

His Hallowed Name Revealed Again

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וְאָמְרוּ לִי מָה שְׁמוֹ מָה אֶמַּר אֲלֵהֶם

And they will say to me, ‘What is His name?’ What should I say to them?

EXODUS 3:13

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ZAYIN

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE ULTIMATE QUESTION

Zeal for knowledge and understanding usually means that you must be willing to ask questions and diligently search for answers. When it came time for Moses to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt, he realized he needed the answer to one final question. Even today, in spite of the impediments of *tradition and translation*, both Jewish and Christian seekers of truth are asking this same question. Let’s look at the passage that leads up to this ultimate question in preparation for Israel’s deliverance from Egypt.

Now Moses was pasturing the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of Elohim. And the angel of יהוה appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed. So Moses said, “I must turn aside now and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up.”

EXODUS 3:1–2

Please stop and look at this *marvelous sight*. I am convinced that if you take the time to *turn aside and look*, you will see something that deserves your full attention. The first thing to notice is a bush burning in the desert; it might catch your attention, but would not necessarily be considered *marvelous*. Sometimes during a storm a lightning strike can cause a tree or bush to catch on fire. However, if the bush was in the arid desert and continued burning unabated, it certainly would catch the attention of an experienced shepherd like Moses.

This fire is not doing what it is supposed to do, which is to consume the fuel and burn itself out. Three elements must be present for a fire to occur: a spark (heat), fuel, and oxygen. If any of the three is lacking, there can be no fire. This is why firefighters use water to extinguish fires; it reduces the heat. Moses knew that this was no ordinary fire so he slowed down and turned aside to *see this marvelous sight*.

At this point I am stuck if I only have my English Bible and, like Moses, really want to see *why the bush is not burned up*. I might be able to guess that, even though there is a *blazing fire*, the presence of the angel of יהוה makes the properties of the fire function differently. However, my Bible does not say that, so I am still guessing what makes this fire *marvelous*. It does not say that Moses turned aside because he saw the angel of יהוה in the fire. My Bible clearly states that he saw a bush *burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed*. There are no further clues to help me figure out what is happening here. Let's go on a journey of discovery and take a look at the Hebrew text to see if we can learn anything more about this extraordinary fire.

First of all, I am suspicious of the English words *blazing fire*. Sure enough, the Hebrew word בלבת (*b'labat*, blazing) is very rare. There are only *two* places in the entire Tanach where the word is used in this form; the other time it is translated as *heart*, in the feminine singular construct form, which is the same form that

appears here.¹⁰⁶ The English word *heart* usually comes from the Hebrew לבב (*levav*), which is a masculine noun, rather than the feminine noun we see in this passage. The only difference between the two occurrences of בלבב (*b'labat*) is that the *heart* form has a suffix while the *blazing* form has a preposition. The key to the translation and interpretation of this unique word is the preposition that is used as the first letter, which is a ב (*bet*). This one letter gives us a huge clue.

There is a technical term that is used for this preposition that should make us slow down even further. The term is *Bet essentiae*, which conveys the idea of *manifesting as or like*.¹⁰⁷ The same grammatical phenomenon occurs in Exodus 6:3, where most English translations convey the following: “*I appeared as/like El Shaddai.*” This literally means that יהוה manifested like *El of my breasts* or *mighty breasts*. This is probably a little controversial for the average English Bible reader, but for the Hebrew reader it is a picture of strength and power combined with nurture and protection. No Hebrew reader would think this was a literal picture of El with breasts. Our verse in Exodus 3 could have been translated, “*The angel of יהוה appeared as or like a blazing fire in the midst of the bush.*” This translation helps us understand that what Moses saw was “*like a blazing fire,*” but not necessarily a literal, functioning common fire.

The next thing I want to know is what the original Hebrew word is for this *bush* that doesn’t burn. The English words *bush* or *bushes* are used 18 times in the Old Testament and are derived from seven different Hebrew words, so when we see one of these English words it could be based on any one of the seven Hebrew words. They are: שִׁיחַ, קוץ, סִיר, עֲרוֹעֵר, סֵנֶה, נֶעֱצוץ, חוֹחַ (*sheach, qots, sir, aroer, seneh, na'tsuts, and choach*). The Hebrew word סֵנֶה (*seneh*) is very rare. In fact, Moses is the only author in the entire

¹⁰⁶ See Ezekiel 16:30 where the form לבב is used with the second person singular suffix (your heart).

¹⁰⁷ Kautzsch E. and Cowley A. E. *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*. Oxford University Press, second edition, 1988, paragraph 119, page 379, section i.

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Tanach who uses it. Moses uses סֵנֶה (*seneh*) six times; five of the occurrences are right here in the *burning bush* passage. The sixth time he uses the word is very enlightening, but before I mention that verse I want to better understand the meaning of this word for bush.

