

# What's in a Name?

One of the chief arguments advanced by those who would downplay the importance of the sacred name “Yahweh” is the idea that, in Scriptures, names are merely labels and therefore of little consequence. They contend that while the name Yahweh might be considered an interesting piece of trivia, a name used by some ancient people for the almighty does not carry sufficient importance or value to be considered with any seriousness. But is this view valid? Can the concept that the name “Yahweh” holds little value or importance be sustained by scriptural evidence?

## The Significance of a Name

שֵׁם (*shem*) is the Hebrew word used to denote a “name.” Yet, *shem* means much more than a “name” in our present English sense of the term. It serves not only as a mark or memorial of individuality but implies “honor, authority, character” and “renown.”<sup>1</sup> The Greek term used in both the ancient Septuagint (LXX) translation of the Old Testament and in the New Testament documents in place of the Hebrew term *shem* is ὄνομα (*onoma*), which similarly means “authority, character” and “fame.”<sup>2</sup> According to Proverbs, “A *shem*,” meaning good character, authority and honor, i.e. a good name, “is to be chosen rather than great riches”; and Ecclesiastes similarly advises, “A *shem* is better than good ointment.”<sup>3</sup> In the book of Numbers we find the story involving “certain of the sons of Israel, 250 leaders of company, elect men of the company, men of שֵׁם (*shem*; i.e. of renown)” (Num., 16:2).

In Scriptures personal names held great significance. They voiced prophetic meaning, a fact further emphasized when Yahweh gave a leading character in a scriptural history an additional name. For example, Abram (meaning “high father”) had his name changed to Abraham (meaning “a father of multitudes”), for he was to become the father of many nations.<sup>4</sup> Jacob (meaning “supplanter”) obtained his name at birth because he would one day supplant his elder brother Esau in the blessings and promises held by their father Isaak, and the younger brother would rule over the older.<sup>5</sup> Jacob was later renamed “Israel” (“contending prince with *el* [the mighty one]”), because he wrestled with an *el* and won. As the result of this victory Jacob received a blessing.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> SEC, Heb. #8034; YAC, pp. 683, 685; HEL, p. 270, “fame, reputation (good or bad)”; YDNB, p. 2, “Name also implies reputation, renown, fame.”

<sup>2</sup> SEC, Gk. #3686; GEL, p. 1232.

<sup>3</sup> Prov., 22:1; Eccles., 7:1.

<sup>4</sup> Gen., 17:5; SEC, Heb. #85, 87.

<sup>5</sup> Gen., 25:19–34, 27:1–37; SEC, Heb. #3290.

<sup>6</sup> Gen., 32:22–32, 35:9–12; Hos., 12:3f; SEC, Heb. #3478, from #8280, שָׂרָה (*sarah*), meaning “to prevail: -have power (as a prince).” YAC, p. 522, accordingly, translates the name as “ruling with God [i.e., *el*]” and DB, p. 270, gives, “the prince that prevails with God [*el*].”

The prophet Hosea, as another example, was ordered by Yahweh to marry the harlot Gomer (“completion”), who Yahweh used to represent the harlot nation of Israel.<sup>7</sup> Hosea (“the preserver”), meanwhile, was used to represent Yahweh, the husband of Israel.<sup>8</sup> As this woman bore children to Hosea, Yahweh gave them names. The first was a son called Yezrael (“*el* [the mighty one] will sow”), because Yahweh was to “visit the blood of Yezrael upon the house of Jehu,” a king of Israel, and would “cause the kingdom of the house of Israel to cease.”<sup>9</sup> Yahweh would also “break the bow of Israel in the valley of Yezrael.”<sup>10</sup> The next child was a daughter named Loruhamah (“not pitied”), because Yahweh would “not again have mercy upon the house of Israel.”<sup>11</sup> Finally, Hosea obtained another son, Loammi (“not my people”), for Israel would soon be disenfranchised from Yahweh.<sup>12</sup>

The number of names holding weighty prophetic meanings in the Scriptures is countless. Their value, worth, and significance are everywhere self-evident. The noted biblical scholar J. A. Motyer points out that, unlike the modern notion of “name,” which is “nothing more than a personal label,” within the Scriptures “the concept of ‘name’ is both deep and clearly conceived.”<sup>13</sup> He adds:<sup>14</sup>

We now ask concerning the relationship between the name and the person who bore it. The biblical teaching can be stated in three propositions: the name is the person; the name is the person revealed; and the name is the person actively present.

G. H. Parke-Taylor notes that in the Semitic world to which the Israelites belonged, “Without a name there is no real existence.”<sup>15</sup> U. Cassuto similarly remarks that for these people, “Whatever is without an appellation does not exist, but whatever has a denomination has existence.”<sup>16</sup> The late G. T. Manley of Christ’s College in Cambridge writes:<sup>17</sup>

A study of the word “name” (*q.v.*) in the Old Testament reveals how much it means in Hebrew. The name is no mere label, but is significant of the real personality of him to whom it belongs. It may derive

<sup>7</sup> Hos., 1:1–3 (cf. 1:1–11); SEC, Heb. #1586.

