

The Hebrew Corner

Did you know that God has a name just like you and me? God revealed his name to Moses as part of a covenant with the people of Israel, as is described in Exodus 6:2-4:

“And God spake unto Moses, and said unto him, I am the LORD: And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of God Almighty, but by my name Jehovah was I not known to them. And I have also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their pilgrimage, wherein they were strangers.”

In the version (King James) above, LORD and Jehovah are substituted for the name of God. The name of God is spelled yod-heh-waw-heh (יהוה) using the ancient Hebrew pronunciation of the letters (the waw is pronounced vahv in modern Hebrew). His name is also known as the tetragrammaton because it consists of 4 Hebrew letters. In the Tanach, God is known by many names. In the book of Exodus and other books, he is referred to sometimes as El Shaddai, (אל שדי, ayl shahd-DAHY) which means almighty God (see the passage above). In the Genesis account of creation he is referred to as Elohim (אלהים, eh-loh-HEEM) a plural form in Hebrew which emphasizes the plurality and majesty of God, but in English is simply translated as God. He is also referred to as Adonai (אדני, ah-doh-NAHY), a Hebrew word meaning lord or master.

About 300 BC in Alexandria, Egypt a group of Jews decided that the true name of God should never be pronounced so that the 3rd commandment which prohibits taking God's name in vain could not be violated. This led to a universal practice among Jews that whenever the name of God came up in a reading of scripture, or in other instances which called for referring to the divine name in speech, a name such as Adonai was substituted instead. The tradition was carried over to the Greek, Latin, and subsequent English translations of the Tanach. In the various translations today, the word LORD in all capital letters is usually used. Occasionally you may see the name Jehovah, which is an incorrect rendering of the covenant name of God because Hebrew doesn't have a letter with the sound of the English J, and in ancient Hebrew, waw (ו), the 3rd letter of his name (right-to left), was not pronounced with a V sound.

As we have seen in previous month's discussions, Hebrew names have meaning. There is consensus that the covenant name of God is a form of the Hebrew verb haya (היה, hah-YAH) which means to be. The yod prefix without a suffix indicates a 3rd person masculine singular form. Hebrew verbs do not have inherent tense, such as past, present, and future. So the meaning of Yahweh would be best rendered as he was, he is, or he will be. In this case, all three meanings perfectly fit the nature of Yahweh. He

was, he now is, and he will continue to be! May you all be blessed and continue to live in his everlasting shalom.