



The Burning Bush

God Provides Blessings

About the Story

The second half of the Book of Genesis focuses on one family and God's promise to them. Beginning with Abraham, and passing down through his son Isaac and grandson Jacob, God establishes a covenant with Abraham's descendants, designating male circumcision as the sign of the covenant. God promises that Abraham's offspring will be as numerous as the stars (Genesis 15:1-6), that they would possess the land of Canaan (Genesis 12:7), and that they will be blessed so that they can be a blessing to other nations (Genesis 12:1-3). The same promise is reiterated to Jacob (Genesis 28:13-14), whose name is eventually changed to Israel (Genesis 32:28).

The Point:

God blesses reluctant messengers and uses them to bless others. Like most of the prophets in the Bible, Moses is less than willing to accept the calling to serve God. Amid his objections, God is adamant. Rather than relenting, God equips Moses for the task ahead. God is so determined to send even the least qualified of us that God provides us with all we need to serve where we are called.

The final chapters recount the story of Israel's children, and particularly of Joseph, whose brothers plotted against him. He was eventually sold into slavery in Egypt, but rose to a high rank and was a favorite of the Pharaoh. His position allowed him to provide for his father and brothers during a time of famine. After he had forgiven his brothers, the whole family moved to Egypt and established themselves there. The Book of Genesis ends with the death of Joseph, and Exodus picks the story up there.

After many generations, the descendants of Israel (Israelites) have prospered in Egypt. There are enough of them that "the land was filled with them" (Exodus 1:7). But the new Pharaoh does not remember Joseph and has grown unhappy with the foreigners in their midst. He determines to enslave them and use their labor to build his cities. Finally, after many years, even generations, of oppression and violence against the Israelites, we are told that God is determined to fulfill God's promises to Abraham.

The rest of Exodus tells the story of deliverance and its aftermath. Moses is the central character, an Israelite brought up in Pharaoh's palace, who fled justice after he killed an Egyptian who was abusing an Israelite slave. Today's passage tells the story of Moses' call, when he came upon a burning bush in the wilderness, and God spoke to him. The drama that unfolds pits the God of Israel against the Pharaoh of Egypt, and sets up one of the most famous scenes in the Bible, as the people of Israel escape across the Red Sea. God provides them with dry land to walk on, and then brings the sea back to destroy Pharaoh's army, securing the Israelite's freedom.

Last Week/Next Week

Last week, God blessed Jacob and made him a promise, even though Jacob had been a cheater and a deceiver. In today's lesson, God remembers the promise to Jacob and chooses Moses to be a blessing to Jacob's descendants, the Israelites. Next week, God will continue to bless the Israelites by providing daily food for them as they trek in the wilderness.

Opening Prayer

God of deliverance, you lead us through even the most difficult times, always drawing us toward freedom and salvation in you. Be with us as we gather to read and share your Word, so that our hearts might be open to recognize your name wherever and however it is spoken. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Into the Story

Check in with each by sharing a little of the story of your name. Were you named after someone in your family? In a story? In the Bible? Does your name suit you? Is it hard to spell or pronounce? Do you have a nickname that you prefer? Where did that come from? Is there another name you wish you had? What else would you like to share about your name?

Learning the Story

Moses is called by God to bring a message of deliverance to the Israelites and to Pharaoh. In spite of his objections, God equipped Moses to meet the challenges of this work.

Read Exodus 2:23-25 – God Remembered

- ❓ Why do you think God only remembered the Israelites now, after generations of slavery? What is your reaction to this?
- ❓ Why does the story mention Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob?
- ❓ What do you think it means that God took notice of the Israelites? Had God not noticed them before?
- ❓ What relationship do you think the Israelites had with God up until this point?

Read Exodus 3:1-15 – God Chose

- ❓ Moses had been raised in Pharaoh's house but was a criminal who fled from Pharaoh's justice. Why would God choose him to be the messenger sent to Pharaoh?
- ❓ What objection(s) does Moses make to his calling?
- ❓ How would you react to such a calling from God?
- ❓ What do you make of the name and message that God gives Moses to bring to the Israelites? Why do you think God brings up Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob?
- ❓ How do you expect the Israelites to respond to Moses when he arrives?

Read Exodus 4:10-17 – God Equipped

- ❓ Moses continues his objections on into the next chapter. Why does the story give so much time to Moses’ arguments against his calling?
- ❓ What is God’s response to these final arguments?
- ❓ How does God resolve Moses’ concerns? What tools does God offer?
- ❓ Why do you think God was so insistent that Moses should be the messenger?
- ❓ Do you find God’s offer of assistance reassuring? If you were Moses, how would you feel with this calling?

