

CHAPTER 3-4 RETURN TO EGYPT – GOD’S CALLING AND SENDING**Chapter Structure**

- vv. 3:1-10 God’s Appearing and Moses’ Observing
- vv. 3:11-4:17 God’s Commissioning and Moses’ Objections
- vv. 4:18-31 God’s Sending and Moses’ Obedience

Spiritual Principles:

- P1: In His sovereign providence, God takes initiative to connect to us
- P2: God is willing to use small and despise vessel.
- P3: When God calls you, He calls you and your family.

Last Week...

It has been forty years since Moses settled down in Midian. God did not appear to him nor speak to him. After he had learned the lesson of waiting for the LORD, God revealed Himself to Moses in the greatest self-revelations of the Divine in history (3:14). Yahweh the God of Israel wanted Moses to know Him so that Moses may be faithful to Yahweh’s commission to the end. The first two attributes that God taught Moses about Himself were holiness and faithfulness.

A. God’s Appearing and Moses’ Observing 3: 11-15

1. The bush that does not burn up 3:1-3

*“And Moses said, “I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned.”
⁴ 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.” 3:3,4*

In the Bible, fire symbolizes God’s powerful, consuming and preserving presence (Judg13:20, 2Chr 7:1-2, Eze 1:4-28, Dan 7:9-10, Heb 12:29). It also symbolizes purification of sin and judgement.

The burning bush was an unnatural phenomenon that God used to draw Moses’ attention. The God of glory could have set the whole of Horeb aglow with light and fire, but He chose to use the small and despised bush as the medium of His revelation, and He waited to see how sensitive Moses was toward small things before he invested him with larger tasks.

When Moses saw the burning bush, he reckoned it was a great sight, and he wanted to know more about it. So he turned aside – departed from his route, laid aside his flock and went over to observe it. There he encountered God. When Moses heard the calling of his name, instead of the Midianite language he had been speaking for the past forty years, answered spontaneously with the Hebrew word “Hineini”. Hineini is the respectful response in the Hebrew culture, particularly in responding to a superior or a beloved. This means that Moses knew that it was Yahweh calling him.

Today, God still uses ordinary things in our lives to do extraordinary things to draw our attention to Him, such as a new believer quitted smoking, a young brother stop speaking vulgarity, or a sister becomes more caring, the thirsty receives a glass of water, the lonely has someone sitting by him. . .etc. The question is: do we notice them? do we *turn aside to see* it like Moses did, or do we say to ourselves "I have no time for this or I am not interested in this", thereby allowing ourselves to take an indifferent attitude towards the burning bush?

2. The ground was holy 3:4-6

"Then he said, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." 3:5

God is holy because He being the Creator transcends His creation, and that His righteousness is absolute. The burning bush is a manifestation of God '*come down*'^{3:8} into His created world. The theological term for this is "immanence" of God. The transcendence and immanence of God distinguish the Christian God from the god in the New Age pantheism, which claims god exists in everything in the nature. In the New Testament, the transcendence and immanence of God is cleverly, majestically and beautifully manifested in the Lord Jesus Christ – Immanuel, "God with man". Physically Jesus is like us in every way, except that He does not have a sinful nature nor does he sin; yet he has the divine authority to cast out demons, command the nature (e.g storm and illness) and resurrect the dead. As the apostle John said,

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." John 1:14

Whenever God came into the world, the place or the thing will be set apart and become holy. Removing sandals was a respectful manner towards the higher authority in the ancient east world. In the Egyptian religion, Islam and Judaism taking off sandals is an expression of reverence for solemn places. In a similar occasion, God commanded Joshua to do likewise (Jos 5:15). This tells us that God has an expectation on how we approach Him. We ought to come to a worship service or ordinances with reverence and with trembling joy, as Moses did when he "*hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God*"^{3:6}

3. God takes initiative to deliver His people 3:7-10

Now God was going to teach Moses about divine faithfulness. "*I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt*"^{3:7} God called Israel *my people* shows that God has not forgotten His covenant with Abraham and his descendants. In verses 7 to 10, we could see a series of God's actions: *He said, I have seen ...; I have heard ...; I am concerned ... I have come down ... to rescue ... to bring them up into ... I am sending ...* (Note: The description of God's actions in words usually associated with mankind is called anthropomorphisms)

Verse 15 to 22 is the prophecy of the process of exodus, which is also the epitome of chapter 4 to 15.

