

Who is God? This question drives much of human history, and is a driving force across the meta-narrative of the Bible. After the fall of man in Genesis, mankind no longer had direct access to God, and even the people of Israel only knew certain aspects of their Creator. In Exodus, God states His own name for the first time: “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’” ([Exodus 3:14](#)).

The name of I AM is how God chose to introduce himself, becoming so sacred that in Judaism, the name is not to be spoken. The significance of God’s self-given name encompasses all that He is, and how we are to relate to Him.

## **What Is the Context and Significance of the Name I AM?**

The Book of Exodus is the second book of the Bible. The first five books of both the Jewish and Christian Bibles, called the Pentateuch, are historically attributed to Moses. In context, the introduction of the name I AM comes early in Exodus. The Israelites had been in bondage in Egypt for four centuries. Near the end of this time, Moses fled Egypt and lived in Midian for forty years when God came to him and spoke through a burning bush. Moses asks God for His name, so he will have an answer when the people of Israel ask. In English, God’s answer is translated as “I AM WHO I AM ... tell them I AM has sent me to you” ([Exodus 3:14](#)). This name is known as the [Tetragrammaton](#).

To understand the power and weight of this name, compare this answer to the Egyptian pantheon. The Israelite nation lived surrounded by temples dedicated to deities with faces, bodies, birth stories, and death stories. Most significantly, they had names and dominion over certain aspects of life. For example, the goddess Isis had dominion over women, children, and medicine. Her name identified her with specific characteristics, and she held sway only over a few elements of life. Not so for the God of Israel.

Prior to this moment with Moses, the Israelites called their god Elohim or El – is a title, not a personal name – or “El Shaddai”, often translated as God Almighty. When God gives a name for His people to call Him it conveys His dominion over all things, the source of His power, and His eternal nature: I AM. He is the self-sufficient, self-sustaining God who was, who is, and who will be.

This eternal nature is conveyed better in the Hebrew than in the English. The first time God says I AM (“I AM WHO I AM”), the Hebrew says, “Ehyeh asher Ehyeh”, which translates as “I will be what I will be.” When God then tells Moses, “Say this to the people of Israel: I AM has sent you” ([Exodus 3:14](#)), it is “Yahweh.” Yahweh is the third person version of Ehyeh, which is first person. Yahweh could also be translated as He will be.

[This video](#) from the Bible project explains this topic more.

## **Where Else Is the Name I AM in the Bible?**

The Tetragrammaton appears over six-thousand times in the Bible, even in modern English translations. The Hebrew scribes were very careful to neither say aloud, nor fully spell out the holy and sacred name of God, Yahweh. Instead they would put it in all capital letters, and say Adonai. They put the vowels of Adonai into the consonants of Yaweh to get YAHOWAH, which English Christians translated into Jehovah. Today, any time a translator wants to acknowledge where YHWH is in the original Hebrew text, they use the word LORD in all capital letters.

Some examples include:

[Isaiah 8:1](#) “Then the LORD said to me, “Take a large tablet and write on it in common characters...””

[Psalm 149:1](#) “Praise the LORD! Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise in the assembly of the godly!”

[Proverbs 21:3](#) “To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice.”

Perhaps the most significant use of the name I AM in the Bible comes from Jesus Christ. The religious leaders would often try to catch Jesus in heresy, in a lie, or blaspheming so they could be rid of him. In [John 8](#), the Jewish people challenged his authority, and they brought up Abraham. Jesus tells them how glad Abraham is to see the day of the Lord. When asked by the crowd how He speaks as if He knows Abraham, “Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly I say to you, before Abraham was, I am’” ([John 8:58](#)).

While the original statement in the Book of John comes to us in Greek, the context does indicate that Jesus is invoking the Divine Name of God. First, He is claiming to pre-exist Abraham, a feat rather difficult for an ordinary man. Second, the Jewish people reacted to this statement by trying to stone Jesus, as prescribed in [Leviticus 24:15-16](#), “And speak to the people of Israel, saying, Whoever curses his God shall bear his sin. Whoever blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall stone him. The sojourner as well as the native, when he blasphemes the Name, shall be put to death.” The Jewish people took this law seriously, and reacted to Christ invoking I AM by trying to carry out the punishment of the Levitical law. To them it was blasphemy, as Christ took the Divine name for Himself.

## Issues with Translating “I AM”

When translating the Hebrew name of God into the English language, most translators translate Yahweh as I am. Where there is some differentiation is in the word that goes between the two “I AM” statements - *ăšer* or *asher*. According to [Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible](#), *ăšer* is, “a primitive relative pronoun (of every gender and number); *who, which, what, that*; also (as adverbially and conjunctionally) *when, where, how, because, in order that*, etc...it is often accompanied by the personal pronoun...used to show the connection.” There is a degree of choice that translations have when it comes to this word.

Here are some choices popular Bible translations have:

- English Standard Version: “I AM WHO I AM.”
- King James Version: “I AM THAT I AM.”
- New International Version: “I AM WHO I AM.”
- Wycliffe Bible: “I am that I am.”

Many English versions translate *asher* either as *who* or *that* in this context. Older translations tend towards “that”, where newer translations lean toward “who”.

## Why Understanding [Exodus 3:14](#) Is Important Today

Understanding the weight and power of the name in [Exodus 3:14](#), “I AM WHO I AM” is important for today’s Christian to understand the complexity of who God is. He is all-encompassing and self-sufficient. It is a name above names, one that reminds the believer that God is in control, and that He sees His children. It also affirms the identity of the Savior as the Son of God. It can be easy in the struggles of everyday life to lose sight of the majesty and holiness of God, but meditating on the name He gave Himself, and all that it represents, can help put our time on earth into perspective. God is infinite, and He is sovereign over our lives, He Is Who He Is - אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה.