

# THE NAME OF GOD

---

## What's all the fuss?

A growing number of people today are promoting the idea that it is good or even necessary to pronounce the personal Name of God<sup>1</sup> aloud. There is a wide range of opinions regarding this notion. Some simply believe that the name should be declared aloud in a worship context. Some believe that one cannot be saved without uttering the true Name of God according to a certain pronunciation. Collectively, these groups comprise what is known as the "Sacred Name" movement.

In general, Christianity does not advocate a well-defined tradition of treating the pronounced Name of God with any reverence (other than the prohibition of blasphemy).

The traditionally held view of Judaism is that the personal Name of God should not be uttered aloud, except at the appropriate time during the service in the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, which does not currently stand at the time of this writing. It is also sometimes taught that the actual pronunciation has been lost and cannot be recovered.

---

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this work, the "personal Name of God" is a reference to the Tetragrammaton. See further on to learn precisely what this means.

Historically, the quest for the true pronunciation of the Name of God has been mainly the concern of certain Christians and secular scholars. It has not been a concern to the Jewish community, except for fringe movements who have wished to use it in Kabbalistic meditations.

In many places, the controversy is causing severe division among Messianic and Hebraic Roots congregations. For this reason, it is important to be well informed about the topic.

## Our Custom

At Beth Immanuel, our custom is not to pronounce the Name aloud. Instead of pronouncing the personal Name of God, we choose to use several other Names and titles as circumlocutions.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, please refrain from speaking the personal Name of God aloud during times of corporate worship. If it is your personal conviction that the Name should be pronounced aloud, but are willing to refrain from doing so within our congregation, then you are certainly welcome to worship, fellowship and learn with us.

---

<sup>2</sup> See further on in this essay for an explanation of circumlocutions.

## What is the Name?

### Tetragrammaton

The God of the Bible has many names, but the particular Name surrounded by controversy is the personal Name of God, known as the Tetragrammaton.<sup>3</sup> It consists of four Hebrew letters: *yod*, *hey*, *vav*, and *hey*, which are roughly equivalent to the English letters YHWH<sup>4</sup>. In most modern translations, this Name is displayed in English as LORD using small capitals. It occurs thousands of times in the text of the Bible, both as a stand-alone name and in combination with other names and titles.

### Meaning

The precise meaning of the Name is not exactly clear, because it is not a word used in common expression. However, from the statement made in Exodus 3:14, it seems certain that it is related to the root *hey-yod-*

---

<sup>3</sup> According to the Jewish Encyclopedia, the name Tetragrammaton (meaning "four letters") was used to distinguish it from other names of God used in Kabbalistic ritual, such as the 12-letter name or the 72-letter name.

<sup>4</sup> Or YHWH. It is believed that in ancient times the letter vav made a W sound. In modern Hebrew it makes a V sound.

*heh* (*hayah*),<sup>5</sup> which means “to be/exist” or “to become.”

Exodus 3:14 states:

God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM”;<sup>6</sup> and He said, “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”

It should be noted that neither “I am Who I am” nor “I am (has sent)” represent the actual Tetragrammaton. Instead, they are a permutation of the related root *hayah*. In Hebrew, “I am Who I am” is *ehyeh asher ehyeh*, the verb being *alef-hey-yod-hey*. It is explained in the following verse:

God, furthermore, said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘The LORD (YHVH), the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.’ This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations.

The *yod* at the beginning of the Tetragrammaton may suggest a third-

person imperfect verb.<sup>7</sup> If so, the name may hint at a meaning such as “He is,” or perhaps “He causes [everything] to be.”

### Other names

The Tetragrammaton is undoubtedly God’s most holy, personal Name. Yet this is clearly not the only Name of God. The Scripture refers to the Creator in an incredible variety of ways.

