

Exodus 3:1-15
Who Are You? The Riddle of God's Name
WRCoB 10.1.23

According to Wikipedia: *A riddle is a statement or question or phrase having a double or veiled meaning, put forth as a puzzle to be solved.*

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Let's start this morning with a few riddles for fun.

- I have one eye but cannot see
- I always work with something in it.
- Who am I?
- (needle)

- I'm light as a feather
- Yet the strongest man cannot hold me 5 minutes.
- Who am I?
- (breath)

- I never was but always will be
- No one ever sees me but everyone knows I exist
- I give people the motivation to better themselves daily
- Who am I?
- (tomorrow)

One more, this one from the Holy Scriptures

Proverbs 30:4 (NRSV)

⁴Who has ascended to heaven and come down?

Who has gathered the wind in the hollow of the hand?

Who has wrapped up the waters in a garment?

Who has established all the ends of the earth?

**What is the person's name?
And what is the name of the person's child?
Surely you know!**

Today, we'll learn in this OT lesson
The riddle of God's name
And the experience of a burning bush

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We move quickly from the story of Jacob and Esau
To Moses and the Burning Bush.

We skip over the story of Joseph
In the latter chapters of Genesis.

But the lessons we miss this fall
Will be picked up in another year.

The descendants of Abraham and Sarah
Lived in prosperity in Egypt
Under the leadership of Joseph
Until a new pharaoh took the throne.

This new pharaoh grew intimidated
By the Hebrews' growing numbers and power
Enslaved them under severe oppression

Moses is born within this environment.

He is rescued from genocide by the pharaoh's daughter
And raised in the pharaoh's palace.

As a grown man, he witnessed
An Egyptian slave driver's abusive behavior
Toward a fellow Hebrew slave.

And in a moment of rage
He murders the Egyptian slave boss
And flees for his life into the wilds of Midian.

Moses marries a Midian priest's daughter, Zipporah
And works as a shepherd for his in-law's flocks.

While caring for the sheep near Mt Horeb
Moses witnesses what appears to be a burning bush.

But as he goes for a closer look
He realizes the fire isn't consuming the bush.

And then, from within the bush, he hears a voice!

Exodus 3:5 CEV "Don't come any closer. Take off your sandals—the ground where you are standing is holy.

Not only does he remove his sandals
Moses, frightened so, hides his face.

I have heard the cries of my people!
I have seen their affliction
I know of their sufferings!

I will deliver them out of captivity
And take them to a land of milk and honey!

And you, Moses, will lead them.

And with typical reluctant prophet's response
Moses asks, "What?" "Me?" "Who am I?"

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Don't be surprised that Moses responds this way.
There are reasons he is reluctant.

The first one is, really, who was Moses?

He was a murderer and a fugitive
A lowly shepherd hiding in the wilderness.

Who was he to confront the pharaoh and his army?

Another reason for his reluctance is theological.

Why would God need anyone to do his work?!?!

If it is any assurance, God promises Moses
That he will be with him.

Moses wasn't assured.

Exodus 3:13 (NLT) 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?"

The question Moses poses to God
Is the question above all questions.

One of the greatest questions in life, "God, who are you?"

And God's reply?

EHYEH-ASHER-EHYEH

Say it with me.

I AM THAT I AM

Or as some other translations translate it

I AM WHO I AM

I AM WHAT I AM

I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE

That's the best the English language can do!

It's a riddle, really

If riddle means having a double or veiled meaning
Put forth as a puzzle to be solved.

But that wasn't God's proper name.
God hasn't given it yet.

We read God's name later on, but we really don't
For here again is part of the riddle.

Over the centuries, when Israelites read scripture
When they came upon God's name

So sacred was God's name, they wouldn't speak
They would replace it the name, the LORD

Exodus 3:15 NRSV God also said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'The Lord,^[a] 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 name forever, and this my title for all generations.

Footnotes

- a. **3.15 The word "LORD" when spelled with capital letters stands for the divine name, YHWH**

So, whenever you see LORD spelled with capitals
It is the name that replaces the name YHWH

Often, the name will appear with God, as in

The LORD (YHWH) God (Elohim)

I AM THAT I AM is God's proclamation of sovereignty.

I AM THAT I AM declares that we stand

In the presence of someone so powerful

Someone so holy

So mysterious

So beyond our understanding.

That we can do no more

Than to remove the feet from our feet

For the ground we stand on is holy ground.

I AM THAT I AM says that before Creation

Ever came into being I AM!

And in the midst of Creation, I AM!

And when Creation ceases to exist, I AM

I AM THAT I AM defines the eternal and unchanging

The ever-present and transcendent nature of God

And yet, the great I AM hears the cries of God's people

And sets into motion the things

That will bring freedom for God's people

Not only is God the Great I AM, Creator of heaven and earth

God is a personal I AM that knows all the days

That were formed for us when none have yet existed.

The Great I AM so loved the world he created
That God gave his one and only son

So that whosoever believeth in him
Shall not perish but have everlasting life.

The Great I AM's Son has a name, his name is Jesus.

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Jesus used God's name in a riddle-like way
To describe the power and authority
God gave him.

One time, He was with the religious leaders
And in response to their challenges to his authority
He turned and said to them

John 8:58 CEB "I assure you," Jesus replied, "before Abraham was, I AM."

Also, in the Gospel of John
When Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane
The soldiers came to arrest him.

Jesus went out and asked who they were looking for
And they answered, Jesus of Nazareth.

John 18:5b-6 CEB He said to them, "I AM." ⁶ When he said, "I AM," they shrank back and fell to the ground.

Other translations translate his response as "I am he"

But the soldiers wouldn't shrink back and fall to the ground
If they had not heard him say, I AM

In John, Jesus metaphorically describes himself
As the great I AM

Seven times he uses I AM
Revealing the character of God

- I Am The Bread Of Life (John 6:35)
- I Am The Light Of The World (John 8:12)
- I Am The Gate For The Sheep (John 10:7)
- I Am The Good Shepherd (John 10:11)
- I Am The Resurrection And The Life (John 11:25)
- I Am The Way The Truth And The Life (John 14:6)
- I Am The True Vine (John 15:1)

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Moses and the burning bush experience is not unique.

Anyone can have one.

The late Charles Stanley points out five identifying qualities
Of burning bush experiences.

- **It will be unexpected.** Even if we're praying to hear from God, He usually answers in a way that catches us by surprise.
- **It will be unique to us.** God's personal messages are different for everyone. It will challenge us to trust and obey Him.
- **We're called to make a decision**—to obey or not. And obedience often won't be easy.
- **It will prompt an emotional response.** We might be moved in some powerful way, such as through tears, relief, or even fear.

- **It will have a powerful and lasting effect.** God often communicates this way about significant situations. If we're listening, our obedience could have a dramatic impact on us and others.

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Have you ever stood on holy ground?

Those moments in your life

When the goosebumps rise up and down your spine?

When for no apparent reason, tears of joy are shed?

When a sort of Déjà vu occurs?

When staring into a dark star-lit sky

And experience the limitlessness of the universe?

And at the same time, sense how miniscule you are

In all of the it's grandeur?

How about when God overwhelms you with grace

That drives you to your knees in gratitude

Or when, deep in prayer, you feel the touch of the Holy Spirit

When?

These are burning bush encounters with the great I AM.

Pay attention to those moments

Take off your shoes

For you are standing on holy ground.

One last riddle:

- I am greater than God
- More evil than the devil
- The poor have me, the rich don't,
- And if you eat me, you'll die.
- What am I? (nothing).