

He Has Made His Name Known

Maurice W. Lusk, III

We have earlier discussed the fact *that* God is and *what* he must be in order to have been the cause of our existence and the existence of our world. We now come to a discussion of *who* he is. This knowledge comes only from revelation. An essential belief of Christianity is that our Creator is a God who have revealed himself to man. The very concept of revelation presents us with the concept of hiddenness, in that revelation is the disclosure of that which is hidden. There is a hiddenness of God with which we are confronted in our quest for God; and it is out of this hiddenness that he reveals something of himself to us. There is abundant evidence of his handiwork in ourselves and in our world; but what more we may know of him is what he chooses to reveal to us himself. The earliest form of God's revelation of his identity to man was through the disclosure of his name, which are many! As expressed by one scholar:

The name (Hebrew *shem* / Greek *onoma*) of God is the key to understanding the biblical doctrine of God. In Biblical terms the religious question is not: "Does God exist?" Rather, it is: "Who is God?" Just as an introduction to a person involves a disclosure of his personal name, so God's self-revelation in history is accompanied by the giving of his personal name, by which his people may worship and address him . . . (*Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible* 2:407).

In the Old Testament Scriptures there are a number Hebrew names by which God identified himself. Each name reveals a distinctive characteristic or attribute of God, thus revealing something of his identity or nature. The most distinctive of these are as follows.

El / Elohim: God, Deity, the Supreme Being

El is the Semitic word for God or deity. Its root idea is "power." *Elohim* is the plural of *El* and is one of the most common names used to refer to the God of the Hebrews, occurring in the Old Testament over 2,500 times. A curious fact about this word is that although the plural *Elohim* is used throughout the Hebrew text, the pronouns and adjectives used with it are singular. The exception to this grammatical construction occurs only when the text clearly has heathen divinities in view (e.g., Psalms 96:5; 97:7). This usage occurs in the opening chapters of the Old Testament and continues throughout the text.

Throughout the creation narrative of Gen 1 the Hebrew *Elohim* is the word translated "God;" however, the Hebrew pronoun used with the plural *Elohim* is the third person singular "he". In Gen 1:27 we read: "And God (*Elohim*) created man in his (singular) own image, in the image of God (*Elohim*) created he (singular) him; male and female created he (singular) them." Here the plural *Elohim* is used with singular pronouns. Throughout this Hebrew text, the plural *Elohim* is used with singular pronouns.

This grammatical inconsistency occurs throughout the Hebrew text of the Old Testament indicating that a special meaning was given to the plural *Elohim* as a designation for the God of the Hebrews. One scholar explains this linguistic phenomenon as follows:

It is a characteristic of Hebrew that extension, magnitude and dignity, as well as actual multiplicity, are expressed by the plural . . . It is the reasonable conclusion that the meaning [of *Elohim*] is 'might' or 'power;' that it is common to Semitic language; that the form is plural to express majesty or 'all-mightiness,' and that it is a generic, rather than a specific personal, name for Deity, . . . (*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* 2:1265).

The God of the Hebrews is not just one *El* among many, he is the one *Elohim* who is truly God; not a supernatural being as were the gods/goddesses of Paganism, but a Supreme Being. He is not "a god," he is "the God."

El Shaddai: God Almighty

The Semitic *El* (God) is used in combination with other names of God. Such is the case with *El Shaddai* which is *El* (God) *Shaddai* (Almighty). The Hebrew *Shaddai* is defined as, "self sufficient, almighty, omnipotent" (Brown, Driver, & Briggs, *Hebrew Lexicon* 994-95). The Greek equivalent of this term is the majesty title *pantokrator* (*pantos* - all, *kratos* - mighty), which is used in the Greek Old Testament (the Septuagint) to translate *El Shaddai*. This term is found often in the New Testament as a name of God (cf., 2 Cor 6:18; Rev 1:8; 4:8 11:17; 15:3; 16:7; 19:6, 15; 21:22; with this compare Isa 9:6, then see Titus 2:13).

El Shaddai first occurs in Gen 15:1 as the name by which God was known to the patriarchs (cf., Gen 18:3; 35:11; 43:14; 49:25). In Exod 6:2-8 God explains to Moses: "I am *Yahweh*, and I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, as God Almighty (*El Shaddai*); but by my name *Yahweh* I was not known to them." God is referred to in the Hebrew Scriptures by this name in only thirty-five occurrences, twenty-nine of which are in the book of Job, which may indicate something of the antiquity of the book of Job. The significance of this name is that in God's revelation of himself to the patriarchs as *El Shaddai* he disclosed an attribute of his nature, namely, his omnipotence.

El Elyon: God Most High

(The One Who Dwells in the Heights)

This name of God also appears to be very early. After Abraham's defeat of the league of kings, in Gen 14, he is blessed by Melchizedek in the name of the God Most High (*El Elyon*):

And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine. And he was priest of God Most High (*El Elyon*). And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of God Most High (*El Elyon*), possessor of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High (*El Elyon*), who has delivered your enemies into your hand. And he gave him a tenth of all (Gen 14:18-20).

