

Exodus 3

This chapter records the first appearance of God since Genesis 46. Neither Moses nor Israel for a few hundred years had heard from the God of heaven. But when they were oppressed, God heard; He remembered; He knew (2:23-25). So God appeared to Moses to call him into service and send him back into Egypt to lead the sons of Israel out of slavery, to worship God in the wilderness.

TRANSLATION - 1:1-6:

1 And Moses was shepherding the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, priest of Midian, and he led the flock behind the wilderness and he came to the mountain of God, Horeb. **2** And there appeared the angel of Jehovah to him in a flame of fire from the midst of the bush and he saw and behold the bush was burning in flame and the bush was not being consumed.

3 And Moses said, "Let me turn aside, now, and I will see this great vision, why the bush is not burning up." **4** And Jehovah saw that he turned aside to see and God called to him from the midst of the bush and He said, "Moses! Moses!" And he said, "Here I am."

5 And He said, "Do not approach here! Remove your sandals from on your feet because the place where you are standing on it, ground of holiness it [is]."

6 And He said, "I Myself [am] the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face because he feared to gaze at the God.

7 And Jehovah said to him, "To see, I saw the oppression of My people which [was] in Egypt and their cry I heard from before the taskmaster because I know their sufferings. **8** And I came down to deliver them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up from that land to a good land and spacious, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanite and Hittite and Amorite and Perizzite and Hivite and Jebusite. **9** And now, behold, the cry of the sons of Israel is coming to Me and even I saw the oppression which the Egyptians were oppressing them. **10** And now, go and I will send you to Pharaoh and you will bring out My people, the sons of Israel, from Egypt."

HEBREW WORDS:

"Shepherding" (ver. 1) is a participle in the Hebrew language. The verb is found 167 times in the OT; in Exodus only here and 34:3. "Jethro" is another name, or perhaps title, of Reuel, Moses' father-in-law. The name is found 9 times in the OT, only in Exodus and mainly in chapter 18: 18:1-2, 5-6, 9-10, 12. "Father-in-law" is used 21 times in the OT, 15 times in Exodus, mainly in those contexts where Jethro is mentioned. The word is also used five times in Judges: 1:16; 4:11; 19:4, 7, 9. "Priest" was used earlier at 2:16. See comments at 2:15-16 on "Midian." "To lead" means "to drive or guide." It is used 30 times, but only three times in Exodus: 3:1; 10:13; 14:25. "Wilderness" is used extensively, understandably so since much of the OT takes place in wilderness areas; the word is used 269 times in the OT, 27 times in Exodus. "Mountain" is also used extensively in the OT (558 times), 48 times in Exodus. "Horeb" is used 17 times in the OT; three times in Exodus: 3:1; 17:6; 33:6.

"To appear" (ver. 2) comes from the verb "to see." In its *niphal* form (as here), it means to "make seen" or "to appear." See 1:16; 2:2, 5-6, 11-12, 25 for its earlier uses in Exodus. The last appearance of God was in Genesis 46:1-2 (but the verb is not used). The last time reference is made to God appearing (using the verb) is Genesis 35:9-13. The verb is used in Exodus 91 times. "Angel" or "messenger" is used 213 times in the OT. The word is only used in Exodus 6 times. See the author's commentary on Genesis for comments at Genesis 16:7-11 for a discussion of "Angel of the Lord." This is its only reference in Exodus. "Angel of God" is used at 14:19. This is the only use of "flame" in Exodus; the word is used in the OT 19 times. "Fire," on the other hand, is used 19 times in Exodus, out of 376 uses. "Bush" is only used 6 times in the OT, five of which are in this context (3:2-4); the other use is Deut. 33:16. "To burn" is used 60 times, in Exodus, at 3:2-3; 22:5; 35:3. "To consume" is the verb "to eat," which does not suit this context. The verb is used 820 times in the OT, 55 times in Exodus.

