
The Call of Moses

DAVE BAST

Last week, we left Moses as a little baby who had been drawn up out of the Nile and adopted by Pharaoh's daughter. Now, just a few verses later in the Exodus narrative, many years have passed and Moses' circumstances have changed dramatically. When next we see him, he is an elderly shepherd in the desert, where he has a dramatic encounter with God at a burning bush. You may have heard the story. Well, you will again now if you stay tuned.

SCOTT HOEZEE

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we are in this series on the book of Exodus, one of the great, great narratives, great, great stories of the whole Bible; and in the first program, we found the Israelites now having become a nation; so we saw some of the fulfillment of God's promises, even through the Hebrew midwives, who defied Pharaoh and let the male babies live. So, Israel grew into, and they are called for the first time ever in Exodus 1, a nation, which fulfills what God told Abraham way back in Genesis 12: You will be the father of a mighty nation.

DAVE BAST

But a nation in a terrible fix because in the ominous phrase of Exodus 1: A Pharaoh arose who did not know Joseph.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He knew not Joseph.

DAVE BAST

He did not remember the past history with the Hebrew people.

SCOTT HOEZEE

For all kinds of reasons, we will not recap now, but Genesis ends with the people out of the Promised Land – God's people are out of the land God promised to give them. They landed in Egypt and it went fine for a while, but now they are slaves; and we find out that one of the male babies who gets spared from Pharaoh's death edict is a little guy named Moses and he gets put in that basket that we looked at, and ends up living in Pharaoh's house and growing up alongside who would become the future Pharaoh; but then, things go bad and Moses emerges as a champion for God's people, as we suspect God wants him to be, but maybe he just takes things into his own hands when he murders an Egyptian who had been viscerally abusing a fellow Israelite, and so he has to flee, and he ends up very, very far from Egypt in a place called Midian. We pick up that story in Exodus 3.

DAVE BAST

¹Now 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 wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ²There, the Angel of the Lord appeared to him flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire, it did not burn up. ³So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight, why the bush does not burn up." ⁴When 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." ⁵"Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." ⁶Then 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.

SCOTT HOEZEE

⁷The 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, ⁸so I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of the land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey, ⁹and now the cry of the Israelites has reached me and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them, ¹⁰so now go, I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." ¹¹But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" ¹²And God said, "I will be with you and this will be a sign to you that it is I who have sent you, when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God in this mountain." ¹³And Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites 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 tell them?" ¹⁴And God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM, that is what you are to say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" ¹⁵God also said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites, '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, the name you shall call me from generation to generation.'"

DAVE BAST

That is one great story.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, it is.

DAVE BAST

I just noticed for the first time how interesting this is at the beginning. So, Moses is wandering around, we presume, in southern Sinai; we are not exactly sure where Horeb was...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Or Midian.

DAVE BAST

What Midian was. Midian kind of refers to the land to the east, the desert land where the raiders lived and it is still kind of a wild place, even today, south Sinai. Horeb – another name for it is Mount Sinai – and that is the holy mountain of God. We are not told why – why did God choose that mountain? That is a mystery. He sees a bush that is burning, but not consumed. We are told that the Angel of the Lord appeared to him in that bush, but then, just a couple of verses later, when the Lord saw he had gone over, God called to him from within the bush. So, we have this mysterious figure, the Angel of the Lord, who appears in Genesis, and elsewhere in the early stories of the Old Testament, and then he is called God at the same time; so, as Christians, we read that as is this a pre-incarnate visitation from Jesus – from the second Person of the Trinity? But it is all tremendously mysterious.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I heard a sermon on Genesis 22 just last week, and the same thing happens in the story of the slaying of Isaac that there is this interplay between the Angel saying and then God saying, and they do mix it up, and indeed,

maybe that is the Son of God, whom we now know as Jesus – is the word of God – the Angel. But either way, it is God – the fullness of God – speaking to Moses out of this bush and telling him he has a job to do. It is very interesting, the Bible goes back and forth, and I was reviewing something that John Calvin wrote a while back, saying that once Moses had to flee Egypt because he had murdered this guy, Calvin said Moses just waited patiently for 40 years or a long, long time in Midian, until God would call him back; and I think Calvin is being a little kinder to Moses there than the Bible allows you, because I do not think Moses was waiting for anything. I think he thought he was done. He was a shepherd for the rest of his days; but God has a plan, and we know that because of the way Moses was saved from death. We know God had something up his sleeve where Moses is concerned. He is not going to be gone from Egypt forever; but Moses, I do not think, did know that; and in fact, does everything in his power in this encounter to prevent him from going back to Egypt.

