



## **Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for June 7, 2009**

**Released on June 4, 2009**

### **"Hearing Requires Listening"**

**Lesson Text: Exodus 3:1–12.**

**Background Scripture: Exodus 2:23–3:12.**

**Devotional Reading: Hebrews 3:1–13.**

#### **Exodus 3:1–12**

**1** Now Moses kept the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian: and he led the flock to the back side of the desert, and came to the mountain of God, even to Horeb.

**2** And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed.

**3** And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt.

**4** And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I.

**5** And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet; for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.

**6** Moreover he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God.

**7** And the Lord said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows;

**8** And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

**9** Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me: and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them.

**10** Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt.

**11** And Moses said unto God, Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?

**12** And he said, Certainly I will be with thee; and this shall be a token unto thee, that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain.

## TODAY'S AIM

**Facts:** to see what God said to Moses through the burning bush.

**Principle:** to realize that God is persuasive when seeking to convince His servant to do His will.

**Application:** to listen when God speaks to us and be ready to follow His instructions.

## INTRODUCTION

### Answering God's Call

"You can't be serious, God! My family situation just isn't what it should be." "Not me, Lord. I'm from a family of nobodies, and I'm least among even them." "I'm not worthy; I am a lowly sinner." "I just can't do it; I'm too young, and I have no public-speaking skills."

When God calls us to challenging tasks, we have little trouble manufacturing reasons why God couldn't possibly use us. Perhaps you've hidden behind excuses like those above. If so, you're in good company. When God promised to make Abraham a mighty nation, Abraham claimed that his childless status was a problem (Genesis 15:1-3). When God called Gideon to deliver the Israelites from their enemies, he declared himself the nobody of nobodies (Judges 6:14, 15). Isaiah was overwhelmed with a sense of sinfulness (Isaiah 6:5). Jeremiah was insecure about his youth and speaking ability (Jeremiah 1:4-6).

Fortunately for us, God has a great deal of experience working with less-than-perfectly-capable people! He seems to delight in turning the world's misfits into giants of faith. In today's lesson we will see how God recruited a career fugitive and began shaping him into one of the most significant figures in human history.

## LESSON BACKGROUND

**Time:** about 1445 B.C.

**Place:** Horeb

It had been some 400 years since Israel settled in northern Egypt in order to survive a terrible drought. What began as gracious divine provision in Joseph's day (about 1877 BC) eventually led to harsh Egyptian oppression in Moses' time. In Exodus 2:23, however, we learn of a change in power in Egypt. Would the new Egyptian regime ease the burden? Perhaps Israel's God would personally see to it. So the Israelites cried out for help and God took notice (Exodus 2:24, 25). God had never forgotten His people. Instead, He had been preparing a leader to deliver them. He was shaping Moses to be familiar with both the intrigues of Egypt and the pilgrim nature of Israel's heritage.

The events of this shaping are recorded in Exodus 1 and 2, as well as in Stephen's speech to the Sanhedrin in Acts 7:20-38. Having been brought up in Pharaoh's household for the first 40 years of his life, Moses undoubtedly received the best education royalty could afford. Yet Moses later fled Egyptian security as an outlaw and wandered as a shepherd for an additional 40 years. He thus could identify also with the enslaved Israelites and the nomadic lifestyle they were to face.

At age 80 (Exodus 7:7), however, Moses probably was completely unaware of God's plans for him. Having left both the Egyptians and the Israelites behind, he had found refuge and acceptance among the tents of a hospitable Midianite family. Moses likely thought he would die in peace among these foreigners. But God had other ideas!

## **GOD'S SERVANT—Exodus 3:1-3**

### **1. How long did Moses live in Egypt? How long did he live in Midian (Exodus 3:1)?**

After killing an Egyptian and agitating the Israelites, *Moses* had fled eastward (Exodus 2:11–15); Moses was age 40 at the time (Acts 7:23). This flight took him beyond the Red Sea to the land of Midian. Eventually, he encountered a friendly tribe that welcomed him (Exodus 2:16–22). Moses soon picked up shepherding, the trade of his Israelite forefathers.

