

The Sacred Names:

What They Are,
How They Are Pronounced,
Why They Are Important

By Norman B. Willis

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Shemote (Exodus) 20:7

***7 "You shall not take the name of יהוה your Elohim
in vain, for יהוה will not hold him guiltless who
takes His name in vain.***

The Third Commandment

The Third Commandment is the commandment not to take our Creator's name in vain. We will look at the New King James Version here:

Shemote (Exodus) 20:7
7 "You shall not take the name of The Lord your God in vain, for The Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain."
NKJV

Most believers understand this to be a commandment not to use the Creator's name in an irreverent manner, and not to swear falsely in the Creator's name. These are clearly things our Creator does not want us to do. However, if we study the word 'vain', we can see that it implies other prohibitions as well.

The word 'vain' is Strong's OT #7723, 'shavv' שׁוּׁוּ. This word implies a prohibition against 'making His name desolate,' or allowing His name to 'lay in ruin.'

Strong's OT:7723 shav' (shawv); or shav (shav); from the same as OT:7722 in the sense of desolating; evil (as destructive), literally (ruin) or morally (especially guile); figuratively idolatry (as false, subjective), uselessness (as deceptive, objective; also adverbially, in vain):

When we look up the reference at Strong's OT 7722, we see that it refers to 'rushing over' something like a tempest, in such a way as to destroy it, or devastate it.

OT:7722 show' (sho); or (feminine) show'ah (sho-aw'); or sho'ah (sho-aw'); from an unused root meaning to rush over; a tempest; by implication, devastation.

When our Creator tells us not to take His name in vain, He is not only commanding us not to misuse His name, but He is also telling us not to let His name become devastated by allowing His name to 'lie in waste,' or by 'bringing His name to nothing.' However, this is what many people do (perhaps completely unintentionally), when they do not use our Creator's Hebrew name.

***Tehillim (Psalms) 91:14
14 "Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him; I will set him on high, because he has known My name."***

Psalms 91 tells us that there are rewards for knowing our Creator's name. He also tells us that He wants His true name made known. Indeed, He tells us that one of the reasons He raised up Pharaoh was just precisely so that His name would be declared in all the earth.

***Shemote (Exodus) 9:16
16 "But indeed for this purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth!"***

So then, if our Creator wants His name made known in all the earth, and if there are rewards for knowing and using our Creator's name, then what is our Creator's name?

Many believe our Creator's name is 'The Lord,' or 'The Lord God.' However, the Hebrew language does not support this translation. The first time the Creator's name is used is in Genesis 4:26, where it is spelled in Hebrew, Yod-Hay-Vav-Hay, or יהוה.

<p>Genesis 4:26 Then men began to call on the name of YHWH.</p>	<p>אָז הוֹחֵל לְקַרְא בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה?</p>
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Endless debates rage about the exact manner in which to pronounce our Creator's name. While there may always be disagreement on this issue as long as men live, the majority of scholars agree that the name יהוה is pronounced something similar either to 'Yahweh,' 'Yahuweh' or 'Yahueh'.

- Yod י pronounced like 'y', 'i' or 'ee'
- Hay ה pronounced like an 'h'
- Vav ו pronounced either as a 'v', a 'w' or a 'u', depending on context. Here it is as a 'u'.
- Hay ה pronounced like an 'eh'.

Other pronunciations exist, including Yahveh, Yehovah, Yahovah, Yahuwah and others, and it is difficult (if not impossible) to say which pronunciation is 'most' correct, since the ancient form of the Hebrew script did not use vowel points.

In the West, many people have learned to pronounce the Creator's name as 'Jehovah.' One can see how this pronunciation is derived, since it approximates the pronunciation Yehovah fairly well. However, there is not now, nor has there ever been any letter 'J' (or any 'j' sound) in the Hebrew language, so 'Jehovah' cannot really be His true Hebrew name.

Bemidbar (Numbers) 6:23-27

23 "Speak to Aharon and his sons, saying, 'This is the way you shall bless the children of Israel. Say to them:

24 "YHWH bless you and keep you;

25 YHWH make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you;

26 YHWH lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace."

27 "So they shall put My name on the children of Israel, and I will bless them."

YHWH tells us that His priests are to put His name on His people, and that He will bless them. Therefore, in order to receive His blessing, we need His name put upon us.

That blessings come from having His name put upon us may be one reason why Israelites used His name in everyday greetings and blessings in the days before the Exile to Babylon.

Ruth 2:4

4 Now behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said to the reapers, "YHWH be with you!" And they answered him, "YHWH bless you!"

The prophet Joel also tells us that whosoever calls upon the name of YHWH shall be saved.

