The Ineffable Name:

YHWH, I AM, and the Evolution of the Divine Name in Jewish and Christian Thought

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ABSTRACT

The divine name יהוה, YHWH, revealed in Exodus 3:14–15, presents one of the most profound theological and linguistic mysteries in Scripture. This paper traces the development of the Name from its Hebrew origin in אהיה אשר אהיה, *Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh,* (*"I AM WHO I AM"*) through its Greek and Latin transformations, including the Septuagint's use of κύριος, early Greek transliterations such as Ἰαώ and Ἰαβέ, and the medieval hybrid form *"Jehovah."* It examines the reverence that led to the avoidance of vocalizing the Name, the linguistic barriers to transliteration, and the theological implications of substituting a title (*Lord*) for a personal name.

Special attention is given to how the New Testament authors used LXX language to identify Jesus with YHWH, culminating in a Christology grounded in divine identity rather than functional lordship alone. The study also considers how the name *"Jehovah"* is appropriated in modern religious systems, notably by Latter-day Saints and Jehovah's Witnesses, and how their differing applications of the name reflect theological departures from both the biblical usage and the unified identity of YHWH in the Hebrew Scriptures. Ultimately, the paper argues that the transmission and translation of the divine name were divinely orchestrated to preserve reverence while revealing divine identity—reaching across languages and cultures by the guiding work of the Holy Spirit.

INTRODUCTION

Few words in the biblical canon have generated as much reverence, caution, and theological significance as the divine name YHWH. First revealed to Moses in the burning bush encounter of Exodus 3:14–15, this four-letter name—known as the Tetragrammaton—became central to Israel's identity and worship, yet so sacred that it eventually fell out of regular usage. Ancient Jewish scribes, motivated by a deep fear of violating the third commandment, increasingly refrained from pronouncing it aloud, substituting it with *Adonai* (*"Lord"*) during public readings. This reverence shaped not only oral tradition but also the course of biblical translation, as seen in the Septuagint (LXX), which consistently renders YHWH as *κύριος* (Lord).

The implications of this substitution are far-reaching. Linguistically, the Greek language lacked the phonetic tools to transliterate YHWH precisely. Theologically, the choice to use *κύριος* in place of the divine name provided an opening for New Testament authors to apply Old Testament Yahwistic texts directly to Jesus. Thus, the name YHWH—though rarely uttered—became a cornerstone of early Christian identity claims about Christ. When Paul, for instance, declares that *"every knee shall bow… and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord"* (Phil 2:10–11), he quotes Isaiah 45:23, a passage originally applied exclusively to YHWH. The significance lies not just in Jesus being *"a lord,"* but in Jesus being *the Lord*—the very God of Israel.

This study will examine the origin and transformation of the divine name from its first appearance in Hebrew Scripture to its development through Greek, Latin, and English traditions. It will explore phonetic approximations like Ἰαώ and Ἰαβέ, the theological impact of rendering YHWH as *κύριος*, and the eventual emergence of the

Latinized hybrid *"Jehovah."* It will also consider the modern appropriation of the name in religious movements such as the Jehovah's Witnesses and Latter-day Saints, whose respective applications of *"Jehovah"* to the Father and the Son reflect deep theological divergences. Ultimately, the paper argues that while the pronunciation of the name may be lost to history, its meaning, authority, and redemptive significance are preserved in Scripture and fulfilled in Christ.

II.   **THE NAME REVEALED:** יהוה **AND** *"אהיה אשר אהיה"*

The first full disclosure of God's personal name in Scripture occurs in Exodus 3:14–15, where God responds to Moses' request for identification by declaring, *"I AM WHO I AM"* (אהיה אשר אהיה) and instructs him to tell the Israelites, *"אהיה has sent me to you"*.[1] Immediately following, God reveals His memorial name: *"YHWH, the God of your fathers… this is my name forever"* (v. 15). The interplay between *"אהיה"* (first-person singular imperfect of *hayah*, *"to be"*) and YHWH (likely a third-person form: *"He is"* or *"He causes to be"*) forms the theological basis for interpreting YHWH not simply as a name, but as a declaration of God's nature: self-existence, eternal being, and unchanging presence.[2]

The form אהיה אשר אהיה has been rendered variously in English translations as *"I AM THAT I AM," "I AM WHO I AM,"* or *"I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE."* The

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[1] Exodus 3:14–15, ESV. See also Walter Brueggemann, *Exodus*, in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 1 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 708–710.

