

“DESERT, MOUNTAIN AND WILDERNESS FIRE”  
Exodus 3:1-6, Exodus 19:14-19, Exodus 40:34-38  
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“The Holy Spirit helps us to discern. He’s like a burglar alarm at home. When it goes off, you know somebody has come into your home uninvited. When the smoke detector goes off, you know something is awry. When a metal detector at an airport goes off, it makes a beeping sound that gives an alert to check things. These alarms help us to know that something is not quite right. In the same way, the Holy Spirit alarms the soul.”<sup>1</sup> He awakens us to the need to become aware of changes that need to happen in our life so that we might be more in-tuned with the Lord.

Before all of these mechanical devices were invented, however, the Holy Spirit worked in a different way to call, warn and direct the people of God. **In the Book of Exodus**, the second book of the Bible, we see **three different venues where the Holy Spirit interacted with and touched the lives of the Israelite people. The venues were the desert, the mountain, and the wilderness.** Each of them were instrumental in creating awareness in the people of Israel that changes needed to be made, that God was calling them to a deeper faith in Him, and that God would be with them as they sought to follow His will and His ways.

**The Desert Fire took place while the people were still slaves in Egypt.** Moses had grown up in the palace of the Pharaoh, yet he learned that his lineage was that of the Hebrew people. As Moses became aware of his connection with the slaves of Egypt, he began to recognize the injustice of that slavery. In an attempt to free one of his people from the abuse of an Egyptian, he killed the Egyptian and tried to hide him in the sand (Ex. 2:11-12). But as word got out to the Pharaoh, Moses, the champion of the oppressed and the underdog, had to run for his life (2:15). He was now a criminal in the eyes of Egypt, having turned against the power of the state, to illegally support the Hebrews. Right or wrong, he was wanted for murderer, so he had to leave Egypt.

Moses made his way to Midian where he once again helped out other underdogs, the daughters

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<sup>1</sup> (Tony Evans, *Tony Evans’ Book of Illustrations*, [Chicago, IL: Moody Publications, 2009] pg. 154, #463)

of Reuel Jethro, when other shepherds drove away their flocks from the local well. “...*Moses got up and came to their rescue and watered their flock*” (Ex. 2:17). As a show of gratitude for what he had done, Jethro, a priest of Midian, invited him to join their family and offered his oldest daughter, Zipporah, to him in marriage.

So Moses became a part of the tribe of Jethro, even as an exile of Egypt. Though he was away from his family line, Moses did not forget them, longing somehow to find a way to release them from slavery. Even with the birth of his first son, Moses betrayed his loneliness for his people by naming him Gershom, saying, “*I have become an alien in a foreign land*” (Ex. 2:22).

**From a prince in the royal house hold of Egypt, to a shepherd in the land of Midian, Moses’ life began to change.** He learned about the God of his people, and found it possible to trust in Him as the Lord God Almighty. God was preparing Moses for a greater work.

God does the same with us. As we come to know Him and trust Him as the Lord of All, He uses different life situations to prepare us for a greater work that He has for us to do. The struggles and trials that we face from time to time draw our attention back to Him and He provides us the opportunities to grow closer to Him. It could be the death of a loved one, or a sickness, or the loss of a job, or even a stint in jail or prison, but God is able to use every situation to prepare our lives for the work He has for us to do.

And so it was, that one day, while out watching the flocks of his father-in-law, God gets Moses attention. **An angel of the Lord ignites a bush on fire by the Holy Spirit, but though ablaze, the fire did not burn the bush.** It was God’s Calling Fire, inviting Moses to draw closer to Him.

I don’t know about you, but when something strange happens, I’m right there to investigate. I’ve even gotten into trouble investigating the strange event, but I am curious about what is going on, and God gets my attention through it. Things like plants growing in test tubes without soil. Or exploring a huge illuminated cross on the top of a mountain and then walking down that mountain by moonlight, lighting my path as bright as day. Or the simple act of taking communion. The strange and intricate

nature of things gets my attention and draws me closer to the Lord. And it is then that He calls out to me and guides me to do some work for Him - sometimes big stuff that needs addressing, and sometimes little things that influences the life of just one person. The strange things of our life can open our eyes to greater things that the Lord God wants us to do.

But as Moses investigates the burning bush, God calls out to him, telling him, *“Do not come any closer...Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground”* (Ex. 35). God’s Cleansing Fire made the ground that Moses walked upon, holy ground, and it was not appropriate for sandals to get between Moses and God. The common ground had become holy because of God’s presence, so Moses was not to tread commonly upon the Holy Ground of the Lord. Once Moses removes his sandals and prepares himself, does God introduce Himself. *“I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob”* (Ex. 3:6).

**Moses had not had an encounter with the Lord God of Israel before. God wanted to make sure that he knew who it was that was talking to him.** And as God says, *“I am...”* Moses realizes that he is in the presence of The Almighty God, the maker of heaven and earth, the holy One, the All-powerful and majestic God who Was and Is and Is To Come.

