

EXODUS

Lesson 4 - Chapter 3

Last week we ended with Moses on his way to the backside, or the far side, of the wilderness of Midian. And, I made the case for you that the mountain where Moses would encounter the Burning Bush was NOT on the Sinai Peninsula, but on the Arabian Peninsula. And, this is because Midian is on the Arabian Peninsula. At this point, the mountain where Moses will first encounter the great God of his fathers, up to now known as Mt. Horeb, will be the same place Moses was instructed to bring the Hebrew people when they are released from their bondage in Egypt.

Am I saying that the traditional location of Mt. Sinai, near the tip of the Sinai Peninsula, is not correct? Yes, that's what I'm saying. We need to grasp that Mt. Sinai's location is a Christian tradition, not a Jewish one. It was not until the time of Constantine (4th century A.D.) that his mother, Helena, had a vision and it was in this supposed vision that she decided that the current location of Mt. Sinai was the correct one. Until that time that place had NEVER held any religious significance. Further, no type of shrine was built on it until the 6th century A.D., when the first section of St. Catherine's Monastery was completed there.

Due to the fairly recent work of archeologists like Bob Cornuke and Ron Wyatt, the subject has taken on new life, and in their entirely independent investigations they can find no other solution for the true location of the Mountain of God than in an area east of the Gulf of Aqaba. I say "new life" because this subject goes back a long way. In 1893, in the *Imperial and Asiatic Quarterly Review*, the most highly regarded archaeological journal for its time, Professor Sayce and his colleagues concluded that to look in the Sinai Peninsula for the Mountain of God was wrong minded. That the only evidence, both Biblically and extra-Biblically, was that it had to be located somewhere on the western end of the Arabian Peninsula.

An even earlier mention, outside the Bible, of the location of Mount Sinai/Mt. Horeb, was from Josephus the Hebrew-Roman historian. In his work, *Antiquities*, Josephus says that the location was towards Arabia, and actually named the region: Arabia Petraea.

Without doubt, the earliest name of this mountain was Mt. Horeb. We don't find it called Mt. Sinai until after the Jews returned from Babylon. Coincidentally.....but not enough to call it absolute proof.....one of the Assyrian-Babylonian gods the Jews encountered was named "Sin" and many scholars believe that is how both Mountain and the desert got its name. Sin was the moon-god. So the belief is that the region....Sinai....was named for this moon-god that the Jews were now so familiar with. The Jews began to incorporate many Babylonian names and traditions into their own culture after their 70-year stay in Babylon. However, what is also interesting is that it was the Arabian culturecharacterized by its Sabean religion....that worshipped the moon-god at the top of its god hierarchy. So, it's not hard to see how all of this

could have become mixed-up and absorbed and incorporated over the centuries into Jewish tradition, and then borrowed and changed again in Christian tradition.

I am convinced, at the least, that the real Mt. Sinai is not the current one, and therefore won't even take people there on tours any more. In any case, we'll talk about his subject a little more as we get further into Exodus, not because it has any major theological impact, but because it is simply interesting.

Let's re-read part of Exodus chapter 3 to refresh our memories.

READ EXODUS 3:1 - 12

Moses led his father-in-law's sheep to new pastureland.

Suddenly Moses sees the angel of the Lord, appearing as a burning bush, on one those mountains. But, what really attracted Moses to this fire, was that it was burning without consuming the bush. Now, back in Genesis, we tackled what the "angel of the Lord" meant. But, we'll review it quickly.

This statement "angel of the Lord" is composed to two Hebrew words: malach is the first word, and it simply means, "messenger". In Hebrew, מַלְאָךְ (mem-lamed-aleph-chaf sofit). It could be ANY kind of messenger....human or otherwise, and it could denote anything from telling your child, as a messenger, to run next door and ask your neighbor for some milk, to a heavenly messenger....an angel. But, when it is used to indicate a heavenly messenger, there is a second word added to Malach, and it is usually either Adonai, or Yehoveh. There is a world of difference between these two words: Adonai means "lord" or "master"; it is a rather generic term. It is only within the context of its use that one can determine whether the Bible is referring to a **heavenly** "lord" or simply an earthly authority figure that is being shown respect. It was customary and complimentary in those days to call someone you respect "lord", "master", Adonai.

But, using the Hebrew word Yehoveh is a whole other matter. Yehoveh, or Yahweh depending on which Hebrew scholar you believe is correct as to this name's pronunciation, is the completely unique word that God says is His personal name. In Hebrew, יהוה '???

