

Moses(3)

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Moses in Midian

When Moses escaped Egypt to avoid being put to death for killing an Egyptian taskmaster, he settled with a family of a priest named Reuel (also known as Jethro—Exodus 1:18; 3:1) in the land of Midian. Midian apparently was a region just outside of Egypt along the east side of what is currently known as the Gulf of Aqaba and the north side of the Red Sea. The land of Canaan, which included several kingdoms, was north of Midian. These lands had been settled by the descendants of Noah;¹ more specifically, Canaan was a grandson of Noah (Genesis 9:18) and Midian was a son of Abraham (Genesis 25:1-2).

Moses resided in Midian for many years,² during which time the Pharaoh who sought to kill Moses had died and the bondage and labors of the people of Israel continued to get worse (Exodus 2:23; 4:19). Besides his firstborn son Gershom, Moses had another son with Zipporah named Eliezer (Exodus 4:20; 18:4; I Chronicles 23:15). It was near the end of his sojourn in Midian that God began dealing directly with Moses.

The Burning Bush

In Exodus 2:24-25, we see that God heard the groanings of His people due to the hard labor imposed on them and remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It was time in God's plan to bring His people out of Egypt and into the land of Canaan promised to Abraham (Genesis 17:7-8; Exodus 6:2-4). Furthermore, Moses would be God's instrument for accomplishing this action (whether Moses wanted to or not).

While tending to his father-in-law's flock on what Moses had not known was the mountain of God, he observed a bush that was burning yet was not being consumed by the fire. Furthermore, the angel of the Lord appeared to Moses from within the bush and spoke to Moses as God. God first told Moses not to approach the bush and to remove his sandals because he was standing on holy ground. He then identified Himself as the God of Moses' father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob (Exodus 3:1-6). The conversation that followed included the following statements and responses:

- God was aware of the sufferings of His people Israel at the hands of the Egyptians (Genesis 3:7).
- He was going to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians and bring them up to a bountiful land (the land of Canaan) that was currently occupied by the Canaanite, Hittite, Amorite, Perizzite, Hivite, and Jebusite nations (Exodus 7:8-9).
- He was about to send Moses to the current Pharaoh to bring the people of Israel out of Egypt (Exodus 3:10).

¹ The early descendants of Noah had at one time known God but had turned away from Him to serve idols and their nations had become enemies of God. That is why He established a new nation to Himself through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (aka, Israel). We don't know if Reuel was a man of God or just a priest of a god of Midian; however, *Reuel* apparently means friend of God, so it is possible he was, or became, a priest of the Lord God (Exodus 18:5-12).

² Moses was a relatively young man when he escaped Egypt and was 80 years old when he faced a subsequent Pharaoh to request Israel's release from Egypt (Exodus 7:7).

- Moses objected (to God!) that he was unworthy or perhaps incapable of such a task, but God responded by saying that He would be with Moses and that, after leaving Egypt, the people would worship God at the very mountain that Moses was standing on (Exodus 3:11-12).
- To proclaim the instructions and promises of God to the people of Israel, Moses wanted to know the name of God. God said His name is *I Am*, and that Moses was to tell the people that *I Am* sent him and that He was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exodus 3:13-17).
- God assured Moses that the people of Israel would listen to him, but that Pharaoh would not let Israel go to worship God without compulsion, that is, without miraculous events against Pharaoh and his people (Exodus 3:18-20).
- God, however, would cause the people of Egypt to support the escape of Israel and would cause them to give their own silver, gold, and clothing to the Israelites, thus plundering Egypt (Exodus 3:21-22).

Takeaways

- God *heard* the cries of His people and *remembered* His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God is not hard of hearing, nor does He forget things, even temporarily. I believe this is an example that is repeatedly demonstrated involving Moses (as well as other people in the Old Testament) regarding human perspective versus God's sovereign will. Moses had a special relationship with God where God talked directly to Moses and Moses responded to God; Moses even pleaded and argued with God. Scripture was often written to imply, or even directly say, that in the moment as events unfolded in real time, God reacted to changing conditions, even apparently changing His mind (Exodus 32:11-14; Jonah 3:9-10). This would imply that God is subject to our will, whereas, in truth we are absolutely subject to His will (Proverbs 19:21; Romans 8:26-28; Philippians 2:13).³ God has always had a plan from eternity past and will completely fulfill it exactly as planned (Psalm 33:8-11; Isaiah 14:27; 46:9-10; 55:11; Ephesians 1:10-11). Furthermore, God does not actually change His mind (Numbers 23:19; I Samuel 15:29). Perhaps these examples were instances where God was testing the faith of individuals or His people in general, but they would not have known at the time that He was testing them.
- Starting with the burning bush and continuing through Israel's 40-year sojourn in the wilderness, Scripture says that God spoke to Moses. It is my opinion that Moses was actually dealing and talking directly with Christ in some form (in the case of the burning bush as *the angel of the Lord*) who was speaking for God the Father. This is based in part on the knowledge that God the Father dwells in unapproachable light and is one whom no one has seen or can see (I Timothy 6:13-16), and that Christ was present with Israel while escaping Egypt and residing in the wilderness (I Corinthians 10:1-4). Also, Jesus referred to Himself as *I am* (see Exodus 3:13-14) and that He existed before Abraham and, in fact, before the foundation of the world (John 8:54-58; 17:24). This is provided only for your consideration and is not something in which I'm certain.
- The burning bush was on the mountain of God and was considered by God to be holy or sacred ground. In the Old Testament and the first part of the New Testament, there were places where God, in some form (see above) dwelled among His people, including specific geographic locations and in the holy of holies (the most holy place) of the tabernacle and temple of God (referred to as the sanctuary of God—Exodus 25:8-9; 26:31-35; I Kings 6:11-36). However, there is not a square inch

