

From the Rabbi's Desk
Rabbi Manes Kogan

Hillcrest Jewish Center
183-02 Union Turnpike, Flushing, NY 11366
rabbikogan@hillcrestjc.org

Insights into the Bible [2]

Moses, the Reluctant Leader Insights into Exodus 3:1 –4:18



Exodus Chapter 3

¹ Now Moses, tending the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian, drove the flock into the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire out of a bush. He gazed, and there was a bush all aflame, yet the bush was not consumed. ³ Moses said, "I must turn aside to look at this marvelous sight; why doesn't the bush burn up?" ⁴ When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to look, God called to him out of the bush: "Moses! Moses!" He answered, "Here I am."¹ ⁵ And He said, "Do not come closer. Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you stand is holy ground². ⁶ I am," He said, "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 at God.

⁷ And the Lord continued, "I have marked well the plight of My people in Egypt and have heeded their outcry because of their taskmasters; yes, I am mindful of their sufferings. ⁸ I have come down to rescue them from the Egyptians and to bring them out of that land to a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey, the region of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ⁹ Now the cry of the Israelites has reached Me; moreover, I have seen how the Egyptians oppress them.¹⁰ Come, therefore, I will send you to Pharaoh, and you shall free My people, the Israelites, from Egypt."

¹ See Genesis 22:1

² See Joshua 5:13-15

¹¹ But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and free the Israelites from Egypt?"³ ¹² And He said, "I will be with you; that shall be your sign that it was I who sent you. And when you have freed the people from Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain."

¹³ Moses said to God, "When I come 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?' what shall I say to them?" ¹⁴ And God said to Moses, "Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh." He continued, "Thus shall you say to the Israelites, 'Ehyeh sent me to you.'" ¹⁵ And God said further to Moses, "Thus shall you speak to the Israelites: 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 shall be My name forever,

This My appellation for all eternity.

¹⁶ "Go and assemble the elders of Israel and say to them: the Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, has appeared to me and said, 'I have taken note of you and of what is being done to you in Egypt, ¹⁷ and I have declared: I will take you out of the misery of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, to a land flowing with milk and honey.' ¹⁸ They will listen to you; then you shall go with the elders of Israel to the king of Egypt and you shall say to him, 'The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, manifested Himself to us. Now therefore, let us go a distance of three days into the wilderness to sacrifice to the Lord our God.' ¹⁹ Yet I know that the king of Egypt will let you go only because of a greater might. ²⁰ So I will stretch out My hand and smite Egypt with various wonders which I will work upon them; after that he shall let you go. ²¹ And I will dispose the Egyptians favorably toward this people, so that when you go, you will not go away empty-handed. ²² Each woman shall borrow from her neighbor and the lodger in her house objects of silver and gold, and clothing, and you shall put these on your sons and daughters, thus stripping the Egyptians."

Exodus Chapter 4

¹ But Moses spoke up and said, "What if they do not believe me and do not listen to me, but say: The Lord did not appear to you?" ² The Lord said to him, "What is that in your hand?" And he replied, "A rod." ³ He said, "Cast it on the ground." He cast it on the ground, and it became a snake; and Moses recoiled from it. ⁴ Then the Lord said to Moses, "Put out your hand and grasp it by the tail" — he put out his hand and seized it, and it became a rod in his hand — ⁵ "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, did appear to you."

⁶ The Lord said to him further, "Put your hand into your bosom." He put his hand into his bosom; and when he took it out, his hand was encrusted with snowy scales! ⁷ And He said, "Put your hand back into your bosom." — He put his hand back into his bosom; and when he took it out of his bosom, there it was again like the rest of his body. — ⁸ "And if they do not believe you or pay heed to the first

³ See Jeremiah 1:1-10

sign, they will believe the second. ⁹ And if they are not convinced by both these signs and still do not heed you, take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground, and it — the water that you take from the Nile — will turn to blood on the dry ground.”

¹⁰ But Moses said to the Lord, “Please, O Lord, I have never been a man of words, either in times past or now that You have spoken to Your servant; I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.” ¹¹ And the Lord said to him, “Who gives man speech? Who makes him dumb or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? ¹² Now go, and I will be with you as you speak and will instruct you what to say.” ¹³ But he said, “Please, O Lord, make someone else Your agent.” The Lord became angry with Moses, and He said, “There is your brother Aaron the Levite. He, I know, speaks readily. Even now he is setting out to meet you, and he will be happy to see you. ¹⁵ You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth — I will be with you and with him as you speak and tell both of you what to do —¹⁶ and he shall speak for you to the people. Thus, he shall serve as your spokesman, with you playing the role of God to him, ¹⁷ And take with you this rod, with which you shall perform the signs.”

¹⁸ Moses went back to his father-in-law Jethro and said to him, “Let me go back to my kinsmen in Egypt and see how they are faring.” And Jethro said to Moses, “Go in peace.”

Comprehension and Analysis Questions



Read the text carefully and answer:

? Why did God choose Moses as the leader of the Children of Israel? Justify your answer on Exodus 2:11-22 (Insights into the Bible # 1) and Exodus 3:1-4.

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

? “Do not come closer. Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you stand is holy ground” (*Exodus 3:5*). Are you familiar with other situations (Jewish or not) in which removing the shoes is a sign of reverence?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

? **Five times Moses refused God’s mission. Can you point them out? What were God’s answers to Moses?**

1st Time _____

Answer 1 _____

2nd Time _____

Answer 2 _____

3rd Time _____

Answer 3 _____

4th Time _____

Answer 4 _____

5th Time _____

Answer 5 _____

? *"Thus, shall you say to the Israelites, 'Ehyeh sent me to you.'" God gave an answer to Moses' question about "His name. Then He "volunteered" a second answer: "Thus shall you speak to the Israelites: 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. Why was a second answer necessary?*

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

? "...and he shall speak for you to the people. Thus, he shall serve as your spokesman, with you playing the role of God to him" (*Exodus 4:16*) Are you familiar with other situations in which this division of roles works?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Bonus ? "And take with you this rod, with which you shall perform the signs."

Why does Moses need a rod to perform the signs?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

? Moses went back to his father-in-law Jethro and said to him, "Let me go back to my kinsmen in Egypt and see how they are faring." And Jethro said to Moses, "Go in peace." (*Exodus 4:18*). Why did Moses ask permission from his father-in-law to leave Midian, after God commanded him to go to Egypt?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

? We gave already a couple of reasons why God chose Moses as the leader of the Children of Israel? Based on your reading of Exodus chapters 3 and 4, what could be additional answers to the question?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____