THE DIVINE NAMES

IN the book of Deuteronomy God is designated by nine different titles, and the study of these is valuable both for the light which it throws upon the book itself, as a further indication of style, and also in relation to the wider question of the literary analysis of the Pentateuch. This latter took its rise when the book of Genesis was first divided into two sources, named J and E, because the former used Jehovah, and the latter 'Elohim, for the divine name. This suggests the inquiry whether Yahweh (Jehovah) and 'Elohim should be regarded as equivalents, and if not, what is their connotation, and whether reasons for the choice of one or the other can be discerned.

Divine Names Used in Deuteronomy

	Narrative	i–iv	v–xi	xii–xxvi	xxvii–xxxi	xxxii, xxxiii
1. 'El	—	3	4	—	—	5
2. 'Eloah	—	—	—	—	—	2
3. 'Elyon	—	—	—	—	—	1
4. 'Elohim (gods)	—	1	10	12	10	4
5. 'Elohim (God) alone	1	5	4	2	8	4
6. Yahweh (alone)	14	35	65	54	51	16
7. 'Adonay Yahweh	—	1	1	—	—	—
8. Yahweh the God of (your, thy, our) fathers	—	3	1	2	1	—
9. Yahweh thy (your, etc.) God	—	46	77	130	46	—

The various names and their distribution are set forth in a table on p. 37. At one time there was much debate over variations between the LXX and the Massoretic Text, but in Deuteronomy these are unimportant. As elsewhere, Yahweh is translated κύριος (LORD), and 'Elohim θεός (God). In a few instances 'thy' is replaced by 'your' (e.g. in ii. 30) and once by the definite article (xviii. 3); and occasionally Yahweh is replaced by θεός.[1] Such small variations are common in all parts of the Old Testament and, whatever their cause may have been, do not affect any inferences that will be drawn.

'ELOHIM AND YAHWEH

It can be positively stated that in Deuteronomy Yahweh and 'Elohim are not mere equivalents; if they were, the title 'Yahweh thy 'Elohim' (the LORD thy God) would be deprived of meaning. We shall consider first the word 'Elohim; which, as a plural form, can be given either a polytheistic or a monotheistic meaning.

In the former sense the English versions translate 'gods',[2] the word 'other' being often prefixed (e.g. v. 7). In all it is used thirty-seven times, frequently to exalt Yahweh as the one true God in contrast with the other gods of the nations, who are granted a doubtful existence, but no power.

In the latter case, of which there are twenty-four instances, it may be regarded as a 'plural of majesty'[3] and translated 'God', i.e. the only true God, and thus it approximates to a proper noun. Nevertheless it still retains its conceptual form and meaning; just as in English the forms 'the Deity', or 'the Supreme Being', whilst denoting a Person, are, grammatically considered, common nouns.

Hence, as is the case with 'El, an adjective may be affixed to 'Elohim, as 'the eternal God' (xxxiii. 27), or a possessive pronoun, 'thy (our) God' (x. 21, xxxi. 17).

The qualitative force of the word is seen by its employment as predicate in the sentence 'the LORD thy God, he is God', i.e. truly divine (vii. 9), and again in 'Moses, the man of God' (xxxiii. 1) which signifies his divine calling.

[1] So in ii. 15, viii. 3 (cf. Mt. iv. 4), xii. 21, xxvi. 17, xxix. 20.
[2] In xxxii. 39, 'there is no god with me', the Hebrew has 'elohim.
[3] See Gesenius-Kautzsch-Cowley, *Hebrew Grammar*, § 124g.

The word 'Elohim for God, though a plural form, is used with a singular verb, consistently with a monotheistic outlook.[1] When it is used in preference to Yahweh, an implied contrast can usually be discerned between God and man; often with a suggestion of wonderment and awe. Thus we read 'the judgment is God's' (i. 17), 'the voice of God . . . out of the midst of the fire' (iv. 33), 'God in the heaven above and on the earth beneath' (iv. 39), 'the finger of God' (ix. 10), 'accursed of God' (xxi. 23) and 'feared not God' (xxv. 18).

The contrast between God and man which is implicit in these instances becomes clearer in iv. 32,[2] 'the day that God created man', words allied to, and perhaps quoted from, Gn. i. 27.

In some of these instances Yahweh could not be substituted for 'Elohim, and in others something of the meaning would be lost by the change.

In contrast with this, Yahweh is a *name*, not a concept, and therefore, grammatically considered, a proper noun. As such it denotes an individual Person, with all that personality connotes, life and character, the power to act and to communicate with other persons.

So when Yahweh is named we think at once of a divine Person, higher indeed than man, but revealing Himself to man, as to Moses on Mount Sinai, and able to intervene in the affairs of men, as He did when He brought Israel out of Egypt.

Moreover, however long beforehand the word Yahweh may have been known,[3] Yahweh is quite clearly the name of God associated with the covenant in Horeb; therefore 'I am Yahweh thy God . . .' is the foundation of the Decalogue.

In the brief narrative portions, we find Yahweh speaking (xxxi. 14, 16, xxxii. 48, xxxiv. 4), commanding (i. 3, xxix. 1), appearing (xxxi. 15), and showing (xxxiv. 1). In addition, we have 'the ark of the covenant of the LORD' (xxxi. 25), 'the servant of the LORD' and 'the word of the LORD', all of which imply personal relationships.

In the discourses the same is the rule. Yahweh is the subject of

[1] There is no analogy to this in Assyrian or Babylonian. However, in the Amarna tablets *ilāni* (gods) is found with a singular verb.
[2] It is quite explicit in Hos. xi. 9, 'I am God and not man.'
[3] See pp. 43f.

the verbs to speak or to say (e.g. i. 42, ii. 1) and the sworn promise of God is uniformly introduced by 'the LORD sware' (Dt. i. 8, 34, ii. 14, vi. 18, viii. 1, ix. 5, xi. 9, 21, xxvi. 3, xxviii. 11, xxx. 20, xxxi. 7); which corresponds to Ex. xiii. 5, 11, xxxii. 13, xxxiii. 1.

Among verbs of personal action of which Yahweh is the subject may be mentioned hearing (i. 34), destroying (ii. 21, viii. 20), giving (iii. 20), scattering (iv. 27, ix. 4), bringing (vi. 21), showing (vi. 22), separating (x. 8), laying (xxix. 22), uprooting (xxix. 28), rejoicing (xxx. 9), going (xxxi. 8), abhorring (xxxii. 19), judging (xxxii. 36) and knowing (xxxiv. 10). Yahweh also exercises anger (i. 37), choice (vii. 6), love (vii. 7, 8), and jealousy (xxix. 20). In chapter xxviii it is Yahweh who administers both the blessings and the curses.

In the legislative section (chapters xii–xxvi) Yahweh is the subject of verbs denoting giving (xii. 21, xxvi. 3), turning (xiii. 17), choosing (xii. 14, 26, xiv. 2, xv. 20, xvi. 15, xvii. 10, xviii. 6), blessing (xv. 4), saying (xvii. 16, xviii. 17, 21, 22), hearing (xxvi. 7), bringing (xxvi. 8), and avouching (xxvi. 18).

In conformity with this we have 'the commandment of the LORD' (i. 43), 'the hand of the LORD' (ii. 15), 'the sight of the LORD' (vi. 18, xxxi. 29), 'the mouth of the LORD' (viii. 3), 'the acts of the LORD' (xi. 7), 'the anger of the LORD' (xxix. 20, 27), 'the voice of the LORD' (xxx. 8), 'the name of the LORD' (xxviii. 10, xxxii. 3), 'the word (LXX words) of the LORD' (v. 5), 'the portion of the LORD' (xxxii. 9), 'the justice of the LORD' (xxxiii. 21), 'the blessing of the LORD' (xxxiii. 23), 'commandments of the LORD' (xxviii. 9), 'offerings of the LORD' (xviii. 1), and 'assembly of the LORD' (xxxiii. 1, 2, 3, 8). Yahweh is 'provoked' (ix. 8), 'rebelled against' (xxxi. 27), 'forgotten' (vi. 12), 'followed' (i. 36), and 'requited' (xxxii. 6). We have 'before the LORD' (ix. 25, xvi. 16, xviii. 7, xix. 17, xxiv. 4); 'against the LORD' (ix. 24, xxxi. 27); 'unto the LORD' (xii. 11, xv. 9, xxiv. 15); 'abomination to the LORD' (xii. 31, xviii. 12). Yahweh is invoked in xxi. 8, xxvi. 10, xxxiii. 5, 11.

