

Exodus Chapter 3

1. וּמֹשֶׁה הָיָה רֹעֵה אֶת־צֹאן יִתְרוֹ חֹתֶנּוּ כִּי־בָּן מִדְיָן וַיִּגְהַג אֶת־הַצֹּאן אַחַר הַמִּדְבָּר וַיָּבֵא אֶל־הַר הָאֱלֹהִים
חֹרֵב:

JPS	Fox	Friedman	Alter
Now Moses, tending the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian, drove the flock into the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.	Now Moshe was shepherding the flock of Yitro his father-in-law, priest of Midyan. He led the flock behind the wilderness, and came to the mountain of God, to Horev.	And Moses had been shepherding the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, priest of Midian. And he drove the flock at the far side of the wilderness, and he came to the Mountain of God, to Horeb.	And Moses was herding the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, priest of Midian, and he drove the flock into the wilderness and came to the mountain of God, to Horeb.

Verse 1

Fox

Now Moshe was shepherding: The Hebrew syntax indicates the beginning of an entirely new story

shepherding: A symbol of great power in the ancient Near East; witness the enduring image of King David, sprung from shepherding roots, and of course that of Jesus.

Yitro: Trad. English “Jethro.” It is not clear why other names (Re’uel, Hovav) are also associated with him. The name, if Semitic, means “excellence.”

behind: Others, “to the west side of,” “to the far side of,” or simply “into,” although the word seems to convey a certain mystery. Fairy tales often portray the hero’s going deep into a forest and the like.

mountain of God: Sinai is so designated only several times subsequently in the Pentateuch, suggesting perhaps biblical religion’s reluctance to make of it a shrine of permanence.

Horev: Another name for Sinai, principally used in Deuteronomy (but also twice more in Exodus, 17:6 and 33:6). A related Hebrew root, *harev*, means “dry.”

Friedman

to the Mountain of God, to Horeb: Horeb and Sinai are understood to be two names of the same place.

Alter

Jethro. In the previous episode he was Reuel. Modern critics generally attribute the difference in names to different literary sources.

into the wilderness. The Hebrew preposition 'ahar is odd. Because it usually means "behind," the King James Version bizarrely translated this phrase as "the back side of the desert." The claim that here it means "to the west" is rather strained. Perhaps it may suggest something like "deep into."

Horeb. This appears to be a synonym for Sinai-it is the name used in the E document, whereas Sinai is J" term. The name is transparently derived from a root signifying dryness and so means something like "Parched Mountain'. Abraham ibn Ezra acutely notes that this parched desert location is a full three days' journey (verse 18) from the Nile, the great source of water. That contrast points to a spatial-thematic antithesis: Moses, the man associated with water from infancy on, now encounters the God of all creation in the dry desert, and in flame.

2. וַיֵּרָא מֵלֶאֱךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי בְּלֶבֶת-אֵשׁ מִתּוֹךְ הַסֵּנֶה וַיֵּרָא וְהִנֵּה הַסֵּנֶה בֵּיעַר בְּאֵשׁ וְהַסֵּנֶה אֵינּוֹן אֲכָל:

JPS	Fox	Friedman	Alter
An angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire out of a bush. He gazed, and there was a bush all aflame, yet the bush was not consumed.	And Yhwh’s messenger was seen by him as the flame of a fire out of the midst of a bush. He saw: now here, the bush is burning with fire, but the bush is not consumed!	And an angel of YHWH appeared to him in a fire's flame from inside a bush. And he looked, and here: the bush was burning in the fire, and the bush was not consumed!	And the LORD’s messenger appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of the bush, and he saw, and look, the bush was burning with fire and the bush was not consumed.

Fox

Yhwh’s messenger: Traditionally “angel,” but the English word stems from the Greek *angelos*, which means “messenger.” In Genesis, God appears in somewhat human guise (cf. Chap. 18), and “messenger” indicates an unspecified manifestation of God, open to wide interpretation.

in the flame: Others, “as a flame.” **bush:** Jewish tradition identifies it as a thornbush, but the precise plant remains unknown. The bush, called *s’neh* in Hebrew, perhaps has the added function here of providing assonance with Sinai.

the bush is burning ... the bush is not consumed: The use of tense (plus the opening “here”) conveys the immediacy of the vision.

not consumed: The symbolism of the imperishable bush is left open for the reader; commentators suggest variously Israel and God himself.

Friedman

the bush was not consumed: Insofar as this phenomenon does not conform to the natural course of cause and effect, YHWH is understood, once again, not as a force in nature but as outside nature, manipulating it. Unlike the pagan gods, YHWH causes being. The name YHWH, which is revealed to Moses in this first meeting, means "He causes to be." That is, it is a third-person masculine singular causative form of the verb "to be." This fits with the biblical picture of the deity as the quintessential creator God, who creates light *ex nihilo* — and thus can cause burning without consumption — and who is not *in* the natural realm of existence, but rather transcends it.

