



Studies in the Book of Exodus

Text
Exodus 3:11-22

Topic
Before he leaves the desert to deliver Israel from Egypt,
Moses asks God to tell him His name

Title
"I've Been Through the Desert at a Bush with God's Name"

I thought "Prince" was his stage name. It was his given name - Prince Rogers Nelson.

In 1993, Prince announced that he would no longer go by the name Prince, but rather by a "love symbol" which was a mash-up of the gender symbols for man and woman.

It presented all kinds of challenges for the media, resulting in the clumsy title, "The Artist Formerly Known as Prince."

Maybe you are of Irish decent. You want to choose a beautiful Gaelic name for your baby boy or girl. I came across a couple of names; I'll spell them, and you tell me how you'd pronounce them.

- How would you pronounce this girl name: A-O-I-B-H-E-A-N-N?
It's pronounced *Eev-un*.
- How would you pronounce this boy name: C-A-O-I-M-H-I-N?
It's pronounced *Kwee-veen*.

The pronunciation of the most common name for God in the Old Testament is unknown to us. It is called by scholars the *tetragrammaton*, which is a big word that means, *consisting of four letters*. In Hebrew the name has four consonants and no vowels - Y-H-W-H.

It may have been pronounced *Yahweh*. We can't say for sure, because the Jews came to regard this word with such reverence that they quit speaking it aloud for fear of taking it in vain. Whenever they came to this name in their reading, they would say the words "the Name," or substitute the word *adonai* which means *Lord*.

It is reported by multiple historical sources that the scribes who copied the Old Testament were required to wipe the pen and ceremonially wash their entire bodies before writing the *tetragrammaton* every time they wrote it.

The word *Jehovah* originated from an attempt to pronounce the consonants Y-H-W-H with the vowels from the word *adonai*.

Whenever you see the word LORD in all capital letters in your English bible, it's the *tetragrammaton*.

Our verses this morning are maybe the most important in all the Bible for our understanding of God's name. God commanded Moses to go to Egypt and to bring his people Israel out of

captivity. Moses asked God what His name is, so he could tell the Israelites who sent him.

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.'"

God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'The LORD [that is, Y-H-W-H], the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations."

One more insight before we dig into the text. In the Gospel of John, Jesus was in a confrontation with the religious leaders. They accused Him of being demon possessed. We pick up the dialog in verse fifty-six with Jesus talking:

Joh 8:56 Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw *it* and was glad."

Joh 8:57 Then the Jews said to Him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?"

Joh 8:58 Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, **I AM.**"

There's that *tetragrammaton* again - only Jesus uses it of Himself. In fact, the Gospel of John records seven "I AM" declarations by Jesus.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the great I AM. It was Him talking to Moses from the burning bush that wasn't consumed.

Let's see what He has to say to us. I'll organize my comments around two points: #1 I AM Has Come Alongside You, and #2 I AM Becomes All He's Promised You.

#1 I AM Has Come Alongside You

(v11-12)

Study the places where I AM is used, and meditate upon them, and you come to certain theological conclusions: God is self-existent... God is omnipotent... God is omniscient... God is the creator... God is immutable (meaning He does not change).

The majority of us are believers in Jesus Christ. We never tire of being reminded God is self-existent, omnipotent, omniscient, the creator, Who is immutable. Those things, as important as they are, mean so much more when we realize that I AM also means that God has drawn near to us in Jesus.

When God told Moses His name, He made it clear to Moses He would be with him. Let's listen in.

Exo 3:11 But Moses said to God, "Who *am* I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?"

If you weren't here for the previous studies, and you haven't watched *The Ten Commandments* in a while, I need to catch you up on the story thus far.

Moses' life was miraculously spared by the providence of God. Instead of being drowned in the Nile River like so many other Hebrew babies, he came to the attention of Pharaoh's daughter. She adopted him, and raised Moses as her own son, in the palace of Pharaoh.

After forty years walking like an Egyptian, Moses instead identified with his own heritage.

When he saw an Egyptian taskmaster beating an Israelite, Moses intervened and murdered the Egyptian.

