

my name ייִי I did not reveal myself to them; and also I established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Kanaan, the land of their sojournings, which they sojourned in it.”

This statement, the explanation goes, proves that the sacred name was not revealed to any man, including the patriarchs Abraham, Isaak, and Jacob, until Moses, who lived hundreds of years later. Further, since Moses was sent to the Israelites in Egypt with this name,³ their thought continues, this proves that the name Yahweh was meant only for the Israelites. The Christian and Moslem groups hold this basic tenet as the reason why they need not use the sacred name. The Jewish assemblies (who forbid the use of the sacred name by anyone except those they declare pious, and then only on special occasions), meanwhile, judge this passage to prove how extremely sacred the name Yahweh is. For the Jews it justifies their taboo against its use.

If one were to apply a cursory investigation, since most people already desire this popular interpretation to be valid, this commonly held understanding of Exodus, 6:2–4, would seem plausible. But it is plagued with one immense flaw: if their translation and understanding of this verse is correct then large portions of the Scriptures are blatantly in error. One would be forced to choose between one of two assumed “traditions” of the Scriptures proposed by the priestly school as to when the personal name Yahweh first came into existence. By definition, such a choice would entail a great contradiction between different parts of the Scriptures. Even if one is prone to believe in a totally human origin for the Scriptures, it would be hard to justify why its authors would have allowed such an obvious antithesis between this popular understanding of Exodus, 6:2–4, and the rest of the Bible.

A close examination of Exodus, 6:2–4, in context with the story being told, however, demonstrates that the presently popular interpretation of this passage is in error. Yahweh was not informing Moses that the sacred name was unknown by Abraham, Isaak, and Jacob, but to the contrary, that he had in fact revealed it to them as part of his Covenants of Promise. For this reason

taken place before Moses met with Pharaoh and the Israelites in Egypt, or before he joined his brother Aaron, chapter six clearly falls in sequence after he had arrived in Egypt and his brother Aaron is specifically said to have been with him. Modern scholarship shows these interpretations to be fabricated. For example, G. T. Manley wrote:

The Hypothesis, based mainly upon the wrong interpretation of Ex. vi. 3, that *'el šadday* was the ‘name’ by which the Patriarchs called upon their God, breaks down therefore at several points. First, *'el šadday* is not a ‘name,’ and the writer in Ex. vi. 3 refrains from calling it such. Secondly, Ex. vi. 1–6 is not a doublet, but makes good sense when read as a sequel. Thirdly, it is improbable that this ‘P’ section would be inserted in JE if it contradicted Ex. iii; and fourthly, in any case the early ‘document’ JE would be more likely to preserve the true tradition than the post-exilic P. (NBD, p. 479)

³ Exod., 3:13–16. Verse 16 specifically instructs Moses to, “Go, and gather the elders of Israel, and say to them, ייִי, the eloahi of your fathers, has appeared to me, the eloahi of Abraham, Isaak, and Jacob, saying I have surely visited you and (have seen what) is done to you in Egypt.”

Yahweh would bring the Israelites out of Egypt to take possession of the promised land. To prove this understanding, we must first examine the background of the presently popular interpretation of Exodus, 6:2-4, and then proceed with a detailed study of the context of the verse.

The Rise of an Interpretation

The answer to the apparent contradiction between the popular interpretation of Exodus, 6:2-4, and the rest of the Scriptures comes to the forefront once we consider how this interpretation came about. To begin with, in ancient Hebrew there were no vowel marks written beneath the letters, as is custom today, nor were there commas, question marks, periods, quotation marks, or other such devices. How a sentence was to be understood and read depended entirely upon its context.

The next problem that arose was the lapse of time between when the original books were composed and understood until the return of the Jewish captivity from Babylonia during the sixth through fifth centuries B.C.E. While in captivity in Babylonia (586-538 B.C.E.), the Jews had lost the continuity in such knowledge and upon their return to Judaea they had to be retaught.⁴

⁴ Neh., 8:1-18; Jos., *Antiq.*, 11:5:5. Though the population of Jews that returned from the captivity were retaught by Ezra and some of the Levite priests, it is clear that this knowledge soon disappeared after the death of Ezra and those priests. The book of Malachi proves this. Written as the last book of the Old Testament, according to the *Targum* by "Ezra the scribe" himself, we read of the wretched condition to which the priests had sunk. Malachi (meaning "my messenger") reports Yahweh's dissatisfaction with the Levitical priest, stating:

And now, to you is this command, (you) the priests. If you will not hear, and if you will not set upon your heart TO GIVE GLORY TO MY NAME, says אֱלֹהֵי צְבָאוֹת of hosts, then I will send on you the curse, and I will curse your blessings; and indeed I have cursed it, because you have not set it (i.e. to give glory to my name) upon your heart. Behold I am rebuking to you this the seed. And I will spread dung upon your faces, the dung of your feasts, and one will lift you to it. And you shall know that I have sent to you this command, to be my covenant with the Levi, says אֱלֹהֵי צְבָאוֹת of hosts. My covenant was with him, life and peace, and I gave them to him from respect; and he respected me and from before my name he is put in awe. The Torah (Law) of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found on his lips. In peace and in uprightness he walked with me, and many he turned from iniquity. For the lips of the priest should guard knowledge and the Torah they should seek from his mouth, for the messenger of אֱלֹהֵי צְבָאוֹת of hosts he is. But you have turned from the road; you have made many stumble at the Torah; you have corrupted the covenant of Levi, says אֱלֹהֵי צְבָאוֹת of hosts. And also I have made you despised and abased to all the people because you are not keeping my ways, but are lifting up faces in the Torah. Is not there one father to us all? Has not one el created us? Why do we act deceitfully (each) male to his brother, to profane the covenant of our fathers? (Mal., 2:1-10)

This record shows that towards the end of Ezra's life the Levi priests had already become debased. The prime charge against them was the fact that they had not set it upon their hearts to give glory to the sacred name Yahweh, the "key" to scriptural knowledge. This degeneration continued and by the time of Alexander the Great's conquest of Judaea in 331 B.C.E. the priesthood was in part being replaced by people who were not of the royal priestly tribe of Levi. The Jewish scribes now began their rise to the leadership, but Yahweh accuses them of having a

This knowledge was once again suppressed during the forced Hellenization period of Judaea by the Seleucid king Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who died in 163 B.C.E.

The loss of various subtle understandings of scriptural verse was counterbalanced by the development of Jewish “traditions” and schools of “interpretations,” which flowered from the latter half of the second century B.C.E. until the second century C.E. These traditions and interpretations were the source of much contention between the messiah and the Jewish religious leaders of the first century C.E.⁵ As the years proceeded these traditions and interpretations came to be finalized in written form and are now known as the Mishnah and the various Talmud and Midrash documents.⁶

As we shall fully document in our chapter entitled, *The Prohibition Against the Sacred Name*, and in Volume II of our study, one of the mistaken interpretations developed by the Jewish religious leaders was the notion that the personal name Yahweh was far too sacred for any common man to utter. Beginning sometime after the mid-second century B.C.E, the high priest, and then only on special occasions, and a few other chosen (who learned the name in secret) were permitted to express its sound. For all others it was forbidden by Jewish law. When the Jewish religious leaders came to the verse in Exodus, 6:2–4, they chose to understand it as further evidence of their new and radical interpretation about the sacrosanctity of the name Yahweh.

Our earliest evidence of this interpretation comes in the works of the first century C.E. Jewish historian Josephus. With regard to Yahweh’s revelation of his personal name to Moses, as recorded in Exodus, 3:1–16, Josephus writes:⁷

Then the deity revealed to him (Moses) his name, which ere then had not come to men’s ears, and of which I am forbidden to speak.

The belief that Moses was the first man to hear the personal name Yahweh is clearly disproved by numerous quotes from Genesis. Nevertheless, this inventive interpretation was needed in order for the Jewish religious leaders to justify their stand on not using the sacred name.

“lying pen” that “worked deceit” (Jer., 8:8). In the NT we find that the religious leaders, especially the scribes and the Pharisees, were considered wicked and perverse. Their “traditions” were constantly ridiculed as unscriptural by the messiah and his disciples (see below n. 5). Those who should have been opening the doors to scriptural knowledge now were accused of concealing the “key,” hiding it from those seeking the truth (Luke, 11:52).

⁵ For example, see Matt., 15:1–9; Mark, 7:7–9; Gal., 1:13:f; Col., 2:7–10; 1 Pet., 1:18; 1 Tim., 4:1–7.

⁶ The Talmud is the body of rabbinic literature consisting of the Mishnah (or Misnah) and the *Gemara*. There are actually two Talmuds, the Palestinian and the Babylonian, each having its own *Gemara* (discussion and exposition revolving around the Mishnah) but the same Mishnah. The Mishnah was committed to written form in about 200 C.E. (Danby, *Mishnah*, p. xiv); the Palestinian Talmud was completed about 400 C.E. and the Babylonian about a century later. The *Midrash* texts are the homiletical interpretation and exegesis of the Bible. Two types of *Midrash* are used: the *Midrash Halachah*, which explains Biblical laws as they apply to a variety of circumstances, and the *Midrash Haggadah*, which interprets the Scriptures from the ethical and devotional viewpoint.

⁷ Jos., *Antiq.*, 2:12:4.

The debate over whether or not an average man should speak the personal name of the almighty also became the chief bone of contention between the messiah and the Jewish leaders.⁸ The early assemblies following the messiah believed in speaking the sacred name. But during that period the Pharisaic elements which had joined these assemblies spread their own interpretation about. By the second century C.E. many of those calling themselves Christians had become adherents to the “ineffable name” doctrine of their Jewish brothers.⁹ It became official Christian dogma at the beginning of the fourth century when the Roman Church was founded under Constantine. From this point on it was considered “Jewish” to use the sacred name (despite the fact that the Jews forbade its use).

To justify the apparent contradiction between the popular understanding of Exodus, 6:2-4, and the evidence produced by the book of Genesis that the name Yahweh was previously known, biblical scholars developed the “two traditions” theory. This theory opened the door for some critics to argue that such books as Genesis and Exodus were not really composed until sometime in or after the days of kings David and Solomon (tenth century B.C.E.).¹⁰ If we accept this view then there exist grounds for the belief that the Jews invented the sacred name. To do so also entails an acceptance of a contradiction in the Scriptures of major proportions, a belief that Moses did not write Genesis or Exodus. More to the point, it allows for the supposition that the Scriptures are a lie—all which are unwarranted when set against the evidence.

The Context of Exodus, 6:2-4

The problem with the so-called contradiction between the popular interpretation of Exodus, 6:2-4, and the prior revelation and use of the sacred name reported in the book of Genesis is solved once we take a much closer look at the context in which the statement at question takes place. The comments given in Exodus, 6:2-4, came as the result of events which had just recently transpired. We begin by observing that after the Exodus the Israelites sent a letter to the king of Edom recalling that before they came out of Egypt, “we cried to אֱלֹהֵינוּ, and he heard our voice, and sent a messenger (i.e. Moses), and has brought us out of Egypt; and behold, we are in Kadesh, a city at the edge of your border” (Num., 20:14-16). This passage, written by Moses, reveals that prior to his calling the Israelites had pleaded to Yahweh to save them.

Next, in the first part of Exodus we are informed of how אֱלֹהֵינוּ appeared to Moses atop Mount Sinai (Horeb) and revealed that he was “the eloahi of his fathers, the eloahi of Abraham, the eloahi of Isaak, and the eloahi of Jacob” (Exod., 3:6). Yahweh enlightened Moses to the fact that he had now come to bring his people, the Israelites, out of Egypt and take them into the land of Kanaan as he had promised their forefathers.¹¹ As part of this task Yahweh was sending Moses both to Pharaoh and the Israelites in Egypt advising them of this message.

⁸ See Part III entitled, *The Messiah, His Disciples, and the Sacred Name*.

⁹ See below Chap. XVII, ns. 5 and 8, and Vol. II.

¹⁰ Some, like Benedict Spinoza, went even further and concluded that the entire OT, from Genesis to Nehemiah, was composed by the fifth century B.C.E. scribe Ezra (see above Chap. I, n. 45).

¹¹ Exod., 3:1-10; cf. Gen., 15:12-14.

One might think that Moses would have met this invitation with great joy and enthusiasm. To the contrary, Moses had a great incentive to stay out of Egypt. Earlier in his life he had killed an Egyptian whom he had found beating on a fellow Israelite. This act caused Moses to be placed under a sentence of death by Pharaoh. To save his life he fled to the land of Midian along the Gulf of Aqaba. There he found safety in the house of the priest-king named Jethro, whose daughter he married.¹² Moses knew that as long as Pharaoh still lived he was under a death sentence in Egypt; Moses had not yet learned of the recent death of Pharaoh or knew that all the men who were seeking his life were now dead.¹³

Fearing the consequences of his arrival, Moses immediately tried to find a reason to excuse himself from going. As this story develops, Yahweh becomes increasingly angry with Moses because of his continuous efforts to evade the journey to Egypt:

And Moses said to eloahim, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and that I should bring out the sons of Israel from Egypt?" (Exod., 3:11)

We should immediately take note of the fact that Moses did not test out the identity of his divine visitor. He did not ask, for example, "Who are you," but rather "Who am I." This detail is our first indication that Moses already knew that the "eloahi" of his fathers was Yahweh.

Yahweh then comforted Moses by telling him he would be with him in this endeavor. But, Moses, who at every opportunity sought a way to escape these orders, then tried to find another justification as to why he need not go. He asked Yahweh:

Behold, I shall come to the sons of Israel and say to them, "The eloahi of your fathers has sent me to you" and they will say to me, "What is his name?" What shall I say to them? (Exod., 3:13)

The first point to be cognizant of is that if the almighty's name was "eloahi" there would have been no purpose for Moses to ask this question. Here is one more proof that eloahi is not a personal name. Second, the above question was not asked by someone who was anxiously trying to follow the words of Yahweh, but rather, the words of someone trying to be relieved from going! If Moses knew who his ancestors were, then he would certainly have known the name of their eloahi. The entire discussion is set with the backdrop that both the Israelites in Egypt and Moses already knew the name of the eloahi of their fathers. What Moses was, instead, trying to do was find

¹² Exod., 2:1-22. Jos., *Antiq.*, 2:9:7-2:11:1, adds that the Egyptian ruling class had long sought the death of Moses, being jealous of his prowess and his position as next in line to the throne, a position he held despite his ignoble birth.

¹³ Moses did not discover the death of Pharaoh and the other Egyptians who sought his life until after he left Mount Sinai and his meeting with Yahweh and had returned home to Mid-

just cause not to go to the Israelites living in Egypt. Moses was attempting to excuse himself on the grounds that the Israelites in Egypt knew the name of their eloahi and would test him on that issue. The eloahi who was now speaking to him, nevertheless, had not admitted to his name (reminiscent of the episode of Jacob's wrestling match with the el).¹⁴ How then could he go to them without this information?

