

Exodus 3-4: *Moses' Divine Encounter and Calling*

I. The Burning Bush (3:1-22)

1. What is Moses doing at the beginning of 3:1?
 - Acts 7:30 informs us that the “many days” spoken of in 2:23 was 40 years, which puts Moses at 80-years-old in 3:1.
2. How is Horeb described in 3:1?
 - Another name for Horeb is Mount Sinai.
3. Who appears to Moses in 3:2?
4. In what does he appear to Moses?
5. When he looks at it, what does Moses notice about the bush?
6. After calling to Moses out of the bush, what are the Lord's first instructions to him?
 - “The instructions to Moses are followed by a reason that emphasizes the **place** where he is **standing**. The very ordinariness of the location helps make the point that it is **holy ground**, not because of any special properties of the place but only because of God's presence. This is representative of a theme in Exodus: God is holy, and he is the one who makes or declares places and people to be holy—and each is properly understood or treated as holy only in its relation to God” (*ESV Study Bible*, p. 148).

7. How does the Lord identify himself in 3:6?

- “Although Moses is in exile from his household in Egypt and somewhat estranged from the people of his birth, God reveals himself as **the God of your father** and makes it clear that Moses’ identity is framed primarily by his being an offspring of **Abraham** and thus belonging to the people to whom God has pledged himself by covenant” (*ESV Study Bible*, p. 148).

8. How does Moses respond to God at the end of 3:6?

9. What does the Lord say next? (3:7-10)

10. How does Moses respond to the Lord?

11. What does the Lord say back to Moses?

12. What does Moses ask God in 3:13?

13. What does God say back to Moses (3:14-15)?

- “I AM WHO I AM” can also be translated “I AM WHAT I AM” or “I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE.”
- Notice in 3:15 that God tells Moses to say “the LORD...has sent me to you.” The word LORD, when spelled with all capital letters, stands for the divine name YHWH, which means “He will be” (we spell this name with the vowels, i.e., “Yahweh”). This name is the *personal* name of the God of Israel. It appears over 6,500 times in the Old Testament.
- “The three occurrences of “I AM” in v. 14 all represent forms of the Hebrew verb that means “to be” (Hb. *hayah*), and in each case are related to the divine name Yahweh. The divine name Yahweh has suggested to scholars a range of likely nuances of meaning:
 - 1) that God is self-existent and therefore not dependent on anything else for his own existence;
 - 2) that God is the creator and sustainer of all that exists;
 - 3) that God is immutable (unchanging) in his being and character and thus is not in the process of becoming something different from what he is; and
 - 4) that God is eternal in his existence.

While each of these points is true of God, the main focus in this passage is on the LORD’s promise to be with Moses and his people.” In verse 14, a specific form of “to be” (Hb. *hayah*) is used: “I will be” (Hb. *‘ehyeh*). “Given the context of Exodus 3:12 (“I will be with you”), the name Yahweh (“the LORD”) is also a clear reminder of God’s promises to his people and of his help for them to fulfill their calling” (*ESV Study Bible*, p. 149).

Deeper Study: New Testament Connection

- Read John 8:48-55.
- Instead of saying, “Before Abraham was, I *was*” (which would make the most grammatical sense), what does Jesus say?
- The words “I am” in Greek (language of the New Testament) use the **same** expression (*Ego eimi*) found in the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament) in Exodus 3:14 when God says “I AM WHO I AM.” Simply put: Jesus uses the exact words of YHWH in Exodus to describe himself. Thus, he is equating himself to be YHWH who appeared to Moses at the burning bush.
- His Jewish opponents understood his meaning immediately and “picked up stones to throw at him” for blasphemy.

14. What else does the LORD (aka YHWH, I AM) say to Moses (3:16-17)?

- “This is the first direct charge to Moses related to the role he will fulfill as the one through whom the LORD will speak to Israel” (*ESV Study Bible*, p. 149) (see Exodus 1-2 notes, key themes: mediator).

15. How does the LORD identify himself in 3:18?

- “To someone as powerful as the king of Egypt, Moses making a request in the name of the LORD, the God of the Hebrews would look ridiculous. What god would choose to be identified with a nation of slaves and then also presume to make a request from the king of the nation that has enslaved them? Given all the other equally true things that God could have told Moses to say to designate him (e.g., the LORD, the God who created the heavens and earth), he is evidently making the point to both Egypt and Israel that he has chosen to identify with the people of his covenant even when they appear to have little value in the eyes of the nation they serve except as forced labor” (*ESV Study Bible*, p. 149).

