

JOSHUA

Lesson 2 - Introduction Continued

We begin our second week of preparation for studying the book of Joshua by discussing a subject that is key to our understanding just who God is, and that is His name and various titles that we encounter in the Bible.

Allow me to remind you that what we are doing is essentially reviewing the Torah before we transition to the 1st book of the Former Prophets, Joshua; and we are accomplishing this by following the history of the establishment of a set-apart people group called Israel. In fact I would argue that the entire Old Testament, the Tanakh, uses the history of Israel as the motif and means that the Lord employed to establish His laws and principles on earth, which led to the enactment of His justice system, and subsequently acted as the path to redemption that mankind desperately needs.

We began and ended our first week of preparation around the life of Abraham.

ANCIENT NAMES OF GOD

Before we proceed to his son, Isaac, a discussion of the many “names of God” is appropriate because in the Bible we encounter a large variety and we need to understand why that is. The first thing to grasp is that in ancient cultures a name was far more than simple identification as it is today. The purpose for a name was to announce a person’s reputation and qualities. It was believed that a being, whether human or spiritual, embodied the attributes of his name and this is the sense we must take it in the Bible and it applies very much to the Lord.

It is fundamental for every bible and history student to grasp that the Israelite culture sprang from Mesopotamian roots; the same roots Avraham was born into. It would in no way be incorrect to characterize Noah and his family as the first Mesopotamians (after the Flood, of course). Mesopotamian culture, (or better the many Mesopotamian cultures) was, as were all other ancient civilizations ever scientifically scrutinized, based on a worship of multiple gods. In the first few generations following Noah (*Noah*) man perverted his relationship with God and quickly abandoned the truth that Noah taught: that there is only one God. The result was the birth of the notion of a spiritual universe that contained many gods but with “one god that was above all the other gods”. And the title the Mesopotamians gave to this “highest god” was “Il”, which eventually morphed into the Hebrew “El”. This “highest god” idea was not monotheism; rather it was that there was a god of gods, the “El”, that was preeminent over all the other

gods.

The Canaanite gods that Avraham and later the Israelites encountered in the land of Canaan were only a continuation and variation of the Nimrod-Mesopotamian gods. When Avraham arrived into the land of Canaan he would not have found the Canaanite religious structure at all foreign; rather he would have been well familiar with it.

When Avraham ratified God's covenant and became the first Hebrew there is no evidence that Avraham's clan and offspring instantly swore off all the gods of old in exchange for the true One God of the universe. Almighty God would have become simply another god in their hierarchy of gods, even if He were now the "El"the **highest** god replacing the former highest god. In fact we get constant reminders in the Bible that the Hebrews forever struggled with idolatry; that is, the worship of these other gods that their gentile neighbors bowed down to. Let me make this point again: do not make the mistake of thinking that the first Hebrews discarded one god for the other. Rather they accepted some hybrid mixture of God Almighty with the other lesser gods that they fully believed existed. If you'll keep this in mind when reading the Bible you'll have a more complete context for understanding the thought processes of the Hebrews in those days.

Throughout the Bible we have prophets and the writers of the Holy Scriptures finding cause for anger and complaint against the Hebrews for their idolatry. This is proof in and of itself of the prevalence of multiple-god worship by the Israelites even at the same moment they were supposedly pledging their allegiance to Yehoveh, God of Israel. Let us not be too harsh in our judgment upon them: the Hebrews represented the first organized monotheistic religion and that was a radical notion in and of itself. The very concept of One God, and only one god, ran against the confused nature of the human race.

The Bible indicates that God's formal personal name is YHWH. It is key to grasp that most other words for God were, up to then, not NAMES, but fairly impersonal titles and characteristics. There is no universal agreement as to the MEANING of the name Yehoveh.

