

WHAT ARE HEBREW VERSIONS?

Most who use the *New World Translation* (published by the Watch Tower Society) are familiar with its reference to the Hebrew versions. What are these Hebrew versions and why are they used to reinstate the divine name *Jehovah* in the Christian Scriptures of the *New World Translation*?

Why were Hebrew versions used for the *New World Translation*?

All ancient Hebrew language manuscripts of the Hebrew Scriptures use the Tetragrammaton (written יהוה in Hebrew letters) for God's name. The divine name is used almost 7,000 times between Genesis and the last book, Malachi. The *New World Translation* is to be commended for translating these references as *Jehovah* rather than *LORD*.

However, the Christian Scriptures were written in Greek. The publishers of the *New World Translation* truthfully admit that there are no ancient Christian Scripture manuscripts of any kind that use the Tetragrammaton.¹ This is true in spite

¹ For reference see *Aid to Bible Understanding*, page 886. However, in spite of the absolute lack of any

of numerous examples of the Tetragrammaton in the Greek *Septuagint* Hebrew Scriptures.

However, because many Hebrew versions use the Tetragrammaton in the Christian Scriptures, the translators of the *New World Translation* used these Hebrew translations of the Christian Scriptures as the basis for reinstating the divine name *Jehovah* 237 times in their Christian Scriptures.

What are Hebrew versions?

Hebrew versions are simply Hebrew language translations of the Greek Scriptures for use by Hebrew-speaking readers. In fact, most have been published with one purpose being the conversion of Jews to Christianity. For that reason, some of these Hebrew versions were published by a Trinitarian Bible Society. Because the Tetragrammaton (יהוה) is a word understood by Hebrew speakers, it is

manuscripts containing the Hebrew letters of the Tetragrammaton, the Watch Tower Society maintains that the Tetragrammaton was used by the Inspired Christian Greek Scripture writers and was subsequently removed because of a great heresy in the 3rd and 4th centuries C.E. For a complete discussion of this lack of evidence to support such a heresy, see the book *The Tetragrammaton and the Christian Greek Scriptures*.

frequently found in these Hebrew versions.² The *New World Translation* uses 25 Hebrew versions (and two non-version sources) as footnote references citing יהוה in the Christian Scriptures.

Are Hebrew versions ancient texts?

Most assume that these Hebrew versions are ancient texts. In fact, they are not. The earliest complete Hebrew version cited by the *New World Translation* was translated from the King James Greek text in 1599. The most recent Hebrew version cited in the *New World Translation* was translated in 1979 from a “New Testament” Greek text published in 1975. Of course, all of the Greek texts from which these versions were translated can be readily examined today. None of these Greek texts contain a single occurrence of either יהוה in Hebrew letters or even the divine name transliterated into Greek letters.

² The reader may be surprised to realize that the Tetragrammaton is frequently used by the Christian Jewish translators to identify Jesus with יהוה in these Trinitarian Hebrew versions. For further information, see the short book, *The New World Translation and Hebrew Versions*.

An example of a Hebrew version

J18 is one of the Hebrew versions used by the New World Bible Translation Committee to substantiate its use of the Tetragrammaton. The 1969 edition of the *Kingdom Interlinear Translation* (also published by the Watch Tower Society) gives the following information regarding this version:

J18

Greek Scriptures in Hebrew. In London, England, in 1885, a new Hebrew translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures was published. This new translation was commenced by Isaac Salkinson and completed after his death by Christian David Ginsburg. Our oldest copy is of the third edition published in 1891. This has been compared with the small edition published by the Trinitarian Bible Society, London, England, in 1939, and also with the Hebrew-English New Testament published in 1941 by the same Society (page 29).

When we study the 237 *Jehovah* references, a large number of the footnotes cite J18. As expected, we will find confirmation of the presence of the Tetragrammaton in this Hebrew version exactly as listed in the *New World Translation*

However, the title page of J18 gives this information:

**THE
NEW TESTAMENT
OF
OUR LORD AND SAVIOUR
JESUS CHRIST**

Translated out of the original Greek: and with
the former translations diligently compared
and revised, by His Majesty's special command

Did you notice the reference to the source material for the Hebrew version? The word *version* simply means *translation*. Yet, while studying the Tetragrammaton in the Christian Scriptures of these Hebrew versions, it seldom occurs to us that we are talking about *translations* from a Greek text that plainly does not use the Tetragrammaton.

Manuscript dates in the *Jehovah* footnotes

The footnotes for any *Jehovah* reference in the *New World Translation* Christian Scriptures give meaningful information regarding both version and manuscript dates.

Revelation 4:11 is one of the important *Jehovah* verses. The verse appears in the *Kingdom Interlinear Translation* as follows:

11 Ἄξιός εἶ, ὁ κύριος καὶ ὁ θεὸς
Worthy you are, the Lord and the God
ἡμῶν, λαβεῖν τὴν δόξαν καὶ τὴν τιμὴν
of us, to receive the glory and the honor
καὶ τὴν δύναμιν, ὅτι σὺ ἔκτισας τὰ
and the power, because you created the
πάντα, καὶ δια τὸ θέλημά σου
all (things) and through the will of you
ἦσαν καὶ ἐκτίσθησαν.
they were and they were created

The *New World Translation* quoted in the right hand margin translates the verse:

11 "You are worthy, Jehovah,* even our God, to receive the glory and the honor and the power, because you created all things, and because of your will they existed and were created."

