

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF EXODUS

Ron Roberts

Lesson 3

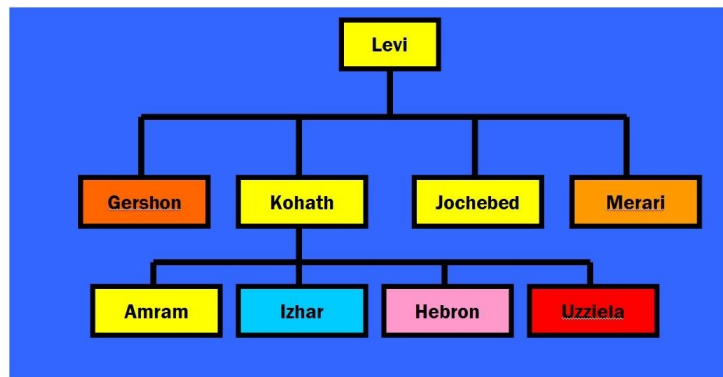
– Chapters Two & Three –

“And a man of the house of Levi went and took as wife a daughter of Levi. So the woman conceived and bore a son. And when she saw that he was a beautiful child, she hid him three months...” With these words, we raise the curtain on the story of Moses: born to Levite parents during a time when the Pharaoh subjected God’s people to hard labor and sought to kill all male Hebrew offspring. He will be nursed by his birth mother Jochebed, but will grow up the son of the Pharaoh’s daughter who will give him the name Moses because she *“drew him out of the water.”*

His life, as it is recorded for us, will be divided into three 40 year segments. Only a snapshot of his first 40 years is reported in Exodus, but the Jewish historian Josephus records that *“Moses was a very handsome and educated prince and a mighty warrior in the cause of the Egyptians.”* Most commentators and historians do believe that as a “prince” Moses had access to the royal libraries, so he would have been well read and well trained in the laws and customs of the Egyptian people.

We are not shown Moses’ genealogy until chapter 6, but I think it is to our benefit to take a quick peek at it now. As you see, Jacob’s son Levi is at the top of the chart. The four children listed below are the only ones the Bible mentions.

That *“man of the house of Levi”* will be revealed to be Amram, one of four sons of Kohath, as shown above. The yellow background indicates the lineage we are following: Levi – Kohath – Amram. The *“daughter of Levi ”* that he took as a wife is Moses’ mother Jochebed, also shown with a yellow background. She was the sister of Amram’s father Kohath, so when she became Amram’s wife, she was already his aunt!



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Historians disagree on how old Jochebed was when she gave birth to Moses. I suspect she was a younger sister of Kohath, making her age somewhat compatible with Amram's. Several historians' record that Jochebed was born in the same year that Jacob brought his family into Egypt. We know that to be 1766 BC, so that would have made her 159 years old when Moses was born (80 years before the exodus in 1527). I find that highly unlikely. As a matter of fact, Numbers 26:59 tells us that ***"...Amram's wife was Jochebed... who was born to Levi in Egypt."*** We know for certain that her brothers were among the "seventy" who accompanied Jacob to Egypt with their father Levi (see the chart from lesson 1). So, based on the above scripture, I believe Jochebed was born after the Israelites were settled in Goshen – probably the last child to be born to Levi.

Some take offense at such a union between two close relatives, but it would have been acceptable in God's eyes at that time because "The Law" had not yet been given. It was necessary, especially immediately after the Great Flood, for intermarriage of brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, cousins, etc., to take place because there was simply no other choice. There is no need to question whether God sanctioned this, because those 8 souls who walked off of Noah's Ark were told by God to ***"be fruitful, multiply and repopulate the earth."***

This practice continued to be acceptable while the Israelites were in Egypt, but was not allowed afterwards. Very soon after their departure from Egypt, probably between 45 - 90 days, "The Law" will be given to Moses on Mt. Sinai, and from that point on, the intermarriage between those "close" family members will be forbidden. (*That portion of the Law of Moses is fully described in Leviticus 18.*)

