

The Names Of God

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Preface

In Biblical days names often carried significant meaning. There are many examples that come to mind such as Moses, Samuel and of course Jesus himself. Each of these names had profound spiritual significance. This is particularly the case when it comes to the names or titles given to God in Scripture. They each tell us something about his wonderful character in order that we might appreciate just how great God is. Most of us have a very inadequate understanding of how glorious God is, simply because our minds are inevitably very limited. However, it is our prayer that this booklet will at least help each reader to grow in their appreciation of the Lord, and as a result love and trust and serve him more. It is not an exhaustive study of God's names, but we trust it will wet your appetite to study the Scriptures even more.

The contents of this book have been compiled from the notes Trevor Low produced for the talks on this subject in Serving Today. I am indebted to Trevor for the hard work

he has done to give us this material and our prayer is that the Lord will make it a rich blessing to you.

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Introduction

In the Bible, God is referred to by a number of different names. Sometimes he is called God (Hebrew: ELOHIM); sometimes LORD (Hebrew: JEHOVAH); then there is God Almighty (Hebrew: EL SHADDAI); and Most High God (Hebrew: EL ELYON) and LORD of Hosts (Hebrew: JEHOVAH SABAOTH), to name but a few. These names are very significant, in that they illustrate for us the character of God. In Proverbs 18:10, we read,

“The name of the LORD is a strong tower. The righteous run to it and are safe.”

I find the positioning of this verse very interesting. It appears at first to be totally isolated, having no connection with any verses immediately before or after. And yet, if we look at the chapter as a whole, we see that it is concerned with those things in life that cause difficulty and stress. For example, in the opening verses, we read,

“An unfriendly man pursues selfish ends. He defies all sound judgement. A fool finds no pleasure in

understanding but delights in airing his own opinions. When wickedness comes, so does contempt and with shame comes disgrace.”

Then, into this apparent state of chaos comes the great assurance,

“The name of the LORD is a strong tower. The righteous run to it and are safe.”

It is like a ray of light shining in darkness. How true it is that the Christian has, as the foundation of his life, the solid rock of the Lord Jesus Christ. When we study the names given to God in the Scriptures, our confidence in God, and our love for God, should increase.

Chapter 1, Elohim

The first name given to God in the Bible is the Hebrew word Elohim which is simply translated into English as the word God. This is the name, and indeed the only name, given to him in the first chapter of the book of Genesis and it is used in almost every verse of that chapter. The Hebrew word El means mighty or strong, and so Elohim portrays God as the One who puts forth energy and strength. He is the all-powerful one who is to be revered and worshipped.

An interesting fact is that in Hebrew this word is plural,

and yet it is often accompanied by action words or describing words which are singular. So, for example, in Genesis 1:1 when we read,

“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth”

‘God’ (Elohim) is plural but the word ‘created’ is singular. Although the details are not developed in Genesis 1 we can say that from the beginning of the Bible, therefore, we are told of the Trinity - one God and yet three persons within the Godhead - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We see this in Genesis 1:26 when God says,

“Let US make man in our own image.”

And in God's commissioning of Isaiah in Isaiah 6:6, we have a curious combination of singular and plural when God asks,

“Whom shall I send and who will go for US?”

The Jesus whom we worship, while he came to earth 2000 years ago, has existed with the Father and the Spirit from all eternity. As we read at the start of John's gospel,

“In the beginning was the Word – (the logos, the eternal word, the Lord Jesus) - and the word was with God, and the word was God.”

