Names of God and Exodus 3:16*

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Starting with Exodus 3:16, we will explore the verse's translation and its context to learn about different names for God.

(Start by listing as many different names for God as possible. Possibly transliterate a Hebrew word into the Latin alphabet.)

1 Translating the Verse from Hebrew to English

Copying from [GRB43], I have listed a word-for-word translation of Exodus 3:16 from Hebrew to English in Table 1. Hebrew writers can add suffixes to convert one word into a clause so English words appear next to the Hebrew words in the left column.

By choosing among the the choices for each Hebrew word, adding punctuation, and rearranging, write the verse in English.

Caveat reader: I obtained the Hebrew transliteration words from both [VeW96, Zod84], which differ in the use of accents and in tone.

2 The Verse's Meaning and Context

What does the verse mean? What is its context? Who is the speaker, and who is the listener? What is the verse's context?
Question to answer at home: What is the relationship with Gen 50:24–25? What verb is used for God's actions?

3 Names for God

What names for God does the verse use? What do each of the different names mean? Why so many different names?

What other names are used in Exodus 3? Is there a pattern to their use?

Hebrew	English meaning
	Egypt in you to done is [what] and you
pâqad have I	(see next line)
pâqad	to number, visit, be concerned with, look after, make a search for, punish, did as promised, to see, blessed, to take a census, take note of, to witness, be gracious
	saying Jacob and Isaac Abraham of God the me unto appeared has
’âb your	father, begetter; progenitor, forefather, ancestor; originator, creator, inventor; benefactor, guardian; head, chief, ruler; lord, master, teacher; advisor, counsellor
	of God the Jehovah them unto say and Israel
of zâqên	old, aged, ancient (men), eldest, senators, man of old, elder, presbyter, old man, aged man, council of elders
	the
’âcaph and	to gather, to remove, to gather in, to collect, to take away, to destroy
	Go

Table 1: The verse translated word-for-word from Hebrew to English with a few words remaining in Hebrew.

4 Published Translations

Contemporary English Version (1995) Call together the leaders of Israel and tell them that the God who was worshiped by Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob has appeared to you. Tell them I have seen how terribly they are being treated in Egypt.

Darby Bible "Go and gather the elders of Israel together, and say unto them, Jehovah the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, hath appeared to me, saying, I have indeed visited you, and [seen] that which is done unto you in Egypt."

Douay-Rheims Bible (1609) Go, gather together the ancients of Israel, and thou shalt say to them: The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath appeared to me, saying: Visiting I have visited you: and I have seen all that hath befallen you in Egypt.

The Jerusalem Bible (1966) "Go and gather the elders of Israel together and tell them, 'Yahweh, the God of your fathers, has appeared to me—the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob; and he has said to me: I have visited you and seen all that the Egyptians are doing to you.' "

King James Version (1611) Go, and gather the elders of Israel together, and say unto them, The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared unto me, saying, I have surely visited you, and *seen* that which is done to you in Egypt.

Seen appears italicized in some editions because it was added to the Hebrew when translating.

Modern Language Bible (1969) "Go and convene the elders of Israel and tell them, the LORD, the god of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob has appeared to me with this message: I have faithfully been present with you and observed the treatment you received in Egypt."

New American Standard Bible (1963) "Go and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, "I am indeed concerned about you and what has been done to you in Egypt." ' "

New English Bible (1961) "Go and assemble the elders of Israel and tell them that JEHOVAH the God of their forefathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, has appeared to you and has said, 'I have indeed turned my eyes towards you; I have marked all that has been done to you in Egypt.' "

New International Version (1984) "Go, assemble the elders of Israel and say to them, 'The LORD the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—-appeared to me and said: I have watched over you and have seen what has been done to you in Egypt.' "

New King James Version "Go and gather the elders of Israel together, and say to them, 'The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared to me, saying, "I have surely visited you and seen what is done to you in Egypt." '"

New Living Translation (1996) "Now go and call together all the leaders of Israel. Tell them, 'The LORD, the God of your ancestors—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—appeared to me in a burning bush. He said, "You can be sure that I am watching over you and have seen what is happening to you in Egypt." '"

New Revised Standard Version (1989) "Go and assemble the elders of Israel, and say to them, 'The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying: I have given heed to you and to what has been done to you in Egypt."

