

Reformation Fellowship Notes • November 15, 2015
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Handout #6
Exodus 3:1-22

I. Introduction

- A. Moses was raised as the son of the daughter of Pharaoh.
 - 1. But he identified with his Hebrew kinsman.
 - 2. He wanted to use his privileged position to help his tormented people.
 - 3. He ended up killing an Egyptian foreman for abusing an Israelite.
 - 4. Then he broke up a quarrel between two Hebrews.
 - a) His interference was rejected by the one who was in the wrong.
 - (1) “Who made you a prince or a judge over us?”
 - (a) Rebellious spirit against authority
 - (2) “Are you intending to kill me, as you killed the Egyptian?”
 - (a) Abiding distrust
 - 5. Moses had to flee to Midian.
 - a) Defended the daughters of a priest of Midian against bullying
 - b) Joined their household
 - c) Married one of Jethro’s daughters
 - 6. God finally takes notice of the suffering of the Israelites.
- B. Question from last week: Reuel means “friend of God.”
 - 1. “El,” or the longer form “Elohim,” means “God.”
 - a) But this name is used with respect to other gods.
 - (1) “YHWH,” on the other hand, refers only to God.
 - 2. We will see Reuel again in Exodus 18.

II. Exodus 3:1-9

- A. What did Moses know about God before chapter 3?
 - 1. He knows of the existence of YHWH and at least some of the history of Israel.
 - a) Learned from his mother?
 - b) God refers to himself as the God of the patriarchs.
 - (1) This presumably has content.
 - (2) He knows about the promises.
 - (i) This is behind his desire to be the savior of Israel.
 - 2. He may have learned more from Reuel.
 - a) But we don’t know what he learned, if anything.
- B. Moses’ view of God must have been influenced by what happened to him.
 - 1. Moses was raised as a member of the Egyptian elite and thought he was going to “save” Israel.
 - 2. Moses experienced a dramatic fall.

- a) He has been reduced to a shepherd.
 - (1) Given his cultural background, this would have been horrible.
 - (a) Egyptians hated shepherds.
 - (b) That is why Joseph could not eat with them (Genesis 43:32; 47:1-6).
 - (c) He doesn't even have his own flock.
 - (i) He is herding his father-in-law's sheep.
 - (ii) God did not bless him with abundance like patriarchs.
 - (d) This had to have been a very humbling experience.
 - (i) He has fallen from privileged member of Egyptian elite and "savior of Israel" to poor menial laborer.
3. But he has distanced himself from his people.
- a) He could be either embittered or confused.
 - b) I will lay out some of the reasons why I think this is the case as we proceed.
 - c) He is probably also puzzled as to what God did with respect to him.
- C. Moses is ranging pretty far west.
- 1. Apparently in the Sinai
 - 2. Came to Mount Horeb
 - 3. Mount Horeb appears to be a range of mountains.
 - a) Of which Sinai is a single peak
 - b) Mountain of God—No mention of it until now.
 - (1) Probably called this after the giving of the law
 - (2) The only thing that makes it special is God's presence.
 - 4. Why is a mountain out in the middle of the desert designated to be God's?
 - a) In Mesopotamia, gods were thought to dwell on mountains.
 - b) Desert is where God can be found (?)
 - (1) Horeb means "wasteland."
 - (2) God can be found in lifeless places, where survival is in question.
- D. God manifested himself as a burning bush.
- 1. God initiates this interaction.
 - a) No indication that Moses had called for this interaction.
 - b) We can only know God to the extent he reveals himself to us.
 - 2. God appears in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush.
 - a) *Angelos*—manifestation
 - (1) Jack [Crabtree] has used this phenomenon as his prototype manifestation of God for understanding the book of Hebrews.
 - b) The fire alone was not that amazing.
 - (1) Bush burned, but did not burn up.
 - c) Notice that the burning bush does not play any other role in the rest of the account; it just gets Moses' attention.
 - 3. Why would God appear in the form of a fire?
 - a) God could have used other things to attract Moses' attention:
 - (1) hovering rock, talking bird.

