Pronouncing & Translating the Divine Name

History & Practice

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Contents

Introduction & Motivation .................................................................................................................. 3
Use of the Divine Name in the Hebrew Bible .................................................................................. 4
The Beginning of the End for Pronouncing God’s Name ............................................................... 6
  The Septuagint ............................................................................................................................... 11
  The Early Church and the Divine Name ......................................................................................... 18
  The New Testament Use of “Lord” .................................................................................................. 18
The Early Church & Late Antiquity ................................................................................................. 24
Translation Traditions from the Reformation to the Present ......................................................... 30
Sacred Name Movement & Bibles .................................................................................................... 38
Returning to Exodus 3:15 ................................................................................................................ 41
The Evidence for Yahweh ................................................................................................................ 42
The Lack of Evidence for Yahweh .................................................................................................... 42
Objections to the Pronunciation and Translation of יהוה .......................................................... 43
  We Don’t Have an Audio Recording of Moses ......................................................................... 43
  The Pronunciation of Yahweh is Historically Artificial ............................................................... 44
  Nehemiah Gordon ......................................................................................................................... 46
  We Run the Risk of “Taking God’s Name in Vain” .................................................................. 46
  Inconsistency, Overwhelming the Reader, and Creating Obstacles ............................................ 48
  Jews Will Be Offended ................................................................................................................ 50
  It Spoils the Literary Effect ......................................................................................................... 51
Conclusion ....................................................................................................................................... 51

Appendices ....................................................................................................................................... 54
  Some Key Verses where a Title Substitute is Awkward/Inadequate for YHWH ...................... 54
  A Selection of OT Passages Tracing the Importance of God’s Personal Name ...................... 56
  A Selection of NT Verses Tracing the Importance of “Name” .................................................... 57
  A Roman Catholic Perspective ...................................................................................................... 58

Bibliography ..................................................................................................................................... 61
Pronouncing & Translating the Divine Name יְהֹוָה

O Yahweh, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! —Psalm 8:1

The personal name of God is Yahweh. It is a foreign name, quite un-English, and so unlike the good Anglo-Saxon word ‘God.’ For that reason, if perhaps for no other, the name Yahweh must be preserved—lest it should ever be imagined that God is an Englishman. He is a foreigner now to every race on earth. The very awkwardness of addressing a God whose name is not native to one’s language in itself alerts us to the alienness of Yahweh to every god created in our own image. —David Clines

Introduction & Motivation

Growing up, I understood that the name of God was “the LORD.” As I got older, at some point I began to understand that when I saw the LORD in caps, that meant that it was the special, divine name of God revealed to Moses. This seemed strange and confusing to me—adding a level of complexity to understanding a Bible that was already difficult enough for a teenager to understand. I don’t remember when it was that I first heard the name Yahweh pronounced, but when I went to seminary I quickly realized that it was an accepted pronunciation and spelling for God’s name, especially in academic circles. Commentaries used it regularly, and professors assured me that it was the most reasonable approximation of the way it was originally pronounced.

Interestingly, most of what I learned about the divine name was in passing during seminary. There was no course dedicated to it, no class that devoted an entire hour to discuss it, nor any book recommended or required on the topic. That fact now saddens me. As I dig deeper into this issue, I realize that there is enough to construct an entire course around the name of God, most of which I was never taught in seminary.

Why did this study and interest arise? As my wife and I began creating Aleph with Beth (a video course that teaches Hebrew through communicative, comprehensible input), we came to the point where we realized that we needed to introduce the divine name. So we had to decide how we would pronounce it in the videos. Also, as a translation consultant, this is an important issue to grasp in order to adequately advise translation teams. This paper is an opportunity to explore this vast field of study, evaluate the evidence, and articulate the position we have arrived at, as well as help and encourage others to reevaluate preconceptions they may have about the matter.

This paper seeks to answer two primary questions:
1) Would it be better for translations of the Hebrew Bible to use some approximation of Yahweh, or a title like the Lord?
2) When teaching and reading Hebrew today outside of Israel, would it be better to pronounce his name as some approximation like Yahweh, or say Adonai (Lord)?

From the outset it should also be made clear that this paper does not intend to address the sense or meaning of God’s name. For that I recommend Austin Surls’s dissertation Making Sense of

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2 For more information visit http://freehebrew.online

In his book on Ancient Near Eastern worldview, Walton writes, “Ancient cultures considered something to exist when it had a name and a function…. [The name] is the god’s identity and frames the god’s ‘existence.’”\textsuperscript{4} It could be argued that modern cultures are very much the same way. In the West, for example, we are obsessed with having special names for everything, from sicknesses to psychological conditions to personality types. The impulse to name things and people is prominent across cultures today. This reality highlights the importance of careful and meticulous deliberation regarding the translation and pronunciation of God’s name.

Use of the Divine Name in the Hebrew Bible

Before looking at historical evidence outside the Bible, it is important to frame everything by what we do know from Scripture.

Although Exodus 3:15 will be discussed further in a later section, we should begin with it here. “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘Yahweh (יהוה), 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 thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.” In Hebrew the last sentence reads: והשם ילהי ליעלו והשם יבריח לזרד. Literally: “This (is) my name forever, and this (is) my memorial/remembrance/mention to generation generation.” Some versions like the NET Bible and KJV translate יבריח as memorial, but the word in this context can be understood as implying the speaking of the name, since things that remain unspoken are usually lost in oral cultures. Thus the NIV translates: “This is my name forever, the name you shall call me from generation to generation.” The entry for the noun יבריח in Holladay’s Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the OT reads as follows: יבריח: cs. = ; sf. יבריח, יבריח: — 1. mention (of a name) Dt 32:26; — 2. solemn naming or address of God Ex 3:15.

In Isaiah 26:8 God’s name and “mention/remembrance” are paired together, hearkening back to Exodus 3:15: “O Yahweh,…your name and remembrance (לדיבר) are the desire of our soul” (ESV). The opposite of this remembrance is the grave, where Yahweh’s name is not heard. Thus the psalmist, after addressing Yahweh by name, says, “For in death there is no remembrance (לדיבר) of you; in Sheol who will give you praise?” (Ps. 6:5, see also Ecc 9:5). Hosea picks up on Exodus 3:15 as well when he writes, “Yahweh, the God of hosts, Yahweh is his memorial name (לדיבר)” (Hos. 12:5 ESV).\textsuperscript{5} The psalmist also picks up the same theme: “Your name, O Yahweh, is everlasting, your remembrance, (לדיבר) O Yahweh, throughout all

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\textsuperscript{3} https://www.academia.edu/23163338/Making_Sense_of_the_Divine_Name_in_Exodus_From_Etymology_to_Literary_Onomastics


\textsuperscript{5} The NASB, NLT, and NIV completely obscure this by translating simply “the LORD is his name.” I assume their reason for doing so is that יבריח is used in synonymous parallelism with שם in places like Psalm 135:13.
“generations” (Ps. 135:13). English versions cannot seem to agree on a gloss for יְהֹוָה in this verse: NASB “your remembrance,” KJV “your memorial,” NET “your reputation,” NIV “your renown,” NLT “your fame.” What is clear is that this verse is a restatement or summary of God’s revelation of his name in Exodus, and it would be helpful to English readers to maintain the connection by translating יִדְרָם consistently in both places.

The seventh definition of זכר (the verbal root of the noun ידָרָם) in the BDB lexicon is as follows: “remember, with implied mention of, obj. מִי” They give an example for this from Jeremiah: “If I say, ‘I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,’ there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot” (Jer. 20:9). Craigie comments:

As a result of the derision and mocking (v 7) and the reproach and derision (a different word than v 7) (v 8), Jeremiah had decided no longer to proclaim the word…. The word זכר, here translated “mention,” most often means to “remember,” “recall,” or even “commemorate” (17:4). Certainly Jeremiah is not proposing to disremember Yahweh, to forget, as do the people. In this instance, the verb must have the connotation of mentioning. That connotation fits well with the parallel half-line, refusing to speak in Yahweh’s name.6

Here the desire to stop speaking Yahweh’s name is not out of respect or reverence, nor is it because Jeremiah considered it taboo or ineffable. It is simply because he is tired of being persecuted for it.

If we return to Exodus we find a hiphil form of זכר used to prohibit the mentioning (and hence remembering) of the names of other gods: “and the names of other gods you shall not mention (זָכַר הָאֱלֹהִים) nor shall they be heard upon your lips” (Ex 23:13). The NIV takes a different approach and translates “Do not invoke the names of other gods,” probably because it is obvious that Yahweh and the prophets themselves speak the names (or titles) of other gods throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, but not with the purpose of invoking them. The point of the verse is that God’s name is the only one worthy to be on people’s lips, and thus remembered and made famous. Other gods are not to be made to compete with him in this arena.

In the same vein, Joshua says, “and the names of their gods you shall not mention (זָכַר הָאֱלֹהִים) nor shall you swear by them nor shall you serve them nor shall you bow down to them” (Josh 23:7). In other words, a unilateral agreement of silence when it comes to the names of the gods is a way of forgetting and belittling them, which will help the Israelites avoid swearing by them and serving them.

So the question then becomes, by whose name should they swear? Scripture speaks clearly to this question in Deuteronomy 6:13: “It is Yahweh your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear.” Again: “You shall fear Yahweh your God. You shall serve him and hold fast to him, and by his name you shall swear” (Deut. 10:20). Jeremiah, as a faithful Torah student, reiterates the importance of this: “And it shall come to pass, if they will diligently learn the ways of my people, to swear by my name, ‘As Yahweh lives,’ even as they taught my

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people to swear by Baal, then they shall be built up in the midst of my people” (Jer. 12:16). This is a surprising promise to restore the other nations along with Judah, if they will learn the ways of Yahweh’s people. Thus it is clear that swearing by Yahweh’s name constitutes an important mark of those who belong to and follow him. Conversely, it is clear that Yahweh places no value on avoiding the use of his name out of reverence, or to avoid the risk of blasphemy. Consequently, to avoid using the name of Yahweh to make a vow would be to go against his explicit wishes.

Many people in the Hebrew Bible conform to Yahweh’s desire that his name be used to swear or vow. Boaz says to Ruth, “as Yahweh lives, I will redeem you” (Ruth 3:13). The people say to Saul, “Shall Jonathan die, who has worked this great salvation in Israel? Far from it! As Yahweh lives, there shall not one hair of his head fall to the ground” (1 Sam. 14:45). Even Saul says of David, “As Yahweh lives, he shall not be put to death” (1 Sam. 19:6). Elijah says, “As Yahweh, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word” (1 Ki. 17:1). Micaiah says, “As Yahweh lives, what my God says, that I will speak” (2 Chr. 18:13).

Thus it is clear that righteous men like Boaz and Elijah swore by Yahweh’s name. It is also worth noting that righteous men also used the name in formulaic greetings. Gordon writes,

> If it were forbidden to use the name we would expect that the righteous men of ancient Israel whose deeds are recorded in the Tanach would refrain from using it. Yet we find the name used repeatedly by the ancient Israelites…. the name is even used in what can be described as “casual” contexts. Thus Boaz and the Judahites of his day used the name of יהוה as a greeting, as we read in Ruth 2:4: “Now Boaz came from Bethlehem and said to those harvesting, ‘May יהוה be with you!’ And they answered him, ‘May יהוה bless you!’”

Although there is no uniform agreement among commentators about how casual or formulaic this greeting was, the opinions are admittedly speculation. What is clear is that the divine name is being used in a non-religious context as a kind of greeting. The context gives more weight to the idea that this was a standard greeting like “Good morning!” It also points to the fact that the name was not considered too sacred to pronounce in everyday interactions.

Another verse that seems to corroborate Boaz’s greeting also comes from the time of the Judges. The messenger of Yahweh appears to Gideon and says, “Yahweh is with you, O mighty man of valor” (Jdg. 6:12). This, as will be seen later, was considered by many throughout the history of Jewish interpretation as a legitimate use of Yahweh’s name in a greeting parallel to the one we see in Ruth.

### The Beginning of the End for Pronouncing God’s Name

So how did the Israelites go from swearing by Yahweh’s name and using it in simple greetings to forbidding its use altogether? God himself gives us a clue as to what might have motivated this historical change of attitude towards his name in the book of Amos. This book goes back at least to the 8th century B.C., and thus represents the oldest evidence of what might

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7 Nehemiah Gordon, “The Ban on the Divine Name,” http://messianicfellowship.50webs.com/ban.html, accessed June 22, 2020. I think most of Gordon’s conclusions regarding the divine name are misguided, and his research does not demonstrate sufficient rigor (more on this later), but he does raise some important questions and make some good observations.
have caused the shift. Amos warns the people of the coming exile and destruction that will punish their pride and oppression of the poor and needy. As he describes the horrors of Yahweh’s imminent judgment, he says something interesting. “And if the relative who comes to carry the bodies out of the house to burn them asks anyone who might be hiding there, ‘Is anyone else with you?’ and he says, ‘No,’” then he will go on to say, “Hush! *We must not mention the name of Yahweh*” (Amos 6:10). Stuart comments on the last part of the verse:

The point would seem to be that after the awful slaughter wrought by Yahweh, the few harried, terrified survivors will not be able to stand any further miseries and so will want to avoid “mention” (דבר נאך) of Yahweh. Since the speaker already uses Yahweh’s name, the issue cannot be prohibition of mere oral formulation, but must concern calling on Yahweh (cf. הזכיר in Isa 48:1) in prayers of lamentation or the like. Yahweh will have become foe, not friend. Survivors will want him to stay away, not come back.8

Thus there exists the strong possibility that some Hebrews were so traumatized by what happened under Yahweh’s judgment that they preferred not to talk about him anymore. This trauma could have easily developed into never mentioning his name for fear that they might somehow run the risk of falling under a similar judgment. This trauma-induced fear could have then evolved into the substitution of titles for God’s name, which the Jews later labeled as a sign of “reverence” or “respect.” This idea of avoiding his name out of “reverence,” however, cannot be found evidenced in Scripture, but rather is described in later traditions.

During the intertestamental period the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek, and an interesting thing happened in the translation of Leviticus 24:16. The original Hebrew reads:

> נקב יפרעה יפיה יתית

The one who blasphemes the name of Yahweh shall surely be put to death.

The Greek, on the other hand, reads ὁ ὄνομα τοῦ Κυρίου ἐπονομάσει καταράσετο. “The one who names the name of the Lord will surely be put to death.” According to the critical edition of Leviticus, the manuscript tradition is unanimous without variation so the form of the text is sure.9 In order to understand what may have happened, we must look carefully at the verb נקב and take into account relevant phrases in verses 11 and 15, which read respectively:

> יוסב ליהו היכל בקארלפש יסאוך אנס עיסים ידלוגל

the Israelite woman’s son blasphemed the Name, and cursed.

> נקב בְּרֵאשֵׁה תִיָּרָאָלְתֶּּה אֲרוּ חֶשְׁם ידְלוּגָל

καὶ ἐπονομάσας ὁ νῦς τῆς γυναικὸς τῆς Ἰσραήλιτιδος τὸ ὄνομα καταράσετο

Whoever curses his God shall bear his sin.

> אֲרוּ אֲשֶׁר כָּרִישֵׁלְה יִדְלוּגָל תְּלְוַי הָאָמָה

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According to *HALOT* בָּקָן can mean 1) to bore through, 2) to fix, establish, 3) to denote, curse, or slander. The last option, “slander,” is only attested in this chapter, Leviticus 24, while at the same time the meaning “to curse” comes through clearly in Job 3:8 and Prov 11:26. Imes also provides helpful commentary on the use of בָּקָן here:

First, the Akkadian cognate, *naqabu*, is undoubtedly negative (‘to deflower, rape’). Second, v.16 clearly employs the qal active participle of בָּקָן, making its reappearance in v. 11 more probable. Most likely בָּקָן is euphemistic for open disparagement of YHWH (cf. Job 2:9), since the unambiguously negative לָלֶגָּפ is never paired directly with ‘YHWH’ in the Hebrew Bible (though note LXX 1 Sam 3:13). This may also explain the narrator’s avoidance of the name ‘YHWH’ in his statement of the offense (vv. 11, 16). The meaning of בָּקָן in the present context is clarified in v. 15, which announces the oracular judgment based on this case: anyone who ‘disparages his God’ (**יִוֹדֵע לֶאָלִים לֵיהָּנִּים** is guilty.10

The LXX translators may have rendered בָּקָן in Lev 24:16 as “to name” for any of the following reasons:

1. In a spirit of piety they could not bring themselves to translate “curse/blaspheme/slander” directly connected to the divine name, so they used circumlocution to generalize or soften the phrase.
2. They simply misunderstood the Hebrew verb.
3. They allowed a belief about pronouncing the divine name to influence their translation.

Because of the LXX’s strong influence on post-exilic Judaism and the early Church, this reading may have led to the proliferation of sentiments against the pronunciation of the Name. If an anti-pronunciation belief was already prevalent during the time of the translation, then it may have served to strengthen that belief. This is admittedly speculation, but nevertheless an important piece of evidence that needs to be mentioned and considered in the search for a reason the tide turned against the pronunciation of the divine name.

The Babylonian Talmud offers another explanation, but not as ancient as Amos or the LXX:

The [Seleucid] Greeks decreed that the name of Elohim may not be spoken aloud; but when the Hasmoneans grew in strength and defeated them they decreed that the name of Elohim be used even in contracts... when the Rabbis heard about this they said, ‘Tomorrow this person will pay his debt and the contract will be thrown on a garbage heap’ so they forbade its use in contracts.11

So according to this Talmud account, the prohibition to use the name of Yahweh began as one of the anti-Torah decrees enacted by the Seleucid Greek tyrant Antiochus IV Epiphanes around 168

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B.C. This was part of his plan to convert the Jews into Greeks. But when Judas Maccabeus defeated the Greeks, he restored the used of the divine name and established a law “requiring the use of the name of יהוה in contracts so that every Jew would regain the habit of using the divine name. But the Rabbis were opposed to this decree and banned the use of the name in contracts.”12

Of the three primary Jewish religious groups described by Josephus in the centuries before Christ (Sadducees, Pharisees, and Essenes), only the Sadducees defended the use of the divine name and required its use in contracts. The Essenes, on the other hand, stood strictly against the mention of Yahweh’s name in their community rulebook:

Anyone who speaks aloud the M[ost] Holy Name of Elohim, [whether in... ] cursing or frivolously or as a blurt in time of trial or for any other reason, or while he is reading the book or praying, is to be expelled, never again to return to the body of the community.13

The wider context of this prohibition does not give any reason, whether out of reverence or respect. Note that the prohibition does not limit itself to using Yahweh’s name in cursing, but even in prayer or any other reason. This kind of blanket prohibition ignores the teaching of the very OT scriptures the Essene community is famous for preserving.

