

Exodus:

The Redemption of God's People,
a Covenant with God's People,
the Renewal of the Covenant for God's people,
and the Worship Center of God's People.

IV. Comment on the Writing

A. The Redemption of God's People, 1:1-18:27

1. The situation in Egypt, 1:1-22
2. The deliverer of Israel from Egypt, 2:1-4:31
 - a. The birth of the deliverer, 2:1-10
 - b. The flight to Midian, 2:11-25
 - c. The Return of Moses from Egypt, 3:1-4:31
 - 1) The call of Moses, 3:1-6

Attracted by an unusual phenomenon, God confronted Moses at Horeb (Mount Sinai), fire being a sign of God's presence. What is arresting is not a burning bush in the wilderness; it is a burning bush that was not consumed, having a fire within.

Moses recognized the fact that he was in the presence of God. The "angel of the Lord (v. 2)" is a theophany, an appearance of Christ. His response was fear. This is the first time that we have a record that God appeared to Moses.

The emphasis here (v. 4) is upon God speaking. God addresses Moses by name twice. This was no casual encounter for Moses; it was indeed an encounter with God. The removal of the sandals suggests humility and reverence. What made the site special was not the place, but the presence of God, the condescension of God to address Moses. Moses, recognizing the presence of God was fearful and reluctant ("Moses hid His face").

"I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham..." (v. 6) followed by naming the other patriarchs of the nation would

remind Moses of the great Abrahamic promise (Gen. 12, 15, 17). That He *is* the God of the patriarchs tells us that there is life after physical death (he is the God of the living)!

2) The commission of Moses, 3:7–10

The purpose of bush-phenomena was to get Moses' attention. Moses is instructed to lead the people out of oppression to a land of plenty possessed by six mighty tribes. The command is clear, the commander is no ordinary person, but Moses is an ordinary man; this will be a work that only God can accomplish.

The pharaoh of the exodus was mostly likely Amenhotep II (ca 1446-1435). He made his capitol in the Delta at Memphis near the Land of Goshen rather than further south at Thebes. He conducted two huge campaigns into Palestine, but none after 1445, likely because of the devastation of his military in the Red or Reed Sea.

3) The excuses of Moses, 3:11-15

a) The first excuse: Inadequacy, 3:11-12

Human fear of inadequacy is always a potent excuse; it is fear of personal embarrassment through failure to execute a task. God promised two things: His presence and His success. It is interesting the God does not answer Moses' question; He states the source of Moses' adequacy.

To comfort Moses, God makes a promise. Moses will return to this very same place as the leader of the nation (v. 12).

b) The second excuse of Moses: Authority, 3:13-15

From human inadequacy, resulting in hesitancy, Moses turned to the issue of authority. "By whose authority shall I tell them that you send me?" The patriarchs knew God as El Shaddai, the Almighty One. The new name, a further revelation of Himself is YHWH. The one who is as He is, is known by what He does. He is the eternally existent one who is to be known in His acts, principally covenant and redemption.

- (1) Technically, Jehovah or LORD is not a name; it is a description. God has not revealed Himself to us directly, but only as He relates to us.
 - (2) In Genesis 1, the designation for God as the creator is Elohim (Lord) implying one of strength and power (the creator). In Genesis 2, our term appears as the Bible describes the creator of man. This name for God suggests His closeness to humans (2:7).
 - (c) What is clear to our scholars is that uncertainty prevails because the original meaning of the term unclear. The noun is derived from the verb “to be” and, thus, most English translations following the KJV translate it as “I AM THAT I AM.” Since the present tense and future tense in Hebrew are identical, it could mean “I am” or “I will be” meaning “as I am I will always be,” emphasizing the constancy of God’s character. The point would be that God is not bound by time. While God is present, He will always be present, even in the future. The gist seems to be that God is omnipotent over His creation and His presence guarantees the fulfillment of His promises in creation. The latitude within the term suggests that He is the eternally existent one (the “was,” the “is,” and the “is to come”). He is all that we ever needed, need, and will need!
- 4) The instruction for Moses, 3:16-22
- These instructions must be seen in the context of oriental bargaining procedure, which was dialectical (Abraham and Ephron the Hittite over a burial place for Sarah [Gen. 23]; or Jacob and Laban over a bride [Gen. 30]). Was Moses asking for a three-day journey? The paragraph suggests a complete deliverance. God promises His presence, power, and success. The request that Moses is asked to make of pharaoh most likely was a hypothetical request to determine his attitude toward the release of the Jews (v. 19). It seems that God would thereby reveal pharaoh’s heart.
- 5) The further excuses of Moses, 4:1-17
- a) The third excuse: Fear of failure, 4:1-9
- This excuse focuses on the people’s response. Will they accept Moses’ leadership? The answer is that God will provide

supernatural enablement. His power to do so is demonstrated in three signs.