- b) Many reasons have been posited:
 - (1) Just a point of interest;
 - (2) Symbolic of Jesus who came and died for our sins.
- c) What makes the most sense in context?
 - (1) God is beginning to make himself known to Moses.
 - (a) Not an explanation, but a demonstration
 - (i) The whole book [of Exodus] is a demonstration of who God is.
 - (2) The first thing he wants Moses to know is that he is a burning fire.
 - (a) Eternal
 - (i) Requires no fuel
 - (b) A pure and purifying God
 - (i) That which is impure is destroyed.
 - (ii) That which is pure is made purer.

“Most commentators see in the fire that is self-sufficient, self-perpetuating, and wholly unaffected by its environment, a symbol of the transcendent, awesome, and unapproachable Divine Presence.” (Sarna, p. 41)

- (3) God is holy.
 - (a) More about this later
 - d) God is often associated with fire:
 - (1) Fire that passed between the pieces when God made a covenant with Abraham;
 - (2) Pillar of fire;
 - (3) Fire on Mount Sinai.
 - e) Why a bush?
 - (1) “*Seneh*” sounds like “Sinai”
 - (a) Could be a play on words, or a way of associating the two
- E. Moses’ curiosity is piqued.
- 1. He could have had different responses.
 - a) He could have fled in fear.
 - b) He could have ignored it.
 - 2. He wants to see the amazing sight.
 - a) A fire that does not burn up
 - b) Typically a small dry bush would be consumed in an instant.
- F. God addresses Moses when he sees him come near.
- 1. God waits until Moses responds to the bush.
 - a) God had acted first by creating the fire in a bush.
 - b) But then he waited for Moses to respond.
 - c) Then God spoke to Moses.
- G. God calls Moses by name.
- 1. This phenomenon is personal (it is God) and knows Moses as a person.

- a) Says Moses' name two times—a divine calling
 - b) The account proceeds for another two chapters with no mention of the bush or the fire.
 - c) We just have the voice.
2. The voice becomes increasingly compassionate.
 3. This is a call to be a prophet.
 - a) Initial resistance
 - b) The prophetic calling is an arduous calling.
 - (1) Those called usually resist.
- H. Moses responds with a willingness.
1. "Here I am" like "Yes, sir." (But cf. Stuart p. 114, footnote 23)
 2. Willing and able to do what is asked
- I. Signs of respect for that which is holy:
1. Keep at a distance.
 2. Take off shoes.
 - a) In the presence of a king
 - b) Priests serving in temple
 3. Holy ground
 - a) Only time in OT a place is called "holy" (Stuart, p. 115)
 - b) Ground is holy because God is present.
 - (1) It is not holy later.
 4. These conditions are repeated when the Israelites appear at Sinai.
- J. God identifies himself as the God of:
1. Moses' father, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
 - a) They are separated out in this context, for emphasis.
 2. As recent as your father, as far back as Abraham, and every individual in between
 - a) I have given them promises, and I am committed to those promises.
 - (1) This is a prelude to announcing what God is doing to free those who are heirs to those promises.
 - (2) Jesus uses this verse to prove life after death.
 - (a) Matthew 22:32
 - (b) God's promises to each of the patriarchs was not fulfilled in their lifetimes; therefore, there must be life after death.
 3. More about this later
- K. Moses hid his face.
1. He was not instructed to do this.
 - a) Natural response
 2. To be in the presence of the one true God is truly fear-inducing.

- L. God explains why he has appeared to Moses (chiastic, inclusio).
 - 1. He has seen—affliction (carefully watched) .
 - a) My people
 - 2. He has heard—cries.
 - 3. So he has come down—to deliver.
 - a) Bring them up to good land
 - (1) Spacious, productive
 - (2) Milk and honey
 - (a) Honey is probably date syrup.
 - (b) Standard expression of abundance for a pastoral culture.
 - (c) God did not promise this to the patriarchs.
 - (d) The Israelites are in a place of plenty [in Egypt].
 - (e) They need to be persuaded to leave.
 - (3) Where Canaanites, etc., live
 - (a) This land supports several peoples (so it is productive).
 - (b) This hides a challenge (those people will have to be displaced).
 - 4. Behold the cry (he has heard).
 - a) Very strong word

“Pervaded by moral outrage and soul-stirring passion, it denotes the anguished cry of the oppressed, the agonized plea of the helpless victim.” (Sarna, p. 15)

- 5. He has seen the affliction.
- 6. Implication—God is ready to act.

