

Exegetical Notes, Exodus 2:23-3:10
“He Heard Their Cry”

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Exodus 2:23-3:10

Verse 23-24

During that long period, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.

- The Pharaoh had a long reign and during that entire time, the Hebrews in Egypt were oppressed with increasingly harsh conditions as slaves.
- They groaned under the pressure put on them by the Egyptians and, at last, cried out to God for help.
- God heard their prayers and their groaning. Because of the promise that He had made to their forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, He was concerned about them. When the text says, “He remembered,” it does not mean to imply that God had forgotten the covenant. It means that the covenant He had made with the people of Israel through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob became of foremost importance to Him.

Verse 25

So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them.

- The word, “so,” is casual in the text. It is meant to imply that God’s special concern for Israel was not due to anything that Israel was or had done or not done. God’s concern for Israel grew out of His choice of Israel for special favor. Israel was not chosen for her special merit. God’s choice of Israel was a sovereign act of His grace and because He had picked Israel upon which to show favor, He was concerned for her. Israel deserved no better treatment than she was receiving from the Egyptians, because despite God’s offer of special favor through His covenant, she had chosen to disregard His offer. None-the-less, because of the offer He had made, He was concerned about Israel.

Verse 3:1

Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.

- Meanwhile, Moses had settled into a peaceful life in Midian among his wife's people. He had become the chief shepherd for his father-in-law and was living a good life there.
- Moses had led his father-in-law's sheep to good pasture in a remote place.
- Horeb means desert in Hebrew. Some scholars say that Mount Horeb and Mount Sinai are different names for the same place. Tradition identifies Mount Horeb as Ras es-Salsaf and Mount Sinai as Jebel Musa. The first is 6,500 feet high. The second is 7,400 feet high.
- The identification of the mountain as "the mountain of God," often leads scholars to the conclusion that this mountain was Mount Sinai, the place where God appeared to Moses and gave Israel the Law. However, that evidence is weak as every mountain is the mountain of God as He made them all.
- The bottom line is that these events took place on some mountain in a remote place in Midian where Moses was tending sheep.

Verse 2

There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up.

- As Moses was tending to his business, going about the duties of shepherding the flock, he saw a strange sight. On this mountain, he discovered a bush that was on fire. There were flames leaping up from within the bush. However, the flames did not harm the leaves and the branches of the bush.
- The text wants us to understand that the burning bush that did not burn up was God's way of getting Moses' attention so that He might speak to him.
- The word, "angel," means messenger. The angel does not actually speak to Moses from the bush. God speaks directly to Moses from out of the bush. The angel's purpose was simply to get Moses' attention for God.

Verse 3

So Moses thought, “I will go over and see this strange sight...why the bush does not burn up.

- The plan worked! Moses decided to investigate the bush that was on fire but not consumed by the flames.

Verse 4

When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, “Moses! Moses!” And Moses said, “Here I am.”

- When the angel had done his job, God spoke to Moses directly from the burning bush. God called Moses by name. Moses clearly heard the call of God because he responded to it with the words, “Here I am.”
- Speaking from a Biblical perspective, God’s call is always personal as it is here. He calls whom He pleases but He always does it personally. However, it not always done so directly. Sometimes, as in His call to Saul and David, God uses other people as his messengers.

Verse 5

“Do not come any closer,” God said. “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.”

- God’s first instruction to Moses is to keep his distance. Even though God’s call is personal and God calls Moses’ name, Moses is still required to remember that God is God and that proper respect must be maintained. Though Moses is called by name, and this implies an intimacy between he and God that others cannot claim, he is not to presume on this offered relationship.
- God’s second instruction to Moses is to remove his shoes because the place of his call is holy to God. The place is to be respected because God has so decided.

Verse 6

Then he said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

- Next, God identifies himself to Moses. First God says, “I AM.” This is the root of His proper name, “YHWH.” He then tells Moses that he is the God of Moses’ father, Amram. He then reminds Moses that he is the God who offered covenant to Israel through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

- Realizing who it is that speaks from the bush, Moses covers his face out of respect for God. He believes that it would offend God if he looked directly at God.

Verse 7-8

The Lord said, “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey -- the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites.

- God acknowledges that He is aware of the trouble of the people of Israel in Egypt, that He has heard their cries for help, and that He has come to help them by delivering them from the Egyptians.
- God explains that He intends to give the people of Israel a good, safe place in which to live, the Promised Land. God intends to keep the obligation of the covenant that He has made with His people even though they, by their behavior, have violated that agreement.
- However, the promise also acknowledges the potential problem. This land God intends to give to Israel already belongs to other peoples.

Verse 9-10

And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.”

- At last God explains why He has chosen to come to Moses in this unique way. He has picked Moses to be the leader of the Hebrews who will go to Pharaoh in order to deliver Israel from his hand. Moses is to be the man who executes the plan of God to deliver Israel.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *God Heard Their Cry*. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Senior Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by Dr. Jensen and *Cornerstone Fellowship*.)