He is the eternal Son of God, equal with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit in substance and power and timelessness. Is it not wonderfully encouraging and comforting to know that the all-powerful God has loved sinners so much that his eternal Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, has come to earth so that we might be forgiven and might have eternal life? And it is the Holy Spirit who applies the saving work of Christ to our hearts and lives. Salvation is the work of the Trinity - the Holy Trinity - three in one and one in three. And this is brought out so beautifully in the Hebrew name for God - Elohim - the strong one; the one who is almighty, and therefore the one that we as his children can depend on completely. We need never fear if our faith is in God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Chapter 2, El Elyon

The next name of God we are going to consider is the name El Elyon, usually translated as God Most High or the Most High God. We have already noted that 'El' means the mighty or strong one. 'Elyon' means the strongest, so the name El Elyon carries the idea of "the strongest strong One". In other words, God is far above all. He is supreme. He is the one who is in absolute control of heaven and earth. He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Nothing and no-one is higher or greater than God. Indeed, when compared with his greatness, any brief authority that a man may possess pales into insignificance. God - the Most High God - is supreme. He alone is to be glorified.

We find the first reference to El Elyon in Genesis chapter 14. Abram had just won a victory in battle and had brought back much treasure from the battle. He was met by Melchizedek, who was called in verse 18,

“priest of God Most High.”

He said to Abram,

“Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand.”

Melchizedek was reminding Abram that God Most High, the Strongest Strong One, has in fact won the battle for Abram and the spoils of battle belonged to God. Abram grasped the truth of this quickly and, overcome by a sense of God's greatness, he gave to Melchizedek a tenth of all he had brought back from the battle. The Most High God is the Possessor of all.

The next appearance of the name El Elyon in Scripture occurs in connection with Balaam in Numbers chapter 24. Balaam says that he heard the words of God and had knowledge from the Most High, but that knowledge was not translated into action. By contrast Abram acknowledged God and that determined how he lived, but when Balaam acknowledged the Most High God, he did not act accordingly. He sinned by simply pleasing himself. It is sad indeed when a man knows about the Most High

God, but his life is not lived in accordance with that knowledge.

The book where the name God Most High is found most often is the Book of Daniel. Daniel wrote the book while he was a captive in Babylon, and its chief purpose was to show the Gentile kings that the earth belongs to the Most High God, Israel's God and the God of heaven and earth. Warfare between nations in those days was considered by them as warfare between the gods of those nations. In the minds of the Babylonians therefore, the gods of Babylon had defeated the God of Israel. But then God arranged a series of events which proved that the Most High is indeed in control of heaven and earth. In Daniel 2, Nebuchadnezzar had a dream which Daniel interpreted, and in his interpretation Daniel made it clear that it is the Most High God who had placed Nebuchadnezzar on the throne and given him the kingdom. In Daniel 3, Daniel's three friends were miraculously preserved in the fiery furnace and Nebuchadnezzar releases them,

“in the name of God Most High.”

But his recognition of God Most High was short-lived. In his heart he refused to subordinate himself to Daniel's God, so God caused him to dream again, a dream which predicted his insanity. Daniel, in his interpretation of the dream, mentioned 'El Elyon' no less than four times. Sure enough, Nebuchadnezzar became insane and lived like a wild animal, until he acknowledged that the Most High

God had placed him on the throne and the kingdom depended on him. In Daniel 5 Nebuchadnezzar's successor, Belshazzar defied and blasphemed the Most High God and God warned him as to what would happen through the writing appearing on the wall. Daniel told him of the power of God Most High. Belshazzar died and the kingdom was given to Darius the Mede.

So today, earthly rulers must learn that the Most High God reigns in heaven and on earth. Satan continues to persuade men to defy God, but ultimately God is in control. What an encouragement that is for each one whose trust is in the Lord Jesus Christ. In Christ the Most High God is our loving Father. He is in control of our lives and of the world and of all events in the world. He has promised that he will never leave us nor forsake us. May that thought inspire us and may it give us the desire to live for the honour and glory of the Most High God, 'El Elyon'.

Chapter 3, Adonai

A name which is given to God about 300 times in the Old Testament is Adonai. It is always translated by the English word Lord. Like the word Elohim, it is a plural noun and confirms the idea of the three persons in the Godhead – the Trinity. Adonai was the name for God which was most familiar to the Jews. They used it as a substitute for Yahweh (Jehovah or LORD), a name which they considered too holy actually to pronounce. The Hebrew root from

which the word is derived means to judge or to rule. At a human level, the word was used to denote the relationship between a king and his subjects, or a husband and his wife, or a master and his slaves. As our King, God demands our homage. As our Husband, he seeks our submissiveness, but also our love in return for love. As our Master, he requires respect and unquestioning obedience. And it is this last relationship I want to develop now.

In Bible times, a slave could not stop working. He could not go on strike. He had been purchased and was therefore the possession of his master. He accepted his master's will and obeyed his orders fully.

There are two principles to note about this.

i. The master had a right to absolute obedience from the slave.

In Exodus chapter 3, God assigned to Moses the task of leading the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. Moses tried to give reasons, or rather excuses, as to why he should not do this, and in chapter 4 of Exodus, he said,

“O my Lord (Adonai) I have never been eloquent: I am slow of speech and tongue.”

But the moment he used the word Lord (Adonai), he had committed himself. By using that name he was acknowledging that God was his Master, and his Master

had the right to absolute obedience. Therefore Moses must do no other than obey. The slave cannot choose his tasks. He must do what his master assigns him.

Moses' successor was Joshua. We read in Joshua 5:13 of him meeting a man standing before him with a drawn sword. This was none other than the Lord Jesus Christ in a preincarnate form. Joshua, realising this, bowed down in worship and asked,

“What message does my Lord (Adonai) have for his servant?”

Again by using this word, he was acknowledging that his Master had the right to absolute obedience from his slave. In the next chapter, the Lord told Joshua his plans for taking the city of Jericho. This involved the army marching round the walls of Jericho once each day for six days, and seven times around on the seventh day. Joshua obeyed the Lord and achieved a great victory. But the next chapter reveals a tragic defeat, and why? For the simple reason that Joshua was over-confident in himself, he did not consult the Lord. He went up against the town of Ai in his own strength. And when he failed in his attempt, he fell to the ground before God and called him ‘Adonai’ repeatedly. God said to him,

“Get up. Why are you lying there?”

Joshua was calling God “Lord”, but he was not doing his

Master's will.

Here is a lesson for every Christian. Jesus is both Lord and Saviour. In the New Testament, and especially in the letters of Peter, we find that Jesus is frequently referred to as Lord and Saviour in that order. We cannot expect to have the blessings of him as our Saviour, yet not acknowledge him as our Lord. Remember the words of Jesus himself, found in Luke chapter 6,

“Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and you do not do the things I say?”

To recognise God as the Lord is to forsake every lesser allegiance, whatever that might be. So the first principle is that the master has an absolute right to obedience from the slave.

ii. The slave had the right to expect provision and protection and direction from his master.

A slave never needed to worry about such things. They were the responsibility of his master. Man in his fallen condition needs lordship. His judgments are impaired by sin. If he does not surrender to the lordship of Christ, he remains the slave of sin. No-one can serve two masters. But, as long as we submit to the Lord Jesus Christ, we can count on him to protect us and provide for us and direct us. Joshua learned that at Jericho. The Apostle Paul learned it when he met the risen Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus.

“Who are you, Lord?” he asked. And *“What shall I do, Lord?”*

From that moment on, he knew the blessing of his new master's provision, so that, later in life, he could write to the Philippian Christians,

“My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory.”

In the last letter he wrote, Paul said to Timothy,

“The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack, and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom.”

The substance of his preaching was the Lordship of Christ. Let us also be faithful to Adonai, the Lord. May we echo the words of Isaiah 26:13,

“O Lord, our God, other lords beside you have ruled over us, but your name alone do we honour.”

Chapter 4, El Roi

The next name we are going to consider and by which God is known in his inspired word is El Roi, which means the God of seeing, or, the God who sees. At the start of the Biblical narrative, after Adam and Eve had sinned, they tried to hide from the presence of God but they soon

discovered that this was impossible. In Psalm 139:7 the writer asks the question,

“Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?”

He realised that there was no place where we can escape from the eyes of God. He is El Roi - the God who sees all.

