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Flames of Fire from within a Burning Bush

3: 1-5

Flames of fire from within a burning bush DIG: Why do you think God used a burning bush to get Moses' attention? What do you make of the fact that Moshe was rejected before he saw the burning bush? How is the nation of Isra'el like the burning bush?

REFLECT: What does it mean to you that Moses was rejected in Egypt before his burning bush experience in Midian? As Moshe drew near to the bush, God met him. In the same way, God told Jeremiah the prophet: You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart (Jeremiah 29:13). Do you want to find Him? Do you want a relationship with Him? Do you seek Him today?

Moses' forty years in **Midian** had come to an end. All of his schooling in Egypt was not enough to prepare **him** for **his** great work of delivering **Isra'el** from slavery. **God** prepared **him** for this task with forty years in the desert of **Midian**.³⁷ Throughout the south Sinai Peninsula area there are little **bushes** that the Bedouin sheep and goats feed on. And because of a lack of rain and extreme heat, these bushes sometimes unexpectedly ignite with **fire** and **burn** up. So **burning bushes** there are not all that unusual. But **burning bushes** that talk to you, give you orders and don't **burn** up are unusual, even for the Sinai.

Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. His real name was Reuel (2:18). Jethro was a title like Pharaoh, not an actual name. This would have been especially humbling for Moses because the Egyptians detested herding flocks as an occupation (Genesis 46:34). And he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb, which means *desolation*, or the mountain of God (3:1). Horeb and Sinai are two names for the same **mountain**, just as Mount Hermon is also called Mount Sirion (Deuteronomy 3:9; Psalm 29:6). Horeb is the most elevated area of the Sinai Peninsula, and has the most fertile valleys in which even fruit trees grow. Water is plentiful there and consequently it is the destination of all the Bedouins when the lower countries are dried up. Therefore, Jethro's home was separated from Horeb by a desert.³⁸

Even Moshe's vocation served to shape **his** character. To mankind, who judges primarily on

the things of the flesh, **Moses** appeared to be a tragic figure at this stage in **his** life. **He** had lost his position of power and authority, **his** fame and riches. And at that time **he** was carrying out the most menial type of work in a barren land! But to **ADONAI**, all earthly authority, power, riches and pride are mere chaff that the wind drives away. For **Moses** was a poor shepherd who became the deliverer of **Isra'el**. In fact, that lowly work was preparation for the task of shepherding the flock of **the Lord**.³⁹

On one occasion at Mount Sinai, perhaps at night so it would be easy to see, **Moses** suddenly found **himself** confronted by a burning acacia bush. As mentioned earlier, the extremely dry conditions in the desert sometimes cause bushes to burst in to flames by spontaneous combustion. But there was something different this time; **Moshe saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up (3:2)**. But what **Moses** thought was fire, was actually the Sh'khinah glory, or the visible manifestation of **God's** presence.

Deuteronomy 33:16 refers to the Sh'khinah as: **Him who dwelt in the burning bush**. The Hebrew word dwelt, is *shahchan*, and this is where we get the concept of the Sh'khinah glory. Whenever the Sh'khinah glory is present it appears as a light, a **fire**, a cloud, or some combination thereof. **Moshe** had seen many **burning** bushes, however this was something he had never seen before.

When **Moses** saw **the burning bush**, **he** was curious and decided to take a closer look. **He thought to himself, "I will go over and see this strange sight - why the bush does not burn up" (3:3)**. Here was a wonder that all the magicians of Pharaoh could not produce. Here was something that confused all the wisdom of Egypt. This was the manifestation of **God Himself**, and from the midst of **the bush**, **God** began to speak to **Moses**.⁴⁰

There, within **the burning bush**, **the Angel of ADONAI appeared to him**. Whenever the phrase: **the Angel of ADONAI** is seen in the TaNaKh, it is always **the Second Person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ**. It is never a common, ordinary, run of the mill angel. Therefore, **when ADONAI saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush** and called out: **Moses! Moses! And Moses** answered: **Here I am (3:4)**. The Bible is very consistent that whenever **God** calls a man's name twice, as **He** does here, it is for the purpose of calling him to a specific ministry or commission. **He** does this to **Abraham** in **Genesis 22:11**, to **Jacob** in **Genesis 46:2**, to **Samuel** in **First Samuel 3:10**, and Rabbi **Sha'ul** in **Acts 9:4**.



After talking to **ADONAI**, **Moshe** decided to take a closer look. But from the midst of **the bush God** set the tone immediately when **He** commanded: **Do not come any closer. Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground (3:5)**. This is a sign of reverence common to the ancient Near East, a practice that continues to this day. **Joshua** was commanded to do the same in **Joshua 5:15**. There, **the commander of the Lord's army**, again **the Second Person of the Trinity** or **Yeshua Messiah**, appeared to **Joshua** just before the fall of Jericho. As here in **Exodus 3**, through a **Divine** encounter, a leader is commissioned to do battle with those forces that oppose **God's** people.⁴¹

The picture of **the burning bush** is full of symbolism. First, **the bush** was **burning** and **fire** is consistently used as a symbol of divine **judgment** in the Scriptures (**Genesis 3:24; First Kings 18:38; Dani'el 3:1-27; Matthew 25:41; Revelation 20:14**). The writer to **the Hebrews** tells us that **our God is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29)**. When we get to the building of the Tabernacle in **Exodus 35:1 to 39:43**, we learn that bronze, like the bronze altar, contained the **fire**. Therefore, bronze is also associated with judgment (**Numbers 21:9; Dani'el 10:6; Revelation 1:14 and 2:18**).

Secondly, the word **bush**, or *seneh*, means *a thorny bush*. When **God** introduces the concept of **sin** in **Genesis 3**, **He** uses **thorns** as its symbol. **ADONAI** said: **Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field (Genesis 3:17b-18)**. And when **Christ** was being crucified on the cross for our sin, the Roman soldiers **twisted together a crown of thorns and set it upon His head (Matthew 27:29a)**. **The Holy Spirit** is consistent in this usage and **the thorny bush** in the desert was a symbol of sin. So the picture we have before us is sin being judged by **God's** consuming **fire**. **The rabbis teach that God chose the lowliest of the trees as the place of revelation to show that He was with the Israelites in their sufferings and humiliation.**

Thirdly, a very strange thing happened. **The burning bush did not burn up**, which pictures

His mercy. This is exactly what **God** is asking **Moshe** to do at **his burning bush** experience. **God** is sending **Moses** to Pharaoh and the ten plagues will be in **judgment** of Egypt's **sin**. However, even in **His** judgments, **God** will show **mercy** to the Egyptians and not consume them.

One of the greatest proofs of the accuracy of Scripture is the existence of the nation of **Isra'el**. Years ago an emperor of Germany asked his chaplain the question, "What is the greatest proof that the Bible is the Word of **God**? Is that proof somewhere in my kingdom?" Without hesitation the chaplain answered and said, "**The Jew** sir. **She** is the proof." **Isra'el** is **the burning bush** that ought to cause the unbeliever to turn aside and take a look today. It is amazing that **she** has existed down through the centuries. From the days of **Moshe** to the present hour, **she** has been in existence. Other nations have come and gone, and **she** has attended the funeral of all of them. But **she** is still around. **Isra'el** has been in the **fire** of persecution from the bondage in Egypt, through the centuries, to the present day. But like **the burning bush**, **Isra'el** has not been consumed.⁴²