In order to ensure the complete elimination of the divine name’s use, they went so far as to write the name in Paleo-Hebrew script (which the average person could not read, since it had fallen into disuse in the 3rd century B.C.), even though the rest of their Hebrew documents are written in Aramaic square script. But just in case someone knew how to read Paleo-Hebrew script, some of the scrolls used four black dots • • • • in place of יהוה to prevent anyone from reading it.14 So one might read something like, “And • • • • spoke to Moses, saying....” Based on their own explicit statement regarding the prohibition, any attempt to claim that this practice was for the sake of “reverencing” God’s name is pure speculation. Based on the biblical teaching above, this practice of the Essenes accomplishes exactly the opposite of what Yahweh desired.

Later writings in the Mishnah from the 3rd century A.D. describe the developing attitude of Jewish teaching on the issue of pronouncing Yahweh’s name: “The following have no portion in the world to come: ... Abba Saul says: Also one who pronounces the divine name as it is written.”15

But the subsequent thread of rabbinic teaching does not always agree with this prohibition. Consider the following line of developments of Jewish commentary on Boaz’s greeting and Judges 6:12:

When the sectarians perverted their ways and said that there was only one world, they decreed that they should say, “for ever and ever [lit. from the end of the world to the end of the world]. They also decreed that a person should greet his fellow in God’s name, as it says, “And behold Boaz came from Bethlehem and said to the reapers, ‘May the Lord be with you.’ And they answered him, ‘May the Lord bless you’” (Ruth 2:4). And it also says, “The Lord is with you, you valiant warrior” (Judges 6:12). And it also says, “And do not despise your mother when she grows old” (Proverbs 23:22). And it also says, “It is time to act on behalf of the Lord, for they have violated Your teaching” (Psalms

13 The Rule of the Community, 1QS 6:27-7:2.
14 See 4QSamc, 1QS, and 4Q170.
15 Mishnah Sanhedrin 10:1
Pronouncing & Translating the Divine Name יהוה

119:126). Rabbi Natan says: [this means] “They have violated your teaching It is time to act on behalf of the Lord.”

The Talmud then comments on the above commentary from Berakhot 9:5:

The Sages also instituted that one should greet another in the name of God, i.e., one should mention God’s name in his greeting, as it is stated: “And presently Boaz came from Bethlehem and said to the harvesters, The Lord is with you, and they said to him, May the Lord bless you” (Ruth 2:4). And it says: “And the angel of God appeared to him and said to him, God is with you, mighty man of valor” (Judges 6:12). And it says: “And despise not your mother when she is old” (Proverbs 23:22), i.e., one must not neglect customs which he inherits. And lest you say that mentioning God’s name is prohibited, it says: “It is time to work for the Lord; they have made void Your Torah” (Psalms 119:126), i.e., it is occasionally necessary to negate biblical precepts in order to perform God’s will, and greeting another is certainly God’s will.

Berakhot 63a:7-8 then offers further commentary on the issue:

The Gemara explains: And if you say: Boaz said this on his own, and it proves nothing with regard to normative practice, come and hear a proof from the verse: “The Lord is with you, mighty man of valor” (Judges 6:12). And if you say that it was an angel who said this to Gideon, that perhaps this verse was the angel informing Gideon that the Lord is with him, but it is not the standard formula of a greeting, come and hear proof from the verse: “And despise not your mother when she is old” (Proverbs 23:22); the customs of the nation’s elders are an adequate source from which to derive halakha.

After the above comes further commentary (Makkot):

Why was the proof from Boaz’s statement to the harvesters insufficient? The Gemara explains: And if you would say: It is Boaz who did so on his own, and from Heaven they did not agree with him; come and hear proof, and it says: “The Lord is with you, mighty man of valor.” The angel greeted Gideon with the name of God, indicating that there is agreement in Heaven that this is an acceptable form of greeting.

Finally, the modern Jewish commentary on the discussion reads as follows:

The sages also decreed that it was permitted, and even worthy, to greet one’s fellow human being by using the name of God, as did Boaz and the other reapers. Usually decrees are meant to change a prior practice. Here the historical background is slightly unclear. My guess is that earlier generations thought that it was improper to use God’s name in greeting a mere human being. In contrast, according to the sages, since human beings were created in the image of God, there is a little bit of divine in every human being. In a sense then, greeting one’s fellow human being by using God’s name is like greeting God by using God’s name. Hence it is not only permitted, it is encouraged. The final two midrashim are not specifically related to the two decrees mentioned above but are rather general exhortations to heed the decrees of the sages.

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16 Mishnah Berakhot 9:5
17 Mishnah Berakhot 54a:1-9
Strangely, the typical practice and overwhelming culture around the divine name in Israel today is one completely contrary to what these commentaries conclude. In my research I have not found a reason for this.

**The Septuagint**

The majority tradition of the Greek translation of the Old Testament (LXX) used *kurios* in place of the divine name. The great Christian manuscripts Sinaiticus, Alexandrinus, and Vaticanus all have *kurios* in place of YHWH. What motivated this? Some scholars have suggested that this was a strategy used by authorities to facilitate the Hellenizing of Jews. By suppressing the special name of God and using *kurios* it made it more universal and easier to harmonize with the emperors and gods of the Greco-Roman world.¹⁸ Baudissin argued that the later practice of the Masoretes (of marking YHWH with alternate vowels) arose from the precedent set by the LXX.¹⁹ “He held this primarily because he did not consider *kurios* to be merely a pious way of avoiding articulation of the Tetragrammaton, but a distinct Semitic divine name (*'adon*) used instead.”²⁰

As already mentioned above, some Greek manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible have been discovered to differ from the standard of using *kurios* for the Name, especially amongst the Dead Sea Scrolls. One scroll containing the second half of Deuteronomy, dated from the middle of the 1st century B.C. contains no evidence of *kurios* at all. Instead, the scribe left large spaces where the divine name would have occurred, marked the gaps with a dot on each side, and then inserted the Name in Hebrew between the dots. One space was left blank. This may indicate that the first scribe was not able or allowed to write the Name in Hebrew, and thus left it for another.²¹

The Nahal Hever scroll fragments of the Minor Prophets (8Hev XII gr), dated from about 50 B.C. to 50 A.D. have the divine name written in paleo-Hebrew script in 28 places, as in the images below.

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²¹ Ibid., 55.
This same archaic script can be found in 12 Hebrew manuscripts of Leviticus and Job from the Dead Sea, and it is used consistently throughout those manuscripts.\(^{23}\)

Another interesting piece of evidence from Qumran is 4QpapLXXLev\(^b\) dated to the 1\(^{st}\) century B.C., which renders \(\text{i}a\hat{o}\) in the place of the Name, instead of \(\text{kurios}\). Frank Shaw argues that this manuscript represents an ancient contention over the pronunciation or avoidance of the Name, and that its use did not die out as early as some have proposed.\(^{24}\) Whether this constitutes evidence for the original translation practice of the first LXX translators remains speculation.

\(^{22}\) Image: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_Minor_Prophets_Scroll_from_Nahal_Hever


