

Exodus 3-4 - “I Am That I Am”

1. Moses’ Call and Commission – 3:1-10
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1. Moses’ Call and Commission – 3:1-10

3:1-2 - *Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. And he led the flock to the back of the desert, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² And the Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed.*

Why was Moses here in Midian when God had such great things in store for him? It would be a time of preparation and purging. For Moses to be able to shepherd a whole nation, he’ll have to learn the art of shepherding.

- The Lord will often times have us show our faithfulness in a few things before He moves us on to the bigger things. Joseph’s life wasn’t much different. Paul had to go through a training time in Arabia after his conversion to prepare him for a fruitful ministry – Galatians 1:15-18.
- God will take us through times of being in the desert before we experience the oasis. This isn’t meant to hurt us or cause us to suffer for suffering’s sake, it’s meant to teach us dependency on God and to trust fully on Him.

Horeb = Mt. Sinai. It’s often called the Mountain of God in Scriptures (Exodus 4:22; 24:13). This will be a very significant site in the Exodus story.

This is traditionally located in the south central area of the Sinai Peninsula associated with the Jebel-Musa mountain. Some believe it may have actually been east of the Gulf of Aqaba and into north-western Saudi Arabia at the mountain known as Jebel el Lawz. This is up for debate and nothing to lose sleep over.

But what is really something to behold is a bush that is burning yet is not consumed!?

3:3-6 - *Then Moses said, “I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn.” ⁴ So when the Lord saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.” ⁵ Then He said, “Do not draw near this*

place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground.”⁶ Moreover 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 upon God.

The Angel of the Lord, as seen in various times through the Old Testament, is a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus Christ.

The burning bush has been seen as a picture of Israel. Though they go through fiery trials, and nations have tried to exterminate them, they have never been consumed. They have endured!

I think we see another wonderful picture here. This bush was believed to be a thorn bush according to the Hebrew word used. What are thorns often reminding us of? The curse of sin! Jesus was given a crown of thorns as He bore the curse of sin for you and me.

Fire symbolizes judgment. Here we see this fire in the midst of this thorn bush, but the bush is not consumed. You and I needed sin judged, and it should have consumed us. But in God's grace He judges our sin through His Son and we are not consumed; we are spared and saved! Hallelujah for that.

To see a bush burning in a hot desert like this was not really a shocking sight, but the thing that got Moses' attention was that the bush was not destroyed. And notice that when Moses turned to look and was focussed on it, this is when God spoke to Him. There are times when we fail to hear from the Lord because we are not giving our full attention. We may open up the Word and get through a chapter, but if our mind is elsewhere we will not receive anything from it.

- That is why we find ourselves at times in the desert places. God wants to develop in us a trust, a dependency upon Him. Moses may not have stopped at this moment had he still been involved politically in Egypt.

A quick lesson in God's holiness and our unholiness. You take off your shoes in a house so you don't track dirt all over the place. Moses removes his shoes not to say he's clean now, but to show His reverence before a holy and pure God. Moses hid his face as he saw his unworthiness in the light of God's holiness. Whenever we come into the presence of God we should be keenly aware of our unworthiness. Isaiah felt it in Isaiah 6:5. Peter experienced it in Luke 5:8, *“Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.”* Throughout the Old Testament very few

could ever come near the Tabernacle of meeting. If they did unworthily, they would die.

- So what hope do we have to approach God. How can we mere mortals, every come into the presence of a holy God? Simple, we needed to become holy ourselves! This is why God sent His Son to this world.
- **Colossians 1:21–22**, *"And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled²² in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight—"*

3:7-10 - And the Lord said: "I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows. ⁸ So I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites. ⁹ Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel has come to Me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. ¹⁰ Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt."

God says *I have come down to deliver them, **and** to bring them up... to a good and large land* (3:8). I'm thankful that God not only delivers us from something negative, but then brings us into something positive. He redeems us out of sin and death so that He can bring us into life and heaven with Him. We're not just spared, we're spoiled!

Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh... God could easily do this act without Moses' help. But aren't you glad God chooses to work through you to bring about His purposes? It's always a path of glory not grief. It's to bring fun not frustration. He invites us in to partner with Him and see first hand the amazing work of God.

Are you willing to go when God says come? Well, Moses wasn't so much.