For example, the name *El*<sup>8</sup> is used hundreds of times in Scripture. Since it is also used of false gods, nearly every time it is used of the true God, it is qualified by additional descriptive words. This provides a beautiful array of names, such as *El Olam* (Everlasting God) and *El Shaddai* (Sufficient God or Almighty God).<sup>9</sup> The related form *Elohim* is also used of the true God thousands of times, also often in a descriptive construct. These combinations form dozens of different names and titles for the One God.

Another Name used of God hundreds of times in the Hebrew Scriptures is *Adonai*.<sup>10</sup> It is a form of the word *adon*, which means

“lord” or “master.” *Adon* itself is also used of God, often in a construct with descriptive words, such as *adon kol-ha’arets*, “Lord of all the earth.”

There are numerous additional names of God. For example, Isaiah 57:15 states:

For thus says the high and exalted  
One  
Who lives forever, whose name is  
Holy,  
“I dwell on a high and holy place,  
And also with the contrite and lowly  
of spirit  
In order to revive the spirit of the  
lowly  
And to revive the heart of the  
contrite.”

In this passage, God is called, *Ram v’nissa* (High and Exalted One), and *Shochen Ad* (One Who Lives Forever).<sup>11</sup> Then it declares, “Whose name is *Kadosh* (Holy).”<sup>12</sup> God is called by the name Holy in several other passages, sometimes in construct form (i.e., with other words).

Exodus 34:14 tells us that a Name of God is *Kanna* (Jealous):

For you shall not worship any other  
god, for the LORD, whose name is  
Jealous, is a jealous God.

Other names and titles appear frequently, such as Redeemer and Savior. Scripture

<sup>5</sup> Or the related root *hey*, *vav*, *hey*.

<sup>6</sup> “I am Who I am” is only an approximate translation because Biblical Hebrew verb tenses do not directly correspond with English past, present, or future. The underlying Hebrew tense is called imperfect, which is most often represented in English as future tense (as in “I will be”). However, it does not exactly represent an action that has not yet begun, but one that has not yet been completed, giving it a sense of continuation. A translation that reflects this sense may be “I will continue to be Who I will continue to be.”

<sup>7</sup> The normal third-person singular imperfect form of *hayah* is spelled *yod-hey-yod-hey* and pronounced *yihyeh*.

<sup>8</sup> *El* can mean, “god” or “powerful being.”

<sup>9</sup> God’s personal name YHVH is also often used with descriptive words.

<sup>10</sup> The reference here is not to the Tetragrammaton, but to places where the actual word *Adonai* appears spelled out in the Hebrew text, *alef-dalet-nun-yod*. Later, we will discuss how YHVH is also read aloud as *Adonai*.

<sup>11</sup> Or, “One Who Inhabits Eternity”

<sup>12</sup> It is also valid to interpret “Whose name is holy,” meaning that “Kadosh” (Holy) is not His name; it only describes it.

also calls God by names such as Father, King, Rock, Shepherd, and Judge.

We can see from this that there are many appropriate ways to address and refer to our Creator. Simply put, God has many names.

### The broader sense of *Shem*

The word in Hebrew for name is *shem*. The word *shem* can mean a name in the sense of a vocal or written designation, like the various names and titles mentioned above. *Shem* also has the broader senses of reputation, fame, and glory, and also authority. It represents a person's essential characteristics and attributes.<sup>13</sup>

The Name of God often refers to His reputation. This is clear from verses that speak of God acting for the "sake of His Name." For example, Ezekiel 36 talks about God's Name being profaned. Israel was expelled from the Land, and the nations noted their association with God. Since this tarnished God's reputation, He declares that He is about to act for the sake of His holy Name (reputation).

This sense of *shem* is also evident from passages that talk about "making a name." God declares to David:

---

<sup>13</sup> Note that this is not a figurative interpretation of the word *shem*—it is a clear, literal meaning of the word. See any standard lexicon, such as *The Brown Driver Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*.

"I will make you a great name, like the names of the great men who are on the earth."<sup>14</sup>

And later it is written:

"So David made a name {for himself} when he returned from killing 18,000 Arameans in the Valley of Salt."

