

God's name is often written as "the LORD" in most Bible translations. Some translations use "Jehovah" for God's name. However, Lord is not a name but a title. *"One of the titles for God is Lord, a translation of Adonai. There is yet another name for which is particularly assigned to God as His special or proper name, that is, the four letters YHWH (Exodus 3:14 and Isaiah 42:8)" [NASB, Principles of Translation].*

"Indeed, there are many gods and many lords, yet for us there is but one God, the Father" (1 Corinthians 8:5,6 NASB). In the Old Testament, or Hebrew-Aramaic Scriptures, God's name is Yahweh. **"I am Yahweh, that is my name!" (Isaiah 42:8 NJB).** The name Yahweh appears some 6,800 times in the manuscripts of the Old Testament, or Hebrew-Aramaic Scriptures. Yet, *"this name has not been pronounced by Jews because of reverence for the great sacredness of the divine name. Therefore it has been consistently translated as LORD. The only exception . . . is when it occurs in immediate proximity to the word Lord, that is, Adonai. In that case it is regularly translated GOD to avoid confusion" [Ibid.].* Of course, there would be no worry about such "confusion," if YHWH were translated accurately as Yahweh.

WHY ISN'T YHWH TRANSLATED AS YAHWEH?

Here is the main reason given in the following analysis:

the Old Testament (OT) still hides God's personal name Yahweh behind "LORD." In perpetuating this bad habit among translations, the NRSV preface offers the most bizarre defense I've yet read. The preface alleges that it is "inappropriate for the universal faith of the Christian Church" to imply that "there were other gods from whom the true God had to be distinguished" (p. xii). But — aren't there? I seem to recall that Israel made a rough go of it learning this very fact! Yet say this, apparently with a straight face, in spite of the fact that the preface had just allowed that it is "almost ...certain that the Name was originally pronounced "Yahweh" (pp. xi, xii). So the upshot seems to be: we know what God's name was, but we just do not want to use it. The committee evidently felt itself fit to improve on the Bible's communication of Christian faith, inasmuch as God's personal name is found some 6823 times in the Hebrew text of the OT.—A New Revised Standard Version, by Daniel j Phillips, 1990

WHY TRANSLATE AND USE GOD'S NAME YAHWEH

What are the facts?

"The word LORD in English is a title of God and does not accurately convey to modern readers the emphasis on God's name in the original Hebrew"—HCSB Large Print Compact, 2005 edition p ix

"God's covenant name is rendered as Yahweh. The meaning and implication of this name is God's self-deriving, ongoing, and never-ending existence. Exodus 3:14-15 shows that God himself considered it important for His people

to know His name. The effect of revealing God's name is His distinction from other gods and His expression of intimacy with the nation of Israel. Such a dynamic is a prevalent characteristic of the Scriptures as Yahweh appears in the OT over 6,800 times.

In addition to Yahweh, the full name of God, the OT also includes references to God by a shorter version of His name, Yah . . .

The translation Yahweh substantiated by scholarly reconstruction as well as by discussions in Theodoret, Epiphanius, Clement of Alexandria, Origin and Aquila. Consequently, those individuals affirm the usage of God's covenant name in the early church. Preserving this in translation foundational records what is present in the OT text. It also allows proper distinction between God's personal name and the title 'Lord' (Adonai) which emphasizes God's authority. Even more, it helps the reader to engage God with the name which He gifted to His people. Thus the reintroduction of God's personal name into the translation of the OT is a feature that enhances the precision, intensity, and clarity of the biblical text in English."—Foreword to the Legacy Standard Bible

While the name "Yahweh" is not found in the New Testament, an abbreviated form of it is found 4 times.

"Hallelujah" (Revelation 19:1,3,4,6 HCSB). (Lit Praise Yahweh: the Gk word is translated *hallelujah* from a Hb expression of praise and is used in many places in the OT—HCSB note on Revelation 19:1).

Since God's name in its full form isn't found in the New Testament, and its abbreviated form is only found 4 times, the use of it for Christians is not very important. However, his name is Yahweh, not "the LORD", "GOD", or "Jehovah".

The following article from the Fall 2024 issue of *Biblical Archaeology Review*, "Parsing the Divine Name," by Ronald Hendel, further explains why there is a discrepancy between

what is in the ancient Hebrew manuscripts of the Old Testament and its current usage:

*“Articles in **BAR** often write “Yahweh” as the name of ancient Israel’s God. This concerns some readers, as occasionally expressed in letters to the editor (see [Queries & Comments](#)). Here, I explain why many—but not all—biblical scholars and archaeologists use this name. The problem involves two intertwined facts: (1) The letters of the tetragrammaton—YHWH—are not fully vocalized in the Hebrew Bible; and (2) Jewish tradition prohibits the pronunciation of this name. Why, then, do we say Yahweh if this pronunciation is both obscure and heretical? I first address the name’s obscure vocalization, and then the apparent heresy.¹*

Ancient Hebrew is written consonantly, with some consonants used sometimes to indicate vowels. In the four letters of the tetragrammaton, the first three letters represent consonants, and the last letter (the final he) is a vowel marker. This is so in Iron Age inscriptions—for instance, in the Mesha Stele, the Kuntillet ‘Ajrud inscriptions, and letters from Arad and Lachish—and in the Hebrew Bible.

