

God Prepares For Deliverance

Exodus 3:7-17

SS Lesson for 11/03/2013

Devotional Scripture: 2 Cor 1:9-10

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Introduction

Overview and Approach to Lesson

The lesson reviews how **God Prepares for Deliverance**. The **study's aim** is to discern the essential elements of the way God works through people and whether He utilizes their natural gifts or works contrary to them. The **study's application** is to be on alert to events and circumstances that could represent the leading of the Lord for service and worship.

Key Verse: Exodus 3:16-17

16 Go and gather the elders of Israel together, and say to them, 'The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared to me, saying, "I have surely visited you and seen what is done to you in Egypt; 17 and I have said I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, to a land flowing with milk and honey.'"

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

Moses doubted his ability to confront the new Pharaoh (Amenhotep II) successfully and to lead the nation out. God responded to this objection with two promises: the assurance of His personal presence and the promise of Moses' return to Mount Horeb (you [pl., referring to Moses and the people] will worship God on this mountain). The purpose of the deliverance was that Israel might "worship God." This purpose is stated frequently in Exodus (4:23; 7:16; 8:1, 20; 9:1, 13; 10:3, 7-8, 11, 24, 26; 12:31). The Hebrew word for "worship" is the same word for "to be a slave". Israel had been slaves of Egypt (6:6), and was in slavery in Egypt ("the land of slavery," lit., "the house of slaves," 13:3, 14; 20:2). Having served as slaves to the Egyptians, Israel was now to serve the Lord, worshiping Him as His subjects. In Moses' second objection he felt the Israelites would challenge his assertion that God had sent him to deliver them. God told Moses to tell them, I am who I am (3:14; cf. "I will be," v. 12) and I AM has sent me to you (v. 14). This One said He would be with His people in their time of trouble and need. 'Ehyeh is probably a wordplay on Yahweh (Lord) in verse 15. Thus, the name Yahweh, related to the verb "to be," probably speaks of God's self-existence, but it means more than that. It usually speaks of His relationship to His people. For example, as Lord, He redeemed them (6:6), was faithful to them (34:5-7), and made a covenant with them (Gen. 15:18). The word also (Ex. 3:15) points to a second reply to Moses' second objection (the first reply is in v. 14). The always-present God had demonstrated His character in the past to the fathers (patriarchs; cf. vv. 6, 16; 4:5) and that willingness to look over His people tenderly is an abiding attribute. He is to be remembered by that name forever. Perhaps Moses knew of God as the distant Sovereign but not as the immanent God who cares for and loves His chosen ones. Both of Moses' objections (3:11, 13) were answered with lessons on the nature and character of God (vv. 12, 14-15). After being apprised of the nature of his mission (vv. 7-10) and of his God (vv. 11-15), Moses received instructions, details about how to accomplish the task. The instructions relate to the elders (vv. 16-17), the king (vv. 18-20), and the Israelites (vv. 21-22). God told Moses to go to the elders (leaders and counselors) in Israel and tell them of the theophany, the appearance of God in the bush and His message of concern (I have... seen what has been done to you; cf. 2:24; 3:7) and of His plan to deliver them out of... Egypt and into Canaan (cf. v. 8 and comments there). With the elders Moses was to approach Amenhotep II. The phrase the God of the Hebrews was later used by Moses when he spoke to Pharaoh; it is a term polytheistic people could understand (cf. 5:3; 7:16; 9:1, 13; 10:3). Moses and the elders were simply to request permission to leave Egypt for a short trip (three-day journey) for religious purposes. He deliberately said nothing about them returning.

Commentary from Bible Expositor and Illuminator

The key verse text comes from words of God as He called upon Moses to speak with the elders of Israel. This command was not as simple as it seems. In fact, Moses responded with unbelief, saying, among other

