

UNIT 4: THE CALL OF THE DELIVERER (2:23–3:22)

INTRODUCTION¹

Text and Textual Notes

¹ The next section of the book is normally referred to as the “Call of Moses,” and that is certainly true. But it is much more than that. It is the divine preparation of the servant of God, a servant who already knew what his destiny was. In this section Moses is shown how his destiny will be accomplished. It will be accomplished because the divine Presence will guarantee the power, and the promise of that Presence comes with the important “I AM” revelation. The message that comes through in this, and other “I will be with you” passages, is that when the promise of his Presence is correctly appropriated by faith, the servant of God can begin to build confidence for the task that lies ahead. It will no longer be, “Who am I that I should go?” but “I Am” with you. If the great I AM is working through us, it does not matter who we are.

2:23 It happened² after that long period of time³ that the king of Egypt died. And the Israelites⁴ groaned because of the slave-labor and they cried out; and their desperate cry⁵ about their slave-labor went up to God. **2:24** And God heard their groaning, and God remembered⁶ his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. **2:25** God saw⁷ the Israelites and had compassion.⁸

² The verse begins with the temporal indicator, “and it was.”

³ Literally, “in those many days”

⁴ Literally, “the children/sons of Israel”

⁵ There is a change in vocabulary in the verse: “they cried out” is from *za’aq*, but “desperate cry” is from *shawa’*.

⁶ These two verbs, both preterites, say far more than what they seem to say. The verb “to hear” (*shama’*) means to respond to what is heard. It even can be found in idiomatic constructions to mean “to obey.” To say God heard their complaint means that God responded to it. Likewise, the verb “to remember” (*zakar*) means to begin to act on the basis of what is remembered. A prayer to God that says, “Remember me,” is asking for more than memory (see Brevard Childs, *Memory and Tradition*, pp. 1-8).

The structure of this section at the end of the chapter is powerful. There are four descriptions of the Israelites, with a fourfold reaction from God, presented in pairs with “God” as subject both times. On the Israelites’ side, they groaned (*’anah, na’aq*) and cried out (*za’aq, shawa’*) to God. On the divine side God heard (*shama’*) their groaning, remembered (*zakar*) his covenant, looked (*ra’ah*) on their affliction, and took notice (*yada’*) of them. These verbs emphasize God’s sympathy and compassion for the people. God is near to those in need; in fact, the deliverer had already been chosen.

It is important to note at this point the constant repetition of the use of the word “God.” The text is waiting for this coming chapter to introduce the name “Yahweh” in a special way.

⁷ Literally, “and God saw”

⁸ The last clause reads literally, “and God knew” (*yada’*). The idea seems to be that God took knowledge of them, noticed or regarded them. In other passages the verb “know” is similar in meaning to “save” or “show pity.” See especially Gen. 18:21, Ps. 1:6, and Amos 3:2.

3:1 Now Moses⁹ 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 desert, and came to the mountain of God, even to Horeb.¹⁰ **3:2** And the Angel of Yahweh¹¹ appeared¹² to him in¹³ a flame of fire from the midst of a bush.¹⁴ He looked¹⁵--and¹⁶ the bush was

⁹ The *waw* disjunctive with the name “Moses” introduces a new and important starting point. The LORD’s dealing with Moses will cover the next two chapters.

¹⁰ Horeb is another name for Mount Sinai. This indicates that the area where Moses was living was not across the Gulf of Aqabah; but it also indicates that the people of Midian did move a great deal. There is also a good deal of foreshadowing in this verse, for later Moses would shepherd the people of Israel, and lead them to Mount Sinai to receive the Law. See David Skinner, “Some Major Themes of Exodus,” *Mid-America Theological Journal* 1 (1977):31-42.

¹¹ The designation “the Angel of Yahweh” (usually “the Angel of the LORD”) occurred in Genesis already. There is some ambiguity in the expression; but it seems often to be interchangeable with the holy name itself, indicating that it refers to the LORD. When this is clearly the case, Christian expositors have (rightly) interpreted this title to be a reference to the pre-incarnate appearances of the second person of the trinity.

¹² The verb (*wayyera*’) is the *niphal* preterite of the verb “to see,” and so properly rendered “and he was seen.” But in passages of divine revelation, rather than say he was seen, it is usually translated “he appeared.” See also Gen. 12:7, 46:29, Ex. 6:3, and Gen 35:9 (with God as the subject). Jacobs notes in his commentary on Exodus that He only appears like this to individuals and never to masses of people; it is his glory that appears to the masses (p. 49).

¹³ Gesenius rightly classifies this as a *beth essentiae* (par. 119i); it would then indicate that Yahweh appeared to Moses “as a flame.”

¹⁴ God chose to reveal himself through a blazing fire in a thorn bush. The symbolism of fire in the book frequently accompanies the revelation of Yahweh as he delivers Israel, guides her, and purifies her. The description here is unique, calling attention to the manifestation as a flame of fire from within the bush. Philo was the first to interpret the bush as Israel, suffering under the persecution of Egypt but never consumed. The Bible leaves the interpretation open. However, in this revelation the fire is coming from within the bush, not from outside; and it represents the LORD who is in the midst of his people and will deliver them from persecution

burning with fire, but the bush was not being consumed.¹⁷ **3:3** So Moses thought,¹⁸ “I will turn aside to see¹⁹ this amazing²⁰ sight, why the bush does not burn up.”²¹ **3:4** And when Yahweh²² saw that²³ he had turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush, and said, “Moses, Moses!”²⁴ And

and make them into a holy nation. See further Etan Levine, “The Evolving Symbolism of the Burning Bush,” *Dor l^e Dor* 8 (1979):185-193.

