

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Bible Student* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bible-student_01.php



"The Entrance of THY WORDS Giveth Light"

C O N T E N T S

THE FIVE "FAITHFUL SAYINGS"	145
THE TESTIMONY OF BIBLE PROPHECY ...	154
WORLD LEADERS IN THE FINAL CRISES	161
THE THEOPHANIES OF THE OLD TESTAMENT	166
NOTES ON HEBREWS	171
THE HEBREW PSALTER	178
HOW TO STUDY AND UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE	184
EXEGETICAL STUDY OF COLOSSIANS ...	190

THE THEOPHANIES OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

BY ALEX SOUTTER

IV. Moses at the Bush

The divine visitation described in Exod. 3 ranks among the greatest of the theophanies of Scripture. In this scene is found the call of Moses, and in Moses' call we witness the first of a series of divine acts that culminated in Israel's redemption from Egypt and their return to the land promised to their fathers. This happening thus marked the beginning of a new epoch, the birth of a chosen nation, and the advent of a unique theocracy. Such is the historical setting of this theophanic manifestation.

Horeb, here called the mountain of God (a reference by anticipation to a future period when the place was hallowed by the giving of the law), was the place of meeting. There Moses led the flock. The neighbourhood of Sinai was fertile and abounded in springs and the Bedawin are wont to resort thither during the heat of summer. Josephus describes it as "admirable for pasture, abounding in excellent grass". It is not easy to ascertain the relation of the names Horeb and Sinai. In Exodus, Horeb is only used twice—in this passage and in 17:6, at the striking of the rock. And in Deuteronomy Horeb is substituted for Sinai, the former being always used, the latter never, for the Mountain of the Law.

At the beginning of his sojourn in Midian, Moses met Jethro and later married Zipporah his daughter. His relationship with his father-in-law stands in striking contrast to that between Jacob and Laban. Jethro is called the priest of Midian and when we piece together the fragments of information, as recorded by the sacred writer (in this case Moses himself) we find in Jethro an interesting example of how the remnants of the primitive faith were in part held by certain individuals who did not belong to the stock of Abraham. Later on when Israel was led by Moses to Sinai, Jethro set out to meet his son-in-law, bringing with him Zipporah and the two children (Exo. 18). At their meeting, their joint devotions included the offering of a burnt offering by Jethro (not Aaron) and at the sacrificial feast that followed, Aaron and

the elders joined in. It is remarkable how, in these proceedings, Jethro is given prominence over Aaron. Of course, Moses' long years of contact with Jethro may have been God's way of teaching the latter more of the true way of approach to God.

And what of Moses and his stay in Midian? First, his life there was a life of contentment, despite obscurity, poverty, and (doubtless) a sense of frustration over the failure of his mission. Stephen, in Acts 7:25, refers to that mission, and of how Moses' brethren failed to understand the import of it. We know, of course, that Moses was in too big a hurry to begin his work of deliverance. He needed years of wilderness solitude, sheep-rearing and sheep-tending, before he could effectively lead Israel. Moreover, Moses was outwardly poor; yet richer by far than when in Egypt, for before he left that land he made the resolve that he would renounce Egypt's treasures and choose in their place the reproach of Christ, for the latter, he knew, would bring by far the greater gain.

The Divine Appearance described in the first six verses of chapter three arrested the man of God as he tended his sheep. He saw the thorn bush (Israel), the flame of fire (Egyptian trial—see Gen. 15:17); yet despite the fire, the bush was not being consumed. Why? The Lord was there to preserve it. Moses turned aside to see it and the Lord Who was at once the Cause and Centre of this divine phenomenon revealed His glory and uttered His word to His enquiring servant. The Angel of Jehovah Who appeared was we believe none other than the Lord Himself. Having already chosen the reproach of Christ (Heb. 11:26) Moses now is given to see Christ's glory and majesty. Calvin points out that it is not to be wondered at if Christ, the Eternal Word of God, of one Godhead and essence with the Father, assumed the name of the Angel, on the ground of His future mission as Messenger of the Father. The Lord's intense desire to meet with Moses finds expression in the double call "Moses, Moses" (cf. Gen. 22:11; Acts 9:4, etc.). And what of the lowly shepherd? What were his thoughts prior to this experience? Had he been meditating on the theme of Ps. 90? Many think he wrote this psalm about this time. In these verses we read first of how he fed and led his flock—cf. Ps. 78:22; then of what he saw (the fire) and what he said ("Here am I"); then of why it was he hid his face (for fear) and why he demurred (because of his own nothingness).