“Now” (ver. 3) is often translated “please.” The word is used 405 times, 74 times in Genesis, 15 times in Exodus. “Vision” is related to the verb “to see.” It is only used in Exodus at 3:3 and 24:17. The word is used in the OT 103 times. The word translated “Here I am!” (which is all one word in Hebrew) is used 21 times in the OT. It combines two words: “Behold” and “I.” “To approach” (ver. 5) is used 280 times, often in the context of worship to denote offering a sacrifice. It is used 16 times in Exodus. “Sandals” is used 22 times in the OT; in Exodus, here and 12:11. “Feet” is used 251 times in the OT; in Exodus, 14 times. “Place” is used extensively in the OT, 401 times; in Exodus, 10 times. “Holiness” is a noun in Hebrew. The noun is used 470 times in the OT, reflecting the Bible’s nature as a religious text. The verb “to make holy” is used 171 times; the adjective “holy” is used 117 times; “sanctuary” (or “holy place”) is used 75 times and “temple prostitute” (or “holy person”) is used 11 times. “Holiness” in Exodus is used 70 times. “Ground” is the noun which gives us the name “Adam.” The noun is used 9 times in Exodus, 222 times in the OT.

“I Myself” (ver. 6) is the pronoun “I”, used 359 times, in Exodus 22 times. “To hide” is used 82 times in the OT; only here in Exodus. “To gaze” means “to look at or behold.” It is used 70 times in the OT; in Exodus only here and 33:8. “To fear” was used earlier at 1:17, 21; 2:14. “God” is used with the definite article (which should not always be translated) 738 times in the OT; in Exodus, it is found 58 times. We translate the last word “God” with the definite article because Moses is being introduced to a God different from the gods with which he was familiar in Egypt. This God is “the” God.

“Cries” (ver. 7) is used 21 times in the OT; in Exodus, at 3:7, 9; 11:6; 12:30; 22:23. “Taskmasters” is a participle in the Hebrew language, from the verb “to oppress or force to work.” It is used 23 times. In Exodus, it is used at 3:7; 5:10, 13-14. “To know”, a key verb in Exodus, was used earlier at 1:8; 2:4, 14, 25. “Sufferings” is used only here in Exodus. It is used in the OT 16 times.

“To come down” (ver. 8) is used 382 times in the OT, 20 times in Exodus. “To deliver” means “to rescue, deliver, or save.” It is used 213 times in the OT, 14 times in Exodus, of which five times are in chapter 18. “To bring up” is often used in context of worship for “offering up” sacrifices. The word is used 894 times in the OT, 62 times in Exodus. “Milk” is used 44 times in the OT, 6 times in Exodus. The phrase “milk and honey” is used 20 times throughout the OT. “Honey” is used 54 times in the OT, 5 times in Exodus.

“Cry” (ver. 9) was used at verse 7. “To oppress” is used 19 times in the OT; it means “to press, torment.” This is the only use of the verb in Exodus. “Oppression” is the related noun. It is used 12 times in the OT. In Exodus, it is found at 3:9; 22:20; 23:9. “To send” (ver. 10) is used 847 times in the OT; in Exodus, 74 times.

HEBREW GRAMMAR:

The phrase “to see, I saw” (ver. 7) translates a Hebrew phrase used to emphasize an idea. The phrase is a Hebrew grammatical construction called the infinitive absolute, followed by the same verb in a perfect tense.

REFERENCES AND ALLUSIONS TO GENESIS:

The double call of one’s name (ver. 4) is typical of that culture as is the the simple response: “Here, I am”: Genesis 22:1, 7, 11; 27:1; 31:11; 46:2. “The God of your father” (ver. 6) is used to designate Jehovah God seven times in Genesis: 26:24; 28:13; 31:29; 43:23; 46:3; 49:25; 50:17. When God identifies Himself as the “God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” (3:6, 15), Moses draws our attention to the whole story contained in the book of Genesis.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

“Horeb” (ver. 1) is often used interchangeably with “Sinai,” but scholars are not sure how the two relate. The location has not been identified. It is normally assumed to be the mountain *Jubal Musa*.

The “bush” (ver. 2) might be the *Rubus sanctus*. However, the flora is not important.

The sandals (ver. 5) were made probably of papyrus or leather.