¹⁵ Literally, “and he saw”

¹⁶ The text once again uses the deictic particle with the *waw*, *w^ehinneh*, traditionally (and archaically) rendered “and behold.” The particle goes with the intense gaze, the outstretched arm, the raised eyebrow--excitement and intense interest: “look, over there.” It draws the reader into the immediate experience of the subject.

¹⁷ The construction uses the suffixed negative (*'enennu*) to form the subject of the passive participle: “it was not” consumed. This was the amazing thing, for nothing would burn faster in the desert than a thorn bush is on fire. But the repetition of the word “the bush” is meant to focus on the fact that it was not burning up.

¹⁸ Literally, “and Moses said”

¹⁹ The construction uses the cohortative (*'asurah-nna'*) followed by the imperfect with the *waw* (*w^e'er'eh*) to express the purpose or result (logical sequence): “I will turn aside in order that I may see.”

²⁰ Literally, “great.” The word means something extraordinary here. But in using this term Moses revealed his reaction to the strange sight, and his anticipation that something special was about to happen. So he turned away from the flock to investigate it.

²¹ The verb is an imperfect tense; here it would have the progressive nuance--why the bush is not burning up.

²² The preterite with the *waw* is once again subordinated as a temporal clause to the main point of the verse, that God called to him. The language is again anthropomorphic, as if God's actions were based on His observing what Moses did.

²³ The particle *ki* after the verb “see” introduces a noun clause that functions as the direct object of the verb (Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, par. 490).

²⁴ The repetition of the name in God's call is emphatic, making the appeal direct and immediate (see also Gen. 22:11 and 46:2). The use of the personal name shows how specifically God directed the call, and that He knew this person; but the repetition might have stressed even more that it was indeed he whom the LORD wanted. It would have been an encouragement to Moses that this was indeed the LORD who was meeting him.

Moses²⁵ said, “Here I am.” **3:5** And He said, “Do not come near hear.²⁶ Take your sandals off your feet, for the place upon which you are standing is holy²⁷ ground.”²⁸ **3:6** And He said, “I am the God of your father,²⁹ the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon³⁰ God. **3:7** Then Yahweh said, “I have surely seen³¹ the affliction of my people who are in Egypt; and have heard their cry from before their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows.³² **3:8** And I have come down³³ to

²⁵ “Moses” supplied to the translation.

²⁶ Even though the LORD was drawing near to Moses, Moses could not simply approach Him. There still was a barrier between God and man, and God had to remind him of this with instructions. The removal of the sandals was, and still is in the East, a sign of humility and reverence in the presence of the Holy One. It was a way of excluding the dust and dirt of the world. But it also took away personal comfort and convenience, and brought the person more closely in contact with the earth.

²⁷ The word “holy” (*qodesh*) indicates “set apart, distinct, unique.” What made a mountain or a place holy was the fact that God chose that place to reveal himself, or to dwell among his people. Because God was in this place, the ground was different--holy.

²⁸ The causal clause includes within it a typical relative clause, which is made up of the relative pronoun, then the independent personal pronoun with the participle, and then the preposition with the resumptive pronoun. It would literally be, “which you are standing upon it”; but the relative pronoun and the resumptive pronoun are combined and rendered, “upon which your are standing.”

²⁹ This self-revelation by Yahweh prepares for the revelation of the holy name. While no verb is used here, the pronoun and the predicate nominative is a construction that will be used throughout Scripture to reflect the “I AM” disclosures--“I [am] the God of” But the significant point here is the naming of the patriarchs, for this God is the covenant God, who will now begin to fulfill His promises.

³⁰ The construction uses the *hiphil* infinitive construct with a preposition after the perfect tense (*yare' mehabbit*): “he was afraid from gazing” meaning “he was afraid to gaze.” The preposition *min* is used before infinitives especially after verbs like the one in this text, and functions to tell what he feared (completes the verb; see BDB p. 583, #7b)

³¹ The use of the infinitive absolute with the perfect tense intensifies the statement: I have surely seen--there is no doubt that I have seen and will do something about it.

³² Two new words are introduced now to the report of their suffering: “affliction” and “pain/suffering.” These add to the dimension of the oppression of God’s people.

deliver them³⁴ from 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,³⁵ unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites. **3:9** And now, indeed,³⁶ the cry³⁷ of the Israelites has come up to me, and I have also seen the oppression³⁸ with which the Egyptians oppress them. **3:10** So now, go, and I will send you³⁹ to Pharaoh that you may

³³ The text uses the preterite verb “[and] I came down.” God’s coming down is a frequent anthropomorphism in Genesis and Exodus; it expresses His direct involvement, often in the sense of judgment.

³⁴ The *hiphil* infinitive with the suffix is *l’hatssilo*, “to deliver them.” It expresses the purpose of God’s coming down. The verb itself is used for delivering or rescuing in the general sense, and snatching out of danger for the specific sense.

³⁵ This vibrant and extravagant description of the promised land is a familiar one. Gesenius classifies this as an exegetical genitive because it provides the nearer definition following an adjective in the construct state (GKC, par. 128x). The land is modified by “flowing,” and “flowing” is explained by the genitives “milk and honey.” These two products will be in abundance in the land, and they therefore represent the abundant land. The language is hyperbolic, as if the land is streaming with these products.

³⁶ The particle focuses attention on what is being said.

