

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Names of God in the Old Testament: El Roi and Jehovah Sabaoth

Looking at the names of God in the Old Testament today we come to El Roi and Jehovah Sabaoth. The first, El Roi, only occurs once in Scripture in the story of Hagar who was a maidservant of Sarah, the wife of Abraham. Abraham and his faith features a great deal in the Bible, but the story of Abraham and Hagar, the Egyptian servant girl, is a sad episode in his life. It is also the root of many of the problems in the Middle East today; but that's another story! Abraham and his wife, Sarah desperately wanted a child. God had promised them a son some time earlier but, as yet, Sarah had been unable to conceive. Rather than continuing to wait on God, Sarah suggested that her husband, Abraham, should sleep with her servant girl, Hagar, and she would then claim the child of the union for her own.

Abraham agreed and Hagar, as a servant girl in that society, probably had no choice in the matter. Hagar did conceive and when she realised she was pregnant, she became very proud and arrogant toward her mistress, Sarah. Then Sarah said to Abraham, "It's all your fault. For now this servant girl of mine despises me, though I myself gave her the privilege of being your wife." Sarah had made the suggestion but now blames her husband for going along with her idea! We are no different; how easy we find it to blame others for our faults! Abraham tells Sarah to punish Hagar, and her punishment is so severe that Hagar runs away. Let's read the rest of the story which is found in Genesis 16. "Now the Angel of the LORD found her by a well of water in the wilderness, by the well on the way to Shur. And the Angel of the LORD said: 'Hagar, Sarah's maid, where have you come from, and where are you going?' Hagar replied, 'I am running away from my mistress.' The Angel of the LORD said to her, 'Return to your mistress and submit yourself to her.' Then the Angel of the LORD said to Hagar, 'I will multiply your descendants exceedingly, so that they shall not be counted for multitude.' And the Angel of the LORD said to her, 'Behold you are with child, and you shall bring forth a son. You shall call his name Ishmael, because the LORD has heard your affliction.'"

Ishmael, the name Hagar was told to give to her son, means "God hears." We must never think God is indifferent to the suffering of His people. Years later, when the Israelites were slaves in Egypt, God speaks to Moses His servant and says, "I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry ... I know their sorrows" (Exodus 3:7). God always hears the cries of His own, and sees their plight. He may not always intervene in the way we would like or expect, but He is never indifferent and He certainly cares!

To carry on with the reading in Genesis 16 "Then Hagar called the name of the LORD Who spoke to her, "You are the God Who sees," or El Roi, for she said, "Have I seen Him Who sees me?" Later that well was named "The well of the Living One Who sees me." Hagar had had an experience that made her realise that "God sees." He doesn't miss a thing! We cannot hide from Him, nor can we deceive Him.

We have had to grow accustomed to the increasing use of Closed Circuit Television watching us both in public and private buildings and spaces alike. How often have you sat in your car at traffic lights and watched a camera at the top of a pole swivel round until it appeared to be pointing straight at you? There is a growing realisation that the state knows more and more about us, our likes and dislikes, our financial situation and our movements. We also know that big businesses will pay considerable sums of money to share this information. Our spending habits are closely analysed so that retailers can establish our hobbies and preferences. On the basis of this information, targeted advertising is then directed towards us. When we browse the World Wide Web, programs monitor the sites we visit and adverts "pop-up" encouraging us to visit similar sites where we can spend our hard-earned money. We have had inflicted upon us television shows that do little more than appeal to our voyeuristic nature. In Big Brother a group of people have their every move recorded by numerous cameras. The viewing numbers indicate how popular this pointless experiment is. Big Brother was introduced to us by George Orwell in his book "1984" which envisaged a state in which the lives of all those living in the society were closely monitored by cameras and microphones. Their thoughts and actions were influenced and indeed regulated by what was shown on television and what could be written and read.

