

Debunking the Myths of Sacred Namers

יְהוָה:

Part II

By

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December 24, 1997

Myth # 4

Jehovah is Pointed with the Vowel Markings of Adonai

The divine name יהוה (*jvh*) is used some six thousand eight hundred and twenty-three times in the Masoretic Text. Six thousand five hundred and eighteen times the name is marked to be pronounced יהוה (Hebrew *J'hōh-vāh'* ³⁰⁶⁸). Three hundred and five times the name is marked to be pronounced יהוה (Hebrew *Jehōh-vih'* ³⁰⁶⁹). Not once is the divine name *jvh* marked to be pronounced in any other way.

Sacred namers view the markings that are found with *jvh* in the Masoretic Text as illegitimate. They claim that these vowel points do not show the original pronunciation of יהוה (*jvh*) but were transferred from the Hebrew name אֲדֹנָי (*adonai* ¹³⁶), which means "Lord." They point out that many scholarly works support this view of the vowel markings that are found with *jvh* in the Masoretic Text.

John R. Kohlenberger III is typical of those scholars who have adopted this view. He writes in the introduction to *The NIV Interlinear Hebrew-English Old Testament*, " יהוה , *Yahweh*, the proper name of God, is either pointed with the vowels of אֲדֹנָי [*adonai*], 'Lord,' (יהוה) or אֱלֹהִים [*elohim*] 'God,' (יהוה) and **is to be pronounced as the word whose vowels it borrows**. This *deliberate mispointing* was an effort by the scribes to keep the name of God from being taken in vain (Exod. 20:7; Lev. 24:11) by making it unpronounceable. This device was **misinterpreted in 1520 by one Galatinus** who mixed the vowels of אֲדֹנָי with the consonants of יהוה , **thus producing the hybrid form *Jehovah***, which remained with us to this day."

Is it true that the name Jehovah borrowed its vowels from Adonai? Did Galatinus invent the name Jehovah by mixing the vowels of Adonai with the consonants of *jhvh*?

Let us evaluate Kohlenberger's statements by reviewing what we learned under Myth #3. We know from the records of history that **the name Jehovah** was used *hundreds of years before the time of Galatinus*. Thus Kohlenberger's assertion that Galatinus invented this pronunciation of *jhvh* is a historical impossibility. Furthermore, there is no evidence that any Christian scholar at the time of Galatinus viewed the name Jehovah as a misinterpretation or mispronunciation. In fact, scholars of that era unanimously supported the pronunciation of *jhvh* as Jehovah.

There is no question that Kohlenberger's assertion concerning Galatinus is false, but what about his assertion that the scribes deliberately mispointed the name *jhvh*? We must search the records of history before the time of Galatinus to determine whether or not the Masoretes deliberately mispointed the divine name *jhvh*.

Let us go back to the time when the pointing of the Hebrew text was first undertaken. At that time, the text contained only consonants. Although a few consonants could also be used as vowels, most of the Hebrew words were unpronounceable as written. The pronunciation of the words had to be taught by word of mouth. This was the responsibility of the priests and Levites, who passed the pronunciation of the words down from generation to generation by oral tradition. Only those who were trained in oral tradition could accurately interpret the words in the Hebrew text by supplying the correct vowel sounds. Others who attempted to interpret the text could easily change the meaning of words simply by adding the wrong vowel sounds. That is why the task of pointing the text was undertaken.

As Wurthwein attests, the effort to point the Hebrew text began about the fifth century A.D. He writes, "This task was engaged by the Masoretes from **about the fifth century [the 400's]**. It was found inadequate to establish merely the consonantal text and the *matres lectionis* [consonants used as vowels], the vowel letters which were used to a limited extent to indicate pronunciation, because even with due consideration for the stabilizing

influence of oral tradition the possibility still remained open for reading and interpreting many words in more than one way" (*The Text of the Old Testament*, p. 21).

By this time in history, the Jerusalem Talmud had been completed and the Babylonian Talmud was in the process of being written. The Talmudic writings raised great concern among the Levitical Masoretes living in Babylon, who perceived that the rabbis were misinterpreting many words in the Hebrew text by adding the wrong vowel sounds to the consonants. In English, it would be like changing "bid" to "bed," or "date" to "duty." Changing the pronunciation gave the Hebrew words an entirely different meaning.

To eliminate any possibility of misinterpreting the words in the Hebrew text, the Masoretes devised a written system to denote the exact pronunciation of the Hebrew words. Instead of inserting vowel letters between the consonants, as in modern languages, the Masoretes used a system of dots and dashes, each of which represented a specific vowel sound. These marks, or "vowel points," were then inserted into the Masoretic Text.

In the early stages of vowel pointing, there were two different systems--the Babylonian system of the Eastern Masoretes and the Palestinian system of the Western Masoretes. In both systems the vowel marks, or "points," were placed above the Hebrew consonants. In the final system, called the Tiberian system, most vowel points were placed below the consonants. Wurthwein explains how the later Tiberian system developed from the earlier work of the Palestinian or Western Masoretes.

