

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Broadcast Date: 20 November 2005

No. T0393

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Names of God in the Old Testament: LORD and Lord

I wonder if you, when a child, ever had to endure being called names. My surname lends itself to all kinds of easy insults and some children were quick to spot a chance to make fun and create a laugh, at my expense, and when you are young this is not easy to deal with. My father used to tell me about one of his teachers who would draw attention to a piece of wrong, or uncompleted work, by shouting "Ollerhead, blockhead, thickhead and company, stand up." I think that you would agree that this did nothing to establish self esteem in a classroom, or give a child confidence to attempt new work! There is a rhyme that I was taught that was supposed to help me to cope with name-calling. It was, "sticks and stones will break my bones, but names will never hurt me." I found that it was not as easy to be undisturbed, when I was the object of hurtful names, as the couplet suggests, and it soon taught me that names could be negative influences.

As you might have gathered, today's talk, the first of a series of four, is about names. In this case, however, the names are very positive because they are words the Bible uses for God. We must always remember, however, that when the writers of Scripture used a name for God they were describing a facet, or attribute, of One who is indescribable in His fullness. We must also remember that when we use words to describe God we can never contain Him within the limits of our vocabulary. We believe that He has been pleased to reveal Himself to the limit of our ability to grasp something of the eternal splendour, majesty, power and love that is true of the Supreme Being, that we describe as God. We also believe that the most complete revelation, that exceeds even the Old Testament names, is the revelation that we have in Christ, but that does not stop us from learning something of the infinite care that He showed to the believers of a past era.

The particular names for today's study are, Lord and LORD, differentiated in the King James translation by differences in the print. To make thing clearer I will give an example of what I mean by referring to Genesis 2:4-5, where it states: "These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens, and every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew: for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was not a man to till the ground."

Both times when "LORD" is mentioned the translators have used capital letters, as I trust you will notice if you have your Bible open at the correct page.

If you now turn to Genesis chapter 15:7-8 we can read the following: "And he said unto him, I am the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it. And Abram said, Lord GOD, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?" It would be impossible for anyone hearing these words to notice any difference between the word "Lord", or between the words "LORD God" in Genesis 2, and "Lord GOD" in Genesis 15.

This might seem very complicated to begin a Bible study with, but please stay with me as the difference is so important for us to grasp. The first example of "LORD" in Genesis 2, where the translators of the King James Version used capitals, stands for the name Jehovah, though some other versions carry the more literal translation of Yahweh. To keep matters simple I shall use Jehovah, and when I do so please remember that this is "LORD" in capitals.

The word "Lord" in Genesis 15, as you will notice, is in small, or lowercase letters, and here the name "Adonai" is introduced, which has the meaning of "Master", in the sense of the relationship between master and servant, or a king and his subjects. I intend to illustrate this, with examples from the Old Testament, but I say again, please keep in mind when I use "Adonai" I am referring to "Lord" in small letters. This might seem very technical and unimportant to lives lived in a busy and faithless world, yet I am convinced that such details reveal to us something of the grace and majesty of the eternal God. Such details received in vibrant faith must help us to serve intelligently, and to worship more deeply One, whoever increases in greatness and glory, as we grasp a little more of the scriptural revelation of Him.

Before we concentrate upon a few of the many examples, where the name Jehovah is mentioned in the Old Testament, it will be worthwhile quoting what a well-known study bible says about it: "The primary meaning of the name LORD, with capital letters, is the self-existent One; literally, He that is who He is, therefore, the eternal I AM."

Another commentator on Scripture simply states that the name Jehovah sets Him forth as the eternal God, and reveals something of His character. I emphasise, again, that a numerous collection of names could never capture the fullness of God's glory and greatness. He will ever remain beyond the limit of man's thoughts and imagination. The Lord Jesus is, we believe, the final revelation of God, and we also believe that all the fullness of God is in Him, but no created being can ever grasp the fullness and greatness of the risen and glorified Christ.

It is important for us to appreciate that the first time the name Jehovah is mentioned in Scripture is after the creation of man. Some critics have seen the use of a different name, in the early chapters of Genesis, as evidence that different writers recorded these events from differing standpoints. I hardly need to say that the team at Truth for Today sees the Spirit of God at work, in the pages of Scripture, in a progressive revelation of the eternal God. We believe that the secret of the knowledge of God can be, by faith and through grace, in the present possession of man.

