

God's Mysterious Name

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Moses was 80 years old with a stammering tongue and still tending sheep for his father-in-law near Mt. Horeb. One day as he wandered in the wilderness a voice spoke to him from a burning bush telling him to deliver Israel from Egypt's bondages. He stared spellbound at the burning bush and wondered why it didn't burn up. When he realized Yahweh was speaking to him he reminded God how Israel rejected him forty years before and complained about his own inabilities. "*Who am I that I should go?*" he stuttered, but the Voice assured him: "*Certainly I will be (EHYEH-Heb) with you*" (Ex. 3:12). He reluctantly agreed to go, but not without some additional conformation. "*When they say to me, what is His name? What shall I say to them?*" (Ex. 3:13).

What God said to Moses still keeps scholars guessing. He said: "*Ehyeh asher ehyeh (I AM WHO I AM). Tell them I AM sent me to you.*" (3:14). Moses waited silently for the rest of the answer to this strange statement, but it didn't come. "I am who I am? I am what? I am who?" Moses was familiar with the name YHWH. Jochebed, his mother's name, means, "YHWH is glory" (Ex. 6:20). God previously told Moses He was: "*El Shaddai, The All Sufficient God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob,*" but Moses wanted a more comprehensive name. He wanted to know something of the nature of this God who was sending him to confront the most powerful regime in existence. In his culture names were more than labels identifying a person as today. They revealed the character, plan or purpose of the person so God's name should say something about His personal being.

God changed Abram's name (the father of exaltation) to Abraham (father of a multitude) expressing God's destiny for Abraham. Likewise, Sarai was changed to Sarah and that of Jacob to Israel.

God continued: "*Thus you will say to the children of Israel. YHWH, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, has sent me to you. This is my name forever, and this is my memorial to all generations.*" (3:15). Moses probably wondered whether God's name was *Ehyeh* or *Yhwh*. He had been well educated in Egypt and understood his native language. He authored the first five books of the Bible. He knew *I AM* was not a noun, but the 1st person singular of the Hebrew verb *hayah* "to be" and *YHWH* was the 3rd person singular of the same verb. When God spoke directly to Moses he used the 1st person, but in Egypt He would speak indirectly through Moses so the 3rd person would be the correct form.

There is common confusion about the origin and meaning of God's memorial name. Some have suggested the meaning was lost, but that is doubtful. God said *YHWH* would be His memorial name for all generations and if the meaning was lost then the knowledge of God's Person was lost. It was senseless for the Almighty to reveal Himself with a name and allow both the pronunciation and meaning to be lost. It challenges His ability to preserve His Word. The Lord Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away but my Word will never pass away." So that is that!

Both Moses and the Israelites knew how to say God's name, but they did not know what it meant. When Eve gave birth to her firstborn she said, "*I have gotten a man child from YHWH*" (Gen. 4:1). Gen. 4:26 tells us men began calling upon the name of YHWH when Enosh, Adam's grandson, was born. Later, as a nation, Israel became

fearful of blaspheming the name so they gradually refused to speak it and eventually the pronunciation was obscured. If the exact pronunciation was important God would have preserved it just as He preserved His Word. Hebrew was a cognate language and contemporary texts dating from this period record the name.

God's memorial name, or how He wants to be *remembered*, is recorded 6,823 times in the Hebrew Scriptures, but it can't be found once in the New Testament. Strange isn't it? A memorial name that would last from generation to generation is gone. What happened to The Name?

I AM (*ehyeh*) can be translated in either of two Hebrew tenses or moods and it is a way of looking at the action. The Qal is a static perfect in which all movement has ceased. The action is completed, but the effect may continue. *If this were the correct tense ehyeh would mean I AM or I exist.* The Hiphil imperfect tense does not nail down when it happened. It would not be static, but one of constant movement. Rather than mere self-existence, distant and without feeling, God would continue acting in current circumstances and manifesting Himself in the future. Most scholars favor this tense and without exception the context of the YaHWeH passages bear this out.

Isaac Lesser, noted Jewish scholar, translated the phrase as: "*I will be that I will be,*" in his Bible published by the Hebrew Publishing Society. Notice! He did not say, "I AM" but "I WILL BE." Moses Maimonides (AD 1135-1204), a brilliant Jewish scholar said, "YHWH is the plain Name because it teaches *clearly and unequivocally the substance of God.* Other titles and names of God express His offices or characteristics, but the *personal Name reveals His very Person.*" Some Hebrew linguists suggest: "He causes to come to be" meaning He is a fulfiller of promises, the One who causes his

purposes to be realized. It could be translated, as “I shall be what I shall be,” or, “I will become whatever I please.” Moses, Israel, Pharaoh and all Egypt would come to know what God is really like.

There is more proof the Divine name is in a future tense. YHWH is composed of four Hebrew consonants, Yod, Heh, Vav, Heh. Dr Dwight Pentecost wrote: “It contains each tense of the verb “to be” and might be translated: I WAS, I AM, AND I SHALL ALWAYS CONTINUE TO BE.” The pre-formative YOD gives the word an indefinite or future tense with the emphasis on God’s continued manifestation.

