

5-1-1933

Exodus 6, 3 b. Was God Known to the Patriarchs as Jehovah?

L. Aug. Herrboth

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm>



Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Herrboth, L. Aug. (1933) "Exodus 6, 3 b. Was God Known to the Patriarchs as Jehovah?," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 4 , Article 49.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol4/iss1/49>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Print Publications at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Concordia Theological Monthly by an authorized editor of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact seitzw@csl.edu.

Exodus 6, 3 b. Was God Known to the Patriarchs as Jehovah? 345

est aeternus, omnipotens, iustus, perfectus, nimirum, quia est substantialis et perfecta Patris imago." (Locis, III, 1. 15, s. 12, 206.)

Moreover, Christ is the "Image of the invisible God." In Him our great God has become visible, as it were; though Gerhard correctly says: "*Dicitur autem Filius Dei imago Patris non solum respectu nostri, quia Dei voluntatem nobis manifestat, et Deum quasi visibilem nobis facit, ut Calvinus super 1. Col. et 1. Hebr. nimis ieiune scribit, sed etiam respectu Patris, quia est substantialis imago Patris, perfecte referens naturam eius, quippe cui est ὁμοούσιος.*" (Locis, I, 1. 3, 162.) And Quenstedt sums up: "*Quia perfectissima imago invisibilis Dei est, ergo ipse ut Deus, invisibilis sit, oportet. Filius, qui est invisibilis Dei imago, non invisibilis mansit, sed in carne manifestatus fuit.*" (Syst., I, 9, 384 b.)

If Christ is the perfect and exact Image of the Father, of perfect equality with the Father in respect of His substance, nature, and eternity, it follows of necessity that all the fulness of the Deity dwells in Him, and it is quite natural for Paul simply to say in this context that all the fulness was pleased to dwell in Him, the term *πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα* being used absolutely. Thus it is seen that our interpretation of the term in question is in admirable agreement with both the preceding and the following context.

Again, it must be granted that *πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα* is a beautiful term to describe our great God, pointing as it does to His omnipresence and confirming the Scripture truth that He fills all things. What more fitting term could have been used in the context?

We therefore maintain that the expression *πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα*, without modifier, means the fulness of the Deity, "*omnes divitiae divinae naturae,*" in this context; indeed, that it cannot signify anything else in this setting and that any addition is superfluous. It is of this fulness that Bengel says: "*Haec inhabitatio est fundamentum reconciliationis,*" which we subscribe unequivocally, accepting this great mystery by faith as does Bengel in the words: "*Quis exhaustiat profundum hoc?*"

Hannover, N. Dak.

L. T. WOHLFEIL.

Exodus 6, 3 b.

Was God Known to the Patriarchs as Jehovah?

(Compare *Schrift und Bekenntnis*, 1931, p. 124.)

"But by My name Jehovah was I not known to them." This statement, as it appears in our English and German Bibles, seems to contradict other passages of Holy Writ. The context, vv. 2—5, reads as follows: "And God spake unto Moses and said unto him, I am the Lord [Jehovah]; and I appeared unto Abraham, unto

346 Exodus 6, 3 b. Was God Known to the Patriarchs as Jehovah?

Isaac, and unto Jacob by the name of God Almighty, but by My name Jehovah was I not known to them. And I have also established My covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their pilgrimage, wherein they were strangers. And I have also heard the groaning of the children of Israel, whom the Egyptians keep in bondage; and I have remembered My covenant." Likewise we read in Luther's translation: "*Und Gott redete mit Mose und sprach zu ihm: Ich bin der Herr [Jehovah]. Und ich bin erschienen dem Abraham, Isaak und Jakob, dass ich ihr allmaechtiger Gott sein wollte; aber mein Name Herr [Jehovah] ist ihnen nicht geoffenbart worden. Auch habe ich meinen Bund mit ihnen aufgerichtet. . . . Auch habe ich gehoert die Wehklage der Kinder Israel . . . und habe an meinen Bund gedacht.*"

The words of v. 3b are rendered by the LXX: *Kai to onoma mou Kyrios [Jehovah] ouk idylosa autois;* in the Vulgate: "*Et nomen meum Adonai non indicavi eis.*" (The Jews pronounced the ineffable name [Jehovah] Adonai.) Note that these two versions have *kai* and *et* instead of *but*, *alla*, rendering the Hebrew conjunction ו in this place in the same sense in which it is used in the preceding and the subsequent context.

