

# Exodus – Lesson 5

## The Burning Bush

### Read Exodus 3:1-4:17

1. (a) Compare 3:1-6 to Deuteronomy 4:24. What does the fire of the burning bush *symbolize*? What does it mean that the bush was not “*consumed*” by the fire?

The fire of the burning bush symbolizes the *presence* of God, that God had come down and “manifested” himself in a visible way so that Moses could detect his immediate presence. The use of fire represents the *holiness* of God (see 1b), the perfection of the Divine Nature that had made itself known to Moses. The bush was not consumed because it was not actually “on” fire (in the classical sense of that concept). The “fire” that Moses saw *emanated* from the bush as the visible presence of God, but the bush itself was not “involved” in the process. In other words, the bush was *not* actually burning, but God’s presence had come over the bush in a visible way so that it appeared to Moses as fire within the bush.

- (b) Define the word *holy*. What does it mean that the “ground” around the bush had become holy?

Holy is defined (in this context) as the nature of God whereby he is separated from all that is sinful or impure or morally imperfect, and describes God as morally “whole” and without moral want or need. To say that God is holy is to say that he is *perfect* and that there is no moral defect in him; all that he does flows out of a perfect moral nature. And, because he has a perfect moral nature, he cannot and will not enter into the presence of anything imperfect or evil and he can never be accused of having committed an imperfect or evil act or having caused anyone else to do so either. The idea of “holy ground,” then, comes from the presence of God: since only that which is holy can come into the presence of God, the very ground around the bush had become “holy” since God was present there (just as Sinai was called the “holy mountain” when God appeared to Moses there).

- (c) Why does God call himself “*the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?*”

This phrase identifies God in a number of unique ways: 1) God identifies himself as the God of the *living*, and is able to demonstrate that there is a life after death; by being the God of these men (who were physically dead), God is able to say that they are still alive. Jesus brings this interpretation in Luke 20:37-38; 2) God identifies himself with a specific people, the people that descended down through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (i.e. the Hebrew people now living in Egypt). In this way, God points out his *direct* relationship with the Hebrews and the fact that they are *his* people; and 3) God identifies himself with these patriarchs *and the promises that he made to them*, promises that now extend themselves to the Hebrew people. Using this phrase, God is able to identify himself as the God who had made promises to these patriarchs, and was now bringing those promises to fruition in the people he was about to rescue from Egypt (and to all future generations of those people, as well).

2. (a) According to vv. 7-10, for what *reason(s)* has God appeared to Moses?

God appears to Moses because 1) he has seen and heard the afflictions of the people, 2) he has heard their cry for deliverance from their sufferings, 3) he has chosen, by his grace and mercy, to deliver them from their bondage, 4) he has remembered his promises to the patriarchs to bring their descendants to the promised land, and 5) he has decided to send Moses back to Egypt to act as their deliverer.

(b) Why does God say that *He* has “*come down*” to rescue the Hebrew people, and yet sends Moses into Egypt to speak to Pharaoh?

This is an excellent example of God using *human means* to accomplish his purposes and plans. God could have *directly* delivered the Hebrews from the Egyptians; he could have simply destroyed the Egyptians or used natural elements to force the Egyptians to send the Hebrews away (a part of what he does later), or he could have appeared supernaturally before Pharaoh to seek their release, or he could have simply put it in Pharaoh’s heart to release his slaves. However, God chose to use a *human means* to accomplish this task, sending Moses into Egypt to plead his case before Pharaoh. Moses would act as the *ambassador* of God, the one *sent* by God to bring about the plan of God *under the full power of God himself*. This is prototypical of Jesus: the eternal Son of God came down in *human flesh* to do the work of God to redeem a people. Moses, a *human means*, in much the same way, goes before the “*powers*” of this world carrying the full weight of God’s might and accomplishes God’s plan. A similar application of this can be made today: although God could bring salvation to people through a supernatural work, God chooses, instead, to use the *human* instrument of preaching and teaching to regenerate hearts and lead people to salvation in Christ.

3. From Exodus 3:1-4:17, *list* the verses where Moses “*argues*” with God about his worthiness or ability to take on this task and *summarize* Moses’ excuse in each case.

Moses puts four statements (i.e. arguments) before God regarding his abilities to deliver the Israelites: in 3:13, 4:1, 4:10, and 4:13. In 3:13, Moses questions going to the Hebrews without the *name* of God; he questions whether the people will believe him that he has actually spoken to God. In 4:1, he has a similar doubt about whether the people will believe that he has actually met with God himself. In 4:10, he argues that he is not eloquent of speech and unable to “*convince*” Pharaoh to let the people go. And, in 4:13, he asks God to send someone else because he does not feel worthy of going and doing this thing.

4. (a) Why does God *call* himself “*I AM*” (see v. 14) as the answer to Moses’ first question.

