

# G-d: The Missing ‘o’

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Many well meaning believers unknowingly walk in rabbinic tradition that nullifies the Scriptures. The Rabbis forbid, and say it’s a major sin, to use the name of the God of Israel: Yahveh. They say it’s too holy and shouldn’t be treated lightly. As noble as these concepts sound, the prohibition against saying the name *Yahveh* cannot be found anywhere in Scripture.

Instead of saying the name *Yahveh*, Judaism circumvents it by using titles and descriptions such as God, Lord, ‘the Name’ (*Hashem*), and the Power, etc. As these now become ‘signs’ for the name of the God of Israel, the Rabbis teach their people to spell God in English without the ‘o’, using a hyphen instead, like this: G-d. The also applies to Lord (L-rd), and now, even these (in Hebrew) aren’t said. They’ve become ‘too holy,’ also.

What comes to mind is the warning our Master gave about the Pharisees (and Sadducees) in Mt. 16:6-12. He said to beware of their leaven, and went on to say that He meant their teachings. The Rabbis are the spiritual descendants of the Pharisees and Scribes and we should take Messiah’s words to heart.

The substitution of G-d and L-rd, etc., for *Yahveh* is a rabbinic tradition that nullifies God’s Word. One day the Pharisees approached our Lord and asked Him why He didn’t walk in their ways (the Tradition of the Elders, also known as the Oral Law/Talmud). He told them that they transgressed God’s Word by their traditions, and then He severely reprimanded them for drawing near to God with their mouth, but said that their hearts were far from God.<sup>1</sup>

The name of Yahveh occurs 6,823 times in the *Tanach* (Hebrew Bible/Old Testament).<sup>2</sup> It’s forbidden by the Rabbis to say the name of Yahveh because they don’t want anyone to profane it, thereby sinning against God by ‘taking His name in vain’ (Ex. 20:7; Dt. 5:11). This interpretation and restriction, which is held to most adamantly, goes against God and His Word. It is a false rabbinic concept.

What does the biblical meaning of ‘to take His name in vain’ mean? To take God’s name in vain speaks of a Hebrew who said that he believed in God, but also walked with other gods, even to the point of sacrificing his sons to Molech:

“Yahveh spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Say to the people of Israel: Any of the people of Israel, or of the foreigners who reside in Israel, who give any of their sons to Molech must be put to death! The people of the land shall stone them to death. I Myself will set My face against them and will cut them off from the people because they have given of their offspring to Molech, defiling my sanctuary and *profaning My holy name*’” (Lev. 20:1-3).

The biblical sin of taking Yahveh’s name in vain centers around someone who was part of Israel, but acted like a pagan. In terms of the super-religious Pharisees, they presented themselves as holy and dedicated to God, but their hearts were far from Him. *That’s* taking God’s holy name in vain. It’s called hypocrisy.

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<sup>1</sup> Mt. 15:1-9; see also Mt. 23:1-36 and *Do as the Pharisees Say?! Matthew 23:2-3* at <http://www.seedofabraham.net/Do-as-the-Pharisees-Say.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, authors; Mark E. Biddle, translator, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, vol. 2 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), p. 523.

Taking God's name in vain has nothing to do with His name being 'too holy' for us to use, nor mispronouncing it. Speaking His name in everyday conversation and/or mispronouncing it is not a sin. To say that these are sin bars all Israel from using the name of their God, something that He obviously isn't pleased with (Is. 48:20; Jer. 31:23; Micah 4:5). I agree that God's name shouldn't be treated lightly or without reverence (as well as Yeshua's), but forbidding the use of His name is not God's way of dealing with a heart that would treat His name in such a manner.

