

YAHWEH: THE NAME OF GOD

Jeremiah J. E. Wierwille

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Abstract — The Name of God has had a long history of being avoided and shunned for fear of its misuse. Hebrews scholars have advocated that the proper transliteration of God’s Name is YAHWEH. As God’s personal Name, YAHWEH denotes God’s very character and nature and His acts of covenantal faithfulness to His people. God’s people bear His Name and thus are responsible for representing Him in ways that bring honor and glory to Him.

General Research Topic(s) — Name of God, Doctrine of God, Hebrew and Jewish Studies, Old Testament, New Testament.

I. SUPPRESSING THE INCOMMUNICABLE NAME

The Sacred Name of God is a prominent feature in the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) and appears nearly 7,000 times throughout its pages (6,828 times in Codex Leningradensis). In the actual Hebrew text, the Divine Name of God is written as four letters, YHWH (known as the *Tetragrammaton*). These four consonants representing the Divine Name have been referred to as the ineffable or incommunicable Name of God. The reason for such descriptors is because the Divine Name has been deemed to be too holy and sacred to be uttered for concern that one might misuse The Name, even unintentionally. Thus, for centuries religious authorities have sought to protect The Name from being abused by not permitting the actual Name to be spoken but always deferring to other generalized honorific terms. Even to this day, some conservative religious authorities only

refer to YHWH by saying “*Ha-Shem*” (i.e., “The Name”).

Reluctance to utter (or even write at times) the Divine Name is not just due to sentimentality. Some people believe that The Name must never be used in a profane (common) way, and in order to conserve its sacredness, they forbid mentioning it at all. Prohibiting The Name from being spoken or written was a safeguard intended to prevent it from being demeaned and becoming banal. And so, the use of abbreviations or circumlocutions to stand in place of the Divine Name has been implemented as a way to guard against careless mentioning of The Name.

But the strictest defense for not saying the Divine Name is drawn from several passages in Scripture that sternly warn against misusing the Name of God (Exod. 20:7; cp. Lev. 19:12; 24:16). Many early religious leaders developed a superstitious fear that even speaking The Name could result in possible misuse. Thus, the argument of most religious authorities was that if you never speak The Name, then you will never misuse it, and thus, you will never break the commandment. However, the misuse of The Name does not concern mispronunciation or a casual remark but rather disgraceful and/or contemptuous use. This latter category consists of using The Name in sworn oaths that one does not keep by failing to fulfill what was promised, or invoking The Name in circumstances that bring disdain upon God’s character or will, or

connecting The Name with expletives or other defiling expressions that besmirch its sanctity.

Another issue involved in the tendency to police the use of the Name of God is that scholars dispute the proper pronunciation of The Name. With the ancient Hebrew language originally not containing any vowels, the true pronunciation of The Name has become lost. Therefore, some authorities have advocated that since the true pronunciation of the Divine Name is uncertain, no one can know if they are mispronouncing The Name, and thus, it is both reverent and wise to not even attempt to vocalize it. This was considered a very serious matter in early Jewish tradition as they took the grave threat of execution (as stipulated in the Old Testament) to even entail mispronunciation of The Name (cf. Lev. 24:16).¹

However, while the intention to keep the Name of God sacred is certainly honorable and well-meaning, the drawbacks and detriment involved in making the Divine Name too sacrosanct to even speak can be far reaching. As will be discussed below, the advantages and benefits of including the Divine Name in the Bible and in conversation are esteemed to far outweigh the negative stigma that many people have placed upon it being spoken and/or written.

II. THE PROBLEM WITH SUPPRESSION

Safeguards against misusing the Name have transferred over into most English translations by way of using generic terms (“Lord” or “God”) in place of the Sacred Name. In most English versions, an attempt is made to distinguish between The Name and less sacred Hebrew titles (e.g., *Adonai*, *Elohim*, *El*, etc.) by often setting The Name in small caps (“LORD” or “GOD”) and other titles in normal case (“Lord” or “God”). However,

¹ Samuel Cohon, S., "The Name of God, A Study in Rabbinic Theology," *HUCA* 23 (1951): 579-604. Daniel I. Block, "Bearing the Name of the Lord with Honor," *BSac* 168 (2011): 20-31.

this poses definite obstacles for accurately perceiving when The Name is actually used in the English text. This is absolutely the case when Scripture is verbally communicated, such as in public reading or in conversation. In these circumstances, perceiving such distinctions through auditory recognition is utterly negated since the listener cannot distinguish between the use of The Name (“LORD”) and other titles also translated “Lord” because the two words are phonetically identical.

Using small caps to denote The Name may be perceived by the visual reader who can see the stylistic difference. But when reading Scripture, the possibility of glossing over the occurrence of The Name readily exists. Readers must constantly be evaluating the style of the text to notice the slight variation. In addition, and most unfortunately, the realization of the significance behind the style representing The Name (“LORD” or “GOD”) can be easily confused or forgotten, especially for new and/or infrequent readers of Scripture. Thus, utilizing these types of substitutions for The Name can make reading the text not only more taxing and obscure, but indeed, less effective overall.

And thus, the unique Divine Name of God is suppressed in Scripture, concealed from the listening ear, and encrypted from the casual eye, making it far from easily discernible to all who desire to know and recognize when it appears in the Hebrew text of the Old Testament. This complication produces a hurdle in the text that will not only result in irreparable loss for listeners, but may even yield considerable loss of intelligibility for readers as well.

III. WHY RESTORE THE NAME?

Restoring the Name of God in translations of the Hebrew text carries with it significant advantages and benefits to both the reader and listener of the Old Testament. Aside from the simple benefit of readily

perceiving the places where it does occur, employing The Name in Scripture delivers additional advantages that warrant its use. Following are several examples of the inherent profit in restoring the Name of God in Bible translation:

1. The Divine Name is actually God's personal Name and is explicitly used to refer to the one true God.
2. Use of the Divine Name can bring people into a deeper and more intimate relationship with God by knowing and using His personal Name.
3. Use of the Divine Name will generate associations in the text and in the mind of the reader/listener that might otherwise be easily glossed over through translation with general titles like "LORD" or "GOD." Such connections are critical and necessary in order to grow in the awareness of when God's personal Name is used in Scripture.
4. Use of the Divine Name will produce in the heart of the reader/listener an understanding of the nature and character of God that is absent through the use of general titles in place of His personal Name.

These reasons indicate that there are a number of important advantages in using the actual personal Name of God that is of inestimable value for the believer.

IV. THE NAME OF GOD—JEHOVAH OR YAHWEH

If the Name of God is going to be used in Bible translation, what must be decided is what form of the transliterated Name will be used. The most well-known English form of the Name of God is probably *Jehovah*. This form of The Name is widely recognized and affirmed by the majority of English readers as the pronunciation of the Name of God. However, scholars have rightfully criticized this form, and in place of it,

they have provided ample evidence that favors the form YAHWEH as a more accurate rendering of the Hebrew.² While there is no definitive way of knowing how to precisely replicate the true Name of God, there is a general consensus among Hebrew experts that the form YAHWEH is likely the closest representation of the Divine Name to the original pronunciation. Some slight variations have been proposed, but YAHWEH has been accepted in the field as the most appropriate and most faithful to the ancient Hebrew.

The older and more well-known form *Jehovah* had its beginnings in the sixteenth century when it was introduced as an English pronunciation for the Name of God transliterated from the Hebrew. In William Tyndale translation of the Pentateuch (1530 AD),³ the Name appeared one time in Exodus 6:3 in the Old English form *Iehouah*, before the development of the modern English letter "J." After the modern pronunciation scheme emerged, *Iehouah* transformed into the more familiar form *Jehovah*. This transliterated form was developed by superimposing the vowel pointing of the Hebrew word *Adonai* ("Lord") onto the consonants of the *Tetragrammaton*—YHWH.⁴ This hybrid construct was intentional by Jewish scribes in order to prompt the reader to substitute a different sounding pronunciation than the true Name of God. Thus, the pronunciation of *Jehovah* is simply the phonetical representation of this hybrid construct and not actually the pronunciation of the Name itself. This hybrid construct was never intended to actually represent the true Name but was to be a signal so that whoever was reading the Hebrew

² For an overview of the Semitic progression for pronouncing the lettering of the *Tetragrammaton*, see Martin Rösel, "The Reading and Translation of the Divine Name in the Masoretic Tradition and the Greek Pentateuch," *JSOT* 31 (2007): 411-28. For an older study of the tetragrammaton see Leroy Waterman, "Method in the Study of the Tetragrammaton," *AJSL* 43 (1926): 1-7.