Theologians refer to the four Hebrew letters representing God's name, YHWH, as the Tetragrammaton. Now of course Y-H-W-H is English alphabet characters, which come from a fairly modern alphabet. In ancient Hebrew these letters as originally written by the finger of God on those stone slabs, were the Hebrew characters Yud-Heh-Vav-Heh. Since whether expressed in English or Hebrew these letters/characters are all consonants we have had to speculate at the vowel sounds in order that it could be a spoken word. Due to the extensive period of time that the Jews no longer pronounced His holy name, the tradition of precisely HOW to pronounce the name has been lost. The commonly held pronunciation is Yah-Way or Yah-Vey. I favor the pronunciation as Yehoveh as all recent evidence is that the word consisted of 3 syllables and not 2. This was later English-ized into the word "Jehovah" that we commonly use as the name of God in Western Christendom.

A long time later, about 500 BC, following the Babylonian Exile of the Jewish people (Babylon was in Mesopotamia), we find that the Jews began using the title "El-ohim" whenever referring to God, or whenever the four letters "YHWH" were encountered in the Scriptures. It is believed

that “El-ohim” was used because it was a commonly understood word throughout the Middle East region that meant god or gods and likely was borrowed from the Babylonian culture the Jews were exiled into (remember, El was a native Mesopotamian word). It is interesting that, in reality, the term El-ohim is plural. So in modern English we would be correct in translating El-ohim to God_s (plural). However we would miss the point because in Hebrew grammar the plural did not always mean “more than one”. It would, as in the case of El-ohim, simply indicate preeminence or supreme greatness.

We see many Hebrew titles of Yehoveh beginning with the prefix “El” in the earlier parts of the Bible: El-Roi (God sees me), El-Shaddai (God of the Mountain), El-Elyon (God most high), and many more. This is unmistakably a result of a continuing Mesopotamian influence upon the Hebrews that eventually diminished as we get to the last books of the Old Testament.

By the time of Alexander the Great as the Greco-Roman era dawned (around 300 BC), we find a tradition developing among the Jews against speaking the name of God (YHWH) out loud; this prohibition exists today among Orthodox Jews. The Talmud says straightaway that this taboo had NOTHING to do with the commandment to not take the Lord’s name in vain; rather it was connected with a rather late developing custom of not speaking your own father’s name, because to do so was seen as disrespectful in their culture. That custom was extrapolated to mean that to verbalize THE Father Creator’s name was all the more disrespectful, even amounting to blasphemy. So from about the 3rd century BC on we begin to see the usage of a new way to refer to the God of Israel in order to avoid blasphemy: Adonai.

From that era forward whenever Jews wanted to refer to God they would employ various terms including “El-ohim” meaning “God”, or they used the term “Ha-Shem” meaning “The Name”, or they used the term “Adonai”, meaning “My Lord” or “My Master”, and a few others. They would do this even when reading Scripture out loud and encountering the Hebrew letters YHWH. They would substitute one of the religiously correct names or titles for God but NEVER would they verbalize His given Hebrew name, Yehoveh.

The early gentile Church fathers didn’t agree with the Jews about avoiding saying God’s name and, in their desire to distance themselves from Judaism, began to once again use God’s actual name: Yehoveh. As mentioned, “Yehoveh” was later English-ized into the word “Jehovah” that is commonly used in the Church today when referring to God’s name. Jehovah became predominant in the Church, and the usage of other and older names and titles all but disappeared.

But here is the thing that we should understand: more than 95% of the time that we encounter one of the titles of God in our Bibles.....Lord, God, or whatever.....the original Hebrew was actually YHWH, God’s formal, personal name. Let me say that in a different way: more than 9 out of 10 times that our Bibles say Lord or God, the original Hebrew is Yehoveh. God’s formal name is written over 6000 times in the original Hebrew of the Old Testament, but our modern translations reduce the use to but a handful. Let’s talk about Abraham’s son, Isaac, now.

