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MINISTRIES

“The following is a direct script of a teaching that is intended to be presented via video, incorporating relevant text, slides, media, and graphics to assist in illustration, thus facilitating the presentation of the material. In some places, this may cause the written material to not flow or sound rather awkward in some places. In addition, there may be grammatical errors that are often not acceptable in literary work. We encourage the viewing of the video teachings to complement the written teaching you see below.”

HaShem Series – FAQ: Why It’s Okay to Say “Lord”

There’s a growing movement of believers seeking to return to the roots of their faith. They are seeing the value in God’s commandments contained in the Torah, such as the Sabbath, feasts, and dietary instructions. They are seeking to know the Messiah in His historical context rather than reading the common denominational conceptions of Him into the Scriptures. They are even using the original Hebrew names for Jesus and the God of Israel—That is, Yeshua and YHWH (Yahweh).

These are all great things that we, of course, encourage believers to pursue. However, on the fringes of this growing movement are some strange ideas that are frankly unbiblical.

One of these ideas is that we shouldn’t say the word “Lord,” because doing so is taking YHWH’s name in vain. Some take this idea even further to suggest that the English word “Lord” is connected to Ba’al, the Canaanite deity. It is claimed that when someone uses the word “Lord,” not only are they taking YHWH’s name in vain, but they are using the name of a pagan god to refer to Him.

This is quite a serious charge as it means that every believer who refers to YHWH by the title “Lord” is sinning and utterly blaspheming YHWH’s name. But when we unpack the logic of these claims and test them to Scripture, we can clearly see how to any legitimacy to concerns about using the word “Lord” begin to fall apart.

Before we dive in, we want to recommend watching part 1 of our HaShem series. The first part of this series reveals the meaning behind the commandment not to take Yahweh’s name in vain.

The first thing we need to realize is that, while it’s true that the God of Israel has revealed His name as YHWH, or however you pronounce it, He also refers to himself in many other ways as well in the Scriptures. In the *TANAKH*—that is, the Old Testament—one of the most frequent titles used to refer to YHWH is *Adonai*, which is a word that conveys the idea of rulership and authority. This Hebrew word is translated into English as “Lord,” which means someone who has power and authority; a master or a ruler.

Merriam-Webster, definition of Lord

According to the Oxford Dictionary of English, the word Lord goes all the way back to the Old English word “hlaford,” meaning “loaf-guardian.” The primary sense of the word denotes the head or master of a household in relation to his servants who ate his bread. By the time the Bible was translated into English, the word acquired a wider application as a master or ruler.
Oxford English Dictionary Second Edition (Revised 2005), p. 1036

So one of the simple reasons that the English word “Lord” appears in the Bible is that this word best represents the meaning of the Hebrew word *Adonai*, in both function and definition, hence why the English translators translated it that way. In addition to other titles, such as *Elohim*, which is translated as “God,” *Adonai* is a title that is used of YHWH throughout the *TANAKH*. Here are just a few examples:

Exodus 4:10

“But Moses said to the Lord (YHWH) “Oh, my Lord (*Adonai*) I am not eloquent, either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and of tongue.”

Exodus 5:22

“Then Moses turned to the Lord (YHWH) and said, “O Lord (*Adonai*), why have you done evil to this people? Why did you ever send me?”

Exodus 15:17

“You will bring them in and plant them on your own mountain, the place, O Lord (YHWH), which you have made for your abode, the sanctuary, O Lord (*Adonai*), which your hands have established.”

These are just a few verses out of literally hundreds in which the title *Adonai* is applied to YHWH. So if YHWH Himself did not have a problem with being referred to as *Adonai* in the Scriptures, neither should we have a problem with it. And again, since the meaning of the English word “Lord” reflects the meaning of the Hebrew word *Adonai*, the English translators translated *Adonai* as Lord. It is really as simple as that.

After the anti-Lord folks are forced to acknowledge this biblical point, they might object with something like: “But wait! While *Adonai* is an acceptable title for YHWH, Lord is not. Lord comes from *Ba'al*, the pagan god!”

It’s true that *Ba'al* is the name of a pagan god. It’s also true that *Ba'al* can be translated as “Lord.” But here’s where the logic of the anti-Lord folks breaks down once again.

First, *Ba'al* is not only the name of a pagan god. It’s also a Hebrew word that simply means master, owner, or husband depending on the context. Indeed, the word *ba'al* is used many times throughout the Scriptures in these ways. Here are a couple of examples:

Exodus 21:28

“When an ox gores a man or a woman to death, the ox shall be stoned, and its flesh shall not be eaten, but the owner (*ba'al*) of the ox shall not be liable.”

2 Samuel 11:26

“And when the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she mourned for her husband (*ba'al*).

Even YHWH uses the Hebrew word *ba'al* for Himself:

Jeremiah 31:32

“Not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband (*ba'al*), declares the Lord.”

So the word *ba'al* doesn't always refer to the pagan deity. Oftentimes it simply means master, owner, or husband. While pagans have taken the word and used it to refer to their deity, that does not mean the word is therefore tainted forever—especially when, as we've seen, YHWH uses the word for Himself.

Second, this is a moot point since, as we discussed earlier in this teaching, many of the times “Lord” appears in the Bible, it is a translation of *Adonai*.

So the idea that we shouldn't say the word Lord because it is a pagan title is simply without biblical basis.

Another objection to the word Lord is that it is seen as a replacement of the name YHWH in the Scriptures. This is based on the fact that the translators of most English Bible versions render the name “YHWH” as “LORD” in accordance with the long, pre-Christian tradition. The Jewish people did not say the name YHWH out of reverence, instead substituting it for *Adonai* and eventually *HaShem*, which means “the Name.” This practice is followed in most English translations of the Scriptures.

In addition, as we've covered earlier in our series, it is the scholarly consensus that the exact pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton has been lost. While most scholars believe that YHWH is probably close, nobody can know for sure, hence the decision of the translators to follow this old tradition rather than merely making their best guess.

In the preface of the English Standard Version of the Bible, the translators speak to this issue. This is representative of the perspective that you'll find in the prefaces of most Bible translations:

“...concerning terms that refer to God in the Old Testament: God, the Maker of heaven and earth, introduced himself to the people of Israel with a special personal name, the consonants for which are YHWH (see Exodus 3:14-15). Scholars call this the “Tetragrammaton,” a Greek term referring to the four Hebrew letters YHWH. The exact pronunciation of YHWH is uncertain, because the Jewish people considered the personal name of God to be so holy that it should never be spoken aloud. Instead of reading the word YHWH, they would normally read the Hebrew word Adonai (“Lord”), and the ancient translations into Greek, Syriac, and Aramaic also followed this practice [...] As is common among English translations today, the ESV usually renders the personal name of God (YHWH) with the word Lord.”

www.esv.org/preface

While it's fine to disagree with the decision of most English translators to render the Tetragrammaton as “LORD” instead of YHWH, that doesn't therefore suggest that the word “Lord” is bad or that we shouldn't use it for *Adonai*. We also do not agree that the tetragrammaton should have been replaced with Lord. In response to our disagreement with this we often reinsert YHWH back into the text, but Lord is a suitable English word that properly denotes the meaning behind the Hebrew word *Adonai*.

Again, Lord is simply an English word that means master or ruler; someone with authority and power. YHWH is our master and ruler. He has ultimate power and authority. Thus, YHWH is our Lord. It's okay to say it.

We pray you have been blessed by this teaching. Remember, continue to test everything. Shalom! For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverything.net

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

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