Did you know that hundreds of years later the Jewish Sanhedrin discussed the legality of this very marriage? If you are interested in knowing what they determined, I have copied verbatim, from a Jewish history website, the ruling and conclusion, and it is shown at the top of the next page:

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The Torah tells us the lineage of Moshe and his family:

Moshe's father Amram was the son of Kehat, who was the second son of Levi, while Moshe's mother was the daughter of Levi, i.e., the sister of Kehat, as the verse says (Numbers 26:59), "The name of Amram's wife was Yocheved, the daughter of Levi, who was born to Levi in Egypt." This means that Amram married his aunt as the verse says (Exodus 6:20), "Amram took Yocheved, his aunt, as his wife, and she bore him Aaron and Moshe."

The question: May a Noahide Marry an Aunt?

The Talmud (Sanhedrin 58a) records two opinions as to whether or not a Noahide may marry his aunt. The final halacha is that it is permissible (Rambam, Laws of Ishut 9:5). But in order to explain the opinion of Rabbi Eliezer that it is forbidden, the Talmud says that Yocheved and Kehat were paternal siblings rather than maternal siblings, and according to Noahide law the rules of incest apply only to one's maternal relatives. As Avraham Avinu said to Pharaoh (Gen. 20:12), "Indeed, she is my sister, the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother, and she became my wife." As such, all would agree that according to Noahide laws, Amram was allowed to marry Yocheved.

Even without the intermarriage issue, we have to think beyond our modern understanding of a marriage when we review these ancient couplings. To that end, let's consider the story of Jacob. If you remember, he fell in love with Rachel and asked Laban for her hand, promising to work 7 years in exchange for the privilege of marrying her. While it is true that Jacob loved her, it is not necessarily the case that she reciprocated. Women of that time period had very little, if any, say in whom they married. In most instances, those marriages were nothing more than deals made between two fathers for political or geographic gain, often finalized before the children reached adulthood. In fact, in those situations, neither child had a say in the matter. It certainly appears, from Laban's standpoint anyway, that the marriage of Jacob to Rachel was

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essentially a business deal. Jacob “bought” Rachel from her father in exchange for 7 years of labor – and, ever the savvy businessman – Laban saw a way to make that deal last for 14 years, so he tricked Jacob into taking Leah first.

These unions were, of course, expected to produce offspring, not only to increase the size of the family, but to keep the lineage pure. Multiple examples in the Bible make it clear that, under certain circumstances, God did allow a man to have more than one wife. That practice was even preserved after the giving of The Law. If, for example, an Israelite man took a wife and she was not able to produce a child, then the man was allowed to take another – from the same family if possible – but if not, from a close relative. Should his wife remain barren, he was also allowed to sire children with her handmaid, (who was given no choice in the matter, either) because this servant would usually be from the same lineage as well – not a “pure” descendant traceable directly from Abraham, but of the same family. A classic example comes, again, from Jacob’s family. He sired children with four women – his two wives and their handmaidens.

According to the genealogy recorded in Exodus 6, Jochebed provided Amram with two sons: Aaron (born in less dangerous times) and then Moses, whom we know she hid in her home for several months until she was able to send him down the river in a basket. There is no mention of a daughter in that genealogy, even though Exodus 2:4 tells us he had an unnamed older sister who *“stood afar off to witness what would be done to him”* when Jochebed allowed the current to take the baby Moses toward the area where the Egyptian women apparently bathed. We will later learn her name is Miriam, and most commentators believe her to have been the eldest of the three children. Historians estimate that Aaron was born 12 years after Miriam, and Moses 3-7 years after that. The discourse Miriam had with the Pharaoh’s daughter when she offered to fetch a nurse for the baby certainly indicates she was not a young child.

