
WHAT IS THE SAVIOR'S NAME?

Are Hebrew terms for the Creator God — rather than English or Greek titles — the only ones accepted or recognized by God? Is some one name absolutely essential for salvation? Here's evidence from the original texts of the Bible.

By Lester L. Grabbe

Must we use only Hebrew terms when speaking of the Creator? Should we say Yahweh rather than God? Is it a sin to use the name Jesus Christ and to call His true people the Church of God?

Is God's name Jehovah?

Despite the fact that the Hebrew text of the Old Testament contains many divine names and titles, the major argument propagated by certain religionists centers around the word many English translations have rendered *Lord*. Let's examine this word — the tetragrammaton YHWH.

The Old Testament text as it was preserved for many centuries consisted only of consonants, though semiconsonants were used to indicate certain long vowels. The exact pronunciation, with the correct vowel sounds, was preserved *only* by oral usage.

The vowel sounds were not written down until about the sixth or seventh century, A.D. At that time, Jewish textual scholars known as Masoretes (hence Masoretic text) devised symbols to represent the vowels. They added these symbols (vowel points)

to the consonantal text of the Old Testament.

It was only at this time — centuries after both the Old and New Testaments had been completed — that the then-current pronunciation as orally preserved was written down.

But the tetragrammaton, the Hebrew name YHWH, had long before ceased to be pronounced by the Jews as too sacred to be uttered. Whenever reciting orally, they always substituted the word *Adonai* (Lord) or occasionally *Elohim* wherever YHWH appears in the text. This practice began long before the time of Herod.

Later, in the sixth or seventh century, wherever the Masoretes found the word YHWH, they inserted the vowel points of *Adonai* or *Elohim* (not the original vowels of YHWH) to give the synagogue reader the clue to use the acceptable word. It was from the consonants YHWH plus the vowel points of *Adonai* that the impossible form *Jehovah* was later created by Catholics only partially knowledgeable of the Hebrew language and text.

Hebrew scholars are quick to admit that the exact vowel sounds and

pronunciation of YHWH are not absolutely certain. Most feel that *Yahweh* (pronounced *Ya-hweh*, with the second syllable sounding like the *we* in *where*) is a close approximation. But this reconstruction is partly based on transliterations into Greek by some of the so-called church fathers several centuries after the writing of the New Testament.

This Jewish custom of substituting one word for the other was already practiced, for example, by the Essene sect at Qumran, who left us the Dead Sea Scrolls. For several technical reasons we need not list, it is certain the Qumran sect had stopped pronouncing YHWH as early as the beginning of the second century B.C.

If the correct pronunciation were known at all in New Testament times, it has not survived in writing. Some scholars disagree with the pronunciation *Yahweh*. Some believe the name was *Yaho* or *Yahwo* or *Yahu*. There is simply no way to be absolutely sure how it was pronounced when YHWH introduced this name to Moses.

And, of course, vowel pronunciation is always subject to great change

through the centuries and from region to region. Even if Ezra and later generations pronounced this name Yahweh, how had Moses pronounced it? After all, that would have been the only correct way — *if* exact pronunciation is what matters.

Consider also this factor. Today's Jews have traditional pronunciations for Hebrew vowels and even consonants — and hence words — different from one another in various parts of the world, even in the same generation, just as English speakers from various parts of the world pronounce English words differently. Were there no differences in Hebrew dialects in Bible times between the Nile and the Euphrates? Linguistic records such as Judges 12:6 indicate there were.

If the exact pronunciation were all important, what about those today whose native tongue or dialect is different? They can't form the sounds of Yahweh correctly. Are they all without hope? What about the man today who says Yahvah instead of Yahweh?

Any who continue to support a requirement to designate the Creator as YHWH — regardless of how he might think it should be pronounced — must explain the statement in Exodus 6:2-3: "And Elohim spoke unto Moses and said unto him, I am YHWH. And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, as El Shadday [God Almighty]. But by my name YHWH I was not known to them" (all Bible quotes used in this article are translated directly from the Hebrew or Greek).

