

Exodus Lesson 1

Before the Burning Bush

I'm sure you have heard of having "a burning bush" experience, or saw the Charlton Heston movie where God spoke to Moses from the burning bush.

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Moses and the Burning Bush (Photo credit: Wikipedia)[/caption]

The question you may not be able to answer is, what was Moses doing out there in the wilderness? Why did God speak to Moses from the bush? What happened to lead up to this important event?

In the original Hebrew that Exodus was originally written in, the very first word is "and". This simple word functions to connect Exodus with the preceding book of Genesis. Exodus is the continuation of Genesis. In fact the first 5 verses of Exodus are the same as Genesis 46:8-27. The number of Hebrews who came to Egypt was 70. They consisted of the sons of Jacob (Israel) and their children. Therefore Exodus is a continuation of Genesis and one part of a larger story.

Fulfillment of Prophecy

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What was getting ready to happen in Exodus 1-2 was a fulfillment of what God had promised Abraham a couple hundred years before in Genesis 15:13, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years." This is exactly what happens in the beginning of Exodus. How did God know? I guess it pays to be omniscient. As you know, Abraham's son was Isaac and his son was Jacob who was renamed Israel. Jacob had 12 sons and a daughter. His favorite son was Joseph, but the other brothers being jealous, sold him into slavery in Egypt. Through a series of events engineered by God, Joseph became Prime Minister of Egypt. A terrible famine broke out in the world, but Joseph (at God's direction) had prepared Egypt so there was plenty of food stored up. Joseph's brothers journeyed desperately to Egypt in search of food, and who should they find but Joseph in charge of the whole kingdom. Naturally, the Pharaoh at that time loved Joseph for saving Egypt so Joseph's whole family was welcomed to Egypt. In fact, they were the only people who were given their own land in Goshen (Gen.47). Genesis ends with all the Hebrews in Egypt, and living in peace and harmony with the Egyptians. About 300 years later, as recorded in Exodus 1:7, the descendants of Israel had greatly increased in number such that, "the land was filled with them."

Reversal of Fortune

Exodus 1:8 reveals a dramatic change in the way the Hebrews were to be treated, "Now a new king arose over Egypt who did not know Joseph." Commentators speculate whether this means Egypt had been taken by force by another invading race of people who had no regard for the Jews, or if as time went by, succeeding generations of Egyptians forgot the wonderful things Joseph had done for Egypt and a Pharaoh gained power who both feared and loathed them. Either way they were in for some serious trouble. You may ask, "If they were God's chosen people, then why would God allow this? Don't forget God predicted it back in Genesis 15:13 so it was God's plan for them to be enslaved from the very beginning.

What's a Tyrant to Do ?

Pharaoh was concerned about Israel's exploding population so he devised a series of evil solutions to limit their numbers. Phase one was enslavement. He divided them up under cruel taskmasters, I guess the plan was to keep them so busy they could not breed, but "the more he afflicted them, the more they multiplied". Phase two was to command all the Hebrew midwives to kill all the male children at birth, but the midwives "feared God" and disobeyed Pharaoh. Phase three was the final solution to just murder all male infants by throwing them into the Nile River. The Egyptians failed to discern that the Israelites' increasing numbers was a sign of God's presence and blessing.

Irony

The student of the Bible is aware of something the Egyptians couldn't grasp. The one true God has a sovereign plan for the redemption of mankind. Israel is at the center of that plan. The certainty of Israel's deliverance in Exodus is based on God's past actions in choosing Abraham and making promises to him and his descendants in the book of Genesis. God had made promises and God does not change, circumstances seem to change, but God's plan and promises remain to be fulfilled. Thus as God told Abraham, after 400 years in Egypt, He would bring them out and take them to the Promised Land.

You may ask, what took so long? Why did they have to go to Egypt? Why would God bring them out now? Don't forget Genesis 15:16, "in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Canaanite is not yet complete". What God meant was that the Promised Land was occupied by Canaanites (Amorites). God is very patient, and it would take hundreds of years for their horrible sins to mount up so that God would displace them. Therefore God had removed Israel to Egypt to grow into a great nation until the time when God would both judge the Canaanites and bless the Israelites. The next part of the puzzle was supplied by Pharaoh in Egypt. How do you motivate several million people to suddenly pick up, leave their homes, and journey to a new land? You enslave them and try to commit genocide against them.

One Who is Drawn Out

Exodus 2 introduces us to God's reluctant servant-to-be, Moses. His parents were of the tribe of Levi, and when he was three months old they could no longer hide the babe so they put him in a basket which was made water tight by pitch. The daughter of Pharaoh saw the basket and had him "drawn out", thus he was named Moses. Pharaoh's daughter raised him as her own.

Three 40 Year periods

Moses' life can be broken down into three 40 year periods. The first 40 years he was raised, educated, and treated like an Egyptian Prince. The second 40 years, Moses was a fugitive in the wilderness of Midian, and the last 40 years involved the exodus from Egypt and subsequent wandering in the wilderness.

In Moses' first forty years he was full of the pride his position and education would dictate. We don't know at what point he realized he was from Hebrew heritage, but certainly by Exodus 2:11 he knew and went out to see his countrymen in hard labor. When he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, Moses intervened, and killed the Egyptian. Acts 7:25 tells us that Moses assumed that the Hebrews would accept him right then as their leader and deliverer, but instead they "ratted him out" so he had to flee Egypt. Pharaoh put a death warrant out on him, so Moses became a fugitive in the wilderness for 40 years. How ironic it is that in all pride Moses, at 40 years old, took it for granted that he was a great man, and so took matters into his own hands, but was humiliated and rejected. It is also amazing that the deliverer of Israel was right there yet Israel rejected him when he made himself available. It would take 40 years living with the goats in the desert to humble Moses and prepare him for ministry. Moses would not be so eager at 80 as he was at 40.

Setting the Stage

In Exodus 2:22-25, the stage is set for God to act. Israel increased its cry for help and God was listening. Of course He had always been listening, but the appointed time for His plan was now at hand. "God remembered His covenant with Abraham", tells us the upcoming events in the exodus from Egypt are directly connected to God's promises in the book of Genesis. What will God's method of deliverance be?

While Moses was nonchalantly hanging out with the flock in the wilderness of Horeb (same as Sinai), the angel of God appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush. It was not fire as we know it, but was the glory of God in a bush. Moses was attracted to it because it was unique—it appeared to be on fire, but the bush was not burning up. Commentators believe this was actually the pre-incarnate Christ in His glorious heavenly form because Moses is told to remove his sandals and approach reverently, which such worship is never given created angels. The messenger also said, "I am the God of Abraham" which is another good clue. At that time of God's choosing, Moses was called and commissioned to be the deliverer of Israel. Now that his ego had been crushed, and he was not seeking or expecting the job, God gave it to him.

Why the Burning Bush ?

The fact that the bush is not consumed demonstrates that the fire's natural effect of burning is suspended. Therefore, this encounter foreshadows the upheaval of natural phenomena in all the miracles God would do such as the ten plagues on Egypt and the parting of the Red Sea. The God who is calling is the God who rules over creation. Beginning with the bush, God would shine His glory in a dark world throughout the Exodus and wilderness wanderings. God revealed Himself repeatedly as the one true God, the creator of Heaven and earth. His recurring purpose statement throughout the book of Exodus began here, "that you may know that I am the Lord".

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