

The Name

“We believe in One God”

This simple statement has defined Jews, Christians, and even Muslims for hundreds and hundreds of years. This simple profession of faith is what defines all of us, as being different from every other religion that has existed and, in some cases, still does exist.

We Believe In One God

We take this concept for granted now, but at the time of the Old Testament, this was a very strange idea. The normal concept was to have many gods, one for each purpose in your life. Some of the concepts common to the people at that time were: gods of things, gods of places, gods who were created.

God Of Thunder

Baal was the god of thunder or the weather. Because of that he was also the god of crops. People would pray to Baal to ensure a good harvest of their crops. If you know that Baal is the god of thunder and lightning, then the story in 1 Kings 18 has a new meaning:

1 Kings 18:26: And they took the bullock which was given them, and they dressed it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon, saying, O Baal, hear us. But there was no voice, nor any that answered. And they leaped upon the altar which was made.

As a side note, be aware that the words “O Baal, hear us” in their language was “Jeze Ba’al” or “Jezebel.” This was also the name of Ahab’s wife. It would be like someone having the name, “Hallelujah;” it is a proper noun in the story as well as a prayer word for the worship of Baal.

It is because Baal is the god of lightning that the Bible points out that it is the true God that answers with “fire.”

1 Kings 18:38: Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench.

So because Baal was the god of lightning, which is why the God of Elijah answers with lightning: to show that He is God. The prophets of Baal prayed for lightning all day. Because Baal was the god of lightning and thunder, this should have been an easy task for him. But because he was not really a god at all, nothing happens.

It is only when Elijah calls on the true God that there is an answer to his prayer. In a sense of ironic flair, God answer Elijah’s prayer in the way that the prophets of Baal expected Baal to answer: by bringing down lightning from the sky.

To a people looking for a god of lightning and thunder, God sent lightning and thunder.

1 Kings 19:39: And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, The LORD, he is the God; the LORD, he is the God.

The Bible further makes a joke out of the worshipers of Baal via play on words. While they have spent all day shouting “O Baal, hear us: Jezebel,” they end the day shouting “The LORD He is God: Elijah.”

God Of Fish

The kingdoms of Philistine and Nineveh worshiped a half-man, half-fish called Dagon. If you are familiar with the image we have of a mermaid or merman, this image is a remnant of the old images of the god, Dagon.

It is this image that God sends Jonah out of the mouth of a fish to a people who believed in a god that was half man, half fish:

Jonah 2:10: And the LORD spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.

Jonah 3:6: For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.

Word came to the king of Nineveh because they thought that Jonah was Dagon himself. To a people looking for a man-fish, God sent Jonah from the mouth of a fish.

God Of A Place

Sometimes gods were thought to be associated with a particular place. For example:

Genesis 31: 19: And Laban went to shear his sheep: and Rachel had stolen the images that were her father's.

Genesis 31:34: Now Rachel had taken the images, and put them in the camel's furniture, and sat upon them. And Laban searched all the tent, but found them not.

Why was Laban so upset that the household idols were missing? Because the idols represented the ownership of the land, much like a deed does today.

The idols were a representation of the gods that inhabited the land. If you possessed the idols, then you controlled the gods; if you controlled the gods then you controlled the land.

God Who Just Is

It is into this context that we find Moses speaking to God at the burning bush. In a world that is filled with things and the gods of things, Moses asks God, “What are you the God of?”

Exodus 3:13: And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them?

Exodus 3:14: And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.

This is probably the most significant scripture in the entire Bible because so much of what comes after it is influenced by the words that God spoke to Moses here.

God speaks to Moses and tells him that God is not the god of things. Whatever you think you know about God is too small.

- You know about things? He is the God who created things, but He is not a God of things.
- You know about places? He is the God who created places, but He is not a God of places.

- You know about creation? He is the God who created all things, but He is not part of Creation.

He is. He exists separate from anything you can see. Moses asks, “What are you?” God replies, “Yahweh: I AM.” There is no explanation beyond that.

God Of Relationships

Except for one thing: God also defines Himself this way:

Exodus 3:6: Moreover he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.

That is, while God cannot be defined as a “thing” unto Himself, He can be defined by the relationships He has with people.

So while the other gods of the Bible are defined by the things and only have a relationship with people as a result of those things, the true God is defined by His relationship with people first and with things second.

Is He God of your house? Yes, but only because it is your house. Is He God of your car? Yes, but only because it is your car. He has a relationship with you first and has a relationship with the things you have a relationship with second.

Matthew 22:32: I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living..

At the time that Jesus spoke these words all three of those men were dead. What He meant was that He is not the God of things, but of people.

God is defined by His relationship with people. In Bible terminology, we would say that He is defined by His covenant with us.

God Of Covenant

- In Genesis chapter 9, God sets up a covenant with Noah.
- In chapter 15, God establishes a covenant with Abraham and seals that covenant by passing between the halves of cow, a goat, a ram, and a pigeon.
- In chapter 17 it is circumcision that serves as the sign of the covenant.
- In the book of Ruth chapter 4 it is a shoe that serves as the symbol of a covenant.

No matter the symbolism, it is the relationship that defines us because a God who is too great to be defined has made us equals with Him.

A covenant is an agreement between two equals; two people who are equal stand side by side and make an agreement between them.

In a world where gods stand apart from mankind and dictate their needs, we have a God who stands beside us and makes us His partners. We are mortal; He is immortal and all-powerful. We are defined by what you can see of us; He is so far removed from everything that you can see that He cannot even be defined:

Yahweh: He just is.

And yet the God who cannot be defined stands beside us in covenant and makes us His equal partners. He gives us the ability to call on all of His unlimited power for what we need.

Like a husband and wife that have the ability to speak on each other's behalf, so God gives us the ability to be His partner. We are his bride. We are his Power of Attorney.

Like a bride, we must have only one husband.

Deuteronomy 6:4: Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD:

Deuteronomy 6:4: Sh'ma Israel, Adonai Eloheinu. Adonai Echad

God Of The Name

Because there is such power in that name, we must be careful with how we invoke it. We cannot simply invoke the name of God for mundane things. In the language of the Bible, we must not invoke the Name of the Lord "in vain."

Deuteronomy 5:7: Thou shalt have none other gods before me.	Our covenant between God and us is sacred. We must keep our relationship with Him first.
Deuteronomy 5:8: Thou shalt not make thee any graven image	He is not the God of things. Therefore we should not try to limit God by making Him appear to be anything
Deuteronomy 5:11: Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain	Our relationship with Him gives us unparalleled power to invoke His power by invoking His Name.

God has done the unthinkable by making us equal partners with Him via covenant. He has given us unthinkable power, but we must cherish that relationship by keeping it sacred and only using that power as He would use it.

To invoke the name of God is to make you one with Him. His reputation is invoked when you use His name.

Jeremiah 10:6: Forasmuch as there is none like unto thee, O LORD; thou art great, and thy name is great in might.

Ezekiel 20:14: But I wrought for my name's sake, that it should not be polluted before the heathen, in whose sight I brought them out.

Ezekiel 36:22: Therefore say unto the house of Israel, thus saith the Lord GOD; I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for mine holy name's sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen, whither ye went.

It was in this desire to keep the name of God from “vain” or accidental usage that people began to create euphemisms for the name of God. Whenever people would read Exodus 3:14, for example, they would not use the name “Yahweh” as it is written in the book.

Instead they would substitute the word “Adonai” which means “Lord.” In fact in the King James Version you will often find the word written in all caps “LORD” whenever the word Yahweh would appear in the original text.

Later, the word Adonai was even deemed too sacred and so was replaced with either “Ha Shem” (The Name) or “AdoShem” (half Adonai, half Ha Shem).

The effect was the same, however: the phrase that we would translate as “the name” became a substitute for the name of God Himself. The name of God could never be spoken but was instead substituted with the phrase “The Name.”

This concept of using the phrase “The Name” as a substitute for Yahweh is important because this phrase appears liberally throughout the Old and New Testaments. The name that God gave to Moses in the burning bush is Yahweh or simply “The Name.”

“I AM” (Yahweh) is “The Name” (Ha Shem), and “The Name” (Ha Shem) is “I AM” (Yahweh).

Jesus Is The Name

It is with this background that we can view the following exchange:

John 18:3: Judas then, having received a band of men and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, cometh thither with lanterns and torches and weapons.

John 18:4: Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon him, went forth, and said unto them, Whom seek ye?

John 18:5: They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith unto them, I am he.

The men come looking for Jesus. In the King James Version there is a cryptic "I am He." In reality Jesus answers, "I AM" (Yahweh.)

He does not use the phrase "The Name", but instead invokes the full identity with the God of Moses by stating "I AM." This is why they react as:

John 18:6: As soon then as he had said unto them, I am he, they went backward, and fell to the ground.

They fell to the ground because they could not believe what they were hearing.

Likewise there is a scene in Luke:

Luke 22:70: Then said they all, Art thou then the Son of God? And he said unto them, Ye say that I am.

Luke 22:71: And they said, What need we any further witness? for we ourselves have heard of his own mouth.

Jesus once again uses the phrase; "I AM" (Yahweh) in reference to Himself.

So to us, this equation changes from "Yahweh" is "The Name" to one where "Jesus" is "The Name."

"I AM" (Yahweh) is "The Name" (Ha Shem), and "The Name" (Ha Shem) is "Jesus"

The Name Is Jesus

To a Jewish audience, however, the use of the phrase "The Name" as a substitute of the name of God was so common that it was also adopted when referring to Jesus as well.

To invoke the name of someone is to invoke the covenant: the relationship you have with that person. But to use the phrase "The Name" is also to refer to Jesus as well.

James 2:7: Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?

James 5:14: Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord:

1 Peter 4:14: If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified

1 John 2:12: I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake

Matthew 28:19: Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

So the roundabout way of referring to God (Yahweh) is adopted when referring to Jesus, but that does not infer that Jesus is somehow inferior or different than the God of the Old Testament. Jesus is the God of the Old Testament.