DAVE BAST

Well, it looks for all the world like Moses has reached a dead end. Just step back and hold in suspension all that you know about Moses and his later career and what he would become, and how would you characterize an 80-year-old man – he is 80 at this point, we know from elsewhere in Exodus – how would you characterize an 80-year-old man who was brought up in the palace of the Pharaoh, who has thrown it all away with one impulsive act of violence and now is working for his father-in-law following a few sheep and goats around in the scrub of the desert with no future, apparently, and somewhere along the way he has picked up a wife and some children, but Moses is pretty much a failure.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, it looks like he is washed up, which we as readers sense would be really bad news if this were the end of Moses' story because it might be the end of the Israelites' story because they would be stuck in slavery forever. At the beginning of Exodus, as we saw in the last program, God is hardly mentioned at all; in fact, you have to get to the very, very end of Chapter 1 before God is even brought up. So, you wonder, "Is God seeing the Israelites, his covenant people, the descendants of Abraham, or not?" And the answer is, "Yes," God says, "I have not forgotten my people, and as a sign of that, I am going to send Moses to rescue them." Moses, however, is full of nothing but excuses and we will look at some of that next.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee, and we are in the third chapter of Exodus, and in this show, Dave, we are also going to wander into the fourth chapter before we are finished; but we are in the third chapter; we just heard the story of the burning bush – this amazing sign that caught Moses' attention – and then God spoke to him out of that and called him to his next duty – rescuing the people from Egypt.

DAVE BAST

Right, yes; he began – God did – by identifying himself, and Moses, of course, is terrified. Whenever anybody sees God or comes close to God or – you do not actually see God, but here Moses sees this mystery of the bush on fire and hears the voice – their reaction is terror and fright because God is terrifying in his nature. So, he says take off your sandals, you are standing on holy ground. Moses hides his face, and God says I am the God of your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And then he says this wonderful thing: I have seen the misery of my people in Egypt; I have heard them crying out; I am concerned about their suffering, so I have come to rescue them and deliver them and bring them to the land of milk and honey, and I am going to send you to do it. You are going to Pharaoh, Moses. Guess what?!

SCOTT HOEZEE

Moses cannot believe his ears, and does – as I said before – does everything in his power to wriggle out from underneath what God is saying to him: Well, who am I? I do not know what to do. Who should I say has sent... what if they do not even believe that? It is going to go on, actually; he has even more excuses that we will see.

What is interesting about the text to me is that God does not disagree with him. God does not say: Well, who are you? Man, look at you.

DAVE BAST

You are great! You are somebody, Moses! You are awesome.

SCOTT HOEZEE

God does not disagree, which as we will talk about a little bit more before the program is finished, is a sign of grace and hope for all of us that God does indeed use ordinary people – cracked vessels that Paul talks about in 2 Corinthians – God does indeed call the ordinary into extraordinary service. Heroes of the faith are not like Moses – the New Testament will call him a hero of the faith – you are not a hero of the faith because you are a hero to begin with; you become a hero by God's grace because he uses ordinary people for extraordinary things, giving them his own strength to get it done.

DAVE BAST

If you think about it, nobody is really qualified to deliver Israel from Egypt. That is an impossible task. Nobody is really qualified to convert a sinner and bring them to faith in Christ. Nobody is really qualified to proclaim the riches of God's mercy by declaring his word and will to the world. It is only God's call that gives us the qualification. Perhaps Moses' central objection is: Hey, okay, you are telling me to go back and start with the leaders of Israel; the elders of the people, whom I have not seen in 40 years, and I am supposed to announce to them this crazy story about a vision in the wilderness and tell them God sent me here to deliver you. Which God? What is your name? And then this incredible reply, where God reveals his name to Moses.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And he says something which has confounded scholars ever since. He says: I AM WHO I AM, which apparently in Hebrew could also possibly mean I will be who I will be, but put them together and it is I am who I am, I will be who I will be, I am the faithful One. In the Hebrew the letters are YHWH – there are no vowels in the Hebrew language – you have to supply the sounds in between the words. It was used, actually, in the biblical text in Genesis. If you read Genesis in Hebrew, you will find that this is God's name, but it was used retrospectively. This, in history apparently, is the first time God said: I AM the great I AM. That was the revelation. That is who you are to say.