Jehovah, as we have seen, was first used in Genesis 2, at the creation, and this would emphasise the relationship with man as Creator. The writer of Hebrews restates that fact many years later: "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear."

I believe that the creation story, where the use of the name Jehovah predominates, also indicates to us the moral authority that the self-existing God exercises over man. We might seek to throw off that authority, and disregard it through unbelief, yet Genesis 2:16-17 states, "And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it; for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."

These verses indicate that there was a moral authority present in the relationship between Jehovah and man, an authority that the Fall did not destroy. My first point, then, regarding the title, or name of LORD or Jehovah, is the fact that as Creator He stands supreme, and that man has to recognise that relationship, as Paul makes clear in Romans 1:19-20: "Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shown it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:"

Secondly, the Jehovah revelation has implications for us in that, because we were created in His likeness, we are moral beings and, as we have just heard from Genesis 2 all moral authority lies with God. This brings me to a third and extremely important point.

The peculiar and characteristic emphasis upon the name of Jehovah is that of the redeeming God, or so I would judge. This is best illustrated by referring to Exodus chapter 3. The whole story is far too long to quote in the limited time we have this morning so I shall only read verse 16 and part of 17: "Go, and gather the elders of Israel together, and say unto them, The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, hath appeared unto me, saying, I have surely visited you, and seen that which is done to you in Egypt: and I have said, I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt unto the land of the Canaanites,"

If you are not aware of the details of the way in which this deliverance occurred, then you will find them in chapters 3 to 12 of Exodus. It is sufficient for my purpose to quote the last verse of chapter 12: "And it came to pass the very same day, that the LORD did bring the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt by their armies." The word LORD in this verse is the Jehovah meaning.

One of the major incidents in the act of deliverance was the Passover, when a lamb was sacrificed, at the command of the LORD, by each Israelite family, and which is still remembered by the Jews, even unto this present day. This link between the LORD's salvation and sacrifice is of supreme importance for us, because, often in our day, people are apt to say that if God loves us that is sufficient, as a God who is love does not need any sacrifice for sins. It is a significant fact that nowhere in the Old Testament does the LORD bring salvation to His people apart from sacrifice, and the God revealed in the Old Testament is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We must never lose sight of God's holiness and His hatred of sin that is illustrated, time and again, in Scripture. Neither must we forget that His love and grace provided a sacrifice that has satisfied His righteous demands. There are some words in the beginning of the Gospel of John that gives the identity of the sacrificial Lamb: "The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."

Consequently, if the Bible states that the Lord Jesus is God's Lamb, who removes the penalty of sin from the charge of man, no one can ever say that God does not love them. The Apostle John clearly states in 1 John 4:10: "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

It was the LORD or Jehovah, revealed in the experience of His people, as recorded in the Old Testament, who showed His intense holiness and hatred of sin and the necessity of sacrifice, who completes the revelation of Himself in the Person of Jesus. He is not a different God, and we neglect the revelation of God there at our peril.

It is significant that the name of Jesus is an abbreviation of Jehoshua, meaning "Jehovah the Saviour", for in Him we truly see the LORD our God. It is also pertinent to recall what the Lord Jesus said in John 8:58: "Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am." Here, there is more than a hint that the Lord identified Himself with the LORD, the Jehovah of the Old Testament.

There are other implications of the name of Jehovah that we could refer to, with profit, but time demands that we now turn to the other use of the word "Lord", printed not in capitals but in small, or lower case letters. We have already introduced this word as the translation for "Adonai", that contains the thought of the "master and servant" relationship. It can be illustrated by referring to Deuteronomy 3:23-24, where the context is Moses viewing the Promised Land, at the end of his journey through the wilderness.

"And I besought the LORD at that time, saying, O Lord GOD, thou hast begun to show thy servant thy greatness, and thy mighty hand. For what God is there in heaven or in earth, who can do according to thy works, and according to thy might?"

The first reference to "LORD" is the Jehovah aspect, which shows that Moses had a respect and reverence for the authority and greatness of God, as the self-existing One. In the second instance, the word "Lord" is in small letters meaning the Adonai relationship. In other words, Moses is now in a more personal relationship with the great eternal God. He is now in the service of Jehovah. What grace is shown to the meekest man in all the earth, as Moses is described elsewhere, that he should become a servant of the living God!