On another note, if some Messianic Jews follow the Rabbis in this area, why don't they also do the same with the name of Messiah? Isn't that name as holy as *Yahveh*? Why don't they write *Yeshua* like *Yesh-a* or *Y-sh-a* or something to that effect? Shouldn't Yeshua receive just as much honor and reverence as the name *Yahveh*?<sup>3</sup>

The Scriptures never speak of it being a sin to say the name of *Yahveh*, and so, the Rabbis are guilty, even though they have 'noble reasons,' *of making something to be sin when God doesn't call it sin*. This is not the first time for them, as brought out by Yeshua.<sup>4</sup> The Word of God says that we're not to add to, nor take away from His Word:

“You must diligently observe everything that I command you. Do not add to it or take anything from it.” (Dt. 12:32)

There's nothing in Scripture that warrants rabbinic prohibition of the name *Yahveh*. On the contrary, everywhere we look in the Word, godly men and women called upon the name of *Yahveh*.<sup>5</sup> This gives us a biblical foundation for understanding that God delights in having His people call upon Him, using His name. His name is not 'off limits' to His people. We must do what is right in *Yahveh*'s eyes.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> “Yeshua said, ‘The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son *so that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father*. Anyone who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him’” (John 5:22-23).

<sup>4</sup> “‘Why do Your disciples transgress the Tradition of the Elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.’ He answered and said to them, ‘Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? For God commanded, saying, ‘Honor your father and your mother’ and, ‘He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.’ But you say, ‘Whoever says to his father or mother, ‘Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God’—then he need not honor his father or mother.’ Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: ‘These people draw near to Me with their mouth and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. *In vain they worship Me*, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’” (Mt. 15:2-9).

<sup>5</sup> Here are a few cites where, obviously, the Israelis addressing *Yahveh*, or speaking of Him, use His name, as well as *Yahveh* Himself, speaking His name as He speaks with His people Israel (with no mention or inference that His name shouldn't be said): Ex. 3:16, 18; 5:2; 6:2-3, 8; 12:12; 14:30; 15:1-3, 11-13, 18, 21, 26; 20:2; Lev. 18:2, 4, 5, 7, 21, 30; 19:2, 3, 4, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18, 25, 28, 30, 31, 34, 36, 37; 20:7, 8, 24, 26; 21:8; 22:33; 23:22; Num. 12:2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 13, 14; 13:1, 3; 14:8, 9, 11, 14, 16, 18, 20, 21, 35, 40, 41, 42, 43; 2nd Sam. 22:32; 1st Kings 18:21-39; Isaiah 47:4; 48:1, 2, 16, 17; Jer. 7:4, 10, 12, 14; Ezk. 20:5, 7, 19, 30, 33, 42, 44; 25:3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17; Joel 2:32; Zeph. 3:9; Ps. 105:1; 2nd Chron. 6:32-33; Rev. 14:12. Here are some places where *Yahveh* says that Israel will use His name: Is. 48:20; Jer. 31:23.

<sup>6</sup> Exodus 13:9; 15:26; Deut. 4:2; 6:18; 12:8, 25, 28; 13:18; 1st Kings 3:14; 6:12-13; 15:5, 11; 2nd Kgs. 14:3-6; 15:3, 34; 18:3; 22:2; 23:1-25; Is. 38:3. For the opposite of this, see Judges 17:6; 21:25; 1st Sam. 13:13-14; 15:10-29, 34; 16:7, 19, 25, 30; 1st Kings 11:6, 33; 14:8, 22; 18:18; 21:20; 2nd Kings 3:2-3; 14:24; 15:9, 18, 24, 28; 16:2; 17:2; 21:2, 19; 23:3, 37; 24:9, 19; Is. 56:4; Jer. 52:1-3; Ezk. 18:5, 9, 17, 27; 20:19-20, 21; 22:1-16, 26; Rom. 15:4.

The rabbinic folly and fruit are clear to see. *The Jewish people are the only people who have ever lived who are prohibited by their own religious leaders from speaking the name of their God!* The Rabbis, in not wanting their people to sin (by avoiding the use of the name Yahveh), have led their flocks to polluted waters. Yahveh revealed His name to us so that we could know it and use it:

“For all people walk each in the name of his god, but we will walk in the name of Yahveh our God, forever and ever.” (Micah 4:5)

## ‘God’ and ‘Lord’ in English

In a similar legalistic way, some believers have been told that the English titles of ‘God’ and ‘Lord’ are not to be used because they are the names of pagan entities. The problem with this convoluted thinking is that Yahveh Himself uses their *Hebrew counterparts* in speaking of both Himself and of pagan gods!