Yoel (Joel) 2:32

32 And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of YHWH shall be saved.

In many ways, and in many places, Scripture tells us that YHWH wants us to know His name, to call on His name, and to make His name known. However, Israel has suffered many invasions and deportations over the years, and some of Israel's tormentors have mocked the Israelite practice of pronouncing YHWH's name, as is commanded in the Torah.

In order to keep the gentile nations from blaspheming YHWH's name, the Jewish rabbis enacted what are sometimes called the 'Fence Laws'. These Fence Laws are additional laws that the rabbis have put on the people to keep them from breaking the Torah. Ironically, however, the result is that sometimes they end up leading the people to break the Torah.

For example, YHWH tells us that He wants us to speak and declare His name. However, in order to keep people from blaspheming His name, the rabbis declared that only priests could declare His name, and even then only within the confines of the Temple (e.g. Talmud Tractate Yoma 69b:7). Additionally, in the Second Temple times (Yeshua's time) the established ruling was that whosoever would speak YHWH's name aloud should be put to death (Talmud Tractate Sanhedrin 56a:28). Thus, by adding to the Torah, the rabbis actually caused YHWH's people Israel to break the Torah.

In order to keep the people from speaking YHWH's name, the rabbis decreed that the term 'Adonai' is to be substituted for the Divine Name (e.g., Talmud Tractate Kiddushin 71a:21-24). Additionally, the rabbis also teach the use of the substitute term 'HaShem' (which means simply, "the Name"). However, while Adonai and HaShem do refer to YHWH, neither of these are His name, and so neither of these fulfills the commands to speak His name, and to put His name on His people. It also goes contrary to His desire that His name be put on His people, so He might bless them.

<p>Shemote (Exodus) 20:7 7 "You shall not take the name of יהוה your Elohim in vain, for יהוה will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain."</p>	<p>(7) לֹא תִשָּׂא אֶת שֵׁם יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשׁוּא כִּי לֹא יִנְקֶה יְהוָה אֶת אֲשֶׁר יִשָּׂא אֶת שְׁמוֹ לְשׁוּא</p>
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It is important for us to remember that the Third Commandment does not command us to hide His name, to keep others from blaspheming it. Instead, it tells us that YHWH will not hold guiltless the man who takes His name in vain (or makes it lie desolate).

However, the rabbis are not the only ones who have allowed YHWH's name to lie desolate. In most English versions of the Tanach (the 'Old' Testament), the name 'Lord' has been substituted for YHWH's name 6,823 times. Not only does this break YHWH's intention that we make His name known in all the earth, but it also desecrates His name. This is because the name 'Lord' is actually the English translation of the name of the Canaanite deity "Ba'al" (בַּעַל).

Strong's OT:1167 ba'al (bah'-al); from OT:1166; a master; hence, a husband, or (figuratively) owner (often used with another noun in modifications of this latter sense):

KJV - archer, babbler, bird, captain, chief man, confederate, have to do, dreamer, those to whom it is due, furious, those that are given to it, great, hairy, he that hath it, have, horseman, husband, lord, man, married, master, person, sworn, they of.

In Hosea 2:16-17, YHWH tells the Ephraimites that they will call Him "Ba'al" (Lord), but that He will take the name "Ba'al" (Lord) out of their mouths.

<p>Hosea 2:16-17 16 "And it shall be, in that day," says YHWH, "That you will call Me 'My Man,' and no longer call Me 'My Ba'al (Husband, Lord),' 17 For I will take from her mouth the names of the Ba'als, and they shall be remembered by their names no more."</p>	<p>(18) וְהָיָה בַיּוֹם הַהוּא נֶאֱמַר יְהוָה תִּקְרָאֵי אִישִׁי וְלֹא תִקְרָאֵי לִי עוֹד בְּעַלְי : (19) וְהִסַּרְתִּי אֶת שְׁמוֹת הַבְּעָלִים מִפִּיהָ וְלֹא יִזְכְּרוּ עוֹד בְּשֵׁמָם</p>
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Those who call YHWH "The Lord" are actually calling Him by the name of Ba'al!

In light of the fact that most English versions translate YHWH's name as 'The Lord,' and since 'Lord' is the English name for Ba'al (בַּעַל), the story of Elijah and his showdown with the Priests of Ba'al (the priests of 'The Lord') takes on a whole new significance.