“Canaanite” (ver. 8) is used 73 times in the OT; it was a broad category of peoples who lived in what is now known as Palestine. They are mentioned in Genesis 11 times, in Exodus 9 times. “Hittite” is used 48 times in the OT, first at Genesis 15:20. They are mentioned in Exodus 7 times. “Amorite” is used 87 times in the OT, first at Genesis 10:16. They are mentioned in Exodus 6 times. “Perizzite” is used 23 times in the OT, first at Genesis 13:7. They are mentioned in Exodus 5 times. “Hivite” is used 25 times in the OT, first at Genesis 10:17; in Exodus, 7 times. “Jebusite” is mentioned 41 times in the OT, first at Genesis 10:16. They are in Exodus 6 times. The city of Jerusalem was established by the Jebusites (2 Sam. 5:6-10). The most complete list of the nations in Palestine is found in Genesis 15:19-21. How these different nationalities interrelated is not known. The Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites are not mentioned outside the Bible.

The land of Palestine was 100 miles from the Mediterranean sea to the desert and 160 miles from Dan to Beersheba (north to south). For Americans to get a perspective, Israel was roughly the size of the state of New Jersey. For Romanians, Israel was roughly 2/3 the size of Moldova. The Egyptians hated shepherds (Gen. 46:34). Moses dropped from being a “prince” of Egypt to being a despised shepherd!

COMMENTARY:

While Moses was living in Midian, he became a shepherd. The flock belonged to his father-in-law, Jethro, who was named Reuel in 2:18. See comments there for the different names. Jethro was a priest; we do not know if he was a priest of Jehovah God or priest of a pagan religion. On this particular fateful day, Moses led his flock “behind the wilderness.” The expression “behind the wilderness” is looking at the wilderness from the perspective of Midian; thus, it means “to the west,” which would be toward Egypt. Moses identified this place as the “mountain of God,” an expression used at 3:1; 4:27; 24:13. It is also used at 1 Kings 19:8; Psalm 36:6; 68:15; Ezekiel 28:14, 16. Perhaps Moses used this designation as he wrote the text, knowing that Mount Sinai is part of the mountain range. Here, he identified the mountain as “Horeb.” We do not know the relationship between “Horeb” and Sinai, but in Psalm 106:19, the psalmist writes that Israel made the golden calf at Horeb, while Exodus identifies it as Mount Sinai (chapter 32).

There, Jehovah God appeared to Moses in the form of “the angel of the Lord.” This manifestation was first seen in Genesis 16 (see the author’s commentary on that text). Here, the “angel of Jehovah” is also identified as the “Lord,” as well as “God” (ver. 4). It is this student’s opinion that since God was omnipresent as well as transcendent, He often chose to speak to mankind in a form (perhaps humanoid) identified as “the angel of the Lord.” Jehovah God appears to Moses in a flame of fire burning from the middle of a bush. Moses saw the burning bush and “behold” (this indicates some surprise on Moses’ part), the bush was burning in flame, but the bush was not being consumed. The flame, we suggest, caught Moses’ attention. The fact that the bush did not burn up as it was in flame would tell Moses that he was looking at something supernatural. Moses spoke to Him as he directed his movement toward this curious sight.

Jehovah God saw that Moses was coming closer and He called to Moses from the burning bush: “Moses! Moses!” and Moses responded as God’s servants often did: “Here I am.” Subsequently, God warned Moses not to move any closer. The ground where Moses was standing was unique, holy ground; therefore Moses needed to remove his sandals. The ground was not inherently holy; it was only holy because the presence of God was there. Nor would the ground be holy when God left. This is the first use of the word “holiness” in the Scriptures. The idea denotes “separateness.” God is separate from man *physically* and *metaphysically*. Physically speaking, God is not a physical being. He is “Spirit” (John 4:24), so that He does not have flesh, bones (Luke 24:39), or blood (1 Cor. 15:50). Metaphysically speaking, God cannot sin. It is spiritually impossible for God to engage in an action which violates His divine nature (Hab. 1:13; James 1:13; Titus 1:2).

