

## The Name of God

All readers of the Chinese Bible know that God's name in the Old Testament is Jehovah. However, why is that not mentioned in the New Testament? Why would such an important name disappear altogether in the New Testament? So, how did God's name "Jehovah" come about? Some people would think of **Ex 3:14-15**:

**V15** (from the Chinese Bible) says, "*Jehovah is my name forever*". If you refer to the English Bible, you would discover that v15 does not mention about "*Jehovah*". In the *King James Version*, "*This is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations*". The English Bible only says, "This is my name" and it does not mention "Jehovah" at all. This is the same case in all English versions.

To put it simply, you have been misled by the Chinese Bible. The word "Jehovah" was added into the text by Chinese Bible translators. They have translated "*This is my name*" into "*Jehovah is my name*". They were assuming that "Jehovah" was God's name.

Another example is in **Gen 2:4**:

[Chinese Bible]

创造天地的来历，在耶和華神 (Jehovah God) 造

天地的日子，乃是这样：

The Chinese Bible addresses God as “*Jehovah*”, what about the English Bible?

**[King James Version]**

*...In the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens.*

The word “LORD” in the original text translated into Chinese just means “Lord”. The English Bible does not mention about the name of God. Most English Bible versions translated the word as “the LORD God”.

Notice that the word “LORD” in the original text was all in capitals. Do you know why? Some people thought it was a proper noun which only God would use. However, the word “LORD” itself just means “Lord”. Objectively speaking, is the word “Lord” a name? The Catholics address God as “Heavenly Lord”. The Muslims address God as “True Lord”. We can see that the word “Lord” is not a name.

Why does the English Bible use the capitals? To answer this question, we have to return to the Hebrew Bible. Yet, we have at least noticed a great discrepancy between the Chinese and the English versions. We need to answer the following questions:

1. Why has the New Testament not ever mentioned God’s name “Jehovah”?
2. Why does the English version of the Old Testament not show God’s name whereas the Chinese version does on the

contrary?

### 3. What is God's name in the Hebrew Bible?

To answer these questions, we must return to the Hebrew Bible and we need to understand some historic background. The word "LORD" in the English translation of the Old Testament translated the name of God יהוה (*Hebrew words are read from right to left*) from the Hebrew Bible. The pronunciation of these four letters is equivalent to **YHWH** of the English alphabets. "י" is equivalent to **Y**, "ה" is **H**, "ו" is **W** (or **V**). In the theology books or the Bible-related ones, once you see these four letters, you would know that it is God's name.

God's name in the Hebrew Bible cannot be pronounced because there is no vowel. Perhaps, there was a pronunciation by word of mouth. Otherwise, there was no way to 'Call upon the LORD's name'. Whenever the Jews see the four letters **YHWH**, they would read it as **Adonai** (*"Lord" in Hebrews*). As a result, the word "Adonai" had gradually replaced God's name '**YHWH**'.

Removing the vowels before putting down the name of God in writing had to do with the 3rd commandment of the Ten Commandments, which says, 'You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain'. The Jews did this to remind God's people not to take God's name lightly. However, such an understanding was totally incorrect because the third commandment was talking about "Not taking His name in vain", rather than "forbidden to call"

God's name.

When Assyria and Babylon destroyed Israel's Southern and Northern kingdoms, the Israelites were exiled for 70 years. After 70 years, the Israelites returned to the Promised Land and began to know how to fear God. They had finally understood that they were exiled because they sinned against God. However, such kind of fear of God went to the other end of the extreme, whereby they did not even dare mention the name of God. They would use different alternative terms such as "**HaG'dulah BaM'romim**" (*the Majesty on High*), "**HaM'vorakh**" (*the Blessed One*), etc to replace God's name.

During the Greek and Roman era, many of the Jews among those who were dispersed to different places no longer knew their own languages due to the influence of the Greek culture. When it came to 3 B.C., the Jews started planning for the translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek so as to facilitate those Jews who did not know Hebrews to learn.

The Bible scholars called the Hebrew Old Testament Bible as LXX which means '70', based on the meaning of the Roman numbers whereby "L" represents 50 and "X" represents 10 and "XX" represents 20, which gives a total of 70 after adding them (LXX) up. Apparently, this Bible was translated by 70 scribes although there were also other reasons to the name LXX for this Bible.