He thought that the Hebrews would welcome him as a deliverer; they did not. He was forced to flee Egypt as a fugitive, into the wilderness. There he came upon a group of shepherdesses trying to water their flock being mistreated by the local shepherds. Moses came to their aid, came to their father Jethro in Midian, and became the husband to the oldest daughter.

Moses tended sheep for the next forty years. One day, he looked over and saw, on Mount Horeb, a thorn bush burning, but without being consumed. Intrigued, he approached the bush - only to be spoken to by Jesus from the bush.

The Lord started revealing His plan to send Moses as the deliverer of Israel in a showdown with Pharaoh. Moses had a few questions, which eventually turned into objections.

His first question was, "Who am I?" Forty years as a shepherd had taken a toll on Moses' plans. Before his stint in the wilderness, he thought everyone would recognize his unique readiness to act as the deliverer. Now he hesitated.

I'm not sure how I feel about his hesitation. On the one hand, humility is certainly commendable, and preferable to his earlier bravado. But at the same time, if God says he's chosen you, then shouldn't you simply say, "Yes?"

Humility isn't thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less. If God says you're the guy or gal, then true humility simply submits.

Part of the answer is to understand "all these [Old Testament saints] having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us" (Hebrews 11:39-40).

Moses may have been talking to God, but he had much less information than we do. We should cut Moses some slack and hold ourselves to a higher standard.

Exo 3:12 So He said, "I will certainly be with you. And this *shall be* a sign to you that I have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain."

If you're on a mission, especially a difficult one, you want the hero to accompany you. In the Tolkien universe, the travelers are always disheartened when someone like Gandalf or Aragorn can no longer be along for the journey.

Hearing that God would be with him, at every step, was the greatest of encouragements to Moses. We'll return to this in a moment.

God said He would give Moses a "sign." We tend to look ahead to chapter four, where God gives two signs:

1. First, God turns Moses' staff into a snake, then back into his staff.
2. Second, God turns Moses' hand leprous, then heals him.

Those are indeed signs; but in chapter four they are described as signs by which the Hebrews would believe God had sent Moses. The “sign” God gave Moses that He would accompany him was “When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.”

It would be fulfilled *in the future*. It was a sign in this manner: It was God’s Word and, therefore, must certainly come to pass. God was assuring Moses He *could* and *would* accomplish His Word. But Moses must believe the sign by faith.

We find ourselves trusting in a future we can only know by God’s promises. I believe I will either be raptured, or be raised from the dead. It’s in the future; it hasn’t happened yet. But I know it will, because I have God’s Word on it.

I also have a much greater foundation than a guy like Moses had, because I can see in the past that Jesus rose from the dead. His resurrection assures me that I, too, will be raised one day, to be like Him.

We talk about signs and wonders, but fail to realize that every promise of God is a sign of His faithfulness.

The Angel of the Lord - Jesus, I AM, Yahweh, Jehovah - spoke to Moses and promised “I will certainly be with you.”

- In Matthew 28:20, Jesus said, “And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”
- In Hebrews 13:5, it is reported of Jesus that He said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”

- In John 14:23, Jesus said, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.”
- In John 14:16-17, Jesus said, “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.”

Oswald Chambers wrote a devotion he titled, *The Never Forsaking God*. He said,

“I will never leave you...” - not for any reason; not my sin, selfishness, stubbornness, nor waywardness. Have I really let God say to me that He will never leave me? If I have not truly heard this assurance of God, then let me listen again.

“I will never... forsake you.” Sometimes it is not the difficulty of life but the drudgery of it that makes me think God will forsake me. When there is no major difficulty to overcome, no vision from God, nothing wonderful or beautiful - just the everyday activities of life - do I hear God’s assurance even in these?

Whatever you are going through, or will yet endure, Jesus will most certainly be with you. His presence might be all you have; but it is sufficient.

#2 I AM Becomes All He’s Promised You

(v13-22)

In volume one of the on-screen *Guardians of the Galaxy*, Peter Quill says to his would-be captor, “There’s another name you might know me by: Star Lord.”

