

Sacred Name Concerns

How many of you have been in a Messianic religious setting as of late where you have heard someone use the words God, or Lord, or even Jesus Christ—and then someone gets up and publicly chastises the person? How many of you have been told that if you do not use Hebraic names and terms for the Father and the Son that your prayers will neither be heard nor answered? How many of you have seen people forget the love and compassion of our Savior, and whose faith is now tied up in pronouncing His name “correctly”?

Sadly, these sorts of occurrences are becoming more and more commonplace in certain sectors of the Messianic community. As our Heavenly Father is in the process of restoring His people, many have taken the message of Torah obedience and have abused it. They have removed the message from its original, First Century Jewish context, and are doing things that are foreign to the orthopraxy of the Apostles. In so doing, they have brought disrepute to the Messianic movement and a foul spirit into the camp. They have defamed the name of God, rather than respect it.

For centuries, Satan has done his best to divide those who claim to believe in the God of Israel, Creator of Heaven and Earth. In our day, the enemy is trying to stall or discredit the restoration of Israel. Unfortunately, our enemy’s tactics have all too often succeeded. One such issue that the Adversary has used to divide the Body of Messiah in recent days has been the Sacred Name controversy. He has done his job quite well.

Some are not familiar with what the Sacred Name issue is, while others are all too knowledgeable. In this article we will discuss various aspects surrounding this debate, including: what the Divine Name of God is, various interpretations and views of the Third Commandment, titles for our Creator used in Scripture, where the English name Jesus really comes from, and concerns that we have in regard to this divisive subject. Our goal is to gain a scholastic perspective that encourages Believers to follow the example of the Apostles, who lived within the framework of Second Temple Judaism. Our ministry is concerned about the credibility of the Messianic movement, and we believe that there has been a strong lack of Biblical scholarship in this area, both linguistic and historical.

What is the issue?

In regard to the Father's name, the issue at hand is that one has to decide whether or not it is appropriate to verbalize His proper name which is given to us in the Hebrew Bible. It is composed of the four Hebrew letters *yud* (י), *hey* (ה), *vav* (ו), *hey* (ה): יהוה, equivalent of the English letters YHVH or YHWH. They compose what is commonly called the "tetragrammaton," a term meaning "a word of four letters."

In almost all major English Bible translations of the Tanach or Old Testament, the tetragrammaton has been rendered as "the LORD." Some Jewish Bibles use the term "HASHEM" meaning "the Name." Customarily in Bible translation, proper names are always transliterated, meaning that their sounds are communicated as closely as possible from one language into another, but titles are always translated. Yet in the case of the name YHWH most English Bibles have rendered it as a title. The preface to the New American Standard Bible states the following:

The Proper Name of God in The Old Testament: In the Scriptures, the name of God is most significant and understandably so. It is inconceivable to think of spiritual matters without a proper designation for the Supreme Deity. Thus the most common name for the Deity is God, a translation of the original *Elohim*. One of the titles for God is Lord, a translation of *Adonai*. There is yet another name 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). This name has not been pronounced by the Jews because of reverence for the great sacredness of the divine name. Therefore, it has been consistently translated LORD. The only exception to this translation of YHWH is when it occurs in immediate proximity to the word Lord, that is, *Adonai*. In that case it is regularly translated GOD in order to avoid confusion.

It is known that for many years YHWH has been transliterated as Yahweh, however no complete certainty attaches to this pronunciation.¹

As Exodus 20:7 reads in the NASU: "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain." If the tetragrammaton were transliterated into the text, as it is in the New Jerusalem Bible, then the verse reads, "You shall not misuse the name of Yahweh your God, for Yahweh will not leave unpunished anyone who misuses his name." "Yahweh" is the most common form used by theologians today for יהוה, other than just the letters YHWH. Many scholastic works and commentaries will use the form "Yahweh" in their description of Ancient Israelite religion.

This Christian Bible translation says that the name YHWH is rendered as LORD because of Judaism's reverence for the Divine Name of the Supreme Deity. The NASU translators followed a long-standing tradition of not pronouncing the name

¹ NASB Text Edition (Anaheim, CA: Foundation Publications, 1997), iv.

of God founded centuries ago in Judaism. One widely respected Jewish translation of the Tanach (Old Testament), the ArtScroll Tanach, renders יהוה not as LORD, but HASHEM, meaning “the Name.” Its translators tell us, “In this work, the Four-Letter Name of God is translated ‘HASHEM,’ the pronunciation traditionally used for the Name to avoid pronouncing it unnecessarily.”²

A third, but more liberal view of why YHWH is not used in most Bible translations, is stated in the preface to the Revised Standard Version. It says, “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.”³ Some may take issue with the statement that it is “entirely inappropriate for the universal faith” for our Creator to be designated by a proper name. However, it is historically accurate that the speaking of the name of God aloud was discontinued in Judaism long before the time of Yeshua, as commonly speaking the name of God was considered synonymous with defaming it. Martin Rose comments that “Judaism had secured that the divine name should not be profaned any more. The divine name, once the ‘distinguishing mark’ of divine presence and immanence, had become the essence of God’s unapproachable holiness so that in the Jewish tradition ‘the Name’ (*haššēm*) could be synonymous with ‘God’” (*ABD*).⁴

The primary debate surrounding this issue has many factors. How do we pronounce the name YHWH? What does the Third Commandment truly tell us? Should we even be using the Divine Name?

Secondary debates include what the given Hebrew name of the Messiah is, and whether or not it is necessary to know the specific name YHWH for a person to be saved.

The Creator Has a Name

No honest Christian or Jewish theologian will disagree with those who strongly point out that our Creator indeed has a name. He first reveals His name to Moses in Exodus 3:13-15:

“Then Moses said to God, ‘Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, “The God of your fathers has sent me to you.” Now they may say to me, “What is His name?” What shall I say to them?’ God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM’; and He said, ‘Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, “I AM has sent me to you.”’ God, furthermore, said to Moses, ‘Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, “The LORD [YHWH], 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 this is My memorial-name to all generations.’”

² Nosson Scherman and Meir Zlotowitz, eds., *The Stone Edition Tanach* (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, Ltd., 1996), xxv.

³ *Revised Standard Version* (Nashville: Cokesbury, 1952), v.

