

47 Keys to Dynamic Bible Study (set to magazine)  
The Third Day Phenomenon: Moses' Story  
Read Exodus 19

The clouds looked plump with wool as they wrapped themselves around the uppermost heights of Mount Sinai. Moses gazed out at his people, scurrying this way and that on the barren region below the mount. Women at nearby pools of spring water were washing ankle length garments dirtied by weeks of harsh traveling conditions. Hours earlier, Moses had explained that they had a mere three days to prepare for their God Yahweh's visit: "Wear clean clothing," Yahweh had commanded.

As their garments were being washed, men and boys, dressed solely in loin cloths, picked up rocks to create temporary boundaries before the Mount from which Yahweh would reveal Himself. Some of the youths caught sheep and goats nibbling away at tufts of grass and herded them away from the lower areas of the mountain. Moses was aware that any man or animal that approached the mountain before the ram's horn was blown on the third day would die. Moses surveyed all the Israelites preparations

As the third day dawned, six year old Yoseph stood as close to his mother as he could, without looking like a baby. Just two years earlier he would have stuck his head under his mother's garments while thunder, lightning, and streaks of fire exploded from the mountain in front of him. Yoseph was sick with disappointment as well as terror. Moses had brought the multitudes to the foot of the mountain to go up and meet with God, but the storm seemed to be holding things up. He wondered why his mother wouldn't move forward. He wanted to glimpse the God who had caused the water in the big river to turn to blood and frogs to jump into Egyptian beds.

Just as the ram's horn was blown, and Moses waved his hesitant people forward, the earth shuddered beneath their feet, and rocks rained down from the trembling mountain. The combination of fire, smoke, lightning, and thunder, along with the earth quaking, horrified Moses' people. The multitudes stepped back; mothers clasped babies, children like Yoseph forgot about bravery and grasped their mothers' legs. Many people shrieked in alarm. All--without a word of discussion--came to a common decision: they would not go up that mountain.

Moses' exasperation at his people's reluctance to travel up the mountain churned within him. Their reaction was frustrating, since they had witnessed the horrific plagues Yahweh had displayed in Egypt to deliver His people—ten plagues that had the purpose of establishing Yahweh's power above that of the Egyptian gods. The thunder and lightning that now alarmed them had, two months earlier, exploded across blackened skies, announcing Yahweh's presence at the Red Sea. The sea had opened wide to expose dry land for Moses' people to tread on, only to pound closed over pursuing Egyptian soldiers. "Why would his people be frightened of the God who had set them free?" Moses wondered.

"People," Moses cried out, choking with a despair that clawed at his heart. But the people interrupted him. "You speak to us, Moses," one yelled out, "We'll listen to you." Fervent approval from others provoked more comments. "Don't let God speak to us; He could kill us," shouted a young man, his finger stabbing at the mount. The voices of hysterical people began to blare above the rumble from the mountain.

“Don’t be afraid of God,” Moses pleaded after he had at last silenced them. “God is only testing you; just fear God, and you won’t have to be scared.” But they would not listen.

So the Lord came down upon the mountain in fire. Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently. When the sound of the trumpet grew increasingly louder, the Lord called exclusively for Moses. Then Moses climbed up the mountain to meet Him, on that third day.

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The Lord saves Abraham’s son from being sacrificed on the third day. On the third day, Joseph’s prophecy to the baker and the cupbearer was fulfilled. Esther stands before the king, on the third day, and saves her people from annihilation. Jonah, on the third day, is spit up by the great sea beast onto dry land. Moses climbs up Mount Sinai, on the third day, to meet with God. All these narratives confirm that God does phenomenal acts, which are often redemptive, on the third day, and these acts prepare us for the third-day resurrection. As Paul said, Jesus “was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:4).