

QUIZ

1. Why does Isaiah begin by mentioning the Holy One of Israel?
2. Name the four things associated with their salvation?
3. How had the people decided to save themselves?
4. Why was Jehovah determined to wait?
5. Why are verses 23-26 probably not literal?
6. What is the point of all this section?

SPECIAL STUDY

OLD TESTAMENT NAMES FOR GOD

by Robert D. Stacy

INTRODUCTION

Hardly has there been a time in which mankind did not seek after a god of some kind. As far back as the eye of history looks, it sees man worshipping. He may be worshipping the heavenly bodies. He may be worshipping the rushing sea or mighty mountain. He may be worshipping another man or even himself. But man is inherently a being who seeks something to worship.

As the eye of history focuses on the small nation of Israel, however, it sees a type of worship which is quite unique. The One God, whom Israel claims to worship, is invisible. He is the Creator and Sustainer of life, the Ruler of the universe. And He cannot be represented by wood or stone images. Before Him there is no other god.

The God of Israel was essentially (1) personal, (2) spiritual (3) sole and supreme, (4) of an inapproachably lofty ethical character. . . . Personality . . . is a distinctive feature of the God of the Old Testament throughout.¹

¹ W. T. Davison, "God," *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings (London: T. & T. Clark, 1914), VI, 254.

OLD TESTAMENT NAMES FOR GOD

To Israel the name of God was of major importance. It was in the name of God that Israel walked. It was in His name that she worshipped. In His name she spoke, and to His Name she attached special reverence and significance.

When God is in communication with men, they must have a name for Him. For the Hebrews . . . a name is no colourless appellation serving merely for use. It must be more; it must really express the character of the person indicated and his real importance; or it must embody a declaration of faith, a hope which those who give the name connect with the person named.²

But it is vital to understand, too, that

since God far transcends all human comprehension, He can, strictly speaking, have no name—He is “Nameless,” “Unutterable,” . . . The divine names then are but attempts to express certain facets of God’s being; they teach us what concepts Israel had regarding God.³

One name could never have adequately described the many aspects of God’s nature and personality. And thus it is necessary that the student of the Bible discover the meanings of the most important names given to God in the Hebrew Scripture.

YHWH

There is no name given to God which occurs more frequently in the Old Testament than the personal name, YHWH. This is the name translated LORD in the Authorized or King James Version of 1611 and Jehovah in the American Revised Version

² Hermann Schultz, *Old Testament Theology, The Religion of Revelation in Its Pre-Christian Stage of Development*, trans. J. A. Patterson (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1898), II, 13.

³ Paul Heinisch, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. William Heidt (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1950), 48.

of 1901. This name "occurs more than twice as often as the generic term, *Elohim*."⁴ In all, YHWH occurs 6,823 times in the Hebrew Scriptures.⁵ By far, it was "the favorite name for devotion and worship"⁶ among the Hebrew people. The books of prophecy and the books of wisdom and poetry regularly employ this name for God.⁷

The origin for this name is a cause for great disagreement among the etymologists. Though the majority of scholars agree that this is the ". . . proper personal name of the God of Israel, as contrasted with strange gods. . . .,"⁸ they cannot reach unanimity of opinion regarding its origin. There are those who claim that ". . . this name was known at Ras Shamra, where it stood in the form of *YW the son of El*."⁹ Very little consideration is given to this opinion, however, in most scholarly circles. Others contend that the Kenites were the first to worship YHWH. Since Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, is identified with the Kenites and is conjectured to have been a high priest of YHWH, it is thought that this accounts for the introduction of the name into the Israelite community.¹⁰ Of this explanation, one author states that it ". . . is more than dubious."¹¹

The best explanation of the name is found in the Bible account of the burning bush (cf. Exodus 3:1-15) and in the words of God, Himself, revealed in Exodus 6:3, "And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, as God Almighty; but by my name Jehovah I was not known to

⁴ H. Wheeler Robinson, "The Characteristic Doctrines," *Record and Revelation Essays on the Old Testament by members of the Society for Old Testament Study*, ed. H. Wheeler Robinson (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1938), 321.

⁵ Nathan J. Stone, *Names of God in the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1944), 19.

⁶ Robinson, 322.

⁷ Richard Lewis Farnell, *The Attributes of God* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1952), 106.

⁸ Schultz, 125.

⁹ Stone, 31.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Davison, 254.

them."¹² It is quite obvious from these Biblical passages that this was the official introduction of this name into the Hebrew faith. There are some who would dispute this contention, however, on the grounds that the name, YHWH, is found in Genesis. When this name does occur in Genesis, however, it is the author's intent to show that the same God who manifested Himself to Moses ". . . had directed the destinies of mankind from the beginning."¹³ Because the name appears in Genesis is not proof that the patriarchs were acquainted with the name, or at least with the full significance of the name. "In any case, the fundamental point is that the new name received a very special significance"¹⁴ from the time of Moses onward.

