

EXODUS

Chapter 3

Moses and the Burning Bush

Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2 And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. 3 And Moses said, "I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned." 4 When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." 5 Then he said, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." 6 And he said, "I am the God of your 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 at God. 7 Then the LORD said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, 8 and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. 9 And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. 10 Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt." 11 But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" 12 He said, "But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain." 13 Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" 14 God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" 15 God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations. 16 Go and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, "I have observed you and what has been done to you in Egypt, 17 and I promise that I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey.'" 18 And they will listen to your voice, and you and the elders of Israel shall go to the king of Egypt and say to him, 'The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us; and now, please let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God.' 19 But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand. 20 So I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with all the wonders that I will do in it; after that he will let you go. 21 And I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and when you go, you shall not go empty, 22 but each woman shall ask of her neighbor, and any woman who lives in her house, for silver and gold jewelry, and for clothing. You shall put them on your sons and on your daughters. So you shall plunder the Egyptians."

3:1 Like David (2Sa 7:8), Moses was called from tending the flock to be the shepherd of God's people. (CSB)

keeping the flock – Moses like David before him was doing simple but God-pleasing work when God came to him. We, too, are to be about the daily work that God gives us to do. He will find us and direct our lives in ways that will help his kingdom come and his will be done. – According to Acts 7:30, this event took place 40 years after Moses arrived in Midian. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 2)

The difficult journey over, he might relax, while watchfully observing the flocks. Perhaps Moses mused about his luxurious past at Pharaoh’s court, the tragic struggle of his Israelite people as slaves in Egypt, and his inability as a fugitive to help them. (LL)

Jethro...priest of Midian. Reuel (see v. 18), which means “friend of God.” His other name, Jethro (see 3:1), may be a title meaning “his excellency.” (CSB)

Horeb. Means “desert,” “desolation”; either (1) an alternate name for Mount Sinai or (2) another high mountain in the same vicinity in the southeast region of the Sinai peninsula. Tradition identifies Mount Horeb with Ras es-Safsaf (“willow peak”), 6,500 feet high, and Mount Sinai with Jebel Musa (“mountain of Moses”), 7,400 feet high, but both identifications are uncertain. (CSB)

Elsewhere named Sinai (cf 19:11). God appeared to Moses and later to all Israel here (ch 19). The exact location is unknown but it is probably at the southern end of the Sinai Peninsula. (TLSB)

At the higher elevations around Mt Horeb was enough water and food for large flocks, and this is probably Moses came to this location. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 2)

3:2 *the angel of the LORD.* Just: “This same One alone who is called an Angel, and who is God, appeared to and communed with Moses” (ANF 1:227). (TLSB)

This expression is often used in the OT for the Second Person of the Triune God, before He came to this earth in human form at Bethlehem. (PBC)

appeared to him in flames of fire. God’s revelation of himself and his will was often accompanied by fire (see 13:21; 19:18; 1Ki 18:24, 38). (CSB)

God used this ordinary means to get Moses’ attention. The choice of fire for the appearing and a bush for the place of appearing suggest that God would descend on an insignificant people just as He had descended on an insignificant plant and that He would do so without harming either. We see the mixture of the ordinary with the extraordinary. Fire symbolizes God’s presence (Ex 13:21; 19:18; Mal 3:2) not only in the OT, but also in the NT. It especially seems to symbolize the holiness of God (Ex 19:18; 32:10; Mt 3:11) (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 2)

Fire also became a symbol of revelation in the NT, as divine “tongues of fire” appeared on the disciples’ heads when the Holy Spirit inspired them to preach the Gospel in languages unknown to them. (LL)

Caught Moses’ attention. God does not want to deal with us in any other way than through the spoken Word and the Sacraments. Whatever is praised as from the Spirit – without the word and sacrament – is the devil himself. God want it to appear even to Moses through the burning bush

and spoken Word (Ex. 3:2-15). No prophet, neither Elijah nor Elisha, received the Spirit without the 10 commandments or the spoken Word. (SA IIVIII 10-11) (TLSB)

