

# YAHWEH: The Great I Am, the God of Promise



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**Text:** Exodus 3:1-14 <sup>1</sup>

**Date:** April 20, 2011, 7pm

**Series:** Drawing Near to God through His Name

**Introduction:** Open your Bibles to Exodus 3. The Name of God that we are studying tonight is protected by the Law of God in the third commandment.

- It is found more than 6800 times in the Scriptures. It is God's name of promise, or covenant. That is when He says He'll save us by His only Son and that He will lead us and we will be His people, He swears by His covenant Name: *Yahweh*.
- We get this personal name for God in one of the most dramatic events not only in biblical history, but I believe in the history of the whole world.

## I. Story of Moses

We are familiar with the story of Moses, how that as a child he was sent into the Nile River to be protected from the death sentence of Pharaoh to destroy the male children. We know how Moses was found by Pharaoh's daughter, and reared in the greatest education in the ancient world—in the arts, in science, and in medicine. Some of their technologies, though they were lost for thousands of years, were as advanced as we have today. But when Moses became a young man, we remember that he saw an Egyptian officer beating an Israelite slave. And Moses intervened to stop that travesty. In his anger Moses struck the Egyptian guard, and the guard was hit with such force that he was killed instantly. Moses looked around to determine if anyone had seen it. He hid the body in the sand, but someone had seen it. Because of this, Moses was forced to flee into exile. Certainly it seemed to Moses that the significance of his life was over as he wandered in the barren wilderness of Midian. He had moved from the court of Pharaoh to the life of a lowly shepherd in the wilderness.

### A. Moses' Encounter with God

Then the dramatic moment came... when as Moses was taking care of his flock of sheep, in the middle of the noonday heat, he noticed something very strange out of the corner of his eye that must have startled him and taken him back. You see it was a bush that was burning with great flames, but the bush was not being consumed. Moses was intrigued by this and he stepped closer to investigate this phenomenon. And as he's peering into this burning bush that is not being consumed, Moses hears the voice of God speaking to him audibly from heaven. The sound was coming from the bush.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture is from the *English Standard Version* of the Bible.

**Exodus 3:1-14** (ESV) — “Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2 And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. 3 And Moses said, “I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned.” 4 When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, “**Moses, Moses!**” And he said, “Here I am.” 5 Then he said, “**Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.**” 6 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 at God. 7 Then the LORD said, “I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, 8 and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians...”

Then God says to Moses in **verse 10**, “Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.”

So Moses to go to the mightiest nation on the earth at that time and confront the greatest ruler of that nation and tell him that God had said, “Let my people go!” Now we all know the consequences of this encounter. It was through this moment of encounter that Moses was called to be the prophet of God. To be the mediator of the Old Covenant, the old agreement—he would be the one to lead the children of Israel in the exodus experience to the Promised Land.

So as an old man Moses embarks on his main career. He is 80 years old. He doesn't make his mark in history until he's well past the age of retirement. Two men of the previous century could be seen in a similar category. Winston Churchill had a very checkered career. He was at the age of retirement when the people of Britain asked him to lead them through the dangers of WWII. Douglass MacArthur came out of retirement to lead the US Army in WWII in the Pacific. These were two titans of our country's history. They really didn't make their mark on history until their golden years.

## **B. Two Questions**

It was on the occasion of this call, that when God told Moses to go to Pharaoh's court and to demand the release of the slaves from Egypt, that he asked to questions:

### **I. Question 1: Who Am I?**

We read in **verse 11**, But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?”

The first question was about his own character and identity and ability to fulfill this task. Let's read God's answer in **verse 12**, “He said, “**But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.**”

That's all Moses need to know. I AM WITH YOU! I am not asking you to do this FOR me, but I am asking you to do it WITH me. I am not sending you in your own power. I am sending you in my power.

## 2. Question 2: Who is God?

And now Moses is moved to ask the second question. Moses' second question is about God and who He is and about His character. We read in **verse 13**, Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?"