[2] Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), 136–138.

Hebrew imperfect verb form allows for both present and future senses, suggesting a dynamic and relational being who is not merely static existence but active presence.[3] This nuance is often lost in translation, but it sets the foundation for understanding why the divine name resists precise definition or pronunciation.

When the divine name YHWH appears later in the text, it functions as a theological reflection of the earlier אהיה—a move from the first person (*"I am"*) to third person (*"He is"*), indicating that the name YHWH may itself be a theophoric expression derived from the root *hayah*, linking it intrinsically to the concept of being.[4] This aligns with Jewish theological traditions which emphasize the name's ineffability and holiness, eventually leading to its avoidance in spoken language.

III.   THE SEPTUAGINT AND THE SUBSTITUTION WITH *ΚΥΡΙΟΣ*

By the third century B.C., Jewish translators working in Alexandria rendered the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek, producing what would become known as the Septuagint (LXX). In doing so, they made a critical translational decision: rather than attempting to transliterate the Tetragrammaton (יהוה), they replaced it with the Greek word *κύριος* (Lord).[5] This substitution has had lasting theological ramifications, not only for Jewish diaspora communities but also for the shaping of early Christian Christology.

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[3] Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 51–52.

[4] Raymond Abba, *"The Divine Name Yahweh," Journal of Biblical Literature* 80, no. 4 (1961): 320–328.

[5] Sean McDonough, *YHWH at Patmos: Rev. 1:4 in Its Hellenistic and Early Jewish Setting* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 33–36.

The choice to render YHWH as κύριος was likely influenced by several interwoven factors. First, reverence for the divine name had already become deeply entrenched in Jewish religious practice. Following the post-exilic period, and especially during the Second Temple era, the name YHWH was avoided in spoken liturgy and was replaced by *Adonai* (Lord) or *HaShem* (The Name) during public readings.[6] This practice aligned well with translating YHWH as κύριος, which carried a similar meaning in Greek and avoided the potential profanation of the sacred Name.

Second, Greek as a language lacked the necessary consonants and phonetic structures to represent YHWH accurately. With no consonantal equivalents for Yod, He, Waw, or final He, and no voiced *"h"* or *"w"* sounds, transliteration into Greek would have produced either awkward or inaccurate results. Rather than risk mishandling the ineffable Name, the translators opted for a title that conveyed respect and aligned with established Jewish oral tradition.[7]

Finally, the theological implications of substituting κύριος became evident in the New Testament, where passages from the Septuagint that originally referred to YHWH were quoted and applied to Jesus Christ. This was not merely a literary device but a profound theological claim: that Jesus shares in the divine identity of YHWH. Paul's quotation of Joel 2:32 in Romans 10:13—"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved"—is a clear example. In the original Hebrew, the verse refers to YHWH,

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[6] Larry Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 103–107.

[7] Emanuel Tov, *The Text-Critical Use of the Septuagint in Biblical Research* (Jerusalem: Simor Ltd., 1981), 29–30.

but in Paul's application, it refers to Jesus, signifying an intentional transfer of divine status.[8]

Though some early LXX manuscripts such as Papyrus Fouad 266 preserved the Tetragrammaton in paleo-Hebrew script embedded within the Greek text, these are rare and reflect an earlier phase before the standardized substitution with *κύριος* took root.[9] The move from Name to Title was not a demotion, but rather a protective and providential development—one that would later become essential for proclaiming Jesus as YHWH in the common tongue of the Roman Empire.

IV.   **ALTERNATE TRANSLATION POSSIBILITIES: WHAT COULD THE LXX HAVE USED?**

While the Septuagint's choice to use *κύριος* for YHWH has had enduring theological value, it was not the only theoretical option available to the translators. One alternative would have been to transliterate the Tetragrammaton into Greek letters, attempting to preserve its phonetic structure. Another possibility would have been to render the Name more literally or ontologically, reflecting the meaning behind אשר אהיה*,* *Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh,* (*"I AM WHO I AM"*) using Greek expressions such as *ἐγώ εἰμι* (*"I am"*) or *ὁ ὤν* (*"the Being One"*).[10]

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[8] Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 182–185.