Finally, in iv. 35 and xxix. 13, passages which assert the essential and unique deity of Yahweh, we have Yahweh as subject and *'Elohim* as predicate.

We may therefore summarize the distinction thus: whereas *'Elohim* contrasts God with man as to the difference of nature, Yahweh presents God as entering into a personal relationship with

man and revealing Himself to man. We deduce that normally the choice of one rather than the other is neither a sign of diverse authorship, nor a matter of caprice, but that each has its own point and purpose. Since this is certainly so in Deuteronomy, it renders it probable that the same is the case in the earlier books, Genesis to Numbers; and therefore that the change from Yahweh to *'Elohim* need not indicate a change of authorship.

That is the view of I. Engnell, who says: 'The different divine names have different ideological associations, and therewith different import. Thus, Yahweh is readily used when it is a question of Israel's national God, indicated as such over against foreign gods, and where the history of the fathers is concerned, while on the other hand *'Elohim*, "God", gives more expression to a "theological" and abstract-cosmic picture of God in larger and more moving contexts. . . . So then, it is the traditionist, the *same* traditionist, who varies in the use of the divine names, not the "documents".'[1]

If this be granted, the case for the analysis between J, E and P is seriously weakened, and so thereby is the time sequence JE, D and P, on which so much depends.

YAHWEH THY GOD

A glance at the table on p. 37 shows that the use of this title (299 times)[2] is a marked characteristic of the book.

Confining attention to the legislation, Yahweh thy God[3] is used 120 times, Yahweh alone fifty-four, and then (in striking contrast) *'Elohim* alone only twice. There must be some reason for this. 'Yahweh thy God' expresses a personal and exclusive relationship between Yahweh and Israel, and suggests the consciousness that there is a fundamental difference[4] between Israel's God and those of the nations. For the people of Israel Yahweh is the living God,

[1] *Gamla Testamentet, En traditions historisk inleetring,* I, Stockholm, 1955; quoted by C. R. North, *OTMS,* p. 66.

[2] The distribution is nearly uniform, averaging eleven times per chapter in chapters i–xi, nine in xii–xxvi, and nine in xxvii–xxxi. The same is true of the two following titles, another testimony to the unity of the whole.

[3] To avoid repetition, we include in this one expression all others which vary the pronoun.

[4] This theme is well developed by G. E. Wright in *The Old Testament against its Environment,* London, 1950.

known by His actions, and notably by the fact that He brought them out of Egypt. Throughout the Old Testament, the history, the Psalms and the prophets, Yahweh is the God of Israel, and they are His chosen people. The time of His choice is invariably carried back to the period of the wilderness wanderings and to Sinai in particular;[1] it was there and then that Yahweh chose Israel to be His people, and that Israel confessed Him as its God.

The way the title is used confirms the conclusion that it issues from the revelation at Sinai; for the main discourse begins 'the LORD our God made a covenant with us in Horeb' (v. 2), and the title 'Yahweh thy God' is often followed by 'which brought you out of the land of Egypt' (xiii. 5, etc.). This conception of Yahweh's choice of Israel to be His own 'peculiar people' is indeed deeply set in the Deuteronomic law (xiv. 2, 21). For this is no mere collection of civil judgments and ethical statutes, but the lawgiver is also a preacher, and his aim throughout is to bind the people 'with all their heart and soul' in loyalty to Yahweh their God.