\(^{24}\) Frank Shaw, The Earliest Non-Mystical Jewish Use of \(\text{i}a\hat{o}\) (unpublished dissertation, University of Cincinnati, 2002) in Wilkinson, Tetragrammaton, 56.
Returning to the Nahal Hever fragments’ use of paleo-Hebrew, some have thought that this marks out the divine name as something too holy to be pronounced. Pietersma argued that these Greek manuscripts which write YHWH in Hebrew are actually later manifestations of an archaizing motivation on the part of the scribes (something the Essene community seemed to have a penchant for), rather than evidence of what the earliest LXX translation practice would have produced. In other words, Pietersma showed that it was probably indicative of some dissatisfaction with how previous manuscripts had rendered YHWH as *kurios*. He pointed out that in the Hebrew text we find יְהֹוָה (‘to YHWH’) hundreds of times, and this is rendered in later LXX mss as κυρίω (‘Lord’ in the dative case). An example of this is found in Genesis 4:3 where Cain brought the fruit of the ground as an “offering/sacrifice to YHWH”:

```plaintext
Μνήμη λήθης
θυσίαν τῷ κυρίῳ
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So Pietersma’s argument could be summarized by the following question: If the earliest LXX mss had rendered the divine name in Hebrew letters, without the inseparable preposition (e.g. θυσίαν יְהֹוָה), how would later revisers have known to insert *kurios* in the dative case? In other words, how would later revisers know when there was a *lamed* preposition attached to the Name?25 This argument is challenged, however, by the solution of inserting the dative article τῷ before the Name written in Hebrew, which is evidenced in the manuscript 8HevXIIgr already mentioned.

Further evidence of τῷ preceding the Name in Hebrew occurs in 4QLXXLevb at Leviticus 3:11, 14, and 4:3. Wilkinson writes:

The usage of these manuscripts has weakened Pietersma’s argument because kurioi (dative) could be a substitution for either iaô or the Tetragrammaton with the dative article toi. The article in Zechariah 9:1 of the Scroll of the Minor Prophets was perhaps inserted, as otherwise there would be no indication of case of the Tetragrammaton, and it might also be representing l. The nominative article in Habakkuk 2.20 does not resolve any ambiguity and does not represent anything in the Hebrew. Perkins, “Kurios,” accepts Pietersma’s argument that since the translator uses the genitive article and sometimes the dative article to represent lyhwh, a “kurios surrogator” would be more likely to be consistent in his rendering rather than choosing now one, now the other. M. Rosel also defends an original kurios, noting that although yhwh is usually translated by kurios and ’elohim by theos, there are several places in the Greek Exodus where kurios renders ’elohim and 41 cases where theos does so for yhwh. The majority of these cases seem textually quite firm. Given that there is no evidence that the translators’ Vorlage was different from our Massoretic text, if the original translator wrote iaô or a Hebrew Tetragrammaton, then we must suppose an improbable variation from a reviser choosing between kurios or theos. More probably, the original translator used the word he thought fit at the time. Rosel also considers that the Greek translation of Leviticus 24:16 ordaining death for one who “names the name of the Lord” [the LXX rendering] argues for the use of kurios there, because a translator using iaô or a Hebrew Tetragrammaton would violate the command (assuming naming also means writing). Martin Rosel, “The Reading and Translation of the Divine Name in the Masoretic Tradition and the Greek Pentateuch,” Journal for the Study of the Old Testament 31 (2001), 411–428.26

Pietersma maintained that the original translators wrote kurios without the article in Greek because they regarded it as a proper name—an idea we will return to later when we consider the question of the NT authors’ perception of kurios.27 By contrast, Emanuel Tov explained the absence of the article as evidence of a mechanical scribal replacement of iaô by kurios performed by Christians. He concluded that iaô “represents the earliest attested stage in the history of the LXX translation, when the name of God was represented by its transliteration, just like any other personal name in the LXX.”28 Yet Tov does not explain his view sufficiently, nor provide enough evidence to build a convincing case.

Church father Origen commented that the “most accurate” LXX manuscripts had the Name in ancient Hebrew letters, but it is not guaranteed that he had access to the earliest mss, and it’s probable that he was referring to the revised text of Aquila, which came later.29 Patrick Skehan presented an attempt to place the different LXX renderings of the Name in chronological order as follows:30

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26 Wilkinson, Tetragrammaton, 61.
27 Pietersma, “Kyrios or Tetragram,” 98.
29 Wilkinson, Tetragrammaton, 58.
Wilkinson concludes that, “given the paucity of evidence and challenge of dating the material with precision, it may be better to hold that different conventions were held by different groups—perhaps at the same time. We should further allow for the possibility of different practices in different books: in some of the prophets, kurios may definitely appear to have been the original, but this need not have been so in other books.”

He goes on to write:

An original Septuagint transliteration of the Hebrew Tetragrammaton as iao gains plausibility from other early uses of this name. Diodorus of Sicily I.29.2 (1st century a.d.) states that Moses referred his laws to “the god called Iaô.” Iaô, we shall later see, may also be found in patristic authors and the magical papyri. Varro (116–27 b.c.) tells us that the Jewish god is called iao in the Chaldean mysteries. It is also reminiscent in its pronunciation of the form of the Tetragrammaton found in the Elephantine papyri yhw, which we discussed in the Introduction. Dioscorides Pedanius (40–90 a.d.) in his Peri Painonias 11.2 cries, “Be with me Lord (kurios) God Iaô, Iaô.” The Alexandrian grammarian Aelius Herodianus (180–250 a.d.), writing on orthography (Peri Orthographias), begs, “May I heal you by Iaô.” Much later, the 5th-century grammarian Hesychius, also from Alexandria, in his Lexicon (1212) explains the name Ozeias (Hosea) as “Strength of Iao” (ischus iaô).

Origen also presents more evidence for iaô in his commentary on John 1:1 by glossing the name ieremias as meteorismos iao (exultation of Iao). More occurrences of iaô can be found in Codex Machalianus (Q):

1. As a marginal note in Ezekiel 1:2 where idakeim is defined as iaô etoimasmos (Iao has prepared)
2. As a marginal note in Ezekiel 11:1 where banaiou is interpreted as oidodomê è oikos iaô.

Thus another chronology of the LXX rendering might be as follows:

1. iaô
2. kurioj
3. Hebrew square script / paleo-Hebrew script

This is because of the later tendency to Hebraize as demonstrated by Aquila’s revisions, which used the Tetragrammaton in paleo-Hebrew script instead of kurios (see image below). This was very likely a reactionary archaizing brought about by conflict between Christians and Jews. It seems that even though the Name was written in paleo-Hebrew, it was intended to be pronounced as kurios when read aloud. This is evident from one place in the Aquila fragments

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31 Wilkinson, Tetragrammaton, 63.
32 Ibid., 65.
33 GCS Origines 4.53.
where there was no room to write “in the House of YHWH,” so the scribe rendered the Name with a nomina sacra as KY with a macron over the Y, representing κυρίου.\textsuperscript{35}

Other evidence of Hebraizing is found when ЙІІІІ occurs in some manuscripts, using Greek letters to approximate the appearance of the divine name in Hebrew. C. Taylor’s Hexaplaric fragments show that Aquila, Symmachus, and the LXX column have ЙІІІІ where YHWH would be in Hebrew.\textsuperscript{36} Origen wrote in a letter to Marcella that “Those who do not understand [the divine name] generally read it as ІІІІІ (pipi) on account of the similarity of the letters to those found in Greek books.”\textsuperscript{37} Again, Origen remarked that “the Tetragrammaton is read Adonai as a proper noun, but amongst the Greeks kurios is said.”\textsuperscript{38}

During the period when the Great Isaiah Scroll (1QIsa\textsuperscript{3}) was produced (2\textsuperscript{nd} century B.C.) there is evidence of an aversion to pronouncing the Name, even while dictating Scripture for the sake of copying. For instance, the Isaiah scroll used Hebrew square script to write out the divine name, and it appears that the scribe was writing from dictation. Thus 3:17 has adonai where YHWH should be, and 3:18 has YHWH where adonai should be. If he were only hearing adonai for YHWH in the dictation, then this kind of confusion is to be expected. In both cases he corrected his mistake in the space above each word. Further evidence of this mistake can be found in 6:11, 7:14, 9:7, and 21:16.\textsuperscript{39} This, along with other evidence, demonstrates that the Name was pronounced as adonai long before the masoretic tradition.

What remains in question is whether it is probable that kurios came first in the LXX tradition. Vasileiadis offers a helpful summary of how the debate has progressed over the years:

The original Greek translation of the divine name has proved to be a heavily debated subject. A constantly great amount of scholarly effort has been put in this question, especially as a result of more recent discoveries that challenged previously long-held assumptions. More specifically, W. G. von Baudissin (1929) maintained that right from its origins the LXX had rendered the Tetragrammaton by κυρίος, and that in no case was this latter a mere substitute for an earlier ἀδωναί. Based on more recent evidence that had became available, P. Kahle (1960) supported that the Tetragrammaton written with Hebrew or Greek letters was retained in the OG and it was

\textsuperscript{35} Charles Taylor, Hebrew-Greek Cairo Genizah Palimpsests from the Taylor-Schechter Collection: Including a Fragment of the Twenty-Second Psalm According to Origen’s Hexapla (Cambridge: University Press, 1900), 16.
\textsuperscript{36} Taylor, Hebrew-Greek Cairo Genizah Palimpsests, 6-11.
\textsuperscript{37} Jerome Ep. 25 ad Marcellam (PL XXII.228f, CSEL LIV.218-220).
\textsuperscript{38} In Psalmos 2.2
\textsuperscript{39} Wilkinson, 76.
the Christians who later replaced it with κύριος. S. Jellicoe (1968) concurred with Kahle. H. Stegemann (1969/1978) argued that Ιαω /i.a.o/ was used in the original LXX. G. Howard (1977/1992) suggested that κύριος was not used in the pre-Christian OG. P. W. Skehan (1980) proposed that there had been a textual development concerning the divine name in this order: Ιαω, the Tetragrammaton in square Hebrew characters, the Tetragrammaton in paleo-Hebrew characters and, finally, κύριος. M. Hengel (1989) offered a similar scheme for the use of κύριος for the divine name in the LXX tradition. Evolving R. Hanhart’s position (1978/1986/1999), A. Pietersma (1984) regarded κύριος as the original Greek rendering of the Tetragrammaton in the OG text. This view was supported later by J. W. Wevers (2005) and M. Rosel (2007). Moreover, Rosel argued against the Ιαω being the original LXX rendering of the Tetragrammaton. G. Gertoux (2002) proposed that the replacement of the Tetragrammaton by θεός was gradual between 300 B.C.E. to 100 C.E. and that Ιαω was an Aramaic substitute for the Tetragrammaton used from 200 B.C.E. until the middle of the second century C.E., at a time when the scribal practice of the nomina sacra appeared. K. De Troyer (2008) argued that θεός was the original rendering of the Tetragrammaton in Greek and only later κύριος became the standard rendering following the more extensive use of θεός; obviously some Jews read Ιαω in their Greek Bible at least until the first century B.C.E. L. Perkins (2008) suggested that Ιαω was a secondary change to the original κύριος. G. D. Kilpatrick (1985), E. Tov (1998/2004/2008), J. Joosten (2011), and A. Meyer (2014) concluded that Pietersma’s arguments are unconvincing. More particularly, Tov has supported that the original translators used a pronounceable form of the Hebrew Tetragrammaton (like Ιαω), which was later replaced by κύριος, while Greek recensions replaced it with transliterations in paleo-Hebrew or square Hebrew characters. R. Furuli (2011), after comparing the various proposals, argued that κύριος did not replace the Tetragrammaton before the Common Era and the LXX autographs included the Tetragrammaton in some form of Ιαω. Truly, the hard evidence available supports this latter thesis.40

In the end, the matter remains unsettled; there is evidence on both sides of the debate, leaving us mainly to speculate as to what the earliest LXX translators did with the divine name. While I am of the persuasion that kurios came first, for the purposes of this paper it is not necessary to reach a definite conclusion on this point, but rather to present the evidence and arguments. Whatever the case may be, it appears that there was controversy or confusion amongst LXX translators and revisers regarding what to do with the divine name, as well as a special interest in it. As we have seen, there appears to have been tension around this issue during the Maccabean uprising, which may have contributed to the muddiness. Another possibility suggested tentatively by Wilkinson is that the Greek reading of Lev 24:16 marks a watershed moment that may have initiated the progressive replacement of Ιαω by kurios in LXX manuscripts. It is not a simple matter, and perhaps is one that requires more meticulous research to resolve. An important thing to note is that the inhibition for pronouncing YHWH preceded the work of Christian scribes. At the same time, it should be admitted that we cannot know for sure that the divine name was standardized in its rendering during the time of Jesus and the apostles.

Another question that remains is whether the Old Greek mss that contain Ιαω in place of the divine name were genuinely rendering what they thought was the original pronunciation, or some kind of circumlocution to protect its sanctity. Vasileiadis again comments on this:

> It has been suggested that this form of the divine name was: (a) an approximate vocalic transliteration of the original four-letter יהוה as /y..ho.w/ having the final ה dropped as being

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inaudible, (b) a literal transliteration of the late three-letter divine name יָהוּ (y..ho/ or y..hu/) and thus only “part of the Tetragrammaton” (and, also, later on as the reborrowing term יָהוּ or (c) a translational equivalent that originated or was “fueled” from other semantic domains. The last two cases would allow the use of יָהוּ as a substitute name in place of the fully spelled Tetragrammaton, aiming to “protect” the sacredness of the complete name.  

The Early Church and the Divine Name

While pre-Christian manuscripts demonstrate a range of ways for rendering YHWH, Christian Greek manuscripts are uniform in their use of κυριος, and none have been found with the Name written in paleo-Hebrew, square script, or as πιπι. Instead, early Christian manuscripts used a set of abbreviations known as the nomina sacra. These abbreviations have a horizontal line above them as a signal that it is not the complete name. Examples include theos, kurios, christos, and iesous. Others that occasionally appear in abbreviated form: pneuma, anthropos, stauros, pater, huios soter, meter, ouranos, Israel, daveid, and hierousalem. We have no evidence that these words were considered ineffable or unpronounceable. Neither do we have evidence that this abbreviation was born out of Jewish tradition. For the first three centuries A.D. it appears to be an exclusively Christian practice.

What should be mentioned is that the NT writings, such as Paul’s letters and Revelation (cf. Rev 1:3) were intended to be read aloud. Because of the long tradition of inhibition regarding the divine name, it is doubtful that a mixed community of Jews would tolerate the pronunciation of the Name. Also, we do not have any unambiguous testimony from rabbis that Christians read the Name aloud.

The New Testament Use of “Lord”

Any debate about the pronunciation of the divine name must address the issue of the use of “Lord” by the NT. This is perhaps the most important matter in the discussion, and if not treated adequately, there can be no progress made toward a conclusion. In other words, the fact that the NT never uses God’s personal name as revealed in the Old Testament, or even an approximation of it, is crucial. Why did the NT authors choose to do this? The writers never give us their reason, so everything that follows here is speculation. Nevertheless it is an honest attempt to grapple with the issue.

First, it should be understood that the LXX became the standard for the Jewish world that was forgetting Hebrew in the midst of a world increasingly dominated by other languages like Greek, Aramaic, and Latin. The New Testament writers quoted from it extensively, and it came to be a beloved text to the early Church.

When a text is used as a standard for centuries like the Septuagint was, many things become ingrained in tradition. Over time that text can change or influence how the language is used. It is highly probable that the title κυριος in Greek came to be understood as a proper name. Although it is not technically or lexically accurate to call it a name, it came to be understood as such because it was treated that way. If a community treats a title like a proper name for centuries, it will inevitably come to be understood as a proper name. Subsequent generations will continue to

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41 Vasileiadis, “Aspects of rendering the sacred Tetragrammton in Greek,” 68.
42 Wilkinson, 90-91.
43 I recognized that Revelation has the theophoric word hallelujah (הַלֵּלָעָה) four times in chapter 19, but do not consider it as intentional recognition and transliteration by John of the divine name.
use it, not because they believe it’s wrong to pronounce the actual name, but simply because they consider it to be the name of God.

This is not hard to understand because it has happened in English. Many generations have grown used to hearing and reading “the Lord” as God’s name, and they no longer recognize it as a title. Part of the reason for this is that the use of “Lord” outside of the Bible has diminished. English speakers understand it vaguely as a remnant of our distant past that comes up in Victorian novels and historical movies, but it is no longer a word used in daily life outside of the Bible. Because of this, and because we constantly hear God addressed as “Lord” and see “the Lord” in the place where only a proper name would work in Scripture, we naturally understand it as a proper name. Tradition and language shift have changed our mental categories, and now “the Lord” occupies the space of a proper name. If anyone sits down to parse and analyze “the Lord,” they will admit that it is a title with the definite article. But in their own internal lexical inventory, “the Lord” is a name. This is easy to see with the word “butterfly.” If anyone sits down to parse and analyze it, they will notice (sometimes for the first time) that it can be divided into “butter” and “fly.” Yet no English speaker thinks of butter or flies when they say or read the word “butterfly.” It has been assimilated into a different category and lexical space. In a similar way, in accordance with the perception of “the Lord” in modern English, we could just as well write it as a unified proper name “Thelord.” That would more accurately represent how it is perceived and treated.

This has happened in other languages. I spoke about this matter with Brazilian students who are used to hearing and reading the divine name rendered as “the Lord” in Portuguese. They said that they honestly don’t think of it as a title. They think of it as a name. It feels like a name when they use it, and thus to change it in a translation would make them feel like God’s familiar, personal name had been changed, and this would alienate readers. It is important to point out that this reason for retaining “the Lord” in a translation is different from showing “reverence” or avoiding the misuse of God’s name, which stems from a misunderstanding of one of the Ten Commandments.

There is another example from my personal life that helps illustrate how names can rapidly become deeply entrenched in our perception of someone. A friend of mine, upon turning sixty, decided that he no longer wanted people to call him Mike, but Michael. He had realized at some point that Michael is a Hebrew name, and the suffix –el is the word for God. Thus, he wanted to put God back into his name. When he told me this I began to call him Michael, but it didn’t feel natural, and it took a conscious effort to remember to do so. I suspect that other people struggled or refused to change the way they had always called him, because after a couple years he told me not to worry about calling him Michael anymore. The new version of his name had failed to catch on, so he gave up. This story has an obvious, lesser-to-greater application in this discussion of changing the tradition of God’s name. If it was so difficult merely to change the name of a man to the complete version of the same name after decades, how much more difficult would it be to change the name of God to a name that sounds completely different—after centuries! It would create a massive stumbling block and distraction for the apostles who were busy trying to fight other battles.44

Chris Lovelace helpfully points out that “pious Jews in the first century avoided using the word theos to refer to God. Matthew’s Gospel reflects this tendency by using the phrase ‘kingdom of heaven’ instead of Luke’s ‘kingdom of God’ (though ‘kingdom of God’ occurs rarely in Matthew). Consider also Mark 14:61. The high priest asks Jesus whether he is the son of the ‘Blessed One.’ The biblical author is aware of the custom of using circumlocution to avoid calling YHWH by his name, or even calling him theos. Even so, Mark has no problem with ignoring these
I am convinced that the NT authors did not perceive *kurios* purely as a title, but rather as a centuries-old tradition that people were accustomed to for referring to God in a personal way.\(^45\) They were certainly aware of the history of the progression from the four letters YHWH to *Adonai* (Lord), but since they were trying to communicate clearly to listeners who didn’t speak Hebrew and were familiar with calling the God of Israel *kurios*, they kept it as a convention for avoiding confusion in their message.

At the same time, they were interested in heralding a new covenant in which a new name came to be exalted: *Jesus*. In Philippians 2:9-11 Paul writes: “Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Gordon Fee provides the following helpful comments on verse 9 in this passage:

What does Paul intend by “the name that is above every name”? Here the options are basically two, “Jesus” or “Lord.” On the one hand, there is much to be said for “the name” to refer to his earthly name “Jesus.” That, after all, is what is picked up in the next phrase, “at the name of Jesus.” If so, then Paul does not mean that he has now been given that name, but that in highly exalting him, God has bestowed on the name of Jesus a significance that excels all other names. Moreover, “Jesus” is in fact a *name*, whereas “Lord” could be argued to be a title.

On the other hand, most believe that the bestowing on him of the name “Lord,” as the equivalent of Yahweh, is how Jesus has been exalted to the highest place. Indeed, were it not for the phrase “at the name of Jesus” in the next clause, this would be the universal point of view. In favor of it is the second part of the result clause (v. 11), that every tongue will confess that “the Lord is Jesus Christ.” But what favors it the most is the clear “intertextuality” that is in process here. The twofold result clause that makes up our vv. 10 and 11 is a direct borrowing of language from Isa 45:23, where Yahweh (the Lord) says that “before me (the Lord) every knee shall bow and every tongue will swear (LXX, confess)” that “in the Lord alone are righteousness and strength.” This emphasis on Yahweh, the “Lord,” as the one unto whom all shall give obeisance, seems to certify that what Paul has in mind is none other than the name, Yahweh itself, but in its Greek form of “the Lord,” which has now been “given” to Jesus.\(^46\)

