

Jesus the I AM, Part 1

In Exodus 3, God reveals Himself to Moses. God is about to take His people out of Egyptian bondage and lead them to the land of Canaan. Moses is worried about being God's messenger and doubts his ability to do so. One of the questions he asks of God is what he should say if the people ask, "What is his (God's) name?" (v. 13).

God replies emphatically: "I am who I am" (v. 14). He is the God who exists. He needs no other name than "I am". The term Yahweh, one of the most used terms to describe God in the Old Testament, refers to this discussion. It will be our goal in this study to learn more about God as the "I am" so that we can have a better understanding of the claim that Jesus makes when He says, "Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58).

The Eternal God

One of the obvious implications about God using the name "I am" is His eternal nature. "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). Everything that man experiences has a beginning. The earth, the sun, the stars, all these incredible things had a starting point. Every person has a beginning as well. There is a time where every one of us starts to exist. That all these things have a beginning implies that, at some point, they did not exist. The starting point tells us that before that starting point, these things were not there.

The same cannot be said of God. God is. He has always been, and He will always be. This is what John means in Revelation 1:8 when he says, "who is and who was and who is to come". There has never been a time where God did not exist. God was there before the beginning and brought the beginning into existence (Genesis 1:1). He is eternal.

The Almighty God

Another deduction that we can make is about the mighty nature of God. During this time, and particularly in Egypt, people practiced polytheism (the worship of many gods). In order to keep track of all these gods, they would need to differentiate them by name. When talking with Moses, God differentiates Himself from all the other so-called gods. He does not need a name to distinguish Himself, because He is the only God. There is no other God. By declaring Himself as "I am", He tells them that He alone exists as God and the only thing that needs to be named about Him is that He is in fact there.

Isaiah speaks to this same idea (Isaiah 44). In verses 16 and 17 he points out the foolishness of idolatry:

"Half of it he burns in the fire. Over the half he eats meat; he roasts it and is satisfied. Also he warms himself and says, 'Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire!' And the rest of it he makes into a god, his idol, and falls down to it and worships it. He prays to it and says, 'Deliver me, for you are my god!'"

The gods of Egypt and the other nations at this time were nothing but creations of man. They only existed by man making them. This is in direct contrast to Yahweh. He exists independent of man. He needs nothing from Moses or the Israelites to bring Him into existence. He already is, and that is why refers to Himself as the "I am".

The God of Promise

As we continue reading the passage, we see that after identifying Himself as the "I am", God has more to tell the people about who He is. He wants them to know that He has heard their prayers and seen their affliction (Exodus 3:16, cf. v. 7). Furthermore, He comes to them with a promise. He tells them that He will free them from their Egyptian bondage and lead them to the land of Canaan (v. 17). The land is filled with milk and honey. Inherent in this promise is not just the fact that he will free them from their slavery, but that he will take them to a prosperous place where they will thrive as a nation.

It is fitting, then, that He describes Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (v.15). We see that God's relationship with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is one of promise. God made covenants with these men on what He would do for them, just like He is doing with Israel through Moses now. This should have been of great comfort to the Israelites, because they would be able to look back at the history of their ancestors and see that God is one who keeps His promises.

In Genesis 12 we see that God promises that Abraham will be a great nation (Genesis 12:2). However, Abraham is concerned, and rightly so. As an old man, He is without a child. How could he possibly become a great nation if He doesn't even have one son? In Genesis 15, we see that God once again reassures Abraham that all of this will come to pass. It was not until Sarah was 90 years old and Abraham 100 that God blessed them with a child. Even then Abraham had a hard time believing the promises (Genesis 17:15-17). Yet in Genesis 21 we see that Isaac is born. God not only makes promises, He keeps them.

In Genesis 26, we see that God makes a promise to Isaac. He was in Gerar and a famine came. Isaac would naturally be concerned that such a famine would mean no food for His family and destroy His livestock. Yet God told Isaac to stay in the land instead of going down to Egypt. He repeated the promise made to Abraham if Isaac would stay. Isaac stayed, and God provided. We see later in the chapter that Isaac was able to find wells to take care of his family. God's promise was true.

With Jacob, we see the same pattern as with his father and grandfather. In Genesis 28:13-15, we see that God promises Jacob that God will protect him. Again we see the promise of great offspring, and furthermore we see that God will bless him and be with him wherever he goes. This promise is to a man in exile, running from his brother trying to murder him. Jacob goes to his uncle, who continually tries to cheat him. Yet whatever his uncle tries, Jacob is still

successful. He leaves with a great amount of possessions and with 11 children. God took care of him, even in those difficult circumstances.

Furthermore, Jacob and his family would have been in grave danger because of another great famine. Yet God worked through Joseph to save his family and to put them in a position to once again prosper. While this did lead to the eventual enslavement of the people, we see that God used this to protect Jacob and to make his family a mighty nation.

By referencing those fathers before them, God sends a powerful message to the Israelites. He is a God who makes promises. Moreover, He is a God who keeps promises. All that He has promised has come to pass. They should take comfort in that when they hear the promises that God made to Moses.

The God of Deliverance

We are able to learn more about God, then, by also studying how He keeps the promises made in Exodus 3. We see that God was able to provide for His people, and everything that He promised came to pass. The “I am” is a great deliverer of His people.

First, we are able to see how He defeats the Egyptians. What is incredible about this is how thoroughly He defeats them. When God rescues His people, He does so thoroughly. We see that the Egyptians were so desperate to rid themselves of the Israelites that they actually gave them silver, gold and clothing. The slaves were actually plundering their masters as they left (Exodus 12:35-36).

We also see that God took great care to lead His people. In Exodus 13:17, God decides not to lead them toward the Philistines because He did not think they would be able to handle it. So He led them on a safer path. Furthermore, He led them clearly, by using a pillar. It was a cloud during the day and a pillar of fire by night (so they could see and travel at night). It was a clear indication that they were not alone, but that God was providing a path and leading them to where they needed to go.

In Exodus 16:4, we see that God also made provision for His people. They were traveling through a wilderness with no easy way to provide food for themselves. God took care of their needs by having manna sent from above. Exodus 17 shows a similar problem. This time they are without water (v.1). God is able to provide to them once again, this time having the water come straight out of a rock (v. 5-6).

God is able to eventually lead them into the land of milk and honey, keeping His promise. God says through Joshua to the people that He led them through the wilderness, defeating all of their enemies (Joshua 24:6-11). He gave them houses they did not build, crops they did not plant (Joshua 24:13). God delivered the people to the land of Canaan, the land of milk and honey, just as He promised.

Questions:

1. What is the name that God gives Moses in Exodus 3?
2. Why does it matter that God was there before the beginning?
3. What does John mean when he describes God as “Who was, Who is, and Who is to come”?
4. Why did the gods of Egypt need to be named?
5. What is the foolishness of idolatry?
6. Why was it hard for Abraham to believe the promise that God made to him?
7. Why would Jacob have doubted God’s promise?
8. How did God show the people where to go?
9. What did God do when the people were without food?
10. What did God do when the people were without water?