

FAQ

FROM THE MESSIANIC APOLOGETICS ARCHIVES (2000-2018)

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MESSIANIC APOLOGETICS
messianicapologetics.net

Frequently Asked Questions

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Abbreviations and Special Terms

The following is a list of abbreviations for reference works and special terms which are used in publications by Outreach Israel Ministries and Messianic Apologetics. Please familiarize yourself with them as the text may reference a Bible version, i.e., RSV for the Revised Standard Version, or a source such as TWOT for the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, solely by its abbreviation. Detailed listings of these sources are provided in the Bibliography.

- ABD: *Anchor Bible Dictionary*
AMG: *Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament, New Testament*
ANE: Ancient Near East(ern)
Apostolic Scriptures/Writings: the New Testament
Ara: Aramaic
ASV: American Standard Version (1901)
ATS: ArtScroll Tanach (1996)
b. Babylonian Talmud (*Talmud Bavli*)
B.C.E.: Before Common Era or B.C.
BDAG: *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich)
BDB: *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*
C.E.: Common Era or A.D.
CGEDNT: *Concise Greek-English Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Barclay M. Newman)
CGL: *Cambridge Greek Lexicon* (2021)
CHALOT: *Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Holladay)
CJB: *Complete Jewish Bible* (1998)
CJSB: *Complete Jewish Study Bible* (2016)
DRA: Douay-Rheims American Edition
DSS: Dead Sea Scrolls
EDB: *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*
EJ: *Encyclopaedia Judaica*
ESV: *English Standard Version* (2001)
Ger: German
GNT: *Greek New Testament*
Grk: Greek
HALOT: *Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Koehler and Baumgartner)
HCSB: *Holman Christian Standard Bible* (2004)
Heb: Hebrew
HNV: Hebrew Names Version of the World English Bible
IDB: *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*
IDBSup: *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Supplement*
ISBE: *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*
IVPBBC: *IVP Bible Background Commentary (Old & New Testament)*
Jastrow: *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature* (Marcus Jastrow)
JBK: *New Jerusalem Bible-Koren* (2000)
JETS: *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
KJV: *King James Version*
Lattimore: *The New Testament by Richmond Lattimore* (1996)
LITV: *Literal Translation of the Holy Bible* by Jay P. Green (1986)
LES: *Lexham English Septuagint* (2019)
LS: *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (Liddell-Scott)
LSJM: *Greek-English Lexicon* (Liddell-Scott-Jones-McKenzie)
LXE: *Septuagint with Apocrypha* by Sir L.C.L. Brenton (1851)
LXX: *Septuagint*
m. Mishnah
MT: *Masoretic Text*
NASB: *New American Standard Bible* (1977)
NASU: *New American Standard Update* (1995)
NBCR: *New Bible Commentary: Revised*
NEB: *New English Bible* (1970)
Nelson: *Nelson's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words*
NETS: *New English Translation of the Septuagint* (2007)
NIB: *New Interpreter's Bible*
NIDB: *New International Dictionary of the Bible*
NIV: *New International Version* (1984)
NJB: *New Jerusalem Bible-Catholic* (1985)
NJSB: *Tanakh, A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures* (1999)
NKJV: *New King James Version* (1982)
NRSV: *New Revised Standard Version* (1989)
NLT: *New Living Translation* (1996)
NT: *New Testament*
OT: *Old Testament*
REB: *Revised English Bible* (1989)
RSV: *Revised Standard Version* (1952)
t. Tosefta
Tanach (Tanakh): the Old Testament
Thayer: *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*
TDNT: *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*
TLV: *Messianic Jewish Family Bible—Tree of Life Version* (2014)
TNIV: *Today's New International Version* (2005)
TWOT: *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*
UBSHNT: *United Bible Societies' 1991 Hebrew New Testament revised edition*
v(s). *verse(s)*
Vine: *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*
Vul: *Latin Vulgate*
YLT: *Young's Literal Translation* (1862/1898)
WMB: *World Messianic Bible* (2020)

God & Lord, Pagan Titles

Why does your ministry use the terms “God” and “Lord” for YHWH, when these are well documented terms used in ancient paganism?

