

A Name Like No Other

Session 1

December 3, 2023

The Importance of God's Name

The Point: God's name reveals He is the all-powerful God whom we can completely trust.

Session Passage: Exodus 3:1-6,9-15

The Setting of Exodus 3. Moses had fled from Egypt after he killed an Egyptian taskmaster who was mistreating an Israelite slave (Ex. 2:11-12). He had taken refuge in Midian (v. 15), where he met and settled with the family of Reuel, the priest of Midian. While perhaps Moses thought that this would be his home from that day forward, God had other plans as He remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (vv. 23-25).

Exodus 3:1-6

Connection to The Point: God is a holy God we are to approach with reverential fear.

Shepherding (v. 1). Egyptians did not have a high view of shepherds. They were "detestable to Egyptians" (Gen. 46:34) because they viewed shepherds as being uncultured in their nomadic ways.

Father-in-law Jethro (v. 1). *Jethro* is also identified as Reuel (Ex. 2:18). It is possible that the term for *father-in-law* is used of all male relatives in that line, meaning Reuel was the grandfather of Moses's wife, Zipporah (v. 21) and Jethro was her father. On the other hand it is also possible that the names were synonymous. It was not uncommon for a person to have multiple names in that period.

Priest of Midian (v. 1). Midian was a son of Abraham by his concubine Keturah (Gen. 25:1-2). Abraham had sent him and his family away to the east (v. 6), where they became a nomadic tribe. The Midianites settled in habitable areas of the central and northern parts of the Sinai Peninsula, where Moses went when he fled Egypt. The god that the priest of Midian served is uncertain, though Jethro later declared Yahweh to be "greater than all gods" (Ex. 18:11).

Wilderness (v. 1). The term *wilderness (midbar)* is sometimes referred to as "desert." The wilderness is similar to a desert in that it receives little rain throughout the year, but it is usually not composed of sand that we normally associate with deserts. Rather it is a rocky, barren land.

Horeb, the mountain of God (v. 1). *Horeb* was another name for Mount Sinai. Sinai was the name of the peninsula, and Horeb was a mountain located in the southern part of the peninsula. Moses had apparently traveled a far distance from Midian with Jethro's sheep to find good pasture land. Moses referred to Horeb as *the mountain of God* because it was where God appeared to him and where he later received the Ten Commandments from the Lord (Ex. 19:20; 20:1-17).

Angel of the Lord (v. 2). The term *angel of the Lord (malak Yahweh)* appears in the Old Testament fifty times. It often appears to designate a theophany, or appearance of God to humanity. This seems to be the usage in Genesis 16 when the angel of the Lord appeared to Hagar and spoke to her as the voice of God. This also appears to be the case in Judges 6 where the angel of the Lord spoke to Gideon, and Gideon recognized that he had been in the Lord's presence. In Exodus 3, the angel is referred to as both Lord (vv. 2,4,7,15-16,18) and God (vv. 4,6,11-16,18).

A bush (v. 2). The Hebrew word (*seneh*) refers to a small, thorny bush that populated that region of the wilderness. The presence of God was often associated with fire: a pot of fire and a flaming torch when God made a covenant with

Abraham (Gen. 15:17); a pillar of fire when the Lord led the Israelites at night during the exodus (Ex. 13:21). Moses described the Lord as “a consuming fire, a jealous God” (Deut. 4:24). The miraculous sighting of a bush that was burning but not consumed attracted Moses’s attention.

God (v. 4). The Hebrew term is *Elohim*. It emphasizes the majesty and infinite nature of God.

Moses, Moses! (v. 4). In Semitic culture of that time, speaking someone’s name twice was known as “repetition of endearment.” It was a way of expressing friendship and affection. “Thus Moses would have understood immediately that he was being addressed by someone who loved him and was concerned about him.”¹

Remove the sandals . . . holy ground (v. 5). Priests who entered temples in that day would enter barefoot to prevent bringing in dust or impurities to the place of worship. Also, an inferior removed his sandals when in the presence of his superior. God had taken a common place in the wilderness and turned it into *holy ground*. Because the presence of God was in the bush, Moses had to keep a proper distance from the bush and remove his sandals in acknowledgement that he was in the presence of God.

God of your father (v. 6). God knew Moses, calling his name twice (v. 4). However, Moses did not know God. God first introduced Himself as the “God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” He also spoke in the present tense “I am” rather than “I was.” This emphasizes continuity: The same God who was with the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, was now with Moses, and this was too much for Moses to endure. He “hid his face because he was afraid to look at God.”