Even with these expert Hebrew scholars can we be certain the imperfect or the future is the right choice? I think so. Look at verse 12 again. God said to Moses: “I AM with you here and I WILL BE with you there.” He didn’t say HOW He would be with him, only that He would be! The verb *ehyeh*, *I WILL BE*, is in the imperfect (future tense).

That future emphasis is still present in verse 14 when God said He was *EHYEH ASHER EHYEH* “I shall be in the future what I have been in the past.” This is what I AM THAT I AM means. We see the same time emphasis in verse 17 when YaHWeH said, “I WILL bring you up ...out of Egypt.” Israel’s deliverance has not happened yet, but the name YaHWeH guarantees it.

A characteristic of the Hebrew language is there are many nominal or nonverbal sentences. The verb “to be” is not expressed unless the speaker purposely wants to use the past or future tense. In the present *tense* the verb “to be” is not used. For example: The speaker would say, “I teacher,” not “I AM the teacher.” “I, here,” not “I AM here.”

The present is understood. The translators added “AM” to avoid confusion since the sentence construction sounds strange to the English ear.

I hope this isn't boring or confusing to you. Please stay with me and you'll soon be shouting, not only for new knowledge, but when you realize what happened to God's name? The mission of Jehovah's Witnesses to restore the Divine name to the New Testament is a futile exercise since the name, Jehovah, was first concocted and recorded by a Spanish monk in 1270 AD.

THE MYSTERY OF THE MISSING NAME is one mystery Perry Mason did not solve, but we can. If properly pronouncing the name Jehovah or Yahweh was important Yahshua-Jesus would have informed His disciples. Even though Israel had a long tradition of not saying the Divine Name for fear of blasphemy there wasn't any special power in saying The Name. The power comes from intimately knowing Him.

In Exodus 6:2-3 God spoke to Moses again, saying, “I am YaHWeH, and I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God Almighty (El Shaddai), but by My name, YaHWeH, I did not make myself known to them.” Isn't that interesting?

Mankind had addressed God as YaHWeH since the Garden of Eden, but God had not made Himself known. The key is the next verse. “*And I ALSO established My covenant with them.*” The name YaHWeh (Jehovah or LORD) relates only to God's covenant people. The Name was never used with gentiles or unrelated nations. The book of Hebrews says when God could not swear by anything greater He swore by His own name.

How did Israel come to experience God as YaHWeH? Their fathers experienced God as El Shaddai, the “all sufficient One” when Abraham and Sarah’s aged bodies conceived and brought forth Isaac.

Now it’s time for Moses and Israel to experience the depth of the Covenant name YaHWeH. God said: I am YHWH. I will deliver them by redeeming them, by taking them as His Own people, by bringing them into the place of blessing and inheritance and by being God to them. Seven times God said, “I WILL” and concluded with: “I AM YHWH.” He began with YHWH and finished with YHWH. Between are the seven I Wills’ contained in His name.

Their knowledge would not be an abstract mental or historical knowledge about God; they would actually “taste and see” what God’s name means as He delivered them from Egypt and adopted them as His particular people by signs, wonders and miracles.

The promise made to Abraham was not made to seeds, referring to many, but to his seed, that is Christ (Gal. 3:16). When the fullness of time came God sent forth His son, made in the likeness of man, to redeem those who were under the curse of the law and death. The angel visited the young Virgin Mary and told her not to name her son Joseph Junior but Yashua (Jesus), which means Emmanuel, or God is with us (Matt. 1:23).

Here is the answer to the mystery. The name YHWH was not lost or deliberately deleted from the Christian Greek Scriptures. When God spoke to Moses at the burning bush it was the only time He referred to Himself in the first person: I WILL BE. After that God spoke of Himself in the 3rd person: He SHALL BE.

When Yahshua, the “seed of the woman,” was born God once again revealed Himself to man, not as I WILL BE, but as the now I AM. The tense changed from future to present. Jesus, Yahshua, (Hebrew) is a compound word. YAH, the name of God (Psa. 68:4), and Oshua, salvation. Yashua means Yahweh is salvation.

When Yahshua-Jesus was born, He was called Emmanuel, God is with us. God was the eternal I AM manifested and revealed in Christ. The reason YHWH isn't found in the New Testament is because God no longer reveals Himself as YHWH, “He will be” but the present tense I AM. In the Greek it is *ego eimi* or “I, I am,” a declaration the Lord Jesus Christ used often. The Jews knew exactly what He meant and countered: “How can you being a man call yourself God- YHWH, *ego eimi*?” So they tried to kill Him, but being YHWH or Emmanuel He could not stay dead. He was raised from the dead and He is alive!

Every prophetic promise made to Israel, every temple ritual and ceremony, the feast days, temple, high priest, sacrifices etc. all found a final fulfillment in Christ Jesus. The challenge for skeptics is not “How did a man become God,” but “How did God become man?”

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