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STEPHEN TAKES HIS STAND WITH MOSES AND WITH JESUS

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF THE ACTS
NUMBER 25
ACTS 7:30-40

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Moses had to spend forty years in that desert. Now it didn't take God forty years to train Moses, but many other factors were involved. God was waiting for the "fullness of time" as far as Israel was concerned. Moses had a forty years vacation from the life of Egypt, his geographical location was changed, and God gave him a period of quiet preparation for the next forty years ordeal of his life. God was preparing Moses for forty years of intense service. The Jews in Egyptian bondage were ignorant of doctrine and God had to wait on them until the right moment came for their deliverance.

During that forty years period, Moses lived sort of a ranch kind of life. He married into an Arab family and had two sons. Moses took care of cattle and sheep and had time to think. Then came the great experience of the burning bush.

Back in Acts 6 you remember, the Sanhedrin had accused Stephen of speaking blasphemous things against Moses. Stephen is going to show that he not only is not guilty of this accusation, but that he is on Moses' side.

God actually performed an amazing miracle with Moses and when he returned to Egypt at eighty, he was in the very vigor of his great strength. God just turned the clock back psychologically and physically. Moses was not an old decrepit man with a white beard when he returned to Egypt. He was in the very prime of his life. God had wrought a miracle on Moses, but remember, God is a God of miracles. Moses was rested and refreshed for the task God had for him. Quite often God will raise up a man of unusual physical strength to do his will. We emphasize mental and spiritual preparation and sometimes minimize physical preparation. God did not overlook any of these areas. So Moses had forty years of private living and refreshment. But from the time God ordered Moses back to Egypt there would be no more private living and no more relaxation for forty long years in that desert.

Pressures mounted on top of pressures and Moses was probably the greatest leader that ever lived for he led two million of the most stubborn people of all history. Moses' wife turned against him and ran off with his two sons and Moses never saw them but once more during his life.

ACTS 7:30 "And when forty years were expired, there appeared to him in the wilderness of mount Sina an angel of the Lord in a flame of fire in a bush." "Angel of the Lord" does not have the definite article in front of it and it refers to the one and only Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. Moses was going through his usual cattle work and in the desert, he saw the bush aflame. The fire didn't burn the bush up and it didn't spread. Moses was attracted and he went to the bush to investigate.

(I might add here that in our day television has glamorized the life of the cattleman. They have added adventure and romance and have made it appear about the most thrilling life in the world. Nothing could be farther from the truth. It is a lonesome, difficult and often boring task with little excitement. Anything like a burning bush in the lonesome desert would be something to see. And Moses was attracted to it.)

The Lord was ready to send Moses back to Egypt and he broke into his rather complacent menial existence with a burning bush.

ACTS 7:31 "When Moses saw it, he wondered at the sight: and as he drew near to behold it, the voice of the Lord came unto him"

The word "Wondered" is in the imperfect tense and this tells us that Moses saw this bush from a distance and he kept on looking at it, kept on being amazed as he drew nearer and saw that the bush didn't burn up. Moses just kept looking at the bush. For so long he had been looking at sheep and the cloudless sky, and now here is something that really startled Moses. Please remember, this is the rugged country of Arabia. This is not Mount Zion in Jerusalem. This is in Southern Arabia. As Stephen was talking to the Sanhedrin, they were in the holy temple, but Stephen is trying to prepare them for the thought that this spot in the desert was just as holy as any spot in the temple.

"The voice of the Lord" refers to Jesus Christ. Christ is now going to confront Moses with his call to service.

ACTS 7:32 "Saying, I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Then Moses trembled, and durst not behold." This verse explains Romans 9:6-13. This is the title God gave to Jesus Christ. Abraham was originally a Gentile, but God called him, he was regenerated and he became a Jew. Nahor, the brother of Abraham, was not converted and he remained a Gentile. Ishmael and Isaac were brothers, but Ishmael remained a Gentile and became the father of many of those Arabian tribes that inhabit the Arabian desert until this day. Isaac became a believer and was a Jew. Isaac had twin sons, Esau and Jacob. Esau was an unbeliever, a Gentile and Jacob became a believer and was a Jew. The Jewish race is founded on regeneration. When Moses heard this voice out of the burning bush, he became terrified. (Moses spoke three languages--Egyptian, Hebrew, and the Arabian language. I do not know the language Christ used in speaking to Moses, possibly Hebrew.) Moses was terrified and would look no longer at the burning bush.