2. Moses' Excuses and God's Response – 3:11-4:17

Excuse #1: I Lack Credentials (3:11) / God's Response (3:12)

3:11-12 - *But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" ¹² So He said, "I*

will certainly be with you. And this shall be a sign to you that I have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.”

Instead of answering, ‘Here am I, send me!’ (Isaiah 6:8), Moses replies with, ‘Who am I? Send me??’

Now there’s some good humility here which is important, but sometimes we let our own feeling of insufficiency be an excuse for not answering God’s call. Moses didn’t have to worry about who he was if he fully comprehended Who was sending Him!

- Our sufficiency certainly is not of ourselves. **2 Corinthians 3:5**, *“Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God,”* When we understand who calls us and equips us, we don’t have to wonder about the how’s or the what’s. We understand that God enables us and goes before us to accomplish His purposes.

“The call to God’s service always comes with the promise of God’s presence. There are many examples of this in the Bible. When Joshua inherited the mantle of spiritual leadership, God promised him, “As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Josh. 1:5). God made the same promise to Gideon, who was too timid to lead the troops into battle. God said, “I will be with you” (Judg. 6:16). God also promised to be with Jeremiah, who was only a youngster when he became a prophet: “Do not be afraid ... for I am with you” (Jer. 1:8). But this promise is not just for prophets like Moses and Joshua—it is for all God’s people. Just as God was with Moses and the children of Israel, so he is with us, for he has given us the promise of his presence in Jesus Christ, who said, “Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matt. 28:20b). In making this promise, God has given himself to us forever and for always. And now that we have the promise of his eternal presence, what more could we need, or even want?”¹

Excuse #2: I Lack Content (3:13) / God’s Response (3:14-22)

3:13-15 - Then Moses said to God, “Indeed, when I come to the children of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they say to me, ‘What is His name?’ what shall I say to them?”¹⁴ And God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And He said, “Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’ ”¹⁵ Moreover God said to

¹ Ryken, P. G., & Hughes, R. K. (2005). *Exodus: saved for God’s glory* (p. 93). Crossway Books.

Moses, “Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: ‘The Lord 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 this is My memorial to all generations.’

Now Moses kicks into overdrive with the excuses. What if the children of Israel ask this? Or what if they want that? What about this? What about that?

Moses was being moved outside of his comfort zone and he’s feeling the pressure. He starts imagining all that could go wrong, instead of seeing all that would go right with God on His side.

- Israel never did ask Moses what God’s name was.
- “We often bring upon ourselves a lot of needless worry and anxiety when we dwell on the things that might go wrong.

So, you’re trying to sleep, and it’s well after bedtime. But you’re tossing and turning and unable to get comfy. You notice you’re replaying the same scenario in your head. Some vision of tomorrow, of what might happen, how a hope could be dashed. If you’ve had this experience, you’re far from alone.

Researcher Lucas LaFreniere, Ph.D. said, “This is what breaks my heart about worry. It makes you miserable in the present moment to try and prevent misery in the future. For chronic worriers, this process leads them to be continually distressed all their lives in order to avoid later events that never happen. Worry sucks the joy out of the ‘here and now.’”

In his study on worry, participants were asked to record their worries and how they caused distress and interfered with their lives. Each night at 10pm, they reported how much time they spent thinking on each specific worry throughout the day. Then, 20 days after that period, they reviewed each entry and reported whether any of the worries had become true.

The good news is, LaFreniere’s study found that in his survey of worrisome people, 91.4 percent of their worries never actually happened.

Worrying caused only more misery and did nothing to help the worriers handle whatever they had been worrying about. This is mainly because the hotly anticipated events never transpired. Remember what Jesus said: “Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?” (Matthew 6:25-34).”²

² <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2020/january/91-percent-of-what-we-worry-about-never-happens.html>

So God's response to Moses is a powerful one: ***I AM WHO I AM***. Simply put – God is! God is what? God is everything! God always was and always will be. He is everything we need in every particular situation. *I Am for you whatever your need may be*. This is a wonderful truth and reality!

Scholars are divided over whether the name of God is in verse 14 (***I AM***) or verse 15 (***the LORD***). In actuality I see these names being very closely tied together.

- The word for I AM is the Hebrew verb *hayah*, which means 'to be'. The name LORD is *Yahovah (YHWH)*, which means 'the existing one'.

