

Exodus 3:13-15

Introduction

1. There's quite a bit of debate over this passage, mostly revolving around whether this was the first time God revealed His name, Yahweh
2. Some believe it was, and this is mostly based upon an interpretation of Exodus 6:2-3 (READ)
3. However, the book of Genesis reveals that God's name was known and used by many before this event:
 - a. Eve referred to God as "**Yahweh**" (Genesis 4:1)
 - b. After Seth was born, "**men began to call upon the name of Yahweh**" (Genesis 4:26); not just call upon God, but call upon His "**name**"
 - c. Noah referred to God by the name Yahweh (Genesis 9:26)
 - d. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob all knew Him as "**Yahweh**":
 - 1) God specifically introduced Himself to Abraham and Jacob as "**Yahweh**" (Genesis 15:7; 18:14; Genesis 28:13)
 - 2) Abraham and Isaac both "**called upon the name of Yahweh**" (Genesis 12:8; 26:25)
 - 3) Abraham, Isaac and Jacob all used God's name when speaking to Him and about Him (Genesis 15:2, 8; 22:14; 24:7; 26:22; 30:30; 32:9)
 - e. A host of others throughout Genesis use Yahweh's name when speaking to or about Him including Abraham's servant and relatives, Rebeka, Esau, Laban, Leah, Rachel, and Abimelech and his military advisor
4. So, it seems pretty clear that God's name had been known and used by people prior to Him meeting Moses at the burning bush:
 - a. Therefore, there are other viable interpretations of Exodus 6:2-3 that should be considered
 - b. We will address this more specifically when we get to chapter 6, but possible resolutions involve what the NIV does (that He wasn't "fully known" to them by His name Yahweh) or understanding the second half of the verse as a rhetorical question, "**but by my name Yahweh was I not known by them?**"

A. Moses' asked God His name (READ Exodus 3:13)

1. So, if God was known by previous people and generations, why did Moses anticipate that Israel would ask him for God's name when He told Israel that the God of their fathers had sent him to them?
 - a. We must keep in mind that Israel had been living in Egypt for 400 years:
 - 1) It was a pagan polytheistic nation with 1000s of gods, and each of these gods had its own name (sometimes multiple names)
 - 2) Based on what's recorded in the Bible, it had been ~420 years since God had appeared to anyone (Jacob before he returned home to Canaan and moved to Egypt 17 years later)
 - 3) That's a LONG time to be living in a pagan land with 1000s of pagan gods without hearing from God

- b. So, I see three possible scenarios:
- 1) Moses and Israel assumed God was simply one of the 1000s of Egyptian gods and simply wanted to know which one had spoken to him (unlikely)
 - 2) A second option is that Israel knew God as Yahweh, but would be skeptical if Moses said He appeared to him:
 - a) He hadn't appeared to anyone in 400+ years, despite their crying out to Him
 - b) How would they know it was Yahweh unless Moses could confirm it?
 - c) As for Moses, up to this moment God had not announced himself Yahweh as He had done with Abraham and Jacob (above)
 - 3) A third option—the one I believe is most likely—is that Moses and Israel no longer knew/remembered the name of their God:
 - a) Again, it had been 400+ years of living in a pagan nation with 1000s of gods and without an appearance by God, or even any prophets
 - b) How many generations had come and gone over that time, with the memories and stories of Abraham's, Isaac's and Jacob's interactions with Yahweh fading with each new generation?
 - c) Chapters 1-2 indicate Israel cried out to God in their distress, that the midwives feared God, and that Moses's own father knew God, but the name Yahweh is never used, only the Hebrew Elohim
 - d) Some believe Moses refrained from using Yahweh in the first two chapters and only started using it in chapter 3 and beyond as a literary tool to subtly suggest they knew God but no longer as Yahweh

B. God revealed His name to Moses (READ Exodus 3:14-15)

1. God's response to Moses is three-fold (three statements) and each begins with either "**God said**" or "**He said**":
 - a. The first statement (3:14a): "**God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM'**":
 - 1) The meaning of this phrase is probably one of the most debated in the entire OT; one commentator said that if you ask five different OT Hebrew scholars what it means you'll get ten different answers
 - 2) The only thing that seems to be agreed upon universally is that God is saying or describing something about Himself (we'll get to that in a moment)
 - 3) Part of the problem is that historically there's never been agreement on exactly how it should be translated:
 - a) God uses the Hebrew word "**to be**" in the first-person singular and most English translations render it "**I AM WHO I AM**"
 - b) However, this same word in the same first-person form is used by God repeatedly in the OT in a future sense, "**I WILL BE**"—so some scholars have suggested "**I WILL BE WHO I WILL BE**" as a better translation here
 - c) The LXX translates it as "**I am the One Who Is**"
 - 4) Many scholars refer to this as a literary statement called *idem per idem* which is Latin for "the same for the same":
 - a) There are similar sayings elsewhere in the Bible such as Esther's statement, "**if I perish I perish**" and God's statement in Exodus 33:19 "**I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy**"