No YHWH before Moses

Did Elohim mean what He said? — that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob did not even know the name YHWH? Or must we try to explain away this passage by saying (as some do) that Abraham actually used the name YHWH but just didn't understand it? On the contrary, these two verses strongly indicate the name YHWH was simply not revealed as the name before Moses.

Supporting evidence for the statement of these verses is found in an examination of the theophoric names of people who lived before Moses — names, that is, bearing some form of divine name within them. Our mod-

ern society seldom uses such names except for names actually taken from the Bible. But Hebrew society was different. So we find many names in the Bible with an El, or Yah or Yahu (short for YHWH) in them.

For example, early in the Bible we run across names with El in them. Genesis 5:12 mentions Mahalaleel whose name means *praise of El*. Genesis 10:28 lists Abimael — *a father is El*. Jacob changed the name of Luz to Bethel (*house of El* — Gen. 28:19) and later had his own name changed to Israel, *he perseveres with El*.

Similarly, we find the divine name *Shadday*, which first appears in Genesis 17:1, in the name Zurishaddai, meaning *my rock is Shadday*, (Num. 1:6). Zurishaddai lived before the exodus.

Yet we find no human names with YHWH (including Yah or Yahu or any shortened form of the name) until after the time of Moses. A careful examination of all the biblical names before the time of Moses reveals no trace of the name YHWH.

Some are bound to ask why the name YHWH is used in the text all through Genesis if it were not known before Moses. It's simple. By the time the book of Genesis was composed, the name YHWH was known and was simply inserted into the text.

This means that such men as Abel and the other preachers of righteousness before the flood, as well as Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph — righteous men for more than 2½ millennia — never so much as heard this name that some today emphatically assure us is absolutely necessary for salvation!

The many names of God

A careful study of the Bible reveals the Creative Family has a multitude of meaningful names and titles, but yields absolutely no prohibition against translating them into another language.

Nowhere in the Bible are we told that only the Hebrew form is permissible. On the contrary, we are given positive examples of these names being translated *into other languages*.

Many do not realize that several

sections of the Old Testament (Dan. 2:4 through 7:28; Ezra 4:8 through 6:18; and 7:12-26) are written in Aramaic rather than Hebrew. Aramaic was not the language Moses spoke.

Nowhere in these Aramaic sections do we find YHWH, or any Hebrew names for the deity. Instead we find the Aramaic form Elah.

Similarly, we find no Hebrew names in the New Testament. Instead we find the Greek terms *theos* (God) and *kurios* (Lord). Furthermore, the New Testament uses *kurios* in quotations from the Old Testament where YHWH is used in the Hebrew, such as Matthew 3:3, quoting from Isaiah 40:3.

New Testament: inspired or corrupted?

Of course, some would rather throw out God than their false theory about sacred names. So they theorize that the New Testament has been corrupted.

But what they claim would have required no less than one of the most thorough editing jobs in all history! For not a single Greek New Testament manuscript shows any evidence for the use of original Hebrew YHWH supposedly put there by the authors for their Greek readers!

Someone would have had to have superhuman powers to gather every single Greek manuscript scattered around the entire Mediterranean basin and carefully expunge YHWH from all New Testament manuscripts and substitute the Greek *kurios*.

The apostle Paul certainly spoke Hebrew (Acts 21:40), but he was under no illusions that only Hebrew names for God were acceptable. Not only did he use Greek terms in his letters, but even a common greeting in Aramaic, which was widespread in the early Church.

When Jesus spoke Greek to someone He used the Greek form of His name. He inspired His servants to use that same form in the New Testament. He didn't say that YHWH is the only name by which we must be saved — nor Hebrew Yehoshua, or Yahshua.

Instead, the apostle Peter uses the Greek form *Iesous* in Acts 4:10-12 and goes on to state that whoever calls on the name of *kurios* (Lord

By No Other Name Under Heaven

Is it necessary to use some special term — and only that term — in referring to the Creator, Jesus Christ? Must God's name be uttered only in Hebrew? The sacred names issue has long been a stumbling block, amazingly enough, to many people.

Some claim that the Hebrew tetragrammaton YHWH — translated *Lord* in many English versions of the Bible — is the only truly sacred name of God. They hold that using this word is a prerequisite by which salvation may either be attained or lost.

