

# What About the Name Jehovah?

By [Wayne Jackson](#)

**Why is the name Jehovah not found in the King James Version of the Bible or in most modern translations?**

The term “Jehovah,” appearing in the American Standard Version (1901), takes the place of “LORD” (all caps) in the King James Translation, as well as in most modern versions.

It derives from four Hebrew consonants, called the Tetragrammaton, a term that signifies a four-letter word. This expression is used by scholars for the four Hebrew letters, **YHWH**, that constitute a name for God employed some 6,800 times in the Old Testament. (Note: “Jehovah” is found in the King James Version in Exodus 6:3, Psalm 83:18, and Isaiah 12:2 and 26:4.)

I am not sure of the motive of the KJV translators four hundred years ago (or of later versions, e.g., RSV, NIV, ESV) in rendering **YHWH** by “LORD,” in contrast to “Lord.” “Lord,” a rendition of the Hebrew term **adonai** was used as a title for deity (some 442 times). Perhaps the all-caps format was to accommodate the late-first-century Jewish superstition against pronouncing the sacred covenant name of God (Ex. 6:3; cf. 3:14).

Admittedly, the name Jehovah is a hybrid term (i.e., vowels from **adonai** were imported into the four Hebrew consonants). The same procedure is employed in the construction of **Yahweh**, a term commonly used today in scholarly literature as a substitute for “Jehovah.”

Though “Jehovah” may not approximate the original term quite as closely as **Yahweh**, the expression “Jehovah” has “now acquired by usage independent standing in English” (Ferm 1945, 389) and certainly is more familiar to the common reader than is **Yahweh**. Criticism of the use of the name Jehovah is unwarranted.

Numerous scholars have noted that the original word’s exact pronunciation has been lost and the various spelling forms are speculations, e.g., “Jehovah, Yehovah, Jahweh, Yahweh” (Unger and White 1980, 229). All of these forms are conjectural transliterations. There is no solid documentation to confirm the original vocalization of **YHWH** (Horn 1960, 1161). Dogmatism, therefore, is without justification.

It is difficult to appreciate the rationale of the somewhat caustic critics who virtually rail against the name Jehovah, when no one knows precisely how the original term was pronounced. Moreover, why has there been no swelling enthusiasm by translators for incorporating **Yahweh**, as an anglicized term, into the texts of our modern Old Testament versions?

Finally, why camouflage the difference between **Yahweh** and **adonai** by a subtle change in the English capitalization, when the average Bible student has no clue under the sun as to what lies behind the type style alteration from “Lord” to “LORD” (KJV, RSV, NIV, etc.)?

One scholar notes that “LORD obscures the fact that **Yahweh** is a name” (VanGemeren 1997, 1296). This controversy, it appears to me, is a translation tempest in a teapot.

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## Works Cited

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VanGemeren, W. A., ed. 1997. *Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*. Vol. 4. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

## Scripture References

Exodus 6:3; Psalm 83:18; Isaiah 12:2

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