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The Name of God

and

The Name of Jesus

יהוה

Ιησους

Bible quotations are taken from the NIV or retranslated

In Revelation chapter 1, John saw a vision of the entire head and body of the glorified Christ. His voice was not the single voice of Jesus, but like the sound of many waters. This was not Jesus the head alone, but the completed Christ body. John fell prostrate at its feet as a dead man. The time is coming when Jesus the head will receive his completed body. This body is the name to which every knee will bow.

Other scriptures indicate that people will bow down to the body of Christ. Revelation 3: 9 reads “I will cause those of the synagogue of Satan ... to come and bow down at your feet”. Isaiah 45: 14 says “they will bow down to you; they will make supplication to you”, and Isaiah 49: 23 and 60: 14 are similar.

This will not be like the bowing of Muslims physically prostrating their bodies in a mosque. Rather it will be a bowing in spirit as people come face to face with God manifest in man. When the queen of Sheba met King Solomon, and heard his wisdom, and saw all his wealth, we read that there was no more spirit in her. She was completely overcome with wonder, awe, admiration and love.

Conclusion

As we contemplate the high purposes for which God has called us, we can only acknowledge that we fall far short of the mark. We are wholly inadequate and unsuitable by nature to be his name and representation in the earth and indeed the heavens also.

God sees and knows this far more clearly than we do, and his plans provide for it. To change and transform us is not our work but his. We must not be surprised then when he begins a deeper and more radical work in us than we have previously experienced. This work will separate us from man, so that we may be joined in the spirit to God. Before we can be his true representatives, he must deal with our whole carnal nature.

We will enter the death and resurrection of our Saviour. We will be partakers of his sufferings and humiliation. After suffering with him we will be ready to reign with him. Let us press on then like Paul towards this high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

supernatural. Rather it is an ongoing experience of God by which we become so one with him that we may be called his body and his name.

On the subject of baptism Matthew and the book of Acts appear to contradict each other. In Matthew 28: 19 Jesus instructs his disciples to “baptise into the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit”. In the book of Acts, the disciples baptised in or into the name of Jesus. To God, a name is not a sequence of phonetic sounds that must be pronounced correctly. It is a people sanctified and set apart for him. Through that people the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit will be made known to the world. With this new understanding we find these scriptures harmonize.

Sanctifying the Name

Jesus taught his disciples to pray, “Our Father, may your name be sanctified, may your kingdom come”. Millions recite this prayer daily, but few understand it. Now perhaps we can see its meaning more clearly. The name to be hallowed or sanctified was Jesus himself and those whom he would call. John chapter 17 records Jesus’ last prayer in Gethsemane before his arrest. Praying for his disciples he says, “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth” (v17) and “For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth” (v19). Both prayers then perfectly accord as requests for the sanctification of himself and his people.

So when Jesus prayed the prayer that millions recite daily, its very first request, “may your name be sanctified” was a prayer for the setting apart of his people in holiness. Only on that basis will the second request, “May your kingdom come”, find its fulfilment. When his people are sanctified, his kingdom will come.

Names, places, buildings and days can never truly be sanctified. These things in their nature cannot be holy. They have served their purpose and their time, and are but shadows of the reality. Only people can be holy. The Holy Spirit comes on people and sets them apart for God.

Exaltation of the Name

Philippians chapter 2 speaks of Jesus passing through humiliation and death into resurrection and exaltation. “God has highly exalted him, and given him a name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow”. Can his name in this context really be his people?

Introduction

The name of God and the name of Jesus are profoundly important subjects in the Bible. Both subjects are mysteries, which we must approach with humility and prayer for understanding. Some of what I write may not be easy to grasp, and will require the enlightening of the Holy Spirit.

The purpose of a name in our culture is to identify. We use names to distinguish one person from another. Otherwise we would never know who we were talking about. Most people choose names for their children because they like the sound of them. At the subconscious level this is probably because they have known or admired real or fictitious people with those names. The names John, Michael, Mary, Anne etc do not describe their bearers in any way. They are simply used to distinguish one person from another. Few people know the meanings of English names as most of them - apart from some like Grace, Patience, June, Rose, Ernest etc - are not English words.

