

**Ablaze, But Not Consumed**  
**Exodus 3:1-8**  
**November 2, 2025**

On the day *before* Thanksgiving in 2016, near the Chimney Tops area in the Smoky Mountains, two teenage boys allegedly dropped some lit matches on that well-known hiking trail. The fire smoldered for a few days. Then, a windstorm hit the region. Within days, over 17,000 acres burned. The fire ended up causing an estimated 2 billion in damages. On a mountain, a fire. It was *not* contained. It consumed.

Then, as you likely recall, last year on top of a hill in California a fire started. At first it was a small brush fire. But dry wood burns. And winds caught *that* fire, and then thousands of acres caught it too. Up on a ridge, a fire. It was *not* contained. It consumed.

That's what fire does; it consumes. You don't have to know the science of it to understand that. When you light a match, you watch this happen—little by little. For the sake of your fingers, you better blow it out.

3000 years ago, they had fire too. It's likely Moses would've been even *more* acquainted with the properties of fire than we are. Every Israelite would've been something of an Eagle Scout. You'd start a fire to cook. You'd start a fire to keep warm. You'd gather logs and tinder if you needed light.

Moses knows that fire consumes. And in Exodus 3, Moses is on a mountain. And there's a blaze in front of him. And yet this fire does *not* consume.

**1. The God Who Makes Himself Known (vv. 1-3)**

Thus far in the book of Exodus, we've met Moses. We've heard about him as a baby. He's the boy that lived. Then we heard about midlife Moses, striking down the Egyptian, fleeing the Pharaoh, and absorbing the reality that he's a sojourner. In this book, that *he* wrote, Moses has introduced us to Moses. And then last week, for the *first* time in the narrative, we read about the One orchestrating every moment of this book. He'd heard the sons of Israel's groaning. He saw. He remembered His covenant with them. And He knew.

So, we've met Moses. In the reading, we've quote "met" the Lord. And in our passage today, finally, Moses meets Him.

But, first, we should consider the setting where he does. Verse 1: **Now Moses was pasturing the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian.** Back in chapter 2, we noted how the book of Exodus fast-forwards chronologically. In 2:10, Moses is a baby. In 2:11, Moses was 40-years-old.<sup>1</sup> Well, by the time we get to chapter 3:1, we've skipped another 40 years. For the foreseeable future, Moses is around 80-years-old (Acts 7:30).

He *was*, at one point, on the run. But probably no one's even looking anymore. For decades now, he's lived in relative obscurity. He's taken on an assignment almost every Egyptian would've frowned upon.<sup>2</sup> He, the one who'd grown up surrounded by Egyptian pomp, is in a pasture. Further, he's not even shepherding *his* flock, he's shepherding the flock of Jethro—his father-in-law.

Keep in mind that when we left Moses in chapter 2, he'd prematurely taken matters into his own hands, at least to some degree. He'd tried to lead. No one followed. And what he'd attempted

---

<sup>1</sup> Based on Acts 7.

<sup>2</sup> Douglas Stuart, *Exodus*, NAC, 108.

resulted in utter failure, so much so that he'd had to flee all he'd ever known. It's safe to say that—at this point, 40 years later—Moses had learned a few things about humility.<sup>3</sup>

On this particular day, he's on something of a trip, weeks away from home.<sup>4</sup> Verse 1 continues: **and he led the flock to the west side of the wilderness.** The language points towards Moses being in a remote and isolated location. The “west side of the wilderness” in our vernacular would be the “middle of nowhere.”<sup>5</sup>

But of course, it couldn't be *farther* from nowhere. Because out in that wilderness, verse 1 goes on to say, Moses **came to Horeb, the mountain of God.** Maybe you say, “How is Horeb the mountain of God?” Well, Horeb is the more general name for this particular mountain. Sinai is the more specific one.<sup>6</sup> As you know, Moses will be back on this peak.

