

much wider area than the tiny Roman province of Judea: just who are the “kings” (plural) who had hitherto reigned over the territory in question? And was there wholesale acknowledgement of Jesus as the Lamb of God, as verse 16 describes, in A.D. 70? Surely not; the very opposite was true, and the events of A.D. 70 were designed not to convert what was left of Judah’s commonwealth but to destroy it. Doubtless there are parallels between A.D. 70 and the overthrow of pagan Rome, as each dispensation was judged by God and came to an end. But I think that closer attention to the detail will tell us which one is being described in Revelation 6.

Brother Alleyne asks for a direct answer to the question, If the similar phrases of Matthew 24 and Revelation 6 are not describing the same events, then “why are those allusions there?”. The answer I offer is this: because they are describing *similar* events—it is as simple as that.

Revelation is characterised by literally hundreds of quotations and allusions from the Old Testament, and very many of them are given new and unexpected applications by the Lord Jesus. So, whilst examining similarly phrased passages of God’s Word is undoubtedly a basic tool of Bible interpretation, there is often much more involved in comparing Scripture with Scripture.

Jeremy Thomas
Sale

Israel’s dwelling safely

Brother Whittaker’s analysis of Israel’s dwelling safely (Dec. 2001, p. 464) is very interesting. He seems to be correct when he points out that, for Gentiles who are outside the covenants of promise, *betach* is translated ‘careless’, involving being caught off-guard, whereas for Israel it is usually translated ‘in safety’ or ‘safely’.

We must note, however, that in Leviticus 26:5,6 Israel is offered safety on the condition that they keep God’s commandments. We know that from A.D. 70 onwards Israel was placed right outside God’s loving protection, and have faced over the years such things as the Inquisition and the Holocaust, the outworking of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. They are having a very hazardous time today, with danger in every corner.

Ezekiel 38 and 39 are about God’s final punishment on Israel for their wayward behaviour over the past 2,000 years. In their present situation the nation of Israel is without Divine protection,

as they are living in their own self-confidence, like the Gentiles who know not God, and are living outside the covenants of promise. Thus Ezekiel 38:11 would be best rendered, “I will go to them that are at rest, that dwell carelessly [*betach*], all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates”, and similarly verses 8 and 14.

Those who survive the catastrophe described in Ezekiel 38 and 39 will recognise Christ as their Messiah when he shows them his hands (Zech. 13:6). Once they do this they will again come under Divine protection and will dwell safely. But at this time Israel are living as the Gentiles do, carelessly, without Divine protection.

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The meaning of God’s Name

I would like to comment on some of the points made by Brother Mark Vincent concerning the Name of God in his series on Exodus. I agree with the point he made concerning addressing God as ‘Father’ rather than ‘Yahweh’ ([Jan. 2002, p. 14](#)). God is our Father by adoption, and the pattern laid down by the Lord Jesus, “Our Father Which art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name”, shows how we can address God as our Father whilst giving due reverence to His Name.

However, I would not agree with him when he says concerning Exodus 3:14: “it is quite legitimate to translate the Hebrew as either ‘I am’ or ‘I will be’” ([Aug. 2001, p. 307](#)). Whilst acknowledging that Brother Vincent does not rule out a future application, I would argue that the Scriptural evidence points to the future tense as being the only right way to translate these words.

In verse 12 the same Hebrew translated “I am” in verse 14 is found, but here it is translated “I will be”. In verse 12 God was saying how He would be with Moses when he went into Egypt. As this was to be in the future, God said, “I will be with thee”. It would be expected that the AV would also use the future tense for the other occurrences of this word in this passage. However, the AV translators chose to translate it in the present tense in verse 14. The RV recognises this inconsistency, and suggests in a footnote, among other variations that use the present tense, “I will be that I will be” as a translation.

The same Hebrew translated “I am” in Exodus 3:14, *ehyeh*, is found in 2 Samuel 7:14, “I will be his father”. This is quoted in Hebrews: “I will

be to him a Father” (1:5). The Greek uses the future tense to translate the Hebrew. This helps confirm that indeed *ehyeh* is a future tense.

