

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

"YAHWEH: THE GOD WHO IS" EXODUS 3:1-15

This Week's Core Competency

Personal God – I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life. Psalm 121:1, 2

- 1 *I lift up my eyes to the hills-
where does my help come from?*
2 *My help comes from the LORD,
the Maker of heaven and earth.*

In the quotation from Psalm 121, "LORD" is in small caps to distinguish the Hebrew word being translated from a different Hebrew word rendered "Lord" in small letters. This practice is commonly employed in English translations to indicate the divine name. In the Preface to the NIV, the translation committee explains: "In regard to the divine name *YHWH*, commonly referred to as the *Tetragrammaton*, the translators adopted the device used in most English versions of rendering that name as 'LORD' in capital letters to distinguish it from *Adonai*, another Hebrew word rendered 'Lord,' for which small letters are used" (xii). The need to do this is rooted in the historic refusal of pious Jews to utter God's most sacred name lest they inadvertently violate the Third Commandment. Since they always read *Adonai* in place of it, when Hebrew vowels were added to the text of the Old Testament by the Masoretes ca. 10th century A.D., the vowels for *Adonai* were attached to the consonants of the divine name, *YHWH*, giving rise to the hybrid name *Jehovah*.

One of the reasons for using this name is to highlight God's continued existence with his people.

– Peter Enns

Names were particularly significant in biblical times. One commentator writes: "Names in the ancient Near East provide insights into the nature, character, prospect, hope, and destiny of the person bearing the label; they are not merely euphemistic labels of identification, as is often the case in our culture. William Sanford LaSor says that a person's name is 'based closely with a person's existence, representing and expressing his or her character and personality. To learn a person's name is to enter (into) a relationship with his very being' . . . God's revelations of his names in Exodus 3:1-5 [*sic*, vv. 13-15] and 6:4 [*sic*, vv. 2-4] are significant texts in writing theology of the Old Testament. These self-revelations serve to encourage the beneficiaries of the revelation to remain faithful so that they may carry out God's will in the most difficult situations. Moses and Israel need to know the meaning and significance of his name so that they may throw themselves into the fray with the powerful Pharaoh and retain their loyalty to him in face of Pharaoh's hardening opposition" (Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 359-60).

So what is the meaning and significance of the divine name, *YHWH*? The answer to that question is found in Exodus 3:13-15. God appears to Moses in the desert to tell him that the time has come to deliver the Israelites from Egyptian bondage. The LORD makes it clear that he has "come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians" (v. 8). He makes it equally clear that he intends to send Moses to Pharaoh to bring the Israelites out of Egypt (v. 10). In response to God's call, Moses offers five excuses (cf., 3:11, 13; 4:1, 10, 13); God in turn offers five assurances before Moses finally accepts

can't pg. 2

his call (4:18-23). The second of his excuses is found in 3:14: "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?" One writer quips: "Whereas the first objection Moses brings is, 'I don't think I can do this,' the second objection is, 'No one else will think I can do this, either'" (Peter Enns, *The NIV Application Commentary: Exodus*, 101).

It's not that the Israelites do not know their God's name; it's that they do not know how their God is going to respond to their desperate circumstances. One writer puts it this way: "Moses actually is asking 'What is God's relationship to the people? He has been the 'God of the fathers'; who is he *now*?" (William Sanford LaSor, David Allan Hubbard, and Frederic Wm. Bush, *Old Testament Survey*, 135, 36). Another puts it a bit differently: "Within the context of the narrative, Moses is really anticipating this question from the Israelites: 'Given all the suffering we have been through, what does I AM mean anyway?'" (Waltke, 365). Both writers agree the issue isn't God's name per se. It's what God's name implies for his people. Moses expects the people to ask him for an explanation of the significance of the divine name.

God answers Moses saying, "I AM WHO I AM," which sounds like no answer at all. One writer says that it "sounds like an evasive, circular definition and hence a refusal of an answer" (135). In fact, it's quite the opposite. The same writer goes on to say: "The Hebrew phrase translated 'I am who I am' reflects an idiom in which something is defined in terms of itself, used when the speaker either does not desire or does not have the means to be more explicit. Hence it can express something undetermined, but also totality or intensity. Thus, 'I will be gracious to who I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy' (33:19) means 'I am indeed he who is gracious and shows mercy.' Taken with that force, 'I am who I am' means 'I am indeed he who is.' Further, this existence is not a matter of being in the *metaphysical sense*—as if a philosophical statement—but rather in the *relative or efficacious sense*: 'I am he who is there (for you)—really and truly present, ready to help and to act'" (135, 36 italics added). Another explains: "In its function God's name suggests his pragmatic presence. This sense of God's being can be captured in the English phrase 'I am who I am for you.' His simplicity shows there is no shadow of variability in him. God is dependable; he can be counted upon" (Waltke, 366, 67; see also Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 114-19; R. Alan Cole, *Exodus, TOTC*, 69, 70; Enns, 101-108).

