

Exodus 3 “I AM the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” January 29, 2017
Psalm 47
Luke 20:27-44

The book of Exodus highlights the way in which the LORD
is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
He is the God of Israel.

It might seem a little odd, then, that we – who are *not* Israelites by birth –
would worship the God of Israel.
Why do people all over the earth worship the God of a tiny middle eastern nation?!

Our psalm of response helps us remember that the God of Abraham is also the God of all nations.
“The princes of the peoples gather as the people of the God of Abraham.”

God had told Abraham that in his seed, all the nations of the earth would be blessed.
God’s purpose was to focus his blessing (and his judgment) on one nation, one tribe –
so that he might ultimately focus his judgment and blessing on one man –
Jesus.

So that through Jesus, the blessing of Abraham might come to all the earth.

The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob
is truly the God who has revealed himself in his Son, Jesus Christ –
the one through whom we also become the Seed of Abraham by faith.

Sing Psalm 47
Read Luke 20:27-44

Jesus says that in the passage about the burning bush,
when Moses calls the Lord,
“the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob,”
Moses is teaching us that the dead are raised.

I want you to learn how to read the scriptures the way Jesus does.
When you hear the Angel of the LORD say to Moses,
“I am the God of Abraham” –
do you think, “Ah, of course, that means that the dead must be raised!”?
Why don’t we think that way?

Because we have been taught to read the Bible in a strictly literal way.
Why do we read the Bible in a strictly literal way?

Who said that the Bible should be read strictly literally?

Where *should* you go to learn how to interpret scripture?

I would suggest that Jesus is the best guide to interpreting the scriptures.

It is an ancient saying that “scripture interprets scripture.”

The best practice is to watch and learn from the biblical writers themselves.

Jesus and the apostles teach us how to read the scriptures faithfully.

That’s why I regularly connect scripture with scripture –

showing how other passages engage with our text –

with the goal that you might learn how to do this too.

I love it when you come up to me afterwards and ask “what about this passage?”

because that tells me that you are getting it!

Chapters 3-4 focus on the call of Moses at the Burning Bush on Mt. Horeb (or Sinai).

When God reveals himself to people there is a common pattern to the appearance –

or “theophany” as it is sometimes called.

It starts by giving the opening scene (here, a burning bush).

God calls out the name of the person (here, “Moses” –

but also think of Samuel, or Abraham, or Saul of Tarsus)

The person responds with an appropriate gesture of humility.

God declares who he is and what he is doing –

and calls the person not to be afraid.

Then God commands the person to do something.

The person objects or inquires of God and God answers.

And finally the person does what God says.

Of course, the objection phase can sometimes last for quite a while!

In chapter 4, we will see that Moses continues raising objections!

But God’s call is *effectual* – God’s call *works* –

whether it is calling Moses to be the deliverer of his people,

or whether it is calling *you* out of darkness into light.

Verse 1 reminds us that Moses has fled from Egypt

and has married the daughter of Jethro, the priest of Midian.

1. “Holy Ground”: The Presence of the LORD in the Burning Bush (v1-6)

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.

In Genesis we learned that the Egyptians despised shepherding –

so when Moses takes up shepherding his father-in-law’s flocks

he is engaging in very non-Egyptian work.

He has identified with his own people – the people of God.

The “west side of the wilderness” well describes the Sinai peninsula.

It is quite a journey from Midian – but if it was a dry year
he may well have needed to travel far in search of grass.

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.”*

The Hebrew word for bush sounds almost the same as “Sinai” –
and we will learn later that Mt. Horeb is also called Mt. Sinai

It would be a remarkable sight to see a bush burning – and yet not being consumed.
It would get my attention!

But this is the way that the angel of the LORD *appeared* to Moses.

This is the first use of the name “Yahweh” in the book of Exodus –
and with the one exception of the prayer of Jacob in Genesis 49,
the first use of the name “Yahweh” since Genesis 39.
For 13 chapters, the name of Yahweh has only been used *once* –
when Jacob declared that he waited for the salvation of the LORD.