³ Francis B. Denio, "On the Use of the Word Jehovah in Translating the Old Testament," *JBL* 46 (1927): 149-49.

⁴ Rösel, "The Reading and Translation," 411-28.

Scriptures out loud would not pronounce the Divine Name but rather would supply an alternate pronunciation while reading (e.g., *Adonai*, *Ha-Shem*, etc.).

Probably the most overlooked issue involved in using the phonetical pronunciation *Jehovah* is that the Hebrew language does not have the “J” phoneme at all (i.e., Hebrew has no letter or letter combination that sounds like the English letter “J”). This fact alone is more than enough for one to realize that the form *Jehovah* is an artificial rendering of The Name. Even considering the supplied vowel pointing from *Adonai*, the form *Jehovah* fails to be a faithful substitute and is acknowledged to be a foreign and invalid pronunciation of The Name.⁵

V. THE MEANING OF THE NAME

The Divine Name of God was used before the time of Moses (Gen. 4:26; 13:4; cf. Exod. 6:3), but the meaning and understanding of The Name was not revealed until God made it known to Moses.⁶ To understand the meaning of the Divine Name is to understand the character of God revealed by that name,⁷ and thus, to know someone by name means to have

⁵ While the more accurate pronunciation of the Hebrew letter yod (י) is a “Y” sound rather than a “J”, people have become very accustomed to reading many Hebrew proper nouns like Jacob, Joshua, Joab, Jehoshaphat, Jerusalem, Judah, Jubal, and many others with the “J” phoneme. But since the Name of God has not been consistently translated in English versions, it is not as well known among English readers. Therefore, this lack of familiarity with it provides the opportunity for a more accurate pronunciation to be introduced and utilized without the need for extensive recourse in re-learning the pronunciation of the Divine Name.

⁶ “In the character which this name declares, that is, as the God whose love would be in virtue of certain qualities, even His elect, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, had not as yet known Him.” Andrew Jukes, *The Names of God in Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1967), 49-50.

⁷ Charles R. Gianotti, “The Meaning of the Divine Name YHWH,” *BSac* 142 (1985): 38-51.

come into intimate and personal acquaintance with a person.⁸ In other words, knowing the Divine Name does not just equate to simply knowing what it is or how to pronounce it—knowing the meaning of the Divine Name means knowing the God that is expressed by that Name.⁹ This is true of God but is also true of many other figures in the Old Testament. A person’s name often represented certain characteristics or events associated with them.¹⁰ Moreover, the Name is declared numerous times in the Hebrew Scriptures pointing to God’s specific acts or words in association with His Name.¹¹

God revealed His character most fully first of all to Moses when He sent him to deliver His people from

⁸ J. Alec Motyer, *The Revelation of the Divine Name* (Leicester: Theological Students Fellowship, 1959), 15-16.

⁹ “It is not a question of whence this name [YHWH] comes and what its linguistic stem is which moves mankind, not whether it is Hebrew, Sinaitic, or Egyptian, not whether Moses or his chronicler first discovered the sense of the sounds, not the question of whether the interpretation fits the verbal explanation; the important question is the meaning eternally fixed in this name, namely the meaning established by the deeds of the name-bearer.” Joseph Kalir, “The Problem of Moses’ Name and the Divine Name,” *RelEd* 71 (1976): 377-91.