Sometimes it is said that there is ambiguity in Hebrew tenses and therefore a specific tense cannot be ascribed to the Hebrew in Exodus 3:14. However, if it really was true that Hebrew tenses were vague, then the Old Testament would be almost impossible to understand. Indeed, it would be very strange if God chose to write most of the Old Testament using a language which had vague tenses, especially as much of the Old Testament is concerned with prophecy, where it is critical to indicate that what is being spoken of is going to happen in the future.

In Romans 4 Paul writes: “. . . (as it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before Him whom he believed, even God, Who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were” (v. 17). That God sometimes calls “those things which be not as though they were” presupposes that God could have spoken in the future tense about certain things but on occasions chose to speak in another tense.

The name ‘Yahweh’ has a similar meaning to *ehyeh*. Whereas *ehyeh* means ‘I will be’, Yahweh means ‘He will be’. This links with the “I will be” promise in Exodus 3:12: “I will be with thee”. This is spoken in relation to the deliverance from Egypt. The meaning of the Name of God helps us to remember this. However, the promise of ‘He will be’ also speaks of a much greater deliverance, the deliverance from sin and death, which would be achieved through the Lord Jesus Christ.

The name ‘Jesus’, and the explanation of his name given by the angel, helps us to understand the meaning of God’s Name. As is well known, the first part of the name Jesus is *Yah*, the shortened form of Yahweh. The second part is *yasha*, a Hebrew verb meaning ‘save’. The meaning of the name ‘Jesus’ (the Greek form of the Hebrew ‘Joshua’) is therefore ‘He will save’. The meaning of the name Jesus is expounded by the angel to Joseph: “And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for *he shall save* his people from their sins” (Mt. 1:21). The phrase “he shall save” used by the angel is the true meaning of the name Jesus. This again helps to confirm that Yahweh means ‘He will be’.

In John’s Gospel the Lord Jesus often said, “I am” (for example, in 8:24,28,58). When the Lord Jesus said “I am” he was showing that he was the fulfilment of the promise ‘I will be’. In Exo-

dus 3:14 God said, “I will be that I will be”, or, better, “I will be who I will be”. The word “who” translates the word *asher*, which is a plural word. This implies that God would not just be manifest in the Lord Jesus, He would be manifest in other people as well. James spoke of this when he said: “Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name” (Acts 15:14).

A right understanding of the meaning of the Name of God provides a strong foundation for unity. At the very least we should appreciate that the Name of God that we pray should be hallowed is Yahweh, and that this Name refers to the living God of Israel. In addition, an understanding of the prophetic meaning of the Name will help to enrich our understanding of our place in the purpose of God. A belief that God said “I am that I am”, as well, detracts from the importance of the theme of God-manifestation in Exodus 3 and, furthermore, can lead to false interpretations concerning God and the nature of Christ. Moses did not walk away from the burning bush thinking that God had stated that He existed. Moses went away with the sure knowledge that God would be with him and would deliver His people. When we have read the account of the burning bush we too can walk away with a similar reassurance. God will be with us and will deliver us from sin and death. And so, in God’s mercy, we will be part of that multitude who will provide the ultimate fulfilment of the promise: “I will be who I will be”.

Nigel Bernard
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Reply

Could I ask that readers with a general interest in this topic look back at my original article ([Aug. 2001, p. 305](#))? It offers more in terms of exposition and edification than I am able to offer here. God’s Name is a topic of immense depth and wonder, and in that article I tried to lay this out in a way that I do not have space to repeat. For readers who require it, I must now reply specifically to Brother Bernard’s criticisms. This requires me to be somewhat more pedantic and involved than I would normally wish to be.