III. Exodus 3:10-15

- A. Moses is given his mission.
 - 1. God will send Moses to Pharaoh.
 - a) God is going to work through a person rather than act directly.
 - 2. Moses will bring God’s people out of Egypt.
- B. Moses objects.
 - 1. Serious objection or just custom?
 - a) Serious objection—that becomes clear later.
 - 2. His first concern is that he is not up to the task—“Who am I?”
 - a) He has lost his confidence and desire.
 - 3. This is what he had wanted to do forty years earlier.
 - a) He no longer feels competent to do it.
 - (1) He is no longer in the palace.
 - (a) Earlier he was well placed, now he is not.
 - (2) He is out of touch.
 - (a) Solzhenitsyn had no voice when out of Russia.
 - (b) Israelites won’t accept him as one of them.
 - (3) He is unworthy to perform either task:

- (a) Appear before Pharaoh;
 - (b) Lead the people out.
- C. God assures Moses that he will be with him.
- 1. God will give a sign.
 - a) Some have argued that the burning bush is the sign.
 - (1) This appears to be grammatically unlikely.
 - b) Weird sign
 - (1) You (plural) shall worship (serve) God at this mountain.
 - (a) This sign is only helpful after the fact.
 - (i) In a few months when he arrives with his people to Sinai, Moses will be able to look back on what has happened and see that it all went down as God had planned.
 - (2) God's signs don't instill faith, they reinforce the faith of the faithful.
 - (a) Moses will be reassured that YHWH is the one who brought this about.
 - (i) No other god did it.
 - (ii) Moses didn't do it.
 - 2. Moses is mostly concerned about the Israelites.
 - a) God said he would send Moses to the Pharaoh.
 - b) But Moses knows he will need to get the support of the Israelites.
 - (1) This is what he fears.
 - (2) All of his concerns have to do with the Israelites.
 - (a) None of his concerns have to do with Pharaoh.
- D. Moses wants to know who he should tell the Israelites this God is.
- 1. He continues to worry about how he will get this people's cooperation.
 - a) I will tell them the God of *their* (not "our") fathers sent me.
 - b) They will ask for your name.
 - (1) Name is not so much identity as area of competence.
 - (a) god of fertility, god of thunder, sun god, etc.

"The meaning of an object's name indicates its nature and determines its characteristics."
(Cassuto, p. 37)

- c) What do I say?
- E. God gives his name.
- 1. "I am who I am."
 - 2. The God of your fathers has sent me to you.
 - a) This is more strictly identity.
 - 3. This is my name forever.
 - 4. Comments:
 - a) Up till now the author has only used "Elohim" to refer to God.
 - b) "YHWH" may have been largely forgotten.
 - (1) Sons of Israel seem to have been largely assimilated culturally (but not socially).

- c) But Moses' mother's name contains this name (Jochebed)
 - (1) Earlier, God was mostly known as El Shaddai (Exodus 6:2-3)
 - d) We saw that the midwives feared God.
 - (1) We don't know what they knew about God.
5. Two main interpretive options for the name:
- a) Cassuto

“The sense is: It is I who am with My creatures (compare B. Berakhoth 9b) in their hour of trouble and need—as I have already declared to you: ‘But I will be with you’ (v. 12)—to help them and save them. And I am who I am, always, and just as I am with you, so am I with all the children of Israel who are enslaved, and with everyone who is in need of My help, both now and in the future. There is also implicit in this interpretation the thought of implementing the promises: I am who I am always, ever alike, and consequently I am true to My word and fulfill it (compare Mekhilta of Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai on Exod. vi 2). (Cassuto, p. 38)

- b) Stuart

“The name should thus be understood as referring to Yahweh's being the creator and sustainer of all that exists and thus the Lord of both creation and history, all that is and all that is happening—a God active and present in historical affairs.” (Stuart, p.121)

- c) My offering:
 - (1) YHWH is the “God of Existence.”
 - (a) God is uniquely self-existent.
 - (b) And creator of all that is
 - (i) Therefore he can carry out his promises.
 - (2) Matches the burning bush.
 - d) Notes:
 - (1) Both include unchangeability.
 - (2) John seems to match this understanding.
 - (3) Moses uses this name exclusively when he uses direct speech.
6. This is God's name forever.

IV. Exodus 3:16-22

- A. Talk to the elders.
 - 1. Moses needed to establish some legitimacy.
 - 2. These are responsible people, not just the rabble.
- B. Say:
 - 1. God is concerned about (visiting) you.