In the culture of the Bible, names were chosen for their meanings. Names were simply Hebrew words or phrases that anyone could understand. These names sometimes described the experiences of the parents. Moses named his son Gershom - *a stranger here*. He was an exile in the wilderness at the time. Joseph means he shall add. This was his mother Rachel’s prayer that God would give her more sons. Benjamin means son of the right hand. Other names were prophetic. Hosea named a son Lo-ammi meaning not my people; Isaiah named his son Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz meaning *Swift is the booty, speedy is the prey*. Jesus received his name because he was to save his people from their sins.

In the spirit realm, names directly describe their bearers. We read of demons in the New Testament called *Legion*, “because they were many”. There are angels in the book of Revelation called Death and Apollyon, which is Greek for *Destroyer*. The name Satan means *Adversary* or *Opponent*. Many people who have experience in deliverance and exorcism find that demons will actually give their names when challenged. They give names like *Greed* or *Lust* etc, which are descriptions of their characters.

Names then in the Bible have the two purposes of describing and identifying.

Beyond this cultural difference between our modern use of names and that of the Bible, there is a further problem. “God’s thoughts are not our

thoughts, neither are his ways our ways”, as Isaiah said. But his ways and his thoughts are higher than ours. Or so it is at least to the measure that our minds have not been renewed. The more we possess the mind of Christ, the less Isaiah’s pessimistic assessment will be true of us. We must learn to think in divine rather than human terms, if we hope ever to understand the deeper things of God. **The carnal mind is enmity with God. The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God; because they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.** We must have the illumination of the Holy Spirit if we ever hope to understand the mind of God. The meanings we see in words may be no more than shadows of deeper and more expanded meanings that God has for them.

The Name of God

Much has been thought and said and written about the name of God. We will begin then with a consideration of this topic. The lessons we learn from studying God’s name may seem a bit academic, but they will turn out to be a preparation for a much deeper understanding of the name of Jesus.

An obvious starting point is Exodus chapter 3 where Moses stands before the burning bush. For our present purposes we must look first at verse 6 where God introduces himself with the words, **“I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.”** According to our human thinking we might have expected God to say, “I am the all-powerful creator of the universe, all-wise, all-loving and all-knowing, and my name is **YHWH**”. This is the sort of way a missionary might try to introduce his concept of God to an animistic tribe. God, as we see, gave no description of himself and no name. The only identification he gave was in terms of his followers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob - people who exhibited at least in some degree his characteristics. This shows us the mind and nature of God. Words, names and descriptions are totally inadequate for him. He is both described and identified in his people, and most particularly in his son. To be understood, he must be seen in human form. He must be manifested in the flesh.

The Old Testament contains many names and titles for God. These include the Lord of Hosts, the God of Heaven, the Most High God, El Shaddai, and others. People have written good and instructive expositions of their meanings, but Jesus did not do this. Instead, he said, **“He that has seen me has seen the Father”**. Descriptions are only necessary for what you cannot see. I could describe London to you, but if you really want to know what London is like, you would do much better to come and see!

who lived two thousand years ago and founded the Christian faith. Spiritually speaking it is another matter. Do we really all mean the same person? To three quarters of the world’s population Jesus, if known at all, is the founder of an alien religion. In the western world to a minority Jesus is Son of man, Son of God, Saviour, Healer, Lord and Friend. For the rest each has a different idea according to his traditions, biases and prejudices.

Interestingly there are four other people named Jesus in the New Testament, besides the Jesus who dominates its pages. Jesus was quite a common name. People had to say Jesus of Nazareth to be clear whom they meant.

Where does all this lead us? What really is the name of the Son of God? The answer, I believe, is like the answer to our first question, “What is the name of God?” Jesus was the name, description and identity of God to all who met him when he walked the earth, as he also is to us his people today. **We** are to become the name, description and identity of Jesus to the world. Jesus reveals God to his people. His people are to reveal him to the world. We are to be the manifestation or name of Jesus to the world, just as Jesus is the manifestation or name of God to his people.

