



### 3. What's in a Name? (Exodus 2:15 – 3:22)

Last week we saw how Moses, having been brought up in all the privileges of an Egyptian prince, even though he was one of an oppressed people, blows all that and any hope that he may have had to help his people from the inside as it were. His murder of the Egyptian taskmaster and then the obvious rejection of the Israelites who just saw him as another dodgy Egyptian, led to his being a fugitive in Midian.

He went from privilege to penniless outcast. But he was the subject of the grace of God who changes minuses to pluses. But just as it took 40 years for the rise and fall of Moses, it took another 40 years for him to rise out of obscurity and back into Egypt.

But it was not unpleasant obscurity. At the start of the passage he was an Egyptian who helped out the daughters of Reuel/Jethro and as a result he became part of the family! Actually in becoming part of Jethro's family he actually linked to his kith and kin again, as the Midianites were distant relatives (Midian was a son of Abraham). Like him, they were Semites and it seems that Jethro was a priest. This was his opportunity to learn the ways of his own people in the benefit of the relative freedom of Midian – which was located east of the Dead Sea) and to start learning the ways of God from Jethro.

This was the start of learning all the ways of God. In Egypt he learned the ways of the world and how Egyptians learned how to lead – by oppressing others. But in Midian he learned to lead as Semites did and how God desired he lead – by being a shepherd of the flocks of his father in law. His father's name Reuel means friend of God or shepherd of God.

And that was Moses life for 40 more years – a husband and father, doing a humble job – and then it's all change in Egypt again and the people start to cry out to God. That's interesting; in the 80 years they were oppressed, this is the first time they cried out to God. Amazing! How slow they were to call out to a God who would help them.

But before we are too amazed, just think how slow we are when it comes to calling on God when we're in trouble. Usually we are in deep when we call out aren't we? But our God is a God of promise – He remembers us and He remembered them – and He already had someone lined up for the job. What a gracious God we have!

The only problem was that "someone" – Moses – was happily ensconced in Midian. He wasn't the angry man who killed the Egyptian now. He is happy and settled in Midian with his family and it's his time for an eureka moment – an encounter with God and it's surprising how patient God is with him as he is levered into going back to Egypt to lead Israel.

if we want to do the work of God, we need to understand that God often asks us to leave our comfort zones and trust Him. Whether that's to bring people to Christ in Maidstone Road or go to Egypt, it's easy to stay put when we are happy with things as they are. But that wasn't Moses' destiny and it isn't ours too!

The encounter is in an interesting place. The GNB uses the word Sinai but other translations correctly use the Hebrew word, Horeb. Many commentators including the translators of the GNB equate Sinai and Horeb and so they've changed the word. It helps casual readers but may not be literally correct. It could well be that Horeb was used as a word to describe the greater area and Sinai a specific peak. What is significant is that it is referred to as the mountain of God. Was this a place Moses retreated to? Was he looking for God there? Was he spending time seeking God? Whatever, he got more than he bargained for.

So first out, Moses is given a burning bush to feast his eyes on – quite amazing, it was burning but it wasn't getting burnt. It's quite a wonderful picture of how God works actually. The fire of the Spirit

lights us up and God's light shines through us – but we are not consumed either even though God is a holy God and we aren't. We have a fearful God who graciously preserves us as He shows His awesomeness. And Moses got a feel of that as he comes in to look and God speaks to him to Take off His shoes as the ground he was standing on was holy.

So Moses gets over the first hurdle, takes his shoes off and has the privilege of communing with God who has revealed Himself in a tangible way – theophany. The passage starts off like this **2 There the angel of the LORD appeared to him as a flame coming from the middle of a bush. Moses saw that the bush was on fire but that it was not burning up.** But we see that as we go down, the conversation is with God Himself. Now that was amazing.

Now this is where the grace of God comes in. Here's Moses faced with the most awesome thing he's ever come across in his life. You'd think that he would have said yes to everything. It starts pretty good: **6 I am the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." So Moses covered his face, because he was afraid to look at God.**

It starts with the awesome God of promise but soon Moses is given the mission. He's given the mission and Moses immediately shies off it "I'm just a nobody, no-one's going to listen to me – particularly the Israelites". After all, no-one had when he was someone. He really was a nobody who clearly didn't really understand the ways of God. Although it wasn't an unrealistic thing to say in human terms – why should anyone listen to him?

Robert McAfee Brown (2001) *As with Moses, so with us: we like promises but we dislike demands e.g. "I call you to be my disciple." (Great!) "You may end up where I ended up, on a cross." (Aw!)*

Now this is where God is gracious because He perseveres with Moses. He gives to Moses a profound and privileged piece of information – His name. And here it is written in Exodus 3 as in deed it is written 5410 in the Bible – except we don't 100% know exactly how it is pronounced. It was a name so holy to Jews that they would not utter it. That was a pity because Hebrew is a consonantal language and the name appears as YHWH.