During the course of translation, they decided to translate

יהוה (YHWH) to κύριος (*Kurios*, means “Lord”) in Greek. In that way, no one would be reading God’s name by mistake. This tradition passed on and God’s name became *Kurios* (Lord). God’s name disappeared from the Greek Bible since.

Then, the English translation inherited this Jewish tradition of ‘Not taking God’s name in vain’ had also translated YHWH as “LORD”. If you read Ps 110:1 from the English Bible, you would notice that there are two different ways of writing the word “Lord”: “The LORD said unto my Lord, sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool”(KJV). The one in all capital letters "LORD" is the translation of YHWH. Meanwhile, the Chinese translation adopted a different path. The translator knew that YHWH is God’s name, so it was translated as “Jehovah”. Therefore, **Ps 110:1** in the Chinese Bible is translated to become “*Jehovah said to my Lord....*”

These are the historic background that Christians need to know. Having understood such historic background, it would not be difficult to understand why there is such a difference between the Chinese and the English Bibles.

Such then, how did “Jehovah” come about? Since YHWH cannot be pronounced, some scholars suggested combining the words “Adonai” and “YHWH”, which means inserting the vowels of **Adonai (a、o、a)** into **YHWH**, which became “**YaHoWaH**” (*transliteration of KJV is*

*"Jehovah" then ) .*

When it came to the medieval period, some Christian scholars adopted this suggestion and changed God's name to be Jehovah and propagated it. That's the origin of the word "Jehovah". This was a very creative, yet baseless approach. The contemporary scholars opine that the pronunciation and written form of Jehovah are incorrect, so many English translation versions did not adopt it. Some English translations such as the New Jerusalem Bible adopted the more plausible pronunciation "**Yahweh**".

In fact, the English Kings James Version only mentions the word "Jehovah" four times (**cf. Ex 6:3, Ps 83:18, Is 12:2 and 26:4**), most of the English versions did not adopt such a translation. Unfortunately, the Chinese translation had adopted it. As a result, the majority of the Chinese churches thought that "Jehovah" was God's name revealed by the Bible, not knowing that this name was fabricated.

LXX's translation of "YHWH" as Kurios in Greek had also created two different "Lord" because the Greek New Testament had also followed the tradition of the LXX translation. In the Greek New Testament, YHWH has become Kurios, and Jesus is the Kurios instituted by Yahweh, such that there are two Lords in the New Testament. Therefore, when the New Testament cites Ps 110:1, it has become, "The LORD said to my Lord, 'you sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.'" (**Lk 20:42-43; Ac 2:34-35**).

Reading the New Testament from the Chinese Bible will have this kind of confusion: whenever readers come across the word, 'Lord', they could not know immediately whether it is referring to God or Christ. According to this kind of translation, the subjects in many passages become ambiguous. With that, how could one exegete the Bible correctly?

The Trinitarian doctrine has made the problem worse. This doctrine says that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are all God, which has made the understanding of God for the non-Jewish Christians extremely confusing. Whenever you see the word 'Lord', you will be wondering which 'Lord' is this one referring to.

In fact, this problem is un-called for. It is caused by the Trinitarian teaching. To the Jews, there is only one God and that is Yahweh. If you ask which one, it is precisely because there is more than one God in your heart.

The Old Testament had mentioned God's name, why did it disappear without a trace when it came to the New Testament? Hope that you have already known the answer by now. The Jews, because of their sins against God, were disciplined by God and exiled. Later, they were fearful of God and dared not mention the name of God. After some time, God's name was forgotten by their descendants. When it came to our generation, we cannot even be certain of the correct pronunciation of God's name.

How could one call upon God's name without knowing

the pronunciation of God's name? This is our problem today. In order that we can call upon God's name accurately, we should change the word 'Jehovah' to 'Yahweh' because the word 'Jehovah' was purely fabricated without any basis. The name of Yahweh is very important. His name is a focus, giving you a clear and unique target of worship and prayers. "That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me. I am the Lord, and there is none else." (Isa 45:6)

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**Recommended references and articles on related topics:**

- i) Baidu Baike → <http://baike.baidu.com/view/37048.htm>
- ii) Hydong Baike → <http://www.hudong.com/wiki/%E9%9B%85%E5%A8%81>
- iii) Encyclopedia Britannica International Chinese Edition, Vol 18, p373-374, "Yahweh" section.