

Emblems From the Life of Moses

by A.B. Simpson

The sermon emphasizes the importance of faith and trust in God's providence, highlighting the stories of Moses and the burning bush as symbols of God's power and presence in the midst of trials and temptations.

Scripture: Exodus 3:2-5, Exodus 4:2-5, Isaiah 43:2, Luke 24:27, John 14:13-14, Acts 7:37, Romans 8:28, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Hebrews 11:1, 1 Peter 1:7

Topics: "God's Providence", "Faith"

Description

A.B. Simpson explores the life of Moses as a profound emblem of faith, redemption, and God's providence. He emphasizes how Moses' journey, from being placed in the Nile to encountering the burning bush, symbolizes the trials and triumphs of the Christian life. Simpson illustrates that just as Moses was called to trust God with his life and the rod in his hand, believers are invited to surrender their weaknesses and ordinary lives to God's transformative power. The sermon highlights that God's presence, represented by fire, sustains and empowers us through our trials, making us indestructible in faith. Ultimately, the message is about recognizing God's sufficiency in our insufficiency, as encapsulated in His name, 'I AM.'

Transcript

And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." "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 is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake unto him in the Mount Sinai, and with our fathers; who received the lively oracles to give unto us." Luke 24: 27; Acts 7: 37.

We need not repeat what has been said in a former volume, that all these ancient scriptures are God's pictures of Christ. We shall now renew our study of these emblems as we next find them, in the Book of Exodus. We have seen that the first book of the Bible is almost a table of contents of all that was to follow; and that the germ truths of the whole system of redemption are there made living in the personal characters and the symbolical figures that God gave in a series of object lessons to the infant class of His church. In the Book of Exodus the vision grows more vivid, though not less spiritual, and not less Christly.

SECTION I -- The Ark on the Nile.

The first that we call attention to is the ark of faith, as we may call it -- that little vessel to which a Jewish mother entrusted all her hopes and all the hopes of her people in that hour of strange and terrible extremity; and out of which God brought through His chosen servant, the hope and the deliverer of the church. This picture of Moses and his rescue is the real parable of the whole story of the Book of Exodus, and all that it means -- namely, the work of redemption. The word Exodus means "taken out," and the word Moses means "drawn out." And so the Exodus tells how the children of Israel were taken out of Egypt, and thus how we are taken out of the Egypt of sin in like manner. And Moses is the figure of their deliverance and ours; and thus his name became expressive of the whole story of the Exodus. He, too, was condemned to die by the harsh decree of the cruel Pharaoh, and he was laid on the altar of death by his mother's trembling hands. He was given up to die, and to her was as really dead, almost, as though he had been taken out of her arms and buried. And then he came back to her as much from the dead as Isaac came back to his father. Thus he becomes the symbol of death and resurrection. There is a trial in front of every blessing. There is a cross everywhere, and there is a crown on the other side; and only thus can we enter into the mystery of God's working; in the life of faith. Little Moses must die and come back to his people, as Christ must be crucified and raised again; and your life must be laid on the altar if you are to come up in resurrection power. So the story of Moses is the parable of resurrection, redemption and the Christian life.

And in handing over that which is so dear to us, there must be faith. We cannot do it unless we trust God. That mother could not have put her cherished one on the bosom of the Nile, if she had not thought that God's hand was under him, and God's power going to deliver him. It is really a question whether Abraham could have yielded up Isaac as he did, if he had not had faith. It glorifies that act, to be told that Abraham believed Isaac would somehow be given back, even from death. It was the faith that made it possible to go through the death. It was the joy that was set before Him that enabled Jesus to endure the cross, and despise the shame. And so God does not take any of us as blind sacrifices, and put us to death in a sort of brutal and hopeless surrender, but He gives us the blessed consciousness that we are in the hands of infinite love, and that, though we may not see how, yet somehow God has for us nothing but blessing, and an outcome of mightier joy and service, and issues that shall reach out through eternity for His glory and for the good of others. So it was here; little Moses, kept in her home, would have perished. Little Moses, on the Nile, is still alive in his work, and has become the leader of faith for the millions that have followed in his footsteps. And so, the clinging hands that would hold back what God is calling you to give Him are cruel, foolish hands; and your true life and their true life must ever lie in the example of this ancient mother. Just place all at His blessed feet, and all eternity will unfold to you an hundred fold.