In verse 6, God identified Himself as the God of Moses' father (Amram, Exo. 6:20), and the God of his fathers, the patriarchs of Genesis: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God spoke to Moses as if Moses knew about the fathers, which suggests to us that Moses (and probably Israel itself) had the record of Genesis available to them, either in a written form (likely) or in some kind of oral form. Moses, as Adam and Eve did in the garden (Gen. 3:8), was afraid to gaze at "the God" so he hid his face. Let us remember that God has not spoken from heaven since Genesis 46. Moses had lived one-third of his life in Egypt, surrounded by pagan idols which did not talk! He had then lived one-third of his life in Midian, likely surrounded by more pagan idols, which did not talk! Now, he is being approached by the God of his ancestors! We can only imagine what was passing through Moses' mind.

In verse 7, we see God's commentary on the previous paragraph (2:23-25). God said that He had indeed seen the oppression of His people. He heard their cry as they were afflicted by the taskmaster and He knew their sufferings. Consequently (ver. 8), God "came down" to deliver them. The Bible teaches that God is omnipresent (Psa. 139:7-8). Thus when the Scriptures present God, as it does here, as "coming down," it is using an anthropomorphic expression to portray God's immanence. We have seen this picture in Genesis: 11:5, 7; 17:22; 18:21, 33; 35:13.

Not only would God "deliver" Israel, but He would bring them up to a "good land," a "spacious land," a "land flowing with milk and honey." The abundance of resources in Canaan was well-attested in the Egyptians' writings. The milk is likely goats' milk; the honey might be juice from the date fruit. While the cultivation of bees' honey (called apiculture) was not known in Palestine, bees' honey was eaten: Judges 14:8; 1 Sam. 14:27; Psa. 19:10; Prov. 16:24; Song 4:11; 5:1. God would bring them to the land of Canaan. In Genesis 15:16, God told Abraham that He would wait to remove the Canaanites from the land, because their "iniquity was not complete." It would become complete by the time Joshua leads Israel into the Promised Land. Their sins caused the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites to be removed from the land. They received justice from the hand of God. Yet God will later remind Israel that they were not more righteous than the other nations whom He drove out of the land (Deut. 9:4-5). Of course Israel will also be driven out of the land because of sin, first under the Assyrians and then under the Babylonians.

In verse 9, God once again comments, relative to 2:23-25, that He heard the cry of the sons of Israel and He had seen their oppression. Thus He was sending Moses to Pharaoh (ver. 10) and Moses would bring Israel, "My people" (an expression used 222 times in the OT), out of Egypt.

APPLICATION:

Moses' contemporaries - "The God of your father" is only used in Exodus in this context: 3:6, 13, 15-16. Fearing God's appearance is a natural reaction: Judges 6:22-23; 13:22. Israel will later be afraid of the appearance of God: Exodus 20:19; 24:10-11; 33:20. This latter passage states that no man can look at God and live. In that passage, Moses will ask to see God's glory (33:18). Moses will be allowed to see God "in part:" 24:1-2; 33:21-23. See also God's description of Moses' role as a prophet in Numbers 12:8. Israel had to keep a distance from the holy presence of God at Mount Sinai (19:9-25).

Moses will continue portraying God "coming down" to be close to His people: Exo. 19:11, 18, 20; 34:5; Num. 11:17, 25; 12:5. Moses will later describe God as a "consuming fire" (Deut. 4:24). For other passages which associate the appearance of God with fire, see: Gen. 15:17; Exo. 13:21; 19:18; Numbers 11:1-3; 16:35; 1 Kings 19:6; 2 Kings 1:12-14; Job 1:16; Psa. 50:3; Ezek. 1, 8; Dan. 7:9-10; Amos 1:4-2:5. In a state of depression and anxiety, the Israelites will later call Egypt a "land flowing with milk and honey" (Num. 16:13). This was the result of ingratitude.

Later Jewish writers - Joshua was also commanded to remove his sandals when he stood face to face with the angel of the Lord (5:13-15). Later Jewish writers also used the phrase "Here I am," in response to God: 1 Sam. 3:4, 6, 8, 16; 2 Sam. 1:7; Isa. 6:8; 52:6; 58:9.

