

The Name of God

Here is a question: What is a good definition of God? A divine being or a deity? The problem with that is that it is essentially saying that God is God-like. It is surprisingly difficult to come up with a good definition of God. In Isaiah 40:18 it says

To whom will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare unto him?

The problem is that God gives definition to everything that he has created. But what he has created cannot define Him. Therefore you cannot illustrate God by saying, 'God is like this or that created thing in the temporal realm.' In many ways God is undefinable. God is above everything, overall. Nothing can contain Him and we struggle to define Him with words. The Bible does not define God. The nearest the Bible gets is

John 4:24

God is a spirit

Or 1 John 4:8

God is love.

That says something about his being and one of his attributes.

So we can say he is a spirit. The other way defines God by characteristics or attributes, like love. With God they are all perfect and infinite (boundless). Also one of the defining characteristics repeatedly mentioned in connection with God is his holiness or purity. So, a *good*, but not an *adequate*, description may be 'a pure Spirit of infinite perfections.'

But if God is so difficult to define how can we know him? But the Bible says we can. In John 17:3a it says

And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God.

Knowing about God is different from knowing Him personally. Is that possible to know Him personally? This verse says yes, for it is a personal knowledge that is spoken of here. And not only that, this knowledge is the key to life.

So, who is God? Well, one of the first things to do if you want to know someone is to find out their name. Does God have a name? Yes. Actually it was in our reading. In Isaiah 40:28 *LORD*. It is a translation of a personal name.

The Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew. And this name was written in Hebrew. It has been called the 'tetragrammaton'. 'Tetra' meaning four, and 'grammaton' meaning letters. Therefore it means having four letters. This is it in Hebrew writing from right to left:

יהוה

Hebrew

English HWHY (YHWH) (H could also be a J, and W could be a V)

Attempts to make it pronounceable:-

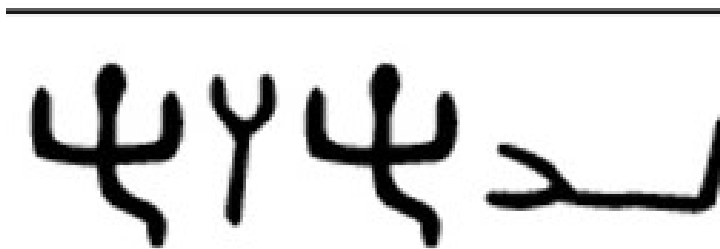
The Hebrew original did not use vowels so the way this name was pronounced was lost. The Jewish scribes with a somewhat superstitious tendency and a fear of the sacred name of God being misused, would not say the name and replaced the spoken name of God with the title 'Adonai' which simply means Lord. Later they mixed the vowels from Adonai with these 4 letters to produce YaHoVaH from which we get our English word Jehovah.

Another attempt was to make the word YaHWeH, because there was no consensus whether the original name was pronounced with 2 or 3 syllables.

In any case, we know that the way these names are pronounced is certainly wrong. For there is no sound for a V or W in the Hebrew. So there is an enduring mystery with this name. Something we would expect from the God far above all.

What does it mean? It means 'the existing one', or 'the one who exists'. We can think of when God replied to Moses who asked, *What is thy name? and he replied I AM that I AM*. Essentially, this is God, the self-existent One. He exists in and of Himself. Everything and everyone is dependent on something else, especially Mankind, but God is not. For example, stop drinking any liquid for more than 3 days and you will find out how dependent you are on something. Hold your breath for as long as you can and you will find out how dependent you are on something. If your heart stops beating, you stop living. We are in the hands of God.

There is an older Hebrew though. An ancient Hebrew, termed proto-sinaitic Hebrew. These are pictograms. Here is the tetragrammaton in pictograms



Look/behold. Nail/peg. Look/behold. Hand/arm/work(creative)

This can be translated as Look at the handiwork, look at the nail.

Now I am not advocating finding strange, over stretched, meanings in the Bible with words or numbers for letters as some fancifully do. But it is interesting to look in this instance, and one other, at a most significant word and some letters that could bear some scrutiny.

With that in mind, I will use this as an illustrative point. What does this pictogram meaning remind us of? Surely, it must be the account of the doubting of Thomas.

Thomas had said, *Except I shall see in his hand the print of the nails... I will not believe*

In John 20:27 the Lord says to Thomas,

Reach hither thy finger and BEHOLD MY HANDS.

This he said to Thomas to rebuke his unbelief. This bears a remarkable similarity to the pictorial meaning of the tetragrammaton. Whether a deliberate foreshadowing of the work of Christ, or not, it serves as a reminder of the key work of God in redemption; the cross of Calvary.

So, two things we can learn just from God's name.

- 1) He exists
- 2) Believe in Him

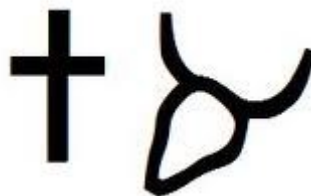
Now let's go back to the very beginning of the Bible. The first verse in our English translation is rendered

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

But that is what it says in English. However, there is something missing in English from the original Hebrew. There are two letters written after God, in this verse in the Hebrew. They are the letters Aleph א and Tav ט. These are the first and the last letters of the Hebrew alphabet. This would correspond to our A and Z, or the Greek Alpha and Omega. The English translators considered it untranslatable. But why are these 2 letters after the name of God? Any good student of the New Testament would be reminded of the words of Christ in Revelation 1:8 *I am alpha and omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.*

He is the God over all, the most high creator God outside of time. God was telling us this from the beginning.

It is interesting to note what these two letters are in their pictograms



Tav Aleph

Aleph is a pictogram of an ox, meaning strong, power, leader. We can think of a warrior king.

Tav is a pictogram of crossed sticks, meaning mark, sign or monument. This reminds us of Mark 15:26 the sign at the cross

And the superscription of his accusation was written over THE KING OF THE JEWS.

This is amazing, all linked to God's name.

But you may say, 'The king of the Jews! I'm not a Jew.'

Well, to be a Jew is to be an Israelite and the Bible says in Romans 9:6 *For they are not all Israel, which are of (or born of) Israel.*

In Galatians 6:16 Christians are called *The Israel of God*, in other words, 'spiritual' Israel.

In Matthew 3:7-9 John the Baptist rebukes the Jews of his day

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth, therefore, fruits meet for repentance: and think not to say within yourselves, we have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

To be *truly* God's people and to know him personally is a spiritual thing, not a physical thing that you can be born into. Whether you are born a Jew or a Gentile (non Jew) you must be born again spiritually in order to be a true Israelite. The Jewish nation was always just a picture of God's people in history for our learning. In reality they were a mixed multitude of saved and unsaved people.

God is the self-existent One, but we are dependent on many things. Ultimately we are all dependent on God, we are in His hands day by day. You only exist because he does. That being the case, what he thinks about you is very important. We have considered in previous lessons that he is a moral God, perfectly holy, but we are not holy at all. There is only one person between you and a judgement for your sins. However, if we were to come before God with our sins unforgiven and unreconciled to God whose law we have utterly broken, then we'd be burned up by His holiness, like coming too close to the sun.

Let's go back and look at the verse that we looked at the beginning about knowing God. I did not read you the full verse. It reads this

And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. John 17:3

Jesus Christ therefore is the key to life. He was sent.

For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. John 3.17

He came to make an atonement, the Bible says. What does that mean? It means an at-one-ment, a reconciliation of two estranged parties. We must be reconciled to God in order to know Him personally, we must be forgiven. To accept this work of Christ freely and believe in it for yourself is the key. To try to work or reconcile yourself is a great mistake.

Let's end with the end of our reading Isaiah 40:30-31

Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall. But they that wait upon (TRUST) the LORD (YHWH) shall renew their strength: they shall mount with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint.

This is a spiritual description. God is not especially interested in making you a better athlete! This is about your soul. Do you have a weary soul? Are you ready to fall? Then fall at the foot of the cross. Believe, and trust in the work of Christ and he will raise you up and you will find the key to life, a true personal knowledge of God.