

Exodus 3:1 – 4:31

^{3:1} Now Moses was pasturing the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² The angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed. ³ So Moses said, 'I must turn aside now and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up.' ⁴ 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 come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.' ⁶ He said also, 'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. ⁷ The LORD said, 'I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings. ⁸ So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite. ⁹ Now, behold, the cry of the sons of Israel has come to Me; furthermore, I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians are oppressing them. ¹⁰ Therefore, come now, and I will send you to Pharaoh, so that you may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt.' ¹¹ But Moses said to God, 'Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?' ¹² And He said, 'Certainly I will be with you, and this shall be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain.' ¹³ Then Moses said to God, 'Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you.' Now they may say to me, 'What is His name?' What shall I say to them?' ¹⁴ God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM'; and He said, 'Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.' ¹⁵ God, furthermore, said to Moses, 'Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'The LORD, 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 this is My memorial-name to all generations. ¹⁶ Go and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, 'I am indeed concerned about you and what has been done to you in Egypt. ¹⁷ So I said, 'I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite, to a land flowing with milk and honey.' ¹⁸ They will pay heed to what you say; and you with the elders of Israel will come to the king of Egypt and you will say to him, 'The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us. So 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 permit you to go, except under compulsion. ²⁰ So I will stretch out My hand and strike Egypt with all My miracles which I shall do in the midst of it; and after that he will let you go. ²¹ I will grant this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and it shall be that when you go, you will not go empty-handed. ²² But every woman shall ask of her neighbor and the woman who lives in her house, articles of silver and articles of gold, and clothing; and you will put them on your sons and daughters. Thus you will plunder the Egyptians.' ^{4:1} Then Moses said, 'What if they will not believe me or listen to what I say? For they may say, 'The LORD has not appeared to you.' ² The LORD said to him, 'What is that in your hand?' And he said, 'A staff.' ³ Then He said, 'Throw it on the ground.' So he threw it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from it. ⁴ But the LORD said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand and grasp it by its tail' – so he stretched out his hand and caught it, and it became a staff in his hand – ⁵ that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you.' ⁶ The LORD furthermore said to him, 'Now put your hand into your bosom.' So he put his hand into his bosom, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous like snow. ⁷ Then He said, 'Put your hand into your bosom again.' So he put his hand into his bosom again, and when he took it out of his bosom, behold, it was restored like the rest of his flesh. ⁸ If they will not believe you or heed the witness of the first sign, they may believe the witness of the last sign. ⁹ But if they will not believe even these two signs or heed what you say, then you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground; and the water which you take from the Nile will become blood on the dry ground.' ¹⁰ Then Moses said to the LORD, 'Please, Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither recently nor in time past, nor since You have spoken to Your servant; for I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.' ¹¹ The LORD said to him, 'Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes him mute or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? ¹² Now then go, and I, even I, will be with your mouth, and teach you what you are to say.' ¹³ But he said, 'Please, Lord, now send the message by whomever You will.' ¹⁴ Then the anger of the LORD burned against Moses, and He said, 'Is there not your brother Aaron the Levite? I know that he speaks fluently. And moreover, behold, he is coming out to meet you; when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart. ¹⁵ You are to speak to him and put the words in his mouth; and I, even I, will be with your mouth and his mouth, and I will teach you what you are to do. ¹⁶