The builders of the tower of Babel also sought to make a name for themselves.<sup>15</sup> In these passages, it is obvious that we are not talking about a name in the sense of a vocal or written designation.

Particularly in the Scriptures' usage of the Name of the Lord, *shem* is simply a designation of God Himself, His very Person. For example, in Psalm 20:1:

May the LORD answer you in the day of trouble!  
May the name of the God of Jacob set you securely on high!

In that passage, the Name of God is performing an action, and it is directly paralleled with the LORD Himself. The same parallelism occurs in Isaiah 50:10:

Who is among you that fears the LORD,  
That obeys the voice of His servant,  
That walks in darkness and has no light?  
Let him trust in the name of the LORD  
and rely on his God.

---

<sup>14</sup> 2 Samuel 7:9

<sup>15</sup> Genesis 11:14

Here, it is obvious that to trust in the Name of the LORD is the same as to rely on God.

It is undisputable from Scripture that while the "Name of God" can simply be a series of letters or sounds, it is often much more than that.

### Circumlocutions

A "circumlocution" is an indirect way to express something. Circumlocutions of the Name of God are ways to indicate the Name of God without writing or speaking it directly.

It is not considered forbidden to write the Tetragrammaton in Jewish law. However, it is considered forbidden to deface the written name, or to treat it with dishonor. Therefore, it is written in sacred texts such as Hebrew Bibles or prayer books, but it is not written in texts that are likely to be thrown away or misused. In those texts, alternative forms are used to indicate the Name of God to the reader. One method is to write the letter *yod* twice. Another method is to use the letter *hey*, *dalet*, or *yod* with a *geresh* (an abbreviation mark that looks like an apostrophe).

Instead of pronouncing the Tetragrammaton as written, different names for God are always substituted. In general conversation, or in a personal context, the Name *Hashem* is used. *Hashem* means "the Name." In the context of corporate prayer and worship, the Name *Adonai* is substituted.

Hebrew is normally written without vowel marks, both in sacred and secular contexts. The reader supplies the vowel sounds. Originally, the vowels in the Hebrew Scriptures were simply retained by oral tradition. The Masoretes developed the system of transcribing the vowels in about 1000 CE. When the personal Name of God appeared in the text, the Masoretes wanted to remind the reader to read *Adonai* instead, so they inserted the vowels of *Adonai* into the letters of YHVH. In several instances where the actual word *Adonai* appeared immediately prior to the Tetragrammaton, they inserted the vowels of *Elohim* instead so that the reader would read the combination *Adonai Elohim*.

Christians who were unfamiliar with this custom read the text with vowels inserted. They read the text literally, actually pronouncing the vowels of *Adonai* with the consonants of YHVH, resulting in the combination *Yehovah*. This is the origin of the name Jehovah,<sup>16</sup> which is certainly not

---

<sup>16</sup> In older English and in most other languages (such as German), J made a Y sound. The difference between the A of *Adonai* and the E of *Jehovah* is the result of technical laws about Hebrew vowels: the reduced vowel *chatef patach* (which makes the “ah” sound of *Adonai*) can only occur under one of the guttural letters, *alef*, *he*, *chet*, and *ayin*. The appropriate equivalent vowel for use under other letters such as a *yod* is the *sheva*, a very short vowel with the sound of the letter E in “petition.” There are those who, armed solely with a Strong’s concordance and very little working knowledge of Hebrew, declare this substitution to be the result of a

the accurate pronunciation of the Name of God.

Some suggest that the names *Hashem* or *Adonai* are demonic or pagan. This is ludicrous and false. *Shem* is a very common Hebrew word meaning, “name,” as was mentioned before, and *Hashem* simply means “The Name,” being a substitute for the name that should not be pronounced.

There are people that connect the name *Adonai* with the Greek mythological character Adonis. Though it is poor scholarship to connect words from different languages simply because they sound alike,<sup>17</sup> it could be possible that the Greeks applied a Hebrew name to their god. But just because a name is borrowed by pagans does not mean that it can no longer be used of the true God. As it has been stated the actual name *Adonai* appears hundreds of times spelled out in the Scriptures as a Name for God. It stems from *Adon*, a Hebrew word meaning “master” or “lord.”

