

JEHOVAH

IN THE AUTHORIZED or King James Version of our Bible the Hebrew word Jehovah is translated “LORD” in capitals to distinguish it from another Hebrew word, Adonai, also translated Lord. The Hebrew word is transliterated Jehovah in the American Standard Version. Jehovah is the name by far the most frequently employed in the Old Testament, occurring 6,823 times. It appears for the first time in Genesis 2:4, here together with Elohim as Jehovah-Elohim, and so all through the second and third chapters, except in the story of the temptation where only the name Elohim appears. After this we find the name of Jehovah alone, or Jehovah and Elohim together, or sometimes we find the two names used separately even in one sentence. This makes it difficult for those critics who would tell us that wherever the names Jehovah and Elohim appear separately they come from different documents, for it is incongruous to conceive of a later writer who took bits of different documents to put together even one sentence.

For example, Jacob in his dream at Beth-El hears the voice of God saying: “I am Jehovah, the Elohim of Abraham thy father, and the Elohim of Isaac . . . (Gen. 28:13). It is much easier and more satisfactory to conceive here of a spiritual significance, a divine purpose in a single revelation, and a unity of authorship in the use of these divine names. It is incredible that God should have revealed Himself (as many of these critics have claimed) to one person only as Elohim, and to another person or group only as Jehovah, and then left it to later unknown writers to take bits from here and there and fit them together like a jigsaw puzzle. The wonder and glory of the divine Person, His character and relationships as revealed in His names could hardly have been inspired in such fashion.

DERIVATION AND MEANING OF THE NAME

The name Jehovah is derived from the Hebrew verb havah, “to be,” or “being.” This word is almost exactly like the Hebrew verb, chavah, “to live,” or “life.” One can readily see the connection between being and life. Thus when we read the name Jehovah, or Lord in capital letters, in our Bible we think in terms of being or existence and life, and we must think of Jehovah as the Being who is absolutely self-existent, the One who in Himself possesses essential life, permanent existence. It is worth observing in this connection that the Hebrew personal pronoun translated “he” in our Bible is strikingly similar in the Hebrew to the verb havah, which means being. And in some significant passages, the word he, used of God, is the equivalent to the true and eternal God, that is, the One who always exists. eternal and unchangeable. For instance, we read in Isaiah 43: 10, 11: “I am he: before me there was no Elohim formed, neither shall there be after me. I, even I, am Jehovah: and beside me there is no saviour.” Then in Psalm 102:27 we read: “But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end.” Literally translated, it should read: “Thou art lie, and thy years shall have no end”; the he, so much like the Hebrew word for being, is the equivalent of “the same,” the One of old whose years have no end—that is, without beginning and without end.

The most noted Jewish commentator of the Middle Ages, Moses Maimonides, said with regard

to this name: "All the names of God which occur in Scripture are derived from His works except one, and that is Jehovah; and this is called the plain name, because it teaches plainly and unequivocally of the substance of God." Another has said: "In the name Jehovah the personality of the Supreme is distinctly expressed. It is everywhere a proper name denoting the person of God, and Him only ... Elohim ... denoting usually ... the Supreme. The Hebrew may say the Elohim, the true God, in opposition to all false gods; but he never says the Jehovah, for Jehovah is the name of the true God only. He says again and again, my God or my Elohim, but never my Jehovah, for when he says my God he means Jehovah. He speaks of the God (Elohim) of Israel but never of the Jehovah of Israel, for there is no other Jehovah. He speaks of the living God, but never of the living Jehovah, for he cannot conceive of Jehovah as other than living."¹

RELATION TO ISRAEL

The origin and meaning of the name Jehovah are especially brought out in relation to Israel. When Moses at the burning bush says to God: "Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The Elohim of your fathers -hath sent me unto you; and they shall say unto me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them?" And the Lord said to Moses, "I am that I am." The words could be rendered, "I will be that I will be," and often the word is used in that sense, "I will be with thee." Its origin is exactly the same as that of Jehovah being, existence and certainly denotes the One who will always be: personal, continuous, absolute existence.

