LORD (Lawrd) One who has power and exercises it responsibly. Lordship must include power to exercise control as well as possession of power within the boundaries of a well-defined system such as law. A despot is only a caricature of the legal term "Lord" or "ruler."

Humans as Lord The Hebrew word adon, "lord," is used more than 300 times in the Old Testament for a human's rule over another person. This is to be distinguished from baal (also "lord") in that adon represents a personal relationship of the subjection of one person to another, while baal designates the owner of things, including slaves and women. See Baal. At times persons would address someone of equal social status as "lord" out of respect

In the New Testament the Greek word kurios can designate both one who exercises rule over persons as well as the owner of goods. It is also used in respectful address to a father (Matt. 21:29-30) or to a ruler (Acts 25:26). In the era of the Roman caesars, the title kurios symbolized the caesar's position as absolute monarch. It did not mean that the caesar was a god. Kurios was not used in the cults devoted to the worship of the caesars. When the early Christians confessed Jesus as Lord, they protested against the religious claims of the state but not against the rulership of the caesar as such. On the other hand, the Jewish rebels denied the political authority of the caesar. Being exempt from the cult of the caesar, Jews could easily call the caesar: "lord." Christians had to dispute the caesar's claim to be lord when that claim was understood to mean the caesar was divine. See Emperor Worship.

God the Lord Nations around Israel often called their gods: "lord." We need to distinguish between the Near Eastern and Greek religions. At first the Greeks did not see themselves in a slave/lord relationship with their gods because they did not believe their gods were responsible for their creation. They could, indeed, call the gods "lord," but that was not characteristic. Instead, both they and their gods were subject to the same higher power--that is, fate. Thus the Greeks felt no personal responsibility before the gods. The divine manifested itself much more in the political governing structures. In the democracy the divine manifested itself in the law which the citizens served. In the monarchy the divine was embodied in the ruler; and, in the worship of the ruler the law (which lived in all citizens of Greece) was honored.

In the Near East the gods were lords of fate. Humans were thus responsible to the gods. Many gods were called "lord." Marduk, the national god of Babylon, was called Bel, another form of Baal (Isa. 46:1; Jer. 50:2; 51:44). From among humans, the king towered above and beyond all others. The god had transferred the administration of divine law to the king.

In the Old Testament, Lord usually describes the essence of Yahweh: His power over His people (Ex. 34:23; Isa. 1:24), over the entire earth (Josh. 3:13; Mic. 4:13), and over all gods (Deut. 10:17; Ps. 135:5). Thus adon could stand parallel to the personal name of God, Yahweh (Ex. 15:17): Yahweh is Lord; the Lord is Yahweh. Additional terms such as Sabbaoth (that is, Supreme Head and Commander of all the heavenly forces) underscored the absolute lordship of Yahweh (Isa. 3:1; 10:16,33). Many times adon or the special form adonai was used in direct address to God (439 times), attesting to the honor of God or His representative (2 Sam. 7:18-22,28-29; Josh. 5:14; Zech. 4:4). In time a formal designation, adonai jahweh ("the Lord Yahweh"), developed. This corresponded to the uniqueness of Yahweh; and, finally, Yahweh was referred to as adonai alone, especially in Isaiah, Psalms, and Lamentations. Israelites formed personal names with adonai (Adonijah, Adoniram) just as did their neighbors (Adoni-zedek, Josh. 10:1-3), since these peoples also addressed their gods as "lord."

The designation of Yahweh as adonai led to varied forms of conflict with Baal and his worshipers during the history of Israel: for example, prior to the conquest (Num. 25); during the time of the Judges (6:25-32); during the monarchy (1 Kings 18; 22:53; 2 Kings 3:2; 10:18-28). Even in Judah, worship of Baal proved a danger (2 Kings 11:18; 21:1-5). King Josiah's reform finally ended the conflict with Baal by destroying the worship places outside Jerusalem (2 Kings 23). The prophets Hosea, Jeremiah, Zephaniah, and Ezekiel spoke out against the hidden "Baalizing" of the religion of Yahweh. They claimed Israel went to worship Yahweh but did it in such a way they were actually worshiping Baal without naming his name. Yahweh was the supreme Lord over the world; but Baal's worshipers saw Baal as lord of at least a part of the world. He appeared and disappeared with the vegetation, being humiliated and defeated by other gods, even becoming weak, sick, and dying. See Gods, Pagan. These competing understandings could only mean alternatives and opposition. The revelation of God in the Old Testament, however, speaks against any such alternative or opposition, for Yahweh alone is Lord. He is Lord in His historical acts. Humans have no power over Him. He is Lord in His directions for life. Humans are to obey Him totally. He is the Lord who reveals Himself in His covenant, His law, and His faithfulness.

About 300 B.C. adonai became more frequently used than Yahweh. Thus the Books of Esther, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon do not use the name: Yahweh. The title "Lord" (adonai) was no longer an adjective modifying the divine name but was a substitute for the divine name: Yahweh. Origen reported that when Jews read the divine name Yahweh, they would pronounce it adonai, while non-Jews would pronounce it kurios.

In the Greek translation of the Old Testament (Septuagint), written before the time of Christ, "Yahweh" was written in Hebrew characters. In the Dead Sea Scrolls, the scribes out of awe for the divine name wrote it in ancient Hebrew script rather than in their normal script. Later, Christian scribes replaced the Hebrew characters in the Greek Bible with kurios. Scribes transmitting the Hebrew Bible showed that Yahweh should not be pronounced but read as adonai by substituting the Hebrew vowels of adonai for those of Yahweh when writing the divine name. See Kere-Kethib. Later readers who did not know this history did not pronounce Yahweh; but neither did they pronounce adonai, as the scribes intended. Rather in the Middle Ages readers of the Hebrew Bible began pronouncing precisely what was written, the mixture of consonants from Yahweh and vowels from adonai, producing the pronunciation of Jehovah, a word that never existed for speakers of classic Hebrew.

In the majority of the books of the New Testament, also, Yahweh, or God was called Lord. That occurs above all in quotations from the Old Testament and in translating terms such as "angel," "way," "word," "day," "name," or "hand" of the Lord. In important passages kurios (Lord) appears in the sense of the Old Testament adonai as Creator of the world and Director of history (Matt. 9:38; 11:25; Acts 17:24; 1 Tim. 6:15; Book of Revelation). In this way Christians preserved and continued the Jewish understanding of God. Since the New Testament and early Christians also called Jesus "Lord," we have difficulty many times determining whether Jesus or God is meant by "Lord" (Matt. 24:42; Mark 5:19-20; Luke 1:76; Acts 10:14).

Jesus is Lord The two words, "kurios Jesus," composed the first Christian confession of faith (1 Cor. 12:3; Rom. 10:9). The decisive reason for transferring the divine title Lord to Jesus was His resurrection from the dead.

Before His resurrection, Jesus was addressed with the Jewish title of honor Rabbi ("teacher", Mark 9:5; 11:21, for example). Luke always, and Matthew usually, translated this title into Greek as kurios ("Lord). According to Mark only once did a non-Jew address Jesus as Lord (Mark 7:28), but even that was simply a polite and courteous way of speaking (equivalent to our "sir"). Jesus was also addressed with the Aramaic mari ("lord", John 13:13). The resurrection changed the respectful student/teacher relationship of the disciples with Jesus into the believers' servant/Lord relationship. The designation of Jesus as Lord in the Gospels (esp. in Luke) is an indication of this shift in relationship. Paul said that God honored Jesus with the title of Lord as His response to Jesus' obedient suffering (Phil. 2:6-11). Jesus in the form of a Servant is the humbled One with the marks of the cross, before whom the entire world will bow down. Thus the Crucified One will experience an act of homage like that due God Himself (Isa. 45:23-24). His church already gives Him such homage. He has been seated at the right hand of God, which demonstrates the elevation of Jesus to the position of Ruler next to God Himself (Ps. 110:1; see Mark 12:35-37). Still, the New Testament does not go so far as to identify Jesus with God by calling Him, "abba" (that is, father; see Abba).

Jesus as the Messiah of Israel (Acts 2:36) was installed as Head of His church and Ruler of the cosmos by His resurrection (Col. 1:17; 2:6,10; Eph. 1:20-23). As such, the church prays for His return: "Come, our Lord" (or in Aramaic, maranatha, 1 Cor. 16:22; 11:26; Rev. 22:20). The cosmic lordship of Jesus still remains the lordship of God. Jesus will give the judged and redeemed world back to the Father (1 Cor. 15:28). The center of this lordship is the power of administration over all things human (Rom. 14:9).

The lordship of Jesus has ethical consequences. He makes the significance of all other powers of only relative importance (1 Cor. 8:5-6; Col. 2:15). The Christian believer is foundationally freed from being servant to any thing or person in the human world (1 Cor. 7:22-23). The believer devotes self to serve others, even the ones in power, as his or her lord in voluntary service (Mark 10:42-45). Speaking the word Lord or calling out to Jesus with the title "Lord" is not enough for salvation. Such calling must be accompanied by actions which correspond to the teachings of the resurrected, Crucified One and to His example (Matt. 7:21-22; John 13:14-15).

Already in Acts, "Lord" had become something like a summary of the Christian message. This expresses itself in a growing, more extensive formulation of the name of Jesus: "Lord Jesus," "the Lord Jesus," "the Lord Jesus Christ." In the introductions and conclusions of Paul's Epistles--as well as at significant places of the logical argument of the Epistles--the name is expressed in especially extensive formulations (Rom. 5:1; 8:39; 15:30; 1 Cor. 15:57). The objective fact of the Lordship of Christ is supplemented by the subjective element of personal bonds to Christ through the possessive pronoun: "My/our Lord Jesus Christ." The "our" in "our Lord" includes all Christians; "your Lord" does not occur in the New Testament. Jesus Christ either joins people together, or He separates them, when they deny His right to be Lord (Rom. 16:18; 1 Cor. 1:2,10-13). The personal bond or union with Jesus and with one another is especially emphasized in the formula "in the Lord" or "in Christ." Here it is evident that Lord and Christ are, in the final analysis, interchangeable (1 Cor. 7:22; 2 Cor. 4:5). The Lord is Jesus, through whom God intervened in the activities of the world in order to bring salvation.

How can humans be convinced that the crucified Jesus from Nazareth is the Lord--that is, that in Him God acted in the way that the Bible says and in the way that the world needs? How can people be convinced that He is the Messiah of Israel and the Lord of all people, who comes near to all people as Friend and Brother? How does the Lord of the cosmos become our personal Lord in His church? This happens through the Holy Spirit. God has fully empowered the resurrected Jesus to send out this Spirit (Acts 2:33). Indeed, Paul could say that the Lord is the Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45; 2 Cor. 3:17). This does not signify a total identifying of Jesus with the Spirit of God (compare 2 Cor. 13:13), but it testifies to the inseparable unity of the Lordship of God with the sending of Jesus and with the work of the Spirit. See Christ; God; Holy Spirit; Messiah; Jesus; Rabbi; Resurrection.

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My source: Holman Bible Dictionary for Windows, Parson’s Technology, 1994.