

## God's Name

### YHWH

**“And Moses said to God, Behold, when I come to the sons of Israel, and shall say to them, The God of your fathers has sent me to you, and they shall say to me, What is his name? What shall I say to them?”**

**“And God said to Moses, I AM WHO I AM. And he said, Thus shall thou say to the sons of Israel, I AM has sent me to you.**

**“And God said moreover to Moses, Thus shall thou say to the sons of Israel, Jehovah, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is my name forever, and this is my memorial to all generations” (Exodus 3:13-15).**

Even though God told Moses his name was I AM, it is the only time in the Bible he (or anybody else) refers to himself that way. Yet that was a beautiful and powerful way he used to express the eternal supremacy of his existence. He alone can be named I AM, for he alone has always been. No man can justifiably say, “I am who I am.” And I know of no man who has tried, although there probably have been some obscure eccentrics and lunatics who have. Whenever we hear a man speak about I AM, all who have heard of this passage recognize immediately to whom he is referring.

Names are given for purposes of identity, which is especially useful when communicating. Most animals identify themselves by smell, or sometimes by their unique sounds. In those early days of the Bible, as we have seen, names were usually associated with characteristics of the person and/or circumstances about them. But what name could be given for God? He is called descriptively the Lord, because he is Lord of lords. However, the most frequent name given in the Old Testament Hebrew for God is YHWH or YHVH, transliterated with English letters, called the tetragrammaton.

Knowledge of its exact pronunciation cannot be determined from the manuscripts because ancient Hebrew writing had no vowels.

Nineteenth century German scholars recommended pronouncing it Yahweh, which is a transliteration of YHWH. However, the translators of the ASV pronounced it Jehovah, which is a transliteration of YHVH; hence, YeHoVeH.

In answer to Moses' question about his name, God used both "I AM" and "Jehovah." God said to tell the sons of Israel that I AM sent him. He also told him to tell the sons of Israel that Jehovah sent him. And he said that was his name forever. His name I AM was used only once, but his name YHWH or YHVH is used almost 7000 times in the Old Testament. Yet that name is not applied to God at all in the New Testament. He is either called God or Lord. The New Testament was written in Greek not Hebrew. And when the New Testament authors quoted from Old Testament scriptures that contained YHWH or YHVH they substituted the Greek word for lord instead of trying to transliterate the name. Even Jesus used lord instead of YHWH when he quoted the Old Testament (see Luke 20:42 where he quotes Psalm 110:1).

Why was the Hebrew name YHWH or YHVH not transliterated in the New Testament? I am told the exact pronunciation of YHWH or YWVH was lost because Hebrew writing had no vowels, and the Jews considered the name too sacred to pronounce. That tradition began sometime after the Old Testament was written and before the time of Christ. They decided not to pronounce his name for fear pronouncing it inaccurately would be considered taking it in vain. Indeed, I am told pronouncing his name was eventually considered blasphemy, and therefore a capital crime. There is no evidence in the Bible that God did not want his name pronounced, even if its pronunciation was imperfect. Indeed, it was commonly uttered throughout the Old Testament period. The Jews have often gone far beyond what God wanted in many of their practices.

If the Jews considered pronouncing YHWH or YHVH blasphemy, then transliterating it in the New Testament would have generated unnecessary controversy and persecution. That is no doubt why the Holy Spirit guided the authors of the New Testament to use "the Lord" instead of a transliteration of God's

Hebrew name. But how should his name be translated for the Old Testament in English?

Since the writings of the New Testament were divinely inspired, substituting Lord for YHWH or YHVH has divine approval. Apparently, therefore, based upon the New Testament practice, instead of transliterating YHWH or YHVH the translators of the KJV used the expression “the lord” primarily (it uses Jehovah seven times) but added all capitals, making “the LORD.” Most other versions follow that tradition. However, that necessarily introduced some translation errors. For example, the words “the Lord YHWH (or YHVH)” would produce “the Lord LORD.” And that was obviously too awkward to use. Hence, they altered the expression to say “the Lord God.”

I decided to follow the tradition of the ASV in my translation (the ACV), which uses the transliteration, Jehovah. The ASV has a reputation of being one of the most accurate translations of the Old Testament. However, contemporary Bible scholars prefer the word Yahweh. They and their followers condemn the word Jehovah as being an inaccurate perversion. The truth is, nobody knows exactly how his name was pronounced, and they have no right to condemn that choice. Indeed, the word Jesus is *known* to be an inaccurate pronunciation of the name of our Savior, but I have never heard any of them call it a perversion. Those Bible scholars who condemn anything but the word Yahweh are hypocrites.

The great majority of contemporary Bible scholars are either atheists or pseudo-believers under the control of the devil, whom Paul said was **“the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the sons of disobedience”** (Ephesians 2:2). I suspect they have been led by that spirit to prefer Yahweh because it looks and sounds more like the word Yahoo. And my Webster’s New World dictionary defines Yahoo this way: “in Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*, any of a race of brutish, degraded creatures subject to the Houyhnhmns and having the form of all the vices of man.” The definition given for the word yahoo (small case y) is the following: “a person who is variously thought of as being coarse, uneducated, unrefined, anti-intellectual, crudely materialistic, etc.” Making God’s holy name look and sound like

yahoo no doubt pleases the spirit that works in the sons of disobedience.

I believe another reason the New Testament authors did not transliterate God's Hebrew name is because it was just not important. Descriptions and pronunciations of his name can vary as long as they are not irreverent or sound like anything demeaning. The fact is, we all pronounce our words uniquely to some degree. That is how we can recognize persons by their voices. Hence, I believe arguing about how to pronounce names is quibbling and fits in the category of what Paul said was **“doting about disputes and word controversies”** (First Timothy 6:4).

Perhaps there is another lesson we can learn from the fact the Hebrew word for Jehovah was not transliterated in the New Testament. It may be an example of how we should accommodate to local laws and customs to avoid unnecessary offences unless those customs violate the will of God. For example, when writing about foods, Paul said, **“If any of those unbelievers invites you, and ye want to go, eat everything being set before you, inquiring of nothing because of the conscience”** (First Corinthians 10:27).

The Old Testament prohibitions about certain foods were done away with for the church, except for eating blood. Therefore, what we should eat is not important to our souls, and is not worth fighting about. We should try to avoid offending others unnecessarily in all that we do. Such matters as the words we use, the clothing we wear, the food we eat, and so forth should not offend unless they are necessary for our obedience to God, or unless they undermine our Christian identity. We should never use anything that is an unnecessary stumbling block to our efforts to save lost souls.