

# The Name of God

Exodus 3:11-22

God reveals the incredible feat of exodus that will happen through Moses, and his response is what you'd expect from a sane person: "Who am I...?" The task is enormous, but the Lord reveals himself as Yahweh, the God who keeps His promises. Moses will not go alone.

NOTES:

## Who am I?

Moses has seen the bush burning and not consumed; God has not abandoned His people. But it has been forty years since he was in Pharaoh's palace and a lot has changed since then. He has been serving the Lord and Jethro faithfully as a shepherd in Midian, but that doesn't feel like diplomatic training (v11). In addition, the last time he tried to free Israel, he risked his life and was rejected: "For he supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand" (Acts 7:25). What has changed besides getting older and more distanced from his people? The call of God overcomes obstacles, including our repeated unbelief (cf. 4:1, 10, 13). He trains the called, and doesn't necessarily call the trained. And His timing is His own. Moses did the right thing earlier and he is going to do the right thing now even though it's very hard. In the ministry there's nothing wrong with seminaries and formal training, but it's no substitute for knowing why and how you ought to serve God and having that confirmed by the right people. We also need to remember Moses from Midian, John the Baptizer coming out of the wilderness, and Jesus of Nazareth. He called His apostles and then trained them. God's answer to Moses is "I will certainly be with you", and He also gives him a sign: "When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain" (v12). God gives us words and signs, word and sacrament. *The* word is the gospel—the life, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead for your sins—and the sacrament is baptism, signifying and sealing the righteousness of Christ (Rom. 4:11-12, 6:3-4; Col. 2:11-12), and communion. We don't come to a mountain like Horeb that we can touch, but "to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel" (Heb. 12:22-24). Want to know who you are? Look at where you are.

## YHWH

When Moses tells the Israelites the God of their fathers sent him and they don't know whom he's talking about, God says tell them "I AM WHO I AM" sent you (vv13-14). This is Yahweh God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and His name is His memorial to all generations (v15). "I AM" is the first person of the *to be* verb in Hebrew, and "LORD" is a nominal form translated from YHWH, the four Hebrew consonants known as the tetragrammaton. If you take the vowels from the Hebrew word for Lord (*adonai*) and put them with YHWH, you get Jehovah. Moses asks for a name and he gets a verb, really *the* verb. It's confusing, but when you try to name, to define the one who defines everything, you are on holy ground as Moses was. God can be described, but not comprehensibly defined by us because we are finite and He is

# The Name of God

Exodus 3:11-22

infinite. When He says I AM, we see His self-existence or aseity. God is from Himself; He depends on no one and has no source other than Himself. You had a beginning (conception) and rely on God's pleasure and power for your continued existence—you are what you will be—but God Is. Hebrew tenses depend on syntax, so we could also translate this as "I WAS/AM/WILL BE". Moses is not referring to a new god he met in Midian or carved in Goshen. God is eternal; we must deal with Him now and always. He is only and always ignored in person. God is transcendent in these ways, but He is also immanent, the God our fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (v15). Giving your name opens yourself up, inviting someone to call on you, which is why we introduce ourselves to people we don't know (cf. Matt. 5:47). God Almighty (El Shaddai) made promises, and Yahweh will hear and fulfill them. Yahweh's name is a memorial that reminds Yahweh. Why remind the one who can't forget? Because reminding Him teaches us and becomes a prayer for Him to act on. This memorial is similar to the rainbow He said would be a memorial to Him of His promise to never flood the earth (Gen. 9:14-15). Bad theology makes our interactions with God meaningless or redundant, but the Bible teaches how to remind Him.

## Plundering the Egyptians

The Lord lays it all out for Moses. He will tell the elders that Yahweh God has visited, seen their affliction, and will bring them out (vv16-17). He'll ask Pharaoh for a three-day journey into the wilderness, but it won't work so wonders will have to be done before he'll let them go (vv18-20). Finally when they go, they'll find favor so that Egyptian women give gifts of silver and gold to the Hebrew women, and the Israelite sons and daughters will be enriched on the way out (vv21-22). This is the origin of the phrase "plundering the Egyptians", and here it's a matter of justice. God required anyone who sold themselves into slavery after six years go out into freedom blessed with gifts: "You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God redeemed you; therefore I command you this thing today" (Dt. 15:15). The Jews were forced into slavery for far longer than six years. God would provide for and bless them with favor, and they were not allowed to hate the Egyptians (Dt. 23:7-8).

## Before Abraham Was

When Jesus was attacked for being a false teacher with the wrong name, He said "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM" (Jn. 8:58). The God who revealed Himself as Yahweh took on flesh as Jesus of Nazareth, the name above every name. We find out who we are in Jesus. He brought us out of bondage and frees us to love our enemies and offer them the same freedom He gave to us. God has given us all things in Him, and He goes with us and remembers us as we call on His name.