



LEFT PANEL

"Love YHWH your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength."

Deuteronomy 6:5 (NIV)

Commentary

YHWH

These four consonants are the personal name of the God revealed to Moses (Exodus 3) and worshiped by ancient Israel, Jews, and Christians. It may be pronounced "Yahweh," but since ancient times Jews have expressed their reverence by not pronouncing the name. Instead, they say "Adonai" ("Lord") or "Hashem" ("The Name") when reading scripture or speaking of God. Vowels for one of these words are printed in the Hebrew text wherever YHWH appears. "Adonai" became "Kyrios" ("Lord") in Greek translations of the Old Testament and in the New Testament Greek as well. Translations of the OT generally use "LORD" in all caps where YHWH occurs, to distinguish from the ordinary word "Lord."

Background

Our text is the second part of the Jewish "Shema," meaning "hear/listen/pay attention," which begins "YHWH is our God, YHWH alone." This God, the only true God, is the One we are commanded "to love with all our heart and soul and strength." Jesus declares the centrality of this text in Mark 12:32 (also in Matthew 22:37), quoting it in answer to a question about which commandment is the first and greatest of all. Jews place it in a tiny scroll inside a mezuzah on their doorposts.

Here the command to "love" signifies much more than just emotional attachment. The ancient context makes clear that it involves obedience – conformity day by day and moment by moment to the way of life that this God of justice, kindness, and grace requires of us, to "walk humbly" before our one and only God.