Because 'the LORD thy God loved thee' (xxiii. 5) He turned Balaam's curse into a blessing, and Moses calls on the people in response to 'hear his voice and keep his commandments' (xv. 5, xxvi. 16–18).[2]

If we were to eliminate the title 'Yahweh thy God' and all that goes with it, we should rob Deuteronomy of much of its essential character.

The strong preference exhibited in Deuteronomy for this name of God cannot be put down to later prophetic reflection upon the traditions of Sinai and the Exodus, for it is much less used by the prophets than other titles. For instance in Is. i–xxxv it is found only three times, 'Yahweh of hosts' and 'the Holy One of Israel' being much more frequent.[3] It seems then that the prophets did not invent but inherited it.

The early origin of the ideas which are concentrated in this title can be asserted with some confidence.[4] In the song of Deborah, the early date of which is undisputed, Yahweh is

[1] Cf. Wright, op. cit., p. 57.

[2] Cf. xii. 15, xiv. 28, xv. 10, 18, xvi. 17, xxiii. 5, 20, xxiv. 19.

[3] In Hosea 'Elohim is used fifteen times, Yahweh thirty-five times, and Yahweh (their) God only four times.   [4] See Wright, op. cit., pp. 29, 56, 57.

acclaimed as in a special sense 'the God of Israel' (Jdg. v. 5). In Jos. xxiv there is a story of the renewal of the covenant by the tribes gathered at Shechem, who professed their loyalty to 'Yahweh our God' (Jos. xxiv. 25);[1] and the title itself is enshrined in the Decalogue.

It is found in Genesis once only, in xxvii. 24, where Jacob is addressing his father; then next in the vision of the bush (Ex. iii. 18) and afterwards in the colloquies of Moses and Aaron with Pharaoh.

These facts justify the belief that the origin of this name of God and its frequency in Deuteronomy are due to nearness to the Mosaic age and not to later reflection.

YAHWEH, GOD OF YOUR FATHERS

The title we have now to consider is important because it is almost peculiar to Deuteronomy, for its connection with the narrative of Moses' call in Ex. iii, and because it raises the question whether the patriarchs knew the name Yahweh.[2]

The phrase occurs three times in connection with Moses' call (Ex. iii. 13, 15, 16; cf., iv. 5), eight times in Deuteronomy and only three times elsewhere in the Old Testament (Jdg. ii. 12; 2 Ki. xxi. 22; Ezr. x. 11).

It was not derived from the prophets, for it is not to be found in their writings. On the other hand it may well have been an echo of Moses' experience[3] at the burning bush. In that story the voice from the bush first announces: 'I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob' (Ex. iii. 6); the first clause assumes that Moses knows the name of his father's God. Afterwards Moses repeated the words 'my father's God' in his song (Ex. xv. 2)[4] and in naming his son Eliezer (Ex. xviii. 4).

[1] M. Noth accepts this as an authentic tradition; cf. Geschichte Israels, Gottingen, 1954, pp. 89ff., and his commentary 'Josua' in the Hand Kommentar zum Alten Testament.

[2] See note on p. 47. On the etymology of Yahweh see Wright, op. cit., p. 29n., 35, and W. F. Albright's review in JBL, LXVII, 1948, pp. 377–381.

[3] See Lods, Israel, pp. 311–325, for comments on this incident, which that writer regards as probably historical. See also M. Buber, Moses, Oxford, 1946, pp. 39–55.   [4] On the age of Ex. xv, see OTMS, p. 33.

Moses then questions: 'Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you, and they shall say unto me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them?' (Ex. iii. 13).

The form of the question 'What (*mâ*) is his name?' is not that which would commonly be used by one who did not know the name itself; in that case the interrogative would take the form *mî*.[1] The use of *mâ* implies that the reference is to an 'older name whose meaning the Israelites had already forgotten'.[2] Mowinckel's comment is, 'It is *not* E's view that Yahweh is here revealing a hitherto unknown name to Moses. Yahweh is not *telling* His name to one who does not know it. Moses asks for some "control" evidence that his countrymen may know, when he returns to them, that it is really the God of their fathers that has sent him. . . . The whole conversation presupposes that the Israelites knew the name already.'[3] This name is chosen in Deuteronomy to introduce the legislation; the statutes and judgments are to be observed 'in the land which the LORD God of thy fathers giveth thee, to possess it' (xii. 1).