³⁷ The word is a technical term for the outcry one might make to a judge. God had seen the oppression and so knew that these complaints were accurate, and so he initiated the proceedings against them (Jacobs, p. 59).

³⁸ The word for the oppression is now *lakhats*, which has the idea of pressure with the oppression--squeezing, pressuring--which led to the later use in the Semitic languages for torture. The repetition of the root in the participle form after this noun serves to emphasize the idea in the sentence.

³⁹ The verse has a sequence of volitives. The first form is the imperative, “go” (*l’ka*); this is followed by the cohortative/imperfect form with the *waw*, “and I will send you” or more likely “that I may send you” (*w’eshlakhaka*), which is followed by the imperative with the *waw*, “and bring out” or “that you may bring out” (*w’hotse*). There is a series of actions, but they begin with Moses’ going. When he goes, it will be the LORD who sends him, and if the LORD sends him it will be with the purpose of leading Israel out of Egypt.

These instructions for Moses are based on the preceding revelation made to him. The deliverance of Israel was to be God’s work--hence, “I will send you.” When God commissioned people, often using the verb “to send,” it indicated that they went with His backing, His power and His authority. Moses could not have brought Israel out without this. To name this incident

bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.” **3:11** But Moses said⁴⁰ to God,⁴¹ “Who am I, that I should go⁴² to Pharaoh, or that I should bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” **3:12** And God⁴³ said, “Surely I will be with you;⁴⁴ and this will be the sign⁴⁵ to you that I have sent you: when you bring the people out of Egypt, you

a commissioning, then, means that the authority came from God to do the work (compare John 3:2).

⁴⁰ Literally, “and Moses said”

⁴¹ When he was younger, Moses was confident and impulsive; but now older the greatness of the task makes him unsure. The following narratives, the third section of the chapter and the next chapter, record the four difficulties of Moses, and how the LORD answers them (11-12, 13-22; then 4:1-9; and finally 4:10-17).

⁴² The imperfect tense (*'elek*) carries the modal nuance of obligatory imperfect, i.e., “that I should go.” Moses at this point is overwhelmed with the task of representing God, and with his insufficiency, and so in honest humility questions the choice.

⁴³ “God” supplied

⁴⁴ The particle *ki* has the asseverative use here, “surely, indeed,” which is frequently found with oaths (Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, par. 449).

The imperfect tense (*'ehyeh*) could be rendered as the future tense, “I shall be,” or the present tense “I am” with you. The future makes the better sense in the passage since the subject matter is the future mission. But since it is a stative verb, the form will lend itself nicely to explaining the divine name--He is the One who is eternally present--“I am with you always.”

Here is the introduction of the main motif of God’s commission which will be the explanation of the divine name. It will make little difference who the servant is, or what that servant’s abilities might be, if God is present. It is this presence that overcomes the world. It is not a simple catch-phrase; it represents abundant provisions to the believer (see below on verse 14).

⁴⁵ In view of Moses’ hesitancy, a sign is necessary to prove the promise. A sign is often used for unusual and miraculous events that introduce and signify, authenticate, or illustrate the message. One always expects a direct connection between the sign and the message (for a helpful discussion, see S. Porubcan, “The Word *'OT* in Isaia 7,14,” *CBQ* 22 [1960]:144-149). In this passage the sign is a confirming one, i.e., when Israel worships at the mountain that will be the proof that God delivered them from Egypt. Thus, the purpose of the Exodus will be the proof that it was God. In the meantime, Moses will have to trust in Yahweh.

shall serve⁴⁶ God on this mountain.” **3:13** But Moses said⁴⁷ to God, “If⁴⁸ I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they say to me, ‘What is his name?’⁴⁹—what should I say⁵⁰ to them?” **3:14** So God

⁴⁶ The verb “you shall serve” (*ta‘abdun*) is one of the foremost words for worship in the Torah. Keeping the commandments and serving Yahweh usually sum up the life of the faith, the life of the true worshiper who seeks to obey him. The highest title anyone can have in the Old Testament is “the servant of Yahweh.” The verb here could be rendered interpretively as “worship,” but it is better to keep it to the basic idea of serving because that emphasizes a very important aspect of worship.

This sign is also a promise from God--“you will serve God at this mountain.” It is given to Moses here as a goal, but a goal already achieved because it was a sign from God. But the leading Israel out of Egypt would not be completed until they came to this mountain and served God. God does not give Moses details of what will take place on the road to Sinai; but he does give him the goal, and glimpses of the defeat of Pharaoh. The rest will require Moses and the people to trust in this God who had a plan, and who had the power to carry it out.

⁴⁷ Literally, “and Moses said”

⁴⁸ The particle *hinneh* in this clause introduced the foundation for what comes later--the question. Moses is saying, “Suppose I do all this and they ask this question--what shall I say?”