As a spoken language, people would have known where to sound the vowels. By the time Jews translated the OT into Greek in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century BC, they used the Greek word for Lord as a translation for YHWH. And that practice has continued to the present – look in tonight's passage and Lord is there because people are not 100% sure Yahweh should go in there so they follow the tradition. . Modern Jews use the alternative word Ha Shem (the Name).

Just for your information, as Hebrew went out of use completely, vowels got added to Hebrew texts to make it easier for scholars to study manuscripts. It was in the form of dots and dashes. Oh dear, nobody knew what vowels went with YHWH because the Jews never uttered the word. So people started to put the vowels for the Hebrew word for Lord, Adonai. To Jews it would indicate the convention that Lord was to be said. But Christians mixed the vowels up with the consonants to produce the name Jehovah, which it 100% incorrect. Shame for the Jehovah's Witnesses that one. Even their name misses the mark! Current scholarship favours YHWH being Yahweh for reasons we'll see in a moment.

So let me give you these few verses again, this time from the Word English Bible, which uses Yahweh as the name of God so you can see how it sounds without the mistranslation of Lord which most translations use: **13 Moses said to God, "Behold, when I come to the children of Israel, and tell them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you;' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' What should I tell them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM," and he said, "You shall tell the children of Israel this: "I AM has sent me to you." 15 God said moreover to Moses, "You shall tell the children of Israel this, 'Yahweh, 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, and this is my memorial to all generations. 16 Go, and gather the elders of Israel together, and tell them, 'Yahweh, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, "I have surely visited you, and seen that which is done to you in Egypt;**

This passage actually gives us the clue that YHWH means Yahweh because it seems to be derived from the Hebrew word for to be. So when God uses I AM and I AM WHO I AM; these words define the Yahweh nicely which a shortening of the longer phrase. And it shows that God's name is a verb, not a noun for Hebrew proper names. People's names, idol's names, animal's names are almost always nouns. God's name is a verb. That is totally unique as against the names of the gods of men. He's

defined by what He does – because in this world and in this universe He does the doing as Creator and Sustainer because He's real and other gods aren't. And in Exodus God becomes defined by what He did: *Exodus 20: 2 "I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.* That's one of the most important statements about God to Jews. To them Yahweh is defined by what He has done for them – and incidentally is a statement of grace.

And here were a people in Egypt crying out to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They did not know His name, they understood little no doubt. And someone was going to come and reveal Him to them. The name of God was new to Moses, but he at least had an experience of the power and presence of God and just that testimony would have given a desperate people hope and as we'll find out in the next chapter, the name of God was backed up with displays of power.

Unlike Moses we are in a much clearer position. We have the Holy Spirit in our lives, and we don't use the name Yahweh, but instead we use the name Jesus, because that's the name of authority we have been given as the people of God in Christ.

It brings us back to what we looked at this morning. We may have the Holy Spirit in our lives and we may have the name of authority but what on earth are we doing with them. The Holy Spirit is awesome in power, He's wise in guidance and counsel and He opens us to the mind and will of God – and what do we do with Him – we push Him to one side and do our own thing!

Even worse, we use the name of Jesus in our prayers casually. That name Jesus has immense power because it represents the authority of God. If something is really done in the name of Jesus, then it's done! I can understand why the Jews wouldn't use the name of God, because to invoke it casually was an insult to a holy God and they never wanted to sin inadvertently. But they missed out on a name that has power and authority if they were prepared to act in it. But by the time of Jesus, that name fell out of use. But now there is another name of authority – Jesus - and God has placed everything under Him.

I'm not saying don't use it, but think hard before you invoke it in prayer because it is the name in which things are done in the spiritual realm. And when we take the name of Jesus seriously in prayer – then things do get done. Let me be as practical as I can be here because I'm aware this has to make the trip from our heads to our hearts. At Horeb/Sinai Moses was shepherding and possibly seeking the presence of God. He certainly got his encounter with God; his Eureka moment. But God gave Him a name under which he and His people could operate. It was a holy name; a name that should not be used lightly but which would be used in authority to bring all sorts of judgement down on the Egyptians who had for nearly a century brought nothing but misery on Israel. It was a powerful name.

So how does our powerful name, Jesus, work? For Moses it started in the presence of God. For us it is inevitably the same. As we seek His presence we'll find ourselves connecting with the Spirit of God. It's easy to get ourselves on to holy ground – the holy Spirit is in us. We must just metaphorically take our shoes off and submit to Him. As we listen to the voice of God, we'll know how to use the name of Jesus authoritatively. Why do you think I want us to go deeper into prayer as a fellowship. Because things happen when we get to grips with God and you'll find the name of Jesus becomes even more precious to you.

So things happen: next week we'll see what happened next.