

Introduction:

- A. Illus.: Larry Crabb tells how when his brother, Bill, was killed in a plane crash, his 78-year-old father when outside and screamed at God for 10 minutes. And then, he told Larry later, *“When God wouldn’t repent, I had to trust him.”* [#4093] Maybe you know that feeling. But here’s my question. Why? *Why* do we have to trust him?
- B. Israel had a devil of a time trusting God when they were slaves in Egypt. They cried out to him. They remembered that God’s long ago promise to one day bring them out of Egypt into their own land, but nothing happened. It seemed that the many gods of Egypt were apparently in absolute control of the Hebrew’s miserable lives and deaths. You can almost hear them groaning:
- Look down, look down
You’ll always be a slave
Look down, look down
You’re standing in your grave.* [from *Les Miserables*]
- C. Then, far from the groans and sobs of the Hebrew slaves in Egypt, Moses, who was shepherding his flock of sheep in the wilderness, came upon a strange sight at Horeb, the mountain of God. A bush burning but not burning up. And from that bush the very voice of God—the God who had spoken ages before to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Moses stood there, barefoot on holy ground, shielding his eyes lest he die at the sight, and God said, *“I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey.”* [Ex 3:7-8]
- D. If you had never heard this story you’d never guess what comes next. Not deliverance just yet, but theology. A

profound lesson in knowing God. The God of Israel was going to war against the gods of Egypt and in the end, the Israelites would have to choose who they would trust. Their job was not to fight the battles but to trust God, and to do that, they needed to know him. So it is for us.

Turn to Ex. 3. God said in **vv.7-8**, *“I have indeed seen the misery of my people... so I have come down to rescue them.”* **Rescue!** In **v.9**, God repeats himself: *“And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them...”* I imagine Moses literally heaving a sigh of relief. God was rising to his feet! Even though Moses had been away from Egypt for 40 years, the suffering of his people weighed upon him so **this was the best news he had ever heard. This was gospel news.**

But Moses was not ready for what he heard next. V.10, *“So now, go, I am sending **you** to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.”* **V.11:** *But Moses said to God, “**Me??!!!**”* Actually, he said, *“Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt.”* Good question! God might have replied, *“You’re the man I’ve prepared for 80 years,”* but that wasn’t the most important thing. **V.12:** *“I will be with you.”*

I. IF WE’RE TO TRUST GOD WITH OUR LIVES WE NEED TO KNOW THAT GOD IS WITH US (3:12)

- A. This had the feel of a debacle of divine delegation! Sending a man in to do God’s job. Moses had tried to deliver Israel 40 years earlier. He’d killed an Egyptian slave driver but no one rallied to him and he’d had to run for his life. But going forward God, through Moses, faced down the dark and deadly powers of Egypt. There is one statement I want you to hear now. In **Ex. 6:31** Moses said to God, *“Since I speak with faltering lips, why would Pharaoh listen to me?”* God replied in **7:1**, *“See, I have made you **like God** to Pharaoh...”* *I have made you like God to the king who has the gall to think he is god. **You are not what you once were when God is with you.***

1. There is nowhere God expects you to go alone. There is nothing he expects you to do by yourself. God will leave you weak-kneed and wide-eyed with his assignments but he will never send you out on your own.
 2. Just as God was with Moses, so he would be with Israel. He made his presence visible in a pillar of fire. God is with us in our Lord Jesus Christ who said, *"I am with you always, even to the end of the age."* He is *within* us and *among* us by his Holy Spirit. **We are not what we once were because now God is with us.**
- B. God said something else to Moses: **v.12b...** Well that's confusing. A lot of good a sign does you after you get where you're going! But remember that these words are spoken to Moses by the voice of God out of a fire. Moses had no doubt who was speaking to him nor that every word was true. So this promise had the ring of certainty. This was prophecy. Here was Israel's destiny. So when Pharaoh made Israel's labor harder and the people lost hope, Moses had this sign: *God promised we'd return to the mountain.* When Pharaoh said no go, time after time, Moses had this sign: *We **will** return to the mountain.* When Israel was trapped between a rock and a hard place—between the chariots of the devil and the deep blue sea, Moses remembered the sign: *"You will worship God on this mountain."* **God's promises are the signs that assure us our faith is headed in the right direction.**

Think of God's forward-pointing signs God that sustain us. Like, Like when Jesus said, *"I am going to prepare a place for you."* Or when 1 Thess. says, *"The Lord himself will come down from heaven ... and we will meet the Lord in the air... and be with him forever."* And the sign in Rev. 21, *"God himself will be with them... He will wipe every tear from their eyes."* **Those are God-given signs, out on the highway of life, that our faith can see and our hope can follow.**

Now here comes another surprise: v.13... My first reaction is, “*Why would they ask that?*” But in that culture, a name was like a résumé. Israel knew this name—it is used in Genesis—but they didn’t know what was in the name.

II. IF WE’RE TO TRUST GOD WITH OUR LIVES WE MUST KNOW HIS NAME (3:14)

If Moses’ question seems a little out of the blue to us, God’s answer is even more bewildering: v.14, “*I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’*” God has many titles in the Bible, but God’s personal name is **I AM**. In Hebrew God’s name is spelled with four consonants; YHWH. In the King James Bible that morphed into *Jehovah* but today we say *Yahweh*. **I AM** is a good translation but nothing can capture the whole sense of this name. Dr. Kaiser says that a bibliography on the etymology and meaning of the name Yahweh in the last century alone would fill a book. Just the bibliography! I like the way Alec Motyer captured it: “*God is who he is, and that’s all there is to it.*”

This is a case where God’s inscrutable answer in Hebrew becomes even more enigmatic in translation. Plus, we aren’t used to seeing God called **I AM** in our Bibles because translators always substitute the word **LORD** in small caps to signify this name. What’s more, this name hides out in other phrases all over the Bible. For example, in v.12 when God said, “*I will be with you,*” his name is in there: “*With you I AM will be.*” So this name, *I AM*, is all over the Bible but we may not spot it.