It is notable that many Sacred Name Only advocates who affluently use the Divine Name YHWH, tend to forget that our Creator has many titles which are used complementary and independently of the Divine Name YHWH. In the Hebrew Scriptures, the most notable titles which one encounters are *Elohim* and *Adonai*. In the Greek Scriptures, their counterparts are *Theos* and *Kurios*. These titles in English correspond to “God” and “Lord.”¹

Sacred Name Only advocates often have a field day in attacking people who use the English titles “God” and “Lord.” It is often said that these words are of pagan origin and should have no place whatsoever in the vocabulary of a true Messiah follower. This claim is frequently made on the basis that God and Lord have also been titles of pagan deities. This claim is made even more so for the Greek titles *Kurios* and *Theos*, which were used in Ancient Greek as titles for the deities of classical Greek religion. However, arguments against *Kurios* and *Theos* lose significant weight when we see that the Jewish Rabbis who translated the Hebrew Tanach into Greek, with the Septuagint, had no problem using them in reference to the Holy One of Israel. In fact, when the Apostles went into Greek-speaking lands, this is *exactly* what they called the God of Israel—because these were the same terms used by a Diaspora Judaism in the Mediterranean, which even employed the Septuagint as a main Bible version.

It is not uncommon at all for many in today’s Messianic sphere of influence, to perceive of the Hebrew language as being the “holy tongue.” This is based on a misunderstanding of Zephaniah 3:9, where the Prophet said, “I will give to the peoples purified lips” (NASU) or *safar beruah*. To assume that this means that the peoples will be given an ability to speak Hebrew is not an honest assessment of the Book of Zephaniah, as the previous verses state exactly what the problem of Ancient Israel had been:

“Woe to her who is rebellious and defiled, the tyrannical city! She heeded no voice, she accepted no instruction. She did not trust in the LORD, she did not draw near to her God. Her princes within her are roaring lions, her judges are wolves at evening; they leave nothing for the morning. Her prophets are reckless, treacherous men; her priests have profaned the sanctuary. They have done violence to the law. The LORD is righteous within her; He will do no injustice. Every morning He brings His justice to light; He does not fail. But the unjust knows no shame. I have cut off nations; their corner towers are in ruins. I have made their streets desolate, with no one passing by; their cities are laid waste, without a man, without an inhabitant. I said, ‘Surely you will revere Me, accept instruction.’ So her dwelling will not be cut off *according to* all that I have appointed concerning her. But they were eager to corrupt all their deeds” (Zephaniah 3:1-7, NASU).

Being given “purified lips” is undoubtedly connected with moving from a state of sinfulness to a state of holiness—from a state of profanity to a state of purity. Zephaniah’s prophecy of “I will make the peoples pure of speech” (NJPS), is akin to the Apostle Paul’s later instruction, “Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a *word* as is good for edification according to the need of *the moment*, so that it will give grace

¹ Another notable title, particularly used of Yeshua in the Apostolic Scriptures, is *Despotēs*, usually rendered as “Master.”

There is a noticeable trend among some in today’s Messianic movement, who do not believe in speaking God’s Divine Name in deference to Jewish tradition, to replace references to Yeshua as “Lord” (*Kurios*) in English Bible quotations with “Master.” Why this is the case is uncertain, but a likely reason is that it is a reflection of a low Christology, and with wanting to purposefully disconnect any connections between the Lord Yeshua and the LORD God.

to those who hear” (Ephesians 4:29, NASU). The “purified lips” pertains to a *manner of speech* by which the Father’s people will be able to serve Him.