"Until the Age of Humanism and the Reformation, the Hebrew text and its transmission remained primarily a Jewish concern. In the first millennium A.D., during which the basic lines of transmission were set, we should distinguish between the Jews of Palestine, the **Western** Masoretes..., and the members of the great Jewish colony in Babylonia, the **Eastern** Masoretes....**The Western school centered at Tiberias** until the end of the third century, and again from the eighth to the tenth century; the Eastern centers were the schools at Sura, Nehardea (destroyed A.D. 259), and later at Pumbeditha, which were authoritative in matters of Jewish scholarship for centuries. Finally the Babylonian schools lost the significance, and in the

tenth and eleventh centuries they disappeared. Once again the West assumed the spiritual leadership of Judaism, and the Western Masoretes sought to eliminate all traces of textual traditions that differed from their own. The views of **the school of Tiberias** became determinative for the future, and the Eastern tradition was forgotten for a millennium" (Ibid., p. 14).

Although the Babylonian system of the Eastern schools was replaced by the Tiberian system in the 900's, it survived in Yemen until the 1200's. Its early development can be traced through fragments of ancient manuscripts. Wurthwein writes, "The Babylonian system...developed in two stages, an older and simpler stage represented in the fragments of the seventh century (E), and a later, more complex stage appearing in fragments from the eighth and ninth centuries (K)...The Babylonian tradition was preserved in Yemen into the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Under the influence of Tiberian pointing a characteristic Yemenite tradition was later developed reflecting a simplified Tiberian system with supralinear signs [vowel points above the words]" (Ibid., pp. 22-23).

As Wurthwein goes on to relate, remnants of the Palestinian system can also be found in ancient manuscripts. He writes, "A system found in some Samaritan manuscripts from the twelfth to the fourteenth century is clearly derived from it. Kahle published the relatively few and textually varying Biblical fragments (seventh to ninth century) in *Masoreten des Westens*, 2 (1930); they are cited in BHK as V(ar)^{pal}. Their significance lies in showing how the vocalized Hebrew manuscripts of the Bible first appeared when the Masoretes of Tiberias began their work. Basically **they lack the strict consistency of the Tiberian Masoretes in indicating pronunciation**" (Ibid., pp. 23-24).

These remnants of the early Palestinian system bear witness to the superiority of the Tiberian system, which became the fixed standard for the Hebrew text. As Wurthwein testifies, the "**Tiberian system...combined the accent system with a means of indicating finer nuances, and permitted control of pronunciation and intonation of the Biblical text in its minutest details**" (Ibid., p. 24).

The Tiberian system replaced both the Babylonian and the Palestinian systems because they were inadequate for the task of preserving the oral tradition of pronunciation, punctuation and accentuation that had been faithfully passed down from the time of Ezra. These earlier systems did not meet the requirements for strict and consistent pronunciation of the Hebrew words.

The Tiberian Masoretes strove earnestly to preserve in written form the pronunciations that they had inherited by oral tradition. The Masoretes were not descended from the tribe of Judah but from the tribe of Levi. While all Masoretes were Levites, not all Levites were Masoretes. **The Masoretes were a special class of Levite, entrusted with the responsibility of safeguarding the Hebrew text and preserving it from being corrupted in any way.** To allow any word to be mispronounced through a deliberate mispointing would have been totally against the ethic of these Levitical Masoretes! Had such tampering with the Hebrew text been attempted, the cries of protest from these Masoretic scholars would be recorded in historical writings for all the world to see. But there is no such historical record!

On the other hand, there is ample evidence in the records of history to support the accuracy and consistency of the system of vowel pointing that was developed by the Tiberian Masoretes. From the work of the Tiberian Masoretes has come the great Masoretic Text that underpins the King James Bible and many grammatical, analytical and lexical study aids.

Among the Tiberian Masoretes were a number of different schools, the chief of which were the Ben Asher family and the Ben Naphtali family. Contrary to the belief of scholars in the past, it has been discovered that the work of these two leading schools is identical except in a few minor details. Wurthwein relates the similarity in the texts produced by these leading Masoretic schools.

"Within the Masoretic center of Tiberias there were several different parties or schools. The Ben Asher family was outstanding among them: its last two members are known today for the model manuscripts Codex Cairensis and the Aleppo Codex (cf. pp. 34f.). But we know that there were other Tiberian Masoretes besides the Ben Ashers; Ben Naphtali is best

known among them. The Jewish scholar Mishael ben 'Uzziel in his famous tractate *Kitab al-Khilaf* (eleventh to twelfth century) discusses the difference (*khillufim*) between the text of Ben Naphtali and that of Aaron ben Moses ben Asher. It was once thought that these two schools were diametrically opposed, because Ben Naphtali's text was identified with manuscripts that have nothing to do with him (see below). But if we read carefully the statement by Mishael, which is our only reliable source for Ben Naphtali's text (ignoring as less significant the occasional marginal notes in some manuscripts), it appears that **Ben Asher and Ben Naphtali are quite closely related. They differ only eight times in their consonantal text, and these differences are slight.** The majority of their differences are concerned with minutiae [insignificant details] of vocalization and accent" (Ibid.).

From the Tiberian Masoretes of the Ben Asher school came the Hebrew text that was inherited by the Sephardic Levites dwelling in Spain in the tenth century A.D. Shortly after Ben Asher finished his manuscript, copies were taken to Spain by Levitical Karaite missionaries. When persecution arose in Spain, the Sephardic Levites fled northward to France, Germany and other parts of Europe, taking their Hebrew texts with them.

After the invention of the printing press, the Ben Asher text was the first complete Hebrew text to be printed--first as the Soncino Bible and then as the Bresica Bible. These were the Hebrew Bibles that the scholars of Europe studied in order to understand the original language of the Old Testament. It was from these printings of the Ben Asher text--the most authoritative text for the pronunciation of Biblical Hebrew--that European scholars learned the name Jehovah.