Exodus 3:9-12

Connection to The Point: We can trust God to do what He says He will do because He is all-powerful.

The Israelites’ cry (v. 9). The intensity of the Israelites’ cries for help was due to the Egyptians’ increasing demands under which the Israelites were forced to labor. God had heard their cries and remembered His covenant with the patriarchs (Gen. 12:1-3; 15); He was now acting to fulfill His promises to Abraham by delivering the Israelites from Egyptian slavery (Ex. 2:23-25).

Seen (v. 9). Nothing escapes God’s attention. He knows all that happens throughout His creation.

Oppressing them (v. 9). The term for *oppressing* (*lachats*) literally means “to press”; figuratively it means to afflict or to crush. The Israelites were suffering under the crushing weight of the Egyptians’ work demands. The oppression of the Israelites centered upon the Egyptians’ fear that the Hebrews were becoming too numerous and powerful (1:9). This resulted in increased workloads (vv. 11-14) and genocide against Israelite male infants (vv. 16,22). It would get worse before it got better, as more labor was demanded of the Israelites with less supplies provided to accomplish their work (5:6-19).

Go. I am sending you (v. 10). Moses was to be God’s representative before Pharaoh and the Egyptians, as well as the leader of the Israelites during their exodus from Egypt.

My people (v. 10). Through His covenant with Abraham, each generation of Abraham’s descendants were part of that covenant, therefore they were God’s *people*. God called Abraham to leave his homeland and go to a land God promised to give Him (Canaan). The Lord promised to bless Abraham and make him into a great nation. Through Abraham, all the peoples of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 12:1-3).

Out of Egypt (v. 10). Joseph had asked his descendants to carry his bones from Egypt to Canaan, the land that God had promised to the Israelites (Gen. 50:24-25). The Israelites spent 430 years in Egypt (Ex. 12:40), so slavery and Egyptian culture were most if not all that the Israelites knew by the time of Moses.

Who am I (v. 11). This was a proper and respectful way of expressing humility when given such a large assignment. This question in and of itself did not suggest that Moses lacked self-confidence. However, Moses's seeming lack of self-confidence is clearly apparent in another passage (4:10). Most likely Moses's question expressed both respect and humility, as well as a lack of self-confidence.

Be with you (v. 12). God promised Moses that he would not be alone in accomplishing the task He was giving him. God would go with him. This is a similar promise to the one given to Christians by Jesus in the "Great Commission" where they are commanded to go and make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19-20).

Sign (v. 12). This Hebrew word (*oth*) describes something that pointed to something of greater value or significance. It refers to the lights in the sky that served as signs for the seasons (Gen. 1:14). It also refers to the mark God put upon Cain after he murdered Abel (4:15). The rainbow was a sign God would not destroy the world again by water (9:12-13,17). Circumcision was a sign of God's covenant with Abraham and his descendants (17:11), as was the Sabbath (Ex. 31:13,17). All of the miraculous plagues God inflicted upon Egypt were called "signs and wonders" (7:3). The purpose of this sign in Exodus 3:12 was so that all would know it was the Lord who had sent Moses to the Israelites and that it was the Lord who would deliver the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt.

Worship (v. 12). God saved the Israelites from something (slavery), but He also saved them to something (worship and witness). He delivered them from their old way of life and prepared them for a calling to worship Him, to live in community with Him, and to be a witness concerning the one, true God to the world. In the Hebrew the verb is plural, meaning that God was calling the entire nation to worship Him after He had delivered them from the Egyptians.

This mountain (v. 12). This is a reference to "the mountain of God" (v. 1). That verse identifies this mountain as Horeb, another name for Mount Sinai (19:11). It was on this mountain that God would descend in the presence of the Israelites (vv. 16-20). It is also where God would give Moses the Ten Commandments and the various instructions concerning how the Israelites were to faithfully live in covenant with God as the community of His people, as well as instructions on building the tabernacle (chaps. 20-23; 24:12-31:18).

Exodus 3:13-15

Connection to The Point: God's name reflects His sovereign character that draws us into a trusting relationship with Him.

If I go to the Israelites (v. 13). Moses was weighing his response to God's request. This conditional clause is an indication of the concern that Moses would have had about returning to Egypt, where he had killed an Egyptian and then fled to the wilderness to escape Pharaoh's wrath (2:11-15). He needed assurance that what God was asking Him to do was attainable.