DAVE BAST

Actually, here is a little tip for readers of the English Bible, such as you and me most of the time. Normally, most Bibles will set the name *Yahweh* in a special type and they will use a capital L and then small caps for the ORD; so, if you look closely as you are reading in the Old Testament, if you see just the word LORD capitalized in normal type, that is *Adonai*; that is translating my Lord, which was the common phrase, but if you see the word in the text capital L then small cap ORD that is *Yahweh*, and it stands for the divine, sacred name. As you said, Scott, as you pointed out, it occurs in the text of Genesis, and even of Exodus before this point, but it is not really revealed, except in this moment to Moses at the burning bush.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Which begs a curious question: If the Israelites have never heard this name before, how is Moses saying: I AM sent me to you. They are going to say: Who is that? But then he [God] goes on to say – and he fills out his own name by saying who is this I AM? It is the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.

That is who the I AM is. So this idea of the Great I AM as the ever present One, the ever faithful One is carried all through the Bible; and of course, ultimately Jesus will pick this up in the New Testament; which is why in John's Gospel, which is the most theologically sophisticated of the four Gospels, all those I AM sayings: That is code for Jesus saying I am *Yahweh*.

DAVE BAST

I am actually *Yahweh* come in the flesh.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am the one in the burning bush. I am the God of Israel.

DAVE BAST

And probably the most dramatic instance of that in John is in Chapter 8, where he [Jesus] is having a typical argument with the Jewish elders and Pharisees and scribes, and they said to him: You claim to have been around for Abraham? What is up with that? And Jesus says, "Before Abraham was, I AM," he does not say: Before Abraham was, I was. He says, "Before Abraham was, I AM," and they took up stones. They got it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It was blasphemy if it was not true.

DAVE BAST

They thought it was blasphemy. This incredible revelation that God has a personal name and that the significance of the name seems to speak of his covenant faithfulness; of his ever-present, of his unchanging commitment to his people. He has heard their cry; he is going to deliver them; and Moses, you are going to help me do it, and Moses says: Why don't you send somebody else? We will look at his ongoing response in just a moment.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, and to this episode, which is the second of a series of episodes we are going to be doing on the book of Exodus. We have been in Exodus 3 and we are shortly going to slide into the ongoing story of the burning bush and of God's call of Moses; also into Exodus 4.

You know, Dave, when we were reading in the first segment, the bulk of the narrative of the burning bush and Moses' call from Exodus 3, one thing that struck me was that Moses, at one point, essentially says: How do I know that this is true? How do I know that you are really going to be with me? I am just little old me and so, why should I do this? God says: You will do it because I am going to go with you. And then Moses says: How do I know that? And God says: You will know it is true when you are back here on this mountain with the people in tow, that it worked.

I have always thought that is not much of a sign. In a sermon I preached on this a while back, it is like if you go to the bank to take out a loan or re-mortgage your house, the first thing the loan officer is going to say to you is: How do I know that you can pay this back? And it will not cut any ice with the banker to say: Well, you will know I can pay it back the day I do. No, they want collateral. They want evidence. They want a sign that you are good for this today, and that is ultimately what Moses says, too. He says: I do not want to wait 20 years to see if this is true. Give me a sign now.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right; so Moses, in effect, is saying to God: How do I know I will be a great leader? And God says: You will know you will be great leader when you become a great leader.

SCOTT HOEZEE

When it is done.

DAVE BAST

Yes, which maybe is not so helpful; but Moses goes on with his catalog of objections. He started out by saying: I am not qualified. To which God says, in effect: Yes, I know you are not qualified. I did not choose you because you are so great.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Who said you were? I will be with you; that is your qualification.

DAVE BAST

I will be with you; there you go; that is all you need. And then he goes on in Chapter 4: Well, what if they do not believe me when I say the Lord appeared to me? So, God gives him this curious sign. He takes the staff that Moses is carrying – just a wooden stick that he has been prodding his sheep with – and God gives him a couple of what look like magic tricks to play with. It turns into a serpent, and then he picks it up and it turns back into a staff. He puts his hand in his cloak and it comes out white and he puts it back and it is...

