

What is His Name?  
Exodus 3:9-15  
(Grace – May 30, 2010)

## I. Introduction

*“Look! The cry of the people of Israel has reached me, and I have seen how harshly the Egyptians abuse them. 10 Now go, for I am sending you to Pharaoh. You must lead my people Israel out of Egypt.’ 11 But Moses protested to God, ‘Who am I to appear before Pharaoh? Who am I to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt?’ 12 God answered, ‘I will be with you. And this is your sign that I am the one who has sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God at this very mountain.’ 13 But Moses protested, ‘If I go to the people of Israel and tell them, ‘The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,’ they will ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what should I tell them?’ 14 God replied to Moses, ‘I Am Who I Am. Say this to the people of Israel: I Am has sent me to you.’ 15 God also said to Moses, ‘Say this to the people of Israel: Yahweh, the God of your ancestors—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you. **This is my eternal name, my name to remember for all generations.**” (Exodus 3:9-15, NLT)*

God has graciously chosen to reveal His **Name**, which in turn reveals His character through His acts and deeds to the world, in Scripture.

Through the ancient Hebrew Patriarchs, through the great deliverance God brought about through Moses, through the oracles and admonitions of the Hebrew prophets, and most especially through the manifestation of His Messiah, Jesus: in all these ways God has revealed His Name.

In fact, the Scriptures make it clear that the name of Yeshua (Jesus) is so vital to our correct grasp of reality that without it we are literally lost, since we are told *“There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other **name** under heaven by which we must be saved.”* (Acts 4:12, NLT)

Psalms 148:13 says, *“Let them all praise the name of the Lord. For his name is very great; his glory towers over the earth and heaven!”* (NLT)

In the Old Testament, a name was not only identification, but an **identity** as well. Many times a special meaning was attached to the name.

Names had, among other purposes, an explanatory purpose. For example, Nabal, whose name means “fool,” is the target of Abigail’s explanation to David: *“For as his name is, so is he; Nabal is his name, and folly is with him.”* (1Samuel 25:25)

Throughout Scripture God **reveals** Himself to us through His names. When we study the names that God has revealed to us in the Bible, we will better understand who He really is. The meanings of God’s names reveal the central personality and nature of the One who bears them.

Look at how Jesus teaches us to pray. How does it begin? *“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your **name**.”* (Matthew 6:9, NIV)

To hallow a thing is to make it holy or to set it apart to be exalted as being worthy of absolute devotion. To hallow the name of God is to regard Him with **complete** devotion and loving admiration.

*“May your glorious name be praised! May it be exalted above all blessing and praise!”*  
(Nehemiah 9:5, NLT)

God's name is of the utmost importance; therefore we ought to hold it in high regard and meditate on its significance in our minds and hearts.

The Scriptures are clear about this: *“...everyone who calls on the **name** of the Lord will be saved.”* (Acts 2:21, NIV)

How can you call on His name if you do not know what it is? It is not just the name – it is the characteristic of God that is described by the name.

Do you know His name?

The name of the Lord doesn't just speak about being saved from hell. He has revealed Himself to us through many names.

Do you need deliverance from an illness or disease? Then call on the name of YHVH (Adonai) Rapha – the Lord who heals.

I'll explain this in more detail later, but the Jews substitute Yahweh with Adonai (my Lord), not Jehovah, which is what you often hear.

Do you need deliverance from poverty? Then call on the name of Adonai Jireh – the Lord who provides.

Do you need deliverance from your sin? Then call on the name of Adonai Mekoddishkem – The Lord who sanctifies you.

It is not that you need to remember the exact Hebrew pronunciation, but you do need to know who He is!

Moses knew how important the name of God was. If he was going to go back to the Israelite leaders and declare that he had seen God and this God was going to deliver (save) them from the bondage of Egypt, he needed to be able to explain which God he was talking about and what this God could do.

Look at our passage again: *“But Moses protested, ‘If I go to the people of Israel and tell them, ‘The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,’ they will ask me, ‘**What is his name?**’ Then what*

*should I tell them?’ 14 God replied to Moses, ‘I Am Who I Am. Say this to the people of Israel: I Am has sent me to you.’ 15 ...This is my eternal name, my name to remember for all generations.” (Exodus 3:13-15, NLT)*

It is this specific name that I want to look at today, but over future messages I want to look at a number of God’s names and what they mean in our day-to-day lives.

## II. The Sacred Name

In the *Tanakh* (The Jewish Scriptures or what we call the Old Testament), **YHVH** (pronounced by Christians Yahweh) is the personal name of God and His most frequent designation, occurring over 6,800 times.

This is the Indescribable Name or Unutterable Name of the God of Israel.

Because it is composed from the four Hebrew letters Yod, Hey, Vav, and Hey, it is also referred to as the “Tetragrammaton,” which simply means “the four letters.”

When God commissioned Moses to be Israel's liberator from the bondage of Pharaoh's Egypt, Moses asked for God's Name in order to validate his God-given role to the children of Israel. God simply answered Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.”

This phrase derives from the first person form of the verb *hayah*: “I will be,” and indicates a connection between the Name YHVH and being itself.

YHVH is the **Source** of all being. He is the necessary Being. Everything else derives existence from Him.

The name YHVH also reflects the utter transcendence of God. This means that God is above and independent of the material universe. God needs absolutely nothing to exist. He is who He is.

We, on the other hand, could not exist without Him.

In Himself, God is ultimately **beyond** all descriptions or attributes of language. That which has been revealed to us is but a fraction of who He actually is.

Listen to Ezekiel as He tries to describe the indescribable God.

*“Then there came a voice from above the expanse over their heads as they stood with lowered wings. 26 Above the expanse over their heads was what **looked like** a throne of sapphire, and high above on the throne was a figure **like that** of a man. 27 I saw that from what **appeared to be** his waist up he **looked like** glowing metal, as if full of fire, and that from there down he **looked like** fire; and brilliant light surrounded him. 28 Like the **appearance** of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him. This was the **appearance of the likeness** of the glory of the Lord. When I saw it, I fell facedown, and I heard the voice of one speaking.” (Ezekiel 1:25-28, NIV)*

The Third Commandment states, “*You must not misuse the name of the Lord your God. The Lord will not let you go unpunished if you misuse his name.*” (Exodus 20:7, NLT)

On account of this, the Masoretes (Jewish scholars who lived between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries AD) ensured that the Name of the LORD would not be taken in vain by substituting the vowel marks for the Hebrew word Adonai (my Lord).

This results in the Jewish reader saying Adonai in place of the unspeakable YHVH.

Mistakenly, English translators, began to say Jehovah (YaHoVaH), which is not found in the original Hebrew language or Scriptures.

Later English speakers began to say YaHWeH, but this probably is not correct either as there is no “w” sound in the Hebrew language.

The bottom line is that since ancient Hebrew did not use any vowel markings, the actual pronunciation of the sacred Name is simply not known. In ancient Temple times, only the high priest would utter the Name during the Day of Atonement and with the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD this practice was lost – and so was the pronunciation of the name.

The Jewish tradition is to not pronounce the sacred Name at all, but (as mentioned above) to substitute the word Adonai (“my Lord”) in its place. When not reading Torah, most observant Jews refer to the sacred Name simply as *Hashem* or “the Name.”

“*There he built an altar to the Lord and called on **the name** of the Lord.*” (Genesis 12:8, NIV)

### III. Application

What I find amazing is that the indescribable, awesome name of God, which is so highly regarded by the Jews that they will not even speak it out loud, is considered in traditional Jewish literature to express the mercy and condescension of Almighty God.

Listen to an ancient Jewish scholar’s comments: “The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to those, ‘You want to know my name? I am called according to my actions. When I judge the creatures I am Elohim, and when I have mercy with My world, I am named YHWH.’” (Exodus Rabbah 3:6).

Elohim is the Name given for God as the Creator of the universe (Gen 1:1-2) and implies strength, power, and justice. YHVH, on the other hand, expresses the idea of God's closeness to humans. For example, YHVH “*breathed into his [Adam's] nostrils the breath of life.*” (Genesis 2:7).

It is this God who is who He is, needing nothing, yet condescending to you and me to reveal Himself so that we might in some way “know” Him.

Should we not surrender our lives to the One who is?