The point here, however, is that when God wished to make a special revelation of Himself, He used the name Jehovah. As Jehovah, He is especially the God of revelation to creatures who can apprehend and appreciate the Infinite-the becoming One. "Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I Am bath sent me unto you . . . Jehovah, the Elohim of your fathers . . . of Abraham . . . of Isaac, and ... of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name forever, and this is my memorial unto all generations" (Exod. 3 : 14, 15). Then in Exodus 6:2, 3 is written: "I am Jehovah: and I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, as El-Shaddai [God Almighty], and as to my name Jehovah, I was not understood [known] by them; yet verily I have established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan."

We have already noted that the name Jehovah appears as early as Genesis 2 and certainly it is used with special significance in regard to God's rational, moral creatures, but the two passages above do suggest: (1) that though the name Jehovah is thus frequently used as the title of the Elohim of the Patriarchs, its full significance was not revealed to them; (2) it was now resealed in connection with God's covenant and promise to a people; (3) that now, after some hundreds of years, the true significance of the name was to be unfolded by the manifestation of God as a personal, living Being, fulfilling to the people of Israel the promises made to their fathers. Here then, the ever living God reveals Himself to His covenant people, as the unchanging God who remains faithful to His word through many generations. "God's personal existence, the continuity of His dealings with man, the unchangeableness of His promises, and the whole revelation of His redeeming mercy gathers round the name Jehovah."²

Elohim is the general name of God concerned with the creation and preservation of the world, that is, His works. As Jehovah, He is the God of revelation in the expression of Himself in His essential moral and spiritual attributes. But He is especially, as Jehovah, the God of revelation to Israel. To Japheth and his descendants. He is the Elohim, the transcendent Deity, but to Shem and his descendants, through Abraham and Isaac, He is Jehovah, the God of revelation. All the nations had their elohim: and even had they retained the true and only Elohim in their knowledge, He would still have been to them chiefly Elohim. But the Elohim of Israel (when they were not backsliding) was Jehovah, who had especially revealed Himself to them. Thus the constant cry of the faithful Israelite was. "O Jehovah, thou art our Elohim" (11 Chron. 14:11), "Thou art Elohim alone" (Ps. 86:10).

It is interesting, as one writer points out, to note the change of these two names of the Deity throughout the Old Testament beyond Exodus 6:3. Such universalistic books as Ecclesiastes, Daniel, Jonah, have Elohim almost exclusively. On the other hand, the strong theocratic and historical books relating to Israel, such as Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, have chiefly Jehovah. The same is true of the Psalms, which may be divided on this basis into two parts. Psalms 42 to 84 almost exclusively use Elohim and other compound names of God: while the other psalms use chiefly Jehovah. It is not merely a matter of difference of authors, for psalms in both sections are ascribed to David. It is rather a difference of purpose.

Thus to Israel, the medium of the revelation of Himself through the Word--the written Word--and the medium also of the revelation of Himself in the flesh the living Word--He is especially Jehovah, the God of revelation, the ever-becoming One. Yes, and "the coming One" too, the One who shall be, to appear for man's redemption: the permanent and unchangeable One, for "I am Jehovah: I change not": ..the sane yesterday, today and forever." And in this revelation of Himself it is never "thus saith God" or Elohim, but always "thus saith the Lord" or Jehovah.

JEHOVAH-THE God OF RIGHTEOUSNESS AND HOLINESS AND LOVE

The name Jehovah has still further significance for us in that it reveals God as a God of moral and spiritual attributes. One could, perhaps, assume that the Elohim, as the mighty omnipotent One who created this vast universe, and who, within the Godhead, covenanted to preserve it, possessed these attributes, but the name and usage of the title Jehovah clearly reveals it. Whereas the term Elohim assumes a love toward all creation and creatures as the work of His hands, the name Jehovah reveals this love as conditioned upon moral and spiritual attributes. In this connection it is significant that the name Jehovah, as we have already noted, does not appear till Genesis 2:4. Till then the narrative is concerned only with the general account of the entire creation. But now begins the special account of the creation of man and God's special relationship to man as distinct from the lower creation. God now comes into communion with the one whom He has made in His image, and the Elohim now is called Jehovah-Elohim, who blesses the earth for the sake of man, His representative upon it. "The Creator called man into existence as the one being on earth who should have capacity for the enjoyment of God; and the attributes which appear in the name 'Jehovah,' and which were not wanted for the creation of

