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OF REDEMPTION

*Seeing the Cross in the Old Testament*



# **Hardy Street Baptist Church**

What's In A Name?  
February 6, 2019

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*Those who know Your name put their trust in You... Psalm 9:10*

*“But Moses protested, ‘If I go to the people of Israel and tell them, ‘The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,’ they will ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what should I tell them?” God replied to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM. 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: Yahweh, the God of your ancestors—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you. This is my eternal name, my name to remember for all generations.” (Exodus 3:13–15)*

Here is a good and Godly goal for making disciples in our church:

*The advancement and joy of your faith to the glory of God*  
(Philippians 1:20, 25). Knowing His name bolsters our faith!

### **What a Name Signifies**

The reason knowing the names of God will help us trust him with our daily affairs and with our eternal destinies is that in Scripture a person's name often signifies his **character** or **ability** or **mission** — especially when the name is given by God.

### **When God Names People**

God has the right and the power to cause anyone He names to become what the name implies. The names he gives are sure indicators of the destiny of those he names.

*Adam names his wife Eve, because she is mother of all the living (Genesis 3:20). God changes Abram's name to Abraham to show that he had made him the father of many nations (Genesis 17:5). God changed Sarai's name to Sarah (Genesis 17:15). He changed Jacob's name to Israel (Genesis 32:28). And when the Son of God came into the world, his name was not left to chance: “You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21).*

And when he names himself, be sure the name is packed with who He is and what He intends to do. God does not choose names for himself at random, say for the sound or for an ancestor or to avoid embarrassing nicknames. He chooses names for the sake of revealing things about himself that will deepen our love for him and enlarge our admiration and strengthen our faith.

## **The Most Important Name for God in the Old Testament**

The most common and the most important name for God in the Old Testament is a name that in our English versions never even gets translated. Whenever you see the word LORD in all capital letters, you know that this name is behind it. In Hebrew, the name had four letters — YHWH — and may have been pronounced something like Yahweh. The Jews came to regard this word with such reverence that they would never take it upon their lips, lest they inadvertently take the name in vain. So whenever they came to this name in their reading, they pronounced the word “adonai” which means my lord. The English versions have basically followed the same pattern. They translate the proper name Yahweh with the word LORD in all caps.

Yahweh is God’s proper name in Hebrew.

It occurs 6,828 times in the Old Testament. That’s more than three times as often as the simple word for “God” (Elohim — 2,600; El — 238).

This fact shows is that God aims to be known not as a generic deity, but as a specific person with a name that carries his unique character and mission.

### **The Meaning of Yahweh from Exodus 3**

The most important text in all the Bible for understanding the meaning of the name Yahweh is Exodus 3:13–15. God has just commanded Moses to go to Egypt and to bring his people Israel out of captivity. Moses says 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?” 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 [that is, Yahweh!], the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.’ This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.”

Now notice that God gives three answers to the question, “What shall I tell them your name is?”

In verse 14, God says, I AM WHO I AM.

In verse 14, God says, I AM has sent me to you.

In verse 15, God says, Yahweh . . . has sent me to you . . . this is my name forever.

So two facts persuade me that this text provides an interpretation of the name Yahweh. One is that the name Yahweh and the name I AM are built out of the same Hebrew word (hayah). The other is that Yahweh seems to be used here interchangeably with I AM. “I AM has sent me to you” (verse 14). “Yahweh . . . has sent me to you” (verse 15). I think it would be safe to say that God’s purpose in this meeting with Moses is to reveal, as he never had before (Exodus 6:2), the meaning of his personal name, Yahweh. The key is in the phrase, I AM, and especially in the phrase, I AM WHO I AM.

So here is where we ought to spend a lot of time meditating. What does it mean when you ask your God, Who are you? and he answers, I AM WHO I AM? I hope you can begin to feel this morning how important these words are. There aren’t any words more important than these. Any words that you think might be important only because these words are true. The more you ponder them, the more awesome they become. I know I can’t do them justice. But perhaps the Holy Spirit might take my stammering attempt and open some vista for you.

## **Seven Implications of the Divine Name, I AM WHO I AM**

### **1. God Exists**

First, God exists. Or as Francis Schaffer never tired of saying, God is there. At first, this may seem so obvious and so basic that we wouldn’t need to mention it. Well, it is obvious and it is basic, but the reason we should mention it is that most people live as if it were not true, or as if it were a truth that makes no difference in life.

Suppose the president of the United States invited you and a few of your friends to the White House for a reception. As you enter the cozy green room, the president is sitting by the fireplace and you walk right by him without a glance or a greeting. For the whole evening, you neither look at him nor speak to him nor thank him nor inquire why he called you together. But every time the one reporter asks you if you believe in the existence of the president, you say, “Of course.” You even agree that this is his house and that all this food came from his kitchen. But you pay him no regard. Practically speaking you act as if you do not believe he exists. You ignore him. He has no place in the affections of your heart. His gifts, not himself, are the center of your attention.

The vast majority of people who say they believe in God treat him this way. He is like hydrogen. You learned once in school that it is in the air you breathe, but after that, your belief in it has made no difference in your life. Every time someone takes a poll, you say, "Of course, hydrogen exists." Then you return to things that matter.

"Contained in the name Yahweh is the first and most important truth about God: he exists.