Alter

the LORD’s messenger. In what follows, it is God Himself reported as speaking to Moses from the burning bush. Either God first assigns a divine emissary to initiate the pyrotechnic display that will get Moses’s attention, or the piety of early scribal tradition introduced an intermediary into the original text in order to avoid the uncomfortable image of the LORDS’ revealing Himself in a lowly bush.

the bush. The Hebrew *seneh*, a relatively rare word, intimates Horebs’ other name, Sinai, by way of a pun. Some have conjectured that the name Sinai is actually derived from *Seneh*. In the ancient Near East, deities were often associated with sacred trees, but not with bushes. Rashi construes this epiphany in the humble bush as an expression of God’s identification with the abasement of Israel enslaved.

and the bush was not consumed. The epiphanies to the patriarchs did not involve supernatural events, but Moses is destined to lead Israel out of slavery through great signs and wonders. If one recalls the later image in Jeremiah of God’s word as fire in the bones of the prophet (chapter 20), one might see in the divine fire that does not consume the bush a reassuring portent for Moses of the daunting prophetic role to which he is called, for the bush invested with divinity is not destroyed. Rashi makes a similar inference here. In much of the Exodus story, one senses strong symbolic implications in the concrete images, but the symbolism is never explicit.

3. וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶסְתַּר-נָא וְאָרְאָה אֶת-הַמַּרְאֵה הַגָּדֹל הַזֶּה מִדֹּעַ לֹא-יִבְעַר הַסֵּנֶה:

JPS	Fox	Friedman	Alter
Moses said, “I must turn aside to look at this marvelous sight; why doesn’t the bush burn up?”	Moshe said: Now let me turn aside that I may see this great	And Moses said, "Let me turn and see this great sight. Why doesn't the bush burn?"	And Moses thought, "Let me, pray, turn aside that I may see

	sight — for-what-reason does the bush not burn up?		this great sight, why the bush does not burn up."
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Fox
let me turn aside: Despite Moshe's apparent retirement from intervening on behalf of his brothers in Egypt, his reaction here seems active, not passive. He does not shirk from seeking out the strange sight.

Alter
Let me... turn aside that I may see. Moses is initially drawn by curiosity about the anomalous sight, scarcely imagining what he is getting into.

4. וַיֵּרָא יְהוָה כִּי סָר לְרֵאוֹתַי וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָי אֱלֹהִים מִתּוֹךְ הַסֵּנֶה וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר הֲנִנִּי:

JPS	Fox	Friedman	Alter
When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to look, God called to him out of the bush: "Moses! Moses!" He answered, "Here I am."	YHWH saw that he turned aside to see, so God called to him out of the midst of the bush; he said: Moshe! Moshe! He said: Here I am.	And YHWH saw that he turned to see. And God called to him from inside the bush, and He said, "Moses, Moses." And he said, "I'm here."	And the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, and God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am."

Fox
Moshe! Moshe!: The name is repeated for emphasis, as in Gen. 22:11
Here I am: The classic response of biblical heroes; see Gen. 22:1, 11; I Sam. 3:4.

Friedman
God called to him: The text does not say why Moses is selected to bring Israel out of Egypt. As we observed in Genesis, it rarely does state the reasons that particular persons are chosen. We only know that, once Moses is chosen and commissioned, virtually the entire narrative is developed through him.

5. וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהֵימֶךָ רַב הַלֵּם שְׁלִיחֶיךָ מֵעַל רַגְלֶיךָ כִּי הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אָתָּה עוֹמֵד עָלָיו אֲדַמֶּת־קֹדֶשׁ הוּא:

JPS	Fox	Friedman	Alter
And He said, "Do not come closer. Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you stand is holy ground.	He said: Do not come near to here; put off your sandal from your foot, for the place on which you stand — it is holy ground!	And He said, "Don't come close here. Take off your shoes from your feet, because the place on which you're standing: it's holy ground."	And He said, "Come no closer here. Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place you are standing on is holy ground."

Fox

put off your sandal from your foot: A common form of respect in the ancient East, still practiced by Muslims in worship.

6. וַיֹּאמֶר אֱנֹכִי אֱלֹהֵי אָבִיךָ אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם אֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק וְאֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב וַיִּסְתֵּר מֹשֶׁה פָּנָיו כִּי יָרָא מִהַבֵּית אֱלֹהֵימֶיךָ:

JPS	Fox	Friedman	Alter
I am," He said, "the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.	And he said: I am the God of your father, the God of Avraham, the God of Yitzhak, and the God of Yaakov. Moshe concealed his face, for he was afraid to gaze upon God.	And He said, "I'm your father's God, Abraham's God, Isaac's God, and Jacob's God." And Moses hid his face, because he was afraid of looking at God.	And He said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God.