The word סֵנֶה (*seneh*) here seems to convey the idea of something like a mulberry bush, possibly with fruit on it. If it had been a tumbleweed bush or a regular thorn bush the color might not stand out. The passage also contains the English word “*behold.*” The Hebrew word is הִנֵּה (*hineh*), which conveys the idea of something more than a glance. Imagine Moses raising his eyebrows, dropping his staff, and saying, “*Wow!*” Imagine a large fruit bush that appears to be burning but produces no smoke, combined with the spectrum of light from the fire and the color of the fruit as a background. Is it possible that Moses saw an amazingly colorful spectrum of light in the dry, dusty desert? Clearly something is different about the סֵנֶה (*seneh*) bush. What Moses saw caused him to הִנֵּה (*hineh*) *behold* this marvelous sight.

The sixth and final use of the word סֵנֶה (*seneh*) was when Moses pronounced a blessing over Joseph. This verse adds further illumination to the *bush* that doesn’t burn:

And with the choice things of the earth and its
fullness, and the favor of Him who dwelt [שָׁכַן,
shaken] in the bush [סֵנֶה, *seneh*] . . .

DEUTERONOMY 33:16

This *bush* is reserved for favor from the presence of the One who lives in heaven, but sometimes chooses to dwell (שָׁכַן, *shaken*) in a bush that looks like a flame of fire on earth. שָׁכַן (*shaken*) is the root of the word for the tabernacle (מִשְׁכָּן, *mishkan*), where the glory dwelt (Psalms 26:8).

When you combine something that looks like fire with a large fruit bush that displays His glorious presence, it requires a second look. You have to slow down, turn aside, see, and behold this *marvelous sight!* Maybe our process of discovery will also

attract the attention of Elohim so He will call to us from the סנה (*seneh*) bush.

When יהוה saw that he turned aside to look, Elohim called to him from the midst of the bush [*seneh*] and said, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.”

EXODUS 3:4

Are you still with me? When יהוה had Moses’ full attention, He did *two* things. First, he called his name twice, “*Moses, Moses!*” I have already explained my opinion about why things happen in *twos*. I am sure Moses would have only needed one holy call of his name from Elohim to realize who was calling. There must be some significance for there to be *two* calls. Until I hear otherwise, I am taking the position that the first call is for heaven and the second call is for earth as a *witness* that something crucial has happened or is about to happen.

The second thing יהוה did was to command Moses to *take off his sandals because the place he was standing was holy ground*.¹⁰⁸ Moses was close enough to the bush to be on holy ground, yet he apparently felt no physical discomfort. Was that because the bush was not literally on fire and, therefore, emitting no heat?

At this point I would like you to consider doing something as a sign of acknowledgement of where we are in this process of discovery. Would you be willing to do the same thing יהוה asked Moses to do and remove the barrier between you and this holy ground? Seriously, would you stop reading and take off your shoes, slippers, boots, or sandals out of respect for this holy moment?

We are about to interact with the holiest name in the universe. Maybe this is a good time to reflect and possibly adjust our attitudes and actions for the remainder of this study. Are you willing to be like Moses and slow down, turn aside, and remove your shoes, or are you like a lot of people who just ignore the signs and hurry along, maintaining the status quo? I hope you will not

¹⁰⁸ Exodus 3:5.

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miss this special opportunity to interact with the light of His word from this *fire*.

There is a theme that runs through Scripture regarding fire and light. These *two* phenomena seem to get the attention of people like nothing else on earth. Both fire and light have been used in religions around the world to simulate the presence of the Divine.

Fire has been used to shape the entire industrialized world. It is fire that extracts copper from rock, makes glass out of sand, and turns iron and coal into steel. Fire allows cars to move and airplanes to fly. Man uses wood, coal, gasoline, and other fuels to make fire. He has also tapped into the power of the atom. What is even more fascinating is that יהוה has manifested Himself in this same powerful picture of fire throughout the pages of Scripture. I encourage you to take some time to research the many ways that the presence of יהוה is connected to fire. You might be motivated to write your own study about this amazing phenomenon. One thing I hope you find in your study is that יהוה sometimes answers by fire!

Then you call on the name of your Elohim, and I will call on the name יהוה, and the Elohim who answers by fire, He is Elohim.

1 KINGS 18:24

And [David] called to יהוה and He answered him with fire from heaven on the altar of burnt offering.

1 CHRONICLES 21:26

The subject of light is even more amazing! In fact, I would argue that light is one of the most important manifestations of יהוה that ever was or ever will be. I would go so far as to say that even though light was created, it is also a part of the very essence of our Creator! In other words, light came from יהוה just like woman came from man. It is an inherent property that has been manifested and given to us to reveal one aspect of His essence.

I would like to briefly comment about the speed of light. Visible light travels at 186,000 miles per second—the equivalent of seven times around the earth! In the universe that יהוה created, we just can't measure distance in inches, feet, yards, or even miles. In order to grasp the magnitude of His universe, we must measure in light years. One light year is the distance light travels in a year, which is just less than 6 trillion miles.

A simple example of something that must be measured in light years rather than miles is the distance between earth and the closest star beyond the sun. Our sun is 93 million miles from earth. In order to reach Alpha Centauri, the next closest star, we would need to travel the distance between the earth and the sun 277,000 times. That is a distance of 4.3 light years or more than 25 trillion miles! As you read this book there is a space probe called *Voyager* that is traveling 35,000 miles per hour; it has enough fuel to continue for approximately 8,000 years. In order for that probe to cover the distance from earth to Alpha Centauri, 4.3 light years away, it would need to travel for approximately 80,000 years! Speed is just one of the properties of light. We could also discuss color and its other properties.

It is amazing how many places in Scripture there is a connection between יהוה and light. If you do a study on this subject, you will learn things like the rainbow of light in the sky is a sign of a promise and His word is like a light for guidance on earth. I better not get started. However, there are *two* verses that I must share here.

Come, house of Jacob, and let us walk by the light of יהוה.

ISAIAH 2:5

No longer will you have the sun for light by day, nor for brightness will the moon give you light; but you will have יהוה for an everlasting light, and your Elohim for your glory.

ISAIAH 60:19

Maybe now you can understand why I assert that light is part of the very essence of יהוה. Before we return to the main topic of this study, I would like to share just a little more information.

Let's go back to the imaginary meeting in heaven from Chapter Two. Do you remember what I said about the first words recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures, which are directly from the mouth of יהוה and written for all (who are willing to try their left hand) to see? If you open your Hebrew Bible to Genesis 1:3 you will see these words: יהי אור (*Yehee Or*), which are translated as "*Let there be light.*" It should not be a surprise that one of the names of our Heavenly Father is יהוה אורי (יהוה My Light).¹⁰⁹

It is remarkable and creative that the first word spoken, יהי (*Yehee*), is the same Hebrew root word for the name יהוה. Notice that the first *two* letters of יהי match exactly the first *two* letters of the name יהוה. This is not mere coincidence. The Hebrew word translated "*let there be*" and the name of our Heavenly Father יהוה come from the same Hebrew root word היה (*hayah*). This verb היה (*hayah*) is used 3,576 times in the Hebrew Bible! The reason it looks different in this verse is because it is in the jussive,¹¹⁰ which is why in English we say "*Let there be.*" The Hebrew jussive form in this particular verse means "Be!"¹¹¹

When יהוה gave the command to light, there was no delay, debate, discussion, or denial. The Almighty One was commanding the action. That is why the same word combination is used for the result of this command: ויהי אור (*Vayehee Or*) and light was! The One who spoke "*Be*" to light is the One who is speaking to you and me! This nugget is for all who are stuck back in Chapter Four ("Above Everything") and who are still wondering if there is a

¹⁰⁹ יהוה Oree, Psalms 27:1.

¹¹⁰ The jussive is used to express all the nuances of will from a superior to an inferior: command, exhortation, advice, invitation, permission. Jouon, Paul, and Muraoka T. *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*. Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, Rome, 2000. Page 376, section 114 h.

¹¹¹ The jussive can be a commandment just like the imperative. The jussive is יהי whereas the imperative is יהי for masculine (Exodus 18:19) and יהי for feminine (Genesis 24:60).

connection between His name and His word. Maybe this little Hebrew grammar lesson helped.

Now back to Moses and the marvelous sight of light! As you may know, the story in this passage sets the context for the exodus of the people from Egypt. Even though יהוה appeared to Moses, he still had to ask the question that we are asking now:

Then Moses said to Elohim, “Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I shall say to them, ‘The Elohim of your fathers has sent me to you.’ Now they may say to me, ‘What is His name?’ What shall I say to them?” Elohim said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM;” and he said, “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” Elohim, furthermore, said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘יהוה’, the Elohim of your fathers, the Elohim of Abraham, the Elohim of Isaac, and the Elohim of Jacob, has sent me to you.’ This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations.”

EXODUS 3:13–15

I have three issues (not two) from this important passage to address about the revelation of the name יהוה. First we have to understand why Moses would ask the question about the name, and then address why יהוה would reveal His name. Finally, we need to learn what the expectations and applications for the use of His name were back then and what they are now.

The Question

Moses spent many years in Egypt. He knew that the gods of Egypt all had names and areas of “authority.” There were gods of the water, the animals, the crops, the sun, the moon, and many other things. If you study the plagues that were inflicted upon Egypt you will find that יהוה was showing the Egyptians and the

Israelites that He is the One who is **אלהי האלהים ואדני האדנים** (Elohim of the gods and Adonim of the lords).¹¹² He is the one and only Elohim and the false gods of Egypt had no power. Moses knew that the Israelite people had been surrounded by the worship of false deities and that they would expect a name for the One who would deliver them from the hand of Pharaoh. Moses needed to know what to tell these curious people about the One who would be for them **אלהי ישראל מושיע** (Elohim of Israel a Savior!).¹¹³ He had to ask for a name! Moses also knew that if **יהוה** gave His name, there would be a message behind the name that could be communicated to the people.

Moses asked **יהוה** a question that was also asked by at least two other men. In Chapter Three I explained that both Jacob and Manoah tried to get an answer to the same type of question about the name, but did not receive the response they wanted. Moses asked the question in a much more ingenious way when he said, *“Now they may say to me, ‘What is His name?’ What shall I say to them?”* I consider this to be the most intriguing question asked of **יהוה** in the pages of the entire Bible.