¹⁰ Gen. 25:26 (ESV) “Afterward his brother came out with his hand holding Esau’s heel, so his name was called Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them.” Gen. 29:32 (ESV) “And Leah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Reuben, for she said, ‘Because the LORD has looked upon my affliction; for now my husband will love me.’” Gen. 30:23-24 (ESV) “She [Rachel] conceived and bore a son and said, ‘God has taken away my reproach.’ And she called his name Joseph, saying, ‘May the LORD add to me another son!’” Gen. 32:28 (ESV) “Then he [YAHWEH] said, ‘Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed.’”

¹¹ The Old Testament is filled with YAHWEH’s self-disclosure of his personal Name. For example, the phrases “I am YAHWEH...” (e.g., Gen. 28:13; Exod. 6:2, 29; 7:5, 17; Lev. 18:5-6, 21; 19:13, 16, 28, 30, 32, 37; 22:2-3, 8, 30-31, 33; 26:2, 45; 31:12); “I am YAHWEH who...” (e.g., Exod. 6:7; Lev. 18:2, 4, 30; 19:3-4, 10, 25, 31, 34; 23:22, 43; 25:55; Num. 10:10; 15:4); and “For because I am YAHWEH ...” (e.g., Exod. 31:13; Lev. 11:44; 21:15, 23; 24:22; 25:17; 26:1, 44). Each of these phrases is an explicit declaration by YAHWEH of His identity, His character and conduct, and the justification for everything He is and everything He does.

Pharaoh in Egypt. After God appeared to Moses in the burning bush on Mt. Horeb, God revealed himself to Moses by the designation “I AM WHO I AM” or “I WILL BE WHO I WILL BE.”¹² Moses was instructed to tell the children of Israel that “I AM” has sent me to you (Exod. 3:14). The next statement Moses was to proclaim to the children of Israel was that this God who calls himself “I AM” was actually YAHWEH, the God of their fathers.

Exodus 3:15-16 (HCSB)

¹⁵God also said to Moses, “Say this to the Israelites: Yahweh, 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; this is how I am to be remembered in every generation. ¹⁶Go and assemble the elders of Israel and say to them: Yahweh, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, has appeared to me and said: I have paid close attention to you and to what has been done to you in Egypt.”

¹² The Hebrew expression EHYEH-ASHER-EHYEH (אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה) in Exodus 3:14 is commonly translated by the phrase “I Am That [Who] I Am,” but Hebrew scholars readily concede that this is not the only possible (and perhaps the most accurate) translation. Much has been learned about the ancient Hebrew language in recent decades and Hebrew scholars debate about the best way to bring this complex Hebrew phrase into English. Some have suggested “I Am Who I Am,” “I Am Who I Shall Be,” “I Shall Be Who I Am,” and “I Shall Be Who I Shall Be” [Gerardo Sachs, “Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh,” *JBQ* 38 (2010): 244-46]. Furthermore, a recent proposal has advocated for a cohortative construction: “I Would Be Who I Would Be” to elicit the idea of a direction of the will to an action [Randall J. Pannell, “I Would Be Who I Would Be! A Proposal for Reading Exodus 3:11-14,” *BBR* 16 (2006): 351-53]. Embedded in this designation is all the complexity and versatility of God Himself and we do not have sufficient means to express that reality in one single, short phrase. Indeed, the various translation proposed all capture an aspect of what EHYEH-ASHER-EHYEH means and they lend to the understanding that all that YAHWEH is cannot be confined into one simple statement in English.

God did not tell Moses to reveal His Name to the children of Israel in order to simply proclaim and validate that it was, in fact, YAHWEH who sent him. God revealed His Name in order for Moses to remind the children of Israel who their God was and that their God had been with them all this time and He had demonstrated His covenantal nature through His relationship with their ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It was this covenantal nature and loving faithfulness that the personal Name of God was to evoke in the minds of the Israelites. The Divine Name conveyed that God had not forsaken His people or neglected to hear their cries. The Name was intended to do much more than confirm a mere identity to the children of Israel.¹³ The children of Israel did not need merely “to know facts about God’s character or that He was simply a covenant God present in their time of need, but to be reassured that this God would meet them in their time of need, proving true His character and promises.”¹⁴

When Pharaoh refused to free the children of Israel, God told Moses to tell the Israelites that He would deliver them, for His name is YAHWEH (Exod. 6:6). The act of deliverance from Egypt was intended to convince the children of Israel that YAHWEH is their God and for them to know His character through the signs and miracles that they saw Him perform. Such experiences were meant to prove YAHWEH’s covenant faithfulness to the children of Israel and in order that they might know that “I am YAHWEH your God.”

