

BREAD OF LIFE TORAH STUDIES

"I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall never hunger ..." John 6:35

EXODUS 3-4

Chapter 2 ended with the words: *Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. God heard their moaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. God saw the children of Israel; and God knew.*

The time had now come to call the one who had been raised up from birth to set the captives free. We are also seeing a beautiful messianic portrait unfolding:

- Moses grew up in the courts of the Pharaoh of Egypt, but didn't participate in enslaving Israel—which is a picture of man's slavery to sin.
- In obedience to God, he "emptied himself", taking on the identity of this brethren, in order to "set the captives free". (Philippians 2:5-8)

CHAPTER 3 - The Commission & Moses' Response – 3:1 - 4:17

This discourse takes up 39 verses, which underlines its monumental significance. There are several key elements to the dialogue, which we will approach separately:

The Burning Bush

Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the back side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.

Shepherding is a common testing ground for those who will become leaders of Israel. Jewish Midrash says that the LORD tests their conduct while they tend the flocks. They have a story about a lamb straying while Moses was tending the flock. When Moses discovered the lamb he realized it must now be tired and so he lifted it up on his shoulders and carried it back to the flock—familiar picture?

Horeb means "desolate", so it certainly doesn't give a picture of green pastures where sheep might graze. "Horeb" comes from a Hebrew root word, *davar*, meaning "to speak". We often see that God speaks to people in a wilderness place, far away from the distractions of life. Horeb is also another name for Mt. Sinai—where God will meet with the children of Israel and hand down His Torah.

This will be Moses' first encounter with the Angel of the Lord, and his attention is drawn first by what appears to be a natural phenomenon: a bush was burning, yet not consumed. *And Moses said, "I will turn aside to see this great sight, why will the bush not be burned." When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am."*

When the Lord revealed Himself to Moses in the burning bush, Moses said upon seeing this bush: "I will now turn aside and see this great sight." Rashi comments: "Let me turn away from here to draw near to there". It was when Moses turned aside to look, that God called to him from the midst of the bush. This dynamic, between the disposition of the heart and the opening of the eyes is very important in the Bible. God cannot penetrate a hard heart, as we will see with Pharaoh.

Moses had turned aside to see an extraordinary, but earthly sight, and he encountered the LORD Himself. Have you thought about why God might have appeared to Moses in a lowly bramble bush? What might be the significance of a thornbush that is burning, but not consumed? This question has caused intense debate among the scholars.

Q. What are your thoughts? Does this bring any other scriptures to mind that might shed light on this phenomenon?

Then he said, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." (3:5) The Angel of the Lord identified Himself as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob *Moses hid his face for he was afraid to gaze upon God.* Soon Moses himself will attain a level of holiness that will allow him to climb the mountain and speak with God face-to-face.

Read v.7-8 Again the LORD is revealing Himself as a personal, compassionate, merciful God, whose promised intention, as with the patriarchs before him, is to bring Israel to "a land flowing with milk and honey". However, we will also notice that God doesn't hide the fact that this land is occupied by "ites" – six tribes who will need to be dispossessed of this land. *"...and I have said I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, to a land flowing with milk and honey."* (repeated in 3:17 - see also Gen 15:20).

This will require their desire to enter and take possession of the land, along with their faith in the God who leads them, to be greater than their fear of the enemies in the land – a journey that will take 40 years.

This list of Israel's enemies has come up before and will come up time and time again. On a deeper level, each of these "ites" represents a particular sin of the flesh, and therefore become relevant for our own spiritual journey.¹ When we are saved out of captivity to sin, it is the beginning of a long journey to "take possession of the land" (which speaks of salvation of the soul), until we finally enter "Jerusalem". As we will see further on in Ex. 23:28-30, the enemies cannot all be defeated at once.

Reflect on the relevance of this to your own faith life.

The Name of God

v.10" Come I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt."

Moses asks, "when I come to the children of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they say to me, 'What is His name?' what shall I say to them?"

The LORD stipulates twice: 'The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' He is the only God, who is "I AM"—Jehovah = "the existing One". God is revealed through various names throughout the Torah, but this is His Holy

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Edomites	Refer to Adam and the sins of the flesh – evil inclination.
Amalakites	sharp, vicious version of the 'old man'
Canaanites	generally keeps us out of a place of humility & peace
Amorites	sins of the tongue
Moabites	carnal desire
Girgashites	backsliding spirit
Perushites	murmuring against God
Hittites	fears, anxiety
Hivites	lack of consecration to God
Jebusites	spiritual pride – these were the last to be conquered – they occupied Jerusalem

name: *'This is My name forever, and this is My memorial to all generations.'* This name brings the merciful aspect of God into play like no other.