Moses’ first question of God involves the divine name: *who are you* God? The Hebrews had spent more than 400 years in Egypt, and their *intimate* knowledge of God had waned. God had not spoken to them *directly* during this entire period, and he was virtually *unknown* to them. God’s answer to Moses’ question hints at *who* God is; the name of God, especially as it is stated here, expresses the *fullest magnitude of the divine nature*. The “*I AM*” statement, also known as the *tetragrammaton* (the “*name*” of God translated to YHWH from the first letters of the Hebrew words making up this statement), expresses the complete *self-existence* of God. In this form, God says that he simply “*is*” – he has no beginning nor any end, and there is nothing outside of himself that is necessary for his existence. He is the infinite source of all reality; his existence is not *dependent* on anything other than himself, unlike everything in the created order. God connects this “*name*” for himself with the title that he uses as the “*God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.*” The promises made to them are based on the self-existence of God – they are not conditional on aspects of reality outside of God (such as obedience or ritual or interpretation), but fully on the nature of God as self-existent. This was the news that Moses was to carry to the Hebrews as they inquired of who this God was they were to follow.

(b) How does Jesus do a *similar* thing in describing and naming himself (see John 5:17; 6:48, 51; 8:12, 58; 9:5; 10:7, 11, 38; 11:25; 13:13)?

Jesus uses a number of “I am” statements in the Fourth gospel to identify himself, both as the One sent by God, and as *God himself*, particularly in his statement in John 8:58. Each of these statements identifies an *aspect* of the eternal Christ: he is the one doing the work of God (5:17), he is the source of all life (i.e. the bread of life; 6:48,51), he is the fullest revelation of the knowledge of God (i.e. the light of the world, 8:12, 9:5), he is complete access to God (i.e. the door of the sheep, 10:7), he is the guardian and protector of the people of God (i.e. the good shepherd, 10:11), he is the fullest *essence* of the Father (i.e. *in* the Father, 10:38), he is the eternal hope of humanity (i.e. the resurrection and the life, 11:25), and he is the one who teaches humanity who God is and what God is doing (13:13). However, the greatest expression of Christ was his statement in 8:58: his *preexistence* and *identification* with the Father as co-equal from all eternity and having the fullest *essence* of God in every respect. Jesus uses, in this verse, the same *name* that God uses for himself (proven by the response of those listening to him) and claims to possess the fullest nature of God as the *self-existent One*.

(c) What connection is there between *this* declaration of God and Philippians 2:9-11?

Although the “I AM” statement of Exodus 3 declares the self-existent name of God, God has *given* to Jesus *the* name that is above all names, and that the name “Jesus” supersedes the “I AM” expression as the name of God and the name that possesses all authority in the universe. In other words, the name “Jesus,” as it is used to identify the eternally incarnate Son of God, is *greater* than the self-existent expression “I AM” – God has identified himself in the *Person* of Jesus, and Jesus, as the fullest expression of God, is the name above all names and the *actual* name of God.

5. (a) How does God *respond* to Moses’ objection in 4:1?

Moses’ second objection is that the people will not *believe* him when he says that he has been sent from God. God responds by *demonstrating* to Moses that he is in the presence of the Living God, the Creator who is able to supernaturally alter matter and perform miraculous acts. God uses these demonstrations to show Moses that God’s power will work *through* Moses, and that Moses (who cannot do these things on his own) will not have to worry about “convincing” either the people or Pharaoh. Ultimately, they are designed to convince *Moses* that he has nothing to fear when obeying God and doing his will.

(b) *Compare* these verses to Exodus 7:8-13 and John 12:37-40. Explain *why* the use of miraculous signs to “prove” a revelation from God is often ineffective.

The miraculous signs that Moses was given by God were *ineffective* in convincing Pharaoh and his court that Moses and Aaron had come from God and that God’s power was behind these acts. A similar thing happens in John 12: although Jesus was able to perform a number of miraculous signs before the Jews of his day, they still did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah and the Son of the Living God. In both cases, the issue was the *natural inability* of those seeing the miracles to believe that they were signs from God himself. The signs, although clearly supernatural in nature, were “explained away” by counterfeit signs or justified as “normal.” This is why John quotes from Isaiah in John 12: the hardness of the hearts of those who saw these signs were *both* natural (as human beings go) and *the judgment of God* upon those who have suppressed the knowledge of him as God (see Romans 1:18ff). This is why Abraham’s response to the rich man in hell (Luke 17:27-31) is so *apropos*; even miracles cannot convince the dead (Ephesians 2:1) to trust in God and follow him in faith. Only the *internal* miraculous work of regeneration can change a person so that he or she will respond in faith to the work of God and his person as their Creator.

6. What is Moses' *third* objection (see v. 10)? How does God *respond* to it?

**He complains that he is not eloquent or persuasive in speech. Moses believes that it will take a *human effort* to convince Pharaoh, specifically, the ability to “convince” Pharaoh through a persuasive argument. God responds by pointing out his *sovereign* control over Moses, even over the words that he would speak to Pharaoh. The lesson to us in this is obvious: it is not by persuasive speech or flattering talk that we should attempt to convert the lost, but only by the words that God has given us. In fact, any attempt that we make to “persuade” others to faith by cunning argumentation or fancy logic will fall flat. Only the Word of God, as it is expressed in Scripture, empowered by the Holy Spirit can convert a soul, and we make the same mistake Moses made when we assume that “we” must do the work of saving others through our own human effort.**