material world, were only made visible when man came forth from God's hand."³

It is as Jehovah that God places man under moral obligations with a warning of punishment for disobedience. Thou shalt and thou shalt not. How significant in the light of this that when Satan tempts Eve to disobedience he does not mention the name Jehovah, but only Elohim, nor does Eve mention it in her reply to him. Is it because the name Jehovah is not known to them, or rather because deliberate purpose on Satan's part to deceive and an incipient sense of guilt within Eve suppress that name? Can one do evil and mention that name at the same time? And how that after their sin they hide, and then hear the voice of Jehovah-God in the garden, saying, "Where art thou?" demanding an account of their actions.

That image of Jehovah-God in which man was created is revealed to us in the New Testament as "righteousness and true holiness" (Eph. 4:24). To Israel of old righteousness and holiness were the two great attributes associated with the name Jehovah. So holy and sacred was that name to them that they feared to pronounce it. Perhaps that fear was based on Moses' injunction that they should not profane that name, and the penalty of death imposed for blasphemy of the name Jehovah (Lev. 24: 16); but to this day the name Jehovah is never read in the synagogue nor uttered by this people, the word Adonai being substituted for it, and by many simply a word meaning "the Name." Thus the original pronunciation of that name we call Jehovah, regarded as too sacred to be uttered, has been lost to this day. Indeed, orthodox Jewry will regard it as a sign of Messiahship in the one who can truly pronounce it.

Jehovah is righteous, He loveth righteousness (Ps. 11:7); Jehovah our Elohim is righteous in all His works (Dan. 9: 14) . "Just and right is he," says Moses. And "shall not the Judge of all the earth do right," says Abraham to the Jehovah before whom he stood (Gen. 18:25). The holiness of this Jehovah is magnified throughout the Old Testament. His first requirement of those who should be His witnesses is: "Ye shall be holy: for I Jehovah your Elohim, am holy" (Lev. 19:2). Holy, holy, holy is Jehovah of hosts," cry the seraphim, and that is His glory. Jehovah is ever the Holy One of Israel.

It is this righteousness of Jehovah against which man sins. And a righteous Jehovah whose holiness is thus violated and outraged must condemn unrighteousness and punish it. So it is Jehovah who pronounces judgment and metes out punishment. It is Jehovah who sends man forth from the garden, for Jehovah is of purer eyes than to behold evil (Hab. 1: 13). Jehovah "created man to enjoy and to exhibit His righteousness." So He demands righteousness and justice and holiness from the creatures made in His image. It is as Jehovah that He looks upon a wicked and corrupt earth and says, "I will destroy." It is as Jehovah that He rains fire and brimstone upon an iniquitous Sodom and Gomorrah. It is as Jehovah that He is angered so often against a sinning, wicked Israel. It is Jehovah who says to Moses: "Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book" (Exod. 32:33).

But as Jehovah He is also Love. His love makes Him grieve and suffer for the sins and sorrows of His creatures. "I have loved thee with an everlasting love," says Jeremiah (31:3) of Jehovah. In

the Book of Judges we read again and again (10: 6, 7, etc.) that when Israel forsook Jehovah and served the elohim of the peoples about them, Jehovah's anger brought grievous punishment upon them; but of the same Jehovah it is said: "His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel" (Judges 10: 16). "In all their afflictions he was afflicted," says Isaiah (63:9) in a context full of the love and pity of Jehovah. "How can I give thee up O Ephraim ... my heart heaves within me, my repentings, together they are kindled" (Hosea 11:8).