<sup>8</sup> Hos., 1:1–11; SEC, Heb. #1954, “deliverer,” from #3467, *יָשָׁא* (*yasha*), “to be open, wide, or free, i.e. (by impl.) to be safe,” i.e. “deliver(-er), help, preserve, rescue, be safe”; DB, p. 254, “salvation.”

<sup>9</sup> Hos., 1:3–4; SEC, Heb. #3157.

<sup>10</sup> Hos., 1:5.

<sup>11</sup> Hos., 1:6.

<sup>12</sup> Hos., 1:8–9.

<sup>13</sup> NBD, p. 861.

<sup>14</sup> NBD, p. 862.

<sup>15</sup> YDNB, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> CBE, p. 37.

<sup>17</sup> NBD, p. 478.

from the circumstance of his birth (Gn. v. 29), or reflect his character (Gn. xxvii. 36), and when a person puts his "name" upon a thing or another person the latter comes under his influence and protection.

The *Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* states:<sup>18</sup>

In the Bible, as throughout the Semitic world, a name carries significance beyond that of its meaning or its use as a title. Because of the vitality ascribed to words, a name signifies first and foremost existence. Everything and everyone has a name (Ecc. 6:10), and the very naming brings them into being (Isa. 40:26; cf. Gen. 2:19). The name represents the person (Num. 1:2; cf. Acts 1:15, KJV; RSV "persons") and the personality (e.g., Nabal, "fool"; 1 Sam. 25:25). Because a name is a social reality, kept by memory and through posterity (cf. Ps. 72:17), to cut off a person's name means not only death but the very obliteration of one's existence (e.g., 1 Sam. 24:21 [MT 22]; Ps. 9:5 [MT 6]; 109:13). . . . By extension, a person's character is his name, whether for good (Prov. 22:1; Ecc. 7:1) or ill (Job 30:8; *b<sup>ē</sup>lî-sēm*; NIV "nameless"; RSV "disreputable"). It is the equivalent of fame or renown (Gen. 11:4; 1 Sam. 18:30).

The sacred personal name of the almighty took on an even higher significance. *A New Standard Bible Dictionary* observes:<sup>19</sup>

To the ancient Israelite, great as was the significance he attached to his own and others' names, the names of God were of the highest importance. Even ordinary person-names were looked upon as being more than mere words; they almost possessed an entity of their own. Consequently, the Divine names were invested with a special and peculiar sacredness. In a vague way the Deity and his name were considered as inseparable.

Rabbi H. Freedman similarly states:<sup>20</sup>

In general the name of God was regarded more than a mere designation, but represented His nature or character and His relation to His people. It thus came to partake of His essence, His glory and power.

<sup>18</sup> EBD, p. 747.

<sup>19</sup> NSBD, p. 606.

<sup>20</sup> Freedman, *Kidd.*, p. 362, n. 8.

The *Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* comments:<sup>21</sup>

God's self-revelation in history is underscored by the giving of his name, in Semitic thought tantamount to disclosure of his true character.

This text elsewhere adds:<sup>22</sup>

The name conveys the authority of the person even when absent. To speak or act in another's name is to participate in that person's authority (1 Sam. 17:45; 25:9; Acts 4:7). The principle is that of prophecy and revelation (Exod. 3:13–14; Deut. 18:19; John 5:43). God's name reveals his character and salvation in which people may take refuge (Ps. 20:1 [MT 2]; cf. Isa. 25:1; 56:6); to treat God's name as empty is to despise his person (Exod. 20:7).

With such heavy emphasis placed upon names in the Scriptures, it stands to reason that the name applied to the almighty would be the most important one of all. We begin to comprehend its high value by its meaning. The name יהוה (יהוה), the Tetragrammaton Y-H-W-H, is "a straight-forward substantive, in which the root hwh ("to be") is preceded by the performative y," meaning, therefore, "he exists."<sup>23</sup> It is often translated as "the eternal," because it carries with it the idea of "self existence."<sup>24</sup> In the Old Testament alone, the name Yahweh is found nearly 7000 times, far more than any other personal name.<sup>25</sup> *The Interpreter's Dictionary Of The Bible* concludes:<sup>26</sup>

The name (יהוה; ὁνομα) of God [*eloahim*] is the key to understanding the biblical doctrine of God. In biblical terms the religious question is not: Does God exist? but: Who is our God? Just as an introduction to a person involves a disclosure of his personal name, so God's self-revelation in history is accompanied by the giving of his personal name, by which his people may worship and address him as "Thou." Thus God's name signifies the personal relation between God and people, which is the supreme characteristic of biblical faith.

<sup>21</sup> EBD, p. 425.

<sup>22</sup> EBD, p. 747.

<sup>23</sup> NBD, p. 478; LVTL, pp. 368f; VHL, pp. 17f; HBD, p. 685f. OTT, 1, p. 180, notes that the root יהוה should be understood in the sense of "being present," "being there." Therefore, Yahweh more specifically means "he is present."