Before I present my research on the answer, I want to give a simple but profound thought about why the Omnipotent, Omniscient, and Omnipresent Supreme Ruler, Sustainer, Merciful, Loving, Most High, Eternal Creator of the Universe was willing to answer the question of a mere man like Moses with the revelation of His name. He answered because the time had come to reveal the power and purpose of the name **יהוה** and the people were finally prepared to know Him!

There were a number of things that had to happen in order for this date with destiny to take place. **יהוה**, the great maestro of the orchestra of human affairs conducted a musical masterpiece for all time. He directed many notes, instruments, and musicians. He used people like Noah, Shem, and Abraham; places like Eden, Mount Ararat, and Egypt; and events like the Creation, the Flood,

¹¹² Elohe Haelohim Ve Adonai Haadonim, Deuteronomy 10:17.

¹¹³ Elohe Yisrael Moshia, Isaiah 45:15.

and famines. In the final analysis, Moses was the right man who asked the right question at the right time. As the saying goes, timing is everything!

The Answer

I consider the answer to this intriguing question the most important and revelatory in all of history! I know that is a huge claim, but I am confident the revelation of this awesome name can back it up. This important and revelatory answer informs us about all of history. You might ask, “*Keith, how can you say all of history?*” I can say it because what is being revealed is all about “His story.” When אֱלֹהִים בְּשָׁמַיִם (Elohim in the Heavens)¹¹⁴ chose to reveal to Moses that he is אֵל צַדִּיק וּמוֹשִׁיעַ (Righteous El and Savior)¹¹⁵ through the name יְהוָה, then we have a miracle message in the making. These descriptive Hebrew words, connected with the name יְהוָה, paint a powerful picture of who He is.

Bear with me as I write the answer to Moses’ question and our own—from the mouth of יְהוָה himself—as it appears in the oldest complete vocalized Hebrew manuscript in the world.¹¹⁶ Of course, I will explain this answer in English, but there is nothing like seeing the name and pronouncing it the way it was spoken by יְהוָה and recorded by Moses. To refresh your memory, read Exodus 3:13-15 again. After Moses asked the question, אֵל הָעֲנָה (El Who Answers)¹¹⁷ gave his response:

“What shall I say to them?” And יְהוָה said to Moses:
אֵלֶיךָ אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה [’eheyeh ’asher ’eheyeh].

These three Hebrew words are the source of the age-old debate on the meaning of the name יְהוָה. For hundreds of years

¹¹⁴ Elohim Bashamayim, Joshua 2:11.

¹¹⁵ El Tsadiq Umoshia, Isaiah 45:21.

¹¹⁶ The Leningrad Codex B19A.

¹¹⁷ El ha’oneh, Genesis 35:3.

people have tried to analyze what is very clear in the Hebrew text. In English it basically means “*I AM WHO I AM.*” There have been many theories and wild guesses on the “hidden meaning” of אֶהְיֶה (*’ehyeh*), which is the first common singular form of the verb הָיָה (*hayah*). Do you remember that this verb is the root of His name? In a simple, yet profound way, יְהוָה is saying, “*I AM like the verb TO BE.*” This verb is used in the past, present, and future tenses. Nothing else in the heavens or on the earth can convey this meaning the way יְהוָה does, because He can back it up!

There are other biblical accounts that witness to the meaning of אֶהְיֶה (*’ehyeh*). When Moses tried to make the excuse “*I am not a man of words,*” what did יְהוָה say? “*I AM with your mouth*” (אֶהְיֶה, *’ehyeh*). When Moses tried again by saying, “*Please send someone else,*” יְהוָה said, “*I AM with your mouth and with his [Aaron’s] mouth*” (אֶהְיֶה, *’ehyeh*). When Joshua was about to bring the people of Israel into the Promised Land (Joshua 1:5), what did יְהוָה say? “*I AM with you*” (אֶהְיֶה, *’ehyeh*). The emphasis is always on the “I.” יְהוָה is the “*I AM.*” This is not merely a name of acclaim but it is also a name packed with action.

Since this chapter deals with the ultimate question, let’s take this a step further. Imagine with me that an ancient Israelite journalist living in Egypt has been assigned to interview Moses, the *deliverer of the Israelite people*. I am sure he would want to ask Aaron about scheduling an exclusive interview with Moses since he had announced to the elders of Israel that יְהוָה “*was concerned about them and had seen their misery.*”¹¹⁸ After their worship service, photographs, autographs, and congratulatory pats on the back by the excited Israelites, the journalist would probably usher Moses and Aaron into the media room for the interview. There would be an agreement that there was only time for six questions because they were on their way to an appointment with Pharaoh.

The journalist’s six questions would all focus on one subject. He would not be interested in the many rumors that had circulated about Moses and his family background. He would not address the

¹¹⁸ Exodus 4:31.

Egyptian tabloid stories about Moses' new wife and their relationship. He would not even ask about the allegations of the murder of the Egyptian overseer or the outstanding warrant for Moses' arrest. Instead, all six questions would be about the One called יהוה. Of course, the journalist would dig deep into his training and choose the six most famous interrogatory questions of all time: who, what, when, where, why, and how.

