

WHAT IS GOD'S NAME?

Does it make any difference what names you use for the Father and the Son?

[By Keith W. Stump, from the January 1986 *Good News* magazine - the Bible Fund editors]

God's name is important!

We must not use it lightly or inreverently - but with a genuine sense of reverence and awe (Exodus 20:7).

But what is the name of the heavenly father? What is the name of His Son, our Savior, the Messiah?

It is important that we know. For there is only one "name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4: 12).

Must we, as some claim, use only Hebrew names when speaking of the Father and the Son? Is salvation based on the pronunciation of God's name in a certain language, or on a certain set of sounds?

Are we unwittingly transgressing the Third Commandment when we say "Jesus Christ," "God" and "Lord" - because these are not Hebrew names?

There is no need for confusion. Read on and understand!

Sacred names?

The notion that we must use only God's Hebrew names is of no ancient origin. Actually, the Hebrew-names teaching had its beginning less than 80 years ago, in the late 1930s.

At that time, proponents of the idea began to claim that it is gross sin to say the name *Jesus Christ*, which is an anglicized spelling of the Greek words *Jesous* and *Christos*. Likewise, they declared it a sin to utter the phrase *God the Father*, for the English word *God* was said to be linked etymologically with pagan worship.

The Deity's name, they alleged, must be spoken only in Hebrew. This is an important prerequisite for entering God's Kingdom, they claimed.

These same few teach that the sacred personal name of our heavenly Father is *Yahweh* (or, in its contracted form, *Yah*) and that the name of His Son is *Yahshua* the Messiah. The word *Elohim*, too must be used instead of our equivalent English word *God*. They declare that when we pray or speak about the Father and the Son, we must use only these Hebrew names. It is wrong, they say, to translate the names of the Deity into English or any other language. In other words, we may freely read and discuss the Bible as translated into the English language in all terms except

the names of God or Jesus Christ. Then we must speak Hebrew. Using substitutes for the names *Yahweh* and *Yahshua*, we are told, could deny us salvation.

Are Hebrew names the only ones acceptable to God? Is He insulted by anything else?

The tetragrammaton

First, let's examine the name *Yahweh*, said to be the personal name of the Heavenly Father.

In Exodus 3:15, the Creator introduced His name - YHWH - to Moses. (In many English versions of the Bible, YHWH is translated LORD, usually printed in capital letters.)

Unrealized by many, the text of the Old Testament consisted of consonants, no vowels. The original Hebrew of the Creator's name as written in the consonantal text of this verse is spelled simply YHWH, not *Yahweh*. YHWH is often referred to as the "tetragrammaton," meaning the "four letters." The name YHWH is derived from a form of the Hebrew verb *to be*. It has the same meaning as the name I AM, mentioned in the previous verse (Exodus 3:14). Hebrew scholars say YHWH could mean "he exists" or "he causes to be." The English equivalents of this word would be "the Ever-living" or "the Eternal."

Though we cannot be absolutely certain what the missing vowels in YHWH should be, many scholars believe that YHWH was probably vocalized originally as *Yahweh*.

The Jews, thinking the name YHWH too sacred to be uttered, ceased to even pronounce it after the days of Ezra and Nehemiah. Indeed, it was considered unlawful and blasphemous to utter it. When a Jew reciting orally came to YHWH in a scripture, he substituted the word *Adonai* (a Hebrew word meaning "Lord" or "Master") instead. The name of God, in other words, was written YHWH, but pronounced *Adonai*.

But one thing is certain. The pronunciation of the Hebrew word YHWH was not "Jehovah." This familiar but erroneous name is a comparatively recent invention, devised by Peter Galatin (the confessor of Pope Leo X) in 1520. Galatin interjected the vowels of the word *Adonai* (a-o-a) between the four sacred consonants YHWH, producing the hybrid monstrosity *YaHoWaH*, which later became "Jehovah" in some English Bibles. It is a totally artificial name, formed by adding alien vowels to the Tetragrammaton. It has no claim to legitimacy.

Yahshua is Yahweh!