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To which his adversary says, “Who?”

Obviously his reputation had not preceded him.

If you’re going to deliver several million people from bondage out of one of the most powerful kingdoms on the earth, you’d better have the reputation.

Exo 3:13 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?"

When God revealed Himself to man in the days of the patriarchs it was often associated with a newly revealed name or title:

- Abraham, in the encounter with Melchizedek, called on “God Most High” (Genesis 14:22).
- Abraham later encountered “Almighty God” (Genesis 17:1).
- Abraham came to know the LORD as “Everlasting God” (Genesis 21:33), and “The-LORD-Will-Provide” (Genesis 22:14).
- Hagar encountered “You-Are-the-God-Who-Sees” (Genesis 16:13).
- Jacob met “El Elohe Israel” (Genesis 33:20) and “El Bethel” (Genesis 35:7).

When Moses comes to the elders of Israel with a new message from God, it is logical to think they would ask, “What name did He reveal Himself to you under? What new revelation from God do you have?”

Exo 3:14 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.' "

“I Am,” “Y-H-W-H,” and “I AM THAT I AM” are used interchangeably. They are all nuances of the same name. Y-H-W-H was not exactly a new name. Moses’ mother’s name was *Jochabed*, meaning, *Yahweh is my glory*. Moses and Israel knew the name *Yahweh*. God did not give Moses a new and improved name of God, but the name they had known before.

Exo 3:15 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.'

God was calling them back to the faith of the patriarchs, *not* to something new. They were to understand that they were part of an ongoing story. One commentator calls it “the unfolding drama of redemption.”

For one thing, God had revealed to Abraham that his descendants would be in bondage four hundred years, then be dramatically delivered to receive their inheritance in the Promised Land.

In other words, God was no distant deity who finally decided to help Israel. No; history was unfolding just as He had foreseen it. He had been involved with redeeming lost mankind ever since the fall of man in the Garden of Eden. The exodus was another important chapter in that drama.

You and I are likewise part of the plan. In our case, it's the church age, when the Gospel is going out into all the world. The Lord is building His church; forming His body on earth; calling-out His bride. Any moment He may call us home, precipitating the beginning of the seven-year Great Tribulation, and the consummation of the age.

Exo 3:16 Go and gather the elders of Israel together, and say to them, 'The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared to me, saying, "I have surely visited you and *seen* what is done to you in Egypt;

There's the *tetragrammaton*, in the word "LORD," all in caps.

Moses was to go first to the tribal leaders, called "elders."

When it says God "visited," it means something like He observed them. After four hundred years, it must have seemed like He was a passive observer - someone who decided to not get involved.

God's presumed inactivity can seem like the Prime Directive on *Star Trek*, prohibiting interference.

Scholars label that idea Deism, which says that God does not interfere directly with the world. It also rejects revelation as a source of religious knowledge and asserts that reason and observation of the natural world are sufficient to determine the existence of a single creator of the universe.

Not so; God was making moves behind the scenes, providing for His prophesied plan to deliver Israel... And for His plans well beyond their exodus, through the end of the age.

Exo 3:17 and I have said I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, to a land flowing with milk and honey." '

I almost see this like an, "I've got good news, and I've got bad news; which do you want first?"

- The good news was that God would deliver them from bondage in Egypt to "a land flowing with milk and honey."
- The bad news was that, even though it was their land, it was full of fierce enemies who would need to be driven out by force.

I said I *almost* see it that way. I can't, not really, because in the so-called 'bad news,' the Lord had promised to be with them. There were battles to be fought; but the battles belong to the Lord.

Exo 3:18 Then they will heed your voice; and you shall come, you and the elders of Israel, to the king of Egypt; and you shall say to him, 'The LORD God of the Hebrews has met with us; and now, please, let us go three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God.'

If the goal is to be delivered from Egypt, why ask for a brief holiday, with the implication they would return after worship services were ended?

It was to show that Pharaoh was hardened against the Hebrews. If he wouldn't let them have a long weekend, then he certainly would not set them free.