Now, whereas the traditional translations quote God as saying: "But by My name Jehovah was I not known to them," *i. e.*, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, we find seemingly contradictory statements in the following passages: "Abraham said, Lord [Jehovah] God, what wilt Thou give me?" Gen. 15, 2; "Abraham said, Lord [Jehovah] God, whereby shall I know?" Gen. 15, 8; "Abraham builded an altar unto the Lord [Jehovah] and called upon the name of the Lord [Jehovah]," or rather, as Luther translates, he "preached of the name of the Lord," Gen. 12, 8. Abraham preached "the name of the Lord [Jehovah], the everlasting God," at Beersheba, Gen. 21, 33. To every unbiased reader these statements in Genesis are sufficient proof that Abraham knew the holy name Jehovah, the everlasting God. Isaac, too, "called upon the name of the Lord [Jehovah]," Gen. 26, 25. Jacob made the vow: "Then shall the Lord [Jehovah] be my God," Gen. 28, 21. But let us go back two thousand years before the time of the patriarchs. Eve, having born Cain, said: "I have gotten a man from the Lord [Jehovah]," Gen. 4, 1. (This passage should be translated: "I have gotten a man, namely, the Lord [Jehovah]," because the Hebrew particle (מִן) before Jehovah does not here mean *from*, but introduces an appositional accusative.) Furthermore we are told that at the times of Seth and Enos "men began to call upon," *i. e.*, to worship publicly or to preach, "the name of the Lord [Jehovah]," Gen. 4, 26.

In the face of these statements every one that does not believe in the divine authorship and inerrancy of the Bible will raise the

Exodus 6, 3 b. Was God Known to the Patriarchs as Jehovah? 347

accusation that we have here an irreconcilable contradiction and that for this reason the Bible cannot be the Word of an infallible God. What shall we answer?

Many commentators try to answer this objection by asserting that the words in Ex. 6, 3b must not be understood absolutely, but relatively. Their explanation is that God did not mean to say that the patriarchs did not know the name Jehovah at all, but that now, at the time of Moses, or from now on, God would *manifest His name* more clearly and powerfully by the great deed of delivering His chosen people from the bondage of Egypt and by the marvelous events connected therewith. God was now about to show more clearly than ever before that He, Jehovah, was in truth the covenant God of Abraham and his seed after him, Gen. 17, 7, so that the children of Israel under Moses would "experience" (יָדַע, to know, experience) God's faithfulness to a higher degree and in a larger measure than the patriarchs ever had done. This explanation, the only one possible if we accept the reading of our traditional translations, will suffice to convince a devout believer that Ex. 6, 3b does not contradict other Bible-passages. Even if he feels that such an explanation is not doing full justice to the text, nevertheless he is fully persuaded that the Bible, being God's Word from beginning to end, cannot contradict itself; and he is confident that in heaven he will be enlightened on all difficult points which he does not fully understand at present. 1 Cor. 13, 12.

But with an infidel the case is quite different. He *seeks* faults in the Bible in order to find reasons for his rejection of God's Word. Unbelieving critics say that Ex. 6, 3b declares absolutely, not relatively, that God says: "By My name Jehovah was I not known to them," and that, in contradiction to this, Gen. 15, 2. 8 and other passages relate how Abraham and others called God by His name Jehovah and that this contradiction cannot be "explained away." An infidel will not concede that, wherever an explanation in harmony with Biblical truth is possible, we have neither reason nor right to assert a contradiction and that, even if we cannot find a solution of the difficulty, we have but to confess our inability.

However, we are not shaken in our conviction that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God" and that God cannot contradict Himself. In many cases an exact translation of the original text clears up a seeming contradiction. We submit this translation: "I am Jehovah and have appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob as God Almighty. And regarding My name Jehovah was I not known to them? And also [*i. e.*, in addition to this] have I established My covenant with them [namely] to give to them the land," etc. With this translation every possibility of a seeming contradiction with other Bible-passages disappears entirely.

