

Exodus 3:1-4:17

Study Outline

Launching question

People sometimes say 'I like to think of God as ...'
What kinds of things do they say to complete that phrase?
Tonight we're going to see how God wants us to think of him.

Excuses, excuses

Choose three readers, as Narrator, Moses and the Lord to **read 3:1-4:17**.
As it is read, ask everyone to note all Moses' excuses.
Draw up a grid with passages down the side (3:11-12; 3:13-33; 4:1-9;
4:10-12; 4:13-17), and two columns: Moses' excuse, and God's response.
Fill it in together.
Which of these excuses do you identify with? what sort of excuses do you
come up with for not doing what God wants you to?
What do we learn about God from the way he deals with Moses' excuses?

Who is this God, anyway?

In 3:7, what three verbs does God use to explain why he's doing as he is?
What three words describe the troubled situation of his people?
What are the two actions God has done / will do (8)?
Why is acting as he is (6)? why is this significant (cf 2:23-25)?
What are all the things we learn about God from his actions in these verses?
Optional extra Read Mark 12:18-27
What does Jesus say that Exod 3:6 tells us?
What does this add to our view of God in these vv?

In 13, Moses asks for more information about who God is.
How does God want to be remembered?

Read Genesis 15:13-16

Why do you think the covenant God took Israel into captivity in Egypt?
Why does God want 'to bring my people out of Egypt'?
Lots of answers here: 3:7, 8, 17, 12 and 18, 20-22; 4:5 etc
Link to 3:8 to Gen 12:7

What does all this tell us to answer Moses' question in 13?
Why is it so important that God wants to rescue his people?
Why is it important for us to remember God as rescuer/redeemer?

Thinking it through

What does it mean for us to always 'remember' God as redeemer?
What did it mean for God to 'remember' (2:24): does this help us?
What practically do we do to 'remember'? how can we 'remember' more?
We often feel that God saving us is just an assumption in our Christian lives:
what can we do to keep it as more central, more significant?
What is so wrong with the phrase 'I like to think of God as ...'
After tonight's study, how would you now answer someone who says that?

Exodus 3:1-4:17

Study 2

THE GOD WHO MAKES HIMSELF KNOWN

Summary

Exodus is the story of God showing us what he is like: he is the God who rescues his people. He does this in faithfulness to his promises, for his own glory, and out of sheer mercy and kindness to those he has chosen. We should expect to know our God better through reading this book.

The story so far

Sometime in the early second millennium BC, out of the blue, God called Abram out of Mesopotamia to go to Canaan. He promised him [1] many descendants, [2] his blessing and [3] this land to live in. Abram went, and many years later had a son, Isaac who, in turn, had two sons; the promises of God were established with the younger, Jacob, and his descendants. In time, his twelve sons all went to live in Egypt because of famine in Canaan, and there these descendants of Jacob multiplied to become a very large number of people. The Egyptians no longer regarded them with friendliness and made their life misery as slaves. When they cried to God for rescue, God appointed Moses to be the one to rescue Israel out of Egypt and lead them back to the promised land of Canaan.

Exodus 1-2 has made this history the background to the mighty rescue God is about to do. It is all motivated by God remembering this covenant: he's bound himself to act on behalf of his people by making his promises to them. In particular, the promise of **descendants** is patently being fulfilled (cf 12:27), and is the very reason why Pharaoh is oppressing them. There has also been evidence of God's **blessing** on them (19, 20b) and on those who bless them (20a, 21). But the third element of the promise of Gen 12:1-3, 7, the **land**, is the problem, and is what God will now resolve (cf 3:8, where 'land' is mentioned three times, plus the word 'place').

Theme Sentence

God is known (and to be known) by his act of rescuing Israel from Egypt.

Ideas for application

- the main thing that the covenant God commits himself to do, and the main way that I need to remember him is as my redeemer. Rejoicing in my redemption, praising him for redeeming me ... nothing beats it!
- God's dealings with Moses the individual show that he will always achieve his plans, and achieve them in his way.
- when God gives miracles, they point to who he is, and to his plan to rescue people.