First, many of the points Brother Bernard makes in defence of an ‘I will be’ understanding are points which I had already made or were implicit in my article:

- the connection with verse 12 and the importance of God’s promise to be with Moses

- the connection between YHWH and *ehyeh*
 - the clear link with deliverance from Egypt, which I take to be a natural type and foreshadowing of God's ultimate act of deliverance through the Lord Jesus Christ
 - God's plan to be revealed in His people
- in short, what Brother Bernard calls, "the prophetic meaning of the Name". As far as I can see, he has said nothing about what the Name *does* mean that was not already in my article.

Let me state categorically that these facets of the Name are central. It is not merely that, as Brother Bernard says, I do not "*rule out* a future application" (my italics). Taking on board the future dimension to the Name is *imperative*, in my view; any understanding of the Name which did not incorporate this would be seriously incomplete. I refer readers back to my original article on this matter.

Where we part company is in Brother Bernard's attempt to argue that there is no present and ongoing dimension to the Name in addition to this. My point is that God did not say either "I am that I am" or "I will be what I will be". Instead, He said something in Hebrew which, because the Hebrew tense system does not precisely map onto our own, may not be fully comprehended in all its richness in either of these translations (which is why, to use Brother Bernard's example, the RV and other versions will often opt for one and footnote the other). If there was any insight or 'added value' in my article it was this very point: that to argue, 'Is it present or is it future?', misses out on the richness of meaning encompassed in the Name.

For God always exists; He always has and He always will, from everlasting to everlasting (this is a first-principle doctrine). But He does not live for the present, as we often do. He is *future-focused*. He has a great and wonderful plan to deliver and redeem, to be manifest in His Son and in His people (this is a first-principle doctrine too, and is what God-manifestation is all about). In arguing that the Name encompasses both of these aspects, then, I am asking for *two* first principles to be included in the Name instead of *one*. There should be no danger here of detracting from the theme of God-manifestation, nor of false interpretations of God and the nature of Christ. Any such suggestion would seem to me to be alarmist and unhelpful.

In response to Brother Bernard's attempt to argue for a *solely* future understanding of the Name, it must be pointed out that his linguistic

arguments about the Hebrew tense system are weak. While it may sound superficially reasonable to say, "How could the Old Testament talk about the future without a future tense?", the fact is that one does not need an English-style tense system to talk about the future. Many languages of the world have tense systems that are quite different from those found in Western European languages, but this does not mean that those cultures cannot speak about the future.

Hebrew has two 'tenses', traditionally called the perfect and the imperfect. If, as Brother Bernard wishes it, the imperfect were a straightforward 'future' tense, and the 'perfect' were a 'past', then what about the present? On this reasoning one would have to conclude that the Old Testament could never talk about the present! But of course it does, and, depending on context, the imperfect may be best rendered in English by a present or by a future. Sometimes it is even rendered by a past tense in English, as in "a river *went out* of Eden to water the garden" (Gen. 2:10)—the imperfect is used here to make a point about a continuing state.

It is quite true to say that the imperfect often carries a future connotation and is often best translated into English as a future; no Hebrew scholar would dispute this. But that does not mean that it *is* an English future tense. On many occasions the imperfect is best rendered by a present; for example: "What seekest thou?" (37:15); there are countless examples. It all depends on context. Readers who are not linguists should not be alarmed by this. It does not mean that Hebrew is 'vague', or that Jews never know which period of time they are talking about; it just means that Hebrew works in a different way from English.

Let me re-emphasise the point. To someone acquainted with Western European languages it seems bizarre that some languages manage without tense, that others manage without number, and yet others without gender. Yet this is a plain fact, which anyone who has studied non-Indo-European languages will regard as a commonplace. Those who have studied French or German may well recall their surprise at first discovering that inanimate objects have gender. To an English speaker it seems very strange that in French flour should be feminine and sugar masculine, because we simply do not make those distinctions. Similarly, the German case system is not used at all in French. I say this to illustrate that different languages work in different ways—but

they are all capable of communication. An argument that Hebrew *needs* an English-style future tense in order to talk about the future simply does not hold up.

