

Exodus 3:1-4:17 • Five Questions for a Burning Bush

Introduction

It has been over four hundred years since Jacob's family relocated to Egypt. The first chapter of Exodus informs us that Jacob's family has now grown into an entire nation, which fulfills God's promise to Abraham (Gen. 12:2). Not only are the Hebrews sojourners in Egypt, they pose a threat to Pharaoh simply by virtue of their numbers. Therefore, the Egyptians made their lives exceedingly harsh, enslaving the Hebrews and working them seven days a week to build cities and monuments. The Hebrew nation was under great affliction, but all that has happened to Jacob's descendants was spoken beforehand to Abraham by God.

God said to Abram, "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. But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions.

Genesis 15:13-14

There is, of course, a great lesson learned from the Hebrew's four-hundred-year affliction: though God may be silent, He is not absent.

In chapter three, God breaks His silence. He confronts the Hebrew fugitive Moses at the burning bush. It is a turning point in biblical history.

¹Now 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. ²The 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. ³So Moses said, "I must turn aside now and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up."

⁴When 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."

⁵Then He said, "Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." ⁶He 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.

[Read 3:1-6]

Q: What are the first words Moses hears God speak?

A: His name. The God of the universe—the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of the Hebrew nation—knows Moses personally by name.

Q: How does God immediately protect Moses and what does this protection imply?

A: In verse 5, God warns Moses not to come too close to the burning bush, implying harm if he does. This implies that God's nature, unlike the Egyptian gods, is holy while Moses is unholy. The fire would most likely have consumed him. [FYI: An orthodox church stands on the supposed site where Moses encountered the burning bush. There is a tree in the courtyard, and the priests there believe it is the original "bush." Of course, this cannot be verified, and it is highly unlikely that the tree is the original. Furthermore, when the Hebrews returned to the mountain, there is no mention of the bush or that it was ever memorialized.]

Q: Why does God identify Himself in verse 6, and what is Moses' response?

A: At that point, Moses does not know the origin of the voice. He may have thought it merely an angel (v. 2). When God identifies Himself, Moses' reaction turns from curiosity to reverential fear.

Application: Does God know your name? In what manner does He speak to you today? The position of Walk with the Word is that God speaks to believers primarily through His Word, and it is the Holy Spirit within who causes us to recognize it as such, and empowers us to "incarnate" His Word.

⁷The 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. ⁸So 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. ⁹Now, 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.”

¹¹But 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?”

¹²And 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.”

[Read 3:7-12]

Q: In verses 7-10, God tells Moses that He has been aware of five things concerning the Hebrews. What are they?

1. “I have seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt...” (v. 7).
2. “...I have given heed to their cry because of their taskmasters...” (v. 7)
3. “...I am aware of their sufferings” (v. 7).
4. “...The cry of the sons of Israel has come to Me...” (v. 9).
5. “...I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians are oppressing them” (v. 9).

Application: *If a Christian is suffering, and God remains silent, does that mean He is not aware of our suffering or that He doesn't care? (Come back to this question again after addressing the application below.)*

Q: In verses 7-10, God outlines five points of His plan for Moses and the Hebrews. What are they?

1. “...I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians...” (v. 8)
2. “...To bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey...” (v. 8)
3. “...To the place of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite” (v. 8).
4. “...I will send you to Pharaoh...” (v. 10).
5. “...So that you may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt” (v. 10).

Application: *Does God always assign a time table for the plans He has made? Does God always reveal a time table for the plans He makes for our lives? How do our plans for our lives often change according to God's plan?*

Footnote: *In actuality, God did have a time table for the Hebrew nation to be delivered from Egypt. Genesis 15:16 states, “...When the iniquity of the Amorite is complete...” God, however, is the only One who can make this judgment, and the Hebrews would have to be a strong nation in order to make the conquests of the Amorites; that is, the indigenous people of Canaan. Thus, their 400-year sojourn in Egypt.*

Q: What is the first of Moses' five questions for God and why do you suppose Moses asked this question?

A: In verse 11, Moses asks, “Who am I...?” Intimately acquainted with Pharaoh's power and military might, and knowing full well he is a fugitive, he is asking a legitimate question. It indicates that Moses has not yet fully grasped the power of God, and has not yet learned, “With God, all things are possible.”

Application: *Why do we Christians often underestimate what God can do in us and through us? For an interesting side discussion, examine Ephesians 1:3, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,”*

¹³Then 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?”

¹⁴God 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.’”

¹⁵God, 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.

¹⁶“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.

¹⁷So 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.” ¹⁸They 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.’ ¹⁹But I know that the king of Egypt will not permit you to go, except under compulsion. ²⁰So 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. ²¹I 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. ²²But 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.”

[Read 3:13-22]

Q: What is the second of Moses’ five questions?