Journalist: Who is יהוה?

Moses: He is the Elohim of our fathers, the Elohim of Abraham, the Elohim of Isaac, and the Elohim of Jacob.¹¹⁹

Journalist: What does יהוה want to do for us?

Moses: He has seen the oppression and heard the cry of His people and He has come down to rescue us from the hand of the Egyptians.¹²⁰

Journalist: When does יהוה plan to carry out this rescue?

Moses: He is doing it now!¹²¹

Journalist: Where is יהוה planning to take us?

Moses: יהוה is taking us out of Egypt and into a land flowing with milk and honey; the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites.¹²²

¹¹⁹ Exodus 3:6.

¹²⁰ Exodus 3:8.

¹²¹ Exodus 3:10.

¹²² Exodus 3:8.

Journalist: Why is יהוה doing this for us?

Moses: Because יהוה made a promise to our ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and because He hears, sees, and acts.¹²³

Journalist: How will יהוה do this miraculous thing?

Moses: Through His name!¹²⁴

I can imagine that he would want to ask a seventh question to get more thoughts on the “*through His name*” statement, but Aaron would end the interview and insist that the time was up. I imagine that Moses would stand up and say something like this:

I have an appointment with Pharaoh so I have no more time for questions. But let me leave you with something to ponder. When I asked יהוה what was the name I should tell the people and He answered me, there was a promise of action through His name. He revealed Himself through His name as the One who is willing “TO BE!” Think of His name this way: He was, He is, and He will be! He is not limited by time or circumstance. He can never be too late or too early. He cannot be contained, controlled, shut out, locked up, or ignored. Past failures, present threats, and future challenges cannot stop the promise of His name in action. As you see the miracles that are about to take place in your midst here in Egypt, just bow your head and say:

¹²³ Exodus 3:9, 17.

¹²⁴ Exodus 3:14.

הַיָּה וְהָיָה הָיָה וְיִהְיֶה *haiyah hoveh*¹²⁵ *veyihyeh*
He was, He is and He shall be.
He is יהוה.

After an interview like that I would bow my head, thank יהוה and start packing for my trip out of bondage!

I hope you still have your shoes off so there can be no barrier between you and the holy ground we are on right now. I trust that you understand, to the best of your ability, the meaning of יהוה as the great “I AM.” Now let’s continue our study of this pivotal and powerful verse in Exodus 3:15.

The Application

The third portion of the passage I want to focus on is the last statement in Exodus 3:15, which is sometimes translated as, “*This is My memorial-name to all generations.*” Our young Jewish boy would read about this important phrase in his new Stone Edition Chumash. I am impressed by the lengths to which Jewish commentators will go to maintain the ban on the name. I hope they are equally as impressed by the lengths to which this book will go to expose and undo this unbiblical ban. Here is the commentary:

This is My Name forever. Since the word לעולם [*le’olam*] is spelled without the customary ם it can be pronounced לעלם to conceal. This implies that the Divine Name should not be pronounced as it is spelled. God continued, “*this is My remembrance*” meaning that He taught Moses to pronounce the Name as *Adonoy*.

Rashi from Midrash Pesachim 50a¹²⁶

¹²⁵ This rare form appears only in Ecclesiastes 2:22 and Nehemiah 6:6. A variant form *hoyah* is found in Exodus 9:3.

¹²⁶ The Stone Edition Chumash, edited by Rabbi Nosson Scherman/Rabbi Meir Zlotowitz. Brooklyn, New York: Mesorah Publications, 2001, page 305, paragraph 15.

Before you get frustrated, understand that Rashi is saying that the Hebrew word לעולם (*le'olam*), which means *forever*, actually means *concealed*. I cannot pass up the opportunity to interact with the great Jewish commentator Rashi on this verse. Rashi is an acronym for Rabbi Shlomo ben Yitzchak. I must admit this is a daunting task; Rashi is considered to be one of the best Tanach commentators of the Middle Ages. I can understand why English translators conceded to the Jewish commentators, especially with linguistic challenges like this one. It is much easier to just follow the traditional opinion of the majority than to dig for the truth. I am going to take you through my process of discovery on this issue not knowing the outcome. In other words, as I am writing this section I do not know what I will find regarding Rashi's line of reasoning. Here we go!

I will begin by checking my Hebrew Bible to confirm two things. I want to know if the word לעולם (*le'olam*, forever) in this verse is written without the customary ם (the word is usually spelled לעולם). Do you see the difference? This word is very common and appears with its “full-spelling” more than 400 times in the Tanach. I want to check the *Masorah* of the Masoretic text, which are the notes in the margins of my Hebrew Tanach. The Scribes were very strict about noting variations in spelling. These notes provide another layer of discovery. As I examine Exodus 3:15 I find the following note regarding this word that Rashi is commenting about. I see לעולם with several Hebrew letters in the margin that give me some guidance; they are יה חס י מנה בתור. These Hebrew letters are full of information that explains one aspect of Rashi's argument. (If you are interested in learning how to decipher these scribal annotations, in Appendix C I have listed a book that explains them. It is *The Masorah of Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, by Paige H. Kelly and Daniel S. Mynatt.)