Therefore, I agree with Fee that “the name that is above every name” is Yahweh. This probably has another layer of significance as well: the name Jesus, יֵשׁוּעַ, “Yeshua” is a late, shortened form of the name Joshua, יְהוֹשֻׁׁעַ, which means “Yahweh is salvation.”\(^47\) The divine name is historically embedded within Jesus’ name, which speaks of his deliverance. Although

\(^{45}\) This is the reason simple arguments against calling God by a title fall short in the discussion. If we are quick to condemn the use of titles like “the LORD,” we have to be able to explain how we are not simultaneously condemning the NT authors. The issue is more complex than saying, “Lord is a title, not a name!” The debate has to be more nuanced and center around the reasons the NT authors did what they did with *kurios*.


\(^{47}\) See the entry on יְהוֹשֻׁׁעַ in *BDB*, 221.
Matthew does not mention the theophoric element in the meaning of Jesus’ name directly, he does write, “for he shall save his people from their sins” (Matt 1:21).

Fee also expounds on the phrase “every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” in verse 11:

In the Jewish synagogue the appellation “Lord” had long before been substituted for God’s “name” (Yahweh). The early believers had now transferred that “name” (Lord) to the risen Jesus. Thus, Paul says, in raising Jesus from the dead, God has exalted him to the highest place and bestowed on him the name of God—in the Hebrew sense of the Name, referring to his investiture with God’s power and authority. On the other hand, Paul’s monotheism is kept intact by the final phrase, “unto the glory of God the Father.” Thus very much in keeping with 1 Cor 8:6, where there is only one God (the Father, from whom and for whom are all things, including ourselves) and only one Lord (Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and we through him), so here, this final sentence begins with God’s exalting Christ by bestowing on him “the name” and concludes on the same theological note, that all of this is to God the Father’s own glory.48

There is a striking statement from Jesus in the High Priestly Prayer worth mentioning. “I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world” (John 17:6). Most likely this is a typical use of “name” to represent the whole person and their character (e.g. John 1:12), but there may also be an allusion to the fact that Jesus has accomplished what God began at the burning bush, as well as on Mount Sinai (Ex 34). In the same passage Jesus also prays for his disciples: “Holy Father, keep them in your name” (John 17:11). Then later he prays: “I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them” (v 26).49 Here it may be possible to see an implication that Jesus’ name is now being promoted in the place of YHWH.

It is also worth noting that Revelation refers to the name of Jesus’ Father, but without spelling it out: “Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father’s name written on their foreheads” (14:1). Later, John refers to the same kind of mark, but the context seems to conflate God (the Father) and the Lamb (the Son): “They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads” (22:4). This is most likely a connection to Exodus 28, showing that God’s people have become a true “kingdom of priests,” in stark contrast to those with the mark of the beast.

Both Jesus and the apostles had a strong desire to communicate and remove stumbling blocks from getting their message across. An example of Jesus doing this appears in Mark 12:30 when he is answering one of the scribes. He quotes Deuteronomy 6:5 in saying, “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” But the verse in Deuteronomy actually says: “You shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”50 Jesus adds “with all your mind” to the command, even though it isn’t there in Hebrew. He does so because the heart, in the ancient Hebrew worldview, was also the seat of thought. For the Old Testament writers there did not exist the later dichotomy of mind vs. heart. This dichotomy had become part of first century culture because of Greek influence, so Jesus speaks to them in a way that they can understand more clearly. This shows his desire to adapt even the quotation of Scripture for the sake of

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50 He was not quoting the LXX because the LXX does not add anything in this verse.
clarity. Therefore, it would not be surprising if he adapted to the use of *adonai*, “Lord,” for the sake of removing stumbling blocks from the ears of his listeners.

Finally, there is an even more convincing reason that God, in his sovereignty, ordained that *adonai* became the standard pronunciation and led to *kurios* as the standard translation of his name in the LXX and NT. This is the simple reason mentioned by Martin Luther in the preface to his German translation: “that readers can thereby draw the strong conclusion that Christ is true God.”

The LXX’s use of *kurios* was paving the way for a seamless, convenient, intelligible way to connect Jesus with Yahweh. One example comes from Peter: “sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts” (1 Pet 3:15 NAS). Michaels provides a helpful commentary:

Peter continues his midrash of Isa 8:1352, substituting τὸν Χριστόν for the αὐτόν of the LXX (κύριον αὐτόν ἄγαστε, “the Lord himself you must revere”). It is possible to read τὸν Χριστόν as appositional to κύριον (“the Lord Christ”), or the other way around (“Christ the Lord”). Or τὸν Χριστόν might be the direct object of ἄγαστε, with κύριον as predicate accusative (“Christ as Lord”). Peter’s understanding of κύριος as primarily a designation of Jesus Christ was seen earlier in 2:3, as well as in the substitution of κυρίου for τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν in 1:25 (citing Isa 40:8).

The ability to use the same word seamlessly for Yahweh and Jesus throughout the NT made the overlap natural and more apparent. It facilitated a high Christology, and effortlessly infused the statement “Jesus is Lord” (Rom 10:9) with a double meaning. This double meaning is made possible because *kurios* was doing double-duty as *Lord* and *Yahweh*. The lack of distinction ironically made it easier to distinguish Jesus as the one true God, Yahweh himself. Consider again how this convention made Paul’s teaching possible in 1 Corinthians 8:5-6:

For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”—yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

Just as Jesus saw himself all throughout the OT (Luke 24), and just as the apostles consistently identified Jesus with Yahweh through allusion and direct quotation of OT passages, the use of *kurios* allowed early Christians to see and hear that continuity across the testaments. It enabled them to read about “the Lord” in the LXX and think of Jesus Christ. Therefore, it seems that what men meant for [fill in the blank] by obscuring the name Yahweh with the title *adonai/kurios*, God meant for good, to identify Christ as the God of Israel with a hyperlink across covenants.

The NT writers also did this with “name” as a design pattern. In Acts this is particularly apparent, where “name” is mentioned about thirty times in relation to Jesus or Yahweh. Notice the overlap between Jesus and Yahweh in the following verses:

- “Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for *the name*” (Acts 5:41, see Lev 24:11).

52 ESV: “Yahweh of hosts, him you shall honor as holy.”
• “But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name” (Acts 9:15-16). To carry/bear God’s name is a direct connection to Exodus 20:7: “You shall not bear/carry the name of Yahweh your God in vain.”)

• “So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord” (Acts 9:28).

• “To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name” (Acts 10:43).

Also, the kurios phenomenon enabled rich statements like Paul’s here: “For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’” (Rom. 10:13, Joel 2:32). Moo comments on this exact quotation of the LXX by saying, “In the OT, of course, the one on whom people called for salvation was Yahweh; Paul reflects the high view of Christ common among the early church by identifying this one with Jesus Christ, the Lord.”54

This then raises the question as to whether modern publishers should carry on the tradition of the LXX and NT for the sake of communicating Christ’s identity as Yahweh by rendering YHWH as “LORD” in the OT. I would argue that it is unnecessary for a few reasons. First, if you search for the word Adonai in the OT, there are over 700 occurrences, most of which refer to Yahweh. Although this is not as many occurrences as Yahweh, it is substantial, definitely memorable, and unmistakably referring to Yahweh himself. Consider a verse like Jeremiah 32:17 that reads as follows in the ESV: ‘Ah, Lord GOD! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you.’ Lord GOD is what many translations choose to do with Adonai Yahweh (אֲדֹנַי יְהוִה) in Hebrew. This stems from the tradition of the Masoretes who pointed יהוה with the vowels for אלֹהִים (God) in order to avoid the redundancy of saying “Lord LORD.” The Masoretes (and many English translators following suit) do this about 280 times in the OT.

A better solution would be to translate “Lord Yahweh,” since it would be more accurate (the word “God” is nowhere to be found in the text in these cases). At the same time the title/name Lord would be preserved as a hyperlink to Lord in the NT. Such a rendering does not undermine or detract from the linking of Yahweh and Jesus, rather it enhances the connection. Now a reader of the NT will mentally link the statement “Jesus is Lord” with over 700 verses where God is called “Lord,” and simultaneously be able to link Jesus with the name Yahweh. The overlap the apostles enjoyed would be preserved while still honoring God’s desire in Exodus 3:15.

In conclusion, the NT authors probably used kurios, “the Lord,” because it had become the equivalent of a personal name by that time, and the purpose of their writings was not to correct ancient traditions that did not directly threaten central tenets of faith and the gospel. More importantly, they embraced the tradition as God-ordained for the purpose of showing that Jesus was the Yahweh of the First Testament in the flesh, the King of kings and Lord of lords. Modern publishers have no need to carry on the tradition of the LXX and NT for the sake of communicating Christ’s identity as Yahweh, since the word Adonai/Lord occurs so many times in the Hebrew Bible in reference to Yahweh.

54 Douglas J. Moo, The Epistle to the Romans (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 660.
The Early Church & Late Antiquity

Was the NT unique in its use of kurios, and what did people do with the divine name after the NT? As we will see, pronunciation continued to be avoided by some, while others sought to recover its original pronunciation or use it in various ways. The first example comes from the early Jewish-Christian work Didache, also known as The Lord's Teaching Through the Twelve Apostles to the Nations (Διδαχὴ Κυρίου διὰ τῶν δώδεκα ἀποστόλων τοῖς ἔθνεσιν). It is a brief anonymous early Christian treatise written in Koine Greek, dated by modern scholars to the first century, which demonstrates some of the early worship and Christology, where the name is mentioned but left unwritten, just like in the NT. Also, the substitute “Lord” is used. The beginning of a prayer in the work reads:

We give thanks, Holy Father, for your holy name, which you have made to tabernacle in our hearts, and for the knowledge, faith and immortality which you have made known to us through your servant Jesus. To you be glory forever. You, Lord Almighty, did create all things for your name’s sake, and gave food and drink to men for their enjoyment, that they might give you thanks; and to us you did grant spiritual food and drink and life eternal, through your servant….”

St. Jerome, because of his distinction as a Hebraist and orthodox translator left his own impact regarding the Name in his work de Decem Dei Nominibus, “The Ten Divine Names.” The ten names he wrote about were: El, Eloim, Eloei, Sabaoth, Elion, ie je aser ie je, Adonai, Ia, Iao, and Saddai. This idea of ten names of God also appears in an anonymous Greek treatise on the subject first found in Origen’s comments on Psalm 2 (PG XII.1104), where the divine name is rendered as Iae.55 As it turns out, all the forms of the divine name we find in the writings of the church fathers are also found in the Greek magical papyri.56

From the testimony of Irenaeus in the 2nd century A.D. in Against Heresies we find that the Gnostics referred to God as Iaoth whilst the Jews call it Ia.57 It has been commonly assumed that the Samaritan pronunciation “reflected the sound of the word undistorted by Jewish inhibitions against vocalization and was thus strong evidence for the original vocalization being Yahweh, which was (and is) defended, as we know, also by morphological arguments.”58 At the same time, Nicolas Fuller (1557-1626) rejected iabe as an obvious error in the transmission of Theodoret’s text, while others have found evidence for iabe and iaba in the magical papyri, which may have been of Samaritan origin. Another possibility is that iabe is simply a rendering of the Samaritan title yafeh “The Beautiful,” used of God. In the end it is difficult to know exactly how free Samaritans were in their pronunciation of the divine name.59

55 Wilkinson, 124.
56 See also Gideon Bohak, Ancient Jewish Magic (Cambridge, 2008), 147.
57 Natalio Fernández Marcos and Angel Sáenz-Badillos, Theodoreti Cyrensis. Quaestiones in Octateuchum. Edito Critica (Textus y Estudios “Cardenal Cisneros” de la Biblia Poligota Matritense) 17 (Madrid, 1979), 112.
58 Wilkinson, 127.
59 Ibid.
Around the time of Origen we begin to see attitudes and beliefs about the divine name (and Hebrew names in general) evolve farther away from biblical roots and venture into the bizarre. Origen believed that names point to the deepest nature of objects, Hebrew was the language of Creation, and that Hebrew names lose their efficacy when translated. He also preferred the essentialist interpretation of language developed by the Stoics (Against Celsus 1.24), which emphasizes the superiority of Hebrew names above all names from other languages. This idea eventually grew into a belief that Hebrew names had power to work exorcisms, miracles, and wonders. He wrote, “These [Hebrew] names accordingly when pronounced with that attendant train of circumstances which is appropriate to their nature, are possessed of great power; and other names, again, current in the Egyptian tongue, are efficacious against certain daemons who can only do certain things.” In essence, during Origen’s time there were two competing philosophies: 1) divine names offer some sort of connection to the divine, 2) arbitrary and conventional names of God are adequate.

Justin Martyr (d. 165 A.D.), a philosopher converted to Christianity and apologist against Judaism, had other theories about the name of God. He rejected the capacity of human language to define God, and claimed that God has no proper name: “He accepts those only who imitate the excellence which resides in him—temperance and justice and philanthropy and as many virtues as are particular to a God who is called by no proper name” (Apol. I.10). He argued that Greek gods cannot be regarded as gods because they have proper names, since the action of naming implies a master who names and a slave who is named (Apol. sec. 6). This view spread throughout the Gnostics and even up into the Reformation.

Clement of Alexandria, born around the middle of 2nd century A.D., argued in a similar way as Justin Martyr. As another converted philosopher he wrote,

> God is without form and nameless. Though we ascribe names, they are not to be taken in their strict meaning; when we call him One, Good, Mind, Existence, Father, God, Creator, Lord, we are not conferring a name on him. Being unable to do more, we use these appellations of honour, in order that our thought may have something to rest on and not wander at random…. It remains that the Unknown be apprehended by divine grace and the Word proceeding from him (Stromata 5.12).

Irenaeus, the bishop of Lyons in the 2nd century, contributed another interesting piece to the discussion. He believed and taught that the Son was the one speaking to Moses in Exodus 3:14. “For it is the Son who descended and ascended for the salvation of men. Thus through the Son who is in the Father and has the Father in himself, He who is has been revealed” (Adversus Haereses, 3.6.2, emphasis added).

Eusebius of Caesarea offers another perspective on the use of the divine name when he writes:

> The combination of the seven vowels contains the enunciation of one forbidden name, which the Hebrews indicate by four letters and apply to the supreme power of God, having received the tradition, they say, from father to son that this is something unutterable and forbidden to the multitude. And one of the wise Greeks, having learned this, I know not whence, hinted it obscurely in verse, saying as follows;

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61 Quoted in Wilkinson, 131.
62 Ibid., 137.
By the time we get to St. Augustine we find his opinion contrary to others like Irenaeus regarding the angel in Exodus 3:14. He believed that it was a created angel impersonating God, through whom God spoke.

At this point it is important to highlight the impact of the work of pseudo-Dionysius on later Christian thought about the divine name. Around the beginning of the sixth century he produced a unified corpus of four Greek works: The Divine Names, The Mystical Theology, The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy, and The Celestial Hierarchy.

An example of his writing and theology can be seen in the following:

On no account therefore is it true to say that we know God, not indeed in his nature..., but by the order of all things that he has established, and which bears certain images and likenesses of his divine paradigms, we ascend step by step, so far as we can follow the way, to the transcendent, by negating and transcending everything and by seeking the cause of all. Therefore God is known in all, and apart from all.... And this is, moreover, the most divine knowledge of God, that He is known through unknowing, according to the union which transcends the understanding, when the understanding withdraws from all, and abandons itself, and is united with the dazzling rays and in them and from them is enlightened by the unsearchable depths of wisdom (DN VII. 3:869 C-872 B).

In essence, regarding God’s name, Dionysus believed that “the Theologians praise Him by every name and as the Nameless One.”

As already mentioned, the divine name played a significant role in Gnostic circles and magical texts. The magical use of the Name abounded in the centuries leading up to the Reformation, especially in places away from the control of religious authorities. In the great magical papyrus of Paris (PGM IV) there are instructions for making a phylactery containing the names iaeô and iao. Then an incantation follows: “I conjure by the god of the Hebrews, Jesus, Iabe, Iaê…” (PGM IV 3019-2024). Another Coptic magic text also identifies Christ with the divine name: “Iao, Iao, Christ Pantocrator” (XLIII.83).

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64 Wilkinson, 149.
65 Quoted in Wilkinson, 153.
66 See also P.W. van der Horst, “The Great Magical Papyrus of Paris (PGM IV) and the Bible,” in Jews and Christians in Their Graeco-Roman Context (Tubingen, 2006), 269-279.
Later Jewish traditions like *Toledoth Jesu* accused Jesus himself of using the divine name for sorcery, since use of the Name was extensive in second-temple Judaism magic. Mixed in with all this was the use of the names of angels (probably the most important book of Jewish magic, *Book of Mysteries*, has about 700 angel names) and new combinations of the letters YHWH or substitutes for it.\(^{68}\) In Josephus one also finds echoes of Jewish magical mindset:

In a context of healing Josephus mentions the importance of not disclosing angel names (War 2.142); in Jubilees, Noah is given special healing knowledge by angels (10:10–17;48:10); in Enoch, the watchers under Azazel teach humanity the secret of roots and plants, and Raphael is responsible for human illness and wounds (40.9). On the other hand, one finds a physician might also cure—using the name of God, see Yom. 3.7(40d).\(^{69}\)

Most of the Greek magical papyri come from around the 4\(^{th}\) century A.D., and possibly are older. They contain evidence of a kind of pagan syncretism, wherein divine names are listed liberally. Even the names of Hebrew biblical patriarchs occur frequently, along with titles for God. Origen, in his anti-Gnostic work *Contra Celsum*, explains some of the situation around these pagan texts:

One must know that those who composed these things neither understood the magical texts nor grasped the meaning of divine Scripture, but mixed everything up. From magic they took Ialdabaoth and Astraphaio and Horaios, while from Hebrew Scripture they took Iao (also called Ia by the Hebrews) and Sabaoth and Adonaios and Eloaios. Now the names which they took from Scripture are epithets of the One and Only God, but these enemies of God did not understand this, as they themselves admit, and thought that Iao was one god, Sabaoth another and a third besides this was Adonaios (whom Scripture calls Adonai) and yet another was Eloaios (whom the prophets call in Hebrew Eloai) (6.32).

We also have evidence of a Spaniard named Priscillian who was accused of making use of an amulet bearing the Tetragrammaton for magical purposes.\(^{70}\) And this leads us to some of the lore surrounding the Name in rabbinic texts. It “was considered to be endowed with incomparable power.”\(^{71}\)

The use of the name in sealing the Abyss in creation is mentioned…in *Hekhalot Rabbati* 23 and in *bMakkot* 11a, where a shard with the name written on it is thrown into the Abyss to hold back the waters which threaten the world. *bBerachot* 55a attributes to Rav the idea that Bezalel, the builder of the tabernacle, knew how to combine the letters by which heaven and earth were created. Genesis 2:4 and Isaiah 26:4 are interpreted as proof that one letter of the divine name was used to create the world, and another was used for the world to come (*Pesikta Rabbati* 21)....

Knowledge of name was once widespread, but due to corruption of human society it was continually restricted until after the death of Simon the Righteous (*bYoma* 39b, *jYoma* 40d). The death of Simon the Righteous (identified by Christians as Simeon, the old priest in the Temple who blessed baby Jesus) will occur frequently in Christian histories of the use of the name. The name was diminished: after the destruction of Temple it consisted of two letters (*bEr*. 18b). The present state of

\(^{68}\) See Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition* (University of Pennsylvania, 2004), 97-110.

\(^{69}\) Wilkinson, 170.


\(^{71}\) Wilkinson, 185.
the world is such that prayers are not heard because they do not contain the name (Midrash Psalms 91.8)—a situation to be remedied in the world to come.

Use of the Tetragrammaton was not, however, confined to creation. Solomon had a ring with a divine name on it to subdue the demon Ashmodei (bGit. 68b). Moses used it to kill the Egyptian (Exodus Rabba on 2.14; PdeRK 19). “What did the sea behold? It beheld the divine name graven on Aaron’s staff and fled.” The name also enabled Solomon to fly (bSanh 95a). A woman used the divine name to ascend to heaven and God turned her into a star. The Tetragrammaton was used to animate lifeless images. Abraham created living souls by this method (Genesis Rabba 39, sec. 14). Scholem compares this to the creation of a homunculus by Simon Magus in the Pseudo-Clementine Homilies (II.26) and to later golem stories. Jeroboam’s golden calf was animated by the name which was placed in its mouth (bSota 47a). Nebuchadnezzar made an image live either by placing the high priest’s breast plate with the name on it into the image’s mouth or by writing the name on its forehead. Daniel removed the name by kissing it, and the image became lifeless again (Song of Songs Rabbah 7.9). Two rabbis created a calf using the name (bSanh 65b/67b).72

