

# 2

## The Hebrews, the Jews, . . . and God: I

“For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement.”

LEVITICUS 17:11

“The sorrows of those who have bartered for another god will be multiplied;  
I shall not pour out their drink offerings of blood,  
Nor will I take their names upon my lips.”

PSALM 16:4

“And according to the Law, one may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.”

HEBREWS 9:22

“I might agree that the Allies are partly to blame, but nothing can fully excuse the iniquity of Hitler’s persecution of the Jews, or the absurdity of his theoretical position. Did you see that he said ‘The Jews have made no contribution to human culture and in crushing them I am doing the will of the Lord.’ Now as the whole idea of the ‘Will of the Lord’ is precisely what the world owes to the Jews, the blaspheming tyrant has just fixed his absurdity for all to see in a single sentence, and shown that he is as contemptible for his stupidity as he is detestable for his cruelty. For the German people as a whole we ought to have charity: but for dictators, ‘Nordic’ tyrants and so on—well, read the chapter about Mr. Savage in *The Regress* and you have my views.”

C. S. LEWIS<sup>1</sup>

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Those familiar with the life and works of C. S. Lewis can be forgiven for being mildly confused as to where and when Jack finally gave in and was converted. However, his journey may be longer and more protracted

1 “Lewis to Arthur Greeves, 5 Nov 1933.” In *They Stand Together*, 466–687.

## A HEBRAIC INKLING

than many others, but it does bear witness to the situation many find themselves in: life is often full of steps where we can become closer to God. But there may be specific Damascus Road moments, which Lewis often wrote of.

### 2. DEBATE: AWARENESS AND COMPREHENSION

Lewis's final conversion to the God witnessed by the Gospel writers and affirmed by the creeds was in many ways foisted onto Lewis by the young Oxford don, the Roman Catholic Professor of Anglo Saxon, John Ronald Reuel Tolkien. This was the God who had been revealed, unfolding by meeting and encounter, to the ancient Hebrews, to the Jews in the temple and synagogues, distinct and apart from the multitudinous gods and goddesses of pagan Rome and Greece (and the seemingly multitudinous nations and tribes, with their "gods" and "goddesses" that came and went with alarmingly rapidity in the Eastern Mediterranean, preying on the ancient Hebrews): *Elohim*, *El Shaddai*, *YHWH*. Two years after Lewis's conversion to theism, a conversation took place on the evening of Saturday September 19, 1931, between J. R. R. Tolkien and Hugo Dyson, on the one hand, and Lewis, on the other. This debate was about myth and Christianity (part of the debate took place in Magdalen water meadows, along the tree-lined Addison Walk). It was, by all accounts, a heated conversation that lasted through the night till the early hours of the morning of Sunday September 20, and it finally convinced Lewis of the veracity of the claims of the Gospel writers and the creeds: that *Yeshua bar Yosef* was the Messiah, the Christ, the incarnate Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God. Writing to Arthur Greeves two days later on Tuesday September 22, 1931,<sup>2</sup> Lewis outlines the meeting, how Dyson came to talk in his rooms at Magdalen, how Tolkien joined them, discussing late into the night, then leaving at 3.00am, Lewis and Dyson seeing him out by the postern on Magdalen Bridge. Lewis and Dyson then retraced the walk through the water meadows and Addison walk talking further and recapitulating on their conversation, till 4.00am. Writing again to Greeves on the October 18, he explains how Tolkien and Dyson showed him how redemption was achieved, for it was this in many ways that proved the obstacle to Lewis. What had been holding him

<sup>2</sup> "Lewis writing to Arthur Greeves, Sept. 22, 1931." In, Lewis, *Collected Letters Vol. I*, 969-72.

back from full belief was puzzlement over how the event of the cross and resurrection should achieve salvation for mankind:

My puzzle was the whole doctrine of Redemption: in what sense the life and death of Christ “saved” or “opened salvation to” the world. . . . What I couldn’t see was how the life and death of Someone Else (whoever he was) two thousand years ago could help us here and now—except in so far as his example helped us. And the example business, tho’ true and important, is not Christianity: right in the centre of Christianity, in the Gospels and St Paul, you keep on getting something quite different, . . . “propitiation” —“sacrifice” —“the blood of the Lamb.”<sup>3</sup>