So, the story tells us that Jochebed ended up being paid to care for her own son. As I mentioned earlier, the Pharaoh’s daughter gave Moses the name recorded in scripture, but I suspect Jochebed had already given the infant a Hebrew name, as was their custom, on the eighth

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day when the child was circumcised. There is, however, no record of that, nor is it mentioned whether or not Moses was circumcised.

We are also not told how long Jochebed took care of the child or what she may have taught him during that time. Because of the health risks that infants faced in those times, Jewish families traditionally celebrated a child's weaning as an important moment in his life. When a child survived infancy, it was a cause for jubilation because it was during those early months (years even) that he was most delicate and susceptible to disease. A "weaned" child, having survived the fragile period, could now eat solid food and was expected to continue to grow and thrive. As best I can determine, it was not unusual for this "weaning" to occur at 5 or 6 years of age or even later. Since breast-feeding a child of this age would have been improper, I suspect that "weaning" also included the eating of strained or mashed foods similar to the jars of baby food we have today. Some commentators suggest that Jochebed "nursed," but not breast fed, her son until he was 7 or 8 years old, delaying the weaning in order to teach Moses the Jewish way of life and relate stories of his ancestors before handing him over to the Pharaoh's daughter to be raised in her Egyptian household. If that is true, I would suspect she told him she was his true mother, and when he was old enough to fully understand, even explained to him the true nature of the relationship between the Israelites and Egyptians. But, that is all speculation on my part.

Almost 40 years pass between Exodus 2:10 when we are told his name, and Exodus 2:11 where we read: ***"And it came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown, that he went out unto his brethren, and looked on their burdens: and he spied an Egyptian smiting an Hebrew, one of his brethren."*** So what does "grown" mean? In Acts 7:22, Luke answers that question: ***"Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds."*** In verse 23 he adds that he was a ***"full forty years old when it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the children of Israel."*** So, the Moses who witnessed an Egyptian ***"beating a Hebrew, one of his brethren"*** was a 40 year old man.

Whether it was because of Jochebed's teachings, we can't know, but Moses reacted strongly to seeing one of his own being mistreated, so he killed the Egyptian and buried his body

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in the sand hoping that would be the end of it. They say “you never know who is watching you” and that was certainly the case here. The very next day when Moses saw two Hebrew men fighting and asked, “*Why are you striking your companion?*” one of them replied: “*Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you intend to kill me, as you killed the Egyptian?*” Not only was it apparently common knowledge among the people, but, of course, the Pharaoh had heard the news as well, and he determined to kill Moses. Rather than stay in Egypt and face a



death sentence, Moses fled to Midian. You can see on this map just how far he went, the land of Goshen is at the top left, Midian in the lower right.

The route Moses took is not known, but the one marked on the map is the suspected path – south from Goshen following the Arabian Trade Route

across the upper part of the Sinai Peninsula (presently called Saudi Arabia, but at this time was annexed and controlled by Egypt) and entering Midian just north of the Gulf of Aqaba. (*Notice the two gulfs of the Red Sea extending north with the Sinai Peninsula in between them. We will speak more about the Gulf of Aqaba later in this lesson.*) Once in Midian, it is thought that Moses traveled south past Mt. Sinai (the yellow star) – later to become a site of great import in Jewish history – and sat down by a well (the blue triangle) in a fertile valley of Midian. A little further south of the well is the home of Reuel, the priest of Midian (the green rectangle). Soon after that, seven young women came to the well to draw water for their father’s flock. After an altercation with some shepherds who arrived and pushed the women away so they could use the water the girls had drawn, Moses stepped in. He fended off the herdsman, and then helped the ladies with their task. Remember, at this time Moses was 40 years old, “*mighty in word and deed,*” and most likely was wearing Egyptian royal clothing. I suspect this might be why the

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herdsmen chose not to push the issue after Moses' show of force (even though they certainly outnumbered him) and backed away so the young women could water their flocks first.