By the way, we talked about this in Hebrews some, but in the Scriptures mountains function not *only* as topographical realities, but also spiritual symbols.<sup>7</sup> Eden was on a mountain (Ezek. 28:13-15). Noah and his family landed on a mountain. Abraham and Isaac ascended one. Moses does so here. It's the *same* mount Elijah would one day climb (1 Kings 19). And then they'd *both* be on one together when the Son of God was transfigured.

But that's to get ahead of things a bit. At this point, I just want to point out the significance of mountains. And in doing so, point out how often the Lord reveals Himself on one.

Speaking of, verse 2: **The angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush.** Moses might be in a wilderness. He *might* have been living in obscurity for decades upon decades at this point. But God intends to make Himself known.

The angel of the Lord—the messenger—appears to Moses. By the way, it doesn't say, “an” angel. It's more definite, that is, *the* angel.<sup>8</sup> And not to get into the grammar *unnecessarily*, but the language is in a form where *both* elements are definite; and the second word further identifies the first.<sup>9</sup> With all *that* in mind, some would even translate this phrase, “the angel, that is, Yahweh.”<sup>10</sup>

Now, whether or not verse 2 is what theologians call a “theophany,” that can be debated. However, when we get to verse 4 it's quite clear. God Himself is there. He is the One making Himself known.

And in verse 2 He's revealing Himself by appearing in the form of a **blazing fire.** And in this case, it's a **blazing fire from the midst of a bush.** This bush is no Cedar of Lebanon. It's at most a few feet in diameter. It's something of a thorny shrub.<sup>11</sup> And on this mountain, it's ablaze. Moses would've been drawn to that.

Verse 2 explains why *else* he was: **and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed.** Again, what does fire do? It consumes. We've seen forests destroyed. A little bush? Surely it'd be gone quickly. And yet it wasn't.

Further, what keeps a fire burning? What do you do when the fall bonfire starts to go down? Or in your fireplace? You throw some wood on it. Wood is fuel for the blaze.

---

<sup>3</sup> Alec Motyer, *Exodus*, BST, 36. And that lesson had been taught as he was faithful in the ordinary routine of everyday life.

<sup>4</sup> Stuart, 109.

<sup>5</sup> Jeffery Leonard, *The Preacher's Hebrew Companion to Exodus 1:1–15:21*, 102.

<sup>6</sup> Desmond Alexander, *Exodus*, AOTC, 82.

<sup>7</sup> Leland Ryken, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, 572. At times they're inaccessible, barren, and uninhabited. Other times they're places where God's people dwell in abundance.

<sup>8</sup> As you know, angel often just means “messenger.” And in the Old Testament, oftentimes the messenger is God Himself. Alexander, 82-83.

<sup>9</sup> Stuart, 110.

<sup>10</sup> He is Jehovah Himself, according to Motyer, 36.

<sup>11</sup> Stuart, 109.

In this case, none of that is happening. The fire isn't consuming. Nor is the wood fueling the blaze. Whatever it is—or *whoever* it is—we'd describe as self-sustaining.<sup>12</sup> That's why Moses says what he says in verse 3: **I must turn aside now and see this marvelous sight.** In the original, it's "the great this."<sup>13</sup>

Moses speaks better than he even knows. And then he asks himself a question that has more than one level of meaning, that is, **why the bush is not burned up.**

God intends to make Himself known. And as the text continues, this becomes even more clear. And what He intends to make known about Himself concerns His nature.

## 2. . . . Known as Holy (vv. 4-6)

Verse 4: **When the Lord saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him.** So, whatever you believe about the angel of the Lord, at *this* point it's God Himself speaking. He "saw" Moses. Of course He did. He *sees*.

And when He does, verse 4: **God called to Him from the midst of the bush and said, "Moses, Moses!"** Now, this is quite different from our current culture, but in the ancient Semitic world, addressing someone by saying their name *twice* was a way of expressing endearment.<sup>14</sup> You've heard this "more than once." In Genesis 22, "Abraham, Abraham." In Genesis 46, "Jacob, Jacob." In Luke, "Martha, Martha." And in Acts, "Saul, Saul."