The original Hebrew of this verse, translated typically as "angel of the lord" is actually, in Hebrew, "malach Yehoveh".....angel of Yehoveh. When we see the term "angel of the **lord**", it CAN mean, and most often refers to, just an "angel".....a heavenly angel as we typically think of one. But, when we see "angel of **Yahweh**", it seems to mean a manifestation of God Almighty, Himself. This was not a run-of-the-mill angel in the burning bush, bringing a message FROM God.....it was God Himself that was about to speak to Moses; of that there is no scriptural doubt. So, what we need to take of this is that, just like it is for us today, sometimes there is no word or phrase to adequately describe an attribute or manifestation of the Father. God could have just spoken to Moses with no visible aspect to the communication

at all. But, usually God does do something visual because of our rational senses sight is the most powerful and impacting upon us.

Now, I think I can say with some confidence that Moses was unprepared for what was about to happen: a voice coming from the bush that calls out his name! Typically one would think that Moses' "fight or flight" reflex would have kicked in right about then..... (FEET DON'T FAIL ME NOW!). Moses didn't do either one.....he fell to the ground and lay there like a slug; scared out of his wits.

God instructs him to remove his sandals, for he is now on Holy Ground. Why is the ground Holy? Because if God is there, its holy. We'll see this fleshed out a little more as God instructs the building of the Wilderness Tabernacle. The removing of one's sandals was, and remains, a standard Middle Eastern sign of respect when entering the presence of a king or a god. However, the Lord didn't say "since you're in the presence of God, your must remove your sandals". Rather, the reason is that the ground, the dirt surrounding the bush had taken on a holy condition. As we'll find out in later parts of the Torah, holiness was something that could be transmitted from person to person, or person to object, or object to object. I know that sound pretty odd; this is because the Biblical definition of holiness and its qualities is something that modern Christianity tends to shy away from because it's pretty dicey to deal with. But, from a Biblical principle aspect, at least part of the matter with the removal of the sandals was that, as the Lord says, the very dirt Moses was standing on was holy because God was near. How come the dirt was holy? Because holiness was transmitted to it from a holy God.....it was physically unavoidable. It would have been tragic had the holiness of the dirt surrounding the Burning Bush been transferred to Moses' sandals, and then wherever he walked those sandals would have possibly transmitted holiness to whatever they touched. We can't see it in this account, but this whole incident is one that is quite dangerous as it involves God's holiness.

And, now, God introduces Himself to Moses. He explains that He is the God of Moses' fathers....the Patriarchs. Why is that important? Because it instantly connects what is happening here with the Abrahamic Covenant.....the COVENANT of Moses' fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And, Abba says that He sees the terrible condition of the people, down in Egypt, the people that He has set apart for Himself.....the Israelites. In V8, God says, "I have come down" to rescue Israel from the hand of Egypt. "I have come down" does NOT mean God changed location. Rather, it is an everyday Hebrew idiom that indicates someone, in this case God, is intervening in this particular human affair; just as in the Hebrew word **zakar**, translated "remember", which inherently includes involvement.

God next says that He is going to do what He promised to do so long ago; "I shall surely bring you back up again" from the place you have sojourned to a land I have given to you. And, the place He had prepared for them was Canaan. A good land, with plenty of room for them.....a land flowing with milk and honey. We will hear this phrase "flowing with milk and honey" many times in the Scriptures, and it has nothing to do with milk OR honey.... it simply is another of the scores of Hebrew idioms we find in the Word, and this one indicates great fruitfulness and fertility and blessing.

Of course, this land, Canaan, is already occupied with many peoples, primarily the Canaanites; that is, the descendants of Canaan, son of Ham, and grandson of Noah; this was a cursed line of people. V8 also mentions 4 other people groups who were in the land of Canaan. The Hittites at one time, well before the Assyrian Empire, formed a substantial empire of their own. Starting at about the time of Moses, they occupied an area that encompassed modern day Turkey, Syria and Lebanon. They also had influenced on other areas, including Canaan. They were a very advanced civilization, and here we see mention of them in the Bible, with some of them living in Canaan. Interestingly, it was not long ago that scientists and scholars regarded the Biblical mention of Hittites as just another of the many so-called mythical peoples enumerated throughout the OT. Imagine their surprise when recent archaeological digs confirmed that this civilization not only existed, it was a heretofore-unknown dominant regional power. Now, museums are flooded with confirmed Hittite artifacts.

It is believed that the Amorites were of Mesopotamian origin; in fact, it is pretty well agreed among Biblical anthropologists that Abraham was likely an Amorite. They dominated the area of modern day Iraq, and were very aggressive in pursuit of power and territory. The great Conqueror Hammurabi was an Amorite. Their heyday was BEFORE that of the Hittites, but their culture survived for centuries after its peak.