As I said, they knew this was God’s name but they’d never really grasped it before. They’d never realized what it said about God. And that is exactly why they needed to know it when their salvation hung in the balance. Soon, they’d have to decide whether or not to trust this God, **I AM**, with their lives.

So how does knowing God’s name help? Why does God tell Moses, “*This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you’?*”

- A. Through his name God tells us, I AM always present. God has emphasized several times that he is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He works in time. He is our heritage and our future. But he is always in the now. And now. And now. I AM.
- B. Through his name God tells us, I AM self-existing. God simply exists all by himself. Alexander Maclaren wrote over 100 years ago, *“You and I have to say, ‘I am that which I have become,’ or ‘I am that which I was born,’ or ‘I am that which circumstances have made me.’ [God] said, ‘I am that I am.’ All other creatures are links; this is the staple from which they all hang. All other being is derived, and therefore limited and changeful; this being is un-derived, absolute, self-dependent, and therefore unalterable forevermore.”* [quoted in Motyer, p.98]
- C. Through his name God tells us, I AM your sovereign Savior. This name is a verb, an action word, but it is a verb that begs for a predicate: *I am good. I am powerful. I am holy.* **Among its mysteries is the way God’s name becomes the carrier of the stories of God’s salvation.** Illus.: I read that Tolkien has a character called **Treebeard** who says, *“My name is growing all the time, and I’ve lived a very long, long time; so my name is like a story. Real names tell you the story of the things they belong to.”* [Motyer, note, p.68] God had said, *“I AM the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob,”* drawing up all those stories into his name. Here in Exodus he will take up in his name the stirring stories of Israel’s deliverance and life. And so on through the Bible, and right into this place today. Jesus said, *“Before Abraham was, I am.”* All the stories of Jesus in the Bible and in the lives of his people draw meaning up into God’s name, I AM.
- D. So when the demonic gods of Egypt or today challenge I AM whose side do you want to be on? When Pharaoh says no and I AM says go, which direction will you face? When I AM says to guard your lives with the blood of a lamb, what

are you going to do? When I AM says, “You shall have no other gods before me,” what choices must you make?

III. WE ARE PRIVILEGED BEYOND MEASURE TO CALL I AM OUR GOD (3:15-22)

- A. **V.15a...** I AM... has sent our deliverer. Israel wouldn't always respect or follow Moses, but he became their deliverer, their lawgiver, their shepherd, their prophet, and the one man who would plead with God to spare their lives when they sinned. How much greater our gratitude to I AM for sending us Jesus Christ who is greater than Moses in every way.
- B. **V.15b...** *“This is my name forever, the name you shall call me from generation to generation.”* This is another way of saying that I AM wants us to know him personally, to call him by name, to pour our own salvation stories into his name, to pray to him, and to own him as our treasured inheritance and our richest legacy. We know him as Jesus, for Jesus said ***I am** the bread of life, **I am** the good shepherd. **I am** the true vine. **I am** the resurrection and the life. **I am** the First and the Last; **I am** the Living One. And I hold the keys of death and Hades.*
- C. **Vv.16-17...** There is an especially rich word there in v.16, *“I have **watched over** you.”* The Heb. word means *visit*, like a doctor's visit; a visit with help in it; like a visit from a rescuer to a hostage. That word rang a bell with the elders of Israel. The last word they had from God was centuries before when Joseph, on his deathbed, said in **Gen. 50:24**, *“I am about to die. But God will surely **come to your aid** [visit you] and take you up out of this land to the land he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.”* And now the time had come. Here was the knock on the door. Hurry! Pack up! You've been rescued! That's what God says to us, too: *“I AM visiting you with my help.”* Jesus Christ is God come down to rescue us and to bring us home.

- D. **Vv.18-20...** I AM will stretch out his hand to save us and no one can stop him. Ahead is an epic battle, not because God is pushed, but because of the colossal stubbornness of Pharaoh. There are people today who think they are too guilty for God to save, that they're beyond forgiveness. But God's very name, I AM, says otherwise. Nothing and no one can stand in God's way when we trust him to save us.
- E. Finally, there is this intriguing promise from I AM: **vv.21-22...** I love this part of the Exodus story. We'll look at it more later, but remember how Pharaoh feared that the *sons* of Israel would become too powerful? But when Israel loots Egypt, the *women* just ask for the treasure and the Egyptian women finally pay them their due. Look closely on that holy night when Israel marched out of Egypt. See the children? No slave rags. They're wearing the linen and jewelry of Egypt. When I AM delivers his people we walk out of slavery not just free but rich!

Conclusion

All this spoken from the fiery holiness of the burning bush. All this while Moses stood barefooted and eyes shut tight. The story is not finished, for Moses commences arguing with God. But we have learned that if we are to trust God when our salvation hangs in the balance we need to know that God is I AM. And we know the great I AM through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Alexander Maclaren wrote, *"Because we live, we die... But God lives forevermore, a flame that does not burn out; therefore his resources are inexhaustible, his power unwearied. He needs no rest for recuperation of wasted energy. His gifts diminish not the store which he has to bestow. He gives and is none the poorer. He works and is never weary. He operates unspent; he loves and he loves forever. And through the ages, the fire burns on, unconsumed and undecayed."*