The girls' father, Reuel, after hearing his daughters' story of the heroic Egyptian coming to their defense, invited Moses to his home in order to repay his kindness. The scripture tells us Moses was content to live in this household and, in fact, was given one of Reuel's daughters, Zipporah, as his wife. To them was born a son that Moses called Gershom, because ***"I have been a stranger in a foreign land."*** How long did Moses remain in Midian? Well, that is the second 40 year segment of Moses' life. The first 40 he spent in Egypt, and Acts 7:30 tells us that another 40 years passed (living in Midian) before he saw the burning bush in the wilderness of Mt. Sinai. We can mark the third 40 year segment from that point, because we know that Moses died when he was 120 years old, before going into the Promised Land.

"Now it happened in the process of time that the king of Egypt died. Then the children of Israel groaned because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry came up to God because of the bondage. So God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God acknowledged them."

These are the closing verses of chapter 2. It is thought by some commentators that they cried out because they knew the new Pharaoh – the successor of the one who had sought to kill Moses for murdering an Egyptian – would increase their labor even more. But, God acknowledged them – decided to help them – and, whether he liked it or not, Moses was to be their leader.

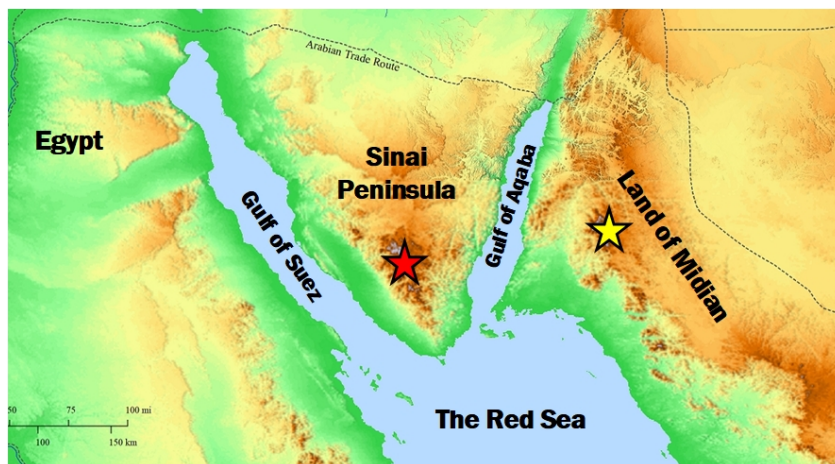
Before we discuss the well-known moment when Moses encounters the burning bush near the base of Mt. Sinai, let's focus on its location in the wilderness of Mt. Sinai. This mountain will, of course, be a key landmark in our story, so it's important to know its whereabouts – a subject much contested for thousands of years.

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On this map two possible locations are shown marked by red and yellow stars. The red star located in the southern part of the Sinai Peninsula is the traditional location that you may have been taught in Sunday school. Toward the end of the third century BC (from 306 - 337 BC) the Roman Emperor Constantine, prodded by his mother Queen



Helena – and possibly trying to counter pagan religions and idolatry – tried to promote Christianity by building huge monuments around many of the sacred places mentioned in the Bible. Among those places were the purported site of the burning bush and the location of Mount Sinai. Even though Queen Helena never set foot in the land, she claimed that Mount Sinai was in the “Egyptian Peninsula” (*now called the Sinai Peninsula – but at that time under Egyptian rule*). No one who knew differently would have dared to question the queen and as a result, after a few hundred years, this became generally accepted as the location of Mount Sinai.

The problem, however, is that this traditional location does not fit with the Bible’s geography. Scholars tried in vain – relying on Queen Helena’s claims – to piece together an archaeological record in that area by looking for traces of a large mass of people camping in the region for an extended period of time. When they found nothing, they began to question the whole story of the Exodus. From what we know now, they were looking in the wrong place. That was unfortunate not only because of the time they wasted, but because as a result of their faulty information, the miraculous work of Yahweh in the Exodus began to be viewed as fantasy, rather than fact.

