Onoma

A. Onoma belongs to the following word group:
1. Onoma (ὀνόμα) (noun), “name, reputation, title, rank.”
2. Onomazo (ὀνομάζω) (verb), “to speak of, call, address persons by name, to name or specify things, to designate, to tell, express, indicate, assent, promise.”
3. Eponomazo (ἐπωνόμαζω) (verb), “to apply a name to, to surname, to nickname, call by name, to denominate.”

B. Classical Usage
1. The noun onoma is derived from the Indo-Germanic word nomn, or enomn (cf. the Latin nomen and the Scandinavian name) and means “name.”
2. From the earliest period of the Greek language, onoma means name, whether of a person, or a thing.
3. As with the English word “name,” an extended meaning is “fame” or “reputation.”
4. To “have a name” means to be not able or, in other contexts, to have only a name without the accompanying reality.
5. In business dealings the name represents the person, his property, his interests, or his obligations.
6. In grammar, onoma means “noun.”
7. More significant than mere definitions were the various views of the relationship between a name and the thing or person bearing the name.
8. Primitive peoples believed the name provided magical power over the thing, person, god, or demon named.
9. They believed the name itself had an intrinsic and revelatory relationship to its owner.
10. This view persisted in some circles but came to be questioned by the Greek philosophers, beginning in the 6th and 5th centuries B.C.
11. Parmenides, the Sophists and Plato held views somewhat similar to those of modern linguistic science: words (including names) means what a given language group agree to have them mean.
12. A name may reflect a perception of the thing or person, but a perception may be wrong or partial.
13. Thus onoma cannot be simply equated with the nature of what is named.
14. In contrast to Plato, Stoic philosophers held that the name represents the very nature of the thing named.
15. Consequently the Stoics believed that etymological analysis of names provides genuine insight into the nature of reality.
16. The discussions of the names of the gods were important for the relationship between language and its object.
17. Hesiod had already tried to find the key to the nature of the gods from the etymology of their names.
18. The names of the gods were viewed as “verbal cult-pictures” (Democritus, Frag. 142, in Diels-Kranz I, 170, 9).
19. The aspect of the terrible and unapproachable was thus appropriate for them (Plato, Philebus 12c; Cratylus 403a).
20. Others, such as Menander and Aristides, represent the viewpoint that the higher a god stood, the more names he had.
21. In a move toward monotheism, the Stoics ascribed all the divine names to one god (Zeus), explaining the various names as descriptions of the multiple aspects of his nature and deeds or fulness of being.
22. But the many names of the god of the universe can be transmuted into namelessness, in that no name does justice to the fullness of the godhead.
23. This line of thought has continued right up to modern times.
24. The magical phrases and formulae found on the papyri of late antiquity reveal the belief in the power and effectiveness of the names of gods and demons.
25. The name is thus a power which is very closely associated with the bearer and which disloses his nature.
26. Pronouncement or invocation of the name sets in operation the energy potentially contained in him.

C. LXX Usage
1. Onoma occurs over 1000 times in the LXX, almost always translating the Hebrew shem (sv@), “name.”
2. In a few places it translates other Hebrew words meaning “report” or “fame” (e.g., Numbers 14:15; Joshua 6:27).
3. Hans Bietenhard states, “In Israel as among other peoples there was awareness of the significance attached to a name, and of the power which resided in it. The first and later utterance of a name means more than formal endowment with, and use of, a means of naming someone. By giving someone a name, one

4. The significance attached to names is easily seen in the many etymological explanations of the names of individuals, places and nations.

5. The basis for the choice of name could have been:
   a. certain events which took place when the child was born (e.g., Gen. 25:26).
   b. particularities in connection with the complexion of the child (Gen. 25:25).
   c. parents wishes and expectations for the newborn child (Gen. 35:18).

6. Giving or changing a name could indicate dominion over that which is named or a change of status:
   a. Abram became Abraham (Gen. 17:5).
   b. The Jewish exiles received new names from their captor Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 1:7), which was a way of giving them Babylonian citizenship so they could help in the government.

7. Sometimes the name could be personified completely, so that it is mentioned as if it performed the action itself (cf. Psalm 20:1-2 [LXX 19:2]; Malachi 1:11).

8. To disregard the name was to disregard the person (Ex. 20:7; Lev. 24:16).

9. To pay homage to the name was to show honor to the one who was given that name (Neh. 9:5; Psa. 34:3 [LXX 33:3]; 138:2 [137:2]).