"I AM" is the God of the patriarchs (v. 15), who intends to keep his word to Abraham: "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions" (Ge 15:13, 14). "I AM" is a personal God.

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

Exodus 3:1-15

1 Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2 There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. 3 So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up."

4 When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!" And Moses said, "Here I am." 5 "Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." 6 Then he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

7 The LORD said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. 8 So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good

and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. 9 And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. 10 So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt."

11 But Moses said to God, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"

12 And God said, "I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain."

13 Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?" 14 God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

15 God also said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the 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, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation."

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Circle "Horeb" in v. 1.
- * Bracket "angel of the LORD" in v. 2.
- * Bracket "flames of fire from within a bush" in v. 2.
- * Circle "holy" in v. 5.
- * Highlight "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob" in v. 6 and similar words in v. 15.
- * Underline "seen," "heard," and "concerned" in v. 7.
- * Box "so" indicating *result* in vv. 8, 10.
- * Box "to" indicating *purpose* in v. 8.
- * Bracket "flowing with milk and honey" in v. 8.
- * Circle "sign" in v. 12.
- * Highlight "I AM WHO I AM" and "I AM" in v. 14.
- * Circle "the LORD" in v. 15.

day 2

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. Moses, the Hebrew turned Egyptian, turned exile, had turned shepherd by the time of this episode. The one who would deliver the Israelites was biding his time tending sheep. What a waste, don't you think?
2. What attracted Moses to the burning bush?
3. In what sense was the ground near the bush *holy*?
4. When God spoke to Moses, he identified himself as "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." Why would God repeatedly identify himself in this way? (Cf. 3:13, 15, 16; 4:5)
5. God used the words "my people" to refer to the Israelites in 3:7, 10. What made them his people?
6. Rather than jump at the chance, Moses proved to be a rather unwilling participant in God's plan to rescue his people. Put the point of Moses' first question (3:11) to God in your own words.
7. In what sense is the "sign" *after the fact* a real sign?
8. Should he go to the Israelites and say to them "The God of your fathers has sent me to you," Moses expected them to ask him, "What is his name?" Why would he expect them to ask that? (See pg. 1 and note on 3:15.)
9. **Discussion:** Talk about the meaning and significance of the divine name, YHWH or Yahweh.

day 3

EXAMINE – an explanation of its message to clarify your understanding of the passage.

Before discussing the message of Exodus 3:1-15, a word or two regarding its context is in order. It belongs to a longer section that extends to 4:17. This long section is divided differently by different commentators. For example, one divides it into three major parts: 1) God's Appearance to Moses (3:1-15); 2) God's Instructions to Moses (3:16-22); 3) God's Signs to Moses (4:1-17) (see U. Cassuto, *Exodus*, 30-52). Another divides it into two major parts: 1) God's Call to Moses (3:1-10); 2) Moses' Objections to the call (3:11-4:17) (see Waltke, 361-67). A third refuses to subdivide it at all claiming that to do so would destroy its unity and distort its theological message (see Enns, 94). The story of the plagues told in chapters 7-12 is another such example. While each plague can be studied individually, the purpose and point of each is best understood when they are viewed together as a polemic against the gods of Egypt that proves the God of the Israelites is the one true God. That said, there does appear to be a break between 3:15 and 16.

The message of 3:1-15 is hard to miss. The *upper story* is about God. He had seen the misery of his people in Egypt, had heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and was concerned about their suffering (vv. 7, 9), so he appeared to Moses—the Hebrew, turned Egyptian, turned exile, turned shepherd—to commission him to return to Egypt, to go to Pharaoh, and following an astounding display of wonders (see v. 20), to bring them out. And in the process of calling him he declared to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." In other words,

"I am here for my people." He had given his word to Abraham! (cf., Ge 15:7-16).