YITZ’CHAK (ISAAC)

The Bible doesn't tell us much about Yitz'chak (*Isaac*). He wanders around some but not nearly to the extent of his father Avraham (*Abraham*). His wandering is not as an aimless person; rather it was that he was an owner of substantial flocks and herds that needed fresh pasture lands on a regular basis. He appears to have done well for himself, inheriting his father's wealth [**Gen. 25, 26, 27, 28**]. God appears to Yitz'chak (*Isaac*), as He did to his father, and gives him the same promise about fathering many nations, thus alleviating any doubt that Isaac would carry on the line of the covenant promise. Rivkah (*Rebecca*) gives him twin sons, Esav (*Esau*) and Ya'acov (*Jacob*). Esav, being the first one out of the birth canal, was the traditional and rightful heir to his father's wealth and authority. But years later in what the Bible describes as a casual and impulsive transaction, Esav (*Esau*) sells his birthright to Ya'acov (*Jacob*) for the princely sum of a bowl of lentil soup. Actually selling a birthright was a somewhat common practice at that time, but in this case it was indicative of Esau's lack of character.

We fast forward. Yitz'chak (*Isaac*), now about 135 years old and blind and knowing that his death is near, decides it's time to give the customary blessing to the firstborn of his twin boys, who is Esav (*Esau*). The effect of this blessing is to validate that son's right to inherit the bulk of the family's wealth and also to assume the leadership role. Yitz'chak (*Isaac*) is unaware of Esau's dumb deal in selling his birthright to Ya'acov (*Jacob*); and Esav (*Esau*) intends to keep it that way. When Yitz'chak (*Isaac*) instructs Esav (*Esau*) to go hunting and get him some fresh meat for the blessing, his brother Ya'acov (*Jacob*) and their mother Rivkah (*Rebecca*) devise a cunning plan. The name Jacob turned out to be prophetic; for, in Hebrew it means heel catcher (the Bible tells us that when Esav was born, Jacob was hanging on to his heel). However, heel catcher is not to be taken literally; it is simply an ancient Hebrew idiom that meant **deceiver**. Before Esav can return from the hunt Ya'acov (*Jacob*) disguises himself as Esav, goes into Yitz'chak's (*Isaac's*) tent and dupes the nearly blind old Yitz'chak into giving Ya'acov (*Jacob*) the firstborn blessing; Isaac believes that it is his firstborn, Esav, that he has blessed. Esav (*Esau*) returns from the hunt, finds out what has transpired and is devastated; he begs his father to change the blessing. But such a blessing is, by tradition, irreversible for any reason. Rivkah (*Rebecca*) knows her twin sons well and fears that upon Yitz'chak's (*Isaac's*) imminent death Esav will kill Ya'acov for his treachery. Upon their mother's urging Ya'acov (*Jacob*) quickly packs up and flees north to his uncle Lavan (*Laban*), far away in Mesopotamia.

YA'ACOV (JACOB)

In Haran Ya'acov (*Jacob*) meets Rachel, one of Lavan's (*Laban's*) daughters, at the family well (Lavan is Ya'acov's uncle, his mother's brother) [**Gen. 29,30**]. It's love at first sight. As a fugitive, with nothing else to offer, Ya'acov (*Jacob*) agrees to 7 years of servitude to Lavan (*Laban*) in return for the right to marry Rachel. The 7 years pass and in a sure sign to Ya'acov (*Jacob*) that what goes around comes around, during the marriage ceremony Leah, Lavan's oldest daughter, is secretly switched for Rachel. By the time Ya'acov (*Jacob*) finds out it's too late.....Leah is now his wife. So in a promise for another 7 years of service Lavan also gives Rachel to Ya'acov (*Jacob*).

Make no mistake, Ya'acov (*Jacob*) was not an eager and foolish young man when he married

first Leah, then Rachel; he was 84 years old! So the giving up of 14 years of his life for Rachel had to have been well thought out. Not only had Jacob received more than he originally bargained for but his two wives, sisters, quarreled constantly for the next several years, which coincides with a growing hostility between Ya'acov and his father in law Lavan. After completing 20 years of servitude to Lavan (14 for Rachel and Leah, plus 6 more in exchange for some livestock) Ya'acov, knowing something bad is about to happen, gathers his family and flees **[Gen. 31]**.