16. According to the last part of 3:18, for what reason should Pharaoh let the Hebrews go?

17. Interestingly, what does God already know in advance of Moses initially requesting Israel’s release?

18. What does YHWH tell Moses he will do to make Pharaoh let the Israelites go?

II. Moses Given Powerful Signs (4:1-17)

- “This section narrates the dialogue between God and Moses regarding the signs he will perform before Israel and Pharaoh; it is framed by explicit references that bring Moses’ staff into focus (vv. 2, 17). The staff serves as a sign that God will be with Moses and will bring about what he has promised through him” (*ESV Study Bible*, p. 149).

19. In response to YHWH's promise of plunder, what does Moses say back to God?
20. What are the three signs the LORD gives Moses for the people (Hebrews) to believe God sent him?
21. Following the three signs, what does Moses say to God?
22. How does the LORD respond to Moses (4:11-12)?
- “Egyptian magicians acted as Pharaoh’s advisers and were known for being proud of their considerable powers of speech. When Moses protests that he is slow of speech and of tongue, he is raising a relevant concern if he is going to address Pharaoh and his court. However, as the LORD signified in making Moses’ hand leprous and then restoring it, he has power to work in and through that which he has created, including Moses’ mouth” (*ESV Study Bible*, p. 150).
23. Following YHWH’s promise to “be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak,” how does Moses respond to God (4:13)?
24. How does YHWH respond to Moses (4:14-17)?

Covenantal Call and Dialogue

Moses' Questions and Concerns	Yahweh's Responses and Signs
Who am I that I should go? (3:11).	I will be with you; when you come out of Egypt, you will serve me on this mountain (3:12).
What is your name, that I may tell the people who sent me? (3:13).	I AM WHO I AM: Yahweh, the God of your fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (3:14-15).
How would the people believe that you have sent me? (4:1).	Yahweh turns Moses' rod into a serpent then back into a rod (4:2-4); Yahweh makes Moses' hand leprous and then heals it (4:6-7); Yahweh instructs Moses to turn water from the Nile into blood (4:9).
I am not eloquent; I am slow of speech (4:10).	I, Yahweh, am the one who made your mouth (4:11).
Please send someone else (4:13).	Aaron will go with you; you will speak my words to him and he will speak to the people for you (4:15-16).

ESV Study Bible, p. 148

III. Moses Returns to Egypt (4:18-31)

- “This section is brief but significant for what it shows in the transition from Moses' exile in Midian to his return to Egypt. In each subsection there is a focus on the LORD's masterful speech or action: he informs Moses that he can return to Egypt (vv. 18-20); he reminds Moses of his call before Pharaoh and foretells the outcome (vv. 21-23); he seeks Moses' life (vv. 24-26), and he sends Aaron to encourage and assist Moses (vv. 27-31)” (*ESV Study Bible*, p. 150).

25. What does Moses do before Jethro, his father-in-law? What does this communicate to the reader about their relationship?

26. In addition to his wife and sons, what does the narrator mention Moses took back with him to Egypt (4:20)?

27. Related to what the LORD said to Moses in 3:19, *but different*: what does he say concerning Pharaoh in 4:21?

28. What is the reason given for Israel to be let go (4:23)?

29. What will God do to Pharaoh if he refuses to let his “firstborn son” go?

- “**4:24-26** The events narrated in these verses are significant not only for what they tell but also for what they *show*. Not only has the LORD remembered his covenant promises, but his people are also called to remember the conditions of the covenant. Moses is held responsible for the provisions of the covenant with Abraham that required him to circumcise his sons. Failure to be circumcised may lead to being “cut off” (some form of severe punishment from God). Moses’ failure to circumcise his son could have led to his death, had it not been for his wife’s action. Once again, Moses’ life is preserved through the actions of another, this time through his wife Zipporah” (*ESV Study Bible*, p. 151).

30. Where does Aaron meet Moses at the end of chapter 4?

31. What is the last action of the elders of the people of Israel recorded in chapter 4?