In addition to Jewish lore, the 10th century prayer book of Saadia Gaon shows how the divine name was sometimes used in devotion:

As far as Your glorious name is concerned…You have concealed it from the majority of the people; it has only been handed down to anyone who is modest, humble, God-fearing, slow to anger and not seeking his own interests. In each generation You have disclosed something from its secret.73

Rabbis also devised other complex substitutes for the divine name, both to avoid pronouncing it exactly and also to access its power. Some of these names had twelve, forty-two, and seventy-two letters, and only were revealed to those considered worthy and who could be trusted to maintain their secrecy.74

The Talmud contains much more lore about the divine name, including a story about a gold tablet inscribed with the ineffable name that Moses used to raise the metal coffin of Joseph from the bottom of the Nile, where the Egyptians had sunk it (Melkita on Exodus 13:18). It also teaches that God used the 72-letter version of his name to defend Israel. But it gets even more outlandish when we look at the book of 3rd Enoch, which speaks of one of the angels of God with the name Metatron, who is considered to be “lesser YHWH”:

…and I put upon him my honour, my majesty and the splendour of my glory that is upon the throne of my glory. I called him lesser Yhwh, the prince of the presence, the knower of secrets. For every secret did I reveal to him as a father and all the mysteries declared I unto him in uprightness…Seventy names did I take from [my] names and called him by them to enhance his glory there. R. Ishmael said: ‘I said to Metatron, Why are you called by the name of your creator, with seventy names? [Why are] you greater than all the princes, higher than all the angels?’

The point of all this is that the divine name entered into a time of chaotic use in late antiquity, which followed in the middle ages. Many people had no idea what it was or meant, but it was useful for superstitious purposes. Pagans, Jews, and Christians were using the divine name in various forms in amulets, curses, and exorcisms, and this usually meant that it was pronounced

72 Wilkinson, 186.
74 bYoma 3.8 (40d); Eccl R 3.11; bKidd 71a; Gen R. 44.19; AdRN A13
aloud in some way. By the time of the middle ages, the knowledge of Hebrew and Greek in Christendom was scarce, illiteracy was common, but the Bible still was the most studied book. Most laity would not have any knowledge of the Bible except for what they heard from the preaching of the clergy.75

The development of the name “Jehovah” was a mistake waiting to happen. The convention of the Masoretes for pointing the four letters YHWH with the vowels of either the Hebrew ‘adonai or ‘elohim was not known by everyone, and became less and less known by Christians. Rampant anti-semitism (the Jews were often seen in Europe as the very incarnation of evil) and attacks on Jewish literature (such as the Talmud, which was declared heretical in 1240 and burned by the thousands) that raged in the middle ages also played a part in keeping the knowledge of Hebrew at a minimum.

Due to the widespread ignorance of Hebrew, people like Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) indulged in imagining that each letter of the Name represented “a stage on the path to salvation and a way in which God is with us.”76 This era was also marked by many misspellings of the Tetragrammaton, such as ylya. Even the popes tried their hand at creative interpretation of the Name. Pope Innocent III (1199-1216, who became pope at 37 years of age) saw the Name as a revelation of the mystery of the Trinity. His spelling of the Name was IEVE, which he later misspelled in his De Sacro Altaris as ioth, he, vau, heth, which he interpreted as “the principle of the passion of life.”77

Vasileiadis in his article “Aspects of rendering the sacred Tetragrammton in Greek” provides an analysis of all Greek renderings of the divine name throughout the centuries. He makes two observations worthy of note. The first is that one of the reasons the Name was silenced was “the increased sense of moral degradation.”78 He quotes I. H. Weiss in saying that “The priests, seeing the decline of faith and fear of God, considered neither themselves nor their contemporaries worthy of proclaiming or of hearing the name of God.”79

Second, Vasileiadis writes:

In the subsequent post-Nicene trinitarian contemplation on the definition and the interrelation of theo-ontological terms such as φύσις (nature), οὐσία (essence), ὑπόστασις (substance), and πρόσωπον (person), there was an attempt to reconcile the biblical deus revelatus and the philosophical deus

75 Wilkinson, 215.
76 Ibid., 222.
77 Bk I cap xxx PL CCXVII, cols. 785 and 789.
absconditus. Any name used to describe the essence of God would not be acceptable—a philosophical dilemma not found in the Hebrew Scriptures. Basil of Caesarea, writing in the mid-fourth century C.E., inferred that God’s “operations (or, energies) come down to us, but His essence remains beyond our reach.” Early in the sixth century C.E., a more thorough theology of the name of God is explicated in the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus and especially in the work On the Divine Names. Two centuries later, John of Damascus tried a quite more balanced approach to this theology. Eventually, the Christian God could be described at the same time as God with no name, God with many names, and God with all the names.  

Finally, one of the most important contributions to the study of the divine name is Vasileiadis’s incredible appendix that presents an exhaustive, systematic list of each Greek transcription or transliteration of the Tetragrammaton from antiquity to the present, the earliest date each was identified, and the corresponding references or sources. Sifting through these six pages of different ways it has been rendered shows that it simply cannot be concluded that there was ever a universally “correct” way of spelling or pronouncing YHWH in Greek. The variety is vast.

**Translation Traditions from the Reformation to the Present**

After the LXX and NT, Latin versions like the Vulgate followed the tradition and used *Dominus* for every occurrence of *Yahweh* or *Adonai*. (This practice remains the rule for all Roman Catholic liturgy to the present day.  

Then, during the Reformation, Luther chose to carry on the tradition of the LXX and the NT. He gave the following reasons in the preface to his German translation of the Old Testament:

> Whoever reads this Bible should also know that I have been careful to write the name of God which the Jews call “Tetragrammaton” in capital letters thus, LORD [HERR], and the other name which they call Adonai only half in capital letters thus, LOrd [HErr]. For among all the names of God, these two alone are applied in the Scriptures to the real, true God; while the others are often ascribed to angels and saints. I have done this in order that readers can thereby draw the strong conclusion that Christ is true God.

It seems that Luther understood that the NT authors upheld this tradition so that people could “draw the strong conclusion that Christ is the true God,” by associating Christ the *kurios* with the *kurios* of the OT instead of having two different proper names Yahweh and Yeshua. Luther wanted to do the same. Ironically, what the Jews had begun as a way of reverencing the name ended up being used by the NT authors and Luther to create the ultimate offense to them (Jesus=God), according to Luther.

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81 See the *Liturgiam Authenticam*, which included the following directive: “In accordance with immemorial tradition … the name of almighty God expressed by the Hebrew tetragrammaton (YHWH) and rendered in Latin by the word Dominus, is to be rendered into any given vernacular by a word equivalent in meaning.”

When John Calvin translated the Psalms into French he decided to use Jehovah. He wrote about this decision as follows:

It would be tedious to recount the various opinions as to the name “Jehovah.” It is certainly a foul superstition of the Jews that they dare not speak, or write it, but substitute the name “Adonai;” nor do I any more approve of their teaching, who say that it is ineffable, because it is not written according to grammatical rule. Without controversy, it is derived from the word הוהי or הוהי and therefore it is rightly said by learned commentators to be the essential name of God, whereas others are, as it were, epithets. Since, then, nothing is more peculiar to God than eternity, He is called Jehovah, because He has existence from Himself, and sustains all things by His secret inspiration. Nor do I agree with the grammarians, who will not have it pronounced, because its inflection is irregular; because its etymology, of which all confess that God is the author, is more to me than an hundred rules.

The Wycliffe version of the Bible in English used “the Lord,” as well as English versions afterwards. The King James Bible added the nuance of printing the LORD in all caps when it represented YHWH, except in four places (Exodus 6:3, Psalm 83:18, Isaiah 12:2, and Isaiah 26:4) where the translators felt the need to render it as a proper name, and in these places the name “Jehovah” appears.

Casiodoro de Reina, the translator of the most famous Spanish version of the Bible, took particular interest in rendering the divine name faithfully, and avoiding the substitution of a title. Born in 1520, at the age of 37 he became a monk and then came into contact with Lutheranism, which led him to join the Protestant Reformation. Because of the Spanish Inquisition, he and a dozen other monks fled the country, and he ended up in Geneva for a time. After rejecting the rigid atmosphere of Calvin’s Geneva, Reina spent his exile in other places such as London, Antwerp, Frankfurt, Orléans and Bergerac, in all of which he continued to work on a translation of the Bible into Spanish. In the prologue to the 1602 publication of his work, he wrote the following:

We have retained the name (Yehovah), not without serious reasons. First of all, because wherever it will be found in our version, it is in the Hebrew text, and it seemed to us that we could not leave it, nor change it for another without infidelity and singular sacrilege against the law of God, in which it is commanded “Do not take away from it, or add it to it” (Dt. 4.4 and Pr. 30.5). Adding to the Law of God and his Word is, it is understood, when to the commandments, or constitutions of God, reckless men add their traditions, so, either they undo the commandment of God, or they add greater severity to it by superstition. An example of the first can be what the Lord says in Mt.15.4… So in what has been used up to now about this name: it is expressly to remove and add, both in the act of removing the name (Yehovah), and to put (Lord, or God) in its place… which does not matter little. It also seemed to us that this mutation cannot be made without contravening God’s advice, and in a certain way wanting to amend it, as if He had done wrong all the times that his Spirit in Scripture declared this name, and it was to be another. And it is true, that not without particular and very serious advice, God revealed it to the world, and wanted his servants to know and invoke him; it would be a reckless thing to abandon it; and reckless superstition to neglect it, on the pretext of reverence. And to better see this as well, it will not be out of purpose to show where this superstition about this holy name has come from….

The modern rabbis…(not understanding the intent of the Law), gave this superstition to the people, making it illicit to pronounce or declare the holy name, not seeing that, in addition to the fact

that the intent of the Law was clear, on the occasion of the blasphemer, after that Law, it was pronounced by Moses, Aaron, Joshua, Caleb, Deborah, Gideon, Samuel, David, and all the prophets and pious Kings; and finally it was very sweet in the mouths of all the people, who sang it in Psalms and praises, as it appears throughout the discourse of the Holy History. So from the superstition of the modern Rabbis came this law directed by the devil to—under the pretext of reverence—bury, and put into oblivion his holy name, with which alone He wanted to be differentiated from all other gods.… We say modern Rabbis, not because they are those of our time, but those who came after the prophets, ignorant of the divine Law, and setters of new traditions.… See now, if it is right for this superstition to continue, or to cease, God having given better understanding; and that the Christian people know him and adore him in Christ by the same name, with which he made himself known to the fathers, and they knew him and invoked him, and by which, he promised through his prophets, that he would make himself known to people, to invoke him. This one will say (says Isaiah) I am Jehovah’s; the other will be called by the name of Jacob; the other will write with his hand, “Jehovah’s.”

Someone could argue to us here that neither Christ nor the Apostles in their writings made amends for this error, etc. To this we answer, that they were never in charge of making versions, or correcting the facts, but attentive to a greater and more central matter, which was the announcement of the advent of the Messiah, and of his glorious Kingdom. They used the common version, which was then in use, which seems to have been that of the Seventy [the Septuagint], because they had plenty of it for their main purpose.

Another obligation of the one who makes profession of translating divine Scripture is to give it in its entirety. Nor are we here determined to take question with anyone on this matter; nor compel anyone to pronounce this name, if Judaic superstition seems better to him than the godly freedom of the Old Testament Prophets and pious: he can pass over it when he reads, or instead, pronounce “Lord,” as the Jews do; as long as you confess, that in translating it, we have not gone beyond our duty.

By the nineteenth century German scholars began to point out that the name “Jehovah” was a mistaken pronunciation, but many scholarly works in England continued to use “Jehovah.” In spite of these trends, English Christians did not see the necessity to produce an altered version of the Bible. Matthew Arnold reflects this attitude in the following:

The English version has created certain sentiments in the reader’s mind, and these sentiments must not be disturbed, if the new version is to have the power of the old. Surely this consideration should rule the corrector in determining whether or not he should put Jehovah where the old version puts Lord. Mr. Cheyne, the recent translator of Isaiah,—one of that new band of Oxford scholars who so well deserve to attract our interest, because they have the idea, which the older Oxford has had so far too little, of separated and systematised studies,—Mr. Cheyne’s object is simply scientific, to render the original with exactness. But how the Four Friends, who evidently, by their style of comment, mean their very interesting and useful book, The Psalms Chronologically Arranged, for religious use, for habitual readers of the Psalms, and who even take, because of this design, the Prayer-Book version as their basis,—how they can have permitted themselves to substitute Jehovah for Lord passes one’s comprehension. Probably because they were following Ewald; but his object is scientific. [When one] considers what the name in question represents to English Christians, what the Psalms are to them, what a place the expression The Lord fills in the Psalms and in the English Bible generally, what feelings and memories are entwined with it, and what the force of sentiment is,—[anyone who] considers all this, would [never] allow himself, in a version of the Psalms meant for popular use, to abandon the established expression The Lord in order to substitute for it Jehovah. Jehovah is in any case a bad substitute for it, because to the English reader it does not carry its own meaning with it, and has even, which is fatal, a mythological sound. The
Eternal, which one of the French versions uses, is far preferable. The Eternal is in itself, no doubt, a better rendering of Jehovah than The Lord. In disquisition and criticism, where it is important to keep as near as we can to the exact sense of words, The Eternal may be introduced with advantage; and whoever has heard Jewish schoolchildren use it, as they do, in repeating the Commandments in English, cannot but have been struck and satisfied with the effect of the rendering. In his own private use of the Bible, any one may, if he will, change The Lord into The Eternal. But at present, for the general reader of the Bible or of extracts from it, The Lord is surely an expression consecrated. The meaning which it in itself carries is a meaning not at variance with the original name, even though it may be possible to render this original name more adequately. But, besides the contents which a term carries in itself, we must consider the contents with which men, in long and reverential use, have filled it; and therefore we say that any literary corrector of the English Bible does well at present to retain The Lord, because of the sentiments this expression has created in the English reader’s mind, and has left firmly fixed there. 84

It wasn’t until the 1880s that Yahweh became a more frequently used pronunciation among scholars and students. Then in 1901 American scholars prepared their own revision of the Revised version of the KJV for publication in America, which came to be known as the American Standard Version (ASV). In this version they decided to use Jehovah consistently. Even though they were aware that Jehovah was not an accurate pronunciation, they decided it would be received better because it was still more well-known than Yahweh. They explained in their Preface:

The change first recommended in the Appendix [of the English Revised Version] — that which substitutes “Jehovah” for “LORD” and “GOD” — is one which will be unwelcome to many, because of the frequency and familiarity of the terms displaced. But the American Revisers, after a careful consideration were brought to the unanimous conviction that a Jewish superstition, which regarded the Divine Name as too sacred to be uttered, ought no longer to dominate in the English or any other version of the Old Testament, as it fortunately does not in the numerous versions made by modern missionaries. This Memorial Name, explained in Ex. iii. 14, 15, and emphasized as such over and over in the original text of the Old Testament, designates God as the personal God, as the covenant God, the God of revelation, the Deliverer, the Friend of his people; — not merely the abstractly “Eternal One” of many French translations, but the ever living Helper of those who are in trouble. This personal name, with its wealth of sacred associations, is now restored to the place in the sacred text to which it has an unquestionable claim. 85

Benjamin B. Warfield, who was influential at the time of the publication, expressed his own strong approval of the ASV:

We cannot understand how there can be any difference of opinion as to the rightness of this step. This is the Lord’s personal name, by which He has elected to be known by His people: the loss suffered by transmuting it into His descriptive title seems to us immense. To be sure there are disputes as to the true form of the name, and nobody supposes that “Jehovah” is that true form. But it has the value of the true form to the English reader; and it would be mere pedantry to substitute for it Yahweh or any of the other forms now used with more or less inaccuracy by scholastic writers. We account it no small gain for the English reader of the Old Testament that he will for the first time in his popular

version meet statedly with “Jehovah” and learn all that “Jehovah” has been to and done for His people.86

Regardless of Warfield’s opinion, the public had a harder time accepting the massive shift. As the Princeton Seminary Bulletin remarked, “However correct this practice might be in scholarly theory—for the word in Hebrew is indeed a proper name, not a title—it was disastrous from the point of view of the liturgical, homiletical, and devotional use of the Bible, and was almost universally disliked.”87 Thus, when it came time to Revise the ASV, the committee decided to revert to using “the LORD” instead of Jehovah. The RSV was published in 1952. The preface explains the decision:

A major departure from the practice of the American Standard Version is the rendering of the Divine Name, the “Tetragrammaton.” The American Standard Version used the term “Jehovah”; the King James Version had employed this in four places, but everywhere else, except in three cases where it was employed as part of a proper name, used the English word Lord (or in certain cases God) printed in capitals. The present revision returns to the procedure of the King James Version, which follows the precedent of the ancient Greek and Latin translators and the long established practice in the reading of the Hebrew scriptures in the synagogue. While it is almost if not quite certain that the Name was originally pronounced “Yahweh,” this pronunciation was not indicated when the Masoretes added vowel signs to the consonantal Hebrew text. To the four consonants YHWH of the Name, which had come to be regarded as too sacred to be pronounced, they attached vowel signs indicating that in its place should be read the Hebrew word Adonai meaning “Lord” (or Elohim meaning “God”). The ancient Greek translators substituted the word Kyrios (Lord) for the Name. The Vulgate likewise used the Latin word Dominus. The form “Jehovah” is of late medieval origin; it is a combination of the consonants of the Divine Name and the vowels attached to it by the Masoretes but belonging to an entirely different word. The sound of Y is represented by J and the sound of W by V, as in Latin. For two reasons the Committee has returned to the more familiar usage of the King James Version: (1) the word “Jehovah” does not accurately represent any form of the Name ever used in Hebrew; and (2) the use of any proper name for the one and only God, as though there were other gods from whom He had to be distinguished, was discontinued in Judaism before the Christian era and is entirely inappropriate for the universal faith of the Christian Church.88

While the ASV revisers had their own reasons for using Jehovah, English Unitarian Joseph Priestly had a different theologically-driven reason. He intentionally wanted to obscure any verbal connections between God and Jesus and maintain a sharp distinction between the two. He proposed the following rule for producing a new version: “In the Old Testament, let the word Jehovah be rendered by Jehovah, and also the word κύριος in the New, in passages in which there is an allusion to the Old, or where it may be proper to distinguish God from Christ.”89 Although his version was never published, the Arians published a version using his rule in 1952. Later, the Jehovah’s Witnesses published their New World Translation, which “uses the name

Pronouncing & Translating the Divine Name יְהֹוָה

Jehovah to translate κύριος in many places, so as to prevent anyone from identifying Christ with God.  

In 1966 The New Jerusalem Bible was released by Roman Catholic scholars in England with the expressed purpose of replicating what was done with the French La Bible de Jérusalem. The NJB was the first Roman Catholic version of the Bible in English to be based on the original languages rather than the Latin Vulgate. The committee decided to use Yahweh consistently throughout the translation, even though Catholic tradition would prohibit its use for the public reading of Scripture and liturgy on that basis alone. In the foreword the editor does not go into detail as to their philosophy behind the decision, but he does offer some comments:

The Psalms present a special problem for translators since, unlike other parts of the Bible, the psalter is not only a book to be read but a collection of verse which is sung or chanted. Moreover, many of them are so familiar in their sixteenth century form that any change may seem to be an impertinence. Nevertheless, here too the first duty of a translator is to convey as clearly as he can what the original author wrote. He should not try to inject a rhetorical quality and an orotundity of cadence which belong more truly to the first Elizabethan age in England than to the Hebrew originals. He must avoid the pure bathos of prosy flatness, of course, but he will be aware that there is no longer an accepted ‘poetic language’ which can be used to give artificial dignity to plain statements. It would certainly be dangerous to give the form of the translation precedence over the meaning.

It is in the Psalms especially that the use of the divine name Yahweh (accented on the second syllable) may seem unacceptable—though indeed the still stranger form Yah is in constant use in the acclamation Hallelu-Yah (Praise Yah!). It is not without hesitation that this accurate form has been used, and no doubt those who may care to use this translation of the Psalms can substitute the traditional ‘the Lord’. On the other hand, this would be to lose much of the flavour and meaning of the originals. For example, to say, ‘The Lord is God’ is surely a tautology, as to say ‘Yahweh is God’ is not.  

Its successor, The New Jerusalem Bible (1985), upheld the use of Yahweh, and it continues to be a popular version used by Roman Catholics, although still not allowed for Mass, etc. But in 2019 the tide turned, and The Revised New Jerusalem Bible changed Yahweh to ‘the LORD.’ The editor Henry Wansbrough explains why in the foreword:

Soon after his election as Pope, Benedict XVI was approached by the Chief Rabbi of Rome who said that the use of a possible vocalization of the divine name was offensive to Jews. Pope Benedict submitted the matter to the Pontifical Biblical Commission and we recommended the use of ‘LORD’, with small capitals, for YHWH, a suggestion which the Pope accepted.

Surprisingly, the foreword makes no mention of the NJB not being suitable for liturgical use. From an outside perspective it seems that the motivation to sell more bibles would be a powerful one; the change from Yahweh to the LORD now allows the RNJB to compete with the NRSV for use during Mass. It may be that this was a motivation for the change, but not a sufficiently ‘spiritual’ one to mention in the foreword. The reason that is mentioned comes across as much more politically correct than the ambition to make more money through increased popularity.

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90 Marlowe, “The Translation of the Tetragrammaton.”
91 See Divino Afflante Espiritu (1943) (c.f. NJB p34), a letter in which permission is granted to abandon the tradition of only translating from the Vulgate, by Pope Pius XII.
If I had been the Pope, I would have liked to ask the Chief Rabbi of Rome, “Why do you care what is in our Bible translation? Do you also want to become Christ’s disciple?” For the Pope to capitulate to such a request on the basis of possible offense would also require him to remove the New Testament, since most of it offends the Jews, especially Jesus’ teaching and identification with God. Paul was well aware of what he was doing when he said: “we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews” (1 Cor 1:23).

Finally, let us look at a particularly interesting case of translating the NT into modern Hebrew. The Bible Society in Israel describes the dilemma they faced in this work regarding the divine name:

In the Hebrew translation of the New Testament it was necessary to decide at each appearance of kurios whether to render adonai or יהוה or something else. In the case of quotations from the Hebrew Scriptures the decision is simple enough. In a passage such as Matthew 22:44, the modern Hebrew New Testament returns to the original of Psalm 110:1 and reads, “ne’um yhvh (by tradition read as adonai) le’adoni,” where English translations have rendered, “The Lord [or Lord] said to my Lord.”

Notice in the above example that Matthew is quoting words which Jesus spoke to an audience. Would Jesus or anyone else in the New Testament have actually pronounced the Divine Name? The answer must be no. However, the translators felt justified in leaving the original wording of the Psalm, even though Jesus would have spoken the words “ne’um adonai ladoni,” substituting adonai for the tetragrammaton. In this case they were copying from the original Psalm rather than quoting the actual words which came out of Jesus’ mouth.

Other instances where God is spoken of in direct speech are in the words of Elizabeth, Mary and Zechariah in Luke 1:28, 46, 68. In all of these cases the first edition of the modern Hebrew New Testament used יהוה to translate kurios, although the three speakers would have said adonai, as will the modern reader.

The Septuagint translators, who tended to be fairly literal in their translating, had been faced with the converse problem: how could they distinguish between adonai and יהוה in their Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible? The solution they generally seem to have settled on was to render adonai as ho kurios (the Lord), and יהוה as simply kurios without the definite article. This was done without distinction as to whether the passage was direct speech or narrative. The Septuagint was translated over a period of several generations, and this rule was not followed consistently by its various translators.

It is interesting to note that the Greek of the New Testament also has both forms, kurios and ho kurios, sometimes even coming side by side (e.g., Lk. 1:9, 11: 1:25, 28, 32; 1:45, 46). To make things more complicated, the form of kurios without the definite article is occasionally used of Jesus, as in Luke 2:11 (“...is born [a] savior, who is Messiah, [the] Lord”).

The first edition of the United Bible Societies’ Hebrew New Testament, with a few exceptions, had used the Septuagint practice as a guideline by rendering ho kurios as adonai, and kurios without the definite article as YHVH. However some members of the editorial committee called this into question. First of all, the distinction would not be clear to modern readers to whom it might seem strange to find the tetragrammaton being used in direct speech. Secondly, modern Israeli readers will say adonai when they encounter יהוה in the text.

To aid in making the decision, we asked a number of Israelis with a good academic command of Hebrew whether the translation should maintain yhvh or substitute instead an abbreviation such as נא or א, both of which are common in Hebrew literature and are read as adonai or ha-shem, “the

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94 It is indeed far from consistent (e.g. Josh 3:11 and many others).
name.” Opinions were divided, although most were in favor of maintaining יהוה, except in direct speech. Some of these argued that to use יוה or יה would give the impression that the New Testament is just another secular book with less sanctity than the Hebrew Bible.

Those who argued against using יהוה said that it has simply never been done in texts other than the Hebrew Bible, from ancient times until today. Additionally, they said, more Israelis would be likely to read the New Testament if it did not contain the divine name. The first of these objections is contrary to the evidence: the divine name is found in non-biblical material in the Dead Sea Scrolls and especially in the Temple Scroll. The second objection is not at all certain. Those Israelis who are interested in reading the New Testament probably will not be put off by the appearance of the tetragrammaton. Those who refuse to read the New Testament do so because of objections to Jesus and Paul and the history of “Christian” treatment of Jews; changing יהוה to יוה or יה will make no difference to them.

It was decided to abandon the Septuagint’s solution and treat each case on its own merits. Each one of the more than 300 occurrences of kuriōs in the New Testament had to be checked in its context. Where direct speech was involved, it could be translated by ἡ αὐτός, the Lord, αὐτός, or even elohim, God, as the Septuagint translators themselves had sometimes done (in the reverse direction, of course). The one exception to this is where the speaker is quoting a verse from the Hebrew Bible which includes the tetragrammaton. In these cases, as in the example from Matthew 22:44 cited above, the original יהוה has been maintained. In narrative sections יהוה has been left in the translation in almost every case. Some of the cases in the Gospels are in fact stock phrases in which the divine name of God is normal. Among these are ἴησος, ἰησοῦς, the angel of the Lord, ἔλεος, the day of the Lord, ἐπήλθεν, the hand of the Lord, and kérōs, the glory of the Lord. Here the Hebrew New Testament has preserved the familiar phrase.

In some places it needs a decision bordering on the theological to determine how to translate kuriōs. What should be done, for example, in a situation like Luke 19:31, 34: “You shall say ‘The Lord needs it.’”? Was the owner to understand that the Lord needed the colt or that the LORD needed it? In the modern Hebrew translation it would be possible to render kuriōs as either ἡ αὐτός, the Lord or as αὐτός, the Lord. English translations generally do not have to make such a decision because they use the distinctive Lord only in the Hebrew Scriptures. The modern Hebrew translators decided to use ἡ αὐτός, leaving open the interpretation that Jesus, the disciples’ master, needed the colt. Translation sometimes unavoidably involves interpretation, and in this case the interpretation could have gone either way.

Or, to take a similar example, how are we to understand the words of Jesus in Mark 5:19: “Go home to your family and tell them what ἡ κορίτσι has done for you”? The first Hebrew New Testament edition used יהוה, but it need not have been so unequivocal since Jesus would not have pronounced the divine name. It is clear that Jesus said either αὐτός or ἡ αὐτός. To render kuriōs here as αὐτός would lose the ambiguity. It is better to stay with ἡ αὐτός, which could have been understood by the newly-healed demoniac (as well as by today’s readers) to refer either to the Lord or to Jesus. Judging from verse 20, the ex-demoniac may have understood the latter, because he went out to proclaim in the Decapolis “how much Jesus had done for him.”

As a general rule it was decided that the modern Hebrew New Testament would stay with αὐτός, Lord) or αὐτός, Lord for kuriōs rather than use the tetragrammaton, יהוה. The exceptions to this are those quotations from the Hebrew Bible in which יהוה appears in the original. Other minor exceptions also can be found in places where the context seemed to demand using יהוה (for example, Rev. 19:6).95

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Finally, it should be mentioned that there is a public domain version of the Bible called the World English Bible (WEB), which was started by Michael Johnson back in 1994. Its history, variations, and text can be accessed freely online at ebible.org. One of its unique features is that it uses Yahweh consistently throughout the OT. As much as I like the idea that this version is public domain and uses “Yahweh,” I find it to be a poor example of translation principles. The English is awkward and unnatural to the point that one might think there were no native English speakers involved in the project.

The limited scope of this book does not permit the inclusion of the decisions regarding the translation of the divine name in many translations done over the centuries in other languages. As can be seen from the survey of its treatment in English versions, there has not been clarity or consensus, and traditions have proven to be fickle.  

Sacred Name Movement & Bibles

At this point it should be recognized that there exists a fast-growing phenomenon of Bibles that render God’s name in ways that strive to preserve its historicity, many with the same kind of archaizing tendencies of the Essenes. Peter Unseth is one of the few scholars who has spent time analyzing these versions and the theology driving them. He writes,

Since 1960, over a dozen translations of the Bible have been produced in English with the explicit goal of restoring the original Hebrew forms of the divine names, consistently using forms such as “Yahweh” and “Yeshua” in both the Old and New Testaments (in contrast to ASV’s use of “Jehovah” in the Old Testament alone).

This is something that was birthed out of the Sacred Name Movement (SNM), which began within the Church of God (Seventh-Day Adventists), and was spread by Clarence Orvil Dodd in the 1930s through his magazine called The Faith. This movement claims to seek to conform Christianity to its “Hebrew roots” in practice, belief and worship. The Assembly of Yahweh was the first religious organization in the SNM, formed in Holt, Michigan in the 1930s. SNM adherents also generally keep many of the Old Testament laws and ceremonies such as the Seventh-day Sabbath, Torah festivals, and kashrut food laws. They also reject the Trinity as an unbiblical doctrine, and consider Christmas and Easter pagan holidays.

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Pronouncing & Translating the Divine Name יְהֹוָה

The first Sacred Name Bible was published by Angelo Traina in 1963, called the *Holy Name Bible*. Unseth provides a list of some other Sacred Name Bible versions that followed Traina’s version:

— *Sacred Name King James Bible*, by John Hurt, 2005.
— *Human Instruction Manual* (HIM), Nazarite.net.
— exGeses companion BIBLE, Herbert Jahn.
— *Transparent English Bible*: Underway, only small portion available.

The preface to *The Word of Yahweh* explains:

The prime objective in producing this new edition of the scriptures was a desire to accurately represent the most sacred names of our Father and His Son. It has been the tradition of most translators to substitute more common, familiar terms such as lord and god, in place of the very names inspired from Yahweh Himself. We believe this is a grave injustice. Not only does this substitution steal from the richness and fullness of the original languages, but probably directly breaks the third commandment we read in Exodus 20:7.

The personal name of the Heavenly Father, Yahweh, was inspired into the Hebrew and Aramaic texts of the Old Testament nearly 7000 times. This includes 134 instances where the Masoretic scribes admittedly changed Yahweh to the more common Hebrew adonai. In all instances where Lord, or God was substituted for the Sacred Name in the English text we have properly inserted Yahweh. Because there is no accurate translation of elohim we have transliterated that title into the English. As for adonai, sovereign or master serves as an adequate translation in most cases.  

It should be noted their accusation of breaking the third commandment applies to the NT writers, and nowhere in the preface do they address that issue. They do, however, claim that “In recent years many scholars have proposed that there are Semitic originals underlying the Greek text of much of the New Testament.”

They do not substantiate that claim or admit that it is purely speculation and therefore does not ameliorate their grave accusation.

They also do not substantiate their use of “Yahweh” as the correct pronunciation of the divine name, nor do they explain why there is no accurate translation of elohim—a claim which is nonsense if no good reason is given. Finally, when reading the entire preface, it seems to be the case that, because they do not believe in the Trinity, they speak of Jesus as distinct from Yahweh. Thus, in their mind, Yahweh is Jesus’ father, and Jesus is not God, although he is the savior of the world.

The following is a sampling of how some of these versions render YHWH in Deuteronomy 6:4:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Version</th>
<th>Pronunciation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Besorah</td>
<td>יהוה</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Scriptures</td>
<td>יהוה</td>
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<tr>
<td>ROSNB</td>
<td>YAHVAH</td>
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<tr>
<td>Word of Yahweh</td>
<td>Yahweh</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sacred Name KJV</td>
<td>YHVH</td>
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<tr>
<td>NIBEV</td>
<td>Yahweh</td>
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<tr>
<td>exeGeses companion BIBLE</td>
<td>Yah Veh</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

None of these bibles are published by well-established publishers, and much of the theology driving them is troublesome.

Those who produce and use Sacred Name Bibles are not theologically uniform, but there are several theological distinctions that frequently reoccur. They are united in their belief in the vital importance of using Hebraic forms of sacred names. Additionally, most of them observe a seventh-day Sabbath and the Feast of Tabernacles, celebrate the new moon, and do not eat pork. Some stress the exact form of sacred names so much as to say that those “who worship JEHOVAH and JESUS or whatever you choose to call him, they will have the Mark of the Beast.” Also, “We find salvation in only one name: the sacred name Yahweh. It is not found by uttering the name ‘Jesus Christ’ or even its original Hebrew form ‘Yahushua ha-messiah.’” Many of their websites claim that the name “Jesus” is derived from the name for the god “Zeus” and “Christ” is from “Krishna,” but without credible evidence or scholarly support.

It should also be noted that the general consensus among the proponents of this movement is that the NT was originally written in Hebrew and Aramaic. Some of the misunderstanding around this has presumably stemmed from works like those of George Howard (The Hebrew Gospel of Matthew, 1987). Those who have a penchant for hebraizing or judaizing Christianity tend to gravitate towards these kinds of ideas about an original Hebrew NT, even though it is entirely speculation. Although the theory is attractive, there is no manuscript evidence for the NT having been written originally in something other than Greek.

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100 Ibid.
101 Unseth, “Sacred Name Bible Translations in English,” 188.
George Howard also proposes that κύριος as a title for Yahweh or as a translation of the tetragrammaton is found only in later Christian copies of the Septuagint. This proposal was eagerly embraced by the Jehovah’s Witnesses as part of their arsenal of proofs that all the references to the ‘Lord’ in the NT refer to God and not Jesus.

Unseth adds that the proponents of Sacred Name Bibles see the present Greek text of the New Testament “as a translation and as flawed in not having preserved the Hebraic forms of names, particularly sacred names. Therefore, they believe it appropriate to insert/restore Semitic-based names in their translations of the New Testament. They believe that the use of Hebrew-based sacred names is for all people, not just Jews, and for all time.”

I suspect that these versions have muddied the waters in this discussion and created a cultish association around those who would strive to think carefully about the implications of Exodus 3:15 and other biblical evidence. This could potentially be another objection to rendering the divine Name as Yahweh or an approximation of Yahweh in translation, since it might inadvertently lend credence to imbalanced and unhelpful movements like this one. This would not be surprising, since cults have historically caused orthodox protestants to react strongly to their errors and throw out any good that they might have had along with the bad. Unfortunately, there will most likely be a tendency for many to ignore careful thinking about the divine name simply because they assume such thinking is always and only associated with extremist groups like the SNM.

Returning to Exodus 3:15

At this point it may be helpful to return to Exodus 3:15 and ask the question, “What does God want regarding his name?” He says, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘Yahweh (יְהוָה), 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 thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations” (Ex 3:15). One thing seems clear: God’s personal desire is that he be remembered throughout all generations as יְהוָה.

In some cultures the best way to remember someone is by speaking of them by name. Conversely, when someone wants to forget the existence of a person (perhaps because of wrong they did, or shame they brought upon the family) they seek to silence anyone who would speak their name. In the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, Christians regularly “do this in remembrance” of Jesus. In the same vein, one question that should echo throughout this discussion is: How can God’s children remember him throughout all generations as Yahweh if they seldom, if ever, hear or say his name, or read it in their translation of the Hebrew Bible? In the midst of the mass of confusion, misplaced fear, and mistaken reverence surrounding the divine name there is something wonderfully helpful in this simple, lucid, specific desire expressed by God himself in Exodus 3.

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The Evidence for Yahweh

How did scholars end up with the generally acknowledged pronunciation “Yahweh”? There are several pieces of evidence that the Anchor Bible Dictionary points out, some of which have already been discussed at length:

The longer of the two reduced suffixing forms of the divine name, yāh and yāhā, indicates that the name probably had the phonetic shape /yahw-/ with a final vowel. The vowel is supplied on the basis of the observation that the name derives from a verbal root hwy, which would require the final vowel /ə/; this inference is confirmed by the element yahwā occurring in names in the Amorite language (see TDOT 5: 512; the relevance of the Amorite names is challenged by Knauf 1984: 467). In the Aramaic letters from Elephantine in Egypt (ca. 400 B.C.; ANET, 491–92), the divine name occurs in the spelling yhw, probably with the vocalization /yah/ (TDOT 5: 505). Instances of the divine name written in Greek letters, such as Iao (equivalent to “Yaho”), Iabe (known to the Samaritans, Theodoret [4th century A.D.], and Epiphanius), Iaoue, Iaouai (Clement of Alexandria [3d century]), and Iae also favor the form “Yahweh” (NWDB, 453).

The Lack of Evidence for Yahweh

As can be seen so far, the evidence for “Yahweh” as the historic pronunciation is far from overwhelming. Austin Surls, in his excellent dissertation Making Sense of the Divine Name in Exodus points out that there is more hard evidence for “Yahu” than “Yahweh.” He writes:

Though the form “Yahweh” has taken hold as the consensus view in scholarly circles, it is based on very little hard evidence. Most agree that an etymological-grammatical connection between הִיאָה and יהוה suggests that יהוה should be vocalized as a third-person yiqtol form of היה. Scholars have substantiated this by rightly appealing to the form Ἰαβὲ in Origen, Theodoret and Epiphanius, but wrongly to the form Ἰαουὲ in Clement of Alexandria. However, the etymological-grammatical connection is not sensitive to the form of explicit naming wordplays and misunderstands the function of proper names used in them. Furthermore, the Greek evidence is far too late to make substantive claims about the original Hebrew form of this ancient name. The form Ἰαβὲ is never ascribed to Jewish practice in the extant sources, but only to Samaritans and pagans.

