

## The Purpose of God in the Name of Jehovah

The name *YHWH* (*Jehovah* or *Yahweh*<sup>1</sup>) is the unique name of God (other titles, such as *God*, *Lord*, and *Savior*, are designations, epithets, or appellatives rather than a name). The name first occurs in the second chapter of Genesis, but its deeper significance is not seen until Exodus 3. Over time, the name undergoes a transformation along with changes in the Hebrew language and in how the name is used. The name is striking in terms of its meaning, particularly as it relates to the purpose of God intrinsically. It is related to and derived from *hawah*, the verb *to become* or *to be*, and it indicates God both in an absolute sense as the self-existing and ever-existing One as well as in a predicated sense, expressing God's desire to become or be many things to His people. Eventually, this Jehovah became a man so that human beings would become God in life and nature but not in the Godhead. Corporately they become the one new man in which Christ is all and in all. This article examines the origin of the name *Jehovah*, its transformation, and its significance, particularly as it relates to the purpose of God in God's New Testament economy.

### The Origin and Use of the Name *YHWH*

The name *Jehovah* occurs over 6800 times in the Old Testament, first appearing in Genesis 2. It occurs twenty times in chapters 2 and 3 followed by the appellative *'Elohim* (i.e., *Jehovah God*). Many scholars consider the occurrence of *Jehovah* in chapter 2 indicative of a different source. However, others account for the difference between the use of *'Elohim* in chapter 1 and *Jehovah God* in chapter 2, one of emphasis, with *'Elohim* emphasizing the transcendence of the Creator and *Jehovah* emphasizing the immanence of God in His involvement in creation. In the rest of Genesis people have various interactions with Jehovah, including calling on the name of Jehovah (beginning from 4:26; cf. 13:4; 21:33; 26:25); lifting up their hand to Jehovah (as in an oath—14:22); building altars to Jehovah (8:20; 12:7-8; 13:18); believing in Jehovah (15:6); bowing down and worshipping Jehovah (24:26, 48, 52); blessing and praising Jehovah (9:26; 24:27, 48; 29:35); and

inquiring of Jehovah (25:22). The name *Jehovah* occurs 145 times from Genesis 4 through Exodus 3.

### Exodus 3

In Exodus 3 (the Angel of) Jehovah calls Moses and reveals the particular significance of the name of Jehovah to him. He first declares, "I am [the first person pronoun *'anoki*, translated in the Septuagint ἐγώ εἰμι] the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (v. 6). He then promises to send Moses to Pharaoh in order to deliver the children of Israel from Egypt. When Moses questions Jehovah regarding his own

qualifications to carry out such a task, saying, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" (v. 11), Jehovah replies, "Surely I will be [*'ehyeh*] with you" (v. 12). Moses continues by asking Jehovah's name, to which God replies, "I AM WHO I AM," or

"I will be who I will be" (*'ehyeh 'asher 'ehyeh*, translated in the Septuagint ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὢν, "I am the one who is or who exists"). He then continues with the ungrammatical, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, I AM [*'ehyeh*] has sent me to you" (v. 14). In the next verse Jehovah uses the same verb but changes the subject from I AM to Jehovah, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, saying, "Jehovah, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is My name forever, and this is My memorial from generation to generation" (v. 15). Thus, He associates *'ehyeh* with both Jehovah and the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. After this, *Jehovah* rather than *'ehyeh*<sup>2</sup> is the subject of the following verbs, i.e., He is the One who appeared to and met with Moses (vv. 16, 18).<sup>3</sup>

This dialogue contains a number of elements that deserve comment. First, the revelation of the name comes in response to Moses' expression of his own inadequacies to carry out the task set before him. Jehovah promises His presence in the expression "*'ehyeh* with you" in verse 12. He then reveals His name as *'ehyeh 'asher*

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'ehyeh and states that Moses should say, "'Ehyeh has sent me to you." Apart from this brief reference to 'ehyeh, three times in close proximity, elsewhere it is by the name YHWH, or *Jehovah*, that He is named. What then is the function of 'ehyeh? Perhaps, since it would not be appropriate to address God in the first person, as we ourselves are also in the first person, He uses a third person form, YHWH, for others to address Him or talk about Him. Therefore, 'ehyeh in the context of Exodus 3 functions as a gloss on the name *Jehovah*.

'Ehyeh is the classical Hebrew imperfective form of *hayah*, which functions as the verb *to be* in rabbinic and modern Hebrew and comes to mean "I am" or "I will be." It perhaps began as a present/future prefix form (like Akkadian) of the verb root HWY and meant "to occur, to happen, to come to pass," hence, "to become or exist." Only later, with the demise of stative verbs, in post-exilic, Qumran, and Rabbinic Hebrew, did it become equivalent to the verb *to be*.<sup>4</sup> This change in meaning is also reflected in the Septuagint translators translating 'ehyeh with the verb εἶμι (*to be*) in Greek. In addition, the consonants of the verbal root HWY also underwent two changes. The middle consonant *W* was replaced by *Y*, the third consonant *Y* was replaced by *H* in word final position, which produced the current third person verb form *yihyeh* (corresponding to the first person form 'ehyeh, used in Exodus 3).<sup>5</sup>

The archaic verb HWY therefore underlies the name YHWH, the shortened form *Yah*, as well as the shortened prefix YHW- (*Yeho-*) and suffix -YHW (*-yahu*) in theophoric names (see below). By the time of Moses, or at least the time of the editing of the Hebrew text of Exodus, the verb HWY had for the most part been replaced by HYH. Therefore, this verb is used to explain the significance of the name YHWH.