⁴ Martin Rose, “Names of God in the OT,” in *ABD*, 4:1010.

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The proper name of our Creator was revealed to Moses as he was preparing to go back to Egypt with His help to free the Israelites in slavery. He needed a name to distinguish YHWH from the pagan gods of the Egyptians. The *Jewish Study Bible* comments that while the name “YHVH is [often] represented by the word LORD...it is connected to the verb *h-y-h* [הָיָה], ‘be’ or ‘become,’ most likely in a causative sense, ‘he who causes to be.’”⁵ Another possible meaning of YHWH is simply “Eternal One,” or perhaps even “Transcendent.” We see Moses using the name YHWH in His encounters with Pharaoh:

“And afterward Moses and Aaron came and said to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the LORD [YHWH], the God of Israel, ‘Let My people go that they may celebrate a feast to Me in the wilderness.’” But Pharaoh said, ‘Who is the LORD that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and besides, I will not let Israel go’” (Exodus 5:1-2).

As previously mentioned, most English Bibles use the title “the LORD” in place of YHWH. In instances such as these, did the Pharaoh of Egypt verbally speak the name YHWH? From the text alone, it is likely that he did. As history later records, the Jewish Sages who returned from Babylonian exile did not wish God’s name to be brought to shame, as misusing God’s name was believed to have been one of the significant reasons that caused the exile. Substitutions were used for the Divine Name, such as *Adonai* (אֲדֹנָי), meaning “(my) Lord,” or *HaShem* (שֵׁם), meaning “the Name.” Whenever YHWH would appear in a Biblical text, *Adonai* or *HaShem* would likely be pronounced instead. It is important to note that both of these titles appear independently in the Scriptures to refer to God.

Most Jews who returned from captivity in Babylon considered it blasphemous to speak the Divine Name, and some in the Messianic movement likewise believe it is blasphemous to verbalize it. The Talmud states how the “sages say, ‘On account of using the ineffable Name, one is subject to the death penalty, but as for euphemisms, one is subject to the admonition [not to do so, but not to the death penalty if he does so]’” (b.*Sanhedrin* 56a).⁶ Post-exilic Judaism has historically maintained that if a person were to curse using the name YHWH in a sentence, he was to be given the death penalty. If it were just a curse with a title used in place of the Divine Name, then it was not worthy of death. This is one of the reasons why the proper name of God was not spoken by the First Century C.E. The intention was to disallow instances where pagan individuals such as Pharaoh would curse using the Divine Name. This is something often not realized by many today who insist on its usage.

The Third Commandment

From most Bibles, the Third Commandment reads: “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished

⁵ Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Study Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 2142.

⁶ *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*.

who takes His name in vain” (Exodus 20:7; cf. Deuteronomy 5:11). Within Christianity, this command is usually interpreted as meaning that we are not to curse using the name of our Heavenly Father or that of His Son. This includes using derogatory slurs involving titles given to God as a curse. Jack S. Deere reflects on this interpretation, observing, “This command forbids using God’s name in profanity but it includes more. The third commandment is a directive against using God’s name in a manipulative way (e.g., His name is not to be used in magic or to curse someone). Today a Christian who uses God’s name flippantly or falsely attributes a wrong act to God has broken this commandment.”⁷ You should not find any Believer who disagrees with this interpretation.

In some Jewish translations of Scripture, the Third Commandment is rendered as “You shall not swear falsely by the name of the LORD your God; for the LORD will not clear one who swears falsely by His name” (Exodus 20:7, NJPS), meaning that one is not to take a false oath in His name or by God’s authority. Nahum M. Sarna remarks, “The tradition demands that we neither swear falsely in court nor use God’s name in vain. We, therefore, refrain from using the traditional names for God in secular writings or conversation, much less in voicing profanities.”⁸

This translation reflects an interpretive tradition that equated misusing the name of God to swearing falsely in His name. The Hebrew clause commonly rendered as “in vain” is *l’shav* (לֹשֶׁן). Sarna explains that this means “for nothing, in vain,” but indicates it is also ambiguous, commenting, “The ambiguity broadens the prohibition and allows for the proscription of both perjury (by the principals in a lawsuit, swearing falsely) and unnecessary or frivolous use of the divine name.”⁹

HALOT offers several different applications of the term *shav* (לֹשֶׁן), including “**worthless**,” meaning “to utter a name in vain, unnecessarily to abuse a name in an evil way (in a magic ritual or an oath)”; “**worthless, unrestrained**.”¹⁰ “It designates anything that is unsubstantial, unreal, worthless, either materially or morally” (*TWOT*).¹¹ Obviously, what the Third Commandment is trying to communicate to us is that we are not to misuse the name of God. It is to be treated with great respect and it commands authority. This includes using it inappropriately as a slur, as it is commonly interpreted by Christianity, and using it falsely in oaths as it is widely interpreted by Judaism.

Some, however, believe that the Third Commandment is violated by those who refuse to use or speak the name YHWH, and by rendering YHWH with a title such as “LORD” or “HASHHEM” in English Bible translations. Is the Third Commandment broken when people do not speak the name YHWH?

When our Creator revealed His proper name to Moses on Mount Sinai, He says, “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.’

⁷ Jack S. Deere, “Deuteronomy,” in *BKCOT*, 272.

⁸ Nahum M. Sarna, “Exodus,” in *Etz Hayim*, 444.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *HALOT*, 2:1425.

¹¹ Victor P. Hamilton, “לֹשֶׁן,” in *TWOT*, 2:908.