³ See my study **Salvation and the Sovereignty of God** that addresses God's sovereign nature and will.

of holy or sacred ground on this earth during this dispensation of grace—God is not dwelling among us. For those who believe that Christ died for our sins, Christ is in us and we are in Him, and we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God (Romans 8:1, 9-11; I Corinthians 3:16; Ephesians 2:4-6; Colossians 1:25-27). Our bodies are considered to be the temple of God (I Corinthians 3:16; 6:19-20).

Therefore, God, through Christ and the Holy Spirit, spiritually *dwells* wherever we are.

Unfortunately, most Christian churches have a sanctuary, and many have an altar in their sanctuary to copy or substitute for the temple of God. This represents a misunderstanding between the Law of Moses that has been set aside by God and the dispensation of the grace of God in which we live.

Furthermore, most religions in the world falsely consider physical places (manmade structures, mountains, rivers, etc.), objects (manmade idols), and/or plants and animals of God’s creation as sacred (Romans 1:18-25).

- Throughout Scripture that pertains directly to the nation of Israel, God is frequently referred to as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, beginning with Exodus 3:6 (I Kings 18:36; Matthew 22:32; Acts 3:13). These men are considered by God to be the fathers of the people of Israel (Exodus 3:15). Although Paul referred to the *fathers* (i.e., Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob), it was when he was explaining something that unbelieving Jews or the Jewish brethren would understand and could compare to the Law of Moses (Acts 26:6-7; Romans 9:1-13).⁴ However, when he revealed and expounded upon our promises as members of the body of Christ in this dispensation of grace, he described our relationship to God through Christ, but didn’t refer to God as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, or to them as our ancestral fathers.
- God revealed Himself and spoke to Moses as *the angel of the Lord* in a bush that was burning yet was not being consumed by the fire. This was miraculous in every way and was preparing Moses for the many miracles that God would perform through him. More often, God *spoke* to specific individuals through visions and dreams to reveal future events and other things not already written or prophesied (e.g., Daniel 7:1-14; Matthew 1:18-25; Revelation 1:1-2). In this dispensation of grace, God does not speak to us verbally or through visions or dreams, because He has revealed to us everything He wants us to know (according to His will, He opens our eyes to understand what is written in His word—Ephesians 1:15-21). The revelation of the mystery and the gospel of the grace of God revealed through Paul by our ascended and glorified Lord Jesus Christ completed the word of God to us (II Corinthians 12:1-4; Galatians 1:11-12; Colossians 1:25-27; Ephesians 3:1-12).⁵ In fact, we are warned to beware of teaching from those who supposedly received visions (e.g., from God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, or an angel)—visions that actually are the product of our sin nature (i.e., a

⁴ Paul was appointed by God as the apostle of the Gentiles (Acts 9:15-16; Romans 11:13). However, when they were present in the cities he visited, he always went to the Jewish synagogues first because of his love for his fellow Jews, to explain who Christ was, to reveal the gospel of the grace of God, and to give the Jews no excuses for rejecting the word of God (Acts 13:44-47; 18:5-6; 20:24; 28:23-28; Romans 1:16; 9:1-5; 10:1-4). In general, the Jews rejected Paul and his message, but those individuals who believed became the first participants of his newly established churches that were composed primarily of believing Gentiles (Acts 13:48-49; 18:5-8).

⁵ See my studies **The Mystery (God’s Secret Plan)** and **The Two Messages of Our Lord Jesus Christ** for discussions on the revelation of the mystery through Paul and the differences between the gospel of the kingdom and the gospel of the grace of God.

figment of our imagination) or perhaps even Satan (Colossians 2:16-19; I Timothy 6:3-5; II Timothy 4:1-4).⁶

⁶ I'm not aware of anything in Scripture that says or implies that Satan works directly through believers; the Holy Spirit and Satan can't coexist in the same person. However, Satan works through nonbelievers in ways that can deceive children of God. For example, we can be influenced by our own sin nature to accept a teaching, prophecy, or vision by a false believer (a person who does not belong to Christ despite his or her claims and who is influenced by or perhaps even controlled by Satan—II Corinthians 11:12-15; Philippians 3:2-3; I Timothy 4:1-3) as the truth of God. That is why we need to search the Scriptures to see if what we are being taught is true and humbly rely on God to open our hearts to understand His word (Acts 17:10-12; II Timothy 2:15; 3:16-17; Proverbs 3:5-7; Colossians 1:9-12).