

## The Call to Serve: *Moses and the Burning Bush (part one)* – Exodus 3:1-22

“God hath in Himself all power to defend you, all wisdom to direct you, all mercy to pardon you, all grace to enrich you, all righteousness to clothe you, all goodness to supply you, and all happiness to crown you.”  
~ Thomas Brooks

### I. Investigation: An Examination of Exodus 3:1-22

#### A. Introduction

In Exodus 3:1-4:17, we find the first interchange between God and Moses. In this extended dialogue, God commissions Moses three times, while Moses will raise five sets of objections. The speeches of God are skillfully delivered, remaining patient, but resolute. Whereas Moses' speeches are not logically connected. One commentator observes that “each time in which the objection is fully met, a new one springs up, unconnected with the later. No visible gain is ever made . . . in the end he [Moses] is trapped and his real doubt emerges” (Childs, *Exodus*, 71). Ultimately, God's interchange with Moses reveals a God who cares deeply for His people, a God who keeps His Word, and a God who demonstrates unbelievable grace.

#### B. God Encounters Moses (3:1-6)

v. 1 - With the drying up of the lowland grasses, Moses leads his flock to the remote region of Mt. Horeb, also, known as Mt. Sinai.

v. 2 - The “angel of the LORD” or “messenger of the LORD” is interchangeable and undistinguishable from the Lord Himself (cf. Gen 16:13; 22:12; 31:13). Many scholars propose this messenger is the pre-incarnate Christ.

God's unexpected visit to this shepherd in this remote part of the Middle East demonstrates that the Lord can show up wherever He pleases, whenever He pleases, and to whomever He pleases.

v. 5 - This is the first reference to “holy” in Scripture. The term “holiness” means “separation” or “something set apart”. As noted by Victor Hamilton: “The Lord calls Abraham to be blameless . . . but he never calls him to be holy. Holy places and holy people appear in the Bible only in conjunction with the covenant and covenantal law that God gives to his chosen people, Israel” (*Exodus*, 48). Later, Hamilton aptly observes that if the Lord can take dirt (*'adamâ*) and make it holy, He can do this with man (*'adam*) (p. 49).

#### C. God Commissions Moses (3:7-12)

vv. 7-9 - Not only did God purpose to bring Israel *out of* Egypt, but it was also His purpose to bring Israel *into* the Promised Land. Note that the Lord saw their affliction, heard their cry, and knew their sorrows. The Lord is a personal God, who is intimately involved with His people (cf. Isa 43:1, 3a).

“flowing with milk and honey” - This phrase, which speaks of great abundance, is used to describe Canaan approximately 20 times in Scripture. “Milk” most likely refers to goat’s milk, and “honey” refers to sap from dates.

Twenty-seven passages in the Old Testament list the various people groups, such as the Hivites and the Jebusites, who live in the land of Canaan (e.g., Deut 20:17; Josh 9:1; 11:3; 12:8). Whereas the term “Canaanite” “seems to be a fairly broad and generic term; it designates inhabitants of the southern Levant [land of Israel and the Sinai peninsula] who spoke a northwest Semitic language” (Garrett, *Exodus*, 204).

v. 10 - The Lord orders Moses to “go” four different times (3:10; 4:12, 19; 6:11).

The Lord redirects Moses’ attention off of himself and onto the Lord. The Lord does not eliminate the object of the fear nor downplay Moses’ emotions, but rather, the Lord eclipses these fears with His own character and person.

v. 11 - The Hebrew indicates two tasks which Moses feels inadequate to address: (1) standing before Pharaoh; and (2) leading the nation of Israel.

#### D. God Instructs Moses (3:13-22)

vv. 13-15 - Interestingly, no one asks Moses, “Who is the divine being who sent you?” “Maybe, like some of us, Moses excels at raising problems and issues that never emerge as problems and issues” (Hamilton, *Exodus*, 63).

Three major questions pertaining to verses 13-15:

- One: *Who does not know God’s name?* Is this the Egyptians, the Israelites, or Moses? Most scholars believe Moses is expressing personal doubt and attempting to warrant an excuse for not returning to Egypt.
- Two: *How do you render “I am Who I am”?* Most scholars render this phrase as “Who causes to be what is”. Later, Jesus utilized this phrase for self-identification (cf. Lk 22:70; Jn 8:58). In his commentary on the Book of Exodus, Garrett pens these powerful words: “His [God’s] identity is not tied to any shrine, cult, city, people, or title. . . . He exists independently of all things, and is the only being for whom existence is part of his essence. Everything else is contingent on him. In simplest terms, he is the one, eternal, all-powerful, creator God” (p. 207).
- Three: *Is God’s words to Moses a response or a rebuff?* It would appear that it is more of a response. One commentator writes, “Moses asks after God’s name . . . Yahweh responds by providing not a label but a theology” (Goldingay, *Exodus*, 333). In other words, God instructed Moses that He is

omnipresent (all-present), omniscient (all-knowing), and omnipotent (all-powerful). The Lord's revelation of Himself is why generations remember and worship Him.

vv. 16-20 - Note that "the author uses the speech to show that from God's perspective the way is clear. His whole plan unfolds before an open future. Each of the obstacles which successively appear to grow in size, are all part of his plan" (Childs, *Exodus*, 77). These verses also highlight that the Lord can utilize a variety of means to punish the wicked (cf. Ps 18:25-26).

vv. 21-22 - The Law required that a freed slave not leave empty-handed (cf. Deut 15:12-18). Unwittingly, the Egyptians fulfilled this future commandment. The Lord also used the Egyptians to fulfill His promise to Abraham: "I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions" (Gen 15:14).

## II. Intersect

A. The Lord works through ordinary human beings to accomplish His work.

Matthew 28:18-20 -

B. When it may seem that God is nowhere to be found, we need to remember that He does see, He does know, and He does care.

Psalms 34:15-18 -

C. A proper view of God distills the greatest fear and diminishes the most insurmountable problem.

Isaiah 64:3-4 -

"God commands nothing but what is beneficial. 'O Israel, what doth the Lord require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, and to keep His statutes, which I command thee this day, for thy good?'  
To obey God, is not so much our duty as our privilege."

~Thomas Watson