It has been concluded that the Perrizites were not a tribe, but rather a name for a group of people or tribes that populated the hill country of Canaan. So, it's thought that Perrizites was a kind of generic term that simply meant "hill dwellers", and therefore indicated more of a location than any particular tribe. It's like referring to people as Floridians, or Californians, or New Yorkers.

Very little is known of the Hivites. However, we do know that the people who occupied and ruled the ancient city of Shechem, at least when Jacob lived there for a time, were Hivites. And, it appears they were concentrated in the northern part of Canaan, though some of their tribe likely lived in other parts of Canaan as well. They are thought to even possibly be the ancestors of the Huns.

The Jebusites were the people who occupied and likely even built the city that would eventually be called Jerusalem.

God makes it very clear to Moses that He has not been asleep at the switch. He has seen, He has heard, and He has KNOWN of His people's plight. We should NEVER assume that what we perceive as a long period of God's silence in our lives means that He has forgotten His promises to us, or isn't aware of us, or has lost interest in us. For, as daunting as it can be it seems that an extended period of heavenly silence is invariably a major ingredient of God's preparation process; His preparation of us.....for whatever His divine purposes for us might be...WILL include periods of divine silence.

And, now begins an incredible dialogue between Moses and God. There has never been one like it before, and there has never been one like it since. It is no wonder that the Jewish people venerate Moses.....holds him in such high esteem. Church, it's really sad that we don't, too. Because, as we progress through the Torah, we're going to see just how highly God thought

of Moses.

After God makes it clear WHO He is, and of His great compassion for His people, and His intention to do something about their condition, in V10, He calls Moses to be His instrument of deliverance. And, the way this call occurs is really a pattern for the way God will commission all of His prophets.....not just in Biblical times, but for all time. And, it is almost opposite of the way a human would expect such a thing to occur.

First and foremost it is that it is God who approaches the one He has chosen to be His prophet. It is God that initiates the contact. Sometimes it's in a vision, or a dream. In this case, with Moses, it is a direct confrontation.....the flame in the bush is about the closest thing we're going to see in the Bible that approaches "face-to-face" conversation with God. Second, the one chosen is always either reluctant or outright refuses the call at first. Jonah is often called the Reluctant Prophet. In point of fact, ALL prophets are reluctant prophets. Being reluctant seems to be a pre-condition to being chosen to be a prophet God. Are you anxious and determined to be a Prophet for God? Then from everything I've read in the Bible you are not a candidate.

Third, we see that the prophet candidate (male or female) is to return to society, or wherever God sends him, without concern for the opposition he will receive, undeterred by the skeptical nature of the many who will scoff at him, ready to tell men of great power and authority things that will, shall we say, disturb them. It may well be that the prophet will never, in his lifetime, achieve an even modest amount of respect from his former friends and family, nor might he ever see come to pass what it is he has been told by God to prophesy.

But, if we look at this from a little different perspective, we can also see what it is that God is looking for in the character of the person He chooses to be His prophet. Utmost, God wants someone who doesn't consider himself worthy to be a prophet of God. Someone who does NOT think, "pick me, I have what it takes!" No personal ambition must be present. Because, the person chosen must understand better than most that, of himself, it is impossible to carry out the task about to be given him; that what will come next he won't know, and that there is no way for him to prepare for it. That if God doesn't do it all, it simply can't happen.

So, we see God's patience with Moses; because God well understands that the very attributes of the man He will use to bring His people out of Egypt runs counter to what this man THINKS he is capable of doing.

Folks, if you have ever WANTED to be a prophet of God..... you are not a candidate. If you think you might make a good prophet..... you are disqualified. If any man's ambition is to gain personal benefit from speaking for God, that man will not be chosen. I tell you this not just so we can all look in the mirror and make some honest judgments about ourselves concerning this; but also that we might look closely at the men and women who profess to speak for God. Do they have the attributes that God seeks for His spokespersons? Those characteristics so clearly laid out in the Word? Or, is it that they have attributes that appeal to themselves and to worldly human nature? Do they have a desire to be popular and successful, or do they have a desire to tell the truth that God has given them to tell, no matter the cost? Don't ever let

anyone tell you that you have no right to make such a determination. It's our duty, to our families, and us to carefully examine those who profess to speak for God. Otherwise, we will have no idea who it is we are hearing from: God..... or man..... or worse.