Do you understand what's going on here? He's going to the children of Israel, and he's asking them to revolt against Pharaoh and to risk their lives and the lives of their children against *the mightiest power on earth*. What Moses is going to suggest to them is a massive slave uprising.

Moses is saying, "When I tell your people that I talked to you out here in the Midianite wilderness here at this bush, nobody's going to believe that, God. They're going to want to know who you are. What God has commissioned the exodus? What name shall I give them?" Moses asks.

And God answers Moses' question with the simple response, "Yahweh". This is the Hebrew word that means literally, "I am who I am". You tell them that I AM has sent you.

**Verse 14**, "God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.'" And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you'".

## II. The Story of God.

God introduces Himself to Moses as the One who has no beginning and no end. We have a name for this personal Name.

### A. Tetragrammaton

This name is made up of four consonants. The Hebrew word is strange because there are no vowels. I'm told that most Hebrew words have three consonants, this one has four. And this Name of God is called by Bible scholars the Tetragrammaton. Given the vowel points, but the pronunciation in Hebrew is "Yahweh".

Many English Bibles translate this name as "Jehovah". There is no Hebrew word or title of Jehovah. This title is actually a German transliteration of the Hebrew title Yahweh, and it comes from putting the vowels of another title of God, Adonai with the consonants of YHWH, and it comes out as: Jehovah.

In any case, the proper name of God is the Name Yahweh, and it means "I am who I am". It the name that tells us that God is the self existing One.

### B. The Self-Existent One

Moses is standing here, humbled, with his sandals off, awe-struck in the presence of the outward visible display of the majestic glory of God. The self-existent One was speaking to him.

This Name as was the Hebrew tradition reflects the character of the One who bears the name. In other words, God's being is not generated from outside Himself. He is the only being in the universe that exists within Himself.

### **The Cemetery**

For us, the past, present, and future, we are creatures bound by time. Go to the cemetery and look at the tomb stones, you will find a beginning and an ending. People's whole lives will be summarized by their name and by two dates: the date of their birth and the date of their death. God has no beginning and no ending. For God there is no birthday. There is no future day when God shall be die. He is always and forever I AM!

## **III. The Nature of God revealed through the name Yahweh.**

### **A. Yahweh has an eternal, unchanging nature.**

Today God is I am, yesterday He is I AM and tomorrow He is I AM. He is unchanging. One of the things Jesus did in the NT that provoked so much animosity and hostility from his contemporaries was the way He used the phrase, "I AM".

**Hebrews 13:8**, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." There is no shadow of turning in His nature. He remains always the same.

1. Jesus uses the personal name of God. Constantly we see Jesus saying 'I am'. Now there are two ways to say "I am" in Greek: Ego or eimi, but Jesus would often use both of the words together.
2. This is exactly what the Greek translators of the Old Testament did when they translated the Septuagint. Each time they would come to the Name of God, Yahweh, they would write, "Ego eimi"! This is a strange conjunction of two verbs in the Greek. Jesus used the Name of God because He was Yahweh. Jesus is using this same concept by which God reveals His eternal deity to Moses in the Midianite wilderness.
3. Listen to Jesus...
  - He would say, "Ego, eimi" the door.
  - **John 6:35**, "I am [Ego, eimi] the bread of life;"
  - **John 9:5**, "I am [Ego, eimi] the light of the world."
  - **John 10:7**, "I am [Ego, eimi] the door of the sheep."
  - **John 10:11**, "I am [Ego, eimi] the good shepherd"
  - **John 11:25**, "I am [Ego, eimi] the resurrection, and the life."
  - **John 14:6**, "I am [Ego, eimi] the way, the truth, and the life".
  - **John 15:1**, "I am [Ego, eimi] the true vine"
  - **John 8:58**, "before Abraham was, I am [Ego, eimi]."

Jesus identifies Himself as Yahweh throughout the New Testament.

- **Revelation 1:8** "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."

**Conclusion:** But this name means so much more than God's self-existence. But we are going to have to wait until our next meeting to cover that!