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This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations” (Exodus 3:15). No honest commentator denies the fact that in the Hebrew source text of Exodus 3:15 the name YHWH appears.¹² Thomas B. Dozeman remarks in the *New Interpreter’s Study Bible*, “The name YHWH, translated as ‘Lord’ in the NRSV, is the third-person masculine singular form of the verb. It translates ‘he is’ or ‘he will be.’ Speaking the name YHWH actually poses a question: He will be what? The answer to the question requires further reading of the book of Exodus, where the future actions of God for Israel are recorded, providing the content of the divine verbal name: YHWH will be savior, healer, revealer, covenant maker, etc.”¹³

Jeffrey H. Tigay, in *The Jewish Study Bible*, identifying that the Creator indeed has a name, reflects on the tradition of why Jewish people over the centuries have avoided saying it. He remarks, “*The LORD* is actually a translation of ‘*adonai*’ (lit. ‘my Lord’) because that is what Jews now pronounce whenever the consonants YHVH appear. YHVH was probably originally pronounced ‘Yahweh,’ but in Second Temple times, as an expression of reverence, Jews began to avoid uttering it, substituting ‘*adonai*’ and other surrogates.”¹⁴ The *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period* mirrors these remarks, adding, “When the high priest addressed God in the Temple’s Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement, he uttered this name. When the priests blessed the people in the Temple, they used this name. By the third century B.C.E., God’s name had become so hallowed that it could not be pronounced outside of worship, and the term *adonai* (my lord) was regularly substituted.”¹⁵

While certainly recognizing that our Creator has a name, YHWH, both the Jewish and Christian traditions have avoided its pronunciation due to its extreme holiness. The rendering of YHWH as “the LORD” is identified in the preface to most major English Bible translations. In scholastic circles, however, it is not uncommon to see forms such as YHWH or Yahweh used to refer to God, as Jewish and Christian theologians do plainly recognize that our Creator has a name.¹⁶ But, in Second Temple Judaism the name of God was not spoken aloud. As Messianic Believers, we must recognize that this was the same Second Temple Judaism in which Yeshua the Messiah lived, and from which the early Messianic community arose. Regarding whether or not we should use the name YHWH today, we should determine whether or not the Messiah ever spoke it. *We should follow the example of Yeshua and His Apostles.*

¹² Heb. YHWH Elohei avotei’khem...zeh-sh’mi l’olam (יהוה אלהי אבותיכם...זה שמי לעולם).

¹³ Thomas B. Dozeman, “Exodus,” in Walter J. Harrelson, ed., et. al., *New Interpreter’s Study Bible*, NRSV (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003), 90.

¹⁴ Jeffrey H. Tigay, “Exodus,” in *The Jewish Study Bible*, 112.

¹⁵ “God, names of,” in *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period*, 259.

¹⁶ However, a theologian’s or a commentator’s usage of “Yahweh” is to be contrasted as being *much different* than those of the Sacred Name Only movement today.

Yeshua's Handling of the Name of God

Objectively examining the Apostolic Scriptures, we find that **there is not a single instance** of the Messiah ever verbalizing the name YHWH, either directly, or with Him quoting from the Tanach. Consider Luke 4:17-19, which includes a direct quotation from Isaiah 61:1 and 58:6:

“And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found the place where it was written, ‘THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES, AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED, TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD.’”

In the Greek source text, Isaiah 61:1 is quoted from the Septuagint, the Jewish translation of the Hebrew Bible composed approximately three centuries before the Messiah. The LXX rendered the name YHWH as *Kurios* (κύριος) or “Lord,” the Greek equivalent title of the Hebrew *Adonai*. In the synagogue at Capernaum, Yeshua would have read this text aloud with *Adonai*. While the following verses in Luke 4:28-32 indicate that most in the synagogue thought He was blaspheming, **they do not indicate that He was blaspheming because He verbalized the name YHWH**. On the contrary, they were dismayed because of Yeshua’s words “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21).

EJ indicates that “The prohibition against the pronunciation of the name of God applies only to the Tetragrammaton, which could be pronounced by the high priest only once a year on the Day of Atonement in the Holy of Holies...and in the Temple by the priests when they recited the Priestly Blessing.”¹⁷ The Mishnah reflects these traditions that existed in the Judaism of Yeshua’s day:

“And the priests and people standing in the courtyard, when they would hear the Expressed Name [of the Lord] come out of the mouth of the high priest, would kneel and bow down and fall on their faces and say, ‘Blessed be the name of the glory of his kingdom forever and ever’” (m.*Yoma* 6:2).¹⁸

There was a protocol for using the proper name of God, and it is clear that Yeshua adhered to it during His ministry. In the Gospels Yeshua actually spends more time calling His Father, “Father” or “Abba,” than referring to Him as God or Lord.¹⁹ If Yeshua considered not speaking the name YHWH aloud to be an error of the Second Temple Judaism in which His ministry functioned, then there would be plenty of evidence in the Apostolic Scriptures supporting this, including charges of blasphemy against Him for verbalizing the name YHWH. **But these things do not appear**. As Messianic Believers who are trying to return to the theology of the First

¹⁷ Louis I. Rabinowitz, “God, Names of,” in *EJ*.

¹⁸ Neusner, *Mishnah*, 275.

¹⁹ About as close as things get to Yeshua verbalizing the Divine Name appears at Yeshua’s trial when He claimed to be the “I AM,” and was considered blaspheming by the high priest (Mark 14:61-64; Luke 22:70-71). *Egō eimi* (ἐγώ εἰμι), appearing in the Gospels for many of His “I AM” statements, was used in the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew *ehyeh asher ehyeh* אֲנִי אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי אֲהְיֶה) where God reveals Himself to Moses as “I AM WHO I AM” (Exodus 3:13-14).

Consult G.M. Burge, “I am’ sayings,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, pp 354-356.

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Century Believers, who operated within the context of Second Temple Judaism, we must recognize that while our Heavenly Father has a proper name, it was not used by Yeshua or the Apostles. We must have the same kind of respect for the holiness of the name YHWH that they had. Today's Messianics should follow the example of our Jewish forbearers in this matter.

Can we know with certainty how to pronounce the Divine Name?

One important key to the debate surrounding this issue regards the pronunciation of the name YHWH. To many Jews, it is considered "the unspeakable name of God." A major part of this is due to the fact that *the exact* pronunciation of the Divine Name has been contested, having been lost to antiquity.

It is notable that most Sacred Name Only organizations **cannot agree** upon the exact pronunciation of YHWH. Each has its own theory about how to pronounce our Heavenly Father's name. Renderings range from the common forms "Yahweh" and "Yahveh" to "Yahuweh," "Yahuveh," "Yahvah," and "Yahueh," just to name a few. Many just choose to write it as YHVH or YHWH. (And yes, some even insist on using the Hebrew letters יהוה.)

