

Core Study #3

The Burning Bush

Passage: Exodus 3:1-12

Themes: God's concern for his people, and Moses' fear.

Background and Summary:

The announcement of God's presence with his people in Exodus 2:23-25 sets the stage for this passage, which is commonly referred to as the "call of Moses." Moses is shepherding the flocks of his father-in-law Jethro, and ends up leading the sheep to the far side of the desert where he meets with God who calls to him from within a bush that is on fire but does not burn up.

Leaders' Preparation:

Take time to pray and then read Exodus 3:1-4:17 a few times. Although this study will only include the first twelve verses of this passage, the remaining portion is important in order to understand the context and the full theological message of this passage. Once you have finished, read 3:1-12 in a few different translations and take note of any interesting things you notice (repetitions, verbs, footnotes, etc) or any questions you may have. Here are some questions to think about as you prepare your study:

1. Where is Mount Horeb?

Mount Horeb was located in the southeastern part of the Sinai peninsula and is believed to be either an alternate name for Mount Sinai, or another tall mountain in the same region.

2. Who is the angel of the Lord mentioned in verse 2?

The identity of the angel of the Lord has long been a matter of debate. The angel is identified very closely, if not equated, with Yahweh himself, and appears to play the role of the messenger of the Lord, a phenomena commonly seen in the ancient Near East where a messenger often spoke for the sender. Some scholars even suggest that the angel of the Lord is a manifestation of the incarnate Christ.¹

¹ *The NIV Application Commentary: Exodus* by Peter Enns, page 96

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Introductory Question:

- What are you afraid of?

Discussion Questions (selection to choose from):

Read Exodus 3:1-12

1. How would you respond if you saw a bush that was on fire but did not burn up?
2. Why did Moses have to take off his sandals? What does it mean for the ground to be holy (verse 5)?
Holy ground (verse 5) was not holy by nature but was made so by the holy presence of God. The word holy means to be “consecrated to the Lord’s service and thus being separated from the commonplace.”²
3. Discuss why Moses afraid (verse 6).
The word “afraid” used in verse 6 is from the Hebrew word “yare” which means to fear, to morally revere. Moses was afraid to look at God because he recognized God’s power and holiness and responded in fear and reverence.
4. In this passage Moses was afraid of looking at God, but also afraid of what God was asking him to do. How is fearing God different from being afraid of God and of the things of the world (for example: spiders, the dark, public speaking)?
5. How does God respond to his peoples’ misery in Egypt (verses 7-10)? What is his plan?
6. How does Moses react to God’s plan? Remember that he was not received well by the Israelites or Egyptians in Chapter 2, but was welcomed by strangers (the Midianites).
7. How does God respond to Moses’ insecurity (verse 11)? What promises does he make?
In verse 12, the word translated as “I will be” is the same used for “I AM” in verse 14, which is the name used by God to identify himself to his people. Jesus used the same word to identify himself in John 8:58, thus claiming to be God.
8. Why do you think that God involved Moses in his plan to rescue the Israelites?

Application Questions (selection to choose from):

- If you don’t experience something like the burning bush, how can you discern God’s calling or purpose for your life? Keep in mind that our UCM theme for the year is to abide in Christ and be transformed by him (John 15:4; Romans 12:2).
- God promises to be with us when we are afraid or anxious, as He did for Moses. Take some time to pray about those the things that you are afraid of, and remember that you don’t need to be afraid because God is with you.

² The NIV Study Bible, 1985