

## Bible Study #06 Exodus 3.11–22 02–13–2021

**SPECIAL NOTE:** *In today's study I will be printing LORD in all capitals, every time the verse we are studying has YHWH in the Hebrew Text. This is the one name of God which the Jews would not speak. They always substituted adonai instead of yhwh. Remember they didn't vowel pointing to tell you how to say it until about 500 A.D.*

*Vowels were spoken in Hebrew, but not written. As time progressed, less and less people were able to teach the correct pronunciation. To save the language the Masoretic Scribes developed a vowel system. This is how Jehovah came into use. They printed the vowels the Masoretes developed under the Hebrew letters (yhwh) as substitute a signal to the Jewish reader not to pronounce yhwh but say 'adonai' instead.*

*Today almost all translations print LORD in either all caps or small caps: LORD. If is 'adonai' instead of YHWH, they print Lord. Learn to watch for that difference.*

Moses' response to God's call, was to question his own ability. Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh? This is the first of several occasions on which Moses showed reluctance to fulfil the role God had in mind for him (for later ones, see 4:1, 10, 13). Earlier Moses was confident of his own ability to redress at least some of the grievances of his people. Now he was apprehensive knowing the anger of Pharaoh towards him (2:15).

God's answer came in two parts. The first was that God gave reassurance regarding His presence. The form, 'I will be with you' is the same in Hebrew as the promise that God gave Jacob (Gen. 26:3). This is the first occurrence in these early chapters of Exodus of the Hebrew verb 'to be' that is going to be crucial in the passages dealing with God's self-revelation of Himself (see especially, 3:13-15; 6:2-8).

Moses would be restless until he rested in God's presence with him. The response, "I will be with you," emphasized that Moses' true identity was not in himself but would be found in the God who made him. The real power was the presence of the Creator with him. God would be doing the "rescuing," not Moses (v. 8).

The personal name for God (YHWH, 'the LORD'), used in verse 15, is thought to come from this verb. As events proceeded, Moses was to understand that God's presence would constantly sustain him. The second part of the response was a declaration concerning a sign. The word for 'sign' can mean either an immediate demonstration to show the truthfulness of a message, or one given later to confirm what has been said or done.

Here the sign is clearly of the latter variety. The proof of God's presence with His people in their escape from slavery would be worship 'on this mountain', i.e. on Horeb/Sinai. This was why Moses was so insistent to Pharaoh that the Israelites must be allowed to worship yhwh in the desert (5:1). The fulfilment of the promise of a sign came about when Israel entered into a formal covenantal relationship with the Lord.

Now in v. 13 Moses sought further information to assist him in his mission. His concern was, that in going to his own people, 'the sons of Israel', and making a declaration that he had been sent by 'the God of our fathers', they would ask about God, 'What is his name?' The form of the suggested question is not, 'Who is he?', but 'What is his name?'

It is significant that the Israelites would immediately identify the God who had sent Moses as the covenantal God of Israel. But if he used the name yhwh, would they recognize of whom Moses was speaking? The evidence points to the fact that this name, the so-called tetragrammaton (the four-lettered word), was already in use before the time of Moses.

The name, as God shared it with Moses, comes from the Hebrew word for “to be” and that’s the reason that it’s translated “I AM THAT I AM.” It is clearly related to the self-existence of God, and it has been understood to mean not only “I AM WHAT I AM,” but “I AM BECAUSE I AM,” and “I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE” (or “WHAT I CAUSE TO BE”).

The narrative continues the instructions that God gave to Moses. He was told to go and say to the Israelites that the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, had sent him. The repeated reference to the God of the patriarchs is important, as it highlights the fact that God, the redeemer, was well-known to the people, and, while not mentioning the covenant with Abraham, yet implies that He is the God of the promises.

In addition, Moses was instructed to tell the people that God’s name (it is implied it is yhwh) was a perpetual one, a name to last for generation to generation. In perpetuity, this distinctive name for God was going to express His character.

