

The Acts of the Holy Spirit and the early church

May 18th, 2014 Stephen's message, Part 8

Stephens Speech: Moses, the long awaited deliverer



Acts 7:30-33 New International Version

After forty years had passed, an angel appeared to Moses in the flames of a burning bush in the desert near Mount Sinai. When he saw this, he was amazed at the sight. As he went over to get a closer look, he heard the Lord say: 'I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.' Moses trembled with fear and did not dare to look. "Then the Lord said to him, 'Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.

It is fairly obvious that this now is going to be at least the second time that Moses had direct contact with God. The first was just before his aggressive defense of his fellow countryman by murdering his assailant, for he thought that everyone understood that God was going to be with him and let everyone know that it was he, little ole Moses, that was going to be the long awaited for deliverer of God People.

Now if we can read into some of the tie in's between the life of Moses and that of the nation of Israel, we can see that God met with Moses far away while he was in exile away from Egypt, just as God was now trying to get close with Israel who had been far away from Him during the last 400 years.

Stephen was in a fight for his life, but rather than standing for his own feelings of betrayal, he calmly and with a wonderful demeanor, gives a great rendition of the history of the world. Now we know as did Stephen that it was the Holy Spirit that was assisting him in this great speech, and notice how this speech addressed quite specifically the allegations of blasphemy that he was facing.

We have already looked at his detailed account of both Abraham and Joseph, and now with the history lesson on Moses, we see what a pedestal that he put Moses on, not even detailing the not so glorious actions of Moses in his life, but rather pointing out the great workings of God through the life of this Hebrew/Egyptian man.

Life begins at 80:

Now Stephen through the Holy Spirit is giving us a short take on the exchange on the mountain between God and Moses, so to fully grasp the entirety of the story, let's examine the scene from the book of Exodus Chapters 3&4...

Exodus 3 & 4 NIV, Selected verses..

Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the back or far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up." When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!" And Moses said, "Here I am." Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." Then he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob."

At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God. The Lord said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey. So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt."

But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" And God said, "I will be with you. Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?" God said to Moses, "I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I am has sent me to you.'" The elders of Israel will listen to you. Then you and the elders are to go to the king of Egypt and say to him, 'The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us. Let us take a three-day journey into the wilderness to offer sacrifices to the Lord our God.' But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless a mighty hand compels him. So I will stretch out my hand and strike the Egyptians with all the wonders that I will perform among them. After that, he will let you go.

Moses answered, "What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, 'The Lord did not appear to you'?" Then the Lord said to him, "What is that in your hand? a staff," he replied. The Lord said, "Throw it on the ground." Moses threw it on the ground and it became a snake, and he ran from it. Then the Lord said to him, "Reach out your hand and take it by the tail."

So Moses reached out and took hold of the snake and it turned back into a staff in his hand. This," said the Lord, "is so that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has appeared to you." Then the Lord said, "Put your hand inside your cloak." So Moses put his hand into his cloak, and when he took it out, the skin was leprous—it had become as white as snow. Now put it back into your cloak," he said. So Moses put his hand back into his cloak, and when he took it out, it was restored, like the rest of his flesh.

Then the Lord said, “If they do not believe you or pay attention to the first sign, they may believe the second. But if they do not believe these two signs or listen to you, take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground. The water you take from the river will become blood on the ground.” Moses said to the Lord, “Pardon your servant, Lord. I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue.”

The Lord said to him, “Who gave human beings their mouths? Who makes them deaf or mute? Who gives them sight or makes them blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say.” But Moses said, “Pardon your servant, Lord. Please send someone else.” Then the Lord’s anger burned against Moses and he said, “What about your brother, Aaron the Levite? I know he can speak well. He is already on his way to meet you, and he will be glad to see you.

Meeting on the Backside of the desert:

Now it’s interesting to note that it was on the far side, or as the King James Translation reflects, on the **backside of the wilderness**, where Moses climbed the mountain to stand before God. To understand this idea, we have to go back in the ancient Middle Eastern customs, where it is said that the East is always before a man, the west behind him, the south and north on the right and left hand. This is their traditional saying, just like for us today, that if something goes wrong, we say that “**it went south**” meaning that North is always before us.

The mountain that God chose to reveal Himself to Moses was called Horeb, which was a name given to the northern part of the Sinaitic range of mountains. Also if you remember the plagues that God smote Egypt with, each one God specifically chose to destroy some or all of the strength and power of the Egyptian gods.

Now, even just beginning with Moses on this mountain side, history records that this particular mountain range was regarded by the Egyptians as specially consecrated to the gods from a very early time. What a truly great God it is that we serve today, one with a wonderful sense of justice and mercy, love and forgiveness and lest we forget, our God also has a brilliant sense of humor.

An Angel of the Lord, or God Himself??

It is only fitting that we take a closer look at who was actually in the bush, as well as speaking with Moses on that most fateful of days.