Another illustration of this, that again shows both sides of the use of Lord, is in Deuteronomy 9:26: "I prayed, therefore, unto the LORD". I break off from the Scripture to point out that "LORD" here is in capitals, meaning Jehovah, showing again the fact that Moses was always aware of the greatness of God as the creator and redeemer. He goes on to emphasise this latter aspect of "redeemer", but uses the word "Lord" in its Adonai meaning, so I will begin the quotation again: "I prayed, therefore unto the LORD, and said, O Lord GOD, destroy not thy people and thine inheritance, whom thou hast redeemed through thy greatness, whom thou hast brought forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand."

Please notice that the prayer is framed by his use of the term "Adonai". The relationship that Moses had with the LORD is one that he valued, for it meant that he was in the service of God, and in that relationship he could plead his people's cause.

We shall further examine this relationship by looking at 2 Samuel 7:18-20, where King David is praying. These verses state: "Then went King David in, and sat before the LORD, and he said, Who am I, O Lord GOD? and what is my house, that thou hast brought me thus far? And this was yet a small thing in thy sight, O Lord GOD; but thou hast spoken also of thy servant's house for a great while to come. And is this the manner of man, O Lord GOD? And what can David say more unto thee? for thou, Lord GOD, knowest thy servant."

Two details should be highlighted, from amongst these three verses. They are that David, great though he was, knew his place before Jehovah, the self-existent God. There was a realisation that he was nothing, and God was everything, for it was God who had made him king in the first place. The second matter is that David could claim to be serving Jehovah, for he addresses Him as Adonai.

Two implications of this relationship are that David, despite being king of Israel, considered himself to be the possession of God, in the way a slave belonged to his owner, or lord. This meant that he had no rights when it came to doing God's will. To belong to God meant acting in a certain way, and when he stepped outside of the commission of Jehovah, David was convicted to the depth of his being. One only has to read Psalm 51 to obtain a sense of David's distress when Nathan, the prophet, reminded him of his sin. Many rulers of that era would have had no compunction about doing what David did, when he took Uriah's wife. If anyone had dared to criticise such actions, then, in all probability, they would have been executed. David, however, realised that he was a servant of Jehovah, and that made all the difference.

The second implication is that the master had responsibilities towards the slave. We must, at all cost, avoid the idea that all slaves were badly treated in the ancient world. This was not the American cotton belt of two centuries ago. Many slaves, in ancient times, were privileged members of the household. This meant that their needs were the master's concern. An example of a prayer expressing the hope that God would answer, because of the master-servant relationship, can be read from the Judges 16:28, where Samson was being tortured in the Temple of Dagon. "And Samson called unto the LORD, and said, O Lord GOD, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee,

only this once, O God, that I may at once be avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes." Notice that Samson called unto Jehovah, but on the basis of his links as a servant to Adonai. His need for strength could only be answered if the Lord was willing to give it to him for one last action.

Our last Old Testament reference to the name of the Lord, this morning, is found in Isaiah 6:1: "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple."

If your Bible is open at that reference, you will see that "Lord" signifies Adonai. A few verses later, Isaiah reveals the identity of this figure in striking language: "Then said I, Woe is me! For I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts."

This makes clear to us, if we needed such clarity, that the vision of the divine majesty of Jehovah, that was granted to Isaiah, was nothing less than the glory and excellence of the same God, revealed as the one who graciously allows Isaiah to be His servant.

As we approach the end of our talk this morning, I want to follow this thought through to the New Testament, where the Lord Jesus is identified as the glorious figure we have just read about in Isaiah 6. The reference is in John 12:41: "These things said Isaiah, when he saw his glory, and spoke of him."

You can easily look up the context of this statement; we have no time, but I want to emphasise the importance of this declaration. Here the pre-existence of the Lord Jesus is made known; without any doubt, we can say, on the authority of Scripture, that the God revealed by many names in the Old Testament is seen in the man we know as the Lord Jesus.

Even this title of "Lord" that I have just used, and by which He is known through-out the bulk of the New Testament, is the Greek equivalent of the word "Adonai" that we have been considering today. What marvellous grace that brings us into the knowledge of the living God, revealed so long ago by His name Jehovah, or Yahweh. The question must be asked of each one of us this morning as to whether we believe in Him or not?

If we do believe there is an additional thought that brings before us still greater depths of grace, and with this I close. It is found in John 15:15: "Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you."

How precious this truth is to the believer, that we are now brought into a position where the Lord Jesus calls us His friends. Despite this, however, we must never lose sight of who He is. He still commands our obedience, reverence and respect, for He is, and always will be, "the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto". We have the privilege today of believing, serving and loving Him.

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