

I AM with You
Exodus 3:9-15
November 9, 2025

In *The Two Towers*, Merry and Pippin meet an ancient tree called an Ent. They introduce themselves, telling this Ent their names. Though it is kind to them, the tree responds, “I am not going to tell you *my* name, not yet at any rate. . . For one thing it would take a long while: my name is growing all the time, and I’ve lived a very long, long time; so *my* name is like a story. Real names tell you the story of the things they belong to.”¹ I bring that up, not because it’s a one-to-one to anything we’ll talk about today, but because it captures a few things that are a bit foreign to us, but better understood in the ancient world, and true in the Old Testament.

Our fourth through sixth grade Sunday School class is currently doing a study called *How Majestic is Your Name*, a study that emphasizes the truth that the names of God in Scripture are central to God’s self-revelation. The scope of this revelation is *one* of the reasons there’s more than one name revealed in the Bible. One wouldn’t capture it, at least not *fully*.

I’ve taught through that particular study more than once. On *El-Shaddai* day I’d stream an 80s tune on my phone while fifth graders rolled their eyes. But when I taught the fact that one name alone couldn’t capture all of God’s nature, I would point out that this is true even of us, at least in terms of names used in relationships. By that I mean, to some of you I might be Pastor Matt. My high school buddies do *not* call me that. Further, there are a number of Greek students over the years that have called me Dr. Sliger. So, there’s Matt, there’s Sliger, there’s Pastor Matt, there’s Dr. Sliger. But that’s not all. The dearest people in my life call me “Dad.” One day, I hope to be called “Pa,” or “Grandpa,” or whatever Julie tells me is my new name.

You have your own version of that. One “name” doesn’t capture all the ways someone might relate to other people.² But the point in bringing it up is that each of those “names” refer to the *same* person.

Now, that captures *some* of the reality, not all of it. In the Old Testament there’s *more* than one name because *as* God intervenes in history, He’s revealing more and more about Himself. What unfolds isn’t His person. That’s unchanging. What unfolds is the revelation of Him.

How do we know that to be true? Because we see it happen. “God Most High” is in Genesis 14. The “God who sees” is in Genesis 16. The “Lord will provide” is with Abraham and Isaac in Genesis 22, and on we might go. Those names in Genesis don’t *each* reveal a different God, but the same unchanging God revealing Himself more fully in relationship to His people.

And we don’t believe this *only* because we see it unfold, but because God Himself tells us this is what He is doing. With that in mind, we might skip ahead to Exodus 6, when God says this to Moses: **I am the LORD** (Yahweh); **and I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God Almighty** (El-Shaddai), but by my name, **LORD** (Yahweh), **I did not make myself known to them.**

In that passage, God tells us what He’s doing.³ Though there are *aspects* of Him that were not revealed in the book of Genesis, Exodus—the book *and* the event—will make some of those aspects known. And His name is central to this self-revelation.

Exodus 3 tells us that name. Or—better said—in this passage God reveals it to Moses.

We’re going to look at this text—not with my typical three points—but with two questions and two answers. The first question is this:

¹ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Two Towers*, 68. Thanks to Alec Motyer for pointing me to this, in *The Message of Exodus*, 54.

² How could an inexhaustible God be revealed fully in a single expression?

³ We do not name God; He names Himself. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, Vol. 2, 98.

1. Who am I? (vv. 9-11)

As I mentioned in the update last week, this week's text is part two of the burning bush. Moses *remains* on Horeb—or Sinai—and the Lord *continues* to speak to him out of a blazing fire. Last week He told Moses to “come no further” (v. 5). He told Moses to remove his sandals. And He told Moses who *He* is, at least to some degree, in verse 6: **I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.**

When Moses heard all this, from Him, he hid his face. Though a few moments prior, when he *first* saw the “ablaze but not consumed” bush, Moses *had* to see **this marvelous sight** (3:3). But now—having God revealed to him—he **was afraid to look** (3:6). The ground he stood on was holy. And he knew it was holy because of the One speaking to him.

So, as we consider today's text, don't *descend* from Horeb. Stay on the mount. The fire is *still* burning. The bush is *still* not consumed. And the voice of God proceeds from it.

And in verse 9 He reiterates something we've heard now for three weeks in a row. I'm not sure we could hear it *too* much. The God that speaks is the God that hears and sees. He says in verse 9: **Now, behold, the cry of the sons of Israel has come to Me; furthermore, I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians are oppressing them.**

He's holy, yes. But He's *also* drawn near to those who are afflicted. In fact, in verse 8 He'd *just* said, **I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians.** Now, someone that didn't grow up with Charlton Heston, Sunday School, or *The Prince of Egypt* would wonder, “*How?* How will He do this?” What's this God speaking from the midst of a bush going to do to bring about the deliverance of scores and scores of (1:7) enslaved Hebrews—those swarming the Goshen Delta—those under the thumb of one of the world's superpowers, Egypt?

