

I AM and Moses

Except for the death of Jacob and Joseph and the birth of Moses little is recorded from Jacob's entrance into Egypt (Genesis 46) to the time of Israel's exit therefrom (Exodus 12), a period of four hundred and thirty years. From the death of Joseph to the birth of Moses, approximately two hundred and eighty years, the scriptures are completely silent. By human standards this is strange history. We are reminded again that the Bible is about God's work with man, not about man's work with God, and, as such, proceeds unconstrained by time or human convention.

In Exodus 1 we find that the works of Joseph and the favor bestowed upon Jacob by a former Pharaoh are forgotten as "there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph (Ex. 1:8)." God had blessed the descendants of Abraham until "the land was filled with them (Ex. 1:7)," and the Egyptians had become wary of this large band of foreigners dwelling among them. Skeptical of their loyalty in the event of an invasion, Pharaoh bound the Israelites to forced labor, thinking this would slow the growth of the Hebrew population. But, "the more he afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew (Ex. 1:12)"

Pharaoh went to extreme measures in his attempt to curtail the growth of these Hebrews, ordering that "every son who is born you shall cast into the river, and every daughter you shall save alive (Ex. 1:22)." It was under this dictum that Moses was born. In an effort to protect her child's life, Moses's mother placed the child in an ark of bulrushes and set him in the river where the daughter of Pharaoh bathed. As his mother hoped, when the daughter of Pharaoh saw the child, she "had compassion on him (Ex. 2:6)" and took the child as her own, enlisting his Hebrew mother to be his nurse. Moses grew up as a member of the Egyptian royal family, but his mother trained him in his Hebrew heritage.

This heritage was honored when Moses defended one of his brethren who was being beaten by an Egyptian. He killed the Egyptian and hid the body, but the deed became known (Ex. 2:14-15). Fearing for his life, Moses fled from the court of Pharaoh and became a shepherd in the wilderness of Midian. It is from here that God, upon acknowledging the plight of Israel, "remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob (Ex. 2:24)" and began the process of delivering Israel from oppression. His first act was to choose Moses as His mediator, and He did so in a most remarkable way.

The account of God's calling of Moses is an exceptionally profound event, but is recorded in exceedingly simple and direct language. The reader has to use his full mental faculties to grasp the magnitude of the event. We learn that Moses, while tending his father-in-law's flocks, encountered a burning bush that was not consumed by the fire. As he drew near it, a voice from the midst of the bush called out his name and directed him to remove the sandals from his feet for he was standing on "holy ground (Ex. 3:5)." God revealed that He had heard the cries of His children in Egypt (3:7), that He had come to deliver them (3:8), and that He was sending Moses to Pharaoh to bring His people out of bondage (3:10). The

succeeding five verses record in powerful simplicity that Moses was being commissioned, not only by a powerful being, but by the God of all Being.

Reluctant to be His agent, Moses asks God what he shall say to the children of Israel if they should ask who sent him. He instructs Moses to say, "I AM has sent me to you (Ex. 3:14, NKJV)." This may not seem of great significance to the casual reader, but it is truly stunning. The Hebrew for "I AM" is so profound that it is hard to translate and equally hard to describe. It means something like: God who is, or the God who is because He is. Philosophers and theologians, Christian and otherwise, have recognized throughout the ages that there is an ultimate reality that exists without dependence on anything else. Some have thought that this reality is remote from man and impersonal. This passage declares otherwise. God spoke with Moses and, by his name, "I AM," identified Himself as the source of all being. Furthermore, it is by this expression that Jesus makes what is arguably His most explicit and powerful claim to Divinity. Jesus said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM (John 8:58)". Jesus was claiming to be the One, or the same as the One, who produced all existence, who is existence itself. In this scene, the God of all Being spoke to Moses as a prelude to the God of all Being taking Himself to the Cross. If you do not shudder a bit as you read this text, you do not yet understand what you have read.

Read Exodus 4-12:30