David portrays God's immanence by picturing God "coming down:" 2 Sam. 22:10 (Psa. 18:10). Isaiah will do the same (31:4) as will Nehemiah, although Nehemiah is referring to this account (9:13). The holiness of God is a standard attribute ascribed to Him (Hosea 11:9; 1 Sam. 2:2).

NT writers - The apostle John, setting his gospel in the context of the book of Genesis (1:1), writes that "the Word was God... and the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth" (1:14). Jesus is the complete, final, and perfect immanence of Jehovah God. God still hears the cries of His people and desires to deliver them from oppression: James 4:8; 1 Peter 5:6-7. The only way mankind can be holy today (separate from sin) is to be immersed through baptism into Jesus Christ (John 17:17; Acts 22:16; 1 Peter 1:2).

In Matthew 22:23-28 (Mark 12:18-27; Luke 20:27-40), Sadducees will ask Jesus about the nature of human existence after death. Jesus will cite Exodus 3:6 to argue that there *is* life after death because God said, "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." Jesus is quoting the LXX in this instance. See the author's commentary on Matthew. Jesus alludes to this passage again in a different context, in John 8:58. When He states, "Before Abraham was born, I am," the Jews believed (correctly) that Jesus made Himself equal in nature with Jehovah God so they picked up stones to stone Jesus because they thought He was blaspheming. He hid Himself from them and left.

The NT also associates the judgment of God with fire: Matthew 3:10; 18:8-9; 2 Peter 3:7; Jude 7; Revelation 1:14; 2:18; 19:12.

TRANSLATION - 3:11-22:

11 And Moses said to God, "Who [am] I that I will go to Pharaoh and that I will bring out the sons of Israel from Egypt?"

12 And He said that, "I will be with you and this to you the sign that I Myself am sending you... To bring out the people from Egypt, you will serve God on this mountain."

13 And Moses said to God, "Behold I myself am coming to the sons of Israel and I will say to them, 'God of your fathers has sent me to you.' And they will say to me, 'What [is] His name?' What do I say to them?"

14 Then God said to Moses, "I will be what I will be." And He said, "Thus you will say to the sons of Israel. 'I will be has sent me to you.'"

15 Then God said again to Moses, "Thus you will say to the sons of Israel, 'Jehovah God, of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob has sent me to you.' This [is] His name forever and this [is] My memorial from generation to generation.

16 Go and gather the elders of Israel and you will say to them, 'Jehovah the God of your fathers has appeared to me, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, 'To visit, I will visit you and what was done to you in Egypt. **17** And I said I will bring you up from the oppression from Egypt to the land of the Canaanite and Hittite and the Amorite and Perizzite and Hivite and Jebusite to the land flowing with milk and honey. **18** And they will listen to your voice and you will come, yourself, and the elders of Israel to the king of Egypt and you all will say to him, 'Jehovah the God of the Hebrews has met us and now let us go, please, a journey of three days in the wilderness and let us sacrifice to Jehovah our God.' **19** And I Myself know that he will not give to you all the king of Egypt to go and unless by a strong hand. **20** And I will extend My hand and I will hit Egypt by all My wonders which I will do in its midst and afterward, he will send you out. **21** And I will give grace of this people in the eyes of the Egyptians and it will be that when you go, you will not go in vain. **22** And a woman will ask from her neighbor and from the stranger in her house utensils of silver and utensils of gold and clothing and you will put [them] on your sons and on your daughters and you will plunder the Egyptians."

HEBREW WORDS:

"Sign" (ver. 12) is a "mark or pledge," used 79 times in the OT. It is used 16 times in Exodus. "To serve" was used back at 1:13-14. It is one of the key verbs in Exodus, being used

31 times. See comments at 1:13-14. "Behold" (ver. 13) was used earlier at 1:9. See comments there. "Jehovah" (ver. 15) is the specific name for Israel's God, the true God, the God of the universe. This name is used 6,828 times. It was used in Genesis 165 times. It will be used in Exodus 398 times, in a book 4/5 the size of Genesis. It was used earlier in this context (and first in Exodus) at 3:2, 4, 7. "Forever" can mean "everlasting or ancient." In some texts, it simply means "indefinite." The word is used 439 times; it was used in Genesis 12 times; it will be used in Exodus 17 times. "Memorial" is related to the verb "to remember." The noun is used here and at 17:14 in Exodus, out of 23 times in the OT. "Generation" is used 19 times in Exodus, out of 167 uses.

