

The NAME knows Nobody

Introduction

In the view of the powers that be in the world, who are you? What power do you have? We are a small congregation. What power does our congregation have? Most of us are not politically connected, nor have thousands of social media followers, have no significant position of social influence. In the eyes of the world, we are a nobody. Today I want to talk about one of those nobodies.

*Genesis 16:13 Hagar named **Yahweh**, who had been speaking to her, “You Are **El Roi**. (God who sees)” She said, “This is the place where I watched the one who watches over me.” (Names of God Bible)*

The Name of The Name

Before I talk about a nobody, who is one of the names on the screen, I want to talk about another one who is named on the screen, because most of our Bibles don't show that name. For example, the Holman Christian Standard Bible reads like this:

*Gen 16:13 So she called the **LORD** who spoke to her: The God Who Sees, for she said, “In this place, have I actually seen the One who sees me?” (HCSB)*

Why is it, that in so many of our Bible translations we see the word “Lord” written in all capitals instead of the name God gave us. I mean, this name first appears all the way back in Genesis 2, and in the Hebrew scripture it appears more than 6800 times in the Old Testament? We don't see it in Genesis chapter 1 where God is mainly creating stuff. But when the Bible starts to talk about the creation of creatures that God wants to have a relationship with, we start to see this name – not in Genesis 2:3 where God is wrapping up the rest of creation, but in Genesis 2:4 where the Bible begins the account of God creating humans, the creatures who are made in His image. So to understand how our Bibles use the Lord instead of the name he gave us. We need to follow 2 streams.

There are 2 streams to follow here: the reading stream and the spiritual stream.

First the reading stream

In the original Hebrew scripts, there were only consonants and no vowels. So the name we are investigating this morning was written like this יהוה.

יהוה

Having no vowels was no problem as long reading was always done out loud and to others. You always heard how words were pronounced. And in fact, one of the first accounts we have of anyone reading silently to themselves around the year AD 400 when Augustine's in his book, “Confessions,” noted that he saw Ambrose, one of his mentors reading to himself. It was so unusual that Augustine saw fit to write it down.

Now the spiritual stream

One of the things that the Old Testament is clear about, is the inability of the Israelites to follow God. We see bits and pieces of success, but everyone fails, even the best of them, including: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Joshua, David. When God told the Israelites to build a Tabernacle where he could dwell with them: His presence in the Tabernacle lasted from the time of Moses and part way through the time of Joshua – not more than 80 years and did not appear again until the time of Solomon. Even then, after

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Solomon built the temple, God's presence was in the tabernacle for no more than 40 years, and never appeared again.

It was not until after the Israelites were in exile in Babylonia that they finally got serious about their faith. They started to organize the writings that would become their scripture and other supporting writings, they developed synagogues to teach those scriptures. Then they also developed a tradition of considering God's name so holy that they would never pronounce it. So over the course of years no one heard the name pronounced during the reading of scripture. When they got to that word in scripture they would substitute it with the word, Adonai, which means Lord. In their everyday language, instead of saying the name that was given, they would say, HaShem, which literally means, The Name.

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Adonai = "Lord"

Hashem = "The NAME"

So when Bible translations began to be written, since no one knew how to pronounce the original word, the translators used the word that was said in its place, Lord. The difference would be that they would put the word, Lord in capitals to distinguish that they were using Lord in place of The Name.

Around the year AD 700 or so, a group called the Masoretes were concerned about how little any Hebrew was being used and therefore loss of pronunciation of any Hebrew text, that they introduced vowel marks into the Hebrew script – of course, except for The Name.

We first see evidence of Christians trying to pronounce the unpronounceable name in the 1400s. At that point they had limited knowledge of Hebrew and were also constrained by the Latin language and the resulting pronunciation ended up as Jehovah. More modern scholars, now with better knowledge of the Hebrew language and other Ancient Near East languages think that the most likely pronunciation is Yahweh.

יהוה

Adonai = "Lord"

Hashem = "The NAME"

Jehovah – 1400s pronunciation

Yahweh – Modern pronunciation

But in the meantime, because of the long established tradition in Bible printing, most Bible translations still use LORD instead of the now (mostly) accepted pronunciation.