As we observed in the conclusion to *Debunking the Myths of Sacred Namers, Part I*, "When the **Ben Asher text** was finally sealed by 980 A.D. and the work of the Masoretes became **the standard Hebrew text for all time**, the divine name *jhvh* was **pointed to be pronounced Jehovah**. When Fagius, or Buechelin, supported the name Jehovah, he was following the vowel markings that he had learned from the Hebrew text of Ben Asher. **When Tyndale translated *jhvh* to be pronounced as Jehovah, he was following the vowel markings that he had learned from the Hebrew text of Ben Asher**" (p. 22).

The name Jehovah is supported not only by historical records of the transmission of the Hebrew text but also by the philological evidence--that is, the very structure of Hebrew as a Semitic language. Experts in the study of Biblical Hebrew confirm that the vowel marks in the Ben Asher text--now known as the Masoretic Text--fit the traditional structure of all Semitic words.

As Waltke testifies, there is ample evidence to show that the vowel points inserted by the Tiberian Masoretes represent the original pronunciation of the ancient Hebrew words. He writes, "**The relative uniformity of Biblical Hebrew results primarily from two factors: the largely *consonantal presentaion* of the language throughout its pre-Masoretic history and the *unified representation* of it by the Tiberian Masoretes.** The consonantal representation, both with and without *matres lectiones*, effectively "covers up" vocal variations both on the synchronic and diachronic levels. The consonantal phonemes [sounds], those represented by most of the letters, are precisely those that are most stable and not given to change, whereas the vocalic phonemes [vowel sounds], those most given to change, are not graphically represented apart from the limited use of vowel letters. Even more significantly **the Tiberian tradition aimed to squelch variation in order to produce a normative text.** Our expectation that the vowels changed within both the phonological and morphological system can be verified. Nevertheless, **the MT's [Masoretic Text's] vocalization essentially REPRESENTS AN ANCIENT AND RELIABLE TRADITION"** (*An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, pp. 24-25).

Waltke, a leading authority in Biblical Hebrew, confirms the accuracy and reliability of the vowel points in the Masoretic Text--including the points that are found with *jhvh*. Waltke and other experts in the study of Biblical Hebrew declare with one voice that **IT WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE to fake the vowel points in nearly 7000 occurrences of *jhvh*.** A deliberate mispointing of this divine name would stand out like a proverbial "sore thumb" as an outright violation of the traditional structure of Semitic words.

Waltke points to an abundance of philological evidence which shows that

the Masoretic scribes did not fake the vowel points, but recorded the pronunciations they had learned by oral tradition. He writes, "**The Masoretic tradition, including the vowel points, represents the overall grammatical systems current during the period when biblical literature was being created.** [The Biblical Hebrew we possess today is basically the Hebrew of Abraham and Moses!] We may say this, despite the problems we have reviewed, because of *a considerable body of evidence* indicating that the traditioning function was taken seriously and that **the linguistic data of the MT could NOT be faked....A COMPLEX BODY OF EVIDENCE indicates that the MT COULD NOT, in any serious or systematic way, REPRESENT A RECONSTRUCTION OR FAKING OF THE DATA**" (Ibid., p. 26).

Any scholar who understands the structure of ancient Hebrew and other Semitic languages can see the folly in claiming that the vowel points found with *jvh* in the Masoretic Text were "invented." As Waltke declares, "On the whole the grammar [which includes vocalization and accentuation] of the MT admirably **fits the framework of Semitic philology, and this fact certifies the work of the Masoretes.** When in the 1930's Paul Kahle announced his theory that the Masoretes made massive innovations [supposedly "inventing" vocalizations in the 600's and faking the vocalization of יהוה J'hōh-vāh], Gotthelf Bergstrasser sarcastically observed that they must have read Carl Brockelmann's comparative Semitic grammar to have come up with forms **so thoroughly inline with historical reconstructions**" (Ibid., p. 28).

There is no question in the mind of the respected Hebraist Waltke that the name Jehovah "**fits the framework of Semitic philology**" and that the pronunciation of *jvh* as marked in the Masoretic Text is "**thoroughly inline with historical reconstructions.**" Sacred namers who make claims to the contrary are unlearned in the structure of the Hebrew language and are ignorantly speaking about matters of which they have no real knowledge, as Paul warns in I Timothy 1:7. Scholars who are truly knowledgeable in the Hebrew language support the vowel points that are found in the Masoretic Text, knowing that they were placed there by the Masoretes to preserve the true pronunciation of the ancient Hebrew words as passed down by oral tradition.

By establishing a written system to convey the exact pronunciation and

meaning of the words, the Masoretes provided an accurate and uniform standard for interpreting the text. Their work laid the foundation for the first Hebrew grammars, which were developed in Spain after the tenth century A.D. These grammars were passed down to early Protestantism by Elias Levita through the Christian Hebraists Reuchlin and Buechelin. Waltke describes this transition:

"In the late Middle Ages [1250-1550], as the intellectual and demographic center of Jewry shifted away from the Near East [and Spain], so too the study of Hebrew grammar took on a European cast....The medieval **Jewish grammatical tradition died with Elijah Levita**, who, as we shall see, **passed this heritage to Christian hands**" (Ibid., pp. 36-37).