It was this which Lewis found shocking, it led to an immediacy: the implications of the sacrifice of Christ were in the *here and now*, not isolated in the event two thousand years ago. Also, Lewis could not see how, when the world was full of stories of dying and resuscitated gods in pagan myths and world religions, this one story could be unique and true. Lewis, from his atheistic apostate days, was suffering from a form of puzzling multi-religion syncretism: this was, in part, because Lewis had immersed himself so much during his youth in Northernness and the pagan myths (eschewing anything to do with the ancient Hebrews, the Jews, and their scriptures and traditions). However, now he could see that the doctrines we get out of the “true myth,” to use Lewis’s own words, are separate, a dilution in some ways, they are “translations into our concepts and ideas of what God has already expressed in a language more adequate, namely the actual Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Resurrection.”<sup>4</sup>

This conversation with Tolkien and Dyson was still not the final giving-in by Lewis to full Christian belief. Intellectually he could not see how God had acted unilaterally, uniquely, and there was still the problem of what Lewis saw as the language of atonement: propitiation, the sacrament of communion, the emphasis on the blood of Christ. It is fair to assert that much of this was cultural prejudice on Lewis’s part, but there was also a deep ingrained resistance to finally giving in to this God. It was required that Lewis lay down his intellectual ego, his intellectual crown (cf. Rev

3 “Lewis writing to Arthur Greeves, Oct. 18, 1931.” In Lewis, *Collected Letters Vol. I*, 975–77. Quote, 974.

4 “Lewis writing to Arthur Greeves, Oct. 18, 1931.” In Lewis, *Collected Letters Vol. I*, 977.

## A HEBRAIC INKLING

4:10),<sup>5</sup> but somehow this required more than belief, it was not simply a suspension of the intellect, it was something different. This moment came eight days later on Monday September 28, 1931; the realization of who and what Christ was suddenly became real to Lewis, while he was riding in the sidecar of his brother's motorcycle to Whipsnade Zoo!

I was driven to Whipsnade one sunny morning. When we set out I did not believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and when we reached the zoo I did. Yet I had not exactly spent the journey in thought. Nor in great emotion. "Emotional" is perhaps the last word we can apply to some of the most important events. It was more like when a man, after long sleep, still lying motionless in bed, becomes aware that he is now awake. And it was, like that moment on top of the bus, ambiguous.<sup>6</sup>

This realization was, in many ways, the gift of the Holy Spirit; an example of grace: the spiritual action of God affecting the human mind. But Lewis had to prepare himself by slowly, painfully slowly, exorcizing his false gods and the philosophical barriers that prevented him seeing God, and understanding the why of the crucifixion. Warnie, incidentally, had returned to belief in Christianity eight months earlier on the May 9, 1931.

Lewis up to this point is too ignorant of the Hebrew Bible to understand the significance and the necessity of a blood sacrifice to end all sacrifices.<sup>7</sup> What he heard through attendance at Holy Communion, either as a boy at public school or obligatory attendance at college chapel services in the University of Oxford, clearly puzzled him. Yet what happens in the Mass/Eucharist/Communion, so the apostle Peter asserts, is how the precious blood of the Anointed One offered as an unblemished lamb was part of God's plan from before "the foundations of the world" (1 Pet 1:19–20). This resonates with depictions of Melchizedek, Abraham, and the Passover in the Hebrew Bible. But he does acknowledge the personal God he has submitted to; the idea of "the Will of the Lord" comes not from all the wide and contradictory history of religions across the world,

5 "[T]he twenty-four elders fall before the one who is seated on the throne and worship the one who lives forever and ever; they cast their crowns before the throne." Rev 4:10.

6 Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 229.