After Moses displays the FIRST quality God looks for in a Prophet, by saying, "Who am I that I should go Pharaoh?" God tells Moses that He will be present with him in the task just assigned. And, then God says something we need to remember for some future chapters in Exodus: He says, as a sign of His direct hand in bringing the people out of Egypt, Moses is to lead the people to THIS mountain where they will all serve God. What mountain is THIS mountain? The exact same one on which Moses is now encountering God in the burning bush. And, WHERE is this mountain? Where Moses drove his sheep to; behind the desert of Midian.

Let's re-read a little more of Exodus 3.

Re-READ Exodus 3:13 - END

Even though God reassures Moses that He will be with him, Moses now says, in V13, that the people will want to know God's name...obviously, Moses does NOT know the God of Israel's name. Does anyone else find this a curious question? What's the big deal about knowing God's name that Moses is just so sure the Israelites will demand? What's wrong with just saying, "the God of our fathers sent me"? Has Moses forgotten that all of his forefathers called God El Shaddai? The sad reality is that the Israelites had succumbed to nearly 4 centuries of living amongst the pagan worship practices of the Egyptians. And, one of the main tenets of the Egyptian religion was that if you knew a particular god's name (and they had MANY gods) you could manipulate that god to do YOUR will by invoking his name. You see, just like in Hebrew, in the Egyptian language personal names held meanings. So, the name of a god denoted that god's characteristics, and that characteristic was directly associated to some specific part of the natural or spiritual world that he, or she, had control or influence over. So, if one was clever enough to match up the particular matter that was of concern to you with the right god, and then knew that god's name, you could call out "oh great Electro, god of the TV, please make my picture come in clearer", and that god had no choice but to do your bidding.

Moses well knew this from living in Egypt for his first 40 years of life. And, of course, God well knew it. So, God obliged and gave Moses a name: a name that denoted God's characteristics, and that name was **ehyeh asher ehyeh**. Let's take a few minutes with this. First off, understand that God gave Moses what he knew Moses was looking for: a name that indicated God's characteristics. Because, this is NOT the same thing as God's personal name which He will soon tell Moses.

Ehyeh asher ehyeh is most typically translated "I am that I am" or "I will be What I will be". Nothing wrong about that. This has been the source of much mystery that has caused disagreement among reasonable Bible scholars as to its precise meaning. And, I have absolutely no doubt that God gave us that "name" for just that reason. His name is not to be compared with anything, or anyone, else.

Some translators make it “What I will be, I will be”; others “I am WHO I am”. Still others “I am THAT which I am”, and another intriguing interpretation “I will be-there howsoever I will be-there”.

I have no trouble with any of these definitions because I think we are attempting to define God's sublime characteristics, His unique essence, in the only way we have: human words developed from human thoughts. And words just can't quite capture it, but it's all we have. I also think that, as is our human propensity, we want to come to an easily digestible consensus of a SINGLE characteristic that we can assign God. You know, our desire for a “bottom line”, black or white, answer. Rather, I believe God is giving us, in ehyeh asher ehyeh, just a glimpse of the nearly impossible to envision reality that He is self-existent (I am that I am), that He is eternal (I will be as I will be), and that He is one of a kind (I am THAT which I am). He is not a being that He should be even remotely compared to man. He is always present and He is with us and around us in ways which would be futile for Him to try and explain as in a translation that I like, “I will be-there howsoever I will be-there”. He was, and is, and will always be. No Egyptian god had such a name as this; no known pagan god claimed such a thing.

Now, in V15, God gives Moses His FORMAL personal name. What we will find out at a later point is that THIS is the first time God has given out His personal name. And, that name is YHVH; '???

And, YHVH says that this name is his name for all generations. In other words, as long as their exists mankind, this is the name God wishes to be known by.

Now, a quick explanation: if we go back to Genesis, we will see several places where the name “YHVH” is used when referring to God. So, if only here at the burning bush does Moses, and mankind, FIRST receive God's formal eternal name, how is it that this same name is present in the records of events, in Genesis, that took place hundreds of years earlier? It is because Moses wrote down Genesis, and portions of the other books of the Torah, after the fact. That is, he wrote a history, not a diary. And, as is normal in human literature, when we look back at a person, or event, or place, we usually refer to it by the most common CURRENT name that people would understand. For instance, today I might refer to my 2-year-old granddaughter, Hannah, by name, even when concerning a time she was still in her mother's womb..... a time before she was even named! Or, if I was going to tell you the history of an area of Southern California that we are all familiar with, I would say that 500 years ago in the Los Angeles area there lived a huge population of Chumash Indians. Now, the name “Los Angeles” is not very old. And, certainly, there was no place called “Los Angeles” 500 years ago. But, what better way to refer to a particular area than by the name it is CURRENTLY known? That's all that was happening when Moses used God's name earlier in Genesis.....it was done in retrospect.