While the Hebrew language certainly has great beauty—it is still a *human language* (and in many cases a primitive language, with limited vocabulary, at that). And perhaps most significantly, Hebrew is an Ancient Near Eastern language with relatives such as Aramaic, Akkadian, and Ugaritic. Yet this is not understood by many teachers in too much of the Messianic sphere of influence, who assume that Hebrew is a holy language and every other language is unholy. Such a misunderstanding can lead to ridiculous conclusions such as,

“The Set-apart Spirit, inspiring all Scripture, would most certainly not have transgressed the Law of Yahuweh by ‘inspiring’ the Messianic Scriptures in a language riddled with the names of Greek deities and freely using the names of these deities in the text, no way! (C.J. Koster, *Come Out of Her, My People*)”²

Here, because common nouns in Greek are also attested to be used as names of Greek deities, the Greek Scriptures are assumed to obviously not be inspired of the Almighty. This has led to a number of people doubting the message of the gospel or good news, and leaving faith in Yeshua the Messiah.

But what happens if we were to apply this logic equally to the Hebrew Scriptures? Terms common to Hebrew are used as the proper names of pagan gods in languages such as Ugaritic—including the terms *El* and *Elohim*—which are applied to YHWH in the Tanach.³ If such a standard as proposed were applied to the whole of Scripture, **neither the Hebrew Tanach nor Greek Messianic Writings could be considered inspired**, as both languages include common vocabulary words used to refer to pagan deities. Are today’s Messianic people ready to start reading the Tanach against its Ancient Near Eastern context? This has certainly been a significantly deficient area of our Biblical Studies.

If we are to reject titles such as God and Lord because they might be used to refer to pagan deities, then we must hold the Hebrew titles of *Elohim* and *Adonai* to the same standard. Not surprisingly, both of these titles have been used to refer to *pagan deities* every bit as much as YHWH. *TWOT* explains that *El*, the singular form of *Elohim*, “is a very ancient Semitic term. It is also the most widely distributed name among Semitic-speaking peoples for the deity, occurring in some form in every Semitic language, except Ethiopic.”⁴ So, if a Bible reader is to reject God and Lord as titles, then they must do the same for *Elohim*—precisely because *Elohim* is used to refer to pagan deities, and *El* is used in almost every Semitic language to refer to deities *other than* YHWH.

And, Bible readers have to also consider some more (inconvenient) matters. A shortened poetic form of “Yahweh,” *Yah*, which also appears in the Hebrew Tanach, was possibly used by pagan societies which pre-dated the Israelites. The *IVPBB* indicates, “There are a number of possible occurrences of Yahweh or Yah as a deity’s name outside of Israel, though all are debatable.”⁵ If we assume there is some accuracy here, we should not then just conclude that YHWH is a pagan name because pagans in the Ancient Near East may have used derivations of it. Note how in 2 Samuel 5:20, David described the God of Israel as *Ba’al*, which was indeed the name of a Canaanite deity. Yet we also see that, “In the early years the title Baal seems to have been used for the Lord (Yahweh)” (*NIDB*).⁶ Is this an error on David’s part? We should not believe so.

There is no substantial evidence that makes “God” and “Lord” pagan titles. Otherwise, titles such as the Hebrew *Elohim*, and possibly even the name YHWH itself, would be pagan. Let us be a faith community which can begin to actually read the Bible in its world, and be guided by more facts.⁷

² C.J. Koster, *Come Out of Her, My People* (Northriding, South Africa: Institute for Scripture Research, 1998), vi.

³ Consult the author’s article “The Song of Moses and God’s Mission for His People” (appearing in the *Messianic Spring Holiday Helper*).

⁴ Jack B. Scott, “*el*,” in R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 1:42.

⁵ John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 80.

⁶ Steven Barabas, “Baal,” in Merrill C. Tenney, ed., *The New International Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 113.

⁷ For a further discussion on this and related issues, consult the author’s article “Sacred Name Concerns” (appearing in *Introduction to Things Messianic*).