things, that the elders and people who heard him would not believe him (Gen. 4:1). In this particular part of the conversation, God reassured Moses that He had seen the pain and suffering that His people had experienced. Not only had God seen their pain, but He was also going to do something about it. This attitude that God displayed during the time of Israel's slavery and Exodus is the same as the one He exhibits in the lives of His followers today. As Christians, we should believe that God knows the struggles we endure. Moreover, we should recognize that He will respond in some way eventually. The best thing we can do is believe Him and walk in obedience despite the circumstances. The worst way we can react is to reject God's directions and try to force Him to see things our way. God communicated to His people that He had "seen that which is done to you in Egypt," He was intimately familiar with the physical, emotional, and spiritual pain and struggle that were an inescapable part of the Israelites' slavery experience. This theme is not limited just to the Israelites in the Old Testament; it is echoed throughout Scripture. It is especially evident in the book of Hebrews. For example, notice Hebrews 2:18: "For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted." Jesus is God, and thus He is omniscient. He knows everything there is to know about reality, including the reality of your deepest and darkest struggles. He experienced life as a man and suffered excruciating amounts of physical and emotional pain, culminating in His cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46). Hebrews later goes on to encourage believers: "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (4:16). Because we bear the name of Christ, we can and should boldly approach the Father's throne with our petitions. Such is the charge placed before us by the God who sees everything in the lives of His children. God firmly told Moses that He was going to intervene in the plight His people were experiencing. He later rebuked Moses for expressing an unyielding attitude of doubt, to the point that His "anger . . . was kindled against Moses" (Exod. 4:14). Christians today should see this as a warning to check the way we respond to God's desire to intervene in our lives. Many times, God does not intervene in difficult situations according to our timetable. Our response, then, should be one of faith, believing that obeying God's Word is better than doubting or acting on our sinful impulses. Indeed, trials are quite often accompanied by temptations to sin. God reassures us that He will "make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (I Cor. 10:13). In the end, God's intervening combined with our humble obedience will always produce the best results. This concept was true in Moses' time, and it is still true today.

Approach to the Major Outlines in Lesson

The concept of the outline of the lesson was adapted from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary and from the points revealed by the study of the Scriptural text.

Verse	Phrase	Commentary
8	So I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land	Preparing the Divine Plan
12	So He said, "I will certainly be with you	Preparing the Divine Assurance
14	And God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And He said, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"	Preparing the Message of Revelation

Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

In 1998, DreamWorks Animation released the animated film *Prince of Egypt*. This popular movie retells the story of the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt. As is often the case with cinematic retellings, the producers take considerable liberty with the story. Although the Bible says nothing about Moses' life growing up as the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter, the movie furnishes abundant details. In the movie, Moses is adopted not by Pharaoh's daughter, but by the queen. That makes Moses the stepson of Pharaoh and kid brother to Ramses, who is next in line to succeed his father as Pharaoh. Moses therefore ends up wielding considerable power as Royal Chief Architect under his brother, who is crown prince in charge of all of Pharaoh's temple building projects. Moses is oblivious to his humble origins as the son of a Hebrew slave at first. But Miriam, his sister by birth, reveals the truth to him. Although he is reluctant to accept it, this truth is confirmed by a disturbing dream and a frank conversation with his stepparents. DreamWorks Animation is not alone in filling the gaps in Moses' backstory. It is quite common for preachers, Sunday school teachers, and even Bible scholars to infer a great deal from the simple statement, "When the child grew older, she took him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son" (Exodus 2:10). Who can blame them? Moses is a pivotal figure in both biblical and world history. Three of the major world religions (Christianity, Judaism, and Islam) claim Moses as a core prophet. Today we will look at what Scripture does have to say about the event that changed the course of Moses' life and world history.