The *lower story* is about Moses. In spite of God's repeated assurances, his reluctant rescuer refused to accept his mission. As one writer puts it, "One might think that Moses would skip with joy all the way from Mount Horeb to Egypt with the good news. The promise of redemption from Egyptian cruelty was foretold as far back as Abraham's day (Gen. 15:13-14). Now Yahweh is finally going to do something about it, and Moses is privileged to bear the news. But in a fashion more like a pouting child than a warrior singled out by his commander for an honorable task, Moses begins to question God's wisdom—not once, not twice, but no less than five times" (Enns, 100). First, Moses doubted himself, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" (3:11). Then, he doubted whether the Israelites would receive him. No doubt they would challenge his claim that God had sent him (3:13) by asking, "What is his name?" And even if he answered their question, they still might not believe him (4:1). Moreover, if they didn't, he would not be able to persuade them because he was not eloquent and did not possess the powers of verbal persuasion (4:10). While some of his concerns may have been more or less legitimate, at best Moses was just dragging his feet, and he knew it. More importantly God knew it, and by the way, wasn't too happy about it! Moses just didn't want to do what God commanded, and sometimes neither do we.

The Message of the Passage

Don't drag your feet; instead get in step with I AM and obey his word for he is there to enable you to do whatever he tells you to do.

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you through his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22. Reflect on 3 "living questions" to apply what you have learned this week.

• **Journal your answers to the following *living* questions:**

–How is God making himself known to you?

–How does God want to change you?

–How is God calling you to change your world?

notes STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 2 **angel of the LORD** No ordinary angel, the angel of the LORD or messenger of the LORD (Yahweh) first appeared in Ge 16:9. Because this mysterious figure is identified with the LORD (Ge 16:13; cf. Ex 3:4) yet at the same time is distinguished from him, some have suggested that the angel of the LORD was an Old Testament manifestation of the preincarnate Christ. Others consider this unlikely. One writes, "The New Testament never lowers the identity of the Son of God to an angel of any sort. Neither Christ nor his apostles equate Jesus of Nazareth with the angel of *I AM*" (Waltke, 363). He explains: "In the biblical world, the *mal'ak*, who bears a message, is fully equated with the sender (Judg. 11:13; 2 Sam 3:12, 13; 1 Kings 20:2-6). The king's plenipotentiary is treated with the same respect as if the king himself were present. The messenger, like a press secretary for the president of the United States, is empowered to speak for the king, for he is presumed to know fully the mind of the king (cf. Gen. 21:17; 22:11; 31:11; Exod. 3:2; 14:19; 23:20; 32:34). *I AM*'s angelic captain (Num. 22:23, 31; 1 Chron. 21:16; Dan. 10:5, 20) is also treated in this fashion" (362).

v. 2 **bush** The burning bush caught Moses' eye. The curious "fire" that did not consume the bush, a frequent sign of God's presence in Exodus (cf. 13:21; 19:18; 24:17), has been explained in various ways but was likely a manifestation of the burning brightness of God's glory.

v. 5 **any closer** "Stay where you are—not another step" (Enns, 98).

v. 5 **holy** The ground around the bush was unlike any other ground; it was holy. It was set apart or made distinct by the presence of God. Consequently Moses was to remove his sandals as a sign of reverence.

v. 6 **hid his face** "What begins as a curiosity in verse 3 turns into a source of fear and reverence. Moses is getting a crash course in holy etiquette. He is to be the redeemer of Israel" (Enns, 98).

v. 7 **seen . . . concerned** This verse (cf. v. 9) clearly echoes what is recorded in 2:24, 25.

v. 8 **flowing** "'Oozing' would be a better translation. This is a dairyman's metaphor: drops of milk ooze from the animal's teats, so full of milk is she. This description of Canaan is a pastoralist's dream" (Cole, 66).

v. 10 **So, now go** God intended to rescue his people (v. 8). He planned to use Moses (v. 10) to bring them out of Egypt and take them to Canaan. That's why he commanded Moses to go, so he might implement his plan in earnest. "One expects Yahweh to say in verse 10: 'I will go to Pharaoh and give my people decisive victory.' Unexpectedly, however, this verse throws it all in Moses' lap. This is what Moses objects to, and we can perhaps sympathize with him" (Enns, 100).