[9] Kristin De Troyer, *"The Tetragrammaton in the LXX,"* in *Studies in the Hebrew Bible, Septuagint, and Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. James A. Sanders (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2006), 189–202.

[10] Martin Hengel, *The Septuagint as Christian Scripture: Its Prehistory and the Problem of Its Canon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 28–31.

These alternatives, while conceivable, were likely avoided for both linguistic and theological reasons. A transliteration of YHWH into Greek—such as Ἰαώ (Iaō)—was known in some mystical and magical texts of the period but never became part of mainstream Jewish or Christian Scripture.[11] The form Ἰαώ appears in Greek magical papyri, early Gnostic writings, and even in the works of Church Fathers like Origen and Theodoret, who reported it as a Jewish attempt to vocalize the divine Name.[12] However, this form likely reflected a shortened or poetic version of the Name (e.g., *"Yahu"* or *"Yaho"*) rather than a full rendering of YHWH.

A more philosophically robust option would have been to translate the Name using ὁ ὤν (*"the One who is"*), which the Septuagint in fact uses in Exodus 3:14 in its rendering of אשר אהיה: ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὤν — *"I am the One who is"*.[13] However, this expression was reserved for that specific context and was not used throughout the LXX in place of YHWH. Its ontological depth may have been too abstract for general use in narrative and law texts, and its philosophical overtones may have made it unsuitable for liturgical purposes.

Another intriguing hypothetical is the use of ὁ ἐγώ (*"the I Am"*) as a stand-in for the divine Name. While never used in the Septuagint, it would have aligned conceptually with the theology of Exodus 3:14 and foreshadowed the I Am sayings of Jesus in the

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[11] Charles W. Hedrick, *"The Meaning of the Divine Name YHWH," Journal of Biblical Literature* 96, no. 3 (1977): 385–393.

[12] Theodoret of Cyrus, *Quaestiones in Exodum* 15; Origen, *Commentary on Psalm 2*.

[13] LXX Exodus 3:14. See also Moisés Silva, *"Old Testament in the New,"* in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1997), 845–850.

Gospel of John (e.g., *ἐγώ εἰμι*, John 8:58).[14] However, this form may have been considered grammatically awkward or theologically presumptuous.

In the end, the translators chose *κύριος*—not for lack of options, but likely out of reverence, clarity, and continuity with oral Jewish tradition. Ironically, that very substitution would become the vehicle through which Jesus would be identified as the embodiment of YHWH's divine identity in the Greek-speaking world.

V.   THE *"I AM"* SAYINGS OF JESUS AND THE DIVINE NAME

Nowhere is the connection between the divine name and New Testament Christology more explicit than in the Gospel of John, where Jesus repeatedly uses the phrase *ἐγώ εἰμι* (*"I am"*) in ways that echo the divine self-revelation of Exodus 3:14. While some of these expressions are grammatically normal (e.g., *"I am the bread of life"*), others stand out as theologically charged, especially in contexts where *ἐγώ εἰμι* is used absolutely—without a predicate.[15]

John 8:58 is the most direct example: *"Before Abraham was, I am"* (*πρὶν Ἀβραὰμ γενέσθαι, ἐγώ εἰμι*). The response of the crowd—picking up stones to kill Him—suggests that they understood Jesus to be making a divine claim, not merely asserting pre-existence.[16] The construction parallels the Greek of Exodus 3:14 in the LXX (*ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὤν*) and appears to place Jesus within the identity of YHWH Himself.

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[14] Richard B. Hays, *Reading Backwards: Figural Christology and the Fourfold Gospel Witness* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014), 84–87.

[15] C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), 344–347.

[16] Andreas J. Köstenberger, *A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 392–395.

John's Gospel reinforces this connection through multiple thematic *"I AM"* sayings—"I am the light of the world" (8:12), *"I am the good shepherd"* (10:11), *"I am the resurrection and the life"* (11:25), and others. These sayings blend the familiar metaphorical structure of Jewish wisdom and messianic expectation with the ontological weight of the divine name.[17] The usage of ἐγώ εἰμι in these contexts should not be seen merely as a grammatical device, but as a Christological declaration rooted in Jewish theological tradition.