By the 1600's most "Jewish scholars" had forsaken any serious study of the Scriptures, and some rabbis had never even seen a Hebrew text! Waltke quotes Chomsky's words concerning this deplorable state of Biblical illiteracy: " 'Most of the Jewish scholars of the subsequent generations regarded the study of grammar as a waste of time, and some even considered such study heresy. Even the study of the Bible began to be regarded as of secondary importance [to the study of the Talmud] and was gradually dwindling to such an extent that a German rabbi of the 17th century complained that there were **certain rabbis** in his generation **"who had never in their lifetime seen a text of the Bible"** ' (Chomsky, Mikhlol, xxviii)" (Ibid., p. 38).

Chomsky's description of these Biblically illiterate rabbis should warn us to beware of rabbinical interpretations of the Scriptures. Today's rabbis have inherited the interpretations of the Talmudic rabbis of old. These teachings did not originate in the oral tradition that was passed down from the time of Ezra. On the contrary, these rabbinical interpretations of the Hebrew text were a blatant departure from the traditional interpretations of the text that the priests and Levites had inherited from their forefathers. When these misleading teachings were recorded in the Talmud for future generations, the Levitical Masoretes--the preservers of the Hebrew text--feared that the true meaning of the Scriptures would be lost. And indeed it might have been, if the Masoretes had not established their system of vowel points to preserve the original pronunciation and meaning of the Hebrew words.

The Masoretic vowel points, which recorded the pronunciations that

previously had to be taught orally, opened the Hebrew text to the entire world. For the first time in history, it was possible for scholars everywhere to study the structure of the Hebrew language. Waltke quotes other Hebraist scholars to emphasize the importance of the Masoretes' work to the study of Hebrew grammar.

"The Masoretes, whose work had culminated in the tenth century with the school of Ben Asher in Tiberias, were concerned not with describing the language but with recording the text. Nevertheless their activity in **vocalizing the text** [by adding the vowel points] and in commenting on it in the Masorah, both activities aimed at preserving an essentially oral body of tradition, **formed the basis for early grammatical descriptions**. Concerning the relevance of the pointed text, Tene writes:

'It is rather astonishing that the initial emergence of the linguistic literature of the Jews had to be so late in time. There is, however, general agreement that in Semitic this kind of metalinguistic discourse **could not have begun before the invention of the vowel points.**'

"Concerning the more specific contribution of the Masoretes to Hebrew grammar, Israel Yeivin notes:

'Some of the terminology used in the Masorah was taken over by the grammarians. Terms such as masculine, feminine, singular, plural, the names of the letters, the vowel and accent signs, and other features of the pointing...were all used by the Masoretes and taken over by the grammarians....**Since the Masoretes compared all the occurrences of particular words, their lists formed the basis for grammatical observations on changes in vowel patterns:** either conditioned changes, **such as changes in forms** in contextual or pausal situations, changes in words with or without *maqef*, **with or without the definite article**, or *waw* simple and *waw* consecutive, etc., or unconditioned variation in the vowing of the word.'

"The Masoretes had a sophisticated linguistic theory with an underdeveloped expression; the grammarians, in taking the step of making the theory explicit, were able to advance it because they could appreciate gaps and inconsistencies in it" (Ibid., p. 33).

The grammarians built their knowledge of Biblical Hebrew on the foundation that the Masoretes had laid, which was in turn based on the oral tradition that had been passed down from the time of Ezra the priest. As

Waltke attests, the work of the Masoretes was "**aimed at preserving**" oral tradition--**not aimed to undermine or deviate** from it in any respect! The Masoretes who established the vowel system in the Hebrew text were not Talmudic rabbis but Karaite Levites who had totally rejected Talmudic rabbinism and had set about to preserve the Hebrew Old Testament for all time. They were bitterly opposed to Talmudic law, rabbinic superstition and the esoteric Gnostic paganism that masqueraded as Judaism!

Wurthwein attributes the accuracy of the vowel system in the Masoretic Text to the rigid standards of these Karaite Levites. He writes, "The development of a more complex system may have been related to the appearance of the Karaites, the sect founded about A.D. 760 by 'Anan ben David. **They rejected the Talmud for a more literal interpretation of the text** [Protestants would later carry the torch of "sola Scriptura"], giving rise to a new interest in the text of the Bible and the necessity for **determining its pronunciation as closely as possible**" (*The Text of the Old Testament*, p. 23).

It was their "**literal interpretation of the text**" that led the Karaite Masoretes to reject the Talmudic practice of reading Adonai in place of *jhvh*, and it was their insistence on "**determining its pronunciation as closely as possible**" that led them to insert the vowel points that are found with *jhvh* nearly 7000 times in the Masoretic Text. The Karaite Masoretes could not have faked the name יהוה (J'hōh-vāh) unless every Masoretic school in Tiberias from the end of the eighth century to the end of the tenth century A.D. had been converted to Talmudic rabbinism--their bitter enemy. On the contrary, the records of history all testify that from the beginning of their work in the fifth century A.D. to the end of their work in the tenth century A.D., the Masoretes remained adamantly opposed to Talmudic teachings and practices.

