

## Week 2: The Commission - Exodus Ch 3-4

### Pre-Work

- Why do you suppose Yahweh chose to reveal Himself to Moses through the image of a flaming plant? What other tree should we be reminded of in this powerful scene in Exodus 3? Please watch the following video to reflect on the power of the image of the “Tree of Life” throughout the Bible.

<https://bibleproject.com/videos/tree-of-life/>

- Please read Exodus 3-4 in the translation of your choice. What stands out to you in these chapters? What questions arise in your mind when you read them?

# Class Notes

Recap:

1. Descendants of Israel are oppressed by the snake-king
2. After failing to entice the women to sin, Pharaoh determines to destroy the Israelite babies in the waters
3. Moses goes through the waters by the reeds in a “basket” and is rescued (7 women involved in deliverance in Moses’ life)
4. Moses “strikes” the Egyptians, is rejected by the Israelites, and goes to the wilderness where he is taken in by descendants of Ishmael
5. God hears the outcry of the oppressed Israelites
6. Question we can ask in Moses’ shoes: “Who am I?”

**3** Now Moses was pasturing the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.

- Shepherding for the sake of a gentile in-law (Jacob)
- West - direction of promise
- Horev “sword”
- Mountain of God literary design pattern

**2** Then the 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 being consumed.

- Angel of the Lord?
- Bush/shrub/tree/wood as a place of divine encounter or rescue
- Bush - **se'neh**
- Fire that burns but does not consume - can you think of a NT allusion?

<sup>3</sup> So Moses said, “I must turn aside and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burning up!” <sup>4</sup> When 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.”

- In Exodus 25, a 7-branched lamp with floral designs and which burns with fire but is not consumed occupies the Holy Place in the Tabernacle.
- Points back to a very important tree...
- “Moses, Moses” - double call, about to reveal Moses’ identity through his calling
- “Hineni” - the same answer Abraham gave to Yahweh and to Isaac

<sup>5</sup> Then He said, “Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.”

- The Presence of God is perilous after the Fall in the garden/ there is a sacred space in which it is unsafe for humans to get too close at this point in the redemption story

<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.” Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

- God gives Moses an identity by identifying Himself

<sup>7</sup> And the LORD said, “I have certainly seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their outcry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings. <sup>8</sup> So I have come down to rescue 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, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite. <sup>9</sup> And now, 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.

A - I have seen the oppression of my people

B - ...have heard their outcry

C - Taskmasters and suffering

D - I have come down to rescue and bring them up

C` - 6 “ites”

B` - ...the cry has come to Me

A` - I have seen the oppression

- Great news! God will take care of everything!

<sup>10</sup> And now come, and I will send you to Pharaoh, so that you may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt.”

- Wait, what???
- Meaning of “Image of God”
- Moses about to give 5 objections to this call

<sup>11</sup> But 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?”

- 1st objection: “Who am I?”
- Question of worthiness
- Question of identity

<sup>12</sup> And He said, “Assuredly 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.”

- “I will be with you” - response to question of identity
- “You will worship” - response to question of worthiness

<sup>13</sup> Then 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?”

- 2nd objection: I don’t know Your name
- Divine names and spiritual manipulation in the ancient world

<sup>14</sup> And God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM”; and He said, “This is what you shall say to the sons of Israel: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”

- Literally “I will be who I will be” - “ehyeh” אֶהְיֶה
- Not to be confused with the lesser spiritual beings buzzing around the ancient world posing as gods

- Not to be invoked by name by some ritual
- Expression of timeless, non-derivative sovereignty

<sup>15</sup> God furthermore said to Moses, “This is what 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 the name for all generations *to use* to call upon Me.

- Now God refers to the Name by which He will be known, YHWH יהוה
- “I AM” has sent Me to you
- This is the Name of the Elohim of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob...the One their ancestors worshiped

<sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> So I said, I will bring you up out of the oppression of Egypt to the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite, to a land flowing with milk and honey.”’ <sup>18</sup> Then they will pay attention 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, so that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God.’ <sup>19</sup> But I know that the king of Egypt will not permit you to go, except under compulsion. <sup>20</sup> So I will reach out with 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. <sup>21</sup> I 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. <sup>22</sup> But every woman shall ask her neighbor and the woman who lives in her house for articles of silver and articles of gold, and clothing; and you will put them on your sons and daughters. So you will plunder the Egyptians.”

