

“YHWH” – God’s Sacred Covenant Name

The book of Genesis is the book of beginnings. Starting with Genesis 12, God began to build the nation of Israel starting with Abraham who is the human father of the nation. Genesis then follows the line of 4 major persons in the building of this nation: namely, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. Of course, it was Jacob who had 12 sons that became the 12 tribes of Israel. In the providence of God, Joseph ended up in Egypt; and in the course of time, the rest of his family joined him there. They went to Egypt, not yet as a nation, but rather as a growing family consisting of merely 75 people.

Then in terms of further revelation, we have a pause down in Egypt for about the next 275 years. During this time the Hebrews had a population explosion in Egypt to where, by the time of the Exodus, they numbered about 2.5 million people. As time went by, they experienced the rigors of slavery in Egypt.

In the providence of God, Moses was born and was preserved in the house of Pharaoh himself. At the age of 40, Moses decided he would stand up for his people and lead them out of this slavery. In the process of these ambitions, he killed an Egyptian which he thought no one knew about. But when he discerned that the word was out and that Pharaoh sought to kill him, he fled for his life.

Forty years later, we find him on the backside of the desert in the very humbled position of herding his father-in-law’s sheep. Forty years earlier, he had assumed he would lead the people out from slavery, and he assumed they would recognize him as the logical choice that God would use to do it (cf. Acts 7:25).

But now in Exodus 3, as God calls him, Moses does not see himself as qualified (cf. Ex. 3:11-12) and he is “reluctant” to accept the call. Moses’ first objection was that he was unqualified, to which God told him that He would be with him and gave him a prophetic sign to validate it (cf. 3:11-12).

We now come to the second question that Moses had, as found in Exodus 3:13.

Exodus 3:13 (NKJV)

13 Then Moses said to God, “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?”

- The issue was WHAT, not WHO!

In asking, “What is Your name?”, Moses was not merely asking Who are You in terms of a title or identity. The question then would have been phrased in terms of “Who”. But here the question is “What”.

What Moses was really asking is: “What kind of a God are You? What is Your CHARACTER? What defines You in terms of our circumstances as a people?” So, Moses was really asking about the character and essence of Who God is. The issue was this: Is He the kind of God that is relevant to the people of Israel?

After all, they had been languishing there in Egypt for hundreds of years with no clear revelation from God. So, Moses in effect asks: ***“In light of all that we have gone through, and are continuing to go through, WHAT KIND OF A GOD ARE YOU?”***

As Moses goes back to the people, he anticipates such a question coming from them. Is He a God Who cares about them? Is He a God Who is in control? Hundreds of years of slavery had left the people shaken and wondering what is the nature of the God of our fathers?

And here is God’s answer:

Exodus 3:14 (NKJV)

14 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.’”

God is defined by Himself. No one else is qualified to define Him. The name **“I AM”** simply means *“to be”*. He simply is. He is the “ever-present” reality! He is the eternal God. He is self-existent and self-sufficient (cf. Mt. 22:32, Mk. 12:26, Jn. 8:58).

God is the ONLY totally self-existent, self-sufficient BEING in the universe. He has no need! Only God has life completely in and of Himself. He exists completely independent of all else and is dependent upon nothing. And Who He is He has always been and will always be. He just IS. He is the eternal “I AM”.

When God says, “I AM WHO I AM” it denotes “uninterrupted continuance”. He just always IS. He NEVER CHANGES. He is the ever-existing One and He is the never-changing One. God never learns anything. He has nothing to acquire. He has nothing to become. He just IS. All the attributes that make up God are ETERNAL and UNCHANGING.

In this, God is UNIQUE. He has no equivalent. There is no one else like Him (cf. Isa. 40:18, 25, 46:5).

Genesis 1:1 (NKJV)

1 **In the beginning God** created the heavens and the earth.

John 1:1 (NKJV)

1 **In the beginning was the Word**, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

- Before the beginning, God was already there because He is ETERNAL.

“I AM” is a most important and unique Name for God in the Bible. It is an “all-encompassing Name”.

I AM WHO I AM

Eternally Present
Self-Existent
Self-Sufficient
Independent
Unchangeable
Unique
Consistent

Dependable
Sovereign

God told Moses to go and say to the children of Israel, "I AM has sent me to you." And then verse 15 enlarges on this:

Exodus 3:15 (NKJV)

15 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**.'

The Name "**I AM**" is related to a verb form meaning "*to be*", and so is the Name "**YHWH**", which is translated as "*LORD*" in this verse.
In other words, God's Name "I AM" means "*to be*" and His Name "YHWH" also means "*to be*".

"**I AM**" (Hebrew - *ehyeh*) – means "*to be*".

"**YHWH**" (related to an earlier form of *ehyeh*) means "*to be*".

- 1) "I AM" and "YHWH" are built out of the same Hebrew word meaning "I am".
- 2) Exodus 3:14-15 uses "I AM" interchangeably with "YHWH".

- Thus, "I AM" and "YHWH" are essentially interchangeable.

In v. 14 God says: "I AM WHO I AM."

In v. 14 God says: "I AM has sent me to you."

In v. 15 God says: "YHWH... has sent me to you... This is My name forever".

- The self-existent, eternal I AM is YHWH.