<sup>24</sup> CB, 1, app. 4; NTB, pp. xx–xxi; DB, p. 284, "usually interpreted as signifying self-derived and permanent existence." NB, pp. 5–6, concludes that the name Yahweh signifies, "HE THAT ALWAYS WAS, THAT ALWAYS IS, AND THAT EVER IS TO COME." The translation "the eternal" is practiced by Moffatt, the French authors and Matthew Arfonold.

<sup>25</sup> See above Chap. II, n. 4.

<sup>26</sup> IDB, 2, p. 407.

## One Sacred, Covenant Name

The name Yahweh also has another distinguishing feature that places it in a category far above any other name: it is the only name in the entirety of the Scriptures said to be sacred.<sup>27</sup> For example, in Psalms we read, “They shall thank your great and fearful name, it is sacred,” and “sacred and awesome is his name.”<sup>28</sup> Isaiah refers to Yahweh as “the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity, and his name is sacred.”<sup>29</sup> When the messiah taught his disciples to pray, the opening line acknowledged, “Our father who is in heaven, sacred be your name.”<sup>30</sup> Neither is this merely the opinion of men. Yahweh himself refers to it as “my sacred name.”<sup>31</sup> Yet, at no time do Scriptures speak of him as having “sacred names,” it is always spoken of in the singular.

The sacred name was of such important value that, when Yahweh “lifted up”<sup>32</sup> his hands in order to swear an oath validating the covenants he made with Abraham, Isaak, and Jacob, he swore by himself. For example, in one act of confirming his covenant, we read in Genesis, “I have sworn by myself, says אֲנִי אֲנִי.”<sup>33</sup> The book of Hebrews proclaims that Yahweh’s promises to Abraham were confirmed by an oath, “since by no one he had greater to swear, (he) swore by himself.”<sup>34</sup> Another example comes from Jeremiah, 44:26, where Yahweh states, “Behold, I have sworn by my great name” that a prophecy he spoke would come true. Yahweh also uses the phrase, “I have sworn by my sacredness,” in confirmation of a promise.<sup>35</sup> Since the name of Yahweh is sacred and represents his very character and good reputation, it is clear that it is by his name that he backs up his promises.<sup>36</sup>

The act of swearing an oath by these ancient people meant, as William Smith points out, “an ultimate appeal to divine authority to ratify an assertion. On the same principle, that oath has always been held most binding which appealed to the highest authority, as regards both individuals and communities. As a consequence of this principle, appeals to God’s name on the

<sup>27</sup> For examples see, Pss., 33:21, 103:1, 105:3, 106:47, 145:21; Luke, 1:49, 11:2.

<sup>28</sup> Pss., 99:3, 111:9.

<sup>29</sup> Isa., 57:15.

<sup>30</sup> Matt., 6:9; Luke, 11:2.

<sup>31</sup> Lev., 22:2, 32; Ezek., 20:39, 36:21,22, 39:7,25, 43:7–8; Amos, 2:7.

<sup>32</sup> The Hebrew word for the action committing oneself to an oath is נָשָׂא (*nasha*), meaning to “lift” up one’s hands in an act of swearing an oath (SEC, Heb. #5375, 5378; HEL, p. 173). In Exod., 6:8, for example, Yahweh tells Moses to inform the Israelites, “And I will bring you into the land which I נָשָׂא (lifted up) my hands to give it to Abraham, to Isaak, and to Jacob, and I will give it to you for a possession, I am אֲנִי אֲנִי.” Also see Num., 14:30. Gen., 26:3, shows that this lifting up of hands occurred while in the act of swearing an oath. Yahweh tells Isaak, “Stay in this land, and I will be with you and bless you, for to you and to your seed I will give all these lands; and I will establish the sworn oath which I swore to Abraham your father.” Also see Exod., 13:5,11; Deut., 1:8, 4:31, 7:12f, 8:18; Judg., 2:1; and so forth.

<sup>33</sup> Gen., 22:16. Also see as examples Isa., 45:23; Jer., 22:5, 49:13, 51:14; Amos, 6:8.

<sup>34</sup> Heb., 6:11–19, which also adds that this oath is assured since it is “impossible” for Yahweh to lie.

<sup>35</sup> For examples see Ps., 89:35; Amos, 4:2.

<sup>36</sup> For example in Isa., 45:3, Yahweh states, “I have sworn by myself, the righteous word has gone out of my mouth and shall not return, that to me shall every knee bow, every tongue shall swear.”