All this leads us to realise that the technology exists to monitor closely our movements and actions. This could be either good or bad, depending on the character of those in possession of the information. What Hagar discovered thousands of years ago in the story that we have just read from Genesis chapter 16 was that "God sees me" Hagar was a maidservant, pregnant through no fault of her own, with her master's child. She had been forced to flee her home after her situation became apparent, and felt she was all alone in this world, a baby on its way, and no-one to

turn to for support. Now here she was, desperate and lonely, by a well of water in the wilderness when she is approached by a person, called here “the Angel of the LORD”. This was certainly no ordinary person, nor do I think it was an ordinary angel; if angels can ever be described as ordinary! Here was Someone Who knew all about Hagar’s situation, could give her directions and had plans for her, and her unborn child. He even told Hagar the sex and name of the as yet unborn baby! So here, very early on in the Bible we are introduced to El Roi or “God who sees me” which is what the name means.

We must be struck by the fact that this is Someone Who whilst knowing everything and possessing all power, is still not just a disinterested observer. He is aware of, and interested in the smallest details of our lives and would like to help us if we will let Him. Do we understand that this is the God with Whom we are dealing? It might be an uncomfortable fact. Most of us, if not all of us, are not exactly who we appear to be. By observing us and listening to us, our friends and colleagues form certain opinions about us. Often these are reasonably accurate, but no one truly knows and understands us, our hopes and fears, our motives, even those closest to us. The prophet Samuel said that “Man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart.” Much more than just seeing the outside, God sees right inside me and knows my thoughts. King David, who wrote many of the psalms, realised that God “knew his thoughts from afar.” It is worth reading some verses King David wrote in Psalm 139: “O LORD, you have examined my heart and know everything about me. You know when I sit or stand. When far away you know my every thought. You chart the path ahead of me and tell me where to stop and rest. Every moment you know where I am. You know what I am going to say before I even say it. You both precede and follow me and place your hand of blessing on my head. This is too glorious, too wonderful to believe! I can never be lost to your Spirit! I can never get away from my God! If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I go down to the place of the dead, you are there. If I ride the morning winds to the farthest oceans, even there your hand will guide me, your strength will support me. If I try to hide in the darkness, the night becomes light around me. For even darkness cannot hide from God; to you the night shines as bright as day. Darkness and light are both alike to you. You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit them together in my mother’s womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! It is amazing to think about. Your workmanship is marvellous - and how well I know it. You were there while I was being formed in utter seclusion! You saw me before I was born and scheduled each day of my life before I began to breathe. Every day was recorded in your book! How precious it is, LORD, to realise that you are thinking about me constantly! I can’t even count how many times a day your thoughts turn toward me. And when I waken in the morning, you are still thinking of me!” verses 1-18

Whilst David was overwhelmed by the knowledge that God knew absolutely everything about him, he also had a deep sense that God desired the very best for him. We, too, should always have a reverential attitude towards God, Who sees everything and knows everything. We can also rest in the assurance that as the hymn writer put it, “His love is as great as His power, and knows neither measure nor end.” If we have trusted His Son Jesus as Saviour and Lord, we are the objects of His unchanging favour and love. We can never get away from God; we can never escape from His sight. He is El Roi: the God Who sees me.

It is just worth noting that it is at this same well, in Genesis 24, that Isaac, the son God had promised to Abraham and Sarah meets his bride, Rebekah. Abraham was concerned that his son, Isaac, his true heir, should marry a bride from his home country. The story of the journey of the un-named servant to find this bride is one of the loveliest stories in the Old Testament. Abraham’s desire for a bride for his son and the servant’s care and diligence in seeking out a suitable bride for Abraham’s son is exemplary. It is certainly a picture of the work of God the Father and God the Holy Spirit in searching out and preparing a suitable bride for the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. God is El Roi, the God Who sees, and is watching out for His people and fulfilling His purposes at all times.

If El Roi speaks of a God with a very personal interest in me, the name Jehovah Sabaoth, or as it is generally translated “LORD of Hosts” speaks of His great power. It is not until we get to 1 Samuel that we are introduced to this name of God, Jehovah Sabaoth, or “LORD of Hosts” I think it is only in the New Testament that it is rendered “Jehovah Sabaoth” In Genesis, God is dealing just with individuals, now in Samuel we have God’s dealings with His nation Israel. Even when God deals with us a nation that does not eliminate our individual responsibility to Him.