And if one started to wonder *how* He might do this, I'm not sure you'd expect what comes up in verse 10. Certainly, the one that heard it didn't. The One that's come down to deliver His people says to Moses in verse 10: **Therefore, come now, and I will send you to Pharaoh, so that you may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt.**

To grasp Moses's response to this, it might be worth considering what's transpired in Moses's life, at least in terms of what Exodus has told us. He—a Hebrew child—was born under an edict of death. Yet, *in* the very waters of destruction, he's delivered by means of an ark (2:3). Then he's adopted, named, and raised in the halls of Egyptian power. If anyone's ever been upwardly mobile, it's the first forty years of Moses's life.

And yet if anyone's embodied riches to rags bottoming out, it's Moses's *next* forty years. Chapter 3 begins with him weeks away from home. He's out on the west side of the wilderness—in the middle of nowhere—doing a job no Egyptian would be caught doing. He's a shepherd, pasturing a flock. Further, it's not the flock he's earned during the “prime” of his life. No, instead, he's taking care of his father-in-law's possessions (3:1). That's Moses at 80. It's a long way from Moses at 40.

But *this* day the God of His Fathers appeared to Moses in a burning bush, told him that He planned to deliver the sons of Israel, and *then* told Moses that He planned to do so *through* him. With all that in mind, I think verse 11 makes sense: **But Moses said to God, “Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?”**

I'm not saying *all* of Moses's questioning in the chapters ahead should be described as good, but I *am* saying it's understandable. Considering his failure from 40-years-prior, considering the fact that he's *not* some great leader or warrior—instead a shepherd out in “Timbuktu”—the question, “Who am I?” seems quite appropriate. It might even, at *this* point, be humble.

Later in the Hebrew Scriptures, a king would be told, by this same God, **I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. He**

shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. And to that revelation, to the same God, David said the same words Moses did: **Who am I?** (2 Sam. 7:12–18).

I'm not saying *either* one of these guys asked the question perfectly, but the question aims in the right direction. In one sense God's answer in Exodus 3 affirms the spirit of the question. And He answers it in the only way it can be. That is, "Who are you? Well, you're right about that. But that's less relevant than you think it is. You're not the reason this will succeed." Verse 12: **And He said, "Certainly I will be with you."**

2. I AM with you (v. 12)

In one sense, the Lord accepted Moses's sense of inadequacy. That's not up for debate. But *then* He countered that truth by the adequacy of His own presence.⁴ That is, it's not ultimately going to be about who Moses is, but the One who was *with* him. We might say that the answer to "Who am I?" is—all caps—I AM. I AM *with* you.

This is, of course, a common encouragement in the Old Testament, especially in moments of uncertainty or danger.⁵ If we fast-forward a bit, after Moses dies, Joshua's about to cross the Jordan. Enemies await. And in that moment the Lord says to Joshua: **Just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you** (Josh. 1:5).

And of course that's not *only* true with Moses, nor with just Joshua.

We might say, and we *should* say, "I can't. There's just no way. But, I'm not alone."

In Exodus 3, the Lord is so confident of what's going to come about that He gives Moses specifics concerning the journey *out* of Egypt. And not just about the destination, but about the hearts of those who'll make the trip. *Before* it happens, He wants Moses to know what's going to happen.

In fact, He calls it, preemptively, a sign. Out of the bush, the God who said, "I will be with you," then says, **And this shall be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain.** That's the sign. The Lord says *when* (not *if*) you and the people come out of Egypt, you'll worship Me on this very mountain.

Some people get a little tripped up on this, because they wonder *why* Moses would need a sign *after* the Lord's used him to deliver the sons of Israel. But I think the sign has *at least* three significant functions. First, as noted, it portrays the deliverance as a done deal. In other words, I am with you. And *this* is what's going to happen *because* I am. Or, because I AM.

Secondly, this sign shows us that it's not *merely* physical or temporal deliverance He aims to bring about. That is, it's not merely measurable by the movement of people from one place to another.⁶ What are they going to *do* once they leave Egypt? Out of the bush, this holy God, says, "They will worship Me." What God intends to bring about is not just liberation in a geographical sense, He aims to transform.⁷ He will reveal Himself to them. And many of them will believe.

It's worth pausing there. That's why we've believed as well. It wasn't on a mountain lit-up by a fire. But you were in a dungeon. And that dungeon filled with light.