Scholars have debated for centuries over the exact pronunciation of God's name, based on available linguistic evidence and testimonies from ancient history. But all that anyone can provide is a best guess. B.W. Anderson observes the following in *IDB*:

"In the earliest Hebrew the sacred name appeared as a four-letter word or tetragrammaton: YHWH (יהוה), without any vowel signs. Since the vowels were added very late, at the time of the fixing of the MT text..., the OT itself gives no clue to its original pronunciation. Some help, however, is given by the early church fathers. Theodoret of Cyrus (fourth century A.D.) testifies that the Samaritans, who shared the Pentateuchal scripture with the Jews, pronounced the name Ἰαβέ, and Clement of Alexandria (early third century A.D.) transliterated the 'name of four letters' as Ἰαουέ. Moreover, Egyptian Magic Papyri from the end of the third century A.D. attest to the patristic spelling, especially that of Theodoret. Following these hints, modern scholars believe the approximate pronunciation was 'Yahweh.'"²⁰

"Yahweh" has become the most common pronunciation of the tetragrammaton in the scholastic community, but no complete certainty can be attached to this pronunciation. There are some variant pronunciations such as "Yahuweh" or "Yahoweh" which some prefer. A default position is to represent the name of God by the consonants YHWH or YHVH. We can, however, be confident that "Jehovah" (or "Yehovah") is not the correct pronunciation of YHWH. As Anderson notes,

²⁰ B.W. Anderson, "God, names of," in *IDB*, 2:409.

"[This is a]n artificial form, often attributed to Petrus Galatinus in *ca.* A.D. 1520, which results from the combination of the consonants of the Tetragrammaton...with the substitute vowel reading which was introduced in the sixth-seventh centuries A.D...Of the various substitutes that were employed, the chief was 'Adonai' ('Lord'), the vowels of which the Masoretes as a rule added to the consonants 'YHWH' to indicate that 'Adonai' should be read. The combination of the two—the Tetragrammaton and the vowels of 'Adonai'—yields the artificial name."²¹

Because the Hebrew language has no vowels, the Masoretes, whose job it was to copy the texts of the Hebrew Scriptures, added special markings underneath letters to indicate vowel sounds.²² For the name YHWH (יהוה), the vowel markings for *Adonai* or "Lord" were applied, so the cantor in the synagogue would read *Adonai* (אֲדֹנָי). Some early Christian Bible translators applied the vowel markings for *Adonai* and came up with the name "Jehovah." There are still a fair number of Christians who use the form Jehovah, albeit in error. The scholastic community today, in contrast, is more likely to use the form "Yahweh," or simply YHWH.

There are some in the Messianic community who believe that *they* know what the correct way to say the name of God is. The problem with this is that the pronunciation of His name has been debated for centuries, and one of the reasons why Jews today do not use it is because His name was only spoken aloud by the high priest in the Temple on *Yom Kippur*. Perhaps today we might not view not speaking God's name as some kind of superstition, seeing the name YHWH or forms such as "Yahweh" used in academic journals and publications. But considering the debate over how God's name is pronounced, it would be best for all of us to respect historical precedents, knowing that our Father has a name, but treating it with the respect and holiness that it deserves. Again, today's Messianics should follow Jewish orthodoxy in this matter.

Is it necessary to know the Divine Name to be saved?

Of course, the debate does not stop there. Many people who staunchly advocate usage of the Divine Name believe that you must know the name YHWH in order to be saved. This is not what the Scriptures tell us. Although the proper name of the Holy One of Israel is YHWH, and it is important we recognize what this name is and the supreme holiness attached to it, **there is no mandatory requirement in Scripture that a person must know this exact name to be saved.** However, there are some that like to use the Scriptures to make us think so.

Proverbs 30:4 asks us some rhetorical questions: "Who has ascended into heaven and descended? Who has gathered the wind in His fists? Who has wrapped the waters in His garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is His name or His son's name? Surely you know!" Some believe that the text of this

²¹ B.W. Anderson, "Jehovah," in *Ibid.*, 2:817.

²² Consult Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), for a relatively conservative analysis of the copying and preservation of the Tanach Scriptures.

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verse makes it absolutely necessary that one must know the name YHWH and the original Hebrew name of the Messiah to be saved. But this is not what it tells us. Proverbs 30:4 speaks of the majesty of our Creator and the greatness of our Heavenly Father's and His Son's names, not that a person must know these names to be saved. For in Hebraic thought, one's "name" also concerns his reputation, power, and authority.²³

Notably of the Sacred Name Onlyists we could ask: If it is required to know the *correct* names to be saved, *which form of the names must we know?* (And this is where their not agreeing among themselves can cause manifold problems.)

In Romans 1:18-20 the Apostle Paul writes, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse."

Paul said that no person on Planet Earth is excused from not hearing the good news of salvation in the Messiah—or the revealed nature of our Creator in His creation. In theology this is usually referred to as natural revelation, or the witness of God in the world. This means that a person living in a remote jungle, who has never heard of the name YHWH or even has read or seen a Bible, will be held accountable on Judgment Day for his or her sin.²⁴ **No person must know the specific, proper name of the Creator to be saved—because that is not what the Word teaches.** If it were truly the case, then why does this Scripture imply otherwise?

However, one thing that we do know is that it is absolutely necessary to call upon the One True God, whose proper name is YHWH (יהוה), to be saved (Acts 2:21; Romans 10:13). *None of us denies this.* If the Messiah is not YHWH made manifest in the flesh, then He is incapable of being our Redeemer (cf. Philippians 2:5-11; Isaiah 45:23).

Any good student of the Bible should know that the proper name of God is YHWH. However, there is *no verse which says that a person must know the proper name of God to be saved.*

Our Father in Heaven

It is important that we emphasize how the Apostolic Scriptures are replete with admonitions on how we are to call our Creator *Father* or *Abba* (i.e., Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6), as the Messiah wanted us to have an *intimate* father-child relationship with God, not a *strictly* formal king-subject arrangement, or one where we are in constant concern over saying His "name" correctly. (Although, we are

²³ Consult Walter C. Kaiser, "יְהוָה," in *TWOT*, 2:934-935; and similarly for the Greek Scriptures, H. Bietenhard, "ónoma," in *TDNT*, pp 694-700.

²⁴ Consult the author's exegetical paper on Romans 1:18-25, "Is Salvation Only Available for Those Who Profess Faith in Yeshua?" for a further discussion of this issue.

certainly to revere and honor God as King!) We all need to remember that the Messiah Himself prayed, “Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name” (Matthew 6:9). Examine the following text of Scripture, commonly called “the Lord’s Prayer”:

“Pray, then, in this way: ‘Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. *For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen*’” (Matthew 6:9-13).