Jehovah Sabaoth is a term of great encouragement. As Jehovah He is the “ever existing One” and the term Sabaoth tells of the vast hosts that are His, either through creation or through the right of redemption. At the beginning of the book of Samuel, Israel were in a very poor state as a nation. Because of their sin and disobedience they had been enslaved by various nations, and had suffered many famines. Yet here was a couple, Elkanah and his wife, Hannah, who went up to Jerusalem every year to worship and pray to “Jehovah Sabaoth” the LORD of Hosts. They still had a sense through faith of the greatness of the God they believed in. Hannah, who was childless, prayed for a son, and God through His prophet, Eli promised Hannah an answer to her earnest prayer. In due time, the baby Samuel was born to this couple. He grew up to become one of the greatest prophets Israel had ever known.

The thought behind most usages of the name “LORD of Hosts” seems to be that He is the eternal God, the God Who keeps His promises, and the One Who commands the allegiance of the powerful heavenly hosts. And this God is our God! We should be greatly encouraged!

There are well over two hundred mentions of this name in the Bible, obviously far too many to comment on in detail. However it is worth noticing that most usages of the name "LORD of Hosts" are in the prophetic books such as Isaiah and Jeremiah, and also in what are sometimes called the "Minor Prophets" such as Malachi and Zechariah. This is significant; the fame and glory of the kingdom of Israel under David and Solomon had passed, and again the nation was weak and threatened by its neighbours and suffering from famine. Time and again when speaking to His people by His prophets, God refers to Himself as the "LORD of Hosts" or Jehovah Sabaoth. A glorious reminder to them of His greatness and power, He is the One Who is the Lord of all the powerful unseen heavenly angelic powers. He is the LORD of Hosts, utterly reliable and overwhelmingly powerful. If the nation of Israel would just repent and turn again to Him, He would intervene on their behalf and restore their status as a great and favoured nation.

In Malachi, the last book in the Old Testament and chapter 3 God pleads with His people, "Bring all the tithes into My storehouse, that there may be food in My house. And try Me now, in this, says the LORD of Hosts, "If I will not open the windows of heaven, and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it." Surely the spirit of this promise still holds good today. If we would sincerely put God's interests first, He would bless His Church in such a way that we couldn't contain it. A verse in the New Testament that would correspond to this is found in Matthew 6:33: "Seek first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." God deserves to have, and demands to have, the first, the most important place in our lives. If we set ourselves to look after His interests first, we can rely on Him to look after our concerns.

The name of the "LORD of hosts" is mentioned many times in Malachi. He is remonstrating with His earthly people Israel over their indifference to Him. God challenges them in chapter 1:13 that they find His service wearisome. They should have brought the best of the flock as a sacrifice, but instead we are told in chapter 1:13 that they would bring the injured or diseased animal, for which they had no other use to offer to God. The Lord says, "Take it to the governor! Will he be pleased with you?" They wouldn't have dared! But what was not good enough for their leaders was considered good enough for God!

This catalogue of the shortcomings of the people of Israel continues through the book of Malachi. They are charged by God with treachery, robbery and hypocrisy, He says in chapter 2:17 that He is altogether wearied by them. Time and again He calls Himself the LORD of hosts and they should have been warned as He reminds them in this way of His power and glory. He tells them of a coming day when He would sit in judgement, but He also reminds them in chapter 3:6, "I am the LORD, I change not; therefore you sons of Jacob are not consumed." We can never comprehend the greatness of His faithfulness. In spite of their many failures, God's attitude towards Israel was still one of love, they were still His favoured people.

Towards the end of chapter 3 we come across a delightful story that I think reminds us of El Roi, the God Who sees, and the God Who hears. Even in that land at that time there were still a few people who remembered their God. Verse 16, reads "Then they that feared the LORD spoke often one to another: and the LORD hearkened and heard and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the LORD and that thought upon His name." It seems that, in spite of the general failure, these few people still had a great love for God and met together to think upon His name. They would think of all the various names of God in the Old Testament, and the meanings behind the names and so find encouragement and joy. We too have been asked by the Lord Jesus to meet together and remember Him. How often do we do this?

If we read on into Malachi 3:17 we read, "They shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up My jewels." This small, insignificant group who had met to speak about the Lord, and think about His name, will be acknowledged by the LORD of hosts in the day of His glory. He values the time we spend in His presence thinking about Him, probably more than we realise. In a coming day, the LORD of hosts will publicly own us as His.

