De Nomine Sancto

(Concerning the Holy Name)

Introduction

Early in my Christian life, I became aware of the holy name (aka sacred name) controversy. I read numerous tracts and booklets concerning the reasons why Christians should use the name "Yahweh" for our God and use the name "Yahshuah" instead of the name "Jesus." I obtained a Sacred Name version of the Bible and a Holy Name version of the Bible. The introductions provided more ammunition for the case for using the holy names. Shortly after entering upon full-time ministry I presented a series of five sermon-lectures on all the reasons why I was henceforth going to use only those sacred names. Shortly thereafter, I was roundly criticized by a number of other ministers who felt I was in error. I had even gone so far as to state that if one were not water baptized using the name "Yahshua," then the baptism was no good and therefore one was not really "saved." Ugh! About the same time, I was beginning to be privately tutored in Greek and Hebrew. I re-studied the whole issue and concluded I was in serious error. At a Bible conference, I publicly recanted and requested that all who had received the audiotapes from us either destroy them, re-use them or return them to us.

Understand that I did not recant every single point of my teaching on that subject. It is still patently obvious to anyone who makes even a cursory study of the subject that, despite their good intentions, the translators had no right to remove the name of God (usually spelled "Yahweh" in English) and substitute the word "LORD," (usually in all capital letters). He *is* our Lord, but His <u>name</u> is not "LORD." "Lord" is a title, like "king" or "president." Thus, it has been my practice ever since, that whenever I am quoting the Old Testament orally, I re-insert the name "Yahweh," or in writing, I reinsert the English equivalent letters "YHWH" for the Hebrew letters. However, I do not use "Yahshua" instead of "Jesus." I use the English name Jesus. But I am not offended by those who do use what they believe to be the Hebrew name of the Savior. I simply think there is no need to use the Hebrew form.

Furthermore, there is much debate in sacred name circles as to whether it is properly rendered as "Yahshua" or "Yashua" or

"Yashuah" or "Yahshuah" or "YahoShua" or "Yeshua" or "YeHoShua" or YeHoShuah" or "Jehoshua"or numerous other variants. Still more debates are enjoined among them regarding which syllable is to be stressed. It all becomes very confusing to the average Christian who simply desires to worship the true Creator and His Son. Without attempting to become overly technical, therefore, we ask the reader to consider the following discussion.

Challenges of Interlanguage Communication
When the 70 scholars translated the Old Testament from Hebrew to Greek, they faced the same inherent challenges facing any translator when attempting to reproduce the message communicated in one language into another. Most of the difficulty in translation involves grammatical and semantic structure, but there also exist challenges with the mechanical and phonetic aspects of interlanguage communication, namely the very letters and sounds themselves.

Native speakers of English tend to be ignorant of the fact that not all people and tongues employ the same set of sounds or phonetic rules as English does. For instance, if one asks a native speaker of German to pronounce the English word *this*, he will either say *tis* or *dis* because his own language does not use the English sounds associated with the consonant blend *th*. When a German encounters a construction containing the *th* consonant blend, he does not relate to the blend, but sees it rather as two consonants with two individual sounds. Likewise, if one asks native speakers of English to pronounce the guttural German *ch*, we are at a loss, for our language does not use it in speech, nor do any of the letters of our alphabet represent such a sound. When we consider these mechanical and phonetic differences, we can understand the challenges facing the scholar who must communicate the proper names of one language into another while dealing with widely differing alphabets and phonetic tools.

Transliteration of Proper Names
Translators usually transliterate proper names rather than translate them so as to retain the personal aspect of a name and to avoid having to make awkward renderings. Many Hebrew names are transliterated from Hebrew into Greek in the New Testament as can be seen readily in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. We see names like Ἐνώχ (Enoch), Ἰακώβ (Jacob), and Ἰωσήφ (Joseph) among others whose Hebrew names were transliterated into Greek characters as closely as the Greek

alphabet would allow. We identify these proper names as transliterations because rather than having been translated into actual Greek words, their Hebrew sounds/letters have been represented in the corresponding characters of Greek. For example, English translators could have rendered the Hebrew name *Jacob* "*heel-catcher*," but because it is a proper name, they transliterated it from Hebrew into English characters as would most aptly fit the phonetics of our English (Roman) alphabet; thereby rendering it *Jacob*.