"To gather" (ver. 16) means "to assemble, take in, or even destroy." It is used 200 times in the OT; in Exodus, it is used 7 times: 3:16; 4:29; 9:19; 14:13; 23:10, 16; 32:26. "Elder" is used 180 times; it is an adjective in Hebrew. The word is related to the verb "to grow old." The word was used in its literal sense 9 times in Genesis; twice it referred to "elders in Egypt" (50:7). This is its first use referring to older, wise men of the nation of Israel. The word is used 12 times in Exodus. "To appear" was used back at verse 2. "To visit" means "to pay attention to, take note of, visit, appoint." It is used 304 times in the OT; in Exodus, 12 times.

"Oppression" (ver. 17) was used in verse 7. "To hear or to listen" (ver. 18) might also be translated "to obey." The verb is used 1,165 times in the OT. It is used in Exodus 49 times; it was used earlier at 2:15, 24; 3:7. "Voice" (ver. 18) is also "sound, noise;" it is used 505 times in the OT. In Exodus, it is found 31 times. "King" was first seen at 1:8. "Hebrews" was seen first at 1:15. "To meet" means "to encounter, happen to." It is found 22 times. It is used in Exodus 10 times. "To sacrifice" was only used twice in Genesis (31:54; 46:1). It is used 134 times with its related noun, altar, being used 403 times in the OT. In Exodus, "to sacrifice" is used 18 times. The word "please" was seen first at 3:3.

"Strong" (ver. 19) is used 57 times, meaning "might, hard." It is used in Exodus at 3:19; 6:1; 10:19; 13:9; 19:16; 32:11. Here, it suggests "willing help." "To extend" (ver. 20) is the same verb we have translated "to send out" at the end of the verse. It was used earlier at 2:5; 3:10, 12, 13-15. "To hit or strike" is the verb used in the previous chapter at 2:11-13. "Wonders" is used 44 times in the OT, in Exodus only twice: 3:20; 34:10.

"Grace or favor" (ver. 21) is used 69 times in the OT. It was first used at Genesis 6:8. It is used in Exodus 9 times: 3:21; 11:3; 12:36; 33:12-13, 16-17; 34:9. "In vain" is used 16 times. It means "empty-handed, without success." It is used in Exodus at 3:21; 23:15; 34:20. "To ask" (ver. 22) is used 176 times; it means to "request, demand." It is used in Exodus 7 times. "Clothes" is used 31 times and is a general word. "Neighbor" is used here and at 12:4 in Exodus, out of 19 times. It is related to the verb "to dwell, inhabit." "Foreigner" is related to the verb "to stay temporarily" and is related to the noun from which Moses' son "Gershom" is named. This word is only used in Exodus here, out of 4 uses in the OT. "Silver" can also be interpreted as "money." The word is used 403 times in the OT, 41 times in Exodus. "Gold" is used 392 times in the OT, 105 times in Exodus. Much of the tabernacle furniture was overlaid with gold. "To plunder" was used earlier at 2:19; 3:8. The word typically denotes the spoils of war. This word hints at how God views His interaction with Pharaoh (see 15:3).

HEBREW GRAMMAR:

The phrase "to visit, I will visit" (ver. 16) translates a Hebrew verbal expression used for emphasis, the infinitive absolute followed by the same verb in the perfect tense.

REFERENCES AND ALLUSIONS TO GENESIS:

God's promise to "visit" Israel repeats Joseph's promise to his family in Genesis 50:24-25, in an emphatic form which also uses the infinitive absolute (see above under "Hebrew Grammar"). In Genesis 15:14, God had promised Abraham that He would bring his family out of their slavery with great wealth.