We first meet the name El Roi in Genesis 16. Abram's wife Sarai had no children. Although God had promised Abram that he would be the father of a great nation, Sarai suggested that she give her servant Hagar to Abram, that she might bear children on behalf of Sarai. This was the beginning of sorrow and trouble for the household. When Hagar learned she was pregnant, she adopted a superior attitude towards her mistress, so that Sarai dealt with her very severely, and Hagar eventually packed up and left. Alone in the wilderness, she sat by a well and contemplated her plight. Where could she go? What would happen when the baby was born? Suddenly the Angel of the Lord appeared to her and gave her wise counsel and a comforting promise. And she called him ‘El Roi’ - the God who sees; and she named the well ‘Beer-lahai-roi’ which means ‘the well of him who lives and sees me.’ Yes, he is the God who sees us and concerns himself with our needs. He looks after us and sees to it that our needs are met.

In Genesis 29, we read of Abram's grandson, Jacob, going to Padan Aram to find a wife. When he proposed marriage

to Rachel, her father Laban consented on the condition that Jacob worked for him for seven years. Jacob agreed to do this. After the wedding, however, Jacob learned that he had been tricked into marrying Rachel's sister, Leah. Laban told Jacob that if he really wanted Rachel for his wife, he had to work for Laban for another seven years. Jacob agreed and in fact worked for him for a total of 20 years, during which time Laban reduced his wages ten times. What a miserable 20 years Jacob suffered. But one day God appeared to Jacob and said to him in Genesis 31:12,

“I have seen all that Laban has been doing to you.”

The God who sees had witnessed all, and he assured Jacob that he would look after him.

Now we go forward to the Book of Exodus when the Israelites were a captive nation in Egypt. They had cried to God but he had not done anything to help them. Then, God appeared to Moses in the burning bush and he said in Exodus 3:7,

“I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering.”

This should be a great comfort to God's children today. Whatever difficulties we are experiencing, we can rest assured that God knows all about us. He sees us. His eye is always upon us. He sees our trial. He knows our need. If

we are ever tempted to think that God has forsaken us, let us remember that our heavenly Father is the God who sees.

The same idea occurs in the New Testament. In Revelation 2:9 the Lord said to the church in Smyrna,

“I know your afflictions and your poverty...”

He knew all about their difficulties, the persecution they had suffered and the trials they faced. He encouraged them by telling them that, when some of them were put in prison, he would be watching. Nothing touches the life of a Christian which God does not see. There is deep comfort in this thought. Whatever our circumstances, wherever we may find ourselves, we can say with Hagar that we know God sees us and knows all about us. In Psalm 33:18 to 19 we read,

“The eyes of the Lord are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love; to deliver them from death and keep them alive in famine.”

In Psalm 32:8 God says to David,

“I will instruct you and show you the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you.”

This means that God will prevent us from pursuing a wrong path if we look to him. He will not let us go astray.

Of course, we must also say that, if God is the God who sees then we cannot overlook the fact that God, as well as seeing distress and suffering, also sees sin and falsehood. In Jeremiah, the people's pride led them away from God and into all sorts of sinful practices. This was clearly not the purpose for which God had called and saved them. And in Jeremiah 13:27, God said,

“I have seen your detestable acts.”

The Bible tells us that God is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, so, if we persist in our sin, he will say as in Jeremiah 7:15,

“I will thrust you from my presence...”

What God sees in us determines whether he is to us a God of comfort or a God of judgement. To the disobedient, he is a God of judgement. To those living in fellowship with him and looking to him constantly, he is a God of comfort and a God of grace. As Hebrews 4:13 says,

“Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”

He is El Roi - the God who sees.

Chapter 5, Jehovah

We come now to consider the name which is applied to God more than any other in Scripture, and that is Jehovah. On about 300 occasions, it is translated in the English language as GOD (all capital letters) and as LORD (all capitals) about 6000 times. It is also linked with other words to give further titles to God. For example, Jehovah Tsidkenu - which means the Lord our Righteousness; or Jehovah Nissi - The Lord our Banner. The Jews themselves avoided using the name Jehovah, as they believed that it was wrong to pronounce it. This grew out of their interpretation of Leviticus 24:16, which states,

“...anyone who blasphemes the name of the LORD must be put to death.”