Fox

the God of your father: Harkening back to the personal and family relationships with God in Genesis (see, for instance, Gen. 26:24, 31:42, 32:10).

Avraham ... : The text stresses the Patriarchs, reminding both Moshe and the reader of the promises made to them in Genesis.

Friedman

I'm your father's God: God's acquaintance with Moses is personal from the start. God does not introduce Himself as "I am the creator of the universe" or "I am the God of Israel," but: "I'm your *father's* God."

Alter

Moses hid his face. The gesture reflects the reiterated belief of biblical figures that man cannot look on God's face and live. What should be noted is how God's manifestation has shifted from Genesis. God spoke to Abraham face to face in implicitly human form. Here He speaks from fire, and even that Moses is afraid to look on.

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה רְאֵה רָאִיתִי אֶת-עֲנֵי עַמִּי אֲשֶׁר בְּמִצְרַיִם וְאֶת-צַעֲקוֹתָם שָׁמַעְתִּי מִפְּנֵי נִגְשָׁיו כִּי יָדַעְתִּי
אֶת-מִכְאָבָיו:

JPS	Fox	Friedman	Alter
And the LORD continued, "I have marked well the plight of My people in Egypt and have heeded their outcry because of their taskmasters; yes, I am mindful of their sufferings.	Now YHWH said: I have seen, yes, seen the affliction of my people that is in Egypt, their cry I have heard in the face of their slave-drivers; indeed, I have known their sufferings!	And YHWH said, "I've <i>seen</i> the degradation of my people who are in Egypt, and I've heard their wail on account of their taskmasters, because I know their pains.	And the LORD said, "I indeed have seen the abuse of My people that is in Egypt, and its outcry because of its taskmasters. I have heard, for I know its pain.

Fox

the affliction of my people: Heb. 'oni 'ammi.

my people: This fateful designation signals the beginning of the liberation process. The Golden Calf story (Chaps. 32ff.) provides a tragic variation on this phrase.

I have seen ... heard ... known: Echoing the narrative above, 2:24–25.

Alter

Il... have seen. I have heard, for I know its pain. The three verbs in this sequence pick up three of the four highlighted verbs used at the end of the previous chapter. As Rashi notes, the objectless "knew" of 2:25 here is given its object — pain.

8. וְאֵרַד לְהַצִּילוֹ מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם וְלְהַעֲלֹתוֹ מִן־הָאָרֶץ הַהִוא אֶל־אֶרֶץ טוֹבָה וְרַחֲבָה אֶל־אֶרֶץ זָבַת חֶלֶב
וְדָבָשׁ אֶל־מְקוֹם הַכְּנַעֲנִי וְהַחִתִּי וְהָאֱמֹרִי וְהַפְּרִזִּי וְהַחִוִּי וְהַיְבוּסִי:

JPS	Fox	Friedman	Alter
I have come down to rescue them from the Egyptians and to bring them out of that land to a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey, the region of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.	So I have come down to rescue it from the hand of Egypt, to bring it up from that land to a land, goodly and spacious, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanite and the Hittite, of the Amorite and the Perizzite, of the Hivvite and the Yevusite.	And I've come down to rescue them from Egypt's hand and to bringt hem up from that land to a good and wide-spread land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite.	And I have come down to rescue it from the hand of Egypt and ot bring it up from that land to a goodly and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite.

Fox

I have come down: The phrase indicates God's intervention in human affairs (as, negatively, in Gen. 11:7).

a land flowing with milk and honey: Or with “goats’ milk and date-syrup.” This description of Canaan is repeated many times in the three subsequent books of the Pentateuch, but is not found in Genesis.

Canaanite [etc.]: These names are the Bible’s designation for the indigenous peoples of Canaan at the time of the Israelite conquest. Biblical lists contain varying numbers of peoples, from six to ten.

Yevusite: The pre-Israelite inhabitants of Jerusalem.

Friedman

to the place of the Canaanite...: We would expect the list of the seven groups (as in Deut 7:1). Why are the Girgashites left out here (and in v. 17)? It is simply a scribal error. The Girgashites are in fact included in the Qumran, Septuagint, and Samaritan versions of this text. We should accept the fact that not every question has a deep literary or moral answer to it. Sometimes the explanation is simple, mundane, and human.

