

'I am Yahweh who sanctifies' or, Our God cares enough to confront ... and consume

... thus let us offer to God acceptable worship with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.

– HEBREWS 10:28,29

Analysis

- A. (22:17-33) **"I AM YHWH". God's signature is just as plain on the ritual, on the moral law, and on the salvation promises. Standards for offerings, just as much as sexual & moral standards, reflect God's holiness.**

Nothing but the best is good enough for a God whose gives all – *He poured out His soul to the very death* (Isaiah 53:12). The Holy Name of God is all over the book – in the ritual (chaps 1-10), in the middle section on ritual cleanliness and the Day of Atonement (chaps 11-17), in the Holiness Code (chaps 18-22). And in the final section, on the Holy Festivals and sanctions (chaps 23-27). But though the Divine Name is very prominent in Leviticus, its usage is determined by a consistent pattern. See C below.

- B. **'I am Yahweh who sanctifies' ... why do we so often let salvation equate with forgiveness, as if the ticket makes the journey unnecessary?!**

It is as if we heard *I am God who forgives*, not *I am Yahweh who sanctifies*. God creates, Yahweh communicates. God judges, Yahweh saves. His covenant Name is the seal of the totality of salvation – not merely deliverance or forgiveness, which is the beginning of the journey. Not the end (as in goal) of salvation, but the entrance unto salvation. Justification (forgiveness) deals with our legal status before God, but sanctification deals with our transformation to a new man, *into the image of the One who created and called us* (Col 3:10). The process of salvation, of course,



J. BARTON PAYNE
YHWH – God nearby. So it is that God commands, but Yahweh closes the ark. God enlarges Japheth, but Yahweh is the God of Shem.

culminates in glorification, our final putting aside of the mortal nature and *putting on immortality* (1 Cor 15).

C. A closer look at the NAME in Leviticus

The covenant Name YAHWEH occurs 311 times in the Hebrew text of Leviticus. That is an average of more than 10 references to the Name per chapter of text. Yet the occurrences of the Name are not random, though they are consistent. That is, consistent with other notable phenomena associated with the use of this Most Holy Name within the Old Testament as a totality.

For example, the Name occurs frequently in Leviticus chapters 1-10, where the subject is legitimate sacrifice and worship. In those chapters the Name is most frequently annexed to God's revelation – *YHWH said ... YHWH commanded*. And to the formulations regarding offerings ... *before YHWH ... unto YHWH ... of YHWH*. Even where God is **personal**, however, (ie He is speaking to a person), the Hebrew text is still in the **third** person (eg *Yahweh spoke to Moses ...*).

In contrast to chapters 1-10, the Name becomes much less prominent in chapters 11-15. This will surprise no one who looks closely at the subject matter of those chapters – unclean animals, leprosy, sexual discharges, contamination and the resultant exclusion from divine favour and even human community. The Name *YHWH* only occurs in these central chapters when reference is to sacrifice and restoration – never in the catalog of contaminants, only in the rituals of reconciliation. This pattern of usage is in conformity with the pattern in the Old Testament as a whole, marking sections of books (eg the 5 collections of Psalms, Daniel), sometimes even entire books (eg Ecclesiastes and Job).

As former Jehovah's Witnesses, nothing was for Vivian and me more striking than our study of the phenomena of the Name's use in the Old Testament. Such a study, of course, is never needed, nor encouraged in the context of life within the Watchtower. JW's use the Bible as a collection of proof texts, and their careless use of the Name *Jehovah* reflects their generally superficial handling of Scripture. A JW, for example, will never notice that, although the Divine Name *Jehovah* (YHWH in Hebrew) occurs over 6700 times in the Old Testament, its use is not random, and never accidental. The Name occurs in specific contexts, and for this reason there are significant portions – even entire books – of the Old Testament where the Name *Jehovah* or *Yahweh* **never occurs**. Such contexts include the court life of Joseph in Egypt, Daniel in Babylon, and the entirety of the book of Esther. A close study of the post-exile books Ezra and Nehemiah also reveals fascinating patterns of use (and disuse) of the Divine Name.