v. 12 **sign** How does a sign that will not be validated until after the fact help Moses at that particular moment? According to one commentator, "The proof of the pudding will be in the eating, as we say. It will be the success of Moses' mission that will show beyond contradiction that God was indeed with him and had sent him. Such signs always follow faith" (Cole, 68). Another explains, "The reason the gathering of the Israelites at Mount Horeb is mentioned as the sign is that the Israelites *then* will experience what Moses is experiencing *now*, i.e., theophany (Exodus 33). Such an explanation, although still dissatisfying in light of Moses' self-doubt, fits nicely into the theme discussed in the previous section, i.e., Moses' experiences foreshadow those of the Israelites" (Durham cited by Enns, 101).

v. 15 **the LORD** The NIV uses capital letters to distinguish God's name, Yahweh (YHWH), rendered "LORD" from the more general Hebrew term, Adonai, rendered "Lord" in lower case letters. The name Yahweh (sometimes incorrectly spelled Jehovah) is thought to be derived from the Hebrew verb meaning to be (cf. v. 14). "The name denotes the self-existent, covenant God who lives and acts independent of outside influences. With this name God reveals himself as the faithful God of all grace who pledges himself to his people. This faithful God of the covenant does not change his being or purposes as it relates to his people whom he has redeemed" (Glen S. Martin, *Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers*, HOTC, 23; see also Enns, 101-107). The name would assure the Israelites that God would redeem them.

Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

Scott Speed is a racecar driver. Dr. Payne is a dentist. Larry Speaks is a White House spokesman. Steven I. Ball is an optometrist. Ju-Ying Song is a music teacher. Some names suit people well. During the next five weeks we will be studying different names of God. In ancient times, and in some cultures still today, a person's name had a special meaning. Names could reflect the parent's vocation or the geographic location of a family. Children today are often named after a family member who held special significance to the parents. Every name has a story. God's names reveal something about Him too. They reveal His character. Each name of God found in the scripture gives us greater insight into our Heavenly Father. How blessed we are to have a loving Father who wants us to know Him. Why not play a fun game with your family? Gather them together and have everyone guess what their name might mean. Guess the meaning of other family members. Look up the actual meaning to see how close you were. You can find many websites or books at the library that give name meanings. For unusual names you may have to find one close to it. Spend some time thanking God that He knows our name and everything else about us! May He grant us wisdom to know Him more!

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Read Exodus 3:1-15

1. What strange sight did Moses see in the desert?
2. What was the first thing God told Moses to do?
3. What did God call Himself in verse 14?

What Do You Think

In verse 7, God said He had seen the misery of His people in Egypt. How does it make you feel to know that God sees every situation we are in?

What R U Going To Do

The task that God gave Moses was a big one and at first, Moses was afraid to go. God assured Moses that He would go with Him. Is there something that God has asked you to do? Be kind to someone? Pray for someone? Serve someone in some way? Go ahead and do it! He will be with you!

MEMORY TIME

Core Comp

Personal God – I believe God cares about everything in my life

Memory Verse

Psalm 86:9 – *All the nations you have made will come and worship before you, O Lord; they will bring glory to your name.*

KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized CC ____ and Verse _____. Family completed **Say** _____ **Think** _____ **Do** _____

Child's name _____ Grade ____ Parent's signature _____

Earn 1 token by completing the PantegoKids Bible study and another token by reciting the memory verse.
Questions: Kids@pantego.org

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity 2 Corinthians 13:14

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace Ephesians 2:8-9

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible 2 Timothy 3:16-17

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God Psalm 121:1-2

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ John 1:12

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church Ephesians 4:15-16

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity John 3:16

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion Psalm 82:3-4

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity John 14:1-4

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship 1 Timothy 6:17-19

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship Psalm 95:1-7

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer Psalm 66:16-20

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study Hebrews 4:12

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness Matthew 6:33

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts Romans 12:4-6

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community Acts 2:44-47

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time Colossians 3:17

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith Ephesians

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life Romans 12:1

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy John 15:11

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace Philippians 4:6-7

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness Proverbs 3:3-4

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control Titus 2:11-13

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility Philippians 2:3, 4

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love 1 John 4:10-12

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience Proverbs 14:29

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness 1 Thess. 5:15

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness Philippians 4:5

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope Hebrews 6:19-20

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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Wendy Hollabaugh (B.S.W. University of Texas at Arlington) is the Children's Minister at Pantego Bible Church. Wendy has over ten years of experience in Children's Ministry. She has a passion for leading families to connect with God and each other. She enjoys creating compelling environments where kids fall in love with God and His Truth. Wendy and her husband, Greg, are also involved in their own personal youth ministry as they are training their three teenagers, Hannah, Aaron and Noah.



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