



THE NAME OF THE LORD

Exodus 3 records one of the greatest revelations in the Old Testament: the personal name of God. (The words translated *God* in our Bible [*'El*, *'Elohîm*, *'Eloah*] are not names, but the standard vocabulary for the Deity and even for false gods.)

God had told Moses His plan to use Him in delivering the Israelites from Egyptian bondage, and Moses had asked whom He should tell the people had sent him. God answered Moses: "I AM WHO I AM." He told Moses to tell them that "I AM" had sent him, "the LORD God." "I AM" and "LORD" are both probably derived from the Hebrew verb *to be* (*hayah*) because God is the ever-present One, "the Eternal" (Moffatt translation).

Many people are puzzled that in this and many other (over six thousand!) passages some Bibles read *LORD* in all capitals (e.g., KJV, NKJV, NIV), some read "Jehovah" (ASV, Darby), and some read "Yahweh" (Jerusalem Bible). Why such a radical difference? Do the manuscripts vary that much? No, not at all.

Because the name of God is so important—Jews devoutly refer to Him as "the Name" (*ha Shem*)—it is well worth exploring this revelation in some detail. It is merely a question of a Jewish tradition and how various Christian scholars handle that tradition.

In the Ten Commandments, God forbids us to take His name "in vain." That is, we should not bear false witness in oaths and probably should avoid using profanity, as well. In their great fear of violating this command, devout Hebrews went beyond the law, and when they read the Hebrew Scriptures aloud they would read the word *Lord* (*Adonai*) whenever they saw the four letters (*YHWH*, or traditionally *JHVH* in Latin pronunciation) that spelled out God's revealed covenant name. This was the sacred name by which He had committed Himself to Israel as a nation.

The most ancient copies of the Hebrew text were written in consonants only. As the language became less and less used, scholars (called Masoretes) added little dots and dashes called "vowel points" to

indicate how the text was to be pronounced. Oddly enough, they put the vowels that go with the word *Adonai* together with the sacred four-letter name (called "tetragrammaton") to guide the readers to say *Adonai* aloud in synagogue services.

Jehovah

This is the origin of the name "Jehovah." It is actually a hybrid name, combining the vowels of *Adonai* with the consonants of *YHWH* into *JeHoVaH* or *YeHoWaH* (the "a" of *Adonai* is changed for reasons of Hebrew pronunciation). The people who produced this name were medieval Christian Hebrew scholars; the Jews never acknowledged such a name. The defense of this Christian hybrid is the same as the defense of the Jewish avoidance of pronouncing the name—tradition! There are many lovely hymns and paraphrases of the Psalms that use this name, so it would be a loss to eliminate it from our Christian vocabulary. The poetical form of Jehovah is *Jah*.

Yahweh

It is very likely that the name was pronounced very much like "Yahweh." Comparisons with transliterations of the name into other alphabets from very ancient times confirm this. The best argument for the spelling is that it is probably historically accurate. However, the RSV's 1952 introduction explained its reason for rejecting "Yahweh" in the translation. It said that it lacks devotional qualities for English-speaking Christians. It is true that many names beginning with "Y" seem odd to our culture (*all* the names in English Bibles beginning with "J"—including *Jesus*—were pronounced with a Y sound, in the original, as in "*hallelu-Yah*").

LORD

Most recent major English Bibles, dissatisfied with both *Jehovah* and *Yahweh*, have retained the KJV's *LORD*. The NASB, which is an updating of the ASV, actually restored *LORD* (the 1901 text read *Jehovah*).