<sup>37</sup> DB, p. 458. Also see as examples Exod., 23:13, 34:5–8; Deut., 29:10–21.

one hand, and to heathen deities on the other, are treated in Scripture as tests of allegiance."<sup>37</sup>

There are numerous examples to demonstrate this point. When Abraham asked his chief servant to swear an oath he specifically requested that it be done by the name "Yahweh."<sup>38</sup> When the Israelites promised not to attack the Gibeoni, even though the Gibeoni had slyly entered into the agreement by lying, the Israelites were unable to break the arrangement because they had sworn "to them by יהוה" (Josh., 9:19). Similarly, Jonathan and David remained friends despite the fact that Saul, Jonathan's father, sought the life of David, for they had sworn to do so "in the name of יהוה, saying, יהוה shall be between you and me, and between my seed and your seed forever" (1 Sam., 20:42; cf. 20:3f). When King Saul swore an oath not to kill David, he said, "As lives יהוה."<sup>39</sup>

The Hebrew word for oath is שבע (*sabua*). It means "seven" and is the root of the word Sabbath,<sup>40</sup> the name of the seventh day of the week. A *sabua* implies that the one taking the oath has sworn "seven times" by the deity's name as vouchsafe for his oath.<sup>41</sup> It was, as J. G. S. Thomson keenly observes, "the invocation of a curse upon one if he breaks his word (1 Sam. xix, 6), or if he is not speaking the truth (Mk. xiv. 71)."<sup>42</sup> It has led some scholars to suggest "that in invoking God's name in an oath a Hebrew 'released the action of God,' or 'committed to God the duty of taking action against the perjured or false man.'"<sup>43</sup> As a result, in Scriptures we are told:

יהוה your *eloahi* you shall respect, and him you shall serve, and by his name you shall שבע (*sabua*; swear). (Deut., 6:13)

יהוה your *eloahi* you shall respect, him you shall serve, and on him you shall cling, and by his name you shall שבע (*sabua*; swear). (Deut., 10:20)

J. L. Crenshaw poignantly observes, Yahweh is the only sovereign "in whose name all oaths must be sworn."<sup>44</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Gen., 24:1-4.

<sup>39</sup> 1 Sam., 19:6. For other examples see Judg., 8:19; Ruth, 3:13; 1 Sam., 14:39, 45, 20:21, 25:26, 34, 26:10, 16, 28:10, 29:6; 2 Sam., 4:9, 12:5, 14:11, 15:21, 22:47; etc.

<sup>40</sup> SEC, Heb. #7620, 7621, 7650, 7651, 7652. The word שבת (*sabbath*), the 7th day of the week, comes from שבע (*sabua*), meaning "seven" (SEC, Heb. #7652). Since the sabbath carried with it the idea of "resting from your works," it also formed the word שבת ("to repose, i.e. desist from exertion") (SEC, Heb. #7673). This second meaning comes from the fact that *sabua* also carries with it the idea "to sate, i.e. fill to satisfaction" and to be "complete" (SEC, Heb. #7646-7651), that is, the number seven was the number of being filled to satisfaction and completeness. The sabbath, likewise, was the end of a complete week, being the seventh day. The terms *sabua* and *sabbath* were also used to mean the entire seven day period of a week (Gen., 29:27,28; Dan., 9:27; Matt., 28:1; Mark, 16:2,9; Luke, 18:12, 24:1 John, 20:1, 19; Acts, 20:7; 1 Cor., 16:2).

<sup>41</sup> SEC, Heb. #7650, "to seven oneself, i.e. swear (as if by repeating a declaration seven times)."

<sup>42</sup> NBD, p. 902.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> ZAW, 81, p. 175.

The Scriptures overwhelmingly condemned those who swore by any other *eloahim* than Yahweh.<sup>45</sup> Yahweh would not break his own commandments, therefore he also would swear by his sacred name. Yahweh's appeal to his own sacred name (his good character, honor), therefore, was an appeal to the highest name by which anyone could swear.

The covenants and promises of Yahweh, as a result, are bound by the character and honor of his sacred name. On numerous occasions the Scriptures inform us that Yahweh will perform his promises, which he confirmed by oaths, for the sole reason of his name's sake.<sup>46</sup> The following are but a few examples:

For יהוה will not leave his people for his name's sake; because it has pleased יהוה to make you his people. (1 Sam., 12:22)

יהוה is my shepherd. I shall not lack. In pastures of green grass he makes me lie down; to waters of rest he leads me. My *nephesh* (life) he restores; he leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. (Ps., 23:1-3)

For your name's sake, יהוה, even pardon my iniquity, for it is great. (Ps., 25:11)

Help us, *eloahi* of our salvation, for the matter of the glory of your name; and deliver us and atone for our sins for your name's sake.<sup>47</sup> (Ps., 79:9)

יהוה, because of your name make me live. (Ps., 143:11)

While the Israelites were still in Egypt, Yahweh wished to bring them out to fulfill part of his covenant. Instead of throwing away their abominable idols, the Israelites rebelled. Yahweh then comments:

Then I said, I will pour out my fury against them, to fulfill my anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt. But I worked for my name's sake, that it should not be profaned before the nations, of whom they were among, of whom I made myself known to them in their sight, by bringing them out of the land of Egypt. (Ezek., 20:8-9)

<sup>45</sup> For examples see Jer., 5:7; 12:16; Amos, 8:14; Zeph., 1:4-6.

<sup>46</sup> For examples see, Pss., 31:3, 106:8, 109:21; Isa., 48:9, 66:5; Jer., 14:7,21; Ezek., 20:22.

<sup>47</sup> The atoning of one's sin for Yahweh's name's sake is directly tied into the covenant agreement made with Abraham. In order for one to receive the conditions of the covenant he must reach a position of being forgiven for his transgressions. This concept involves the entire notion of salvation itself. We will examine the role of the sacred name in man's salvation in Chap. XV entitled, *Salvation and the Sacred Name*.