This concept is probably new and hard to grasp. We are familiar with the thought of being the body of Christ or the temple of the Holy Spirit. These things are explicitly stated in the Bible. Our very familiarity with the words of Scripture, alas, has often let us accept deep truths of God too lightly.

The idea that we should be the name of Jesus is not clearly stated in the New Testament, but matches and throws light on many passages, which we will now consider.

Baptised into the Name

The phrase **being baptised into¹ his name** occurs several times in the New Testament. (Most versions translate it as **in** his name). We also read of **being baptised into his body**. These two phrases now perfectly correspond. His body is his sanctified people. His name is his sanctified people. His name and his body are the same. Both phrases speak of a deep identification with the Father and the Son. The real baptism in the sight of God is not a ceremony that man can see, nor even a dramatic experience in the

¹ Greek εἰς rather than ἐν

The Third Commandment

We must now return to the third commandment. “Do not take the name of YHWH your God in vain”. Almost everyone interprets this commandment as meaning “Do not blaspheme”. This interpretation has many centuries of tradition behind it, but I would venture to suggest that at least it may not be the primary meaning. The ten commandments are prefaced with the statement “I am YHWH, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery”. What does it mean to “take a name”? The Hebrew word *nasa* primarily means to take, carry or bear. Just as a son takes his father’s name, the Israelites were to take and carry the name of their God, the God who had adopted them, and brought them out of the land of Egypt. They were to be his representatives and bear his name. They were not to do so in vain.

Jesus suffered and died that he might bring us out of the spiritual land of Egypt. He wants us now to bear his name. Perhaps it is because we so often bear it in vain, that the world so often blasphemes it.

The Name of Jesus

What condescension it was when God, the great Creator and Lord of the whole universe, the infinite Being who is beyond all human description, took a name in human language by which he could be known. Much greater condescension followed. In the fullness of time he took a human body. Specific instructions were given to Joseph in a dream and to Mary by the angel Gabriel: “Call his name Jesus”. The New Testament never once mentions the name of YHWH, but gives immense prominence to the name of Jesus.

We have considered the name YHWH, and the reverence given to this day to a name that no one knows how to pronounce. We find a surprising parallel in the name JESUS. Every language pronounces his name differently. None of the five letters that make up the name in our Latin spelling has a consistent pronunciation in other European languages. The J has at least 4 different pronunciations including Y and CH. The E may be the phonetic E or I. The S may be S, SH or Z. The U has minor variations. The final S may be present or absent. Indeed the Hebrew version of the name Yeshua and the English Jesus have no phonetic sounds in common.

Do we not all know who we mean when we say Jesus? Historically speaking, yes we do. Jesus means the person described in the New Testament

Jesus did not need to describe God to people. He himself was the description. He was and is the name of God. You do not gaze at a photograph of someone when you are in their presence. You have something better.

We must return to the bush. After introducing himself as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, God commissioned Moses to go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt. Moses then had two problems of identity: the first one, “Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh?”; the second, “Who are you?”.

He said to God, “Behold, I am going to the children of Israel, and I shall 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?”

If we are to understand God’s reply, we must first consider the background to Moses’ question. Moses grew up in a polytheistic culture. People believed in many different gods, each of which had to have a name to identify him (her or it!). You can talk about ‘the sun’ or ‘the moon’ because there is only one of each of them. You cannot talk about ‘the star’ because there are millions of them, and each must have a name so that they can be distinguished one from another. The sun and the moon do not have names because they do not need them.

Does God really have a name? Moses thought he did. Many people today think he has. Let us examine the Bible’s revelation.

God’s reply in verse 14 is, “I am who I am!”. I believe we could paraphrase this “I am myself”. In other words God is saying to Moses, “Your question is wrong. I have no name. I alone am God and I do not need, and in reality cannot have, a name to distinguish me from other gods, because there are none. Neither can any name be found that will describe me adequately.”

Jesus in his high priestly prayer said, “I have manifested your name” (Jn 17: 6) and “I have made known to them your name” (Jn 17: 26). This was the only real answer to Moses’ question. Jesus himself in person was and is the name of God.

