

“Upon the Lampstand”

“After lighting a lamp there is not one person who conceals it with something or who puts it underneath a bed. Instead the person puts it upon a Lampstand so that those who come inside may see the light.”—*Jesus of Nazareth*, as recorded in the Gospel of Luke 8:16–17.

Question: *Do you believe that the divine name, the tetragrammaton, was used by the writers of the New Testament? (October 13, 2007)*

Answer: Yes, I do. But before I present some of the reasons why I believe the name of the God of the Old Testament was used in certain instances also in the original New Testament writings, I must give some thought to your question only in terms of “the divine name,” and not specifically to “the tetragrammaton.”

The tetragrammaton refers to the four-letter form (יהוה) of the divine name given to the God of the Jews some 6,828 times in the Hebrew text of the Old Testament (hereafter, “OT”). But this is not the only form of the divine name given to this God in ancient times by Jews who worshipped him. The name “Jah” (Hebrew: יה [YaH]) occurs as a stand-alone name at least 49 times in the Hebrew text of the OT. Additionally, the name of God also occurs in its two-letter form “Jah” and in a three-letter form (יהו [YHW]) when used as part of proper names in- and outside of the Bible. There is also some use of the form יו (YW) when used as part of proper names, but this Hebrew form never occurs in or outside of the Bible as a stand-alone form of God’s name.

The three-letter form of the Hebrew/Aramaic divine name (יהו), which we might pronounce in English today as “Jaho,” or possibly even “Jeho” or “Jahu”) does stand on its own (that is, apart from its occurrence as a part of other proper names) outside of the Bible in pre-New Testament Aramaic papyri found on the island of Elephantine, near Aswan in Egypt (see Bezalel Porten, *The Elephantine Papyri in English: Three Millennia of Cross-Cultural Continuity and Change* [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996], pages 107, 140, 142, 143, 144, 146, 147, 151, 159, 160, 196, 205, 212, 213, 216, 217, 223, 237, 241, 242, 245, 246, 248, 249, 251, 266). Further, the three-letter form of the divine name of the Jewish God is also found transliterated (represented in another language’s characters) into Greek (Ιωω) in one of the best and most ancient representatives of the Greek translation of the OT (4QLXXLev^b [Göttingen 802], viewable here: <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/rs/rak/lxxjewpap/4QLevB.jpg>). This three-letter form of the divine name is also referenced in several classical sources and also in early and later Jewish and Christian literature as the name of the biblical God of the Jews (see my *Jehovah Witnesses Defended: An Answer to Scholars and Critics*, 3rd Edition [Murrieta, CA: Elihu Books, 2008], pages 25–43).

While there are good reasons to pronounce God’s name in English as either “Jehovah” or “Jaho” based on the four–letter and the three–letter forms just mentioned (and there are even good reasons for believing that the four–letter form represents the same pronunciation as the three–letter form [see *Jehovah’s Witnesses Defended*, 3rd Edition, pages 48–52), “Jah” (יָה) is the least disputed of all of the forms of the divine name that have come down to us, with the Hebrew pronunciation almost universally considered to be *YaH* based on the least controversial of linguistic and phonetic evidence. This form and pronunciation of the divine name is found contrasted with one of the few potential pieces of evidence supporting a form and pronunciation of the divine name such as the modern “Yahweh” in the writings of Theodoret of Cyrrhus (c. 393–c. 468). In his ‘Questions in the Octateuch’ (15.17–18) Theodoret wrote the following concerning the divine name, “The Samaritans pronounce it [the tetragrammaton mentioned in 15.15] ‘Iabe,’ but the Jews pronounce it ‘Ia.’”

Related to this form and pronunciation of the divine name, *Ia*, is evidence that also helps us answer the question about the use of the divine name in the NT from the final book of the Christian Bible, Revelation. In Chapter 19 of Revelation, after God ‘executes judgment upon the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication’ and after he ‘avenges the blood of his slaves at her hand,’ we read of the name of the God that is to be praised twice by a “great crowd in heaven,” once by the “twenty–four elders and the four living creatures, and once also by what appears to be another “great crowd”:

Revelation 19:1–8 (NWT)

After these things I heard what was as a loud voice of a great crowd in heaven. They said: “Praise Jah, YOU people! The salvation and the glory and the power belong to our God, because his judgments are true and righteous. For he has executed judgment upon the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication, and he has avenged the blood of his slaves at her hand.” And right away for the second time they said: “Praise Jah, YOU people! And the smoke from her goes on ascending forever and ever.” And the twenty–four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God seated upon the throne, and said: “Amen! Praise Jah, YOU people!” Also, a voice issued forth from the throne and said: “Be praising our God, all YOU his slaves, who fear him, the small ones and the great.” And I heard what was as a voice of a great crowd and as a sound of many waters and as a sound of heavy thunders. They said: “Praise Jah, YOU people, because Jehovah our God, the Almighty, has begun to rule as king. Let us rejoice and be overjoyed, and let us give him the glory, because the marriage of the Lamb has arrived and his wife has prepared herself. Yes, it has been granted to her to be arrayed in bright, clean, fine linen, for the fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the holy ones.”