The name Jehovah is, above every other name of God, the one most sacred and precious to the Jew. Perhaps Christians could learn a lesson from this. Do we ever show a lack of respect and reverence when we speak about God or even when we speak to God?

The name Jehovah is derived from the Hebrew word HAVAH, meaning ‘to be’. The idea is that of self-existence. Jehovah is the eternal self-existent one, without beginning or ending, the one who is the same yesterday, today and forever. He is to his people what they need and he it is who supplies their need.

We see Jehovah's sufficiency if we look at the story of Moses at the burning bush. When Moses asked God for a name whereby God could be described to the Israelites, God said in Exodus 3:14,

“I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: I am has sent me to you.”

So, God is - in a sense in which no other being is. He is, and the cause of his being is in himself. He is because he is. There never was a time when God could not say, “I AM”, because he always was. He stands outside of time. There is no past, present and future with God. Isaiah chapter 46 asks and answers the question,

“To whom will you compare me or count me equal? I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me.”

We return to the book of Exodus and the burning bush. God said to Moses in Exodus 3:15,

“Say to the Israelites, ‘The LORD, 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 ever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation.”

He used the name ‘The LORD, the God...’ which in Hebrew is Jehovah Elohim - the strong, faithful one who has kept

his word to the patriarchs. How different Jehovah is from men, even godly men. For example, we know that when Abraham went down to Egypt he lied to Abimelech, yet by contrast Elohim forgave him and remained faithful to his word. Also Isaac lied in calling his wife Rebekah his sister in order to protect his own life, and again by contrast Elohim forgave him and remained faithful. Jacob also deceived his blind father, but Elohim remained faithful to his covenant. He is Jehovah Elohim - the covenant-keeping God.

The name Jehovah is used when speaking of God's relation to mankind. In the Genesis account of creation, it is Elohim who creates the heaven and the earth, but it is as Jehovah Elohim that he makes man in his own image and likeness. In the story of Noah's Ark, where the animals are involved, the name Elohim is used. So for example in Genesis 7:16 we read,

“The animals going into the ark were male and female as God (Elohim - the Creator) had commanded.”

Then we read,

“And the LORD (Jehovah) shut him (i.e. Noah) in.”

God has a special relationship to man which is distinct from the rest of creation, and this is brought out in the text by the use of the name Jehovah - the covenant-keeping God.

We want now to consider briefly three outstanding characteristics of Jehovah.

i. Jehovah is holy.

In Leviticus 11:44 God says,

“I am the LORD your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy.”

Only Jehovah is absolutely holy. In Exodus 15:11 we read,

“Who among the gods is like you, O LORD? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?”

God is eternally, infinitely, absolutely holy.

ii. Jehovah hates and judges sin.

In Genesis 3, in the conversation between Eve and Satan, the name Jehovah is never used. When they speak of God, they use Elohim. But from verse 7 to the end of the chapter, it is Jehovah Elohim who pronounces judgement on Adam and Eve and Satan. God's names stand for his character and, as Jehovah, he cannot condone evil. So, from the entrance of sin into the world in Genesis 3, right to the end of the Old Testament, it is Jehovah who pronounces judgement against sin. It was Jehovah who rained down fire and brimstone on Sodom and Gomorrah. It was Jehovah who said to Moses in Exodus 32:33,

“Whoever has sinned against me, I will blot out of my book.”

And it was Jehovah who sent a plague on the people for making the golden calf. We must never forget that sin is absolutely abhorrent to God.

iii. Jehovah loves and saves sinners.

