

# Sample Chapter

## The Other Three Sixteens

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### Chapter three: EXODUS

*“Go, assemble the elders of Israel and say to them, ‘The Lord, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—appeared to me and said: I have watched over you and have seen what has been done to you in Egypt.’” - Exodus 3:16*

Moses is a central character in the book of Exodus, beginning with his birth and following his journey as he led the people out of Egypt toward the Promised Land. By the time we arrive in the third chapter, Moses had left his adopted childhood home in Egypt and established a new life in Midian. He had a wife and young family to support while shepherding his father-in-law’s flock of sheep. All seemed calm and quiet until he stumbled upon a strange sight on the far side of the wilderness. He found a bush, and it was ablaze with flames. However, the fire did not consume it in the usual charred and smoky fashion. This called for closer examination. As Moses peered into the fire, a voice called his name, right from the bush! Moses calmly replied, “Here I am.”

The fact that this whole scene did not freak out our guy Moses is remarkable. It speaks to the calming presence of the Lord in the midst of the miraculous. But the flaming foliage was not the main event here, God was, and He had something to say. First, He established boundaries. Moses was told not to come any closer, but instead to remove his shoes in respect for the holy ground where he found himself standing. Once that’s settled, the Lord continued His explanation of why He called this holy meeting. He heard the painful cries of the Israelites as they were oppressed in slavery in Egypt. He was going to deliver his people from bondage and has chosen Moses to lead them out of their captivity.

Moses had some questions, and God, of course, had the answers and more. The two were discussing details when we get to our next 3:16: “Go, assemble the elders of Israel and say to them, ‘The Lord, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—appeared to me and said: I have watched over you and have seen what has been done to you in Egypt.’” Let’s break this down and see where we find evidence of God’s love.

The first part is straightforward; it’s part of Moses’ instructions. This is the beginning of an epic friendship, one that develops through the entire book of Exodus. The love between God and Moses was strengthened through adversity, plagues, miracles, and dependence. But, for now, we see God’s love in the act of entrusting Moses with the weighty task of confronting Pharaoh and freeing His beloved people. It’s a love that didn’t simply delegate a job and walk away. Instead, God was with Moses at every step in the journey, from confronting Pharaoh to implementing the first Passover, or raising a rod to tell the Red Sea to make a path and leading an entire nation through the wilderness. Even at this very beginning, God provided direction and answered questions from a man who felt

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very unqualified for his job. God equips and reassures those He loves. The writer of Hebrews included this in his benediction: "Now may the God of peace.... equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen." (Hebrews 13:20-21).

The second sentence holds some pretty serious weight. We frequently run across the phrase "God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" as we read Scripture. At face value, it's descriptive enough. In a land where multiple gods were worshiped, the Jewish people wanted to be clear when they were talking about the God, the same God they'd been following all their lives, the God of their fathers and ancestors. There is also another layer when we look at the relationships God had with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. These were relationships rooted in love. Cruise back over to Genesis 15, and you'll find God making His initial covenant with Abraham, who was then known as Abram. After describing Himself to be Abram's shield and great reward, God promised that Abram's descendants will be too many to count. He also promised possession of the very land upon which Abram was standing. Both of these things seemed pretty unbelievable, given Abram's situation of childlessness and advanced age. But God keeps His word, and a covenant was made between the Divine and the mortal.

Also, check out verses 13-16, where God gave Abram a glimpse of the very situation we find in Exodus, though hundreds of years before it happened! True to the covenant, Abraham wouldn't remain childless. His son, Isaac, also had a relationship with God Almighty. When we jump ahead to Genesis 26:2-4, we see God renewing the covenant, this time with Isaac. In addition to the vow of offspring and land possession, the Lord told Isaac that, despite famine, he should remain where he was, and he'd be blessed. Then, Isaac's son, Jacob, also has a relationship with the Lord, though one with quite a rocky start. Despite Jacob's stubbornness and tendency to deceive, God remained faithful to the covenant He made with Jacob's father and grandfather. His words, spoken to Jacob in a heavenly vision, are recorded in Genesis 28:13-15, again echoing the promise of descendants and land. He said that all peoples on earth will be blessed through Jacob and his offspring, then assured him that He will be with Jacob, watching over him wherever he goes. Further into his story we find Jacob in an actual wrestling match with the angel of the Lord. That's a strong commitment for a powerful God to meet Jacob in that place, going as far as to give him a new name while continuing the sacred covenant.

So what could possibly inspire the Almighty Creator of heaven and earth to take interest in the life of a single human being? What is it that would drive a deity to make promises to His creation? Not only does He make the covenant, but He steadfastly keeps it. Deuteronomy 7:8-9 sums it up succinctly. "But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath he swore to your ancestors that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments."

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The answer, of course, is love. No other force would be great enough to sustain such a promise to human beings who are full of flaws and limitations. Only the perfect love of the Most High God could inspire and fulfill such a covenant to His precious children.

We're not done yet. There's one more piece of Exodus 3:16: "I have watched over you and have seen what has been done to you in Egypt." The people were suffering, and just when they thought they had reached their limit, the Egyptians increased their oppression. Yet, none of this goes unnoticed by God. Not only does He see, but He is closely watching. He was paying careful attention to the Israelites, purposely keeping His eyes on them. He was with his people; He did not abandon them. The next question is, then, why did He allow the pain to last for so long? This is a huge inquiry that many have struggled with, and have, in fact, struggled with for all time. The account of Job is likely the oldest book in the Bible, and it centers around the question of why suffering exists. When Job called out with pleas of "why?", God answered him... but not necessarily with "because". Instead, He provided a glimpse of His glory and an assurance that His plans are perfect. Since then, we have learned that God's big picture and his attention to detail and timing are intentional—and ultimately in our best interest. We cling to scriptures that promise future hope and things working for our benefit when we can't understand why things seem wrong, while trusting that God is good. The Israelites also cried out to their God. As their oppression went on, God watched with compassionate eyes. They would remain in bondage no longer; a rescue was coming.

For the Israelites, their darkness came in the form of slavery. Over the centuries, all of God's people have experienced some form of darkness. It comes in all varieties, big and small, external and internal. We face pain, bleak circumstances, injustice, catastrophes, illness, persecution.... These seasons are dark, and they can be long. We may feel unloved and forgotten by our Heavenly Father, but, dear child of God, He is watching. And don't for one second think that He is a passive bystander. His never-faltering presence is a light in the dark. He is in the process of making something good and beautiful out of deepest despair. God sees you. He cares about what is happening to you. He loves you. A rescue is coming.

We could stop here at our 3:16 and cling to the richness found in these short phrases. But our eyes can't help to continue down the page to find out what will happen next and how God's people will be saved. We know that they will most certainly be rescued. There was a covenant to be fulfilled. God's people would be given more than just relief from slavery; they would be given an entire blessed land of promise. They would be redeemed.... And so will we.