In spite of this failure, I am happy to say there were explorers whose faith in the Bible was not shaken. They went to its pages in search of clues or indicators to the actual location of this important mountain. One such expedition found an area across the Gulf of Aqaba (mentioned above when Moses fled to Midian) where locals informed them the "Mountain of

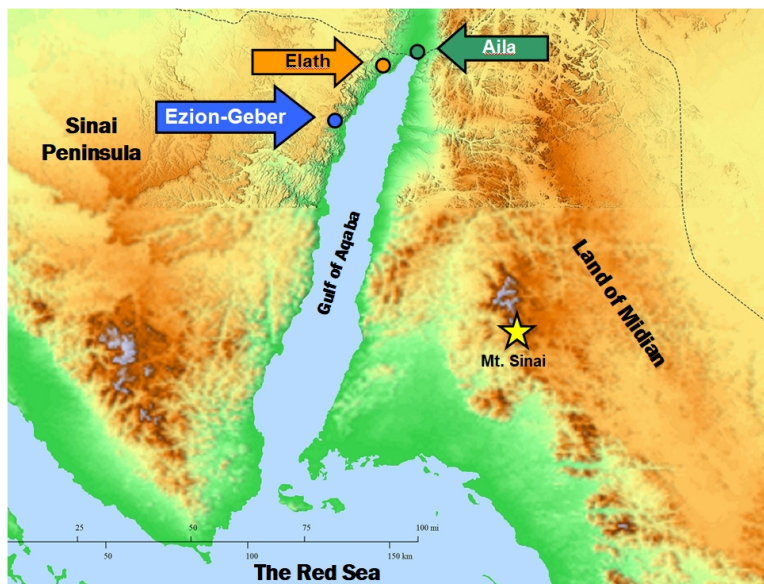
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Moses" was nearby. An investigation around the base of that mountain began to reveal artifacts that – you guessed it – indicated a great number of people had camped there for a lengthy period, or several shorter periods!

The Bible marks the body of water (the Gulf of Aqaba) clearly in several places, one even indicating that the Gulf of Aqaba borders Saudi Arabia – the area known as the Sinai Peninsula earlier. In I Kings 9:26 we read: *“And King Solomon made a navy of ships in Ezion-Geber, which is beside Elath, on the shore of the Red Sea [Yam Suph], in the land of Edom.”*



Ezion-Geber is mentioned six times in scripture, and references such as the one quoted above from I Kings help us place it on a map along with Elath. You may ask why these cities are significant in our study. Because later, we will learn that the Israelites pass through this area during the exodus, which helps us to place Mt. Sinai in its approximate

location on this map.

So, if there are indicators in scripture of this mountain's location, why is it not widely known? We need only turn to the book of Isaiah for the answer. Isaiah was a seventh century prophet from Judah who chastised God's people for adopting pagan cultures and religious practices. In chapter 65 of his book, he speaks of God's people *“forgetting His holy mountain.”* In the Hebrew language, to forget means more than just not recalling the location... it means forgetting what actually occurred there! After their Babylonian exile, the Israelites returned to Jerusalem with thoughts of rebuilding the temple and resuming their lives. Mount Sinai was not revered by this group as a holy mountain; it was just a place where their people once camped. In fact, by the time the families of those “campers” settled in Canaan after the exodus, they had already forgotten.

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But, beginning in the latter part of the 20th century, access to that area allowed archeologists and academics to begin uncovering evidence, that is to say, artifacts that made it obvious they had found the real location of Mount Sinai. This map is essentially a broader view of the same area, as the last map, but with the modern boundaries and names, and skewed a bit. The Gulf of Aqaba is now known as the Persian Gulf, as you see and access to the region previously known as Midian is tightly controlled by the Iranian government. I didn't make this map, and it is hard to know exactly where Mt. Sinai is located, but I placed a yellow dot about where I think it is and a red arrow pointing to it. The shoreline has changed over the last three or four thousand years, but I believe it is near the city Bandar-e Bushehr. The present name for Mt. Sinai is "Jebel al-Lawz." As time passes, even more evidence is being discovered that points to "Jebel al-Lawz" as Mt. Sinai. As our study progresses, we will see landmarks in the biblical account that match landmarks in Iran and other places, further establishing that this is where Moses was given the Law.