In Genesis 15, God appeared to Abraham in a vision to reaffirm the promise to make a great nation of that man. God sealed his Word with a covenant ceremony. Though this was certainly good news to Abraham, a dark cloud hovered over this promise: God also revealed to Abraham that his descendants would be enslaved in Egypt for 400 years (v. 13). That is precisely what happened. Abraham's grandson Jacob was forced to relocate all of Abraham's descendants to Egypt in about 1877 BC to survive a famine (Genesis 45-50). Things went well at first. Through divine providence, Jacob's son Joseph had received Pharaoh's favor and was able to settle all of his extended family in the rich region of Goshen. The Israelites multiplied as time passed, but the memory of Joseph's favor evaporated from the Egyptian establishment (Exodus 1:8). The Israelites came to be seen as a threat within their host country. So the Pharaohs followed the well-trod path of paranoid power-bearers: they intensified their grip and oppressed this minority (vv. 9-11). Things seemed bleak for Abraham's descendants, but the birth of Moses changed everything. Because Pharaoh had issued a decree that all Israelite boys were to be killed at birth, Moses' mother placed him in the river in "a papyrus basket" (Exodus 2:3). Pharaoh's daughter soon discovered him and proceeded to ask Moses' mother to nurse the infant. The daughter then adopted Moses as her own (vv. 5-10). The next we hear of Moses is when he killed an Egyptian for mistreating a Hebrew slave (Exodus 2:12). Unlike the animated film, however, Pharaoh exhibited no special affection for Moses and ordered him to be executed (v. 15). Moses fled and found a new home among the Midianites, who lived east of Egypt (vv. 11-22). Then Moses found God—or God found Moses! While tending sheep, Moses saw a bush that burned without being consumed (Exodus 3:2, 3). Moses listened as God revealed his will to Moses, who was 80 years old at the time (7:7).

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Preparing the Divine Plan (Exodus 3:7-10)

7 And the LORD said: "I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows.

8 So I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites.

9 Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel has come to Me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them.

10 Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt."

God's plan always contains deliverance for His people (7-9)

Deliverance through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit (2 Thess 2:13-14)

13 But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. 14 He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Deliverance through grace (2 Tim 1:8-9)

8 So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, 9 who has saved us and called us to a holy life-not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time

As God delivered those in the Old Testament, He will deliver us (2 Peter 2:9)

9 if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.

God delivers even into our old age (Isaiah 46:4)

4 Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you.

God has always delivered and will continue to do so (2 Cor. 1:10)

10 He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us,

When God reveals His plan to man, He has a part for man to do (10)

God has plans for each one of us (Jer 29:11)

11 For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

God delivers us for a purpose (Jer 15:11)

11 The LORD said, "Surely I will deliver you for a good purpose; surely I will make your enemies plead with you in times of disaster and times of distress.

God created us to do good works (Eph 2:10)

10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

God predestined us and called us for His purpose (Rom 8:29)

29 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

God has plans for some that may include dishonor (Rom 9:19-21)

20 But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'" 21 Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?

Preparing the Divine Assurance (Exodus 3:11-12)

11 But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?"

12 So He said, "I will certainly be with you. And this shall be a sign to you that I have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain."

Man tends to always have an excuse for not doing God's will (11)

Excuses started in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:8-12)

8 Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. 9 But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?" 10 He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid." 11 And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" 12 The man said, "The woman you put here with me--she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."

Moses gave the excuse that he couldn't talk (Ex 4:10-12)

10 Moses said to the LORD, "O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue." 11 The LORD said to him, "Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the LORD? 12 Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say."

Aaron gave the excuse of peer pressure (Ex 32:21-24)

21 He said to Aaron, "What did these people do to you, that you led them into such great sin?" 22 "Do not be angry, my lord," Aaron answered. "You know how prone these people are to evil. 23 They said to me, 'Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him.' 24 So I told them, 'Whoever has any gold jewelry, take it off.' Then they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!"

Excuses make one unfit for service (Luke 9:59-62)

59 He said to another man, "Follow me." But the man replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." 60 Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God." 61 Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family." 62 Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."

God's assurance is that He will always be with His people (12)

God promises to be with us to the very end (Matt 28:20)

20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

The Holy Spirit will be with believers forever (John 14:16)

16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever-

God will never forsake His people (Deut 31:6)

6 Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you."

The Psalmist points out that he has never seen any righteous forsaken (Ps 37:25)

25 I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread.

God loves and will never forsake His faithful ones (Ps 37:28)

28 For the LORD loves the just and will not forsake his faithful ones. They will be protected forever, but the offspring of the wicked will be cut off;

Man's response to God's assurance is to be obedient and serve God (12)

Our response should be out of love for God because if we love God, we will obey Him (John 14:15)

15 "If you love me, you will obey what I command.

Our response is an obligation to live by the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:12-14)

12 Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation-but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. 13 For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, 14 because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

Our response should be to be obedient and serve God regardless of the circumstances (Dan 3:16-18)

16 Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. 17 If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. 18 But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

Our response should be to offer our whole selves as living sacrifices to God (Rom 12:1)

12:1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-this is your spiritual act of worship.