In Vs 16, God tells Moses to go to a certain group of authority figures in Israel, in order that they are informed what is about to happen. Notice what these people are called: “elders”. If you refer to your charts from an earlier lesson, you'll see that elders are the people's representatives, an elected or appointed class of leadership. Elders are not a part of the hereditary hierarchy that forms the ruling class of Prince, Chief, and Head. Kind of interesting,

to me, that God sent Moses NOT to the rulers of Israel, but to the common peoples' representatives. Jesus would do exactly the same thing: he went to the people, not the institutional religious authorities. And, I don't think that, when it comes to God wanting to communicate with His people that it is any different now than it was then. Do you? Pastors, teachers, and other church leaders are simply managers necessary to organize, and people God uses to carry out tasks and needed functions; we, they, are NOT Mediators. There is NO one between Abba and you, except Jesus.

God gave Moses a short list of things he was to say to the elders of Israel, who were to pass it on to those they represent: the general population of Israel. Moses is to tell them that he has personally SEEN the God of their fathers (hence the Burning Bush), and it is YHVH who has sent him. Further, YHVH wants the people to know that He knows of their affliction, and He has determined to remedy it by bringing Israel out of Egypt and up to Canaan, a fertile and fruitful place.

God tells Moses that the elders and the people WILL listen to what Moses tells them, and then.....and here it comes.....Moses and the elders are to confront the king of Egypt. But, unlike what we typically think, Pharaoh was not first hit with a demand to release the people of Israel to permanently migrate. No, all that was asked was that Israel be allowed to take a 3-day journey into the wilderness where they can worship God. Implied in all this is that this journey was simply akin to us going on a retreat. But, God goes on to say that He knows in advance that the Pharaoh will deny Israel permission to do this, and therefore after Pharaoh refuses this request God is going to smite Egypt and only after that will Pharaoh comply.

Why this Kabuki dance? Why the need to try for a 3-day pass instead of an honorable discharge? Well, with the benefit of hindsight, we can see that God needed to show Israel some things that they were currently blind to. Like all of us, Israel didn't want to change they just wanted **their circumstances** to be different. They didn't so much mind being in Egypt and being associated with (and polluted by) Egyptian culture and Egyptian religion. They just didn't like the slavery part. So, God began by telling Moses that Israel had to separate itself from Egypt, so that He could have them all to Himself that He might show them what proper worship is.

The dividing and separating of God's people from the world is crucial. And, the elders need to see that Pharaoh has a far deeper hold over them than they realized; the king of Egypt doesn't just want their labor, he wants them mind, body, and spirit. Pharaoh wants what Satan wants. Pharaoh's refusal to allow them to separate for but 72 hours that they might worship God will show the elders that the only path before them is to permanently separate from Egypt. And, this is going to be a very difficult and arduous path for the people and their leaders, so they have to buy into it wholeheartedly. Remember, what we are talking about here is REDEMPTION.

There is probably not one of us in this room who has not been faced with this same reality. If you are one of God's people, then God is going to use whatever means necessary to divide and separate you from the things of the world; things that are not good for you. But, it **is not** our human instinct to follow God and leave behind everything that is not OF God. Rather, we

try to keep one foot in the world, and the other in God's Kingdom. But, it won't work. I'm not sure there is any greater misery experienced than for a child of God who keeps resisting the Lord's will that we separate ourselves from all that is unholy. And, the grueling part of it all is that it is a process that is never ending for the entire duration of our lives, as long as we stay in the faith. It seems that once we FINALLY sever ties to some worldly thing that we are enslaved to, God will show us yet another area of our lives that must be dealt with in the same manner.....and on and on the process goes all of our days. Israel would have preferred to keep one foot in Egypt, and the other in the promises of God. That would prove to not only be impossible, but deadly.

At the end of chapter 3, God gives Moses a prophecy integrated with a command: STRIP EGYPT!! When God was through punishing Egypt, Israel was to ask, or better demand of the Egyptian citizens their valuables. And, God said Egypt would gladly give Israel anything they wanted just to be rid of them. In reality, Egypt would come to fear the presence of Israel....or better yet, the presence of Israel's God. Here we have another God produced irony: the slaves plunder their masters. It was the tradition of that time, as it is today in most non-Western societies, that to the victor goes the spoils. But, Israel was not the victor; they had done NOTHING to overcome Egypt. God did it all and Israel benefited from it. Another God-pattern that the Church most recognizes as a New Testament principle created in Yeshua, yet actually originated right here: it was that God redeemed us from our servitude to our flesh and to Satan. All we did was to benefit from what HE did.

Next week, we'll begin chapter 4.