God has always been and still is taking initiative to resolve the enmity between man and God, both with individual person and with mankind as a whole. God looked for Adam when he hid from God (Ge 3:9); God promised a Seed before He drove men out of His presence (Ge 3:15); God sought Abraham out first and made a covenant with him; God sought Jacob at Bethel when he was lonely and helpless. Now, God called Moses to embark on the divine plan for Exodus. *"We love because God first loved us"* 1Jn 4:19 God sent His only Son Jesus Christ to be the atoning sacrifice for mankind. In our personal relationship with God, God is always the one taking initiative. Philippians 2:13 for it is God who works in us to will and to act according to His good purpose. At times we may feel that we are ignored by God. The bible assures us that God will not cover His countenance when we seek Him sincerely (Js 4:8; Mt 7:7,8). Contemplate on His words and acts, pray to Him, and He will surely be with you.

P1: In His sovereign Providence, God takes initiative to connect to us

"Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt." 3:10

This is the commissioning of Moses. But Moses objected to the commissioning five times consecutively, with a different reason each time. You may find these reasons familiar, for we all have used some of them if not all to turn down the work of the church.

B. God Commissioning and Moses' Objections 3: 11- 4: 17

First Protest 3:11-12: Who Am I? I am not good enough

"But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?"" 3:11

This reflects the big change that had come upon Moses after forty years of humbling reflection. Forty years ago, he saw himself as the best candidate, now he saw himself lowly as a shepherd, a fugitive and a loser. However, he presented a different problem to God now.

Today we also said, "I am not qualified, I am not good enough."

God's response, *"But I will be with you"* 3:12 God assured Moses His presence.

Second Protest 3:13-22: What if they ask what your name is? I do not know God well enough

"Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?"" 3:13

Moses did not believe that the Israelites will trust him anymore, the Pharaoh's daughter's son who had remained aloof in the palace of Egypt for forty years and then disappeared from them for another forty years.

Today we also said, "I do not know God well enough to serve Him."

God's response: *I AM WHO I AM* 3:14 *And they will listen to your voice* 3:18

"I AM WHO I AM" has very profound meanings. It answers many questions man has about God, for example: Where does God come from, how does God live, can God be destroyed, does God need our worship and offering and service...God's revelations about Himself differ vastly from man's best conjectures.

- a) **God is self-existent and ever living.** He does not have a beginning and exists before everything else come into being, and He does not stop existing.

From everlasting to everlasting, You are God. (Psalm 90:2)

"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty." (Rev. 1:8)

- b) **God is self-sufficient.** God does not lack anything. He certainly does not need worship and offering from us, though he delights in them. Praises, gifts or services of man cannot add glory to God, from whom all glory emanated. Therefore, do not think that Jesus needs your help for His church. When we serve God, we are at the receiving end, not God.

- c) **God does not change.** God's nature does not change, neither does His will for us.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. (Hebrews 13:8)

But you remain the same, your years will never end. (Psalm 102:27)

Third Protest 4:1-9: They will not believe me – People will not listen to me.

Even though God has assured Moses that the elders of Israel will listen to him ^{3:18} Moses continued to protest:

"Then Moses answered, "But behold, they will not believe me or listen to my voice, for they will say, 'The Lord did not appear to you.'"" ^{4:1}

Today we also insist, "People will not listen to me"

Graciously and patiently, God answered Moses with three miracles: turning the staff into a serpent, making Moses' hand leprous and turning the river water into blood ^(4:2-9). Note that all three miracles symbolise the salvation of God: the serpent is a symbol for Satan, leprosy is a symbol for sin and blood is a symbol for the redemption of Jesus Christ.