In response Yahweh angrily said, "I am who I am!," and told Moses to tell the sons of Israel, "I am has sent me to you."¹⁵ Later, after Yahweh calmed down, we are told he "again" responded to the question of Moses by saying:¹⁶

You shall say this to the sons of Israel, אֱלֹהֵינוּ, the eloahi of your fathers, the eloahi of Abraham, the eloahi of Isaak, the eloahi of Jacob, has sent me to you; this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial to generation upon generation. (Exod., 3:15)

Yahweh's initial reply, "I am who I am," was not simply a casual remark made to a man asking him a plausible question. It was spoken out of anger and displeasure because Moses had asked such a foolish question in an obvious attempt to keep from traveling to Egypt. This circumstance is verified by what happened next. After once more telling Moses to bring the Israelites out of Egypt and then informing him of the events that were to transpire, Yahweh was met with still another excuse from Moses as to why he should not go:

And Moses answered and said, "And, behold, they will not believe me and will not listen to my voice; for they will say, 'אֱלֹהֵינוּ has not appeared to you.'" (Exod., 4:1)

This passage is extremely important for understanding the context of all that was taking place. First, it shows that Moses was continuing to seek reasons why he should not go. Second, Moses does not say that he would be rejected because the Israelites did not know who Yahweh was. Instead, Moses states that the Israelites would ridicule him with disbelief that Yahweh had appeared to him. If they had not known of Yahweh they would have said, "Who is Yahweh?," as Pharaoh did.¹⁷ The fact that Moses expected them only to deny Yahweh's appearance proves that the Israelites already knew Yahweh but they would doubt that he had sent Moses as a prophet.

Indeed, the very notion that the eloahi of Abraham, Isaak, and Jacob would have revealed himself to Moses by a different name is absurd. As A. B. Davidson observed, the name Yahweh "can hardly have been altogether
ian (Exod., 4:18-19).

¹⁴ Gen., 32:13-32.

¹⁵ Exod., 3:14.

¹⁶ Exod., 3:15, "And eloahim again said to Moses."

¹⁷ When Moses and Aaron told Pharaoh that "אֱלֹהֵינוּ the eloahi of Israel" had sent them to him and had ordered Pharaoh to "send away my people," Pharaoh responded, "Who is אֱלֹהֵינוּ that I should listen to his voice to send away Israel?" If the Israelites had not known who Yahweh was their response would have been much the same.

new to Israel before their deliverance. A new name would have been in those days a new god"!¹⁸ Clearly Yahweh had revealed himself to Moses as being the same eloahi that Abraham, Isaak, and Jacob had served. He was the eloahi of the ancestors of the Israelites, not someone new.

The attitude of these passages is further established by the fact that after Yahweh gave Moses signs to take with him into Egypt, Moses continued to seek ways to flee from his duty. This time his excuse was his inability to speak:

And Moses said to יהוה, "Please adonai, I am not a man of words, either from yesterday or from the third day (before) or since you spoke to your servant; for I am heavy of mouth and heavy of tongue."
(Exod., 4:10)

Yahweh angrily responded:

Who has made man's mouth? or who makes (the) dumb, or (the) deaf, or (the) seeing, or (the) blind? Is it not I, יהוה? (Exod., 4:11)

Yahweh then reassured Moses that he would provide him with what he needed to say. Seeing all of his objections answered, and no valid reason for not being sent, Moses now resorted to one final, last ditch attempt. He simply asked Yahweh to send someone else in his place:

Please adonai, now send by the hand (another) who you will send. (Exod., 4:13)

This was the last straw, for as part of Yahweh's response we are told, "And the anger of יהוה glowed against Moses."¹⁹ Yahweh now gave Moses his brother Aaron to act as a spokesman. Moses, seeing no way out, made preparations to return to his home in Midian and then to go to Egypt.²⁰ Yahweh, meanwhile, sent Aaron, the brother of Moses, to meet Moses at Mount Sinai while Moses was returning from Midian to go to Egypt.²¹

Next, Moses and Aaron arrived in Egypt and came to the sons of Israel, telling them all that Yahweh had spoken. The Israelites did not meet these words with, "Who is Yahweh?" Instead, we are told, "the people believed; and they heard that יהוה had visited the sons of Israel, and that he had seen their affliction; and they bowed down and worshipped."²²

All of these statements reveal that Moses and the Israelites were already fully aware of who Yahweh was. More importantly, they also show the attitude of Moses and Yahweh's anger towards it. This anger was further

¹⁸ ADB, 2, pp. 199f.