The Name of the Nobody

This brings us to the name of someone most people would call a Nobody. To get a fuller story, let's read the entire passage.

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Gen 16:1-14 16 Sarai, Abram's wife, was not able to have children. She owned an Egyptian slave named Hagar. So Sarai said to Abram, "**Yahweh** has kept me from having children. Why don't you sleep with my slave? Maybe I can build a family through her." Abram agreed with Sarai. After Abram had lived in Canaan for ten years, Abram's wife Sarai took her Egyptian slave Hagar and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife. He slept with Hagar, and she became pregnant. When Hagar realized that she was pregnant, she began to be disrespectful to Sarai, her owner. So Sarai complained to Abram, "I'm being treated unfairly! And it's your fault! I know that I gave my slave to you, but now that she's pregnant, she's being disrespectful to me. May **Yahweh** decide who is right—you or me." Abram answered Sarai, "Here, she's your slave. Do what you like with her." Then Sarai mistreated Hagar so much that she ran away. The Messenger of **Yahweh** found her by a spring in the desert, the spring on the way to Shur. He said, "Hagar, Sarai's slave, where have you come from, and where are you going?" She answered, "I'm running away from my owner Sarai." The Messenger of **Yahweh** said to her, "Go back to your owner, and place yourself under her authority." The Messenger of **Yahweh** also said to her, "I will give you many descendants. No one will be able to count them because there will be so many." Then the Messenger of **Yahweh** said to her, "You are pregnant, and you will give birth to a son. You will name him Ishmael [God Hears], because **Yahweh** has heard your cry of distress. He will be as free and wild as an untamed donkey. He will fight with everyone, and everyone will fight with him. He will have conflicts with all his relatives." Hagar named **Yahweh**, who had been speaking to her, "You Are El Roi." She said, "This is the place where I watched the one who watches over me." This is why the well is named Beer Lahai Roi [Well of the Living One Who Watches Over Me]. It is still there between Kadesh and Bered.

So who is Hagar? We don't know her background except that she is from Egypt. Sarai probably purchased her when they went down to Egypt shortly after they first entered the land of Canaan, because of a drought. She was a slave. In the customs of the time, we see her being used here as a sex slave, to bear a child for whom she would not be considered the mother. As Sarai's slave, her child would belong to Sarai.

And as we see the drama of real people unfold, Hagar gets pregnant, she teases Sarai, Sarai gets upset, she dumps on Abram as if to say, "look what you did, what are you going to do?" and Abram, who is bearing no responsibility for his own child says, "do what you want," and Sarai berates her until she runs away. And so with a little food and a little water, Hagar, now pregnant, in a foreign country finds herself on a road where no town is nearby.

A Nobody.

On a road in a foreign country, a long way to any town, she finds a spring. And there she has an encounter, with Yahweh. In a scene that reminds of the garden of Eden and Yahweh asks Adam, "where are you?" We see Yahweh at the spring asking,

"Hagar, Sarai's slave, where have you come from, and where are you going?"

Yahweh knows her name and where she is from, but the question gives Hagar an opportunity to open up and admit her situation.

When Yahweh responds, He does not respond in a way that makes us most comfortable. Instead of setting Hagar, away from the people who have used her and putting her in new town where she could raise her yet to be born child, Yahweh sends her back to Abram and Sarai and tells her to submit to Sarai. Then he promises Hagar that she will have more descendants than she can count, but it's a mixed message, that her son will be free and wild and will fight with everyone.

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Even if we have reservations about what Hagar is told, we know that Hagar sees things positively. she feels that she has been seen by Yahweh. She called him, “El Roi,” the God who sees me.

The Nobody. The slave from Egypt. Used by Abraham and Sarai as property. Was seen by the one some people simply call, The Name. Yahweh, who knows the name of all the nobodies in the world.

- The One who is The NAME above all Names knows your name.
- He sees you wherever you are,
 - Even if you are running away.
 - Even if you are a nobody

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Appendix – Answers from Claude

when were vowel marks introduced in Hebrew writing

Vowel marks (called "nikkud" or "niqqud") were introduced to Hebrew writing during the early medieval period, primarily between the 6th and 10th centuries CE.