COMMENTARY:

After hearing God's plans for Moses, he asks a question reflecting his view of himself: "Who am I?" Moses wondered why Pharaoh would even listen to Moses and allow the sons of Israel to leave Egypt. As many Bible students note, the important question was not "Who was Moses?" but "Who was God?" He answers that question in the subsequent discussion.

First, God responded with His promise that He would be with Moses. God had promised the patriarchs His presence on numerous occasions (for example, Genesis 26:24; 28:15, 20). Now He promises His presence with Moses. The "sign" that Jehovah God was sending Moses, if not simply a reference to the burning bush which Moses was seeing with his own eyes, would be that Moses and Israel would soon be assembled together at that mountain to serve God. The purpose for leaving Egypt was to worship God: Exodus 4:23; 5:1, 3, 8, 17; 7:16; 8:1, 20, 27; 9:1, 13; 10:3, 7-9, 24-26; 12:31. See also Leviticus 22:33; 25:42.

Moses responds with a second legitimate question. Moses asks that assuming he goes to the sons of Israel and says to them, "The God of your fathers has sent me to you," then Moses anticipates their question: "What is His name?" How was Moses to respond to that? Remember that the knowledge Israel had of God (assuming it was limited to what is revealed in Genesis) was extremely limited. The Egyptians had "gods" all around them and every god has his or her own name. Moses anticipated Israel asking about the character, nature, and identity of this God who has sent Moses, so what should Moses respond?

God responds with a statement that has consumed the time and attention of students of the Bible for generations: "I will be what I will be." The verb is an imperfect verb. There are many possible translations. Another might be "I will be who I will be." The statement seems to express self-existence, omnipresence, eternity; perhaps it even suggests that God will actually *complete* the statement as Moses and Israel and Egypt get to know Him through His actions. In that sense, the statement is incomplete: "I will be..." Jehovah responds to Moses that he should answer Israel with "I will be has sent me to you."

Finally, God gives a rather lengthy monologue to Moses to help him identify Who God is, and what God expects to do through him among the sons of Israel. First (ver. 15), God uses the noun form related to the verb "I will be:" Jehovah, connected to the general word "God." Jehovah is used in the OT 6,828 times. The name we have translated "Jehovah" is, in Hebrew, four consonants: יהוה. It is subsequently known as the "tetragrammaton," or "four consonants." Because the Jews were afraid of using God's name in vain, they would not pronounce His name as they read the Scriptures. They would substitute the Hebrew word for "Lord:" *adonai*. The name is often written in English translations with all capital letters: LORD.

Second, Jehovah identifies Himself again as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This statement shows Moses there is continuity between the God of his ancestors and the God who is sending him on this mission. Third, Jehovah identifies His name as "forever" and a memorial to His character and nature "from generation to generation."

Fourth (ver. 16), Jehovah tells Moses to gather the older men, the leaders, the tribal elders together and tell them that Jehovah, the God of their fathers, had appeared to him. Again, Jehovah identifies Himself with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Fifth, God repeats the statement of Joseph from Genesis 50:24-25, that He will surely visit (the verb is emphatic) the sons of Israel and see what has been done to them in Egypt. This shows that God is neither ignorant nor apathetic to His children's oppression.

Sixth (ver. 17), God promises that He will bring the sons of Israel out of the oppression in Egypt, as He had promised Abraham centuries ago (Gen. 15:14) and bring them to Canaan, the land of the Canaanite, Hittite, Amorite, Perizzite, Hivite, and Jebusite. Canaan was portrayed beautifully as a land with ample resources, flowing with milk and honey.

Seventh (ver. 18), God states that the elders will listen to Moses and so Moses with the elders will go to the king of Egypt, the pharaoh, and say to him, "the God of the Hebrews" had met with them. "God of the Hebrews" was not used as a designation for God in Genesis. The expression is used six times in Exodus: 3:18; 5:3; 7:16; 9:1, 13; 10:3. It is not used elsewhere in the OT. Moses and the elders were to ask permission from Pharaoh to leave on a three days' journey so that they might sacrifice to (worship) Jehovah their God. We do not know how to

understand the reference to “three days.” It likely does not refer to the entire distance from Egypt to Mount Sinai. Was it a journey of three days to a certain location and then a journey of three days back? Was it a journey of one day, a stay of one day to worship, and then a journey of one day to return? The “three days” travel would take the Israelites beyond Egypt’s range of distance considered “holy.” Moses will ask for the three days at 5:3, which Pharaoh will decline. Later, Pharaoh seemed to acquiesce (8:27-28), but again changes his mind. When God brings the plague of darkness on Egypt, He will cause it to last for three days (10:22-23).

