

# APOLOGIA

... always be ready to give a defense [Greek, *apologia*]  
to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you ... 1 PETER 3:15

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## The Divine Names 5 steps up from paganism

IT IS TRUE that not all of us are called to be missionaries of the gospel, let alone apostles – literally, ones ‘sent forth’ to preach the gospel. Yet it is an apostle, Peter, who commands Christians to *sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you.*

So an apostle tells us we are to be apologists! How do we measure up, we defenders of the faith? When Peter urged us *always be ready ...* the context of this command was the immediate threat of suffering for the name Christians bore. Nero ruled. And what was Nero’s version of

### The Son sums up his mission – the revelation of the Father

[on John 17] Jesus speaks as the revealer of the Father. The Father’s name is his character, which Jesus has manifested to his disciples, preeminently in his actions and words there in the upper room (13:1-16:33). The ‘world’ as a whole had failed to recognize Jesus as the revealer of the Father ... The Father’s name, already declared to the disciples by the Son, would be declared in the Son’s death on the cross more eloquently than in any other way. [F.F. Bruce - seen on the right (*The Gospel of John* 330-337)]



*Entertainment Tonight?* Christians facing wild animals, even burning for their faith. What was the NAME that made them so phenomenally unpopular? Nero did not burn Jews, nor pagans.

We are – ALL of us – called to be apologists. When we make a defense for the hope in us, Peter adds, we should do so *with gentleness and reverence*. So when a Jehovah’s Witness calls upon us, and we, gently and reverently, allow him to express his hope, what will we hear? That unless you call on the name JEHOVAH you have no hope of getting out of this age alive. How will we show a JW he is mistaken?

Thus 15 million people on the planet believe the name JEHOVAH separates the saved from the lost. Then there are 100 times that number who will tell you that there is but one God and his name is ALLAH. How will we respond gently and reverently to those who will die — and perhaps even kill – for the name ALLAH? Perhaps Christians of prior generations could ignore this question. Can we?

Does it **really** matter at all what we call God? Or are the exponents of radical ‘Christianity’ right, that such conflicts over ‘theology’ just divide us and get in the way of loving our neighbour as ourselves? In other words, so they say, all names lead to God.

### God is ELOHIM

Let us attempt an elementary overview of what the Bible reveals as to the use of the Divine Names.

First, the first name used of Deity in the Bible. This name is used 35 consecutive times in the beginning of Genesis before another name occurs. Which name is used EXCLUSIVELY in the creation account? ELOHIM, and herein is the clue we need as to WHY it is used, and why exclusively. *Elohim* is God in His power, God in His transcendence – God in contrast to His creation, and apart from it.

But Genesis records that mankind lost the knowledge of one true God, transcending and apart from creation. Polytheism became the religious norm. What is polytheism? Belief that there are multiple powers or gods, each having a personal domain. This was the religious state of things when the Bible began to be written about 3500 years ago, in the

days of Moses. In fact, polytheism was the multicultural norm even for millennia before Moses, when the patriarchs wandered the ancient east, around 2000 BC.

## EL ELYON – and henotheism

At that time a few had reached an intermediate stage in the ascent from pagan polytheism to monotheism. A step called HENOTHEISM. A belief that there may be many gods, but ONE of them deserves to be called **EL ELYON** – God Most High. For the name *elohim* is actually a plural in Hebrew, and came therefore to be used of pagan deities as well. Hence its short form EL, with the descriptive ELYON attached, was used to distinguish the highest God from other gods.

But this belief in GOD MOST HIGH is not CLEARLY monotheism. The name ELOHIM and its variant EL ELYON, while 2 necessary steps to a knowledge of the true God, do not clearly break with pagan polytheism. They still leave the possibility that the universe is actually a MULTI-VERSE, divided among several, even many, rival deities. Each of whom has his or her own people and own land or domain. Each deity, in this tolerant stage of human speculation, has specific gifts and attributes which other deities do not. This is the lure of polytheism, the very reason for its nearly universal popularity – the god you call upon has sufficient of what YOU want. If he or she does not, shop elsewhere – call upon another NAME. No god has exclusive claim – YOU choose. All names had magic power, and only by calling on the NAME could power be released on your behalf. So ritual magic and pagan polytheism were from the beginning inseparable .

And here is where we encounter the THIRD step upward from paganism. When God meets Abram, he lives in polytheistic Canaan. In Canaan the supreme god is EL, though BAAL is the most popular deity. And Baal and El had female counterparts, and sex, and children – ‘gods’ made in our image. How could the true God be distinguished from these very human deities? Add to this theological dilemma a very human one: even 25 years after God promises Abram he will be father of a great nation, he has no son by his one wife Sarai. Is even the Most High

God NOT sufficient for all things? Do we not think that Abram and Sarai are tempted to call upon the names of the local fertility gods?

