

group Bible Study – October 17, 2007

Read Exodus Chapters 6-11

Reflection: Bob Zurinsky, Center for Worship, bob@spu.edu

Have you ever noticed that in our English versions of the Bible the word “LORD” is often written with all capital letters? There is a secret hidden in this seemingly small detail, and it’s something we need to understand in order to grasp the full meaning of the book of Exodus.

The always-useful dictionary.com tells me that the word “lord” means *a person who has authority, control or power over others*. This is the generic use of the word. When people called out to Jesus, “Lord, save me!” they were recognizing his power and authority. The same word is used throughout the English language to describe a whole variety of “masters”: the lord of the castle, the lord of the jungle, the Lord of the Rings. The word just means “ruler.”

But **LORD** (all caps) means something very specific. When you see this in the text, it is a symbol that indicates that in this place the personal name of God is used. Not just any “god,” but *Yahweh*, the one who said I AM WHO I AM at the burning bush. (Note: “I AM WHO I AM” and “YHWH” are pretty much the same word, except that “I AM” is first-person and “YHWH” is third-person: *He is*.) Whenever you see a name of God in all caps like this, you should understand that the personal name of God is used here (some form of YHWH). Sometimes this will look like: LORD, I AM, GOD, etc. The word “Jehovah” that Pastor Dahlstrom is talking about this week is thought to be a form of YHWH as well (at least it sounds like that in Hebrew).

When God appeared to the ancestors of the people Israel, as recorded in Genesis, God said “I am El-Shaddai,” which means, “I am God Almighty” (see Genesis 17:1). But something remarkable happens in Exodus chapter 6:

God also said to Moses, “I am the LORD. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as ‘God Almighty,’ but by my name ‘the LORD’ I did not make myself known to them.”

Something new is happening. Essentially God says: “You will call me **the LORD**. I’m not just any old god. You can’t figure me out by thinking about the idea of ‘god’ in general. Only I get to determine who I am, and you will learn who I am by seeing what I do in your midst.”

Study Questions (for individuals or small groups):

- Spend some time thinking critically about your idea of “God.” Where does your definition of God come from? Is it more based on what humans think a “God” should be like, or is it based on what God has revealed to us in words and actions throughout the great Story?