In Gen 14:22 Abraham identifies the God *El Elyon* with *Yahweh*: "And Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have lifted up my hand unto *Yahweh*, God Most High (*El Elyon*), possessor of heaven and earth . . ." In Num 24:16 (the oracle of Balaam) *El*, *Elyon*, and *Shaddai* are used together:

. . . the oracle of one who hears the words of God (*El*), who has knowledge from the Most High (*Elyon*), who sees a vision from the Almighty (*Shaddai*), who falls prostrate, and whose eyes are opened . . . (Num 24:16).

Elyon is used with the name *Yahweh* in numerous Old Testament references (cf. Deut 32:8-9; 2 Sam 22:14; Psalms 7:17; 9:2; 21:7; 46:4; 91:1, 9) and is used frequently in the Jewish writings of the period between Malachi and Matthew called the Intertestamental Period: the Apocryphal books of 1 Esdras, Sirach, and the Pseudepigraphal books of 1 Enoch, Jubilees, and 4 Ezra. Even in the New Testament (in the Greek text) this designation is found for God (cf. Lk 2:13-14; 8:28; 19:38; Acts 7:48; 16:17; Heb 7:1).

What seems to be intrinsic within this name is God's transcendence above/beyond this world. As observed by B. W. Anderson:

God is prior to and exalted above man's world and the whole universe. In the OT divine transcendence is often expressed in terms of the ancient cosmological view of the universe: God's true dwelling place is not on earth but in heaven (Eccl 5:2). from his lofty and remote dwelling place, he 'comes down' to visit men and to take part in historical affairs (Gen 11:7; Exod 3:8; 19:11; 24:9-10; etc.). He sits 'above the circle of the earth,'

(Isa 40:22) . . . Thus by using cosmological imagery in a religious rather than a scientific sense, Israel affirms that God is not a phenomenon of man's historical world (*Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible* 2:419).

El Olam: God Everlasting or Eternal

(The One Who Transcends Time)

The Hebrew word *olam* means eternal in the sense of everlasting. Where in Greek philosophical discussion eternal may mean timelessness or timeless existence, with the Hebrews this was too abstract. To the Hebrew, *olam* was an indefinite expanse of time or time whose boundaries are hidden from view. God is not a being who is subject to time and space as are the gods and goddesses (supernatural beings) of ancient Mediterranean Paganism. As far as man can imagine into the past or into the future, God is there. There is no time when he was not there. He is the everlasting God (Isa 40:28); from everlasting to everlasting he is God (cf. Psalms 90:1-2; 93:2; Psalms 145:13; Isa 26:4; also Gen 21:33).

Included in this name is the concept of God as "a living God" (1 Sam 17:26, 36; 2 Kings 19:4, 16; Jer 10:10), a God who is "ancient of days" (Dan 7:9, 13, 22; also 1 Enoch 46:1-47:3), and the God who is "from first to last" (Isa 44:6; 48:12).

That God was "living," "ancient of days," and "from first to last" set him over against those deities of Paganism whose existence was characterized by supernatural powers yet they were like man in that they were beings of this space-time dimension of existence, death being a part of that existence. The God of Biblical revelation is a God who transcends both space and time. He is, in fact, the Creator of space and time and is not limited to or by the forces that he created. His existence transcends this dimension of existence and he is, thus, not subject to the limitations of space or time - he transcends both.

Yahweh: "I Am,"

(The One Who Is or Causes To Be)

According to the Biblical tradition, *Yahweh* is the divine name proper. This is drawn from the Exodus account of God's revelation of himself to Moses. In Exodus 3:4 God called out to Moses from the burning bush and instructed him to go down to Egypt to announce deliverance to his people. The account reads as follows:

Moses said to God (*Elohim*), 'Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God (*Elohim*) of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them? God (*Elohim*) said to Moses, 'I am ('*ehyeh*) who I am ('*ehyeh*). This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I am ('*ehyeh*) has sent me to you.' God (*Elohim*) also said to Moses, 'Say to the Israelites, '*Yahweh*, the God (*Elohim*) of your fathers - the God (*Elohim*) of Abraham, the God (*Elohim*) of Isaac and the God (*Elohim*) of Jacob - has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation (Exod 3:13-15).

The Hebrew verb for "I am" ('*ehyeh* pronounced "ee-YAH") in verse 14 is expressed as a formal name (*Yahweh*) in verse 15. The name in the Hebrew text consists of four letters "YHWH," called by the scribes "the four letter word," called the "tetragrammaton"). Its meaning is debated by scholars; opinion is divided between the two following interpretations. These are given as follows by Drew University scholar Bernard Anderson:

One interpretation takes the verb in the simple (*Qal*) stem. 'I am' means that 'I am here, really present, ready to help.' Thus *Yahweh's* being is not passive and abstract, but is his being present . . . The Tetragrammaton, then, means" 'He is present.' . . . Another interpretation, which has much to commend it, takes the verb in the causative (*Hiph'il*) stem, which is precisely the grammatical form of the word '*Yahweh*.' On this view, instead of 'I am' we should read 'I cause to be.' When the whole enigmatic

formula is changed into the causative, it means: 'I cause to be what comes into existence.' It is conjectured that behind this was an older formulation in the third person: 'He causes to be what comes into existence' . . . He is the Creator of all (*Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible* 2:410).