7 For example, a small number of pertinent references: Exodus 23:18; 24:6; 44:7; 44:15. Hebrews 9:7, 22, 25; 10:4; 13:11; Isaiah 1:11; 66:3. Leviticus 4:5, 16; 6:27, 30; 17:11; Luke 13:1; Psalms 16:4; 50:13; Romans 3:25.

but from the Jews, from the ancient Hebrews: and it comes as revelation to humanity.<sup>8</sup>

### 3. WISDOM: THE CHRISTIAN LEWIS

We cannot underestimate the immediate change of heart towards European Jews, the ancient Hebrews, and their scriptures, engendered in Lewis by his conversion to Christianity. The anti-Semitism—from his upbringing and his schooling—has disappeared. Writing to his brother in 1933 on the rise of National Socialism in Germany and Hitler’s politicized prejudices towards the Jews, Lewis—who had shown little interest in politics before his conversion—comments that Warnie might be correct that the Western forces share much of the responsibility for the present growth of National Socialism in Germany, “but nothing can fully excuse the iniquity of Hitler’s persecution of the Jews, or the absurdity of his theoretical position.”<sup>9</sup> Lewis quotes some of the more ridiculous of Hitler’s comments about the Jews, the absurd argument that the Jews have made no contribution to human culture, further that Hitler has argued that by destroying the Jews he will be undertaking the will of the Lord. This is regarded by Lewis as contradictory: “Now as the whole idea of the ‘Will of the Lord’ is precisely what the world owes to the Jews, the blaspheming tyrant has just fixed his absurdity for all to see in a single sentence, and shown that he is as contemptible for his stupidity as he is detestable for his cruelty.”<sup>10</sup> Lewis expresses charity towards the German peoples, but gives no quarter to Nordic dictators and tyrants, as he terms them. It is fair to assert that this new approach is down to his conversion(s), which culminated with the motorcycle ride two years prior to his writing this letter. It was like a switch was thrown in his brain, he merely accepted and knew God’s truth in the incarnation-crucifixion-resurrection, with all that flowed from this event, and how it was grounded in and issued from millennia of witness from the Jews. His conversion changes utterly his approach to, and value given to the Jews of Europe, and the ancient Hebrews and their testimony. Lewis’s position is quite different also to the mainstream attitude amongst the British people at that time towards the Jewish question—particularly amongst the intelligentsia elite at Oxford.

8 Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 220.

9 “Lewis to Arthur Greeves, 5 Nov 1933.” In *They Stand Together*, 466–687.

10 “Lewis to Arthur Greeves, 5 Nov 1933.” In *They Stand Together*, 466–687.

4. “I AM THAT I AM” (EXOD 3:14)

*The Lord as “I Am.”*

For Lewis, that “God was God”<sup>11</sup> was more of an acknowledgement than a realization and he qualifies this by invoking the present tense: the realization that God stood over and against him simply, sheerly, and purely as Lord: “I am the Lord; ‘I am that I am.’”<sup>12</sup> For Lewis, this is a paradoxical statement as it tells little about God except for utter transcendence, and diametric being over and against the world. He is still coming from a position redolent with nineteenth-century German philosophy—the obvious influence of Hegelian metaphysics prior to his conversion/re-conversion is clear. (His starting point is not with the Hebrew *El, Elohim*<sup>13</sup>—the eternal self-existing One—but with nineteenth-century Enlightenment-led philosophy.) Perhaps this is why he stresses the absolute transcendence and separation, aseity and independence of God from human reality so much. But this realization is more than the acknowledgement of an abstract absolute spirit over and against the world: this is a personal Lord that knows us intimately and seeks a response. As we have seen, Lewis makes the link explicitly with Exodus 3:14: “God said to Moses, ‘I Am that I Am.’ He said further, ‘Thus you shall say to the Israelites, I Am has sent me to you.’”

Eberhard Busch has noted (in the context of a similar conversion experience by the Swiss Reformed theologian Karl Barth, early in his career) how this new starting point (for Barth more of a *Retraktation*) was in many ways an explication of God’s revelation to Moses in the Book of Exodus (Exod 3:14).<sup>14</sup> Busch describes how Barth began to use this phrase, how he sought to deny the “god” that parts of the church revered as a no-god; further, how the position “God is God” does not exclude a Christocentric position. Neither does “God is God” mean “God is everything;” for if God is everything then God is not God. What is

11 Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 220.

12 Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 220.

13 *Elohim*, singular *Eloah*, (Hebrew: God), the God of Israel in the Old Testament. . . . When referring to *YHWH, Elohim* very often is accompanied by the article *ha-*, to mean, in combination, “the God,” and sometimes with a further identification *Elohim hayyim*, meaning “the living God.”

14 Busch, “God Is God: The Meaning of a Controversial Formula and the Fundamental Problem of Speaking about God.”

more, explains Busch, this is not a mathematical equation: “The equation, therefore, is not self-evident because it implies the critical thesis that our speaking about God does not automatically speak about God.” To say that “God is God” invokes the realization that what we take for God is not God: therefore, God is not acknowledged as God. Even in saying thus, all we can proclaim is that we fall short in our perceiving. Our speech is inevitably inadequate. As Busch notes, by placing our “god” “on the throne of the world we enthrone in him only ourselves.”<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, to say, “God is God, is so unprotected that it seems to cry out for further explanatory definition.”<sup>16</sup> Lewis finds himself in the same position, which is why he struggles in the period in his life from the conversion to theism in his rooms in Magdalen in 1929 through to the conversation with Dyson and Tolkien, this is followed by the motorcycle ride in 1931, which sees the end of his wrestling with God in his mind, by which time he is as exhausted as Jacob (Gen 32:22–32) and God can finally, conveniently gift Lewis true faith. (And unlike Jacob, at least Lewis escaped with his skeleton and musculature intact.)

*The Paradoxical Difficulties  
of Defining the Complement in “God is God”*

The proposition, “God is God” is subject-complement. This is to invoke, deliberately, the language of grammar. In calling God *subject*, this is as the *nominative* in a sentence; not the *object (accusative)*, the object that we may study, investigate. In his mature work, Barth asserted that God allows us to turn God into an object of study so as to gain some understanding, but this self-objectification does not deny the primacy of God as the *eternal* subject, the eternal origin from which all that is created flows. Grammatically the complement is not less than the subject.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, such a construct is in essence Trinitarian, or, more particularly, points to the Trinitarian—the relationship between the Father and the Son can be seen as subject-complement: the Son is not less than the Father; the Father does not exist before the Son; the Spirit is co-eternal, it proceeds

15 Busch, “God Is God,” 105.

16 Busch, “God Is God,” 105

17 For example, in NT Greek *Theos ēn ho Logos*: The Word is God (John 1:1). The position of the article indicates the subject; the complement drops the article and is placed before the verb.

## A HEBRAIC INKLING

from both the Son and the Father. They are, however, different persons. This question of personhood is important. However, what is predicated requires further elucidation. The complement in “God is God” implies unknowing; the complement opens up distance and hiddenness, aseity and sovereignty. This becomes a safeguard that prevents God being merged utterly into human affairs. Therefore, for Karl Barth and for Lewis, without this safeguard we have only a noetic idol: the no-“god” of human-centered churches/religion for Barth,<sup>18</sup> or C. S. Lewis’s “absolute spirit” from his Hegelian phase. In his commentary on Romans, Barth faces the paradox that we *must* speak about God—it is a divine imperative—but we are human and therefore *cannot* speak about God. We must replace the complement “God” in both Barth and Lewis’s declaration with a qualifier, but herein lies danger, for whenever we declare God is *love*, God is *glorious*, is *truth*, is *goodness*, God is *immeasurable*, *infinite*, *immutable*, there is compromise—we reduce God to a concept. And we so often draw these concepts from ancient Greek philosophy not from the ancient Hebrews, from the Hebrew Bible, where God again and again stops the Hebrew patriarchs, the prophets, the kings, and tribes from creating idols and little “gods” out of an idea or thought about God: they had to suffice again and again with this blank canvas—the, “I am that I am:” that God is.

For hundreds and hundreds of years the “Lordship” of the Holy Spirit restrained and prepared the ancient Hebrews until qualification of the great “I am” happened as an event in human history. Therefore, we must always keep before us the paradoxical revelation of this hidden God, the *Deus abscondus*,<sup>19</sup> rooted in the name given in Exodus: “I am that I am.” Therefore, the qualifier can only be “Lord.” This then opens up space for the self-revealing of God in Christ Jesus: “God is God” is qualified by Lordship; personhood is thereby revealed as the nature of this Lordship—this person acts in love toward humanity. But this love, forgiveness, and mercy do not deny God’s Lordship. This is rooted in the first commandment: “*I am* the LORD your God, and you shall have no other gods before me” (Exod 20:2). Therefore, to return to Busch, “The

18 This is best expounded by Barth in a scathing attack on religion, an address delivered in the Town Church of Aarau on Jan. 16, 1916. See, Karl Barth, “*Die Gerechtigkeit Gottes*.”

19 Busch, “God Is God,” 104. The phrase (or “name”?) God is God is in one sense apophatic, yet it does not point to nothingness. Is it not a form of unknowing-knowing, kataphatic-apophatic?

equation ‘God is God’ seeks initially to avoid the equating of God and our concepts of God.”<sup>20</sup> Only if this is no definition at all can we avoid the pitfalls of qualifying and reducing God to a human idol. Busch rightly notes how the acknowledgement/declaration is a reflection of the revelation of God’s name given to Moses. In Barthian terms, this is simultaneously a revealing and a concealing, a veiling and unveiling, visible yet shrouded: “I am that I am”: as both Abraham and Moses found in their own particular ways. This name is both informative and given, yet obtuse and cryptic. Therefore, any conversion must be initiated by God and on God’s terms: otherness and Lordship are essential to this, as both Barth and Lewis realized. It is this realization that separates Barth and Lewis’s conversions from the Hegelian metaphysics they were both moving away from. There is perhaps a way in which the Holy Spirit rehearses and prepares individuals, such as Lewis (and his wife to be—the American Jew, Joy Davidman—over the other side of the Atlantic); is this how the Holy Spirit converted many ancient Hebrews to a closer relationship with God? If so, this is fundamental to the Hebrew understanding of God as revealed and is given to the rest of humanity by the chosen people: a blank canvas is how to start a great painting.<sup>21</sup> Lewis and Barth in particular had to clear out all false conceptions of God and start with this basic axiom—that God was indeed God.

*fides quaerens intellectum*

There is another factor in this understanding—namely the realization that faith precedes doctrine, or more pertinently, *faith is a necessary prerequisite for understanding*. The acceptance of God as God, of the Lord as “I am,” is the correct prerequisite for any degree of understanding; it is also the basis of a sound Christology. This is the basis of faith in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament; intellectualization (something of the approach of the Greek academy) comes after. What then follows is as Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109), churchman, theologian, and philosopher, wrote, “I do not seek to understand so that I can believe, but I believe so that I may understand; and what is more, I believe that unless

20 Busch, “God Is God,” 107.

21 And if the painting goes wrong, does not work, fails, then scrub-off the painting and re-prime to a bare canvas!

## A HEBRAIC INKLING

I do believe I shall not understand.”<sup>22</sup> Anselm accepted that any degree of understanding of God initially involved accepting the Lordship of God. Hence, *fides quaerens intellectum* (faith seeking understanding): faith may seek understanding but faith can only understand if such understanding is built upon faith. Lordship, however, is a constant: thus, Anselm could write that he was not trying to make his way to the height, to penetrate the light inaccessible, he knew in humility that his understanding was not equal or capable. But out of love he desires to understand a little of the truth about God. For Lewis he had to take the step of faith; then he could seek to understand, but an important factor was humility—a trait that was lacking in the pseudo-Hegelian beliefs prior to his conversion. If he had remained with his own innate theological speculation, he would have got no further than the idea he called “absolute spirit,” which merely complemented all that he had become as a person. By comparison, Barth attempts to solve the crisis of faith manifested in his preaching and beliefs through left-wing politics. However, the year of the new starting point, 1915, for Barth is characterized by a realization of the distance and hiddenness, aseity, and sovereignty of God. This is a position that in Barth is redolent with humility. Both conversion/re-conversion for Barth and Lewis bear the hallmark of what Anselm asserted. It is of no mere coincidence that both Barth and Lewis developed a profound appreciation of Anselm of Canterbury in their mature work.

### 5. . . . TO CALL UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD

C. S. Lewis’s protracted conversion was about perceiving a supernatural influence, listening and assessing, measuring and responding to the LORD. But the name does not come out of nowhere, it is given by God—revealed. If the complement in the paradoxical title of Lewis and Barth’s “God is God” (“I am that I am”) is Lord then the will of the Lord is known through relationship: listening and perceiving, hearing, knowing and understanding, . . . and receiving. This happens preveniently if we are open to the grace: so that the will is known through the name, a name that encapsulates what is known and understood. The revealed reality of knowing of God focused down from the point of the incarnation onto a triune understanding—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, co-eternal,

22 Anselm of Canterbury, *The Proslogion*. Anselm is quoting from Isa 7:9. See, Davies and Evans, *Anselm of Canterbury—The Major Works*, 82–104.

three persons in one God—but we need briefly to remind ourselves, as Lewis did, of the development, some might say evolution, in the human understanding of God that was given to the ancient Hebrews and formed the foundation of the triune revelation. This was a right understanding that was mirrored, to a degree, in Lewis’s protracted stages of conversion. What happened for Lewis over a few years happened for the Hebrews over a period of nearly four thousand years.

Rabbinic Judaism regards seven names of God to be so holy that written down, they must never be expunged or removed: *YHWH*, *El* (“God”), *Eloah* (“God”), *Elohim* (“God”), *Shaddai* (“Almighty”), *Ehyeh* (“I Am”), and *Tzevaot* (“of Hosts”).<sup>23</sup> The name *Yah*, which forms the first part of the name *YHWH*, is regarded by some of worthy of similar protection. There are other names but they are seen as titles or epithets reflecting different aspects of God, however, often out of respect—even exclusivity—special care is taken when writing of God in English: hence, “G-d.”<sup>24</sup>

We need to look a little deeper at the name “I am.” In the Septuagint this is “I am the one being”—*egō eimi ho ōn* (in the Hebrew: *ehyeh ‘asher ehyeh*—“I-am who I-am” or “I-will-be who I-will-be.”). However, the name *YHWH*—referred to as the Tetragrammaton,<sup>25</sup> and often translated as “LORD”—is, according to Jewish culture, forbidden to be pronounced, being substituted or replaced by the word *Adonai* (the Lord); but what is evoked by *YHWH* is often seen as more, yes, lordship, to a degree, but also, and essentially, the personal God and relation (which Lewis began to submit to in the final stages of his protracted conversions: was Lewis in effect visited by the *Shekhinah*<sup>26</sup>—the divine presence?).<sup>27</sup> *YHWH* has often

---

23 Maimonides. *Mishneh Torah, Yesodei ha-Torah* §6:2. See, <http://www.mechon-mamre.org/i/1106.htm>. Compiled by Maimonides, the *Mishneh Torah* is a code of ethics, advice/answers to moral questions, regarding Jewish law authored by Maimonides, as compiled between 1170–80 AD, in Egypt.

24 See, “Names of God,” in Karesh and Hurvitz, *Encyclopedia of Judaism*, 179.

25 The Tetragrammaton or Tetragram (from Greek; meaning four letters, the four-letter Hebrew word *YHWH*, and is the name of the biblical God of Israel: from right to left, *yodh, he, waw, he*).

26 A title used freely in the Talmud.

27 There is nothing in the Torah that prohibits the speaking of the name and it is liberally cited in the Hebrew Bible (the people calling on the name of the LORD); however, the name had ceased to be spoken aloud by the third century BC (Second Temple Judaism). The writers of the New Testament consistently follows this practice.

## A HEBRAIC INKLING

been interpreted as meaning, “He who makes that which has been made, he brings into existence whatever exists.” It is important to remember that the ancient Hebrews were surrounded by pagan tribes and nations that had invented “gods” and “goddesses,” distant and unknowable—except, that is, knowable by a religious elite of mystical priestesses, shamans, shrine prostitutes, and patriarchal priest-kings. Many ordinary Jews living in an agrarian economy would suffice with *HaShem* (meaning, The Name). The evolving understanding of God as the one, the one true living deity, is potentially perceivable by all. Yes, there is a priestly tribe (the Levites) who handle sacrifice and intercede, to a degree, but God is perceivable and knowable and all can partake in this understanding, depending on how they have personally developed, and how life has shaped them. But many turn away and invent their own gods and idols (the Book of Judges, 2 Kings, et al.).

