

Parashah 14: Va'era (I Appeared) Exodus 6:2-9:35; Ezekiel 28:25-29:21; Romans 9:14-17; 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1

Exodus 6:23 God spoke to Moshe; he said to him, 'I am Adonai. I appeared to Avraham, Yitz'chak and Ya'kov as El Shaddai, although I did not make myself known to them b my name, YHWH.

The word Shaddai which often occurs with El, is also used independently as a name of God, chiefly in the book of Job. It is commonly rendered 'the Almighty.' However, the Hebrew root shadad, from which it has likely been derived, means 'to overpower, to treat with violence, to lay waste.; This would give Shaddai the meaning of 'devastator' or 'destroyer; which can hardly be right. It is possible, however, that the original significance was that of 'overpowering strength' and that this meaning persists in the divine name.

Another interesting suggestion is that it may be connected with the Assyrian mountain (Shad), an epithet sometimes attached to the names of Assyrian deities. Thus the Hebrews took a name representing a mountain to express their understanding about their strong God. Another distinct possibility is that the name derives from the Hebrew word Shad or 'breast'. In this case, God would be seen as 'the nourisher,; the one who imparts and provides life. According to Exodus 6:2-3, this is the name of God known to Avraham, Yitz'chak, and Ya'kov.

The announcement "I am the Lord" (Heb "Yahweh") draws in the preceding revelation in Exod 3:15. In that place God called Moses to this task and explained the significance of the name "Yahweh" by the enigmatic expression "I am that I am." "I am" (אֶהְיֶה, 'ehyeh) is not a name; "Yahweh" is. But the explanation of the name with this sentence indicates that Yahweh is the one who is always there, and that guarantees the future, for everything he does is consistent with his nature. He is eternal, never changing; he remains. Now, in Exodus 6, the meaning of the name "Yahweh" will be more fully unfolded.

The verb is the Niphal form נִדַּעְתִּי (noda'ti). If the text had wanted to say, "I did not make myself known," then a Hiphil form would have been more likely. It is saying, "but by my name Yahweh I was not known to them."

sn There are a number of important issues that need clarification in the interpretation of this section. First, it is important to note that “I am Yahweh” is not a new revelation of a previously unknown name. It would be introduced differently if it were. This is the identification of the covenant God as the one calling Moses—that would be proof for the people that their God had called him. Second, the title “El Shadday” is not a name, but a title. It is true that in the patriarchal accounts “El Shadday” is used six times; in Job it is used thirty times. Many conclude that it does reflect the idea of might or power. In some of those passages that reveal God as “El Shadday,” the name “Yahweh” was also used. But Wellhausen and other proponents of the earlier source critical analysis used Exod 6:3 to say that P, the so-called priestly source, was aware that the name “Yahweh” was not known by them, even though J, the supposed Yahwistic source, wrote using the name as part of his theology. Third, the texts of Genesis show that Yahweh had appeared to the patriarchs (Gen 12:1; 17:1; 18:1; 26:2; 26:24; 26:12; 35:1; 48:3), and that he spoke to each one of them (Gen 12:7; 15:1; 26:2; 28:13; 31:3). The name “Yahweh” occurs 162 times in Genesis, 34 of those times on the lips of speakers in Genesis (W. C. Kaiser, Jr., “Exodus,” EBC 2:340-41). They also made proclamation of Yahweh by name (4:26; 12:8), and they named places with the name (22:14). These passages should not be ignored or passed off as later interpretation. Fourth, “Yahweh” is revealed as the God of power, the sovereign God, who was true to his word and could be believed. He would do as he said (Num 23:19; 14:35; Exod 12:25; 22:24; 24:14; 36:36; 37:14). Fifth, there is a difference between promise and fulfillment in the way revelation is apprehended. The patriarchs were individuals who received the promises but without the fulfillment. The fulfillment could only come after the Israelites became a nation. Now, in Egypt, they are ready to become that promised nation. The two periods were not distinguished by not having and by having the name, but by two ways God revealed the significance of his name. “I am Yahweh” to the patriarchs indicated that he was the absolute, almighty, eternal God. The patriarchs were individuals sojourning in the land. God appeared to them in the significance of El Shadday. That was not his name. So Gen 17:1 says that “Yahweh appeared...and said, ‘I am El Shadday.’” See also Gen 35:11; 48:2; 28:3. Sixth, the verb “to know” is never used to introduce a name which had never been known or experienced. The Niphal and Hiphil of the verb are used only to describe the recognition of the overtones or significance of the name (see Jer 16:21, Isa 52:6; Ps 83:17ff; 1 Kgs 8:41ff. [people will know his name when prayers are answered]). For someone to say that

he knew Yahweh meant that Yahweh had been experienced or recognized (see Exod 33:6; 1 Kgs 18:36; Jer 28:9; Ps 76:2). Seventh, “Yahweh” is not one of God’s names—it is his only name. Other titles, like “El Shaddai,” are not strictly names but means of revealing Yahweh. All the revelations to the patriarchs could not compare to this one, because God was now dealing with the nation. He would make his name known to them through his deeds (see Ezek 20:5). So now they will “know” the “name.” The verb יָדָע (yada’) means more than “aware of, be knowledgeable about”; it means “to experience” the reality of the revelation by that name. This harmonizes with the usage of שֵׁם (shem), “name,” which encompasses all the attributes and actions of God. It is not simply a reference to a title, but to the way that God revealed himself—God gave meaning to his name through his acts. God is not saying that he had not revealed a name to the patriarchs (that would have used the Hiphil of the verb). Rather, he is saying that the patriarchs did not experience what the name Yahweh actually meant, and they could not without seeing it fulfilled. When Moses came to the elders, he identified his call as from Yahweh, the God of the fathers—and they accepted him. They knew the name. But, when they were delivered from bondage, then they fully knew by experience what that name meant, for his promises were fulfilled. U. Cassuto (Exodus, 79) paraphrases it this way: “I revealed Myself to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in My aspect that finds expression in the name Shaddai...I was not known to them, that is, it was not given to them to recognize Me as One that fulfils his promises.” This generation was about to “know” the name that their ancestors knew and used, but never experienced with the fulfillment of the promises. This section of Exodus confirms this interpretation, because in it God promised to bring them out of Egypt and give them the promised land—then they would know that he is Yahweh (6:7). This meaning should have been evident from its repetition to the Egyptians throughout the plagues—that they might know Yahweh (e.g., 7:5). See further R. D. Wilson, “Yahweh [Jehovah] and Exodus 6:3,” *Classical Evangelical Essays in Old Testament Interpretation*, 29-40; L. A. Herrboth, “Exodus 6:3b: Was God Known to the Patriarchs as Jehovah?” *CTM* 4 (1931): 345-49; F. C. Smith, “Observation on the Use of the Names and Titles of God in Genesis,” *EvQ* 40 (1968): 103-9.

Shalom Blessings

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