



08 The Name of God – Not Who I am but Who He Is

The passage we will come to today will lead us into a conversation about the Name of God. We really don't know exactly how it was pronounced. Some think it was pronounced Yahweh, but we don't really know for sure. When the Bible began to be written in Latin, the translators began to say that the name was pronounced something more like Jehovah. In preparing for this sermon I googled and found 46,300,000 websites that argue about how the name of God is pronounced. In my humble opinion, that is all a big waste of time. It will be very interesting for me to show you the intricacies of the Hebrew language and how it relates to the Name. But I think the bottom line for today is not perhaps that you know everything about His name, but that you know Him as your "Father." In the end that is all that matters. If you can pronounce His name but you don't have a relationship with Him, you are totally lost. Jesus told us to call Him "Father." So, on this Father's Day, I want to make sure that above all concerning His name, you know that He is your Father. Let's now read the account where God reveals His name to Moses.

The Mission of Moses

3 Now Moses was pasturing the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. (Exodus 3:1, NASB).

The text tells us that Moses had a life that was pretty much going nowhere. He had a wife and child but he really hadn't accomplished a whole lot. The verse tells us that He was taking care of his father-in-law's flocks. So he really didn't even have his own flock. He's just drifting from day to day. So Moses has come to a mountain called Mt. Horeb that later will be called Mt. Sinai. It is there at Sinai that he would end up receiving the Torah from the Lord.

2 The angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed. (Exodus 3:2, NASB).

The writer is saying here that the "angel of the Lord" appeared to him. So, I want to talk for a minute about this "Angel of the Lord." This is obviously some kind of higher being because this Angel will speak in this passage in the first person. Remember that the word "angel" in Hebrew means messenger. This is the messenger of the Lord speaking about what will be done. In seminary, I learned that many scholars believe that this is the pre-incarnate Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity. This is called a Christophony.

3 So Moses said, "I must turn aside now and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up." 4 When the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the

bush and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." ⁵ Then He said, "Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." ⁶ He said also, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. (Exodus 3:3-6, NASB).

You might wonder why God told him to take off his shoes. We don't take off our shoes in our society to show respect, but that is something that these Semitic people did. It was an act of humility. The poorest poor couldn't afford shoes and so when someone couldn't buy shoes, they were really poor. When Moses took off his shoes he was saying "I am nothing and I am standing before someone way above me." Jesus talked about humility in the Beatitudes when he said, "*Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven*". (Matthew 5:3, NASB 1995). We can show our humility to the Lord in other ways (for example kneeling). We each seek the presence of the Lord. In that Beatitude Jesus is telling us that when we really know how broken we are, we can begin to see things God's way. I've told you all, I sort of have those meetings with God on the back of my zero-turn mower. He promised and told us that He will be in our midst when we gather in His name. I long for the moments when I realize that I am in His presence. I don't feel that often, but when I do it is a beautiful thing.

God then introduced Himself as the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Moses knew that he was a Hebrew but he was raised in Egypt as an Egyptian. God was reminding him of who he REALLY was. God was reminding him of his direct connection with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God was showing Moses exactly who he was and He was reminding Moses of what has been covenanted and promised to his ancestors. God was essentially telling him: "I know it's been 430 years but I have not forgotten my people." Remember what we learned last Sunday, "God never forgets His children."

⁷ The LORD said, "I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings. ⁸ So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite. ⁹ Now, behold, the cry of the sons of Israel has come to Me; furthermore, I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians are oppressing them. ¹⁰ Therefore, come now, and I will send you to Pharaoh, so that you may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt." ¹¹ But Moses said to God, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?" (Exodus 3:7-11, NASB).

I think that often when God calls us to do something we ask Him questions such as: "God, who am I to do this thing that needs to be done?" Forty years earlier Moses had probably thought that he was going to be a liberator of some kind to his people. Then he killed a guy and he blew it. And now, 40 more years passed and all he was doing was taking care of his father-in-law's flocks. I think Moses probably felt as though opportunity had passed him by. He asked God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?" It's interesting that God answers the question of "who am I" with "I am."

¹² And He [God] said, “Certainly I will be with you, and this shall be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain.” (Exodus 3:12, NASB). ¹³ Then Moses said to God, “Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you.’ Now they may say to me, ‘What is His name?’ What shall I say to them?” ¹⁴ God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM”; and He said, “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” ¹⁵ God, furthermore, said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.’ This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations. (Exodus 3:13-15, NASB).

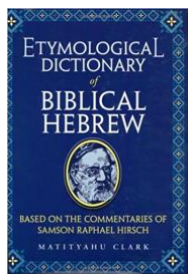
The answer to who we are, is who He is! When we ask “Who am I” the answer is “I will be with you.” When we are unsure of what direction to take in our ministry, God is the answer. The question I always who am I? And the answer is always Who He is.

I AM WHO I AM. This is a description different from any other god or deity that man has ever imagined. God described Himself to Moses as a verb, and not as a noun. I am going to show you in a minute that in the Hebrew this speaks of the total sufficiency of God. Curiously, according to the rabbis who have discussed this for several thousand years, this verb form can be expanded to mean way more than I AM THAT I AM.



God needs nothing. He doesn’t need me. He doesn’t need you. He is because He is. He is without beginning. He is without end. I spent all of this last week trying to understand more about God through his name. From this little piece of scripture, a four letter name originated. Many scholars refer to His Name as THE TETRAGRAMMATON (from Greek meaning four letters). The ancient Hebrew alphabet contained only consonants. But these four letters are the name by which God described Himself. The name became so holy that in time the Jews wrote “Adonai” next to it. That means “The Lord.” Whenever they come to this NAME in the Torah reading, they just said “The Lord.”