Though always a minority view, the claim that “Yahu” was the original form has much to commend it. The presence of a consistent three-lettered affix on theophoric names constitutes its earliest witness. It is remarkable that the written form הוה occurs on a jar in the southern Negev (ca. 800 BCE) while הוה also occurs on Elephantine Island about 400 years later. Furthermore, the vast quantity, early date, and wide geographic distribution of the Greek form Ἰάω predominates over the consensus form (see Table 5 and Figures 2 and 3 below). Nevertheless, it is unlikely that this form is original, because even the earliest evidence for the form “Yahu” is not early enough to verify this claim. This form cannot account for the final he of the Tetragrammaton, and the waw probably did not function as a vowel letter originally. The original form probably had a consonantal waw, a final he that was consonantal, and was perhaps followed by a short vowel that was never written down. The vocalization of הוה would probably have been longer than “Yahu,” but phonetically similar—perhaps it was simplified when appended to theophoric names. The antiquity of the name and the weak consonants on which it is built makes it unlikely that we will discover its original form or vocalization. The following are possible: “Yahwahu,” “Yahawhu,” “Yahuwah,” or “Yehwahu.”

If this hypothesis is correct, then the divine name resembles the majority of proper names in the Pentateuch’s explicit naming wordplays in that most do not correspond to a precise verbal or nominal form. Furthermore, the name יהוה appears to be etymologically opaque. Such a personal name makes direct reference to the name-bearer without adding any sense (descriptive meaning) to its reference. Such a name must gather its sense from the biblical narrative rather than from a supposed etymology.

The divine name יהוה is explained in Exod 3:13–15 (via assonance) in order to anticipate YHWH’s powerful intervention and subsequent acts of salvation on behalf of his people. The phrase אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה does not describe YHWH’s essence or character, but defers such a statement for a later time. The divine “self-naming” does nothing more than answer Moses’ question, while letting the future reveal what sense Israel should ascribe to the name. YHWH offered his name as a peg on which to hang descriptions of all that he was about to do, be, and say.  

I find Surls’ dissertation compelling, and agree with him that there is not as much evidence for the pronunciation “Yahweh” as one would hope would be behind such a widespread academic convention. Nevertheless, since an accurate reconstruction of YHWH will always be speculative, I am satisfied with the convention of Yahweh because it is a name (not a title), it communicates to many people, and it accounts for the יָה (yah) abbreviation in theophoric names and elsewhere (e.g. hallelu-yah, “praise Yah[weh]).

Objections to the Pronunciation and Translation of יהוה

We Don’t Have an Audio Recording of Moses

One objection to the pronunciation of the divine name יהוה is that the exact pronunciation has been lost.  Since there is no unanimous agreement as to how it should be pronounced, it is better to avoid saying it at all. My response to that begins with the name of Jesus. Do we actually pronounce Jesus as the biblical authors did? Let’s start with English. Only the last “s” sound in the English pronunciation corresponds with the Greek pronunciation Ἰησοῦς (“ee-ay-SOOS”), and the Greek pronunciation has very little in common with the Hebrew pronunciation it’s based on. But, regardless of that fact, we use it constantly in the world of English-speaking Christianity, without thinking twice. This is certainly not because we do not respect the name of Jesus. Neither is this because every other language in the world pronounces Jesus as we do.

The same can be said of many names in the Bible, such as Eve, which we pronounce in a way that is a far cry from how it probably sounded in early and later Hebrew. Nevertheless, that

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106 In this paper I assume the reader understands that there is a long manuscript tradition of the name being written without vowels in Hebrew, and that the Masoretes embedded the tradition of saying “Lord” (adonai in Hebrew) into their manuscript copies by artificially marking the four consonants of the name יהוה with vowels from adonai, thus contributing to the loss of the actual pronunciation throughout history. More details about this issue can be found online and in many books and study bibles. Although I am well-aware of Nehemiah Gordon’s arguments against this idea, I am not at all persuaded by them. See the heading on Gordon in the “Objections” section for more on this.
disconnect and inaccuracy do not make us hesitate to pronounce that name, and many others. Someone might argue that consistency would require us either to stop pronouncing Jesus’ name and always substitute Lord or the Christ, or else pick a pronunciation for the tetragrammaton and use it as we do the name of Jesus.

Another answer to the objection is that people who have lived abroad are used to having their names mispronounced in various ways. My wife’s name is Bethany, but Latin American Spanish does not have the “th” sound in its phonetic inventory. Neither are Spanish speakers readily able to pronounce the “a” in her name as it sounds in English. So they inevitably end up pronouncing it as BEH-tah-nee. Others prefer to use the Spanish equivalent of the name, which is Betania because the English pronunciation is too hard or confusing. In the case with my own name, Andrew, there are some people in Spanish-speaking countries who attempt to pronounce it as close to the English as possible, but they end up saying Ahn-DREY-u, which has changed the sound rather drastically. Then there are others who simply call me (as I prefer) by the equivalent Spanish name, Andrés. Using the same logic as this argument against pronouncing the divine name, I ought to insist on non-English speakers addressing me exclusively with a title such as consultant or sir, or simply man. However, I am able to appreciate and navigate the reality of having my name rendered differently and, in one sense, inaccurately. Therefore, how much more must Jesus be able to bear the changes in the pronunciation of his name all over the world and throughout history! Jesus and Yahweh are the same God (e.g. Jn 8:58), therefore, if God accepts a variety of pronunciations of Jesus, he will accept various pronunciations of Yahweh.

It should also be observed that in Exodus 3 “God is expressing his desire that all people everywhere come to use this name for him. In God’s omniscience, he would have known that speakers of different languages would have to pronounce his name according to the phonetics of those languages. Nevertheless, God still indicated that this was the name by which he wanted everyone to know him.”

In conclusion, the objection to pronouncing YHWH because we cannot be 100% certain of how it was originally pronounced is not a valid objection, nor is it consistent with our treatment of other biblical names.

The Pronunciation of Yahweh is Historically Artificial

A related objection to the one above is that Yahweh is an artificial reconstruction based on historical phonology. In a special edition video from “Daily Dose of Hebrew,” Dr. Mark Futato explains why he does not believe that Yahweh is a correct reconstruction of the pronunciation of YHWH:

Yahweh is a modern scholarly reconstruction of the divine name. Yahweh presumes that the divine name is a hiphil imperfect third person masculine singular from יהוה. The Yah is no doubt correct. We have clear evidence for this in a number of forms. One example is hallelu-yah. …Yah is a short form for the divine name as Mike is short for Michael or John is short for Jonathan, or Liz is short for Elizabeth. The -weh, however, is doubtful in my opinion and in the opinion of other Old Testament scholars.

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107 Chris Lovelace, personal correspondence, May 14, 2020. He goes on to point out: “Ironically, the name that God reveals in Exodus 3:14 is not Yahweh, but Ehyeh asher ehyeh, ‘I am that I am’ or simply Ehyeh, ‘I am.’ The name Yahweh is an adaptation of what God reveals in Exodus 3:15. (So, strictly speaking, we shouldn’t have a problem with saying Yahweh at all. If there’s any issue to be had, it’s with Ehyeh - which nobody says.)”
The *waw* preserves an early form, before syllable-initial *waws* became *yod*…. The original יהוה became בָּהֶרellite which represents the shift from the syllable-initial *waw* to *yod*. The *segol* *he* presumes a later form, when the original final *yod* was dropped and only a vowel was left, written with a *he*. If you’ve learned your 3-*he* verbs, you know that most of them originally ended with a *yod*. That *yod* was dropped, and all we had left was a vowel, and that vowel ends up getting written with a *he*…. Before 900 B.C., the final *he* would have been a consonant, because before 900 B.C. there were no vowels represented in Hebrew writing at all. So the true original יהוה eventually became בָּהֶרellite. What’s the point? The point is that –*weh* is a mixture of early and late elements. The *waw* as the second root letter preserves a very early form; the *he* at the end presumes a much later form. And this mixture of early and late forms just makes no sense. And so I’m not one who would vote on a translation committee for using *Yahweh* in translation.108

Futato bases his claims on *The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, which implies that YHWH would have most likely been pronounced as “Yahawaha” around the time of Moses, but they admit that they can only speculate:

An alternative possibility for the original pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton should be mentioned. Actually, there is a problem with the pronunciation “Yahweh.” It is a strange combination of old and late elements. The first extra-Biblical occurrence of the name is in the Moabite Stone of about 850 B.C. At that time vowel letters were just beginning to be used in Hebrew. If YHWH represents a spelling earlier than 900 B.C. (as would seem likely), the final “*h*” should have been pronounced. The pronunciation Yahweh assumes the ending of a lamed-*he* verb, but these verbs in Moses’ day ended in a “*y*” (cf. for *hānā* the Ug. impf. *ybny*). So the ending “*eh*” is a late form. But in Hebrew in late times a “*w*” that began a word or syllable changed to “*y*” (as in the pe-*waw* verbs and the verb *hāyā* itself). So the “*w*” of Yahweh represents a pre-mosaic pronunciation but the final “*eh*” represents probably a post-davidic form.

In view of these problems it may be best simply to say that YHWH does not come from the verb בָּהֶרellite (presumably *hawaya* in its early form) at all. There are many places in the OT where it is now recognized that the parallel of a name and its meaning is not necessarily etymological. For instance, I Sam 1:20 probably does not mean that the name Samuel is derived from the verb *šâma* ‘to hear.’ Genesis 11:9 does not mean that Babel comes from the verb בָּלָל “confusion” but only that the two words sound somewhat alike. Likewise Jacob is said to mean both “heel” (Gen 25:26) and “supplanter” (Gen 27:36). There are many other examples of this device which is to be taken as a paranomasia, a play on words, rather than as an etymology. Therefore we may well hold that YHWH does not come from the verb בָּהֶרellite which is cited in the first person *ʾehyeh* “I will be,” but is an old word of unknown origin which sounded something like what the verb בָּהֶרellite sounded in Moses’ day. In this case we do not know what the pronunciation was; *we can only speculate*. However, if the word were spelled with four letters in Moses’ day, we would expect it to have had more than two syllables, for at that period there were no vowel letters. All the letters were sounded.

At the end of the OT period the Elephantine papyri write the word YHW to be read either יָהָע (as in names like Shemayahu) or יָהָה (as in names like Jehozadek). The pronunciation יָהָה would be favored by the later Greek form ἴαοι found in Qumran Greek fragments (2nd or 1st centuries B.C.) and in Gnostic materials of the first Christian centuries. Theodoret in the fourth century A.D. states that the Samaritans pronounced it ἰαβε. Clement of Alexandria (early 3d century A.D.) vocalized it as

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Pronouncing & Translating the Divine Name "יהוה"

In the end Futato and the TWOT are arguing that YHWH would have originally had four syllables instead of two. Yet I find Futato’s conclusion inconsistent: YHWH should not be pronounced, and no approximation of it should be used in a translation. If he knows a better way of pronouncing it based on historical morphology, why doesn’t he use it?

It seems to boil down to this: Futato thinks that “Yahweh” is wrong, but he also realizes that any other suggestion would be speculation (albeit closer to the mark than Yahweh in his mind). He understands as everyone does that we don’t know the exact pronunciation of a word at the time of Moses because there were no recording devices. Thus his conclusion is that we should not try to pronounce it or render it in translation.

In the end, as already argued in the previous section, it doesn’t matter if “Yahweh” turns out to be slightly or drastically different from the original pronunciation at Sinai. What matters is how we seek to understand, obey, and honor God’s explicit desire in Exodus 3:15.

Nehemiah Gordon

Although the teaching of Nehemiah Gordon is not necessarily an objection to pronouncing or translating the divine name, it is important to sound a warning to the reader regarding much of what he has to say. As a Karaite Jew, he is famously outspoken on the pronunciation of the divine name, and has become increasingly influential, especially within non-scholarly circles where people are easily dazzled by his apparent mastery of Hebrew.

He argues that the Masoretes did not point YHWH with the vowels of Adonai, but rather were preserving the secret, correct pronunciation of God’s name, which he claims is “Yehovah.” Gordon argues this in his writings and at a very popular level on YouTube interviews, as well as on his influential podcast. His opinion has gained many followers who preach that we should be addressing God as Yehovah, many of whom are quick to correct anyone who pronounces it any other way.

Unpacking all of Gordon’s “scholarly slight of hand” and deception reaches beyond the scope of this book, but the reader should know that he is (whether intentionally or unintentionally) suppressing evidence and presenting false claims to support his speculations. For those interested in exploring his errors and misinformation in minute detail with clear examples, evidence, and explanations, search YouTube for the channel “Hebrew Gospels,” which is dedicated solely to helping people navigate Gordon’s teaching with discernment.

Although Gordon’s passion for God’s name is contagious, and he speaks with conviction and confidence, he seems to be suppressing evidence that does not fit his views, and has indulged in far-fetched speculation that is unhelpful.

We Run the Risk of “Taking God’s Name in Vain”

One of the most common objections throughout history has been that anyone who pronounces the divine name runs the risk of “taking God’s name in vain.” Unfortunately, the command in Exodus 20:7 has been misunderstood for centuries. Here is how one English

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110 https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCUROTvY5TpcC5ccw-YbrMkbQ
translates: “You shall not take (לא תַּשְּׁא, לא) the name of the LORD your God, in vain (לא תַּשְּׁא) for the LORD will not hold guiltless one who takes his name in vain.”

Carmen Joy Imes provides the following helpful clarification about how we should understand this command. She argues essentially that it is forbidding the Israelites to misrepresent Yahweh. Thus the idea that has come to be popularized as “taking God’s name in vain” really has to do with misrepresenting God’s character:

I’ve asked a lot of people what they think this verse means (we’ll call it the “Name Command”). Most people assume that the Name Command teaches that we’re not supposed to use God’s name as a swear word (as in the flippant, “Oh, my God!” or the harsher “God dammit”). Instead, we should use it reverently. I agree that we should honor God’s name by using it reverently, but I do not think swear words are the problem that the Name Command seeks to address.

However, the Name Command says nothing about oaths or cursing. In fact, there are no speech-related words at all. Translated simply, it says, “You shall not bear the name of Yahweh, your God, in vain.” Perhaps this is why I’ve been able to count 23 distinct interpretations of the Name Command. It seems like an odd statement—how does one “bear” God’s name? It’s no wonder that interpreters have often gone to other passages (either inside or outside of the Bible) hoping for clarification. Most assume that “bear the name” is short-hand for something like “bear the name on your lips,” which would be to say the name, or “lift your hand to the name,” which would mean to swear an oath.

But there’s a much simpler explanation. We miss it because it involves a metaphor that’s unfamiliar to us. Shortly after the giving of the Ten Commandments at Sinai, God gave instructions to Moses regarding the construction of the tabernacle, which will house the two stone tablets, and the official vestments of the high priest, who will officiate. The article of clothing that is of central importance to Aaron’s position as high priest is a cloth chest apron studded with 12 precious stones. These stones are to be inscribed, each with the name of one of the 12 tribes of Israel. Yahweh instructs Aaron to “bear the names of the sons of Israel” whenever he enters the sacred tent (Exodus 28:12, 29). Aaron literally bears their names. He carries them on his person as he goes about his official duties. He serves as the people’s authorized representative before God. He also bears Yahweh’s name on his forehead, setting him apart as God’s representative to the people.

As special as he is, Aaron is a visual model of what the entire covenant community is called to be and do. At Sinai, Yahweh selected Israel as his treasured possession, kingdom of priests, and holy nation (Exodus 19:5-6). All three titles designate Israel as Yahweh’s “official representative, set apart to mediate his blessing to all nations. By selecting the Israelites, Yahweh has claimed them as his own, in effect, branding them with his name as a claim of ownership. Because they bear his name, they are charged to represent him well. That is, they must not bear that name in vain. This goes far beyond oaths or pronunciation of God’s name. It extends to their behavior in every area of life. In everything, they represent him. They are his public relations department. The nations are watching the Israelites to find out what Yahweh is like.

Not convinced yet? Look at Aaron’s blessing in Numbers 6:24-27. After Aaron’s ordination as high priest (where he was clothed with the special garments) and the consecration of the tabernacle and people, his first official act was to pronounce this blessing over the people (see Leviticus 9:22). It’s very likely that you’ve heard the blessing before. It’s often used in churches and synagogues:

“May Yahweh bless you and keep you;
May Yahweh smile on you and be gracious to you;
May Yahweh show you his favor and give you peace.”

But have you ever read the following verse? “So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.”
You see? It’s quite explicit. God put his name on the Israelites as a claim of ownership. They wore an invisible tattoo. They were not to bear it in vain.\(^{111}\)

The name command is further elucidated by passages like Isaiah 44:5, which reads, “This one will say, ‘I am Yahweh’s,’ another will call on the name of Jacob, and another will write on his hand, ‘Yahweh’s,’ and name himself by the name of Israel.” Deuteronomy 28:9–10 also serves to connect belonging to Yahweh and bearing his name: “Yahweh will establish you as a people holy to himself, as he has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of Yahweh your God and walk in his ways. And all the peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of Yahweh [i.e. bear Yahweh’s name], and they shall be afraid of you.”\(^{112}\)

In conclusion, in spite of the opinions of many throughout history, the name command of Exodus 20:7 does not imply in any way that the name of God should not be pronounced as he revealed it. Rather, it requires that those who claim to be associated with the one true God, Yahweh, must not bring reproach on his reputation and character through their actions and words.

Inconsistency, Overwhelming the Reader, and Creating Obstacles

It has been shown that the inspired writers of the NT had valid reasons to use “Lord.” Although we do not know exactly what they were thinking, I believe that we can guess within reason as to their motives. In light of those motives (mentioned above), and in light of Exodus 3:15, let us examine how the Christian Standard Bible publishers object to the use of Yahweh in their translation. The Christian Standard Bible (CSB) recently retracted its practice of rendering the divine name as Yahweh in its earlier English translation (HCSB). What follows is their own full explanation from their website:

In the Old Testament, God gives his personal name more than 6,000 times. Known as the Tetragrammaton, the name is YHWH in the Hebrew text. It cannot be pronounced unless vowels are added. Traditionally, English Bible translations have chosen not to supply vowels in order to make YHWH pronounceable; they simply render this name as a title (Lord). This practice shows sensitivity to some who believe that to call God by his personal name is too informal. There is also debate as to which vowels should be added to YHWH to make it pronounceable. The HCSB broke with tradition and rendered YHWH as “Yahweh” 656 times in the Old Testament. The intent was to share with the reader God’s personal name in contexts where God was referring to his name. Four considerations led the CSB Translation Oversight Committee to depart from the HCSB practice and come into alignment with other English translations.

First, the HCSB was inconsistent by rendering YHWH as “Yahweh” in only 656 of 6,000+ occurrences of YHWH. In many cases, a single verse contains multiple occurrences of YHWH in the Hebrew. As an example of inconsistency, the HCSB in Job 1:21 read: “The Lord gives, and the Lord takes away. Praise the name of Yahweh.” Verses like this raised the question: what criteria did HCSB follow in choosing between “Yahweh” and “Lord”? Criteria were stated in the HCSB Introduction, but many readers felt that the approach should be fully consistent, rendering YHWH as “Yahweh” every time or else returning to the traditional “Lord.”


\(^{112}\) Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, Kingdom through Covenant (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 343-344.
Second, full consistency in rendering YHWH as “Yahweh” would overwhelm the reader. As an example, Numbers 9:23 would read as follows if HCSB had been fully consistent in its use of “Yahweh.” “They camped at Yahweh’s command, and they set out at Yahweh’s command. They carried out Yahweh’s requirement according to Yahweh’s command through Moses.”

Third, consistent feedback from readers showed that the unfamiliarity of “Yahweh” was an obstacle to reading the HCSB. For example, many reported that they felt “Yahweh” was an innovation, and they misunderstood the intent behind using the formal name of God. A translation that values accuracy and readability was thereby limited by a translation choice that did not provide clarity to the reader.

Fourth, when quoting Old Testament texts that include an occurrence of YHWH, the New Testament renders YHWH with the word kurios, which is a title (Lord) rather than a personal name. With this precedent in hand, most English translators have chosen to render YHWH as “Lord” rather than “Yahweh.” For these reasons, CSB is in line with the majority of English translations in its rendering of YHWH as “Lord.” In places where God introduces or emphasizes his covenant name, CSB has a footnote, saying, “Lit Yahweh.”

These four reasons should be responded to in turn.