For the record, when you see the names Mount Sinai and Mount Horeb, I believe they are referring to the same mountain, because in the book of Exodus Moses uses the name Mt. Sinai 13 times, and the name Mt. Horeb 3 times. But, in the book of Deuteronomy he uses the name Mt. Sinai only 1 time, and the name Mt. Horeb 9 times – all seeming to indicate the same place – except a few commentators who say Mt. Sinai is a part of a range of mountains with two major peaks, and Mt. Horeb is the northern peak and Mt. Sinai is the southern peak. Perhaps that is so, but I can't let go of the fact Moses refers to the same mountain with both names.

Now that we have situated ourselves geographically speaking, let's return to our story:

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We read in Exodus 3:1: *“Now Moses was keeping the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian: and he led the flock to the back of the wilderness, and came to the mountain of God, unto Horeb.”* Did you notice an apparent contradiction? Previously, in chapter 2 when we read of the seven young women returning home, *“... they came to Reuel their father...”* the priest of Midian, and Moses dwelt with Reuel and was given *“Zipporah his daughter.”*

But here, as chapter 3 opens, this father-in-law and priest of Midian is said to be named Jethro. Moses, as the author of the first five books of the Old Testament, is not going to make a mistake in the name of his own father-in-law, plus, I refuse to accept that the Bible contains contradictory information. As a matter of fact, most historians believe that the biblical manuscripts are some of the most reliable ancient texts in existence – much more so than the majority of the manuscripts upon which we unquestioningly base our secular history. So here are three possibilities to explain the two names, Reuel and Jethro:

1. Reuel is simply another name for Jethro, much like Jacob also being called Israel (where both are used interchangeably).
2. Reuel is the father of Jethro, and therefore, as the father of the clan, Jethro’s daughters would also be called daughters of Reuel since he was the head of the household.
3. Reuel is his actual given name, but “Jethro” is his priestly title. The word “Jethro” does in fact mean “excellence.”

I think it is highly likely that option number 3 is the correct one.

Note: *A third name does surface in the book of Judges that tends to muddy the water a bit, but it appears to be an error in the translating of the Septuagint, the earliest Greek translations of the Old Testament: The text in question is in Judges 4:11 where, as Deborah and Barak are preparing to go to battle, it is said, “Now Heber the Kenite, which was of the children of Hobab the father in law of Moses...” That statement, written by whomever penned that portion of the book*

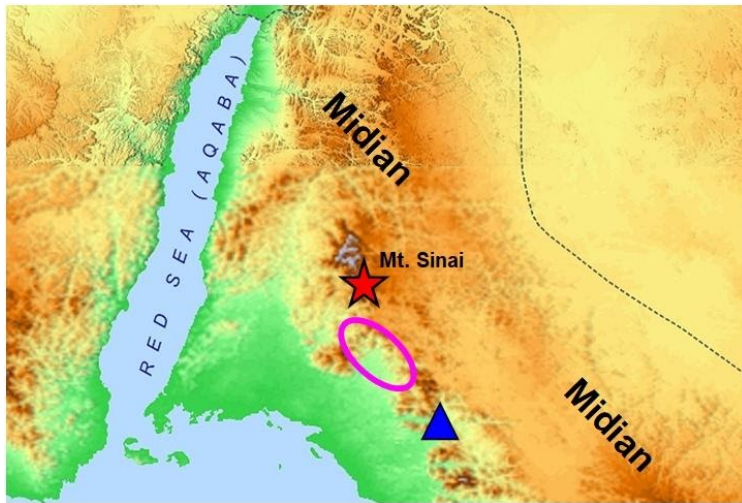
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*of Judges, is based on the text in Numbers 10:29 in which Moses wrote, “**And Moses said unto Hobab, the son of Raguel the Midianite, Moses' father in law ...**” In this passage Moses clearly states that Hobab is the son of Raguel (Septuagint spelling for his actual father-in-law, Reuel). So, as I said, I believe this is an error in translation and need not be considered.*

