

faith: in the cold gray light of dawn

Abram believed the LORD, and the LORD accounted it to him for righteousness. (Genesis 15:6)

Abraham faced the fact that his body was as good as dead and that Sarah's womb was also dead. (Romans 4:19)

When we talk about "saving faith"--the faith that saves--the first instance of it is in the life of Abraham:
Abram believed the LORD, and the LORD accounted it to him for righteousness. (Genesis 15:6)

God promised that Abraham and his wife Sarah would have a child in their old age--and that through this child all the earth would be blessed. (The child would be Isaac. Through that child came Jacob, Judah, David, Jesus Christ--through whom all the world has been blessed.)

Romans 4, the entire chapter, is an explanation of the faith that saves--the faith of Abraham. And the verse which forever changed my concept of faith was Romans 4:19:

Abraham faced the fact that his body was as good as dead and that Sarah's womb was also dead. (NIV)

Another translation says *he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb. (NASB)*

He faced the facts, he contemplated--he considered long and hard--every relevant factor. He did not deny the obstacles.

Biblical faith in God is not devoid of reason. It is a faith that does not deny the existence of obstacles, but evaluates them in the light of God's word and power.

Abraham considered his own body, now "dead." **He weighed the human impossibility of becoming a father at his age against the divine impossibility of God being able to break His word. He decided that it was more impossible for God to break his word, and so he believed God. And God counted it to him for righteousness.**

Thus Romans 4:19 marked a deepening of my understanding of faith. Faith turned from screwing my head on differently to an honest analysis of the situation.

Faith was no longer, "This isn't a problem." Instead it became, "**This is a big problem, but it's not as big as Jesus.**"

Do any of you have a big problem? Don't deny it. It is what it is. But it is not as big as Jesus.

Faith is not a leap in the dark. It is a well-contemplated decision in the cold gray light of dawn. Faith isn't screwing your head on differently in order to deny reality.

I've seen a lot. So have you. We don't need to deny our eyes. I turned a bright light on everything I've seen, everything I know--and I decided to follow Jesus. That's biblical faith.

enter the story...

From the very earliest pages of scripture we note that the images of salvation are solitary.

In the third chapter of the Bible, we are told that a single *seed of the woman* will defeat evil:
I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel. (Genesis 3:15)

In the 15th chapter, God makes an appearance as a flaming torch, gliding through the dark between the glistening pieces of a butchered animal:
*God said to Abraham, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon."
And he brought him all these, cut them in half, and laid each half over against the other.
When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces.* (Genesis 15: 9-10, 17)

It was customary that the parties to an agreement walked together "between the pieces." (See Jeremiah 34:18-19). This symbolized that if either party were to break his word, he would be sundered like that animal had been. So when **God passed between the pieces alone--while Abraham slept--he unilaterally guaranteed both sides of the agreement.**

In Leviticus, when the High Priest offers the blood of the sacrifice on the Day of Atonement, **he enters the Holiest Place alone.** This is another prophetic picture of the sole Savior.

Achieved alone, salvation is received in the same way. The tale is abroad, as if told by the wind: a lone soldier dies sundered in the battle for the soul.

But hearts that can hear won't let it end that way. They change the story by the only means they have--they enter into it:

"He didn't just die," they'll tell you. "He died for me."

You can enter in too. Just make that your prayer.

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## **every story whispers his name**

*So she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, "You are a God of seeing," for she said, "Truly here I have seen him who looks after me." (Genesis 16:13)*

*And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6)*

*You shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins. (Matthew 1:21)*

Don't ever forget that the Bible is, first and foremost, a story. It uses the essential elements of all stories-- character and plot--to progressively reveal Jesus Christ.

This isn't a book of philosophy. This isn't a book of theology, though there's a smattering of that. This is a story, the greatest ever told. Life and death hang in the balance. The eternal Kingdom of light is set in full array against the principalities of this present darkness. Unbridled power and unparalleled poetry charge through these pages.

And a river of blood flows through it. It flows from Eden through Egypt, through the tabernacle to the cross. It flows from the first-born of Pharaoh all the way to the only Son of God. This scarlet thread sews it all together, until every page coheres.

Yes, the Bible is a Story. And it must be told that way, or it will never be understood:

Now, some people think the Bible is a book of rules, telling you what you should and shouldn't do. The Bible certainly does have some rules in it. They show you how life works best. But the Bible isn't mainly about you and what you should be doing. It's about God and what he has done.

Other people think the Bible is a book of heroes, showing you people you should copy. The Bible does have some heroes in it, but (as you'll soon find out) most of the people in the Bible aren't heroes at all. They make some big mistakes (sometimes on purpose). They get afraid and run away. At times they are downright mean.

No, the Bible isn't a book of rules, or a book of heroes. The Bible is most of all a Story. It's an adventure story about a young Hero who comes from a far country to win back his lost treasure. It's a love story about a brave Prince who leaves his palace, his throne - everything - to rescue the one he loves. It's like the most wonderful of fairy tales that has come true in real life!

...There are lots of stories in the Bible but all the stories are telling one Big Story. The Story of how God loves his children and comes to rescue them.

It takes the whole Bible to tell this Story. And at the center of the Story, there is a baby. Every Story in the Bible whispers his name. He is like the missing piece in a puzzle - the piece that makes all the other pieces fit together; and suddenly you can see a beautiful picture.