⁴⁹ There has been a good deal of debate about the name of Yahweh in the Pentateuch, thanks to the higher critical approach to source criticism that tried to argue that the name Yahweh was not known in antiquity. The argument of this whole section nullifies that view, as shall be demonstrated over the course of these chapters. The idea that God’s name was revealed only here raises the question of what He was called earlier. The word “God” is not a name. “El Shadday” is only used a few times in Genesis. But Israel would not have had a nameless deity--especially since we are told from the very beginning that people were making proclamation of the name of Yahweh (Gen 4:26 and 12:8). It is possible that they did not always need a name if they were convinced that only He existed and there was no other God. But probably what Moses was anticipating was the Israelites wanting to be sure that Moses came from their God, and that some sign could prove it. They would have known His name (Yahweh), and they would have known the ways that He manifests Himself. It would do no good for Moses to come with a new name for God, for that would be like introducing them to a new God. That would in no way authenticate his call to them, only confuse; after all, they would not be expecting a new name--they had been praying to their covenant God all along. They would want to be sure that their covenant God actually sent Moses. To satisfy the Israelites Moses would have had to have been familiar with the name Yahweh--as they were--and know that He appeared to individuals. They would also want to know if Yahweh had sent Moses how was this going to work in their deliverance, because they had been crying to Him. As it turned out, the Israelites had less problem with this than Moses anticipated--they

said to Moses, “I AM that I AM.”⁵¹ And he said, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘I AM has sent me to you’.” **3:15** And furthermore, God said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘Yahweh,⁵² the God of your fathers,

were delighted when he came. It is likely that much of this concern was Moses’ own need for assurance that this was indeed the God of the fathers, and that the promised deliverance was now to take place. See the discussions of this passage in the commentaries by Benno Jacobs and Umberto Cassuto.

⁵⁰ The imperfect tense here may be given a deliberative nuance, for Moses is wondering what he should say when the Israelites want proof of the calling.

⁵¹ The verb form used here is *’ehyeh*, the *qal* imperfect, 1csg, of the verb “to be” (*hayah*). It forms an excellent paronomasia with the name. So when God used the verb to express his name, he used this form saying, “I AM.” When his people refer to him as Yahweh, which is the 3msg form of the same verb, it actually means “he is.” Some commentators argue for a future tense translation, “I shall be who I shall be,” because the verb has an active quality about it, and the Israelites lived in the light of the promises for the future. They argue that “I AM” would be of little help to the Israelites in bondage. But a translation of “I will be” does not effectively do much more except restrict it to the future. The idea of the verb would certainly indicate that God is not bound by time, and while he is present (“I AM”) he will always be present, even in the future, and so the verb would embrace that as well. Besides, the prophetic writers often give the significance of the names with the use of timeless pronouns--“I [am] he, there is no one else” (see Isaiah 44:6 and 45:5-7, et al). The Greek translation used a participle to capture the idea; and several times in the Gospels Jesus used the powerful “I am” with this Old Testament significance. The simplest meaning is the English present tense, which embraces the future promises. The point is that Yahweh is sovereignly independent of all creation, and that his presence guarantees the fulfillment of the covenant.

Others argue for a causative *Hiphil* translation of “I will cause to be,” but nowhere in the Bible does this verb appear in *hiphil* or *piel*. For a full discussion there are a number of works available. A good summary of the views can be found in G. H. Park-Taylor, *Yahweh, The Divine Name in the Bible* (Waterloo, Ontario, 1975). See among the many articles: Barry Beitzel, “Exodus 3:14 and the Divine Name: A Case of Biblical Paronomasia,” *TrinJ* 1 (1980):5-20; C. D. Isbell, “The Divine Name *ehyeh* as a Symbol of Presence in Israelite Tradition,” *HAR* 2 (1978):101-118; J. Gerald Janzen, “What’s In a Name? Yahweh in Exodus 3 and the Wider Biblical Context,” *Interpretation* 33 (1979):227-239; Jack R. Lundbom, “God’s Use of the *Idem per idem* to Terminate Debate,” *HTR* 71 (1978):193-201; A. R. Millard, “*Yw* and *Yhw* Names,” *VT* 30 (1980):208-212; and Ronald Youngblood, “A New Occurrence of the Divine Name ‘I AM’,” *JETS* 15 (1972):144-152.

⁵² The paronomasia on the name was first used to give the full meaning of the name. Now the actual name is used for clear identification: “Yahweh . . . has sent me.” This is the name that the patriarchs invoked and proclaimed in the land of Canaan.

the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is my name⁵³ forever, and this is my memorial from generation to generation.’⁵⁴ **3:16** Go and gather⁵⁵ the elders of Israel, and say to them, ‘Yahweh, the God of your fathers, appeared⁵⁶ to me--the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob--saying, I have surely visited⁵⁷ you, and have

⁵³ The words “name” and “memorial” are at the heart of the two parallel clauses that form a poetic pair. The Hebrew word “remembrance” is a poetical synonym for “name”; it conveys the idea that the nature or character of the person is to be remembered and praised (Driver, *Exodus*, p. 24).

⁵⁴ The repetition of “generation” in this expression serves as a periphrasis for the superlative: “to the remotest generation” (GKC, par. 133*l*).

⁵⁵ The form is the perfect tense with the sequential *waw* linking the nuance to the imperative that precedes it. Since the imperative calls for immediate action, this form either carries the same emphasis, or instructs action that immediately follows it.

⁵⁶ The form is the *niphal* perfect of the verb “to see.” As above the translation stresses that He appeared, not that He was seen. This has become the standard interpretation with this verb in reference to God.

⁵⁷ The verb *paqad* has traditionally been rendered “to visit.” This does not communicate the point of the word very well. When the sentence states that God visited someone, it means that He intervened in their lives to change their circumstances or their destiny. When he visited the Amalekites, he destroyed them. When he visited Sarah, he provided the long awaited child. It refers to God’s active involvement in human affairs for blessing or for cursing. Here it would mean that God had begun to act to deliver them from bondage and give them the blessings of the covenant. The form is joined here with the infinitive absolute to underscore the certainty--“I have indeed visited you.” Some translate it “remember”; others say “watch over.” These do not capture the idea of intervention to bless, and often with the idea of vengeance or judgment on the oppressors. If God were to visit what the Egyptians did, it means that he would stop the oppression and that he would also bring retribution for it.