Again, not only do we see faith here, but we see God's providence -- that takes the things that we cannot keep, and guards the things for which we cannot care. We are not walking in the dark; there are eyes above us, and around us, and on every side, that slumber not nor sleep. And God can take the very things that you are most afraid of; God can take the very things that are breaking your heart; God can take the very things that seem to be your enemies, and make them the very occasion of your deliverance, and the instruments of your highest blessing. Poor Jochabed was perhaps haunted with the fear of the cruel Pharaoh and his daughter; but she lived to see them the instruments of blessing. The very thing that seemed to condemn her child to death made him the child of a king. The hard fortune by which he was taken from her arms was the doorway by which he was given back. And the very river to which she consigned him, and by which it seemed she was putting him in a watery grave, carried him on the voyage by which he passed from being a Hebrew captive to be the Lawgiver of the world. The very things that are hard to suffer become the scaffolding for building God's temple, without which He could not have fulfilled

His purpose. And so with the story of Joseph. He had to go into the dungeon to be a Prince. And Moses had to be decreed to death, to be cast into the waters, to be saved, and become the instrument of God to save these people. O let us trust that inscrutable Providence, which is so full of mystery to many, and which hides behind His trials and discipline plans and purposes of love and wisdom. And so, through this little floating vessel let us learn the secret of self-renunciation; let us learn the secret of trust, and let our trembling hands place all that is dear in His infinite arms, and ever keep them there; and with wondering hearts we, too, shall know how wise, how strong His hand.

SECTION II -- The Burning Bush.

The second emblem in the Book of Exodus is the fire of the wilderness, the Burning Bush. We come to it in the third chapter of Exodus, second verse: "And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire, out of the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed. And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt. And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses.

And he said, Here am I. And He said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground. Moreover He said, I am the God of thy 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 upon God. And the Lord said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; and I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them. Come now, therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people, the children of Israel out of Egypt." Here we see the story of Egypt again represented in symbol, just as it was in the waters of the Nile, only the figure here is not water, but fire. It grows more intense, more terrible. And so God's image to us of trial and of trouble is both water and fire, and He has given us a promise for both.

"When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Savior." And so, while the waters of the Nile tell of the engulfing tribulation, the burning bush tells of the tribulations which seem to be a consuming fire. The bush referred to here was a little stunted shrub that still grows in the wilderness of that country.

It was not a palm tree, it was not a beautiful bush full of blossoms. It was a fitting type of these and of the church of God, although a despised little thing. And so it is with our Christian life -- a root out of a dry ground, like the heath in the desert, to the eye of man; not only obscure, but burning with fiery trial. Fire represents here what had been represented to Abraham in the smoking furnace of his vision. It represents the fiery trials of our lives, the things that burn down deep into the very fibers of our being, the flames that penetrate and seem to become the very substance of our soul.

Fire is strangely intense and intrinsic, it goes into the very substance of things. It somehow blends with every particle of the things it touches. Somehow, there are trials that penetrate so that some of us do not

know a moment of life without them, nor a spot that does not hold them. There are seasons of trial -- what is called, in the Bible, "the day of evil." There are the physical trials, the social and domestic trials, and the things that grieve the tenderest sensibilities, and break the loving, sympathizing heart.

There are the trials of uncongenial surroundings and unfavorable circumstances. There are the severer trials that come to minds more sensitive, to the minds that have more points of contact with what hurts; so that the higher the nature the higher the joy, and the greater the avenues of pain that can come. And then there are the deeper trials that come as we pass into the hands of God, as we pass from the psychical and intellectual into the spiritual nature; as the Apostle says, "The fiery trial that is to try you."

When it first comes, we shrink back from its unnatural and fearful breath, and we say: "O this cannot be from the hand of a loving Father; this cannot be necessary to me." O the fearfulness of the struggle, the strange, sulphurous smell that comes from its exhalations, and so sickens and withers, sometimes, our spiritual sensibilities. And then the pains and sufferings that come from God's own hand, when He sits as a refiner and purifier of silver, when He lets it burn, and burn, and burn, and burn in, until it seems that we must be burned to ashes, and we are indeed at last burned to ashes, "for our God is a consuming fire."