As Exodus 3 opens, Moses was a shepherd in the land of Midian and had been one for the past forty years (Acts 7:30). At age eighty, Moses no longer envisioned himself as a deliverer of slaves. He was apparently content to take care of the flocks of his father-in-law and live in obscurity.

The area known as Midian had no definite borders, but it apparently covered much of the Sinai Peninsula. Since the Midianites were descendants of Keturah (Gen. 25:1-2), Moses actually married into an Abrahamic family.

"Horeb" (Exod. 3:1) was another name for Sinai, "the mountain of God," to which Moses would later lead the Hebrews. It became a holy place because God appeared to Moses there and later gave the law from it. The "backside of the desert" simply meant the west side.

Interestingly, the two periods of Moses' life—forty years in the palace and forty years in the desert—actually prepared him for the final forty years of his life as Israel's deliverer (Acts 7:23, 30). Similarly, our life experiences often prepare us for the Lord's work.

### **2. What can the case of Moses tell us about God's plan to use people of various ages in His service today?**

Some people may be tempted to think that they are too old or too young to be active in a leadership role for God. Yet Moses was 80 years old when he was called! At the other end of the spectrum, Timothy started leading when he was young (1 Timothy 4:12). These cases should instill in us a sense of caution about drawing conclusions regarding whom we think God will or will not use to lead His people.

Leadership can take various forms: some leaders serve in the spotlight, others make sure that behind-the-scenes details are handled, etc. With that fact in mind, ask the class to list areas in which Christians of various ages and life situations can lead. For example, an elderly shut-in may be a great leader for an e-mail prayer-chain ministry.

### **3. What do we know about the "angel of the Lord" (vs. 2,3)?**

From Moses' first-glance perspective, a *bush* is burning without being *consumed*. This apparent suspension of natural laws stops him in his tracks. The sight is intriguing enough to make him want to take a closer look.

We wonder about the identity of this *angel* who appears *in a flame of fire* in the *midst* of the bush. We hear no more about an angel in this narrative, and God himself does all the talking. There are at least two options. This could be an angelic messenger who does the speaking and acting on God's behalf, or it could be God manifesting himself to Moses in a guarded form so Moses will not be consumed by His awe-inspiring presence (compare Exodus 33:20). The latter interpretation seems to be favored by Deuteronomy 33:16, which refers to God as one who "dwelt in the bush."

## **GOD'S SUMMONS—Exodus 3:4-6**

### **4. Why did God call Moses' name twice, and how did he respond (v. 4)?**

Now that *God* has Moses' undivided attention, He calls Moses' name twice. God frequently repeats someone's name when demanding immediate attention (see Genesis 22:11; 46:2; 1 Samuel 3:10).

Also noteworthy is Moses' response: *Here am I*. When God calls one by name, one does not respond glibly or halfheartedly. One responds decisively and submissively. This is why Abraham, Jacob, and Samuel respond to God the same way as Moses. In responding "Here am I," these godly people are not telling God something He doesn't already know about their location. Instead, they are at attention, waiting to hear and obey whatever God may say.

God may convict us to act through various means. These include preaching, teaching, or Bible reading. When that conviction comes, we must respond as Moses does. Hebrews 12:18–29 reminds Christians that even though God does not speak to us from a fearsome, flaming mountain, we must not refuse Him who calls us.

### **5. In what ways today does God let people know that He wants them to serve or to lead a ministry? Should we expect burning bushes? Why, or why not?**

God's manner for contacting Moses proves that God can use various methods to nudge (or lead) someone into His service. Today, the Holy Spirit may lay a burden or conviction on a person's heart through a magazine article, a news report, a passage of Scripture, etc. One individual may find the perfect place of service only after aiding a friend who needed a helper.