Many Israelites in the New Testament era were given Old Testament names; therefore, many Hebrew names were in use at the time of Christ. The name *Joseph* is a good example; Matthew 1:16 introduces Mary's husband Ιωσήφ (Joseph), and Hebrews 11:21 refers to the sons of Ιωσήφ (Joseph) having been blessed by their grandfather Jacob. Obviously, the writer of Hebrews refers to the Old Testament Joseph, son of Jacob. Similarly, Matthew 1:1 introduces the reader to *Iησοϋ (Jesus), son of David, and Acts 7:45 refers to the Iησοϋ (Jesus) who led our forefathers out of the wilderness into the land of promise. Here it is obvious the writer of The Acts refers to the Old Testament son of Nun, successor to Moses, whom we know as *Joshua*. The Greek New Testament uses the identical word for the son of Nun as it does for the Son of David because the word *Iησοϋς* and its inflected forms are Greek transliterations of the Hebrew *Jehoshua* (or *Yehoshua*), which mean *Yahweh Savior*, or *Yahweh saves*.

Iησοϋς Is the Correct Transliteration of the Hebrew
The assertion in some circles that *Iησοϋς* is not a correct transliteration of *Jehoshua* (or *Yehoshua*) displays poor scholarship and a gross ignorance of the languages involved. Furthermore, to base such an assertion on the premise that the English transliteration of the Greek Iησοϋς (*Jesus)*, doesn't look much like the English transliteration of the Hebrew *Yehoshua* (*Joshua)*, is unsound reasoning at best. It has also been suggested that if the name *Yehoshua* had been left intact in the Greek New Testament we would have been able to see that our Savior was the true Son of Yahweh because we would see *Yah* in His name. However, with careful inspection, we can understand how the Hebrew name *Yehoshua* becomes *Iησοϋς* in Greek.

First, there is no consonant *j* or *y* sound (as in English *yes*) in Greek. A common way to create an initial *y* sound in Greek is to use a vowel combination using an initial iota, in this case *Iη*

(iota/eta), pronounced individually *ee-ay*, or pronounced together *yay*. Other examples of this can be seen above in the Greek forms of *Joseph* and *Jacob*. This practice also can be seen in Spanish, a language that also lacks a consonant *y* sound (the Spanish *y* is pronounced as a vowel like our long *e*). Second, there is no way to represent the *h* sound <u>within</u> a Greek word (the *h* sound in Greek is only found as an <u>initial</u> sound as indicated by the initial diacritical breathing mark). Therefore it is perfectly reasonable for the second syllable beginning with the *h* sound to be omitted because there was no way of reproducing it in Greek. Third, there is no consonant blend sound *sh* in Greek, so it would be natural to represent it with a *ς* (sigma), pronounced like our *s*. Last, the long *u* sound in Greek is accomplished with the diphthong *ου* (omicron upsilon) rather than the single upsilon, hence the *ου* rendering. In Greek, nouns are inflected for case, and *ου* is a common genitive ending; therefore we have *Ιησοϋ* as the genitive form and *Ιησοϋς* as the nominative form.

This analysis shows that *Ιησοϋς* is indeed a proper transliteration of our Savior's Hebrew name, and as one can see, the only way to have left the name "intact" would have been to have used the Hebrew characters themselves, leaving all future generations in the dark save the select few who could decipher Hebrew.

Jesus Is the Correct Transliteration of the Greek
It has also been suggested that *Jesus* is not a transliteration of the Greek *Ιησοϋς*. Scholarly investigation shows that *Jesus* is a proper English transliteration, and its English usage predates any usage by other tongues such as Spanish (or Mexican). Just because the Mexican practice of christening their sons *Jesus* (pronounced by them as hay-soos) may seem sacrilegious does not negate the authenticity of the name. Mexicans could just as easily christen their children *Yahweh* without challenging its authenticity as the personal name of the God of the Bible.

Is Hebrew the Only Language of the One True God?
Finally, let us consider if there is something inherently holy about the Hebrew language itself. Does the omnipotent God of the universe need or require us to pronounce His name or His son's name in perfect Hebrew to understand to Whom we refer or to be honored by our praises? Interestingly, those who have suggested as much most likely err when they pronounce His name *Yah-way*; the Hebrew would be pronounced more like *Yah-<u>weh</u>*!

We must ask ourselves who put our language into our minds in the first place. The sovereign God of Scripture gave His people diverse languages, and if there was something inherently holy about Hebrew and the proper Hebrew pronunciation of His name and His son's name, surely He would have made Hebrew the tongue of all of His covenant people, and surely He would have made Hebrew the lingua franca of Christ's day instead of Koine Greek.

Conclusion
While all Christians agree that we should worship our God "in spirit and in truth," the debate arises over whose view is the truth. We have been in error before, and no doubt will be again on any number of Bible doctrines, but the above is truth concerning the holy name, *as we now understand it*. Let us all leave off from the name-calling, and decrying our opponents as "heretics," and simply let each brother and sister have the freedom of conscience to call upon the name of our God as each believes it to be.

* *Ιησοῦ* is the inflected form of *Ιησοῦς* and reflects the genitive case.