It comes again in the formula[4] for presenting first-fruits (xxvi. 7), in words which bear a strong resemblance to those in Ex. iii. 7, 8, 16.

Elsewhere in Deuteronomy it is linked with the patriarchal promise of an increase of numbers (i. 11, vi. 3) and of the land of inheritance (i. 21, iv. 21, xxvii. 3) now being fulfilled; and finally in reference to the covenant of Horeb (xxix. 25).

The frequency of this title, therefore, like that of the previous one, connects Deuteronomy closely with Moses and the Sinai revelation.

[1] So in Gn. xxiv. 65; Dt. xx. 5; 2 Ki. vi. 11.

[2] Lods, *Israel*, p. 324. Cf. remarks by W. F. Albright, *The Biblical Period*, Pittsburgh, 1950, p. 11.

[3] Quoted by C. R. North, *OTMS*, p. 54. Cf. Hertz, 'The words . . . are not intended to inform Moses what God is *called* . . . but to impress upon him that the guarantee of the fulfilment of the Divine promises lay in the nature of the being who had given the promises.' *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs*, Vol. II, Exodus, London, 1930.

[4] G. von Rad says that use is here made of 'very old norms' (*Studies*, p. 23). The alliteration betrays an early origin. Cf. Welch, *Code*, p. 25.

'EL, 'ELOAH

The word *'El* is the most general term for a god. Like the cognate forms in other Semitic languages (Arabic *ilah*, Babylonian *ilu*) it is a common noun.[1] As such it can be used either of the true God, or of a heathen deity. However greatly the connotation may differ in the two cases, the word always denotes the attributes which distinguish a god from a man, greater power, immortality and heavenly abode. *'Eloah* is equivalent in meaning; in Deuteronomy found only in xxxii. 15, 17.

The conceptual character of this word is shown by the addition of a qualifying adjective such as 'jealous' (iv. 24), 'merciful' (iv. 31), 'faithful' (vii. 6), 'mighty' (vii. 21).

'ELYON

'Elyôn is used only in xxxii. 8. Previously it is connected with Melchizedek (Gn. xiv. 18) and Balaam (Nu. xxiv. 16), both Gentile associations, as in this verse, and early in date. It is also found in the 'kingship' Psalms and elsewhere.

'ADONAY YAHWEH

In two instances where God is addressed in prayer *'Adonay Yahweh*[2] is used (iii. 24, ix. 26). So also Abraham prayed (Gn. xv. 2, 8), Joshua (vii. 7), and Gideon (Jdg. vi. 22).

Whilst *'Elyôn* and *'Adonay Yahweh* both have early associations, they are also found much later (e.g. Ezk. iv. 14; Dn. iv. 34). Therefore, whilst consistent with an early date for Deuteronomy, they are no proof of it.

OTHER NAMES OF GOD

It remains to consider briefly some other names, which are common in the prophets, but in Deuteronomy conspicuous by their absence.

[1] Whilst so used in the Old Testament, in the Ras Shamra tablets 'El is the name of the supreme god of the Canaanite pantheon, and Baal that of his son (Schaeffer, *Cuneiform Texts of Ras Shamra Ugarit*, London, 1939, pp. 59ff.).

[2] The EVV translation of this, 'Lord God', is unfortunate, for by following the LXX it suggests that the second word is *'Elohim*. It would have been better to read 'Lord Jehovah', with S. R. Driver (*ICC in loc.*).

Yahweh ṣebhâôth, the 'LORD of hosts' or 'the LORD God of hosts', occurs no fewer than 288 times in the Old Testament. We hear it on the lips of Samuel (1 Sa. xv. 2) and David (1 Sa. xvii. 45); and then in a long prophetic series, Elijah (1 Ki. xviii. 15), Hosea (xii. 5), Amos (iii. 13), Micah (iv. 4), Nahum (ii. 13), and Zephaniah (ii. 10); it is used more than fifty times in Is. i–xxxix, and frequently by Jeremiah. If therefore Deuteronomy were a prophetic utterance of the seventh century BC the absence of this name would be a strange phenomenon.

