

# NOON BIBLE STUDY: EXODUS 3

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Moses has fled and eventually settled in the land of Midian. God's people remain in bondage under Pharaoh's control in Egypt. Many years have passed and Moses seems to have made Midian his home without thinking of returning to Egypt. But a powerful encounter with the Living God is about to change his life.

## Exodus 3:1-12 - Burning Bush

Moses is serving as a shepherd for his father-in-law (Jethro) and finds himself watching sheep near Mount Horeb. A bush is on fire, but not being burned - what a sight to see, especially on a mountain in the middle of the wilderness. As Moses approaches the bush to see what is going on, a voice speaks from the midst of the bush! WOW! This is an encounter!

God speaks to Moses and introduces himself to Moses as the "God of your father, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." Moses is afraid and looks away. God continues to speak and tells Moses that He has "seen", "given heed" and is "aware" of the sufferings of Israel in Egypt. He is now taking action to deliver them from the slavery and bring them to the Promised Land. As we finished Exodus 2 we were told that God had heard the cries of the people in bondage. Here we see that Israel's God is the God of compassion - for He doesn't just feel bad about their situation but takes action to help.

How is God going to deliver his people? Through Moses! Moses can't believe it! Moses doesn't think he can do it. But nevertheless, God is calling Him to the task and promises to be with him (v. 12). God tells Moses he will be sent to Pharaoh, call him to release the people of Israel and return to this place to worship.

## Exodus 3:13-16 - YHWH

This short exchange is very important for our understanding of Exodus and the rest of Scripture as well. Here God explicitly reveals and explains his name to Moses, and there is a good reason why.

The Hebrew verb *hayah* means "to be." *Ehyeh* is a form of that verb meaning "I am" or "I will be." This is the word God uses in verse 14 when many English translations read,

"I AM WHO I AM" and then when God tells Moses to tell the sons of Israel "I AM has sent me to you."

God's name is not "I AM". God makes this first statement to explain what His name is/means because it is related to this Hebrew word "hayah/ehyeh". He does this in verse 15. But yet in our English translations it's hard for us to see this and we may run into some confusion.

This is a good time to quickly explain the difference between a **name** and a **title**. My *name* is Victor. I only have one name. That's an identifier that is unique to me. What is your **name**?

And while my **name** is Victor, I have many **titles** which are also used to describe me and even that I answer to - Dad, Husband, Pastor, Son, Friend, Handsome, etc. Those are **titles**. And the reason why this is important to understand is due to the fact that there are many "Dads" and "Husbands" in the world. So if you walk into a room and say "hey dad", many men could turn their heads. But if you call my **name**, I'll be the one who will answer.

Now, another way to identify someone by their title but with uniqueness is to clarify which "dad" they are. If I'm "Eden, Esther & Josiah's Dad" that gives some clarity to who I am based on my relationship with my children. If I'm "Jessica's Husband" than I'm not just a random husband, I'm the husband to Jessica.

And so there are many **titles** for our God. But a title is not the same as a **name**. "Lord," "Creator," "Almighty," "Father," "Provider," and even the word "God" itself can function as titles or descriptions. You can refer to someone by a title and even address them by that title, but their title is not the same as their name.

Most of us primarily use the English word "God" to explain who and what we are talking about when we talk about "God" (meaning the Creator God, the God of the Bible etc), but this isn't super helpful for Moses' situation and that is why he asks God, a really important question.

**Exodus 3:13** Then Moses said to God, "Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you.' Now they may say to me, '**What is His name? What shall I say to them?**'"

Moses, this is a good and relevant question to ask when "God" shows up and speaks to you. Moses says essentially, "I'm going back to Egypt to tell the people that their "God" has sent me...but what is the name of their God." This will come into play again

when Moses approaches Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, a land filled to the brim with “gods” who will ask Moses “who is the LORD (Yahweh), I do not know the LORD (Yahweh).” (Exodus 5:2).

There were many “gods” in Egypt and each had names. “Ra” the god of the sun, “Isis” the goddess of life and healing, “Osiris,” the god of the dead. So Exodus 3 is super important for it is the place where God tells Moses (and us) His **name**.

God tells us that his name is related to the Hebrew word that means “to be or exist.” And this is where He then speaks the following:

**Exodus 3:15** - “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, the LORD (all caps), the God of your fathers...has sent me to you. This is my **name** forever.”

Whenever you and I read the word L-O-R-D (in all capital letters) that is where in the original Hebrew text, the Hebrew letters יהוה (yod hey vav hey appear). These letters most closely relate to our English letters Y-H-W-H. This is God’s **name**. And it is a name that is related to the concept of “being” and “existing”. That’s what his name *means*.



