

SEEN AND HEARD

Exodus 2:23-25, 3:7-15

Sometimes (maybe most of the time) we find ourselves wondering, how did I get into this situation? If it is a bad situation, then we try to figure out what we did that caused us to be where we are so that we can avoid making the same mistake in the future. If it is a good situation, we probably don't think about it at all. We can learn from historical examples such as what the descendants of Abraham experienced since the time God selected him to have a significant role in how God was going to restore humanity to a right relationship with God.

In the last part of the account of God's interaction with people recorded in Genesis and the beginning of the Exodus account, we see that a chosen group of Abraham's descendants was living in Egypt and they were doing very well. Then things deteriorated and they found themselves in an extremely bad situation of being enslaved by the Egyptians. All the original family of Jacob who had relocated to Egypt had died and their children and grandchildren did not know much about the land of Canaan except what had been passed on in stories from their parents. They could not point to any particular thing they did that led to the problem of being enslaved. They were suffering because of the circumstances and the decisions and choices of others. God was aware of what was happening and was allowing it to happen for a purpose. At the right time, God chose to reveal His presence in the situation and to initiate actions that would lead to relief of their suffering or setting them free from the circumstances.

Heard – 2:23-25

²³ Now it came about in *the course of* those many days that the king of Egypt died. And the sons of Israel sighed because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry for help because of *their* bondage rose up to God. ²⁴ So God heard their groaning; and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. ²⁵ God saw the sons of Israel, and God took notice *of them*. Exodus 2:23-25 (NASB95)

We know the account of how things had changed from the time of Joseph to the time of the birth of Moses. Years had passed and the Israelite population was growing rapidly. The Egyptians were threatened by this and so created a number of government jobs and made them work as slaves to build cities. That did not slow down the population explosion, so Egypt instituted their version of “planned parenthood” or eugenics which was to kill all the new born male babies born to the Israelites. It was during this time that Moses was born and the efforts of his parents to save his life resulted in Moses being put in “foster care” and was raised by an Egyptian princess.

As a result of the environment in which he was raised, Moses did not have the mindset of a slave. He had the mindset of a person of privilege or someone with freedom of choice. If you consider the plight of a typical Hebrew child born during this time when everyone they knew worked for the government, they would grow up thinking that was just the way things were. Their expectations would be greatly diminished and they would likely turn out to be enslaved not only by the Egyptians but also enslaved by their own thinking or mind set.

We learn of the character of Moses when he interjecting himself in the situation of the abuse of a Hebrew slave by an Egyptian. He attempted to deliver his kinsman from the oppression of the Egyptian. As it turned out, this was his calling in life, yet at the time he did not realize he was called of God to do this. His timing was premature and, in his compassion, he was running ahead of God. This resulted in a problem in which he had to flee for his life. On the other hand, had he not done this, then he would have been ill-prepared to lead the Israelites through the wilderness.

After Moses left Egypt, things didn't get any better for the Children of Israel. The people were discouraged and near despair because of the bondage. They could see no hope and they groaned under their burden. They were in desperate need of help and would be ready to leave Egypt. Before this time, they may have been reluctant to go.

The wording of the verses concluding chapter two would cause us to think that God had suddenly become aware of the plight of the Israelites. We know that is not the case since God had told Abraham about this condition some 400 years earlier. We also see that God had orchestrated the necessary training that Moses needed to be the person who could lead these people out of Egypt. The wording here is really telling us that the time had come for the deliverance to take place.

God had promised the Land of Canaan to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but it took more than 400 years for everything to come together. At least two things had to happen: the iniquity of the Amorites had to reach its full measure (Gen 15:16) and the Israelites had to increase in numbers in order to be able to be proper stewards of the land God was going to give them.

When the time was right, God called Moses to start the next phase of the process God had initiated when He called Abram centuries before. Part of the timing being "right" involved the death of the Pharaoh who had been king when Moses left Egypt. Moses would have been reluctant to go back to Egypt if there was someone in power who remembered that he had killed an Egyptian.

We are familiar with the burning bush account and we pick up the story of what God told Moses regarding his (Moses') role in what was to develop.

Called – 3:7-10

⁷The LORD said, "I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings. ⁸"So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite. ⁹"Now, behold, the cry of the sons of Israel has come to Me; furthermore, I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians are oppressing them. ¹⁰"Therefore, come now, and I will send you to Pharaoh, so that you may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt." Exodus 3:7-10 (NASB95)

Did you ever think that God didn't know nor care what was happening in your life? The Israelites must have felt abandoned; however, God was watching and waiting for the right time. As previously mentioned, several things had to happen before the promise to make them a great nation could be fulfilled. The first thing was related to the wickedness of the people of Canaan. The second factor in the timing was that a small group of people could not successfully occupy the land of Canaan and manage all the resources that had been developed. They had to increase in number and that took many years for the population to increase that much. The third consideration was that the situation in Egypt needed to become so intolerable so that the people of God would be willing to leave Egypt and go to the promised land. People are reluctant to change and all of that generation of Israelites had never seen the promised land. If things were going well as it had been when Joseph was still living, then why would they want to leave? The lesson for us is to realize that many times our prayers can't be answer because certain things must happen and conditions have to be right before God can or will act on our behalf.

The final thing that needed to change was that the person chosen to lead the Israelites out of Egypt had to come to the point that he would not rely on himself for wisdom and strength but would look only to God for such abilities. Moses was at such a point in his life after having spent the past forty years of his life as a shepherd of sheep instead of being a prince in the

government of a powerful nation. The first forty years of Moses' life produced a person who was confident and impetuous and would take matters into his own hands even to the point of killing another person. The second forty years of his life had brought about a transformation that caused Moses to question his own ability and to become humble rather than arrogant.