Commentary

- 2 Horeb, the mountain of God, is another name for Sinai. Moses' experience prefigures Israel's: both leave Egypt to meet God here (cf 3:12). This is the place where (in 19:1f) God will renew the covenant and (in 34:4f) he will proclaim his name. Both Moses and Israel learn here who God is and what the true significance of their life will be.
- 6 By repeatedly talking of Abraham/Isaac/Jacob, God is tying his actions to the promises he made to them. This keeps God centre-stage as the hero of the story, as he acts as he's promised. Even the way he deals with Moses teaches us more about him than about us.
- In Mark 12:26-27, Jesus refers to Exod 3:6 to teach the Sadducees about God. The important thing, he says, is that God has made himself known as the God of past, present and future (cf 3:14): he's far too much the God of life to name himself after men who were dead and gone. This 'God of the living' is forever 'to be remembered throughout all generations' (15) because how he reveals himself in this story has an abiding relevance for every age. So, the question is: who does he now reveal himself to be? The answer? This promise-keeping God should forever be remembered by his act of rescue.
- 7-10 repeats words from 2:23-25. God has *seen, heard and knows*; their cry has *come up*, he has *come down*. What prompts God to act as he does is that he *knows* his people's sufferings. Israel's captivity is a serious challenge to the covenant: the covenant people are in a land not their own, subject to an alien power, the covenant virtually extinguished by the edict of 1:22. Interestingly, God predicted that Israel would go into this captivity (cf Gen 15:13-16). So presumably this all happens like this because God wants their relationship to be defined by this: they are redeemed, he is Redeemer (eg 20:2).
- 10 God doesn't need to use a Moses, so why do it this way? Not least because Moses' record is so poor: when he tried to rescue his way (2:11f, and cf 2:17, 19 especially), no-one much was rescued, and he had to flee! Study 3 will suggest that God is deliberately stacking up the odds against himself in order that his glory is more clearly shown.
- 11f Moses makes 5 excuses (not using the excuse of his old age [7:7]!):
3:11 who am I?
3:13 what authority do I have?
4:1 what if I'm not believed?
4:10 but I'm not eloquent
4:13 send someone else!
- On each occasion, God is adequate for his weakness: God will save and he will save in the way he intends.
3:12 I will be with you
3:14 the covenant God sent you

- 4:2f 3 miracles to demonstrate the covenant God appeared to you
4:11 the sovereign God who made your mouth will give words
4:14 I will give you Aaron.
- 12 Probably 'this' here means the bush-that-is-not-burnt-up: the bush is the guarantee that after rescue from Egypt, they will return here.
- 14f This is the heart of this passage. Again the formula 'God of your fathers/Abram/Isaac/Jacob' is repeated (15, 16) as if to make the point that this is no new God, but the same God who has bound himself to Israel. But the important new thing here is that God announces the name by which he is 'to be remembered'. This is the name YHWH, translated as 'LORD' (always written like this, in capitals, in our Bibles). Actually even this is not a brand new name (cf Gen 4:26, despite Exod 6:3), but what we get here is a full explanation of the meaning and significance of the name. So what does it mean?!
- 6:1-8 makes clearer what is hinted at here (in that it's all something to do with the verb 'to be'): their personal name for God is linked to who he is, his character (and in particular, his character as the God who keeps his covenant by rescuing his people).
- The rather strangely-translated phrases suggest further conclusions to draw. 'I am who I am' implies that God doesn't rely on anything or anyone else to define himself. 'I will be who I will be' points to his future actions in particular: God is linking his name to how he acts on Israel's behalf. *Who he is* will be made clear by *what he does*.
- This seems to be the main point: God is making himself known by rescuing his people Israel from their captivity in Egypt. If we want to know what the covenant God is like, look to this story. This means that probably whenever the Bible uses the metaphor of redemption, it looks back to this story (and not to slave markets, pawn shops, etc). Col 1:13-14, for example, is full of Exodus allusions.
- Furthermore, to be the covenant people of God means being known by his name (Deut 28:10): Israel are 'son of God' (4:22-23). And later, God will promise redemption to 'everyone who is called by my name' (Isaiah 43:7). Jesus will adopt this 'I AM' name in the 'I am ...' sayings in John's gospel (and especially at 8:58).
- 19f Things will get worse before they get any better (5:22-23) because of the hard heart of Pharaoh (cf 4:21-23 and Study 3). But cf 12:35-36.
- 4:3-9 'Signs' may or may not be miraculous in the Bible, but there are two clusters where they occur: the exodus from Egypt (7:3 cf Dt 4:34; Neh 9:10; Jer 32:20-21) and the ministry of Jesus and his apostles. 'Signs and wonders' therefore become a technical term for miracles which accompany (and even constitute) redemption. Study 4 looks more at the signs in Exodus, but the point now is that these three stunning signs that God gives Moses here are the means through which God reveals himself to Israel / Egyptians as Yhwh (6:6-7; 7:5).