In the Bible, the consonantal writing is overlaid with vowel points inserted in medieval times, which preserve old reading traditions. The vowel points usually written under the letters YHWH are the vowels for the Hebrew word Adonai, “my Lord.” They are not the vowels for YHWH. Why is this so? Because the reading tradition preserves the custom that one does not pronounce the name of God,

instead substituting the epithet "my Lord." This customary substitution goes back to at least the third century BCE, when the Old Greek translation of the Pentateuch translated YHWH as "Lord" (kurios, in Greek) or copied the name in Hebrew letters. The point is that the reading tradition doesn't preserve the original pronunciation of YHWH. So why do we think that Israelites and Jews in earlier periods pronounced it as Yahweh?

The answer is pretty straightforward. The vocalization of the first syllable is actually preserved, mostly in liturgical expressions and personal names. "Halleluyah," a frequent refrain in the Psalms, means "Praise Yah." Yah is a short form of God's name, as it is in [Exodus 15:2](#), "Yah is my strength and my might." The same short form is found in many personal names, such as Obadiah ("servant of Yah") and in the names of many well-known biblical figures, including Isaiah, Jeremiah, Josiah, Micaiah, Zedekiah, Zechariah, and Nehemiah. This is obvious evidence for the ancient pronunciation of the first syllable of the name of YHWH as Yah.

The pronunciation of the second syllable is relatively easy to sort out. The final he, the vowel marker, can indicate e, ō, or ā. Following the first syllable Yah, the only final vowel that makes linguistic sense is e. This is because a Hebrew word starting with ya- is inevitably a verb, for which a final he always indicates the vowel e. An example is the place-name Yavneh, which derives from the verb yabneh, "he builds." This verb was originally yabniyu in pre-Hebrew dialects and contracted to yabneh (with final he indicating the e). The history of

the divine name Yahweh probably follows the same pattern, with pre-Hebrew Yahwiyu contracting to Yahweh. The evidence of some later Greek transcriptions, Iabe and Iaoue, points to the same outcome.



*Yahweh might originally be a dynamic form of the verb “to be,” meaning something like “he moves, blows,” or it could be a causative form, meaning something like “he makes.” But the name’s meaning seems to have been forgotten in classical Hebrew. At Mt. Horeb, when Moses asks God to reveal his name, God says ‘ehyeh ‘ăšer ‘ehyeh (“I am that I am,” or “I am he who continually exists”), which is a wordplay on the not-yet-revealed name Yahweh. Then God tells Moses that his true name is YHWH (remember, not fully vocalized in the consonantal text), concluding his speech with a touch of poetry: “This is my name forever; this is my designation for all generations” (*Exodus**

3:14-15). Notice that God's name is both concealed and revealed in this scene. The name is hinted at with "I am" because 'ehyeh sounds like Yahweh.

The second part of the problem involves the prohibition of pronouncing the name Yahweh. Why was the word "Lord" (or other substitutions) used instead? This has to do with the interpretation of the third commandment, "You shall not take the name of YHWH your God in vain" (Exodus 20:7; cf. Deuteronomy 5:11). This seems to forbid invoking the name of YHWH in false oaths or other illicit speech. Cursing God is prohibited in Exodus 22:28 and is punished by death in Leviticus 24:15-16. Taking a false oath in God's name is prohibited in Leviticus 19:12. Oaths generally used the phrase "as YHWH lives" (ḥay-yhwh), as when King Saul says, "As YHWH lives, no punishment will come to you for this thing" (1 Samuel 28:10). This is explained as "Saul swore to her by YHWH." Originally, this commandment prohibited the misuse of God's name. It had nothing to do with the pronunciation of the name itself.

Later interpretive tradition expanded the scope of this commandment to include any invocation of the name of YHWH. (The earliest evidence is the Old Greek translation of Leviticus 24:16, which gives the death penalty to "whoever names" the name of God, reinterpreting the Hebrew, "whoever curses.") This follows the common tendency to "build a hedge around the Law." If one never says the name of YHWH, then one can never take it

in vain. This interpretive move means that other terminology must be used when saying God's name or reading the name YHWH in the Bible. "Lord" or "my Lord" fit the bill nicely. Orthodox Jews often say "the Name" (ha-Shem) for the name of God, which is another way of not saying the name.

*Why then do many scholars and archaeologists say Yahweh instead of Adonai ("my Lord") as indicated in the vowel pointing, or ha-Shem ("the Name") as do Orthodox Jews? This is because critical scholarship usually prefers language that is historical rather than devotional. It is our own signal that this is academic speech, not speech of the church or synagogue. I should add that some scholars do say Adonai or write YHWH without vowels out of respect for devotional practices, including the traditional Jewish interpretation of the third commandment. This is a matter of personal choice. But my point is, when a scholar writes Yahweh in **BAR** or elsewhere, this is a historical claim, not a devotional one. It is not meant with any disrespect or hint of heresy. We simply think that this is the name as it was said in ancient Israel, by speakers of classical Hebrew and the writers of the Bible."—End of BAR article*

CONCLUSION

Biblically, there is no justification for using or translating the divine name "YHWH" as anything but "Yahweh".