Thirdly, and maybe this is the least obvious, but climbing Horeb (or Sinai) is not necessarily the most obvious excursions on a trip from Egypt to Canaan. And as we'll see when we get to Exodus

⁴ Motyer, 51.

⁵ Jeffery Leonard, *The Preacher's Hebrew Companion to Exodus 1:1–15:21*, 133.

⁶ Douglas Stuart, *Exodus*, NAC, 119.

⁷ Michael Morales, *Exodus Old and New*, 37.

15–18, a lot will happen before they return to this mountain. So, why might the Lord tell Moses this in Exodus 3? Because in Exodus 19, in spite of everything Moses sees in front of him, he could be confident that all was going precisely as intended.⁸ The “sign” would remind him: even if there was a detour, it was there by de-sign.

By the way, don’t miss the pattern here—of water, wilderness, and mountain.⁹ Moses came out of water, went west of the wilderness, and ended up on a mountain. Israel will come out of Red Sea water, go into a wilderness for a bit, and end up on a mountain in Exodus 19. If you look at Matthew’s Gospel, in chapter 3 Jesus comes out of water, in chapter 4 He’s in the wilderness, and in chapter 5 He teaches from on top of a mountain. And if I might take that journey—that pattern—and portray Jesus at the pioneer of it (Heb. 2), we *too* come out of water in baptism, then we sojourn in something of a wilderness, and yet we’re headed to the true and better Mount Zion, the New Jerusalem, a city on a hill lit up by Christ Himself. I AM will be with us—Immanuel, forever.

Now, we have the benefit of knowing all that because of *hundreds* of pages of revelation. Moses did not have that. So, when the voice out of the bush says, “I will be with you,” he asks an understandable follow-up.

3. **Who are You?** (v. 13)

At this point, we might say Moses is thinking through his next steps. He’s been told that he’ll make the journey *back* to the place he fled 40 years earlier. He probably assumes they’re not going to roll out the red carpet. He probably has a thousand questions at this point. But he begins *here*, in verse 13: **Then Moses said to God, “Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you.’ Now they may say to me, ‘What is His name?’ What shall I say to them?”**

In that question, you can hear his lack of knowledge. That is, if he *knew* the name of the Lord, he wouldn’t be asking.¹⁰ And further, it’s not *just* Moses that needs more information. It’s *likely* the people of God needed this as well. At this juncture, nearly all people groups and nations affirmed the truth that there were *many* gods. Having lived in a polytheistic world for centuries, all Israelites were at risk for some “cafeteria” theology.¹¹

And even if we’re a bit more generous toward the Israelites, those who’d *continued* in the faith of their fathers might *still* have questions. They very likely would wonder if Moses *himself* really even knew who the God of their fathers was. So, Moses asks a question that some say sets up, or frames, the entire book.¹² That is, verse 13’s, **what is His name?**¹³

In the Scriptures, at least typically, a name carried a good bit of significance. We noted that when Pharaoh’s daughter named the baby that she pulled out of the Nile. Names were *not* merely labels. They often were given in reference to the person’s character. Eve was given her name for a reason (Gen. 3:2). Likewise, Abram’s name was changed to Abraham, *because* he was the father of a multitude (Gen. 17:5). In the New Testament, Simon received a new name, a name that sounded like a rock: Peter.

⁸ Motyer, 53.

⁹ See Morales, 81.

¹⁰ Ross Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known*, NSBT, 31.

¹¹ Stuart, 120.

¹² Blackburn, 35.

¹³ As we’ve mentioned, the title of this book in the Hebrew Bible is actually “these are the names,” the first words of Exodus 1:1. See Stuart, 57.

With that in mind, in Scripture God's name is His self-revelation.¹⁴ He makes Himself known to His people, in part, by His names. In one sense, Moses's question, **"What shall I say to them?"** could also be understood as a way of saying, "What revelation of God do you bring?"¹⁵ So, God answers him.

4. **I AM Yahweh** (vv. 14-15)

As we've noted before, God answers Moses's question in three stages. Even here, the revelation is progressive. The first stage of this unfolding revelation is in verse 14: **God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM."** This answer looks *back* to verse 12's "I AM with you," at least to some degree.¹⁶ It's not a stretch to say that the meaning of "I AM" is *related* to the assurances the Lord just gave Moses.

Some have called this answer, this phrase, God's "is-ness." I AM means He *is*. The God pictured by the flame in front of Moses, the One that needed no outside fuel—the self-existent and self-sustaining One—*He* was the One who'd be with Him. He *is*. That's why He says, I AM.

However, if you read, **I AM WHO I AM** and think there's just a *little* ambiguity, you're not alone. It's certainly *not* the complete answer.¹⁷ According to Alec Motyer, the Lord is, in one sense, "keeping Himself in reserve."¹⁸ In other words, He seems to be holding back. That is, there's *more* to be unveiled by Him and experienced by His people.