The first point that must be made in answer to those well-intentioned but misguided advocates of "sacred names" concerns their labeling the Father *Yahweh* as distinct from His Son *Yahshua* (which means "Yahweh's salvation"). They claim YHWH is the Father, and that the Son later had to be revealed.

The truth is that YHWH of the Old Testament is the very One who became Jesus or, in Hebrew, *Yahshua! Yahshua*, or Jesus, IS *Yahweh!*

Jesus was the Word (Greek , *Logos*, "spokesman") who was with God the Father from the beginning (John 1:1). The *Logos* was the Creator - "All things were made through Him" (verse 3). That *Logos*- the Creator- later became flesh and dwelt among us (verse 14). He then declared the Father(verse 18), whom no man had heard or seen before (John 5:37).

Notice further: In Deuteronomy 32:3-4, we read that YHWH (translated "LORD" in many Bibles in verse 3) is "the Rock." In 1 Corinthians 10:1-4, we discover that the Rock was none other than Christ. In John 8:58, Jesus reveals that He is the "I AM" of Exodus 3:14. In Hosea 13:4, YHWH says **there is no savior but Him**. YHWH then clearly is *Jesus* (Acts 4:12)! [emphasis ours throughout - the editors]

Jesus (or *Yahshua*) was the God of the Old Testament. He *was* YHWH. (For a thorough proof of this point please review our article "Is Jesus God?" on our website, www.thebiblefund.org). With this understanding, one of the major tenets of the sacred names doctrine falls flat!

Now look at another major error in this false teaching.

Evidence from Old Testament

Though the vast majority of the Old Testament was inspired in the Hebrew language, Daniel and Ezra wrote portions of their books in Aramaic or Syriac, the prevalent language spoken throughout the Persian Empire and elsewhere during their time. It had replaced Hebrew as the language of common speech of the Jews.

When these men of God referred to the Creator in those passages, did they use the old Hebrew names, or did they translate them into Aramaic?

Nowhere in the Aramaic passages do we find the names YHWH or *Elohim*. An examination of the manuscripts reveals that in dozens of places the writers rendered the Hebrew names for God into the Aramaic word *Elah*. And it is just as proper that the Hebrew *El* and *Elohim* should be translated into the English word *God*.

Moreover, it should be noted that the name *El* was in use among the pagan Canaanites long before Moses penned the Pentateuch. In the cuneiform religious tablets excavated at Ras Shamra (the ancient Canaanite city of Ugarit in northern Syria), for example, El (El the Bull) is described as the head of the Canaanite pantheon, husband of Asherah and father of all the other gods. If it is sin for us to use the English word God because pagan Druids used it to refer to their idols, then, by the same reasoning, it is also a sin to use the Hebrew words *Elohim* and *El*.

Also notice that the Hebrew word *Elohim* is used 240 times throughout the inspired Old Testament to refer to pagan, heathen idols (see Exodus 12:12, Deuteronomy 6:14 and Judges 11:24, for example). This usage shows that it is just as permissible to use the English word *God* today for both the Creator and for pagan idols.

Apostolic example

But what about the New Testament books?

The original inspired language of the New Testament was Greek. Greek was virtually a universal language in the first century, widely understood by both Jews and gentiles.

Much of the New Testament was written by the apostle Paul, the apostle sent to the Greek-speaking gentiles who did not know Hebrew or Aramaic. When Paul wrote in Greek to Greek converts, did he pause in mid-sentence and switch from Greek to Hebrew to write *Yahweh*, or *Yahshua* when faced with a sacred name?

Never!

Paul invariably used the Greek words for "God" (*theos*) and "Lord" (*kurios*). And he used the Greek name *Jesous* (Jesus). And so did the other writers of New Testament books, as inspired by God's Holy Spirit. In 665 places in the New Testament, the apostles translated the Hebrew word YHWH into the Greek word *kurios*.

There is not one New Testament Greek manuscript with the names of the Deity written in Hebrew!