Where you see the words “Praise Jah” in the above citation from Revelation the Greek text contains the expression *allelouiah*, which transliterates or corresponds in Greek letters that are appropriate to the same expression in Hebrew, which is הללו (halelu [“praise”]) and יָה (Yah [“Jah”]). The only differences between the Hebrew and Greek

forms of this expression are the use of an “h” sound in Hebrew and a doubled “l” in the Greek transliteration. But both expressions are combinations of the two words *halelu* (Hebrew) or *allelou* (Greek), meaning “praise,” and *yah* (Hebrew) or *ia* (Greek) for what is in English pronounced “Jah.” Thus, in Revelation 19:1–6 we find the name of God in its Greek transliterated form *ia* four times. Again, this Greek form of the divine name is the exact same Greek form of the divine name represented by Theodoret as that which was pronounced by the Jews in contrast to the Samaritan pronunciation of “Iabe.” Yet, in spite of this, in recent times and even today many scholars associate “Yahweh” with Jewish usage and ignore completely what the evidence says about who may have preferred such a pronunciation (the Samaritans). They also ignore the pronunciation that is actually associated with Jewish usage by such writers (*ia*), and fail to use it as often as they do “Yahweh.”

It is *Yah* (Hebrew), *ia* (Greek), or “Jah” (English) who will ultimately be praised! So Christian Witness of Jah and anyone else desiring to worship the Christian God of the Bible should use the appropriate modern-day language equivalent to *Yah*, or *ia*, which in English is “Jah.” There is also nothing wrong with using forms of the name such as “Jehovah” or “Jaho,” since there is evidence supporting these forms as proper Anglicized representations of Hebrew and Greek forms of the divine name (the four- and three-letter forms, respectively) that have also come down to us. But though Christian Witnesses of Jah accept these other forms of the divine name as having good reasons for use in our worship and in speaking to others, we take the name of “Jah,” together with “Christian,” for ourselves. This is because we are witnesses of both Jah and Jesus Christ, and it is “Jah” who is praised in the NT text of Revelation.

But let me return to your original question: ‘Was the *tetragrammaton* used by the NT writers?’ It appears that the oldest NT manuscripts that contain a quote from an OT text that contains the divine name, but with a surrogate for the divine name in the quotation itself, are P⁴⁶ (for example, 1 Corinthians 14:21) and P⁶⁶ (for example, John 1:23). These manuscripts have been dated anywhere from the late-first to the late-second or early-third centuries CE. So at the very least P⁴⁶ is approximately fifty years removed from its original composition, and possibly one hundred years or more removed. It is similar with the dating of P⁶⁶ (see *The Text of the Earliest New Testament Greek Manuscripts*, eds. Philip W. Comfort and David P. Barrett [Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale, 2001], pages 106, 379; Kurt and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, trans. Erroll F. Rhodes, 2nd ed. Revised and Enlarged [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Leiden: Brill, 1989], pages 57, 99, 100).

So there is a considerable gap in time between the dates these documents (1 Corinthians and the Gospel of John) are believed to have been originally composed (middle- to late-first century CE, respectively) and the dates of the earliest copies of portions of these documents, copies that preserve a portion of the text that contains a quotation from the OT where in the OT the divine name occurs. This is one reason why

there are those who believe that during this “gap” the divine name was removed from the NT where it quoted an OT Greek or Hebrew text that according to all available manuscript evidence contained some form of the divine name, not surrogates or even “sacred name” (*nomina sacra*) abbreviations such as we find in early copies of NT manuscripts. There are others who believe that the earliest NT copies we have do in fact represent just how the original NT document writers treated the divine name. But if the latter group is correct then what we would have to say is that the NT writers, instead of quoting from the Hebrew and Greek OT texts before them (based on the available evidence for such texts, all of which shows that some form of the divine name was used [see below]), introduced a brand new way of representing the divine name and possibly even other names or titles, but without making any special mention of this new surrogate device.

