

150 "What is His Name?"

"But when they ask me, 'What is His name?' - what am I to say??" Here was Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3), reacting to the Lord's instruction that he was to go to Pharaoh and "bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt" (verse 10). It was a crucial question about the actual name of the living God, and we'll come back to God's answer shortly.

The first great element of God's name concerns the word "El", translated as "God", with a range of additions revealing different aspects of His Being. "Elohim" (occurring over 2,500 times in His Word) speaks of His Creatorship, His sovereignty, His strength, His faithfulness. Within itself it is both singular - One God - yet also plural, revealing to us that within His Being there is relationship. In the later, completed self-revelation He has given, we now know this relationship to be "Trinity", Tri-Unity, Three-in-One, God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In Genesis Chapter 1 we have Elohim in both these aspects, as One (verse 1ff), and as "Usness-within-the-Oneness" (verse 29).

El Elyon (eg Genesis 14.18) is translated as "the most high God", the Owner of all; El Shaddai (eg Genesis 17.1) as "Almighty God", all-sufficient in Himself, dependent on nobody and nothing, a Provider, a Judge; El Olam (eg Genesis 21.33) "the everlasting God", outside, above, beyond Time, with a hiddenness about Him so He is only known as He chooses to be known.

The second great element of God's name is focussed on the word "Yahweh", "Jehovah", again occurring thousands of times in His Word. At its heart is "the Self-Existent One", the eternal, the Self-Revealer - thus further emphasising aspects of God's nature also revealed in "El".

We are also given what are termed "compound names", such as Jehovah-jireh, "the Lord will provide" (Genesis 22.13-14). (Incidentally this was the name scratched on to his window pane by George Müller during his God-given, God-honouring, God-provided-for work with the orphans on Ashley Down in Bristol; many was the time when that provision was sorely put to the test, yet none was the time when that provision failed). Then also for example: Jehovah-rapha, "the Lord that heals" (eg Exodus 15.26); Jehovah-nissi, "the Lord our banner" (Exodus 17.15); Jehovah-shalom, "the Lord our peace" (Judges 6.24); Jehovah-rohi, "the Lord my shepherd" (Psalm 23.1-3); Jehovah-tsedeq, "the Lord our righteousness" (Jeremiah 23.6); and Jehovah-shammah, "the Lord is present" (Exodus 33.14).

How precious and varied are these examples of the many names describing the living God. He wants to be known, loved, feared, honoured, worshipped and served for Who He really is, for therein lie the very reasons for His creation in the first place.

There is no surprise that at the burning bush the Lord God did not launch into a long list of His names for Moses to try and remember. Instead He gave His ultimate Name, the Name literally above and beyond all other names - perhaps even beyond His own more specific names, none of which quite manages, of itself, to "say it all". Hence God's answer is simple, glorious, and final: "And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you" (Exodus 3.14). There it is. That's it. There is nothing more that can be said or needs to be said.

That is why, when Jesus said to His detractors, "Verily, verily I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I AM", they went berserk: "they took up stones" to kill this Man for - as far as they were concerned - His blatant blasphemy (John 8.58-59).

Oh praise God, there was no blasphemy in those words. Jesus was speaking the simple truth, as Immanuel, "God with us" - another of His precious names.

We live in times when the names of other so-called gods or goddesses are frequently in the public eye. Yet the one true God has already graciously revealed Himself, His names, His written Word and His living Word - all these revelations resting on credentials beyond dispute, and knocking any would-be rivals into the proverbial "cocked hat".

Our calling and privilege is to believe in Who He has revealed Himself to be - Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the One who is simply "I AM THAT I AM."

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