I promised to talk about Hebrew a bit this morning. I want you to know that every basic



thought in Hebrew is reduced to 3 letters. One of the most wonderful tools I use is called the Etymological Dictionary of Biblical Hebrew which is based on the commentaries of a Rabbi Hirsch who lived in Germany in the early 1800’s. He was concerned about the assimilation of the Jewish people into German culture, so he wrote a commentary giving a list of all of the important Hebrew thoughts along with their three-letter root. This sometimes helps me to get to the idea behind certain Hebrew words.

Hebrew is the most unique language I’ve ever studied. I speak English, Spanish, conversational French, and conversational Irish-Gaelic. I can read Latin and have a basic understanding of the Greek of the first century. Hebrew is uniquely different from anything I have ever studied.

Also, just about every noun comes from a verb. For example, I have posted here what Strong’s Concordance (a resource that most Christian scholars use) says about the word for “table”

(*shulchan*). I will add that Strong's does not show how this word developed nor does it show what root that it comes from in Strong's 7979 *shulchan*, שֻׁלְחָן Definition table.

The word *shulchan* is not like the word "table" in English. We call a table a table in English because that is what we were taught was the word for a table. But table without the instruction of what it means, doesn't mean anything. But in Hebrew almost every noun means something because of the root idea (the verbal idea) that it comes from. The word is built on a building block. In Hebrew, the word for table *shulchan* comes from the root שָׁלַח (*shalach* - to send, set in a place, move to a goal). So, the literal meaning for a *shulchan* "table" means "that which is set forth".

Once you have a basic thought idea reduced into this three-letter thought, it will vary just a little bit by changing the meaning but keeping it related to the original thought. For example, the word for parent is *morah*, the word for teacher is *moreh*, and the word for the instruction which one is taught is *torah*. They are all related through the root word meaning "to shoot." All three variations come from the root ירה meaning "to shoot."

Parenting occurs with the "shooting" of semen/seed into the female. The result is a parent. The "shooting" into the path of life comes under the direction of a teacher who shoots the offspring on to the path into which he or she should go. Lastly, the teacher uses the Torah (God's instruction) to "shoot" the student toward the "way in which he should go" (Proverbs 22:6). God's instruction is the ideal and ultimate destination to which we (the students) should be "shot" to be instructed in the way of the Lord. Just knowing that three letter root draws all of this together in an amazing way. It is unlike anything I find in any other language.

The Name of God is derived from a three-letter word (הִיָּה) meaning "to be." That word is used in the word La Chaim (meaning life). In each verb there are 7 Binyanim that are like modes. Each binyan then has 12 *mishkalin* (*sp?*) that are variants. The binyanim include: KAL (simple), NIPHAL (change in status), PIEL (intensified action .. nosheq 'to kiss' becomes minashek 'to make out'), PUAL (passive PIEL, HITPALEL (passive reflexive of PUAL), HIPHEL – cause something else to act upon something, HUPHAL – passive of HIPHEL.

So what does all of this mean? Well, first, we are unable to understand much about God and His name in reality. When He expressed Himself in the form YHWH there were no vowel points. The rabbis point out the fact that the meaning of His name is truly indescribable in human terms. Last week, my rabbi friend explained to me that God's name can be expressed in ALL of these binyanim. That means that the Name of God is all expansive. It is indescribable. This made me contemplate King David's declaration "LORD, our Lord, how majestic is Your Name in all the earth!" (Psalm 8:9, NIV).

I asked the rabbi on Tuesday at lunch, "was my father right in telling me that God's name also means.....'I have met every need you have had in your past. I am meeting every need you have in the present. I will meet every need that you will have in the future.'"

The Rabbi responded to me. "The answer is YES to all of those. Your father was a wise man. He understood and wanted you to know that the Name of God is so perfect that you can never understand it fully. In fact, you can never understand His name fully nor can you understand Him fully." I thought, "Wow!" I asked myself, "What then can I really know about Him?" This led me to contemplate scripture. I began to think of all the times that Jesus said, "I am _____."

In John 8 we read this account. Jesus was talking to the Saducees.⁵⁶ *Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.*⁵⁷ *So the Jews said to Him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?"*⁵⁸ *Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am."*⁵⁹ *Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple.*" (John 8:56-59, NASB 1995).

Jesus was declaring the central truth. "I am one with the Father. I am that I am. I have no beginning. I always was. I always will be." This whole idea of "I am" became the center point of how Jesus described Himself. It is the point that caused the Pharisees to rip their clothes. Remember what Jesus declared Himself to be.

Jesus said, I am the Good Shepherd. I am the way. I am the truth. I am the life. I am the light of the world. I am the bread of life. I am the Alpha and the Omega. Jesus even said, "I am the resurrection." When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead He had a conversation with Martha (Lazarus' sister) about whether she would ever see Lazarus again.

²⁵ *Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies,*²⁶ *and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?"*²⁷ *She *said to Him, "Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world."* (John 11:25-27, NASB 1995).

Can I ask you today if you've made this same confession that Martha made? Have you believed in Him? If you have, He is your I AM and whether or not you understand all that is in that name or not, He is your loving Father. Today is Father's Day. Whether you had an earthly father that was worth his salt doesn't really matter. Some of you in this room were abandoned as children. All of us had earthly parents that procreated us. But, the important thing is that you have a Father and that you have a relationship with Him. And you have THE FATHER when you believe in the Son. He said, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies". What a comfort it is to know we have a heavenly Father above, with eyes full of mercy and a heart full of love.

Let us pray.

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