The Holy Ghost shall baptize you with fire. And this fire sometimes means suffering in your deeper spiritual being, until your soul becomes partaker of the virtue of God, and then all the fires cannot consume you. I know that some of you can understand this. This is one of the things that does not need philosophy to explain. Christ knew it, and He talks to us as a suffering people. The Bible avers that we are the children of affliction. Though trial does not spring from the ground, or from the clouds, yet man is born to it as the sparks fly upward.

But, blessed be His name, if you are God's workmanship, the bush burns, but is not consumed. If one branch of God's little shrub is reduced, or calcined by that little flame, it does not harm anything that is real. They walk through the midst of the fire, without the smell of the flame on their garments, and come forth, set free from its vehemence and fury, set free from the very chains that had been on their limbs when they entered the furnace. God tells us that trouble cannot harm us if we are His.

He was showing Moses that His people could not be destroyed by these persecutions, for, the more they were persecuted, the more they grew and multiplied. Our troubles have not harmed us, if we are the Lord's. We shall suffer no loss through them.

But we must get the victory through faith. We must get above the billow, or it will sink us. The moment you cease to fear it, that moment it ceases to harm you. He says, "The waters shall not overflow you." He says, "The flames shall not kindle upon you." The flames will burn something, but nothing that is divine. God must burn all else some day, and it is better now. The fire will try men's souls to see what they are, and where there is hay or stubble, it will burn like tinder, in the last day: is it not better now? There are things in you that will burn, but they are not divine things. God wants you to be made free from everything that would consume. I take a piece of paper and put it in the gas jet, and how quickly it burns up. But I can keep a piece of gold there all day, and yet it is not burned: it may melt, but it is all there; it is indestructible. And so God wants to take out of you and me that which is perishable. "O," let us say, "anything in me that will not stand in that day, let it go, and give me that which will stand." If the faith withers, maybe it was not faith. And if the song dies out, maybe it was only an earth song. Possibly God is letting your natural strength wither, that you may take the strength of God; letting your old powers shrink, that you may get rooted in the rock. That which burns out is transient and earthly, and God is burning it out that you may get

something better. You know that He is burning out the dross of sin; are you willing that he should? I have no doubt that there was some way in which the children of Israel were being prepared for their future by their sufferings. We may not understand it, but God does. And so the peaceable fruits will come out of our trials. And is it not wonderful that here the very figure that is used to express the suffering, the very emblem of their terrible furnace of affliction, is the type of Christ Himself. The burning flame is God's most ancient emblem of His own image, and the one that shines preeminent above all other symbols among His ancient people. In Eden He appeared as the fiery Shekinah.

And preceding, or following, the children of Israel in their journeys, was the pillar of cloud and fire. And so the symbol of God throughout the Old Testament was fire. In the tabernacle the Spirit of God was represented by the flame above the ark. At Mount Sinai He came down in the fire and in the lightning. When He came to judgment, He came in fire. So, again, when Elijah called on God on Mount Carmel, He answered by fire. When the Holy Ghost came, we are told in the Book of Acts that cloven tongues of fire sat upon each of the disciples.

Thus fire was the special enrobing of the Divine form. It tells not only of our sorrow, but of Him who comes to us in our sorrow. And so, as we look at the licking tongues of flame, and think of its consuming power, lo! suddenly it becomes transformed, and over its glowing figure we behold the name of God and read these words: "I am that I am." And so this figure of the burning bush not only represents the suffering church, but also God in the midst of His people, pervading them with His life, and thus making them indestructible in the midst of trials and temptations; sustained and upheld by His own indwelling, and His mighty all-sufficiency.

Dear friends, do we know this indwelling fire? It is not the God of judgment who is a consuming fire, but the language of the Apostle is: "Our God is a consuming fire" -- the God that comes to us, the God that we love to have come to us. Has He come to us as a fire? Has He come to consume the perishable and the corruptible, the sinful and the narrow? Has He burned out of you the foolishness, the sinfulness, the weakness, and the selfishness? Will you let Him? O this is a wholesome fire; it is a blessed fire.