And now that day has come.

Throughout the passage the “angel of the LORD” speaks as the LORD himself.

The word “angel” simply means “messenger” –
so this is the “messenger of the LORD.”

Think of this way,
when you have a teleconference
you may have a video image of a person talking to you.

But you would never say that the person is simply *present*.
Rather they are *present* by means of this video image.
And for that matter, it is *not* their voice that you hear!
It is an electronic reproduction of their voice!

(If you think about it, you do not hear a person’s voice on the phone –
you hear an electronic reproduction of their voice.)

When you speak into your phone,
your voice is translated into electronic signals
which are then transmitted across the miles
and then retranslated back into audible sounds)

When God appears to Moses in the burning bush,

it is not the entirety of God that appears –
it is the appearance of God – the messenger of the LORD.
It *is* the LORD himself (in the same sense that the voice you hear on the telephone
is your mother's voice).

Notice that it is the *angel of the LORD* that appears to Moses –
but it is the LORD himself who *speaks*.

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.*

Notice the pattern of the conversation.
God initiates – Moses responds.

God warns him not to come near.
It is not yet safe to draw near to God.
God is holy.
We are not.
It is not safe for an unholy person to draw near to a holy God.

The whole book of Exodus is all about how to draw near to God.
And yet over and over again throughout Exodus
there are warnings against drawing near!
And the last half of the book is about the tabernacle –
the place where God will dwell with his people.

So the first time that God shows up in 400 years –
since Jacob left Canaan to go down to Egypt in Genesis –
God starts by warning Moses *not* to draw near.
Instead, he must take his sandals off –
because even the presence of the appearance of the LORD
renders the place on which he stands "holy ground."

Why must Moses take his sandals off?
Sandals are made of leather –
the hide of an animal.

When God cursed the ground in Genesis 3,
he gave Adam and Eve animal skins to wear.
Animal skins protect us against the cursed ground –

against the thorns and briers that the earth brings forth against us.

But the presence of God in this place restores the holiness of the ground.

And only then does the LORD identify himself:

“I am the God of your father,
the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.”

Jesus says that this should be understood as testifying to the resurrection of the body,
because God is the God of the living – not the dead.

So when God says “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob”
he is saying that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will be raised again.

I will grant that Jesus’ interpretation seems a little odd at first.

It is not at all clear at first blush that Exodus 3 has anything to do with the resurrection!
But what did it mean for Abraham that the LORD is God?

Abraham never took possession of the Promised Land.

But he did buy a burial plot.

He did not want to bury Sarah with the Canaanites.

Why?

Because they were under God’s wrath and curse.

He did not wish to mingle her bones with the bones of the damned.

He went to great lengths to out-negotiate Ephron the Hittite in Genesis 23,
and paid an exorbitant amount for a burial plot.

And there he was buried – and Isaac – and Jacob

(Genesis 50 tells how Joseph and his brothers
took their father’s bones back to Canaan for burial).

Why were Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob buried in the Promised Land?

Because they shared the hope of the resurrection.

I don’t know what exactly they understood about that hope –

but they understood that their bodies were connected to that hope.

That’s why it *mattered* to them where they were buried.

And we need to read the Old Testament the way that Jesus does –

seeing the unfolding mystery in the light of the glory that has been revealed in him!

Jesus is highlighting the importance of what it means for God to be your God.

God is the God of the living - not the dead.

And that means that the dead will not stay dead permanently!

Is God still the God of Abraham?

If so, then that means that the dead must be raised!

And indeed, *resurrection* is precisely what the following verses promise –
the resurrection of Israel, corporately considered.

2. “Flowing with Milk and Honey”: The Promised Land and the Afflicted Seed (v7-12)

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 ...

Verses 7-9 remind us of the last words of chapter 2.