Definite and distinct patterns to the use of the Name YHWH throughout the Old Testament

Summarizing the books of the Pentateuch, the Princeton theologian W.H. Green offered this definition of the distinctive uses of *elohim* (God) and *Jehovah* (in most Bibles, LORD):

When God is spoken of in those general aspects of his being in which he related alike to the whole world and to all mankind, e.g., in creation and providence, Elohim is the proper word; but when he is spoken of in his special relation to the chosen race as the God of revelation and of redemption, and the object of their worship, Jehovah is the appropriate term. -- W.H. Green, *The Unity of the Book of Genesis* p. 542

D. **YAHWEH – God personally present – in the Tabernacle**

No religious group gets more mileage out of the technical meaning of the Greek term *parousia* (coming, or presence) than Jehovah's Witnesses. The Watchtower has constructed their entire last days scenario around the idea that Jesus is **invisibly present** since 1914 (their original date for Christ's "invisible presence" was 1874). Yet the average JW does not realize that his 2 pet doctrines – the Name *Jehovah*, and the "invisible presence" of Christ – are both bound up with the same delusion. The Old Testament use of YHWH, to put it bluntly, embodies the **very opposite** idea to the Watchtower's view – no "invisible presence" (God/elohim is invisibly present ALL the time, and everywhere), but God as *personally present* (theophany):

**Some precious
truths for your
Jehovah's Witnesses
neighbours**

Israel clearly understood by the name Yahweh *the being of God ...* in the sense of a personal presence. ... As a primary religious feeling the name Yahweh called up the idea of the living, *awe-inspiring presence of God*. -- Th.C. Vriezen, *An Outline of Old Testament Theology* p. 195

Elohim, as such, remains transcendent to the world of phenomena; Jehovah, on the contrary, enters into the phenomena of space and time, in order to manifest Himself to mankind; a difference which appears at once in the relation of Gen. i. 1 sqq. to ii. 4 sqq. ... *Theophany* in general is predicated of Jehovah, who, and not Elohim, holds intercourse with man in the manner of men. -- Gustav Friedrich Oehler, *op.cit.*, pp. 98-99

In summary, then, just as the Greek term *parousia*, as used in the NT, consistently means the **visible coming** of Christ to the earth, so the Hebrew Name *Yahweh* connotes the visible visitation or manifestation of God (Gen 12:1; 17:1 – texts which even the Watchtower *New World Translation*, renders, in both cases, *Jehovah appeared ...*).

E. **YAHWEH – God personally present – in the commitment of Covenant**

When we reach chapters 18-22 of Leviticus (the Holiness Code), a careful

reading reveals a significant change in the use of the Name. Suddenly we find the text is no longer in the third person (eg *Yahweh said to ...*), but in the **first person**. *I am Yahweh* is the constant refrain, with variants such as *I am Yahweh your God* or *I am Yahweh who sanctifies you*. It is as if with the switch from ritual righteousness to *moral law*, YHWH has moved from the Tabernacle (God hidden but accessible, through ritual requirements), to God close up – from the Tent of meeting to each family's tent, as it were.. And with that transition goes the potential for personal relationship, and the corollary of that potential – the requirement of personal, individual and family moral responsibility before God. *I am Yahweh your God*. God is transcendent – beyond – but YHWH is immanent – close up.

And with the idea of God immanent comes the ideal of God in **the commitment of covenant**.

The words express not that Israel had God among them, one who was unchangeable, self-existent in His nature, but rather what kind of God they had -- one constant, faithful, ever the same, in whom they could trust, to whom they could flee, who was their dwelling-place in all generations. -- A.B. Davidson, *Theology of the Old Testament* p. 57

In this NAME ABOVE ALL NAMES (again hidden, in *Jesus*) Israel -- and the world -- will know the fullness of God.

Scripture speaks of the tetragrammaton as "this glorious and fearful name" (Deut. 28:58) or simply "*the name*" (Lev. 24:11,16). It carries the connotation of God's nearness, of His concern for man, and of His redemptive, testamentary revelation. So Moses selected Elohim as the appropriate term for Genesis 1-2:3, God transcendent in creation; but Yahweh for Genesis 2:4-25, God immanent in Eden's revelations. Similar shifts in names, corresponding to God's shift in activity from general sovereignty to personal redemption, appear in the Genesis passages that follow. For example, Elohim gave commands, but Yahweh shut the door for Noah. In Genesis 9:26,27, Elohim enlarges Japheth, but Yahweh is the God of Shem. In Psalm 19 (vv. 1-6), the heavens declare the glory of Elohim; but (vv. 7-14) the law of Yahweh is perfect, and Yahweh is my Strength and my Redeemer. The implications of the name Yahweh gain ultimate fulfillment only in the final testament of peace, when the God who has been present from the first will be fully present at the last (Isa. 41:4; 48:12). "I will set My sanctuary in the midst of them forevermore" (Ezek. 37:26). -- J. Barton Payne, *Theology of the Older Testament* p. 148

Elohim and Yahweh
God transcendent in eternity,
Yahweh immanent in Eden.
One God, 2 paradoxical but
complementary truths