3:4 Every true prophet was called by God (see, e.g., 1Sa 3:4; Isa 6:8; Jer 1:4–5; Eze 2:1–8; Hos 1:2; Am 7:15; Jnh 1:1–2. (CSB)

Refers to the angel (v 2), or messenger, who is here identified as God. (TLSB)

God called to him – God does the initiating, not man. (CSB)

Irenaeus of Lyons: “The Son of God is implanted everywhere throughout his writings... and speaks with Moses from the bush” (ANF 1:473). (TLSB)

3:5 *Take off your sandals.* A practice still followed by Muslims before entering a mosque. – Where God is present, there we must show respect. One such place is the worship service. (CSB)

God warned Moses not to keep on his everyday footwear and so defile ground sanctified by His presence. In Near Eastern culture, feet are especially associated with uncleanness, which can lead to shame.. (TLSB)

This practice may result from the fact that slaves usually went barefoot. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 2)

holy. The ground was not holy by nature but was made so by the divine presence (see, e.g., Ge 2:3). Holiness involves being consecrated to the Lord’s service and thus being separated from the commonplace. (CSB)

The ground is holy not because the place is holy in itself but because God has made it holy by His presence. This is the first occurrence of the word holy in the Bible, but the word occurs frequently in the next book of the Bible, Leviticus, a book full of guidelines for Israel’s worship. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 2)

3:6 *God of your father, the God of Abraham* – The identification of God as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is the identification Jesus later used as proof for the resurrection (Mt 22:32; Mk 12:26; Luke 20:37). God has seen the problem, and He is bringing a solution. The solution is the call of Moses to the God-given task and the assurance that Moses will succeed, for Moses will worship Him on that very mountain. But the heart of the assurance is in the nature of the God who calls. The God who calls is not only the God who has been faithful to the patriarchs, He is also the God who is beyond naming. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 2)

Amram (6:20). The Lord includes the patriarchal genealogy, Moses’ ancestors with whom He established the covenant. (TLSB)

afraid to look at God. Later, as the Lord’s servant, Moses would meet with God on Mount Sinai (19:3) and even ask to see God’s glory (33:18) (CSB)

As humans we cannot behold the face of God and live. In heaven where he has brought all cleaned up by Jesus’ blood we will not have this problem.

Moses turned his eyes from the burning bush, the flaming symbol of God’s presence, fearing that God’s majesty would consume him. (TLSB)

3:7 *I have surely seen the affliction of my people* – Nothing escapes the sight of God. He is also always very caring. But, he comes at just the right time. (CSB)

3:8 *I have come down to deliver.* God may also come down to judge (see Ge 11:5–9; 18:21). (CSB)

Irenaeus of Lyons: “It [was] customary from the beginning with the Word of God to ascend and descend for the purpose of saving those who were in affliction” (ANF 1:476). (TLSB)

This does not mean that he isn’t always near. It is an expression that means he is moving into action. – God speaks here almost as if He were coming in bodily form to deliver Israel, as He does in other places (Gen 3:8; 11:5; Ex 19:11; 18, 20: 34:5). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 2)

land flowing with milk and honey. The traditional and proverbial description of the hill country of Canaan—in its original pastoral state. (CSB)

Often used in the OT to describe the bounty of the Promised Land. (TLSB)

This refers to the fertility of the land of Canaan. The milk will come from sheep and goats and the honey from bees. This phrase is common in the Pentateuch, a proverbial expression for the his country of Canaan. It demonstrates the blessing of God in the land, part of God’s original promise to Abraham (Gen 13:15). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 2)

Canaanites ... Jebusites. The list of the Canaanite nations ranges from two names (see Ge 13:7) to five (see Nu 13:29) to six (as here; see also Jdg 3:5) to ten (see Ge 15:19–21) to twelve (see Ge 10:15–18). The classic description includes seven names (see, e.g., Dt 7:1), seven being the number of completeness. (CSB)

3:10 *I will send* – In view of Moses earlier flight from Egypt, Moses was shocked to learn that god was calling him to bring Israel out of Egypt. (TLSB)

Pharaoh. Probably Amunhotep II. (CSB)