Does this mean that we should only read Hebrew Bibles? No — the same people who claim YHWH is the only acceptable name of God use English Bible translations.

As Herbert W. Armstrong has written: "In other words, they allow that we may freely translate all *other* words of the Bible into our English language — *except* those words that are the *names* of the Father and the Son . . . But that contention is not substantiated by the Scriptures" (*Good News*, November-December, 1972, page 3).

The apostle Peter had healed a

lame man by the name and power of Jesus Christ, and was brought before a group of high-ranking Jews for questioning.

"And when they had set them [John was with Peter at the time] in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this? Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them . . . Be it known unto you all . . . that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth . . . doth this man stand here before you whole . . . *Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby ye must be saved*" (Acts 4:7-12).

The New Testament was written in Greek, not Hebrew, and the Holy Spirit inspired Luke, the author of Acts, to use the Greek *Iesous* rather than some Hebrew form of God's name for Jesus Christ in verse 10. And verse 12 says there is *no other name* by which mankind can be accepted by God as fit for His Family!

Mr. Armstrong continues: "The Holy Spirit of God, inspiring the writing in the Greek language, in-

spired that *only name* by which we may be saved to be written in the Greek, and not in the Hebrew.

"The Spirit of God *did not* inspire those words to be written in the Greek language, *except* for the *only name*, and then inspire that name in the *Hebrew*, as the Hebrew names people would have done. The *only name* was inspired in the same language as the rest of the writing. Therefore we should understand that same name in the language in which we read our Bibles — the *English name Jesus Christ* of Nazareth!" (ibid., page 33).

God's Word nowhere says it is wrong for any people to read the Bible — including the names of the Creator — or refer to God in their own language.

Salvation cannot be based on some mystical word or pronunciation, but on a person's willingness to always do what pleases God: "Not every one that saith to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 7:21). —

By Norman Shoaf □

without *the* in front of it) will be saved! Why shouldn't we then use the English forms Jesus and Lord?

Meaning of YHWH

Each of the many divine names and titles describes some aspect of the Creative Family's character. The Bible does not emphasize a pronunciation — a particular combination of laryngeal vibrations modulated by the mouth. It emphasizes that we understand the meaning of the divine names and titles in order for us to be more like our Savior Jesus Christ.

As we cannot be absolutely sure of the vowels in YHWH, we cannot be positive about its exact grammatical form. But scholars generally feel it is some form of the verb *to be*. Some suggest *He causes to be*, others *He exists*.

But perhaps no better interpretation can be found than the Greek statement of Revelation 1:8, referring to Jesus Christ: "I am the Alpha and the Omega [in English we would

say the *A* and the *Z*, the first and the last], says the Lord God, the One who is being, who was being, and who is coming, the Almighty."

What's in a name?

God names things what they *are*. YHWH means the self-existent one — the "Ever Living" as the Fenton translation uses — the "Eternal" as in the Moffatt translation.

There is much in a name. Jesus has been given a name above all, in heaven or earth. There is power and authority in His name — the only name by which we may be saved. To act in His name is to act by His authority, as "power of attorney."

The New Testament, written entirely in the Greek, as inspired by God's Holy Spirit, in quoting from the Old Testament, did not quote the Hebrew names, but translated them into the Greek, as we also translate them into English.

Christ said He came to reveal the name of the Father (John 1:18; 17:6, 26). Yet we would search in

vain for any discussion of its pronunciation or requirement to use only Hebrew.

What then is meant by these verses?

What Christ revealed is the way. He revealed the way to life, which is the way of the character of God. That character is the origin of His names — expressed by whatever different language. The same character in us will lead us to have eternal life like God and to bear His names that summarize His character.

"But this is eternal life, that they might know thee the only true God, and the one whom you sent, Jesus Christ (John 17:3).

We don't get to know God by concentrating on a few Hebrew characters or their English transliterations.

So the use of only one name for Jesus Christ or a certain unmistakable pronunciation of that name is not a prerequisite for entering God's Kingdom. Don't be misled by any such false teachings. □