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YHWH, the Trinity, and the Literal Sense: Theological Interpretation of Exodus 3:13-15

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Abstract

In this dissertation, I engage a variety of contexts in reading Exodus 3:13-15. The trend in late-nineteenth and twentieth-century Old Testament scholarship was to oppose the meaning of the Hebrew text with later Christian interpretations, which built on Greek and Latin translations. According to this view, the text of Ex 3:13-15 presents an etymology of the divine name that suggests God's active presence with Israel or what God will accomplish for Israel; the text does not address the nature or being of God. In Part I, I critique this interpretive trend, arguing that religio-historical approaches to determining the origins of the name "YHWH" and of Yahwism do not substantially help one read the received form of the biblical text, and that Augustine's interpretation of Ex 3:13-15 provides an example of a pre-modern reading of the literal sense that avoids the problems of which it might be accused.

In Part II, I argue that the text of Ex 3:13-15, understood according to the literal sense, addresses both who God is as well as God's action, and that conversation with Augustine's reading can help the reader, in a Christian context, to understand the text and its subject matter. Read within the literary contexts of the received form of the book of Exodus and the Pentateuch as a whole, the text of Ex 3:13-15 suggests that Moses' question addresses more than factual information, even the character and nature of God. The "I am who I am" of v. 14a expresses indefiniteness; while God reveals himself as YHWH and offers this name for the Israelites to call upon him, God is not exhausted by this revelation but rather remains beyond human comprehension and control.

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Allen Institute for AI. Proudly built by AI2 with the help of our. Exo 3:14 and 15 has two verbal forms of the same stem (hwh). The answer in 3:14 is explanatory, but in 3:15 it is literal—YHWH is given as the name. Moses asked about the name and the explanatory reply was “אֲנִי הוּא” (Ehyeh Ehyeh) “I am that I am or I will be what I will be” (S. R. Driver considers it idem per idem construction as in Exo 33:19, “employed where the means or desire to be more explicit does not exist” The Book of Exodus, Cambridge Bible commentary). However, Moses didn’t continue to call him “אֲנִי הוּא” (I am or I will be) from then on in Exodus. In the next verse in Exo 3:15 we have the ubiquitous name then given (which is found throughout the Bible and in Psa 83:18) as the 3rd person singular form of the