As they prepare to secretly depart Rachel steals her father's household gods and takes them with her on their journey. Taking Laban's daughters and grandchildren is one thing; but taking his gods is quite another, so Lavan forms a posse, pursues and catches up to Jacob and his family **[Gen. 32]**. Rachel is a clever and determined girl so even after a thorough search Lavan can't find his missing gods. The issue of the gods is important to Lavan because in that era the person who possessed the family gods could claim legal inheritance of the family authority and wealth. Possessing her father's gods was Rachel's ticket to all her that her father owned, when he passed away. Lavan's sons could not have been happy about this, either. Ya'acov (*Jacob*) survives the ordeal by agreeing to Lavan's demands that he take no other wives. Ya'acov now moves on and returns to Canaan to face his brother Esav (*Esau*), not really expecting to survive the family reunion.

Nearing his destination Ya'acov (*Jacob*) has an odd but history-changing encounter with what some Bibles describe as an angel, others as the Lord, and finds himself in an all-night wrestling match with this being. The result is a changed heart in Ya'acov (*Jacob*) to go along with a permanent disability. But, something else gets changed as well; God tells Ya'acov that he has a new name, and that name is Israel.

It is at this point in history, and not before, that an identifiable people were created that God would call His own.....the Israelites. While Jacob, his offspring, and their descendents could rightfully be called Israelites, only some would eventually come to be called Jews. I'll expound on that in due time.

Expecting the worst Ya'acov (from here on called Israel) finally encounters his twin brother Esav (*Esau*) who, it turns out, is also changed **[Gen. 33]**. Tears flow. Israel (*Jacob, Ya'acov*) offers gifts of reconciliation to Esav. Esav, now a wealthy man, refuses, but Israel insists. They part in peace.

Israel heads for Shechem, by now a **walled** city-state in Canaan; this is the same place where God told Abraham that this is the Land He would give to him and his descendents (but in Abraham's time Shechem was little more than a watering hole). Israel purchases land for his clan from the local dignitary, the King of Shechem, intent to settle down permanently. Being near a city brings mutual security, and the arrangement is formalized in a pact resembling a treaty. Part of any agreement of this type is that the residents of the city and the members of the people, who wish to live outside the city walls, become allies and join each other in fending off marauders. But things quickly sour when the King of Shechem's son rapes Israel's only daughter, Dinah, and her incensed brothers lead a raid of revenge leaving many of the city dwellers dead in the wake **[Gen. 34]**. Israel is heartbroken over the evil and murderous actions

of his sons. He knows they cannot stay, so they pack up and head to Beth'el. God appears to Israel with assurance that the covenants given to Avraham, then to Isaac, and now to Jacob, remain intact. His beloved wife, Rachel, for which he gave 14 years of servitude to marry, dies giving birth to Israel's 12th and last son, Ben-Y'min (*Benjamin*). Its now about 1800 BC.

Back up in Mesopotamia a new Babylonian culture is becoming more powerful and more sophisticated, and is led by the continuing domination of the Amorites. Using the towers they build, called ziggurats, they begin charting the skies as expert astronomers. Down in Egypt the traditional Egyptian culture that has produced such an advanced civilization with its Pyramids, libraries, agriculture, and science, all under strong central rule, is disintegrating. Foreigners now sit in the seat of Pharaoh in Egypt. Not just any foreigners, but Bedouin Sheiks, Semites! These Bedouins were not mindless barbarians. They easily adopted Egyptian ways, even adopted Egyptian names. But they were, by nature, tribal and wanderers and did not understand how to establish and maintain a large central government; the native Egyptians considered their rule almost unbearable. Therefore the so-called Hyksos rulers were never able to unite Egypt the way the Pharaohs before them did, and Egypt declined for the next 150 years.

YOSEF (JOSEPH)

Just a few years after Ben-Y'min (*Benjamin*) was born, 17 year old Yosef (*Joseph*), Israel's openly favored son, fell victim to a plot by his 10 jealous and angry older brothers **[Gen. 37]**. Thrown into an empty water well and sold to a passing caravan of slave traders, Yosef's (*Joseph*) brothers tell his father he was killed by a wild animal. Israel was devastated and he blamed his other sons, obviously unaware of the truth. He would grieve, needlessly, for years to come.