The Hebrew word that is usually translated as ‘God’ or ‘god’ is אֱלֹהִים *elohim* (pronounced *eloheem*). It’s used more than 2,200 times in Scripture for both Yahveh *and* other gods.<sup>7</sup> We find *elohim* being used of the Mighty One of Israel in almost every verse of the first chapter of Genesis. Here’s the very first verse of the Word of God:

“In the beginning God (*elohim*) created the heavens and the earth.” (Genesis 1:1)

The Hebrew word that is translated into English as ‘Lord’ or ‘lord’ is אָדוֹן *adon*. It’s used many times of Yahveh, as well as others (both pagan gods and men).<sup>8</sup> *The Hebrew-Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* states that *adon* is used for Yahveh more than 400 times.<sup>9</sup>

The Hebrew words *Adon* and *Adonay* are used for Yahveh, with *Adonay* being used exclusively for Yahveh (while *Adon* is used of both men and Yahveh).<sup>10</sup> The word *adonay* literally means ‘my Lords,’ which then is translated as ‘my Lord,’ and finally, the Lord.<sup>11</sup> A great example of Yahveh Himself using both words to describe Himself is seen in Isaiah:

“Thus says your Lord (*Adonai*), Yahveh, and your God (*Elohim*), who pleads the cause of

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<sup>7</sup> Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, authors; M. Richardson, translator, *The Hebrew-Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Accordance Bible Software; Altamonte Springs, FL: OakTree Software, 2010), 1:53. “אֱלֹהִים” “אֱלֹהִים” (2250 x); plene Ps 18:47 143:10 145:1... אֱלֹהִים, 2 K 17:31...1. gods אֱלֹהִים מִצְרַיִם Ex 12:12 אֱלֹהִים the gods 18:11; Ps 86:8, gods and men Ju 9:9, 13, gods Ex 32:1, 23; 34:15; Dt 32:39 Jos 24:15; Hos 13:4; Ps 82:1; Da 11:37, אֱלֹהִים the God of gods...Dt 10:17 Ps 136:2, אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים (64 x: → אֲחֵר) ... אֱלֹהִים חִמְרֵי the gods of the Amorites Jos 24:15, אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים the gods of Edom 2C 25:20; אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים other gods (than Y.) Ex 20:3.”

Some other places where *elohim* is used for the God of Israel are Gen. 1:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, etc.

Some places where *elohim* is used for pagan gods are Gen. 31:30, 32; 35:2, 4; Ex. 12:12; 15:11; 18:11; 20:3; Dt. 4:28; 5:7.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. Ex. 5:22; 23:17; Ps. 35:17, 23; 97:5; 114:7; Is. 1:24; 3:1; 6:1, 8; 7:7, 14, 20; 8:7; 9:7, 17; 10:12, 16, 33; 38:16; Amos 3:7, 8, 11, 13; 4:2, 5; 5:3, 16; 6:8; 7:1, 2, 4, 5; 8:1, 3, 9, 11; 9:1; Micah 4:13; Zech. 4:14; 6:5.

In Dt. 10:17 and Ps. 136:3 it’s of other ‘lords’ and in Gen. 19:2; 40:7; 44:8-9, 16, 18, etc., it’s used of men.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Jenni, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, p. 24.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. This article was last revised on 20 Dec 2012.

His people.” (Isaiah 51:22; see also 45:18)

Yahveh used both *Adonai* and *Elohim* to describe Himself, knowing full well that those words were not only used of other entities, but that He Himself used them of other entities (i.e. gods). If the Redeemer of Israel used *elohim* and *adon(ai)* to refer to Himself, and also, to be referred to by others (e.g. the Prophets), while the terms are also used of other gods, it cannot be ‘pagan’ or sin for English speakers to use their English counterparts, saying ‘God’ or ‘Lord’ in relation to the Father and/or the Son. Pharisaism isn’t confined to only us Jews. Those Gentiles who forbid the use of ‘God’ and ‘Lord’ are Christian Pharisees.<sup>12</sup>

***May Yahveh Bless You!***

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<sup>12</sup> Revised on 4 October 2016.