From the midst of the bush, God called and said, "Moses, Moses." Moses hears. And verse 4 concludes, **And he said, "Here I am."**

And the One aiming to make Himself known *then* said, in verse 5: **Do not come near here.** Maybe the modern mind is baffled by this, this "come no further" command.<sup>15</sup> In all *kinds* of ways, we *assume* access. But the verb here would soon come to be used in Israel's priestly literature for approaching that which was sacred.<sup>16</sup> There would be rules. There would be a lot of, "This far. No farther" in Israel's future. And on this mountain, what God's people would eventually have to learn from Moses, Moses was first learning from God Himself.<sup>17</sup>

That is, this God was far from safe for an unholy people. In the years ahead, Nadab and Abihu would learn this lesson. The Day of Atonement would reinforce the principle. Before that, on this *very* mount, God would limit access. In Exodus 19, should a man—or even a beast, touch it—he shall not live (Ex. 19:13; Heb. 12:20).

Years later, the Psalmist asks a pertinent question: **who may ascend into the hill of the LORD?** (Ps. 24:3). And the answer is not, "anyone."

Why? Why does the Lord say to Moses, **do not come near here?** And why does he *then* say, **remove the sandals from your feet?** Because of what verse 5 goes on to say: **for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.**

This is something said of no other location, or ground, in the Bible.<sup>18</sup> But, in the Scriptures, when something *like* this is described as holy, it is due to the virtue of God's presence.<sup>19</sup> And keep in mind that Moses is no longer in Midian, nor is he in Egypt, nor in Canaan. He's west of the wilderness. It's not the dirt, nor is it the acre that makes it sacred, it's the One who is there. In fact,

---

<sup>12</sup> Alexander, 83.

<sup>13</sup> Leonard, 106

<sup>14</sup> Stuart, 114.

<sup>15</sup> Stuart, 114.

<sup>16</sup> Leonard, 109.

<sup>17</sup> Stuart, 114.

<sup>18</sup> Stuart, 115.

<sup>19</sup> Leonard, 111.

in Acts 7, Stephen picks up on this to make the point. The religious leaders wanted to limit God's presence and blessing to a single place. Stephen tells them, from Exodus 3, your Scriptures say otherwise (Acts 7:33). Holy ground is where God is.

He's holy. He's why this ground is holy. And His holiness is *not* something we consider casually, or approach frivolously. Holiness so defines Him that it can be said to include all of his moral perfections.<sup>20</sup> His holiness demands distinction. God stands above, and in contrast to, all things. Further, the holiness of God is *not* a passive attribute. It's an active force.<sup>21</sup> It judges. We might even say, as the Scriptures unfold this reality, it consumes.

With that in mind, it's in mercy that God tells Moses not to come any closer. It's in mercy that He tells him to remove the sandals from His feet. In mercy, He tells Moses how to approach.

And though He's holy, somehow, unholy Moses continues to breathe.

And God continues to reveal Himself in verse 6. Keep in mind that, at this point, Moses knows the bush isn't being consumed, he knows he should *stop* walking toward it, and he knows he should take off his sandals, but he *still* isn't fully aware what this fire is, and who it is that speaks to him. Verse 6: **He said also, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."**

You've already considered that truth this morning. And we'll come back to it. But in this bush, the God of his forefathers spoke to Him. To whatever degree he thought he was alone out in this wilderness, he *was* not. And to whatever degree things had changed in Moses's life, something was unchanged.<sup>22</sup>

And all this—the presence of God, and the revelation of God—had the proper effect on him. It humbled him. On *this* ground, in *this* place, hearing from Him, verse 6 ends: **Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.**

God aimed to make Himself known. And He'd made Himself known as holy.

Do we know Him in this way? Not as the world around us speaks of Him, but as distinct, other, separate, perfect, as the One the angels cover their face in front of. Alec Motyer writes, "Unless we have been on our knees, more or less in tears, because of the holiness of God, we have not begun."<sup>23</sup>

God made Himself known as holy. And He purposed to make Himself . . .

