

This week is the first installment of an unusual series.¹ Moses gets three glimpses of God at Sinai (Exodus 3; 19; 32-34). As we encounter these texts in The Gospel Project, we will stop and consider what they show us about God. The series will be spread out by the events of the Exodus story (January 26; February 23; March 8). If you have any questions, feel free to email me at benjamin.j.williams@gmail.com

Sermon Outline

“The First Revelation” EXODUS 3:1-6

1. The Meeting
 - a. “an angel of YHWH ... in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush”
 - b. “burning, yet it was not consumed”: What sort of power is this?
 - c. In the scene which follows, we get four critical attributes of God’s nature.
2. **SUMMONS:** “Moses, Moses!”
 - a. To know God is to know purpose.
 - b. We cannot have a casual relationship with God.
3. **HOLY**
 - a. “Do not come near”: God is holy “in all the ominous severity of that term.”
 - b. “Take your sandals off your feet”: God is not impressed with anything you are wearing. Before God, we are servants, not lords.
 - c. “Holy ground”: Pagan gods were used for human interest. “Moses is put on notice that this is no user-friendly God.”
4. **EMBODIED:** “And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.”
 - a. God is not a wispy idea.
 - b. God is not a shadowy force.
 - c. God is not the sum of nature.
 - d. God is a person.
5. **PROMISE:** “I am the God of your father”
 - a. Not “I am the Creator” – This is true, but not today’s message.
 - b. Not “I am the God of Israel” – Also true, but not today’s message.
 - c. The God of powerful summons, of dreadful holiness, and of personal being has made a promise which He intends to keep. He is the God of the story of Genesis.

Sermon Questions for Classes: (or you can teach the lesson plan further below)

1. **SUMMONS:** Do humans have an option when God summons us? Did Moses? Do we get any say? (Consider Hebrews 12:25, we can refuse but it is certainly dangerous!)
2. **HOLY:** Does Christianity maintain the doctrine of God’s holiness? How does Christianity change the concept of God’s holiness? (Hint: Hebrews 12:18-24, God is approachable by Jesus)
3. **EMBODIED:** Do you find it difficult to think of God as a person? In what ways is God like a human person? In what ways is He different from a human person?
4. **PROMISE:** Why is it important for Moses to know that God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? Is this still important for us? Why?

¹ Primary source for this series and the commentary quotations which follow: Walter Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology: An Introduction*, Library of Biblical Theology (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2008).

Bible Class Outline: "The Name(s) of God"

Introduction: Why do we have names? Read **Exodus 3:13-15**. Humans need names to distinguish us apart from each other. It is interesting then that Moses expects the God of the Burning Bush to have a name, as if to distinguish Him from the gods of Egypt. God responds by saying that His name is "I AM." It is as if Moses asked, "Which god are you?" and God responded, "Well, I am the only one that actually exists, so call me that." The God of Moses "IS" whereas the gods of Egypt "are not."

That said, God is given many terms, titles, and names in Scriptures, so below is a study of some of the frequent terms and their meaning.

Helpful Video Guide: *Word Study: YHWH – 'LORD'* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eLrGM26pmM0>

1. El
 - a. El is a general name, applied to a number of ancient gods. It is roughly equal to the English word "god," in that it might refer to any being of that sort.
 - b. Often in Scripture, it is used of the Hebrew God in combination with some other term.
 - i. *El Shaddai* (Gen. 49:25) "god of the mountain"; "god almighty" – The god of the Hebrews was a powerful being.
 - ii. *El Elyon* (Gen. 14:22) "god most high" – The god of the Hebrews was above all other beings and so-called gods.
 - iii. *El Roi* (Gen 16:3) "god who sees me" – The god of the Hebrews watches all people and cares for them individually.
 - iv. *El Berith* (Judges 9:46) "god of covenant" – The god of the Hebrews makes covenant promises and keeps them.
 - v. *El Elohe-Israel* "god of Israel" – The god of the Hebrews has a special relationship with these people who would become the tribes of Israel.
2. Elohim
 - a. Genesis 1:1 "In the beginning, God (*elohim*) created the heavens and the earth."
 - b. This is the earliest and most common term for God.
 - c. It is very much like the English word God/gods. You need some context to know if it is referring to the true God or some other beings.
 - d. *ELOHIM* is the plural of the word *EL*.
 - i. In Hebrew, you often add an -im ending to make a word plural like in English we add -s. Examples: one seraph becomes many "seraphim," or cherub in the plural becomes "cherubim."
 - ii. It is not entirely clear why God is so often referred to in the plural (Elohim instead of El). Some Christians think it hints at the Trinity, one God in three persons. Others think it is a royal plural, like when the Queen says "we are not amused" but only means herself.
 - e. Notice how Exodus 20:2-3 uses this term in both senses of the word.
 - i. As the true God, v. 2 "I am the LORD your God (*elohim*), who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery."
 - ii. As gods known to other people, v. 3, "You shall have no other gods (*elohim*) before me."
3. Yahweh (YHWH/YHVH)

- a. This name is a form of the Hebrew verb “I am.” It is the name given to Moses at the burning bush.
 - b. Much of the Old Testament is a debate about which of the gods had the right to be called God or if the God of the Hebrews was one among many gods. In that sort of discussion, the God of the Hebrews is called by the name “Yahweh” to distinguish him from all rivals.
 - c. Examples
 - i. **Exodus 3:14-15** God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” God also said to Moses, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘The LORD (*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 thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.
 - ii. **1 Kings 18:21** “If the LORD (*Yahweh*) is god (*Elohim*), follow him; if Baal follow him”
 - d. The LORD (Yahweh) of Israel claims to be the only god who is in fact God – the real and true ruler of all.
 - e. What does Yahweh mean? It is debated, but here are the common options:
 - i. “I AM” ... as in, “I AM and that’s all you need to know.”
 - ii. “I AM” ... as in, “I AM and nobody else is.” God is “He Who Is.”
 - iii. “I AM” ... as in, “I AM God just like you are human.”
 - iv. “I AM” ... as in, “I AM all that is and I cause all things to be.”
 - v. “I AM” ... as in, “I AM and I always will be. I am the Eternal One.”
4. Random Side Note: What About “Jehovah”?
- a. Sometimes grandparents have silly made up names like Pepaw or Mimi. This usually starts out because a small child cannot pronounce “grandfather,” but the attempt to say that word produces a cute alternative. The word “Jehovah” comes to us in this way too!
 - b. Originally, Hebrew language was written with no vowels, only consonants. Thus, the divine name Yahweh was written as YHWH.
 - c. Based loosely on the 3rd Commandment (i.e. not to use God’s name in vain), the Jews at some point decided to stop saying this name at all out of respect for it. The theory was, if you never said the name, you could never take it in vain!
 - d. In its place when reading Scriptures, they would say the Hebrew word “Adonai,” the ordinary word for “lord.”
 - e. In the 7th Century AD, Hebrew scribes for the first time started to add vowel marks to words so that people will not forget how they were pronounced. When they wrote the name Yahweh, they kept the consonants from Yahweh (YHWH) but wrote the vowels from the word Adonai, so that people would know never to read the holy name.
 - f. In these manuscripts, YHWH looks like YAHOWAH.
 - g. Years later, German Old Testament scholars didn’t realize what this meant and thought it was a name for God, which in German would be pronounced JEHOVAH.
 - h. In short, Jehovah is a made up word which should have been Yahweh. Why do we still use it? Well, we have it in so many hymns, it is kind of hard to get rid of it at this point!