This identification of Jesus with the *"I AM"* of Exodus was not lost on the early church. In Revelation 1:8 and 4:8, John applies the language of ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος (*"the One who is, who was, and who is to come"*) to Jesus, further solidifying the ontological and eschatological identification between the risen Christ and YHWH.[18] The echo of ὁ ὤν from Exodus 3:14 in these passages is unmistakable.

Thus, the use of ἐγώ εἰμι in the New Testament is not incidental—it is a deliberate invocation of the divine name tradition. Jesus does not merely act like God or speak on God's behalf; He speaks in a way that **embodies** the revealed identity of Israel's God, now made flesh.

VI.   TRANSLITERATIONS OF YHWH IN EARLY GREEK SOURCES

While the Septuagint overwhelmingly uses κύριος in place of the Tetragrammaton, some early Greek sources attempted to preserve or approximate the

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[17] Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, Vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 720–726.

[18] Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 28–32.

divine name through transliteration. Among these, the form Ἰαώ (Iaō) stands out as the

most commonly attested. Found in the Greek magical papyri, Gnostic literature, and

referenced by early Church Fathers, Ἰαώ likely represents an effort to capture the sound

of *"Yahu"* or *"Yaho,"* shortened poetic forms of YHWH seen in names like *Eliyahu*

(Elijah) or *Yeshayahu* (Isaiah).[19]

Origen (3rd century AD) records that the Jews pronounced the divine name as

Ἰαώ, while Theodoret of Cyrus (5th century AD) distinguishes between Jewish and

Samaritan traditions: the Samaritans, he says, used Ἰαβέ (Iabe), and the Jews Ἰά (Ia).[20]

These variants suggest that while the sacred name was generally avoided in mainstream

Jewish liturgical contexts, knowledge of its vocalization persisted in certain mystical or

regional traditions.

The use of Ἰαώ in magical and esoteric texts—especially in syncretistic Greco-

Egyptian spells—highlights how the divine name was viewed as having potent spiritual

or cosmic significance.[21] However, its appearance outside canonical contexts and its

association with magical practices likely contributed to its exclusion from official

translations like the LXX.

In terms of phonetics, Ἰαώ is pronounced *Ee-ah-ō* in Koine Greek, ending with a

long omega vowel that suggests the form reflects an open-ended vocalization similar to

"Yaho." It does not align with the reconstructed form *"Yahweh,"* which ends with a short

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[19] Larry W. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism*, 2nd ed. (London: T&T Clark, 1998), 33–35

[20] Theodoret of Cyrus, *Quaestiones in Exodum* 15; Origen, *Commentary on Psalm 2*, cited in G.W. H. Lampe, ed., *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), s.v. *"Ἰαώ."*

[21] Hans Dieter Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), xxxvii–xlii.

"eh" sound. This has led some scholars to suggest that the early vocalizations of the divine name may have sounded closer to *"Yahwah"* or *"Yahuah"*.[22]

These transliterations—though rare and never standardized—nonetheless represent a meaningful attempt to preserve the distinctiveness of the divine name, even within the constraints of Greek phonology. They offer insight into how early Jewish and Christian thinkers wrestled with the tension between reverence and representation when it came to YHWH.

VII.   **WAS IT YAHWEH OR YAHWAH?**

Linguistic Evidence and Theological Implications

Among scholars, *"Yahweh"* is the most widely accepted reconstruction of the pronunciation of YHWH. This form is supported by early patristic evidence, such as Theodoret's report of the Samaritan usage Ἰαβέ (Iabe), as well as by comparative studies in Hebrew grammar and Semitic linguistics.[23] The form *"Yahweh"* is typically understood as a third-person singular imperfect form of the Hebrew verb *hayah* (היה), meaning *"He is"* or *"He causes to be."* It is thus consistent with the theological logic of Exodus 3:14, where God first introduces Himself as *אהיה* (*"I am"*).[24]

However, there are competing views. Some scholars and Hebrew roots advocates argue for a pronunciation more akin to *"Yahwah"* or *"Yahuah,"* which reflects the *Yahu*

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[22] R. Laird Harris, *"The Pronunciation of the Tetragram," The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 23, no. 2 (1980): 144–152.

[23] Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 60–63.