“God heard their groaning,
and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.
God saw the people of Israel –
and God knew.”

The LORD now says to Moses

I have surely seen – I have heard – and I know.
I have seen the affliction of my people.
I have heard their cry because of their taskmasters.
I know their sufferings.

And therefore, I have come.

I know what a modern person would say:
Our tendency is to respond by saying,
“Oh, sure, *now* you show up!
But what about my grandmother who died in slavery last year?
Why couldn't you have “remembered” us back then?
Why did you forget us in the first place?!
With a God like that, who needs enemies?!”

I will freely grant that God's ways can seem very strange to us.

And it gets even stranger.

Because God says that he will give to them
*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.*

So not only has God allowed Israel to suffer for four hundred years in Egypt –
but now he will displace all the peoples of Canaan
in order to give his people their land.

The Canaanites have spent centuries living in their land –

rebelling against God – living wicked lives.

In one sense the Canaanites were no worse than any other nation.

Yes, God says that their wickedness was *complete* –

but that just means that it was *finished* (not that it was worse than everyone else).

What God does in Moses and Joshua – in the Conquest –

is bring a picture of the final judgment,

first on Egypt, then on Canaan.

The point that all the nations should learn is this:

Repent, or the same thing will happen to you.

But before they go to the land of Promise – God must first deal with Egypt:

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.

When God says that the “cry of the people of Israel has come to me”

you should hear echoes of Genesis 18,

where God says that the cry of the oppressed have risen up – against Sodom.

God is going to do to Egypt what he did to Sodom and Gomorrah.

So God allows his people to suffer greatly for 400 years –

then he punishes the Egyptians and devastates the Canaanites –

just to give his *own* people a land of their own.

What is God doing?

Well, there are some things that God has simply not revealed.

So anyone who claims to have it all figured out is either God – or is nuts.

But there are some things that God *has* revealed.

Deuteronomy 29:29 says it well:

“The secret things belong to the LORD our God,

but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever,

that we may do all the words of this law.”

We saw in our series on the Psalms

that God delights in poetic justice.

The one who digs a pit to ensnare others will fall in it himself.

As Jesus put it,

“with the same measure you use, it will be measured to you.” (Matt 7:2)

How you judge others will be the measure that God uses to judge you.

Pharaoh judged Israel by killing their sons.
And the Egyptians went along with it.
How do you suppose God will judge Pharaoh and all Egypt?!

You can see why people might say,
“if this is the case, then it is better not to judge!”
Indeed, that is why Jesus will say “Do not judge, lest you be judged!”
But of course, if you never judge others, then God will leave you to your own verdict.
If you see the innocent being wronged –
and you say “who am I to judge?” –
then when you are being wronged,
God will say “who am I to judge?”

We saw last time that Moses had a very proper view of this.
When he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew,
he sided with the innocent –
and even killed the Egyptian to protect the innocent!
As we saw last time, Hebrews 11 portrays this as an act of faith
whereby Moses identified himself with his suffering and afflicted people.

Of course, as Stephen points out in Acts 7
Moses could not deliver Israel from Egypt through violence.
It would require the mighty hand of *God* to save his people.
Moses first had to learn humility in the desert.

But now it is time.

¹⁰ Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.”

But Moses has learned the lesson of humility!

¹¹ But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?”

This is the right question!

Later, in chapter 4, God will get angry with Moses –
but only when Moses says “please send someone else.”
The LORD does *not* object to these first questions.

And particularly, the first question is exactly the right question!
“Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?”

You might think that Moses would be eager for this job!
Yup, I was trained in Pharaoh's court,
so *obviously* I am the right man for the job.
But Moses has learned humility.
Who am I?

And God's answer gets at the heart of the question:

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."

Who am I?

It is not because of Moses' unique qualifications as one raised in Pharaoh's court,
but simply because the LORD is with him.
If I am with you, that is sufficient.