We need to understand how radically different this God is to the gods worshipped by the surrounding nations. He is a universal God; He is not a tyrant; He does not impose his will by force; He does not enslave; He is a covenant-making God, who seeks free agreement from His people, and whose very name, represents mercy—but the road will not be easy. It will require a radical change of heart.

Israel CANNOT free itself from Pharaoh's grasp—and God CANNOT rescue them without an intermediary. They need a saviour and He plans to set His people free through one of their own kind, but significantly, one who has not been a slave in Egypt!

Q. Discuss this in terms of the broader salvation story.

Moses' Response

No longer the brash young man that he was, Moses has been humbled by his forty years in Midian, and no doubt also humbled more when the Angel of God speaks to him. His responses to God's extraordinary commission are: "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh . . .?" "They will not believe me;" "I am not a man of words...;" "Please Lord, send someone else."

These responses clearly reveal Moses' own self-image: 'This is how I see myself, therefore there is no way I can do what you say.' He knows that, in his own strength he cannot fulfil this monumental calling—and this is exactly where he needs to be—but he cannot stay in that mindset.

Finally, the wrath of God burns against Moses— but immediately Aaron is introduced as though he was part of God's plan all along. Read verses 4:14-16

*"So he shall be your spokesman to the people. And he himself shall be as a mouth for you, and **you shall be to him as God.**"* This is the vision of himself Moses is to take on if this mission is to succeed. No wonder he needed to be humbled first! He will also need to have faith that the people will heed his voice and follow his leadership.

Q. DISCUSS the difficulty, and also the need, for Moses to own who God says he is—and also how that translates to our lives today.

CHAPTER 4

The Signs – 4:2-9

When Moses expressed doubt that Israel would believe that God had sent him and was with him, he was given three signs to assure them—and himself I daresay. "Signs" are always meant to be a pointer to a salvation truth. Seen in isolation, they are just magician's tricks.

- The rod becomes a serpent
- His hand becomes leprous and is restored
- Water from the Nile will become blood on dry land

Q. How would these signs have spoken to Israel, especially considering the situation they are in?

Signs and wonders were also very much a part of Jesus' ministry, and it frustrated him that people wanted the signs and wonders, but missed the deeper significance.

The Journey Begins

18-20 Moses returns to Jethro and, without any explanation, says to him, *“Please let me go back to my brothers in Egypt to see whether they are still alive.”* And Jethro said to Moses, *“Go in peace.”* Then Moses took his wife and his sons and set them on a donkey, and he returned to the land of Egypt. And Moses took the rod of God in his hand.

Interestingly, *Rashi* says that “this was *the* special donkey predestined for this moment. It was the same one that bore Abraham to the binding of Isaac, and the one upon which the Messianic king will one day appear.” Of course, commentators would be aware of the prophecy in Zechariah 9:9 (which was attributed to Jesus when he entered Jerusalem.)

4:22-23 –*Then you shall say to Pharaoh, “Thus says the LORD: “Israel is My son, My firstborn. So I say to you, let My son go that he may serve Me. But if you refuse to let him go, indeed I will kill your son, your firstborn.”*

This verse defines the nature of the Lord’s relationship to Israel. Pharaoh might see them as a wretched, forsaken, pitiful people, but the One True God says: Israel is my firstborn. The term “firstborn” recognizes that Israel is not the only child, but the firstborn of a large family of nations. But as firstborn, they carry a high moral responsibility.

From the beginning of Exodus the principle of judging *measure for measure*, operates with unrelenting severity. Pharaoh is already guilty of killing the sons of Israel, and he will pay the price for that. On the other hand, the Sages have indicated that the reward for good deeds infinitely exceeds the inherent worth of those deeds.

The following story of the threat to Moses’ life and subsequent circumcision, follows on immediately from this verse, and therefore appears to be linked to it.² Israel as God's firstborn also appears to parallel the firstborn of Egypt.