These letters tell me that this word is written in “*defective spelling*” 18 times. This means that the word is occasionally spelled differently, but carries the same meaning. The note goes on to explain that 10 of the 18 are in the Torah (five books of Moses). Now I want to find these 10 places where our word of interest

occurs in the Torah. It only makes sense to find out if Moses uses this “revelatory” spelling in other verses and what it means. Sure enough, I have found all 10 occurrences of this *defective spelling* of לעלם in the Torah.¹²⁷ Now let’s look at these passages to see if there is any “*special revelation*” or “*concealing*” taking place. I encourage you to check each verse for yourself to see if “*to conceal*” could or should take the place of “*forever*.” Here are two from the Torah for you to consider:

[The Sabbath] is a sign between Me and the sons of Israel forever [לעלם, *le’olam*]. . . .

EXODUS 31:17

If I follow Rashi’s interpretation of this word in this form, it means that I should read it as *conceal* instead of *forever*. It would be a tragedy if the Sabbath was to be *concealed* rather than to be a visible sign *forever*. Here is a second verse for us to consider:

Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants to whom You swore by Yourself, and said to them, ‘I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heavens, and all this land of which I have spoken I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever’ [לעלם, *le’olam*].

EXODUS 32:13

I know that a lot of people would love to use Rashi’s interpretation as an argument that the promise to inherit the land is to be *concealed* rather than last *forever*.

The second thing I will do is check to see if I can find the word in this form, in the exact way it is written in our verse, with the meaning *to conceal*. The word for *conceal* is עלם (*‘alam*) and it is used 28 times in various forms throughout the Tanach; nine of

¹²⁷ See Genesis 3:22, 6:3, Exodus 3:15, 15:18, 21:6, 31:17, 32:13, Leviticus 25:46, Deuteronomy 5:29, 32:40.

those times are in the Torah. Of the 28 times it is used, not once is it preceded by a ל (thereby making it לעלם). So we see that there is not one time that the word spelled לעלם means *to conceal*.¹²⁸

The third thing I want to know is if there is a *Qere-Ketiv* note in the Masorah regarding this word. These are places where the scribes wrote one word, but instructed the reader in the notes to pronounce the word differently than it is written. This phenomenon exists throughout the Tanach. There is a circle written over the word and a special note ק or קר that lets the reader know to read a word one way but to pronounce it a different way. There is no *Qere-Ketiv* note for our special word.

An important comment needs to be made here. There is no such *Qere-Ketiv* note on any of the 6,828 occurrences of the name יהוה in the Masoretic text. In other words, there is no circle written over the name and instruction within the manuscript that says, “Read it this way but pronounce it differently or as Adonai/Adonoy.” Some scholars argue that the name is an example of *Qere Perpetuum*, which means they believe that this word is always to be written one way and read differently. Sometimes with a *Qere Perpetuum* there is a scribal note for the word and sometimes there is no note. However, there is not one time in the entire Tanach where there is a note above the name יהוה that indicates a *Qere-Ketiv* or a *Qere Perpetuum*.

Finally, I will look for any evidence of a witness that says Moses was told by יהוה to say “Adonoy” instead of יהוה. It is clear that there is no such command here or anywhere else in Scripture.

I am aware that many people argue that Moses was given the prohibition against pronouncing the name via the Oral Law, not through the written text. I choose not to give credence to the Oral Law because there is no way to argue with the rabbis about something that is not in the biblical text. I would like to strongly encourage you to do your own research on the tradition of the Oral

¹²⁸ One word for *conceal* is העלים (*he'lim*), as in 2 Kings 4:27; with a lamed it would be *le-ha'alim*. The rabbis were interpreting לעלם (*le'olam*) as a shortened form of the hifil in which the hey is dropped, making it *le'alim*. Thanks, Nehemia!

Law and how it has affected biblical interpretation. I believe the written text was meant to be read and spoken aloud to the ancient Israelites every seven years.¹²⁹ There was no commentator to interrupt the reader and explain to the people, “What יהוה *really* meant was . . .” The Torah is perfect and complete, without commentary, in its plain meaning.

Look at the following *two* verses and decide if there is any justification for using the Oral Law.

You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of יהוה your Elohim which I command you.

DEUTERONOMY 4:2

Whatever I command you, you shall be careful to do; you shall not add to nor take away from it.

DEUTERONOMY 12:32

Now I would like to share some important *biblical* information about this verse that will help you understand the significance of speaking/mentioning the name יהוה. The issue we have to deal with is the phrase at the end of Exodus 3:15, which says: “*This is My name forever, and this is my memorial-name to all generations.*”

The question is how can a name be categorized as a *memorial*? We need to delve into a bit of linguistic, grammatical, and technical information in order to understand this pivotal verse.¹³⁰ The word translated as “*My memorial-name*” is זכרי (zikri), but normally we would expect to find the word זיכרון (zikron). For example, this word is first used in Exodus 12:14 in reference to the celebration of Passover: “*Now this day will be a memorial [זיכרון, zikron] to you.*” Of the 24 times it is used in Scripture, seven are in

¹²⁹ Deuteronomy 31:9-13.