Please notice that in the Scriptural quotation above there is no mention of the word “Lord,” where most SNO advocates would insert YHWH.²⁵ In this prayer, the Messiah clearly calls His Father, “Father.” From this portion of text, one can see from our Savior’s own words that using the Divine Name is something not to be taken lightly. The Messiah clearly tells us that YHWH is to be our Heavenly Father and that His name is holy. But what must be noted is that the Messiah *never once* spoke the Divine Name in the Gospel accounts.

There is no direct quotation of the Messiah Himself ever saying YHWH short of inserting the tetragrammaton into the Greek New Testament, which is not supported by any kind of trustworthy textual criticism. The closest that anyone can get to supporting the premise that the Messiah used the Divine Name could come from John 17:6, where He prays “I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world.” The Greek verb *phaneroō* (φανερώω) means “**to cause to become known, disclose, show, make known**” (BDAG).²⁶ However, both the Hebrew *shem* (שֵׁם) and the Greek *onoma* (ὄνομα), which mean “name,” also represent the character and substance of the Holy One of Israel. In actuality, when the Messiah said that He manifested the Father’s name to His Disciples, He was speaking of manifesting the Father’s character to them. This view is reflected in the NIV rendering of John 17:6: “I have revealed **you** to those whom you gave me out of the world.”²⁷

What about “God” and “Lord”?

It is notable that many Sacred Name people who use the name of God tend to forget that our Father has many titles that are used complimentary *and independently* of the Divine Name YHWH. In the Hebrew Scriptures, the most notable titles that are used are *Elohim* (אֱלֹהִים) and *Adonai* (אֲדֹנָי). In the Greek

²⁵ That is, they would insert YHWH in their reading of the passage from a standard English version, or from one of the many so-called “restored name” versions available on the market today.

Consult the FAQ, “Bible Versions, Messianic.”

²⁶ BDAG, 1048.

²⁷ Merrill C. Tenney summarizes how the Disciples “recognized that Jesus’ message came from God; and they accepted him as a messenger of God” (“The Gospel of John,” in Frank E. Gaebelein, ed. et. al., *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 12 vols. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981], 9:163).

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Scriptures, their counterparts are *Theos* (θεός) and *Kurios* (κύριος). These titles in English correspond to “God” and “Lord.”²⁸

Sacred Name Only advocates often have a field day in attacking people who use the English titles God and Lord. It is often said that these words are of pagan origin and should have no place whatsoever in the vocabulary of a Believer. This claim is made on the basis that God and Lord have also been titles of pagan deities. This claim is made even more so for the Greek titles *Kurios* and *Theos*, which were used in Ancient Greek as titles for the deities of Mount Olympus. However, arguments against *Kurios* and *Theos* lose weight when we see that the Jewish Rabbis who translated the Hebrew Tanach into Greek had no problem using them in reference to the Holy One of Israel. In fact, when the Apostles went into Greek-speaking lands, this is *exactly* what they called the God of Israel, because these were the same terms used by Diaspora Judaism.

If we are to reject titles such as God and Lord because they might be used to refer to pagan deities, then we must hold the Hebrew titles of *Elohim* and *Adonai* to the same standard. Not surprisingly, both of these titles have been used to refer to *pagan deities* every bit as much as YHWH. *TWOT* explains that *El* (אֱל), the singular form of *Elohim*, “is a very ancient Semitic term. It is also the most widely distributed name among Semitic-speaking peoples for the deity, occurring in some form in every Semitic language, except Ethiopic.”²⁹ So, if we are to reject God and Lord as titles, we must do the same for *Elohim* because *Elohim* is used to refer to pagan deities, and *El* is used in almost every Semitic language to refer to deities *other than* YHWH.³⁰

We must also consider some more facts. A shortened poetic form of “Yahweh,” *Yah* (יָה), that also appears in the Hebrew Tanach, was possibly used by pagan societies that pre-dated the Israelites. The *IVPBBC* tells us, “There are a number of possible occurrences of Yahweh or Yah as a deity’s name outside of Israel, though all are debatable.”³¹ But even if true, we certainly should not conclude that YHWH is a pagan name because the pagans may have used derivations of it. Furthermore, in 2 Samuel 5:20, David describes the God of Israel as *Ba’al* (בַּעַל), which was the name of a Canaanite deity. But note that, “In the early years the title Baal seems to have been used for the Lord (Yahweh)” (*NIDB*).³² Is this an error on David’s part? We should not believe so.

²⁸ Another notable title, particularly used of Yeshua in the Apostolic Scriptures, is *Despotēs* (δεσπότης), usually rendered as “Master.”

There is a noticeable trend among some in today’s Messianic movement, who do not believe in speaking God’s Divine Name in deference to Jewish tradition, to replace references to Yeshua as “Lord” (*Kurios*) in English Bible quotations with “Master.” Why this is the case is uncertain, but a likely reason is that it is a reflection of a low Christology, and with wanting to purposefully disconnect any connections between the Lord Yeshua and the LORD God.

²⁹ Jack B. Scott, “*el*,” in *TWOT*, 1:42.

³⁰ For some poignant examples of this, consult Simon B. Parker, ed., *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1997).

³¹ John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 80.

³² Steven Barabas, “Baal,” in *NIDB*, 113.

There is no substantial evidence that makes “God” and “Lord” pagan titles. Otherwise, titles such as the Hebrew *Elohim*, and possibly even the name YHWH itself, would be likewise pagan.³³

What is the Hebrew name of the Messiah?

Surrounding the Sacred Name issue is what the original given Hebrew name of the Messiah was. Virtually every Christian scholar will agree that He did not go by the name “Jesus,” simply because the English language did not exist 2,000 years ago.