Alter

I have come down to rescue ... to bring it up. Ibn Ezra neatly observes that the coming down is directly followed by the antithetical bringing up.

flowing with milk and honey. The honey no question is probably not bees' honey, for apiculture was not practiced in this early period, but rather a sweet syrup extracted from dates. The milk would most likely have been goat's milk and not cow's milk. In any case, these two synecdoches for agriculture and animal husbandry respectively become a fixed epithet for the bounty of the promised land.

the place of the Canaanite and the Hittite... and the Jebusite. This imposing and repeated list of the peoples of the land of Canaan serves as a notice that this is far from an uninhabited country, that it contains resident peoples who will need to be confronted militarily.

9. וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה צַעֲקַת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל בָּאָה אֵלַי וְגַם־רָאִיתִי אֶת־הַלְחָץ אֲשֶׁר מַצְרַיִם לֹחֲצִים אֹתָם:

JPS	Fox	Friedman	Alter
Now the cry of the Israelites has reached Me; moreover, I have seen how the Egyptians oppress them.	So-now, here, the cry of the Children of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them.	"And now, here, the cry of the children of Israel has come to me, and also I've seen the oppression that Egypt is causing them.	And now, look, the outcry of the Israelites has come to Me and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them.

10. וַעֲתָה לָכֵה וְאַשְׁלַחְךָ אֶל־פַּרְעֹה וְהוֹצֵא אֶת־עַמִּי בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרָיִם:

JPS	Fox	Friedman	Alter
Come, therefore, I will send you to Pharaoh, and you shall free My people, the Israelites, from Egypt."	So now, go, for I send you to Pharaoh — bring my people, the Children of Israel, out of Egypt!	And now go, and I'll send you to Pharaoh, and bring out my people, the children of Israel, from Egypt."	And now, go that I may send you to Pharaoh, and bring My people the Israelites out of Egypt.

Friedman

And now go, and I'll send you to Pharaoh: Until now, it has all been good news to Moses: God is aware of Israel's problems back in Egypt and is going to do something about them. But Moses still has no knowledge of why God is revealing this to him. Then these words come: "Go!" "I'll send you!" And then comes the command: "And [you] bring out my people!" Moses might well ask, "Who am I, that I should go?" And so he does.

11. וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים מִי אֲנֹכִי כִי אֵלֶיךָ אֶל־פַּרְעֹה וְכִי אוֹצִיא אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרָיִם:

JPS	Fox	Friedman	Alter
But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and free the Israelites from Egypt?"	Moshe said to God: Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, that I should bring the Children of Israel out of Egypt?	And Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and that I should bring out the children of Israel from Egypt?"	And Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and that I should bring out the Israelites from Egypt?"

Friedman

“Who am I?” “Because I’ll be with you.” Some say that Moses' first response shows his extreme humility. But in that case, God's answer is strange: "Because I'll be with you" is not an answer to the question "Who am I?" Rather, as in the case of the exchange with Abraham over Sodom and Gomorrah, God apparently answers what is in the person's heart rather than what he says with his mouth. "Because I shall be with you" is a response to someone who is saying in his heart: "I'm afraid." Moses has just been told that *he* must do this. Now God assures him that "I'll be with you.”

Alter

Who am I. Moses's profession of unworthiness is the first instance of a recurring scene in which the future prophet responds to the divine call by an initial unwillingness to undertake the mission (compare Isaiah 6 and Jeremiah 1). Moses has particular cause to feel unworthy. Having been reared as an Egyptian prince, he has become an outlaw, an exile, and a simple shepherd. His one intervention, moreover, with his Hebrew brothers elicited only a resentful denunciation of him as a murderer.

12. וַיֹּאמֶר כִּי־אֶהְיֶה עִמָּךְ וְזָה־לְךָ הָאוֹת כִּי אֲנֹכִי שְׁלַחְתִּיךָ בְּהוֹצִיאֲךָ אֶת־הָעָם מִמִּצְרַיִם תַּעֲבֹדוּן
אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים עַל הַהָר הַזֶּה:

JPS	Fox	Friedman	Alter
And He said, "I will be with you; that shall be your sign that it was I who sent you. And when you have freed the people from Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain."	He said: Indeed, I will be with you, and this is the sign for you that I myself have sent you: [when] you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will [all] serve God by this mountain.	And He said, "Because I'll be with you. And this is the sign for you that I have sent you. When you bring out the people from Egypt you shall serve God on this mountain."	And He said, "For I will be with you. And this is the sign for you that I Myself have sent you. When you bring the people out from Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain."

Fox

this is the sign: The thought is not entirely clear. It may signify that liberation signals Israel's birth as a people, and therefore Moshe's legitimacy as well.

[all]: "You" is plural here.

by: As opposed to "upon," since the people will not be allowed to trespass its sacred boundaries (see 19:12).