[24] Ludwig Köhler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, trans. M. E. J. Richardson (Leiden: Brill, 1994), s.v. *"היה."*

or *Yahoo* endings preserved in many theophoric names—e.g., *Eliyahu* (Elijah), *Yeshaʿyahu* (Isaiah), and *Zekaryahu* (Zechariah).[25] These forms suggest a shortened or poetic usage of the divine name, possibly vocalized as *"Yahu"* in early Hebrew speech.

Phonetically, the Greek transliteration Ἰαώ (Iaō) offers supporting evidence for a vocalization closer to *"Yahu"* or *"Yaho"* than to *"Yahweh."* The final omega (ō) in Ἰαώ suggests an open vowel sound that aligns more closely with *"Yahwah"* than with the clipped *"eh"* ending of *"Yahweh"*.[26] Furthermore, since ancient Hebrew likely used *waw* (ו) as a /**w**/ sound—not a /**v**/—the *"Yahwah"* form would have matched the phonetics better than modern misreadings such as *"Yahveh."*

The use of Ἰαβέ (Iabe) by the Samaritans, however, more closely matches *"Yahweh,"* and it reflects a later stage of pronunciation, perhaps influenced by Greek phonology. It is worth noting that by the 5th century A.D., Greek beta (β) was likely pronounced as a *"v"* rather than a *"b,"* so *Iabe* may have sounded like *"Yahveh"* to Theodoret's ears, even if the Hebrew retained a /w/ sound at the time.[27]

In the end, the exact pronunciation of YHWH remains uncertain, but not irrelevant. Whether pronounced *"Yahweh," "Yahwah,"* or *"Yahuah,"* each form attempts to recover a name that was considered too sacred to utter. The diversity of forms in the ancient world reflects both the theological reverence for the Name and the linguistic challenges of preserving it across cultures and alphabets.

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[25] George Wesley Buchanan, *"How God's Name Was Pronounced," Biblical Archaeology Review* 5, no. 1 (1979): 14–18.

[26] Joseph Fitzmyer, *"The Aramaic Background of the New Testament," Theological Studies* 25, no. 3 (1964): 417–435.

[27]. Geoffrey Horrocks, *Greek: A History of the Language and Its Speakers*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 175–177.

VIII.   JEHOVAH: THE LATINIZED HYBRID

The form *"Jehovah"* is a relatively late development in the history of the divine name and does not reflect the original pronunciation of YHWH. It arose through a process of misunderstanding the Masoretic practice of inserting the vowel points of *Adonai* (*"Lord"*) into the consonants of YHWH to remind readers to say *Adonai* instead of pronouncing the divine name aloud. When these consonants and vowels were combined—*YeHoWaH*—a hybridized form was created that was never intended to be spoken as written.[28]

As this form passed into Latin, the Hebrew consonants were rendered with Latin equivalents: Y became J, W became V, and the result was *JHVH*. Inserting the Masoretic vowels into this Latinized structure produced *"Jehovah,"* a term that first appeared in the writings of the Dominican monk Raymundus Martini in the 13th century.[29] Although never accepted by Jewish tradition, *"Jehovah"* gained widespread use in early English Bible translations, especially through the influence of William Tyndale and later the King James Version.[30]

Despite its flawed origin, the name *"Jehovah"* became deeply embedded in Protestant devotional language. Hymns such as *"Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah"* and traditional theological works continued to use it well into the 20th century. Even today,

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[28] Paul Joüon and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, rev. ed. (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 2006), §16g.

[29] Raymundus Martini, *Pugio Fidei* (c. 1270), ed. B. H. Cowper (London: Williams and Norgate, 1861), 552.

[30] Jack Moorman, *Early Manuscripts and the Authorized Version: A Closer Look!* (Collingswood, NJ: Bible for Today Press, 2000), 27–28.

some English-speaking Christians associate *"Jehovah"* with the unique covenantal identity of God.

Modern religious movements have also appropriated this form in distinct ways:

- **Jehovah's Witnesses** treat *"Jehovah"* as the exclusive and proper name of God the Father and center much of their theology around restoring its use in both worship and translation.

- **Latter-day Saints (Mormons)** use the name *"Jehovah"* to refer to Jesus Christ in His pre-incarnate state, while Elohim refers to God the Father.[31] In LDS theology, these are not just two names for the same God—they are two separate beings. This view is unique to Mormonism and not found in either Jewish or traditional Christian beliefs.

