

The Importance of His Name

Introduction

Have you ever wondered, why it is, the name of pagan gods is always quoted in the Scriptures, but the name of the Elohim of the Scriptures is, often missing? Have you ever watched a play or film in which the name of the main character is avoided or read a book in which the name of the hero is omitted? It would be most strange, yet this is the situation concerning the principal person of our faith. Furthermore, almost everyone when praying, substitutes His name with either lord or god which are titles not names. T.E. McComiskey put it in perspective when he said, "A blessing is lost when no attention is paid to the difference in usage of a title 'God' or 'Lord' and the actual name of the God of Israel" You may consider such substitutions not a big deal, but as we will see, it is against YHWH's decree, it is against His wish. To put it plainly, it is a transgression against His Torah/Law and any transgression is a big deal to YHWH.

The Name of the Elohim of Israel

Let us consider how the Elohim of Israel introduced Himself to Moshe (Moses),

Moshe said to Elohim, "Look, when I appear before the people of Israel and say to them, 'The Elohim of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is His name?' what shall I tell them?" Elohim said to Moshe, "Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh", And He said, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I Am' has sent me to you.'" (Exod.3:13-14)

'Ehyeh' is first person singular (such as 'I' or 'me') of the verb 'to be' and 'Asher' means who or what. This yields several 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.

A common interpretation is 'I Am/Will Be, Who I Am/Will Be'. We should interpret this phrase in both an absolute sense of an unchanging divine presence and in an active sense, that is, Elohim is able to respond to all the needs of creation, including humanity.

Since only me can use 'I' when referring to myself, only Elohim may use the term 'Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh'. Thus, when we are referring to Elohim, we use the Tetragrammaton "YHWH" which uses the third person singular. The tetragrammaton comprises four Hebrew letters 'yud', 'heh', 'waw or vav', 'heh'. For ease of pronunciation vowels were added to the tetragrammaton so today we have the derivatives **Yahweh**, **Jehovah** (because there is no 'y' in Latin the 'j' was substituted). **Yahuwah**, or **Yehovah**. There are arguments for the tetragrammaton being 'YHVH' and 'YHUH', but these arguments are tangential to this study. What is important is that the Tetragrammaton is the distinctive personal name of the Elohim of Israel and has the meaning 'Self Existing One' **and** 'He Causes to Exist'. But as we will discover it goes even deeper than this.

What's In a Name

It really all comes down to the Hebrew language. According to tradition the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew aleph bet (alphabet) hold the key to creation. A Hebrew word can tell a story unlike any other language, for example consider the name of the first man Adam.

Remembering Hebrew reads from right to left, in Hebrew Adam is spelled (אָדָם): aleph (א), dalet, (ד) mem (מ). The name begins with an aleph (א) and ends with a mem (מ). The word 'am' (אָם) means nations or peoples. The middle

letter is dalet (ד) and means door, so Adam is the door to the nations and peoples. In other words, all humanity will come from him. What is more man's origin can also be found in the name Adam. Gen.2:7 says YHWH made man of the dust of the ground. Ground comprises four Hebrew letters אדמה: aleph (א), dalet, (ד) mem (ם), which is Adam, plus the Hebrew letter het (ה) giving the four-letter word pronounced Adamah (Adam-ah). Adam (man) is from Adam-ah (the ground). Thus, humanity's story is portrayed in a single word and name. Another example of significance is the first word of the Hebrew Scriptures - 'B'rê'shîyth' which in Hebrew is spelt בראשית. Within this single word is contained YHWH's sole desire for a covenanted family relationship with mankind which, this word tells us, is to be sealed by fire. This uniqueness of the Hebrew language also applies to the name change from Abram to Abraham. Is it any surprise that the Hebrew language is considered to be the 'holy tongue'.

But the question arises was Hebrew the language spoken by YHWH to Moshe when YHWH introduced Himself to Moshe? Hebrew was Moshe's language of origin, so it seems practical that YHWH did speak in Hebrew. As just shown a word/name in the Hebrew language can, in and of itself tell a story.

The word 'name' is the English translation of the Hebrew word 'shem' pronounced shaym but unlike 'name' the root meaning of 'shem' expands well beyond just labelling a person.

English	=	Name	⇒	A person's label.
Hebrew	=	Shem	⇒	Name, Position, Reputation, Fame, Glory, Memorial.