Yet, these are not the only alternative names for God. In Jewish writings it is common to avoid using the most sacred Name of God by using terms such as the

---

conspiracy of evil Jewish rabbis, who they believe are trying to conceal the Name of God.

<sup>17</sup> Using the same poor scholarship, someone could suggest that the name of the God of Israel comes from *Iovis*, the genitive form of Jupiter, or from the search engine Yahoo. (Again this is false.)

Eternal, the Creator, the Almighty, or the Holy One.

## Reasons not to use the Name

As was previously noted, Beth Immanuel’s tradition is to refrain from pronouncing the personal Name of God aloud. There are several reasons for this.

### A longstanding tradition

Without doubt, the tradition of pronouncing the Name of God differently from how it is written is very ancient. It is commonly believed that this custom had developed as early as the third century B.C.

It is remarkable that the Jewish custom to refrain from pronouncing the Name is universal. The fractured sects of first century Judaism disagreed about many things, but there is no evidence of argument regarding the pronunciation of God’s Name. This suggests that the custom of using circumlocutions is very old, pre-dating the division of Judaism into these sects. The tradition is the same today worldwide across Jewish communities and cultures.

The Septuagint is perhaps the most ancient translation of the Bible. Modern scholarship holds that it was translated over the course of the third to the first centuries B.C. The Greek does not attempt to transliterate the Tetragrammaton—instead, the translation of *Adonai* is

inserted, the Greek *kurios*. The Greek texts of the Apostles follow this same tradition.

The text of the Bible itself attests to careful and guarded use of the Name. In some of the prophetic books, for example, the Name is used extensively. However, in Nehemiah, Job, and Daniel, the Name appears very infrequently. In Esther, Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes, the personal Name of God does not appear at all. It is notable that Nehemiah, Esther, and Daniel all reflect time of exile, such as we are in today, as we yet await Messiah's return.

The Torah does not explicitly state, "Do not pronounce the Name of God as it is written." However, a weighty commandment appears as one of the Ten spoken aloud on Mount Sinai. It states:

You shall not take the Name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His Name in vain.<sup>18</sup>

This is a commandment regarding making false or needless oaths. The severe language should give us pause. It teaches us that we need to be very concerned about use of God's Name, and should not use it frivolously.

### Yeshua and the Name

As disciples of Yeshua, we aim to model his behavior and obey his teachings. Regardless of what other personalities in

the Scriptures said or did, the example of the Messiah should be of prime importance.

It is absolutely clear from Scripture that Yeshua used circumlocutions to avoid pronouncing the Name as written. In saying, "The Kingdom of Heaven is near," he used the term Heaven as a circumlocution for God's Name.<sup>19</sup>

When Yeshua read from the scroll of Isaiah in the Nazareth synagogue,<sup>20</sup> his reading included the Name of God. If he had pronounced it as it is written, it would have caused uproar long before he was allowed to sit and teach.

In his teachings, he primarily referred to God as Father. When he taught his disciples to pray, he did not tell them to pronounce the Name of God. He said:

Pray, then, in this way: "Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your Name."<sup>21</sup>

### Treating it as Holy

"Hallowed" means sanctified, that is, made or treated as holy.

The Hebrew word for "holy" is *kadosh*. *Kadosh* means set apart, separate, distinct, special.

---

<sup>19</sup> Heaven is a circumlocution also used in the book of Daniel in 4:26. The book of Daniel always avoids using the personal Name of God except in the ninth chapter.

<sup>20</sup> Luke 4:16-20

<sup>21</sup> Matthew 6:9. Also Luke 11:2.

The opposite of holy is not "evil," as some might assume. The Hebrew word for the opposite of holy is *chol*.<sup>22</sup> Though it is sometimes translated as "profane," it actually represents the idea of common, normal, or usual. It is also the word for sand (which is certainly very common in the Middle East).