Friedman

this is the sign. What is the sign? Is it the bush itself? Is it the fact that he hears the divine voice from the bush? Is it that he will successfully "bring the people from Egypt to serve God on this mountain"? Or is it the very fact that "'I'll be with you"? We get a clue near the end of the Torah, in Deuteronomy (4:11). There Moses says that Mount Horeb "was burning" — using the same word that is used here for the burning of the bush. This suggests that the burning bush that Moses experienced was already a sign of what was to come. And this in turn suggests that the sign to which God refers here is the miraculous burning bush itself. And it prefigures what will happen when the people come back to that mountain. This point is supported later in that same chapter in Deuteronomy when Moses reminds the people that at Horeb "you heard His voice from inside the fire" (4:36) - which recalls how Moses himself hears God call "from inside the bush" that is on fire (Exod 3:4).

Alter

For I will be with you. And this is the sign. Rashi proposes that God "answered the first question first and the second question second." That is, to the question "Who am I?", God responds that He will be with Moses, so Moses will have divine authority invested in him. To the question about bringing out the Israelites from Egypt, God responds that the fire in the bush is the concrete token of the miraculous power Moses will exert as God's agent in rescuing his people. It should be observed, however, that the reference of "this is the sign" is quite ambiguous, and perhaps was intended to be so. It could refer simply to the previous clause: "I will be with you" and *that* will be the sign you require. It could refer to the very burning bush out of which God speaks, as Rashi infers. Or, it could refer to the following clause: the sign that it is God Who has sent Moses will be realized when Moses succeeds in the extraordinary undertaking of bringing the Hebrews out of Egypt and leads them all the way to the mountain on which he now stands.

13. וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים הֲיֵנָה אָנֹכִי בָּא אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתִּי לָהֶם אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם שְׁלַחְנִי אֵלֵיכֶם וְאָמַרְוּ־לִי מִה־שָּׁמוּ מָה אֹמַר אֲלֵהֶם:

JPS	Fox	Friedman	Alter
'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is His name?' what shall I say to them?"	Moshe said to God: Here, I will come to the Children of Israel and I will say to them: The God of your fathers has sent me to you, but they will say to me: What is his name? — what shall I say to them?	And Moses said to God, "Here, I'm coming to the children of Israel, and I'll say to them, 'Your fathers' God sent me to you.' And they'll say to me, ' What is His name?' What shall I say to them?"	And Moses said to God, "Look, when I come 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?', what shall I say to them?"

Alter

What is His name? The name of course implies identity, distinctive essence, and in the case of someone giving orders, official authorization (the emissary can claim to be carrying out his mission in the name of So-and-so).

14. וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־מֹשֶׁה אֲהִיָּה אֲשֶׁר אֲהִיָּה וַיֹּאמֶר כֹּה תֹאמַר לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲהִיָּה שְׁלַחְנִי אֵלֵיכֶם:

JPS	Fox	Friedman	Alter
And God said to Moses, "Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh." He continued, "Thus shall you say to the Israelites, 'Ehyeh sent me to you.'"	God said to Moshe: Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh/I will be however I will be. And he said: Thus shall you say to the Children of Israel: EHYEH/I-WILL-BE has sent me to you.	And God said to Moses, "I am who I am." And He said, "You shall say this to the children of Israel: 'I Am' has sent me to you."	And God said to Moses, " <i>Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh</i> , I-Will-Be-Who-I-Will-Be." And He said, "Thus shall you say to the Israelites, " <i>Ehyeh</i> has sent me to you."

Verse 14

JPS

Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh: Meaning of Heb. uncertain; variously translated: "I Am That I Am"; "I Am Who I Am"; "I Will Be What I Will Be"; etc.
Ehyeh: Others "I Am" or "I Will Be."

Fox

Ehyeh: The syntax is difficult. Others, "I am that I am."

Friedman and Alter: See below

15. וַיֹּאמֶר עוֹד אֱלֹהִים אֶל־מֹשֶׁה כֹּה־תֹאמַר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם אֱלֹהֵי יַצְחָק וְאֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב שְׁלַחְנִי אֵלֵיכֶם זֶה־שְׁמִי לְעֹלָם וְזֶה זְכוֹרִי לְדֹר דָּר:

JPS	Fox	Friedman	Alter
And God said further to Moses, "Thus shall you speak to the Israelites: The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you: This shall be My name forever, This My appellation for all eternity.	And God said further to Moshe: Thus shall you say to the Children of Israel: YHWH, the God of your fathers, the God of Avraham, the God of Yitzhak, and the God of Yaakov, has sent me to you. That is my name for the ages, that is my title [from] generation to generation.	And God said further to Moses, "You shall say this to the children of Israel: YHWH, your fathers' God, Abrahams' God, Isaac's God, and Jacob's God has sent me to you. This is my name forever, and this is how I am to be remembered for generation after generation.	And God said further to Moses, "Thus shall you say to the Israelites: The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, sent me to you. That is My name forever and thus am I invoked in all ages.'