10. The Complete Biblical Library makes the following excellent comment regarding God’s name in the OT, “God’s name is the most important one in the Old Testament. Whether called by His distinctive name ‘the Lord’ (Yahweh = kurios) or by the generic term ‘God’ (Elohim = theos), God’s identity and nature cannot be known apart from the history of His words and actions in relationship with His people. For this reason God speaks of Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and as ‘the Lord thy God, Who has brought thee out of the land of Egypt’ (Ex. 3:6; 20:2). True knowledge of God’s name involves knowledge of this history and participation in this relationship. In contrast to the beliefs of the primitive pagan world, the Bible makes clear that knowledge and use of God’s name does not provide power over Him but rather relationship with Him and responsibility to Him. First of all, His name is known only because He freely chose to reveal it (Gen. 17:1; Ex. 3:14-15). Furthermore, the invoking of His name for magical purposes (or other misuses) is forbidden by the third commandment (Ex. 20:7). Israel was urged ‘to call on the name of the Lord,’ trusting His faithfulness to the covenant, not because the use of His name could force Him to act. God promised to care for the people and the temple bearing His name, but those privileges and blessings could be forfeited by human unfaithfulness to the relationship (2 Chron. 7:14-22). Likewise the prophets who spoke ‘in the name of the Lord’ had authority only as faithful proclaimers of what God had spoken to them. Without such a commission, the prophet was false. In Jewish writings outside of Scripture, Philo reflected the influence of Greek Stoicism when he said God’s real name never reaches men. God is being itself, which cannot be named. Thus kurios, ‘Lord’ is only the name for God’s power to rule and not God’s actual name (ibid., 5:264-65) (Complete Biblical Library Greek-English Dictionary Lambda-Omnicron 2948-3664).

11. Hans Bietenhard commenting on the use of the word in the OT, writes, “Of primary significance is the name of Yahweh, which He Himself made known in His revelation (Gen. 17:1; Exod. 3:14; 6:2). One of the most fundamental and essential features of the biblical revelation is the fact that God is not without a name: He has a personal name, by which He can, and is to be, invoked. When appeal is made to Yahweh, He comes near and makes His promise true: ‘in every place where I cause My name to be remembered I will come to you and bless you’ (Ex. 20:24; cf. Num. 6:24 ff.). Priests and Levites, and even the king, bless in the name of Yahweh (Num. 6:27; Deut. 10:8; 2 Sam. 6:18). The name of Yahweh, indeed, is such a powerful expression of His personal rule and activity that it can be used as an alternative way of speaking of Yahweh Himself (Lev. 18:21; Psa. 7:17; Amos 2:7; Mic. 5:4). It is the side of Yahweh which is turned towards men, in which Yahweh reveals Himself. His historical dealings with men in the past (Exod. 3:6, 13, 15), present (Ex. 20:7) and future (Ezek. 25:17; 34:50 et al.) are inextricably bound up with His name. Misuse of this name in magic or in false oaths (for oaths were accompanied by mention of Yahweh’s name) is forbidden (Ex. 20:7), for the name of Yahweh is a gift of the revelation which is not at man’s disposal (Gen. 17:1; Exod. 3:14; 6:2). The name of Yahweh is committed in trust to Israel: the heathen do not know it (Psa. 79:6). Israel has the task of hallowing it. This takes place in the cult, at sacrifice, in prayer, in blessing and cursing, and also in the holy war (Psa. 29:8), in other words, in serving Yahweh, and Him alone, and in obeying His commands. To take part in the cult-worship of another god therefore invokes profanation of the name of Yahweh (Lev. 19:21). The invocation of His name over Jerusalem (Jer. 25:29), over the temple (Jer. 7:10) and over the ark (2 Sam. 6:2), consecrating
them and associating them with him, is the sole basis of that sanctity. Deut. gives the following answer to the question as to how Israel can have dealings with Yahweh: Yahweh Himself dwells in heaven, but He chooses on earth a place where He causes His ‘name’ to dwell (Deut. 12:11; 14:23; cf. 2 Sam. 7:13; 1 Kings 3:2; 5:17). In that His name dwells in the temple, Yahweh’s presence is itself guaranteed; but only in such a way that even if the temple is profaned, Yahweh’s transcendence remains preserved (cf. 1 Ki. 8:13, where Yahweh dwells in thick darkness with 1 Ki. 8:14 ff., where Yahweh’s name dwells in the temple). Yahweh’s name, like Yahweh Himself, remains sovereign” (The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, volume 2, pages 649-650).

D. NT Usage

1. Onoma occurs 228 times in the NT.

2. Bietenhard list the following usages of the word in the NT:
   a. Names of men and other beings.
   b. The name of God.
   c. The name of Jesus.