## God as EL SHADDAI

At this very time God appears to Abram, and reassures Abram that indeed he will have a son, and that he will become father of a multitude. But by what NAME does He refer to Himself now? *I AM GOD ALMIGHTY (EL SHADDAI)*. Actually, Almighty is better rendered ALL-SUFFICIENT. The thought of God’s almighty power is already contained in the name *elohim*, but perhaps because *elohim* is grammatically plural, and therefore can be misunderstood, the patriarchs came to prefer the short form , EL, especially in tandem with SHADDAI. *El shaddai* could have no rival – no pagan gods were needed for backup, for this God was sufficient for ALL human needs. And He would prove His all-sufficiency by performing the impossible – restoring the generative powers of a 99-year old man and an 89-year old woman! In the miracle of Abraham becoming a father of multitudes, we reach the third step of God’s self-revelation.

So the promise of EL SHADDAI was fulfilled. Of Sarai, now Sarah, Isaac was born, Jacob from Isaac and Rebekah, and a nation of 12 tribes through Jacob. BUT – Abraham died, Isaac died, Jacob and the 12 patriarchs too. The nation EL SHADDAI had promised was now a fact. But it was a captive people, NOT living in liberty in the land of promise, but in slavery. Egypt, like Canaan, permitted a plurality of gods. Whatever you need, there is a god for you. A veritable supermarket of spirituality, smorgasbord of religious dishes. EL SHADDAI is OK for Hebrew slaves, but does the God of slaves recommend Himself to the royal family of Egypt?

Well, life’s unanticipated turns take one of the royal family OUT of Egypt for 40 years. A prince of Egypt who, providentially, has Hebrew blood. And when a burning bush speaks to this prince, what does it say? *I AM WHAT I AM. Go tell my people I AM has sent me to you.* And this God further says to Moses, *I AM YAHWEH. And I appeared to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as EL SHADDAI, but by my name YAHWEH I did not make*

*Myself known to them.* Did the patriarchs not know the name? Genesis says they called upon this name in worship. But the verb *to know*, in Hebrew, is much richer than in English. Adam *knew* his wife, we remember. Neither the patriarchs nor their descendants EVER enjoyed the intimacy with EL SHADDAI which was now offered in the revelation of the name YAHWEH.

## God revealed as YAHWEH

For this name, as JW's insist, IS by far the most common name of God in the Old Testament. We have almost 7000 instances of its use. But what we find when we actually examine its use in the OT will not please JW's.

Elohim, as such, remains transcendent to the world of phenomena; Jehovah, on the contrary, enters into the phenomena of space and time, in order to manifest Himself to mankind ... *Theophany* [the appearance or manifestation of God] in general is predicated of Jehovah, who, and not Elohim, holds intercourse with man in the manner of men. -- Gustav Friedrich Oehler, *Theology of the Old Testament*, pp. 98-99

In other words, God speaks PERSONALLY as Yahweh. So Yahweh/Jehovah, as revealed in the OT, is a God who is **personally present**. Who speaks **personally**. Who commits Himself in covenant to – Israel. The OT is absolutely adamant on this theme – Yahweh has revealed Himself to ONE nation and one nation alone. And Israel to this day acknowledges these truths – if only in a negative way. For since God ceased to communicate with Israel through the prophets, since the Shekinah glory ceased to be present among them, since the nation ceased to enjoy His covenant protection, which NAME no longer comes to their lips, which NAME is no longer uttered in synagogues? If you want to see a look of horror appear upon the face of even secular Jews, speak this name before them. So even Judaism has shoved God back to a safe distance, rejecting both Moses and God's Son. An awful irony that the people of Yahweh should share this with Islam & JW's! –

a horror at the thought of God coming personally into the world He has made.

Yahweh, the personal name of the God of Israel, is, however, NOT the name of God in the New Testament. There is yet a HIGHER step that we must reach in the knowledge of the true God. What is the subject of the LORD'S PRAYER? The prayer of John 17. For that which WE call 'Lord's prayer' is actually the disciples' prayer, the one WE are instructed to pray. And what is that prayer's first petition? *Our Father ... Hallowed be thy NAME*. But in the greatest and final prayer of Jesus before the cross, John 17, we have this claim of the Lord: *I have made your Name known, and will make it known*. This is how the Lord Jesus sums up His mission before He leaves the upper room. When I was a JW, this name had to be Jehovah. There was no higher name than the personal name of God, was there? But Yahweh/Jehovah does not occur once in the gospel of John, nor in any of the other gospels. Rather, *FATHER, glorify your NAME.... FATHER, glorify Thy Son, that Thy Son may glorify THEE*. Challenge the JW to search John 13-17, the most detailed record we have of that last night, and see which NAME the Son glorifies. It is the NAME JW's need to know, the name that horrifies Muslims, and the name which even orthodox Jews avoid or rarely use – FATHER.

## The Son's revelation of THE FATHER

Think on that last passover, the first communion. The passover's relation to the name YHWH, communion's relation to another name. The wine and bread, emblems of the New Covenant. The name YHWH had special significance as the revelation of unilateral commitment to covenant. YHWH was a God who personally revealed Himself. ELOHIM was a God transcendent, the God of all flesh, the Most High. But YHWH was intimate with His bride Israel, placing Himself – by His own will alone – in the bond of marital faithfulness, our best human analogy to the divine covenant.

But now, in the person of the Father, YHWH is even closer. Not just married to His people collectively, but personally related – we might

say BLOOD-related – to each ONE of them through the death of His Son. *Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the CHILDREN of God. ... He who has seen Me has seen the Father.* Christ tells them that even after the cross, this presence will continue. *Where 2 or 3 are gathered ..., there I am ... we will come ... make our abode ...*. These promises go even beyond anything YHWH did with Israel. We are no longer servants, contract employees dependent upon our obedience for our relationship. We are friends – and MORE. *Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the CHILDREN of God.* – 1 John 3:1

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But why would the highest revelation, the revelation of GOD THE FATHER, horrify JW, Muslim and even Jew? Why did it horrify Roman pagans?

## Why is God the Father so dangerous?

Look, for example, at the most prominent pagan city in the NT – Ephesus. What was the popular religion of Ephesus? Read Acts 19 and 20. Paul spends 3 years establishing the church in this city. What is the outstanding event of his stay? A riot breaks out, the whole city is in an uproar. Paul's gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God the Father is unpalatable in a city which worships a mother goddess, Artemis (Diana). These 2 systems of worship cannot co-exist. One must go. The democratic vote is cast for Diana. This Deity of Paul and John is too **dangerous**. You can lose your head worshipping Him. Paul did. *Woe to you when all speak well of you*, the Lord warns us. If you are cosy with the culture around you, watch out. It probably means you've already compromised. Paul or Diana must go. Paul went that time, but Diana went later – and for good. Or did she? Goddess worship is back. But Paul is unequivocal, uncompromising. *I bend my knees to the Father, to whom all families in heaven and earth owe their name.* Where do we find these words? In Ephesians. They needed to be heard in Ephesus which, economically & religiously, traditionally depended upon a goddess for sustenance..

We begin to see why Christianity was so detested by the religious establishment. Both Jewish AND pagan. The revelation of God the Father in the Son through the Spirit did not need RELIGION. No need of temples, no need of priests. What could be more threatening to supermarket religion than a PERSONAL relationship with God the Father. *One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all* [where are these revolutionary words? – in Ephesians]. The gods of paganism sit quietly on the shelf till you sample them. If you like the taste, you take them home. But the God that Paul preaches in Ephesus **demands** – COMMANDS – *that all men everywhere repent*, which means forsaking your former gods. The supermarket is out of business if this God wins. The Jews and the pagans beheaded Paul, as they had crucified his Lord. But the Lord sent another apostle to Ephesus – John. And what did John say? *You have no need of anyone to teach you. You have an anointing from the Holy One YOU ALL KNOW.* The Holy Spirit will be with you, you have no need of Artemis and her priesthood, Judaism and its priesthood, JW's and their 'organization' (which they refer to as 'Mother' – are we surprised?). We do not need Ephesus, Rome, Mecca or Salt Lake City – or even Jerusalem. Who was it who records Jesus talking to a woman by a Samaritan well? *Woman, believe me. The hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem shall you worship the FATHER ... the true worshippers shall worship the FATHER in spirit and truth; for such people the FATHER seeks to be His worshippers.* John here insists, as did Paul before him, that is the FATHER who is the true God, the FATHER who sets the terms of true religion. THIS is the gospel of liberty – from all priestcraft and human dependence.

Do you know what is ineffably sad? Muslims and JW's, and millions more, live in the world of 4000 years ago. And don't even know it. They live in the world before the revelation of Jehovah, and so before God the Father. But there is something even more tragic. That the church of Jesus Christ, in the name of Canada's new most high 'god' — TOLERANCE — should knowingly and willingly step back 4000 years. Declare the supermarket reopened. *I bend my knees to the Father, to whom all families in heaven and earth owe their name* We do not choose our name, and we do not choose God's name. Indeed it is the FATHER

who is the source of ALL – including our humanity and our identity. From HIS ‘name’ or identity comes our ‘name’ – OUR identity – as humans, our identity as individuals. If we lose HIS name, we lose ourselves. ALL is lost. Let us pray to the Father of Jesus Christ that this never happens to us.

Father, we all can know you now. We need no mediator but Jesus, who speaks to us through the Holy Spirit, through the Word. Father, we do not want to retreat into paganism, where God cannot be known, does not speak. You told those who had come from paganism in Ephesus, *You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light.* Father, forgive us for retreating 4000 years in 40, a single generation. Retreating to the world of Abram, where God was distant and dumb. Where the whole race fumbled as in a cave, not knowing whether God was male or female, fish or fowl, just or capricious, cruel or gracious. Thank you for revealing Yourself – God Most High, El Shaddai the All-Sufficient, Yahweh the faithful God of covenant, who walks among His people. And most of all we thank you, Father, for 2000 years ago revealing yourself in the Son by the Holy Spirit. Let us not step down again into the darkness. Let us remain standing on this the highest step of elevation, this highest peak of revelation. Amen