There is as much disagreement among Old Testament scholars concerning the derivation of the name as there is concerning its origin. Some attempt to explain the meaning as derived from the Hebrew root meaning "to fall." According to these scholars, it would then indicate ". . . some sacred object, such as a stone fallen from heaven."¹⁵ Another group holds to the theory that the name is from the same root, also, but this school favors the meaning "to blow." YHWH then would be the god of the wind and the storm. The greatest majority, however, contend that the root of YHWH is *hayah*, meaning "to be." Within this majority there is a division of opinion regarding the verb stem from which the name is derived. One group believes that the form is the hiphil, a causative construction. Thus the name would mean "he who causes to be" and would designate YHWH as Creator.¹⁶ It is held by the other division that ". . . the Hiphil of . . . is very rare . . .,"¹⁷ and these scholars believe that YHWH is the Qal, imperfect,

¹² Scriptural quotations are from American Revised Version unless cited.

¹³ Heinisch, 53.

¹⁴ Heinisch, 53.

¹⁵ J. F. McLaughlin, "Names of God," *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, ed. Isidore Singer (New York and London: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1905), IX, 161.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ S. R. Driver, *The Book of Genesis with Introduction and Notes* (London: Methuen and Company, 1904), 408.

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third person, singular of the verb. If this view be correct, then the name emphasizes the existence in His various relationships to Israel as the covenant nation. It can be said with reasonable certainty that the idea of a Being who manifests Himself is to be found in this name. "There is no doubt that the idea of life was intimately connected with YHWH from early times."¹⁸

YHWH is referred to as the "ineffable name" because at some time in the history of Israel the name became too holy to be pronounced. Substituted for the name (in reading) when it stood alone in the Hebrew text was Adonai. When YHWH was compounded with Adonai, however, Elohim became its substitute. The common English pronunciation, Jehovah, is considered a mispronunciation by most scholarship. It arose through pronouncing the vowels of Adonai with the consonants, YHWH. ". . . there is no authentic information¹⁹ concerning the pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton (so called because of its four consonants, YHWH).

Although the other names of God may have been derived from the character or work of God, YHWH is the name that expresses His personality. There is no other YHWH. In this name is revealed to man an eternal God, one who is wholly self-existent, one who is righteous and holy in every aspect of His relationships, one who ". . . stands in special covenant relation to Israel,"²⁰ and one who possesses moral and spiritual attributes. YHWH is ". . . the cause and the ground of all being, faithful to His promise, and constant in His relationship with His people."²¹

ELOHIM

The general term for deity in the Old Testament is Elohim, and it is used for foreign gods as well as for the God of Israel.

¹⁸ McLaughlin, 161.

¹⁹ Kaufmann Kohler, "Adonai," *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, I, 201.

²⁰ Stone, 59.

²¹ W. T. Davison, 254.

Used to refer to such foreign deities as Dagon, Beelzebub, and Chemosh, it is also the name by which God is introduced in Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." From this verse through Genesis 2:4, Elohim is employed thirty-five times. In all, it occurs 2,570 times in the Hebrew Scriptures.

The peculiar aspect of this word, Elohim, is its plural number. It is a masculine plural noun in the original language. Various explanations are given as solutions to this peculiarity. It is quite generally acknowledged by scholars that this plural is a plural of majesty which would indicate eminence and supremacy or ". . . fullness and abundance of power and resources."²² This plural, they agree, also may indicate unity. The plural number then, according to this opinion, ". . . helps to increase the significance of the word, and to express the fulness of power and majesty which is exclusively connected with the unity of person."²³

Others reject this explanation stating that ". . . such use of plural was not known then."²⁴ This school of thought holds that Elohim is ". . . a name usually given in the Scriptures to the ever blessed Trinity by which they represent themselves as under the obligation of an oath to perform certain conditions. . . . Elohim covenanted not only with the creation but, as the Godhead, within itself, concerning the creation."²⁵ Those holding this position believe the plural to be a plural of unity, also, but in this unity, they claim is the Holy Trinity. Pointing to Genesis 1:26, 3:22, and 11:7, they find proof in the plural "us" that Elohim refers to the three distinct personalities of the Godhead. They further claim that the singular verbs and adjectives used when Elohim refers to the God of Israel point to the unity of the Godhead, the Trinity.²⁶ Many conservative

²² Davison, 254.

²³ Schultz, 126.

²⁴ Stone, 16.

²⁵ Stone, 14.