Our response should be to throw off everything that hinders and serve God (Heb 12:1-2)

12:1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. 2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Our response should be to be thankful and worship God (Heb 12:28)

28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe,

Preparing the Message of Revelation (Exodus 3:13-17)

13 Then Moses said to God, "Indeed, when I come to the children of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they say to me, 'What is His name?' what shall I say to them?"

14 And God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And He said, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

15 Moreover God said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: 'The Lord 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 to all generations.'

16 Go and gather the elders of Israel together, and say to them, 'The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared to me, saying, "I have surely visited you and seen what is done to you in Egypt;

17 and I have said I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, to a land flowing with milk and honey.' "

The authority of the message (13-14)

Commentary on "I AM"

From NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

The name *I AM*, spoken by God, declares that God is always living and always the same. Coupled with the words of verse 6, this name told the slaves in Egypt that the God calling them to freedom was the same God of majesty and power who had called Abraham from Ur and had brought him to Canaan with wealth and power and honor. That same God could break the shackles of their slavery and bring them to that same land with similar wealth and power and honor. To all of us, these two verses carry several great thoughts: First, the God who sent Moses is the only God who really is, the only one who actually exists. Other so-called gods are figments of human imagination. They are without life and without power. Second, the God who sent Moses is eternal. Forever he is, and forever he is the same—past, present, and future. His people can depend on him, not only for all the years of this life on earth, but also throughout the eternity beyond this life. Third, in a special sense the God who sent Moses is the God of the Hebrews. He is the one who called, blessed, and helped Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is the one who gave special promises about their descendants as well as about them. In a similar special sense he is the God of Christians, for they are “the Israel of God” (Galatians 6:16). By faith they are “children of Abraham,” and thus “are blessed along with Abraham” (Galatians 3:6-9).

From Barnes Notes

That is, "*I am what I am.*" The words express absolute, and therefore unchanging and eternal Being. The name, which Moses was thus commissioned to use, was at once new and old; old in its connection with previous revelations; new in its full interpretation, and in its bearing upon the covenant of which Moses was the destined mediator.

From Wycliffe Bible Commentary

The name expresses "not abstract existence, but active manifestation of existence ... not what God will be in Himself ... but what He will approve Himself to others.... He will be to Moses and His people what He will be - something which is undefined, but which as His full nature is more completely unfolded, by the lessons of history and the teachings of the prophets, will prove to be more than words can express" (Cambridge Bible). A similar thought is expressed by Keil and Delitzsch: "The question (v. 13) ... presupposed that the name expressed the nature and operations of God and that God would manifest in deeds the nature expressed in the name ... (He) designated Himself by this name as the absolute God...acting with unfettered ability and self-dependence."

God sets His own authority (Acts 1:7)

He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.

God has all the power in Heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18)

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

God was before all things and created all things (Col. 1:16-17)

For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. [17] He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Man has no authority over godly things (John 19:11)

Jesus answered, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin."

All human authority comes from God (Romans 13:1)

Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.

The eternal nature of the message (15)

Eternal nature of God's covenants (Ps 105:8)

8 He remembers his covenant forever, the word he commanded, for a thousand generations,

Eternal nature of God's faithfulness (Ps 119:89-90)

89 Your word, O Lord, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens. 90 Your faithfulness continues through all generations; you established the earth, and it endures.

Eternal nature of God's purposes (Matt 24:34-35)

34 I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. 35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

Eternal nature of God's word (1 Peter 1:25)

25 but the word of the Lord stands forever." And this is the word that was preached to you.

The reason for the message (16-17)

God sees the misery of His people (16)

God sees our circumstances before they happen (Gen 16:13)

13 She gave this name to the Lord who spoke to her: "You are the God who sees me," for she said, "I have now seen the One who sees me."

God sees because His eyes are upon the righteous (Ps 34:15)

15 The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their cry;

God sees because the ways of man are before God's eyes (Prov 5:21)

21 For a man's ways are in full view of the Lord, and he examines all his paths.

God sees because God's eyes are in every place (Prov 15:3)

3 The eyes of the Lord are everywhere, keeping watch on the wicked and the good.

God delivers His people (17)

God delivers through grace (2 Tim 1:8-9)

8 So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, 9 who has saved us and called us to a holy life — not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time,

God delivered those in the Old Testament, He will deliver me (2 Peter 2:9)

9 if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.