- Moses is to communicate God’s care (He is compassionate)
- Moses is to communicate God’s plan (He is full of chesed)
- Moses is to communicate God’s protection (He is just)
- Moses is to communicate God’s provision (He is gracious)

**4** Then 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.’”

- 3rd Objection - What if they don’t believe Me?

<sup>2</sup> The LORD said to him, “What is that in your hand?” And he said, “A staff.” <sup>3</sup> Then He said, “Throw it on the ground.” So he threw it on the ground, and it turned into a serpent; and Moses fled from it. <sup>4</sup> But the LORD said to Moses, “Reach out with your hand and grasp *it* by its tail”—so he reached out with his hand and caught it, and it turned into a staff in his hand— <sup>5</sup> “so that 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.”

- God’s response: signs/miracles
- 1st sign: The tool of your secular occupation will become the sign of Yahweh’s sovereignty over the serpent-king
- Meaning: Yahweh is Lord over thrones and dominions

<sup>6</sup> The LORD furthermore said to him, “Now put your hand inside the fold of your robe.” So he put his hand inside the fold, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous like snow. <sup>7</sup> Then He said, “Put your hand inside the fold of your robe again.” So he put his hand into the fold again, and when he took it out of the fold, behold, it was restored like *the rest of* his flesh. <sup>8</sup> “So if they will not believe you nor pay attention to the evidence of the first sign, they may believe the evidence of the last sign. <sup>9</sup> But if they will not believe even these two signs nor pay attention to 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 turn into blood on the dry ground.”

- 2nd sign: leprosy/healing...Yahweh is Lord over life
- 3rd sign: Nile water to blood...Yahweh is Lord over even the waters

<sup>10</sup> Then 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.”

- 4th objection: I’m not a good speaker

<sup>11</sup> But the LORD said to him, “Who has made the human mouth? Or who makes *anyone* unable to speak or deaf, or able to see or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? <sup>12</sup> Now then go, and I Myself will be with your mouth, and instruct you in what you are to say.”

- Responses are getting shorter
- Response: I made the human mouth and everything else - I will be with you and instruct you

<sup>13</sup> But he said, “Please, Lord, now send *the message* by whomever You will.”

- 5th objection: just send someone else/refusal

<sup>14</sup> Then the anger of the LORD burned against Moses,

- The Lord is slow to anger...
- This is the first time in the Bible that it specifically says God got angry
- Principle of first mention: God’s response here will be the foundation of understanding how God prefers to act when He is angry...

and He said, “Is there not your brother Aaron the Levite? I know that he speaks fluently. And moreover, behold, he is coming out to meet you; when he sees you, he will be overjoyed. <sup>15</sup> So you are to speak to him and put the words in his mouth; and I Myself will be with your mouth and his mouth, and I will instruct you in what you are to do. <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> And you shall take in your hand this staff, with which you shall perform the signs.”

- God’s angry response is to accommodate Moses’ weakness and bring him human help
- As Moses images God, Aaron will in some ways image Moses
- Aaron’s involvement in the call will not be without complications (think Lot joining Abram)

<sup>18</sup> Then Moses departed and returned to his father-in-law Jethro, and said to him, “Please, let me go, that I may return to my brothers who are in Egypt, and see if they are still alive.” And Jethro said to Moses, “Go in peace.”

- Moses went to a gentile leader and asked permission to go...and the Midianite priest said “go”
- Two gentiles so far have done right by Moses (Pharaoh’s daughter said “go” to Miriam and Jethro said “go” to Moses)

<sup>19</sup> Now the LORD said to Moses in Midian, “Go back to Egypt, for all the men who were seeking your life are dead.” <sup>20</sup> So Moses took his wife and his sons and mounted them on a donkey, and returned to the land of Egypt. Moses also took the staff of God in his hand.