²⁶ Heinisch, 49.

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scholars, as well as liberal scholars, have found it necessary to reject this explanation because it is based, for the most part, on conjecture.²⁷

Regarding the derivation of this word, there are at least two major explanations. There are, on the one hand, those who hold that Elohim “. . . is derived from the shorter word, ‘El,’ which means mighty, strong, prominent.”²⁸ The name, in that case, would emphasize the great strength and power of God. Recognizing that power and strength are root meanings of this word, it is also believed that Elohim “. . . contains the idea of creative and governing power”²⁹ (cf. Genesis 1:1—2:4 where Elohim is used thirty-five times). There are others, however, who believe this name is derived from the root, “alah,” which means “to declare or swear.”³⁰ This derivation implies a covenant relationship (cf. Genesis 6:18, 50:24, Jeremiah 31:33). Still others believe Elohim is derived from an Arabic verb, “alih,” which means “to seek refuge because of fear.” If this explanation be true, then Elohim would be the God to be revered or feared.³¹ Whatever the correct explanation, Elohim is “more a philosophical than devotional term and corresponds to our term, Deity. . . .”³²

SHADDAI

The name by which God first made Himself known to the Patriarchs was Shaddai. In Exodus 6:2, 3 are recorded these words: “And God spake unto Moses, and said unto Him, I am Jehovah: and I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ McLaughlin, 161.

³² John McClintock and James Strong (ed.), *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1894), III, 901.

unto Jacob, as God Almighty; but by my name Jehovah I was not known to them." Often the name appears as a compound expression, El-Shaddai. It is used for the first time in Genesis 17:1, 2 where these words are recorded: "And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, Jehovah appeared to Abram and said unto him, I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be thou perfect. And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly." Altogether it appears forty-eight times in the Old Testament Scriptures.³³

The derivation of this name is as vague and obscure as are the derivations of YHWH and Elohim. When compounded with El, it is translated God Almighty and when standing alone, it is translated simply, Almighty. There are some who believe Shaddai is derived from "sadam" which means to be powerful. From this comes the translation, "almighty" or "all-powerful one."³⁴ At the same time, there are scholars who ". . . align it with Accadian *sadu*, mountain, and see in the name the meaning, sovereign, lord, highest."³⁵ According to one author, "the studies of Albright, Burrows, and others have definitely established that Shaddai is somehow to be related to the cuneiform *sadu*, 'mountain.'"³⁶ There are some who believe Shaddai is derived from the word meaning, "breast." "Connected with the word for God, El, it then becomes the One mighty to nourish, satisfy, supply . . . the One who 'sheds forth' and 'pours out' sustenance and blessing. . . ."³⁷ The Septuagint translates the Hebrew word, Shaddai, with the Greek, *hikanos*, all-sufficient.³⁸ Whichever root is decided upon as correct, it is true that Shaddai depicts a mighty God, high and lifted up, who is able to supply every human need.

³³ Stone, 31.

³⁴ Heinisch, 50.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Herbert Gordon May, "The Patriarchal Idea of God," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, LX (June, 1941), Part II, 122.

³⁷ Stone, 35.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 36.

ADONAI

The name, Adonai, appears some 300 times in the Old Testament. It is used for the first time in Genesis 15:2, "And Abram said, O Lord Jehovah, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and he that shall be possessor of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" In various places, as here, the name appears in a compound form. For instance, "in the prophecy of Ezekiel the name Adonai Jehovah appears some 200 times."³⁹ After the Hebrews became fearful of uttering the personal name of God, YHWH, Adonai became the chief substitute in the spoken language. To this day it is used in place of YHWH in speaking.

Adonai is derived from 'adun, which means "to judge."⁴⁰ It is the intensive plural and possessive, which according to some, suggests the Trinity even as Elohim may.⁴¹ In the Septuagint the common *kurios* is used in place of the Hebrew, adonai.⁴² This name describes God as the Judge or the Master to whom man is subservient. It "signifies ownership or mastership. . . ."⁴³ And it is evident throughout the Old Testament that those who accepted Adonai as Master acknowledged that they were His slaves. It is important to understand, however, that the relationship was not that of a taskmaster over his slaves, but rather it was the affectionate relationship of a loving master who took care of his servants. The use of this name makes clear that which God expects of His creatures. In Genesis 15:2, for example, ". . . Abraham understood what this relationship meant; . . . Lordship meant complete possession on the one hand and complete submission on the other."⁴⁴ This name emphasized, more than any other, the responsibility of the individual to his God.

³⁹ Stone, 51.

⁴⁰ Heinisch, 50.

⁴¹ Stone, 46.

⁴² Robinson, 322.

⁴³ Stone, 46.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 48.

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