<p>1 Kings 18:21-22 21 And Elijah came to all the people, and said, "How long will you falter between two opinions? If YHWH is Elohim, follow Him; but if Ba'al, follow him." But the people answered him not a word.</p> <p>22 Then Elijah said to the people, "I alone am left a prophet of YHWH; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men.</p>	<p>(21) וַיִּגֶשׁ אֱלֹהֵהוּ אֶל כָּל הָעָם וַיֹּאמֶר עַד מַתִּי אַתֶּם פֹּסְחִים עַל שְׁתֵּי הַסַּעֲפִים אִם יְהוָה הָאֱלֹהִים לָכֵן אֲחַרְיוּ וְאִם הַבַּעַל לָכֵן אֲחַרְיוּ וְלֹא עָנּוּ הָעָם אֶתֹו דְבָר׃</p> <p>(22) וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהֵהוּ אֶל הָעָם אֲנִי נֹתַרְתִּי נְבִיא לַיהוָה לְבַדִּי וְנְבִיאֵי הַבַּעַל אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת וְחַמְשִׁים אִישׁ</p>
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One of Elijah's rebukes to the people was that they were calling YHWH by the name Ba'al/Lord. Yes, most English versions used by the House of Ephraim today still render YHWH's name as 'The Lord'! Thus they call YHWH by the name of a false Canaanite deity, which is really a form of idolatry.

Shemote (Exodus) 20:3
3 "You shall have no other elohim before Me."

Some people believe that it makes no difference what we call YHWH. Some believe we can call Him YHWH, the Lord, Allah, the Lord God, or what-have you, and that it is all the same name. However, if it truly makes no difference what we call YHWH, then why would it not be OK to call Him Satan?

Ma'asim (Acts) 4:12
12 Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

If there is only one name under heaven by which men may be saved, then why would there be more than one name of the Father? Further, if there is only one name under heaven by which men must be saved, then what is that name?

In the West, our Messiah is commonly called 'Jesus Christ.' However, the title 'Christ' is not a Hebrew word. Rather, it derives from the name of 'Krishna,' the Hindu god of war. The Greeks adopted 'Krishna' into their pantheon, and they later used the term 'Christos' to refer to the Messiah. However, even if Greeks and other westerners do not see any significant difference between the terms Krishna and Messiah, this does not mean that the terms ever became synonymous in Hebraic thought.

Westerners tend to place little emphasis on words and their sounds, believing that a rose (by any other name) smells just as sweet. However, in Hebraic thought, words and their sounds are extremely important, for it was through words that the Creator called the world into being.

Mattai (Matthew) 4:4

4 But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of Elohim (G-d).'"

The earth does not exist except for the words of the Almighty, and men do not live by their own will. Rather, each man's existence hangs on Elohim's words. Thus, a Hebrew knows that words and their sounds are vital.

As we learned earlier, there is no letter 'J' (or any 'J' sound) in the Hebrew language. Because of this, the Messiah's actual name in Hebrew cannot be 'Jesus.' So, if we love our Messiah, then we should want to honor Him, by learning to speak His name properly. Also, we should want to call on the one true name under Heaven by which men must be saved.

Many people know that the Messiah's name is actually the same as that of Joshua, the son of Nun. Joshua's name (יהושוע) was originally pronounced 'Yehoshua' (or some say 'Yahushua') in Hebrew. However, much historical, archaeological and Scriptural evidence indicate that our Messiah was called by the popular short-form of this name in the first century. That short form was pronounced 'Yeshua' ("Yeh-Shoo-ah" or "Yeh-shoo-ah"). The way this short-form ('Yeshua') was arrived at is as follows.

Joshua the son of Nun was originally named 'Hosea' (Numbers 13:8, 16). This name means 'Salvation.' Moshe HaNavi (Moses the Prophet) then renamed Hoshea as 'Yah-Hoshea' (Yehoshua, or Joshua), which means 'YHWH shall save His people.' It also means, "The Salvation of YHWH," or "YHWH saves."

In the Tanach (the 'Old' Covenant), Yehoshua's name is spelled twice in its full six-letter form (יהושוע). When spelled in this full six letter form, this name is properly pronounced 'Yehoshua' (or some say "Yahushua"). However, since Hebrews treasure economy of effort, they later abbreviated this name.

The six-letter form Yehoshua (יהושוע) was shortened from six letters to five (יהושע). Even though the second Vav (ו) was dropped, the pronunciation remained the same, because vowel points simulating the sound of the second Vav (ו) were added to the letter Shin (ש). Thus, יהושוע and יהושע are both pronounced exactly the same way: Yehoshua. However, this was only the first of the changes our Messiah's name went through.

In Hebraic thought, names beginning in יה ('Yah') or יהו ('Yahu' or 'Yeho') are considered to contain the Divine Name. In keeping with their practice of hiding YHWH's name, the rabbis also ruled that any name beginning in יה or יהו should have all but the beginning Yod (י) removed.

When the rabbis went to compress the name Yehoshua (יהושוע), they took out the הו, but they also restored the second Vav (ו). Thus, while the front end was shortened from יהו to י, the back end was restored to שוע (meaning 'saves').