Exodus 3:2a (NIV)

There the **angel of the Lord** appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush.

Acts 7:30 (KJV)

*And when forty years were expired, there appeared to him in the wilderness of mount Sinai an **angel of the Lord**, in a flame of fire in a bush.*

In our study today, we should note that In our passage in Exodus 3, the angel is called both Jehovah and Elohim, whence it is concluded, with reason, that it was in fact none other than the Second Person of the Trinity who appeared to Moses. Now far be it for me to stand on just one thought alone on any tough area of Scripture, I have enlisted some experts to be called to our witness stand to help with this aspect of just what is **(The Angel of the Lord)**

Joseph Benson (1749–1821) was an early English Methodist minister, one of the leaders of the movement in the time of John Wesley. He added commentary to the entirety of the Holy Scriptures, of which is noted for us below in the reference to the “**Angel of the Lord**”.

That this angel was no creature, appears from his saying, I am the Lord, a language which angels never speak; but, I am sent from God — I am thy fellow-servant. In a flame of fire Representing God’s majesty, purity, and power, and showing that he was about to bring terror and destruction to his enemies, and light and comfort to his people, and to display his glory before all

Judges 13:1-5 (NIV)

*Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord, so the Lord delivered them into the hands of the Philistines for forty years. A certain man of Zorah, named Manoah, from the clan of the Danites, had a wife who was childless, unable to give birth. **The angel of the Lord** appeared to her and said, “You are barren and childless, but you are going to become pregnant and give birth to a son. Now see to it that you drink no wine or other fermented drink and that you do not eat anything unclean. You will become pregnant and have a son whose head is never to be touched by a razor because the boy is to be a Nazirite, dedicated to God from the womb. He will take the lead in delivering Israel from the hands of the Philistines.”*

John F. Walvoord, highly respected for his exposition of the Scriptures and former president of Dallas Theological Seminary notes the following on The angel of the Lord question:

Although not all scholars agree, a brief Scriptural survey would support the premise that the Angel of the LORD is (1) supernatural, (2) is God (3) and is not a created angel. The determination of which member of the Trinity the Angel represents is less clear but most conservative, evangelical sources interpret the Angel of the LORD as the second member of the Trinity, representing a pre-incarnate manifestation of the Lord Jesus Christ. Angel in both Hebrew (malak) and Greek (aggelos or angelos) means a messenger, and Jesus as

the Word of God is the ultimate Messenger sent from the Father with a message of the good news of God's covenant love for sinful mankind...

Warren W. Wiersbe, Pastor, Teacher and author comments:

The Angel of the Lord, is generally identified as our Lord Jesus Christ. These pre-Incarnation visits of Jesus Christ to the earth were to meet special needs and to accomplish special tasks. The fact that the Son of God took on a temporary body, left heaven, and came down to help a rejected servant-girl (Hagar) surely reveals His grace and love.

Genesis 16:3-13 (NIV)

So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian slave Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife. He slept with Hagar, and she conceived. When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress. Then Sarai said to Abram, "You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my slave in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the Lord judge between you and me." "Your slave is in your hands," Abram said. "Do with her whatever you think best." Then Sarai mistreated Hagar; so she fled from her.

***The angel of the Lord** found Hagar near a spring in the desert; it was the spring that is beside the road to Shur. And he said, "Hagar, slave of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?" "I'm running away from my mistress Sarai," she answered. Then **the angel of the Lord** told her, "Go back to your mistress and submit to her." The angel added, "I will increase your descendants so much that they will be too numerous to count." **The angel of the Lord** also said to her:*

*"You are now pregnant and you will give birth to a son. You shall name him Ishmael, for the Lord has heard of your misery. He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers." **She gave this name to the Lord who spoke to her: "You are the God who sees me," for she said, "I have now seen the One who sees me."***

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the only visible Person of the Trinity that human beings can see face to face and yet live. "**The angel of the Lord**" was never seen again after the incarnation of Jesus Christ. For the above reasons, "**the angel of the Lord**" is understood to be the pre-incarnate Jesus Christ. Note the passage in 1st Corinthians:

1 Corinthians 10:1-4 (NIV)

For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual

drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.

One last note about the Burning Bush and the Angel of the Lord, I came across another analogy that I wanted to share:

The burning bush is representative of the nation of Israel, for like the flames did not destroy the bush, the 400 years in slavery in the land of Egypt, did not destroy the children of Israel.

Standing on Holy Ground:



Now we are told that Moses had spent the last 40 years in and around that very mountain where he now was. Never before did he have to take off his sandals or do anything out the ordinary.

But today, the God of the Universe was physically present in a form that was visible to Moses. Now, this small, minimal visual of God was so very limited as to allow a normal man to somewhat comprehend the sight.