The Talmudic rabbis, whose teachings were based on esoteric Gnostic beliefs, sought to justify their practices by reading their own interpretations into Scripture. Before the pointing of the text, these rabbis did not hesitate to change the vowel sounds of key words to give them different meanings. The Talmudists not only tampered with vowel sounds but also tampered with consonants by adding or eliminating letters in some words. This was especially true in regard to the unmarked consonants of the divine name יהוה (*jhvh*). Here are the bold words of one Talmudic rabbi concerning the

pronunciation of this divine name. Bracketed material was inserted by the editor of the Talmud:

"R. Jeremiah b. Eleazar further stated: Since the Sanctuary was destroyed¹ **it is enough for the world² to use³ only two letters⁴** [of the Tetragrammaton],⁵ for it is said in Scripture, *Let every thing⁶ that hath breath praise the Lord,⁴ praise ye the Lord.⁷*" (Freedman, Epstein, *The Hebrew-English Edition of the Babylonian Talmud: 'Erubin 18b*).

These words of Rabbi Eleazar show how the Talmudists used false interpretations of Scripture to support their practice of altering the divine name יהוה (*jhvh*). The Talmudic rabbis hid the true pronunciation of *jhvh* both by dropping letters from this divine name and also by substituting the name Adonai when reading the Hebrew text. Thus began the rabbinic tradition of the perpetual reading. This unscriptural practice was justified by misinterpreting the meaning of God's words to Moses concerning His name, as recorded in the book of Exodus. Notice the contradictory reasoning of the Talmudic rabbis as quoted in the following paragraph. Single bracketed material is that of the editor of the Talmud. Double bracketed material is mine.

"Said R. Nahman b. Isaac; Not like this world is the future world. **[In this world [His name] is written with a yod he⁸ [[*jh*]] and read as *alef daleth*⁹ [[*ad*, representing *adonai*]]; but in the future world it shall all be one: it shall be written with *yod he* and read as *yod he*.** Now, Raba thought of lecturing it at the session, [whereupon] a certain old man said to him, It is written, *le'alem*.¹⁰ R. Abina pointed out **A CONTRADICTION: It is written, *this is my name, to be hidden*; [and it is also written],¹¹ and this is my memorial unto all generations?¹² The Holy One, blessed be He, said: Not as I [i.e., My name] am written am I read: **I am written with a *yod he*, while I am read as *alef daleth***" (Ibid., *Pesahim 50a*).**

This Talmudic commentary supporting the reading of *jhvh* as Adonai is based entirely on a false interpretation of the Hebrew wording in Exodus 3:15. The Talmudic rabbis ***changed the meaning*** of "this is My name forever" to "this is My name **to be hidden**," although this interpretation

contradicts the words that immediately follow: "**this is My memorial to all generations.**"

The ancient Talmudists were able to introduce this rabbinical heresy because the Hebrew text contained no vowel points at that time. But those who were trained by oral tradition in the true pronunciation of the text knew that this interpretation was fraudulent. This rabbinical misinterpretation of Exodus 3:15 is one of the heretical teachings that prompted the Masoretes to insert the vowel points in the Hebrew text.

To expose the error in this rabbinical view, we will analyze the structure of Exodus 3:15 in the Hebrew text. First, let us read this verse in its context as translated in the King James Version.

"And Moses said unto God, 'Behold, *when* I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, "The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you"; and they shall say to me, "What is His name?" what shall I say unto them?' And God said unto Moses, 'I AM THAT I AM.' And He said, 'Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, "I AM hath sent me unto you." ' And God said moreover unto Moses, 'Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, "The LORD (Hebrew יהוה *J'hōh-vāh'* ³⁰⁶⁸) God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you." **This is My name forever, and this is My memorial unto all generations'** " (Ex. 3:13-15).

This translation of God's words to Moses is based on the Masoretic Text, which is pointed according to the oral tradition of the priests and Levites, who had preserved the pronunciation of the Hebrew words for many centuries, and who alone were qualified to interpret the Hebrew text. As we have seen, the Talmudic rabbis rejected the traditional interpretation and pronunciation of the Hebrew wording in Exodus 3:15. To justify their practice of hiding the pronunciation of God's name, they taught that "forever" should be translated "to be hidden." But the Masoretes, who had been taught the true meaning of Exodus 3:15 through oral tradition, knew that "forever" was the correct interpretation, and they added vowel points to the Hebrew consonants to signify this meaning. Here are the words "this is My name forever" as they appear in the Masoretic text:

יְהוָה שְׂמֵי לְעֹלָם

Because Hebrew reads from right to left, the first four letters in this Hebrew expression are the ones that represent our English word "forever." These four letters are made up of the Hebrew noun עֹלָם (pronounced *gōh-lāhm'* ⁵⁷⁶⁹) and the preposition lamed לְ (pronounced *le*). Together they form the prepositional phrase לְעֹלָם (le *gōh-lāhm'*), the basic meaning of which is " 'most distant times', whether the remote past or the future, depending upon the accompanying prepositions" (Zodhiates, *The Hebrew/Greek Key Study Bible*, p. 1643).

The Hebrew noun עֹלָם (*gōh-lāhm'* ⁵⁷⁶⁹) may be accompanied by any of several prepositions. When עֹלָם (*gōh-lāhm'* ⁵⁷⁶⁹) is accompanied by the preposition עַד (*gad*), it means "ever." When עֹלָם (*gōh-lāhm'* ⁵⁷⁶⁹) is accompanied by the preposition מִן (*mn*) it means "in old times." But when עֹלָם (*gōh-lāhm'* ⁵⁷⁶⁹) is accompanied by the preposition לְ (*lamed*), it means "forever."

Fox translates this passage, "That is my name **FOR THE AGES**, that is my title **(from) generation to generation**" (*The Schocken Bible: Volume I*, p. 274). Fox's translation confirms that these two statements in Exodus 3:15 are not contradictory but are complementary; that is, the second statement reinforces the meaning of the first statement by using similar wording.