Verse 15

JPS

The LORD: The name YHWH (traditionally read Adonai “the Lord”) is here associated with the root *haya*, “to be.”

Fox

Title: Others, “memorial..”

Alter

and thus am I invoked. The Hebrew of this brief poetic inset preserves strict grammatical-syntactical parallelism with the preceding verset “and that is my appellation in all ages,” but English synonyms for “name” (Hebrew *zekher*) such as “appellation” and “designation,” are too ponderously polysyllabic for the little poem.

16. לך ואספת את-זקני ישראל ואמרף אליהם יהוה אליהי אבתיכם נראה אלי אליהי אברהם יצחק ויעקב לאמר פקד פקדתי אתכם ואת-העשוי לכם במצרים:

JPS	Fox	Friedman	Alter
“Go and assemble the elders of Israel and say to them: the LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, has appeared to me and said, ‘I have taken note of you and of what is being done to you in Egypt,	Go, gather the elders of Israel and say to them: YHWH, the God of your fathers, has been seen by me, the God of Avraham, of Yitzhak, and of Yaakov, Saying: I have taken account, yes, account of you and of what is being done to you in Egypt,	"Go and gather Israel's elders and say to them, YHWH, your fathers' God, has appeared to me — the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob — saying: I <i>have taken account</i> of you and what has been done to you in Egypt,	Go and gather the elders of Israel and say to them, 'The LORD God of your fathers has appeared to me, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, "I have surely marked what is done to you in Egypt,

Fox

elders: They are the holders of political power in such a tribal society.

taken account. As per Yosef's promise in Gen. 50:24.

17. ואמר אעלה אתכם מעני מצרים אל-ארץ הפנעני והחתי והאמרי והפריזי והחוי והיבויסי אל-ארץ זבת חלב ודבש:

JPS	Fox	Friedman	Alter
and I have declared: I will take you out of the misery of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites, the	and I have declared: I will bring you up from the affliction of Egypt, to the land of the	and I say I shall bring you up from the degradation of Egypt to the land of the Canaanite and	and I have said, I will bring you up from the abuse of Egypt to the land of the Canaanite and

Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, to a land flowing with milk and honey.'	Canaanite and of the Hittite, of the Amorite and of the Perizzite, of the Hivite and of the Yevusite, to a land flowing with milk and honey.	the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite, to a land flowing with milk and honey.	the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite, to a land flowing with milk and honey."
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18. וְשָׁמְעוּ לְקֹלְךָ וּבָאתָ אִתָּהּ וְזָקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל־מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם וְאַמְרָתָם אֵלָיו יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי הָעִבְרָיִים נִקְרָה עָלֵינוּ וְעַתָּה נִלְכֶה־נָּא דֶרֶךְ שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים בַּמִּדְבָּר וְנִזְבְּחָה לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ:

JPS	Fox	Friedman	Alter
They will listen to you; then you shall go with the elders of Israel to the king of Egypt and you shall say to him, 'The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, manifested Himself to us. Now therefore, let us go a distance of three days into the wilderness to sacrifice to the LORD our God.'	They will hearken to your voice, and you will come, you and the elders of Israel, to the king of Egypt and say to him: YHWH, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us— so now, pray let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness and let us slaughter (offerings) to YHWH our God!	And they'll listen to your voice, and you'll come, you and Israel's elders, to the king of Egypt, and you'll say to him, 'YHWH, God of the Hebrews, has communicated with us. And now, let us go on a trip of three days in the wilderness so we may sacrifice to YHWH, our God.'	And they will heed your voice, and you shall come, you and the elders of Israel, to the king of Egypt, and together you shall say to him: The LORD, God of the Hebrews, happened upon us, and so, let us go, pray, three days journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God.

Fox
pray let us go: Interestingly, the initial request made of Pharaoh is not for emancipation but for permission to observe a religious festival. It eventually becomes clear that Israel cannot be Israel until it is free of Egyptian hegemony.
slaughter (offerings): Offer animal sacrifices.

Alter

they will heed your voice: God is responding to Moses's understandable concern that the Hebrews will simply dismiss him with his crazy-sounding claims.

and together you shall say: "Together" has been added to make clear what is evident in the Hebrew through the plural form of "say," that the elders will be speaking together with Moses to Pharaoh.

happened: They use a verb that elsewhere suggests chance encounter, rather than the more definite "appeared." This might imply that they want to intimate to Pharaoh that they did not seek this meeting with the divinity.

let us go... three days' journey: They do not say that they intend to return, though these words bear the obvious implication that they are requesting only a furlough (weeklong furloughs were actually sometimes extended to Egyptian slaves). To ask for absolute manumission would have been outrageous.