This is really good news. It is under the name of Jehovah that God provides salvation for sinners. When Adam and Eve sinned, it was Jehovah who came seeking the sinners he had judged. He came with the good news of the Seed of the woman that would crush Satan's head. What a corrective this is to the theory of evolution. Man cannot grope upwards through his moral and spiritual darkness in the hope of finding God. Rather, it is God who loves and seeks the sinner. It was Jehovah who shut Noah into the ark and saved him and his family. The Book of Judges is the fascinating history of the people of God over some 450 years and illustrates in an excellent way both God's judgement on sin and yet his love and provision for sinners. Jehovah does not forsake sinful, fallen men and women. Rather, he manifests his love to them and ever seeks to save them. So, God is holy. He hates sin, but loves the sinner.

Up to this point, all our Scripture references have been from the Old Testament. What about the New Testament? In the New Testament the name Jehovah is ascribed, either directly or by implication, to the Lord Jesus Christ. There

are many facts which ascribe deity to Jesus, but none more clear and convincing than that the name Jehovah is applied to him. Let us compare some texts from the Old and New Testaments.

- i. In Exodus 17:2 Moses asked the people,

“Why do you put the LORD (Jehovah) to the test?”

When we turn to 1Corinthians 10:9, Paul wrote,

“We should not test the Lord (Christ) as some of them did.”

- ii. In Isaiah 6:1 we are given the prophet's great vision of heaven. He wrote,

“I saw the LORD (Jehovah) seated on a throne, high and exalted.”

In John's gospel chapter 12, John quotes from this passage in Isaiah 6 and then writes in verse 41,

“Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him.”

- iii. When John the Baptist introduced the Lord Jesus to the people in Matthew chapter 3:3, he quoted from Isaiah chapter 40:3,

“A voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Prepare the way for the LORD (Jehovah), make straight paths for him.’”

The Jehovah of the Old Testament is Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

iv. In Isaiah 45:23, Jehovah says:

“Before me, every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear.”

And Paul in Philippians 2:10-11, looking ahead to that day when Jesus will return declared,

“...at the name of Jesus every knee should bow... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.”

Earlier we considered the Old Testament interpretation of Jehovah in the statement ‘I AM THAT I AM.’ In the New Testament the Apostle John sets forth very clearly the Lord Jesus as the great ‘I AM’, John's gospel is very much the gospel of the deity of Jesus. In chapter 4:25 when Jesus was speaking to the woman at the well, she said,

“I know that the Messiah” (called Christ), is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.”

Jesus said to her,

“I who speak to you am he.”

Now in the original Greek there is no word ‘he’ in the sentence. It should more properly read, “It is I AM who is speaking to you.” When the disciples were crossing the rough waters of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus appeared to them, walking on the water. He said to them in John 6:20,

“It is I; don’t be afraid.”

Unfortunately in our Bibles, the word ‘AM’ has been omitted. A better translation therefore is, “It is I AM; do not be afraid.” Jesus says to the unbelieving Pharisees in John 8:58,

“Before Abraham was born, I AM.”

In addition to these passages which show Jesus to be the ‘I AM’, the Jehovah of the Old Testament, John records eight sayings of Jesus in which he links ‘I AM’ with other terms. Let me give you the references and you can study them for yourselves,

John 6: *“I am the bread of life.”*

John 8: *“I am the light of the world.”*

John 10: *“I am the door.”*

John 10: *“I am the good shepherd.”*

John 10: *“I am the Son of God.”*

John 11: *“I am the resurrection and the life.”*

John 14: *“I am the way, the truth and the life.”*

John 15: *“I am the true vine.”*

All that Jehovah was to his people in the Old Testament, the Lord Jesus Christ is to his believing people, his church, today. He is the Holy One who hates sin but who loves the sinner and who died on the cross, that sinners might be forgiven and saved.

In conclusion, then, we can see that the name Jehovah is a wonderful comfort to the children of the living God. It represents his guarantee to keep all his promises and to be to those who trust him everything that he has said he would be. Surely the Apostle Paul was drawing out all that this great name implies when he wrote in Philippians 4:19,

“And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.”