The same Hebrew wording that is used in Exodus 3:15 is also found in I Chronicles 16:15, which records the words of King David when he brought the ark of God back to Jerusalem. In this verse, the Hebrew letters לְעֹלָם (le *gōh-lāhm'*) are not used as a noun but as a *Qal* verb in the imperfective form to convey the meaning, "Remember for ever." In the King James Version this verse is translated, "Be ye mindful always [לְעֹלָם le *gōh-lāhm'*] of His covenant; the word *which* He commanded to a thousand generations."

The use of לְעֹלָם (le *gōh-lāhm'*) in I Chronicles 16:15 leaves no room for interpreting its meaning as "to be hidden." David did not command Israel to hide their covenant with God! David wanted Israel always to remember

their covenant with God so that He would continue to bless them. But when Israel forsook the covenant, God sent them into captivity. Instead of repenting, the Jewish leaders in Babylon continued to follow their pagan practices, one of which was to hide the name of God. That is why the Talmudic rabbis interpreted **לְעַלְמֵי** (*le gōh-lāhm'*) in Exodus 3:15 as "to be hidden," contrary to the true meaning of this word as preserved by oral tradition. (See Owens, *The Analytical Key to the Old Testament*, vol. 1, p. 247.)

It is a violation of the Hebrew text to interpret the expression **לְעַלְמֵי** (*le gōh-lāhm'*) in Exodus 3:15 as **לְעַלְמֵי** (*le gāh-lam'*) meaning "to be hidden," as the Talmudic rabbis of ancient Babylon taught. The expression **לְעַלְמֵי** (*le gāh-lam'*) is not used anywhere in the entirety of the Masoretic Text! It is found only in the Talmud. If this expression *could* be found in the Hebrew text, it still could not be interpreted as "to be hidden" unless it was used in a construct chain or an infinitive construct. No such construct can be found in Exodus 3:15--or in the entire old Testament!

We do find the use of **עַלְמֵי** (*gāh-lam'* ⁵⁹⁵⁶) to mean "secret" or "hidden" in Psalm 90:8. But in this verse, the Hebrew text uses the three consonants **עלם** without the preposition **לְ** (*lamed*).

"Thou hast set our iniquities before Thee, our secret [**עַלְמֵי** *gāh-lam'* ⁵⁹⁵⁶] sins in the light of Thy countenance."

In Psalm 90:8, **עַלְמֵי** (*gāh-lam'* ⁵⁹⁵⁶) is used as a *Qal* verb and is correctly translated "secret." The usage of **עַלְמֵי** in this verse is very different from the use of **לְעַלְמֵי** in Exodus 3:15 and I Chronicles 16:15. Not only is the preposition **לְ** (*lamed*) missing in Psalm 90:8, but the vowel points used with the consonants **עלם** are not the same as in Exodus 3:15 and I Chronicles 16:15.

When the Masoretes pointed the consonants of **לְעַלְמֵי** in Exodus 3:15 to be read as **לְעַלְמֵי** (*le gōh-lāhm'*), meaning "forever," they were seeking to

preserve the traditional pronunciation they had learned from their fathers. The Masoretes did not point לַעֲלֹם to be read as לְעָלָם? (*le gāh-lam'*), meaning "to be hidden." They were not seeking to hide the name of God but to preserve it for all generations to come. Had the Masoretes believed and practiced the Talmudic dictum that the divine name *jhvh* was "to be hidden," they would have pointed the consonants of לַעֲלֹם to reflect this belief. They did not do so, because they placed no credence in Talmudic law! Their intention was not to hide the divine name, as did the Talmudists, but to preserve it exactly as they had learned to pronounce it through oral tradition.

The Talmudic teaching that God's name should be hidden does not come from the Bible. This unscriptural teaching can be traced through the pages of history to the pagan philosophy of Hellenistic Jews and ancient Gnostics, who practiced the secret worship of the sacred name of Osiris (the dead Nimrod, worshiped in Egypt as "Lord of the Underworld"). As originally taught by Isis (better known as Semiramis), the "sacred name" was hidden to the world and would be revealed only to those who advanced through successive stages of initiation into the secret Mysteries. After Semiramis' death, her son Horus--known as Hermes in Greek mythology and Mithras in Persia--perpetuated this esoteric teaching of the Babylonian Mysteries.

The concept that the name of God was "sacred" and secret was taught throughout the ancient world. It can be found in the writings of the most renowned philosophers of Greece and Rome, and in the theology of Hellenistic Jews and Levitical Gnostics in Egypt. Rabbi Marmorstein shows the impact of this pagan concept on early Christianity. He writes, "**Greek philosophy, Jewish Alexandrian theology, Christian apology and Gnostic lore CONCUR in the idea of God's *namelessness*.** That God has no name, was **taught by Aristotle [of Greece], Seneca [of Rome], Maxim of Tyre [Phoenicia], Celsus [of Rome], and Hermes Trismegistus [Gnostic philosophy]**" (*The Old Rabbinic Doctrine of God: The Names & Attributes of God*, p. 17). Note: Christian Gnostics in the early centuries of the New Testament church were instrumental in spreading the mythology of Hermes Trismegistus.

