# Translation And Marking Of Divine Names And Titles

Do the original texts of the good news support the use of Hebrew names for the Almighty? Should we say *Jesus*, *Ἰησοῦς* or *Yĕshua*? Should the word *Lord* be substituted for *Yăhweh*? This paper will show that the emissaries (Apostles) or earliest scribes provided a means of marking divine names for divinity and to indicate their Hebrew origin. The presence of the markings call into question the idea that non-Hebrew pronunciation of divine names and titles was ever fully sanctioned as a norm to be achieved. Rather, they suggest that disciples should learn and adopt the Hebrew forms in their prayers, devotions, and that the Hebrew forms should be used in public reading. I am not here condemning the use of traditional forms of reference to God found in most English translations. However, I do question the fidelity of those translations to the intent of the original text. I also question that the emissaries ever meant for foreign forms to become the normal usage. This position may seem ethnocentric to some. But it must be observed that the notion of a chosen people, a Jewish Messiah, and His Torah is also ethnocentric. The God of Israel did choose the nation of Israel to preserve the things which the nations would rather forget.

The reader of *The Good News of Messiah* New Testament Version (GNM) will notice that certain divine names and titles are specially marked. This is because the original Greek text of the New Testament also marked these same words. Also, it is incumbent on translators to understand the meaning of the markings and to preserve their meaning in the translation process. Here is the example for the divine name:
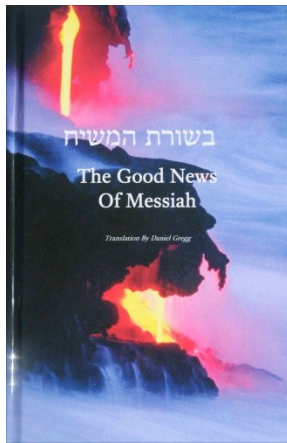
GNM English	Ancient Greek Text Uncial Capitals	After 6th Century Greek Script
Yăhweh	$\overline{\text{KC}}$,	κύριος
	$\overline{\text{KⲰ}}$,	κυρίῳ
	$\overline{\text{KY}}$,	κυρίου
	$\overline{\text{KN}}$,	κύριον
	$\overline{\text{KЄ}}$	κύριε

The ancient manuscripts dropped out the middle of the Greek words (red font) and added in an over line over the top of the word. For example, the ancient uncial Greek of Romans 1:1 would look like this in the oldest texts for three additional nomina sacra:

ΠΑΥΛΟ ϹΔΟΥΛΟ Ϲ$\overline{\text{ΧΥ}}$
$\overline{\text{ΙΥ}}$ΚΛΗΤΟ ϹΑΠΟ ϹΤΟΛ
Ο ϹΑΦⲰΡΙ ϹΜΕΝΟ Ϲ ЄΙϹ
ЄΥΑΓΓΕΛΙΟΝ $\overline{\text{ΘΥ}}$

The combination $\overline{\text{ΧΥ}}$ is put instead of the expected **Χ**ΡΙϹΤΟ**Υ** . The red letters are dropped out of the text, and then a line is drawn over the remaining text. Normally this would be translated "Christ" or "Messiah." However, this would be to ignore the marking. To indicate the marking we put the text as follows: Mĕssiah. Notice the upraised arms over the 'ĕ'; this marks the title as divine. The Messiah is the Almighty One. The marking is also to indicate that the original is Hebrew, a reader can say *Mashiyach*, מָשִׁיחַ. It was normal for the scribes to run all the words together without spaces between them. Further, they only used capital letters, and they write in columns dividing words randomly at the end of the line.

After the 6th century scribes started ignoring the nomina sacra markings. They wrote the divine names and titles out in full Greek. By doing so they destroyed the meaning conveyed by the markings of divinity and Hebrew origin. Here I have shaded the word units:

ΠΑΥΛΟΣΔΟΥΛΟΣΧΥ
ΙΥΚΛΗΤΟΣΑΠΟΣΤΟΛ
Ο ΣΑΦΩΡΙΣΜΕΝΟΣΕΙΣ
ΕΥΑΓΓΕΛΙΟΝΘΥ

Παῦλος δοῦλος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ, κλητὸς ἀπόστολος ἀφωρισμένος εἰς εὐαγγέλιον θεοῦ.

Paul, a servant of Mĕssiah Yĕshua, called as an emissary, and separated for the good news of the Almĭghty

The practice of *nomina sacra* marking in the texts meant that a literate Greek would be going back to his scribe to ask what the words meant if he were not Jewish or were not familiar with the means of marking divine names and titles. Scribes were not necessarily literate, and they might not know the answer. Of course the first scribes were. The meaning of the markings had to be preserved in oral instruction among the literate community of the faithful. That such instruction existed can be deduced from the nature of the manuscripts and the fact that sacred name use is sought after wherever false traditions have not suppressed it.

Introduction and Greeting

1 Paul, a servant of Mĕssiah Yĕshua, called as an emissary, and separated for the good news of the Almĭghty, **2** which he promised beforehand, through his prophets, in the holy writings, **3** about his Sŏn, who was born from the seed of David, according to the flesh, **4** who is designated the Almĭghty Sŏn with power, according to the Spĭrit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Yĕshua the Mĕssiah, our Adŏnai, *ᵃ* **5** through whom we received loving-kindness, and the mission to bring about a listening faithfulness among all the nations, for the sake of his name, *ᵇ* **6** among whom you also are called of Yĕshua Mĕssiah; **7** to all those being in Rome, beloved of the Almĭghty, called holy ones: loving kindness to you and peace from our Almĭghty Făther, and Adŏnai Yĕshua the Mĕssiah.

