

BUILDING OUR VOCABULARY OF FAITH

Water from Rock, April 25, 2017 Tim Smith

THE NAME OF GOD: YAHWEH

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

People in the ancient Near East considered a person's name as more than a label to identify that person. A name expressed something of the person's essential character and activity. This is the thought behind the praise of the psalmist David: "*O LORD, our Lord, how excellent is your name in all the earth!*" (Psalm 8:1). We learn something about God in His names.

YAHWEH AND ADONAI

There are two Hebrew words for God translated "Lord" in English: Yahweh and Adonai. Translators distinguish the two by writing Adonai as "Lord" and Yahweh as "LORD" (all capitals); see Psalm 8:1 above.

Deuteronomy 6:4-5 ⁴*Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone.*
⁵*You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.*

1. We do not know how the divine name Yahweh was originally pronounced. Ancient Hebrew was written without vowels (YHWH), so that the original vocalization has been lost.
2. After the Babylonian Exile, for reverence reasons, Jews did not pronounce Yahweh, but substituted Adonai ("Lord").
3. "Providence has not preserved the vocalization of this tetragrammaton ("four letters"). Scribes, who in the Second Temple period (ca. 535 BC – AD 70) preserved and transmitted the Scriptures, read the tetragrammaton as adonai. YHWH cannot be pronounced. This was the scribes' intention but not the author's original intention. "Jehovah" confounds the vowels of adonai with the four consonants. *Yahweh*, though the probable normalization, is nevertheless speculative." (Bruce Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*)

*(Yahweh
without vowels)*

יהוה

(Adonai without vowels)

אדון

*(Yahweh with
vowels)*

יהוה־

(Adonai with vowels)

אֲדֹנָי

4. The covenant name for God in the Old Testament is Yahweh. The name was regarded as so sacred that by 400 – 350 B. C. Jews would not pronounce it. In the reading of Scripture they substituted Adonai for Yahweh. People did not want to misuse the divine holy name in a careless, meaningless way (Leviticus 24:15; Exodus 20:7).
5. Yah is a s shortened form of Yahweh that appears in the Psalms in the admonition “hallelu-jah” (literally, “praise Yah!).
6. Various Hebrew names are formed on the name Yahweh: Jesus (“Yahweh saves”), Zechariah (“Yahweh remembers”), Isaiah, (“Yahweh is salvation”), John (“Yahweh is gracious”) etc.
7. Adonai, means “lord” and is used to address a superior, master, owner or ruler. Adonai was thus used to refer to God as the master and owner of all. Adonai emphasizes the servant-master relationship.

YAHWEH EXPLAINS HIS NAME

Exodus 3:1-17

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ²There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. ³Then Moses said, I must turn aside

and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.’⁴When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, ‘Moses, Moses!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’⁵Then he said, ‘Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.’⁶He said further, ‘I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

7 Then the LORD said, ‘I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings,⁸ and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.’⁹The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them.¹⁰ So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.’¹¹ But Moses said to God, ‘Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?’¹² He said, ‘I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain.’¹³ But Moses said to God, ‘If I come to the Israelites and say to them, “The God of your ancestors has sent me to you”, and they ask me, “What is his name?” what shall I say to them?’¹⁴ God said to Moses, ‘I am who I am.’^{} He said further, ‘Thus you shall say to the Israelites, “I am has sent me to you.”’¹⁵ God also said to Moses, ‘Thus you shall say to the Israelites, “The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you”: This is my name for ever, and this my title for all generations.*

¹⁶Go and assemble the elders of Israel, and say to them, “The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying: I have given heed to you and to what has been done to you in Egypt.

1. "To the Hebrew 'to be' does not just mean to exist as all other beings and things do as well—but to be active, to express oneself in active being, 'The God who acts.' 'I am what in creative activity and everywhere I turn out to be,' or 'I am (the God) that really acts.'" (Sigmund Mowinckel, "The Name of the God of Moses," *Hebrew Union College Annual*)
2. "The theological significance that attaches to the name yhwh is multiple. Judging from the etymology, but more particularly from the context in which the name is disclosed (Exod 3:12, 14; 6:2-8), the name signifies "presence." God is "with, " he is near and among his people. This overtone of presence is reiterated in the naming of the wilderness

structure as "tabernacle" (lit. dwelling), and in the promised name Immanuel ("God with us," Isa 7:14; Matt 1:23). Yahweh is present, accessible, near to those who call on him (Psalm 145:18) for deliverance (107:13), forgiveness (25:11), and guidance (31:3). (*Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*)

JESUS AS YAHWEH AND KURIOS

1. When the Hebrew Old Testament was translated into Greek (200 B. C.) Yahweh was translated with the Greek as Kurios.
2. After the resurrection Thomas confesses Jesus as "My Lord (Kurios) and my God" (John 20:28).
3. The New Testament always replaces Yahweh with Jesus when using the Old Testament to point to Jesus:
 - Joel 2:32: ³²*Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.*

Compare

- Romans 10:9-13: *If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. ¹¹The scripture says, 'No one who believes in him will be put to shame.' ¹²For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. ¹³For, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'*

See also Isaiah 48:21a-23 *Who told this long ago? Who declared it of old? Was it not I, the LORD? There is no other god besides me, a righteous God and a Saviour; there is no one besides me. ²² Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. ²³ By myself I have sworn, from my mouth has gone forth in righteousness a word that shall not return: 'To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.'*

Compare

Philippians 2:9-11 ⁹ *Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*