The thing you want consumed is a wilderness of woods and swamp. When a fire starts in a swamp, how quickly the wild things get out. How the serpents hiss and flee, and how everything is cleansed. God wants to burn the nest of scorpions out of your heart. Ask Him to let the fire in. If you have anything wrong in your heart, ask Him to come and consume it. There are things in your bosom that you want burned out. You want it as empty as a vessel that has been through the flames.

We need not only to be washed out, but to be burned out, if we would be pure vessels fit for the Master's use. Ask Him to send the fire, and receive it as the fire of love. O for the Divine love that endureth all things, that hopeth all things, that never faileth. Let it burn on and on and never cease -- the unquenchable fire of God in the heart. Then shall it be what the fire is in the wheels of human industry, moving the machinery of life. "He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire."

Before the day closes, you may be like that burning bush, baptized with fire, a glowing thing -- little and obscure, but a wonder to earth and heaven, alive with light and glory and purity; nothing in yourself, but, like that wire which runs along your streets, charged with electric fire so that a man would not dare touch it, it is so alive. So you, though little and lowly, may be fiery channels to touch other lives, and make them yield to Him. Let us realize that the dispensation of today is supernatural as that of Pentecost. It was the Holy Ghost that was in the shrub; He is as present here, and He can make of you all you will let Him.

SECTION III -- The Rod of Moses.

The third emblem we shall look at is the rod referred to in the fourth chapter of Exodus. Moses said: "But, behold, they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice: for they will say, The Lord hath not appeared unto thee."

Then God did not say to him, I am going to give you some great sign, but He said: "What is that in thine hand?" And he said, "A rod." That was God's sign to Moses that God was to be with him. Dear friends, when the Lord wants to give you a sign to the world that He is in you, He is not going to do it by an astonishing emblem. He is going to say to you, "What is that in thine hand?" He is going to take the commonest thing in your life, and make it mighty in His service. He is going to prove that His presence is in you, and that He is going to work with your nothingness and simplicity.

The very thing of all on which the commission of Moses rested, was the simplest and smallest and weakest thing about him. That little shepherd's crook, the little thorn bush he had cut in the desert, is to be the weapon with which he is to go to Pharaoh and challenge his power, and open a pathway for God's redeemed people to walk through the sea on dry land, and bring the cloud of glory to lead as they marched forth. That little rod, the very emblem of insignificance and weakness, is the emblem of God's power and the token of His presence.

Beloved, do you want to know whether God is in your heart, whether God is really all in all? Then, what are you doing with that in your hand? What is God making out of your common life? And is God using the little things about you, and your very weakness? What has God made out of your rod? That is what it all means. It does not mean that you are to get into an ideal state, and when you are particularly strong and adapted to your work, God is going to use you, but God is going to start now; He wants to take you today; and the very thing He wants to baptize with the Holy Ghost is not something that you hope to have by the spring or the autumn, but what you have got this morning or evening.

The very trial in your life from which you want deliverance, and then be at God's disposal, He wants to take now and make it the opportunity of your service. The very work in your hand now, he wants to come into and make a token of his power. The very thing you are trying to get over and make satisfactory to yourself, He wants surrendered as it is. God meets you with that which is in your hand, and He wants to use you with what you have, and what you are, and then prepare you for whatever he has in reserve for you in His purpose of wisdom.

And so we find, all through the Bible, that God takes people in the place He finds them, and in the relations His providence has already given them, and uses them. So not only with Moses but a score of others, God has taken their occupation, and made them illustrious examples of His power. He came to Joshua, and used him for what he was fitted -- a soldier. He came to Deborah, and used her as he would a woman. He came to Miriam, and said: "What have you?" "A harp," she answered, and He used her to sing the song of Moses and the Lamb.

He came to Hannah she had a mother's heart -- and He took that, and out of it came Samuel and his service. He came to Samson, and He did not wait for anything better than an old skeleton bone -- that was enough. He came to David, the shepherd boy, and made him a king before he had any military training, or knew anything of a courtier's life. And so, at a later period, He took Paul, the tent maker, and William Carey at his bench, and David Livingston throwing his shuttle, a missionary before he ever saw Africa.

And so He takes you; you do not need to be anything better than the burning bush. That is not perhaps all He will yet use. If He shall give you culture, He will use that when it is in your hand. But He will not use you until you use what you have. If the fire is not burning in your heart, do not put on any more green wood. What are you doing today? or what are you letting God do? It was not Moses that did it -- it was God. Moses tried to do it forty years before, but God would not have any of his trying.