A person's means of earning a living may become so unsatisfying that "divine discontent" sets in. As a result, the person ends up using his or her skills in a more challenging place—perhaps even on a mission field. Discerning friends may repeatedly tell a person to consider using God-given abilities in certain ways. The most important thing is for Christians to be listening when God calls, no matter the means He chooses to use to make that call.

### **6. Why did God refer to the area around the burning bush as holy ground (v. 5)?**

As Moses approached the bush to get a closer look at this strange sight, the Lord spoke again, this time cautioning him about moving any closer. The Lord declared that Moses should remove his sandals, as he was standing on "holy ground."

Of course, the soil on which Moses was standing was not sacred in and of itself. It was made holy by the presence of God Who was now speaking to Moses in this place.

Removing one's shoes in a place recognized as holy goes back to very ancient times. Even today, in various cultures and religious traditions, shoes must be removed in sacred places.

This passage does not teach that God's presence is limited to a particular location. Christ was very clear about this when addressing the woman at the well. He declared, "But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him" (John 4:23). In this case, however, Moses found himself face-to-face with a visible manifestation of the Holy One of Israel.

### **7. How did God identify Himself to Moses? Why was this important (v. 6)?**

*Moses* learns that *God* is not simply the God of this mountain. He is the God of Moses' ancestors.

Even though Moses had been raised in the Egyptian palace, he was aware of his Hebrew ancestry and of the true God. He was most likely taught this by his

own natural mother, who nursed him as an infant and may have continued to care for him as he grew to manhood (Exod. 2:7-10).

Now recognizing that he was in the presence of the God of Israel, Moses averted his eyes, being afraid to look at God. The kind of fear experienced by Moses was both a reverential awe and an awareness of his own mortality (cf. Isa. 6:1-5).

Even sinless heavenly creatures that are made to worship God in His very presence are equipped with a second set of wings in order to shield themselves from God's glory.

### **GOD'S SYMPATHY—Exodus 3:7-12**

#### **8. For what reason did God speak to Moses at this time (v. 7)?**

God reveals the purpose for His visit: He sees and hears how badly the Israelites are being treated *in Egypt*. Even though the people of Israel had suffered for many years at the hands of their cruel taskmasters, they were not forgotten by their God. He affirmed, "I know their sorrows."

Such knowledge can be a comfort to modern believers when undergoing various troubles and trials. That God does not seem to immediately respond to our prayers or deliver us from our difficulties may cause us to suppose that He is unconcerned about our plight. However, Israel was not forgotten by the Almighty, and neither are we!

Generations of slavery had been experienced by Israel before God sent them a deliverer. Their oppression is spelled out in Exodus 1:11–14. There we read that these taskmasters conscript Israelites to bear the burden of Pharaoh's numerous building projects. The taskmasters work the Israelites into the ground in response to the growth of their population.

#### **9. Why was God going to lead the Hebrew slaves to Canaan? What promise did this fulfill (vs. 8,9)?**

Israel's patient God is now poised to "deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians."

God's purpose was not only to rescue Israel from slavery but also to fulfill the promises made to the patriarchs. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had been sojourners in the "land of promise" (Heb. 11:9). The land in which they had once lived was pledged to their descendants forever (Gen. 13:15-17; 17:8; Exod. 6:8).

It is also important to note that God does not simply deliver His people "out of" something; He also leads them "into" something else. As Jesus teaches, deliverance from a bad situation that does not include replacing the bad with something better only sets one up for a potentially worse future (Matt. 12:43–45).

The place to which the people of Israel were to be led was a "land flowing with milk and honey" (Exod. 3:8). This proverbial expression indicated a land that was agriculturally productive. As it stood now, Israel had no land of their own. What they produced in Egypt was for the benefit of their cruel overlords.

The six nations mentioned here occupied the region generally known as Canaan. These nations would be displaced by Israel once God responded to the cries of the people of Israel (cf. Exod. 2:23; Deut. 7:1-2).