God’s Transforming Fire now begins His work in Moses, as he is called into ministry to his people Israel. God knows their struggles, their hardships and their oppression under slavery. And He wasn’t going to let that continue much more. **Moses was the man God wanted to become the messenger of God to Pharaoh.** *“...I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt”* (Ex. 3:10). God was transforming Moses from an exiled murderer into the savior of his people. Not on his own, mind you, but through the power of God and in the authority of God.

The fire of God was now put into Moses, with a little persuasion mind you. **None of us is ever worthy of being a servant of God, but God calls us, cleanses us and transforms us into the people He desires us to be so that we can do His work in the world.** God knew what Moses would face in Pharaoh, so God was equipping him to do the work He wanted him to do. That could only happen as the

power of God's Desert Fire lived in Moses.

Has God called you to do a great and mighty thing in your life? Have you humbled yourself to His majesty and authority so that He might work through you to accomplish His work? Anyone who is called by God to be His servant must be prepared and transformed from who they were in the past, so that they can be what God calls them to in the present and future. No matter how difficult the task, that person needs to always remember that it is not by their own power or authority that they are working, but through the power and authority of the Great I AM, the Lord God Almighty. As soon as we begin to try to do the work ourselves, as soon as we make it about us and not about the Lord God, everything falls apart and God removes His hand from us. But as long as we keep God's Desert Fire within us, there is nothing that we cannot do, and no where we cannot go to accomplish God's purpose.

So Moses humbles himself to do the work of God, and he leads the people out of Egypt after God miraculously demonstrates His power before Pharaoh. Upon God's command, Moses leads the people of Israel into the uttermost parts of the Egyptian Empire. With God's great display of deliverance, the people are miraculously led through the Red Sea, where the armies of Egypt are completely destroyed and the people are liberated from the hand of their oppressors. Moses then lead them all to Mount Sinai, the Mountain of God, where they experienced God's presence.

Moses had already been prepared and cleansed in the desert, but the people of Israel were still in the mindset of being slaves in Egypt. God needed to cleanse them too, if they were to be His people and inherit the land that God promised Moses (Ex. 3:8), "...*a land flowing with milk and honey...*" The people needed to have their lives transformed, too, so that they could accept God as their God, not the false gods of Egypt. Then came the promise from God, "*Now if you obey Me fully and keep My covenant, then out of all nations you will be My treasured possession. Although the whole earth is Mine, you will be for Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation*" (Ex. 19:5)

**So it was with Mountain Fire that God demonstrates Himself to the people.** Having consecrated the people, Moses and the people see God come down onto the mountain in fire and smoke,

and the sound of a trumpet. The ground trembled and smoke billowed up the whole top of the mountain. And when Moses spoke, God answered him with a voice like thunder.

**This was God's Mountain Fire, demonstrating to all the people of Israel His greatness.**

They dedicated themselves to be God's people and consecrated themselves before Him. Only then did God send His instruction, how they were to live, how they were to conduct themselves, how they were to obey His commands. God gave the people the 10 commandments to live by, the first four determining how they were to honor and respect and worship the Lord, and the other six, how they were to treat each other.

Remember, the people had been in Egypt for 430 years. Generation after generation had grown up and died under that oppressive hand of Pharaoh and the Egyptian task masters. Having spent that much time in Egypt, the people had begun to accept and trust and worship the gods of Egypt, since they had given up their faith in the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Having now been delivered from slavery from God Almighty, the people had to give up their worship and practice of the Egyptian religions. **God was teaching them how to worship Him and follow His standards so that they could be His people.**

The 10 commandments brought the basic laws to the people. And God gave them other laws so that every part of their lives would be guided by His principles, His guidelines, and His standards. They stood out among the other peoples because of these laws. But here at Mount Sinai, God instructed the people.

It was a time of Testimonial Fire, too, when the people physically saw God, heard His voice and experienced His presence. It was terrifying for them because they had never encountered Him before. Over 5 million people saw the fire and smoke on Mount Sinai. God's presence was awesome, shaking the whole mountain with rolls of thunder and trumpet. The experience was to prepare the people with a permanent experience to remind them that God was and is the only God. The gods of Egypt were man-made, but God, I Am Who I Am, was the real deal. It was time the people were fully convinced of it.

So what happened in your life to convince you that God IS God? What was the event that turned you away from the gods of this world and directed your eyes to the living and Holy God? For some, god comes to them in dreams and visions. For others there are miracles involved in their invitation to follow the Lord God. For others, it was an answer to their prayers, and to others it was God manifesting Himself to them in a marvelous way. How did God open your eyes to see Him as the God of gods and the King of kings?

