

SABBATH THOUGHT 2026-02-21—SACRED NAMES

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

It seems there are quite a few who use so-called 'sacred' names these days. In general, 'sacred' names are exclusively the Hebrew names for God, such as Yeshua or some form of YHVH. Some use Hebrew names as a matter of course in discussions of God and Jesus Christ but I want to address the idea that specifically chosen Hebrew names, as well as their pronunciation, are a measure of worship authenticity or matters of salvation. I use Hebrew names (as best I can) from time to time, but not to the exclusion of English ones. Neither is more or less 'sacred'; they simply add variety to praise and worship of God.

I have no issues with using Hebrew names of God anymore than other Hebrew or Greek terms such as *ruach*, *ekklesia*, etc. but I have serious objections to the extremists who demand that others adopt the exclusive use of Hebrew names as being 'sacred'. First, here are some of the common objections to the idea that only Hebrew constructs are sacred to God:

- There is not even a vague inference in Scripture for the sacredness of Hebrew names over other languages.
- There is no common agreement on the spelling and pronunciation for YHVH, which is variously Yehovah, Yah, Yahweh, Yahvah, Yahuwah, Jehovah, etc. How can the Hebrew be elevated with its vague spellings and pronunciations?
- Original Hebrew manuscripts do not exist today and even the oldest sources do not include vowels, so the original pronunciation has been lost to history. Vowel points were added in the sixth through tenth centuries, which is upwards of 3,000 years after the Bible was written. The Jews also stopped vocalizing YHVH out of reverence centuries ago, so no one has heard it accurately pronounced for hundreds of years.
- At least one 'sacred' name is likely an inaccurate reconstruction. The name for Joshua in the Bible is *Yehoshua* ("Yahweh saves"). This was later shortened to *Yeshua* ("My salvation") and is the accepted Hebrew name of Jesus. However, sometime in the 1930s, the name *Yahshua* or *Yahushua* became popular. It did not exist in the ancient Hebrew; it is a hybrid construction that incorporated YHVH into *Yeshua*. Then there the 16th-century name *Jehovah*, which is not linguistically possible since there is no letter 'J' in the original Hebrew.
- The apostles used the names *Kurios* (Lord) and *Theos* (God) over 2,000 times. They obviously did not indicate a preference for Hebrew names.
- The Gospel was preached throughout the world and that, of necessity, required adapting to many languages, both oral and written. The meaning of Hebrew names for God would not be understood by foreigners.

There are many opinions regarding the pronunciation of YHVH. Personally, I simply replace it with "Eternal" when I read it. And that applies to other Hebrew names such as 'El Shaddai ("God Almighty"). When ancient Israelites heard the name YHVH, in their minds they heard something like *Eternal*. Most of us have to mentally translate YHVH as *Eternal* but that was the meaning when YHVH was spoken in ancient times. As an example, Stephen has no meaning for most but it is

derived from the Greek and means victory wreath. If you called out to me and said "Hey, Wreath," I probably would not respond due to its unfamiliarity but it would certainly be appropriate to call me that because that is what it means in English. In Greece, however, people would just be confused if you called me "Wreath," but that is what they would hear if you said "Hey, Stephanos."

It is important to recognize that vocalizing Hebrew names is, for non-Hebrew speakers, different from how their mind THINKS those words. No one uses Hebrew names without looking up their meanings in English. Even if I could perfectly pronounce YHVH, it is just gibberish without the meaning. When Isaiah said, "rām wə-niš-sā šō-kên 'ad," it was manifested in his mind as "the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity"¹. Without translating it, he could well have said, "do you want cream in your coffee?" Hebrew 'sacred' names have no meaning without TRANSLATING them. Names describe the identity of someone so the meaning is critical. Paul explained it is useless to speak in 'tongues'² if no one understands:

1 CORINTHIANS 14:10-11 There are, it may be, so many kinds of languages in the world, and none of them *is* without significance. 11 Therefore, **if I [Paul] do not know the meaning of the language, I shall be a foreigner to him who speaks, and he who speaks will be a foreigner to me.**

There is nothing wrong with using Hebrew names for God and Christ but recognize that initially they need to be translated into English to have any meaning. Over time, it is possible to gain native-level fluency in another language but, until then, a person thinks in their native tongue when they speak in another. Simply vocalizing the Hebrew name for God does not mean someone understands its meaning. In fact, HOW we comprehend the majesty and glory of God is the result of knowing what the Hebrew names MEAN in our minds; mimicking a foreign word adds nothing to our understanding. So, it is utterly false to claim that God has a preference for a particular language—He is most interested in the "thoughts and intents of the heart."³ Using Hebrew names to worship God does not set someone apart who still THINKS in their own language—God hears what is in the *mind*. Plus, imitating Hebrew names does NOT make someone holy—only God can do that.

It is unlikely that people from sixteen different countries at Pentecost⁴ heard the apostles say the names of God and Christ in Hebrew. God would have translated them into their own language; otherwise, they would not know who they were talking about. For example, mention the name King Kamehameha to a native Hawaiian and it stirs up honor and respect for their greatest King who united the islands. His name meant "the one set apart." However, say that same name to someone in Japan and they would laugh because you just said the name of the king is "Turtle Destruction Wave". How can a foreigner KNOW God if His name, which identifies and describes Him, is not translated into their own language?

I also want to emphasize that there is no reference to YHVH in the New Testament. It uses *Theos* and *Kurios* for God but there is no Greek word for YHVH. Several of

¹ Isa. 57:15.

² 1 Cor. 14:1-19.

³ Heb. 4:12.

⁴ Acts 2:5-11.

the epistles were written for non-Hebrew speaking people so it would be more important to convey the identity of God rather than try to explain YHVH in Greek. It would not be surprising if the apostles did this intentionally, knowing their writings would be translated into other languages. Here is one example where they intentionally substituted *Kurios* for YHVH:

JOEL 2:32 And it shall come to pass *that* **whoever calls on the name of the [YHVH]** shall be saved. ...

ROMANS 10:13 For “whoever **calls on the name of the Lord [G2962 Kurios]** shall be saved.”

Then there are those who find it difficult to pronounce some foreign words. That is my problem with the various guttural sounds behind 4 of the 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet. Telling anyone who finds it hard to pronounce foreign words that Hebrew names are required to worship God is cruel. God does not withhold salvation simply because someone has a lisp or any other speech impediment.

There are also variations in accents. People in the deep south in the USA have a southern drawl and pronounce *tire* as ‘tar’ and *wash* as ‘warsh’. New Yorkers have problems with ‘th’ and ‘r’ among others. They pronounce *car* as ‘cah’ and *thirty* as ‘toity’. In ancient times, Ephraimites could not pronounce the “sh” in *shibboleth*, vocalizing it as *sibboleth*⁵ so they would also struggle with *Yehoshua* and *Yeshua*, likely pronouncing them as yeh-ho-soo’-ah and yeh-soo’-ah, respectively. Thinking God must be worshipped by properly vocalizing foreign names is absurd.

I wonder if ‘Sacred’ Namers would condemn the use of *Jesus* if they knew its etymology. *Jesus* comes from the Hebrew name for Joshua—*Yehoshua*. It was contracted over the years to *Yeshua*, which was transliterated (rewriting a foreign word with letters that best correspond to the pronunciation) as *Iesous* because there is no equivalent letter for ‘sh’ or ‘y’ in Greek. It had to be changed to *Iesous* (yee-sous’); otherwise, the name *Yeshua* could not be written or pronounced in Greek. Over time, the pronunciation of ‘i’ morphed into ‘j’ and *Iesous* changed to *Jesus* (jee-sous’). Therefore, the name *Jesus* IS *Yeshua*. That is also how Stephen (ste’-fan) became my name Steven—the pronunciation shifted from ‘f’ to ‘v’.

Interestingly, John the apostle recorded a name of Jesus that is almost never used:

REVELATION 19:13 He [*Jesus Christ*] was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and **His name is called The Word [G3056 = logos] of God [G2316 = theos]**.

John saw Jesus in vision sitting on a white horse and wrote down His name. Why is “HO Logos tou Theou” *not* a ‘sacred’ name when “The Word of God” is His name in heaven? In Greek, it is pronounced almost exactly as it is spelled—“hoh LOG-oss too theh-OO”. The pronunciation is probably way more accurate than any form of YHVH. It is even easy for me to pronounce but I doubt it will become a ‘sacred’ name simply because it is Greek and not Hebrew.

⁵ Judg 12:5-6.

When God scattered the people at Babel, He did not create one language that was superior to all others. The languages seem to reflect national personalities so they can best express their cultural identities. Some languages were more poetic while others were more prosaic and literal. But God understands all languages and knows our thoughts⁶ before we do:

[NET 2.1] PSALM 139:4 Certainly **my tongue does not frame a word without you, O LORD, being thoroughly aware of it.**

Everyone's ability to communicate with God is limited regardless of what language is used. If that were not true, then why is it that "the Spirit also helps in **our weaknesses**. For **we do not know** what we should pray for as we ought, but **the Spirit [itself] makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.**"⁷ Saying *Yeshua* instead of *Jesus* does NOT take away those weaknesses.

When languages were confounded at Babel, did those who spoke Hebrew keep the same articulation over the next 2,000 years? Highly unlikely. There were variations among the 12 Tribes, as already mentioned, so the original languages from Babel were probably unrecognizable by the time of Moses. It would be unimaginable that everyone had to call upon God in Hebrew regardless of the language given to them by GOD. It would be a serious impediment to eternal salvation if God required everyone to learn Hebrew before they seek Him:

ACTS 15:17 So that **the rest of mankind may seek the Lord [G2962 Kurios]**, even all **the Gentiles** who are **called by My name, says the Lord [G2962 Kurios]** who does all these things.'

In fact, was anyone whose native language is English baptized BEFORE they learned the Hebrew names?!? The only reason anyone in English-speaking countries knows any Hebrew words is because of the Internet. No English speaking person 'finds' God using a Hebrew Bible. You, me, and everyone we know learned about God using ENGLISH Bibles and we did not receive the Holy Spirit because we figured out how to say a few Hebrew words. Even Jesus Christ and the apostles did not emphasize Hebrew over Greek. They spoke at least two, if not more, languages (Hebrew, Koine Greek, and Aramaic and/or Chaldean). There is not one language more perfect than others because all will be replaced:

ZEPHANIAH 3:9 "For then **I will restore to the peoples a pure language [lips]**, that they all may call on the name of the LORD, to serve Him with one accord.

Not only is a new, pure language on the horizon, but Jesus will have a new name⁸:

ISAIAH 62:2 The Gentiles shall see your righteousness, and all kings your glory. **You [Jesus Christ] shall be called by a new name**, which the mouth of the LORD [YHVH] will name.

⁶ Ps. 94:11.

⁷ Rom. 8:26.

⁸ Also Rev. 19:12.

REVELATION 3:12 “He who overcomes, I [*Jesus Christ*] will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And *I will write on him* **My [*Jesus Christ*] new name.**

There is no “pure language” in existence today and no one knows the new name of Jesus Christ; therefore, ‘Sacred’ Namers are just as lacking in reverence as those who call upon God using the English language. Until then, God accepts all people **“in every place”** who call upon Him regardless of language:

1 CORINTHIANS 1:2 To the *ekklesia* of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called *to be saints*, **with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus /Iesous/ Christ our Lord /Kurios/**, both theirs and ours:

There is also the question of what language was used before Hebrew existed?

GENESIS 4:26 And as for Seth, to him also a son was born; and he named him Enosh. **Then men began to call on the name of the LORD.**

Enosh lived before the Flood and 700 years before the birth of Eber, the ancestor of the Hebrews. Men called upon God with one language before Babel when the languages were confused, which was well before Hebrew even existed. What language did they use? No one knows, but it would be ironic if it was similar to English. God created all languages so it is foolish to think that one is more ‘sacred’ than others. God desires people to seek Him in any language:

PSALM 79:6 Pour out Your [*YHVH*] wrath on the nations **that do not know You,** and on the kingdoms **that do not call on Your name.**

Asaph wanted God to pour out His wrath on the foreign nations that do not call on His name. He did not distinguish the nations by the language they used; he directed his anger at those who rejected God REGARDLESS of language. If only Hebrew names are ‘sacred’, then why did He create other languages and why was the New Testament written in GREEK?

The names of God and Christ are holy in EVERY language. Jesus Christ said to pray, “Father in heaven, **hallowed** be thy name.”⁹ What name? He called out to His FATHER, not YHVH. God’s name is holy and it is hallowed by HOW someone reveres His name, not by vocalizing it in another language. If someone wants to use a name for God in another language, consider the Greek word *Abba*, which is AUTHORIZED by God through the Holy Spirit:

GALATIANS 4:6 And **because you are sons [and daughters], God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, “Abba, Father!”**

Only a few such as Moses ever heard God speak His own name, so demanding that others use a so-called ‘sacred’ name of God is, at the very least, phonetic legalism. At the worst, it borders on pagan cultic practices of secret names. Condemning

⁹ Matt. 6:9.

others for not worshipping as they do is nothing less than self-righteous judgment, which has a serious warning attached¹⁰:

MATTHEW 7:1-5 “**Judge not, that you be not judged. 2 “For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged;** and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. 3 “And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? 4 “Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me remove the speck from your eye’; and look, a plank *is* in your own eye? 5 “**Hypocrite!** First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.

Objecting when someone says *God* or *Jesus* is falsely condemning them under the Third Commandment:

EXODUS 20:7 “**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.

In English, *vain* means useless; however, the Hebrew has connotations of idolatry, destruction, and falseness. It condemns all disrespect toward God. If only certain Hebrew names are acceptable worship of God, then ‘Sacred’ Namers must not think much of Jesus when He cried out to God in Aramaic as He was dying on the cross and said, “Eloi, Eloi” (“My God, My God”).¹¹ Is *Eloi* missing from the list of ‘sacred’ names because it is not Hebrew? What is most important to God? A spoken language or what is in our minds?¹²

ROMANS 8:27 Now **He [God] who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is,** because [it] makes intercession for the saints according to *the will of* God.

Suggesting certain phonetic sounds are required to worship God can be likened to doing yoga while humming “om” (the Bhramari Pranayama or Bee Breath sound)—it is pagan. People worship God in spirit, not by vocalizing Hebrew words:

JOHN 4:23-24 “But the hour is coming, and now is, when the **true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth;** for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. 24 “**God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.**”

May God’s grace and peace be upon you!

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¹⁰ Matt. 12:37.

¹¹ Mark 15:34.

¹² Matt. 21:28-31.