God continues by saying, “Say to the children of Israel, ‘I am¹ has sent me to you’”. This does not make very good sense in English, and it is no better in Hebrew. The very awkwardness of it shows that God could not give a straight answer to Moses’ question.

¹ Hebrew: אֲנִי אֲשֶׁר אֶחְיֶה - ehyeh asher ehyeh

² Hebrew: אֲנִי - ehyeh

In the following verse God says: “Say this to the children of Israel, ‘YHWH, 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 for the age and this is my memorial for generations of generations.”

As I see it, God is saying: “I have no name. Human terminology can never describe me. I must first be seen in flesh and blood, and then known in the spirit. Neither do I need a name to distinguish me from other gods, because there are none. Nevertheless for the present I will condescend to your limited understanding, and give you something that you can use temporarily as a name. You can be like the other people around you, each of which has a god. You can use the word YHWH¹ to identify me.” The nature of our God - the only God - is to come down to us to bring us up to him.

Moses might have learnt from Jacob’s experience. The story of Jacob’s wrestling with the angel is recorded towards the end of Genesis chapter 32. Jacob wrestled with a man, who finally asked him his name. “Jacob”, he replied. “Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel; for you have striven with God and with men and have overcome,” said the angel. Jacob now had a new identity and description. We, like Jacob, must have a new name. Jacob then said, “Please tell me your name”. The angel’s answer was only an evasion, “Why is it that you ask my name?” Like Moses, he had asked the wrong question. He wanted to reduce the divine to the human.

Manoah, the father of Samson, received a visit from an angel who told him that his wife would bear a son who was to be a Nazirite. After listening to the instructions for the child’s upbringing, Manoah asked the angel his name. He received the same sort of answer as Jacob did: “Why do you ask my name, seeing it is incomprehensible?”

History of the Name

Not too long after meeting God at the burning bush, Moses met him again on Mount Sinai and received the Ten Commandments. The third one was “Do not take the name of YHWH your God in vain”. I will return to the meaning of this later, but will first consider the effect this commandment had on the Jews. At face value there is one safe way of never saying the name of YHWH, or any other name, in vain, and that is not to say it at all. This is their practice to this day. Whenever Jews read the Bible and come to YHWH, they read it as *Adonai* meaning ‘Lord’ or *ha-shem* meaning ‘the Name’.

¹ Hebrew: יהוה - yhwh

It is a strange “co-incidence” that Hebrew was originally written without vowels. This means that, as the name YHWH was neither spoken nor fully written, no one can possibly know its original pronunciation. The word ‘Jehovah’ was formed by taking the vowels from *Adonai* and putting them into YHWH. It first appears in a fourteenth century manuscript and certainly lacks any ancient origin.

After the first dispersion of the Jews to Babylon and Egypt they began to feel a need of translating the Old Testament scriptures into Greek. The result was the Septuagint version, translated by seventy scholars in Egypt in the third century BC. We might have hoped that this Greek version would give us some clue how YHWH should be pronounced. Alas, reverence for the name prevented this. Other names are transliterated from Hebrew into Greek, but not YHWH! In older manuscripts of the Septuagint the actual Hebrew letters יהוה appear in the middle of the Greek text. In other manuscripts YHWH is replaced throughout by *Kurios*, the Greek for *Lord*. When the New Testament quotes the Old Testament, it generally uses the Septuagint. This means that we find *Kurios* rather than YHWH there as well. Many English translations of the Bible follow this tradition by translating YHWH as ‘LORD’ using capital letters.

It is interesting to note further that Greek has no equivalent for the Hebrew letters H and W (or V). Only Y, the first letter of YHWH can be transliterated into Greek (by ι (*iota*)). This made it almost impossible to write the name in Greek.

We may sum this up by saying that God gave the name YHWH to Moses as a temporary measure. When it had served its purpose, he obliterated its memory in three steps:

1. He allowed the Jews to have a spurious reverence for it, so that they did not dare pronounce it.
2. He caused Hebrew to be written without vowels, with the result that its pronunciation was not fully recorded.
3. He did not allow it to be transliterated into Greek or any other language while its pronunciation was still known.