

ARTICLE 1

The Divine Name

the origins of the use of κυριος for יהוה

All extant manuscripts of the NT consistently use the Greek word κυριος (*kyrios*, ‘lord’) when translating the name of God in the OT, יהוה (*Yhwh*). The background to this is not entirely clear nor uncontested, but it is worth noting a few points about what is and isn’t known, and what is and isn’t likely.

First, it is unquestionably significant that the writers of the NT refer to Jesus by the term κυριος (*kyrios*, ‘lord’) when that same term is used in quotations from the OT that refer to יהוה (*Yhwh*). The ambiguity is deliberate. The NT writers are identifying Jesus with Yhwh.

However, this claim only really works if the use of κυριος (*kyrios*, ‘lord’) for יהוה (*Yhwh*) was widely accepted at the time. While it is true that most of the manuscripts we have for the Greek translation of the OT (the LXX or Septuagint) include this substitution, the situation is complicated somewhat by the existence of a small number (about 3) of very early fragments of Greek translations which either include the name Yhwh in paleo-Hebrew script or in Greek transliteration. The discovery of these has prompted some scholars to claim that the LXX originally preserved the name of God throughout and that this was only changed at the behest of 2nd Century Christians who sought to bolster their claim that Jesus should be identified as God.

In spite of these fragments, however, there are good reasons to believe that the use of κυριος (*kyrios*, ‘lord’) for יהוה (*Yhwh*) was widespread by the time the NT was written. The main considerations are:

- The NT includes a number of circumlocutions which serve to avoid having to use the divine name. For example, Phil 2:9 refers to “... τὸ ὄνομα τὸ ὑπὲρ πάντων ὀνομα” — “the name which is above all names.” Most scholars agree that this is a reference to the name Yhwh, but the fact that Paul has avoided simply writing the name reflects the practice of avoiding pronouncing the name at the time.
- There are no manuscripts of the NT which include either a transliteration or other graphical representation of the name Yhwh, even when there are direct quotations of the OT. If the Greek translation of the OT in use at the time (which is the version frequently quoted in the NT) had preserved the divine name, why would the NT writers not have copied it?
- There are grounds for believing that the very few early fragments of the Greek which do preserve some form of the name Yhwh (there are only about three of them) are not copies of the original translation but have been changed to re-insert the divine name. This has been argued most extensively by Albert Pietersma.¹
- There are numerous manuscripts from the caves at Qumran which indicate that the word for “Lord” was in use as a substitute for the divine name in the century or so prior to the

writing of the NT. These texts are mostly written in Hebrew, and so use אדוני (*'ădônay*, '[my] Lord') when we'd expect to see יהוה (*Yhwh*). Furthermore, in contrast to the claims some make that other words were used as a substitute for Yhwh (usually words like אל (*'ēl*, 'God, El')), quite a few of these manuscripts never use such terms, only use אדוני (*'ădônay*, '[my] Lord'), and never use יהוה (*Yhwh*) (e.g. 4Q521, 4Q507, 4Q435, 4Q508, 1Q34bis, 4Q434, 4Q577, 4Q527, 4Q526, 4Q384). In some instances they use אדוני (*'ădônay*, '[my] Lord') in phrases which are strongly reminiscent of biblical passages where יהוה is used.

- There is little doubt that the name Yhwh was not pronounced at all in the centuries leading up to the production of the NT and through the period when the LXX was translated. Some indication of the import attached to this can be found among the DSS. 1QS 6:27–7:2, for example, reads:

Anyone who speaks aloud the M[ost] Holy Name of God, [whether in ...] or in cursing or as an exclamation when under duress or for any other reason, or while he is reading a book or praying, is to be expelled, never again to return to the gathering of the Community.

These considerations seem to warrant the conclusion that "Lord" was widely recognised to be a valid substitute for the divine name prior to NT times. This set the stage for the authors of the NT to be able to apply OT texts about Yhwh to Jesus and so establish his divinity.

ARTICLE 2

Most Jehovah's Witnesses who claim that the New Testament has been altered to remove all traces of the Tetragrammaton have not consider the impossibility of such a task. Let's consider one of the shorter epistles, say 1 John. When John wrote it he sent it to the church. The church would have made copies of the letter and sent those copies to other churches in other cities. Those churches would have made copies of it and sent out those copies to yet other churches. Almost immediately if the first church made five copies, and each church they sent a copy to also made five more copies that would be more than 30 copies in existence. Individuals also may have made copies. Almost immediately if someone wanted to alter the text, they would have to find all of those copies and make changes. But nobody had the ability to do that. There was no ruling power over all of the Christian churches until the fourth century. By then there were thousands of copies of the epistle. Even if somebody had authority to call them all back and to change them, there would be a record of such a thing and there certainly would've been copies that didn't get sent back in and didn't get changed. It is inconceivable that there were multiple changes made to an epistle or gospel without widespread evidence of that change. Hence the presence of the Tetragrammaton in the NT is a fallacy.

Notes:

1. Pietersma, Albert, "Kyrios or Tetragram: A Renewed Quest for the Original LXX" in *De Septuaginta: Studies in Honour of John William Wevers on his sixty-fifth birthday* (ed. Albert Pietersma and Claude Cox.) Benben Publications: Mississauga, 1984. pp. 85-101.