This passage may well have been in Christ’s mind when He gave a similar apostolic commission to His disciples in NT days (Jn 20:21). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 2)

3:11 *whom am I that I should go* – God’s call can be very overwhelming as it was with Moses. His, like our reaction is to make excuses. Moses’ first expression of reluctance (see v. 13; 4:1, 10, 13). – One might express the protests as inadequacy, incredibility, inarticulateness, and insubordination, four I’s. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 2)

Moses’ first objection is that he is a nobody. He did not recognize that God had shaped him for leadership. (TLSB)

This is a different Moses. Many years before this he had wanted to take on this job as a deliverer all by himself when he killed an Egyptian and tried to settle an argument between two of his people. Now he doubts his own ability to do this work. Forty years as a shepherd have taught him humility. (PBC)

3:12 *I will be with you.* The Hebrew word translated “I will be” is the same as the one translated “I AM” in v. 14. (CSB)

This is Hebrew verb (‘ehyeh) is the same as in v. 14, ere I is translated “I Am.” The I Am was with Moses. ((TLSB)

God knows our weaknesses and stand ready to be by our side the whole time. He told his disciples and us this in Matthew 28:20. He shows it constantly in the lives of his disciples and still does so today. The promise is the same promise God gave to Jeremiah (Jer 1:8), when Jeremiah complained about his youth. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 2)

sign. A visible proof or guarantee that what God had promised he would surely fulfill. (CSB)

The burning bush was the sign guaranteeing that Moses would later bring the people to this same mountain. (TLSB)

you shall God on this mountain – We are to call upon him AND also recognize him with thanks when he takes care of our needs. (CSB)

Here the Lord would again descend in fire. (TLSB)

Psalm 50:15 “Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you and you will honor me.”

3:13 Moses’ second expression of reluctance. (CSB)

What is his name? † God had not revealed himself fully to Moses by his personal name (see v. 6; cf. Ge 17:1). (CSB)

Moses’ second objection is raised more for his own sake than for the sake of the people who might ask. Jacob got no answer when he asked god the same question (Gn. 32:29). (TLSB)

3:14 *I AM WHO I AM.* The name by which God wished to be known and worshiped in Israel—the name that expressed his character as the dependable and faithful God who desires the full trust of his people (see v. 12, where “I will be” is completed by “with you”; see also 34:5–7). (CSB)

God began His answer with a short sentence defining His uniqueness. There is no one like God. (TLSB)

I AM. The shortened form of the name is perhaps found also in Ps 50:2. Jesus applied the phrase to himself; in so doing he claimed to be God and risked being stoned for blasphemy (see Jn 8:58–59). (CSB)

Yehovah – This is the personal and covenant name of God, emphasizing his role as Israel’s Redeemer and covenant Lord. It means “He is” or “He will be” and is the third-person form of the verb translated “I will be” or “I am.” Basically it is an assertion of authority. – The name comes from a verb form in the Hebrew language that means “cause to happen.” In the context of God’s kindness and his promises to his OT people the name can be translated “The one who makes the good things happen.” - It may also suggest that this deity is the only one with real existence. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 11, Part 2)

Yahweh in the original Hebrew text included only the consonants. By the time the scribes added the vowels, the name of God was no longer pronounced. These Jews feared that the name of God would be profaned if spoken by the human voice. So, the Jews added the vowels for “Adonai,” which means “Lord” which is why their Greek translation of the OT and general Christian usage, too, renders God’s name, Yahweh, as “the Lord.” (LL)

Designated Himself by this name as the absolute God of the fathers, acting with unfettered liberty and self-dependence. This name precluded any comparison between the God of the Israelites and the deities of the Egyptians and other nations, and furnished Moses and his people with strong consolation in their affliction, and a powerful support to their confidence in the realization of His purposes of salvation as made known to the fathers. (Keil Delisch)

