

Maybe the question isn't "who", but "why"!

When I first began writing this study in 2006, I asked and I've heard others ask, "**Who** changed God's name?" I've come to realize, however, that no one changed His name, per sé. We simply stopped using it, stopped proclaiming it, and stopped acknowledging that YHWH, the God of Israel, was/is any different from any of the thousands of other "gods".

That disturbed me. Then, as I poured over several books and websites about the names of God, I noticed something that disturbed me even more. It seems that no one's asking, "**Why** don't we use God's name?" After all, if knowing His name(s) is important enough for hundreds of books and websites to be published on the subject, why haven't we been using, or at least teaching, His name(s) all along—especially since the birth of the Church?

Why do we stubbornly persist in using such inferior titles as "God" and "Lord" when we know those aren't His name? And, why isn't anyone else asking...

Why did we stop using GOD's name?

If you ask Jews why they don't use God's name, the first thing you'll find is that most, if not all, of them use "G-d" when writing about Him and say, "*Hashem*" (meaning "*the name*") when talking about Him. As for the answer, itself, while there seem to be many, they really are all variations of the same answer: **reverence**.

Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain:
or the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.
(Deuteronomy 5:11 KJV)

I suppose we can all **claim** "reverence" when it comes to not using GOD's proper name, but for Jews it really **is**. Although they've substituted "Adonai" for the original name ("יהוה"), they believe they're breaking the above commandment if they even use the name "Adonai" in any context outside of worship, praise, or prayer. Many are so strict in their observance of this teaching that, if they do happen to say the name "Adonai", they immediately follow it with statements such as: "*Bless His holy name,*" or "*His name be praised forever!*"

I believe it's more about **unbelief** than reverence!

That's a bold statement to make, I know, and one that might evoke much negative emotion among fellow believers. Nevertheless, all of the proofs about YHWH's earnest desire for everyone to know His name begs the question, "Where did we get the idea that we should **not** use it?"

After much prayerful contemplation, I wonder if it might be that we became more aware of our own unworthiness than about **His** unlimited capacity to love and graciously forgive us.

Although Israel has been chosen by YHWH, they have a long and very sad history of not believing Him, of not trusting Him to be everything He told them He wanted to be to them.

- They wandered in the desert for 40 years because of **unbelief**.
- Their **unbelief** prompted them to repeatedly seek out other gods of stone, clay, and wood that they could see and touch.



- **Unbelief** in YHWH's faithfulness compelled them to insist on an earthly king like the other nations had.
- And, **unbelief** prevented them from seeing their promised Messiah in their midst because He didn't look and act the way they expected Him to!

While the Jews look(ed) forward to the Messiah's coming and believ(ed), at least in part, in the promise of His far-reaching redemption, perhaps they didn't believe . . . **enough**. Those who did are the ones whose testimonies we remember: Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (Israel), Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Rahab, Caleb, Gideon, Deborah, Samson, Esther, Samuel, David, and all the prophets. As the writer of Hebrews added:

- ³² And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, about David and Samuel and the prophets,
³³ who **through faith** conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions,
³⁴ quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies.
³⁵ Women received back their dead, raised to life again. There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection.
³⁶ Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment.
³⁷ They were put to death by stoning; they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated--
³⁸ the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground.
³⁹ These were all commended for their **faith**, yet none of them received what had been promised,
⁴⁰ since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.

(Hebrews 11:32-40 *emphasis added*)

YHWH didn't require—or even ask for—perfection from Israel. He knew that was impossible apart from Him. His Word tells us what He required.

My **sacrifice**, O God, is a **broken spirit**; a broken and **contrite heart** you, God, will not despise.
 (Psalm 51:17 *emphasis added*)

For this is what the high and exalted One says—he who lives forever, whose **name is holy**: "**I live** in a high and holy place, but also **with** the one who is **contrite** and **lowly in spirit**, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite."
 (Isaiah 57:15 *emphasis added*)

"Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?" declares the LORD. "These are the ones I **look** on with **favor**: those who are **humble** and **contrite in spirit**, and who tremble at my word."
 (Isaiah 66:2 *emphasis added*)



Contrite means "to feel or express pain or sorrow for sins or offences; remorseful." Notice the above verses tell us that YHWH **favors** and **resides with** those who are humble ("lowly in spirit") and remorseful ("broken spirit"). Remember, too, that He **chose Israel** for His **name to dwell**, not because they were great—and certainly not because they were perfect, as their history clearly indicates—but because He **loved them** and **wanted to**.

The evidence of YHWH's extravagant and unreasonable love, His faithfulness to His promises, and His faithfulness toward His chosen people—even toward David, an adulterous murderer—is overwhelming and indisputable. With all this evidence and almost 200 references to His desire to have His name known, **unbelief** appears to be a more than plausible explanation for them being afraid to use His name.