(1) The shepherd's staff becomes a snake, vv.1-5

The first of the signs to Moses was the turning of his shepherd's staff into a snake and back into a staff. Grabbing a snake by its tail is a dangerous endeavor! Because snakes symbolized power and life to the Egyptians, God was declaring to Moses that he would be able to overcome the powers of Egypt.

(2) The leprous hand, vv. 6-8

The second sign was his hand becoming leprous and its healing. This disease, though perhaps not the same as what is today called leprosy, was prevalent in Egypt and was considered incurable. Moses' fear that no one would believe he was commissioned by God was placated.

(3) Water turned into blood, v. 9

The third instance is more of a promise to assure Moses that the people will listen; Moses is assured of the miraculous ability to turn water from the Nile into blood (7:17-21). The Egyptians regarded the Nile River as the source of life and productivity. The miracle would demonstrate that God had given Moses' ability to overcome the Egyptians, to defeat their gods.

b) The fourth excuse of Moses: Credibility, 4:10-17

(1) The plea of ineloquence, v. 10

(2) The Lord's reply, vv. 11-12

"Apparent" deficiencies are the Lord's making; He promised to be Moses' help. God make us as we are so that He alone would be the recognized source of all accomplishments.

"Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes him mute or deaf, or seeing or blind. Is it not I, the Lord (v. 11)?"

(3) Moses' unwillingness, v. 13

Moses seems to be saying, "Send anyone, but not me."

(4) God's demand, vv. 14-17

God promises to provide help through his brother, Aaron. He will be the spokesman of what the Lord reveals to Moses. *Aaron will prove to lack his brother's fidelity in the*

golden calf episode and in questioning Moses' authority to lead the people subsequently (32:1-5, 22-24).

- 6) The journey toward Egypt, 4:18-26
 - a) The instructions to return, vv. 18-20

Moses was commanded to return to Egypt with the assurance that “all the men who are seeking your life are dead,” likely a reference to Thutmose III (his successor Amenhotep II being the pharaoh of the Exodus).
 - b) The instructions for the confrontation with pharaoh, vv. 21-23

God told Moses that despite the signs of divine power he will perform before pharaoh, pharaoh will not respond because God would not allow him to do so until he lost his own son.

The reference to Israel as God's firstborn son is intriguing (v. 22). A firstborn son to the Egyptians was seen as sacred; Israel is sacred to God! The firstborn's of Egypt died and the firstborn's of Israel were delivered!

- c) The episode with Zipporah, vv. 24-26

The Zipporah incident is strange and mysterious, scholars are left to speculation, speculation to a wide variety of interpretations. It seems that Moses had neglected the circumcision of a son. Though some translations insert the name Moses (NAB, NIV) in the narrative (v. 26), only a pronoun (him) appears in the Hebrew text. Thus, a pivotal issue is the referent of the pronoun “him.” It seems that the referent is in the context of death to firstborns (v. 23).

- (1) A pronoun is identified by its nearest antecedent normally. The “him” seems to be Gershom (v. 24).
- (2) The immediate context (vv. 23) is the dire warning of the death of pharaoh's firstborn. “Israel is my son, My firstborn.... I will kill you son your firstborn...”. Gershom would have been among the firstborns but without the promise of the covenant. *Remember Gershom by this time was likely a mature adult. He likely had the faith of his parents, but not the sign of that faith.*

- (3) It seems illogical that God would seek the death of His servant who has just been called to return to Egypt with the promise that he would lead His people out of bondage.
- (4) Moses' parents most likely circumcised him as the custom since they were pious Hebrews. If they had the conviction to prevent Pharaoh's murderous plot, devising one other their own, it would seem they would have followed the custom of circumcision as practiced since the time of Abraham, being the sign of embracing the faith of Abraham ("a token of the everlasting covenant" [Gen 17:3]).
- (5) We know that between the birth of Gershom and Eliezer Moses seemed to have progress in spiritual perception (from an "alien, a sojourner" [Gershom] to "God is my helper" [Eliezer] in naming his sons. Moses had moved from prematurity in his perception as Israel's deliverer (the killing of the Egyptian taskmaster) to trust in God and His ways.
- (6) If the circumcised person in the narrative was Moses, he would not have been able to immediately travel (remember the Shechem-Hamor-Jacob-Dinah episode [Gen. 34]). Zipporah and his sons did not travel to Egypt and only rejoined Moses in 18:1-5. This may have been due to Gershom's circumcision that prohibited travel (in the least Gershom would have been in his twenties).
- (7) This would also suggest that Zipporah grew in her faith understanding the gravity of not having circumcised sons, not possessing the sign of the covenant. She took the initiative whereas Moses seemed unaware of a pending crisis. It is also likely that Eliezer had been circumcised.