God declares He is an “I,” a personal being. He is not merely an indefinite force or magical power somewhere out in nature, as many people believe. As a person he compares himself to people who think, who feel, who speak, who decide, who act. These words also breathe the spirit of absolute independence. God moves with unlimited freedom. Paul writes in Romans: “Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen” (Romans 11:34-36). God is timeless, constant, unchangeable. Scripture refers to this “I AM” frequently. In the book of Revelation God says, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.” In John 8:58 Jesus says of himself: “Before Abraham was, I am.” The writer of Hebrews declares Jesus to be “the same yesterday, today, and forever.” Through the prophet Malachi God declares, “I the Lord do not change.” To Moses and to the Israelites these qualities which God here revealed were to reassure God’s people that the promises of grace and mercy give to their fathers were still in effect. God had not forgotten them. Now he is about to demonstrate to them that every one of these gracious promises would be fulfilled. (PBC)

3:15 *The LORD*. The Hebrew for this name is (CSB)

God revealed the special name that Israel was to use in worship and teaching. This name was likely pronounced “Yahweh” (YAH-way). (TLSB)

My name forever ... remembered throughout all generations. “I AM WHO I AM,” pronounced Yahweh, and known as “LORD” was God’s special name, which Israel was to keep holy by calling on it in prayer and in praise. (TLSB)

3:16 *elders*. The Hebrew for this word means lit. “bearded ones,” perhaps reflecting the age, wisdom, experience and influence necessary for a man expected to function as an elder. As heads of local families and tribes, “elders” had a recognized position also among the Babylonians, Hittites, Egyptians (see Ge 50:7), Moabites and Midianites (see Nu 22:7). Their duties included judicial arbitration and sentencing (see Dt 22:13–19) as well as military leadership (see Jos 8:10) and counsel (see 1Sa 4:3). (CSB)

Heads of the families and clans, commonly listed in genealogies. (TLSB)

Moses was to utilize a leadership structure already in place. (TLSB)

3:17 *I promise.* God wanted the Israelites to be certain that He would deliver them from Egypt. (TLSB)

3:18 *Hebrews.* Moses would represent all Israel and bring the Lord's testimony to the elders, commissioning them as witnesses with him. (TLSB)

three-day journey. Probably a conventional expression for a short trip rather than a journey of exactly three days. (CSB)

The Lord knew that Egypt's king would reject even this modest request (v 19), leading to Egypt's punishment. (TLSB)

desert. God had met with Moses there (see vv. 1–2) and would meet with him there again (see v. 12). (CSB)

3:20 *wilderness.* A prediction of the plagues that God would send against Egypt (see 7:14–12:30). (CSB)

The Lord knew it would take the 10 plagues to compel Pharaoh to let Israel go. Luther: "The ... people physically came out of the physical land of Egypt through many miracles, as is written in Exodus. This figure does not mean that we, too, should physically go out of Egypt. Rather, our souls should leave the sins and spiritual power of the devil through true faith" (AE 39:77–78). (TLSB)

3:21 *when you leave you will not go empty.* God had promised Abraham that after Israel had served for 400 years they would "come out with great possessions" (Ge 15:14; see Ps 105:37). Israel herself was to live by the same principle of providing gifts to a released slave (see Dt 15:12–15). (CSB)

The Lord planned for the Egyptians to pay Israel back for their years of hard labor. (TLSB)

3:22 *neighbor.* Egyptians and Israelites apparently lived closely but were separated both ethnically and economically. (TLSB)

plunder. Victorious armies plundered the goods of the defeated enemy (cf 2Ch 20:25), so the Lord's triumph over the gods of Egypt allowed His people to plunder their enemy. (TLSB)

Ch 3 What begins as just another day tending sheep changes dramatically when God confronts Moses at the burning bush on the holy mountain. I AM makes His presence known in fire and word. I AM discloses His special name. I AM sends Moses on what seems to him an impossible mission. Moses has absolutely no hope for success except through God's Word and promise, which assures him of God's presence. Luther: "Without God's Word we can have no God" (AE 13:386). What was true for Moses is true for us as well. God is present for us and speaks to us in His Word. We have no hope for salvation except through God's Word and promise. • "Lord, open now my heart to hear, And through Your Word to me draw near" (LSB 908:1). Amen. (TLSB)