- Moses’ statute of limitations had expired
- Did God tell Moses to take his wife and sons?

- Can you recall the last time someone in the family went to Egypt with his wife?  
Result: deception, self-protection/abuse, the acceptance of slaves, eventual oppression of the Egyptian slave

<sup>21</sup> And the LORD said to Moses, “When you go back to Egypt, see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders which I have put in your power; but I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go.<sup>22</sup> Then you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘This is what the LORD says: “Israel is My son, My firstborn. <sup>23</sup> So I said to you, ‘Let My son go so that he may serve Me’; but you have refused to let him go.

- Yahweh’s prediction: this will result in Pharaoh’s refusal
- Harden Pharaoh’s heart?

Behold, I am going to kill your son, your firstborn.””

- Because Israel is My firstborn, I will kill your firstborn
- Speaking to Pharaoh or Moses?

<sup>24</sup> But it came about at the overnight encampment on the way, that the LORD met Moses, and sought to put him to death.

- Put “him” to death...Moses/Gershom? Intentional ambiguity
- Moses in danger of repeating Abraham’s failure, eventually resolved by him being asked to give up his beloved son?

<sup>25</sup> So Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son’s foreskin and threw it at Moses’ feet; and she said, “You are indeed a groom of blood to me!” <sup>26</sup> So He left him alone. At that time she said, “*You are* a groom of blood”—because of the circumcision.

- Significant ambiguity. Who is “he” and “him”? Who was Zipporah talking to...Moses or God?
- Moses’ feet
- Zipporah saves Moses’/Gershom’s life by affirming the covenant...there will be no sexual oppression on this trip to Egypt
- Zipporah and their sons do not apparently continue the trip, but meet with Moses and the Israelites after they leave Egypt

“The one responsible for the application of the blood, as well as the interpretive word, is Zipporah, whose role is often downplayed by commentators. Once again it is a woman who, by her quick-wittedness and insight, saves Moses. She stands in the train of the midwives, Moses’ mother and sister, and the daughter of Pharaoh. Moses owes his very life to a series of actions by women, two of them non-Israelites...[Zipporah] is the only active person in the passage, in both word and deed. Given what God is about here, that action is not without risk to her own life. Moreover, she knows what is called for to save Moses/ Moses’ son in this situation. The difference between Zipporah and the other women is that, while they saved Moses from Pharaoh, she saves him/his son from God—here the parallel works best with Moses. She thus plays the role of mediator between God and Moses, anticipating the very role that Moses will later play on Israel’s behalf (especially in chaps. 32–34). As Zipporah saves Moses from the wrath of God, so Moses will save Israel. Moses is thus revealed as one who does not himself stand without need of mediation with God. However much Moses reaches heroic stature in his later activity, he himself is shown here, right before he embarks on his mission, to be vulnerable and in need of a mediator in his relationship with God. And it is a non-Israelite woman who provides that mediation, saving Moses from sure death.” ~Terence Fretheim, *Exodus: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*

<sup>27</sup> Now the LORD said to Aaron, “Go to meet Moses in the wilderness.” So he went and met him at the mountain of God and kissed him. <sup>28</sup> Moses told Aaron all the words of the LORD with which He had sent him, and all the signs that He had commanded him *to do*. <sup>29</sup> Then Moses and Aaron went and assembled all the elders of the sons of Israel; <sup>30</sup> and Aaron spoke all the words which the LORD had spoken to Moses. He then performed the signs in the sight of the people. <sup>31</sup> So the people believed; and when they heard that the LORD was concerned about the sons of Israel and that He had seen their affliction, they bowed low and worshiped.

- Aaron officially joins the team and is brought up to speed
- Moses and Aaron gathered the elders as Yahweh commanded in v16, Aaron spoke Yahweh’s words and the signs were performed.
- Yahweh’s love inspired the Israelites to worship - this is how “fear of the Lord” is supposed to work

## Reflections