   Importantly, in the Bible, *Elohim* is not a personal name like YHWH—it is a category word that refers to any spiritual being who exists in the unseen realm. This includes:

- **YHWH (the God of Israel)** – *"In the beginning, God [Elohim] created the heavens and the earth." (*Genesis 1:1*)*

- **Angels** – *"You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings [Elohim]." (Psalm 8:5; see Hebrew—many English Bibles say "angels")*

- **Demons** – *"They sacrificed to demons that were not God—to gods [Elohim] they had never known." (*Deuteronomy 32:17*)*

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[31] Stephen E. Robinson, *"Elohim and Jehovah in Mormonism,"* in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 2:479–481.

- **The spirits of the dead** – *"Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?"* … *"I see a god [Elohim] coming up out of the earth."* (1 Samuel 28:13–14, referring to Samuel)

- **The gods of the nations** – *"For all the gods [Elohim] of the peoples are worthless idols, but the LORD made the heavens."* (Psalm 96:5; also, Psalm 82:1)

Only YHWH is described in the Bible as the one Elohim who is eternal, uncreated, and all-powerful—all others are created and lesser.

Though both Jehovah's Witnesses and Latter-day Saints emphasize the name's importance, their divergent uses of *"Jehovah"* illustrate contrasting theological frameworks rooted in post-biblical interpretations. From a scholarly perspective, *"Jehovah"* is widely recognized as a misreading, yet its persistence serves as a reminder of how reverence, tradition, and misunderstanding can intersect in the transmission of sacred ideas.[32]

IX.   THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION: THE NAME AND THE NATIONS

The journey of the divine name YHWH—from Hebrew origins through Greek, Latin, and English—reveals not only a history of linguistic adaptation but also the providence of God in making Himself known across cultures and languages. What began as an unutterable name, revealed in the desert to Moses, eventually became the theological foundation for identifying Jesus as the visible image of the invisible God. The translation choices of the Septuagint, the vocalizations preserved in early Greek texts, and

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[32] Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 68–70

even the mistaken form *"Jehovah"* all testify to the enduring importance of God's name in salvation history.

From a theological standpoint, the shift from YHWH to *κύριος* in the Septuagint was not merely a matter of reverence or linguistic necessity—it was a Spirit-guided decision that would later enable the early church to proclaim Jesus as Lord in a Greco-Roman world.[33] Because the LXX consistently rendered YHWH as *κύριος*, New Testament authors were able to quote Old Testament YHWH texts and apply them directly to Jesus without requiring Hebrew literacy from their audience.

This move also affirms that God's name is not restricted to phonetic accuracy, but is intimately tied to His revealed character. In Philippians 2:9–11, Paul declares that Jesus has been given *"the name that is above every name,"* echoing Isaiah 45:23, where YHWH declares that to Him *"every knee shall bow."* By applying this text to Jesus, Paul identifies Christ not just with the function of Lordship, but with the identity of YHWH Himself.[34]

The existence of divergent pronunciations—*Yahweh*, *Yahwah*, *Jehovah*, and others—may seem problematic at first glance. But they instead reveal a deeper truth: that God has permitted His name to be spoken in many tongues, filtered through many traditions, and still honored by those who seek Him. As the psalmist writes, *"Those who know your name put their trust in you"* (Psalm 9:10). Knowing the name, in Scripture, is not limited to vocalizing it correctly—it is about knowing the One to whom it belongs.

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[33] Karen H. Jobes and Moisés Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 207–210.

[34] N.T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 83–85.

Thus, even as scholars debate the historical pronunciation of YHWH, the Church continues to confess that *"Jesus is Lord,"* and in doing so, calls upon the name that saves (Romans 10:13). This is not merely an act of confession, but an act of alignment with the One who is, who was, and who is to come.

X.   **CONCLUSION**

The divine name YHWH has long stood as a symbol of God's transcendence, covenant faithfulness, and self-existence. Though its exact pronunciation has been lost to time, its significance has only grown. From the burning bush to the cross, the Name has remained central to the identity of the one true God—and, ultimately, to the identity of Jesus Christ as Lord. The journey of this Name through Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and English illustrates more than linguistic change; it reveals the hand of divine providence guiding history, translation, and worship.