"The name "***LORD***" is sometimes called the *tetragrammaton* because in Hebrew it consists of four letters: YHWH. The Jews considered these letters to be so sacred that later some of them even refused to pronounce the Lord's name, for fear of taking it in vain. Perhaps that is why the proper way to pronounce the divine name has been forgotten (part of the problem too is that the most ancient Hebrew manuscripts do not contain any vowels, only consonants). The King James Version of the Bible sometimes writes it out as "Jehovah," although this is based on a misunderstanding of Hebrew vowels that dates back to the medieval church. The New International Version simply prints it as "Lord" in capital and small capital letters. Probably the proper way to say God's special name was something like "Yahweh." But even if its pronunciation is uncertain, God's name itself has never been forgotten." ³

So today nobody really knows the correct name, whether it's Jehovah or Yehovah, Jahweh, or Yahweh. Whenever a Jewish student or scholar sees this tetragrammaton they will often read *Lord* in its place, which is the Hebrew word *adonai*.

"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 in his being and character and thus is not in the process of becoming something different from what he is (e.g., "the same yesterday and today and forever," Heb. 13:8); and (4) that God is eternal in his existence." ⁴

³ Ryken, P. G., & Hughes, R. K. (2005). *Exodus: saved for God's glory* (p. 96). Crossway Books.

⁴ Crossway Bibles. (2008). *The ESV Study Bible* (p. 149). Crossway Bibles.

The word Jehovah or Yahweh means “the existing one”, or “self-subsisting”. As God declares His name “I AM” He is saying, *I exist, not just in ethereal time, but I am existing before you right now!* He is eternally existent and presently available and before us. With God there is no before, or after, there is just the now. He is eternal, not bound by time. He is everything today that He has always been. There is no change. **Hebrews 13:8**, *“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.”*

- The same God that spoke to Moses is the same God we worship today. As present as He was when He met with Moses in the burning bush is as present as He is as we gather in His name.

This name I AM is an important one because it's how Jesus identified Himself often in the book of John. There were 7 I AM statements that He gave. Jews knew just how much this Name was attributed to the one true God and as Jesus used it in reference to Himself, it infuriated the Jews because they knew He was declaring Himself to be one with God; to be deity. This was blasphemous in their eyes and they sought to stone Him for applying this name to Himself.

- **John 8:58–59**, *“Jesus said to them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.’”*⁵⁹ *Then they took up stones to throw at Him...*

Jesus is our great I AM. He's not only the God we worship, He's our Saviour who has saved us. And He is eternally existent and is our ever present help in need.

3:16-18 - Go and gather the elders of Israel together, and say to them, ‘The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared to me, saying, “I have surely visited you and seen what is done to you in Egypt; ¹⁷ and I have said I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, to a land flowing with milk and honey.” ’ ¹⁸ Then they will heed your voice; and you shall come, you and the elders of Israel, to the king of Egypt; and you shall say to him, ‘The Lord God of the Hebrews has met with us; and now, please, let us go three days’ journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God.’

A three day journey? What is God implying here? Wasn't this to be an Exodus out of Egypt, not just a campout for three days?

What we're seeing is the hardness and stubbornness of Pharaoh. He wouldn't want them to go even if it were 3 days.

3:19-22 - *But I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not even by a mighty hand. ²⁰ So I will stretch out My hand and strike Egypt with all My wonders which I will do in its midst; and after that he will let you go. ²¹ And I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and it shall be, when you go, that you shall not go empty-handed. ²² But every woman shall ask of her neighbor, namely, of her who dwells near her house, articles of silver, articles of gold, and clothing; and you shall put them on your sons and on your daughters. So you shall plunder the Egyptians.*”

This verse is exciting when you consider Jesus was in the belly of the earth three days providing a great deliverance (pictured in vs. 18 with a three day journey). It says in Ephesians 4:8-9 that He led captives free and gave gifts to men. These gifts here are just payments for their years of labor.

God is restoring and rewarding His people with the work they perhaps thought was done in vain.

Excuse #3: I Lack Converts (4:1) / God's Response (4:2-9)

4:1 - *Then Moses answered and said, “But suppose they will not believe me or listen to my voice; suppose they say, ‘The Lord has not appeared to you.’ ”*

Moses now is crossing the line from humility to unbelief. God already said in 3:18 that they will listen. Moses thinks, *‘I can't do this! They just don't like me!’*

- God isn't asking you to go out and win a popularity contest. He's just calling you to be obedient with what He shows you. He's the One that takes cares of the results. We just need to be faithful, He'll bring the fruit.