The Messiah, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah (Revelation 5:5), was Jewish in a purely First Century context, which means that He must have had a Hebrew or Aramaic name. The most common Hebrew derivation that is used today for the Messiah’s name, by both Christians and Messianic Believers alike, is the name *Yeshua* (ישוע). The Hebrew ישוע is used in all modern Hebrew translations of the New Testament.³⁴

Yeshua (or Y’shua) is the standard Hebrew derivation used for the name of the Messiah by today’s Messianic Jews and evangelical Christian community. A few SNO proponents, but not most, also use it. Just as SNO organizations disagree over the exact pronunciation of YHWH, so do they disagree over the pronunciation, *and Hebrew spelling*, of the Messiah’s name. The preferred Hebrew spelling for the Messiah’s name by most SNO groups is יהושוע, which is the Hebrew form for Joshua’s name, *Yehoshua*,³⁵ although they seldom render it as Yehoshua.

A general census of SNO literature will show that most believe that the original name of the Son is “Yahshua,” or derivations such as “Yahushua” or “Yahoshua,” which they say means “Yah is salvation.” They primarily base this form on the Messiah’s words in John 5:43 where He says “I have come in My Father’s name.” On this basis, those who use these forms say that the Messiah came in His Father’s name of “Yahweh,” thus His name must be “Yah-shua” or “Yahushua” or “Yahoshua.”

The problem with this form is that it is based on an erroneous interpretation of John 5:43, which says in its entirety, “I have come in My Father’s name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, you will receive him.” The second part of the verse, “if another shall come in his own name, you will receive him,” is sometimes accredited as being a prophecy of the coming antimessiah/antichrist. If the antimessiah is to come in his own name, must he have the first syllable of his own name in his? If the antimessiah had been Adolf Hitler, then given the logic of Hitler “coming in his own name,” the antimessiah’s name would have been something along the lines of AdAdolf HitHitler. (Other examples from historical antimessiah figures would be NapNapoleon BonBonaparte or JosJoseph StalStalin.)

³³ Consult the FAQ, “God & Lord, Pagan Titles,” for additional information to be considered.

³⁴ Notably, the Delitzsch, Salkinson-Ginsburg, and United Bible Societies versions.

³⁵ See lexical entry in *HALOT*, 1:397.

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Some try to argue that “Yah,” the contracted poetic form of “Yahweh,” is the “family name” of God, and thus the syllable “Yah” must appear in the Messiah’s name. The problem with this interpretation is that it does not align with Jewish names of the First Century. If indeed the Messiah were to come in “His Father’s name,” as inferred by SNO advocates, then the Messiah’s name should actually be *Yeshua ben YHWH* (יֵשׁוּעַ בֶּן־יְהוָה) or *Yeshua bar YHWH* (יֵשׁוּעַ בַּר־יְהוָה), “Yeshua, son of YHWH,” *not* the erroneous “Yahshua.”

There are some problems that arise when asserting that “Yah” must appear in the name of the Son. What the Messiah is actually talking about in John 5:43 is that He comes in *the authority of His Father*, not that the syllable “Yah” must be in His actual *designative* name. And, the Messiah coming in His Father’s authority or character is something that is overlooked by many who emphasize “the name”—at the very least by their frequent lack of love or mercy toward others!

Innocently, many believe that “Yahshua” is the original name for the Messiah. However, for “Yah-shua” to be an actual word in Hebrew, it would need to be spelled in Hebrew as יה-שׁוּעַ, and no such word *has ever existed in the Hebrew language*. No Hebrew linguist has ever used or legitimized this form, and it does not appear in any reputable lexicon.³⁶ “Yahshua” is a word that has been entirely fabricated to fit a false theological presupposition.

Our ministry employs the use of the standard form of Yeshua, used by the vast majority of today’s Messianics for the Hebrew name of the Messiah—forms validated by linguistic scholars and accepted by Jews, Christians, and Messianics alike.

It is also important to note that the names “Yeshua” and “Yahshua” *actually have two different meanings*. Very few have pointed out that perhaps these differences may be related to how SNO advocates perceive whether or not Yeshua is Divine.

When one reviews a substantial amount of SNO literature, there is usually not a very strong emphasis on who the Messiah is and His atoning work at Golgotha (Calvary). All too often, unfortunately, many SNO people are extremely legalistic in their approach to the Torah and their obedience to our Creator. Seldom is “grace” ever emphasized. So it should be no surprise that these people often circumvent the Messiah for salvation.

The names “Yahshua” or “Yahushua” point to salvation coming *directly* from the Father, whereas “Yeshua” points to salvation coming *through* God the Son as an intermediary between humanity and the Father, as the name “Yeshua” means “He is salvation.” Many SNO adherents are very eager to talk about “Yahweh,” but are

³⁶ Reputable Hebrew lexicons would include the Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament by Brown, Driver, Briggs or *BDB*, the Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament by Holladay or *CHALOT*, or The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament by Koehler and Baumgartner or *HALOT*. It would not include the linguistically and theologically weak Strong’s Concordance dictionary that so many SNO advocates rely (exclusively) upon.

And it often goes without saying, almost all SNO teachers have not been formally trained in the Hebrew language, much less the Greek language, in spite of their confident assertions (cf. 1 Timothy 1:6-7).

not necessarily as fervent to implore the work of the Messiah on the cross. The Tanach is clear that only God is our Savior,³⁷ and the Apostolic Scriptures are clear that Yeshua is our only Savior.³⁸ If Yeshua is not God in the flesh then He cannot be our Savior. If His name were “Yahshua” or “Yahushua,” this would point to a Savior other than He, and could assert that He is not God made manifest to us in human form.

A large number of SNO groups do not believe in the Divinity of the Messiah.³⁹ Given this, why would we need the Messiah for salvation when we can go right to YHWH? Forms such as “Yahshua” and “Yahushua” can very much *demean the Messiah’s place in the salvation experience*. It is unavoidable that many SNO people have been influential over some in the Messianic community, who now reject foundational Biblical teachings about the Divinity of the Messiah, or have perhaps already denied Him as the Messiah.⁴⁰ This is a problem, and we do not encourage people to use “Yahshua” or “Yahushua” for more reasons than just bad linguistics.

It was *Yeshua the Messiah* who was crucified for the sin of humanity. Again, we can emphasize how Matthew 1:21 so eloquently says, “She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Yeshua, **for He will save His people from their sins.**” Yeshua has been proven by scholars to be the most accurate Hebrew name of the Messiah. It also implies that “He *personally* is salvation,” as one *must* come to faith in Him and His atoning work. Knowing the Father in Heaven *alone* is not enough to be redeemed.

Is the name “Jesus” pagan?