The development happened in stages:

Early development (6th-7th centuries): Jewish scholars, particularly the Masoretes, began developing systematic ways to preserve the correct pronunciation of Hebrew texts. This was crucial because Hebrew was no longer a spoken language for most Jews, and there was concern about losing the proper pronunciation of sacred texts.

Main systems (7th-10th centuries): Three major vowel pointing systems emerged:

- The Babylonian system (used in Babylonia)
- The Palestinian system (used in Palestine)
- The Tiberian system (developed in Tiberias)

Standardization (9th-10th centuries): The Tiberian system, developed by Masoretic families like the Ben Asher family, eventually became the standard. This is the vowel pointing system still used in Hebrew today.

The most famous example of this work is the Aleppo Codex (10th century), which represents the pinnacle of Masoretic vowel pointing.

It's important to note that ancient Hebrew texts, including the original Hebrew Bible, were written without vowel marks - just consonants. The vowel pointing was added centuries later to preserve pronunciation traditions that had been passed down orally. Modern Hebrew can still be written without vowel marks, and most contemporary Hebrew texts (newspapers, novels, etc.) don't include them, though they're still used in religious texts, children's books, and poetry.

when did people start reading silently to themselves

The transition from reading aloud to silent reading happened gradually over many centuries, with most scholars placing the major shift between roughly the 4th and 10th centuries CE.

Ancient period (pre-4th century): Reading aloud was the overwhelming norm in antiquity. Even when reading alone, people typically vocalized the text. This was partly because ancient texts lacked word spacing, punctuation, and other visual aids that make silent reading easier.

Early evidence of silent reading: The most famous early account is from Augustine's *Confessions* (late 4th century), where he describes being amazed to see Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, reading silently. Augustine found this so unusual that he speculated about why Ambrose might do it - perhaps to preserve his voice or avoid being interrupted by questions.

Gradual transition (4th-10th centuries):

- Irish and English monasteries began developing silent reading practices for private devotion
- Improvements in manuscript production, including better word separation and punctuation, made silent reading more practical
- Monastic rules sometimes required silent reading to avoid disturbing others

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Medieval period (10th-12th centuries): Silent reading became more common among educated elites, though reading aloud remained prevalent. Scholastic scholars developed techniques for silent study and cross-referencing texts.

Later developments: The printing press (15th century) and increased literacy rates gradually made silent reading the dominant mode, though reading aloud remained important for education and public communication well into the modern era.

The shift wasn't uniform across cultures or social classes - oral reading traditions persisted much longer in some communities and contexts.

How did the name Jehovah get used as a pronunciation for the Tetragrammaton

Edit

The name "Jehovah" arose from a medieval misunderstanding of how Hebrew vowel pointing worked, combined with a Jewish tradition of not pronouncing the sacred name.

The original situation: The Tetragrammaton (YHWH) appears about 6,800 times in the Hebrew Bible. By the Second Temple period (roughly 500 BCE - 70 CE), Jews had developed a tradition of not pronouncing this sacred name aloud, instead substituting "Adonai" (Lord) when reading.

The medieval vowel pointing: When the Masoretes added vowel marks to Hebrew texts (6th-10th centuries CE), they faced a dilemma with YHWH. Since it wasn't meant to be pronounced as written, they inserted the vowel points from "Adonai" (a-o-a) under the consonants Y-H-W-H as a reminder to readers to say "Adonai" instead.

The Christian misunderstanding: Medieval Christian scholars, who were learning Hebrew but weren't familiar with this Jewish scribal convention, saw the consonants YHWH with the vowels from Adonai and assumed this represented the actual pronunciation. They transliterated this as:

- Y (I/J in Latin) + a = Ja/Je
- H + e/o = ho
- W (V in Latin) + a = va
- H (often silent)

This produced "Jehovah" (or earlier Latin forms like "Iehovah").

Early appearances: The form appears in Christian texts by the 13th century and became more widespread during the Renaissance as Christian Hebraists studied Jewish texts.

The irony: "Jehovah" is essentially a hybrid word that combines the consonants of the sacred name with vowels from a substitute word - exactly the opposite of what the Masoretes intended. Most scholars today believe the original pronunciation was likely closer to "Yahweh," though the exact pronunciation remains uncertain since the tradition of not saying it aloud was so well-preserved.