



International Bible Lessons Commentary

Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series

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Exodus 3:1-12 & 13-17 New International Version July 2, 2017

The [International Bible Lesson](#) (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, July 2, 2017**, is from **Exodus 3:1-12 & 13-17**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the [International Bible Lessons Commentary](#) website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the [International Bible Lesson Forum](#).

(Exodus 3:1) Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.

Most scholars believe that Mt. Horeb and Mt. Sinai are two different names for the same place because the Bible uses these two names interchangeably. Midian was a son of Abraham by Keturah, whom Abraham married after the death of Sarah. Perhaps these Midianite ancestors settled there generations earlier when Abraham sent his son, Midian, to live away from his son, Isaac. Jethro could have been a priest of the true God, because it seems most likely that God would send Moses to a home of true believers rather than to pagan worshipers, especially since Moses would marry a daughter of Jethro.

(Exodus 3:2) There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up.

Moses knew how to lead sheep everywhere to find green pastures, and perhaps he had gone to the mountain of God before during his forty years of shepherding in the area. He would have known all the flora and fauna there, and had never seen an actual burning bush, blazing with fire, that was not being consumed. The angel of the Lord may have been the Son of God prior to His conception and human birth as Jesus Christ.

(Exodus 3:3) So Moses thought, “I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up.”

Jesus (in Mark 12) and Stephen (in Acts 7) teach about Moses and the burning bush. Stephen calls Mt. Horeb, Mt. Sinai. Any normal bush, no matter how colorful, would not have sharply drawn away Moses’ attention as a bush that was burning and not being consumed, nor have drawn the mention by Jesus and Stephen in their teaching. Fire can be considered a sign of God’s holiness that purifies but does not consume, as was the case on Pentecost, when flames of fire rested upon the heads of the Apostles as the sign that each one had received the promised Holy Spirit.

(Exodus 3:4) When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, “Moses! Moses!” And Moses said, “Here I am.”

In many translations, when LORD is in all capital letters, the name LORD refers to God’s name as Yahweh or Jehovah (YHWH in the Hebrew, without vowels). God called out to Moses by name. Moses’ name meant “son” from the Egyptian language or “brought forth,” for he was “brought forth” from the Nile River by Pharaoh’s daughter, when she providentially saved him from death. Later, Moses would “bring forth” God’s children out of Egypt. The Bible shows how God talks to people using real words and events on their level to communicate truth that we can understand generations later.

(Exodus 3:5) “Do not come any closer,” God said. “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.”

God puts limits on how we can come and how close we can come to Him; God sets the standards and conditions for a relationship with Him, for God is holy. God wanted the bare soles of Moses’ feet on holy ground. Sometimes we take off our shoes at the door of a home we visit, or at our own home, so we do not track dirt and mud onto a clean floor. This is particularly true in Japan, where we take off our shoes to show respect for the home and family, and to express the honor we feel bestowed on us to be invited into the home. We need to come into the presence of God with an even greater respect than that for Him. In the presence of God, we are standing on holy ground.

(Exodus 3:6) Then he said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

God maintains historical continuity so we can know the God with whom we speak. Moses knew what God was like in character and divine nature, because he knew the life stories of God’s dealings with the fathers of his faith and the Hebrew people. Moses

would have learned these truths from his mother, and probably from Jethro (with perhaps a Midianite slant). Moses knew enough about the power and holiness of God to hide his face in fear, for Moses knew that he was a sinner: a sinner in exile from his people for a murder he had committed (among other sins).

(Exodus 3:7) The LORD said, “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering.

From before Moses was born God planned and prepared for Moses to meet Him at the burning bush. Though born a Levite in Israel, God arranged for Moses to be raised as a son of Pharaoh’s daughter so Moses could learn to read and write, and so he would learn the language and the proceedings of Pharaoh’s court (compare Moses’ experience to Jeremiah 1:5 – “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.” God observed the misery of His people throughout their time of slavery, and He helped them in many ways until the time came for God to free them from slavery and lead them into the Promised Land. God had told Abraham that his descendants would be oppressed 400 years, and since they were in Egypt 430 years, their oppression began about 30 years after Jacob and his family arrived in Egypt and after Joseph’s death, because the oppression began with a Pharaoh who did not know Joseph (see Genesis 15:13 and Genesis 12:40, 41).

(Exodus 3:8) So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites.

The suffering Israelites cried out to God in prayer. God had always planned to hear their prayers, help them in their suffering, and meet their needs according to His perfect timing and in His perfect way, but God also expected them to call out to Him in prayer. Though the Egyptians were mighty rulers at that time, the LORD reigns so far above all rulers that He “came down” to deliver His oppressed people. They could not free themselves from slavery in Egypt any more than people can free themselves from slavery to sin. Those in slavery need a Savior, the LORD. God not only freed them from slavery, but God also led them to the good and fruitful land, called the Promised Land, that He had promised Abraham He would give to his descendants. God also taught them how to live in true freedom according to the Law that He gave Moses instead of in bondage to capricious kings who commanded how they would live each day.

(Exodus 3:9) And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them.

The LORD emphasized that the cry or the prayer of the Israelites meant something to Him and their cries and prayers did make a difference, even though He had told Abraham their future and had begun to free them from slavery even before the birth of Moses. Perhaps they had cried out to God for more than a hundred years, and not just during Moses' lifetime. God not only heard their prayers, God also saw their oppression. God saw and knew that their cries were justified and real. God takes the oppression of any people very seriously, and God will hear the cries and prayers of all those who are oppressed in addition to seeing how they are oppressed.

(Exodus 3:10) So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.”