Indeed, in Hebrew the statement "I am with you" is written the same as "I will be with you."

By the way, this is God's answer to you as well.

God has called *you* to be his child – to be part of his new family –
to share in the commission that Jesus gave to the apostles
in making disciples of every nation.

The reason why we call Matthew 28 the "Great Commission"
is because it is the final commissioning –
the one in which we all participate as part of the family of Jesus.

And Jesus says at the end of the Great Commission:
"Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

When we ask, "Who am I, that I should do this?"

God's answer consistently comes back,
"No, the real question is *who am I?* – I am the one who will be with you!"

And then second, God gives Moses a sign:

"when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain."

Israel has been serving Pharaoh in Egypt.

Chapter 2 highlighted the "hard service" – the slavery of Israel.
This same word is also used to describe *worship*.

We call it a "worship service" for this reason.

Paul will use the same language in Romans 6:16 –
"Do you not know that if you present yourself to anyone as obedient slaves,
you are slaves of the one whom you obey,

either of sin, which leads to death,
or of obedience, which leads to righteousness.”

In worship we confess that we are servants of God –
('slaves of God' is the term that Paul uses!).

So Moses starts thinking seriously about this task.

Okay, so when I get back to Egypt, what will happen when I say to the Israelites,
“Time to go!”?

3. “A Mighty Hand”: I AM Will Deliver His People from Egypt (v13-22)

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?”

This is important because the *name* of a deity reveals something important about him.

In the ancient world, every culture had multiple deities –
except Israel.

So when they ask,
what *name* should I give?

¹⁴ God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.”^[a] And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”

There is a lot of debate over the meaning of the name of God.

Some translate it “I am who I am” – like the ESV.

Others translate it “I cause to be” (Stuart).

Others translate it “I will be who I will be”

All of these translations get at something of what is being communicated here.

“I am who I am” – communicates the self-existence of God.

God does not need some other being.

When God says “I AM”

he is saying that he is who he is –

regardless of what anyone else may think, say, or do.

“I cause to be” – points to God as the creator –

and not just the creator of all things, but more particularly here,

the creator of Israel (and we saw in chapter 1

lots of parallels to the early chapters of Genesis)

The Exodus will prove to be a sort of “new creation.”

and “I will be who I will be” – reminds us of God’s freedom.

No one ever forces God to do something.

So when God says to Moses “I will be with you” –

there is nothing that can prevent God from doing what he has promised.

And then in verse 15, God explains how Moses is to say this to Israel:

¹⁵ God also said to Moses, “Say this to the people of Israel: ‘The LORD,^[b] 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.

All through the book of Genesis people called upon the Name of the LORD (Yahweh).

So God is *not* saying that the name “Yahweh” was unknown before.

As we saw earlier,

the name of Yahweh is only used once in the last ten chapters of Genesis.

Perhaps Jacob and his sons refrained from using the name of Yahweh as long as they were in Egypt.

Perhaps they were waiting for the great redemption that Yahweh would bring.

(The one use of the name of Yahweh in Genesis 40-50 is when Jacob says, “I wait for your salvation, O Yahweh!” – 49:18).

But now God tells Moses that they shall remember this name forever.

There is a particular revelation of the *name* of God that you see in Abraham –

El Shaddai – God Almighty – is the name that God uses frequently with Abram.

The name of Yahweh – the name of the LORD – is particularly to be associated with the great redemptive act of the Exodush.

And in the same way, the Triune name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit is to be associated with the great redemptive act accomplished by Jesus in the NT.

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.”’

So God tells Moses to go and gather the elders of Israel

and tell them that Yahweh, the God of their fathers – of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – will deliver them from the affliction of Egypt and bring them to a land flowing with milk and honey.

When God says that he sees, he knows, he remembers –

that is not a bare statement of fact –

when God sees, when God knows, when God remembers, that means that he will *do something* about it!