For example, vessels used in the service of the Temple could never be used in other places. Being holy, they could only be used in a holy place. Likewise, to use common dishes in the Holy Temple would compromise its holiness.

The same is true of the Sacred Name of God. In order to treat it as holy, we must not use it in common contexts. The more we speak the Name of God in common surroundings, the less it is being treated as holy.

Oddly, the various groups comprising the Sacred Name Movement do just the opposite of treating God's Name as sacred. Their effort is to make the Name common. In a very literal sense, this is what it means to profane the Name of God.

At a Sacred Name convention it is not uncommon to see people wearing T-shirts with the most holy Name of God printed across the front. Sadly, the shirt is absorbing sweat and oils from the person's body. Sooner or later, perhaps after being stained with ketchup or a soft drink, the

---

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Leviticus 10:10

---

<sup>18</sup> Exodus 20:7; Deuteronomy 5:11

shirt and the Name of God will be placed in the dirty laundry hamper, along with soiled underclothes (Heaven forbid!).

In contrast, during the days that the Master walked on the earth, the Sacred Name of God was only pronounced aloud according to its letters in the holiest place on earth. The holiest man<sup>23</sup> of the holiest clan, among the holy tribe of the holy nation pronounced it aloud on the holiest day of the year, after achieving a state of ritual purity. When he said it, everyone present fell on their faces and exclaimed, "Blessed be His Name Whose glorious Kingdom is forever and ever!"

### Peers with God?

In ancient cultures as today, to use someone's personal name is to treat them as a peer. Children are taught to show respect to their teachers by calling them Mr. or Mrs., with their surname. To a person in authority such as a judge, it is appropriate to call them "sir," or, "your honor." The appropriate way to address the president of the United States is "Mr. President," not "Ron," "Bill," or "George."

It is notable that in the Gospels, people didn't even address Yeshua directly by name; they would call him by titles such "Master," "Teacher," or "Rabbi." The only time that Yeshua was addressed by name

is by the thief on the cross, in his most humiliating moment.

To a king in the ancient near east, language of respect was extremely important. One would address him as, "My lord, the king." Addressing the king by his first name would likely result in a death sentence.

One might argue, however, that we are God's betrothed. He is our Bridegroom. Certainly, then, we should call Him by His personal Name. Yet, this is still inappropriate from the perspective of Biblical culture – being His bride does not give us equal status with Him. Esther called her husband Ahashuerus, "the king," even referring to him in the third person, no matter if she was speaking to him directly, or to another person.<sup>24</sup> Sarah called her dear husband Abraham, "Lord," which is *Adoni* in Hebrew.<sup>25</sup>

Some see this as too distant to reflect their relationship with the Almighty. This is understandable. There are times when we want to use a Name that reflects our intensely intimate relationship with God. A child who is very close to his father does not call him by his first name, but may refer to him as "dad" or "daddy." Abba. This is a term of closeness and endearment as well as respect, and is a term we are welcome to use with our Father Who is in heaven.

Unless Sacred Name proponents encourage their children to call them by their first name as well, they are demanding more respect for themselves than they are giving to God.

When a person addresses another by his first name, he positions himself as an equal. We are not equals with God. If Yeshua called God Father, it is right for us to do likewise.

### Unknown pronunciation

Since the original Hebrew did not contain vowels, it is uncertain how the sacred Name of God should actually be pronounced. Some scholars suggest certain pronunciations, but it is purely speculative. Perhaps it has the vowels of one of the imperfect verb forms. Perhaps it is not pronounced as a word at all, but an acronym for *Yihyeh, Hayah, VeHoveh*, "He will be, He was, and He is." We simply don't know.

The fact that the pronunciation is not certain is illustrated by the debate seen between the various Sacred Name proponents. Many of these groups have their own interpretation as to the correct pronunciation, and some insist that if you don't use theirs, you are praying to the wrong deity.

---

<sup>23</sup> The High Priest. Even if the high priest is corrupt, he is holy by virtue of his set apart status.