ACTS 7:33 "Then said the Lord to him, Put off thy shoes from thy feet: for the place where thou standest is holy ground." Moses had an attitude of faith and respect and love toward Jesus Christ. (You see, Stephen was speaking to the Sanhedrin and he is drawing a contrast between the attitude Moses had toward Jesus and the attitude the Sanhedrin had toward Jesus. Up to this point, it hasn't fully dawned on the Sanhedrin the full implication of Stephen's message, but little by little it will begin to dawn upon them the full impact of his implications.) The temple was holy and sacred to the Sanhedrin. The temple area was holy ground. They were required to take off their shoes when they entered this holy spot. Here Christ tells Moses to take off his shoes as he stands before the burning bush, for the spot is holy. Stephen is reminding the Sanhedrin that when a man faces Jesus Christ, he is on holy ground.

ACTS 7:34 "I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people which is in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send thee into Egypt." Please notice the two repeated phrases--"I have seen--I have seen". They sound the same, but are entirely different. Why are the same words repeated? The first "I have seen" is an aorist active participle, and the second "I have seen" is an aorist active indicative. The meaning is this--The first "I have seen" refers to forty years before, when Moses killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. God was ready to deliver the Israelites then, for he then saw their terrible condition in slavery, but they were not ready for deliverance. Now, forty years later, God still sees their condition. Forty years before they were not ready for deliverance, but now they are. God would have delivered them forty years earlier but their unbelief and lack of faith caused God to wait forty more years. The point is this--ignorance of Bible doctrine hindered a nation's deliverance forty years. The carnal mind is enmity against God, and it takes a regenerated mind to know and follow the ways of God.

When it says here that God saw and heard their "groanings" this refers to the prayers they prayed under the pressure of slavery. So God says to Moses, "Get up, your vacation is over. You are going to Egypt to be my instrument in the deliverance of my people."

When God says to Moses, "I will send" it is an aorist active subjunctive, and this means it is a command from God which will take the human volition of Moses into account. God will not send Moses to Egypt against his will. Later Moses is going to offer many excuses, but eventually he will bend his stubborn will to the will of God and will go.

ACTS 7:35 "This Moses whom they refused, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge? the same did God send to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the angel which appeared to him in the bush." "This Moses whom they refused" refers back to that first "I have seen". Stephen is saying to the Sanhedrin, "You are just like those Jews in Egypt who refused to take their freedom when they might have had it. Jesus Christ came here to you, but you crucified him and refused the freedom he offered you." Even though those Jews refused at first, God kept on and eventually Moses went to Egypt and led them in a mighty deliverance. Stephen is saying to the Sanhedrin-- "Look, you say I am blaspheming Moses and the temple. I am on Moses side. I am not the one blaspheming Moses and the temple, you, the Sanhedrin, are the ones who are doing that."

ACTS 7:36 "He brought them out, after that he had shewed wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red sea, and in the wilderness forty years." God brought them out with a high hand, and sustained them forty years.

ACTS 7:37 "This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear." This verse is a quotation of Deuteronomy 18:18 and is a prophesy about the coming of Jesus Christ.

ACTS 7:38 "This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us:" The word "Church" in this passage comes from the greek word "Ecclesia" and means assembly. Christ and Moses taught the people in the wilderness for forty years. The "living oracles" refers to the doctrine God imparted to these people as they wandered for forty years in the desert.

ACTS 7:39 "To whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt" As God tried to teach these stubborn Jews in the desert, instead of filling their minds with God's teaching, they kept turning their minds back to Egypt. Their bodies were in the desert, but their minds were still back in Egypt. They didn't go back to Egypt physically, but they were in Egypt mentally.

ACTS 7:40 "Saying unto Aaron, Make us gods to go before us: for as for this Moses, which brought us out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him." These Jews in the desert rejected Moses while he was in the mountain getting the laws and teachings of God, and they reverted to their heathen beliefs of Egypt and worshipped a golden calf. They had pagan gods in their minds, the gods many of them had worshipped in Egypt.

Stephen is saying to the Sanhedrin, "You are just like the Jews. They built a golden calf and rejected the living God. You crucified Christ on a cross and have substituted your religion in place of Christ."

Please notice certain principles involved in this Scripture we have studied tonight--

1. God is always ready to deliver--but many times he has to wait on us.
So many times we are rebellious, stubborn, bent on doing our own will.
2. The most important thing for any Christian is to have Bible doctrine saturating his mind. Nothing is as important for the Christian as Bible doctrine.
3. God is patient, but God is not going to allow man to prevent the successful completion of his plan in the earth.