Directly corresponding to the debate over what the Hebrew name of the Messiah is, is the controversy surrounding the name that history and the majority of English speaking people know Him by: Jesus Christ. Most SNO advocates argue that the name “Jesus” is pagan because it has Greek linguistic origins, and some have even referred to our Savior insultingly as “Gee-Zeus.” However, a study of Hebrew to Greek transliteration shows that there is no basis or justification for this.

About three centuries before the Messiah’s birth, the Jewish translators of the Septuagint had a similar problem. They were commissioned to translate the Hebrew Bible into Greek for Ptolemy’s library at Alexandria and had extreme difficulty transliterating Hebrew proper names into Greek. Unlike Hebrew to English transliteration, which is easier because English offers most of the same sounds of Hebrew; Hebrew to Greek transliteration is not as easy because it does

³⁷ 1 Samuel 2:1; Isaiah 43:11; 45:15; 63:7-8; Hosea 13:4; Psalm 49:15.

³⁸ Luke 2:11; John 4:42; 1 John 4:14; 1 Peter 1:11; 2 Peter 3:2; Philippians 3:20; 1 Timothy 1:1; 4:10; 2 Timothy 1:10; Titus 2:13.

³⁹ This is perhaps best seen in the rendering of Colossians 2:9 in the ISR Scriptures, a Sacred Name Bible: “Because in Him dwells all the completeness of the Mightiness bodily.” This is different than the much more specific: “For in Him all the fullness of Deity [*theotēs, θεότης*] dwells in bodily form” (NASU).

⁴⁰ For a further discussion, consult the author’s article “Answering the ‘Frequently Avoided Questions’ About the Divinity of Yeshua” and “Answering the ‘Frequently Avoided Questions’ About the Messiahship of Yeshua” (both appearing in *Confronting Critical Issues*).

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not share some of the same sounds. It is notable that many of our proper Biblical names in English come from Greek transliterations of Hebrew words (i.e., Moses, Phinehas, Caiphas).

Young's Analytical Concordance is one resource that easily confirms that the Greek name *Iēsous* (Ἰησοῦς) used for our Savior in the Greek Apostolic Scriptures, is a transliteration of His original Hebrew name *Yeshua* (יְהוֹשֻׁעַ).⁴¹ The name Yeshua is a contracted form of the name Yehoshua or Joshua, and is used numerous times in the Tanach to refer to Moses' successor.⁴² Transliteration is the process where one tries to communicate, as closely as possible, the sounds of one language into another language, often by representing words of one language in a different alphabet. This is extremely difficult when taking proper Hebrew names and communicating them in Greek. How we get from *Yeshua* to *Iēsous* (pronounced *Ee-ay-sooce*) to ultimately *Jesus* is a challenge to understand if one is armed with nothing more than a concordance, does not understand the difficulty of transliteration, and most importantly has not studied **both** Hebrew and Greek. When transliterating the Hebrew name יְהוֹשֻׁעַ to Greek:

- י (*yud* – “ye”) becomes Ιη (*iota-ēta* – “ye” or “ee-ay”)
- שׁ (*shin* – “sh”) becomes σ (*sigma* – “s” - there is no “sh” sound in Greek)
- ו (*vuv* – “u”) becomes ου (*omicron-upsilon* – “oo”)
- It is necessary for a final sigma (ς) to be placed at the end of the word to distinguish that the name is masculine and for it to be declinable from the nominative case (indicating subject)
- Greek requires that the א (*ayin* – “ah”) sound be dropped
- Hence, we get the name *Iēsous* (Ἰησοῦς), pronounced either *Ye-sooce* or *Ee-ay-sooce*, depending on the Greek dialect

The name *Iēsous*, surprisingly to some, is actually of Jewish origin. This name is used for the title of the Book of Joshua in the Septuagint (appearing as ΙΗΣΟΥΣ),⁴³ the Ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. This serves as definitive proof that *Iēsous* is not of pagan origin, but rather is simply a Greek transliteration of Yeshua developed by the LXX's Jewish translators.

In Old English, the name *Iēsous* was rendered *Iesus* (pronounced *Yesus*). However, it was spelled with a beginning letter “I,” which in the Middle Ages had a “Y” sound. The I was used for letters beginning with both “I” and “J.” Early editions of the King James Version, for example, simply transliterate the Greek

⁴¹ The exact reference in its entirety under the name “Jesus,” specifically indicates “Ἰησοῦς, from Heb. יְהוֹשֻׁעַ *saviour*” (Robert Young, *Young's Analytical Concordance to the Bible* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977], 541).

⁴² Consult B.T. Dahlberg, “Joshua,” in *IDB*, 2:867-868. Note that this entry includes the Hebrew and Greek spellings יְהוֹשֻׁעַ and Ἰησοῦς. See also *Thayer*, 300; *BDAG*, 471-472.

⁴³ Alfred Rahlfs, ed., *Septuaginta* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1979), 1:354-405.

Iēsous into English as “Iesous.” Later in the development of the English language, J’s started being used in place of I’s, and the letter received the same sound that it has today. The name Jesus is less than 400 years old. However, its existence did not come about by some sordid conspiracy as some might errantly claim.

As Messianic Believers, we prefer the richness of our Savior’s original Hebrew name of Yeshua. But because we prefer Yeshua over Jesus *does not mean* that we believe that those who pray in the “name of Jesus” are not praying in the authority of the same Savior that we are praying in the “name of Yeshua.” Our Heavenly Father looks at our hearts, and we need to understand. We encourage people to use the name that was originally given to the Messiah, **Yeshua**, but also must realize that “history happens” and the pronunciation of names can change from language to language via transliteration.

Those who have a problem with the Greek name *Iēsous* need to direct their criticism to the Jewish Rabbis who translated the Septuagint. We would challenge them to provide their own transliteration of the name *Yeshua* into Greek, understanding the linguistic barriers that exist, and ask them to tell us what names the Messiah was designated as having in the sign above His cross which appeared “in Hebrew, Latin *and* in Greek” (John 19:20).

In Old English, *Iēsous* was rendered *Iesus* (pronounced *Yesus*). The Geneva Bible and the 1611 King James Version left all proper names in their Greek forms, so in the New Testament you will see names like *Iesous* and *Noe* (Noah) and *Esias* (Isaiah), rather than their more customary English forms. There was no capital “J” until later on. When this letter began appearing in English Bibles it adopted the “j” sound that we know today, and the English name “Jesus” was formed.