Eighth (ver. 19), God informs Moses that He knows Pharaoh will not give his permission to Israel to leave, unless it is with a “strong arm,” or strong compulsion. A “strong arm” is an expression used in Egyptian texts to reflect the strength of the Pharaoh and his army. Therefore, it is ironic that God will use the same expression to refer to His own power to free His people: 3:19-20; 6:1; 13:9; 32:11.

Ninth (ver. 20), consequently, Jehovah God will extend His “hand” (literally) and He will strike Egypt, just as Moses struck the Egyptian in 2:11-13. God would strike Egypt with “wonders.” While the word does not always refer to miraculous works, it will refer to the miraculous plagues here. Once God strikes Egypt, Pharaoh will “send” them out.

Tenth (ver. 21), however, Israel will not leave as empty-handed slaves. God will “give grace” in the eyes of the Egyptians toward the Israelites. They will not leave “in vain,” that is, penniless. Rather (ver. 22), an Israelite woman will ask her neighbor and from a stranger in her house for utensils of silver and gold and clothing and they will be given these things. This will happen once the last plague comes on Egypt and the Egyptians will both know that Israel will be leaving, and they will be *glad* for Israel to leave since then the plagues on their land will stop. The need for material resources suggests there are plans God has for Israel’s future and the next generation of Israelites. In this way, Israel will “plunder” the Egyptians, much like a victorious nation in war would plunder the defeated nation. The book of Exodus portrays the fight between Jehovah and Pharaoh as a battle (12:12; 15:3).

APPLICATION:

Moses’ contemporaries - The author (Moses?) of Numbers 12:3 will emphasize the humility of Moses. The Israelites will, in fact, leave Egypt with their arms loaded with gifts from the Egyptians: Exo. 11:2-3; 12:35-36. They will use some of that gold to build their golden calf in chapter 32. When God has Moses write out the Law, He will tell Israel that when they send slaves to freedom, they are to give them gifts: Deut. 15:12-15. The verb “to hit” (ver. 20), used earlier in Exodus 2:11-13 is also used for Egypt’s treatment of the Hebrew supervisors (5:14-16, 16), but then God does start *hitting*: God “hit” the Nile River: 7:17, 20, 25. God, through Aaron, “hit” the dust of the earth (8:16-17). God “hit” Egypt with boils (9:15). He “hit” the crops with hail (9:25, 31-23). Then He promised He would “hit” the firstborn: 12:12-13, 29. The elders did listen to Moses and worshiped at the news he brought (4:31).

“Sign and wonders” will be used to describe the plagues God will bring on Egypt: 4:21; 7:3, 9; 11:9-10.

Later Jewish writers - The psalmist will remind Israel of God’s blessing, when they left Egypt: Psalm 105:37.

NT writers - Jesus identified Himself with the One speaking from the burning bush at John 8:58. On a regular basis, He identified Himself with Jehovah God: John 10:30. In fact, there are seven “I am” statements in John in which Jesus quotes the words of Jehovah God (“I am who I am”) from 3:14:

“I am the bread of life” (John 6:35, 48).

“I am the light of the world” (John 8:12; 9:5).

“I am the good shepherd” (John 10:11, 14).

“I am the door of the sheep” (John 10:7, 9).

“I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25).

“I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).

“I am the true vine” (John 15:1).

The phrase “signs and wonders” is used in the NT often to refer to the miracles performed by Jesus or His apostles: Matt. 24:24; Mark 13:22; John 4:48; Acts 2:19, 22, 43; 4:30; 5:12; 6:8; 7:36; 14:3; 15:12; Rom. 15:19; 2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:4. Satan can perform *false* “signs and wonders:” 2 Thess. 2:9.