Moses had put himself in the front, and took his sword and killed an Egyptian and hid him in the sand; and then he said, "That is the way I am going to treat all that misuse my brethren;" but the next day he was glad to run away and hide from the consequences of his impulsiveness. God would not have him then. But now for forty years He has been slowly tempering him; he has been steeping in the waters of patient trial; he has been getting humble, so that now God has to goad him, and push him out.

He says: "I cannot speak, Lord; send anybody, but do not send me." When God gets him there, reduced to the smallest of proportions, the meekest of all the men that ever lived, He says: "You are ready for work; now, Moses, I am going to take that rod, and with it break the arms of Pharaoh, and open the way for my people, and bring waters from the desert rock and make you an instrument of power." Is it not the New Testament lesson? "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world, to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world, to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are; that no flesh should glory in His presence."

He wants only to have our nothingness. But we must have Him. And so, as the closing lesson, we want to learn that, back of the story of the burning bush and the rod, there is another fact that overshadows all, transcends all -- written in the sky, written on the sacred page, written henceforth on Moses' heart, and I hope, on ours -- the mighty name that God pronounces for the first time, "I AM;" "I AM THAT I AM." "Lord, how will they know? How will I get them to accept me?" "Certainly, I will be with thee.

I am that I am." You! Why you have not anything to do, but just to go. But I AM, and you are not. You are a little shrub. I am the fire that burns in it. And no man dare touch it any more than he dare touch that charged wire, to harm it. What does it matter about the brush, if the right painter wields it? What does it matter about the harp; if the right musician plays it, he can bring music out of a broken string. And so, "I am;" and if you want anything more, "I am that I am."

It is just, "I Am -- I Am -- I Am." It is the Personal One -- the One we have been learning to receive, trying to get out of His way and make room for Him to come in. So, over against our nothingness, over against all we fear or desire on earth or in heaven, let us put "I Am." He keeps on saying it through the New Testament. He says it to His disciples on the stormy sea. He says it to you, "It is I, be not afraid." And He is hovering over us between earth and heaven -- and again, about to ascend, He speaks unto His disciples, saying, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth, and, lo, I AM with you all the days, even unto the end."

It still is "I Am." And again, in the latest book -- in the Apocalypse -- He adds, "I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive forever more." O this is the secret of power. It is not merely ceasing from yourself, but it is seeing Him. It is not merely dying, but it is letting Him live. It is not merely saying, I am not sufficient to think anything of myself, but it is putting out your hands and saying, "but our sufficiency is of God." "Having nothing" -- it would kill us if we stopped there "but possessing all things."

That is the reason He wants you to get off the old raft, that you may get on yonder ship of power and all-sufficiency. That is the reason He wants you to let go your old miserable way for, and be carried by the train of His almighty power. O how many of us have stopped with the discouragements, the nothingness. Now, beloved, take hold of His strength. For everything you have let go there is an hundred-fold -- take it. Have you done so? Come, that God may fill your life. Place all that you have at His feet, and before the sun goes down you shall triumph there.

Moses and Jehovah: the rod is enough, only let God wield it. Somebody wanted once to see the sword of Richard Coeur de Lion -- I think it was Saladin the Saracen -- and when he saw it he said: "Why, that is not half so good a sword as mine; that is nothing but a cleaver. Look at my sword," and he took out the burnished blade and doubled it until the point touched the hilt. "Look, it is elastic, and this blade is like a razor." The man quietly looked at him, and then said: "Saladin, it is not the sword of Richard, it is the arm of Richard that wields it, that makes it what it is."

O beloved, we are enough, you are enough, if we will only let Him hide us in His shadow, and uphold us with His hand. "I am He that holdeth the seven stars in my hand," He says. O take His great name today. Fill up the blank in your own covenant, and write after that: "I am; I am joy; I am power; I am love; I am faith; I am providence; I am in the future, and in the past; I am Jesus; I am thine; I am in thee; I am thy faith, and thy power, and thy salvation; -- nay, take me bodily, and own me utterly, for I am thy God, You are not your own. I am not my own, but thine. I am thine and thou art mine." Amen.

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