

Not What: Who is God?

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Exodus: Redeemer and Redeemed / Exodus 3:13–15

Exodus 3:13–22 ESV

¹³ Then Moses said to God, “If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” ¹⁴ 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.’” ¹⁵ God also said to Moses, “Say this to the people 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.’ This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations. ¹⁶ Go and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, “I have observed you and what has been done to you in Egypt, ¹⁷ and I promise that I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey.”’” ¹⁸ And they will listen to your voice, and you and the elders of Israel shall go to the king of Egypt and say to him, ‘The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us; and now, please let us go a three days’ journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God.’” ¹⁹ But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand. ²⁰ So I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with all the wonders that I will do in it; after that he will let you go. ²¹ And I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and when you go, you shall not go empty, ²² but each woman shall ask of her neighbor, and any woman who lives in her house, for silver and gold jewelry, and for clothing. You shall put them on your sons and on your daughters. So you shall plunder the Egyptians.”

In this moment, God is revealing two things about himself, which are important for us to hear. First, God is going to show us his transcendence. Second, God is going to show us his condescension, that is, how he “comes down” to save his people.

1. Yahweh is completely distinct.

Here we learn that God is not a *what* but a *who*. This is a pivotal moment and theme in the book of Exodus: who is actually sovereign over Egypt and the whole universe?

- a. Meaning of Yahweh
 - i. Moses most certainly expected the Lord to answer with a name, but God answers with a verb from Moses’s native tongue: *eh-yeh*---“to be.” *eh-yeh* is in the first person, “I Am Who I Am.” When Moses would have said, “He Is Who He Is,” he would have used the third person: *yah-weh*
 - ii. All of the other “names” of God are actually titles or compound names of description--*El-Shaddai* (God Almighty) or *El Elyon* (God Most High) and *Yhwh Yir'eh* (The Lord Provides) etc.

Excursus: Bibles and LORD

Let’s take a moment and talk about God’s personal name, Yahweh vs. Jehovah.

When the Hebrew Bible was translated into Latin, which was the spoken language of literate people in Western Europe, they used the “j” letter to represent the Hebrew “waw” because Latin does not have a “y.” Incidentally, this is also the reason that we translate Yesua as “Jesus.” So, the Latin West opted for Jehovah because they didn’t have a Y in their alphabet.

I think its important you know this so that no one confuses you with the idea that God’s divine name has been somehow changed. I’m not sure how translators reflect God’s personal name in Chinese, but I’m almost positive they do not have the letter “Y” and opt for whatever pictograph faithfully represents the name.

Your Bible translators put “Lord” in small caps wherever the God’s personal name appears in the original languages to signal to you God has inspired this to be a moment when his covenant name is being revealed. See the Preface of your Bible for exact details.

- b. Attributes of Yahweh
 - i. The first thing we see is his self-reference.
 - ii. There is no beginning, end, or scale. He’s infinitely everywhere and yet, not measurable in our universe.
- 2. Yahweh gladly aligns Himself with his people.
 - a. God does not leave Moses without handles upon which he can grasp to understand this immense God.
 - b. Yahweh clarifies that his first name points to his transcendences, but his second name points to that transcendence being present in covenant relationship.
 - c. Jesus is the Great I Am
 - i. The incarnation, that is the moment when the eternal Son, remaining what he was, namely God, took on flesh becoming what he had not been, namely man...the incarnation is the intersection of these two truths revealed to Moses here: God is totally distinct but gladly aligns himself with his people.
 - ii. Jesus Christ is the eternal Son who takes on flesh to enter the Egypt of your own heart, to smash the idols of your own heart and bring you out to a promised land where the longings of your heart are satisfied.
 - iii. Omnipresent is not abstract distance in Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ, the fullness of deity was pleased to dwell. This presence becomes a saving presence, one where all God is wherever he wants to be.

Sermon Discussion Questions

1. Discuss the significance of God revealing His name as “I Am Who I Am” to Moses. How does this name of God influence your understanding of His nature and character?
2. Reflect on the idea that we are created as glory seekers. How does this align with the ways we often seek satisfaction in life? Discuss ways we can realign our hearts to seek God's glory instead.

3. What does it mean to you that God's presence is purposed and not just a general, omnipresent concept? What Scriptures can you think of that attest to this? Share experiences where you have felt God's purposed presence in your life.
4. Pray for the ability to recognize and resist the idols in our lives, to understand God's immense and purposed presence, and for strength in moments of feeling insufficient, relying on God's sufficiency.

Special Bibliography

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