The nuance of the perfect tense could be a perfect of resolve (“I have decided to visit”), or an instantaneous perfect (“I hereby visit”), or a prophetic perfect (“I have visited” = “I will visit”).

The same word was used in the same kind of construction at the end of Genesis (50:24) when Joseph promised, “God will surely visit you” (but there the imperfect tense with the infinitive absolute). Here is another link to the patriarchal narratives. This work of Moses would be interpreted as a fulfillment of Joseph’s prophecy.

visited⁵⁸ that which has been done⁵⁹ to you in Egypt. **3:17** And I promised⁶⁰ that I would 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. **3:18** And the elders⁶¹ will listen⁶² to you; and then you and the elders of Israel shall go to the king of Egypt, and you shall say to him, ‘Yahweh,⁶³ the God of the Hebrews, has met⁶⁴ with us. And now, let us go⁶⁵ three days’ journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice⁶⁶ to Yahweh our God.’ **3:19** But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go,⁶⁷ no, not

⁵⁸ The verb is supplied here for ease in reading the last clause. It is implied from the preceding clause. To say that God has visited the oppression means that God has decided to judge the oppressing people as he blesses Israel.

⁵⁹ The second object for the verb is this passive participle *he‘ashuy*; it affirms that God will now make right the suffering they had to endure. .

⁶⁰ Literally, “and I said”

⁶¹ “the elders” supplied

⁶² This is the construction of the verb (*shama‘*) followed by *l’qoleka*, an idiomatic formation; it means to “listen to the voice,” which in turn means “to respond.”

⁶³ “the God of the fathers” is in apposition to the name Yahweh. The text is written simply with the holy name. If it had been a new name, Moses’ words would not have made sense.

⁶⁴ The verb *nigrah* means “lighted upon us”, that is, in a sudden or unexpected way. It can be rendered happened or chanced (Driver, *Exodus*, p. 25).

⁶⁵ The form used here is the cohortative of *halak*. It could be a resolve, but more likely before Pharaoh is a request. Was this a deceptive request if they were not planning on coming back? Since no one knows what the intent was, that question is not likely to be resolved. Rather, the question might have been intended to test the waters, so to speak—How did Pharaoh feel about the Israelites? Would he let them go and worship their God as they saw fit?

⁶⁶ Here we have a cohortative with a *waw* following a cohortative; the second one in the text expresses purpose of result: “let us go . . . in order that we may”.

⁶⁷ After verbs of perception, as with “I know” here, the object may be a noun clause introduced with the particle (*ki*)--“I know that . . .” Gesenius observes that the object clause may not always be complete, but sometimes may have a kind of accusative and an infinitive construction (especially after *natan*): “he will not permit you to go” (see GKC, par. 157b, N. 1).

by a mighty hand.⁶⁸ **3:20** So I will stretch out my hand⁶⁹ and strike Egypt with all my wonders⁷⁰ which I will do in the midst of them; and after that he will let you go.

3:21 And I will give this people favor in the eyes of⁷¹ the Egyptians, and it will be that when⁷² you go out, you will not go out empty.⁷³ **3:22** But every⁷⁴ woman

⁶⁸ The expression “and not with a mighty hand” ([*w^elo’ b^eyad hazaqa*]) is unclear. Some have taken it to refer to God’s mighty hand, meaning that the king would not let them go unless a mighty hand compels them (NIV). The expression “mighty hand” is used of God’s rescuing Israel elsewhere (6:1, 13:9, 32:11). This idea is a rather general interpretation of the words; it owes more to the LXX which has “except by a mighty hand.” Another difficulty is that the next verse says that God will stretch out his hand and do his wonders. In view of these difficulties with the Hebrew text, others have suggested that it would mean “strong [threats]” from the Israelites (as in 4:24ff. and 5:3) (Jacobs, p. 81). This does not seem as convincing as the first view. It may be that textual criticism could uncover the original which might have had *‘im lo*. At any rate, the point is that it will not be easy to force Pharaoh to yield to the demand to let Israel go.

⁶⁹ The outstretched arm is a bold anthropomorphism. It describes the power of God. The Egyptians will later admit that the plagues were by the hand of God.

⁷⁰The word *nip^le’otay* does not specify what the intervention will be. As the text will unfold it will be clear that the plagues are intended. Signs and portents could refer to things people might do; but “wonders” only God could do. The root word refers to that which is surpassing, amazing, even “incredible” (if we may use that word in this sense). See Isa. 9:6; Gen. 18:15; Psalms 139:6.

⁷¹ This idiom usually means that the people will be treated well by the observers. It is unlikely that it means here that the Egyptians will like the Hebrews; rather, it means that the Egyptians will give things to the Hebrews free--gratis (see 12:35ff). Not only will God do mighty works to make the king yield, he will work in the minds of the people and they will be favorably disposed to give Israel wealth..

⁷² The temporal indicator (here future) with the particle *ki* (*w^ehaya ki*) introduces a temporal clause.