Although the concept of a hidden sacred name gained widespread acceptance, this teaching did not go unchallenged within the Jewish community. Those who opposed this philosophical view of the name of God raised staunch resistance, which led to major splits in early Judaism. One

Levitical faction favored using the pronunciation of God's name as written, while another faction favored hiding the name by substituting Adonai. The latter view was supported by the Hasidim, later known as the Pharisees. (The rise of the Hasidim in early Judaism is described in the study paper *The Two Jehovahs of the Pentateuch*.) Marmorstein describes the conflict that arose between the two factions:

"We notice a very far-reaching difference between Palestinian and Alexandrian theology concerning the Tetragrammaton [*jhvh*]. **A bitter struggle between Hellenists [an Alexandrian faction] and Hasidim [a Palestinian faction] centred around the pronunciation of the Divine Name. A similar CONTROVERSY arose afterwards around the use of the name Elohim and even as to the SUBSTITUTION OF THE TETRAGRAMMATON [WITH ADONAI]**" (Ibid., p. 13).

The pervasive influence of pagan concepts concerning the name of God is reflected in key passages in the Septuagint--the Greek version of the Old Testament, which was translated by Hellenistic Levites in Alexandria, Egypt. The Septuagint translation of Leviticus 24:15 and the following verses clearly follows the views of pagan Greek philosophy. Marmorstein speaks openly of the connection of this philosophy to Egyptian magic and the use of sacred names. He writes, "**The influence of Greek philosophy is felt in the LXX [Septuagint]. They see in Lev. 24.15 f. a PROHIBITION OF PRONOUNCING THE DIVINE NAME....**Philo, Josephus, and Aquila (et denominans nomen dei morte morietur) agree with their Greek Bible....He [Philo] held with his teachers of philosophy that no name can adequately give an idea or expression of God. New material is gained from the **Magic Tablet of Adrumetum, where the important saying is inserted: ...'I adjure thee by the SACRED NAME which is not uttered in any place.'** This is the old reading of Maspera: ... "**not even in the Temple**" (Ibid., pp. 17-18).

Despite the Hasidic effort to hide the name of God, the pronunciation of the divine name *jhvh*, as written, continued to be used both in the Temple and outside--not only by priests and Levites, but also by the common Jew. After the death of the High Priest Simon the Just (circa 180 B.C.), growing pressure from factions within the priesthood and from political forces within

Judaism caused a decline in the use of the divine name. However, not all the priests and people succumbed to this pressure. Marmorstein quotes Deissmann to show that the divine name *jvh* continued to be pronounced as written at least until the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. He writes, "Deissmann considers it 'absolutely impossible that any one having any kind of sympathy with Judaism whatever could assert that the Holy Name was not pronounced in the Temple' " (Ibid., p. 18).

Marmorstein refers to a number of authorities who substantiate that the pronunciation of the divine name did not stop with Simon the Just [circa 180 B.C.], as Hellenistic writers have claimed. Here is Marmorstein's detailed testimony to this fact:

"We are told that the priests, after the death of Simon the Just, either ceased altogether, or stopped for a short period, to use 'the Name' in pronouncing the blessing....***Geiger* connects this historical tradition with the INFORMATION DERIVED FROM HELLENISTIC SOURCES, according to which the pronunciation of the divine name was strictly prohibited.** *Weiss* says: 'We do not know the special reason for this reform, but it is quite clear that the priests, seeing the decline of faith and fear of God, considered neither themselves nor their contemporaries worthy of proclaiming or of hearing the name of God.' **This information CONTRADICTS many other traditions of the Mishna [Sotah]....In the Sanctuary the priests said the Tetragrammaton ACCORDING TO ITS WRITING, outside the Temple by its substitute....**There is a consensus of opinion as to the prohibition of using the Shem hamphorash [the pronunciation of *jvh*] outside the Temple, yet **in the service of the Temple the Name WAS PRONOUNCED....**A third version is given in B. Sotah, 38A, where the view of R. Josiah is ascribed to R. Jonathan, and that of R. Jonathan to R. Josiah. Anyhow, we learn that according to these Rabbis **the Name was PRONOUNCED IN THE TEMPLE BY THE PRIESTS....**We can cite R. Tarphon, **who tells us AS AN EYEWITNESS that the priests used to pronounce the Name in the Temple.** R. Tarphon was of priestly descent, saw the Temple service, and relates: 'Once I followed my uncle to say the priestly blessing, and I inclined my ear near the High Priest, and I have heard that he mixed...the Name with the tune of his brethren, the priests.' **The Name was said, but not distinctly"** (Ibid., pp. 19-21).

Parke-Taylor quotes other reliable sources which confirm that the divine

name continued to be pronounced by the priests as written. Notice:

"According to *Tamid* 7:2 and *Sotah* 7:6, when the blessing of the priests was given, **'in the Temple they pronounced the Name AS IT WAS WRITTEN, but in the provinces by a substituted word.'** Samuel Cohon comments, **'The Tetragrammaton was ORIGINALLY SPOKEN BY ALL THE PRIESTS in the Temple in pronouncing the benediction. In the synagogues the substitute name Adonai was employed in worship'** " (*Yahweh: The Divine Name in the Bible*, pp. 86-87).

As further evidence that the use of the divine name did not end with the death of Simon the Just, Marmorstein refers to a treatise in the Mishna which describes the Temple service on the day of Atonement. He writes, "In the service of the Day of Atonement, which is described in the ancient treatise of the Mishna called Joma,...**the High Priest pronounced the Name ACCORDING TO ITS WRITING...**[contrary to] **the idea that the High Priest had merely used a, or the substitute for the, divine name, which of course, upsets the report about the usage [ending] after the death of Simon**" (*The Old Rabbinic Doctrine of God : The Names and Attributes of God*, p. 22).