¹³⁰ Nehemia Gordon, “The Pronunciation of the Name,” www.Karaite-Korner.org.

Exodus. However, the word used in Exodus 3:15 is not זִכְרוֹן (*zikron*), but זָכַרִי (*zikri*).

This special word is the key that unlocks the meaning of this unique verse. This is the only time in the entire Hebrew Bible that זָכַרִי (*zikri*) is used in this *exact* form as a noun in the masculine singular construct with a first singular suffix. It appears in different forms the other 23 times. Before we look at the noun form of this word, we can glean some important information by first looking at the word as a verb.

The root is זָכַר (*zekher*), which means “to remember” and encompasses *two* meanings in one word. It can mean to remember with your *mind* or with your *mouth*. Here is an example where it is used for both *mind* and *mouth* in the same verse:

Only keep me in mind [זָכַר, *zekher*] when it goes well with you, and please do me a kindness by mentioning [זָכַר, *zekher*] me to Pharaoh and get me out of this house.

GENESIS 40:14

When זָכַר (*zekher*) is used in the *hiphil* (or causative) conjugation, the translators almost always render it as “*mention*.” A very clear example is found in Exodus 23:13: “...*and do not mention the name of other gods, nor let them be heard from your mouth*.” As you can see, the translators use “*mention*” for the *hiphil* of זָכַר (*zekher*). However, they have chosen to use *remembered* for the same word and conjugation in a very interesting verse that is connected to Exodus 3:15. I am certain that many people who read this book will ask, “*Is all of this technical stuff really necessary?*” My response is that it depends on how confident you want to be in His holy word. You see, I think that some people want the fruit without the labor. Because of what you have studied so far, let me share with you what I call a bona fide blessing from heaven based on the word זָכַר (*zekher*).

If I ask the average religious person if blessings are important, he will answer with a resounding “*Yes! The blessings*”

from our Heavenly Father are important.” Everybody seems to be looking for blessings, so there is preaching, promising, praying, begging, and even manipulating for blessings. The same people who ask, “*Does this name and all of this study really matter?*” will surely say that blessings matter. In His wisdom, יהוה stated a guaranteed way for blessings to come. Put on your translator’s hat and read the following verse knowing that the word *mentioned* is from the first person singular *hiphil* form of זכר (zekher):

In every place where I cause My name to be mentioned [אזכיר, *azkir*], I will come to you and bless you.

EXODUS 20:24

In this verse most English translators disregard the grammatical information in order to conceal the mention of the name! They usually translate it this way: “... *in every place where I cause my name to be remembered, there I will come and bless you.*” Open your English Bible and see how this verse is translated. The same word and verb conjugation are translated differently when it comes to the mention of the name יהוה. There are 41 other examples of the use of this same word and conjugation.¹³¹ You might enjoy seeing some examples of what the translators do in these cases.

Actually there are many verses that can shed further light on the biblical meaning of this word in this context.¹³² Notice the following verse in Hosea, in light of what you have just learned, and make your own “*translator’s decision*,” based on the Hebrew text.

Even יהוה, the Elohim of Hosts, יהוה is His זכרו [*zikro*].

HOSEA 12:5

¹³¹ For example, Joshua 23:7, 1 Samuel 4:18, Isaiah 12:4, Isaiah 19:17, Isaiah 26:13.

¹³² See also Hosea 12:5 and Job 18:17. Both verses use the exact same word זכר (*zikro*).

HIS HALLOWED NAME REVEALED AGAIN

If there is an agenda of not wanting the people to “connect the dots” regarding mentioning the name, how would you translate this verse? Clearly, such an agenda must exist with the following three English translations:

Even the LORD, the God of hosts, the LORD is His name.

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

Yet the LORD, the God of Hosts, must be invoked as “LORD.”

Jewish Publication Society (JPS, verse 6)

Even the LORD God of hosts; the LORD is his memorial.

King James Version (KJV)

Can you see the bias in the translations of this verse? The NASB completely changes the word to make it look as though the verse uses the Hebrew word for *name* when in fact, as we have already shown, it is זָכָרוּ (*zikro*). The JPS really helps by reminding you to substitute the title LORD for the name. Where is there room for that interpretation in the Hebrew word זָכָרוּ (*zikro*)? The KJV is closest to the original, but still veils the word in the unclear term *memorial*. As you can see, checking several different English versions of a verse can help us understand the thinking and practice of translators. Here is my version, which will always be less elegant linguistically, but will be more accurate according to Hebrew grammar.

And יְהוָה, the Elohim of Hosts, יְהוָה is His mention.

HOSEA 12:6 in Hebrew (Keith Johnson Version)

Now let's go back to Exodus 3:15. You might be surprised to see how the English translators seem to pick and choose when they want to *remember* and *mention* the meaning of our word.