Due to this elaborate progression of changes, the name 'Joshua' is spelled in various ways. Beginning with a six letter form (יהושוע), it then progressed to a shorter five letter form (יהושע), and ultimately ended up being spelled in the shortened four letter form (ישוע) that was commonly used after the Babylonian Exile. Thus, the Messiah's name went from:

יהושוע = Yehoshua
 יהושע = Yehoshua
 יהושע = Yehoshua
 יהושוע = Yehoshua
 ישוע = Yeshua

Such post-Babylonian books as Nehemiah and Ezra record that this shortened four letter form (ישוע) was used during the Second Temple Period (in which the Messiah lived):

<p>Nehemiah 8:16-17 17 So the whole assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and sat under the booths; for since the days of Yeshua the son of Nun until that day the children of Israel had not done so.</p>	<p>(17) וַיַּעֲשׂוּ כָּל הַקְּהָל הַשְּׂבִיִּים מִן הַשְּׂבִי סִכּוֹת וַיֵּשְׁבוּ בַּסִּכּוֹת כִּי לֹא עָשׂוּ מִיָּמֵי יֵשׁוּעַ בֶּן נֹון כִּן בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל עַד הַיּוֹם</p>
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However, the Messiah’s name is also spelled in its five-letter form in Ezra and Nehemiah, so both forms were used concurrently at the time when these books were written, over 400 years before Yeshua. Nonetheless, the shortened four-letter form (ישוע) is the one used in the Aramaic Peshitta.

Beyond restoring the true names of the Creator and Son there are also other terms it is important to know. The English term for our Creator is ‘God.’ While this term is almost universally understood in English, there is a problem, in that this term is not the original Hebrew term, but is the name of a Germanic sun deity, “Gott.”

In Hebrew, the word for ‘God’ is pronounced “Elohim” (אלהים). There are also legitimate variations of this title, including simply “El” (אל).

In Hebrew, the term Elohim (אלהים) means “The Strong Ones,” or “The Mighty Ones.” In Hebrew, this word is a plural (since words that end in –ים are usually masculine plurals). We explain this concept in more detail in the study “Manifestation of Elohim.”

Finally, it can also be helpful to understand more about the Hebraic term for the Laws of Moses.

In Hebrew, the Laws of Moses are called the ‘Torah’ (תורה). Although the commandments of our Creator do carry the weight of law, the term תורה means not so much ‘Law’ (per se) as it means ‘Instructions.’ In this case, it means, ‘The Bride’s Instructions.’

The word Torah (תורה) is related to the verb, 'to shoot.'

Strong’s OT:8451 towrah (to-law’); or torah (to-law’); from OT:3384; a precept or statute, especially the Decalogue or Pentateuch: KJV - law.

Here is the reference to Strong’s OT 3384:

Strong’s OT:3384 yarah (yaw-law’); or (2 Chronicles 26:15) yara’ (yaw-law’); a primitive root; properly, to flow as water (i.e. to rain); transitively, to lay or throw (especially an arrow, i.e. to shoot); figuratively, to point out (as if by aiming the finger), to teach:

KJV - (+)archer, cast, direct, inform, instruct, lay, shew, shoot, teach (-ering,-), through.

The idea of Torah (תורה) has less to do with observing a set body of rules and regulations (do's and don'ts), as it has to do with living one's life in the right way. It speaks of improving one's abilities as a servant of the Most High, so as to be able to 'hit the mark' (as an archer might be expected to do).

While it is correct to translate the word Torah (תורה) as 'Law' (in that the Creator's Words do carry the weight of Law), the word Torah more accurately translates as the English word 'Instruction' (or perhaps, 'Training').

***Mishle (Proverbs) 22:6
6 Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.***

Parents instinctively understand the importance of raising up their children in the way they should go, so that when they are old, they will not depart from it. They also understand the importance of training their children to be wise. This is much more than just teaching one's children to obey set body of do's and don'ts, as codified in a book of law. Rather, the point is to help one's children to become wiser, sharper adults who will honor both parents and the Creator.

Finally, we should mention that while it is important to speak and teach in all the truth we have been given, it is also important not to judge others who have not had these same truths revealed to them.

Many people have been saved while calling on the wrong names, and the fruits of the Spirit have been made manifest in their lives. We should be careful not to judge our Father's other servants, lest we fall into judgment.

May true the name of יהוה of Hosts be restored among His people Israel, and may it be glorified and magnified among all the nations of the world.

In the name of ישוע our Messiah,

Amein.

<p>Exodus 3:15 15 Moreover Elohim said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: 'YHWH Elohim of your fathers, the Elohim of Abraham, the Elohim of Isaac, and the Elohim of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is My name forever, and this is My memorial to all generations.'</p>	<p>(15) וַיֹּאמֶר עוֹד אֱלֹהִים אֶל מֹשֶׁה כֹּה תֹאמַר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם אֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק וְאֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב שְׁלַחְנִי אֵלֵיכֶם אֲזַה שְׁמִי לְעֹלָם וְזֶה זְכוֹרִי לְדֹר דָּר</p>
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