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ACROSTICS ON 'YHWH'

1) The Hebrew name for God which is usually translated as "LORD" and which is frequently transliterated as "Yahweh" consists of 4 letters in Hebrew. They are:

- Y (YOD or JOD)
- H (HE)
- W (VAU or VAV or WAU)
- H (HE)

2) When these 4 letters are used in 4 consecutive words (either as always the first letter or as always the last letter of each of those 4 consecutive words), they form an "acrostic", a poetic or literary way of sometimes conveying an added message, which may be superficially hidden from view.

An acrostic is a composition in which sets of letters (i.e. either the first or the last letters of a sequence of words) taken in order form a word or phrase or a regular sequence of letters of the alphabet. There are other acrostics in the Old Testament as well, such as on the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Acrostics in the Bible are not at all limited to the name "YHWH".

3) This name of God may in an acrostic be spelled forwards (i.e. YHWH) or backwards (i.e. HWHY). If in a forward sequence the 5th word starts with a "Y" (i.e. YOD) then the sequence runs as YHWHY, and this embodies a forward and a backward acrostic at the same time.

4) Acrostics on the name of God have received attention because of the Book of Esther, in which none of the names of God are used directly. This book, in which God is not mentioned directly, does however contain 4 acrostics on YHWH. In 2 of these it is the first letter of a 4-word sequence (once spelled forwards and once backwards) and in the other 2 it is the last letter of each word of a 4-word sequence (also once spelled forwards and once backwards). When it is spelled forwards the speaker is an Israelite; and when it is spelled backwards the speaker is a non-Israelite. In the Book of Esther these acrostics have some interesting features, and they certainly appear to have been carefully planned into the context of that book.

This information regarding these acrostics in the Book of Esther is readily available in greater detail in Bullinger's COMPANION BIBLE, in Appendix #60.

5) To look at how common or how rare such acrostics on the name YHWH are in the rest of the Old Testament, I have done some computer searches through the Hebrew Old Testament. I have limited my search to acrostics on the name YHWH found in the FIRST letters of 4 consecutive words, as searches on the last letters of 4 consecutive words are far too complex and involved for my computer to cope with. However, there also ARE some acrostics on the last letters of 4 consecutive words in the Old Testament, and 2 of them are in the Book of Esther, but we'll ignore them for this article.

So limiting ourselves to acrostics on the name YHWH found in the FIRST letters of four consecutive

words, we find the following:

A) There are 24 verses in the Hebrew Old Testament which contain the acrostic spelled forwards (i.e. spelled YHWH).

These 24 verses are:

GENESIS 19:25

EXODUS 4:14

NUMBERS 13:32

DEUTERONOMY 11:2

2 SAMUEL 18:4

1 KINGS 7:12

1 KINGS 8:42

1 KINGS 18:37

2 KINGS 10:1

1 CHRONICLES 5:12

1 CHRONICLES 8:39

1 CHRONICLES 16:31

1 CHRONICLES 18:8

1 CHRONICLES 22:18

1 CHRONICLES 23:11

1 CHRONICLES 23:19

1 CHRONICLES 26:4

2 CHRONICLES 20:34

2 CHRONICLES 26:11

2 CHRONICLES 27:3

ESTHER 5:4

PSALM 96:11

ISAIAH 45:18

EZEKIEL 46:1

B) There are also 34 verses in the Hebrew Old Testament which contain the acrostic spelled backwards (i.e. spelled HWHY).

These 34 verses are:

GENESIS 11:9

EXODUS 4:16

LEVITICUS 8:15

LEVITICUS 9:9

LEVITICUS 21:22

NUMBERS 1:51

NUMBERS 5:18

NUMBERS 19:12

DEUTERONOMY 10:7

DEUTERONOMY 20:8

JOSHUA 2:15

JOSHUA 11:16

JOSHUA 18:28

JOSHUA 24:18

RUTH 1:21

2 SAMUEL 18:4

1 KINGS 18:3

2 KINGS 7:2

1 CHRONICLES 27:30

2 CHRONICLES 23:6

ESTHER 1:20

PSALM 18:7

PSALM 96:11

ECCLESIASTES 3:17

ECCLESIASTES 10:20

ISAIAH 30:26

ISAIAH 35:2

ISAIAH 45:20

JEREMIAH 31:7

JEREMIAH 33:20

EZEKIEL 46:1

DANIEL 12:1

ZECHARIAH 1:5

ZECHARIAH 8:19

Of interest here is that this backwardly spelled acrostic "HWHY" is actually contained TWICE in Numbers 1:51, giving us 35 acrostics in 34 verses.

C) You will also notice that 3 Scriptures appear in both of the above lists. This is because those 3 Scriptures have a 5 WORD SEQUENCE, with the first letters of those 5 words spelling "YHWHY". This means that each of these 3 verses contains TWO acrostics, the forward spelling of this name (i.e. YHWH) and also the backward spelling of this name (i.e. HWHY).

Those 3 Scriptures are: 2 Samuel 18:4; Psalm 96:11 and Ezekiel 46:1.

6) While in the absence of any direct references to God in the Book of Esther the acrostics on the name YHWH in that book are rather interesting, and appear to be obviously planned, I am not aware of any specific significance in general being attached to this Hebrew literary form known as "acrostics". It is basically just a form of poetry.

With the help of computers it is today fairly easy for us to establish that there are a considerable number of occurrences of this literary device in the Hebrew Scriptures. [I have not found any corresponding sequence in the Greek text of the New Testament, where the starting letters of 4 consecutive words would spell "theos". But then acrostics were never a feature of biblical Greek.]

While I myself do not attach any particular significance to the above lists of acrostics, they may provide material for those who wish to take this subject further in their own personal studies.

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