Deuteronomy 29:2-6 (HCSB)

²Moses summoned all Israel and said to them, “You have seen with your own eyes everything

¹³ As Robert Davidson explains, the Name of God that Moses was instructed to bring before the children of Israel was the Name that embodied the reality that “I am the God who is and who will be active in whatever situations you are called to face.” Robert Davidson, *The Old Testament* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1964), 27.

¹⁴ Gianotti, “The Meaning,” 46.

the LORD did in Egypt to Pharaoh, to all his officials, and to his entire land. ³You saw with your own eyes the great trials and those great signs and wonders. ⁴Yet to this day the LORD has not given you a mind to understand, eyes to see, or ears to hear. ⁵I led you 40 years in the wilderness; your clothes and the sandals on your feet did not wear out; ⁶you did not eat bread or drink wine or beer--so that you might know that I am Yahweh your God."

While the Divine Name can be viewed as primarily denoting the covenantal nature of God with His people, it also carries a broader meaning that describes God as the One who "is,"¹⁵ who "causes,"¹⁶ who "acts,"¹⁷ and who is "there."¹⁸ In order to better understand the Divine Name, the notion that that the Divine Name must have a single equivalent meaning must be done away with because it is not possible to have a single, exact equivalent expression that embodies the entirety of what God's personal Name represents. In other words, the Divine Name cannot be reproduced precisely in English with a single designation that can encompass everything it stands for. God is so vast and multifaceted, and His

¹⁵ Robert Lockyer describes YAHWEH as revealing "God as the Being who is absolutely self-existent, and who in Himself, possesses essential life and permanent existence." Robert Lockyer, *All the Divine Names and Titles in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 18.

¹⁶ David Freedman sees the name YAHWEH as essentially meaning, "I cause to be what comes into existence," or as Julian Obermann advocates, "I sustain—I am He who sustains." David N. Freedman, "The Name of the God of Moses," *JBL* 79 (1960): 151-56. Julian Obermann, "The Divine Name YHWH in Light of Recent Discoveries," *JBL* 68 (1949): 301-23.

¹⁷ Sigmund Mowinckel understands the name of YAHWEH to entail the way that God reveals himself through his actions in history. YAHWEH expresses himself in active being as the "God who acts." Sigmund Mowinckel, "The Name of the God of Moses," *HUCA* 32 (1961): 121-33.

¹⁸ J. Alec Motyer concludes that "the heart of the Mosaic revelation of Yahweh was that He was going to redeem His people." YAHWEH is with his people and he helps his people. He is always there. Motyer, *Divine Name*, 24.

Name reflects this reality. Therefore, translators have tried to represent it in different ways in order to tap into at least part of who God really is and what His Name is meant to represent.

Several times in the Old Testament, God revealed aspects of what His Name signifies about Himself and how people have come to know the God that is expressed by that Name. Assuming that only one aspect of the Divine Name is sufficient to understand what the Name represents is to fail to understand the majesty of the God who is expressed by The Name. God has revealed His Name in a multiplicity of ways because God is not defined by only one or two finite descriptions. However, if one expression must be chosen, the Divine Name is best defined by that one simple yet so complex self-designation that God told Moses—I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE (Exod. 3:14). This description of YAHWEH entails an incomprehensible identity that cannot be limited to a couple of finite ideas by which we can categorize God.

As mere mortals with such limited understanding, the Divine Name is like a deep well that we cannot see the bottom of. The descriptor I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE imports the idea of an adaptive, absolute, and all-powerful Being who consists of righteousness, love, and mercy, and yet displays His wrath and exacts judgment with perfect wisdom and holiness and justice.