#### **10. What did God commission Moses to do (v. 10)?**

Up to this point, Moses has been receptive to what God has to say. Moses is more than willing to remove his footwear and hear God's concern for Israel. But Moses' receptivity is about to change as God gets personal. God calls Moses to do the seemingly impossible: to approach the powerful *Pharaoh* and ask him to set free his cheap labor force.

As those who are older know, what a person was eager to do forty years ago may not have the same attraction today. Besides, Moses had previously been unsuccessful in getting the people of Israel to submit to his leadership (Exod. 2:13-14; Acts 7:25). Why should they do so now? Back then he was an Egyptian prince; now he was but a lowly shepherd and a fugitive from justice.

### **11. What excuses did Moses offer for not wanting to return to Egypt (v. 11)?**

Moses' last words up to this point were "Here am I"; his next words are *Who am I?* This is Moses' first attempt to avoid the job God has for him. In Exodus 4:1 Moses expresses concern that the people will reject him. In 4:10 he claims to be tongue-tied. In 4:13 he flatly requests that God send someone else. But God is not fazed by human excuses. Instead, He shows great patience. He listens to Moses' objections, takes them seriously, and offers support.

### **12. What assurance did God give Moses for the task of delivering Israel "out of Egypt" (v. 12)?**

God knows Moses' track record. According to Exodus 2:10, Moses grew up in Pharaoh's household and thus received the finest education. Moses had learned humility during his forty-year sojourn in the desert (Num. 12:3).

Yet the greatest resource Moses possessed for the task before him was God's presence with him. The apostles must have felt similarly overwhelmed when commissioned to take the gospel to the whole world (Matt. 28:19). And they received the same reassurance: "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (v. 20).

The proof that God was with Moses and was sending him was that Moses would lead Israel back to that very mountain to serve the Lord. After being liberated from bondage, the infant nation would encamp at the foot of Sinai. Moses would then ascend its heights to receive God's law for His chosen people.

God plus one is always a majority. The task seemed impossible, humanly speaking. But with God, all things are possible (Gen. 18:4).

## **PRACTICAL POINTS**

- 1.** The Lord can use anything to reach us—even our own curiosity (Exod. 3:1-3).
- 2.** We have been invited to approach God boldly (Heb. 4:16), but we must never come blithely (Exod. 3:4-6).
- 3.** Whatever burdens we carry for people, God has carried them a lot longer (vs. 7-8).
- 4.** If we are yearning for God to solve a crisis, we had better be prepared to be part of the solution (vs. 9-10)!
- 5.** Learning our own inadequacy for a task is the first step in learning God's sufficiency (vs. 11-12).

## **CONCLUSION**

Moses must have had mixed feelings about what God planned to do for Israel through him. On the one hand, he had to be exhilarated to think that his enslaved countrymen were going to be freed and transferred to their God-given land in Canaan. On the other hand, he was disconcerted to learn that God wanted *him* to lead them out.

One of the things believers need to realize is that God sets the calendars of their lives. Moses may have become old, but he was God's choice for lead-

ership. The same thing can be true for individuals today, and each of us should be ready to line up with the divine plan and use his or her gifts accordingly.

### **PRAYER**

God of Moses, we stand in awe of You. You call us to tasks that we cannot complete without You. You call us to live like Jesus. You send us into a world that dismisses Your wisdom as foolishness. You call each of us to great works that You have prepared in advance for us. May we never hide behind our excuses. As You did with Moses, push through those excuses until we see Your promises unfold before our eyes. In Jesus' name. Amen.

### **THOUGHT TO REMEMBER**

Embrace God's call with confidence.

### **ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON**

Next week's lesson is "Accepting Responsibility." A child of God should always assume that a divine assignment carries with it a divine enablement. God wanted Moses to lead Israel out of Egypt. That would require negotiations with the heathen pharaoh, and Moses claimed a speech impediment. That was when God moved his brother, Aaron, into the plan. He would serve as the mouthpiece for Moses. Two brothers would serve as one. Study Exodus 4:10-16, 27-31.

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