In Exodus 3:15 the words “*My memorial-name*” (זכרי, *zikri*) should have been translated as “*My mention*.” If I had been on the committee that translated the Hebrew Tanach into English, I would have literally stood on the table and insisted that this verse be translated as follows:

And יהוה furthermore said to Moses, Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, יהוה, the Elohim of your fathers, the Elohim of Abraham, the Elohim of Isaac, and the Elohim of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is My name forever and this is My mention [how my name is to be *spoken*] to all generations.

EXODUS 3:15 (Keith Johnson Version)

I believe people could and would then see that the ban against pronouncing or mentioning His name is in direct conflict with this eternal command. In other words, we are required to mention His name יהוה forever and, as we are told elsewhere, we are forbidden to mention the names of other gods! In order to receive the blessing associated with the name יהוה we have to obey an everlasting commandment—we must mention His name!

After all that hard work let’s have a little “fun” with this word זכרי (*zikri*). There are actually several men in the Bible who have this name. One in particular caught my attention. Second Chronicles 17:16 *mentions* a man named זכרי (*zikri*) and he had a son who “volunteered” for יהוה. Can you imagine זכרי (*zikri*) constantly *mentioning* the name יהוה and explaining its importance to his son from the time he was a young child? Most likely, when it came time for the son to volunteer for יהוה, he did not hesitate because he knew the One whom his father זכרי (*zikri*) had been *mentioning* for as long as he could remember.

... and next to him Amasiah the son of Zichri, who volunteered for יהוה, and with him 200,000 valiant warriors.

2 CHRONICLES 17:16

HIS HALLOWED NAME REVEALED AGAIN

This word זכרי (*zikri*) should be teaching us to *mention* יהוה with no shame. Hopefully we can find a whole army of people who will volunteer to do the same!

I hope the exegesis of this passage in which יהוה reveals His name to Moses has helped you understand why we must *remember* to *mention* His name! The unique personal name יהוה has been preserved in the Hebrew Scriptures. He has told us that this is His name forever. In fact, יהוה requires His name to be “*mentioned*,” not only by us, but by every generation to come. When He shared His name with Moses He had us in mind too. Don’t you think we should get busy remembering and mentioning Him?

Your שם [*shem*, name], O יהוה, is לעולם [*le’olam*, everlasting], your זכרך [*zikreka*, your mention], O יהוה, throughout all generations.

PSALMS 135:13 (Keith Johnson Version)

I chose the above verse for two reasons. First, because it uses both Hebrew words that we studied in Exodus 3:15, along with two others that you have already learned. Second, it is the verse that our graphic designer chose for the cover of this book. Did you notice how many times יהוה is included in Psalms 135? Great job René!

I also wanted to help you gauge how far you have come in reading a little Hebrew! In this verse, the words *your mention* (זכרך, *zikreka*) are a correct translation,¹³³ just like *my mention* (זכרי, *zikri*) but with a different suffix. I hope you are encouraged by your newly acquired left-handed language skills.

Back to the Blessing!

Now that we have labored to understand the significance of *mentioning* versus *remembering*, let’s enjoy the blessing that can

¹³³ See Psalms 6:5 in the NASB version, which also uses *mention* rather than *remembrance* based on the Hebrew word *zeker*.

come from the fruit of our lips when we mention the remarkable name יהוה. There is a verse in Second Samuel that calls for our attention regarding the blessing that comes with mentioning His name:

Now it was told King David, saying, “יהוה” has blessed the house of Obed-edom and all that belongs to him, on account of the ark of Elohim.”

2 SAMUEL 6:12

When we read the context surrounding this verse, we find that the ark of Elohim was temporarily “stored” at Obed-edom’s house while David decided what to do with this holy object. During the three months of this temporary storage a blessing fell upon Obed-edom and his entire household. If we do just a little more digging, we can find an explanation for this blessing:

And David arose and went with all the people who were with him to Baale-Judah, to bring up the ark of Elohim which is called by the Name, the very name יהוה of hosts who is enthroned above the cherubim.

2 SAMUEL 6:2

I imagine that as soon as the ark which was “called by the Name” arrived at the house of Obed-edom everything began to change. I am sure that family, friends, and neighbors wanted to get a glimpse of this amazing object. I can also imagine that when people asked what this glorious ark was called, Obed-Edom simply called it “by the Name.” There is no secret about why the blessing coincided with the arrival of the ark of Elohim. The ark was called by the name יהוה.

There is a biblical explanation for the blessing that was given to the house of Obed-edom. Can you guess what verse I will use to explain the blessing?

HIS HALLOWED NAME REVEALED AGAIN

In every place where I cause My name to be mentioned [אֶזְכִּיר *azkir*], I will come to you and bless you.

EXODUS 20:24 (Keith Johnson Version)

When the Name stopped at the house of Obed-edom, the blessing automatically arrived with it. Are you open to having that name stop at your house? If you are, then make room for the blessing that will accompany it.

I hope that by now you are a little more comfortable when you see this name יהוה written from right to left in the Hebrew manuscripts. Now you are ready to learn how to mention or pronounce this awesome, blessing-giving name. If you jumped ahead and missed building the necessary foundation, then you have short-changed yourself. But if you have waded through this process of interaction with the biblical text and with the important historical foundational information, you can look forward to receiving what I call a bona fide blessing from “The Name.”