When God told the prophet Jeremiah that He would punish His people and exile them to a faraway land for their sins, God also declared that He would gather them again and restore them to the land that He gave their ancestors (Jer. 16:1-15; 25:1-14). Through this process, God would demonstrate His power and might and by that display of greatness, God's people would come to know that the name of God is "YAHWEH."

Jeremiah 16:21 (HCSB)

Therefore, I am about to inform them, and this time I will make them know My power and My

might; then they will know that My name is Yahweh.

God reveals Himself and proves Himself through what He says and how He acts. This is the way He made himself known to the Israelites when He delivered them from Egypt, and it is the way He made Himself known to the descendants of Judah when they were exiled to Babylon and then brought back to the land of Canaan.

YAHWEH is the true God, an all-powerful, eternal, intimate, and present God, who keeps covenant faithfulness with His people, making Himself known by everything that He has said and done. Even though YAHWEH has revealed much of who He is to His people, there is still much more that yet remains unknown. As Job stated, “Yes, God is exalted beyond our knowledge; the number of His years cannot be counted” (Job 36:26 HCSB). It is hard to fathom how YAHWEH is infinite, eternal, and perfect in all His ways, and yet He is so personal and intimate and cares for His creation.

When Moses was turning over his role of leading the people of Israel to Joshua, he gave one piece of advice that he had come to realize about their God—YAHWEH. Through all the journeys from Egypt, through the desert wilderness, and to the border of the Promised Land, God had always been there leading His people, providing for His people, and being present with His people. Therefore, Moses told Joshua, “Do not be afraid or discouraged...”

Deuteronomy 31:8 (NJB)

Yahweh himself will lead you; he will be with you; he will not fail you or desert you. Have no fear, do not be alarmed.

VI. BEARING THE NAME

The Divine Name is a *personal* Name, and as it is applied to His covenant people, it symbolizes His ownership of and presence among them as their God. In

ancient cultures, it was customary for vassals to bear the insignia of the king or magistrate whom they served. In a similar way, Isaiah describes how some will write on their hand “I belong to YAHWEH” as a sign that they are devoted and bound to Him (Isa. 44:5 NJB). Writing on one’s hand was an act that symbolized intimacy and connection. Thus, bearing the Name of God in this way could be viewed as a form of branding indicating servitude but also as a sign of commitment and involvement.¹⁹

In the Old Testament, Israel was designated to be YAHWEH’s chosen people to declare to the world His glory and grace.²⁰ As YAHWEH’s covenant people, Israel’s mission was to be a people whom He would raise above all the other nations for praise, fame, and glory “to Yahweh, as he has promised” (Deut. 26:16-19 NJB). Furthermore, it was to Israel that Moses said, “From you Yahweh will make a people consecrated to himself, as he has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of Yahweh your God and follow his ways. The peoples of the world, seeing that you bear Yahweh’s name, will all be afraid of you” (Deut. 28:9-10 NJB).²¹

It was on account of carrying the name of YAHWEH “on” them, like a badge or endorsement, that the other nations of the world would revere Israel and understand the power of their God. However, Israel did not always live up to the responsibility of bearing the name of YAHWEH and honoring Him in the ways they should

¹⁹ Jeremiah 15:16 speaks of the prophet Jeremiah being “called by Your name, Yahweh God of Hosts” (HCSB) in the context of being under the protection and care of YAHWEH, God of Armies.

²⁰ God’s messengers (e.g., angels), who are His agents and representatives, are also described as bearing the name of YAHWEH, cf. Exodus 23:20-21 (HCSB): “I am going to send an angel before you to protect you on the way and bring you to the place I have prepared. ²¹Be attentive to him and listen to his voice. Do not defy him, because he will not forgive your acts of rebellion, for My name is in him.”

²¹ Block, “Bearing the Name,” 20-31.

have. When the Israelites were defeated at Ai after conquering Jericho, it was due to the fact that some of them were unfaithful in obeying YAHWEH. And Joshua, unaware about Israel's unfaithfulness to follow God's commandments, was overly distressed about Israel's failure to defeat the men of Ai. He was concerned about the disdain and mockery that this failure would incur upon the "great name" of YAHWEH, their God.