The verb 'ehyeh and the name *Jehovah* in Exodus 3 have the sense of "I will become" and "He will become," respectively. By extension this can also be translated "I/He will be." (The future tense of the verb *to be* and *to become* are close semantically.) This respects the tension that Moses felt when He was commissioned by Jehovah to go to Pharaoh. The self-confident Moses, who slew an Egyptian approximately forty years prior (2:12), had been humbled after tending the flock of Jethro in the wilderness and realized his inadequacy (cf. 3:11). To such a one, Jehovah revealed Himself as the One who will become or be, the One who would not only fulfill His promises but also be with Moses bearing him through the whole process of the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt. He uses the same verb 'ehyeh, promising to Moses, "I will be with your mouth" (4:12, 15). So also in other places in the Old Testament 'ehyeh occurs as a promise of Jehovah's presence and existence to Israel: "I will be with you" (Deut. 31:23; Josh. 1:5; 3:7; Judg. 6:16); "I will be

his Father" (2 Sam. 7:14; 1 Chron. 17:13; 28:6); "I will be your/their God" (Jer. 11:4; 24:7; 30:22; 31:1; 32:38; Ezek. 11:20; 14:11; 34:24; 36:28; 37:23; Zech. 8:8); "I will be like the dew to Israel" (Hosea 14:5<6>); "I will be her wall of fire round about,...and I will be the glory within her" (Zech. 2:5<9>); cf. "I will not belong to you" (Hosea 1:9).<sup>6</sup>

Jehovah's name was also interpreted as "I AM" or "He is," meaning, absolutely, the self-existing and ever-existing One and, predicatively, "whatever you need I am." This predicative sense can be seen in the rest of the Old Testament in the compound titles, predicates, and the theophoric names associated with the name *Jehovah*.

### *Jehovah with a Predicate*

The name *Jehovah* predicated with various complements (with or without *hayah*), used in compound titles and in theophoric names, reflects the experience and appreciation of Jehovah by the Israelites.<sup>7</sup>

In the present, omni-temporal, or timeless realm, *Jehovah* is associated with a number of nouns and adjectives as complements. Jehovah is Jehovah God (*Jehovah 'Elohim* 679 times and *'Elohim Jehovah* 3 times); Jehovah is God (2 Sam. 7:28; 1 Kings 18:37; 2 Kings 19:19; 1 Chron. 17:26; 2 Chron. 14:11; Psa. 118:27; 140:6; Isa. 25:1); the true God (Jer. 10:10); a God of justice (Isa. 30:18); a God of recompense (Jer. 51:56); a jealous God and One who avenges (Nahum 1:2); and a great God and a great King above all gods (Psa. 95:3). Jehovah is Jehovah Lord (*Jehovah 'Adonay* 8 times); Lord Jehovah (*'Adonay Jehovah* 307 times); and Lord (16:2). He is Jehovah of hosts (*Jehovah tseba'ot* approximately 260 times); Jehovah the Most High (7:17; 47:2; cf. 83:18; 97:9); our Father (Isa. 63:16; 64:8); King forever and ever (Psa. 10:16; cf. Isa. 33:22); and a man of war (Exo. 15:3).

Jehovah is also associated with a number of inanimate objects mainly related to the safety and enjoyment of His people. He is Jehovah-nissi (*Jehovah my banner*—Exo. 17:15 referring to an altar), and Jehovah-jireh (*Jehovah will see*—Gen. 22:14, referring to the name of a place). He is a crag and a fortress (2 Sam. 22:2; Psa. 18:2<3>); a rock (Psa. 19:14<15>); a high retreat (9:9<10>); a refuge (14:6); shade (121:5); a stronghold of salvation (28:8; cf. Nahum 1:7); lovingkindness, a fortress, a high retreat, and a shield (Psa. 144:2); a shield, glory, and the One who lifts up His people's head (3:3); strength and a shield (28:7); light, salvation, the strength of life (27:1); strength and song (118:14; Isa. 12:2); and the portion of inheritance and of cup (Psa. 16:5; cf. 119:57; Lam. 3:24). He is in the midst of His people (Num. 14:14), He is near (Psa. 34:18 <19>; 145:18), and He is Jehovah *shammah* (*Jehovah Is There*—Ezek. 48:35, referring to a city).

He also has a number of attributes or characteristics. Jehovah is Jehovah *tsidqenu* (Jehovah our righteousness—Jer. 23:6; 33:16) and Jehovah-shalom (Jehovah is peace—Judg. 6:24, referring to an altar). Jehovah is great (1 Chron. 16:25; Psa. 96:4; 99:2; 135:5; Jer. 10:6); high (Psa. 113:4; 138:6); exalted (Isa. 33:5); first (41:4); much to be praised and feared (1 Chron. 16:25; Psa. 96:4); righteous (2 Chron. 12:6; Psa. 11:7; 129:4; 145:17; Lam. 1:18; Zeph. 3:5); good and upright (Psa. 25:8); good (34:8 <9>; 100:5; 135:3; 145:9; Jer. 33:11; Lam. 3:25; Nahum 1:7); compassionate and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in lovingkindness (Psa. 103:8); gracious and compassionate (111:4; 145:8); gracious and righteous (116:5); slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression but by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and the fourth generations (Num. 14:18; cf. Nahum 1:3).

**I**n the present time or with an omni-temporal or timeless sense, modified by a Hebrew participle, Jehovah is One who creates (i.e., the Creator—Isa. 40:28; 42:5; 43:1; 45:18); who stretches out the heavens (42:5; 44:24; 51:13; Zech. 12:1); who spreads out the earth (Isa. 42:5; 44:24); who lays the foundations of the earth (51:13; Zech. 12:1); who forms the earth (Jer. 33:2); who forms the light and creates darkness, who makes peace and creates evil (Isa. 45:7); who gives the sun for light by day and the order of the moon and the stars for light by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar (Jer. 31:35); and who makes the lightning (Zech. 10:1). He is the Maker (Psa. 95:6; 115:15; 121:2; 124:8; Isa. 44:2, 24; 45:7; 51:13; Jer. 33:2); who forms from the womb (Isa. 43:1; 44:2, 24; 49:5); who gives breath (42:5); and who forms the spirit of man within him (Zech. 12:1). He is the One who calls by name (Isa. 45:3); who heals (Exo. 15:26); who sanctifies (31:13; Lev. 20:8; 21:8, 15, 23; 22:9, 16, 32; Ezek. 20:12; 37:28); who tabernacles in the midst of Israel (Num. 35:34) and dwells in Zion (Joel 3:21 <4:21>; Psa. 9:11); who is enthroned between the cherubim (1 Chron. 13:6); who judges and makes laws (i.e., Judge and Lawmaker—Isa. 33:22; Judg. 11:27); Shepherd (Psa. 23:1); Keeper (121:5; 146:9; Isa. 27:3); Redeemer (43:14; 44:6, 24; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7, 26; 54:8; 60:16); Savior (1 Sam. 14:39; Isa. 49:26; 60:16); Deliverer (2 Sam. 22:2; Psa. 18:2 <3>; 70:5 <6>; 144:2); who gathers the outcasts of Israel (Isa. 56:8); who frees the prisoners (Psa. 146:7); who opens the eyes of the blind and raises up those who are bowed down (v. 8); who kills and makes alive and brings down to Sheol and brings up (1 Sam. 2:6); who makes poor and makes rich and makes low and also lifts up (v. 7); who uplifts the lowly and

brings the wicked down to the ground (Psa. 147:6); who upholds by the hand (37:24); who knows the thoughts of man (94:11); who loves justice (37:28; cf. Isa. 61:8); who loves the righteous (Psa. 146:8); who speaks righteousness, declaring things that are right (Isa. 45:19); who exercises lovingkindness, justice, and righteousness on earth (Jer. 9:24); who searches the heart and tests the inward parts (17:10); who strikes (Ezek. 7:9); and who avenges and reserves wrath for His enemies (Nahum 1:2).

In the past, either with the verb *hayah* or as a noun sentence, Jehovah was with Joseph (Gen. 39:2-3, 23); Joshua (Josh. 6:27); Judah (Judg. 1:19); the house of Joseph (v. 22); the judges (2:18); Samuel (1 Sam. 3:19); David (18:12, 14, 28); Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:7); Phinehas (1 Chron. 9:20); and Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. 17:3).

**F**or the future, Jehovah promised or predicted He will be our God (Gen. 28:21; Ezek. 34:24); our confidence (Prov. 3:26); a place of rivers and broad streams (Isa. 33:21); an eternal light (60:19-20); a shelter and a stronghold (Joel 3:16); a light (Micah 7:8); terrible to the enemies (Zeph. 2:11); and King over all the earth and the one God (Zech. 14:9).

Many of these characteristics or qualities can be seen also in theophoric names.

### **Jehovah in Theophoric Names**

Theophoric names, which bear parts of the name *Jehovah*, are also expressions of the experience, appreciation, and aspiration of the Old Testament believers in relation to Jehovah. These theophoric names have either the prefixes *Yeho-*/*Jeho-* (e.g., Jehoshaphat), *Yo-*/*Jo-* (e.g., Joshua), *Ye-*/*Je-* (e.g., Yeshua, Jesus) or suffixes *-yahu* and *-yah*, such as, Elijah, and Isaiah both written *'Eliyahu* (63 times) or *'Eliyah* (8 times) and *Yeshah'yahu* (35 times) or *Yeshah'yah* (4 times) respectively in the Hebrew text.<sup>8</sup> These names mostly occur in later books such as Kings, Chronicles, Isaiah, and Jeremiah. The longer *Yeho-* and *-yahu* affixes tend to be shortened to *Yo-* and *-yah* in later texts (such as Ezra and Nehemiah, where the *-yahu* suffix is almost non-existent), although there is quite a bit of variation in the Masoretic Hebrew text. The following paragraphs contain almost all of the theophoric names with their translation.

Some names indicate what Jehovah is to His people personally, such as my God is Yah (Elijah), Jehovah is God (Joel), my Lord is Yah (Adonijah), the Lord is Yah (Bealiah), my Lord Yah is good (Tob-adonijah), my King is Yah (Malchijah), my Father is Yah (Abijah), Jehovah is Father (Joab), my brother is Yah (Ahijah), Jehovah is

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Brother (Joah), my beloved is Yah (Dodavahu), and He is Jehovah (Jehu).

The names also describe what He is in function or in an inanimate sense, such as my portion is Yah (Hilkiah), my festival or feast is Yah (Haggiah), my light is Yah (Uriah, Urijah), my lamp is Yah (Neriah), Yah is a refuge (Mahseiah), Yah is salvation (Isaiah, Joshua, Jeshua), Jehovah is a witness (Joed), Jehovah is an oath (Jehosheba, Jehoshabeath), and the thunder of Yah (Raamiah).

**T**he names describe Jehovah's qualities or attributes, such as Yah/Jehovah is strong (Hezekiah, Jehoash, Joash), Yah is mighty (Amaziah, Azaziah), my strength is Yah (Uzziah), Yah is great (Gedaliah, Igdaliah), Yah/Jehovah is exalted (Athaliah, Jehoram), my splendor is Yah (Hodiah), Yah is lovingkindness (Hasadiah), my good(ness) is Yah (Tobiah, Tobijah), completeness of Yah (Meshelemiah), Jehovah is perfect (Jotham), Yah is wonderful (Pelaiah), Jehovah is noble (Jehonadab), Jehovah is glory (Jochebed), Yah/Jehovah is righteousness (Zedekiah, Jehozadak), and Yah is incomparable: who is like Yah? (Micaiah).

Some names indicate what Jehovah's people are to Him, such as, vessel of Yah (Bakbukiah), work of Yah (Maaseiah), possession of Yah (Mikneiah), beloved of Yah (Jedidiah), servant boy of Yah (Neariah), and servant of Yah (Obadiah).

Other names reflect actions of Jehovah, either in the experience of parents in obtaining a child, such as Jehovah's answering a request for the birth of the child or Jehovah's answering a general request. For example, Yah/Jehovah has seen (Reaiah, Hazaiah), taken account of (Hashabiah Hashabneiah), reckoned (Sheariah), has heard (Shemaiah), has given ear (Azaniah), remembered (Zechariah, Jozacar), answered (Anaiah), said (Amariah), blessed (Berechiah), bestowed (Zabadiah, Jehozabad, Jozabad), given (Nethaniah, Jonathan), created (Beraiah), made (Asaiah), built (Benaiah), and accomplished (Gemariah).

Some names may reflect the birth process, such as Yah opened [the eyes] (Pekahiah), opened [the womb] (Pethahiah), loosens [the womb] (Jeremiah), and has drawn out (Delaiah). Some names reflect that through the birth of the child, Yah has added (Josiphiah), enlarged (Rehabiah), replaced or compensated for (Shelemiah), and the child is a gift of Yah (Mattithiah, Mattaniah). The name may point to joy at birth or joy at some other event: Yah/Jehovah has given joy (Habazziniah), given grace (Hananiah, Jehohanan, Johanan), and results in praise of Yah (Hodaviah).

Names with the imperfect verbal prefix *ye-* may reflect a wish for the future care of the child or the people in a general way: may Yah/Jehovah establish (Jeconiah), raise

up (Jekamiah, Jehoiakim), strengthen (Jeheziah, another name for Hezekiah), support (Josiah), bless (Jeberchiah), and purify (Izziah).

**N**ames may indicate general statements about Jehovah's customary acts (particularly with the imperfect verb form) or past acts (with the perfect verb form). For example, Yah/Jehovah hears (Shemaiah), gives ear (Jaazaniah, Jezaniah), knows (Jedaiah, Jehoiada, Joiada), sees (Jahzeiah, Irijah), has been able or is able (Jecoliah, Jechiliah, Jehucal), and lives (Jehiah). Yah has delivered (Pelatiah), has saved (Hoshaiah), has rescued (Melatiah), has drawn out (Delaiah), has hidden or protected (Hobaiah, Zephaniah), has ransomed or ransoms (Pedaiah Iphdeiah), has risen or arises and has shone or shines forth (Zerahiah, Izrahiah, Jezrahiah), has exercised diligence or has dawned (Shehariah), has helped (Azariah, Joezer—Jehovah is a help), assists (Joshaviah), has borne or carried (Amasiah), has sustained, sustains, or supports (Semachiah, Ismachiah), has strengthened (Hezekiah), has preserved or kept (Shemariah), has established (Chenaniah, Jehoiachin), caused to dwell (Joshibiah), plants (Jareshiah), has taken up His abode or dwelling (Shecaniah), has met by appointment (Noadiah), has healed (Rephaiah), forgets or forgives (Isshiah, Isshijah), has comforted (Nehemiah), has judged (Shephatiah, Jehoshaphat), contends (Jehoiarib), has sent burning heat (Sherebiah), has persevered or persisted (Seraiah), has reserved or set apart (Azaliah), has seized or grasped (Ahaziah, Jehoahaz), has purified or purifies (Tebaliah, Izziah), has adorned (Adaiah, Jehoaddah), and even has adorned with gems (Remaliah).

## The Transformation of the Name *YHWH*

### *Substitution*

In post-exilic times and in Second Temple Judaism, the name of Jehovah became less used in both writing and speaking; eventually, it was no longer pronounced. This tendency can already be observed in the later books of the Old Testament. For example, more than thirty times in parallel passages in Chronicles, in the place of the name *Jehovah* in Samuel/Kings another divine name occurs, usually *God* (*ha'Elohim*).<sup>9</sup> *Elohim* also occurs more frequently than *Jehovah* in the later books, such as Ezra, Nehemiah, and Daniel.

The motivation for this was perhaps a concern not to take His name in vain (Exo. 20:7; Deut. 5:11), not to blaspheme the name (Lev. 24:11, 16; Isa. 52:5), or not to mention the name (especially in a dreadful place of death, Amos 6:10). This fear was perhaps enhanced in post-exilic times when Israel was dominated by foreign powers, and there was an increased possibility of the improper use of the name by Gentiles. As a result, the uttering of the

name was restricted to the sacred space of the temple (the place where Jehovah caused His name to dwell) and only by the priestly hierarchy. Perhaps, the shortened forms of Jehovah—*Yeho-*, *Yo-*, *Yah*, *Yahu*, *Yao*—were acceptable as secondary pronunciations in order to reserve the full pronunciation for the priests in the temple.<sup>10</sup>

Eventually the name *YHWH* was substituted by the appellative *'Adonay* (Lord). This process of substitution appears to have been in place by the time that the Old Testament began to be translated into Greek around 280-250 BC. When the translators came across the divine name *YHWH*, they translated it mostly using the word κύριος (Lord) and occasionally using θεός (God). In places the Qumran scribes also avoided the divine name, using four dots or encoded the divine name with paleo-Hebrew script.<sup>11</sup> The writers of the New Testament followed the Septuagint, using κύριος for *YHWH* in Old Testament quotes and allusions.

When the Masoretic scribes put vowel pointing on the consonantal Hebrew text, they followed the convention of not adjusting the written (*ketiv*) consonants but of adding the vowels that would indicate how the consonants should be read (*qere*). Rather than replacing the consonants *YHWH* with the word *'Adonay* they put the vowels of *'Adonay* with the consonants *YHWH*, understanding that the reader would read *'Adonay* when they came to the divine name.

In cases where the expression *'Adonay* occurred with *YHWH*, rather than expecting the pronunciation *'Adonay* to be repeated—*'Adonay 'Adonay*—they followed the convention of pronouncing *'Elohim* for *YHWH* by placing the vowels of *'Elohim* under the consonants *YHWH*. Therefore, if someone were to read the consonants, without respecting the Masoretic convention of reading another appellative, they would pronounce the divine name *Yehovah*, and when *'Adonay* occurred with *YHWH*, the divine name would be pronounced *Yehovih*.<sup>12</sup>

This substitution of the divine name *YHWH* with *'Adonay* not only caused a loss in the distinction between the divine name and the appellative *Lord* but also brought different notions, i.e., sovereign, ruler, etc., rather than the more intrinsic notions of becoming and being that are embodied in the name *Jehovah*.

### *The Replacement of the Name YHWH in the New Testament*

By the time of the New Testament another substitution, or rather an addition, occurred to the name *Jehovah*.

Jehovah took it upon Himself to “become” something in addition to being God. Through the process of incarnation He became a man. His name *Jesus* (*Yeshua*, shortened from *Yehoshua* or *Joshua*—Greek, Ἰησοῦς) bore the theophoric prefix *Ye-* attached to the word *salvation*, and means “Jehovah is salvation,” as is indicated by the gloss “for it is He who will save His people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21).

In the New Testament Jesus indicated that He was Jehovah both in the absolute sense of being the I AM and in the predicated sense of “I AM, the One who meets His people’s need.” This is most clearly revealed in the Gospel of John. Jesus refers to Himself in the absolute sense as the I AM more than five times—three times in John 8: “Unless you believe that I am, you will die in your sins” (v. 24; cf. John 13:19); “when you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am” (8:28); and “before Abraham came into being, I am. So they picked up stones to throw at Him” (vv. 58-59); and twice in John 18 at the time of His arrest: “They answered Him, Jesus the Nazarene. He said to them, I am...When therefore He said to them, I am, they drew back and fell to the ground”

(vv. 5-6). The response of the Jews to Jesus when He uttered these words is a strong testimony to the equating of Jesus with Jehovah as the I AM.<sup>13</sup>

John also indicates that Jesus is the I AM in a predicated sense in his use of the expression ἐγὼ εἰμί in his writings.

This particular expression, which has the emphatic use of the first person pronoun ἐγὼ preceding the first person singular form of the verb *to be* (εἰμί), almost always occurs with a complement that could refer only to Jehovah as the self-existing and ever-existing One for the statement to have validity. Jesus says that He is the bread of life (6:35, 48); the bread that came down out of heaven (v. 41); the living bread which came down out of heaven (v. 51); the light of the world (8:12; cf. 9:5); One who testifies concerning Himself (8:18); the door of the sheep (10:7); the door (v. 9); the good Shepherd (vv. 11, 14); the resurrection and the life (11:25); the way and the reality and the life (14:6); the true vine (15:1); and the vine (v. 5). In Revelation ἐγὼ εἰμί occurs with the modifiers the Alpha and the Omega (1:8), the First and the Last (v. 17), He who searches the inward parts and the hearts (2:23), and the Root and the Offspring of David, the bright morning star (22:16).<sup>14</sup>

In addition, in Revelation John also uses the verb *to be* in its three tenses to refer to God as *He who is and who was and who is coming* (1:4, 8; Gk. ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος; cf. 4:8, *who was and who is and who is coming*,

Gk. ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος). This is also a reference to God as Jehovah, the reality of the verb *to be*, yet also at the same time links this formula with Christ. As McDonough states, John substitutes “‘is to come’ for the expected ‘will be’” to indicate that

this “coming” of God is inextricably linked with the coming of Christ. It is surely no coincidence that in between the *Dreizeitenformeln* [three times formulas] in 1:4, 8, John gives his conflated quotation of Dan. 7:13 and Zech. 12:10: “Behold he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him...” (Rev. 1:7). John cannot utter the name of God without at the same time invoking the person of Christ. (233)<sup>15</sup>

In order to become the essential being of the believers and all that they need, it was necessary for Jesus not only to pass through death and resurrection to become the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45) but also to enter into ascension to be made Lord and Christ in His humanity (Acts 2:36); as such, He is now the Lord Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17-18).

**A**lthough the New Testament writers followed the Septuagint convention of substituting *YHWH* with κύριος, they also combined this appellation with the name of Jesus, to produce the name *Lord Jesus*. This can be seen in the quotation of Joel 2:32, “Everyone who calls on the name of Jehovah shall be saved,” and in Acts 2:21, where *Jehovah* or κύριος refers to Jesus (cf. v. 36). The same verse is developed by Paul in Romans 10:9-13 to apply to the salvation of the believers:

If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved;...for the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes on Him shall not be put to shame.” For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord is Lord of all and rich to all who call upon Him; for “whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

See also 1 Peter 2:3ff, cf. Psalm 34:8, and 1 Peter 3:15, cf. Isaiah 8:13. In Philippians 2:11 Paul also states emphatically, “Every tongue should openly confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.”<sup>16</sup>

### **The Significance of the Name *Jehovah* in God’s Eternal Purpose**

Both God’s name *Jehovah*, as the reality of the verbs *to become* and *to be*, and the processes He underwent in Christ indicate that God intends to be the intrinsic content of us, the believers. He desires to become what we were created to be according to God’s eternal purpose but can never become in our natural human life apart from Him.

We need to receive by faith all that He is and all that He has accomplished. Therefore, Hebrews 11:6 says, “Without faith it is impossible to be well pleasing to Him, for he who comes forward to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”<sup>17</sup>

As Witness Lee states,

Paul said that he who comes forward to God must believe that God is...This implies everything. Do you need God? God is. Do you need food? God is. This is why we use the word *great* in saying that Jesus is the *great* I Am. He told us, “I am...the life” (John 14:6a). “I am the resurrection” (11:25). “I am the door” (10:7, 9). “I am the good Shepherd” (10:11). “I am the bread of life” (6:35). He is the real food. There is only one kind of food that is. This food is Jesus, the great I Am. He is the breath (20:22), the living water (4:10, 14), and the tree of life (15:1; 14:6a; Rev. 2:7). He is God (John 1:1; 20:28-29; Rom. 9:5), the Father (Isa. 9:6; John 14:9-10), the Son (Mark 1:1; John 20:31), and the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17; 1 Cor. 15:45b). He is everything to us...

Then what is existing? Who exists? Only the great I Am—I Am That I Am. He who comes forward to God must believe that God is! Faith is so critical. Without this, you can never make God happy. You must believe that God is...

Faith is to stop you from doing anything but to make God everything to you. This equals Paul’s word in Galatians 2:20: “I am crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me.” Who lives? It is no longer I. I do not exist. I was terminated. I was crucified. I am finished. It is no more I, but Christ lives in me. Christ lives. Christ is. Christ exists. I do not exist. This is the very essence of the short word *believe that God is*. To believe that God is implies that you are not. He must be the only One, the unique One, in everything, and we must be nothing in everything...

The Lord Jesus said, “If anyone wants to come after Me, let him deny himself” (Luke 9:23). This word is the same as what Paul said: “He who comes forward to God must believe that He is.” To deny yourself equals to believe that God is, and to believe that God is equals to deny yourself. This is because you believe that only He is. In the whole universe He is, and all of us are nothing. I should not be anything. I should not exist. Only He should be everything. Only He should exist. So Paul says, “I have been crucified. It is no more I, but Christ.” (*Crystallization* 74-76)

Our faith in Christ should be accompanied by baptism (Mark 16:16; Acts 8:12; 18:8; Eph. 4:5). Baptism is a

testimony that we are good for nothing but death and burial. Baptism links us with Christ's death, in which we were crucified with Him (Rom. 6:3, 6, 8; Col. 2:20); thus, baptism testifies that we should no longer live by ourselves but live by the divine life. Paul speaks of this experience in his Epistles: "It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20; cf. Phil. 1:21); "not I but the grace of God" (1 Cor. 15:10); "not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God" (2 Cor. 1:12). This is in keeping with the Lord's charge to the disciples that they must deny themselves by taking up the cross and following Him (Luke 9:23). To follow Christ is not merely to imitate Him in His outward deeds but to deny our natural human life and to live by the divine life, which is actually Christ our life (Col. 3:4). Christ in His human living has established this pattern for the believers: He did not speak His own words but spoke the Father's (John 14:10, 24; 8:28, 38; 12:49-50; 17:8), did not do His own works but did the Father's (10:25, 32; 17:4), did not teach His own teaching but taught the Father's (7:16-17), and did not do His own will but did the Father's (6:38; 5:30; 4:34; Luke 22:42). In John 6:57 the Lord expresses His desire that His believers follow Him in this self-denying and God-manifesting life: "As the living Father has sent Me and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also shall live because of Me."

**I**t is by rejecting our natural life and living by Christ that we the believers can be the Body of Christ in reality and thus express Christ as the I AM. This is because in actuality the Body of Christ is not merely a group of redeemed believers but more intrinsically the corporate Christ, that is, the enlarged expression of Christ in the believers. The Body of Christ is the new man, a corporate entity composed of the believers whom Christ as the I AM has thoroughly replaced with Himself in their being and living. In portraying this reality, Paul speaks of the new man, where there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, male or female, but Christ is all and in all (Col. 3:11; Gal. 3:28).

### Conclusion

The name of Jehovah is very significant in terms of God's eternal purpose. It indicates God's desire to become everything and be everything in His people's experience and constitution. The Old Testament reveals something of the appreciation and experience of the saints through the predicates associated with *Jehovah* and through theophoric names. However, it was necessary for Jehovah to go through a process so that He could enter into the

believers and thus be able to reconstitute them with Himself. As the life-giving Spirit, He can impart Himself as the essential content of the intrinsic being of the believers. The believers deny themselves through the subjective experience of the cross and appropriate Jesus, Jehovah, the I AM, as their all-inclusive replacement, who is received and participated in by faith. The goal of this is the building up of the church as the Body of Christ and the new man, where there cannot be anything natural or cultural but Christ is all and in all.

by Roger Good

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>In this article we mostly use the traditional English *Jehovah* for the name of God with the four consonants *YHWH* (the Tetragrammaton or four letters). Most modern scholars prefer *Yahweh*. Neither *Jehovah* nor *Yahweh* concurs exactly with Modern Hebrew pronunciation conventions, which would pronounce the name *Yehovah* or *Yahveh*.

<sup>2</sup>*Ehyeh* occurs elsewhere, but always grammatically correct, and it is usually translated as a future tense of the verb *to be* (see below). In the first person, Jehovah frequently (over 200 times) refers to Himself, saying, "I am Jehovah" (*'ani YHWH*), either absolutely (especially after an injunction, e.g., Exo. 6:2, 6, 8, 29; 12:12; Lev. 18:5-6, 21; 19:12, 14, 16, 18, 28, 30, 32, 37; 21:12;

22:2-3, 8, 30-31, 33; 26:2, 45; Num. 3:13, 41, 45) or with some modification, such as "I am Jehovah who..." or "that X may know that I am Jehovah" (74 times). The expression *'ani hu'* (*I, He, or I am He*) also occurs 7 times (Deut. 32:39; Isa. 41:4; 43:10, 13; 46:4; 48:12; 52:6), and the phrase *'anoki hu'* occurs twice (43:25; 51:12). These are considered alternate ways of expressing *I AM* using the third person pronoun as a substitute for the verb *to be*.

<sup>3</sup>In Exodus 6:2-7 Jehovah again appears to Moses and says, I am Jehovah. And I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as the All-sufficient God; but by My name Jehovah I did not make Myself known to them... Therefore say to the children of Israel, I am Jehovah, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. And I will take you to Myself as My people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am Jehovah your God, the One who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.

There is some controversy over the significance of the expression "by My name Jehovah I did not make Myself known to

them.” Some consider that this confirms a late source for the text prior to Exodus 3 that mentions the name *Jehovah*, or that these places where *Jehovah* is mentioned are the insertions of a later editor, and others consider that the early Old Testament believers knew the name *Jehovah* but did not know or appreciate its significance according to what was revealed in Exodus 3. Wenham discusses four possible interpretations of this text but reaches a different conclusion, that *Yahweh* was added by a later editor (180-183).

<sup>4</sup>This semantic change is outlined quite succinctly in Schniedewind (17). See also the article by Gianotti in which he argues for the primacy of this understanding of *hayah*, “the phenomenological view” (45ff). He concludes, “The name YHWH points to God’s relationship to Israel in both His saving acts and His retributive acts, manifesting His phenomenological effectiveness in Israel’s history. What God says, He will do” (48).

<sup>5</sup>The name *Jehovah* is probably based on the third person masculine singular imperfect form (which has a prefix *y-* of the three consonantal verb root *HWY*. In its early stages following the pattern *\*yaqtulu* or *\*yaqtalu* (for stative verbs), it could have had a form that was something like *\*yahwiyu* (by the first *u* vowel changing to assimilate to the following *y*) or *\*yahwayu* meaning “he exists” or “he will become.” Changes in the Hebrew language such as the initial *a* becoming *i*, produced *\*yihwiyu* or *\*yihwayu*. The middle consonant *W* was replaced by *Y*, and the third consonant *Y* was replaced by *H* in the word’s final configuration (the triphthong *-iyu* or *-ayu* reduced to the monosyllabic *-eh*), which produced the current verb form *yihyeh* from the verb *hayah* (cf. *'ehyeh*). The verb *HWY/HWH* occurs rarely in biblical Hebrew (Gen. 27:29; Eccl. 11:3; 2:22; Neh. 6:6) but functions as the standard verb *to become* or *to be* in biblical Aramaic (cf. Dan. 4:29; 5:19; 7:13). The middle consonant *W* has been preserved in the Hebrew verb *hayah* in its participle *hoveh* (cf. Eccl. 2:22; Neh. 6:6) and in the piel, pual, and hitpael conjugations, and the final *Y* occurs in first and second person perfect forms before the personal suffixes.

<sup>6</sup>There is an alternative way in Hebrew of indicating “I will be”: *hayah* preceded by the conjunction *waw* (and), producing the *waw* consecutive form *wehayyiti*; for example, “and I will be your/their God” (Gen. 17:8; Exo. 6:7; 29:45; Lev. 26:12; Jer. 7:23; 31:33; Ezek. 37:27); and “I will be with you” (1 Kings 11:38). N.B. In verse references such as Zech. 2:5<9> the angle bracket <9> indicates the verse number in the Hebrew text when it differs from the English.

<sup>7</sup>This is not to mention numerous times when *Jehovah* is in apposition to another title, e.g., *Jehovah, God of hosts*.

<sup>8</sup>According to Fowler, there are 639 individuals who bear a theophoric element of *yhw*—either as a prefix, occurring 132 times (*yeho-*, *yo-*, or *ye-*), or a suffix, 507 times (*-yahu* 123 times, or *-yah* 340 times, with 44 names with both)—compared to the next most frequent theophoric name with *'el* borne by 318 individuals (32, 34-35).

<sup>9</sup>YHWH is replaced by *'Elohim* in 2 Samuel 5:20, 23, 25

parallel to 1 Chronicles 14:11, 14, 16; 2 Samuel 6:5, 9 (2 times), 11, 17 (2 times) parallel to 1 Chronicles 13:8, 12 (2 times), 14 and 16:1 (2 times); 2 Samuel 7:3, 4 parallel to 1 Chronicles 17:2, 3; 2 Samuel 7:19 parallel to 1 Chronicles 17:17; 2 Samuel 24:10 parallel to 1 Chronicles 21:8; 1 Kings 3:5 parallel to 2 Chronicles 1:7; 1 Kings 6:1 parallel to 2 Chronicles 3:3; 1 Kings 7:40, 48, 51 parallel to 2 Chronicles 4:11, 19 and 5:1; 1 Kings 8:11, 63 parallel to 2 Chronicles 5:14 and 7:5; 1 Kings 12:15 parallel to 2 Chronicles 10:15; 1 Kings 15:15 parallel to 2 Chronicles 15:18; 1 Kings 22:14 parallel to 2 Chronicles 18:13; 2 Kings 11:3, 4, 10 parallel to 2 Chronicles 22:12 and 23:3, 9; 2 Kings 12:14<15> parallel to 2 Chronicles 24:13; 2 Kings 14:14 parallel to 2 Chronicles 25:24; 2 Kings 18:35 parallel to 2 Chronicles 32:14; 2 Kings 21:7 parallel to 2 Chronicles 33:7; 2 Kings 22:4, 19 parallel to 2 Chronicles 34:9, 27. Interestingly, in a couple of places the trend reverses, and *ha'Elohim* in Samuel/Kings is changed to *YHWH* in Chronicles (2 Samuel 7:2 parallel to 1 Chronicles 17:1 and 1 Kings 12:22 parallel to 2 Chronicles 11:2).

<sup>10</sup>It seems that the Masoretes preserved the vocalization on these forms, only substituting the vowels of *'Adonay* for the full form of the name *YHWH* (cf. below). See McDonough, 116-122.

<sup>11</sup>Some Greek manuscripts and texts also represent the divine name *YHWH* using Aramaic or archaic Hebrew script, or transliterate it as *Iao*, *Iabe*, *Iaoue*, or even ΠΙΠΙ (as a Greek approximation to the appearance of the Hebrew consonants!). Some consider that these reflect an older original practice, but Albert Pietersma convincingly argues that *kyrios* was original and these manuscripts were archaizing (99).

<sup>12</sup>This is the most common explanation for the origin of the name *Jehovah* in English, with the *Y* (or *I* in English) being substituted by a *J*, which, rather than being pronounced by a glide (*y*) as in German (e.g., *ja* = *ya*), is pronounced in English as an affricate *dj* as in *Jehovah*, *Joshua*, and *Jesus*. However, the Masoretic pointing with the exact vowels of *'Adonay* would produce a slightly different word *Yahovah* (the first vowel being an *a* vowel, a hateph patach, rather than an *e* vowel, a simple shewa). The Masoretes could have pointed the word *Yahovah*, in the same way that they occasionally point the first syllable of *Yehovih* with a hateph seghol (Gen. 15:2, 8; Judg. 16:28), although they are both grammatically impossible forms. For the most part they pointed the first syllable with a shewa, perhaps to conform the words to the rules of Hebrew pronunciation, or perhaps so that the resulting form *Yehovah* would coincide with the prefix *Yeho-* in theophoric names. An alternate pronunciation for the divine name, *Yahweh*, is explained as corresponding to the suffix *-yah* as in hallelujah (*halleluyah*) or Isaiah. Some consider *Yahweh* as deriving from a causative hiphil of the verb *hawah*, meaning something like “He will cause to come into existence,” i.e., “create.” However, there is no other attestation of a hiphil for this root or for the verb *hayah* in biblical Hebrew. Also in the gloss given to Moses in Exodus 3, the basic (qal) conjugation of the verb is used rather than the causative (hiphil) form. If the hiphil interpretation is rejected, then the name *Yahweh* is also problematic in that it combines early (*yah-*) and



late (-*veh*) features of the language in one form. See Mettinger, who argues against the causative meaning (29-33).

<sup>13</sup>Other cases are John 6:20 (Jesus walking on the sea), and twice with attributive participles: "I, who speak to you, am He" (i.e., the Messiah—4:26; cf. Isa. 52:6); and "I am One who testifies concerning Myself" (John 8:18). Kerr also considers that the name that the Father has given to Jesus in John 17:11-12 is I AM (323-336).

<sup>14</sup>See note 2 in my article "Γίνονται and Christ's 'Becomings'" in *Affirmation & Critique* X.1 (April 2005): 41-46.

<sup>15</sup>Some even use the pronunciation of *Jehovah* to demonstrate the three times by dividing the name *Jehovah* into three components of *hayah* with the meaning "to be": *Ye-ho-vah*: *Yi[h/ye]h*- or *Ye[h/iy]*- future tense, "he will be"; *ho-[veh]* present tense, "he is"; and *[ha]-vah* past tense, "he was" (cf. Newberry xx). Davidson divides the name into two parts, a future *yeho-* and a past or preterite *-vah*, corresponding to "the verb *to be* being twice repeated as in Ex. 3.14" (171).

<sup>16</sup>The Jehovah's Witnesses' New World Translation attempts to restore the name of Jehovah in the New Testament from Old Testament quotation and in allusions containing the name (237 times), but they tellingly omit Romans 10:13, a clear indication that Jesus is Jehovah! They also keep *Lord* for the translation of 1 Pet. 2:3ff, cf. Ps. 34:8; and 1 Pet. 3:15, cf. Isa. 8:13, where the Old Testament quotation or allusions clearly have *Jehovah*.

<sup>17</sup>The context of Hebrews 11:6 is the example of Enoch in the preceding verse, "By faith Enoch was translated so that he should not see death; and he was not found, because God had translated him. For before his translation he obtained the testimony that he had been well pleasing to God." The book of Hebrews follows the Septuagint translation of Genesis 5:24 which, according to the Hebrew Masoretic text, reads, "Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him." Enoch denied himself to walk with God, living and walking in God's presence (cf. 4:16), and he was not. We need to walk with God to such an extent that we become saturated with God as the One who is, and we are not, just like Enoch was not; then we will be qualified to be raptured. As Witness Lee states, most

act and behave by believing that they themselves are.  
You can seldom see a brother who shows, in his attitude

and expression, that he does not believe that he is but believes that only God is. A person who does not believe that he is but believes that only God is, is the Lord's overcomer. (*General Outline* 44)

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## Footnote from the Recovery Version of the Bible

"Thus all the generations from Abraham until David are fourteen generations, and from David until the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon **until** the Christ, fourteen generations" (Matt. 1:17).

**until:** All the generations were directed to Christ and brought in Christ. Christ is the goal, the consummation, the conclusion, the completion, and the perfection of all the generations; as such, He fulfills their prophecies, solves their problems, and meets their needs. When Christ comes, light, life, salvation, satisfaction, healing, freedom, rest, comfort, peace, and joy all come with Him. From this point on, the whole New Testament is a full expounding of this wonderful Christ, who is everything to us. Hallelujah, Christ has come!