Perhaps Douglas Stuart's summary of the passage would help (*Exodus*): "Exodus 4:24-26 is a story showing how Zipporah, by performing as officially as she could a circumcision on her son—whom his father had failed so far

to conform to the covenant requirements of Gen 17:10-14—saved him from the punishment required by the Abrahamic covenant of circumcision. Nothing can thwart God’s plan of redemption. Since Moses had not yet done his part regarding Gershom’s circumcision, God accepted Zipporah’s decisive and pious actions in circumcising her son as an appropriate substitute so that God’s chosen, yet reluctant and headstrong, prophet could continue his assignment to lead the Israelites out of bondage. God often relents if people repent. Right words and actions, if they show the true intent of the heart, demonstrate right repentance. Moses might have lost his own firstborn son, just as Pharaoh would later lose his (predicted immediately prior to the present passage, in 4:23). Zipporah’s intervention prevented that from happening.”

“You are a bridegroom of blood” (vv. 25, 26) is not a negative comment on Zipporah’s part. She is likely saying that she and Moses were joined as one through the blood of circumcision, a spiritual union, so that Gershom is her son. She spared his life! “The Lord let him alone” (v. 26).

The event at the border of Egypt would remind the original readers of Gen. 32 and Jacob’s wrestling with God at Peniel on the Jabbok River upon his return to the land. In both cases there is a brush with death that was memorable. It is interesting that in the previous paragraph God threatened pharaoh’s son with death and here he threatens Moses, His “son.”

Applications:

1. *It is interesting that YHWH cannot be pronounced and that the verbal root suggests a state of being, but can be translated as was, is, or will be. What does this tell us? God was, He is, and He will always be as He was. He is the incomprehensible God, not subject to time or space. In the words of the writer to the Hebrews about Jesus, He is “the same yesterday, today, and forever (13:8). This tells me that we worship the living God, one that is altogether*

powerful and omnipotent. He will never act in a way contrary to what He is! Is there any reason not to trust Him? Do you think you can bring all your needs to Him, and He not supply?

- 2. That the name of God cannot be pronounced suggests that He is beyond us. Instead of seeking to figure Him out or put Him into a box limited by our finite minds, we should stand in delight of His majesty and worship Him in humility, bowing before Him as our God. Do you do that? Do you allow life's temporary sorrows to cast dispersions on the character of God? Does the thought of God fill you with wonder and delight?*
- 3. Sometimes God's work for us comes later in life: Moses was 80. Moses' life divides into three equal parts: 40 years in Egypt, 40 years in the wilderness as a shepherd, and 40 years leading God's people in the wilderness (Acts 7:23). Does this not suggest that we are never too old to serve the Lord? What does this tell us about retirement? Maybe your greatest service to God is ahead of you. What are you doing to prepare for that eventuality?*
- 4. It is not uncommon to doubt one's ability when God calls us. Most of our excuses have little foundation, being motivated by our fear of failure. Moses makes the same excuse three times (3:10; 6:12, 30). What excuses do you make for your reticence? His excuse may have had some substance, but he must have forgotten who was calling him to serve, one who not only calls but provides. It is not uncommon to question our credibility when God calls to do His work (4:1). However, is it about us?*
- 5. Moses makes three excuses; God has three responses: To "who shall I say sent me (3:11)," God says, "I AM" (3:12); to a lack of credibility, He assures Moses of His power (4:2-9); and to the excuse that he was not eloquent God reminds Moses who made us the way we are (4:11). What are your excuses for your reticence to serve the Lord?*
- 6. Sometimes God concedes to our pleas and sends us solutions that prove problematic (Aaron, 4:14). It is better to trust God than ask for help sometimes, certainly if the motivation is within ourselves, fear. Aaron was perhaps more eloquent, but his character was flawed. Have you asked for help only to discover you inherited a burden in the process? What does this say about counseling our fears?*
- 7. Often the view we have of ourselves is not true. Acts 7:22 indicates that Moses was powerful in words. You meet people with a larger-than-life ego, but there are also people that seem down on themselves. When you think about yourself in what ways is your evaluation too high and too low?*

8. *An interesting insight is that Moses at the bush is instructed to remove his shoes, an act of reverence, because God is holy. Israelite worship from the Tabernacle to the Temple was predicated on the absolute holiness of God, one who desires to dwell among His people. God is above us, absolute in power and perfection, yet has willed to be among us. While Moses in warned in the manner of his coming to God, he, nonetheless, was granted that privilege and so we. While God is holy and above us, He is not at all impersonal. This is the central theme of the entire Bible! Are you aware of the privilege you have of intimacy with God? Do you take off your shoes frequently before Him?*
9. *Reflecting on the excuses that Moses raised against his divine calling to lead God's people, F.B. Meyer (Deuteronomy, 71) wrote, "Cherish the lowliest thought you choose of yourself, but unite it with the loftiest conception of God's All-Sufficiency. Self-depreciation may lead to the marring of a useful life. We must think soberly of ourselves, not too lowly, and not too extravagantly. The one talent must not be buried in the earth." To think of yourself too highly (the cultural assumption that feeling good about yourself is the key to a productive life) is just as wrong as a profound and paralyzing sense of disqualification. Either extreme leaves God out! Have you practically left God out of your life when you think of what He desires you to do? Do you measure your goals by your insufficiencies?*