God cares for all His people. God had planned for Moses to free His people from before Moses was born. He had prepared and given Moses the gifts he needed to confront Pharaoh and bring God's people out of Egypt. However, God and Moses also knew that Moses could not do this by himself: Moses would need God's help, and God was ready to help. God wanted to work through Moses to achieve His purposes, and God continues to work through His people today to achieve His purposes.

(Exodus 3:11) But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”

God knew Moses better than Moses knew himself. God saw Moses as a great leader that He had prepared for that particular moment in history. Moses saw himself as an exile from Egypt, a shepherd of sheep, a person who would never be given a friendly welcome in Egypt. Seeing himself as he saw himself, Moses asked the LORD, “Who am I?” God knew Moses, and God knew what He would make out of His humble servant.

(Exodus 3:12) And God said, “I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.”

In answer to Moses' question, God promised, “I will be with you.” God being with him would solve all of his concerns and problems. When God is with us, no matter who we are, we can do whatever the true God asks or wants us to do. The sign God gave to Moses related to Moses' future accomplishments. The sign God gave Moses was also a sign for the Israelites who would follow him, and also for all who would read the Bible later, because we know that God was with Moses and Moses did worship God on the mountain where Moses had met God after God had used him to free His people from slavery in Egypt. God did give Moses smaller signs to perform, but the greatest sign of all was worshiping God on that same mountain with a multitude of God's people below.

(Exodus 3:13) Moses said to God, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?”

Egypt had many gods (or idols) that the Egyptians worshiped. The Israelites worshiped the LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but they did not know the official name of God that would set God, the LORD, apart from all the gods (or idols) that the Egyptians and others worshiped. Moses wanted to know the name of God so the Israelites would know what God was coming to their rescue, and so they could call upon and worship the true God by His true name.

(Exodus 3:14) God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”

God gave Moses a name rich in later philosophical and theological meaning. Moses had asked God, “Who am I?” God gave Moses his name, “I Am Who I Am.” Moses depended on God for his existence, for being who he was and who he would become. The LORD did not depend on anyone or anything outside of himself for who He was and what He could and would do. The Egyptians worshiped the creation and various created things; such as the sun and the moon. God was and is the Creator of all and the foundation of all, including the sun and the moon. God exists. God self-exists: God does not depend on anyone or anything for His existence. God has “real existence;” whereas, idols have “no existence” apart from the materials out of which they are made by humans. When the LORD freed the Israelites from oppression in Egypt, He demonstrated the truth of what He would later inspire the prophets to declare: “Their idols are like scarecrows in a cucumber field, and they cannot speak; they have to be carried, for they cannot walk. Do not be afraid of them, for they cannot do evil, nor is it in them to do good;” “They are both stupid and foolish; the instruction given by idols is no better than wood!” and “Everyone is stupid and without knowledge; goldsmiths are all put to shame by their idols; for their images are false, and there is no breath in them” (Jeremiah 10:5, 8, 14).

(Exodus 3:15) God also said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites, ‘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, the name you shall call me from generation to generation.”

As a true prophet of God, God told Moses exactly what to say to the people and to Pharaoh. In addition to giving Moses His name, God wanted Moses to tell the people that He was not “a new god” that had met Moses on a mountain. Rather than being “a new god,” the LORD was the God Who had been with and had led their most important ancestors, the three patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The “LORD,” the “I Am Who

I Am,” would be God’s name and official title forever. Later, Jesus the Messiah would often refer to himself as “I Am” (see John 6:51, and other verses in the Gospel of John).

(Exodus 3:16) “Go, assemble the elders of Israel and say to them, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—appeared to me and said: I have watched over you and have seen what has been done to you in Egypt.’

God told His prophet Moses exactly what to do as well as say. Moses was to work with and through the established leaders of God’s people in Egypt, who were also slaves in Egypt. Many of these leaders would be Levites, as were Moses and Aaron. Moses would need many faithful leaders to help him guide and govern such a host of people as they wandered in the wilderness and as he prepared them to enter the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua. Moses would tell Pharaoh that they wanted to leave Egypt in order to worship the LORD, and they did go to worship the LORD where Moses had met the LORD on the mountain (in fulfillment of what God had promised Moses).

(Exodus 3:17) And I have promised to bring you up out of your misery in Egypt into the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites—a land flowing with milk and honey.’

God recognized and acknowledged to the Israelites that He saw their misery in slavery and He had heard their cries. God would give them the land He had promised them when He spoke to them through Moses. Because of their sins, the tribes Moses listed in Exodus 3:17 needed to be removed from the land (see Genesis 15:16—“And they shall come back here in the fourth generation; for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.” The LORD would help the Israelites possess the land, and God wanted the leaders and people to know that the land was good and productive. It fed cattle and produced crops that fed honeybees and produced much honey. Later, because of their sins, God would remove the people of Israel for their land and send them into exile as their prophets foretold and warned them.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. Ancient history records failed slave revolts in various kingdoms, why did the slave revolt of the Israelites in Egypt succeed?
2. The Bible tells us to pray for God to fulfill His promises, relate what you know about prayer to Exodus 3:9.

3. What are you doing or have you done for God and others that you would have never dreamed possible years earlier?

4. How do you think God might have been involved or be involved in what you have done or are doing for God to help others?

5. How would you feel and what would you think if God told you to do something and the sign that He was with you would be the eventual accomplishment of what He wanted you to do? That you would know God was with you by hindsight? [Think of God's sign to Moses – that Moses would worship God on that same mountain with the Israelites after he had freed them from slavery in Egypt.]

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson*.

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