

# The Burning Bush

## Exodus 2:23–3:6 (ESV)

**CONTEXT: Listen, if you will, to the final words of the Patriarch Joseph - Genesis 50:24 (ESV)**

<sup>24</sup> And Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die, **but God will visit you** and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob."

God will visit you - and God will bring you up out of Egypt into a land he has sworn to give to you.

For the true believers, generation after generation, they remembered that promise, that prophecy - that one day God would visit them. But, what did that mean? How would he bring them into the promised land? So many questions and so few answers.

Generation after generation - the prophecy of Joseph was spoken of again and again. The further we move from a prophetic utterance, the less real it seems. It is then that all manner of strange interpretations begins to take the punch out of the prophecy.

Perhaps the VISITATION was spiritual, or even metaphorical.  
Perhaps the land of promise was more of a state of mind than an actual inheritance.

Jewish families had sons and daughters, generation after generation, they grew to a vast population in Egypt, so suggest as many as a million souls.

Then it happened, a regime change and all of the difficulty that comes with it. A new Pharaoh arose, who knew not Joseph. He owed nothing to the Hebrews. To him, they were less of a friend, and more of a threat.

You remember the story, they were enslaved, brutally mistreated, ultimately efforts to control their population were enacted with the prescribed killing of all male children born to the Hebrews.

But the PROPHECY of Joseph still echoed in the minds of Amram and Jochebed. On top of that, Amram, tradition tells us, was visited by God in a dream. God told Amram, that is very son would be God's chosen instrument through which the people would be taken out of Egypt and back into the land of promise.

Amram and Jochebed did not fear Pharaoh's edict. They formed a basket of bullrushes and dabbed it with pitch and bitumen. Sending him floating down the Nile, into the Providential hand of God.

Miriam, the 15 year old big sister, runs along the river bank to see what God would do. Fear mixed with anticipation fill her young heart.

The basket comes to rest among the reeds in a place where Pharaoh's own daughter had come with her entourage to bathe. At first it seemed like the worst possible scenario - Moses had floated directly into the Lion's Lair. But this princess of Egypt was different, Bithia, the Hebrews called her, was moved with Compassion and she took baby Moses in. Jochebed, his mother, was selected to serve as a wet nurse for baby Moses, where she was able to influence him and raise him as a Hebrew for the next 7 years, at which time he was taken to the Palace and raised among the princes of Egypt.

He received the best of Egyptian training, food, education, healthcare, but deep inside he always identified as one of the Hebrews. At the age of 40 Moses visits his Hebrew Brethren and sees one of the being beaten by an Egyptian taskmaster. He intervenes, kills the Egyptian and saves his fellow Hebrew.

But the episode was gossiped about until it came to ears of Pharaoh himself. A warrant for the arrest of Moses was issued, and Moses fled from Egypt into the dessert. He wandered north east to the land of Midian, where he became a part of the family of Jethro a Midianite Priest and took a wife from among his daughters named Zipporah. Moses and Zipporah had two sons.

Another 40 years pass in the narrative. Moses now 80 years of age. Living in a foreign land. The memory of his fellow Hebrews in Egypt was still there, but pull on his soul had grown weak. He spoke of the vision that his father Amram experienced, but it was very unlikely that Amram his father, or Jochebed his mother, were even still alive, perhaps Miriam and Aaron looked after them, who knows.

### **Meanwhile in Egypt, another regime change was taking place:**

#### **Exodus 2:23–3:6 (ESV)**

<sup>23</sup> During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. ***Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God.*** <sup>24</sup> And God **heard** their groaning, and God **remembered** his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. <sup>25</sup> God **saw** the people of Israel—and God **knew**.

This is a very significant verse, perhaps one of the most significant in all of scripture. God heard, God remembered, God saw, God knew.

While the memory of dreams and visions, promises and covenants were growing dim in the mind of Moses, the trial of slavery caused them to ring louder and louder in the minds of the Hebrews. That's how it happens, in comfort we forget the promises of God, but in pain - we need them.

Not only were the old tales of deliverance and visions of a deliverer white hot in the minds of the Hebrew slaves, they were white hot on the mind of God.

God **heard**, God **remembered**, God **saw**, God **knew**. **All of creation had conspired together for what was about to happen.** It was as if, God had been waiting for a particular prayer to be uttered, a particular lash of the whip to fall, for Him to say - "ENOUGH, the time has come".

Moses was not conspiring a scheme of deliverance in some mountain top compound, rather he was keeping the flock... an occupation that was scorned by the Egyptians. Like the disciples who went back to fishing after the crucifixion, Moses did what came most natural to the Hebrews - he raised sheep.