At times we may feel like we just don't have the ability or talents to be used of God in a certain area. But God reveals something so wonderful in the next verse...

4:2-5 - *So the Lord said to him, “What is that in your hand?” He said, “A rod.” ³ And He said, “Cast it on the ground.” So he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from it. ⁴ Then the Lord said to Moses, “Reach out your hand and take it by the tail” (and he reached out his hand and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand), ⁵ “that they may believe that the Lord God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you.”*

God will work with what He's given us. God will use what you have in your hand and will often work through the very supernatural natural gifting He gives us.

What is that in your hand?

- God did the same with David – a sling. He did it with Sampson – a donkey's jawbone. And with the young boy who had the 5 loaves and 2 fish.
- What is in your hand today? God doesn't need degrees and credentials, He works with what you have in your hand when it's opened and available for Him to use.

Grabbing a snake by the tail is a dangerous place to pick it up, yet Moses is learning to trust the Lord. Moses is having his faith built up and seeing God help in those areas that might otherwise be very uncomfortable.

This is also acting in direct confrontation of the Egyptian symbol of deity. The cobra represented the national god in lower Egypt. Representations of snakes were all over Egypt – on their walls, on helmets, on monuments. The Pharaoh had the symbol of a snake on his headpiece. This transformation of the rod to a snake is a sign of the power of God over the alleged power of Egypt and Pharaoh.

Just as Jesus on the cross would crush the serpent's head, God too would overrule whatever dependence or power Egypt was trusting in.

4:6-9 - *Furthermore the Lord said to him, "Now put your hand in your bosom." And he put his hand in his bosom, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous, like snow. ⁷ And He said, "Put your hand in your bosom again." So he put his hand in his bosom again, and drew it out of his bosom, and behold, it was restored like his other flesh. ⁸ "Then it will be, if they do not believe you, nor heed the message of the first sign, that they may believe the message of the latter sign. ⁹ And it shall be, if they do not believe even these two signs, or listen to your voice, that you shall take water from the river and pour it on the dry land. The water which you take from the river will become blood on the dry land."*

The Lord has now given Moses an artillery of signs which will clearly prove His calling and the One who has called him. The snake a symbol of Satan and leprosy a symbol of sin – yet God overcomes both!

Yet with all of these signs, Moses is still thinking of excuses. The real issues are coming up.

Excuse #4: I Lack Communication Skills (4:10) / God's Response (4:11-12)

4:10-12 - Then Moses said to the Lord, “O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.” ¹¹ So the Lord said to him, “Who has made man’s mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the Lord? ¹² Now therefore, go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say.”

Moses believes He is not capable of speaking well. This wasn’t the case before: **Acts 7:22**, “And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds.”

- He was an articulate speaker before but for the last 40 years he’s been preaching to sheep. And every sermon was baaaaad.
- His time in the desert certainly broke him of any confidence in himself, but it shouldn’t have swayed his confidence being in the Lord.

I love how the Lord responds here: ‘Who’s in control of the one who speaks or doesn’t speak?’ God gives sight, closes sight, He’s the One that is in control of all that happens. Why should any of us lack confidence.

Excuse #5: I Lack Commitment (4:13) / God’s Response (4:14-17)

4:13-14 - But he said, “O my Lord, please send by the hand of whomever else You may send.” ¹⁴ So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses, and He said: “Is not Aaron the Levite your brother? I know that he can speak well. And look, he is also coming out to meet you. When he sees you, he will be glad in his heart.

Here's the heart of the issue – Moses just didn’t want to go. *Send someone else!*

God never got upset when Moses said, “Who am I?” or when he asked who should he say has sent him, or when he said, “Suppose they won’t believe me...” or when he said he wasn’t a good speaker. But the Lord’s anger was kindled against Moses when he showed his unwillingness. The real issue was that Moses was unwilling, not unable.

- Sadly there have been many that have missed out on seeing God do great things in and through their lives because they have been unwilling to get out of their comfort zone and yield themselves to God. Whether you feel capable or not, let God lead you and use you, surrender to Him and you will be blessed. But God will never force Himself upon you, and if you choose to be unwilling, you will only miss out on seeing the glory and greatness of God!