The Divine Call occupies verses 7 to 10. God's determinate counsel is now seen to operate with clear-cut precision. The hour had struck for action. No longer would Pharaoh be allowed to toy with spiritual values. It was not Egypt versus Israel, but Egypt versus God. Who knows how near we are today to a similar (but greater) enactment of divine justice—not on one nation merely, but on a defiant world? And in it all, how tender is the heart of God! "I know their sorrows," said the God of suffering Israel, and like a mother hastening to assuage the grief of her child God comes down to deliver. God yearns to save, to comfort, to redeem. And how? By means of a man. By means of one who has learned enough of his own nothingness to appreciate the magnitude of God's all-sufficiency. "Come now, therefore, and I will send thee" says Jehovah to Moses. The accuracy of the language here employed is to be noted. God had said, "I am come down . . . to bring them up *out of* that land, *unto* a good land" (v. 8). Now He says, "I will send thee . . . that thou mayest bring forth my people . . . *out of* Egypt." God was going to bring them *out of* Egypt *into* Canaan. He Who knew the end from the beginning foresaw Moses' part in this great work—he would lead Israel *out of* Egypt but not *into* Canaan. Therefore when God called His servant God specifically mentioned what his work would be—Moses would bring release to Israel from Egypt's bondage. Another (Joshua) would complete what Moses had begun, by leading the people into the good land of God's providing.

The Divine Name is then proclaimed in answer to the question of v. 13, "What is His Name?" "I AM THAT I AM"—Jehovah—is the One who sends Moses to Egypt. The name Jehovah was not new, but its significance in relation to God's people was new. It is found away back in Gen. 2:4, "the Lord God—Jehovah Elohim—made the earth". It is embedded in the word Moriah. Abraham used it in Gen. 22:14—"Jehovah Jireh". But now it is linked with the redemptive care of a Redeemer-God over His chosen people. Nor has the name Jehovah ceased to have its significance for us in this day of grace, for it is incorporated in the personal name of the Lord who saves us. "Thou shalt call His Name Jesus"—Jehovah-Saviour. Joshua, as we know, is the Hebrew form of the name Jesus, and Joshua means Jehovah the Saviour. In the book of Revelation (1:8) the name Jehovah is

again proclaimed. John heard it in this form: "The Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty". To Moses the broad significance of it all was that the One before whom he stood claimed for Himself Eternity. The One whose glory he beheld possessed unchanging being—the same yesterday and today and forever (Heb. 13:8). Regarding the name Jehovah, Calvin remarks that the verb is in the future tense, "I will be that I will be", but it is of the same force as the present, except that it designates the perpetual duration of time. "I am the Lord, (Jehovah) I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed" (Mal. 3:6).

Manifestations of Divine Power followed the declaration of the Name. This was needful. The Lord's commands are the Lord's enablings, and since a great task was being assigned to Moses, the Lord gave him this triple demonstration (chap. 4) of the power that would be at his disposal. Moses' rod became a serpent, then turned again to its original form. His hand became leprous, then was made completely whole. And the water of the river was turned to blood. The lessons behind these acts of power seem to be: (1) Devoted Service—"What is that in thine hand?" A rod! Then cast it down before the Lord at His command and lift it for Him, whatever your gift may be use it for Him as He directs. (2) the Sanctified Life—the leprous hand made whole and used wholly for God; and (3) the Warning of Coming Judgment—water turned to blood, betokening the stern message that Moses was given to deliver to a sinful king—and the responsibility also that rests upon us all to fulfil our duties as God's watchmen. God's signs were supernatural signs, for God's servant was about to do a work that was beyond the natural powers of man to accomplish. That should have been enough to reassure Moses, yet a justifiable sense of his own insufficiency grew into what virtually was a false humility. But in the end grace triumphed.

Several words in these chapters correspond closely to certain of Paul's questions in Romans 10, as follows:

Rom. 10:15. "Except they be sent?"
—"I will send thee." Ex. 3:10.

Rom. 10:15. "How shall they preach?"
—"Thus shalt thou say". Ex. 3:14.

Rom. 10:14. "How shall they hear?"
—"They shall hearken." Ex. 3:18.

Rom. 10:14. "How shall they believe?"
—"And the people believed". Ex. 4:31.

Moses' concern was over Israel's heart of unbelief. He should rather have been concerned about his own. He had said, "They will not believe" (4:1), when he ought to have asked himself, "Do I myself believe?" Moses was slow to take God at His word. That was why he hung back for so long. This age-long struggle still goes on. What God requires of His servants—a simple child-like trust—is what He so frequently is denied. Faith on the part of those to whom we preach is consequent on our willingness to trust fully the God who sends us with His message.

This presents a challenge to us all as the servants of Christ. God's constant desire concerning us is surely this, the strengthening of our faith's anchorage in God and in His Word. That is why trials are so often made to cross our pathway. It was in the darkest hour of his banishment that David "encouraged himself in the Lord his God" (1 Sam. 30:6)—an act of faith. Concerning Daniel the Spirit of God has set it on record that in the den of lions "he believed in his God" (Dan. 6:23)—an amazing attitude of faith. Paul stood on a battered ship, with wind and waves assailing him, and proclaimed his faith in these simple words—"I believe God" (Acts 27:25). One of the most trenchant passages to be found in the Psalms has to do with Israel's faith, or rather their lack of it because of which Divine anger came against Israel. Why? "They believed not in God and trusted not in His salvation". With cold scepticism they repelled the thought that God was able to feed them in the desert. (Ps. 78:12-22). How sad! Unbelief turned a nation of worshippers into a nation of sceptics. All of which gives point to the warning of Hebrews 3 that we must needs search ourselves lest in us also is found an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.