Moreover, he shall speak for you to the people; and he will be as a mouth for you and you will be as God to him. ¹⁷ You shall take in your hand this staff, with which you shall perform the signs.’ ¹⁸ Then Moses departed and returned to Jethro his father-in-law and said to him, ‘Please, let me go, that I may return to my brethren who are in Egypt, and see if they are still alive.’ And Jethro said to Moses, ‘Go in peace.’ ¹⁹ Now the LORD said to Moses in Midian, ‘Go back to Egypt, for all the men who were seeking your life are dead.’ ²⁰ So Moses took his wife and his sons and mounted them on a donkey, and returned to the land of Egypt. Moses also took the staff of God in his hand. ²¹ The LORD said to Moses, ‘When you go back to Egypt see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders which I have put in your power; 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 said to you, ‘Let My son go that he may serve Me’; but you have refused to let him go. Behold, I will kill your son, your firstborn.’’ ²⁴ Now it came about at the lodging place on the way that the LORD met him and sought to put him to death. ²⁵ Then Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son’s foreskin and threw it at Moses’ feet, and she said, ‘You are indeed a bridegroom of blood to me.’ ²⁶ So He let him alone. At that time she said, ‘You are a bridegroom of blood’ – because of the circumcision. ²⁷ Now the LORD said to Aaron, ‘Go to meet Moses in the wilderness.’ So he went and met him at the mountain of God and kissed him. ²⁸ Moses told Aaron all the words of the LORD with which He had sent him, and all the signs that He had commanded him to do. ²⁹ Then Moses and Aaron went and assembled all the elders of the sons of Israel; ³⁰ and Aaron spoke all the words which the LORD had spoken to Moses. He then performed the signs in the sight of the people. ³¹ So the people believed; and when they heard that the LORD was concerned about the sons of Israel and that He had seen their affliction, then they bowed low and worshiped.

Historical and Cultural Background

- *God’s presence, fire, mountain:* God sent Adam and Eve away from a mountain, Eden (Ezk.28:13 – 14; Gen.2:10), after they corrupted their human nature through sin. God linked His presence with fire from Genesis 3:24, when God stationed the cherubim and the flaming sword to guard the way to the tree of life.
- *The burning bush* was the acacia bush of the desert, a bush with thorns (Acts 7:30). Thorns were reminders of the fall (Gen.3:17 – 19). The Jewish sacred candlestick holder (menorah) may have looked like this burning bush originally.
- *The angel of the Lord* has been addressed as God Himself, speaks as God Himself, and receives worship as God Himself (Gen.16:7 – 13; 22:11 – 16; 31:11 – 13; 32:24, 30; 47:15 – 16). See <http://nagasawafamily.org/genesis-theme-jesus.pdf>.
- *Serpent:* There was a double allusion here. Pharaoh’s crown had a cobra design on it. And a Hebrew who had been raised on the stories from Genesis would have heard an allusion to the enemy serpent from the garden (Gen.3:1 – 7).

Questions

1. Why does God encounter Moses like this?
 - a. Horeb is the mountain of God (3:1) already?
 - b. Who is 'the angel of the LORD' (3:2)? The manifestation of God's presence. I think this is the Word of God in a form before the incarnation of Jesus.
 - c. Why the burning bush? Why not light Moses' hair on fire? Moses has to see it, be drawn to it, and reflect on the symbolism
 - i. Thorns represented sinful material
 - ii. Fire reflected God's presence, purifying judgment
 - iii. God can inhabit sinful material and not consume it
 - iv. This had special relevance for Moses, since he had sinned back in Egypt, and probably knew himself to be made of corrupt human flesh.
 - v. This would also have special relevance for Israel, because God would come in fire on the mountain and expect Israel to meet with him face to face (Ex.19)
 - d. Why does God identify Himself with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? How many times does He do that in this passage? Lots: 3:6, 15, 16, 4:5. Why? To remind them of the promises He made to them that He is now fulfilling. To stir up faith.
 - e. Why is Moses afraid to look at God (3:6)? This is not explained but it is intriguing that he will later want to look at God.
 - f. This contrasts with God seeing the affliction of Israel in Egypt (3:7) and intending to deliver them to a good land flowing with milk and honey (3:8), which He promised Abraham (Gen.15:16 – 21).
 - g. So God commissions Moses to stand before Pharaoh (3:10 – 12)
 - h. Illus: C.S. Lewis' story from *Prince Caspian* of how Aslan called Lucy:

A circle of grass, smooth as a lawn, met her eyes, with dark trees dancing all round it. And then – oh joy! For *He* was there: the huge Lion, shining white in the moonlight, with his huge black shadow underneath him.