Note that the miracles were not to demonstrate the power of Moses, which he obviously had none. The sole purpose of the miracles was to endorse Moses and His message – that both were truly from God. Just like the Lord Jesus endorsing his disciples and the Gospel in the beginning of the church's era with miracles, "*And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by accompanying signs*" ^{Mark 16:20}

The staff of Moses was ordinary and unspectacular. But when it was thrown on the ground at God's command, it turned into a snake. Moses was instructed to grasp the serpent by its tails to further prove the divine origin of this miracle, because the safe way to pick up a snake is to grip the 'neck' behind its head. The staff was also called the staff of God in 4:20.

This is the same staff used to separate the Red Sea, to defeat the Amalekites and to cause water to come out from the rock in the wilderness.

The three miracles assured Moses of God's invincible power. More importantly, it reinforced the earlier lesson (God used the ordinary bush):

P2: God is willing to use small and despised vessel

All of us are unworthy of serving the self-existent and self-sufficient God. Nonetheless, God is willing to use us if we humble ourselves and be willing to serve Him. With the Holy Spirit living in us, we are a sanctified vessel, like the burning bush, and we have the empowerment of God, like the staff of Moses.

Fourth Protest 4:10-12: I am slow of speech and tongue – I don't have the talent

"Oh, my LORD, I am not eloquent, either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and of tongue." 4:10

Moses was saying, "I don't have the talent to do the job"

God's response: *"Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak."* 4:12

This reminds us that when Jesus warned his disciples about the persecution they would face He also promised to teach them what to say, *"When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour."* Mt 10:19; Luke 12:12 From the book of Acts we found that this was the case. When they were put before the Roman governors or the Jewish Sanhedrin the apostles did not speak to defend themselves but to preach Christ and His salvation to the audience. This is the empowerment of Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 4:7-12 tells us that the Lord Jesus gave gifts to man according to His sovereign will not for our boasting but *"to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up"* To reckon that one does not have the ability to do God's work is an essential pre-requisite to serve God.

Fifth Protest 4:13-17: Why don't you send someone else?

"But he said, "Oh, my Lord, please send someone else." 4:13

God's response: *The Lord's anger was kindled against Moses* 4:14

Many Christians today find it difficult to accept that the loving and patient God would burn His anger against us. The bible tells us that when the world act wickedly against their conscience, they are storing up the wrath of God for themselves and are awaiting the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed (Ro 2:5) When God's children disobey God wantonly, God's anger can burn against us too. This was what happened to Israel. May God's children endeavour to know God and set their hearts on God's heart.

Nevertheless, by His mercy God was still willing to use the reluctant servant. God appointed Aaron whom Israel trusted, to be Moses' spokesman to the Israelites. Aaron must see Moses as God's spokesman.

That was final. *"So Moses took his wife and his sons and had them ride on a donkey, and went back to the land of Egypt. And Moses took the staff of God in his hand."* 4:20

It is not difficult for anyone to see that the five reasons were but Moses' excuses not to return to Egypt. Perhaps Moses didn't want to meet the Egyptians whom he had failed nor the Israelites who had failed him. Indeed, if we put our eyes on man we can be discouraged easily. So let us put our mind and eyes on the Lord and always focus on accomplishing His will.

Moses had realized that he was not the saviour of Israel. The true saviour of Israel is Yahweh. However, refusing the commissioning was not a display of humility. Moses' humility was shown in accepting it even after he reckoned that he could not do it by his own strength. Very often we refuse to undertake a task because we are too proud to fail and not to have applause, or when we want to maintain a strong image for ourselves. Let us invoke the Holy Counsellor to search our heart constantly.