4:15-17 - *Now you shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth. And I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and I will teach you what you shall do. ¹⁶ So he shall be your spokesman to the people. And he himself shall be as a mouth for you, and you shall be to him as God. ¹⁷ And you shall take this rod in your hand, with which you shall do the signs.*

God now has Aaron to be Moses' aid and spokesman. Moses may be breathing a sigh of relief here, but little does he know what a problem Aaron will be for him down the road.

- "Aaron did turn out to be a source of problems for Moses. Aaron instigated the worship of the golden calf, fashioning the calf himself and building the altar himself (Exodus 32:1–6). Aaron's sons blasphemed God with impure offerings (Leviticus 10:1–7). At one time, Aaron openly led a mutiny against Moses (Numbers 12:1–8)." ⁵
- I'm sure as each of these difficult encounters happened, Moses in the back of his mind was thinking, I have only myself to blame because I questioned God.

3. Moses' Return to Egypt and God's Faithfulness – 4:18-31

4:18-23 - *So Moses went and returned to Jethro his father-in-law, and said to him, "Please let me go and return to my brethren who are in Egypt, and see whether they are still alive." And Jethro said to Moses, "Go in peace."¹⁹ Now the Lord said to Moses in Midian, "Go, return to Egypt; for all the men who sought your life are dead."²⁰ Then Moses took his wife and his sons and set them on a donkey, and he returned to the land of Egypt. And Moses took the rod of God in his hand. ²¹ And the Lord said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt, see that you do all those wonders before Pharaoh which I have put in your hand. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go. ²² Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the Lord: "Israel is My son, My firstborn. ²³ So I say to you, let My son go that he may serve Me. But if you refuse to let him go, indeed I will kill your son, your firstborn."*

God lays it on pretty heavy right off the bat with Pharaoh. He wants Pharaoh to see the seriousness of the situation – hardness of heart will result in death.

⁵ Guzik, D. (2013). *Exodus* (Ex 4:13–17). David Guzik.

4:24-26 - *And it came to pass on the way, at the encampment, that the Lord met him and sought to kill him. ²⁵ Then Zipporah took a sharp stone and cut off the foreskin of her son and cast it at Moses' feet, and said, "Surely you are a husband of blood to me!" ²⁶ So He let him go. Then she said, "You are a husband of blood!"—because of the circumcision.*

Now this is a rather strange scene unfolding before us here!? Basically, what we see here is that God was not going to let Moses go any further until he was walking in full obedience and had surrendered every area of compromise. The issue was his uncircumcised son.

Circumcision was to be a sign of the covenant God had made with His people. **Genesis 17:10–14**, *"This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised; ¹¹ and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you. ¹² He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised, every male child in your generations, he who is born in your house or bought with money from any foreigner who is not your descendant. ¹³ He who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money must be circumcised, and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. ¹⁴ And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant."*

Zipporah, not being an Israelite didn't grow up with this tradition and probably thought it barbaric. Moses seemingly listened to his wife rather than to God's commands and compromised in this area. And it nearly cost him his life! Moses had to learn whole hearted obedience before he could move on into the more bigger responsibilities in God.

4:27-31 - *And the Lord said to Aaron, "Go into the wilderness to meet Moses." So he went and met him on the mountain of God, and kissed him. ²⁸ So Moses told Aaron all the words of the Lord who had sent him, and all the signs which He had commanded him. ²⁹ Then Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the children of Israel. ³⁰ And Aaron spoke all the words which the Lord had spoken to Moses. Then he did the signs in the sight of the people. ³¹ So the people believed; and when they heard that the Lord had visited the children of Israel and that He had looked on their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshiped."*

The people believed just as God told Moses they would. This walk of obedience and surrender resulted in great worship before God.

“Dwight L. Moody observed that “Moses spent forty years in Pharaoh’s court thinking he was somebody, forty years in the desert learning that he was nobody, and forty years showing what God can do with a somebody who found out he was a nobody.””^{3 6}

³ Dwight L. Moody, quoted in Maxie D. Dunnam, *Exodus*, The Communicator’s Commentary (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), p. 105.

⁶ Ryken, P. G., & Hughes, R. K. (2005). *Exodus: saved for God’s glory* (p. 197). Crossway Books.