Put yourself forward a few years to the day when every human being will give an account of himself before the living God. God will say to millions of people, "Now it is my understanding that you said often during your life that you believed in me. You affirmed my existence. Is that right?" "Yes." "And is it not true that in your life the more honor and importance and virtue and power and beauty a person had, the more regard he was paid and the more respect he was shown and the more admiration he received? Is that not the case?" "Yes." "Then why is it that I had such an insignificant place in your life since you say you believed in me? Why didn't you feel more admiration for me and seek my wisdom more often and spend time in fellowship with me and strive to know the way I wanted you to make all your everyday decisions? Why did you treat me as though I were like hydrogen?"

What is the world going to answer? What are thousands of so-called Christians going to answer, whose faith in God is virtually the same as their faith in hydrogen?

Oh, how easy it is going to be for God to condemn the world at the judgment! Sometimes in our self-asserting pride, we actually think that God is going to have trouble finding enough evidence to be just in sentencing people to hell. But if you allow yourself to think clearly for a moment about the overwhelming implications of the statement, "God exists," you will see that it is going to be very easy for the Judge on that day. The defendants will be utterly speechless because of the manifest inconsistency of their lives. The portfolio of the prosecuting attorney will not have to be opened beyond page 1 where it says, "Defendant affirmed that God exists; personal life lived as though God made no difference."

Contained in the name Yahweh is the first and most important truth about God: he exists. And for those who will stop pursuing their own glory and their own private pleasure long enough to consider it, that makes all the difference in the world.

## **2. No Reality Exists Behind God**

The second implication in the name I AM WHO I AM is that God's personality and power are owing solely to himself and to no other.

Push back with me before there was any earth or any solar system or galaxies or universe at all. Push back in your imagination to when there was only God. Then, if you can, push back behind God. Where did he come from? How did he get to be the way he is? If you asked me how I got to be the way I am, I would answer that my father and mother gave me a set of genes and they reared me a certain way and I have been surrounded by thousands of influences in my environment — that's how I got to be the way I am.

But when we ask God how he got to be who he is, he answers, I AM WHO I AM. In other words, "nobody gave me a set of genes. Nobody and no power brought me into existence or shaped my personality. I had no beginning. There is no reality outside myself that did not come from me. And so there is no force or influence upon my character and power except what comes from me and is controlled by me. I am utterly absolute. Behind me, there is no reality."

## **3. God Does Not Change**

A third implication of the name I AM WHO I AM is that God does not change. In Malachi 3:6 God says, "I Yahweh do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed." Within the name Yahweh is the affirmation I AM WHO I AM. But if who God is not determined by any forces outside himself, then he is not subject to the changes we are.

He is who he is, and therefore, as James says, "With him there is no variation or shadow due to change" (James 1:17). He is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). His absolute name is the granite foundation of our confidence in his ongoing faithfulness.

## **4. God Is an Inexhaustible Source of Energy**

The fourth implication of the name I AM WHO I AM is that God is an inexhaustible source of energy. Isaiah 40:28 says, "Yahweh is the everlasting

God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary.” If God is the everlasting absolute Reality, then he is the Creator of the ends of the earth and of the universe. And if he is the Creator of everything, then all energy — all motion and combustion and fusion and fission — originate in him.

Everything in the universe plugs into him. If he ever shut down, there would be absolute nothingness. In him we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28). He cannot faint or grow weary. He is an unending river of life and the source of our strength every morning — and will be for all eternity.

## **5. Objectivity Is Crucial**

We may desire God to be a certain way. We may feel that he simply can't be the way some people say he is. But what we feel or what we desire does not make God what he is.

When God says I AM WHO I AM, he summons us to humble objectivity. He puts an end to the notion that everybody's view of God is as good as everybody else's. God is who he is and nobody's opinion of him makes any difference. Therefore, our calling as his creatures is to strive to know him for who he is, not for who we would like him to be.

## **6. We Must Conform to God, Not He to Us**

The vast majority of God's creatures go their own way with little or no thought of conforming their lives to the daily will and character of an absolute God. And when they think of God, they picture him arbitrarily in images of their own making, to suit their own desires. But if God simply is who he is and not who we make him out to be, then it is we who must conform to God and not he to us.

## **7. This God Has Drawn Near to Us in Jesus Christ**

One final implication of this magnificent name, I AM WHO I AM, is that this infinite, absolute, self-determining God has drawn near to us in Jesus Christ. In John 8:56–58, Jesus is answering the criticism of the Jewish leaders. He says, “Your father Abraham rejoiced that he was to see my day; he saw it and was glad.” The Jews then said to him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?” Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly! I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.”

Could Jesus have taken any more exalted words upon his lips? When Jesus said, “Before Abraham was, I AM,” he took up all the majestic truth of the name

of God, wrapped it in the humility of servanthood, offered himself to atone for all our rebellion, and made a way for us to see the glory of God without fear.

In Jesus Christ, we who are born of God have the unspeakable privilege of knowing Yahweh as our Father — I AM WHO I AM — the God

- who exists
- whose personality and power is owing solely to himself
- who never changes
- from whom all power and energy in the universe flows
- and to whom all creation should conform its life.

This is the name of God: I AM WHO I AM! And may those who know the name of God put their trust in Him.