The name for God used by the Hebrews evolves over centuries, it develops over millennia, and it is fine-tuned, to a degree, through encounter and therefore revelation; it is often asserted that there are around 270 names, or combinations of names, for God in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>28</sup> The names are presented so as to reveal some facet of God: life,

See R. Kendall Soulen, *The Divine Name(s) and the Holy Trinity*, vol. 1

28 The Hebrew names for God fall into two categories: conceptual or proper. The original significance of divine names is often lost and indeterminate. Proper nouns are often found in ancient literature, conceptual or abstract names are more of a recent development (i.e., from the time of Second Temple Judaism). Each name is not exclusive but has significance and represents a specific tradition. *YHWH* and *Elohim* represent two biblical traditions. The Tetragrammaton appears the most frequently used and is an essential name of God invoking eternal monotheistic existence (Exod 3:14). *Shem ha-Meforash* (“the Ineffable Name”) referring to “the holiest one” was never pronounced, except by the high priest in the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur. Many other names occur in the Bible, but are regarded as secondary: *El*, *Eloha*, *Elohim* (plural; taken as a singular when applied to the God of Israel) with various suffixes—*El Shaddai*, and *El Zebaoth* (though there is some doubt about the validity of this last one according to the Talmud). The word *elohim* was also used in secular terms for heathen gods (Exod 20:3) and human judges (Exod 22:7). The names of God became ontological representations of God’s relationship to creation and his creatures: often representative of compassion and mercy. Because of the perceived sanctity of God’s name and the authority of the Third Commandment—taking the name of the LORD in vain—this caused a reluctance to overuse a particular name especially in the Talmudic period. See, as a good example of the cumulative Hebraic names and uses thereof, Auret, “The Theological Intent of the Use of the Names of God in the Eighth-Century Memoir of Isaiah”; furthermore, Broadie, “Maimonides and Aquinas on the Names of God.” Regarding the difficulties of discerning intent and meaning see, de Blois, “Translating the Names of God: Trygve

## 2. *The Hebrews, the Jews, . . . and God. I*

personhood, particularity, God's unfathomable enormity, his glory and beauty. A root for many of the names is *El*, *Elohim*—as in *El Shaddai*, God Almighty, *Beth El*, the house of God, *Immanu-el*, God with us. At the centre of this revelation is *Y-hw-h*: properly, *YHWH* (the vowels omitted out of respect for the holiness and purity which is inherent to the name). As we have noted, this is much more personal, indeed it is the very name of God, not a mere title, and is the name reserved for the covenant God of Israel.

The key biblical passage in attempting to understand the name is Exodus chapter 3: Moses and the burning bush. The revelation is fine-tuned in its ontological purity as “I am who I am,” “I will be what I will be. (Exod 3:14). This is divine speech about the name:

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 you shall call me  
from generation to generation.

Exod 3:13–15

As we saw with Karl Barth and C. S. Lewis' conversions. God is therefore the eternal self-existing One. This is associated with the covenant with Israel, a covenant that builds on the encounters with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the twelve tribes. God was revealed to the patriarchs as *El Shaddai*, but to Moses as something other. To Moses this is a binding relational covenant: *YHWH*. There are multiple uses and forms to reflect this throughout the Hebrew Bible which mirror the developing understanding in Lewis during the 1930s as he explores his way forward in faith: “*YHWH Shammah*,” “I am the One who is there” (Ezek 48:35); “*YHWH Sabaoth*,” “I am the Almighty” (1 Sam 1:3); “*YHWH Shalom*,” “The LORD our Peace,” (Judg 6:24); “*YHWH Yireh*,” “the LORD your provider” (1 Sam 1:3); “*YHWH m'qaddesh*,” “The LORD

---

Mettinger's *Analyses Applied to Bible Translation*; also, Marmorstein, *The Old Rabbinic Doctrine of God*, 17–145.

## A HEBRAIC INKLING

who sanctifies you,”/“The LORD our Holiness,” (Exod 31:13; Lev 20:8b); “*YHWH Tsidkenu*,” “The LORD Our Righteousness” (Jer 23:5–6); “*YHWH Ro'i*,” “The LORD is my Shepherd” (Ps 23:1). Hence when we come to the pivot point of revelation we find the apostles struggling to realize what has happened and what is before them: the Son of God? the Son of *YHWH*? Yeshua Ha Mashiach: before Abraham was, I am that I am—“Yes, in very truth I tell you,’ Jesus answered, ‘before Abraham was, *I am!*’” (John 8:58).

Lewis is not alone amongst theologians and intellectual Christians who reflect an evolving conversion measured in some ways by the named revelation of God in the Hebrew Bible.

SAMPLE