

**Question: "What is the meaning of I AM WHO I AM in Exodus 3:14?"**

**Answer:** God appeared to Moses in the burning bush and told him to go to Egypt to lead the Israelites out of slavery. In response, 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?" (Exodus 3:13).

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'" (Exodus 3:14).

The phrase translated "I am who I am" in Hebrew is *ehyeh asher ehyeh*. The word *ehyeh* is the first person common singular of the verb *to be*. It would be used in any number of normal situations: "I am watching the sheep," "I am walking on the road," or "I am his father." However, when used as a stand-alone description, ***I AM*** is the ultimate statement of **self-sufficiency, self-existence, and immediate presence**. God's existence is not contingent upon anyone else. His plans are not contingent upon any circumstances. He promises that He will be what He will be; that is, He will be the eternally constant God. He stands, ever-present and unchangeable, completely sufficient in Himself to do what He wills to do and to accomplish what He wills to accomplish.

When God identified Himself as ***I AM WHO I AM***, He stated that, no matter when or where, He is there. It is similar to the New Testament expression in Revelation 1:8, "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, 'who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.'" This is true of Him for all time, but it would have been especially appropriate for a message in Moses' day to a people in slavery and who could see no way out. I AM was promising to free them, and they could count on Him!

Moses and Aaron delivered the message to Pharaoh: "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Let my people go, so that they may hold a festival to me in the wilderness.'" Pharaoh replied, "Who is the LORD, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD and I will not let Israel go" (Exodus 5:1-2).

Pharaoh stood in opposition to the LORD. Pharaoh was not willing to concede that there was a power higher than himself. He was not willing to yield his plans to the One who was all-powerful and all-sufficient. In essence, Pharaoh was saying "I am who I am, and therefore I will not yield to another." This seems to be the besetting sin of humanity. God is "The Great I AM," but we continually want to be our own "I AM." We make plans and determine that we will fulfill them no matter what. Even evidence to the contrary does not readily convince us of our weakness and contingency.

God is the only One who can accurately describe Himself as "I AM." Jesus claimed the title I AM for Himself in John 8:58. For the rest of us, "I am" is a false claim to self-sufficiency. We are not eternally constant or ever-present. Our only hope is to abandon claims of our own sovereignty and sufficiency and cast ourselves upon the mercy of I AM.