

“I AM WHO I AM”



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One of the most significant events in the life of the Lord’s people in redemptive history is the exodus. However, as important as the exodus is, it is even more important for us to see that in Exodus 3, God reveals the majestic magnificence of His character. It is a magnificence that contains two glorious truths, inextricably linked, without which the Christian God cannot be understood or worshiped. As important as the salvation of Israel from Egypt is, it cannot properly be understood unless it is framed within the revelation of God’s twofold character as expressed by God’s own declaration and as displayed in the burning bush.

As God comes to Moses, He announces Himself as “the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (Ex. 3:6). Here God identifies Himself as the covenant God, the One

who has sovereignly initiated a relationship with His people. The first thing that God wants Moses to recognize is that He is a God who is with His people (v. 12), who will deliver them from Egypt (v. 8), and who has redeemed them for the purpose of worshiping Him alone (v. 12). God is accomplishing His covenant promise to Israel through Moses.

Moses recognizes the sheer weight of this call from God. So he hesitates. He looks for a way out. He first points to his own insufficiency (“Who am I?”, v. 11), and God points back to His all-sufficiency (“But I will be with you”; v. 12).

But then Moses asks something that might, at first glance, seem strange. He wants to know God’s name. The reason he asks for God’s name is because, as we see in the Old Testament, the name of someone often designates the character of the person. Moses is asking God for a revelation of His character so that Israel may know that the One who has called Moses is sufficient. He is able to achieve the deliverance promised.

Aseity: (from Latin a “from” and se “self”, plus -ity) is the property by which a being exists in and of itself, from itself, or exists as so-and-such of and from itself; the quality or state of being self-derived or self-originated; specifically—the absolute self-sufficiency, independence, and autonomy of God.

The name that God gives to Moses—“I AM WHO I AM”—is a revelation of God’s utter and complete self-sufficiency. It is a revelation of God’s aseity. He alone is of Himself (a se). God, and only God, is dependent on nothing. And this means, for Moses and for Israel, that God is not dependent on Pharaoh’s cooperation to accomplish what He has promised.

This name of God—“I Am”—is the root form of the name Yahweh. John Calvin rightly says that this name is given to us in the Old Testament “that our minds may be filled with admiration as often as his incomprehensible essence is mentioned.” That “incomprehensible essence,” given in the name Yahweh, is mentioned more than five thousand times in the Old Testament.

In Exodus 3, therefore, God identifies Himself in two ways. He tells Moses that He is the covenant God, who is with His people, and that He is the self-existing God, who needs nothing in order to be who He is and to do what He purposed to do.

This brings us to the burning bush. The purpose of that miracle was not simply that Moses might be amazed; it was to display God’s own twofold character that He had announced to Moses. The burning bush illustrates what theologians call God’s transcendence and immanence. The revelation of the burning bush was a revelation that the “I Am” is and always will be utterly independent and self-sufficient. He is fully and completely God even as He promises and plans to “come down” (Ex.

3:8) to be with His people and to redeem them. **The burning bush points us to that climactic revelation of the One who is fully and completely the self-existing God, who comes down to redeem a people, and who is Immanuel (God with us). It points us to Jesus Christ Himself (Matt. 1:23; 28:20).**

The revelation of God’s twofold character in Exodus 3 is essential to grasp for all who seek to engage in the biblical task of apologetics. **No other religion on the face of the earth recognizes this kind of God. The faith we defend is wholly unique. It begins and ends with the revelation of this majestic mystery of God’s character given to us in Holy Scripture.**

- This post was originally published in Tabletalk magazine. [<https://www.ligonier.org/blog/i-am-who-i-am/> <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/god/>]