But for the movement of his tail he might have been a stone lion, but Lucy never thought of that. She never stopped to think whether he was a friendly lion or not. She rushed to him. She felt her heart would burst if she lost a moment. And the next thing she knew was that she was kissing him and putting her arms as far round his neck as she could and burying her face in the beautiful rich silkiness of his mane.

'Aslan, Aslan. Dear Aslan,' sobbed Lucy. 'At last.'

The great beast rolled over on his side so that Lucy fell half sitting and half lying between his front paws. He bent forward and just touched her nose with his tongue. His warm breath came all round her. She gazed up into the large wise face.

'Welcome, child,' he said.

'Aslan,' said Lucy, 'you're bigger.'

'That is because you are older, little one,' answered he.

'Not because you are?'

'I am not. But every year you grow, you will find me bigger.'

For a time she was so happy that she did not want to speak. But Aslan spoke.

'Lucy,' he said, 'we must not lie here for long. You have work in hand, and much time has been lost today.'

'Yes, wasn't it a shame?' said Lucy. 'I saw you all right. They wouldn't believe me. They're all so –'

From somewhere deep inside Aslan's body there came the faintest suggestion of a growl.

'I'm sorry,' said Lucy, who understood some of his moods. 'I didn't mean to start slanging the others. But it wasn't my fault anyway, was it?'

The Lion looked straight into her eyes.

'Oh, Aslan,' said Lucy. 'You don't mean it was? How could I – I couldn't have left the others and come up to you alone, how could I? Don't look at me like that...oh well, I suppose I could. Yes, and it wouldn't have been alone, I know, not if I was with you. But what would have been the good?'

Aslan said nothing.

'You mean,' said Lucy rather faintly, 'that it would have turned out all right – somehow? But how? Please, Aslan! Am I not to know?'

'To know what would have happened, child?' said Aslan. 'No. Nobody is ever told that.'

'Oh dear,' said Lucy.

'But anyone can find out what will happen,' said Aslan. 'If you go back to the others now, and wake them up; and tell them you have seen me again; and that you must all get up at once and follow me – what will happen? There is only one way of finding out.'

'Do you mean that is what you want me to do?' gasped Lucy.

'Yes, little one,' said Aslan.

'Will the others see you too?' asked Lucy.

'Certainly not at first,' said Aslan. 'Later on, it depends.'

'But they won't believe me!' said Lucy.

'It doesn't matter,' said Aslan.

'Oh dear, oh dear,' said Lucy. 'And I was so pleased at finding you again. And I thought you'd let me stay. And I thought you'd come roaring in and frighten all the enemies away – like last time. And now everything is going to be horrid.'

'It is hard for you, little one,' said Aslan. 'But things never happen the same way twice. It has been hard for us all in Narnia before now.'

Lucy buried her head in his mane to hide from his face. But there must have been magic in his mane. She could feel lion-strength going into her. Quite suddenly she sat up.

'I'm sorry, Aslan,' she said. 'I'm ready now.'

'Now you are a lioness,' said Aslan. 'And now all Narnia will be renewed. But come. We have no time to lose.'

