

Is 42:8
 Jn 8:24;
 17:6, 26
 Heb 11:6
 Rev 1:4
 Acts 5:30
 Mt 22:32
 Mk 12:26
 Lk 20:37
 Acts 3:13;
 7:32; 22:14

¹³Then Moses said to God, “If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?”
¹⁴God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.”^e And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”
¹⁵God also said to Moses, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘The Lord, 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 for ever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.

3:13–15. Moses now raises another difficulty: he does not know the name of the God who is commissioning him. This gives rise to the revelation of the name “Yahweh” and the explanation of what it means—“I am who I am”.

According to the tradition recorded in Genesis 4:26, a grandson of Adam, Enosh, was the first to call upon the name of the Lord (Yahweh). Thus, the biblical text is stating that a part of mankind knew the true God, whose name was revealed to Moses in this solemn way (Ex 35:15 and 6:2). The patriarchs invoked God under other names, to do with the divine attributes, such as the Almighty (“El-Shaddai”: Gen 17:1; Ex 6:2-3). Other proper names of God which appear in very ancient documents lead one to think that the name Yahweh had been known from a long time back. The revelation of the divine name is important in salvation history because by that name God will be invoked over the course of the centuries.

All kinds of suggestions have been put forward as to the meaning of Yahweh; not all are mutually exclusive.

Here are some of the main ones: a) God is giving an evasive answer here because he does not want those in ancient times, contaminated as they were by magical rites, to think that because they knew the name they would have power over the god. According to this theory, “I am who I am” would be equivalent to “I am he whom you cannot know”, “I am the unnameable”. This solution stresses the transcendence of God. b) What God is revealing is his nature—that he is subsistent being; in which case “I am who I am” means I am he who exists *per sibi*, absolute be-ing. The divine name refers to what he is by essence; it refers to him whose essence it is to be. God is saying that he *is*, and he is giving the name by which he is to be called. This explanation is often to be found in Christian interpretation. c) On the basis of the fact that Yahweh is a causative form of the ancient Hebrew verb *hwh* (to be), God is revealing himself as “he who causes to be”, the creator, not so much in the fullest sense of the word (as creator of the universe) but above all the creator of the present situation—the one who gives

montem istum». ¹³Ait Moyses ad Deum: «Ecce, ego vadam ad filios Israel et dicam eis: Deus patrum vestrorum misit me ad vos. Si dixerint mihi: ‘Quod est nomen eius?’, quid dicam eis?». ¹⁴Dixit Deus ad Moysen: «Ego sum qui sum». Ait: «Sic dices filiis Israel: Qui sum misit me ad vos». ¹⁵Dixitque iterum Deus ad Moysen: «Haec dices filiis Israel: Dominus, Deus patrum vestrorum, Deus Abraham, Deus Isaac et Deus Iacob, misit me ad vos; hoc nomen mihi est in aeternum, et hoc memoriale meum in generationem et generationem. ¹⁶Vade et congrega seniores Israel et dices ad eos: Dominus, Deus

e. Or I AM WHAT I AM OR I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE

The mission of Moses

¹⁶Go and gather the elders of Israel together, and say to them, ‘The LORD^f the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, “I have observed you and what has been done to you in Egypt; ¹⁷and I promise that I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt, to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey.”’ ¹⁸And they will hearken to your voice; and you and the elders of Israel

Deut 7:1

the people its being and who always stays with it. Thus, calling upon Yahweh will always remind the good Israelite of his reason-for-being, as an individual and as a member of a chosen people.

None of these explanations is entirely satisfactory. “This divine name is mysterious just as God is mystery. It is at once a name revealed and something like the refusal of a name, and hence it better expresses God as what he is—infinately above everything that we can understand or say: he is the ‘hidden God’ (Is 45:15), his name is ineffable, and he is the God who makes himself close to men (cf. Judg 13:18)” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 206).

At a later time, around the 4th century BC, out of reverence for the name of Yahweh the use of the word was avoided; when it occurred in the sacred text it was read as “Adonai”, my Lord. In the Greek version it is translated as “Kyrios” and in the Latin as “Dominus”. “It is under this title that the divinity of Jesus will be acclaimed: ‘Jesus is Lord’” (ibid., 209). The RSV always renders “Yahweh” as “the Lord”. The medieval form *Jehovah* was the result of a misreading of the

Hebrew text into which vowels were inserted by the Massorettes; it is simply a mistake and there is no justification for the use of “Jehovah” nowadays (cf. ibid., 446).

3:16–22. The Lord comes back again to the subject of Moses’ mission; despite all the obstacles, it will be a success. “The elders of Israel” (v. 16), that is, the chiefs of clans, representing the whole community, will be happy to hear what Moses has to say. The words “I have observed you” (v. 16: literally, “I have carried out an inspection among you”) are significant because they indicate the key thing—God’s is a friendly presence; but it is also a demanding presence which expects an account of the use we make of gifts received (cf. 32:34; Jer 9:24; Hos 4:14). The three days’ journey (v. 18) would not take them to Sinai but it was enough to get them away from Egypt. Later, three days will become a number symbolizing divine action. See the note on 6:10–13.

The pharaoh, unlike the elders, will refuse to let the people go—making it clearer that the Israelites will attain their

patrum vestrorum, apparuit mihi, Deus Abraham, Deus Isaac et Deus Iacob, dicens: Visitans visitavi vos et vidi omnia, quae acciderunt vobis in Aegypto; ¹⁷et dixi: Educam vos de afflictione Aegypti in terram Chananaei et Hetthaei et Amorraei et Pherezaei et Hevaei et Iebusaei, ad terram fluentem lacte et melle. ¹⁸ Et audient vocem tuam, ingredierisque tu et seniores Israel ad regem Aegypti, et dicetis ad

f. The word LORD, when spelled with capital letters, stands for the divine name, *YHWH*, which is here connected with the verb *hayah*, to be