(Excerpted from "The Jesus Storybook Bible" by Sally Lloyd-Jones)

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*And God said to Moses, "I AM THAT I AM." And he said, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, I AM has sent me to you." (Exodus 3:14)*

*Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad."  
So the Jews said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?"  
Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM." (John 8:56-58)*

*Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. (Acts 4:12)*

**The elements of a story are character and plot. Character is the "who" of the story. Plot is the "do" of the story.**

One of the first things we learn in most stories is the name of the "who." In the Bible's first pages, many of God's most prevalent names have already appeared. So we thought we'd better get formally introduced before we proceed any further.

We first meet God as Elohim, the cosmic creator:

*"In the beginning, Elohim created the heavens and the earth" is the best way to read Genesis 1:1.*

**Later we will meet God as Yahweh, the Redeemer-God, who promises and performs the covenants between God and man. Yahweh is the God with whom we have a relationship.** (Mind you that Elohim and Yahweh are one and the same! We use names in the same way: a doctor's patients might know him as "Doc," but his kids call him "Dad.")

Note: You will also hear "Yahweh" called "Jehovah," because no one knows how to pronounce this name. All we know are the consonants of his name--YHWH. We can only guess at what vowels belong between the consonants, so we guess at the pronunciation. To further confuse the issue, most of our Bibles don't include the name Yahweh or Jehovah at all. Instead, they just render YHWH as "LORD"--all in capital letters.)

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It may sound confusing (because at first it is!) until you remember that all the names point to Jesus. Each one of them reveals some wonderful new facet of his personality or his character. Every name whispers "Jesus," in one way or another. Here's how scripture makes that clear:

YHWH (see above) is the comprehensive, all-inclusive name that is revealed in the Old Testament. It is associated with the Hebrew verb *hayah*, which means "to be." **It means "I AM THAT I AM," thus encompassing all the other revealed names of God.** (This name was revealed to Moses at the burning bush in Exodus 3.)

I've got to be careful here because the name of God is never to be misused, but--just between you and me--"I AM" doesn't really tell me much. It begs the question: **You are what?**

God knows it begs the question, so he shows us:

*"Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad."  
So the Jews said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?"  
Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM." (John 8:56-58)*

Jesus is YHWH! And the entire purpose of scripture is to reveal just "what" Jesus AM!

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It may startle you to know that we have already, in Genesis, been introduced to God as...

**Elohim:**

*In the beginning **God (Elohim)** created the heavens and the earth. (Genesis 1:1)*

**Jehovah Elohim:**

*This is the history of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the **LORD God (Jehovah Elohim)** made the earth and the heavens. (Genesis 2:4)*

**El Elyon:**

*And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of **God Most High (El Elyon)**. (Genesis 14:18)*

**Adonai Jehovah:**

*And Abram said, **Lord GOD (Adonai Jehovah)**, what will you give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is Eliezer of Damascus? (Genesis 15:2)*

**El Shaddai:**

*And when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the **LORD** appeared to Abram, and said to him, "**I am God Almighty (El Shaddai)**"; walk before me, and be blameless. (Genesis 17:1)*

**El Olam:**

*And Abraham planted a grove in Beersheba, and called there on the name of the **LORD, the Everlasting God (El Olam)**. (Genesis 21:33)*

**El Roi:**

*So she called the name of the **LORD** who spoke to her, "**You are a God of seeing (El Roi)**," for she said, "**Truly here I have seen him who looks after me.**" (Genesis 16:13)*

**Jehovah Jireh:**

*And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called the name of that place, "**The LORD will provide (Jehovah Jireh)**"; as it is said to this day, "**On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided.**" (Genesis 22:13-14)*

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As you can see, some of the names are powerful, while some of the names are sweet and kind.

My favorite name (other than the all-encompassing "YHWH" and God's incarnate name, "Jesus,") is "El Roi," the name given to God by Hagar, the Egyptian wife of Abraham. She had been forced to flee from Sarah, but God found her in the desert and encouraged her:

*So she called the name of the **LORD** who spoke to her, "**You are a God of seeing (El Roi)**," for she said, "**truly here I have seen him who looks after me.**" (Genesis 16:13)*

As far as I can tell, Hagar is the only person in scripture who gives God a name; in every other instance, God names himself. People have called God a lot of things, but God liked "he who looks after me" so much that he put it in his book!

Be on the lookout for the names of God, remembering as you do that the culminating name--the *name above all names* (1), the final word on what God AM (2) -- is Jesus:

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## Names of God in the Old Testament

- Elohim (God)
- **Jehovah/Yahweh (the self-existent one: I AM)** (Exodus 3:14)
- Jehovah-jireh (the Lord will provide)
- Jehovah-rapha (the Lord who heals)
- Jehovah-nissi (the Lord our banner)
- Jehovah-Shalom (the Lord our peace)
- Jehovah-ra-ah (the Lord my shepherd)
- Jehovah-tsidkenu (the Lord our righteousness)
- Jehovah-shammad (the Lord is present)
- Jehovah-Elohim (the Lord God)
- Jehovah Sabaoth (the Lord of hosts)
- El Elyon (the most high God)
- Adonai (our master)
- El Shaddai (Almighty God, the strength giver)
- El Olam (everlasting God)

## Before Abraham was, I AM." (John 8:58)

Jesus said,  
**"I AM...**

- the resurrection
- the way
- the truth
- the life
- the light of the world
- the bread of life
- the good shepherd
- the door of the sheep
- the true vine."

*Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him **the name that is above every name**, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:9)*

*Nor is there salvation in any other, for **there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.** (Acts 4:12)*