God delivers even into old age (Isaiah 46:4)

4 Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you.

God has always delivered and will continue to do so (2 Cor. 1:10)

10 He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us,

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Concluding Thought From Bob Deffinbaugh

From the series: Exodus: The Birth of the Nation

One of the applications of this text can be seen in the New Testament, disclosed by our Lord Himself. Let us consider the comfort and hope which we can find through the “I AM,” the Lord Jesus Christ. When our Lord applied the “I AM” teaching of Exodus 3, I believe He did so in light of the reference to the “burning bush” in Deuteronomy (Deut. 33:1, 13, 16). Take note that the context of these blessings which Moses pronounced is the approaching death of Moses himself. In addition, the blessings here are pronounced on Joseph, who has long since died. Now, of course there is the sense in which Joseph will be blessed through his offspring, but this is not the only blessing which Joseph will receive. The writer to the Hebrews speaks of those who died and who are yet to receive the blessings which God promised them (cf. Heb. 11:13-16, 39-40). The promises of God are therefore certain, because God will never die. But just as true, because God is the eternal “I AM,” those who die are still assured of the fulfillment of God’s promises to them. The fact that God is the “I AM” assures us that we “shall live with Him forever,” if we are His children by faith. Jesus applies the truth of the “I AM” passage on two different occasions in the Gospels. In the first instance, the context is the hypothetical question raised by the Sadducees (who did not believe in the resurrection of the dead, cf. Mark 12:18) of whose wife a woman would be in heaven who had had seven brothers as her husband. Pointing out their hypocrisy and error regarding their rejection of the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, Jesus said, “Now about the dead rising—have you not read in the book of Moses, in the account of the bush, how God said to him, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken!” (Mark 12:26-27). In the statement of God, “I AM,” we find assurance that God is not only eternal, but that because of this His relationship with men is also eternal. “I am the God of Abraham,” not only means that God is everlasting, but also that Abraham is as well. God’s eternity is not only the basis for our faith in God’s promises being fulfilled (in the lives of those who are alive at the time), but also is our assurance that we will personally experience those blessings. As the writer to the Hebrews put it, God intended that those who died in faith would wait to be made perfect with us (Heb. 11:40). God’s eternity and our immortality are therefore intertwined truths.

In the Gospel of John, one of the keys to its structure is the “I AM ...” statements of our Lord (cf. John 6:48, 51; 8:58; 10:9, 11; 11:25, etc.). The watershed of this Gospel seems to be the “I AM” statement of our Lord in chapter 8. We are again in the context of one’s hope for life after death, a truth about which some Jews were skeptical. Jesus said to the Jews, “I tell you the truth, if a man keeps my word, he will never see death.” At this the Jews exclaimed, “Now we know that you are demon-possessed! Abraham died and so did the prophets, yet you say that if a man keeps your word, he will never taste death. Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?” (John 8:51-53). The issue, of course, is “who is Jesus?” Jesus is greater than Abraham, as is evident by the fact that He is the “I AM”: “I tell you the truth,” Jesus answered, “before Abraham was born, I am!” (John 8:58). To the Jews who were debating with our Lord, those who had died were dead and gone. It was all over for them (cf. John 8:52-53). Jesus countered that this was not true at all, for “if a man keeps my word, he will never see death” (John 8:51). Death has no dominion over those who trust in the Lord and keep His Word. Abraham saw the “Lord’s day” and rejoiced (8:56), and

as a believer, he would see the promises God had made to him fulfilled—personally. Related to the question of Jesus’ authority was His relationship to Moses. The Jews claimed to have Moses’ authority (cf. Matt. 23:2), thus (in their distorted thinking) giving them higher authority than the Lord Jesus. But think of it—when Moses was asked about his authority, the best he could say was, “I AM sent me.” When our Lord was asked concerning His authority in John 8, He answered, “I AM, I AM!” While Moses was sent by “I AM,” Jesus was “I AM.” Thus, those who believe in the I AM need have no fear of death, for the blessings of God are as certain beyond the grave as they are before it—indeed, more so. Belief in the God who is the “I AM” is therefore the foundation for our hope of eternal life and of experiencing the blessings God has promised us, even though we die. Our eternal hope is wrapped up in the eternality of God. Exodus 3 etches the truth of God’s eternality in bold letters. Let us believe it. Let us stake our earthly and our eternal destiny on it!

