



"A rose by any other name would smell as sweet."  
—William Shakespeare

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## The Sacred Name Movement

[God](#) says to [Moses](#) in [Exodus 6:2-3](#), "I am the LORD. I appeared to Abraham, to [Isaac](#), and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by My name, LORD, I was not known to them." The name of God plays an important role in our beliefs, but some people associated with the church of God have made it the central focus of their religion. Many of us know or have heard of people who have left our fellowship to join so-called "Sacred Name" groups. What is this movement about? How does it affect those of us in God's church? How should we respond to it?

Some trace the movement to the founder of the Jehovah's Witnesses, Joseph Franklin Rutherford. By the early 1930s, a member of the Church of God (Seventh Day), Clarence Orvil Dodd, adopted the sacred name beliefs, apparently in response to a study of [Proverbs 30:4](#), in which a portion of the verse asks, "What is His name, and what is His Son's Name?" Advocates of this movement teach that believers should use only *Yahweh* when referring to God and only *Yahshua* when referring to His Son, [Jesus](#). To use any other name, they contend, is blasphemous.

The first organization in the sacred name movement was the Assembly of Yahweh, formed in the 1930s in Holt, Michigan. Although the church

believes in obedience to the commandments of God, including keeping the [Sabbath](#), the annual holy days, and the dietary instructions found in Leviticus 11, it also teaches that only *Yahweh* and *Yahshua* should be used when naming God and Jesus. Since then, several subgroups have formed, including the House of Yahweh, an Assembly of YHVH, and Yahweh's Restoration Ministry, among others. (Please see Herbert Armstrong's booklet on this subject, "[The Plain Truth About the 'Sacred Name'](#)," for more on its origins and history.)

Advocates of the sacred name claim that a person can be saved only by uttering the correct sound of God's Hebrew name. Some may not take the extreme position that it is a salvational issue, but they still maintain that it is an important matter. They declare that God is restoring His sacred name in these last days, and church members must pronounce it in a certain way.

The real genesis of this teaching springs from sometime after the Babylonian exile of the Jews, especially from the third century BC onward, when the Jews ceased to use the personal name of the LORD, the Tetragrammaton, the four-letter-word, YHWH. *The Encyclopedia Britannica* comments, "[T]he divine name was considered too sacred to be uttered; it was thus replaced vocally in the synagogue ritual by the Hebrew word *Adonai* ('My Lord'), which is translated into *Kyrios* in the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament."

In fact, *Halakha* (Jewish law) directs that when the name of the Lord (YHWH) is uttered, one should pronounce it as "Adonai," which is itself regarded as holy and only said in prayer. At other times, religious Jews refer to God as *Hashem*, which means simply, "The Name." This unbiblical tenet laid the groundwork of the sacred name movement of our day.

Consider this: The Bible's books were penned by about forty different authors, yet none of them hesitated to refer to God as *Yahweh* or *Elohim* in Hebrew or *Theos* in Greek, or *Iesous* when referring to our Savior. Why, then, would it be incorrect for modern English-speaking people to use the term "God" when referring to the Father or "Jesus" when referring to His Son? In fact, why would it be wrong for the Chinese, Spanish, or Russians to use their own spellings and pronunciations of those names and titles?

The irony of this is that we really do not know how to pronounce God's name in Hebrew. Adherents of the sacred name movement cannot even wholly agree on what the sacred names actually are. While *Yahweh* and *Yahshua* are the most common, some propose *Yahvah*, *Yahwah*, *Yohwah*, or *Yahowah*, among others, for God and *Yeshua* or *Yahoshua* for Jesus. If the correct pronunciation of God's Hebrew names is so important to Him, why did He not leave us a pronunciation guide so we would not have to guess?

There are good, biblical reasons God does not limit us to one correct name for the Father and His Son. For instance, the entire New Testament, written in Greek, uses Greek terms for both the Father and the Son, not the Hebrew ones of the Old Testament. For instance, in the well-known Lord's Prayer ([Matthew 6:9](#)), Jesus addresses the Father as *Pater*, not *Yahweh*. He then asks that God's name be hallowed, yet without reference to Him as *Yahweh*. From our Savior's mouth, using the Hebrew name of God (or any of its variants) is not required.

When [the gospel](#) spread from Jerusalem, it was primarily spread in Greek. The apostles used the Greek word *Kyrios*, not the Hebrew *Yahweh* to name God. Even in quotations, the Hebrew words were dropped in favor of their Greek equivalents: "The LORD [*Kyrios*] said to my Lord [*Kyrios*], 'Sit at My right hand . . .'" ([Matthew 22:44](#); [Psalm 110:1](#)).

[Mark 15:34](#) presents another dilemma for sacred-name adherents. It reads, "And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?' which is translated, 'My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?'" Why did Jesus not use the personal name of God, *Yahweh*? In addition, our Savior cried out in Aramaic, and the words were then translated into Greek, not Hebrew! If Jesus, even during the most excruciating time of His life, did not use the so-called sacred name of God, why must we?

While its adherents may be sincere, the sacred name movement's insistence on using only the Hebrew names of God is not correct. Although we should not follow their teachings in this matter, Paul's example in [Romans 14:1-13](#) comes to mind. If an otherwise faithful brother or sister sincerely believes that some deeply held belief is important, and it is not an affront to our heavenly Father, let Him straighten them out on it in His own time. Instead,

we should set an outstanding example for him or her by our own obedience and conduct.

We must balance application with compassion. Each one of us shall answer to God for what we believe. We need to hold fast to the traditions we have been taught ([II Thessalonians 2:15](#)), and despite our minor disagreements about the correct way to [worship God](#), we should not put a stumbling block in front of someone else.

- John Reiss

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## **From the Archives: Featured Sermon**

### **[The Nature of God: Elohim](#)**

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Understanding Elohim teaches us a great deal about the nature of God, determining the direction of our personal lives. The trinity doctrine, admitted by the Catholic Encyclopedia as unsupportable by either the Old Testament or New Testament, but only through "Christological speculation," severely corrupts the truth of the scriptures. Elohim, used 2,570 times throughout the scriptures, refers to a plural family unit in the process of expanding. God considers individuals with His Spirit to be part of the God family already, in unity of purpose and ultimately in composition. Like the term "United States of America," considered as one unit or institution, the family of God or the kingdom of God is a singular unit, consisting of many family members growing into the fullness of God.

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## **From the Archives: Featured Article**

### **[The Names of God](#)**

by Martin G. Collins

The name of God is important—so important that He included its proper use among His Ten Commandments. What is His name? Martin Collins shows

how God's names reveal His character to us. Includes the inset, "A Sampling of the Names of God."

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