Chapter 6, Jehovah Tsidkenu

Each of the names given to God in the Scriptures portrays God's attributes. The name we come to consider now is Jehovah Tsidkenu, which means The LORD Our Righteousness. Among the essential moral attributes of God is his righteousness or justice. God's righteousness may be defined as his holiness in action, his holiness being constantly and consistently demonstrated in his dealings with his creation, and especially with human beings. God has always been known for his righteousness. Even wicked Pharaoh in Exodus 9 admitted,

“The Lord is righteous.”

The psalmist in Psalm 119:142 says,

“Your righteousness is everlasting and your law is true.”

The Apostle Paul, writing in Romans 9:14, asks,

“What shall we then say? Is God unjust (unrighteous)?”

And he answers his own question with the words *“Not at all!”* As Psalm 145:17 states,

“The Lord is righteous in all his ways.”

The name Jehovah Tsidkenu, the Lord our righteousness, appears in the prophecy of Jeremiah chapter 23, verse 6. At that time the kingdom of Judah was declining towards a state of collapse. The godly king Josiah had been succeeded by his three sons, none of them measuring up to their father in godliness. Chapter 22 contains the record of God's pronouncement of judgement on the land. But in the next chapter, God says in verses 5 and 6,

“‘The days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will

live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness.’”

Jeremiah is prophesying that, in contrast to the godless kings, God will put on the throne his Righteous One.

Of course when we examine the passages of Scripture which emphasise God's righteousness, it automatically brings before us man's unrighteousness. All people without exception stand before God in need of righteousness. The Bible clearly states in Romans 3:10,

“There is no-one righteous, no, not even one...”

Because man is by nature and by practice unrighteous, he cannot be justified on the ground of his own righteousness in the sight of God. Many people cannot accept this verdict but as long as a man believes that there is some righteousness in his heart, he will cling to that and will not turn to the Lord Jesus to trust in him alone and receive his righteousness. We must accept the fact of our own unrighteousness before our hearts will be prepared to receive the righteousness of God. In God's sight only one is righteous and that is the Lord Jesus Christ. He alone is what he ought to be and so only of him could God the Father say,

“This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.”

We are always tempted to view our own lives by the

standards of other human beings, and in that case we may consider ourselves quite righteous. But we read Romans 3:10 and we see the absolute and perfect standard of God's righteousness. When we view ourselves alongside Jesus, we realise that we are unrighteous. We agree with Isaiah when he writes in Isaiah 64:6,

“All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags...”

Our pollution is seen not only in our actions, but also in our thoughts and our words. And the righteousness that God requires is not something which we have naturally in our character. It is the righteousness of God himself. Jesus said in Matthew 5:6,

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness.”

It is his righteousness we hunger for. And what we see in the use of the expression ‘Jehovah Tsidkenu’ is that it is the Lord Jesus who is our righteousness. Righteousness before God can be found only in Jesus. In the New Testament we find that Paul, and Peter, and Stephen all preached Jesus as the just or the righteous one. Through faith in Christ a believer becomes what God requires him to be, and he can stand before God in a perfect righteousness. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:21,

“God made him (Christ) who had no sin, to be sin for

us, so that in him we might be made the righteousness of God.”

Jesus was free from sin, yet he took the place of sinners and was made a sin offering in our place. Our sins were transferred to Jesus, and his righteousness was transferred to us. And this gift from God must make a very practical change in how we live our lives. If we are declared to be righteous in God's sight, it does not mean that we can live as we please, quite the opposite. Our daily living must be righteous. The Apostle Peter writes in 1 Peter 2:24,

“He himself (Jesus) bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness...”

How thankful we should be for Jehovah Tsidkenu - The Lord our righteousness. May we, his righteous ones, show forth his praises by living lives which are righteous.

Chapter 7, Jehovah - Nissi

We consider one more of the names or titles given to God in the Bible. We are going to look at the name Jehovah-Nissi, which means ‘The LORD My Banner’. This name is found only once in scripture, in Exodus 17:15, although the idea of God being the banner or flag under which we fight, and in whose name we fight, is found elsewhere in the Bible. So, what is the background to Exodus 17:15? Why

does it say,

“Moses built an altar and called it Jehovah Nissi - the LORD is my Banner.”?

