

God's Name Forbidden

by Rev. Vince Finnegan

At one point in history, the Jews decided that they should not speak the name of God for fear of profaning His name and violating the second command - "You shall not take the name of the LORD [Yahweh] your God in vain." They also decided that they should not write His name; therefore, they replaced it with the Hebrew *Adonia*, which means Lord.

The specific timing of this terrible decision is uncertain. Many scholars believe the Jews did this after the Babylonian exile. The Encyclopedia Britannica states: "After the Exile (6th century BC) and especially from the 3rd century BC on, Jews ceased to use the name Yahweh." However, the historical books of Ezra and Nehemiah written after the return from the exile tell a different story.

Ezra 3:10 and 11

Now when the builders had laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD [Yahweh], the priests stood in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the LORD

[Yahweh] according to the directions of King David of Israel.

They sang, praising and giving thanks to the LORD [Yahweh], saying, "For He is good, for His loving kindness is upon Israel forever." And all the people shouted with a great shout when they praised the LORD [Yahweh] because the foundation of the house of the LORD [Yahweh] was laid.

Ezra's prayers recorded in chapter 9 indicate that they prayed to Yahweh and did so by using His name. "O LORD [Yahweh] God of Israel, You are righteous...." Nehemiah's prayer was similar. He said in chapter 1 – "I beseech You, O LORD [Yahweh] God of heaven, the great and awesome God...." Nehemiah and Ezra led the people back to their God and boldly proclaimed His name. The Scriptures provide undisputable evidence that the Jews had no hesitancy regarding speaking the name of Yahweh.

Nehemiah 9:5-7

Arise, bless the LORD [Yahweh] your God forever and ever! O may Your glorious name be blessed And exalted above all blessing and praise! You alone are the LORD

[Yahweh]. You have made the heavens, the heaven of heavens with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to all of them and the heavenly host bows down before You. You are the LORD [Yahweh] God....

They held the same reverential concern for the name of Yahweh to be praised, glorified, magnified, and exalted as did their ancestors. To imply they stopped using His name contradicts the Scriptures and misses the point of what these believers recommitted to after the return to Israel.

Malachi, probably written around 433-430 BC, is the last book of the Old Testament. In this small book of only four chapters, the name "Yahweh" appears over 40 times. The name "Yahweh" was never lost to the prophets who wrote the Hebrew Scriptures. If anything, they constantly encouraged Israel to revere and magnify the name. The prophets never commanded or slightly implied that Yahweh's name not be spoken or written! Moses and the prophets warned Israel not to profane the name of God, but the context was always regarding how they behaved, especially regarding idolatry. They profaned Yahweh's name because He was associated with Israel, and they were so sinful. The

Jewish tradition of not using the name “Yahweh” did not begin during the time of the Old Testament.

Another viewpoint is that the prohibition of His name began between the time of Malachi and Matthew; however, again history proves different. The Apocrypha found in some Bibles today was written in approximately 200BC. These writings are not considered to be divinely inspired for many good reasons, one of which is they are never quoted or referred to by our Lord or his apostles. The New Testament has over 600 quotes from the Old Testament and not one from the Apocrypha. However, these books are highly regarded for their historical value and understanding regarding the religious beliefs and activities of the Israelites. They reveal that some two hundred years after Malachi, the Jews still revered and used “Yahweh,” the name of God.

Jesus never hesitated to speak God’s name and taught the disciples to reverence His name. The intolerable and even hateful attitude of the Jewish people who lived in Israel toward the Gentiles (those not of Israel descent) and their pagan ways is well documented in the New Testament. When Jesus read the Scriptures in the Temple and

synagogues, he did so from Hebrew manuscripts that are certain and not the Septuagint. The common belief about the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament) is it was written before the New Testament. Although the Old Testament quotations in the English New Testament were copied from the Septuagint, it is very doubtful that Jesus or his apostles quoted from anything other than the Hebrew. The Greek language was the language of the Gentiles and not the Jews. We have no biblical reason to think Jesus read the Septuagint or, for the matter, even knew the Greek language.

The Hebrew manuscripts even to this day have the Hebrew word יהוה which is transliterated YHWH and pronounced Yahweh. Most English Bibles do not translate the Hebrew word “Yahweh” correctly. The translators decided to follow the Jewish tradition and not use God’s proper name. They replaced it with the word “LORD.” For some reason, those who translated the New Testament Scriptures into English decided to copy from the Septuagint rather than the Hebrew manuscripts and thereby eliminated God’s name, “Yahweh.”

When Jesus read the Hebrew Scriptures, he did not read the Greek word *kurios* or the English word

“LORD;” rather, he read what was written which is YHWH, Yahweh. We have no biblical or historical reason to believe that in the times of Jesus, the Septuagint would ever have been read in the temple or synagogues that were in Israel. The Jews would have taken issue with the holy writings being in any language other than their own. They resented and resisted the Gentile influences in the Palestine area.

Quoting from the Old Testament was an integral part of Jesus’ teachings. He did it often. Jesus had a Hebrew understanding of the Scriptures. He thought in Hebrew, read in Hebrew, and he spoke in Hebrew. When he saw the name YHWH, that is what he thought, and that is what he said. If someone accurately quoted the words of Jesus, he or she would have to do so by referring to the same Hebrew texts that Jesus referenced. All of the writers of the New Testament understood Hebrew and therefore could read the Hebrew Old Testament. If these men quoted Jesus, they would not have done so accurately by using the Septuagint because it eliminates the words “Yahweh,” “Adon,” “Adonai,” and “Yah.” If they used the Septuagint when Jesus spoke from the Hebrew, they would have changed our Lord’s words. Those who translated into English and not

the Apostles who wrote the original texts used the Septuagint.

Jesus explained God as none other had done before, according to John 1:18 KJV – “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.” Immediately before his suffering and death, Jesus prayed to His Father and said, “I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world.” Hebrews 2:12 states: “I [Jesus] will proclaim your name to my brethren, in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise.” How could Jesus make known God’s name if he was afraid to say it? Is it not ludicrous to conclude that Jesus feared breaking the second commandment, so he never spoke God’s name?

On two separate occasions, Jesus taught his disciples how to pray. He said, when you pray say, “Hallowed be Your name.” Surely, Jesus never considered that there would be a time when his disciples would not know the name of God as it is today. He never said, “Don’t speak His name” or “Never write His name.” To keep God’s name “hallowed” means to keep it holy, consecrated, and revered.

Immediately preceding the ascension, Jesus gave to his disciples his final instruction, a part of which is commonly called the great commission. He said,

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.” Three distinct and very important subjects were to be at the center of making disciples. The first was to baptize (immerse) in the name of the Father. How can we do anything in the “name of” if we do not know the name? It is shocking and dreadful that so many scholars and teachers use this record to prove the Trinity. By doing this, they lead people away from our Lord’s instruction and propound a false doctrine. Jesus is not talking about the Trinity; rather, he is telling his Church what they should do. We must decide how we draw our conclusions about what we believe. We can be influenced by tradition or by what is written!

The name of Yahweh was spoken all the way through the Old Testament times, during the time of the Apocrypha, and in Jesus’ lifetime. So, when did the change come? It may very well be that the change occurred when so many other doctrines were corrupted – ages after the first century.