There are many Christians today who think that the study of the attributes of God is an intellectual exercise with very little practical application. Nothing could be further from the truth! Recently, I heard R. C. Sproul talk about the greatest need of America. When asked, “What is the greatest need of non-Christian Americans?,” he answered, “To know what God is like.” When asked, “What is the greatest need of American Christians?,” his answer was the same, “To know what God is like.” The attributes of God are simply a description of what God is like. The basis for the call of Moses and for his obedience to that call was an assurance as to the character of God. Personally, I am convinced that the measure of our faith is proportionate to our grasp of the greatness and the goodness of our God. I do not think that any person’s faith will be any greater than their grasp of the greatness of God as the Object of their faith. I do not think that great things have been done for God without a grasp of how great the God is whom we serve. It is the attributes of God which describe Him as He is and which become the basis for our faith and obedience. Let us become students of the attributes of God. Specifically, from this text we have focused upon the eternal, unchanging nature of God. This truth is frequently underscored in the Scriptures (Num. 23:19; cf. 1 Sam. 15:29; Ps. 102:25-28; James 1:17; Rev. 1:8).

For the Christian, there is no thought more comforting than the eternality of God and His changelessness. It assures us that His purposes for us will be fulfilled. The God who came down to deliver His people from Egypt in the person of Moses (Exod. 3) has now come down in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ, to deliver us from eternal damnation due to our sins (cf. John 1:1-17, 29-34; Phil. 2:5-8). Just as the fire of God burned the bush but did not consume it, so the wrath of God was poured out on the Lord Jesus Christ, but did not consume Him. He died for our sins, but He was raised from the dead. Through Him, men can be delivered from the wrath of God on sinners. What a blessed hope there is for those who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, the “I AM” God, who came that we might live through Him. For the unbeliever, there is no thought more horrifying, for the God who in the Old Testament poured out His wrath on sinners still hates sin and will punish the wicked eternally. Unfortunately, those who reject the provision which God has made in the person of Christ, and who trust in their own righteousness, will suffer the eternal fires of Hell. And this fire will not consume them either, so that it will be endured forever: “Then he will also say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels’” (Matt. 25:41, emphasis mine). The text which we have been studying underscores, in my mind, the importance of character. Ultimately, it is the character of God which is the basis for our faith and for our obedience. It is the character of men which is to be much of the basis for identifying church leaders (cf. 1 Tim. 3; Titus 1). So too it is the character of the Christian which God is developing (cf. Prov.; 2 Pet. 1, etc.). Christian character is very often forged in the fires of affliction (Rom. 5:3-5; James 1:3). The endurance of the saints in the purifying fires which God brings into our lives is also evidence of the supernatural work of God (cf. 2 Cor. 3-4). While we need not seek affliction, let us acknowledge that it is often affliction which God uses to purify our lives (1 Pet. 1:6-7) and to prepare us for the glories which lie ahead.

One final thought. Israel, like the bush which Moses saw, is still, as it were, aflame. The great tribulation in the Book of Revelation describes the intense purifying fires of God which will be required to turn the nation Israel back to Himself. But in the midst of her fires of affliction, past, present, and future, Israel has endured, not consumed by the flames, and thus is a testimony to the unchanging nature of God whose promises are sure.

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Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

1. God knows each of us and our circumstances better than we know ourselves (Exod. 3:7; Ps. 139:1-6)
2. God hears and answers the cries of His children (Exod. 3:8-9; Ps. 18:6; Jonah 2:2)
3. In His goodness and grace, God usually enlists people to accomplish His plans (Exod. 3:10)
4. God always enables those He enlists for His service (Exod. 3:11 -12; Isa. 41:10; Phil. 4:13)
5. It is God's character that ultimately motivates men to trust and obey (Exod. 3:13-15)
6. To be effective, God's Word must be shared (vss. 16-17)