And you shall know that I am יהוה, when I have worked with you for my name's sake; (and) not by your evil ways, nor by your corrupt deeds, house of Israel, declares adonai יהוה. (Ezek., 20:44)

In discussing the future fulfillment of the covenant with the house of Israel by returning the Israelites to the Promised Land, Yahweh states:

But I had pity for my sacred name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations, there where they went. Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says adonai יהוה: I do not do (this) for your sake, house of Israel, but only for my sacred name, which you profaned among the nations, there where you went. And I will sanctify my great name which was profaned among the nations, which you profaned amidst them. (Ezek., 36:21ff)

The Israelites had profaned Yahweh's name by the fact that they were not in the Promised Land. Yahweh had committed himself to a covenant to which he had made an oath, sworn to by his sacred name, guaranteeing the fulfillment of the covenant. As long as the Israelites were "among the nations," this covenant was not being fulfilled, thereby leaving the nations to believe that it would not be carried out. This condition, as a result, "*chalal* (חָלַל: profaned, wounded, pierced)"<sup>48</sup> the sacred name by casting doubt upon the veracity of the covenant and the trustworthiness of the name attached to it. Yahweh, therefore, must act for his own name's sake, to protect the honor of his name. This circumstance is why the prophets of the Scriptures constantly make an appeal for Yahweh to save them, not because of anything they have done, but for Yahweh's name's sake.<sup>49</sup>

### The Worth of the Sacred Name

Enhancing the fact that the sacred name is extremely valuable are the many scriptural statements regarding its worth. These include the remarks that we should love his sacred name, trust in it, give glory to it, respect it, remember it, desire it, and seek safety in it; that the name is great in power, majestic, and that it will be used to crush the enemies of Yahweh. Those who love Yahweh's name are those seeking him, the ones who will be dwelling in his inheritance. Moses summarized it best when he directly connected reverence for the sacred name with listening to the voice of יהוה and keeping the words of the

<sup>48</sup> SEC, Heb. #2490, 2491; HEL, p. 86.

<sup>49</sup> For examples, see Ps., 25:4–13 (v. 11), "for your name's sake, יהוה, even pardon my iniquity"; Ps., 31:1–8 (v. 3–4), "for your name's sake lead me and guide me; bring me out of the net they laid for me, for you are my strength"; Ps., 109:21, "But you, יהוה adonai, work with me for your name's sake, because good (is) your mercy, save me"; Jer., 14:7, "יהוה, though our iniquities testify against us, act for your name's sake; for our apostasies are many; we have sinned against you."



Torah. He then pronounces a curse upon all those who fail to observe the laws of the Torah and to revere the sacred name:

If you are not careful to do all the words of this Torah which are written in this book, to revere this glorious and revered name of אֱלֹהֵיכֶם, your *eloahi*, then אֱלֹהֵיכֶם will make your plagues remarkable, and the plagues of your children shall be great and persistent plagues, with evil and long-lasting sicknesses. He shall also bring upon you all of the plagues of Egypt which you were afraid; and they shall cling to you; also every sickness and every plague which is not written in this book of the Torah shall אֱלֹהֵיכֶם bring upon you until you are destroyed; and you shall be left with few men, whereas you were as the stars of the sky for multitude, because you would not obey the voice of אֱלֹהֵיכֶם, your *eloahi*. (Deut., 28:58–59)

The following quotes provide us with a few other examples:

And let all putting trust in you rejoice; let them always shout for joy, because you cover them; and let those who love your name be joyful in you. For you, אֱלֹהֵיכֶם, will bless the righteous; you will surround him with favor, as (with) a shield. (Ps., 5:11f)

אֱלֹהֵיכֶם our *adon*, how majestic is your name in all the earth. (Ps., 8:1,9)

And those who know your name will put their trust in you; for you, אֱלֹהֵיכֶם, have not forsaken those who seek you. (Ps., 9:10)

May אֱלֹהֵיכֶם answer you in the day of trouble; the name of the *eloahi* of Jacob set you on high. (Ps., 20:1)

Through you (אֱלֹהֵיכֶם) we will push (down) our enemies; through your name we will trample those who rise up against us. (Ps., 44:5)

According to your name, *eloahim*, so is your praise to the ends of the earth. (Ps., 48:10)

You (אֱלֹהֵיכֶם) appointed the inheritance of those who respect your name. (Ps., 61:5)

For *eloahim* will save Zion; and he will build the cities of Judah, and they shall live there and possess it. And his servants' seed shall inherit it, and they who love his name shall dwell in it. (Ps., 69:35f)

But my faithfulness and my mercy is with him (David); and his horn shall be exalted in my name. (Ps., 89:24)

Not to us, יהוה, not to us, but to your name give glory. (Ps., 115:1)

All the nations surround me, but surely I will destroy them in the name of יהוה. They surround me, (yet) I surely will destroy them in the name of יהוה (Ps., 118:10f)

יהוה, I have remembered your name in the night and have kept your law. (Ps., 119:55)

(יהוה,) turn to me and favor me, as is the way of those who love your name. (Ps., 119:132)

I will thank you with my whole heart; I will sing praises to you before *eloahim*. I will worship to your sacred temple and give thanks to your name; for your mercy, for your truth; for you have magnified above all (things) your name, (by) your command.<sup>50</sup> (Ps., 138:1–2)

This above verse by itself demonstrates the vital importance placed by Yahweh on his sacred name! If Yahweh has magnified his name above all things, how could we do less?