Zipporah & the Circumcision

In the account of Moses' return to Egypt we are confronted with a very short, cryptic story:

At a lodging place on the way the LORD met him and sought to put him to death. Then Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son’s foreskin and touched his feet with it and said, “You are indeed a bridegroom of blood to me!” So he let him alone. It was then that she said, “A bridegroom of blood,” because of the circumcision. (Ex. 4:24-26).³

Added to the cryptic nature of the story is the fact that Zipporah disappears from the story after this incident and plays no more part in Moses’ life – and the Torah had not even mentioned a second son. (He is only mentioned in Ex. 18:4.) The two sons are named Gershom – ‘I have been a stranger in a foreign land’, and Eliezer⁴ – ‘my God is help.’ (we see this name Ex.18:1)

The brevity with which this event is reported deserves more attention than the event itself. As it reads, it does not specify *who* was threatened with death. Was it Moses or one of his sons? If one of the sons, was it the older or the younger? Why did Zipporah have to perform the act instead of Moses himself? Whose feet did she touch with it? At the end, the reader cannot be sure what really happened; even the leading commentators present totally different versions. It is for this reason that an allegoric approach be tried in which the details of the story are of less significance than the transcendent ideas which emerge.⁵

² There is no break in the Hebrew text to indicate a separate subject.

³ Interpretation can be confused by translations which insert names and designations, The original Hebrew only has pronouns such as "he" and "him" in this verse.

⁴ The name of Abraham’s trusted servant was Eliezer. We saw a representation of the Holy Spirit in his name and life.

⁵ These thoughts are taken from an article by Fred Blumental at http://jfq.jewishbible.org/assets/Uploads/354/354_circum.pdf

This article goes on to suggest that, allegorically, his wife and his uncircumcised son become the symbols of his attachment to Midian. The *rod of God*, (see v.20) on the other hand, is the symbol of belief in, and adherence to, the Hebrew God, the God of his fathers.

Moses was ready for the heroic mission to liberate the Hebrews from Egypt, but perhaps he had not yet become totally identified with the Israelite nation. His wife stands as the symbol of his link to Midian, and it is she who finally terminates any lingering affiliation he still harbors. (In other words, she cut off the uncircumcision of his heart.) The expression *hatan damim* [bridegroom of blood] refers to the blood of circumcision which allegorically seals the appointment of Moses to the leadership of his people. Moses now needed to totally identify himself with Israel. The severed foreskin is held against his feet to express that there is no return; His feet can no longer walk back. The culture and religion of Midian are now reduced to a memory.

Q. Do you agree with this interpretation?

Q. What other thoughts would you bring to the table? e.g. How might v.23 tie into the story?

Q. Do you discern prophetic significance in the story? e.g. If he (Moses) is a bridegroom, what does that make Zipporah? How does blood/circumcision tie into this relationship?

This story completes the appointment of Moses, and is immediately followed by God calling Aaron to meet him — *...and he encountered him “at the mountain of God”*—we can therefore assume that the near death/circumcision experience was necessary in order for Aaron to be called forth.

Moses and Aaron

It is immediately after the circumcision takes place that the LORD says to Aaron, *“Go into the wilderness to meet Moses.” So he went and met him at the mountain of God and kissed him.*

Despite a separation of forty years, Moses and Aaron meet as one. Jewish Midrash describes their meeting as a symbolic conjunction of the virtues of Aaron (love and peace) with the virtues of Moses (truth and justice). This brings the words of David to mind in Psalm 85:10-11: *Loving kindness and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed each other. Truth (or faithfulness) springs from the earth, and righteousness looks down from heaven.*

Jesus was the perfect embodiment of grace and truth, as we read in John 1:14 *14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

v.29 *Moses and Aaron went ...* The use of the singular form of the verb *went*, is an indication of the unified manner in which the brothers conducted their mission. We have a beautiful picture here of the unity that existed between these two brothers—Moses and Aaron.

The name Aaron means “light bringer”; He is to become High Priest; and he is to see his brother Moses “as God”, and speak the words he is given to speak. Clearly the role of Aaron is not an afterthought, and his role is clearly prophetic of Messiah. Can you see that?

Chapter 4 of Exodus finishes with these verses:

³⁰ *And Aaron spoke all the words which the LORD had spoken to Moses. Then he did the signs in the sight of the people.* ³¹ *So the people believed; and when they heard that the LORD had visited the children of Israel and that He had looked on their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshiped.*