2. What do you think of the dialogue between Moses and God?
 - a. Objection #1: 'What is Your name?' (3:13 – 14)
 - i. What is the significance of God's name being YHWH? The holy name is linked to the verb 'to be.' So God describes Himself as the one who exists, who is, who does not need to reference anything or anyone else. Compare that to us. We have to refer to our parents, the place we're from, what traits we have, etc.
 - ii. Pharaoh's name was not given in Ex.1:8, 11, 15, etc. Nor were Moses' parents named. This serves as a contrast with God, who is named.
 - iii. Connection to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob
 - iv. God wants them to observe a three day journey to a sacrifice (3:18)
 - v. God predicts that Pharaoh will resist (3:19) so God will do miracles and Egypt will send them out with provisions
 - b. Objection #2: 'What if they don't listen to me?' (4:1) What does God show Moses?
 - i. Staff to serpent (4:2 – 5). That symbolizes God's power being greater than the evil one, and Pharaoh who served as the representative of the evil one.
 - ii. Healthy hand to leprous and back again (4:6 – 8). That symbolizes God's ability to withdraw life and restore it.
 - iii. Nile water becomes blood (4:9). Similar to above.
 - c. Objection #3: 'I am not eloquent' (4:10)
 - i. I made your mouth (4:11 – 12)
 - d. Imagine yourself in Moses' position. Which concern or objection would you resonate with most? Or another?
 - e. Application: When God calls us to serve Him, what objections do we throw up? How does He answer us?
3. Moses wants to back out (4:13)
 - a. Now God gets angry with Moses; why wasn't He angry before? Those concerns seem to have been legitimate. Although it is doubtful whether Moses literally means that he is not eloquent. At least in writing, he seems fairly eloquent!
 - b. Why does God want to work with Moses so much, anyway? Probably because He saw the dying embers of Moses' faith and hope and wanted to rekindle that. Probably also because He wanted to work with the symbolism of Moses being drawn out of the water through an ark. *Moses is like Noah in the sense that he embodies or will embody a covenant between God and people.*
 - c. God involves Moses' brother Aaron (3:14 – 17). Aaron is presumably a close friend, the man who understands Moses the best.

- i. The relationship between sender-proclaimer in God and Moses is duplicated in Moses and Aaron; 'he shall speak for you to the people; and he will be as a mouth for you and you will be as God to him.' This will have implications for understanding Trinitarian theology: The Father speaks through His Word/Son by the Spirit.
- 4. Moses parts ways with Jethro's family and returns to Egypt
 - a. Does Moses ask *permission* from Jethro? What kind of relationship do they have? It's an interesting formality, perhaps. But Moses stops far short of saying the whole truth. He doesn't want Jethro to worry.
 - b. Moses probably felt safe when God told him, 'Those seeking your life are dead,' but now God seeks his life. Why? Because of the circumcision issue.
 - c. God calls Israel 'My son, My firstborn' in 4:22. That is major. God is bringing Israel as a whole back into a garden land to be what Adam should have been. God retells His own story, and works to restore the story, and to restore people to who He always intended them to be.
 - d. Why is circumcision so important to God here?
 - i. Because the question is 'Who are the people of Israel?' and the answer, at least in part, is the people marked by circumcision, because that represents the faith of Abraham.
 - ii. Israel's bloodshed through circumcision is the opposite of the bloodshed shown elsewhere in Genesis.
 - 1. Cain shed Abel's blood and was cursed from the land. Israel would shed its own blood to inherit the land.
 - 2. Cain's descendant Lamech shed human blood because fathers controlled sons for their own purposes: to provide them with food, protection, retribution, vengeance, etc. Israel shed the blood of circumcision so that fathers could release their sons to God for God's purposes.
 - 3. God shed innocent animal blood to cover Adam and Eve's corrupt blood (Gen.3:21) to live life outside the garden land. God sheds corrupt human blood so they can live life inside a new garden land.
 - 4. God cut away ungodly attitudes in Abraham and Sarah, which didn't fit within His original creation order. He cut away male power and privilege especially. He made this into a physical act or ceremony by cutting something away from Abraham's penis.
 - e. Why might Moses not have circumcised his son?
 - i. He was not identifying with God's people, and hence not identifying with God
 - ii. He was keeping his son open to the possibility of being 'Egyptian' in some sense, or maybe of the tribe of Zipporah.
 - iii. He had despaired in the wilderness; lack of faith
 - f. So Zipporah might be upset that they are going back, because she fears that the confrontation with Egypt will wind up being bloody like the circumcision of her son
- 5. God prepared Aaron, they meet the elders (4:27 – 31)
 - a. They believe! They receive the word from God through Moses and Aaron! They are ready to be rescued!