⁷³ It is clear that God intended the Israelites to spoil the Egyptians, as they might spoil a defeated enemy in war. They will not go out “empty.” But they will “plunder” Egypt. This verb, *w^enitssaltem*, from *natsal*, usually means “rescue, deliver,” as if being lucked out of danger. But in this stem it carries the idea of plunder. So when the text says that they will ask (*w^esha’ala*) their neighbors for things, it implies that they will be making many demands, and the Egyptians will respond as a defeated nation before their victors. The booty that Israel takes it is to be regarded as back wages or compensation for the oppression.\.

will ask of her neighbor, and of her that happens to be staying⁷⁵ in her house, gold vessels and silver vessels,⁷⁶ and raiment. And you shall put them on your sons and on your daughters--and you shall plunder Egypt.⁷⁷

Exegetical Analysis

Summary

Israel cried out for the LORD's help because of their bondage, the LORD commissioned Moses to deliver the people, answering his objections by identifying himself as the sovereign covenant God of Israel and assuring him of a powerful deliverance in spite of opposition.

Outline

- I. In response to the groaning of his covenant people, the LORD had compassion and resolved to fulfill the promises (2:23-25).
- II. God appeared to Moses in a burning bush and revealed his plan to deliver his people (3:1-10).
 - A. The LORD appeared to Moses in a burning bush and revealed his plan to deliver his people (3:1-8).
 - B. The LORD commissioned Moses to be the deliverer of the people from bondage (3:9, 10).
- III. In response to Moses' initial hesitancy and uncertainty, the LORD identified himself as the sovereign covenant God who would deliver the people with a

⁷⁴ Literally, "a woman"

⁷⁵ Literally, "of her that sojourns"

⁷⁶ Literally: "vessels of gold and vessels of silver"; these both would be genitives of material, telling what the vessels are made of.

⁷⁷ See further Benno Jacob, "The Gifts of the Egyptians, a Critical Commentary." *Journal of Reformed Judaism* 27 (1980):59-69; and T. C. Vriezen, "A Reinterpretation of Exodus 3:21-22 and Related Texts," *Ex Oriente Lux* 23 (1975):389-401.

great victory (3:11-22).

- A. He assured Moses that his powerful presence outweighed Moses' inadequacy (11, 12).
- B. He provided Moses with the verification of his identity as the covenant God of Israel (13-18).
- C. He assured Moses that he would powerfully deliver the people from Egypt in such a way that they would plunder the Egyptians (19-22).

Additional Resources

Barry J. **Beitzel**, "Exodus 3:14 and the Divine Name: A case of Biblical Paronomasia," *Trinity Journal* 1 (1980):5-20; B F. **Holmgren**, "Before the Temple, the Thornbush: An Exposition of Ex. 2:11–3:12," *The Reformed Journal* 33 (1983):9-11; C. D. **Isbell**, "The Divine Name *ehyeh* as a Symbol of Presence in Israelite Tradition," *HAR* 2 (1978):10-18; Gerald J. **Janzen**, "What's in a Name? 'Yahweh' in Exodus 3 and the Wider Biblical Context," *Interpretation* 33 (1979):277-39; Dennis J. **McCarthy**, "Exodus 3:14: History, Philology, and Theology," *CBQ* 40 (1978):311-22; David **Skinner**, "Some Major Themes of Exodus," *Mid-America Theological Journal* 1 (1977):31-42; Ronald J. **Youngblood**, "A New Occurrence of the Divine Name 'I AM'," *JETS* 15 (1972):144-52;

EXPOSITORY DEVELOPMENT

The present section of the book is popularly called the "call of Moses." In a way that is true, but it is actually the divine preparation of the servant of God, a servant who already knew what his destiny was. In the last section Moses became aware of what needed to be done; in this section he is shown how it will be accomplished. If the term "call" is taken to include all this, then it is appropriate.

There are few chapters of the Bible so fundamental to biblical theology as this one is. The famous disclosure, "I AM THAT I AM," so simple in its grammatical structure, has been debated for centuries. What is so clear in this passage is that this theological revelation is at the heart of a very practical situation. Moses is concerned enough over the task to ask, "Who am I that I should go?" No answer is given to that directly. It is not who Moses is that counts. Rather,

the LORD majestically states “I AM.” Thus, the enigmatic little statement was a primary source of encouragement for Moses in his task.

So I would suggest approaching this passage as one which guarantees divine power for the mission. There are many “I will be with you” messages in the Bible, especially with regard to military situations. Perhaps the most famous is the “Immanuel” passage of Isaiah. The same theme can be traced through the promise of Jesus to be with us to Paul’s “If God be for us, who can be against us?” What is significant about all these motifs throughout the Bible is the nature of the divine presence. When that is correctly understood, the servant of God may begin to build his confidence for the task.

There are several ways that this section may be divided. I have taken 2:23-25 as a separate section describing the LORD's response to Israel in their affliction. The revelation to Moses at the burning bush in 3:1-10 makes a nice section by itself. Finally, the record of Moses’ objections and God’s revelation should provide a third section.

*I. God responds with compassion
to his people who cry out to him in distress (2:23-25).*

or we could word the point more briefly:

I. God responds to the cry of his people (2:23-25).

So, first, there is the report of the LORD’s response to Israel’s cry. The nature of God is clearly displayed in this portion as a God who is moved to compassion for his people when they cry out to him for help. On the human side, Israel groaned (*‘anah, na’aq*) in their bondage and cried out (*za’aq, shiwwa’*) to the LORD. On the divine side, the LORD heard (*shama’*) their groaning, remembered (*zakar*) the covenant, looked (*ra’ah*) on Israel, and knew (*yada’*) them. These anthropomorphic expressions are intended to convey the faithfulness of the LORD for his people in bondage. He had never forgotten them. But the terms describe the very beginnings of the LORD’s rising up to champion his people's cause. For the text to say that he knew them was tantamount to saying that he was about to deliver them, as the subsequent revelation will show.