---

<sup>24</sup> Esther 4:11, 5:4,8; 7:3; 8:5

<sup>25</sup> Genesis 18:12; 1 Peter 3:6

## Answers to objections

### People in Biblical times

Some would argue that it must be appropriate to speak the sacred Name of God aloud. They note that some people in the Hebrew Scriptures used the Name.

There are several difficulties with this. For one, it is incorrect to assume that since the Name is written, it was always pronounced as it was written. The Name continues to be printed explicitly in sacred texts such as prayer books, but it is always pronounced aloud using circumlocutions.

Second, as was mentioned before, the Bible's use of the Name of God is guarded. In certain books, the personal Name of God is rarely or never used. This should teach us that there are some circumstances in which the personal Name of God should not be used. Today, for those within the Land of Israel as well as outside of it, we are in a period of exile. We await the Messianic Kingdom and the ingathering of the exiles at the time of the restoration.

The personalities in the Bible do not always provide good role models for us in every situation, even when God does not correct them. Ultimately, we are not disciples of Boaz or Moses or Ezekiel. We are disciples of Yeshua the Messiah, and He clearly did not use the personal Name of God.

### "But Yeshua did use the Name!"

#### In the Father's Name

Some would argue that the Messiah did use the Sacred Name. The most common proof presented of this belief is the quote, "I have come in my Father's Name."<sup>26</sup> To suggest that this means he pronounced the Sacred Name aloud is to miss the clear Semitic figure of speech he is using.

To speak "in someone's name" means, to claim his authority to support one's words. This phrase is used literally hundreds of times in the Talmud. For example, in b. Berachot 7, paragraph after paragraph begins with R. Yochanan speaking in the name of someone else: first R. Yose, and then R. Simeon b. Yochai. Here, R. Yochanan is not declaring to everyone the correct pronunciation of his teachers' names; he is relating what he learned from them, and citing them as his source.

In the same way, when the Master said, "I have come in my Father's name," his point has nothing to do with the correct pronunciation of the Name of God. He is speaking of the source of his teaching and the authority it carries.

(Ironically, the people who misunderstand the Hebraic figure of speech also apparently fail to notice that he used the circumlocution "Father" once more to avoid use of the personal Name of God.)

---

<sup>26</sup> John 5:43.

### I have made Your Name known

Another key passage brought forward by those who believe that Yeshua pronounced the Name of God are the verses in John 17:6, 26, where Yeshua says, "I have revealed Your Name to those whom You gave me (the Twelve)," and "I have made Your Name known to them." However, to interpret these passages to mean that he made certain noises with his mouth, the passages must be wrenched from their context.

Notice that it doesn't say, "I have revealed the pronunciation of Your Name to those whom You gave me." Instead, verse six is in perfect parallel with the prelude to his prayer in the previous five verses, which spoke of how the Son revealed (glorified) the Father.

As was stated before, *shem* (name) in Biblical terminology often means much more than a sequence of letters or sounds. In this context, it makes much more sense to understand that Yeshua made known the Father's attributes and characteristics.

In any kind of literature, context dictates meaning, and the context of these passages in John is not only First Century Judaism, but it is also a First Century Jewish Passover Seder. This is Passover Talk.

Throughout the Exodus narratives of the Ten Plagues and the going out from Egypt there is a theme presented of the revelation of God's Name. It begins with God revealing His Name to Moses (at the

burning bush), who then goes to Pharaoh, who in turn protests that He has never heard of the Name of the LORD. “Who is the LORD that I should obey Him?” Pharaoh asks (Exodus 5:2). The rest of the Exodus story makes it clear that God intends to smite Egypt and rescue Israel in order to make His Name known in the world. But it is not His Name that He is making known, but the meaning of His Name. He intends to show the world what kind of God He is, and to establish His reputation.