Revised Standard Version (1946) "Go and gather the elders of Israel together, and say to them, 'The LORD, 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." '"

Tanakh (by Jewish Publication Society) (1985) "Go and assemble the elders of Israel and say to them: The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, has appeared to me and said, 'I have taken note of you and of what is being done to you in Egypt.' "

Today's English Version (1976) "Go and gather the leaders of Israel together and tell them that I, the LORD, the God of their ancestors, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, appeared to you. Tell them that I have come to them and have seen what the Egyptians are doing to them."

Young's Literal Translation 'Go, and thou hast gathered the elders of Israel, and hast said unto them: Jehovah, God of your fathers, hath appeareth unto me, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, I have certainly inspected you, and that which is done to you in Egypt.'

5 Notes About Different Names for God

In the calling of Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt (Ex 3:1–4:18), the divine presence has three different names: Elohim (God), YHWH (LORD), and Ehyeh [Pla81].

"Elohim" is a basic generic name for god, e.g., the god of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Ex 3:6). First appearing in the creation story, "Elohim" is a variant of the name "El," meaning "godhead" in Semitic languages, e.g., Ugaritic "El," Babylonian "Ilu," and Arabic "Allah." It is used for the god of Israel and also generically for gods of other nations. According to the Documentary Hypothesis, it is used by E, i.e., the Elohist.

When Moses asks for the name of which god is sending him to Egypt, the reply is "Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh" and "Ehyeh." (How would a name which none of the Israelites had previously heard give credence that God actually called Moses?) "Ehyeh" is first person singular of the verb "to be" with an unclear tense, and "Asher" means "who" or "what." Combining these together yields many different possible meanings:

- I am who I am.
- I am what I am.
- I am what I will be.
- I will be what I will be.
- I will be what I shall be.
- I will be what tomorrow demands.
- I am what I cause to be.

Should we interpret this as an absolute, unchanging divine presence or in an active sense, i.e., a God that responds to human needs? Do you agree with this commentary?

> The Midrash[1] conveys a similar interpretation: while God is called by many names, He is what He is by virtue of His deeds. That is to say, you cannot really know Him until you experience Him in your own life. [Pla81, p. 406]

Since name-giving implies power over the one named, only Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh itself can use the name. Instead the Tetragrammaton "YHWH" uses the third person masculine singular. In English, it is written using small-capital letters: LORD. The vowels are never written, and, to avoid accidental blasphemy, it is not pronounced. Instead "adonai," "Kyrios," "Jehovah," or "Lord" are frequently used. According to the Documentary Hypothesis, it is used by J.

The phrase "God is my/your/his father," frequently connected with "Abraham" and/or "Isaac," is a distinctive and characteristic feature of Genesis (Gen 31:5, 46:3, 31:29, 46:1, 24:12, 46:1, 28:13, 32:10, 24:12, 27, 42, 48, 28:13, 32:10). In Exodus 3:6, 3:15, 16, 4:5, this becomes "God of your/their fathers," to provide continuity with the past but also with plural referring to the entire people of Israel. Other ancient Near East cultures use similar phrases likes "Ashur, god of my father" and "Shamash, the god of my father." This divine epithet connotes a special, personal relationship between an individual and his god, his patron and protector [Sar91, p. 268].

References

[GRB43] Ph.D. George Ricker Berry. *The Interlinear Literal Translation of the Hebrew Old Testament with the King James Version and the Revised Version*, volume Genesis and Exodus. Wilcox & Follett Company, Chicago, 1943.

[Pla81] W. Gunther Platt, editor. *The Torah: A Modern Commentary.* Union of American Hebrew Congregations, New York, 1981.

[1] Jewish oral tradition, subsequently written down, interpreting their scriptural texts.

[Sar91] Nahum M. Sarna. *Exodus: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation.* The JPS Torah Commentary. The Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, 1991. ISBN 0-8276-0327-4.

[VeW96] William Edwy Vine, Merrill F. Unger (ed.), and William White, Jr. (ed.). *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words with Topical Index.* Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, TN, 1996. ISBN 0-782-1160-8.

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