We should note that verses 16-17 essentially repeat the language of the first part of the chapter.
In other words, “Go tell them what I have told you.”
So why doesn’t God just say “Go tell them what I have told you”?

The repetition is important.

In the book of Acts, Luke will tell the story of how Peter went to Cornelius,
the first convert from the Gentiles.

And then Luke tells the story of Peter telling the story of Cornelius
to the rest of the apostles and elders in Jerusalem.

Why do we get the same story twice?
Because this story is really important!

(Why do we have four gospels?

Because unlike all the important stories that are told twice,
the story of Jesus is really, really important!!)

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. ^[c]

When they ask, “please let us go a three days’ journey into the wilderness,
that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God”
that is the same as asking “please may we leave Egypt, never to return.”

Let me give you a modern analogy:

if your son asks, “Dad, may I please have the keys to the car,”
that is *not* what he means.

What he *means* is, “Dad, may I please take the car and use it for the next few hours.”

Likewise, “I’ll be with you in a second” probably should not be taken literally...

In the ancient world it simply would not do to say,

“O King, we don’t want to be slaves anymore.”

That is simply not what you would say to a king!

So instead, Moses and the elders are to say to Pharaoh,

“The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us...”

(In other words, this request comes from our God, not from us –

and if you disregard this request, you will have to deal with Him!)

“...and now, please let us go a three days’ journey into the wilderness,
that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God.”

In other words, our allegiance to you is over.

We want to leave and give our allegiance to the LORD
and worship and serve him alone.

Jesus will say it another way:

“No one can serve two masters.”

If your ultimate allegiance is to the LORD your God,
then all other relationships will be subordinated to that one.

You might wonder,

Why can't Israel serve the LORD *and* be slaves in Egypt?

Isn't the kingdom of God a *spiritual* kingdom?

Joseph was a faithful servant of the LORD –
yet he served Pharaoh!

Yes, and if you find yourself a slave in Egypt,
you may certainly serve the LORD your God as a slave to Pharaoh.

But God is doing something new in redemptive history.

He had not performed mighty deeds before.

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob all believed God –

with very little in the way of mighty deeds of outward power.

But now God says to Moses:

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. ”

God's mighty deeds will be manifest – not only to the Israelites,
but also to the Egyptians.

Indeed, so mighty will those deeds be that the Egyptians will gladly give you their wealth
in order to get rid of you!

Or perhaps better, they will gladly give you their wealth
as a token of their repentance for their acquiescence
in the way that you were treated by their king!

After the Civil War there was talk of giving every freed slave 40 acres and a mule.

It only happened in a few places.

For the most parts, the whites kept their land –

and the blacks became sharecroppers on the land where they used to be slaves.

That is not the way to promote reconciliation and repentance.

But God's mighty hand will strike the Egyptians
and they will be so eager to send you on your way in peace,
that they will give you clothing and jewelry gladly –
and so you shall plunder the Egyptians!

Plunder is ordinarily a term of war.
But this is war that only God will fight.
The people of God are helpless slaves.
They cannot fight.
But they will plunder their foes – because of God's mighty deeds.
And indeed, it will be the *women* who plunder the Egyptians.

The image here is of the women of Egypt,
mourning over the loss of their firstborn sons,
saying, in effect, "Please, take whatever you want –
only leave us and trouble us no more!"

The Exodus raises lots of difficult moral questions about war, plunder, and slavery –
not to mention the challenging question of God's wrath and judgment.

And it will not do to say "oh, that was just the Old Testament" –
because the same themes emerge again in the book of Revelation.
God says that when Christ returns,
we will once again see his mighty deeds as he comes in judgment against his foes.

This is what Paul said to the Athenians in Acts 17:30-31
"The times of ignorance God overlooked,
but now he commands all people everywhere to repent,
because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness
by a man whom he has appointed;
and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

God is going to make everything right.
And that means that those who oppose him –
those who are making the world *worse* –
need to repent and turn away from their sin.
You need to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus.