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THE DIVINE NAMES AS VEHICLES OF REVELATION

Efforts to find the origins and significance of the Hebrew divine names in other ancient Near Eastern cultures have yielded generally disappointing results. One of the major reasons for this is that the ancient Hebrew theology invested these names with a uniqueness that renders investigation outside the narratives of the OT incapable of exploring fully their historical and religious significance.

Basic to ancient Hebrew religion is the concept of divine revelation. While God is conceived of as revealing his attributes and will in a number of ways in the OT, one of the most theologically significant modes of the divine self-disclosure is the revelation inherent in the names of God.

This aspect of divine revelation is established in the words of Exodus 6:3, "I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by My Name the Lord [Yahweh] I did not make myself known to them." According to classical literary criticism, the verse teaches that the name Yahweh was unknown to the patriarchs. Thus, an ideological conflict exists between the Priestly author and the earlier believer of God who frequently put the name Yahweh on the lips of the patriarchs.

However, the words "by My Name Yahweh I did not make myself known to them" have a somewhat hollow ring if the name Yahweh is understood only as an appellative. The reason for this is that Moses asks in Exodus 3:13, "What is his name?" (μᾶτι-σεμῶ) has demonstrated that the syntax of this question does not connote an inquiry as to the name of God but an inquiry into the character revealed by the name. He says, "Where the word 'what' is associated with the word 'name' the question asked is what finds expression in or lies concealed behind that name".

Exodus 14:4 also support the view that the name Yahweh embodies aspects of God's character. It says, "and the Egyptians will know that I am Yahweh." It is hardly likely that the intent of this assertion is that they would learn only the name of the Hebrew God.

In the light of these observations, the use of the concepts of the name of God in the early narratives of the book of Exodus is far broader than simply the name by which the Hebrew God was known. It has a strong element of divine self-disclosure within it.

The corpus of divine names compounded with el and a descriptive adjunct also support this concept. The very fact that the adjunctive element is descriptive is an indication of its value as a source of theological content.

Typical of this type of name is εὐ ροτ ("God who sees"; Gen. 16:13) and εὐ ολῶμ ("God eternal"; Gen. 21:33). These el names sometimes emerge from a specific historical situation that illuminates their significance.

The Meaning of Yahweh, Jehovah (LORD): Efforts to determine the meaning of the τετραγράμματον (YHWH) through historical investigation have been rendered difficult by the rareness of informative data relative to the various forms of the name ψα in historical sources outside the OT. For this reason the investigation has generally followed philological lines. The form ψα was originally an ejaculatory cry, "shouted in moments of excitement or ecstasy," that was ∇προλογυεδ το ψα(η)ωα(η), ψα(η)ωα(η)ψ, or the like." He suggested further that the name Yahweh arose from the consonance of an extended form of ψα with the "imperfect tense of a defective verb." Thus, he saw the origin of the name in a popular etymology and asserted that its original form was forgotten.