The caravan winds it way south to Egypt where Yosef (*Joseph*) is sold as a house slave to Potiphar, Chief Steward to Pharaoh. Yosef, young, good-looking and highly intelligent, greatly impresses his master; nonetheless he soon finds himself imprisoned as a result of false charges made against him by Potiphar's wife **[Gen. 39, 40, 41]**. While Joseph languished in prison the Pharaoh began having reoccurring nightmares. The local Egyptian wizards were unable to decipher these disturbing dreams so Yosef (*Joseph*) was called upon to try. Pharaoh was so impressed by Joseph's accuracy that he promoted him to 2nd in command of all of Egypt. Potiphar now worked for Joseph. Yosef (*Joseph*), now 30 years old, has not seen his family in 13 years.

Meantime, up in Canaan where Jacob and his clan still resided, things were not good. Another famine had taken hold of the land and Israel's tribe was in danger of not surviving. News arrived that Egypt had, through the adept management of a foreigner, Joseph, somehow foreseen the famine and stockpiled abundant grain supplies. Reluctantly, Israel sent his sons to Egypt to try and purchase food **[Gen. 42, 43, 44, 45]**. Part of the reluctance was due to not wanting to lose another child for Israel had never recovered from the loss of his precious Yosef (*Joseph*). This fear undoubtedly came from the common knowledge that the poorest of Egyptian society, who had run out of money and were unable to purchase grain from their

government, were selling themselves into bond-servitude to the Pharaoh in return for food for their families. This foreign Pharaoh of a divided country was using the famine and Yosef's (*Joseph's*) abilities to rebuild a slave labor force to satisfy his ambitions. But God used the situation to enable Israel's survival.

When Yosef (*Joseph*) finds out it's his brothers who have come asking to buy grain he is crushed when they don't recognize him. Hurt and angry he toys with them for a while. But knowing that any revenge he might extract upon them would only serve to further hurt his aged father, Yosef not only gives them grain he sends word to Israel that all his family should come to Egypt where Yosef, from his position of power, can assure their survival.

Israel comes with his entire clan, which now numbers 70 individuals, not counting Joseph [Gen. 46]. Israel dies in Egypt a few years later but before he dies he pronounces a significant blessing upon Yosef's (*Joseph's*) two male children, Ephraim and Manasseh, born by Joseph's Egyptian wife; this act will have an enormous impact in the future of Israel and the entire world. This deathbed blessing, the cross-handed blessing, put Joseph's younger child, Ephraim, ahead of the older child, Manasseh, for purposes of inheritance [Gen. 48]. But the blessing also included the adoption of these two boys by Jacob so that they were no longer his grandchildren, but his own children. This blessing had both immediate, and prophetic, effects. By adopting these children away from Joseph and his Egyptian wife, Ephraim and Manasseh were no longer considered Egyptians; they became Israelites. Let's pause here to examine this little-known section of the Bible that amounts to nothing less than prophetic dynamite.

READ Gen 48 all

What actually happened here? Well, as I mentioned earlier, the younger child of Joseph, Ephraim, was in essence given the first-born or double portion blessing that normally should have gone to the older child, Manasseh. But on a higher level Jacob gave the birthright that by tradition belonged to his OWN firstborn son, Rueben, to grandson Ephraim. Rueben was replaced with Joseph's son Ephraim. How can I know with complete certainty that this was the result? Listen to **1st Chronicles 5:1..... "..... *Rueben the firstborn of Israel (Jacob) for he was the firstborn, but because he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph, the son of Israel; so that he (Rueben) is not enrolled in the genealogy according to the birthright.*"**

So here is something we must put into our minds and hold onto for awhile: the firstborn rights of inheritance for Israel's (Jacob's) children, wind up NOT going to the rightful heir that would be expected, Rueben, but instead those rights are given to Ephraim who is actually a grandchild of Jacob. That is why Jacob adopted Ephraim (and Manessah) away from Joseph so that Ephraim became a son to Jacob (rather than a grandson) and he could now legally give to Ephraim the firstborn blessings.

