

The Sacred Name

Overview

- The Burning Bush: What is Your Name (Ex 3:13-15)?
- The Third Commandment: Do Not Misuse My Name (Ex 20:7)!
- The Shema: Listen Up Israel (Deut 6:4-5)!

Part 1: What is Your Name (Ex 3:13-15)?

Ex 3:13 Then Moses said to God, "Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you.' Now they may say to me, 'What (*mah*) is His name?' What shall I say to them?"

“The normal way to ask a name is to use the pronoun *mî*; to use *mah* invites an answer which goes further, and gives the meaning ('what?') or substance of the name.”

New Bible Dictionary, s.v. Names of God

Ex 3:14 God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM"; and He said, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM (*ehyeh*) has sent me to you.'"

“The formula used in v.14 is the Hebrew syntactical construction known as *idem per idem* where the same root with the same sense is repeated... Often this construction is used to express a totality, intensity, or emphasis to the form so highlighted by repetition.” Expositor’s Bible Commentary, s.v. Ex 3:14

“Exodus 3:14 emphasizes His self existence in His identification, 'I AM WHO I AM.' The verb *to be* emphasizes He has continual existence in Himself.” The Moody Handbook of Theology, p.188

Exodus 3:14 is an important messianic passage (cf. John 8:58).

- John 8:58 Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am (Greek *ego eimi*)."
- Grammatically, *ehyeh* (Ex 3:14) is equivalent to *ego eimi* (John 8:58); Jesus explicitly claimed to be the "I AM" of the OT.

Ex 3:15 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 pronunciation Yahweh is indicated by transliterations of the name into Greek in early Christian literature” New Bible Dictionary, s.v. Names of God

“Yahweh is a proper noun, the only 'name' of God. In Genesis wherever the word *šem* ('name') is associated with the divine being that name is Yahweh. It is certainly connected with the Hebrew verb *hayâ* (to be) or rather with a variant and earlier form of the root *hawâ*.” New Bible Dictionary, s.v. Names of God

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Ps 110:1 is another important messianic passage associated with the sacred name.

- Yahweh tells the Messiah (David's Lord) to sit at His right hand (cf. Mt 22:42-45)
- Ps 110:1 A Psalm of David. The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at My right hand Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet."

Two Ditches Regarding the Sacred Name

1. Some claim that God's name is too sacred to be spoken

- They use the term LORD or HaShem (the name) instead
- The Psalms were lyrics that were intended to be sung (cf. Ps 135:3)
- When you sing Hallelujah, you are saying, "Praise Yah!"
- Yah is a shortened form of Yahweh (e.g., James, Jim)

Ps 135:3 Praise the LORD, for the LORD is good; Sing praises to His name, for it is lovely.

Two Ditches Regarding the Sacred Name

2. Others insist on using only Hebrew names (Yahweh, Yeshua)

- Leads to endless, pointless debates over correct pronunciation
- The apostles used Greek terms for God and Jesus (1Cor 1:3)

Part 2: Do Not Misuse My Name (Ex 20:7)!

Ex 20:7 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.

The Hebrew term for "vain" (*šavē*) refers to futility or worthlessness (i.e., that which has no result or use) and also to falseness (content which is not true).

Common ways of taking God's name in vain

1. Euphemisms: Golly, Gee Whiz, Gosh Darn, OMG!!!

2 Religious Titles: Rabbi, Father, Reverend (Matt 23:8-9)

Matt 23:8 "But you, do not be called 'Rabbi'; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren. 9 "Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven.

3. Personal Misconduct (Rom 2:23-24)

Rom 2:23 You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God? 24 For "THE NAME OF GOD IS BLASPHEMED AMONG THE GENTILES BECAUSE OF YOU," just as it is written.

4. Apotheosis (human deification)

Illustrations of Apotheosis

- "God is reproducing Himself after His own kind"
- "Christians will be resurrected on the God-plane"
- "There will be billions of God-beings in the resurrection"
- "Christians will become God as God is God"

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Apotheosis (human deification)

Is an insult to God's name and honor (Isa 42:8)

Isa 42:8 I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, Nor My praise to graven images.

Is a direct contradiction of divine revelation (Isa 43:10)

Isa 43:10 You are My witnesses," declares the LORD, "And My servant whom I have chosen, So that you may know and believe Me And understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, And there will be none after Me.

Is a misinterpretation of the doctrine of salvation (Matt 22:30)

Matt 22:30 For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.

Resurrected humans will be supernatural beings, not deities

We will inherit a sinless nature, immortality, glory and authority

We will not inherit God's unique attributes of deity (i.e., eternity, omnipresence, etc.)

We need to use words carefully to avoid inaccuracy and misunderstanding

“When insisting on good definitions from students, and especially when challenging a word that a student might have used because it was not the most precise one, I would often receive this retort: ‘It's only a matter of semantics. One word is as good as another.’ That retort is totally without merit. Definitions are very much a matter of semantics; therefore, one word is not necessarily as good as another. Accurate definitions have to be constructed with carefully chosen words. Sloppy formulation is never acceptable.” Charles Ryrie, Basic Theology, p.533

Part 3: Listen Up Israel (Deut 6:4-5)!

Deut 6:4 Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!

- DBL defines *ʾēlohîm* as: God, gods, an idol, mighty one, judge, great (intensity), ghost, heavenly beings, majestic one, mighty (things), etc.
- DBL defines *ʾē?ā?* as: one (1), first, once, one (united), each one, a certain one, only, etc.

Range of possible translations:

The LORD our God, the LORD is one or The LORD our God is one LORD; or

The LORD is our God, the LORD is one; or The LORD is our God, the LORD alone

Charles Ryrie, Basic Theology, p.51 “This last translation stresses the uniqueness of God more than unity, but it implies oneness by ruling out polytheism.”

The Shema affirms: (1) the covenant relationship of God to His people ("the Lord our God") and (2) the unity of God ("the Lord is one").

“While the primary assertion of v.4 is that there is only one true God, it is also asserted that this true God is Israel's God. The Israelites should acknowledge no other god.... There is only one Lord, and he alone is God. Furthermore, he is Israel's God, and they have entered into a covenant-treaty with him.” Expositor's Bible Commentary, s.v. Deut 6:4

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The Hebrew term for “God” (*ʾēlohîm*) is NOT a family term meaning more than one!

Swanson’s *Dictionary of Biblical Languages* says that “though the form is a grammatical plural, the meaning is singular and many sources think implies a majesty or stateliness”

“The plural ending is usually described as a plural of majesty and not intended as a true plural when used of God. This is seen in the fact that the noun *ʾēlohîm* is consistently used with singular verb forms and with adjectives and pronouns in the singular.” *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, s.v. 93c

The OT and NT clearly assert monotheism (Isa 44:6, 45:5, 1Cor 8:4)

- Isa 44:6 Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: ‘I am the first and I am the last, And there is no God besides Me.
- Isa 45:5 I am the LORD, and there is no other; Besides Me there is no God. I will gird you, though you have not known Me
- 1Cor 8:4 Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one.

Richard’s Second Rule: Don’t make claims based on Hebrew or Greek grammar if you don’t understand Hebrew or Greek grammar.

Deut 6:5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

Conclusion

God’s personal name is YHVH (commonly pronounced Yahweh)

We are not forbidden to use God’s name (e.g., hallelujah)

We are not required to Hebrew names exclusively (1Cor 1:3)

We should avoid euphemisms, religious titles, or personal misconduct

We need to use words carefully to avoid inaccuracy and misunderstanding

We must love our God totally and exclusively