A: In verse 13, Moses asks, “*What shall I say to (the Hebrews when they ask) ‘What is His name?’*” This question arises from Moses’ Egyptian background. All the Egyptian gods had names. It’s a logical question based on Moses’ upbringing. It seems logical to Moses that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob must therefore also have a name.

Q: What is God’s response to Moses’ question?

A: “*I AM WHO I AM.*” In the Hebrew, this name is four letters (all consonants, as the Hebrew language did not have vowels at the time; therefore, the exact pronunciation is not known). The letters most likely mean “Self-existent One.” This name is the holy name for God and the national name for the God of the Jews. In some Bibles, this name is distinguished from other names (such as “Lord”) by using uppercase letters: LORD. This name is considered so holy to the Jews that it is not spoken when reading the Scriptures. Instead, another name for God is pronounced, “Adonai” which is written “Lord.” In the King James Bible, the holy name for God is “Jehovah.”

Q: Amongst the statements by God about what will happen when the Hebrews finally exit Egypt, there is an interesting event that is recorded in verses 21 and 22. What is this event, was it predicted beforehand by God, and what is its significance?

A: Verses 21 and 22 state that when the Hebrews leave Egypt, they will take with them great wealth willingly handed over to them by the Egyptians. This was prophesied earlier in Genesis 15:14. Whereas the Hebrews believe this “*plunder*” is their just reward for having endured harsh treatment, God had other plans for it. [See Exodus 25:1-8 and 35:20-29.]

Application: What implication does the above actions by the Hebrews have on the earthly possessions God has given Christians?

¹Then Moses said, “What if they will not believe me or listen to what I say? For they may say, ‘The LORD has not appeared to you.’”

²The LORD said to him, “What is that in your hand?”

And he said, “A staff.”

³Then He said, “Throw it on the ground.”

So he threw it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from it.

⁴But the LORD said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand and grasp it by its tail”—so he stretched out his hand and caught it, and it became a staff in his hand—⁵that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you.”

⁶The LORD furthermore said to him, “Now put your hand into your bosom.”

So he put his hand into his bosom, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous like snow.

⁷Then He said, “Put your hand into your bosom again.”

So he put his hand into his bosom again, and when he took it out of his bosom, behold, it was restored like the rest of his flesh.

⁸“If they will not believe you or heed the witness of the first sign, they may believe the witness of the last sign. ⁹But if they will not believe even these two signs or heed what you say, then you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground; and the water which you take from the Nile will become blood on the dry ground.”

¹⁰Then Moses said to the LORD, “Please, LORD, I have never been eloquent, neither recently nor in time past, nor since You have spoken to Your servant; for I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.”

¹¹The LORD said to him, “Who has made man’s mouth? Or who makes him mute or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? ¹²Now then go, and I, even I, will be with your mouth, and teach you what you are to say.”

¹³But he said, “Please, LORD, now send the message by whomever You will.”

¹⁴Then the anger of the LORD burned against Moses, and He said, “Is there not your brother Aaron the Levite? I know that he speaks fluently. And moreover,

[Read 4:1-17]

Q: What are the three remaining questions Moses has for God?

3. “What if (the Hebrews) will not believe me...?” (4:1)
4. “What about my poor public speaking?” (v. 10, question implied)
5. “Why me?” (v. 13; question implied)

Q: Why does Moses question God so stringently regarding His choice of Moses to deliver His people?

A: Because (1) Moses doesn’t believe he is up to the task; he is, after all, an outlaw; (2) Moses is fearful that the whole plan will collapse and he will suffer the consequences; and (3) his faith in God is not yet established to trust God for the results.

Application: Why do Christians fail to believe what God is able to do through us? In what area of your life is fear, doubt and ignorance keeping you from bearing significant fruit for the kingdom of God? Why is God’s statement to Moses in 3:12—“I will be with you...”—important for all Christians to grasp? [Compare with Matthew 28:20, “teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”]

Q: What are the 5 things that God gave Moses to equip him for the work of God?

1. The miracles (the staff, leprous hand, and water turned to blood).
2. Aaron as helper and spokesman.
3. The personal name of God.
4. God’s assurance that He would teach Moses how and what to say.
5. The staff with which to do signs.

Q: Were all the things God gave Moses for the benefit of the Egyptians?

A: No; some were for the Egyptians, some for the Hebrews, some for both. In other words, God equipped Moses to minister to both “believers” and “non-believers”, an allusion to the Messiah’s earthly ministry and our own.

Application: God calls and empowers His followers to be witnesses to both those that believe and those that do not. How has God worked through your own life to reach both groups? How like Moses have you hesitated to go in His name according to His promises?

behold, he is coming out to meet you; when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart. ¹⁵You are to speak to him and put the words in his mouth; and I, even I, will be with your mouth and his mouth, and I will teach you what you are to do. ¹⁶Moreover, he shall speak for you to the people; and he will be as a mouth for you and you will be as God to him. ¹⁷You shall take in your hand this staff, with which you shall perform the signs.”

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