'Shem' encompasses position, reputation, fame, glory, or memorial. Thus, a person's *shem* is not just a label as is their name, it is a memorial of their authority, their individuality, their uniqueness. Hence, if we are to accept the translation from 'shem' to 'name' then in the context of Exod.3:13-15, Yahweh's name is an expression of:

- His character,
- His individuality,
- His authority,
- His uniqueness.

In effect Yahweh's name is an expression of his totality and supremacy. Scripture confirms Yahweh's presence, power and protection all reside in His name:

Presence/existence:

- *I sing praise to your name, most high. (Ps.9:2),*
- *May His name endure for ever (Ps72:17),*
- *But I have chosen Jerusalem, for My name to be there. (2Ch.6:6).*

Power:

- *Through your name we tread down those who rise up against us (Ps.44:5),*
- *And the nations shall fear the name of Yahweh (Ps.102:15).*

Protection

- *Save me, Yahweh by thy name... (Ps.54:1),*
- *The name of Yahweh is a strong tower, the righteous run into it and are safe. (Prov.18:10).*

In other words, His name is not just who He is - His name is what He is - **He is His name**. All this places a greater emphasis on verse 15,

And Elohim said further to Moses, "Thus you are to say to the children of Israel YHWH Elohim of your fathers, the Elohim of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob has sent me to you. This is My name forever and this is My memorial name to all generations." (Exod.3:15).

The word memorial is a translation of the Hebrew word 'zeker (zay-ker) which means remembrance, memorial, or memory. What our Father is saying is, "Yahweh is My name forever and this is how I am to be remembered or referred to by all generations". This is a direct decree from the Father. Consider the third Commandment,

You are not to take the name of Yahweh your Elohim in vain because Yahweh will not leave unpunished the one who takes His name in vain. (Exod.20:7).

Vain is a translation of the Hebrew 'La'shav' but it is a diminution of the Hebrew and a poor portrayal of 'La'shav'. In effect what we have is,

English	=	Vain	⇒	To use foolishly or without effect
Hebrew	=	La'shav	⇒	To bring to naught or nothing

'La'shav' can have the same meaning as vain but as with 'shem', its root meaning is much broader. The root can also mean 'to bring to naught, nothingness, to erase.' When we consider the full meaning of the Hebrew 'shem' we can understand Yahweh's desire for His name to be used as His eternal memorial and never forgotten. This considered it would be far more appropriate for the third Commandment to have been presented in the following way,

You are not to bring the name of Yahweh your Elohim to naught because Yahweh will not leave unpunished the one who brings His name to naught.

"Do not bring My name to nothing. Do not erase My name". Yet this is exactly what the synagogue, the Church and the messianic movement have done. In disobedience to His instruction for everyone to refer to Him only by name Christians, Jews and the Messianic congregations have all replaced His name with other terminology:

- Judaism Hashem, Adonai
- Christianity Lord & God
- Messianic Lord, God, Adonai

Judaism has hidden His name with the word Hashem. The meaning of the word Hashem is 'the name.' Does it make any sense to refer to a person as 'the name? Alternatively, Adonai, which means Lord, is used. Similarly, many Christian bibles have replaced His name with Lord and God which are titles not names. When we hide His name from use, we bring it to naught and the ultimate effect of hiding is name may be expressed in the following way,

BECAUSE YHWH IS HIS NAME

To bring YHWH's name to nothing	→	Is to bring YHWH to nothing
To bring YHWH to nothing	→	Is to deny YHWH

Erasing his name from use is erasing YHWH Himself. YHWH desires us to understand His character that is, to know the who, what and the how of Him, all of which is expressed only through His name. He desires a personal relationship with us, in fact it is more than that, He desires an intimate relationship with us. Is it therefore not normal to refer to Him by His personal name. When we have an intimate relationship with someone we talk in an endearing and personal way with them, should it be any different with the One who created us? Lord and god are generic titles and used by pagans when addressing their idols and we are instructed not to use the same worship practices as used in pagan worship (Exod.23:24).