We are told in 2 Samuel at least twice that the "LORD of Hosts" dwells between the cherubim. Its a reference back to the Ark of the Covenant and the Mercy Seat that sat on top of it. This was a highly significant item of furniture in the Tabernacle. There is much we need to learn from the Ark and the Mercy Seat, but the lesson for today is that it was on the Mercy Seat, between the two cherubim, all made out of pure gold, that the blood of the sacrifice was placed. The cherubim were powerful angels, who were charged with carrying out God's orders and maintaining His holiness. They are seen symbolically here looking over the Mercy Seat; the blood is before their eyes. On the basis of that blood God could righteously dwell with His people. As the "LORD of hosts" Who dwells between the cherubim, we think both of His absolute holiness, but also the blood of the sacrifice, that meets the demands of His righteousness. This would be a solemn reminder to Israel of their sin and failure, but also a great comfort to them to know that Jehovah Sabaoth, the LORD of Hosts could still bless them.

Another often repeated use of the name Jehovah Sabaoth is the expression "the LORD of Hosts lives, before Whom I stand." Among other places you will find this expression used by the prophet Elijah in 1 Kings 18:15 and also by Elisha the prophet in 2 Kings 3:14. These prophets were often lone voices speaking up for God's interests in front of violent

and bloodthirsty kings. Their message was often unpopular, and delivered to a disinterested or even antagonistic audience, and very often they suffered greatly in their service for God. But they had this reassurance that they stood in the presence of the living "LORD of Hosts" the ever existing One, the covenant keeping Jehovah, Who commanded the hosts of heaven. As Christians today we maybe do not face violent opposition, at least not yet in Britain, but we do have to convey the message of a crucified Christ and the need for genuine repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. This has never been a popular message but it has never been more needed. We too can stand for God and be assured of His faithful support and presence.

It was in this same spirit that the shepherd boy, David, met the giant, Goliath. We can read the story in 1 Samuel 17. The Philistines, with Goliath, their champion, had terrorised the children of Israel, and they had no one who dared to help them or fight the giant. David, who had proved God out on the hills of Israel whilst looking after his father's sheep, volunteers to fight the giant. David doesn't go out in his own strength, or relying on his own ability to fight. Instead he goes "in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied" (1 Samuel 17:45). David is making the point that far from insulting the puny armies of the Israelites, Goliath had insulted God. He had defied the "LORD of hosts", an altogether bigger opponent for Goliath to tackle, as he found out to his cost!

The last mention of the use of the name "LORD of hosts" I would like to comment on is in Psalm 24. At the end of the Psalm we read, "Lift up your heads, O you gates! And be lifted up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O you gates! Lift up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, He is the King of glory. Selah."

This refers to an event that is still future. The writer appeals for the gates of the city to be lifted up to receive the triumphant conqueror. "Lift up your heads, O you gates! And be lifted up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in." He then asks the question, "Who is the King of glory?" This is worth thinking about, "Who is the King of glory?" The last time the Lord Jesus was seen here on earth by anyone other than those who believed in Him and followed Him was when He was hanging dead on the cross. The crowds had watched Him leave the city, crowned with thorns, His back bleeding carrying a cross on which He was about to die. Now in the psalm there is the cry going out to receive the "King of glory" and it is exactly the same Man! After calling all true Christians to be with Himself at the event we call the Rapture when we meet the Lord in the air, (see 1 Thessalonians 4) the Lord Jesus later returns to earth. This event is described in various scriptures all of which join together to describe the majestic, awesome nature of the event. He has returned to reign in righteousness. He is Jehovah Sabaoth the "LORD of hosts"

Isaiah 52:14 speaks of the astonishment expressed by the disfigurement the Lord suffered at the hands of His torturers. "Many were astonished at You, Your visage was marred more than any man." But it also goes on to say in the next verse "So shall He astonish many nations; kings shall shut their mouths at Him, for what they had not been told shall they see; and what they had not heard they shall consider." The Man that was sent out of the world by way of the cross, is coming again to reign. He is the LORD of hosts.

This morning let us be encouraged that as Christians we have a God Who not only sees us and hears our prayers but also has all the resources of heaven at His disposal to meet us in our need.

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