19. וְאֲנִי יָדַעְתִּי כִּי לֹא־יִתֵּן אֶתְכֶם מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם לְהֵלֵךְ וְלֹא בְּיַד חֲזָקָה:

JPS	Fox	Friedman	Alter
Yet I know that the king of Egypt will let you go only because of a greater might.	But I, I know that the king of Egypt will not give you leave to go, not [even] under a strong hand.	And I know that the king of Egypt won't allow you to go, and not by a strong hand,	And I on My part know that the king of Egypt will not let you go except through a strong hand.

20. וְשַׁלַּחְתִּי אֶת־יָדַי וְהִכִּיתִי אֶת־מִצְרַיִם בְּכֹל נִפְלְאוֹתַי אֲשֶׁר אֶעֱשֶׂה בְּקִרְבּוֹ וְאֶחְרִי־כֵן יִשְׁלַח אֶתְכֶם:

JPS	Fox	Friedman	Alter
So I will stretch out My hand and smite Egypt with various wonders which I will work upon	So I will send forth my hand and I will strike Egypt with all my wonders which I will do in its	and I'll put out my hand and strike Egypt with all my wonders	And I will send out My hand and strike Egypt with all My wonders

them; after that he shall let you go.	midst — after that he will send you free!	that I'll do among them, and after that he'll let you go.	that I shall do in his midst, and afterward will he send you out.
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Alter

send out My hand: A more idiomatic rendering would be "stretch out," but it is important to preserve the symmetry of God's sending at the beginning of the verse and Pharaoh's sending at the end.

21. וְנָתַתִּי אֶת־חַן הָעַם־הַזֶּה בְּעֵינַי מִצָּרִים וְהָיָה כִּי תֵלְכוּן לֹא תֵלְכוּן רֵיקָם:

JPS	Fox	Friedman	Alter
And I will dispose the Egyptians favorably toward this people, so that when you go, you will not go away empty-handed.	And I will give this people favor in the eyes of Egypt; it will be that when you go, you shall not go empty-handed.	And I'll put this people's favor in Egypt's eyes; and it will be, when you go, you won't go empty-handed.	And I will grant this people favor in the eyes of Egypt, and so when you go, you will not go empty-handed.

Fox

you shall not go empty-handed: The despoiling of the Egyptians is reminiscent of obtaining booty in war. At the same time, there is probably a legal background to this (Daube 1961): the furnishing of a freed slave with provisions. The follow-up to the despoiling, intended or not, is God's command that, in Israel's future observance of religious festivals in the Promised Land, "no one is to be seen in my presence empty-handed" (Ex. 23:15).

22. וְשָׂאֵלָה אִשָּׁה מִשְׁכֹּנְתָהּ וּמִגֵּרַת בֵּיתָהּ כָּל־כֶּסֶף וְכָל־זָהָב וְשִׁמְלֹת וְשִׁמְתָם עַל־בְּנֵיכֶם וְעַל־בָּנוֹתֵיכֶם וְנִצַּלְתֶּם אֶת־מִצְרַיִם:

JPS	Fox	Friedman	Alter
Each woman shall borrow from her neighbor and the lodger in her house objects of silver and gold, and clothing, and you shall put these on your sons and daughters, thus stripping the Egyptians.”	each woman shall ask of her neighbor and of the sojourner in her house objects of silver and objects of gold, and clothing; you shall put [them] on your sons and on your daughters — so shall you strip Egypt!	And each woman will ask for silver articles and gold articles and clothes from her neighbor and from anyone staying in her house, and you'll put them on your sons and on your daughters, and you'll despoil Egypt.”	But each woman will ask of her neighbor and of the sojourner in her house ornaments of silver and ornaments of gold and robes, and you shall put them on your sons and on your daughters and you shall despoil Egypt.”

Verse 22

Fox

ask of: Others, “borrow”

strip: Here the verb (*natzel*) means “strip,” perhaps punning on a different form used in v.8 which means “rescue.”

