

Reactions to Reading “Moses at the Burning Bush”

Robinson, Bernard P. "Moses at the Burning Bush" Journal for the Study of the Old Testament 75, 107 (1997): pg. 122

I. What Particular Issue is being addressed?

This article provides an analysis of what the “Burning bush story” from Exodus 3:1-6 could have meant to its original readers. The author looks at how early readers might have viewed the various aspects regarding the burning bush along with how these aspects may have helped to shape the faith of these believers and early temple worship.

II. What is the author’s thesis in response to the issue?

The author is attempting to discover what the early readers of this passage made of it, rather than what the authors intentions may have been in writing it. The author feels that it is restrictive to simply research the intentions of the author as there is nothing to be discovered here than what the author actually wrote.

III. How does the author present His case?

The author approaches this text through a literary approach to the text and utilizes a historical critical method to uncover various meanings that he feels would have been conveyed through this story to its original or early audience. The author also states that he feels there is insufficient evidence available to support the Documentary Hypothesis (of which this passage would be a J source). Although this may not be key since he is ultimately looking into the minds of the first or early readers of the Pentateuch.

The main body of this article sets pace working from top to bottom in this section of scripture discussing points of interest and giving examples of what it could have meant to early readers. This article is well researched and contains a large amount of footnotes showing the author's well thought out and well presented observations.

IV. What evidence does the author bring in to support his argument?

It is notable throughout this article that the author utilizes the scripture often to support his thesis. He sites several sections of scripture to first establish how the Pentateuch was studied and read by early believers, such as Nehemiah chapters 8 and 9. The author continues to utilize scripture in each of his points of interest. From the calling of Moses and an understanding of the divine intervention in the calling of God to assume a higher commission, to the intervention of God in nature to preserve the burning bush from being consumed by fire; the author's arguments are all presented in reference to scripture sources. The writings of the Prophets and observations of the scripture are used in a full way to show the responses of the Jewish people as they studied the Pentateuch and the ongoing leadership of the God of Moses.

The author also uses a host of secondary sources, although in some cases disputes them in order to follow what he feels is a more direct line of reasoning from the Biblical record.

V. Does the author succeed in persuading the reader?

This reader did feel that the author was very persuasive and made many strong points which were quite agreeable. Possibly a reader who holds fast to a Documentary Hypothesis, or does not feel that a historical critical method should be used, would find fault with this article.

The messages to the early readers that Robinson finds is a God who is in control of nature and one who reveals himself definitively on Sinai. A God who prepared Moses to act as His agent, a God who promises protection to those in exile and a God who was not confined to specific spaces, but makes the place where He is present holy. Finally Robinson displays for us how the early reader would have seen the burning bush in the Menorah, a symbol of the constant presence of God.

VI. What significance does this article have for the interpretation and preaching/teaching of the Pentateuch in the church?

This article provides a wealth of information that would be of use in preaching and teaching in the church, not only in its thesis and content, but also in the method and research style of the author. The historical relevance of God's message to his people and the early use of the Pentateuch by the prophets and ability of God's message to be used in interpreting itself is crucial for the current church to understand that the message of God to man has not changed, just as the nature of man has not changed.

There are current views of scripture that seek to discount miraculous signs such as the burning bush or explain the miraculous through scientific reasoning. This, however, would displace many of the important principles that I believe God is trying to communicate to us through this passage in Exodus.

Is God a formidable deity who is in control of the forces of nature? Or can God be safely ignored as we peruse our daily lives? Does God still call people to specific tasks or again, should we depend on our own devices and simply peruse our own station in life? The depth of this passage compelled early readers to revere God as the designator of status and controller of nature, He is to be feared, worshipped reverently and listened

to irrevocably. The ongoing work of Christ in the church points also to the ongoing work of God in our world, the world was not flung into being and now left to run on its own.

Probably the most interesting aspect of this passage that could be presented to the church today would be the symbolism of the burning bush (the bush not being consumed) as a message from God that he can sustain us through persecution or what I would call the “fires of life”. To the Jewish people, this represented their time in exile and God’s preservation of their nation, His people. In my own Christian faith, I view this as the promise I received at my salvation. That one day I will be with Jesus in paradise and even through the pains of this world or fire of death, God will preserve me and keep me from being destroyed by these fires. This is a message that should bring great hope and comfort to Christians today, just as the article’s author found that it would have brought comfort to God’s people many, many years ago.