So why do our Bible’s have LORD instead? Historically this grew out of a out of a desire to show honor and reverence to God’s divine name. Over time, Jewish readers developed the practice of not pronouncing the divine name aloud out of reverence. When they came to YHWH in the text, they would say *Adonai*, meaning “Lord,” instead. Most English Bible translations continue that tradition by printing **L-O-R-D** in all capital letters as a placeholder wherever YHWH appears. (This information can be easily found in the translation notes at the front of most Bibles).

This can sometimes create confusion for modern readers who do not know why LORD is printed that way. We can easily assume that “Lord” is simply another title here. But underneath the English word **LORD** is God’s actual name: **YHWH**, commonly pronounced **Yahweh**.

But unfortunately what started as a good idea ends up leading to confusion for later generations who don’t know why this was done. You and I read the Bible and read “tell them my name is the LORD” and so we think God’s name is “the LORD” - but it isn’t. God’s **name** is יהוה . It’s ancient pronunciation is not completely certain, but “Yahweh” is the pronunciation most commonly accepted by scholars. Any time you

ever see “the LORD” or “GOD” in all caps it is where in actual Hebrew God’s name appears.

And now let’s re-read the verses with this in mind:

**Exodus 3:13** - Then Moses said to God, "Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you.' Now they may say to me, 'What is His name?' What shall I say to them?"

**Exodus 3:15-16** - God, furthermore, said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, **YAHWEH**, 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 this is My memorial-name to all generations. 16 "Go and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, **YAHWEH**, God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, "I am indeed concerned about you and what has been done to you in Egypt.

At times reading “Yahweh” might be helpful when you see the all caps LORD. It helps us remember God’s name and make sense of who he is, especially in light of other so-called gods. Though he has many titles, the name of the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses is **Yahweh**. And the book of Exodus is going to tell us about how this God is going to be introduced to not only His own people, but to the nations. It was important not only that Pharaoh knew who their God was, but that Israel did too.

(For more information check out the Bible Project Video on YHWH “LORD”)

### **Exodus 3:16-22 - Moses’ Instructions**

God gives instructions to Moses about how he should speak to Pharaoh and also a preview about how Pharaoh will respond. Just because the LORD was going to be with Moses didn’t mean the assignment was going to be easy. But God is telling Moses about some of the challenges he will face ahead of time. And maybe most comforting in this exchange, God tells Moses how it is going to end. Pharaoh will let the people leave and the Israelites will leave with silver, gold, & clothing from the Egyptians. After generations of slavery, they will not leave Egypt empty-handed. From sojourners to slaves to saved. Egypt is about to see the powerful hand of the true God.

Learning about the name Yahweh is also a good reminder that the Bible comes to us from a world very different from our own. It was written 1000’S of years ago, in ancient languages & cultures, by people whose world, assumptions, & ways of communicating were often very different from ours.

That does not mean the Bible is impossible to understand. God has given Scripture to teach us, and its message is meant to be known and understood. But good Bible reading sometimes requires us to slow down and ask what the words would have meant in their original setting.

We should be careful not to read the Bible as though it were written directly into twenty-first-century American culture, or as though we are the first people ever to wrestle with what a passage means. We benefit from understanding the original language, historical setting, and from the work of generations of believers and scholars who have studied these texts before us.

The name Yahweh is a great example. If we only notice the English word LORD, we can easily miss something the Hebrew text makes clear: this is God's personal name. Learning a little about the language & culture helps us see something that has been there in the text all along.

But knowing the correct spelling and pronunciation of God's name is not the end goal. One of the most important lessons in Exodus 3 comes from Moses' question in verse 11: *"Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh?"* Moses feels inadequate for what God is asking him to do. But God does not answer by listing Moses' strengths or telling him to have more confidence in himself. Instead, God says: ***"I will be with you."***

That answer shifts the focus from who *Moses is* to who *God is*. Moses asks another question: What should he say when the Israelites ask for the name of the God who sent him? God reveals his name, Yahweh, & reminds Moses that he's the God of Abraham, Isaac & Jacob.

So the chapter brings together two important truths: God calls Moses, and God reveals himself to Moses. Moses does not yet know exactly how everything will happen. He does not know how Pharaoh will respond, how Israel will respond, or how difficult the road ahead will be. But God has already given Moses the most important assurance he needs: 'I will be with you.'

The same God who has seen Israel's suffering, heard their cries, and come down to deliver them is now sending Moses to take part in that work. This is an important reminder for us as well. When God calls us to something that feels beyond our ability, our confidence does not have to come from feeling strong enough, talented enough, or prepared enough. Our confidence comes from knowing who God is and trusting that he is with us.

Moses asks, "Who am I?" God's answer is, "I will be with you."