In the first interpretation, the Hebrew *Yahweh* means that "God exists" or "he is existence;" in the second, "God causes existence." *Yahweh* occurs over 5,500 times in the Hebrew Scriptures as the divine name. The name *Yahweh* is holy and is not to be taken in vain (Exod 20:7). In fact, in first century Judaism the "four letter word" *YHWH* was not to be uttered at all lest one become defiled by expressing the name with unclean lips. In the synagogues the Jew would not pronounce the divine name when he came upon it in the text. He would either substitute "*HaShem*" (the name) or he would read *Adonai* (my Lord) in the place of *Yahweh*. The scribes, in the copying of Scripture, would purify themselves before they wrote the divine name. In the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures the Greek *kurios* (Lord) was substituted for the divine name. This is why many English translations render "Lord" for the Hebrew *Yahweh*, with the exception of the ASV, where the German translation "Jehovah" is found.

Adonai: Lord

The Hebrew *adon* is the word for lord or one in authority (Psalms 2:4; Isa 7:7). *Adonai* is "my lord" (cf. Gen 15:2, 8; Deut 3:24; 9:26; Psalms 8:1; 68:20; 97:5; 109:21; 114:7; 140:7; 141:8; Amos 5:16; 9:5; Jer 26:10; 50:25).

The significance of this designation is that it became the substitute for the divine name in first century Judaism. In fact, the vowel points of the Hebrew *Adonai* were placed within the tetragrammaton *YHWH* in the Hebrew manuscripts used in the synagogues, thus when the reader came to the name *YHWH* he would also see the vowel points for *Adonai* and read *Adonai* for *YHWH*. This is a point of no little significance to Christians in that the confessional title for Jesus of Nazareth in first century Christianity

was "Lord" (cf. Matt 3:1-3 [with Isa 40:3]; Luke 1-2; 6:46; John 20:28; Acts 2:36; Rom 10:9-10; 1 Cor 8:5-7; Eph 4:4-6; Phil 2:5-11). The implications here with reference to who this person Jesus of Nazareth actually was are tremendous.

Conclusion

What is the significance of these numerous names of God found in the Hebrew Scriptures? Each name is a revelation of God's identity. There is something of God's nature, an attribute, intrinsic in each name. He is *Elohim*, a God, a Diety, a Supernatural or Supreme Being. He is also *El Shaddai*, God Almighty, a God who is omnipotent or all-powerful. He is *El Elyon*, God Most High, a God who is not limited by space, he is above or beyond the earth atmosphere, the one who dwells in the highest or heavens. He is *El Olam*, God everlasting or eternal, a God who is not limited or confined by time, he is not limited to past, present, or future. He is *Yahweh*, the Creator, the one who causes existence or being, or causes everything to be. And he is *Adonai*, the Lord of us, the one who to whom we must be submitted because he is our Creator and protector.

It is significant that each of these names tells us something about God's nature. Each is a description of a divine attribute of God. He is a God who reveals him by name or by means of his name/s. This is not the only means by which he reveals himself, he as in other ways revealed his supernatural and his moral character. These revelations are found in the old Hebrew Scriptures, but the greatest revelation of who he is came in the revelation of himself in person, i.e., in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, who was God with us - *Emmanuel!*

Questions for Discussion

1. What is the significance of the claim that the God of Christianity is "a God of revelation?"
2. In view of the previous discussion of the significance of a name in the ancient world, how important to us should the names of God revealed in Scripture be?

3. What is the significance of the fact that the name "God" in the OT is plural (i.e., *Elohim*) while the personal pronouns used with this name are singular? What attribute of God is associated with this name?
4. What attribute of God is revealed in the Hebrew *El Shaddai*?
5. What significance can be attached to the *El Elyon* (God Most High) designation for God?
6. How does the name *El Olam* (God of Eternity) imply his transcendence of our space-time dimension of existence?
7. Discuss the two different interpretations of the Hebrew name *Yahweh* (I AM). Which interpretation seems most convincing to you and why?
8. What importance for Christians is the fact that the Jews substituted the name *Adonai* (my Lord) for the divine name *Yahweh*?
9. What does the way the title "Lord" is used in Matt 3:1-3 and Isa 40:3 imply with reference to the identity of Jesus of Nazareth?
10. How does this whole discussion impact your thinking with reference to the reverence given the name of God in Scripture and the way it is used today?

MWLIII