

Exodus 3:1-6

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When Moses was shepherding Jethro's flock around Mount Horeb, God appears to him in the form of a bush that is burning but is not consumed.

Chapter 3 begins with *Now*, which introduces a new section of the book. In this section (chapters 3 and 4), God confronts Moses and appoints him to be the deliverer of Israel.

By the time the chapter starts, *Moses was pasturing the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian* and had been doing so for about 40 years ([Acts 7:30](#)). This would make Moses about 80 years old by this time. On this occasion, he *led the flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb*. It seems that Moses led the flock farther from his base camp than normal. Perhaps he thought that grazing was better there, or it could be that the climate was more agreeable at that time of year.

"Horeb" ("desolate place") is another name for Mount Sinai. Scholars disagree as to its exact location. The traditional location is on the southern side of the Sinai Peninsula, but others place it somewhere on the east side of the Gulf of Aqaba in what is now northwest Saudi Arabia ([Galatians 4:25](#)). To call Horeb *the mountain of God* is with an eye to the future, for that is what it will be in the not-to-distant future.

It was here, at Horeb, that *The angel of the Lord appeared to him*. The phrase "angel of the Lord" occurs several times in Genesis (16:7,9,10,11, 21:17, 22:11, 15, 24:7, 40, 31:11, 48:16). The word "angel" means "messenger", and it often refers to a spiritual being that serves God. But it also can refer to the LORD, meaning that this could be interpreted to mean that the LORD Himself, the second person of the Trinity in His pre-incarnate state, appeared to Moses. This is called a "theophany", and there are other instances of theophany in the Old Testament (for example, [Joshua 5:13](#)).

The LORD appears to Moses *in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush*. The word "in" is probably better translated "as", yielding "as a blazing fire." The LORD's presence appears as fire in several places in Exodus – here and a pillar of fire (the LORD is Israel's guide, [Exodus 13:21](#)).

When *he looked* at the burning bush, he noticed something strange, that *behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed*. In a dry climate such as the wilderness, burning vegetation is not unusual. But a bush that is burning and not turned to ashes is certainly weird. It violates the rules of nature. Notice also that it is the bush that is burning – later, the whole mountain will appear to be burning because of the LORD's presence in fire ([Exodus 19:18](#)).

In verse 3, in an effort to satisfy his curiosity, *Moses said, "I must turn aside now and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up."* This amazing sight was too much for Moses to ignore, so *When the Lord saw that he turned aside to look*, He confronted him. Notice that the name for the "Lord" (Yahweh) is used here and then it changes to *God* (Elohim) in the rest of the verse.

The conversation begins when *God called to him from the midst of the burning bush and said, "Moses, Moses!"* This repetition is designed to get Moses' undivided attention and to emphasize the significance of this moment. Moses is not the first person to which this has happened. The LORD did the same to Abraham ([Genesis 22:11](#) – to prevent him from sacrificing his son Isaac) and Jacob ([Genesis 46:2](#) – to command him to go to Egypt). Here, using the same formula, the LORD commanded Moses to go down to Egypt. The doubling of the name also appears in the New Testament in [Luke 10:41](#) ("Martha, Martha"), [Luke 22:31](#) ("Simon, Simon"), and [Acts 9:4](#) ("Saul, Saul").

Moses even responded to the LORD in a way identical to Abraham ([Genesis 22:11](#)) and Jacob ([Genesis 46:2](#)) when *he said, "Here I am."*

Moses was approaching the burning bush, where the presence of God resided, and *God said, "Do not come near here."* It is obvious that he could not draw near to God in his present condition. There was something Moses had to do – *remove your sandals from your feet*. In the Ancient Near East, taking off one's shoes was a sign of humility and reverence. It was also symbolic of removing the unclean things of the world. Being a shepherd, Moses' shoes were probably filthy, and Moses had to learn that such uncleanness was unacceptable in the very presence of the holy God.

The LORD also gave him the reason for removing his shoes – *the place on which you are standing is holy ground.* The word "holy" speaks of that which is "set apart" or "special." What made this piece of land special is God's presence. It will be even more special when the people of Israel come here after their liberation from Egypt and enter into a covenant relationship with

their Deliverer. This becomes a pattern throughout the rest of the Bible – one must be clean before coming into the presence of the holy God.

In verse 6, the LORD continues his conversation with Moses. Here, He tells Moses that *“I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.”* Notice the repetition of the word “God” with each patriarch. This is to reinforce the idea that the God currently talking to Moses is the God who made a covenant with them, and now he will continue His covenant activities with Moses.

Notice also the use of “I am.” This is a prelude to what God says in verse 14 about His name. In this regard, it is interesting that Jesus uses this passage as evidence of resurrection. [Mark 12:24-27](#) records His debate with the Sadducees (who did not believe in the resurrection of the dead). Jesus quotes [Exodus 3:6](#) and points out the use of the present tense “I am” to prove that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are living. Otherwise, this verse should have used the past tense “I was.”

After hearing the LORD’s words in verse 6, Moses’ curiosity turned to fear when he realized that he was in God’s presence. So *Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.*

Biblical Text:

¹Now Moses was pasturing the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ²The angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed. ³So Moses said, “I must turn aside now and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up.” ⁴When the Lord saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.” ⁵Then He said, “Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” ⁶He said also, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.