### 3. . . . Known as the Deliverer of His People (vv. 7-8)

Verse 7: **The 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."**

The ESV translates that last verb, not as aware, but as "know." With that in mind, verse 7 sounds almost *exactly* like what you heard last week.<sup>24</sup> Moses wrote that the Lord sees, hears, and knows at the end of chapter 2 because the Lord *told* him that He sees, hears, and knows.

But what is it that He sees, hears, and knows? He's seen their *affliction*. He's heard their *cry*. He knows their sufferings. And it's worth pointing out what the Lord says about those who are suffering in Egypt, the ones who are afflicted. In verse 7 He tells Moses, **I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt.** *My* people, He says. As we noted last week, it's not

---

<sup>20</sup> Timothy George, *A Theology for the Church*, 223.

<sup>21</sup> Motyer, 39.

<sup>22</sup> Motyer, 41.

<sup>23</sup> Motyer, 40.

<sup>24</sup> Stuart, 117.

*merely* that He sees, hears, and knows. He *remembers* the covenant He made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Ex. 2:24).

They are *His* people. He is *their* God. Because of that, He says in verse 8: **So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians.** Again, keep in mind that Moses is hearing this for the *first* time. The sons of Israel are *his* people as well. 40 years before this moment, he attempted to deliver them himself. But on this mountain, speaking from the midst of a bush ablaze, the Lord says He'll do it.

He's seen, heard, remembered, and known. And *now* He **comes down** to deliver.

And not *just* that, but also—as verse 8 continues: **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.**

Back in Genesis 46, He'd promised Jacob as much. Jacob was *just* about to leave the land of promise and step into the uncertainty of Egypt—*hundreds* of years before Exodus 3. But at that moment, in *that* place, God said to him: **I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up again** (Gen. 46:4). In other words, what He'd told Jacob long ago, He would now bring to pass.

What would come about in the book of Exodus continues a narrative that could not be broken. In fact, He'd *just* introduced Himself in verse 6 with these words, **I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.** Earlier this morning many of you considered how Jesus interpreted that reality. In that sentence, we might focus *only* on the patriarchs. But Jesus shows us the significance of the subject and verb: **I am.** In the Gospels, He made plain that—though it had been a *long* time since Genesis, and though Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had long been gone—He was *still* their God (Matt. 22; Luke 20). In the present tense, He said, **I am** the God of your fathers. How is that possible? How could He *still* be the God of men who'd been dead for hundreds of years? Because He's the God of the living. And they weren't dead.

The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and Moses is the God that *continued* to make Himself known. As the Scriptures continue, we find out that He not *only* delivers from slavery, He not *only* delivers from death at the Passover, nor *just* death at the Red Sea, *this* God delivers His people from death for all time. And for those that fail to see this, we can say the same thing Jesus told the Sadducees in Matthew 22. That is, you are **not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God** (Matt. 22:29).

The God who's made Himself known, has made Himself known as holy, and as the One that delivers His people. And He does all this for a purpose.

#### 4. . . . so that He might Dwell with them (vv. 1-8)

Maybe you notice that *beside* that point, I put verses 1-8. Because *this* is what the whole passage is showing us.

Consider again that the God revealing Himself from the midst of this bush is holy. And consider again that Moses is not. Exodus 2 had just made that quite clear. And yet, in the presence of this holy God, hearing from Him, Moses continues to breathe. On this holy ground, he's still standing.

He'd wondered why the bush was not consumed.

Maybe there's more to that bush than we've assumed. And maybe that's because we've not rightly considered the holiness of God. As we go forward, much of Exodus will aim to answer the question, "How can a holy God dwell in the midst of an unholy people?"<sup>25</sup> In the pages to come,

---

<sup>25</sup> A. W. Pink, *Gleanings in Exodus*, 24.

there will be a pillar of fire, there will be a tabernacle, the instructions on approaching this God will be meticulously extensive, and the next time they approach this mountain, the people will *not* be allowed to even touch it, lest they die.

## **Conclusion**

Moses stands *on* that mountain, and asks: why isn't the bush consumed?  
Why isn't Moses?  
Why aren't we?

Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Not us. Only One. He who has clean hands and a pure heart.  
God came down, that *He* might ascend, and deliver His people.