So, Moses was keeping the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law and he ***“led the flock to the back of the wilderness, and came to the mountain of God, unto Horeb.”***



On this map, I suspect the ***“back of the wilderness”*** where Moses led the sheep would be in or around the pink oval shown between the well (blue triangle) where he first met the seven daughters of Reuel, and Mt. Sinai. Or perhaps just to the left of Mt. Sinai, because the brownish-yellow area is the wilderness. The flocks had, no doubt, fed on the grass in the

southern part of the green area and it appears Moses was moving them further north along the back of the wilderness to an area with better grass. The text says he came to the ***“mountain of God,”*** unto Horeb – shown as Mt. Sinai on this map.

As we saw at the end of chapter 2, God has heard His people crying out to Him from Egypt, and is ready to “remember His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” – in other words, set them free! But He needs a messenger to represent Him to the people of Israel and before the Pharaoh. So now, 80 years after he was scooped out of the water by the Pharaoh’s daughter... Moses’ moment has come.

Why God chose to appear to Moses in a burning bush was probably for the purpose of revealing Himself in a manner that would prove His power and authority, but I don’t know for sure. Obviously, God needed to get Moses’ full attention! Imagine Moses working the sheep

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that day, lost in his thoughts, with no inkling that his life was about to be forever changed, and off in the distance he catches sight of a bush that is burning. That in and of itself must have been curious – nothing else around it was afire, but after watching it for a while something even more peculiar becomes clear – though the bush was burning, it was not burning up.

Curiosity got the better of Moses, and as he approached the bush, he heard his name called out... by someone he could not see. Moses answered saying, ***“Here am I.”*** God replied, ***“Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground. Moreover He said, “I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God.”***

In this awe-inspiring moment, the Lord identified Himself as the God of Israel, made it clear that He was aware of His people’s affliction, and declared that He was going to deliver them to the place first promised to Abraham – the land of Canaan! Little did Moses know that the monumental task of rescuing his own people – God’s people – was about to fall to him.

To say that Moses was unsure might be an understatement. Yes, he had once been a prince – a man of power and influence – in the court of the Pharaoh, but that was 40 years ago. Now, he was a poor sheep-herder working for his father-in-law. But, it does appear he didn’t totally close his mind to the idea because he asked God His name, so he could tell the Israelites who had sent him. God’s reply: ***“I AM WHO I AM.” And He said, “Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”... “Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: ‘The Lord 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.’***

Even though Moses was humble and unsure of himself he asks of God: ***“Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?”*** God continued to assure him that ***“I will certainly be with you.”*** He then gave Moses a preview of all that would happen, what wonders and miracles would be wrought, to finally convince the Pharaoh to let His people go. Can you imagine how Moses’ mind and heart must have been

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racing at this point! God even informed him that, “*when you go, you shall not go empty-handed.*” Not only would the Pharaoh finally let the people go, but his people would actually send the Israelites away with “*articles of silver, articles of gold, and clothing; and you shall put them on your sons and on your daughters. So you shall plunder the Egyptians.*” That’s an extraordinary turn of events only possible by the hand of the Almighty God

Even with the knowledge that the great I AM was sending him... that God would be with him every step of the way... that the Pharaoh would eventually let his people go... Moses still wasn’t sure he could do it. We’ll begin our next lesson with his concerns. It makes me wonder if there are things in our lives that God calls us to do – we’re given the talent, the resources, the opportunities, but for whatever reason – maybe self-doubt – we hold back. It is something to think about between now and the next lesson.