Later in the story – I do not know if we will address this; we probably will when we talk about the encounter with Pharaoh – but Pharaoh's magicians mimic those tricks; it is a very curious detail.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I think if God told me to throw a stick on the ground and it turned into a snake and then went back to a stick when I picked it up, or had me put my hand in my coat and pull it out full of leprosy, I think I would be pretty impressed. I would say: That will work; but, not for Moses. He responds – here we are now in Exodus Chapter 4, and God says do these signs; but Moses still is not done. So, now we are in Exodus 4:10:

Moses said to the Lord, "Pardon your servant, Lord, but I have never been eloquent. Neither in the past, nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue." ¹¹And the Lord said to him, "Who gave human being's their mouths? Who makes them deaf or mute? Who gives them sight or makes them blind? Is it not I, the Lord? ¹²Now go; I will help you speak and teach you what you are to say." ¹³But Moses said, "Pardon your servant, Lord; please send someone else."

Moses is relentless here. He is basically having to tick through he every weakness and God is still not letting him off the hook. He finally goes for broke and says what he meant to say the first time: I ain't going. Send somebody else. Period!

DAVE BAST

Choose somebody else. The world's most reluctant father of his country, you might call him. And it begins, finally, to just get to be too much, and at that point we read in the text that the anger of the Lord burned against Moses. Now God has lost patience. Enough is enough, I am kind of ticked off now, Moses. Just go, will you? But he does respond once more to Moses' profession of weakness and inability. Moses says: I am not very good at talking, and God say: Well, your brother Aaron is. I am going to send him with you. You get to be a team. You do not have to go alone. I am going to give you a sidekick – a helper – you will go together. You tell Aaron what to say and he will say it and you will be the head, but he will be the chief negotiator; and that is actually how it worked out.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I love this picture of God because... You know, the great Jewish scholar, Abraham Heschel, always said that the one thing you must say about the God of Israel is he is never finally an angry God. Anger is not the core characteristic of God like it is of some Greek gods – Zeus is just angry. God is never fundamentally angry; he is always fundamentally loving, and you see that here. So, in Exodus 4:14 we are told the Lord's anger burned against Moses, and you think: Oh, boy; that is it. Moses is going to be on fire in a second!

DAVE BAST

Right; he'll be toast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But instead, the first thing God says is: Oh, all right. Aaron can go with you. So, he is angry, but the compassion rules the day, as it always does with our God. He is really ticked off now. Moses will not relent, and so God is ticked; but he still gives in to him and says: Fine. You are right. You do not speak well; Aaron does. That is who we will work with; now go. And he does finally go, of course. But that combination of yes, God is angry, but the love still is what rules his actions. I love that portrait.

DAVE BAST

One of the Puritans said: Mercy is his darling attribute. That is the bottom line with God. Jesus looked out at the crowds and had compassion on them, the New Testament tells us. It was not anger first and foremost at these lost people, but compassion.

You know, Scott, I have a good friend and colleague in ministry – I think I can use his name on the air – his name is Stephen Paul, and he has been the Words of Hope director in India for many years now. He stepped into that role – I was visiting India sometime in the late '90s, and I was asked to do a devotional at this place, and I spoke on Exodus 3 and the call of Moses, and Stephen, who was coasting toward retirement at the time and was actually only a volunteer doing a Hindi program for us, came up to me afterwards and he said, “When you talked about Moses being 80 years old and finally responding to God’s call despite all of his objections, I felt that God was calling me into serving full time,” and he did; he became the leader of our ministry in his late 50s. It just has always reminded me that we are in this story, too. That really, the question comes to us: How will you respond to God’s invitation to do something for him? Something big; something small; the question is not whether we are qualified or not; the question is will we finally give up our last objection and say yes?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, because the great, great promise of this text is our strength comes from the fact that the Lord is with us, and that is good news always.

DAVE BAST

Well, thanks for joining our *Groundwork* conversation. We are your hosts, Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and we would like to know how we can help you continue digging deeper into scripture. Visit groundworkonline.com to tell us what topics or passages you would like to dig into next on *Groundwork*.

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