Let's fast forward to several hundred years into the future, to the time after the Exodus from Egypt and even further to the time of Solomon, King of Israel. Solomon is a ruler over a united and powerful nation of Israel. But that is going to change almost immediately after his death when Solomon's son inherits the throne and right away turmoil and a civil war occur; Israel

becomes divided into two opposing kingdoms. The Bible refers a number a ways to these two kingdoms of Israel: most typically as the Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom..... or.... As the kingdoms of Judah and of Israel (Judah in the south, Israel in the north).

Ah, but there's a problem here. You see, the northern kingdom was not really called Israel at that time. Calling that kingdom Israel is a fairly recent redaction in our bibles. The oldest manuscripts clearly call the northern kingdom Ephraim. By now, of the 12 original tribes of Israel, 2 (Judah and Ephraim) had become dominant and ruled over the other 10. In Biblical times territories tended to be named after the dominant tribe who occupied that area. So the two kingdoms that resulted from the civil war of Israel were eventually called by the names of the two tribes that controlled them: Judah in the south, and Ephraim in the north.

Fast forward again; this time about 200 more years. Judah has struggled to stay separate from its pagan neighbors, and close to God; on the other hand Ephraim has worked hard to associate itself with its neighbors' false gods. Assyria is now a regional power and it attacks Ephraim and empties it of its people. The people of Ephraim are scattered all over the Assyrian Empire and absorbed among the myriad cultures of Asia to the point that the bulk of them lose their Hebrew identity. Ephraim is no longer a people belonging to God; Ephraim doesn't even know its heritage; most members of the 10 tribes that formed Ephraim had mixed their Hebrew genes with the gentile people of the world; Ephraim become lost into the world of gentiles.....at least that's how it seemed until very recently.

From Genesis forward Ephraim and Judah are referred to as the **two houses** of Israel. Ephraim is at times also referred to according to their father's name, as the Joseph Tribes. We'll find that designation for them popping up in the book of Joshua. Together Ephraim and Judah make up the whole house of Israel. That is these two halves of Israel together make up all of Israel. Now with this as a background we fast-forward again. Ezekiel, writing about 130 years after Assyria conquered Ephraim, writes about a prophetic future for the people of Ephraim in the book of Ezekiel 37. Let's read it.

READ EZEKIEL 37 all

Here we find what has come to be known today as the two sticks prophecy. It says that in the end times, the latter days, Ephraim will be rejoined with Judah. The two halves (the 2 houses) of Israel will once again be united and become a whole....the whole house of Israel. Let that sink in for a second. How could Ephraim, most of whom are so mixed with gentiles that they have become gentiles... millions of people who don't even know that they have ancestral roots to the tribe of Ephraim (and some who do suspect the connection but cannot prove it)..... how are they going to be reunited with the tribe of Judah? Who is Judah, today? Jews. Jews are what members of the tribe of Judah have been called since the time of Babylon.

Surprise; another of those prophetic dominoes has taken a tumble. We now know that while almost all of the Israelites who formed Ephraim joined themselves to the gentiles and have essentially become gentiles; remnants of each of the 10 tribes that formed Ephraim remained intact with an ingrained and uninterrupted memory of their Israelite heritage. The largest one currently known, Manasseh, consists of nearly 2 million people and the Israeli government has

now recognized that these 10 “lost” tribes aren’t as lost as they thought. Yet because Israel is officially a “Jewish” nation and because Jews are genetically and tribally the tribe of Judah, what does Israel do with millions of members of those 10 Israelite tribes who have been rediscovered and want to come home to join their Jewish brothers? The difficulty lies in the stance of those 10 tribes that while they are Israel, they are NOT Jews! They are NOT descendants of the tribe of Judah; they are descendents of 10 other Israelite tribes.

Because a tradition grew that today’s Jews ARE all that remained of Israel, most of the world’s Jewish communities are confused and perplexed of just how to handle this new reality. Yet this 2nd house of Israel has been found, and their re-emergence is prophetic. The Israeli government is now allowing them to return and the church is completely unaware that the 2 sticks prophecy of Ezekiel 37 is well underway.

We’ll continue next time.