But while, as Jehovah, His holiness must condemn, He is also Love, and His love redeems; and He seeks to bring man back into fellowship with Himself. So, as one writer says: "Wherever the name 'Jehovah' appears, after man has fallen from original righteousness, what see we-but that God is ever seeking the restoration of man."⁴ He comes seeking Adam and Eve. He teaches man how to approach Him anew by means of sacrifice, a substitute. This is the clear implication of Abel's approach to God through the sacrifice of a life, and the rejection of Cain's approach for lack of it. In the whole sacrificial system, both in the Patriarchal and Levitical dispensations, the object of approach is Jehovah as distinct from Elohim. It is interesting to note in this connection that in the first seven chapters of Leviticus, which especially set forth the system of sacrifice, Elohim occurs only once alone, and once together with Jehovah, while Jehovah occurs eighty-six times. The same is true of the sixteenth chapter of this book which speaks of the great Day of Atonement, where only the name Jehovah occurs, and that, twelve times. It is further interesting to note in connection with the account of the Ark and the Flood that in Genesis 6:22 we read that Noah did according to all that God (Elohim) commanded him, while in Genesis 7:5 it is said that Noah did according to all that Jehovah commanded him. The context will reveal that in the first reference the name Elohim is used with reference to the bringing in of two of every kind of creature into the Ark, for their preservation. The mighty Elohim who has created is also the Covenant-Elohim who has covenanted to preserve that creation. In Genesis 7:5, however, the name Jehovah is used in connection with the command to bring into the Ark seven pairs of every clean beast.

It is not merely for preservation now but for that sacrifice upon which forgiveness and fellowship with Jehovah are based. It was of these clean beasts that Noah offered burnt offerings to Jehovah after the flood.⁵

At the close of the fourth chapter of Genesis, that chapter of tragedy for Adam and Eve, the new son born to them is named Enos, which is a word for man denoting a weak and fallen state. It signifies helplessness. And then men began to call on the name of Jehovah. Weak, helpless man finds he needs more than the mighty, omnipotent, transcendent Being signified by the name Elohim. He needs that favor and fellowship with the divine Being for which he was made, and which is signified by Jehovah. It is the attribute of love in Jehovah which restores to communion with Himself that man who has sinned against His righteousness and holiness. "From the earliest days the name of Jehovah was taken as the embodiment of that hope for the human race which found expression in sacrifice and in prayer."⁶

So the love in Jehovah does not forsake fallen man. His Spirit continues to strive with man in a

period of utter corruption. It is as Jehovah He manifests Himself in covenants and acts of deliverance and redemption. To the children of Israel in cruel and groveling bondage He says, “I am Jehovah, I will bring you out” (Exod. 6:6).

God is always Jehovah to Israel because of His great redemption and deliverance of them. He is in constant communication with Moses. His glory descends upon the tabernacle like a cloud, and Jehovah speaks with Moses face to face as a man speaks to his friend (Exod. 33:9, 11) . What a marvelous passage, and how revealing of what is contained in that wonderful name in Exodus 34:5-7: “And Jehovah descended in the cloud . . . and proclaimed Jehovah by name. And Jehovah passed by before him, and proclaimed, Jehovah, Jehovah, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness and truth; keeping loving kindness for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and sin” (A.S.V.)!

Speaking of a day of redemption in grace even yet in the future Zechariah says: “I will say it is my people, and they shall say, Jehovah is my God” (Zech. 13:9). Jehovah, yea, even Jehovah is my God. It is Jehovah that Isaiah says is “a just God and a Savior.” “Look unto me and be ye saved all the ends of the earth... . Only in Jehovah is righteousness and strength; even to him shall men come” (Isa. 45:22, 24). “Blessed,” indeed, “the people who know the joyful sound: O Jehovah in the light of thy countenance they shall walk. In thy name [Jehovah] they shall rejoice all the day: and in thy righteousness they shall be exalted” (Ps. 89: 15, 16).

1 Girdlesnone, Old Testament Synonyms, p. 62.

2 Op. cit., p. 64.

3 Webb-Peploe. Titles of Jehovah, p. 12.

4 Op. cit., p. 12.

5 Jukes, The Names of God in Holy Scripture, p. 47.

6 Girdlestone, Old Testament Synonyms, p. 65.