What's our excuse as Christians?

Almost 2000 years ago on Calvary, Jesus Christ uttered, "It is finished!" In the original Greek—the language in which the New Testament was written—this word was *tetelestai*, an accounting term that means "paid in full." Jesus had accomplished what He had come to do. He came to pay the debt once and for all time that had accumulated against us because of sin.

We know, too, that making Father's name known was foremost on His mind only hours before going to the Cross.

So, what's **our** excuse for stubbornly continuing to reduce Him to "God" or "Lord"? Why have we permitted Israel's unbelief to infiltrate the Church and shape our doctrines?

- True, we are commanded to not use His name in vain. However, since GOD's Word tells us many times to "call upon His **name**," "let His **name** be exalted," and "praise His holy **name**," then obviously He approves of us using it in a moment of prayerful meditation or exuberant praise.
- True, we are commanded to not **profane** His name among us. But, have we really considered just **how** we might "profane" His name? If using it in a moment of praise is not profaning His name, could it be instead by how we **live** our lives before a watching world? What happens if it's discovered that someone who claims the name of Christ filed a false expense report, lied on a job application, or took something that didn't belong to them? Would we not be profaning YHWH's name whenever we do something that prompts an unbeliever to sneer about us, "And s/he **claims to be a Christian**"?

Based on the foregoing, it would appear that profaning His name or using His name in vain is **not** about **speaking** His name, but about how we **live it!** He has lovingly **placed His name on us**; it's up to us to **live in it**.

Christianity's unique claim that sets it apart from all other world religions is that Christ's death on Calvary 2000 years ago **fully paid** our **sin debt**. Christianity says we can't and don't have to do anything to save ourselves, but have been made **righteous by His blood** (Ephesians 2:8, 2 Timothy 1:9), that we are **adopted** into YHWH's family (Romans 8:23), and are **joint heirs** with Jesus Christ (Romans 8:17, Ephesians 3:6).

Logically, then, Christ's sacrifice makes us **holy** and **acceptable vessels** for YHWH's **name to inhabit**.

Therefore, I suggest, once again, that the most logical explanation for clinging to a defense so weak as "reverencing" His holy name is **unbelief**. We know He is an all-loving, merciful GOD! We know He forgives our sins when we come to Him in repentance and humility. What we may not be sure of is if we're "contrite **enough**" to qualify for His forgiveness. What about



those sins that we keep committing and keep confessing? Surely, there must be a limit to how often He will forgive **those!**

Jesus told Peter that he must forgive "seventy times seventy." That's **490 times**. And that's for the **same** offense, not different ones. Of course, we know that was merely Jesus' way of demonstrating that there's no limit to the number of times we should forgive because there's no limit to the number of times YHWH forgives us.

So then . . . if we still believe we're **unworthy** to use YHWH's name . . . if we still think we are reverencing the Most High GOD when we persist in calling Him the same name as all the gods who are **not** "GOD" . . . if we still **question** what the Bible says YHWH wants in favor of our own church traditions and training . . . the only logical conclusion is **unbelief!**

And interestingly, **that** would disqualify us and make us unfit to speak His name!

And **without faith** it is impossible to please God,
because anyone who comes to him must believe that
he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.
(Hebrews 11:6 *emphasis added*)

Can we truly love and worship a GOD we don't trust?

That may be the most absurd question I've ever asked! Of course we can't! **Worship**—true worship "in spirit and in truth"—is grounded in **love**. And **love**—true love—requires **trust**.

- Do you trust His abounding love enough to place all your hopes and fears in His hands, trusting Him, and Him alone, for the consequences?
- Do you trust His inexplicable grace enough to let Him make you worthy instead of you working for your own righteousness?
- Do you trust His unwavering evidentiary promises concerning that abounding love and inexplicable grace?

If you do—if you **really** do—then speaking His name in worship and in prayer should be as natural as drawing your next breath. If you do—if you **really** do—then praising Him, by name, should be as instinctual as boasting about your child's outstanding school record!

It's obvious that YHWH, our Most High GOD, cares deeply about how, when, where, and why His name is used. As Christians, shouldn't **we** care just as much as He does about honoring and proclaiming His name before a watching world...?

Is GOD's actual name really **that** important?

A name is more than just a label; it is an **identity**. When people think of your specific name, they get a mental picture of you (of your face, your eyes, your smile) and of your attributes. What do I mean by "attributes"? I mean those characteristics, mannerisms, and habits that distinguish you from others—whether you're kind or hateful, generous or stingy, encouraging or discouraging, arrogant or humble, strong or weak, able-bodied or disabled. They might also include your vocation or hobby, such as loving to cook, or being a carpenter or welder, a loving mom, a singer or student or athlete.

In the Bible, a name is more than a means of identifying oneself. It is the distinct personality of a persisting entity—an exactness—that tells us everything we need to know about that person. For example...



- The name Jacob means "*overthrower*" or "*deceiver*". "Esau said, 'Isn't he rightly named Jacob? This is the second time he has taken advantage of me:'" (Genesis 27:36a)
- Later, God changed Jacob's name to Israel, which means "*princely contender with God*" or "*God fought for*". Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome." (Genesis 32:28)
- The name Nabal means "*fool*". "Please pay no attention, my lord, to that wicked man Nabal. He is just like his name—his name means Fool, and folly goes with him." (1 Samuel 25:25a)
- And, let's not forget about the man Jabez whose name means "*pain*" or "*sorrowful*". "Jabez was more honorable than his brothers. His mother had named him Jabez, saying, 'I gave birth to him in pain.'" (1 Chronicles 4:9)

The Bible makes it clear that names are important to a person's identity; they represent that person's authority and all that they stand for. Should we think it would be any less so when the Almighty reveals **His** personal name and attributes to us?

The Messiah has a name.

- **Hebrew:** יהוהשׁוּעַ (pronounced "Yeh-hah shoo'ah" or "Yeh-shoo'ah") meaning "YHWH (יהוה) is Your Salvation"
Although this was His Hebrew name, it was not the name by which He was known when He walked on earth, as it was not the "common" language of the day.
- **Aramaic:** ܝܫܘܥ [Yêšû] (pronounced "Yá-soo")
Aramaic was the language spoken and understood by most of the people of that region at the time, so this was the name by which most people knew Him.
- **Greek:** Ἰησοῦς (pronounced "Há-soos")
The New Testament writers wrote the Gospels and Epistles in Koine Greek because it was the official business language of the Roman Empire at that time. Thus, this is the name they used when writing about Jesus. Contrary to the assertions of the "Sacred Name Movement" (of which I am **not** a part), this form of the name is not of pagan origin nor does it have any connection to the Greek god Zeus. It was/is as accurate a transliteration of the Hebrew/ Aramaic name as is linguistically possible.
- **Latin/English:** Jesus (pronounced "Há-soos" in Latin and "Jee-zus" in English).
Again, the Latin rendering was/is as accurate a transliteration from Hebrew/Aramaic to Greek to Latin as is linguistically possible.

You and I have distinctive names and attributes.

We each have an official birth (or baptismal) name. When combined with our middle name and surname (usually paternal, sometimes also maternal), it becomes the distinctive name that identifies us. That name represents our family's and our own reputation, lineage, and history.

So, also, the GOD of the Bible has revealed Himself by a distinctive name. Obviously, the name and titles GOD uses for Himself in the Bible reveal His characteristics—**who** He is, **what** He is, what He **does**, what He **can do**, and who or what He **wants to be** in our lives,



both individually and collectively. When the Bible uses the phrase "the **name** of God" or "in the **name** of the Lord", it refers to His **total** person—all that He is.

LORD, our Lord, how **majestic** is your **name**
in all the earth! You have set your glory in the heavens.
(Psalm 8:1 *emphasis added*)

I believe a blessing is lost when we allow a **title** ("God" or "Lord") to replace the **actual name** of the GOD of the Bible.

So, should I start calling Him something other than "God"?

Does this mean we should only use GOD's precise name(s) that He revealed to us in the Bible when we pray to Him or talk about Him? No, I don't think so. Or at least, that's not the point I'm trying to make here.

The point of this book is not to destroy long-established church doctrine or traditions. It isn't to persuade you or "guilt" you into adopting a new custom in your prayers and worship.

My objective is the same as His was when He first started expressing Himself to us in all His varied, and yet seemingly contradictory, aspects. Through His names, we learn that He is both simple and complex . . . He is all-powerful and yet capable of being wounded or hurt . . . He can beautifully create and utterly destroy . . . He is both the shepherd and the Lamb . . . He shows no favoritism but strongly desires intimacy . . . He is incomprehensible (beyond understanding) and yet **knowable!**

I don't believe He told Moses His name and revealed His many attributes through diverse titles just so we would **address** Him by those names. Rather, He revealed His name and characteristics to us to help us know Him better, to learn to trust Him, and to draw near to Him.

As you learn about His name and characteristics, consider inserting His original names in place of the Anglicized words during your personal Bible study and devotions. This will not only improve your understanding of Him, but will aid you in gaining greater insight into the full intent(s) of the passage(s). Gradually, He will become bigger . . . more majestic . . . more holy . . . more able to meet every one of your deepest needs . . . and more worthy of your heartfelt devotion and worship.

"Hallowed be Thy name...?"

"Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name..." (Matthew 6:9 KJV) What does that mean? It doesn't mean we should reverence the **words** "God" or "Lord". Rather, it's about the **name** behind the words "God" and "Lord" . . . and about the **GOD** behind those names. The better you know Him by the name and attributes He's revealed to us, then whatever name or title you use will take on a much more significant meaning.

Then, you'll know—and **He** will know—regardless of the name/title you use, that you're talking about/to **the** GOD who is worthy of all **praise, glory, honor, and power** and whose **name** is **awesome** and **glorious!**

Stand up and **praise** the **LORD** your **God**, who is from everlasting to everlasting.
Blessed be your **glorious name**, and may it be **exalted** above all blessing and praise.
(Nehemiah 9:5b *emphasis added*)



"You are **worthy**, our Lord and God, to receive **glory** and **honor** and **power**, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."
(Revelation 4:11 *emphasis added*)

Meditation

What does GOD think about you?

The Most High GOD does not **need** us in order to be fulfilled. He doesn't need our approval or anything else outside of Himself to fulfill Him or give His life purpose. GOD's glory is intrinsic and as essential to His Being as light and heat are to the sun. His glory is infinite, which means no one can add to it or subtract from it. It is the only part of Himself which He will not part with or share (Isaiah 48:11).

All of His thoughts and feelings toward us are rooted in His holy nature and are always expressed perfectly. His love, joy, sorrow, and peace are undivided, uncreated, unaffected, and unaltered by anything outside of Himself. He never has a bad day, but all of His emotions are perfect expressions of His perfect Being.

He is the eternal, self-existent, thrice-holy GOD who shines brighter than the noonday sun and who, as Pastor John Piper said, simply "*delights in being God.*"¹ He is the full expression of **love** and of **life**!

He craves a relationship with us, not to meet **His** needs, but to lavish His unquenchable love on us and meet **our needs** simply because He delights in the objects of His love!

...as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride,
so will your God **rejoice over you**.
(Isaiah 62:5b *emphasis added*)

He brought me out into a spacious place;
he rescued me **because he delighted** in me.
(Psalm 18:19 *emphasis added*)

In other words, GOD didn't save you or me because of our decency, good works, good attitude, or whatever you and I might think makes us desirable. Rather, He saved us to bring glory to Himself, to appease His justice, and to demonstrate His sovereignty. But mostly, He saved you and me simply because He loves us!

Yet the LORD **longs to be gracious** to you;
therefore he will rise up to show you compassion.
For the LORD is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him!
(Isaiah 30:18 *emphasis added*)

As I heard one pastor say one time, if GOD had a refrigerator, your picture would be on it. If He had a wallet, your photo would be in it. He doesn't say, "I love you *if*" or "I love you *because*." He says, "I love you—period!" In Deuteronomy 7:6 He calls you His "**treasured** possession," and Psalm 17:8



says you are "the **apple** of His eye!" Whenever you want to talk, He listens. He can live anywhere in the universe, and He **chose your heart!**

- 17 How precious to me are your thoughts, God! How vast is the sum of them!
18 Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand--when I awake, I am still with you.
(Psalm 139:17-18)

"I have loved you with an **everlasting love**;
I have drawn you with **unfailing kindness**."
(Jeremiah 31:3b *emphasis added*)

You can't make GOD stop loving you because His love is not based on what you do, but on **who He is**.

- 35 **Who shall separate** us from the **love of Christ**? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?
38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, **nor any** powers,
39 neither height nor depth, **nor anything else** in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.
(Romans 8:35, 38-39 *emphasis added*)

"Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my **unfailing love** for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed," says the LORD, who has compassion on you.
(Isaiah 54:10 *emphasis added*)

Who is **He** to you?

Is He El Elyon, GOD Most High . . . is He YHWH Jireh, the Lord Will Provide . . . YHWH Rohi, your Shepherd . . . YHWH Rapha, your Healer . . . YHWH Tsid'ke-nu, your Righteousness?

"The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out the **name** of that person from the book of life, but will **acknowledge that name** before my Father and his angels."
(Revelation 3:5 *emphasis added*)

GOD knows each of us by name. If Christ is going to acknowledge our names before the Father, **shouldn't we know His name too...?**

¹ Piper, John. *The Pleasures of God – God's Delight in Being God*, © 1991, 2000 by Desiring God Foundation.

This work is intended for devotional purposes only and does not insist on the use of certain names of GOD as a point of doctrine or fidelity to Scripture.