Let us see what scripture has to say about hiding or removing His name:

If you will not hear, and if you will not set it on your heart to give glory to My name, says Yahweh of hosts, then I will send the curse on you, and I will curse your blessings. And indeed, I have cursed it, because you are not setting it (His name) on your heart. (Mal.2:2)

Look what is Yahweh saying. If you do not glorify his name and wear it on your heart, He will send you a curse. Erasing His name is not glorifying it, erasing his name is not wearing it on your heart. So where does this verse leave the synagogue, the Church, and many Messianic congregations? Are they to be blessed? Not according to this passage and this is straight from Yahweh's mouth. Let us look at what Revelation says:

I know your works. Behold, I have given a door being opened before you, and no one is able to shut it, for you have a little power and have kept My word and have not denied (made void) My name. (Rev.3:8).

Here we are told, Yahweh has a relationship only with those who acknowledge Him by His name.

And the nations were full of wrath; and Your wrath came, and the time of the judging of the dead, and to give the reward to your slaves, to the prophets, and to the holy ones, and to the ones fearing Your name, to the small and to the great, and to destroy those destroying the earth. (Rev.11;18).

Yahweh only gives His reward to His slaves, His prophets, His holy people and to those fearing (treat with reverence) His name. We do not live in fear or reverence of that which has been removed from our sight or presence. On the contrary we forget it altogether. Messiah reinforced the importance of using the Father's name to His disciples,

I have revealed your name to the men whom You gave to Me out of the world. They were Yours, and You gave them to Me; and they have kept Your Word. (John 17:6).

Notice Messiah does not say I have revealed 'You' to men but 'your Name' to men. This is significant. Messiah said He came for the lost sheep of Israel (Matt.15:24) and He tells His disciples not to go to the Gentiles (Matt.10:5). In other words, He came for the Jewish people. These same Jews would be in the synagogue every week where they would hear the Old Testament read by the priests. So, Messiah did not have to reveal Yahweh to them, they knew all about Yahweh. However, contrary to Yahweh's instructions, the temple priest had hidden his name, the religious leaders ruled that the name was too sacred to be mentioned, so they had replaced it with Hashem and Adonai. For His disciples to teach in Yahweh's Truth, they had to become accustomed to using His name again. The fact that Messiah felt it necessary to do this reiterates the fundamentality of referring to Yahweh by His name and only His name.

The Issue With Exodus 6:2-3

And Elohim spoke to Moshe and said to him, "I am YHWH. And I appeared to Abraham, to Yitzhak and to Ya'akov, as Ėl Shaddai (Almighty One). And by My Name, YHWH, was I not known to them? (Exod.6:2-3).

Some see this passage as proving YHWH did not reveal His name until He chose Moshe to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. Therefore, the His name could not have the importance we allege it to have. But such an understanding leads to confliction within the Scriptures, because in the first book of Scripture we are told that Abram called on the name of YHWH (Gen.13:4, 14:22). Indeed, all the patriarchs both knew and called on His name. So how are we to correctly understand the above passage from Exodus? After all, if all Scripture is divinely given (2Tim.3:16), then there cannot be any confliction between verses. It's all about relationship. The patriarchs new YHWH as a mighty Elohim, the only Elohim. YHWH was an Elohim who demanded obedience and reverence for which He offered righteousness. This was the essence of His relationship with the patriarchs. But insofar as the nation Israel was concerned YHWH wanted a much more intimate relationship: He wanted a marriage relationship. He was to be the husband and Israel His wife (Isa.54:5, Jer.31:31). Israel was to be an endearment to Him and through His name YHWH was to be an endearment to Israel. Remember He is His name. In the above passage YHWH is saying that the patriarchs never knew Him in the same terms that the nation Israel are to know Him.

Conclusion

Yahweh does not waste words; He issues commands because they are necessary. The terms lord and god are generic and not specific they are titles used in pagan worship. He instructed us to use His Name because He does not want to be confused with false gods and pagan worship practices. To summarise,

- He has instructed we refer to Him only by His memorial – His name,
- The third commandment instructs us not to erase His name,
- We are disobeying Yahweh when we substitute His name with god, lord, master, Hashem, or Adonai.
- Scripture warns of punishment awaiting those who do not use His name

Let us repeat Malachi,

If you will not hear, and if you will not set it on your heart to give glory to My name, says Yahweh of hosts, then I will send the curse on you, and I will curse your blessings. And indeed, I have cursed it, because you are not setting it (His name) on your heart. (Mal.2:2).

The effect of erasing His name is exclusion from His kingdom

I bow myself toward Your holy temple and give thanks to Your Name For Your loving-commitment and for Your truth; For You have made great Your Word, Your Name, above all. (Ps.138:2).

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