

The Burning Bush

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One of the best known stories in the Bible is also one of the least understood. It is the account in Exodus 3 of the burning bush. It is an important part of the history of Israel but a true understanding of it was actually highly offensive to the Jews. That understanding was, the God who had appeared to Abraham and made the promises to him, and then later appeared to Moses and delivered Israel from Egypt, was the One who had sent Jesus Christ. And for openly proclaiming that, Stephen was killed ([Acts 7:51-60](#)).

One of the scriptures that ties directly in to the account and helps explain its meaning is [Acts 3:13](#). Peter is teaching at the temple and states **“The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His servant Jesus”**. The Jews knew who the God of Abraham was but most of them did not believe He was the Father and that He had anointed Jesus ([Psalms 2:2](#); [Acts 4:26](#); [5:42](#)). Peter affirmed that to the high priest in [Acts 5](#) by stating **“The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins”** ([verses 30-31](#)). The scriptures are consistent. What Abraham knew, Moses knew, and what Moses knew is what the apostles and the early New Testament Church came to know as well.

When Stephen was called into account before the high priest for teaching about Jesus, he proclaimed **“The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia”** ([Acts 7:2](#)). He then continued and said the God of glory was the One who gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision ([verses 7-8](#)). Stephen then traced the history of Israel down to the time of Moses and showed that the God who had appeared to Abraham had revealed Himself to Moses as well. He said **“an Angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire in a bush, in the wilderness of Mount Sinai. When Moses saw it, he marveled at the sight; and as he drew near to observe, the voice of the LORD came to him, saying, I am the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob”** ([verses 30-32](#)). The God of Abraham was not the Angel. The God of Abraham was the LORD. Stephen went on to state **“This Moses whom they rejected, saying, Who made you a ruler and a judge? is the one God sent to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the Angel who appeared to him in the bush”** ([verse 35](#)). Then Stephen went on further **“This is that Moses who said to the children of Israel, The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear”** ([verse 37](#)). The LORD their God (the Father) is the One who raised up a Prophet like Moses (Jesus Christ) for Israel to hear.

Jesus knew it was His Father who had appeared to Abraham and then spoke to Moses at the burning bush and He said so in the account recorded in [Mark 12](#). There He responded to the Sadducees who were testing Him with a question about seven brothers who had all married the same wife in succession. Their question was **“Therefore, in the resurrection, when they rise, whose wife will she be?”** ([verse 23](#)). Jesus responded **“Are you not therefore mistaken, because you do not know the Scriptures nor the power of God? For when they rise from the dead, They neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels in heaven. But concerning the dead, that they rise, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the burning bush passage, how God spoke to him, saying, I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living”** ([verses 24-27](#)). When Jesus referred to God it was not a reference to Himself, it was a reference to His Father.

What further inflamed the Jews about Jesus Christ and which ties in directly to the account of the burning bush is that He claimed to be I AM, the same as God. In [John 8](#) Jesus said that God was His Father and it

was His Father who gave witness of Him (verses 54-55). The account then follows with **“Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad. Then the Jews said to Him, You are not yet fifty years old, and You have seen Abraham? Jesus said to them, Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM. Then they took up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple”** (verses 56-59). Jesus was saying that Abraham was created, but that He was not. In that, He was the same as his Father.

John recorded how Christ as the Word had been in relationship to God. He stated **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God”** (John 1:1-2). The Greek text actually states “the Word was with the God” and “He was in the beginning with the God”. Jesus Christ is God but He is not the God. The Father is supreme.

The remainder of the reference to the burning bush incident in Exodus 3 then becomes clear. After God spoke to Moses and told Him to go to Israel and tell them He was going to deliver them, Moses asked **“Indeed, when I come to the children of Israel 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? And God said to Moses, I AM WHO I AM. And He said, Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, I AM has sent me to you. Moreover God said to Moses, Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is My name forever, and this is My memorial to all generations”** (verses 13-15). I AM here is the LORD, the God of Abraham, the God of their fathers. I AM here is the Father.

There is only one LORD and it is the Father. As is stated **“the LORD Himself is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other”** (Deuteronomy 4:39). **“You alone are the LORD”** (Nehemiah 9:6). **“You, whose name alone is the LORD, Are the Most High over all the earth”** (Psalms 83:18). **“O LORD our God...You are the LORD, You alone”** (Isaiah 37:20). **“I am the LORD, and there is no other”** (Isaiah 45:18). **“I am the LORD your God and there is no other”** (Joel 2:27).

The account in Exodus 6 that follows the burning bush incident is consistent with this. It states **“and God spoke to Moses and said to him: I am the LORD. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by My name, LORD, I was not known to them...Therefore say to the children of Israel: I am the LORD”** (verses 2-3,6).

The meaning of I AM and the meaning of the LORD [YHWH] is closely related. In fact, their meaning is almost identically the same. In Hebrew, I Am is the first person form of the verb “to be” while YHWH represents the third person form of the same verb; possibly “HE IS” or “HE WILL BE” [Mounce’s, p 422, Zondervan, 2006]. Moffat’s translation of YHWH as the Eternal is a helpful rendering in striving to portray the meaning of the term.

The important thing about the account of the burning bush, when properly understood, is that it perfectly aligns with the rest of scripture. The God of Abraham is the One who glorified Jesus. He is the God of the fathers of Israel and the God of Moses. He is the God of the Old Testament and He is the God of the New Testament.

The One who spoke to Moses at the burning bush was God the Father.