

Exodus 3

Preceding Text

(Where are we? Chapters 1-15 **Redemption - Prelude**)

Exodus 1 has several links to the book of Genesis. It is a way to signal that this book is connected to the preceding narratives. In fact, Exodus will continually flag the long relationship God has with his people (keep looking for ways in which you see that). While generations pass, the promises of God do not expire.

At the end of chapter 2, the people of Israel cry out – the text does not even say they cried to God, and yet God heard them. He paid attention to their suffering and called to mind his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God looked upon the children of Israel and (depending on your translation) “took notice of them,” “was concerned about them,” or simply “knew.” This is a deep experiential understanding of the suffering of his people. The hearing, seeing, remembering, and knowing are repeated in chapter 3, and they provoke God’s response which is where we are this week.

Current Text: Themes and Background

1. Where are we? Moses has left Egypt and is now a shepherd in the service of his father-in-law. He has traveled to Midian. At this point we hit several scholarly opinions. We do not know if Midian is a specific geographical territory or if it connotes a coalition of tribes. In either case, it seems that the land or the collection of tribes was on the northwest Arabian Peninsula near the Red Sea. According to Genesis 25:1-2, this people might be related to the Israelites through Abraham. When we find Moses in this text, he is on the “far side of the wilderness” and on “the mountain of God.” We are far from the Israelite people and far from Moses’ Egyptian roots/education/material comfort.
2. Sacred Presence of God: We are almost surprised by the intensity of the meeting between God and Moses. In Genesis, Adam and Abraham converse with God. Jacob experiences God, and Joseph interprets dreams with God’s help. But no one has this sort of intense encounter with God until Moses. This is a different recognition of the fiery righteousness of God. In this barren landscape with the hot sun blazing down on thick layers of exposed black flint that, spontaneous fires are not unusual. In this text, notice how it is not the fire that is unusual. It is the fact that the bush is not consumed by the fire that grabs Moses’ attention.
3. The name of God: The name of God given in 3:14 is complicated and beautiful. It is packed full of meaning. The proper name “YHWH” comes from the verb “to be.” And here the Hebrew is delightfully flexible. The meaning of the name can be “I am who I am,” “I will be who I will be,” “I am who I will be,” and “I will be who I am.” This deliberately vague phrase may suggest that the “possession” of God’s name cannot be used to coerce this God. Many English translations write out the name LORD here, but we the reader should note that this is a reference to a specific and personal God. The

LORD is not a generic “God” – this one has a past. He has made promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is known, and he is personal. This is not “a” god of Israel. By using YHWH, the authors are saying this is the personal and known God of Israel.

Engage the Text: Discussion Questions

1. What did you hear as the main point of the sermon? Or what was your primary takeaway?
2. Pay attention to how God introduces himself to Moses. Identify the introduction, what God has seen, and how he will respond to what he has seen. Now read Exodus 34:6–7 and Isaiah 63:7–9. How does this fill out the character of God?
3. Identify the distinctions between the place where the Israelites are now and the place where God will take them. This is a curious comparison, because if we were to look strictly at the geography of these two places, we would see that Egypt is far superior. It has better soil, more water, and greater wealth. The land of inheritance is vulnerable and cannot produce the resources needed for empire building. But strict geography is not what is being described here! How would you tease out the distinctions?
4. Why is it important for God to give his personal name to Moses? If you reread this and replace LORD with YHWH (conventionally pronounced as *Yahweh*), does the conversation hit you in a different way?
5. What does it mean to you that God makes and fulfills promise but also requests a response. In this case, he asks for Moses’ participation. God calls, and God sends. What does it say of God’s character for him to do this? What does that mean for the Church today?
6. What is the text telling us about God’s character, God’s revelation, and God’s mission in the world?

Read for Next Week: Exodus 4:1–5:2

Additional resources with a variety of opinions:

1. Israel Bible Podcast [The Name of God: One Name or Many?](#)
2. Israel Bible Podcast [Should the Name of God Be Spoken?](#)
3. [Information and Map of Midian’s territory](#)