Many times it takes repeated events for us to come to understand God for who He is. Many of us are slow to learn that the things of this world are temporary, but the things of God are eternal. All to many of us say we trust in the Lord, but continue to dabble in the worship of the world's ways, making them gods in our life. Many of us have so many other things going on that God has a real low priority in our life. Many people today know very little about the things of God, so all they are left with a re the "gods of Egypt" upon which to rely. For all too many people, it would take a tremendous event like what the people of Israel experienced before they would turn from the gods of this world and trust in the holy and awesome God Almighty.

**This experience that the people of Israel had with the Mountain Fire of God created the transition from slavery to sin to dependence on the Lord God Almighty.** They had to trust in Him before they could inherit the Promised Land. They had to give up their worship of any other god, and worship God alone, before they received the promise of a land flowing with milk and honey. And as we see in the Scriptures, the people continually reverted back to their worship of the pagan gods. They refused to take God at His word and trust Him with their heart, soul, mind and strength. They were quick to wander off, and as a result, they lost their chance at entering the Promised Land, and had to spend the next 40 years wandering around in the wilderness. God became unhappy with them, so almost all of them died in the wilderness and never saw the land flowing with milk and honey. It took a new generation of believers to become faithful enough to receive God's promise.

The Desert Fire of God called Moses to become the savior of Israel from slavery in Egypt. The

Mountain Fire of God instructed and prepared the people of Israel for their journey as God's special people through the presence of God on Mt. Sinai. But it would take another fire of God to complete the task of transforming the people of Israel from a slavery mindset to the people of God mindset. That is the last of these three expressions of God's Holy Fire given to them to finally finish the transformation. Listen to this Wilderness Fire. This is Exodus 40:34-38. (READ Exodus 40:34-38)

Time and time again, the people of Israel strayed from God's trust and violated His covenant with them. When He called them to obey, they rebelled or became afraid to the point of disobedience. But God did not give up on His people.

Once the Tent of Meeting and the Ark of the Covenant were built and the people began to trust in God's presence with them, they experienced God's guidance and direction. **God's Wilderness Fire directed their movements throughout the 40 years of wilderness wandering**, leading them with a visible cloud of His presence by day, which became a cloud of fire by night. When the pillar of cloud moved, the people moved. When the pillar of fire stopped, the people stopped and made camp. Throughout the years, the people began to obey the guidance of the Lord. It was a visible sign of God's holy presence. All they people needed to do was to look at the cloudy pillar in the day time and the fiery pillar at night to know that God was there with them.

At first they complained and grumbled when things like water and food ran out, but God provided for them. He gave them their daily food of manna and quail and miraculously provided water at various times. Stagnant pools of water were purified. Water sprang out of rocks. And enemies were vanquished and destroyed. The people were given many examples of God's provision and protection so that they could completely put their faith and trust in Him. As they followed His laws, obeyed His commands, and trusted in His leaders, the people finally stopped trusting in their own strength and put their dependence on the Lord God for His leading of them. **And God delighted in making Himself present with the people by filling the Tent of Meeting.** His glory shown out of the tabernacle in such a way that all people could see that He was there with them. It kept them focused on following Him.

**God never failed them in the midst of their wilderness wanderings.** Though He became angry every once in a while, God never left them. He continued to lead them, call out to them, and transform them into the people He desired them to be. And they were able to do amazing things when God was with them. As the people trusted in the Lord God Almighty, He led them into the Promised Land, delivered all of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites into their hands, and gave them the land flowing with milk and honey, just as He promised them. But it took their constant reliance on Him to enable them to do the great things that God was inviting them to do.

God's repeated, constant fire can also be experienced in many of His churches today, not so much showing cloudy or fiery pillars, but by showing God's holy visible radiance in the lives of His people within the church. **When we continue to put our trust and dependence upon the Lord God of Israel, we find His blessings in our own lives.** When we trust in His Messiah, Jesus Christ, His fire illuminates our lives so that His radiance shines out to the world through us.

So when we come upon our own wilderness experiences in life, as we invite God to go with us, He shows up in marvelous and often miraculous ways to assure us that He is with us. When we trust in His commands, when we obey His laws and follow His Word, God is delighted to be in our presence with us. As we call out to Him in prayer and invite Jesus into our lives, God's Holy Spirit comes into us and enables us to do so much more than we ever thought possible. And **God takes great pleasure blessing all who faithfully follow Him.**

So what will it be for you today? Will you call upon the name of the Lord our God, through Jesus Christ our Savior, and let Him come be with us? Will you begin to learn of all of His commands and become faithful as His followers to demonstrate His presence in you? That is God's great desire for each and every one of us. Let's pray.

Father God, thank You for sending Your Desert, Mountain and Wilderness Fires to encourage us and guide us to be Your people. Give us the courage to open our hearts and minds and spirits to let You come into us and fill us by Your Holy Spirit, so that we might be able to accomplish Your work, leading us to Your Promised Land, through Jesus Christ our Messiah. Help us to never doubt You or turn against You, but to always faithfully follow You in all we do and say. This we pray in Jesus Name. Amen.