There was a time later in the life of Moses when he asked God if he could see more of the Glory of God:

Exodus 33:12-23 (NIV)

Moses said to the Lord, “You have been telling me, ‘Lead these people,’ but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. You have said, ‘I know you by name and you have found favor with me.’ If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you. Remember that this nation is your people.”

The Lord replied, “My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” Then Moses said to him, “If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?”

And the Lord said to Moses, “I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name.” Then Moses said, “Now show me your glory.” And the Lord said, “I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.

But,” he said, “you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live.” Then the Lord said, “There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. When my glory passes by, I will put

you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen.”

Stephen takes notice of, as a check to those who prided themselves in the temple, that holy place, as if there were no communion to be had with God but there; whereas God met Moses, and manifested himself to him, in a remote obscure place in the wilderness of Sinai, just as He previously had done with Abram in the land of Mesopotamia.

People deceive themselves if they think God is confined to places, for He can bring his people into a wilderness, and there speak comfortably with them. God although limiting Himself to being a man for a period of 33 years, is nevertheless not limited to anything. The old saying that you can't put God in a box, is nevermore true today.

It is worthy of notice that God Himself orders this mark of respect to be shown to the place which His Presence has hallowed at that time, not for all time. After the incident of the burning bush, anyone could have walked on that mountain in boots if desired, without fear of consequences.

It is doubtful whether shoes were known at this early date. They would certainly not have been worn in Midian according to historians. Egyptians before the time of Moses, and Orientals generally, in ancient (as well as in modern) times, removed their sandals (or their shoes) from their feet on entering any place to which respect was due, such as a temple, a palace, or even the private house of a great man. Looking at the term of Holy ground, we see that it literally means "ground of holiness" - ground rendered holy by the presence of God upon it, not because of anything special of the specific piece of ground.

The custom of worshipping bare-footed, as the priests did when actually engaged in the Temple worship, or as the Arabs do as they enter their mosques with bare feet do have carried over for the past millennia to today. Many people nowadays to avoid plain dust or dirt ask their guests as well as themselves to remove the footwear. Funny how that these Jewish leaders that were grilling Stephen on his actions, did not even realize that the Temple was not the only Holy Place. The historian **Albert Barnes** writes the following:

The Arabs and Turks never enter the mosques without putting off their shoes. They exact a compliance with this rule from those of a different faith who visit these sacred places. Though, until a recent period, the Muslims excluded Christians entirely from the mosques, they now permit foreigners to enter some of them, provided they leave their shoes at the door, or exchange them for others which have not been defiled by common use.

The truth seems to be, as some historians observe, that putting off the shoes was then, as to what is taking off the hat is now, a token of respect and submission. Most courts in the United States

today have their clerks or the deputies tell all who enter the courtroom to remove all hats of any kind as a respectful gesture for the judge. Note the following words from Matthew Henry, a truly great Bible expositor from years ago..

We should note that anywhere we meet with God today we should look at in our hearts as being Holy Ground, and approach God with the utmost respect and awe, due our Creator.

In Closing:

We ought to approach to God with a solemn pause and preparation; and to express our inward reverence by a grave and reverent behavior in the worship of God, carefully avoiding anything that looks light or rude. Our closing statement is from **Micky Galloway of the Knollwood Church Of Christ in Beavercreek, OH**. Here is a good reminder for all of us:

Proper expression of a reverent attitude toward God reveals the character of the heart. The greater our character, the greater our reverence toward God will be. On the other hand, many have become so casual in attitude toward sacred things that they have a blurred view of who God is. Many have lost sight of Almighty God's greatness, and they consider Him to be no greater than themselves. Perhaps we have gotten so immersed in the world, and so absorbed by that which is foul, that real reverence is almost impossible. Whatever the cause, we must understand God's attitude toward this lack of respect and honor that is due Him. We must examine our own lives for any evidence of such dishonor, and if we find such evidence, seek to change our attitudes toward God.

The prophet Asaph clearly expressed God's attitude toward His people's irreverence:

Psalm 50:14-21 (NIV)

Sacrifice thank offerings to God, fulfill your vows to the Most High, and call on me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me." But to the wicked person, God says: "What right have you to recite my laws or take my covenant on your lips? You hate my instruction and cast my words behind you. When you see a thief, you join with him; you throw in your lot with adulterers. You use your mouth for evil and harness your tongue to deceit. You sit and testify against your brother and slander your own mother's son. When you did these things and I kept silent, you thought I was exactly like you. But I now arraign you and set my accusations before you.

We know that Moses wasn't permitted to lead the Israelites into the Promised Land.

Instead, Moses died in the desert, and Joshua (which is Yeshua in Hebrew or Jesus in Greek) was the one to lead the Israelites into Canaan.

Through this example, we see how Moses was used as a type of the Law, in the way the Law cannot lead men to heaven, only Yeshua (Jesus) can.