### **Exodus 3:1-6 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.

Perhaps he was just following the fields fit for grazing, or perhaps there was something about that Mountain that kept drawing him back, we don't know. But he was far from camp when it happened.

<sup>2</sup> And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. <sup>3</sup> And Moses said, "I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned."

A bush that burns but is not consumed. The subtlety in the language is so slight, that it's easy to overlook. There are times when prophets have great and grand visions that are very complicated and anything but subtle.

- Jacob sees a great Ziggurat ascending into Heaven with Angels ascending and descending.
- Ezekiel sees a wheel turning within a wheel every direction.
- John the Revelator sees a lamb standing in the midst of a throne, as though slain.

But this burning bush is much more subtle than any of those. The fact that it was burning was not that significant, this sort of thing happens in the dessert of Midian. But this burning was not accompanied with all of the familiar experiences.

There was no sound of the wood crackling as it burned.  
There was no smoke rising from the bush.  
There was no failure scent that accompanies a fire.

It was subtle, but it was different enough to get Moses's attention.

<sup>4</sup> 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."

There in the Midst of the flame, Moses sees what the text call the Angel of the Lord. When this particular phrase is used throughout the OT, it is evidence of what theologians call a Theophany - a manifest appearance of God, most likely the pre-incarnate Jesus Christ.

<sup>5</sup> Then he said, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground."

Moses is greeted with the double utterance of his name, which in the East is a kind and familiar greeting, "Moses, Moses" As if to say, "I am your friend, and you are mine".

But then he is warned not to get too close - because this friend is terribly awesome and dangerous. It's like Jesus would later teach us to pray, "Our Abba Father" close and intimate, "Who art in Heaven".. terrible and mighty. Behold the transcendence and imminence of God, who is at once our friend, and at once the very source of all existence.

<sup>6</sup> And he said, "I am the God of your 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 at God.

What an introduction - Moses, your father Amram worshipped me. It was I that gave him that vision that you would one day deliver your people. I was the one to whom

I am the one who called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldeans.  
I gave him the son of promise in Isaac.  
I am that God your ancestor Jacob worshipped.

And now I visit you. Can you imagine the emotions? Fear, excitement, hope, stupefaction, it must have seemed like an out of body experience for Moses. God stepped into his reality and everything was about to change.

Burning Bushes, let's talk about that for a moment. Does God still step into the reality of His people? I believe from time to time He does. And when He does, it's not all together different from what Moses is experiencing.

#### **Notice a few things:**

1. This happened in a **Secluded Moment**
2. It happened through **Familiar Object**
3. There were **Subtle Differences** (no smell, no sound, no smoke)
4. There was a **Transcendent Immanence** - Approachable, yet Terrifying
5. There was a **Confirmable Truth** - This was not something strange and unknown, this was the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In other words it was in perfect concert with previous revelation.

NOW - none of us will likely have an experience that was on par with Moses. The whole of that experience was not **NORMATIVE**, this was a one time event in redemptive history. But these aspects I mentioned are transferrable to some degree.

I've had at least 4 personal burning bush experiences in my time.

### **The first happened in 1994**

1. **Conversion** - I was sitting in my car alone minding my own business, waiting for school to start on my first day at the University of North Alabama. I began to flip through the radio stations to find a good song to help me wake up. This was before you could connect your phone via bluetooth and bring up anything you wanted to Spotify.

I was at the mercy of whatever any particular station was playing. Do you remember those days? It seemed like a miracle if someone happened to be playing your favorite song. I sat there flipping through the stations, then I came across what I thought to be the news.

It was a well spoken man in a conversational tone, without the thick accent of radio DJ's in north Alabama. Back then, you had to stop and listen to know what was going on, no twitter to keep us in the loop. So I stopped to catch up on the news.

His voice was like the other news men I had heard, but then I noticed something subtly different. He was talking about God, this was a preacher - but not like the preachers I had heard all my life. The preachers I grew up around yelled and screamed, this man just talked. He explained, "God made Him who knew no sin to become sin on our account that through Him we might know the righteousness of God". He said that, "all that was required for us to know God and be forgiven - didn't happen when we walked the aisle of a church, or got baptized, but it happened 2000 years ago on a Roman Cross. He said the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ was the essence of Christianity.

Now if you had asked me, I would have said I was a Christian, but very frankly the person and work of Jesus Christ had very little to do with my faith. I believed in what I **HAD DONE** and according to this man, I was not a Christian at all.

As I heard his voice coming through my speakers to my physical ears - God also spoke, it was personal and approachable yet scary. I had to turn aside and give it my attention. I went through drop/add and dropped every course before lunch and sat and listened to these radio preachers day after day. Until eventually, I believed.

That factory radio in my 1994 Chevy Camaro - was for me a **BURNING BUSH**.