The name of יהוה is a strong tower of strength; the righteous run into it and is set on high. (Prov., 18:10)

Yes, (in) the paths of your judgments, יהוה, we await you; for your name and for your memorial, the desire of our *nephesh* (life). (Isa., 26:8)

<sup>50</sup> The verse in Ps., 138:2, which reads in Hebrew “כי הגדלת על כל שמד אמרת” is a difficult passage to render into the English language. As a result various attempts, such as that in the KJV, fare rather poorly. A literal translation would be, “For magnified-you above all name-your command-your.” (That אמרת [*amrath*] should read “command” see SEC, Heb. #565, showing that *amrah*, also read *amrath*, is the feminine form of אמר [*amar*], #559–561. Also compare the Hebrew in Ps., 147:15). In Hebrew this phrase literally means that Yahweh’s name has been magnified by Yahweh above all things, and that it was done by his command.

In the ancient Greek Septuagint version of this passage, it is rendered “ὅτι ἐμεγάλυνας ἐτι πᾶν τὸ ὄνομα τὸ ἅγιόν σου,” which is literally translated as, “wherefore magnified above all the name the sacred your.” In this ancient translation, the Jewish scribes understood that Yahweh’s “*amrath* (command)” was “ἅγιόν (sacred),” and render it as such in the Greek. Most English translations of this LXX passage give the English as, “for you have magnified your holy name above everything.” Another way of understanding the Hebrew is, “for you have magnified above all (things) your name, (as) you commanded.” These translations are fully supported by the CD, “for you have made great above all things, your name and your promise,” understanding that a command is also a promise, and the BAT version, “for thou hast magnified thy name over all.”

Who among you respects  $\text{אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתַי}$ , obeying the voice of his servant, who walks (in) darkness and no light is to him? Let him trust in the name  $\text{אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתַי}$  and rest on his *eloahi*. (Isa., 50:10)

There is none like you  $\text{אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתַי}$ ; you are great and your name is great in might. (Jer., 10:6)

The love and respect of Yahweh's sacred name and the power and other attributes rendered to it, as demonstrated by these above verses, clearly show that according to Scriptures the sacred name was no trivial issue. To blaspheme ( $\text{נָקַב}$ , *naqab*, i.e. do "violence" to)<sup>51</sup> the sacred name was considered a high crime worthy of death:

And he who blasphemes the name  $\text{אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתַי}$  shall certainly be put to death; all the congregation shall certainly cast stones at him; as with an alien, so a native, when he blasphemes the name, he is executed. (Lev., 24:16)

In both the Old and New Testaments it was considered an act of wickedness to blaspheme or scorn the sacred name of the almighty.<sup>52</sup> It was also considered evil to profane ( $\text{לִלְבַד}$ —wound, pollute)<sup>53</sup> the sacred name.<sup>54</sup> If the sacred name had no intrinsic value of great worth, why would Yahweh order the death of those who blaspheme it, whether Israelites or aliens, and count as wicked those who would profane it?

## The Memorial Name

There is yet another special quality attached to the sacred name Yahweh that gives it an extremely high value—his personal name is his memorial to all mankind:

Thus shall you say to the sons of Israel,  $\text{אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתַי}$ , the *eloahi* of your fathers, the *eloahi* of Abraham, the *eloahi* of Isaak, and the *eloahi* of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is my *shem* (name) to forever, and this is my  $\text{זֵכֶר}$  (*zeker*; memorial) to  $\text{לְדַרְדָּר}$  (*la dar dar*, i.e. generation [upon] generation). (Exod., 3:15)<sup>55</sup>

<sup>51</sup> SEC, Heb. #5344,  $\text{נָקַב}$  (*naqab*), "to puncture, lit. (to perforate, with more or less violence) or fig. (to specify, designate, libel); HEL, p. 172, "pierced," "pronounced unfortunate," "cursed."

<sup>52</sup> For *naqab* (blasphemy) see above n. 50. Also translated as blasphemy is  $\text{נָאָץ}$  (*naats*), meaning "to scorn" (SEC, Heb. #5006), when something is "turned away from, despised, rejected" (HEL, p. 156). In Greek the term used for blasphemy is  $\text{βλασφημέω}$  (*blasphemeo*), "to vilify; spec. to speak impiously" (SEC, Gk., #987). That those who blaspheme or scorn the sacred name are connected with wickedness see, Ps., 74:10,18; Isa., 52:5; Rom., 2:24; James, 2:7; Rev., 13:4–9, 16:9.

<sup>53</sup> See above n. 48.