When you and I are in some difficulty, enduring some trial, and it seems like God delays His deliverance, maybe it's because He is providing an opportunity for someone involved in it to repent. Especially when your problem is with one person who seems to be against you.

“That we may sacrifice to the LORD our God.” That is, to Y-H-W-H, Who is our God. Though in bondage, God was worthy of their praise.

Exo 3:19 But I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not even by a mighty hand.

We've previously discussed God's foreknowledge. Of course He knew how Pharaoh would respond. But God did not cause Pharaoh to refuse; when we get there, we'll see it was his own free will decision.

Exo 3:20 So I will stretch out My hand and strike Egypt with all My wonders which I will do in its midst; and after that he will let you go.

A contest of gods was shaping-up. Y-H-W-H versus the gods of Egypt. Each of the Egyptian gods would be defeated, leaving no doubt that Yahweh alone is God.

Exo 3:21 And I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and it shall be, when you go, that you shall not go empty-handed.

Exo 3:22 But every woman shall ask of her neighbor, namely, of her who dwells near her house, articles of silver, articles of gold, and clothing; and you shall put *them* on your sons and on your daughters. So you shall plunder the Egyptians."

In a stunning reversal of fortune, the exodus would be financed by the Egyptians.

Some see this as a sort of back-pay for their years of enslavement. Maybe; but this passage isn't about social justice or reparations.

It's about redemption - God's plan to redeem lost mankind by sending a Savior through the Hebrews.

The massive amounts of gold and silver would be of little use to the Hebrews in the wilderness. There were no WalMart's where they could purchase supplies.

In fact, the gold and silver would mostly go towards the building of the Tabernacle, where God would have His presence and meet with them; and where the sacrificial system, and calendar of feasts, would tell the story of redemption through Jesus.

I said that in these verses we'd see that I AM becomes all He's promised you. I got that idea from a passage penned by a language scholar. He wrote,

[I AM] is essentially a verb of becoming, not merely of coming into being, but coming into relationship, i.e., becoming this or that to some one... This tense yields the following rendering: "I am becoming," or, "I will become." It is full of promise: "I will become" - to Israel, disheartened, timid - "what I will become" - all that it is in My heart to become to them, all that they need. Their redemption is in Me; and, therefore, out of the fulness of My nature, shall it be unfolded act by act, step by step, stage by stage.

I AM is a declaration that God will become everything that is needed, step-by-step in your walk, in order to fulfill His promises to you. It is the name that assures you He *cannot* and *will not* fail to accomplish what He has promised.

He will never leave you or forsake you, AND being with you, He will provide everything you need.

Need for what? Everything you need in order to be conformed into the image of Jesus, a little more each day.

I can therefore trust God that He, and not me, knows what I need.

Some of you are familiar with the teaching and writing ministry of H.A. Ironside. I highly recommend his commentaries.

In his biography, an incident is recorded where, as an itinerant evangelist, he ran out of resources. He was literally sleeping on park benches. At one point, he was hungry. Applying the verse in Philippians that says, "God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus," (4:19), Ironside concluded that God knew he "needed a starving."

That's a little different. If I'm hungry, especially when serving the Lord, I think I need food. God may know that I need a starving.

Paul the apostle needed starvings... and shipwrecks... and scourging... and imprisonments... and even a thorn in his flesh.

You see, God is *conforming* us, not making us *comfortable*. The goal of our lives is Christ-likeness. A life of ease and comfort can never conform you to Christ.

God is not the cause of bad things in our lives; we live in a fallen creation, where sin and death have a foothold, and where Satan is the god of this world. But we can be assured that when God permits suffering, He can use it to conform us into the image of Jesus.

I'll close with a paragraph from my reading that sums-up nicely what we've been saying:

God has a glorious end-game in mind for us. The end-game for this physical life is only the beginning of the next - eternal life. Our God, with all the power at His command, is committed to getting us there, as First Thessalonians 5:23-24 reveals: "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. **He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.**"

Jesus is I AM - ever with us, becoming everything He's promised us, to complete the work He has begun in us at His appearing.

Step-by-step, He will do it.