

LEAD! A.3 God's Identity

In Which We Discover Who God Is, and Why That Matters

In the [previous lesson](#), we discovered that God wants us to disciple all peoples into His "name." This week, we discuss the first aspect of God's name: His identity.

Adoration

[Psalm 8](#)

Bible

[Exodus 3:1-15](#)

Our story begins with Moses, a man who has known great glory and greater shame, and now finds himself on the backside of nowhere:

Now [Moses](#) kept the flock of Jethro his father in law, the priest of Midian: and he led the flock to the [backside](#) of the [desert](#), and came to the [mountain](#) of [God](#), [even] to [Horeb](#).

I don't know if Horeb was known as the mountain of God before this, but at any rate it sure earns the title now:

And the [angel](#) of the [LORD](#) appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a [bush](#): and he looked, and, behold, the bush [burned](#) with [fire](#), and the bush [was] not [consumed](#).

Of course we know it is the angel of the Lord, but Moses is just drawn by the [pyrotechnics](#):

And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this [great sight](#), why the bush is not burnt.

Though he gets a lot more of a show than he bargained for:

And when the [LORD](#) saw that he turned aside to see, [God](#) called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here [am] I.

For some reason, God chose to act through Moses' apparently idle curiosity to get his attention. Moses, for his part, responds respectfully when God calls him by name -- despite what must have been mind-boggling curiosity about what was going on!

Before explaining Himself, God first establishes some (literal!) ground rules:

And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the [place](#) whereon thou [standest](#) [is] [holy ground](#).

The word for "ground" is [adamah](#), whence we get [Adam](#); given that we are but dust to God, it is oddly comforting that He considers dirt worthy of sanctification. And of a formal introduction:

Moreover he said, I [am] the [God](#) of thy [father](#), the God of [Abraham](#), the God of [Isaac](#), and the God of [Jacob](#).

God begins by asserting a common reference point: His **relationship** with Moses' ancestors. Moses had presumably heard the founding stories of Israel from his [mother/nurse](#), so he had some context for interpreting this strange apparition before him. At least enough to make him realize he was way out of his league:

And Moses [hid](#) his [face](#); for he was [afraid](#) to look upon God.

God appears to overlook Moses' discomfort, as He has serious business on His mind:

And the LORD said, I have [surely seen](#) the [affliction](#) of my [people](#) which [are] in Egypt, and have [heard](#) their [cry](#) by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their [sorrows](#);

This must surely have struck a chord with Moses, who had also been [moved](#) by the [mistreatment](#) of His fellow Hebrews. Like most of us, I'm sure he must've wondered whether God was paying attention. To find out that God cares about the same things we care deeply about it is a wonderful feeling -- especially when that empathy is linked to action:

And I am [come down](#) to [deliver](#) them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a [good land](#) and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

Why, again?

Now therefore, behold, the [cry](#) of the children of Israel is come unto me: and I have also seen the [oppression](#) wherewith the Egyptians oppress them.

Moses must be thinking: this is great! God feels exactly the same way I do, and is finally going to do something about it; perhaps he will come down and smite Egypt the way he smote [Sodom and Gomorrah](#), or the [Tower of Babel](#)!

Well, yes -- but there's a catch:

[Come](#) now therefore, and I will [send](#) thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest [bring forth](#) my people the children of Israel out of Egypt.

Yow! God isn't just conveying a message of deliverance, He is recruiting Moses to be the agent of that deliverance. Not exactly what Moses had in mind:

And Moses said unto God, Who [am] I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?

Oddly, God doesn't answer Moses, at least not directly:

And he said, Certainly I will be with thee; and this [shall be] a [token](#) unto thee, that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall [serve](#) God upon this mountain.

A powerful promise: **I will be with you**. On the other hand, the token isn't terribly reassuring, since it only manifests after Moses succeeds! Perhaps that is why he wants to take with him something more tangible:

And Moses said unto God, Behold, [when] I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What [is] his [name](#)? what shall I say unto them?

As mentioned in our [previous lesson](#), the Biblical concept of [name](#) refers to someone's character, not merely an [appellation](#). From that perspective, Moses is basically asking, "What kind of God are you? How should I represent you to the people you're promising to save."

God's response is quite stunning:

And God said unto Moses, [I AM](#) THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath [sent](#) me unto you.

Philosophers sometimes use the term "[non-contingent reality](#)" -- absolute [self-existence](#) -- to define [divinity](#). From there, they go on to discuss what form divinity might take and what (if anything) can be known about it. By this simple "I AM", God asserts that divinity is:

- **singular** (as opposed to *divided*, as in [polytheism](#))
- **personal** (as opposed to *impersonal*, as in [materialism](#))
- **present** (as opposed to *absent*, as in [deism](#))
- **active** (as opposed to *passive*, as in [pantheism](#))
- **Him** (as opposed to *us*, as in [solipsism](#) or [suitheism](#))

Why does God answer Moses in such an exotic fashion?

Perhaps because it is essential for us to first recognize that God simply "is", independent of any our interactions with Him. In our science-dominated world, it is tempting to think of God as some sort of [disembodied spirit](#) or keeper of the [afterlife](#), who is outside of -- and perhaps even subordinate to! -- the physical world. The truth is the exact opposite: God **Himself** is the ultimate reality, and everything we experience or perceive ([physical, emotional, rational](#)) is ultimately [contingent on Him](#).

The fact that God exists outside of His creation is known as His [transcendence](#). One useful metaphor -- though it is only a metaphor -- is that God relates to creation the way an author relates to a book. As such, He isn't bound by the rules that exist *inside* creation. We describe this reality using terms such as:

- [Omniscience](#) "all-knowing"

- [Omnipotence](#) "all-powerful"
- [Omnipresence](#) "everywhere"

Philosophers sometimes consider these abilities a source of [paradox](#) (e.g., "If God can do anything, can He create a rock so big He can't lift it?"). They overlook the fact that omnipotence *et al* aren't abstract philosophical definitions, but merely our attempt to put human terminology around the [brute fact](#) that everything in creation is subject to God's will and oversight.

What's even more extraordinary is that this source of ultimate reality claims relationship with Moses' through his ancestors:

And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The [LORD God](#) of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you:

Here we see the **familial**, **historical**, and **philosophical** concepts of divinity joined together into one seamless whole. And not just for Moses, but for us as well:

this [is] my [name](#) for ever, and this [is] my [memorial](#) unto all generations.

Conversation

1. How would you define "God"? How do you picture Him?
2. How much is/was your concept of God shaped by your family?
3. Which is harder for you to believe: that God transcends our physical reality, or that He hears our cries?
4. Do you wrestle with the meaning of philosophical terms such as omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence?
5. What do you think Moses felt when he heard that the "I AM" was sending him?

Decision

- **Repentance:** Where has your concept of God fallen short of His reality?
- **Action:** Given who God is, to whom might He be sending you?
- **Worship:** How does God's transcendent reality make you feel about His desire to relate to you?

Explore

- [Aseity- Self Existence](#)
- [The Spurgeon Blog » Blog Archive » Self-Existence 3](#)
- [Divinity - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia](#)
- [God, Names of - International Standard Bible Encyclopedia](#)
- [Transcendence \(religion\) - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia](#)
- [YouTube - U2 "Yahweh"](#)

For Next Week

Read [Exodus 33–34](#). What does Moses want from God? Why?