<sup>54</sup> For examples see Lev., 18:21, 19:12, 20:3, 21:6, 22:2,32; Ezek., 36:20–23; Mal., 1:11–12.

<sup>55</sup> See below pp. 42f and Chap. IV, ns. 8–10.

The word translated as “memorial” is זָכַר (*zeker*). It means, “a memento” and by implication “commemoration:—memorial, memory, remembrance.”<sup>56</sup> It carries with it the concept to “meditate upon, call to mind.”<sup>57</sup> The name Yahweh is thereby the instrument or mechanism by which the true *eloahi* is brought to mind. It is a remembrance to all generations of mankind that he will keep his word. No other name is recorded in the entire Scriptures to which this important attribute is assigned. Many deities are called “Lord (Baal),” “Sovereign (*Adon*),” “God (*Eloah*),” and so forth, but only one *eloahi* is called יהוה. Other scriptural passages are as follows:

Sing praises to יהוה his pious ones and give thanks to his sacred זָכַר (memorial). (Ps., 30:4)

יהוה, your name (endures) to forever; יהוה, your זָכַר (memorial) to דָּר וְדָר (generation and generation). (Ps., 135:13)

In this above verse from Psalm, 135:13, the name “Yahweh” is referred to as “your (Yahweh’s) memorial.” Yahweh’s personal name is his memorial to דָּר וְדָר (all the generations of mankind).<sup>58</sup>

Yes, (in) the path of your judgments, יהוה, we awaited you; for your name and for your זָכַר (memorial), the desire of our *nephesh* (life). (Isa., 26:8)

He (יהוה) finds us at the house of *el*, and there he speaks with us; and יהוה, the *eloahi* of hosts, יהוה is his זָכַר (memorial). (Hos., 12:4–5)

Why would Yahweh claim that his name was a memorial to all the generations of mankind and then change his mind? Would that not make him a liar? Yet Scriptures proclaim he cannot lie.<sup>59</sup> Rather, every man is said to be a liar, as well as Satan who is the father of the lie.<sup>60</sup> It is Satan who “misleads the whole world.”<sup>61</sup> The fact of the matter is that it has been the traditions of men—traditions that teach that the sacred, eternal name of our heavenly father is to be forgotten and cast aside as something without value—that have served as the source of error. Stemming from men’s traditions have come the numerous and contradictory translations of the Scriptures, which try to disguise the importance of the sacred name.

### The Third Commandment

The greatest blow against those who would have us believe that it makes no difference what name we use—because “God knows what we mean”—comes

<sup>56</sup> SEC, Heb. #2143.

<sup>57</sup> HEL, p. 74.

<sup>58</sup> See above n. 55.

<sup>59</sup> Deut., 23:19; Titus, 1:2; Heb., 6:18.

<sup>60</sup> Rom., 3:4, “let *eloah* be true, and every man a liar”; John, 8:44.

<sup>61</sup> Rev., 12:9.

in the Third Commandment, which is recited in both Exodus, 20:7, and Deuteronomy, 5:11.

You will not **שׂ** (carry) the name **אֱלֹהֶיךָ**, your *eloahi*, **לְשׁוֹן** (to/for uselessness); for **אֱלֹהֶיךָ** will not leave unpunished **אֲשֶׁר** **שָׂא** (he who carries) his name **לְשׁוֹן** (to/for uselessness).

This important passage is too often glossed over by religious leaders, who do not wish to see its ramifications. This avoidance is most evident in various translations but even more so in religious interpretation. If one asked a minister or priest about this passage the most common interpretation is that we are not to curse using the heavenly father's name. Though this is part of its meaning, it is the lesser part. The Hebrew term **שׂ** (*sa*), a form of the word **נָסָא** (*nasa*), means to "lift up" and "carry away" something.<sup>62</sup> It carries with it the concept of "holding" or "bringing" something. The letter **ל** at the beginning of the word **לְשׁוֹן** is Hebrew meaning "to, towards," "in order to, for the purpose of," and "for" something.<sup>63</sup>

Therefore, you will not lift up or carry the name Yahweh your *eloahi* to something. That something is **שׂוֹן** (*shaua*). This term is defined as "to rush over; a tempest" and by implication "devastation:—desolate(-ion), destroy, destruction," in the sense of "desolating evil (as destructive)," literally "ruin" and figuratively "idolatry" and "uselessness (as deceptive)" and "worthlessness, vanity."<sup>64</sup> Simply put, we are not to lift up or carry the name Yahweh to/for a condition of being WORTHLESS, thereby DESTROYING it. Yet every time someone makes the statement that the name Yahweh has no real value that person has in fact reduced the name to a state of being useless and worthless; he has broken the Third Commandment!

The Scriptures go even further. Not only are you to avoid destroying or making the sacred name worthless but you are ordered never to use the name of any pagan deity in prayer, worship, or in swearing an oath.

And be watchful in all that I (**אֱלֹהֶיךָ**) have said to you; and you shall not mention another *eloahim* by name, nor shall it be heard out of your mouth. (Exod., 23:13)

And you shall be very courageous to keep and do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, so as not to turn from it to the right or to the left, so as not to go among these nations (in Kanaan), those who are left with you; and the name of their *eloahi* you shall not make mention of, nor shall you swear by, nor shall you serve them, nor shall you bow yourselves

<sup>62</sup> HEL, pp. 173f; SEC, Heb. #5375.