These verses (16–17) contain the instructions regarding Moses’ delivery of God’s message to the Israelites. It was to be mediated through the assembled elders. Very significantly the message was from the LORD (yhwh). Whatever ambiguity might appear in the preceding verses over God’s name (especially verses 13-14), from this point onwards ‘the LORD’ is the self-designation of God, and also the most frequent title used of him.

The mode of God’s revelation to Moses is described in the same way as used of Abraham (Gen. 17:1, ‘appeared’). In the case of Moses the revelation was in the burning bush (3:2). The message made reference to God’s knowledge of what had happened to Israel in Egypt. The Hebrew text does not say that God had seen the affliction but that He had indeed visited the people.

The message was one of promised deliverance from Egypt and the transfer of Israel to Canaan. It is not just a promise of a trip, it is a promise that the land will be their land, given the God who gave them life. The description of the destination of Israel when delivered from slavery in Egypt is set out in terms similar to, but not identical with, what Abraham had earlier been told (see Gen. 15:18-19).

The point was clearly to show that the land of Canaan was not empty territory but occupied by various ethnic groups who would defend their territorial rights. Occupation of the land was going to be by divine intervention.

Then assurance was given (v. 18) that the elders would listen to Moses and that there would be a joint delegation to Pharaoh. The group were to inform him that ‘the LORD, the God of the Hebrews’ had met with them. The result of this meeting with God was the demand to Pharaoh that the Israelites should be allowed to go three days’ journey into the desert and there to sacrifice to one called ‘the Lord our God’.

The mention of ‘three days’ raises questions regarding the ethics of this request. Were the Israelites to tell a lie in order to secure their release? A number believe the best explanation appears to be that of Augustine (a.d. 354-430) who suggested that the requests to Pharaoh were graded, getting more and more difficult for him to grant. There was no intention to deceive.

Our God knows the past, present and future (cf. v. 19) We will discuss this in greater detail as we go through the plagues. God was given the pharaoh opportunity to act in accordance with God’s plan. “The first and greatest commandment is always to love God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 3:9 reminds us, God is not slow, he is just giving people an opportunity to repent.

The Lord’s pre-knowledge was disclosed in relation to Pharaoh’s reaction to the request. The king of Egypt was not going to ‘give [permission]’ for any movement of the Israelites away from his immediate control. A release would only take place if there were an intervention with ‘a strong hand.’ This description of God’s

omnipotence was to become part of the standardized expression, ‘with a strong hand and an outstretched arm,’ (Deut. 6:21; 7:19).

The solution for Israel lay with the Lord who promised to ‘send’ his hand so that Pharaoh will ‘send away’ the children of Israel. This is a play on two verbal forms of the same Hebrew verb (shâlach: ‘send’, ‘send away’). What was going to convince Pharaoh was the exhibition of God’s wonders. This word is very significant as it is from a root that is used of acts that only God could perform.

Deliverance from Egypt was going to need divine intervention. Whatever was to take place as a consequence of this assurance, it would be the direct action of God (‘I will perform’). Ultimately the position would be reached that Pharaoh would send the Israelites away.

21-22 Exit of Israel from Egypt was not to mean that the people lacked material possessions (v. 21). God pledged to so alter the feelings of the Egyptians towards them that they would not leave ‘emptily’, that is, with empty hands. Shepherds and their families were to come into possession of gold, silver, and clothing.

Whereas Jacob’s family had come down relatively poor to Egypt, it was God’s intention that they would go out much richer. Hence He promised to so touch the hearts of the Egyptians (‘to give this people grace in the eyes of the Egyptians’) that they would willingly enrich Israel.

While the text here only directs women to ask from their neighbors, the account at the time of the exodus makes it plain that men and women were involved by description of it in plural terms. The Israelites asked as Moses instructed and the Egyptians gave them what they asked for, so they plundered the Egyptians’ (Exod. 12:35-36).

Our next study will cover Exodus 4.1–17.