The next was in 1995

## 2. Call to Ministry

I had been pursuing a career in the Entertainment Industry. I had every intention of graduating college and moving to Nashville to work in Country Music in some fashion. One day I was driving down main street in Florence, AL and I heard a sermon by John Maxwell, the leadership guru. As I heard him, the thought came to mind for the first time I remember - you could do this. I brushed it aside and went on about my day. Then it seemed like every sermon I heard, despite of the text or the subject - God was saying to me, "Preach the Word" over and over. But it was terrifying to me. My parents had made major investments in my Music career and I didn't want to disappoint them.

Then one Wednesday night, a lady came forward in a wheel chair to talk to Harold King the associate Pastor of my Church. Pastor didn't typically give people, especially visitors the mic. But this time was an exception - he let her speak. She began to tell how she ran from a call to missions back in her 20's... then pointing to her wheel chair she said, "now I can't run anymore".

Harold King said, "the call of God is very serious thing", God always gets his man. The gravity of the call began to build, until one Sunday morning I was in the choir, and God spoke to me - I knew that if I didn't surrender to His call on my life, I would be living in sin. I unzipped the robe, walked forward at the invitation and told the pastor, "God has called me to Preach". That wasn't easy, but what came next was far more difficult. I had to tell my parents.

I called dad when I got home and told him the story just as I rehearsed, "Dad, God has called me to preach". Dad said, "Here's your mom, tell her". Mom was gracious, she said, "well that's real nice son, we are proud of you". I hardly remember what she said, because I was devastated by my father's response. Was he angry? Disappointed? Humiliated? I didn't know, but it didn't matter, God called and I answered.

Dad got the phone back and began to tell me, that he needed a minute to gain his composure - then he told me about sorting that happened in 1976. I had been born with an underdeveloped kidney. The kidney died and began to poison my system, but they had to wait until I was 9months old to remove it. Dad said that in 1997 as I was on the gurney being wheeled back to surgery - God spoke to him and said, "he's not going to die, he will live and he will be a preacher".

Dad had never told me that story - he didn't want to influence my decision in any way. But he said, "Son, I've waited 19 years for this phone call". What confirmation.

For me - that John Maxwell sermon had been a burning bush.

3. **Church Conflict** - Another happened in 2012. It had been the worst year of my life up to that point. Our Senior Adult Pastor died of a sudden heart attack. Our student director who was averaging 200+ students in youth group was called away to a mega church in Woodstock, GA. Our Worship Pastor fell in love with a stripper at a club he had been sneaking off to - which is frowned upon in a Baptist church. We had just moved my father and mother into our home to take care of Dad as he was in failing health. And on top of all of that, a couple of people were leading what amounted to a coup to take control of the church. We had grown from 250 to over 900 in attendance and things seemed to be on the brink of falling apart.

On one particular Sunday we were going to have a major meeting to determine the future direction of the Church. I remember walking in my back yard at night and praying for what seemed like hours. It was around 10:30PM I told God, "If you are ever going to give me a visible sign - now would be a good time. I just need to know I'm on the right path and that you are going to get my back on Sunday". Now I knew that it was a very small thing for God to give me a sign. He could just say the word and an Angel would appear and all my worry would go away.

But nothing happened, I went inside, Julie asked what was going on... I told her.. and I told her God didn't respond. She said, "well what are you going to do"? I said, "I'm going to do all I know to do - I'm going to preach the Word". LISTEN, when God doesn't speak - be faithful to the last thing he said.

That Sunday morning I got up, angry at God. I put my suit on, grabbed my bible, and headed out. It was a 15-20 minute drive to church. When I was about 5 mins away I received a text message. It was from a man named Vic Robinson. He was one of the leaders in our church. I could tell it was long so I pulled over to read it.

The text read, "Pastor, I hesitate to tell you this because it will sound unbelievable. But Friday night around 10:30PM I was awakened to my bedroom being filled with light and glowing letters on my wall that said, "follow Zach, he is following Jesus". His wife woke up to see what was wrong, she saw nothing. Vic stayed up and prayed all night. Vic Robinson is a career military man - he's not the type to get dreams or visions. Think of the least theologically charismatic man you know - that was Vic Robinson.

As I read the text - the wisdom of God was evident. God did not want me living my life seeking for signs and wonders. He wanted me to be faithful to the Word. Once I had proven that I intended to open Him, he showed me that, "yes, it's a very easy thing for me to give you a sign. As a matter of fact he gave it at the very minute I asked for it - he just gave it to someone else who needed to see it as badly as I did".

**That text message was for me a Burning Bush.**

Folks, the God of Moses is alive and well. He is not silent. It's not an everyday thing, but if you will watch and wait - you to will hear the voice of God. Perhaps even today... let's pray.