But the debate does not end there. Does the Greek name *Iēsous*, as some have claimed, mean “son of Zeus”? No. First of all, *Iēsous* (Ἰησοῦς) and *Zeus* (Ζεὺς) have two totally different Greek spellings. Second, Zeus in Ancient Greek is *not pronounced* as Zoos. Its first letter, zeta (ζ), actually has a “dz” sound. A more accurate transliteration of *Dzeus* is better for the layperson who has not studied Greek. Third, the diphthongs “ou” in *Iēsous* and “eu” in *Zeus* are pronounced differently. “Ou” is pronounced as “oo,” and “eu” is pronounced as “eh-uh.” Fourth, the term “son of Zeus” in classical Greek would probably appear as *ho huios tou Dios* (ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ Διός) and not *Iēsous*. Anyone who claims that the name *Iēsous* is even remotely connected to *Zeus* is exhibiting poor, sub-standard scholarship, and should be immediately dismissed.

Transliteration is not an exact science. However, it does prove that the Greek name *Iēsous* from whence we derive the name “Jesus” is not pagan. Those who believe that “Jesus” is another god and declare that they “reject Jesus” need to examine the facts of Hebrew to Greek transliteration. They need to realize just who they are rejecting. Those who believe that “Jesus” is someone else and proclaim that “We reject Jesus!” need to do more scholarly work.

When going out into the Ancient Mediterranean to declare the good news of the Messiah to Greeks and Romans, not only did the Apostles preach in the name of *Iēsous* (Ἰησοῦς) to diverse audiences—but we encounter at least one Diaspora Jew

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who was given the name *Iēsous* by his parents. In the closing greeting of the Epistle to the Colossians, we see a man who has a very intriguing name: “Jesus who is called Justus” (Colossians 4:11). This is a prime attestation of how in ancient times, and even frequently today, Jewish people commonly had two names: one from their Jewish heritage, and one from the environment in which they were living. Paul or *Paulos* (Παῦλος), otherwise known as Saul or *Shaul* (שׂאֻל), also had two names (Acts 13:9). What makes this so intriguing for us as Messianics is that this Jewish man, also with the name Justus (Grk. *Ioustos*, Ἰουστos), was actually named *Iēsous* (Ἰησοῦς). The following is what the *ABD* entry has to say about this man:

“Jesus Justus, a Jewish Christian who sent greetings to the Colossians along with Paul from his place of imprisonment (Col 4:11). Jesus (the Greek form of Joshua or Jeshua) was his Jewish name. It was common for Jews to have this name (cf. Acts 13:6) up until the 2d cent. C.E. Justus was his Latin surname, which denoted loyal observance of the law, and was probably given to him because of his reputation.”⁴⁴

What makes Jesus Justus significant is that it points to the fact that the name *Iēsous*, the Greek transliteration of the Hebrew name *Yeshua* (יֵשׁוּעַ), was in fact used among Greek-speaking Jews as an acceptable male name.

The CJB renders Colossians 4:11 with “Yeshua, the one called Justus.” A commentator like F.F. Bruce recognizes how “Jesus is the Greek/Latin form of Joshua or Jeshua; Justus was a common Latin cognomen.”⁴⁵ Peter T. O’Brien also recognizes that for this man “‘Jesus’ (Ἰησοῦς) was his Jewish name (the Greek from of ‘Joshua’ or ‘Jeshua’) and this was common among Jews (Acts 13:6) until the second century A.D. when it disappeared as a proper name, no doubt because of the conflict between the synagogue and the Church.”⁴⁶ Douglas J. Moo further observes, “‘Jesus’ was a popular name among the first-century Jews, fading in popularity only in the second century because of growing Jewish/Christian tensions.”⁴⁷

What this all points to is the fact that when people like the Apostle Paul went out into the Greek speaking world, to Greek speaking Jewish synagogues, referring to the Messiah with the name *Iēsous* (Ἰησοῦς) would not at all have been something strange to them—even if they and their adherents knew it was a transliteration of *Yeshua* (יֵשׁוּעַ). The negative reaction that we often find in today’s Messianic movement to the English name “Jesus,” would not have been mirrored among the First Century Jewish Believers to the name *Iēsous*—because just as there were normal Jewish men in Judea who bore the name *Yeshua*, so were there normal Jewish men in the Diaspora who bore the name *Iēsous*. The name *Iēsous* may not

⁴⁴ John Gillman, “Justus,” in *ABD*, 3:1135.

⁴⁵ F.F. Bruce, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 180.

⁴⁶ Peter T. O’Brien, *Word Biblical Commentary: Colossians, Philemon*, Vol. 44 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), 251.

⁴⁷ Douglas J. Moo, *Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 340.

have been the original name that Joseph and Mary were instructed to call the unborn child (Matthew 1:21), but it was by no means something concocted in later centuries by Greeks and Romans so that they could somehow continue to worship their pagan deities.⁴⁸

The *biggest evidence*, of course, against the claim that the name “Jesus” is pagan is that people have been saved, delivered from demons, and prayers have been answered through the name of Jesus Christ. It is ironic, of course, to find out that many SNO advocates will admit to being saved in the name of “Jesus.” But it is often these same people who will slander, harass, and unfairly criticize others who likewise say they were saved in the “name of Jesus,” telling many Christians that they cannot be saved. Anyone who says that the name Jesus is pagan (while it may not be the Messiah’s original name) in light of this evidence, we should believe *is guilty of blasphemy* (cf. Matthew 12:31).

As Messianic Believers, we prefer the richness of our Savior’s original Hebrew name Yeshua, and we do not overly encourage usage of the name Jesus. But because we prefer Yeshua over Jesus does not mean that we believe that those who pray in the “name of Jesus” are not praying in the authority of the Same One who we are praying to in the “name of Yeshua.” *We must reflect a Lord and Savior who embodies ultimate love and compassion.* Our Heavenly Father looks at our hearts and we need to be understanding. We should encourage people to use the name that was originally given to the Messiah, but also must realize that “history happens” and the pronunciation of names changes from language to language via transliteration.

⁴⁸ This section includes some embedded quotations from the author’s commentary *Colossians and Philemon for the Practical Messianic*.