The exposition will probably have to deal with such anthropomorphisms (if not here elsewhere). Such are expressions for our benefit, so that we might understand more about God's relationship with us. They are figures of speech. Be careful how you say this, though. It does not mean that God does not have personality (feeling, intellect, sensibilities). Rather, it means that there is no other way that we can even begin to grasp the nature of God and his dealings with us.

II. God supernaturally calls some to lead his people (3:1-10)

or, in a simpler way:

II. God comes to deliver his people (3:1-10).

In the second part there is the commissioning of Moses for the deliverance of the people from bondage (3:1-10). This part has two sections basically, the appearance in the burning bush and the instructions. The manifestation at the bush itself is explained by the LORD before the instructions are given.

Apart from the word studies in the section, the exposition will have to deal with the interpretation of the burning bush. Study fire as a motif in the manifestation of the LORD. In Exodus, it accompanies the appearance here and will be the major manifestation at Sinai (Exod. 19). The fact that the sign God gives to Moses is the Israelites' coming to worship at Sinai provides further information that must be included. At the first appearance, and at the culminating appearance, fire is used. The later experience is proof of the first, and so must harmonize (note there also that the response is fear and worship). Fire is a manifestation of the LORD also in the wanderings (pillar of fire leading them). The Bible suggests strongly that the point of the fire is that the LORD is a consuming fire, i.e., he judges, purifies, etc. In this passage it is hard to know whether the bush represents Israel or not (in the fire of persecution but not consumed). I probably would not make much out of that. It may be enough to note that the nature of the LORD is a holy, purifying God, a consuming fire, before whom none can stand (cf. Rev. 1).

The importance of the one appearing to Moses is stressed by the warnings when his curiosity leads him to investigate. I would concentrate on these: "Do not draw near," "remove your shoe," the place is "holy" (*qadosh*). The vision of the

LORD, even if in a manifestation, demands reverence for the awesome holiness he brings.

These warnings are followed by the self-disclosure of the LORD: I am the God of This will be the theme of the discourse of the LORD throughout this and the subsequent sections. Once again the nature of this covenant God (as this passage stresses) is clearly displayed: “I have seen,” “I have heard,” “I know” (supporting the MT of 2:25), and “I have come down to deliver.” If one were to ask what I AM signifies, these verses provide a preliminary answer: He is! He is the one who sees, thinks, hears, knows, remembers, and intervenes to deliver (*natsal* must be studied).

All that the humans bring to this deliverance, that is, their share in the deliverance, is a cry for help. It is their affliction, their cry of distress, their sorrows, that the LORD will resolve. One instinctively knows that the human dilemma (in Exodus and always) is hopeless apart from divine intervention. The existence of a compassionate, covenant God is the hope that we share with the ancient Israelites.

The commissioning takes place in 3:9,10. The instructions are based on the preceding revelation: “And now, because (*hinneh*) the cry. . . .” The instructions call for Moses to go under God’s commission: “Go and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring out” It was not up to Moses to do it. He could not have done it unless God had sent (*shalakh*) him. Or, as one in another place said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him” (John 3:2). The naming of this a commission means, then, that the authority came from God, to do the work of God (delivering God’s people).

An interesting construction here is “Go, and I will send you.” The word order seems to be the reverse of what we might say: I will send you, so go. The verb “send” is used in such passages to express the divine authentication of the commission. Going was the act of faith; sending was the authority that he was given.

III. God prepares his servant with the promise of his presence (3:11-22).

or, in a shorter expression:

III. God guarantees the deliverance of his people (3:11-22).

The third section records how the LORD convinced Moses of his presence, and what that presence meant (3:11-22). This section is a little different than chapter four; here the discourse is primarily God's self-revelation explained, but there the discourse is the LORD's solutions for Moses' attempt to escape the responsibility.

This section begins with Moses' immediate response (not an attempt to get out of it so much as a feeling of being overwhelmed): "Who am I that I should go . . . and that I should deliver . . . ?" The point was that who he was made no difference. What mattered was who the LORD was. That is the subject addressed now.

God's immediate answer introduces the motif on the name: *'ehyeh*, "I shall be with you" (or perhaps better, "I am with you," because he is eternally present). It makes no difference who the servant is if God is with him or her. The promise of the divine presence overcomes the world. It is not a magical catch-phrase; rather, it signifies tremendous truths to the believer.

But a sign is necessary to prove this statement. The word "sign" (*'ot*) often is used for unusual and miraculous events that introduce and signify, authenticate, or illustrate the message. One always expects a direct connection between the sign and the message (for a helpful discussion of the term in general, see S. Porubcan, "The Word *'OT* in Isaiah 7,14," *CBQ* 22 [1960]:144-149). In this passage the sign is a confirming one, i.e., when Israel worships at this mountain that is proof of the message. (A similar point is made concerning authentic prophets in Deut. 18:22). Thus, the purpose of the Exodus will be the proof that it was of God.

Moses, at this point still apparently willing to go, wishes to know how to identify the God of the fathers to the people. The question prompts one of the most enigmatic statements of the Bible—*'ehyeh 'asher 'ehyeh*. The many attempts to explain the divine name have been summarized nicely by G. H. Park-Taylor, *Yahweh: The Divine Name in the Bible* (Waterloo, Ontario: 1975).

The expression is a popular etymology on the ancient name Yahweh. That

the name is ancient can be seen from two points. First, the *waw* in the name is an archaic spelling of the verb *hayah* (<*hawah*) as comparative lexicography shows. Second, the first syllable was probably vocalized with an “a,” attesting the spelling of the verb prior to the shift of “a” to “i” in the closed syllable (as with *yaqtulu* > *yiqtol*). The ancient name is then the third masculine singular of the *qal* imperfect (or remotely possible, jussive) of the verb “to be.” The record of the Bible has already informed the reader that men began to call upon this name in the lifetime of Adam and his sons.