<sup>63</sup> HEL, p. 131; IHG, p. 83.

<sup>64</sup> SEC, Heb. #7722, 7723; HEL, p. 261.

to them; instead, on יהוה your *eloahi* you shall cling as you have done until this day. (Josh., 23:6–8)

Calling upon the name of another *eloah* (*eloahi*, *eloahim*), whether one believes that other name belongs to the true creator or not, is tantamount to worshipping a false *eloah*, strictly forbidden by Yahweh.

One sacrificing to *eloahim* shall be destroyed unless it is to יהוה only. (Exod., 22:20)

By “sacrificing” the Scriptures do not mean just offerings at the altar. Hebrews states, “By him therefore we should offer (the) sacrifice of praise continually to *eloah*, that is, fruit of (the) lips confessing to his name. But of doing good and of communicating be not forgetful, for with such sacrifices *eloah* is well pleased.”<sup>65</sup> In Psalms we read, “I will offer sacrifices of joy in his tabernacle.”<sup>66</sup> According to these statements and many others like them,<sup>67</sup> Yahweh is well pleased with the “fruit of the lips confessing to his name,” done with “praise” and “joy.” Nor are we allowed the excuse that we have forgotten his sacred name:

If we have forgotten the name of our *eloahi*, and spread our hands to an alien *el*, shall not *eloahim* search this out? For he knows the secrets of the heart. (Ps., 44:20–21)

For all the *eloahi* of the peoples are idols but יהוה made the heavens. (Ps., 96:5)

The First Commandment states:

I am יהוה, your *eloahi*, who has brought you out from the land of Mizraim (Egypt), from the house of bondage. There will not be to you any other *eloahim* besides me. (Exod., 20:3)

If it makes no difference which name you use as the personal name of our heavenly father then these scriptural commands that we are not to speak the name of any other *eloahim* in worship are made null and void. For example, if those who had for centuries worshipped the deity named Baal converted to the *eloahi* of the Scriptures, would it be proper for them to call *eloahim* by the personal name of “Baal”? The scriptures cited above would strictly forbid this practice. Surprisingly, even most of the religions claiming the Scriptures as their ultimate authority would agree. Yet when it comes to their own circumstances, they grant themselves a pardon. The names “God,” “Allah,” and “*Adonai*,” the three names used by English speaking Christians, Arabic speaking Moslems, and Hebrew speaking Jews, to make a point, are all

<sup>65</sup> Heb., 13:15f.

<sup>66</sup> Ps., 27:6.

<sup>67</sup> For examples see Pss., 4:5, 51:17–19, 107:22, 116:17; Rom., 12:1.

personal names of ancient pagan deities.<sup>68</sup> Yet, the preponderance of the “believers” in these faiths use the personal names of ancient pagan deities as the personal name of our heavenly father.

If it makes no difference, would they allow someone to use the name God spelled backwards (i.e. Dog)? Suddenly, it does make a difference—the difference is whatever tradition a particular group of believers happens to cherish. It is curious that in numerous languages the name of Yahweh’s antagonist, “Satan,” is faithfully translated and pronounced. They continue this practice so that the evil one can be readily identified, so that all will know who it is they are condemning. But when it comes to our heavenly father’s revealed, eternal and sacred personal name—the name by which the almighty swears and fulfills his words, the name we are called upon to desire and love, and warned against blaspheming, profaning, or making worthless—this name they feel entitled to forget.

## **Conclusion**

Despite the interpretations of men, the evidence from the Scriptures proves that the name Yahweh possesses great value and worth. In Scriptures a name signifies “existence” and one’s “character.” It represents a person’s “authority.” Yahweh’s name is magnified above all things and therefore is greater than all names. The very name itself means “he exists.” Yahweh felt so deeply about his personal name that he declared it sacred and swore by it when he made the Covenants of Promise with Abraham. He established his name as a memorial to all generations of mankind and made it a commandment that no one should carry it to worthlessness, neither profaning nor blaspheming it. At the same time, the Scriptures advise us to love, desire, and seek safety in this name, giving respect and glory to it. Certainly, the sacred name “Yahweh” is no mere label to be easily cast aside as a relic of history.

These facts bring up the question of why the sacred personal name of the almighty, the name Yahweh, is not being published and proclaimed throughout the world by those who claim to follow the Bible. Yet very few who call themselves Jews, Christians, or Moslems have even heard of the sacred name Yahweh. The sacred name and its meaning are rarely if ever preached from the pulpits, but when someone raises the issue it is treated either as taboo or with disregard, and often with contempt. The sacred name is often held to be irrelevant (as it is by the various Christian and Moslem sects) or is prohibited (as it is by the various Jewish and Samaritan groups). But in the Scriptures, it is prized as extremely valuable.

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<sup>68</sup> See Vol. II, Chap. XVI entitled, *Upon Whom are They Calling*.