The context is that we are with the children of Israel as they make their way through the wilderness. In Exodus chapter 14, God had shown his power and his protecting love as he had divided the waters of the Red Sea and Israel crossed safely on dry ground. Then, at Marah, in Exodus 15, God had made the bitter waters sweet. In the next chapter, at Elim, he had fed them with manna. Then in chapter 17, at Rephidim, there is again no water and the Israelites complain to Moses. In answer to Moses' prayer, God performed a miracle by sending forth water from the rock. Thus, he had proved time and time again, that he had not forsaken his people. But then, at verse 8 of Exodus 17, the incident takes place which occasions God's revelation of himself as ‘The Lord my Banner’. We read,

“The Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim.”

Just when it seemed to Israel that all her troubles were over, the Amalekites attacked them. Moses gave instructions for the battle. Joshua was to lead the men into battle. Moses would go the top of the hill to pray. The fight went on all day long, and Moses observed that when his hands were raised in prayer as he held the rod of God, so the battle turned in Israel's favour. God gave them victory.

Afterwards we read in Exodus 17:14,

“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered, and make sure that Joshua hears it, because I will completely blot out Amalek from under heaven.’”

It was then that Moses built an altar and called it Jehovah Nissi - the LORD my Banner (v15). Now why did God say that Joshua must hear this? Well, Joshua was the hero in everyone's eyes, but God wanted it to be clear to all, including Joshua, that it was God who had given them the victory. It had nothing to do with their own strength or ability or wisdom. So Moses built an altar and called it ‘The LORD is my Banner’.

The word Nissi means a war flag; the emblem of victory which gleams after the battle is fought and won. It is a reminder to God's people that all power is his and all strength comes from him. When we continue to read the account of the children of Israel, we see that they needed to know that the LORD was their Banner, because they were not finished with Amalek. They would meet again, and only as they did so in the strength of ‘The LORD their Banner’ could they be assured of victory. In Numbers 14, the Amalekites attacked again and Israel could not conquer them, simply because they were fighting in their own strength and not relying on God, and, as a result, Jehovah Nissi, the LORD my Banner, was not with them.

We learn a very important lesson from this, namely that spiritual battles cannot be won with worldly weapons nor in our own human strength. Amalek, the founder of the Amalekites, was a grandson of Esau, and Esau was a man without any spiritual appetite or insight. He lived for the satisfaction of earthly desires. He had no appreciation of spiritual values. He treated sacred things lightly so that he might gratify the flesh. So Esau, and his descendant Amalek, are representative of what some Bible translations call ‘the flesh’ or our ‘sinful natures’, and also of the opposition we find from our sinful world and the devil. Galatians 5 tells us that the flesh or sinful nature lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. There is that constant warfare between the Holy Spirit and our sinful natures, and the persistent animosity between Israel and the Amalekites in the Old Testament is an excellent illustration of this continual battle the Christian believer is engaged in. We must beware of our sinful natures just as Israel had to beware of Amalek. He attacked Israel in the rear. He attacked where they were weakest. And in our spiritual battles it is the same story. Our enemy the devil will attack where we are weakest and when we are least prepared. He will kick us when we are down. We can never change flesh into spirit. When God saves us, he gives us a new life; he does not polish up the old life. In this spiritual battle we need to remember we have access to Jehovah Nissi, ‘the LORD our Banner’. If we take the battle to him in prayer, he will lead us to victory. In the King James or Authorised Version of the Bible we read in Isaiah 59:19,

“When the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD will raise up a standard - or a banner - against him.”

Our standard is the Lord Jesus himself. He is the captain of our salvation. With the Apostle Paul, we can say,

“In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.” (Romans 8:37)

“Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Corinthians 15:57)

Through faith and prayer, each of us can have the victory through Jehovah Nissi - the LORD my Banner.

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