At the bottom of the page, the *Jehovah* footnote is given:

11* Jehovah, J7,8,13,14,16,18; Lord, ⚭AV₉Syh.

The verse footnote lists six Hebrew versions (J7,8,13,14,16,18) which are used as evidence for reinstating *Jehovah*; two early Greek manuscripts (⚭ *Sinaitic MS* and *A Alexandrine MS*) which have *Lord* in the Greek manuscript; and two versions (the Latin *Vulgate* and a Syriac version) which substantiate *Lord*.

J7	<i>Christian Greek Scriptures in Hebrew</i> ; Elias Hutter.	1599
J8	<i>Christian Greek Scriptures in Hebrew</i> ; William Robertson.	1661
J13	<i>Christian Greek Scriptures in Hebrew</i> ; A. McCaul and others.	1838
J14	<i>Christian Greek Scriptures in Hebrew</i> ; John Christian Reichardt.	1846
J16	<i>Christian Greek Scriptures in Hebrew</i> ; John Christian Reichardt and Joachim H. R. Blesenthal.	1866
J18	<i>Christian Greek Scriptures in Hebrew</i> ; Isaac Salkinson.	1885

From this same verse, a similar (though shorter) list³ is given indicating Greek manuscripts that contain the Greek word *Kyrios* (Lord).

³ The Greek word *Kyrios* (Κύριος) is translated *Lord* in the *Kingdom Interlinear Translation*. The number of references to *Kyrios* (or *Lord*) passages are fewer in the *Kingdom Interlinear Translation* only because the editors have chosen to cite so few of the over 5,000 ancient Greek manuscripts that are available today. All of these manuscripts are uniform in their use of *Kyrios* (or *Theos*, which is translated *God*) rather than the Tetragrammaton. The United Bible Societies' Christian Greek Scripture textual apparatus (the *Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* which shows all textual variants in cited Greek manuscripts) was consulted for each of the 237 *Jehovah* references. This volume lists *all* major Greek Scripture manuscript variations from which translators must choose. The following tabulation was made for each of the *Jehovah* references. 71 of the 237 references are specifically discussed in this textual apparatus. *The presence of the Tetragrammaton is never mentioned at any of these 71 verses, and is therefore not considered as a textual variant in any known Greek manuscript.* Further, because the remaining 166 references are not mentioned, we are assured that no basis for textual variants exists in any of the 237 *Jehovah* references. A discussion of *Kyrios* [Lord] and *Theos* [God] as the choice for the specific verse occurs 31 times.

Ⲛ	<i>Sinaitic MS</i> ; an uncial Greek manuscript.	4 th cent.
A	<i>Alexandrine MS</i> ; an uncial Greek manuscript.	5 th cent.
V _g	<i>Latin Vulgate</i> ; a revision of Old Latin by Eusebius Jerome.	405 CE
Sy ^h	<i>Syriac Peshitta Version</i> .	464 CE

What do these dates tell us?

The *Kingdom Interlinear Translation* cites six Hebrew version sources for Revelation 4:11. The date of the earliest version is 1599 C.E., while the latest version is dated 1885 C.E. Two Greek manuscripts of the fourth and fifth centuries (301-400 C.E., and 401-500 C.E. respectively) are cited for this verse in support of the Greek word *Kyrios*.

The translators of the *New World Translation* chose to use the divine name in 237 selected verses by virtue of supporting evidence from Hebrew translations of 1385 C.E. and later. By way of contrast, the earliest evidence available for the Greek word *Kyrios* (*Lord*), referred to in the *Kingdom Interlinear Translation's* footnotes, was from reliable Greek manuscripts dating as early as 300 C.E. None of these manuscripts contain the Tetragrammaton. These are the same Greek texts from which the Hebrew versions were translated.

We must ask ourselves if these Hebrew versions prove that the original writers of the Christian Scriptures used the Tetragrammaton in these 237 locations. It is clear that they do not. These Hebrew translators used the same Greek texts to translate their versions as any translator during the same periods of time used to translate all other English Christian Greek Scriptures that correctly use *Lord*.

Why is this important?

You may well ask if this is really important, or is simply a meaningless theological debate. Look back at Revelation 4:11. Notice that the one being addressed is either “*Jehovah*, even our God.” according to the *New World Translation* or it is “You...the *Lord* and the God of us.” According to the earliest Greek manuscripts. In one case, it is *Jehovah* who is “our God.” In the other case it is the *Lord* who is “our God.” It makes a great difference as to whether the speaker in Revelation 4:11 is addressing the *Father* as God, or is addressing the *Lord Jesus* as God.

If the original writers of the Christian Greek Scriptures use the word *Lord* rather than the Tetragrammaton, then Jesus is “Our *Lord* and our *God*” according to this and many other verses. A faithful Bible translation must convey the exact meaning of the original Scripture writers’ words

without alteration in order to accommodate a theological predisposition.