These facts about Hebrew tenses mean that Brother Bernard's quotation of passages where a future sense is implicit (for example, 2 Samuel 7:14) prove nothing at all. All one has to do is to quote other passages where a present and continuous sense is implicit.¹ As I stated in my original article, the use of an imperfect form does not *in itself* dictate a future or present tense. Context is key.²

The problem is that in translation one *does* have to adopt a future or present tense because English has those tenses and English is the language in which we communicate. So which should be adopted in Exodus 3:14? This is where I feel the mistake is too often made; we get caught up focusing on an issue of translation instead of focusing on the Name. It is legitimate, on purely linguistic grounds, to translate the Name either as "I am that I am" or "I will be that I will be". One does not have to get technical to establish this point; one only has to look in the English translations that are available to see competent Hebrew scholars making both choices. As individual interpreters, people may have their particular preference. One possibility would be to embrace both potential translations of the phrase and render it as the somewhat clumsy "I am and will be what I am and will be", rather than forcing the either-or distinction.

I take it that Jesus's promise in Matthew 28:20 relates to Exodus 3:12-14. Note that Jesus said, "lo, *I am* with you alway", not "I will be", even though he would be leaving them to ascend to his Father. I say this, not because I think it necessarily determines the meaning of Exodus 3, but to point out there are also verses which could be used to point in the other direction from that sought by Brother Bernard.³

What do we conclude? In my opinion, God's Name in Exodus 3:14 incorporates the future dimensions of which Brother Bernard writes (and of which I originally wrote). In this much we agree. He goes on to state that this is *all* it means, and that the future is the only legitimate translation. He is not correct from a strictly linguistic point of view. He *may* be right from a contextual standpoint; I do not, however, find his proofs at all convincing. But likewise neither can I prove that the ongoing existence of God *must* also be comprehended in the Name, even though it

seems clear to me that it is, and that linguistically the expression can be understood quite naturally to incorporate this dimension.

It would be very difficult to argue that the continued existence of God is *not* relevant to the context of Exodus 3, and I cannot really understand why anyone would wish to do so. I tried to show in my article that both the continued existence of God *and* the theme of God-manifestation are *highly* and *particularly* relevant to the context of Exodus 3, and again refer readers to what I said in dealing with this passage. As interpreters, we have to make our own choices on these issues. But certainly it is true that God exists and always will, and that He is with us if we are with Him, whether or not this is taught in Exodus 3. On this point, I am certain, neither of us will disagree.

Mark Vincent

The principal issues having been considered, correspondence on this topic is now closed.—E.D.M.

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1. Check any Hebrew grammar on this point, for instance, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, Section 47, footnote 1, and Section 107.
 2. Brother Bernard argues that the AV's future tense in verse 12, "Certainly I will be with thee", suggests or requires a future in verse 14. I think this is a mistake. The context is indeed Moses' (future) going to Egypt, so it is entirely reasonable for the AV and others to select a future tense. However, the expression could equally well be translated, "Certainly I am with you", with no loss in the context. After all, God's point in verse 12 is not a point about *tense* at all. God is not saying (I take it), "I *will be* with you when you get to Egypt (although I am not with you at the present moment)", just as He is not saying, "I am with you now (but may or may not still be so when you arrive in Egypt)". The point God is making is a point about *being with*, about *fellowship*, not about present or future. The force of the imperfect here can equally be taken to be that of a *continuous* state of 'being with' as it can be taken to be concerned with the future. So, for me, the argument from verse 12 rather misses the mark. In any case, there is no reason why verse 12 should *exclusively* determine the scope of meaning of the plainly enigmatic phrase of verse 14 (see my article on this enigmatic dimension). I fully agree, however, that God's promise to be with Moses is vital to understanding what is comprehended in the Name, and said so in my article.
 3. In the interests of accuracy, it should also be pointed out that the word *asher* is not a plural word, contrary to Brother Bernard's assertion. It does not have number, and may be used with either singular or plural antecedents (check any dictionary or reference work for confirmation).