### Blasphemy

Another text used to support the idea that Yeshua pronounced the Sacred Name is a passage in the Mishnah, which states that a man cannot be put to death for blasphemy unless he pronounced the Sacred Name of God.<sup>27</sup> When Yeshua was brought to trial, Matthew records that the high priest asked him if he was the Messiah, the Son of God. His response:

“You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will see the son of man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.”

Then the high priest tore his robes and said, “He has blasphemed! What further need do we have of witnesses? Behold, you have now heard the

blasphemy; what do you think?” They answered, “He deserves death!”<sup>28</sup>

Therefore, the assumption is that when Yeshua said, “the Power,” he actually said the Sacred Name, which caused the High Priest’s reaction. However, this conclusion is based on several faulty premises.

This “trial” is not taking place in an actual valid court of law before the Sanhedrin. We know this for several reasons: first, it is convening *in the middle of the night!*<sup>29</sup> Secondly, it is not in the Chamber of Hewn Stones, but it is *in the home of Caiaphas*.<sup>30</sup> Third, only the dissenting voices are there – his supporters among the Pharisees (such as Nicodemus) were not invited to this gathering. Since we know that this was not an actual court of law, there is no reason to believe that they would adhere to honest standards in judgment!

The Talmud and the Gospels agree that Caiaphas and the Sadducees were corrupt sell-outs to Rome. The text states clearly that the witnesses brought forth were false witnesses. Again, this shows us that there was no intention to give him a fair trial. There is no reason to believe that they would be concerned with the ordinance in the Mishnah.

---

<sup>28</sup> Matthew 26:64–66

<sup>29</sup> Matthew 26:31,34; also note that the disciples could not keep themselves awake at the time of the arrest (Matthew 26:36–46).

<sup>30</sup> Matthew 26:3,57

In addition, Caiaphas and those assembled with him were Sadducees. Sadducees, the predecessors of modern-day Karaites, did not believe in the authority of the Oral Law. They did not care what the Mishnah said, which hadn’t even been put in writing by that time.

Being Sadducees, they also didn’t believe in a Messiah King. To them, the only “anointed one” is the High Priest. Calling oneself “messiah” would be blasphemy against the priesthood, and would have been taken personally by Caiaphas. It is not difficult to imagine that the declaration Yeshua made would have been extremely offensive to his ears, even without use of the divine Name.

Some point out that Yeshua was alluding to Psalm 110, which contains the divine Name. However, the part he quoted does not say, “the right hand of YHVH,” it says “My right hand.” (It is also of note that he follows up with a quote from Daniel 7:13, after which Daniel once again avoids the Name of God through use of the circumlocution “Ancient of Days.”)

One more serious fault of this argument is that it quickly assumes that the Greek text is unreliable, and that someone must have changed the Tetragrammaton into “the Power,” though there are no manuscript witnesses to support their claim. More likely, Yeshua used this title once again *to avoid* saying God’s personal Name.

---

<sup>27</sup> m. Sanhedrin 7.5



## I AM

It is sometimes taught that when Yeshua said, “I am” (as in John 8:58), he must have said the Name of God. This is also undoubtedly false.

YHVH does not mean, “I am.” Remember, this is a Name that appears to be from a related root, but it is quite unclear what it means exactly. It is certainly not the way to say, “I am;” otherwise, people would be pronouncing the Name of God any time they wanted to talk about themselves.

When God said “I AM has sent you,” YHVH is not used. It is the verb *ehyeh*.<sup>31</sup> And it is likely that Yeshua didn’t even say that, because the natural way to respond, “I am” in Hebrew is *ani hu*, literally, “I he.” Either way, he did not say YHVH. The scandal was not in the sound of the syllables he uttered, but what he claimed to be!

The Gospel record is clear: Yeshua did not use the personal Name of God, nor did he teach others to do so.

## Call on the Name

It is common for people who promote using the Sacred Name to point out passages from the prophets that enjoin us to “call on the Name of the LORD.” Some

---

<sup>31</sup> In the Septuagint, *ehyeh* corresponds with the phrase *ego eimi*, which is the also underlying Greek text of the passage in question. However, *ego eimi* is a very common phrase and is not normally a reference to God—it can just as easily correspond with *ani hu*.

interpret Joel 2:32, “Whoever calls on the Name of the LORD will be saved,” to mean that one must articulate the proper pronunciation of God’s Name to escape eternal damnation.

