a continuing state of existence.

THE SUFFICIENCY OF GOD

1. God's Sufficient Concern: *"Go and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, "I am indeed concerned about you and what has been done to you in Egypt.'"* (Exodus 3:16).

The foundation of the message Moses will deliver to the Israelites is in the fact that God cares. Though they have gone for hundreds of years without hearing the word of the Lord, He has not forgotten about them or their plight in Egypt.

We need to be assured of God's love and concern and care for us. 1 Peter 5:7 calls for you to cast *all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.*

2. God's Sufficient Promise: *So I said, I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite, to a land flowing with milk and honey* (Exodus 3:17).

God not only cares, He promises to turn that care into action. He gives a promise that He is going to deliver the Israelites and bring them into a new land. He makes mention of *the land of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite.* Why does He do this? Because there are some of the same people that were mentioned when God promised the land to Abraham in Genesis 15.

3. God's Sufficient Worship: *They will pay heed to what you say; and you with the elders of Israel will come to the king of Egypt and you will say to him, "The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us. So now, please, let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God."* (Exodus 3:18).

Moses and the Israelites are instructed to go to the pharaoh of Egypt with a request that they be permitted to leave Egypt on a temporary basis to go and to worship the Lord. The request will be that they go *a three days' journey into the wilderness* where they can sacrifice and worship the Lord.

This tells me something about the book of Exodus. It is a book of deliverance, but it is also a book of worship. God is pictured as being intensely concerned about worship. Why? Because what you worship has a great impact upon what you are.

4. God's Sufficient Foreknowledge: *But I know that the king of Egypt will not permit you to go, except under compulsion. 20 So I will stretch out My hand and strike Egypt with all My miracles which I shall do in the midst of it; and after that he will*

let you go. (Exodus 3:19-20).

The Lord is already aware that the pharaoh of Egypt will resist any and all attempts to allow the Israelites their temporary leave to go and to worship. He is aware that this hardness will result in a subsequent judgment brought against Egypt.

This serves as a reminder of the foreknowledge of God. He is never taken by surprise. He knows the end from the beginning and His plan is set accordingly.

5. God's Sufficient Provision: *I will grant this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and it shall be that when you go, you will not go empty-handed. 22 But every woman shall ask of her neighbor and the woman who lives in her house, articles of silver and articles of gold, and clothing; and you will put them on your sons and daughters. Thus you will plunder the Egyptians. (Exodus 3:21-22).*

When the time comes for the Israelites to depart from the land of Egypt, the Lord is going to put within the hearts of the Egyptians a spirit of generosity. To be sure, this will not be motivated by kindness or good will, but rather by fear of what has taken place in Egypt.

What a wonderful picture of the provision of the Lord! He is going to bring the Israelites out of Egypt and He is going to mandate the construction of a Tabernacle and various items of worship made of gold and other precious items and the Egyptians are going to pay for all of it.