3. Bietenhard commenting on the phrase “the name of Jesus” in the NT, writes, “The significance of Jesus’ life and activity is evident in his name (Matt. 1:21; Jesus art. Iesous; on Emmanuel in Matt. 1:23-God, art. Emmanouel). He bears the sublime name of Son (Heb. 1:4 f.). His name is ‘the Word of God’ (Rev. 19:13; cf. John 1:1). God’s name of Lord also becomes his name (Phil. 2:9 f.; Rev. 19:16). Above and beyond this, he bears a name which he alone knows (Rev. 19:12), ‘and the name by which he is called is The Word of God’ (Rev. 19:13). The name ‘Jesus’ can be replaced simply by ‘the name’ (Acts 5:41; 3 John 7; cf. the Jewish replacement of Yahweh by sem). The whole content of the saving truth revealed in Jesus is comprised in his name (Acts 4:12; 1 Cor. 6:11). Belief in the name of the Son, i.e. belief in Jesus’ messianic mission (John 3:18), is God’s command (1 John 3:23; 5:13). Anyone who believes in his name receives forgiveness of sins (Acts 10:43; 1 John 2:12), has eternal life (John 20:21; 1 John 5:13) and escapes the judgment (John 3:18). A Christian’s whole life is dominated by the name of Jesus (Col. 3:17), whose glorification is the goal of faith (2 Thess. 1:12)” (The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, volume 2, page 654).

4. The Complete Biblical Library states, “Jesus came in the name of the Father (i.e., sent by the Father) to accomplish the Father’s purposes (John 5:43), but the accomplishment of those purposes brought a revelation of Jesus’ own name. Ultimately every knee will bow to Jesus’ name, for the name of ‘Lord’ is above every name (Eph. 1:21; Phil. 2:9-11). ‘Lord’ (kurios) is the Septuagint’s rendering of Yahweh. To call Him ‘Lord’ is to acknowledge that He is God (John 20:28), and to call upon Him as Lord is to find salvation (Rom. 10:9, 13). To use His name this way, however, does not put His saving power under man’s control, since ‘no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Spirit’ (1 Cor. 12:3). The saving use of His name is God’s gift just as the salvation itself is His gift” (The Complete Biblical Library, Greek-English Dictionary Lambda-Omnicron 2948-3664).

5. Once again we will quote Bietenhard, who writes, “The fulness of being and the work of Jesus Christ may be seen in His name. At God’s command He receives the name of Jesus (Matt. 1:21 and par.), which expresses His humanity and also His divine mission: autos gar soset tou laon autou apo ton hamartion auton. The significance of this name is more fully elucidated in verse 23. It implies ‘God with us’ (meph hemon ho theos), i.e., that with the presence of Jesus God’s presence is given to the community. The exalted name which Jesus receives according to Heb. 1:4 is the name of Son (cf. v.5: huios mou ei su). The name kurios, which in the LXX is either a translation or a paraphrase of the divine name Yahweh, is also His name (Phil. 2:9 f.). It denotes His divine equality. Because the essence of the Most High is in it, because the name of Lord belongs to both God and Jesus Christ, it is the name above all other names, i.e., beings (cf. Eph. 1:21). In His divine equality He is kurios kurion (Rev. 19:16). The divine dominion is revealed in Him: basileue basileon (Rev. 19:16; cf. Dt. 10:17). The unity of nature and name may also be seen in Rev. 19:13 when taken with Jn. 1:1: He not only bears the name, but is ho logos tou theou, i.e., He alone has the communion with God which is described in Jn. 1:1 and remains a mystery in every revelation. The being of the Lord who is exalted over all also remains a mystery; He bears a name which no one knows apart from Himself, Rev. 19:12. ‘He possesses a relationship with God which none can perceive’” (Theological Dictionary of the New Testament volume V, pages 272-273).

6. Lars Hartman commenting on the word onoma, states, “Two NT texts speak of the name of the exalted Christ: Phil. 2:9 and Heb. 1:4 (cf. also Rev. 3:12). According to Phil. 2:9 God gives to ‘exalted one’ ‘the name that is above every other name,’ i.e., the name Kurios: The name represents His divine essence. Heb. 1:4 refers to a similar enthronement: Christ has inherited a name that is more excellent that that of the
angels, i.e., God has given Him the name and therefore also the nature and position of ‘Son’” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, volume 2, page 521).

   a. of the name by which a person or things is called.
   b. for all that a name implies, of authority, character, rank, majesty, power, excellence, etc., of everything that the name covers.
   c. as standing, by metonymy, for persons.