¹⁹ Exod., 4:14.

²⁰ Exod., 4:14-20.

²¹ Exod., 4:18-5:1.

²² Exod., 4:31.

accentuated after Moses spoke to Pharaoh. Instead of listening to Yahweh's command, Pharaoh placed the Israelites under an even heavier state of servitude than had heretofore existed. As a result, the overseers of the Israelites came to Moses and Aaron complaining that it was their fault that Pharaoh now sought to kill their people. Upset by these words and the turn of events, Moses returned to Yahweh and complained that Yahweh's word had not been fulfilled:

And Moses returned to אֵלֹהִים, and said, "Adonai, why have you done evil to this people? Why then have you sent me? And since I came in to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has done evil to this people; and you did not certainly deliver your people."
(Exod., 5:22-23)

It was to this complaint and lack of trust, following Yahweh's anger at Moses for trying to contrive a way out of going to Egypt, that Yahweh made his important response in Exodus, 6:2-4. Yahweh's reply, must be gaged against the history of his anger and the impertinent comments just made by Moses. Yahweh's response, as a result, was one of chastisement as he informs Moses that Moses was way out of line, for Yahweh would indeed bring his people out of Egypt!

A Rhetorical Question

The anger of Yahweh towards Moses is vital to understanding the context in which his response in Exodus, 6:2-4, was made to Moses. As part of his answer, Yahweh tells Moses, "Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh; for with a strong hand he will send them, and with a strong hand he will drive them from his land!" Affirming his intentions, Yahweh then continues by reminding Moses that he had appeared to Abraham, Isaak, and Jacob. With a scolding tone in his voice, Yahweh follows these words with the Hebrew sentence (reading right to left):

וּשְׁמִי אֵלֹהִים לֹא נִדְעֵתִי לָהֶם
them-to me-reveal-I not [did] Yahweh my-name-and

When these words are read in context with Yahweh's tone of voice they become a rhetorical question, not a simple statement: "and (by) my name אֵלֹהִים, (did) not I reveal myself to them?" Yahweh then adds that he had established his covenant with these men to give them the land of Kanaan. He emphasized his name because it was by his name that he swore to fulfill his oath and keep his word.²³ How then could Moses doubt that Yahweh would bring the Israelites out of Egypt? Was not the honor of his sacred name, which he had revealed to Abraham, Isaak, and Jacob, attached to the Covenants of Promise?

²³ That Yahweh swore an oath by his own name see above pp. 29-32.

Conclusion

Once we understand that Yahweh was chastising Moses and that he was using a rhetorical question, all of the facts fit perfectly together. Exodus, 6:2–4, rather than defeating, actually confirms Genesis and the other books of the Scriptures. Cognizant that question marks must be supplied in any English translation, the correct understanding of Exodus, 6:2–4, is as follows:

And eloahim spoke to Moses and he said to him, “I am יהוה; and I appeared to Abraham, to Isaak, and to Jacob as el-shaddai (the almighty el); and (by) my name יהוה, (did) not I reveal myself to them? And I also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Kanaan, the land of their sojournings, which they sojourned in it.”

Neither are other translators of this Hebrew verse unaware of this inflection. For example, *The Holy Bible, New International Version* footnotes this sentence with the alternate reading, “and by my name the Lord [i.e. יהוה] did I not let myself be known to them?”²⁴

If we trust that the Scriptures do not contradict themselves, or even if one simply acknowledges that the original author of Exodus would not have been so ignorant as to have allowed for such a contradictory statement as the popular interpretation of Exodus, 6:2–4, would contend, we are compelled to the conclusion that this verse must be understood as a rhetorical question. Once arriving at this judgment, we find that there is absolutely no basis for the belief that the name יהוה was only first revealed in the days of Moses or that it was meant only for the Israelites or Jews.

²⁴ NIV, p. 74, n. c. Also see the NIV Interlinear Hebrew-English Old Testament, ed. by John R. Kohlenberger III, Regency Reference Library, Zondervan, Michigan, 1979.