But that's the first stage of this revelation. The second stage does reveal a *little* more information, mostly in terms of those to whom Moses was to speak. Verse 14 continues: **Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, "I AM has sent me to you."** It's not *much* more, but it's more. This answer re-emphasizes Moses's role in relationship to Israel's God. If they wondered who Moses was, he was the one sent by I AM.

But again, "I AM" begs the question, "you are . . . *what*?"¹⁹ What is your *name*?

The third stage of His answer arrives in verse 15: **God, furthermore, said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, '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.'"**

Now, before we get to *the* name, note the names of these fathers listed here. Interestingly, the *first* time Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are listed together is in Genesis 50:24. It's just a page or two back in your Bible. But it's hundreds of years before this moment. And in that instance, those names are listed together in reference to God's promise to bring His people out of Egypt.²⁰ Why point that out? Because Moses was *not* coming to God's people in the name of a new god but in the name of the true God of old.²¹ You might say His name—and the revelation of Him—is part of an unfolding story.²²

And what is that name? We read it in verse 15. It might be in all-caps in your Bible. It's the Hebrew word, "Yahweh," translated in verse 15 as LORD. Though the word is certainly *used* earlier in the Scriptures, this is the *first* time God declares Yahweh as His name. Moses asked the question. God answers it.

¹⁴ Bavinck, 95.

¹⁵ Motyer, 54.

¹⁶ Blackburn, 35. In Hebrew, "I am" is in verse 12 as well. See Leonard, 132.

¹⁷ Blackburn, 37.

¹⁸ Motyer, 57.

¹⁹ Blackburn, 37, 39.

²⁰ Leonard, 138.

²¹ Stuart, 122.

²² Motyer, 55fn.

Some have called it a re-revelation of the name.²³ Even though it'd been used before this moment, it doesn't *seem* as if the children of Jacob had employed it much. So, it's been hundreds and hundreds of years. And, again, living in a place marked by pagan polytheism for centuries, the Hebrews had lost a measure of the knowledge of the true God.²⁴

But, as mentioned earlier, it's not *just* that; it's *more* than that. Because God declares in Exodus 6 that He hadn't revealed this aspect of His name—at least in *this* way—yet. Exodus 6:3: **I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God Almighty (El-Shaddai) but by My name, LORD (Yahweh) I did not make Myself known to them.**

What does He mean by *that*? What will *be* revealed about God to Israel that was *not* made known fully to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob?²⁵ Exodus 6:6 answers: **“Say, therefore, to the sons of Israel, ‘I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage. I will also redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. Then I will take you for My people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.’”**

As we've mentioned, this is *some* of the reason Exodus doesn't skip from chapter 5 to chapter 14, moving quickly from Moses confronting Pharaoh to the release of God's people. God doesn't release Israel *immediately*²⁶ because what He's *about* to do—the signs and wonders and plagues and Passovers that lead to the Exodus itself—reveal the being and attributes of God as *no other event* thus far.²⁷ In other words, God tells Moses what He's *about* to do; and He tells him *why*.

In the chapters ahead, in the events ahead, He aims to make Himself—His *name*—known. “Who are you?” Moses asks. God answers, “I AM Yahweh.” And then He says this at the end of verse 15: **This is My name forever, and this is My memorial name to all generations.**

And that is what happens. The Law reveals it further. The Psalmist sings of His name (Ps. 72:17, 19; 135:13). And to those who've forgotten it, the prophets declare it once again (Isa. 55:13; 63:12).

Conclusion

And as revelation progressed, so did the revelation of God Himself.

In fact, when the fullness of time came, the One who said to Moses, “I AM with you,” and declared “I AM Yahweh” to Israel, dwelt among a people, was “with them,” so He might make God known (John 1:18). Not by flame in a bush, but in flesh with a body. He even used the language of Exodus 3 to refer to Himself, saying, **Before Abraham was born, I am** (John 8:58). And that two-word phrase wasn't language He shied away from. In the same Gospel He declared, “I am” the bread of life (Jn. 6); I am the light of the world (Jn. 8); I am the door; I am the good shepherd (Jn. 10); I am the resurrection (Jn. 11); I am the way; I am the truth; I am the life (Jn. 14).

And then, after He'd done all *that*, on a Thursday night, He prayed this: **I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave me out of the world. . . I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known** (John 17:6, 26).

This is God made known. I AM was with Moses. Then, He walked among us. And, now, He is the One with us.

²³ Stuart, 120.

²⁴ Stuart, 120.

²⁵ Blackburn, 45.

²⁶ Morales, 43.

²⁷ Morales, 40.