848 Exodus 6, 3 b. Was God Known to the Patriarchs as Jehovah?

But it is asked, Is such a translation possible? And is it in accordance with the context? We shall endeavor to give a satisfactory answer to these questions. In v. 3b the first words, הַיְהוָה שְׁמִי = "My name Jehovah," stand in a *casus pendens*, the predicate of which is given in the following clause (cf. Gen. 34, 23; Lam. 3, 36), and it must be rendered into English by adding a preposition, *as to*, or *regarding*. Further, an interrogative clause is very often introduced by an interrogative particle, הֲ , אִם , but frequently such a particle is also omitted. Hence the mere omission of such a particle does not stamp a clause as affirmative; the context and the scope of the text must decide whether we have an affirmative or an interrogative clause. According to the Gesenius-Kautzsch Grammar, § 150, 1a, the interrogative particle may be, and frequently is, omitted: first, when "the natural emphasis upon the words is of itself sufficient to indicate an interrogative sentence as such," especially if the word or words to be emphasized stand at the beginning of a sentence, as we find it here: "My name Jehovah"; secondly, "especially when the interrogative clause is connected with a preceding sentence by ו ," which is the case here, v. 3b being connected with v. 3a by ו ; thirdly, "when it is negative (with אֵל for אֵלֶּיךָ , *nonne?*)," which exactly applies to our verse. Thus the *possibility* of taking v. 3b as an interrogative sentence cannot be doubted. Similar interrogative sentences are quoted in Gesenius's Grammar, § 150.

But how about the *necessity*? Does the context compel us to take v. 3b as a rhetorical question? In the preceding as well as in the following words God names the *motives* which prompt Him to deliver His people out of the bondage of Egypt. First He states that He is Jehovah, the Everlasting and Immutable One, who forever will be what He is (Ex. 3, 14 f.). Thereby He says that He will be, especially in fulfilling His promises, what He has promised to be, namely, the Deliverer and Redeemer. Then He declares that He had appeared and revealed Himself to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as "God Almighty," who has power to keep His promise. (The translation of the preposition בְּ in the connection בְּשֵׁם אֱלֹהֵי by "by the name of" cannot be justified grammatically; see Gesenius's Grammar, § 119, i; besides, it makes the impression as if those patriarchs had known Him only by the name "God Almighty," whereas Abraham, according to Gen. 12, 18, after God had established His everlasting covenant of grace with him, preached His name Jehovah long before God declared Himself to be "God Almighty," Gen. 17, 1). To this the Lord adds: "And as to My name Jehovah, was I not known to them?" In these words, without doubt, God refers to those statements in which it is said that the patriarchs built altars to Jehovah and publicly worshiped Him by this name, Gen. 12, 8, *et al.* Thus the Lord says that they knew Him, worshiped Him, and loved Him (וַיְרַחֵם) as their covenant God (cf. Gen. 28, 21 f., the vow of Jacob), in whose promise, as given

by "God Almighty," they firmly trusted, Gen. 15, 6. In short, God says here: Shall the faith of the patriarchs, with whom I established My covenant as Jehovah and who believed in Me as the Almighty God, be put to shame? Never! God will not become a liar to them! This is verily a strong motive for the Lord to act. Then He mentions as another motive the special promise, or covenant, by which He had pledged Himself to give to Abraham and his seed the land of Canaan, which is an additional motive for the deliverance of Israel, saying: "And also," *i. e.*, in addition to this, "I have established My covenant with them to give them the land Canaan," etc. The particle *also* (וְ) in vv. 4 and 5 shows that in these verses additional motives are named. Thus in v. 5: "And in addition to this I have heard the groaning of the children of Israel," etc. So we see that in vv. 2—5 God enumerates the causes that moved Him to action, and this declaration of His motives is the leading thought and the scope of God's words in vv. 2—5. This is also evident from the introductory particle in v. 6, beginning with "therefore" (לָכֵן). Thus the sequence of thought and the clear scope of the entire section compel us to take v. 3b as expressing one of a series of motives, given in the form of a rhetorical question, by which God is prompted, or moved, to action; and this special motive is emphatically expressed in an interrogative form, to which only an answer in the affirmative is possible, as every one acquainted with the confession and the worship of the patriarchs can well understand.

Besides, if it cannot be denied that God in vv. 2—5 states His motives, how *could* it be a motive for delivering their descendants that the patriarchs did *not* know His name Jehovah? This would be an impossible thought.

Some one might think that these words should be considered a parenthesis. But that would not fit into the context, as we have seen. A negative parenthesis would be entirely out of place in this context.

From all that has been said it is evident that Ex. 6, 3b is to be understood as an *emphatic interrogative clause* requiring an affirmative answer and that it is in full harmony with other passages.

L. AUG. HERRBOTH.

Das Comma Iohanneum, 1 Joh. 5, 7.

Unter den Schriftstellen, die in der neutestamentlichen Textkritik am häufigsten behandelt werden, befindet sich auch das sogenannte Comma Iohanneum, 1 Joh. 5, 7. Die Anfragen betreffs der Authentie dieser Stelle lauten oft um so besorgter, als diese sich eben in der altkirchlichen epistolischen Perikope für Quasimodogeniti findet und in unsern Bibelausgaben als Teil des Textes gedruckt ist.