8. The Analytical Greek Lexicon Revised (page 289):
   a. A name; the proper name of a person
   b. A mere name or reputation
   c. A name as the representative of a person
   d. The name of the author of a commission, delegated authority or religious profession

   a. Universally: of proper names
   b. By a usage chiefly Hebraistic the name is used for everything which the name covers, everything the thought or feeling of which is roused in the mind by mentioning, hearing, remembering, the name, i.e., for one’s rank, authority, interests, pleasure, command, excellences, deeds, etc.
   c. In imitation of the Hebrew שם
   d. Like the Latin nomen, i.e. the cause or reason named

    a. of proper names
    b. title, category
    c. person
    d. the (well-known) name, reputation, fame
    e. office

11. Louw and Nida list the following categorical usages for the word (Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains, volume 1):
    a. the proper name of a person or object - ‘name.’
    b. a person, with the possible implication of existence or relevance as individuals - ‘person, people.’
    c. that which is said about a person on the basis of an evaluation of the person’s conduct - ‘reputation.’
    d. category or kind, based upon an implied designation for a class of entities - ‘category of, being of the type that.’
    e. to employ the name of the Lord as evidence that one worships the Lord.
    f. to spread information extensively about a person.
    g. to insult or slander, with a possible implication of a kind of psychological ostracism.
    h. to give a name to, with the possible implication of an additional name.
    i. to be acknowledged as belonging to the one whose name is called upon such an individual.

E. Research of Deismann

1. Adolph Deismann states that the word’s “repeated occurrence in indictments certainly suggests the conjecture that it must have had a technical meaning...the name of the King is the essence of what he is as ruler. We see how nearly this idea of the onoma approaches to that of the Old Testament shem (שם), and how convenient it was for the Egyptian translators to be able to render quite literally the expressive word of the sacred text. The special colouring which onoma often has in early Christian writings was doubtless strongly influenced by the LXX, but the latter did not borrow that colouring first from the Hebrew; it was rather a portion of what they took from the adulatory official vocabulary of their environment” (Bible Studies page 146).

2. He also notes that *onoma* was “established for the impressive language of the court and of worship” (Bible Studies page 147).

F. Philippians 2:9 Usage

1. *Onoma* means “rank,” and with the definite article *to* preceding it the phrase should be translated “the rank.”

2. Thayer states that the phrase *to onoma* denotes a title of honor and authority (The New Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon page 447).
3. The context of the passage implies that *onoma* does not refer to any definite appellation such as *kurios* or *Iesou* but rather it denotes the superior rank, power, and authority which the humanity of Christ has been awarded by God the Father for His substitutionary spiritual death on the cross which executed the Father’s plan for the incarnation.

4. The humanity of Christ now has been awarded the sovereign rulership over all of creation and every creature by God the Father because of His substitutionary spiritual death at the cross which accomplished the defeat of Satan in the angelic conflict!


6. Lightfoot commenting on the word’s usage in Philippians 2:9, states, “If St. Paul were referring to any one term, *kurios* would best explain the reference; for it occurs in the context *hoti kurios Iesous Christos*, ver. 11. But here, as in the passages quoted, we should probably look to a very common Hebrew sense of ‘name,’ not meaning a definite appellation but denoting office, rank, dignity. In this case the use of the ‘Name of God’ in the Old Testament to denote the Divine Presence or the Divine Majesty, more especially as the object of adoration and praise, will suggest the true meaning; since the context dwells on honor and worship henceforth offered to Him on whom ‘the name’ has been conferred. ‘To praise the name, to bless the name, of God’ are frequent expressions in the Old Testament” (St. Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians pages 113-114).

7. Wuest commenting on *to onoma*, writes, “That which was graciously bestowed was not ‘a name,’ but ‘the Name.’ The definite article appears in the Greek text and refers to a particular name. The title, THE NAME, is a very common Hebrew title, denoting office, rank, dignity. The expression, ‘The Name of God’ in the Old Testament, denotes the divine Presence, the divine Majesty, especially as the object of adoration and praise. The context here dwells upon the honor and worship bestowed on Him upon whom this name was conferred. The conferring of this title ‘The Name,’ was upon the Lord Jesus as the Son of Man. A Man, the Man Christ Jesus, who as Very God had voluntarily laid aside His expression of the glory of Deity during His incarnation, now has placed upon His shoulders all the majesty, dignity, and glory of Deity itself. It is the God-Man who stooped to the depths of humiliation, who is raised, not as God now, although He was all that, but as Man, to the infinite height of exaltation possessed only by Deity. It is the answer of our Lord’s prayer ‘And now, O Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine own self with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was’ (John 17:5). It is the glory of Deity, not now seen shining in infinite splendor as in His pre-incarnate state, but that glory shining in perfect contrast to and with His glorified humanity raised now to a place of equal dignity with Deity. It is the ideal and beautiful combination of the exaltation of Deity and the humility of Deity seen in incarnate Deity” (Word Studies in the Greek New Testament volume 2, page 71).

8. This expression *to onoma* expresses the fact that the humanity of Christ in hypostatic union has been promoted to the sovereign rulership over all of creation and every creature and is thus higher than angelic authority.