The fact that a first common singular verb is used to explain this name shows that the etymology is popular, that is, connected loosely with the verbal root to expound the significance of the name. “I AM” is the significance God reveals to his people.

I personally do not think that there is any substantial evidence for taking the name as “I shall be.” Nowhere does the biblical text explain it that way (see, e.g., Isaiah 44:6 and 45:5-7 within that section of Isaiah for his exposition of the name). The Old Greek did not understand it that way, for it translates the expression as *eimi ho on*, and then “*ho on* has sent me.” Quickly, then, this is changed to *kurios* when he says “that is my name” (v. 15). Moreover, there are about three passages in the New Testament where Jesus uses the Greek verb *eimi* and they accused him of blasphemy (e.g., John 8:58, which is not a relational use of the verb).

The point that is being made seems to be that the nature (i.e., Hebrew idea of “name”; in fact, study the use of *shem*). “What is his name?” means the nature of the God who appeared to Moses: it signifies sovereign independence of a;; creation. The first verb “I AM” would have conveyed that the LORD exists (is actually alive) and that he is with his people (stressing the relationships that can be added to such a verb). But the relative clause modifying the first verb shows that he exists independently. He is absolute, sovereign, independent, etc. So the significance of this popular etymology is the means of convincing Moses and the people of the sufficiency of his nature. We could say that among other things he is stressing that 1) he is present with them (“I am with you” was already introduced), 2) that he exists independently (so that no power on earth can limit him), 3) that he has absolute power (the name was played upon as the verb of creation, *yehi*, “let there be,” and now let there be plagues, judgments, signs, deliverance), and 4) that he is the covenant God (“I am the God of . . .”). Do not miss the impact of this revelation for the task that lies before Moses (and us).

I would also stress in these words of the LORD *paqod paqadti*, “I have surely visited” (a prophetic perfect) in v 16. This is the long-awaited fulfillment of the prophecy of Joseph: “God will surely visit you” (Gen. 50:24). This is the visitation from on high, God's coming to deliver his people. Israel would recognize it and what it meant, both here in Egypt and later in Jerusalem (cf. Luke 1:68). So too the New Testament fell silent with the promise of the visitation from on high that would judge the world and deliver the people of God.

The LORD has planned that Pharaoh refuse so that wonders could be worked in the world. “Wonderful” (*pale'*) is a particularly fruitful word to study, for it most frequently refers to that which is surpassing, amazing, (dare we say) incredible—what God does. His name is “Wonderful” (Isa. 9:6 in its theological fulfillment). Through these wonders the LORD will deliver (*natsal*) his people, and they will plunder (*natsal*) Egypt. Thus, when God stretches out (*shalakh*) his hand to strike (*nakah*) Egypt, everyone will know that God has sent (*shalakh*) Moses, and then Pharaoh will let the people go (*shillakh*). All the elements stress that it will be God's marvelous work.

CONCLUSION

It would seem to me that in this passage in which the LORD is sending his servant to lead his people and confront the oppression from the wicked the main point of the theological material is commendation. The LORD promises to deliver his people, and this promise is supported by the revelation of the LORD as the compassionate, sovereign creator who is Israel's covenant God. The promise of such a presence will confirm the authority of the servant and ensure the completion of the redemption. The basic theme of the value of the divine presence for the LORD's chosen servants as they lead the people of God is consistently stressed throughout the Bible. It is true that God is with every believer, but the truth is especially beneficial for those who lead. Moses, Gideon, Samuel, the disciples, and a host of others, knew full well that if God went not with them they dare not go; but if God was for them, who could be against them? This has to be at the center of the exposition; so we could state the point of the passage in a number of ways to do this, such as:

When the LORD calls someone to lead his people out of bondage to the world to serve the living God, he promises that his sovereign presence will enable him to realize the fulfillment of the promises of God.

Or, if we want to be more concise:

***God promises his presence to his messenger
to enable him to deliver his people from bondage to the world.***

The situation is that the people were in bondage to Egypt; today people are in
in
bondage to the world system, its power and influence. But if they cry to the LORD for deliverance, he will respond with compassion and resolve.

The subject matter is the call of Moses. The primary application will then be to the way God calls people to serve as leaders. A secondary application might be that God calls all Christians to serve. But that is more difficult since the call here is for Moses to lead the people of God (they are not called to lead themselves). The call is through the revelation of God (then a supernatural phenomenon, the burning bush, now through the supernatural provision of spiritual gifts, special blessing in service, and perhaps miraculous events). The call is direct from God, by his word, then spoken, now the written word that the Spirit uses to speak to people. And the promise of the success is the divine presence, the I AM. And this can be linked to Christ in the New Testament for he is the I AM who calls people today.

So if there are people in the Church who sense the need, and who know the will of God (what God wants done), they need to examine their spiritual gifts, consider how God is working in and through them supernaturally, and prayerfully read passages of divine revelations like this one with calls and commissions in order to determine if God is calling.

And the related application would be for people—seminarians especially, to realize that the success of God’s program does not depend on their abilities or performances. It will be God’s work from start to finish. So people who answer the call must live on that spiritual level that Moses followed, always hearing from God and following his leading. There is an old saying that seems appropriate here: The battle is not ours to win; but we are not free to desist from the battle.