This hyper-literal reading of the text fails to recognize a common idiom. As was shown before, to “call upon the Name of the LORD” is not to utter some kind of magical formula, but rather means to call upon God’s authority, attributes, and Person.

## To whom are you speaking?

There are some that raise an objection, saying that if we don’t use the personal Name of God, then it is unclear to whom we are speaking. This is not true. There is only One God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. There is only One Father in Heaven. There is only One Creator of the Universe. And He doesn’t play dumb with us. Even if a boy calls his earthly father “Dad,” there is no ambiguity about whom he is speaking, though there are many dads in the world. We don’t have to say God’s personal Name to make sure our prayer is heard.

Some people think it is degrading to call God by a title that is also used by others. They say we need to pronounce the Tetragrammaton instead of *El* (god) or *Elohim* (God or gods) because these terms can be used of false gods. They say we shouldn’t use *adon* (lord) or *Adonai* (my

great Lord) because these can also refer to earthly lords.

However, this ignores the plain fact that the Bible itself uses these titles for the True God repeatedly. In fact, the Creation account in the first chapter of Genesis never uses the personal Name of God even once! “In the beginning GOD created the heavens and the earth.”<sup>32</sup> We are not told the Name of this God until much later.

We know that there are evil fathers; nonetheless, our Master tells us to pray, “Our Father.” Such titles put God in terms we can understand. The function analogically. Using them does not make His identity less clear; on the contrary, we know more about Him when we learn the different descriptions given of Him as recorded in the Scriptures.

## Sacred Name in Christian Texts

Some would say that the early believers spoke the personal Name aloud. As evidence, they cite passages from the Talmud<sup>33</sup> that refers to the Name of God being found written in the writings of the *minim* (heretics), which does seem to refer to the followers of Yeshua. And indeed, they are certainly speaking of the Hebrew Tetragrammaton, not some other name or a Greek translation.

Yet, the fact that the Sacred Name appears in sacred texts should be no surprise. As it

---

<sup>32</sup> Genesis 1:1

<sup>33</sup> b. Shabbat 116

was said before, there is no prohibition against writing the personal Name of God. Likewise, the Name of God appears in Torah scrolls and prayer books, but we cannot infer from this that Orthodox Jewish people pronounce it aloud. Most likely, the early believers wrote the Name of God in sacred texts, but pronounced it using the standard evasive synonyms.

## **The Sacred Name movement**

Though efforts are being made to spread the message of the Sacred Name movement in Messianic congregations, the movement actually did not begin within Messianic Judaism. In fact, it began in the 1930's among a few members of the Church of God (Seventh Day). This denomination came from the same origin as the Seventh Day Adventists, but rejected the teachings and vision of Ellen White.

There is no official doctrine associated with the Sacred Name movement, and there are many diverse beliefs among the adherents. Many, however, treat the personal Name of God as a magical formula for salvation or blessing, or as secret knowledge that will set one's soul free, reminiscent of the ancient heresy of Gnosticism.

Finally, Sacred Name theology is fundamentally anti-Jewish, since is based on the premise that there is an evil conspiracy of Jewish rabbis on a mission to conceal or blot out God's name! It is not surprising, then, that anti-Jewish sentiment is often expressed by Sacred Name

followers. But obviously this is not a hallmark of true faith.

## **Conclusion**

At Beth Immanuel, we want to treat the personal Name of God with the utmost respect by not treating it as something common. By so doing, we believe we are walking in the footsteps and teaching of Yeshua our Master. In living lives of love and devotion to God and others, it is our mission to bring holiness and glory to God's Name—in the sense of His Person, attributes, and reputation—and to make this Name known in the earth. We hope that you will join us in this vision and treat our values with respect.