First, the CSB oversight committee admitted that they failed to be consistent in the rendering of Yahweh. However, they conclude that their failure to be consistent is a reason to stop trying altogether. I find this reason to be self-defeating and less than compelling.

Second, they believe that fully consistent rendering of Yahweh would “overwhelm the reader,” yet they fail to explain how it is that repeating “the LORD” over and over does not overwhelm the reader. Both options have only two syllables.

Third, they received negative feedback from readers, who said that the use of Yahweh made it an obstacle to reading the HCSB. This sensitivity seems to be in keeping with what may have been involved in the NT writer’s decision to use kurios. But it would more helpful if the committee addressed why they think the NT authors would do the same in their position. For instance: 1) the NT authors were not a publishing company trying to sell Bibles, so money was not a possible motivation for removing obstacles for readers, 2) the NT authors were not publishing a new version of the Hebrew Bible for a people who already had many different options to choose from.

If these differences are acknowledged and addressed by the CSB committee, it will help their reasoning to be more transparent and useful.

There are many areas in a project where a translation team must compromise for any number of reasons. There are thousands of trivial examples one could mention, from text-critical issues to grammatical issues, but most of them do not approach the gravity of the use of God’s distinct, personal name, since it is a matter explicitly important to God himself.

The fourth and final reason of the CSB oversight committee is the most relevant. They recognize the NT’s use of kurios in Greek (κύριος, the title “Lord”) in place of the divine name as a standard they wish to follow. This objection is acceptable in light of the previous discussion of the NT authors’ desire to communicate clearly and identify Jesus with Yahweh. However, the oversight committee needs to provide their own criteria for following the example of the NT.

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114 Bob Carter also points out: “It’s normal translation practice to replace a name with a pronoun when the target language requires it. And in fact, they did this in Num 9:23. יהוה occurs 4x in the verse, but CSB only has ‘the LORD’ 3x and the 4th is replaced by ‘his.’” Personal correspondence, May 12, 2020.

115 The modern English speaking world already has access to the Bible in dozens of versions, which allows publishers the freedom to make a move against tradition and render God’s name as a name instead of as a title.
First, they should show what they believe were the reasons for the NT’s use of “the Lord.” Second, they should demonstrate a compelling rationale for following those NT reasons in today’s context.

Third, they should be required to argue why the apostles would do the same in their place, if they were given the chance to publish a translation of the OT in a language other than Greek, with access to mass media and the convenience of being able to communicate their reasons in a preface, study notes, footnotes, etc. For example, they must answer the question, “If Paul were alive today, in a world where Yahweh is a name used widely in the academic world and understood by many to be God’s personal name, and he were publishing a Bible translation primarily for Gentiles to read, would he still decide to publish a version of the OT using ‘the Lord’?” The answer, in their minds, may very well be a resounding YES, but they still need to articulate their logic cogently and carefully demonstrate that they have considered the issue from every angle. Fourth, they must address Exodus 3:15 and deal adequately and responsibly with the tensions created by that passage. Ignoring that passage calls into question the credibility of their reasoning and undermines their objections to the alternative.

Jews Will Be Offended

As already observed, many Jews can be offended by the pronunciation of the divine name in any way besides Adonai or Hashem, even though this reaction ignores the Mishnah’s teaching as we saw earlier in Berakhot 9:5. “Although the prohibition on pronunciation applies only to the four-letter Name, Jews customarily do not pronounce any of God’s many Names except in prayer or study. The usual practice is to substitute letters or syllables, so that Adonai becomes Adoshem or Ha-Shem, Elohaynu and Elohim become Elokeynu and Elokim, etc.” Thus, for many who live and work in Israel, the issue of pronouncing the divine name can be an emotional and personal one, even volatile. Dr. Jan Verbruggen offers an example of this in the following post online:

I do not think it is a sin, or even wrong to pronounce the divine name, as long as it is used in a reverent manner. However, I still do not pronounce it for two reasons:

1. Having studied under Jewish teachers (or teachers who themselves had Jewish teachers) I am used to saying adonai instead of ‘Yahweh.’

2. This second reason, for me, is the stronger one. I once attended a conference that was trying to bridge the gap between Jews and Evangelical Christians. One of the speakers, a well-known Evangelical scholar, went on eloquently about his topic, all the while pronouncing the divine name as ‘Yahweh.’ As he did, I noticed that some of the Jewish scholars present were so appalled that they were physically shaking. So then, for the sake of not offending our Jewish friends (we Christians seem to have been experts at that in the past) I have chosen not to pronounce the divine name. As I see it, there is no reason to erect an unnecessary wall between us.

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116 This should be required for any translation project in other majority and minority languages as well. The team/committee should be able articulate in the translation brief their position on all four issues and defend them.


118 “Some rabbis asserted that a person who pronounces YHVH according to its letters (instead of using a substitute) has no place in the World to Come, and should be put to death.” Ibid.

As stated previously, any objections that do not address both Exodus 3:15 and the NT’s use of “the Lord” undermine their relevance to the discussion. Verbruggen’s motives are admirable and guided by love, which is to be commended. Obviously, nobody wants to be accused of anti-Semitism, nor do true followers of Christ wish to intentionally offend anyone out of malice. Nobody wants to build barriers between the Jews and Christians.

When raising objections like this one from Verbruggen, I suggest that it would be fair to raise the parallel question of what might offend God and build unnecessary barriers between him and us. Could it be possible to show our Jewish friends how much we love, reverence, and honor God by actually using his name? It does not seem unreasonable to think that we might use such an opportunity to model obedience to God’s wishes in Exodus 3:15. I do not believe that the Jews should be the only ones who get to show their reverence for God by not saying his name. Rather, Christians ought to have the freedom to read God’s word, follow it, and honor his desire that we use his name as he has revealed it so that it be remembered throughout all generations. We are the foreigners who are called to join ourselves to him and “love the name of Yahweh” (Isa 56:6). If we are to “love his name” (Ps 69:36), we must offer solid, careful, biblical reasons why we decide to obscure it before men or in translations.

It Spoils the Literary Effect

Similar to the objection of the CSB committee, Michael D. Marlowe, the editor of bible-researcher.com voices the following complaint about the ASV’s use of Yahweh: “The Hebrew tetragrammaton or divine name (represented as ‘Lord’ in the New Testament) is everywhere rendered ‘Yahweh,’ which spoils the literary effect of many passages, especially in the Psalms.”

My response to this objection is simple: literary effect is subjective, and thus should not be given as a significant argument for or against the use of Yahweh. Gleason Archer expresses the exact opposite opinion about the same ASV in the following:

The avowed purpose of these translators is to abandon all traditional Bible-English and to produce a completely new rendering on the basis of contemporary English vocabulary and usage. This pursuit of modernity has not gone to the extremes of the New English Bible, nor is it a mere Phillips paraphrase. Actually it often displays a real vitality which is refreshingly original, and lends a heightened impact to the thought of the ancient author. Very striking is the abandonment of the traditional “LORD” for the Tetragrammaton, and also the traditional “Jehovah,” in favor of the historical pronunciation, “Yahweh.” The RSV, the NEB and most other modern translations have shied away from this, but it looks and sounds very well (to this reviewer, at least) in this work, and it may serve to encourage future translators to follow suit.

Conclusion

Barry Webb in the introduction to his translation and commentary on Judges provides a good model for how to deal with this issue both humbly and honestly. He writes:

There is admittedly something rather presumptuous about scholars (especially Christian ones) deciding to use the personal name of God (in reality their own hypothetical version of it) when those who transmitted the text to us as Holy Scripture refrained from doing so. Nevertheless I have chosen to render the Tetragrammaton as *Yahweh*, mainly because of the intensely personal way in which God is depicted in the Judges narrative—as a character interacting with other characters and manifesting all the angst involved in being in a committed relationship with people who are again and again unfaithful to him. A descriptive title such as *Lord* seemed to me to throw the emphasis too much on one dimension of this relationship at the expense of others, and therefore to be much less suited to the drama involved than the personal Name. I hope that Jewish readers will forgive my impertinence.

This book set out to answer two primary questions:

1) Would it be better for translations of the Hebrew Bible to use some approximation of *Yahweh*, or a title like *the Lord*?

2) When teaching and reading Hebrew today outside of Israel, would it be better to pronounce his name as some approximation like *Yahweh*, or say *Adonai* (*Lord*)?

I have done my best to consider carefully the two primary criteria (Exodus 3:15 and the NT’s use of *kurios*, *the Lord*) and answer objections. My answer to question one would be, yes, for the following main reasons:

1. It honors God’s desire in Exodus 3:15.
2. It does not undermine the purpose of the NT writers in using *kurios* to highlight Jesus’ divinity and identification as Yahweh himself, since the title *adonai* is used hundreds of times in the OT, which would serve to accomplish what the NT writers wanted while at the same time maintain its familiar sound for those who hold dear the tradition of translations using the title “Lord.”
3. Many OT verses sound awkward (see appendix) when a title is rendered where a name is expected.

My position in the English-speaking world would be specifically to encourage the use of the name *Yahweh*, not because we can be sure that Moses pronounced it that way on Mount Sinai, but rather because it has gained the widest acceptance in the pulpit and academic writing, just as we continue to use our pronunciation of *Jesus* in English although it is a far cry from its original pronunciation both in Hebrew and Greek.

In the rest of the world where people do not speak English, who have different phonetic inventories, I would encourage the choice of a name that approximates YHWH, rather than a title, if the community will accept it.  

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123 For instance, there is a longstanding tradition in Latin America of using *Yavé* or *Jehová* rather than *Yahweh*. While the use of Jehovah in North America has significantly faded or disappeared in the majority of evangelical contexts, it has not in Latin America. For a discussion of issues arising in Muslim contexts around YHWH, see Mike Tisdell, “Tchadien Arabic Review,” May 23, 2020, https://biblicalmissiology.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Tchadien-Arabic-Review-R2a.pdf
justify their decision in light of the two primary criteria (Exodus 3:15 and the NT use of \textit{kurios}) and clearly articulate their decision to others.

Regarding question two: I conclude that one should try to pronounce some approximation of \textit{Yahweh} in most situations. If I found myself teaching biblical Hebrew to a group of Jews in Israel, out of love and respect for them I would choose to use \textit{Adonai} if they voiced offense at the alternative, just as I believe the apostles would have done. That said, I would be sure to explain to them much of the content in this book to make sure they continue in their tradition with eyes wide open to the issues. Love and respect would compel me to try to persuade them to think clearly, biblically, and honestly about the matter from every angle.

\textit{Yahweh the God of armies, Yahweh is his name of renown!} –Hosea 12:6
Pronouncing & Translating the Divine Name

Appendices

Some Key Verses where a Title Substitute is Awkward/Inadequate for YHWH

Seth also had a son, and he named him Enosh. At that time men began to call on the name of Yahweh.

So Abraham called that place “Yahweh will provide.” And to this day it is said, “It will be provided on the mountain of Yahweh.”

Pharaoh said, “Who is Yahweh, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know Yahweh and I will not let Israel go.”

I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name Yahweh I did not make myself known to them.

Yahweh is a warrior; Yahweh is his name.

Moses built an altar and called it “Yahweh is my banner.”
Pronouncing & Translating the Divine Name  

יוהוּה

Leviticus 22:2

Tell Aaron and his sons to treat with respect the sacred offerings the Israelites consecrate to me, so they will not profane my holy name. I am Yahweh.

Leviticus 22:32

Do not profane my holy name. I must be acknowledged as holy by the Israelites. I am Yahweh, who makes you holy.

Deuteronomy 32:3

I will proclaim the name of Yahweh. Oh, praise the greatness of our God!

2 Samuel 6:2

He and all his men went to Baalah in Judah to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the Name, the name of Yahweh of armies, who is enthroned between the cherubim on the ark.

Psalm 83:19

Let them know that you, whose name is Yahweh—that you alone are the Most High over all the earth.

Psalm 135:13

Your name, O Yahweh, endures forever, your renown, O Yahweh, through all generations.

Isaiah 12:4

In that day you will say: “Give thanks to Yahweh, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done, and proclaim that his name is exalted.”
Pronouncing & Translating the Divine Name יוהו

O Yahweh our God, other lords besides you have ruled over us, but your name alone we bring to remembrance.

I am Yahweh; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols.

Our Redeemer—Yahweh of armies is his name—is the Holy One of Israel.

You who call yourselves citizens of the holy city and rely on the God of Israel—Yahweh of armies is his name.

Yahweh the God of armies, Yahweh is his name of renown!

A Selection of OT Passages Tracing the Importance of God’s Personal Name

- Exodus 9:16 But for this purpose I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth.
- Exodus 23:20-21 “Behold, I send an angel before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared. Pay careful attention to him and obey his voice; do not rebel against him, for he will not pardon your transgression, for my name is in him.
- Exodus 33:19 And he said, “I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name ‘Yahweh.’ And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.
- Leviticus 19:12 You shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God: I am Yahweh.
- 1 Kings 9:3 And Yahweh said to him, “I have heard your prayer and your plea, which you have made before me. I have consecrated this house that you have built, by putting my name there forever. My eyes and my heart will be there for all time.
- 2 Chronicles 7:14 if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.
Pronouncing & Translating the Divine Name יהוה

- Psalm 91:14-15 “Because he holds fast to me in love, I will deliver him; I will protect him, because he knows my name. When he calls to me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honor him.
- Isaiah 42:8 I am Yahweh; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols.
- Isaiah 43:6-7 I will say to the north, Give up, and to the south, Do not withhold; bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.”
- Isaiah 52:6 Therefore my people shall know my name. Therefore in that day they shall know that it is I who speak; here I am.”
- Jeremiah 12:16 And if they learn well the ways of my people and swear by my name, saying, ‘As surely as Yahweh lives’-- even as they once taught my people to swear by Baal-- then they will be established among my people.
- Jeremiah 16:21 “Therefore, behold, I will make them know, this once I will make them know my power and my might, and they shall know that my name is Yahweh.”
- Jeremiah 23:26-27 How long shall there be lies in the heart of the prophets who prophesy lies, and who prophesy the deceit of their own heart, who think to make my people forget my name by their dreams that they tell one another, even as their fathers forgot my name for Baal?
- Malachi 1:6 “A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear? says Yahweh of armies to you, O priests, who despise my name. But you say, ‘How have we despised your name?’
- Malachi 2:4-5 So shall you know that I have sent this command to you, that my covenant with Levi may stand, says Yahweh of armies. My covenant with him was one of life and peace, and I gave them to him. It was a covenant of fear, and he feared me. He stood in awe of my name.

A Selection of NT Verses Tracing the Importance of “Name”

- “but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” (Jn. 20:31)
- “And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:21).
- “But Peter said, “I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!” (Acts 3:6)
- “And his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all” (Acts 3:16).
- “And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).
- “So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus” (Acts 4:18).
- “that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things” (Acts 15:17).
• “And this became known to all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks. And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled” (Acts 19:17).
• “For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God’s truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, “and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, “Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name” (Rom. 15:8-9).
• “And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Col. 3:17).
• “To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, “so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess. 1:11-12).
• “having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs” (Heb. 1:4).
• “For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles” (3 Jn. 1:7).
• “The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name” (Rev. 3:12).
• “Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father’s name written on their foreheads” (Rev. 14:1).
• “On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords” (Rev. 19:16).
• “No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads” (Rev. 22:3-4).

A Roman Catholic Perspective
From Antonius Lupus:

First, we must recognize that there is no law, canonical or Divine, that forbids usage of the Divine Name even in its most proper pronunciation outside of liturgical events. Thus, one can find many Bibles, devotionals, texts, and such which have the Divine Name printed or used in such a way that expects verbal expression. The Church, being the New Israel, tolerates this practice and really doesn’t speak one way or the other, but simply asserts that the custom of the substitutionary reverence of the Name be respected. Private devotion however is a different matter. Theologically speaking, one can justify quite easily a Christian’s ability (or even right, in some sense) to verbalize the Divine Name. We are literally sons and daughters of God; we know God through the intimacy of Jesus Christ; God dwells within us, and so on. Usage of the Divine Name also can provide an intimacy with God and a sense of deepened identity with the Old Covenant, which has been continued and fulfilled in the New.
Second, it is clear that compromises can be made with the Divine Name so as to keep the usage close but imperfect out of respect for the Name. The pronunciation of the tetragrammaton is very precise and follows a form of Hebrew that is no longer spoken natively. Thus, one can easily “garble” the true pronunciations whilst keeping the general structure. Some examples include: “Yaveh,” “Iahveh,” “Yahvé,” “Yah,” “Jahveh,” “Jah,” “Iabe,” “Yao,” and so on. One can also use a device founded by our Jewish ancestors which inserts different vowels into the tetragrammaton creating new names (which are, by nature, titles) such as: “Jehovah,” “Yehowah,” “Yahoveh,” “Yiyeh,” “Jehoveh,” and more.

Third, we must recognize that the Name of God is found more fully in Christ than in the tetragrammaton. The name “Jesus” is derived from the Hebrew “Yehoshua” (meaning: “YHWH saves”). It was shortened in the mid to late Old Covenant to “Yeshua” which is the Hebrew/Aramaic form of Our Lord’s Name. Thus, anytime the Name of Jesus is mentioned, the Divine Name is included by the nature of the Hebraic formula as “Yeh,” “Yah,” and “Yoh” all form linguistically equivalent expressions of the Name: “Iahveh.” This truth reminds us that the Name of Jesus is far more exalted and worthy of reverence than even the Divine Name in the New Covenant. The Catechism of the Catholic Church explains:

CCC, 2666: But the one name that contains everything is the one that the Son of God received in his incarnation: JESUS. The divine name may not be spoken by human lips, but by assuming our humanity The Word of God hands it over to us and we can invoke it: “Jesus,” “YHWH saves.” The name “Jesus” contains all: God and man and the whole economy of creation and salvation. To pray “Jesus” is to invoke him and to call him within us. His name is the only one that contains the presence it signifies. Jesus is the Risen One, and whoever invokes the name of Jesus is welcoming the Son of God who loved him and who gave himself up for him.

So I would say that a Christian is free to use the Divine Name (preferably in a compromised form) during his or her private devotions; especially if it is invoked in silence. Any utterance however must be accompanied by all due reverence, honor, and sense of the sacred. Any usage of the Divine Name or titles and words related to it (God, Lord, etc.) which are used disrespectfully or even frivolously is a sin against the Second Commandment. That being said, I encourage instead an increased usage and sense of reverence be cultivated in the Name of “JESUS,” as the Catechism states above. In the Name “JESUS” we receive all that was and is and will be the power of the Divine Name, YHWH, and also the very Presence of Christ in our hearts. I personally pray with the usage: “Iahveh” to God, especially on important or momentous occasions, however I strive to follow the Catechism’s teaching and rely more on the Name of Christ than the Divine Name as it was used in the Old Covenant.

I submit everything I have said, written, or implied to the judgment and correction of Holy Mother Church; most especially the Holy Roman Church under whose care I have been
placed by God. Anything here that contradicts the teaching of Holy Mother Church in any way is null, void, and downright incorrect and should be seen as such.¹²⁴

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125 A big thank-you to Scott McKenzie for his help compiling this bibliography!
Pronouncing & Translating the Divine Name יהוה