Promised – 3:11-12

¹¹ But Moses said to God, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?" ¹² And He said, "Certainly I will be with you, and this shall be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain." Exodus 3:11-12

When God calls, what should our response be? I'm sure that it would please God for us to be as Isaiah was and to say, "Here am I, send me." Very few of us do that. We are more like Moses who realized his lack of ability and looked for any excuse to avoid the call of God. But God would not accept Moses' excuses. God heard Moses as he expressed his concern of not being capable to do the task that God had given him. Moses' lack of ability would be taken care of by the presence of God in his life. The bottom line was that God was not going to take "No" for an answer. Moses was going to do what God called him to do. We can look back on his life and see that God had spent 80 years preparing Moses for the job.

God had already started the work of delivering the Children of Israel from bondage in Egypt so He could take them to the land of Canaan that He promised to give to Abraham and his descendants. He allowed conditions to get worse so the people would not want to stay in Egypt. In a spiritual sense, Egypt is the sinful condition in which a person lives before salvation. Unless the situation gets really bad, most people will not want to leave that life and make a major adjustment in their lifestyle to walk with God. This is why crises in people's lives are good opportunities to confront them with the gospel message. God had not only prepared the Israelites to want to leave, but He also had prepared Moses for the task of confronting Pharaoh and leading the Israelites out of their bondage.

God initiated the encounter with Moses at the burning bush and issued an invitation (it was actually a command) for Moses to be a part of what God was already doing. He spoke to Moses from the burning bush and Moses was forced into a crisis of decision. To decide to follow God would require a major adjustment in his life.

Moses may have been looking for an excuse to avoid this assignment that God had for him. He realized how insignificant he had become and how little influence he would have in confronting a king or pharaoh. When we think that we can do something rather than looking to God, then we are not in position to be useful to Him. When we realize that we can do nothing without God but that through Him we can do all things, then we are at the point of service.

Revealed – 3:13-15

¹³ Then Moses said to God, "Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you.' Now they may say to me, 'What is His name?' What shall I say to them?" ¹⁴ God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM"; and He said, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.' " ¹⁵ God, furthermore, said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, '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, and this is My memorial-name to all generations. Exodus 3:13-15 (NASB95)

Why should the Israelites follow this man whom they had not seen for forty years? What was the basis for his authority? These are some of the practical questions swirling through Moses' mind. The way he put the question to God was, "In Whose name am I acting or coming to these people?" God's answer to Moses was "Tell them that My name is I AM THAT I AM."

In order to understand the meaning of this group of verses, it is essential to start with the

concept of the word “name” and what it (the concept as well as the name itself) means. To most people, a name is nothing more than a title or label that identifies a person or an object. However, we use the word “name” to mean other things such as ideas or characteristics and reputations. For example, we might notice a certain person and can state something such as that man’s name is Sam – which is a label. Then the person to whom we are talking could ask, “Does Sam have a good name?” – which would be related to Sam’s reputation. This clearly represents two different concepts of the word “name.”

In the conversation Moses was having with God, he stated that he intended to go to the Israelites who were enslaved by Egypt and state “The God of your fathers has sent me to you.” The word Moses used that has been translated as God is “elohim” which basically means “a divine supernatural being.” There was no name (such as Sam or John) associated with the divine supernatural being who was worshiped by Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. So, the expression “God of your fathers” would be akin to a label that was referencing a specific divine supernatural being.

The people of Israel had been living in Egypt for more than a hundred years and they were exposed to the gods (the elohim) of Egypt and, apparently, these gods had names such as Ra, Isis, Atum and many (at least twenty) more. So, it would have been a natural question for them to ask what was the name of the “God of their fathers” since they did not know His name. (It may be that they would try to associate the “God of their fathers” with one of the Egyptian gods.) Moses did not know any such name for the Most High God either.

Many who read this passage will tell us that God told Moses that His “name” is YWYH; however, if we read the message carefully, God used YWYH simply to describe the essence of His being as opposed to YWYH being a name such as Sam or John or Ra, or Jupiter.

The meaning of “I AM THAT I AM” tells us that God Most High is unchangeable. The essence of the attributes of God in the past and in the future is the same as right now in the present. It also means that the Most High God is the essence of all being in that “all that exists was created and is dependent upon Him” and “He is not dependent on anything that He has created.” He transcends all that He has created and at the same time He is in all that He created. Theologians state this dualism by saying that God is transcendent and immanent.

We can know that God is the God of the NOW. He WAS and He WILL BE; however, the most important thing for us to realize in our present situation is that He IS. And His purposes will be fulfilled. God promised Moses that He would see to it that the work to which Moses was assigned or called to carry out would be done, in spite of the opposition of Pharaoh.

We see validation of the above interpretation in verse fifteen. God told Moses to tell the people of Israel that He had sent Moses. God referred to (named) Himself in two different ways. The first was YWYH (translated in most texts as the LORD) which is His “forever” (unchanging) character (name). He also referred to Himself as the “God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” which He said was His “memorial name” which was a reference to relationships that had been. This is the name used by people in the generations of the Israelites leading up to this time in their history to label (name) the Most High God. This label would continue to be used in future generations; however, it would be gradually replaced by another label that referred to the Most High God as the “God who delivered Israel from Egyptian slavery.” In the distant future, God’s memorial name would transition to “God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” While there are many verses in the Old Testament that refer to the Most High God as our Father and many verses that refer to us as His children, the general acceptance of this “memorial” name was emphasized in the teachings of Jesus and later in the church.