When translating the divine names and titles into English we can take several factors into account. The first is that the marking does not have to be too obvious. This is because English contains the letter "Y" and the "SH" which Greek did not. We can therefore reproduce the Hebrew pronunciation of "Yahweh" and "Yeshua." Observe the example from Romans 1 of the *Good News Of Messiah* at the left. See that the word Messiah and Yeshua are marked in the first two lines. Almighty is marked in line 4. In vs. 3 observe the word Son, and in vs. 4 Almighty Son, Spirit, Yeshua, Messiah again, and lastly Adonai:

The vowels are marked: ă ĕ ĭ ŏ

The next table continues the first chart.

GNM English	Ancient Greek Text Uncial Capitals	Hebrew Equivalents	Transliteration
Făther	ΠΤΡ, ΠΤΙ, ΠΤΣ, ΠΤΩ	הָאָב אַבָּא	abba
Sŏn	ΥΣ, ΥΝ, ΥΥ, ΥΩ	בֵּן בֶּן	ben
Spĭrit	ΠΝΔ, ΠΝΙ, ΠΝΝ, ΠΝΣ	רוּחַ	ruakh

Almĭghty	$\overline{\Theta C}$, $\overline{\Theta N}$, $\overline{\Theta Y}$, $\overline{\Theta W}$	אֱלֹהִים	אֱלֹהֵי elohim
Gŏd	$\overline{\Theta C}$, $\overline{\Theta N}$, $\overline{\Theta Y}$, $\overline{\Theta W}$	אֵל	el
Yĕshua	$\overline{IC}$, $\overline{IN}$, $\overline{IN}$, $\overline{IW}$	יְהוֹשׁוּעַ	יֵשׁוּעַ Yehoshua
Mĕssiah	$\overline{XC}$, $\overline{XN}$, $\overline{XW}$, $\overline{XY}$	מָשִׁיחַ	Mashiyakh
Adŏnai	$\overline{KC}$, $\overline{KN}$, $\overline{KY}$, $\overline{KW}$	(אֲדֹנָי) אֲדֹנִי	
Adŏni	$\overline{KC}$, $\overline{KN}$, $\overline{KY}$, $\overline{KW}$	אֲדֹנִי	
Adŏn	$\overline{KC}$, $\overline{KN}$, $\overline{KY}$, $\overline{KW}$	אֲדוֹן	
Yăhweh	$\overline{KC}$, $\overline{KN}$, $\overline{KY}$, $\overline{KW}$	יַהְוֶה	

The reason the nomina sacra takes so many forms for each word in the Greek text is that each word has four (or sometimes five) case endings marking grammatical inflection. Also, it should be noted that the nomina sacra $\overline{KC}$, $\overline{KN}$, $\overline{KY}$, $\overline{KW}$ offers four possibilities for the Hebrew equivalent. Of course when the nomina sacra is a quotation from the Torah or Prophets then it is easy for the translator to figure out which is meant. Otherwise the English name marked with the nomina sacra may be interpreted by the reader differently, i.e. Adonai instead of Yahweh, or Yahweh instead of Adonai. Also open to interpretation is Adonai vs. Adoni. While we may assume that the person speaking in the text said it one way, we also have to consider the point of view of the original writer. For example, the speaker in the text is not necessarily confessing Yeshua's deity, but the writer so marks it anyway to give his point of view.

The marking of nomina sacra in *The Good News of Messiah* is a relatively minor point of correction when taking the mass of errors committed by translators into consideration. It is in the original text, so far as we can determine. For all the most ancient texts contain the markings. Therefore, to be faithful in translating them, some means of indicating them and their purpose is necessary.

Since most translators do not understand the issue, their efforts to translate these names are for the most part a failure. This failure is also aided by a heretical theology which seeks to steer Christians away from the personal covenant keeping Gŏd of Israel. They want nothing to do with remembering that Gŏd's names are of Hebrew origin. So those scholars who know the most about the practice are not generally motivated to communicate the practical implications of what they know to translators.

The reason that the first Jewish Scribes of the Good News so marked these words was to indicate the divine status of the bearer and also to suggest that a Hebrew substitution be made for the name out of respect for the original way of saying the divine names and titles. This practice was begun in the Septuagint Version (ca. 250 B.C.). The Septuagint was the first translation of the Torah and Prophets into a foreign language, which was Greek. The earliest manuscripts we have of the Septuagint (also abbreviated LXX, 70) copied the divine name directly into the text. So when you look at a facsimile of these manuscripts, you will see the Hebrew word written in among the Greek text. This system was expanded by the Jewish Scribes responsible for copying and distributing the Good News of Messiah to encompass seven words in the Greek text. These seven words were marked to indicate their Hebrew origin and the divine status of the bearer. Modern Greek scholars call these markings *nomina sacra*. They sometimes express ignorance about their origin and meaning.

The Good News of Messiah gives the meaning of the Hebrew in the English name or title marked, but shows the bearer as divine and suggests the Hebrew form of the word be thought of or read into the text by those knowing them. I have decided in the translation to minimize the use of the word God and Lord. This choice is not because Lord is not an accurate translation of Adonai. Nor is this choice because there

is something etymologically idolatrous about the word Lord. It is a perfectly kosher word. The reason is that there is so much false Lord talk in the Church by people who claim to know God, but who are nowhere near him. Thus the choice has to do with the circumstances of the times. Adonai suggests the God of Israel, the giver of the Torah.

The Good News of Messiah is available at www.torahtimes.org. There is an online preview there also of the whole text of the third edition. This article just covers one of the features, the phenomenon of the nomina sacra in the earliest texts. There is a considerable scholarly literature about the practice, and the reader who wishes to know more should start with the book *The Earliest Christian Artifacts, Manuscripts And Christian Origins* by Larry W. Hurtado, 2006.