Less common, but still frequent in the prophets of that time,[1] is 'Yahweh God of Israel' (Is. xvii. 6, etc.; Zp. ii. 9, 13; Je. xiii. 12, etc.), which is also missing in Deuteronomy.

One more may be noticed, a favourite with Isaiah, 'the Holy One of Israel' (Is. i. 4),[2] also found in the Psalms[3] and Jeremiah.[4] Were the author of Deuteronomy an immediate follower of Isaiah, this also might have been expected to find a place.

Taken singly, little importance could be attached to the absence of these titles; but the absence of them all finds its most satisfying explanation if Deuteronomy belonged to the pre-prophetic period. It would not be fair to press this point unduly, but neither is it right to ignore it altogether.

In this and the previous chapter we have counted words and phrases, and this has been necessary to establish certain facts; but the value of the evidence lies in these facts and not in the numerical detail, and that value is of both a negative and a positive kind.

On the one hand, we have discovered nothing to indicate that the book originated either in the time of Manasseh or in a prophetic circle; and the use of the divine names in Deuteronomy casts doubt upon the analysis in the previous books where it is based upon them as alternatives.

More important is the positive evidence for an early origin. The phraseology belongs to a period when the exodus from Egypt and the impending entry into Canaan were vivid memories. There are links with the call of Moses and the covenant in Horeb which are too many and too subtle to be due to mere chance.

When the repeated use of the phrases concerning the promised

---

[1] But going back to the days of Deborah (Jdg. v. 3, 5).

[2] In all, twenty-nine times.

[3] Pss. lxxi. 22, lxxviii. 41, lxxxix. 18.   [4] Je. l. 29, li. 5.

inheritance and the impending entry into Canaan, which were considered in the previous chapter, is combined with this special preference for the divine titles relating to the patriarchal promise and the covenant in Horeb, the impression left upon the mind is that the writer lived in proximity to these events. Admittedly, this does not possess demonstrative force; the author might have made use of old traditions in order to render more realistic the Mosaic setting which he had composed for the laws which he had collected or invented; nevertheless, the feeling remains that we are not here dealing with fiction.

NOTE ON EXODUS VI. 3

The words in Ex. vi. 1–3 are by some scholars assigned to P, and are taken to prove that the name Yahweh was not known to the patriarchs, who knew their God by the name *'El Shaddai*.

Against this interpretation it must be noted in the first instance that *'El Shaddai* is not a name, but a description, and as such is appropriately used, in connection with a promise or a blessing, wherever it occurs.[1]

J. Hertz goes so far as to say that this view of Ex. vi. 3 'rests on a total misapprehension of the Hebrew idiom'.[2] Where a name is made known for the first time the verb commonly used is *nāghadh* (hiph), as in Gn. xxxii. 29. Here it is *yāda'*, the same as is found in 1 Sa. ii. 12, iii. 7, where the persons concerned were familiar with the name Yahweh but not with all that the name implied.[3] W. J. Martin takes the words 'was I not known . . .' to be an elliptical interrogation which expects an affirmative answer.[4]

Finally, it would be strange indeed for the priestly writer, if he ever existed, so flatly to contradict the well known JE tradition. As M. Buber puts it: 'Abraham proclaims the name when he comes to Canaan, as might a herald, at one spot after another, and his clan knows the name. Is it likely that the author of Ex. vi. 3 did not know this?'[5]

---

[1] Gn. xvii. 1, xxviii. 3, xxxv. 11, xliii. 14, xlviii. 3. In the LXX Shaddai is replaced by a possessive pronoun.

[2] *Exodus*, p. 104.   [3] Cf. Pedersen, *Israel*, I–II, pp. 245ff.

[4] *Stylistic Criteria and the Analysis of the Pentateuch*, London, 1955, pp. 16–19.

[5] *Moses*, London, 1946, p. 49.