Joshua 7:6-9 (NJB)

⁶Joshua then tore his clothes and prostrated himself before the ark of Yahweh till nightfall; the elders of Israel did the same, and all poured dust on their heads. ⁷And Joshua said, "Alas, Lord Yahweh, why did you bother to bring this nation across the Jordan, if it was only to put us at the mercy of the Amorites and destroy us? If only we could have settled down on the other side of the Jordan! ⁸Forgive me, Lord, but what can I say, now that Israel has turned tail on the enemy? ⁹The Canaanites, all the inhabitants of the land, will hear of it; they will unite against us to wipe our name from the earth. And what will you do about your great Name then?"

At other times, though, Israel sought YAHWEH their God and obeyed Him faithfully. When Asa became king of Israel, he removed all the pagan altars and shrines and chopped down all the pillars and idols and brought Israel back to seeking YAHWEH and obeying his instructions and commands. Then, when Zerah the Chushite came to attack Israel with an army twice as large as Israel, Asa brought the men of Israel out and called upon YAHWEH and proclaimed that they were coming there to fight in His name and for His purposes.²²

2 Chronicles 14:11 (NJB)

Asa then called on Yahweh his God and said, "Yahweh, numbers and strength make no

difference to you when you give your help. Help us, Yahweh our God, for, relying on you, we are confronting this horde in your name. Yahweh, you are our God. Human strength cannot prevail against you!"

YAHWEH had placed His name upon His people so that wherever they went, they would bear His name before all the nations, making Him known and representing Him. Through this act, though, YAHWEH's name and reputation were also subjected to the behavior of the people who bore the brand of His Name. The name of YAHWEH became known throughout the land as the God of Israel, and YAHWEH did great things among His people for his namesake. But to their own shame and demise in bearing the name of YAHWEH, Israel did a deplorable job of honoring Him to the point that even when they went into exile in Babylon, the other nations became confused about the character of Israel God—YAHWEH. The prophet Ezekiel described Israel's failure as reflecting poorly on YAHWEH with the result that His name became desecrated.

Ezekiel 36:16-21 (NJB)

¹⁶The word of Yahweh was addressed to me as follows, ¹⁷"Son of man, the members of the House of Israel used to live in their own territory, but they defiled it by their conduct and actions; to me their conduct was as unclean as a woman's menstruation. ¹⁸I then vented my fury on them because of the blood they shed in the country and the foul idols with which they defiled it. ¹⁹I scattered them among the nations and they were dispersed throughout the countries. I sentenced them as their conduct and actions deserved. ²⁰They have profaned my holy name among the nations where they have gone, so that people say of them, 'These are the people of Yahweh; they have been exiled from his land.' ²¹But I have been concerned about my holy name, which the House of Israel has

²² "Blessed in the name of Yahweh is he who is coming! We bless you from the house of Yahweh." (Ps. 118:26 NJB)

profaned among the nations where they have gone.”

In Micah’s prophecy about the last days when God’s kingdom will be established and Zion will be restored, nations will no longer train for war and there will be peace and security according to YAHWEH’s rule. This is what YAHWEH has promised (Mic. 4:1-4). And in those days, Micah proclaims that “though all the peoples each walk in the name of their gods, we will walk in the name of YAHWEH our God forever and ever” (Mic. 4:5 HCSB).

Bearing the name of YAHWEH is not only an Old Testament notion; it also appears in the New Testament as well. But in the New Testament, it is Jesus the Messiah who comes in the name of YAHWEH (cp. Matt. 21:9; 23:39; Mark 11:9; Luke 13:35; 19:38; John 12:13). When Jesus is making his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the people spread their robes and tree branches on the road and began shouting “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD [YAHWEH]” (cf. Psa. 118:26). “It is in the person of Jesus that the function of the Name of YAHWEH as a form of the divine self-manifestation finds its fulfillment.”²³ As the active vice-regent for God on earth, Jesus was YAHWEH’s earthly representative who revealed His heart and character to the world. Thus, bearing the name of the Messiah is inextricably linked to bearing the name of YAHWEH. One cannot bear the name of the Messiah without also bearing the name of the God who sent him. By being spiritually united together as God’s people, believers today in God’s church collectively bear God’s Name through their connection with His chosen Messiah.

