

ZOOM STUDY: IMPORTANT BIBLICAL TERMS

LORD (יהוה)

Introduction

Like many terms in Scripture, the word “Lord” can have several meanings depending on its context. This matter is further complicated by the translation of different Greek and Hebrew words into the English equivalent of “Lord.”

1.) “the LORD” / “Yahweh” (Hebrew: יהוה) (Greek/LXX/NT: κύριος)

- When you see LORD in all capital letters in the Old Testament, this is the way many Bible translators (e.g. NIV, EHV, ESV, HCSB, NASB) are signaling to the reader that the Tetragrammaton (“the four-letter divine name” personally used by the God of Scripture) is being used.
- The Hebrews considered the divine name too sacred to be uttered aloud. This combined with their misguided efforts to keep the Second Commandment against misusing God’s name led to the practice of saying, “Adonai” (אֲדֹנָי - “my Lord”) in place of the divine name.
- When translated into Greek in the Septuagint (or LXX, that is the Greek translation of the Old Testament) and the New Testament the term κύριος is substituted.

2.) Lord: “master (also of slaves)/ruler” (Hebrew: אֲדֹנָי / Greek: κύριος / δεσπότης)

OT Example: Psalm 110:1 The LORD (יהוה) says to my Lord (אֲדֹנָי): “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.”

NT Example: John 20:28 Thomas said to [Jesus], “My Lord and my God!”

3.) Lord: term of polite address – “lord/sir” (Greek: κύριος)

NT Example: John 12:21 [The Greeks] came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. “Sir (κύριος),” they said, “we would like to see Jesus.”

Let’s investigate how the LORD revealed himself and the meaning of his name to Moses at the burning bush and at Mt. Sinai.

Exodus 3:13-15 Moses said to God, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?” God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” God also said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.’ This is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation.”

1.) What is the significance of God naming himself “I AM”?

2.) What comfort would be found in God tying his name to their fathers? Why would that be comforting to the then enslaved Israelites?

3.) What were the promises that the LORD had given to Abraham? What was the most central promise?

4.) Below are five qualities of God which are expressed in the name I AM. How do each of these inform, amaze, and comfort God's people?

- Existing (cf. Psalm 145:15 The eyes of all look to you [the LORD], and you give them their food at the proper time. You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing.)
- Singular (cf. Isaiah 45:5 "I am the LORD, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God.")
- Personal (cf. Isaiah 63:16 You, O LORD, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is your name.)
- Eternal (cf. Malachi 3:6 "I the LORD do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed.)
- Independent (cf. Psalm 135:6 The LORD does whatever pleases him, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths.)

Exodus 34:5-7 Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the LORD. And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation."

5.) Based on this passage how/why could we say that the name LORD contains both law and gospel? How does this comfort you when you have fallen for the same old sin again? When you are tempted to think you can sin without consequence? When the sins of others have hurt you deeply?

6.) What is the significance of Jesus appropriating and applying the divine name to himself?

John 8:53, 56-59 [The Jews exclaimed,] "Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?" ...[Jesus replied,] "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad." "You are not yet fifty years old," the Jews said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!" "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am (ἐγὼ εἰμὶ)!" At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds."

Revelation 22:13 "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End."

7.) In his explanation of the Second Commandment Luther not only directs us to avoid misusing the name of the LORD, but he also encourages us to use his name in ways that are right, holy, and God-pleasing. Explain and cite examples of each from Scripture.

We should fear and love God that we do not use his name to curse, swear, lie, or deceive, or use it superstitiously, but call upon God's name in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks.

Closing Prayer: LORD, we confess that you are the God and Ruler and Savior of all. You will rescue us from our sins and judge the world in righteousness. Grant that we may reflect your character towards others by living in forgiving love and gracious compassion. Amen.