Alter

each woman will ask of her neighbor and of the sojourner:Both "neighbor" and "sojourner" are feminine nouns. The verse reflects a frequent social phenomenon — also registered in the rabbinic literature of Late Antiquity — in which women constitute the porous boundary between adjacent ethnic communities: borrowers of the proverbial cup of sugar, sharers of gossip and women's lore. It must be said that this situation, in which Egyptian women are lodgers in Israelite houses, does not jibe with the Plagues narrative, in which the Israelites live in a segregated region. Some readers have felt discomfort at the act of exploitation recorded here. The most common line of defense is that this is restitution for the unpaid labor exacted from the Hebrew slaves. In any case, it seems wise not to view the story in terms of intergroup ethics. From beginning to end, it is a tale of Israelite triumphalism. The denizens of the simple farms and the relatively crude towns of Judea would have known about imperial Egypt's fabulous luxuries, its exquisite jewelry, and the affluent among them would have enjoyed imported Egyptian linens and papyrus. It is easy to imagine how this tale of despoiling or stripping bare Egypt would have given pleasure to its early audiences. In each of the three sister-wife stories in Genesis that adumbrate the Exodus narrative, the patriarch and his wife depart loaded with gifts: the presence of that motif suggests that the despoiling of Egypt was an essential part of the story of liberation from bondage in the early national traditions.

Exodus 3:15 Extended Commentary

Friedman:

I am who I am. (Or: "I shall be who I shall be." The imperfect verb here is not limited to present or future time.) This answer to Moses' second response is the first formal presentation of the divine name, revealed first in the first person, EHYH, and thereafter in the third person, YHWH. It has long been uncertain why this double identification occurs here. In v. 14 God tells Moses to say "EHYH sent me," and in v. 51 God tells him to say "YHWH sent me." It appears most likely to me that the former is expressed in the first person because it is the deity's own first articulation of His identity in the world. And the second is the deity's informing Moses of the name in the form in which humans will know it forever after, naturally in the third person.

YHWH. The name of God is now revealed. It is a verb. It is third person. It is singular. And it is masculine. Its root meaning is "to be." It is generally understood to be a causative form. Its tense is the imperfect, and it cannot be limited to a past, present, or future time. Its nearest translation would be: He Causes To Be.

Regarding its masculine gender, we must acknowledge that all the signs indicate that biblical Israel conceived of God as male. The terms for the deity are all masculine words. The word that became most associated with feminine aspect of deity in later Judaism, "Shechinah," does not occur in the Tanakh.

Alter

'Ehyeh-'Asher-'Ehyeh. God's response perhaps gives Moses more than he bargained for—not just an identifying divine name (the implication of offering one such name might be that there are other divinities) but an ontological divine mystery of the most daunting character. Rivers of ink have since flowed in theological reflection on and philological analysis of this name. The following brief remarks will be confined to the latter consideration, which in any case must provide the grounding for the former.

"I-Will-Be-Who-I-Will-Be" is the most plausible construction of the Hebrew, though the middle word, *asher*, could easily mean "what" rather than "who," and the common rendering of "I-Am-That-I-Am" cannot be excluded. ("Will" is used here rather than "shall" because the Hebrew sounds like an affirmation with emphasis, not just a declaration.)

Since the tense system of biblical Hebrew by no means corresponds to that of modern English, it is also perfectly possible to construe this as "I Am He Who Endures." The strong consensus of biblical scholarship is that the original pronunciation of the name YHWH that God goes on to use in verse 15 was "Yahweh." There are several good arguments for that conclusion. There is

an independent name for the deity, Yah, which also appears as a suffix to proper names, and that designation could very well be a shortened form of this name. Greek transcriptions reflect a pronunciation close to "Yahweh." In that form, the name would be the causative or *hiph'il* form of the verb "to be" and thus would have the theologically attractive sense of "He Who Brings Things into Being." All this is plausible, but it is worth registering at least a note of doubt about the form of the divine name.

Here God instructs Moses to tell Israel '*Ehyeh*, "I-Will-Be," has sent him. The deity, if the Masoretic vocalization is to be trusted, refers to Himself not with a causative but with the *qal* ("simple") conjugation. This could conceivably imply that others refer to him in the *qal* third person as *Yihyeh*, "He-Will-Be." (The medial *y* sound in this conjugated form would have had considerable phonetic interchange with the *w* consonant in YHWH.) This in turn would make the name fit a common pattern for male names in the third-person masculine singular, *qal* conjugation, imperfective form: *Yitshaq* (Isaac), "he will laugh"; *Ya'aqov* (Jacob), "he will protect," or "he will grab the heel"; *Yiftah* (Jephthah), "he will open"; and many others. If this were the case, then the name "Yah" could have been assimilated to YHWH by folk etymology and then perhaps even affected its pronunciation. Whether the pronunciation of this name later in the Hellenistic period, by then restricted to the high priest on the Day of Atonement, Yahweh, as indicated in Greek transcriptions, reflects its original sound is at least open to question. The logic of *Yihyeh* as the essential divine name would be that whereas particular actions may be attributed to humans through the verbal names chosen for them, to God alone belongs unlimited, unconditional being. This conjecture, inspired by the use here by God of the *qal* conjugation rather than the causative conjugation in naming Himself, is far from certain, but it might introduce at least some margin of doubt about the consensus opinion regarding the divine name.