In the Septuagint, the substitution of *κύριος* for YHWH was not a diminishment, but a bridge—one that allowed the gospel to cross linguistic and cultural boundaries without compromising theological integrity. The apostles' application of Old Testament YHWH texts to Jesus was only possible because of this substitution, showing that what may have appeared as a scribal workaround was, in fact, part of God's redemptive plan. Through Jesus, the Name has been revealed in a new way—not just spoken, but embodied.

Even the hybrid form *"Jehovah,"* though philologically flawed, has served as a vessel for worship and revelation. It stands as a testament to God's willingness to make Himself known through imperfect means, using the languages of the nations to proclaim the Name that saves. As this study has shown, God is not confined to any one phonetic

form. He is the One who was, who is, and who will be known—by His Name, through His Word, and ultimately in the person of His Son.

In the end, the LXX stands not only as a translation of Scripture, but as a testament to the sovereign wisdom of God, who, by His Spirit, prepared a way for the nations to know His Name. At the end of all our textual analysis and theological reflection, we bow—not to manuscripts or traditions—but to the Holy Spirit, who guided it all.[35]

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[35] As echoed in the conclusion of the author's earlier study, *"The Septuagint's role in spreading Christianity demonstrates its significance as a divinely orchestrated tool in redemptive history... we bow to the Holy Spirit, who guided it all."* See also Michael S. Heiser, *The Bible Unfiltered: Approaching Scripture on Its Own Terms* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017), 172–174.

APPENDIX: JEHOVAH AMONG THE RESTORATIONISTS — LATTER-DAY SAINTS AND JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

1.   **Jehovah's Witnesses (Watch Tower Society)**

Use of *"Jehovah"***:**

- Jehovah is the name of God the Father alone.

- Jesus is not Jehovah; he is the created being Michael the Archangel who became human.

- The New World Translation inserts *"Jehovah"* into the NT over 200 times — even where no manuscript has YHWH, based on theological reasoning.

- For JWs, *"Jehovah"* is the one true God, and Jesus is His Son, subordinate in being and function.

Do they debate pronunciation?

- They acknowledge *"Jehovah"* is likely not the original pronunciation, but they insist it is the most recognizable and widely accepted rendering of the divine name in English.

- For them, using some name is more important than being exact.

2.   **Latter-day Saints (Mormons)**

Use of *"Jehovah"***:**

- Jehovah is the personal name of Jesus Christ in his premortal existence.

- God the Father is called Elohim, treated as a distinct divine being.

- Jesus as Jehovah is the God of the Old Testament, appearing to Moses, giving the Law, etc.

- This usage is deeply embedded in LDS temple liturgy and theology.

Do they debate pronunciation?

- LDS scholars generally recognize *"Yahweh"* as more accurate.

- However, the use of *"Jehovah"* is retained for consistency with LDS revelation and tradition.

- No widespread internal controversy — the name is doctrinally assigned rather than historically reconstructed.

3.   **Comparison Table:**

Aspect	Jehovah's Witnesses	Latter-day Saints (LDS)
Jehovah =	God the Father	Jesus Christ
View of Jesus	Created being (Michael the Archangel)	Uncreated Son of God, spirit child of Elohim
View of Elohim	Rarely used; not a proper name	Name of God the Father
Trinity	Denied (strict monotheism)	Denied (three separate gods in one Godhead)
Pronunciation of YHWH	*"Jehovah"* used publicly; admits it is not original	*"Jehovah"* used liturgically; *"Yahweh"* acknowledged in scholarship
Substitution of Name in Text	Inserts *"Jehovah"* into OT and NT (even where not in manuscripts)	Retains *"Jehovah"* in interpretation and liturgy, not in translated scripture

4.   **Theological Reflection**
The divergent uses of Jehovah in these two systems reveal how redefining the divine name can result in radically different theologies:

- For JWs: **Jesus cannot be Jehovah**, so they redefine Him as the greatest created being.

- For LDS: **Jesus must be Jehovah**, so they redefine the Father as **Elohim**, a separate being.

Both systems break from the biblical and Jewish tradition, in which YHWH is the personal name of the one true God and is never applied to more than one being.

The early church's bold move was not to divide YHWH's name among divine beings, but to identify Jesus within the singular identity of YHWH — a claim that maintains monotheism while affirming Jesus as truly divine.

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