5

What Is God's Name?

The word "god" means an object of worship. When capitalized, it refers to the one true and living God. There are others called gods, but "for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him" (1 Corinthians 8:5, 6). The personal name of the heavenly Father He set forth in Exodus 3:15: "The LORD [YHWH] . . . This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations." How God pronounced the four letters "YHWH" (technically called the "Tetragrammaton") is unknown, but their meaning shines through.

If the pronunciation was "Yahweh," the meaning is "He causes to be," a declaration of God's creative power. How thankful we are that there is such a Being! We are glad to be alive, and we know that without His creative power we could not have been. "The eternal God is [our] dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms" (Deuteronomy 33:27).

If the pronunciation of the four letters was "Yeh-weh," the meaning is "He keeps on being," a declara-

tion of His endlessness and of His selfsufficiency and of His independence. "And there is no God besides Me" (Isaiah 44:6); "From everlasting to everlasting, You are God" (Psalm 90:2). It is impossible for our finite minds to explain how He came to be (Hebrews 11:6), but how thankful we are that He has existed, does exist, and will keep on existing! Our hope for nonextinction depends on such a Being. If He keeps on existing, and if He loves us, there is hope that we too may be eternal. "Because I live, you will live also" (John 14:19).

According to the Bible, the first human being to speak God's personal name was Eve, announcing the birth of Cain: "I have gotten a manchild with the help of the LORD [YHWH]" (Genesis 4:1). Her grandson Enosh called on the name of YHWH (Genesis 4:26). Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and others spoke the name "YHWH" (Genesis 14:22; 15:2; 24:27; 26:28; 27:27; 28:16; 30:24; 31:49), but none of these knew the great meaning wrapped up in the four letters "YHWH" (see Exodus 6:3). Moses was the first human to whom God explained the significance of the Tetragrammaton: "I am because I am" or "I exist because I exist" (Exodus 3:14). Reverence for the sacred name was prescribed when the Lord with His own finger wrote in stone, "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" (Exodus 20:7).

A man who blasphemed "the Name" (Leviticus 24:11, 16) was stoned to death. From this incident arose the superstition that "the Name" is too sacred to be on human lips. However, the Lord had not made His Name unutterable; He had only specified that it must be kept sacred. Notwithstanding, the

Hebrews developed the habit of substituting the word "LORD" every time they came upon the name "YHWH" in the sacred text. As a result, the proper pronunciation, formerly well known, died out of human knowledge. To this day no one knows how God originally pronounced the four letters to Moses.

It pleased the Father, when He sent Jesus into the world, that all men should "honor the Son even as they honor the Father," and a failure to do so was a dishonor to the Father (John 5:23). Consequently, now—under the New Testament—everything must be done "in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Colossians 3:17). It is the Father's good pleasure that the name "YHWH" during the Christian Age is replaced by the name of Jesus, one that is "above every name" (Philippians 2:9).

On the first day of the new dispensation, the Spirit-inspired Peter commanded repentance and baptism, not by the authority of YHWH, but "in the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 2:38). Philip's preaching in Samaria was not in the name of YHWH, but in "the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 8:12). Truly, there is no "other name under heaven" given among men by which we are to be saved (Acts 4:12).

Before Hebrew scholars transliterated the four letters of God's name as "YHWH," they wrote "JHVH." For many years, the word's pronunciation was studiously avoided and the substitute word "LORD" was used instead. During that time, in 1518, a man by the name of Petrus Galitinus had the idea of crossbreeding words. He took the vowels from the Hebrew word for "LORD" and injected them into the letters "JHVH." The result of interspersing the vowels "e," "o," and "a" in the four letters caused

the word "Jehovah" first to be written. Many good people today do not realize that the word "Jehovah" is nonbiblical. It is a man-made hybrid unheard of before 1518.[1]

A zealous, deluded sect called "International Bible Students" in 1931 (at a convention in Columbus, Ohio) changed their name to "Jehovah's Witnesses." They did not know they were employing a nonbiblical word, but they began to reverence the name "Jehovah" above every name. They sought to exalt Jehovah above Jesus. Though the word "YHWH," from which "Jehovah" was derived, appears about 6,823 times in the Old Testament, it is not found as such even once in the New Testament. Since the Jehovah's Witnesses claim to go by the whole Bible, they were embarrassed that the word "Jehovah" was not used by any New Testament writer. They have relieved this embarrassment by translating their own Bible, brazenly injecting the name "Jehovah" into their New Testament 237 times.

The God who demands that all men honor the Son in the Christian Age cannot be pleased with such maneuvers. He had the New Testament written the way He wanted it, giving His Son the preeminence in all things (Colossians 1:18). God wants all people today to honor Christ by calling themselves "Christians" (1 Peter 4:16). One cannot pronounce the name "Christian" without saying "Christ." All people now are commanded to give thanks to God, the Father "in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 5:20).

---

[1]A. B. Davidson, *The Theology of the Old Testament* (New York: Scribner, 1926), 47. Petrus Galitinus was a confessor of Leo X.