Bearing the Divine Name, by being a follower of the Messiah whom God sent, carries with it an expected

duty to represent God and the Messiah as God’s chosen people. People will judge the character and nature of God by seeing how His people behave. Personal conduct has always been a criterion used to evaluate the character of the one whom someone serves. Believers are to accurately reflect the character of God and bring honor to His Name and His Messiah through their actions and attitudes (2 Thess. 1:11-12; cp. 1 Pet. 4:14-16).

Misconduct on the part of God’s people will deliver a bad testimony on behalf of God and will mar His Name. James speaks against rich people who oppress and drag believers into court and who “blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called [i.e., that you bear]” (Jas. 2:7 ESV).²⁴ Also, in his letter to Titus, Paul exhorted him to “show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us” (Titus 2:7-8 ESV). Paul’s emphasis was for Titus to adopt a lifestyle commensurate with godly conduct and speech so that there would not be opportunity for the Name of God or His Messiah to be slandered by opponents. Paul’s message to Titus was that bearing the Name of God carries with it an inherent responsibility to properly represent the One to whom you have been called and now belong. Being called by (or bearing) an honorable name requires an honorable response in return. God’s people are charged with protecting and upholding the dignity of that Name by not affording any cause for it to be defamed or spoken evil of.

Revelation 3:12 (HCSB)

The victor: I will make him a pillar in the sanctuary of My God, and he will never go out

²³ Walter Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (trans. J. A. Barker; vol. 2; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), 45.

²⁴ A custom may underlie the expression “to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38; 10:48), because after baptism new believers were recognized as bearers of the Name. James P. Martin, *James* (WBC: Word, 1988), 67.

again. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God--the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God--and My new name.

VII. CONCLUSION

As the Psalmist David proclaimed, “Yahweh, our Lord, how magnificent is Your name throughout the earth! You have covered the heavens with Your majesty” (Ps. 8:1 HCSB). The Divine Name of God is certainly magnificent and it signifies a God who is true and faithful in all that He is and does.

The Divine Name “points to God’s relationship to Israel in both His saving acts and His retributive acts, manifesting His phenomenological effectiveness in Israel’s history. What God says, He will do. His Name promises that. And He will act on behalf of His people.”²⁵ This means that God has revealed Himself through the miraculous acts of deliverance that He performed among His chosen people, Israel. Those acts have since been a source of testimony about who God is, and more specifically, who and what the Divine Name expresses.

The Exodus narrative became a hallmark message throughout later writings of the Old Testament, especially of the prophets who used that record of Israel’s history to remind God’s people who YAHWEH was and who they were as His people. Furthermore, the New Testament points to the Exodus account as a “type” of how God has again called out a people from among the earth through the salvation (deliverance) that is offered in Jesus the Messiah.²⁶

The Divine Name embodies the true substance of God’s character and virtue in all its manifold expressions and infinite diversity. God will be whatever God wills to be. It is the God expressed by the name YAHWEH who we can come to know and who is worthy of all praise and worship. Glory be to Him both now and forevermore.

Psalm 72:17-18 (NJB)

¹⁷May his name be blessed for ever, and endure in the sight of the sun. In him shall be blessed every race in the world, and all nations call him blessed. ¹⁸Blessed be Yahweh, the God of Israel, who alone works wonders.

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²⁵ Gianotti, "The Meaning," 48.

²⁶ For an overview of the Exodus in the Old and New Testament, see Robin E. Nixon, *The Exodus in the New Testament* (London: Tyndale Press, 1963).

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CORRESPONDENCE

Author: Jeremiah Wierwille
 Affiliation: N/A
 Street: 06573 Southland Rd
 City/State: New Knoxville, OH 45871
 Country: U.S.A.
 Email: contact@jerrywierwille.com