“... his own overt mention of his being *aware* automatically implies additionally his determination to *act*.” (Stuart, p. 123)

- a) Joseph had said God would be watching (visiting). (Genesis 50:24)

“And Joseph said to his brothers, ‘I am about to die, but God will surely take care of (visit) you, and bring you up from this land to the land which He promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob.’”

2. God will bring you out of Egypt.
3. He will take you to Canaan.
- C. The elders will listen to you.
 1. They will go with you to see Pharaoh.
- D. You will speak to the Pharaoh.
 1. YHWH has met with us.
 - a) He unexpectedly appeared to us.
 2. Let us go into the desert to sacrifice to God.
 - a) It would be abomination to sacrifice to YHWH on Egyptian soil (Exodus 8:26).
 - b) So they need to go a distance into the wilderness.
 - (1) 3 days journey
 3. This is just the initial request.
 - a) Later requests will be more extreme.
 - b) Pharaoh even rejects the simplest request.
- E. He will not permit you to go.
 - a) He will only let you go under compulsion.
- F. God will strike Egypt with miracles.
- G. God will grant you favor in sight of Egyptians.
- H. You will ask for things before you leave.
 1. Your women will ask their neighbors and masters for jewelry.
 - a) Put it on your sons and daughters.
 - (1) How the children will fare becomes an issue later.
 2. “Thus you will plunder the Egyptians.”
 - a) But it is really reparations.
 3. Fulfills Genesis 15:13-14:

“And God said to Abram, ‘Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve; and afterward they will come out with many possessions.’”

4. This is worked into later law (Deuteronomy 15:12-15):

“If your kinsman, a Hebrew man or woman, is sold to you, then he shall serve you six years, but in the seventh year you shall set him free. And when you set him free, you shall not send him away empty-handed. You shall furnish him liberally from your flock and from your wine vat; you shall give to him as the Lord your God has blessed you. And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you; therefore I command you this today.”

V. Conclusion

A. What is holiness?

1. Definition from Colin Brown:

“The decisive element in the OT concept of the holy, in contrast to the profane, is not so much the awesome divine power. Rather, through certain places, objects or occasions men enter into relatively direct contact with the divine power which can be awesome; if men treat it in a profane way.” (Colin Brown, DNTT, vol. 2, p. 224)

2. Like a cartoonist making contact in his cartoon with a cartoon character

a) There are two main differences between the animator and the character:

(1) The character is absolutely dependent on the animator, and the animator is in no way dependent on the character.

(a) There is therefore a power disparity, but it is far more than a little power vs. a lot of power.

3. The character of God is also a factor.

a) God is purely good.

(1) He hates any wickedness; will not tolerate wickedness.

(2) Human beings are not purely good.

“Holiness endangers the sinner because the holiness of the Lord is not a passive attribute but an active force, embracing all that conforms to it (Ps. 24:3-4) and destroying all that offends (1 Sam. 6:19-20). The trepidation humans feel before the Lord is not, therefore, the trembling of the lowly before the Almighty or the created before the Creator, but the fear of sinners endangered by holiness (Isa. 6:3-5). The biblical symbol of this perilous force of holiness is fire, and it pervades the book of Exodus. In particular, fire is the bracket (or ‘inclusio’) which provides a framework around the central narrative of Exodus. It starts with the fire in the bush (3:2) and ends with the fire on the mountain (19:18), and in each case the fire is linked with the separateness of the divine and the exclusion of the human as endangered.” (Motyer, p. 53-54)

“The underlying concept of holiness presupposed in these two accounts represents a radical break with accepted pagan notions. In the world of paganism, the holy is such by virtue of the intrinsic “natural” mysterious quality of the object of place that is so revered. In Israelite monotheism, with its fundamental insistence on a God who is outside of and wholly apart from nature, who created nature and who is sovereign over it, there is no room for any possibility of an independent, immutable and inherent holiness. That which is holy, be it temporal or spatial, possesses that quality solely by divine will.” (Sarna, p. 40)

4. “Compassionate otherness”?

B. God of the living:

1. God made promises to the patriarchs as individuals, not as a people group.

2. Those patriarchs have not received those promises.

3. There must be life after death.

C. Why in the desert?

1. God is most apparent in desert times and experiences.