The Mishna contains additional records that are even more revealing. These records show that the pronunciation of the divine name continued long after the death of Simon the Just and, in fact, was practiced by the common people as late as the first century A.D. Contrary to Hellenistic teachings, the average Jew at the time of Christ openly used the divine name with no fear of recrimination from the authorities. Notice the following record from the Mishnic tractate Berakhoth:

"There is a further passage which exhibits the same difficulty. M. Berakhoth, ix. 5, contains **several institutions** which are of the greatest importance for the knowledge of the intellectual movements **of the FIRST CENTURY [AD]. They instituted that people should greet their fellow men ... 'by the Name'**. The date of this arrangement must be *very old*. In the very Mishna it is put together with practices in the Temple. It must date back, therefore, before the destruction of the Second Temple" (Marmorstein, p. 22).

As this Mishnic record reveals, the Jewish practice of greeting others by

the divine name was a long-standing custom by the first century A.D. Here is absolute and undeniable evidence that the pronunciation of the divine name *jhvh* had not been lost! The common people had been greeting each other by this name for many generations, and they were thoroughly familiar with it. The fact that they used it every day, to greet visitors both in their homes and in public, shows that they did not view the divine name as "sacred" and did not have a superstitious fear of pronouncing it.

These historical records verify that the pronunciation of the divine name *jhvh* was known even in New Testament times. The true pronunciation had been passed down through the oral tradition of the faithful priests and Levites. And how did the priests and Levites of the first century A.D.--and the generations that went before--pronounce the divine name *jhvh*?

The answer is revealed in Rabbi Kohler's writings. A recognized authority on the history of Judaism, Rabbi Kohler played a dominant role in founding the Jewish Encyclopedia, as well as compiling a history of Jewish practices, entitled *The Origins of the Synagogue and the Church*. In this book, Rabbi Kohler acknowledges the traditional pronunciation of the divine name by the priests, but he rejects it as erroneous because his views have been molded by the Talmud. Notice how he justifies the substitution of Adonai for the divine name:

"For as long as Yahweh--or JEHOVAH, AS THE NAME WAS erroneously [in Rabbi Kohler's view] READ--was viewed as the proper Name of Israel's God, there adhered to Him a more or less tribal character, but as soon as He is spoken of as the Lord (*Adonai*), He has ceased to be merely the God of one nation and has become the universal God" (*The Origins of the Synagogue and the Church*, pp. 50-51).

As this eminent rabbi admits, **before the substitution of Adonai, the divine name was READ AS JEHOVAH.** Although Rabbi Kohler disagrees with this pronunciation, he acknowledges that it was the pronunciation that the priests used in reading the Scriptures. That is the true pronunciation of *jhvh* as passed down by oral tradition and read by the

priests of every generation from the time of Aaron.

In confirming the original pronunciation of the divine name as read by the priests, Rabbi Kohler has exposed the falsehood in claiming that the name Jehovah was invented by "borrowing" the vowel points of Adonai for *jvh*. There is no historical evidence whatsoever to support this claim. **The truth is that the Masoretes pointed *jvh* to be read as JEHOVAH because they were descendants of the priests and Levites, and THAT WAS HOW THEY HAD ALWAYS PRONOUNCED IT.**

The original pronunciation of *jvh*, as marked in the Masoretic Text, is confirmed by historical records of the priestly usage of the name. The fact that the common people freely used this divine name, as well as the priests, shows that the pronunciation of *jvh* was not regarded as "sacred"--that is, not until the esoteric practices of the ancient Mysteries were adopted by the Hasidim during the Jewish exile in Babylon.

As the influence of the Hasidim spread, the practice of hiding the name of God by substituting Adonai was gradually established among the Jews of the Dispersion. Underlying this practice was the belief that the pronunciation of the divine name *jvh* was "sacred." Rabbi Kohler writes, "**For the people at large the name *Adonai*, 'the Lord,' was introduced as a substitute both in the reading and the translation of the Scripture....THIS SUBSTITUTION GUARDED THE NAME FROM PROFANE [COMMON] USE...**" (Ibid., p. 50).

Over the centuries, the substitution of Adonai in reading the Scriptures became a fixed tradition in every synagogue. And with it, the pronunciation of the divine name *jvh* was lost to the entire Jewish community. Today, the rabbis teach that the original pronunciation of *jvh* was Yahweh, and all Jews regard this name as "sacred."

The leaders of Judaism have embraced both a false concept and a false name--and many Christians are following in their footsteps. The only difference is that, while the rabbis *refuse* to pronounce this so-called "sacred name" in public, those Christians who view it as sacred *insist* on using it!

Contrary to the claims of both Jewish and Christian sacred namers, Yahweh is not the true pronunciation of the divine name *jhvh*. The records of history and Semitic philology testify to the accuracy of the vowel points that are found with *jhvh* in the Masoretic Text, verifying that the true pronunciation of the divine name is Jehovah--not Yahweh. Yahweh is not and never has been a name of the God of the Old Testament. It is neither Scriptural nor sacred! Although Jehovah is the true pronunciation of the divine name *jhvh*, and is a legitimate Scriptural name, it should not be viewed as sacred. The concept that God has a sacred name is pagan to the core!

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