

The Name of God

It would be easy to forget or to have never been taught, that the God of the Old Testament actually had a name. The translators have chosen to follow a Jewish custom of not translating the name of God. According to Jewish interpretation, the Name is too holy to be pronounced. In deference to their wishes, most Bible translators have chosen not to accurately translate God's name. Nowhere in the Biblical text does it suggest that God's Name is too holy to be pronounced. It is an assumption based on the following commandment, "Exd 20:7 NKJV - "You shall not take the Name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His Name in vain, again, courtesy of www.blueletterbible.org.

If you carefully study Ezekiel 36:16-38, you'll have a better idea as to why it has become Jewish custom not to even speak the Name of God. But, since you have carefully studied these verses, you have noted that the Name was defiled because of their sin, not because they mispronounced the Name.

The last American Bible in common usage to attempt to translate the Name of God was the American Standard Version. They translated the Name as "Jehovah." Most modern scholarship suggests that "Jehovah" is also a misinterpretation. The Rabbi's in an attempt to help the faithful not sin by mispronouncing the Name, would write it varying the vowel points. These erroneous vowel points placed by the Masoretes led to the Name being translated "Jehovah." This Bible, the "ASV" was for many years the primary text of the Jehovah's Witnesses. Eventually, they produced their own translation and the ASV passed out of common usage in the late 1950's. Oddly, this Bible is again available as a trade paperback. It is found listed in the various translations used at www.blueletterbible.org.

In Exodus 3, the "burning bush" narrative, Moses sees a bush that burns but is not consumed by the fire. A voice speaks to him from the fire and Moses engages the Voice in a conversation. At one point, Moses asks, ". . . what is His name and what shall I say to them?" Moses grew up in Egypt where over a hundred gods were served. Moses is now married to a daughter of the high priest of Midian. His question is very logical. Gods have names.

The following verses help us enter into the dialogue.

Exd 3:14 NKJV - And God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And He said, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

Exd 3:15 NKJV - Moreover God said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: 'The **LORD** 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.'"

Exd 3:16 NKJV - "Go and gather the elders of Israel together, and say to them, 'The **LORD** God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared to me, saying, "I have surely visited you and seen what is done to you in Egypt;

Notice, the New King James Version follows the tradition of the King James Version in that the name is translated "LORD". Notice it is in all capital letters. Now, read these same three verses from the American Standard Version, "ASV,"

Exd 3:14 ASV - And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.

Exd 3:15 ASV - And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, **Jehovah**, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name forever, and this is my memorial unto all generations.

Exd 3:16 ASV - Go, and gather the elders of Israel together, and say unto them, **Jehovah**, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, hath appeared unto me, saying, I have surely visited you, and [seen] that which is done to you in Egypt:

There is no "J" in Hebrew so you will also see the name written, "Yehovah." The actual Hebrew script transliterated to English reads, "YHVH" but usually comes into English as "YHWH." Again, most modern scholarship believes that the name was pronounced as "Yahweh" or "Yahveh."

Here is the most important point . . . God's name is not LORD or Lord. Verse 15 tells us that the Name "Yahweh" or "Jehovah" is given as a memorial for all generations. LORD or Lord is not given as a memorial to all generations. In Ezekiel 36, it isn't the title "LORD or Lord" that was defiled and profaned, it was the Name, "Yahweh or Jehovah." This may seem like a small issue but I know from Holy Spirit, it is no small thing.

My Jewish friends, tell me that the Name is pronounced as “Yahveh.” In either case, we have defined a Name for God. Whether you choose to use “Yahweh, Yahveh, Jehovah or Yehovah,” it is between you and God.

Consider the following extracted again from www.blueletterbible.org. If we look at Moses only, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, that Name “Yahweh” is used in the Hebrew 1606 times in the King James Version. The New King James uses it 1605 times and the American Standard Version uses the Name 1558 times. The difference in the ASV, relates to how they interpret the word, “lord” as used for owner or master.

I’ve not written this section to debate which translation is correct but to point out that Moses used God’s Name regularly. Most translations address this issue in their preface or forward section. Some give several paragraphs to this topic. My most recent Bible purchase was a NKJV that was recently published. It had reduced the teaching on the Name to a simple footnote, in very small print, that was incorporated into a section on how to use their text.

What do you think Yahweh thinks about having his Name reduced to less than a footnote? A memorial for all generations recorded as a footnote? A common theme in scripture is that God is looking for a people who “will be called by My Name . . . they will be My people and I will be their God.” Are you among those people?

The Bible says that Yahweh/Yahveh/Jehovah has been given as a memorial for all generations yet also says that Jesus is the Name above all Names. Is the Name “Jesus” above that of “Jehovah?” “Jesus” translates into Hebrew as “Yeshua or Yehoshua.” Does that make “Yeshua or Yehoshua” above the Name of “Yahweh or Yahveh?” Do you think it matters to God?

Jesus said in John 5 that Moses wrote about Him. Moses never used the Name of Jesus and never wrote directly about Messiah or the anointed one unless he was writing about Aaron and his sons. Yet, by the NKJV, Moses wrote about “Yahweh or Yahveh or Jehovah” over 1600 times.

What do you think?