What is his name? (v. 13). The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was known by various names. His name was *El Elyon* ("God Most High," Gen. 14:18-20), *El Shadday* ("God Almighty," 17:1; 28:3; 35:11; 43:14; 48:3), and *El Roi* ("the one who sees me [literally "God sees me"]," 16:13) to name just a few of His titles. In Exodus 6:3, the Lord told Moses that He had appeared to the patriarchs as "God Almighty." Although God has different names based on the circumstances through which people came to know Him, He is still the same God who is consistent in character. The reason for Moses's asking the name of God was so the Israelites would know the source of Moses's calling and message.

I AM WHO I AM (v. 14). God revealed to Moses that His name is *I AM WHO I AM*, the translation of the personal name of God—*Yahweh*. This name comes from the Hebrew verb for “to be.” It emphasizes God as being both self-existent and self-sufficient. Nobody created Him, and He needs nothing outside of Himself to exist. He is the Creator and Sustainer of all that exists. It was important for the people of Israel to know that the God who spoke to Moses is not merely some localized deity invented to boost the crops or create fertility in humans. This is the God who created and sustains the world in which they lived, and He was about to deliver them from slavery in Egypt.

I AM (v. 14). This is a shortened form of the Hebrew translated *I AM WHO I AM*. “God’s response [to Moses asking what God’s name is] is not a ‘name’ that makes God an object of definition or limitation. Rather, it is an affirmation that God is always the subject, always free to be and act as God wills.”² Later, Jesus would refer to Himself as “I am” when He said, “Truly I tell you, before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58, see 1:1-3).

Say this to the Israelites (v. 15). God gave Moses a message to deliver to the Israelites. Moses was to tell the Hebrews that *Yahweh* was not a localized Egyptian deity but the same God who had revealed Himself to their ancestors and made His covenant with them. In reestablishing the Israelites as His people (“my people,” Ex. 3:7) and leading them to the promised land, God was continuing the work of fulfilling the covenant that He had begun in calling Abraham. Through this covenant the entire world would be blessed (Gen. 12:3). This promise would have its ultimate fulfillment in the coming of Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, through whose sacrifice people can be saved from their sins, reconciled to God, and receive eternal life (Mark 10:45; John 3:16).

The Lord (v. 15). This is a substitution for God’s name *Yahweh*. The substitution follows the practice of the Jews, who substituted the word *Adonai* (meaning “lord” or “master”) for *Yahweh* because they feared saying God’s name lest they mispronounce it. When Lord occurs (in small caps) it is an indicator that the word being referenced is *Yahweh*. He is the Creator and Sustainer of all that exists.

My name forever (v. 15). Though the Hebrews did not have a fully developed view of eternity, the Hebrew word translated *forever* (*olam*) is the closest that they came to understanding the concept. It referred to a continuing permanence, or something that would extend to the future even beyond what one could comprehend or experience with his own senses. In this context, it indicates there never will be a time when God’s name ceases to exist. This is another way of expressing the meaning of God’s name *Yahweh*. God is the One who was, who is, and who is to come (Rev. 1:8; 4:8). The Israelites could trust Moses because His commission was from the one, true God whose name will last into all eternity. Earthly rulers, including the Pharaoh of Egypt, would perish, but *Yahweh* stands forever.

Remembered (v. 15). The term (*zeker*) is related to the word for “memory.” One of the consistent reasons that the Israelites strayed from their faith in and covenant with *Yahweh* was that they failed to remember Him, their covenant with Him, and how He had faithfully provided for them and their ancestors. Instead, they strayed, placing their hopes in false gods and thereby falling into idolatry.

Every generation (v. 15). God did not choose Israel because of some deserved merit on their part. Rather, He chose them because of His grace and His desire to use them to bless all the other nations (Gen. 12:3). His desire was to use the Hebrew people to reveal Himself to the nations. However, the Hebrews failed in this regard; but God still used the Hebrews to bring the Messiah, Jesus, into the world. In so doing, the name of God would stand forever and it would affect every generation. Two words in Hebrew receive the translation *generation*. The first is *toledoth*, which is not used in this passage. It refers to family history and genealogies. The second term *dor*, the word used in this verse, is related to the Hebrew word for “circle,” and means to move in a circle. It refers to the circle of life from birth to death or from birth to birth. It can also refer to all the people living in a specific time-period. That period could include the years of a living person, or it could have specific events as its boundary markers. God declared to Moses that *Yahweh* was the name by which He was to be known to every future generation of the Israelites.

1. Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, vol. 2, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 113–114.
2. Chris Church, “I Am,” *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, gen. ed. Chad Brand, rev. (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2015), 786.