This new scribal convention involved abbreviating a surrogate title such as “Lord,” “God,” or “Christ,” and then writing a line above the abbreviation (this convention for “Lord” can be seen on the fourth line, for “Christ” on the fifth line, and for “God” on the seventh line in the image of P⁴⁶ [<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:P46.jpg>]). But no Bible translation today follows such a practice, so it cannot be said that translations using “Lord” or “God” in the NT, where the NT quotes an OT text that contains the divine name, are following the evidence of the earliest NT manuscripts since the earliest of these use the sacred name abbreviations, not full word surrogates, for the divine name. On the other hand, translations such as the *New World Translation* published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society that use the divine name “Jehovah” in NT quotations of the OT, where the OT text contains the tetragrammaton in the Hebrew text, are consistent with the best manuscript evidence, which evidence is the source material available to the NT writers during the first century CE. The source material was the Hebrew text itself which contained the divine name, as well as all available Greek OT manuscripts that preserve a divine-name-containing text. In this light, consider the testimony of early church writers like Jerome (c. 342–c. 420 CE) and Gennadius of Marseilles (who wrote during the late fifth century CE), namely, that at least one of the NT writings (the Gospel of Matthew) was originally composed in Hebrew and that the writer faithfully followed the Hebrew text rather than the Greek texts available to him:

Matthew, also called Levi, apostle and aforesometimes publican, composed a gospel of Christ at first published in Hebrew for the sake of those of the circumcision who believed, but this was afterwards translated into Greek though by what author is uncertain. The Hebrew itself has been preserved until the present day in the library at Caesarea which Pamphilus so diligently gathered. I have also had the opportunity of having the volume described to me by the Nazarenes of Beroea, a city of Syria, who use it. In this it is to be noted that wherever the Evangelist, whether on his own account or in the person of our Lord the Saviour quotes the testimony of the Old Testament he does not follow the authority of the translators of the Septuagint but the Hebrew.

If this testimony is true, and there is no reason to believe it is false, then Matthew quoted the Hebrew text before him which, based on a healthy manuscript tradition, contained the tetragrammaton. Thus, when Matthew quoted from the Hebrew OT in places such as Matthew 3:3, 4:4, 7, 10, 22:24, and 23:39, if what Jerome and Gennadius wrote is true, he used the tetragrammaton.

But if Matthew, or any other NT document writer, quoted a divine-name-containing text from the manuscript tradition of the Greek OT represented by P. Fouad 266^b (Göttingen 848, viewable online here: <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/rs/rak/lxxjewpap/PFou848.jpg>), dated from the third to the first centuries BCE, then the tetragrammaton would have appeared in the NT in Hebrew/Aramaic characters. If Matthew, or any other NT document writer, quoted a divine-name-containing text from the Greek OT manuscript tradition of 8HevXIIgr, which is dated to between 50 BCE and 50 CE ([Göttingen 943], viewable online here [hand A]: <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/rs/rak/lxxjewpap/MPrsA.jpg>, and here [hand B]: <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/rs/rak/lxxjewpap/MPrsB.jpg>), then the tetragrammaton would have appeared in the NT in one of two ancient Hebrew character forms. If Matthew, or any other NT document writer, quoted a divine-name-containing text from the Greek OT manuscript tradition of P. Oxy 3522 (viewable online here: <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/rs/rak/lxxjewpap/POxy3522.jpg>), which is dated to the early part of the first century CE, then the divine name would have also appeared in the NT in ancient Hebrew characters. If, however, as noted earlier, an NT writer quoted from 4QLXXLev^b (Göttingen 802), then the NT document would have contained the Greek form of the divine name Ιαω (*Iaō*).

The available manuscript evidence shows that the divine name, in its four- or three-letter forms, would have been used by an NT writer quoting from an OT divine-name-containing text. The available manuscript evidence shows that at around the same time that the divine name was no longer used in Greek OT texts (mid- to late-second century CE and following) it is also not found in copies of NT documents, the earliest of which use novel “sacred name” (*nomina sacra*) abbreviations with special markings above them, which special abbreviations are nowhere today represented in the same way in any translations of the NT. Yet, in the book of Revelation, the canonicity of which appears to have taken the longest to establish, we do find the divine name of God used four times in the form *Ia*, the form of the divine name that we are also told was pronounced by the Jews in contrast to the Samaritan pronunciation of the divine name as *Iabe*, which is similar in sound to “Yahweh.”

For extended consideration of all of the above and other related issues, see Chapter 1 of my forthcoming Third Edition of *Jehovah's Witnesses Defended*.

Greg Stafford

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***This article was revised on the date indicated only with respect to the release date of the Third Edition of *Jehovah's Witnesses Defended* at the end of the article which is here now only given as “forthcoming,” and to the original article’s formatting. No other changes were made to the content of the original article.**