In the face of these clear facts, "sacred names" proponents have no choice but to deny the New Testament was originally written in Greek. They assert - wrongly - that the whole of the New Testament was originally written in Aramaic (some even say Hebrew), and only later translated into Greek. At the time of this alleged translation, they claim, the sacred Hebrew names were wrongly removed and pagan Greek names substituted.

The burden of proof is on them. The evidence?

There is none - for it is a totally false notion, devised out of necessity to justify a false premise!

The Aramaic version of the New Testament available today is clearly a later translation from the original inspired Greek. The only copies of the original New Testament writings that have been preserved are in Greek - none in Aramaic or Hebrew.

More proof

Jesus said He came to reveal and declare the name of the Father to men (John 17:6, 26). Yet, where do we find any discussion of its pronunciation? Where did Jesus say that Hebrew is the only name we must use? If *pronunciation* is so all-important, why did Jesus never say so?

Another point: Jesus prophesied that "many [deceivers] will come in My name" (Matthew 24:5). If the only proper form of his name is *Yahshua*, then Jesus' prophecy has utterly failed - and He is a false prophet! Have many come in the Hebrew name of *Yahshua*? No - hardly any. But many deceivers *have* come in the name of Jesus Christ, which Jesus in this verse clearly calls His name.

In other words, Jesus was saying that false churches would use the true name. Jesus obviously is not concerned with the language in which His name is spoken; it remains *His name*. There is power and authority in Jesus' name - the only name by which we may be saved (Acts 4:12).

Consider further: In John 17:11, Jesus asked the Father to "keep through Your name those whom You have given Me." As we trace the history of the true Church through the ages, what name do we find it using? "The Church of God," or the equivalent name in the native language spoken by members of the Church at any particular time! We do not find through history the name "Church of *Yahweh*" or some other Hebrew form. Either it is acceptable to use the non-Hebrew word *God* - or the Father failed to answer Jesus' request!

Moreover, from apostolic times to our day, ministers of that one true Church, praying in the name of Jesus Christ, have performed mighty miracles of healing (Acts 3:6). There is power in the name of Jesus. His name is as sacred in one language as in another.

What's in a name?

What does the word *name* really mean, anyway?

In Bible usage, a "name" signifies much more than merely a set of vocal sounds. Names convey meaning. They are given for a purpose. "Abraham," for example, means "father of many nations." "Israel" means "prevailer with God." And *Yahweh* means "the Eternal."

One's name summarizes one's authority, power, reputation and character. It is not merely a certain set of sounds or vocal vibrations that is important, but the meaning and power behind the name.

God's name has profound significance. The Hebrew text of the Old Testament contains many divine names (*sem* in Hebrew), each descriptive of some aspect of God's character. Among them is *El Shaddai*, "almighty God," as in Genesis 17:1, and *Eloheseba'ot*, "God of hosts," as in Amos 5:27. The meaning of each of them is infinitely more important than its mere sound in Hebrew. God's character remains the same - whatever the language may be.

Moreover, you need to understand that Elohim (God) is a family name (Ephesians 3:14-15)! It has a plural ending - allowing for more than one member in the one divine Family. We may also bear that name - the very name of God! We may enter the God Family by a resurrection. (Our free Bible Correspondence Course lesson on *Just What Do You Mean - Born Again?* explains this fully. You can find it on our website.)

Performance, not pronunciation

Salvation is not based on pronunciation! Those who would worship the sound of a name - treating it with superstitious and mystical reverence - make an idol out of that sound. Thinking they have some gift of greater knowledge, they actually miss the whole point and in tent of the Scriptures, and engender needless strife and division.

Remember the words of Jesus in Matthew 7:21: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven."

Performance, not pronunciation, is of paramount importance to God. We honor His name by obeying Him, not by mouthing a certain sound.

Do not be misled by the naive and misguided "scholarship" of those who would make a "show of wisdom." Their teachings are not substantiated by the Word of God, but are based on a multitude of woefully misapplied scriptures. Speaking the names of God in Hebrew is *not* a prerequisite for salvation.

Take reassurance from the statement of the apostle Peter, who declared, "If you are reproached for the name of Christ [*Christos* in the original Greek], blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you" (1 Peter 4:14).