- b) Such statements are sometimes used to end debate or discussion (e.g. “The law is the law”), or express finality or totality (e.g. “it is what it is”), so some believe that God is simply refusing to answer Moses’s question
 - c) However, such statements can be used to describe something that has no comparison except with itself—since God can only be compared to Himself, He says, “I AM WHAT I AM” (or “I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE”)
 - d) We’ll come back to what this may mean in a moment
- b. The second statement (3:14b): “**and He said, ‘Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”**”
- 1) “**I AM**” is obviously connected to the previous statement, “**I AM THAT I AM**”, just in a shortened form
 - 2) God appears to directly answer both of Moses’s questions here (paraphrase): “Tell them my name is “I AM” and tell them that I have sent them to you.”
- c. The third statement (3:15): “**God, furthermore, said to Moses...**” (READ):
- 1) There are a few important things going on with this statement
 - 2) First, God uses a different form of His name here, “**Yahweh**”, which is the third person singular, “He is/He will be” (as opposed to “I AM” which is the first-person singular)
 - 3) Second, He tells Moses to remind Israel that He is the God of their fathers, of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob
 - 4) Third, He tells Moses that this form of His name, “Yahweh” (the third person singular) is to be His name forever
 - 5) Finally, this name “Yahweh” is His memorial-name to all generations (e.g. to remember Him by)

C. What does God’s name mean?

1. The meaning of the phrase “**I AM WHO I AM**” is probably one of the most debated statements in the entire Old Testament
 - a. The most common interpretation is that the statement refers to God’s nature, specifically His self-existence, self-sufficiency, and eternal nature—He simply is, has always been, will always be, and is dependent on nothing:
 - 1) The fancy theological term for this is the aseity (ah-SEE-i-tee) of God
 - 2) The concept is summarized well by this quote from crossway.org:

God’s aseity refers to God being eternally and completely “of himself.” The word comes from the Latin. It’s a compound word made up of two smaller words: “a” (from) and “-se” (self). To talk about the aseity of God, then, is to say that God is from and of himself. He is completely self-originating and dependent on nothing other than himself. When we’re talking about God’s aseity, we are referring to the way that God has existed from eternity past completely independently of anything else—completely “of himself”—and therefore satisfied and delighted in himself.

- 3) This interpretation of God’s name can be supported by what the Bible says elsewhere:

- a) Psalm 90:2: **“Before the mountains were born or You gave birth to the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.”**
 - b) Psalm 93:2: **“Your throne is established from of old; You are from everlasting.”**
 - c) Isaiah 44:6: **“Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts; I am the first and I am the last, and there is no God besides me.”**
- b. There’s another view which interprets God’s name as a reflection of His promise to be with His people, and therefore represents His loyalty and faithfulness:
- 1) This is based on the fact that God repeatedly promised **“I will be with you”** to various individuals in the Old Testament and the phrase **“I will be”** is the same word and form as **“I AM”** used here in Exodus 3:
 - a) Just two verses earlier, God promised Moses, **“I will be with you”** (READ 3:12)
 - b) He did it again with Moses in Exodus 4:12-15 when He said, **“I will be with your mouth”** and **“I will be with you”**
 - c) He did it with Jacob both in Genesis 26:3 and 31:3 when He said **“I will be with you”**
 - d) He did the same thing with Joshua (Deuteronomy 31:23; Joshua 1:5; 3:7), Gideon (Judges 6:16), Solomon (1 Kings 11:38) and Israel (Isaiah 43:2) when He said that He them
 - 2) In addition, other passages like Exodus 6:7-8 appear to associate God’s name with His presence and faithfulness to His people (READ)
 - 3) So, this view suggests that God’s name, “Yahweh”, served as a reminder of His promise to be with them
- c. There are also times in the Bible where “Yahweh” is associated with God’s omnipotence and sovereignty:
- 1) Exodus 7:5: **“The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the sons of Israel from their midst.”**
 - 2) Exodus 7:17: **“Thus says the LORD, ‘By this you shall know that I am the LORD: behold, I will strike the water that is in the Nile with the staff that is in my hand, and it will be turned to blood.’”**
 - 3) In these verses and many others, God suggests that people will know He is Yahweh because of His powerful and supernatural acts
2. With all of this in mind, it seems best not to be dogmatic about what “Yahweh” means: Biblical arguments can be made that it reflects His self-existence and eternity, His faithfulness and presence with His people, and His sovereignty and omnipotence

D. Takeaways

- 1. There’s a difference between knowing about God or knowing Him generally, and knowing Him intimately:
 - a. Throughout Genesis (and in fact the entire OT), those who knew God most intimately knew Him by His name, “Yahweh”

- b. Over time, Israel retained some knowledge of the God of their fathers, but they appear to have forgotten His name, and no longer knew Him by name as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and even Joseph did
- c. They cried out to Him as Elohim, but didn't know Him as Yahweh

My own experience growing up Catholic and having a general knowledge of God, even crying out to Him, but not truly knowing Him; that all changed when I got saved and now know intimately through the name Jesus

- d. READ John 20:31; Acts 4:12; 1 John 3:23
2. A second takeaway from this passage is that God wants his people (us) to know that He is faithful and always with us:
- a. His name "**Yahweh**" reminded the Old Testament saints and Israel of His promise to always be with them
 - b. Jesus promised us this same thing in Matthew 28:20 shortly before He ascended into heaven saying, "**and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.**"
 - c. He even promised in John 14:15-17 that He would ask the Father to send us the Holy Spirit who would be with us forever
 - d. Each one of us who have placed our faith in truth in Jesus for salvation have been given the Spirit just as Jesus said and He is the seal and assurance of our salvation until Jesus returns
 - e. Ephesians 1:13-14 says, "**In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation-- having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.**"