Bible Connections

- ✚ The prophet Elijah encountered God at Mt. Horeb (Mt. Sinai) as well (1 Kings 19:1-18).
- ✚ The prophet Jonah is so reluctant to be called that he flees (Jonah 1).
- ✚ Jesus claims the name of God, “I Am,” for himself (John 4:26; 18:5, 8).

Living the Story: Worship

Before you gather, have one person find the lyrics for the old spiritual “When Israel Was in Egypt’s Land.” If you do not know the tune, read the words aloud together. The song is drawn from today’s story as well as portions of the Israelite’s journey into freedom. It was used to connect the biblical story of Exodus to the plight of African-descended slaves in the United States. As God equipped Moses to lead his people out of Egypt, the story of Moses equipped abolitionists to fight for the freedom of slaves in America.

Closing Prayer

Say the following litany together as a closing prayer. You may have one person read all of the Leader portions, or take turns. The whole group responds with the refrain, and joins together for the final petition.

Leader: God of creation,

All: I am who I am.

Leader: God of Adam and Eve,

All: I am who I am.

Leader: God of Noah,

All: I am who I am.

Leader: God of Abraham and Sarah,

All: I am who I am.

Leader: God of Isaac and Rebekah,

All: I am who I am.

Leader: God of Jacob and Rachel,

All: I am who I am.

Leader: God of Joseph,

All: I am who I am.

Bible Nuts & Bolts: The Exodus Story

The exodus story is one of the most central pieces of the Jewish identity. The Passover, still one of the most important holidays for many Jews today, is a remembrance of God’s deliverance. By remembering the exodus from Egypt, the Jewish people remember God’s presence among God’s people, God’s determination to act on behalf of the oppressed, and God’s covenant with the Israelites. Several themes central to the exodus story are important for both Jews and Christians today. Deliverance from death through the waters of the Nile (for Moses) and the waters of the Red Sea (for the Israelites) is echoed in the waters of baptism for Christians. The presence of God in the burning bush on Horeb and later in the pillar of fire in the wilderness becomes the presence of God in the tabernacle and then the temple in Jerusalem. For Christians, that presence and the salvation it represents is found in the person of Jesus Christ.

Leader: God of Moses and Zipporah,

All: I am who I am.

Leader: God of our fathers and our mothers,

All: Send us to proclaim freedom to captives; equip us to lead people to you; name us as your own children. Now and forever. Amen.

At Home

- ✚ Make a list of your objections to what you sense God might be calling you to do. Now make a list of ways that God might be equipping you to serve.
- ✚ Light a candle and use it as a focal point for your prayers.
- ✚ Ask for help on a project or ministry from someone who has gifts that you do not.

Daily Readings

Sunday—Read Exodus 2:23-25; 3:1-15; 4:10-17

God calls Moses to deliver God's message in Egypt, and tells Moses God's name. Using magazine clippings, make a collage to depict a burning bush.

Monday—Read Exodus 5:1-13

Moses approaches Pharaoh for the first time, demanding release for the Israelites, but Pharaoh refuses and increases their labor. What would your response be to Moses' efforts if you were one of the Israelites?

Tuesday—Read Exodus 7:14–8:15

God sends the first two plagues on Egypt, but Pharaoh refuses to let the people go. Write an investigative article explaining the plagues for the local newspaper.

Wednesday—Read Exodus 8:16–9:12

God sends four more plagues on the Egyptians, sparing the Israelites, but still Pharaoh refuses to release the captives. Draw a comic strip depicting each day of the plagues.

Thursday—Read Exodus 9:13–10:29

God sends the seventh, eighth, and ninth plagues against Egypt, but Pharaoh still refuses to allow the people to go. When have you felt that your heart was hardened, so that you could not do the right thing?

Friday—Read Exodus 12:1-32

God institutes the Passover in order to protect the Israelites from the tenth plague, which kills all the firstborn of Egypt, and Pharaoh finally relents and releases the people. Ask a Jewish friend or a member of a local synagogue to tell you what Passover means to them.

Saturday—Read Exodus 13:17–14:25

God appears as a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night, leading the people out of Egypt and through the Red Sea into freedom. Watch the film *The Ten Commandments* (1956), comparing it to the story told in Exodus.