C. God's Sending and Moses' Obedience 4: 18- 31

"So Moses took his wife and his sons and had them ride on a donkey, and went back to the land of Egypt. And Moses took the staff of God in his hand." 4:20

Following the instruction of God, Moses took Zipporah and his two sons with him and headed back to Egypt with the staff of God in his hand. God sent Moses at a time when all the men who had the power to kill Moses were dead 4:19, here we see that God will not let His servants go through unnecessary dangers.

Many find what happened in vv.24-26 enigmatic. Before they arrived at Egypt, *"the Lord met him and sought to put him to death"* 4:24 Bible commentators generally believed that God inflicted Moses with a very serious illness that Zipporah had to perform the circumcision which was normally the duty of the father. Why did God want to kill Moses? We know that it must have something to do with his son's circumcision because of Zipporah's swift response and because after she circumcised their son God's anger ceased (v.26). Apparently, Moses had wanted to circumcise their son but Zipporah had objected to it. (Casting the foreskin at Moses feet and calling him "bridegroom of blood" in her reproach indicated her revulsion and disgust with this rite of circumcision). 18:2 tells us that after the incident Zipporah brought the two sons back to Midian while Moses went on with his mission.

Circumcision was a sign instituted by God for His covenantal people. Any man who does not have this sign would be cut off from the covenant and the assembly of Israel (Ge 17:10-14). By **not** insisting on circumcising his sons, Moses had broken God's covenant and would not be fit to lead the exodus. Moses was going to be the giver and administrator of God's Law. If he himself did not uphold the law, how would Israel believe in the law and fear the LORD? The Lord Jesus once taught us that *"One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much"* Luke 16:10 Sin can seep through a small slit and

enter a fortified heart. Let us not belittle every small transgression lest we sin against God gravely without even knowing it.

This passage affirms another thing about God's commissioning. If God calls you, He also calls your spouse. God will help you prepare your family to share the commission with you, for God gives us family to share the grace of life with us (1Pe 3:7). Moses almost lost his calling and his life because Zipporah was not fully in tune with him regarding God's matter. Let this be a grave reminder for Christian husbands and wives. Let us not say, "that is your calling, not mine". Only when husbands and wives submit to the commissioning of God as one man can the family receive the blessing and reward of God.

P3: When God calls you, He also calls your family

"And the people believed; and when they heard that the Lord had visited the people of Israel and that he had seen their affliction, they bowed their heads and worshiped." 4:31

Everything took place as God said. Firstly, Aaron came to Mount Horeb to meet Moses and his heart was glad, just as God had said 4:14,27. They went to see the elders of Israel, the elders believed and were willing to listen to them, just as God had said 3:18. Then Aaron told the Israelites what he heard from Moses about God commissioning Moses to bring them out of Egypt. When the Israelites saw the miracles, they believed and worshipped the LORD, just as the God had said 4:31. Again, we must remember that these miracles were not the ends of their trip but a witness to God's servant and the work God's going to accomplish for them, *"I promise that I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey."* 3:17

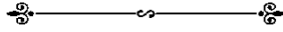
D. Closing

"when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain" 4:12

God brought Israel out of Egypt in order that they may serve the Lord and become a testimony for God. In fact, we shall see that God did not bring them into the land of Canaan immediately, but He brought them to Mount Sinai, gave them the law and made a covenant with them (ch. 24). They were to build a tabernacle and establish a corporate life of worship as God's people.

"You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness" Ro 6:18 NIV

We were slaves to sin but now slave to righteousness. A slave to sin is bound by sin and takes order from Satan the destroyer. Eph 2:2 tells us that even atheists are living under the power of Satan, *"... following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—"* (Eph 2: 2) Slaves to righteousness, on the other hand, serve God willingly, worship joyously, follow Him faithfully and testify for Him boldly out of gratitude for Christ. Dear brothers and sisters, let us spend time in knowing God more deeply so that we may rejoice in serving Him as a faithful slave to righteousness until we meet our Lord Jesus face to face!



The Renewing of the mind:
