

# Biblical Hebrew Words You Already Know and Why They Are Important

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Whether we realize it or not, when we read scriptures and sing hymns, we often say Hebrew words. Our pronunciation may not be quite right, but this observation is true nonetheless. Why don't some of us realize this? Because Hebrew words have successfully made their way into our modern religious terminology without our knowledge of the origin of these words or the process of their transmission. What difference does it make whether we know their origin? Because many of these words are religious terms and titles, knowing their meaning in their original language can instruct and remind us of important concepts every time we use them. But this can happen only if we know what they mean and how they were employed in the Hebrew Bible. We miss a complete dimension of understanding and spiritual reinforcement if we do not know the meaning of these terms. The Prophet Joseph Smith certainly shared this perspective when he commented on the value of studying the scriptures in their original language: "Our latitude and longitude can be determined in the original Hebrew with far greater accuracy than in the English version."<sup>1</sup>

Certain Hebrew words made their way into English through a process called transliteration. A transliterated word is one in which the general sound of the letters (*-literate*) of a word in one language cross (*trans-*) into another language, creating a new word, so to speak, in the second language. This process contrasts with "translation," through which a word in one language is replaced by a word with the same

meaning in another language but rarely sounds anything like the word in the original language. Biblical names are good examples of words that are routinely transliterated, not translated. For example, 1 Samuel 13:16 begins, “And Saul, and Jonathan his son, and the people that were present with them. . . .” *Saul* is the transliterated form of the Hebrew name *šā’ûl* (pronounced *shah-OOL*), which means “asked,” whereas *Jonathan* comes into English from *yônātān*, “Jehovah has given.” If these names had been *translated*, the verse would read, “And *Asked*, and *Jehovah-has-given*, his son, and the people that were present with them. . . .” This example sufficiently illustrates the occurrence of transliterated words (in this case names) in the Old Testament. It also shows that some Hebrew letters are not available in English (such as *’aleph*, the letter in the middle of *šā’ûl*/Saul), so there is not always an exact match between the original form and its transliterated counterpart.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, there are no capital letters in Hebrew, and there is no “j” sound. The Hebrew “y” (*yod*) ended up being pronounced like a “j” in English because of the linguistic influence of French on Middle English (AD 1100–1500) in the centuries following the Norman invasion of Britain.<sup>3</sup>

The following discussion of six biblical Hebrew words, including the name *Jehovah*, indicates what these words originally meant and demonstrates how they were employed by biblical authors. It also suggests how knowing the meaning and usage of these words can make our experience more meaningful when reading or speaking them, whatever their context.

## Amen

The English word *Amen* (commonly pronounced *ay-MEN*) is transliterated from the Hebrew אָמֵן/*’āmēn*, and pronounced *ab-MEN* (or *ab-MAIN*). It means “surely” or “may it be so” and has the sense of confirming what has just been spoken or done. The Hebrew word *’āmēn* derives from the lexical root *’MN*, which conveys the sense “to be faithful, to be established, to believe, to be confirmed.” This explains why *Amen* is used even as a title for Jesus in Revelation 3:14: “the Amen, the faithful and true witness.”

The confirming nature of *’āmēn*/*Amen* is very evident when David, shortly before his death, gave orders to “cause Solomon my son to ride upon mine own mule. . . . And let Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anoint him there king over Israel. . . . For he shall be king in my stead. . . . And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada answered the king, and said, Amen: [may] the LORD God of my lord the king say so too. As the LORD hath been with my lord the king, even so be

he with Solomon” (1 Kings 1:33–37). Not only did Benaiah verbalize his consent to David’s orders with his “Amen” but he also expressed his desire that the Lord ratify Solomon’s kingship. About three and a half centuries later, when the Lord instructed Jeremiah to remind his contemporaries about the Lord’s covenant promise to their ancestors, Jeremiah responded, “So be it [’*āmēn*], O LORD” (Jeremiah 11:5). In both of these passages, ’*āmēn* was spoken to show affirmation of and commitment to what had just been said.

Latter-day Saints regularly conclude their prayers, teachings, and testimonies with the word *Amen*. When this occurs in a public context, the class or congregation responds, “Amen,” in unison. This practice has its antecedent as early as Mosaic times, as illustrated in several passages in the Old Testament. For example, Moses instructed the Israelites to have a covenant-renewal ceremony in Shechem after entering the land of Canaan. As part of that occasion, the Levites would “say unto all the men of Israel with a loud voice. . . . Cursed be he that maketh the blind to wander out of the way. And all the people shall say, Amen. Cursed be he that perverteth the judgment of the stranger, fatherless, and widow. And all the people shall say, Amen. . . . Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them. And all the people shall say, Amen” (Deuteronomy 27:14–26).

Similarly, when David brought the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem, he delivered a psalm of praise and thanksgiving as part of the public festivities (see 1 Chronicles 16:7–36). When he concluded, “all the people said, Amen, and praised the LORD” (v. 36; see also Nehemiah 5:13; 8:6; Jeremiah 28:6). Several psalms also preserve the liturgical use of this word. Psalm 106 concludes with the line, “Blessed be the LORD God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting; and let all the people say, Amen. Praise ye the LORD” (v. 48; see also Psalms 41:13; 72:19; 89:52). These passages illustrate how the public pronouncement of ’*āmēn*/*Amen* was an important part of Israelite worship involving all who were present as they witnessed their acceptance of what was said or done.

Thus, when a Latter-day Saint utters the word *Amen* after an ordinance or at the conclusion of a prayer or testimony, the person declares to the Lord and to others (when uttered in a public setting) his or her approval and acceptance of the preceding action, teaching, or prayed request: “May it be so—or, I am convinced that it is so—just as I have said (or done).” The individual thereby declares personal responsibility for what has been requested, taught, or done in the sacred name of the Lord Jesus. And when other Latter-day Saints respond to a public

testimony or prayer by collectively declaring “Amen”—just as ancient Israelites did—they indicate that they are witnesses to and accepting of what has been said: “So be it” or “Let it be so.” As such, they become participants in the proceedings, praying the same prayer, testifying of the same truths, renewing the same covenant. Obviously, *Amen* should not be uttered thoughtlessly.

## Hallelujah

The expression *Hallelujah* is always translated, not transliterated, in the KJV Old Testament, so it does not appear therein. But the Hebrew from which it derives, הַלְלֵוּ-יָהּ/*halēlū-yāh*, occurs two dozen times in the Bible, always in the book of Psalms.

Hallelujah (*halēlū-yāh*) consists of the plural imperative form (*halēlū*) of the verb HLL, “to praise,” plus an abbreviated form of the divine name *Jehovah* (*yāh*). As noted above, the “j” sound in English is not present in Hebrew. Furthermore, ancient Israelites pronounced the name of God more like “Yahweh” than “Jehovah” (see discussion below). Thus, *yāh*, at the end of *halēlū-yāh*, represents Yah, a short form of the name of the God of Israel. This form of the divine name occurs independently about twenty times in the Hebrew Bible but only once in the KJV, in Psalm 68:4, where it is spelled with a “j” and rendered in all capitals: “Sing unto God, sing praises to his name: extol him . . . by his name JAH, and rejoice before him.” Elsewhere, it is rendered “the LORD.”<sup>4</sup>

*Hallelujah* thus means “praise Yah/Jehovah.” It is translated in the KJV as “praise (ye) the LORD” because English Bibles substitute “the LORD” for the name *Jehovah/Yahweh*. For example, Psalm 106:48 (quoted above) reads: “And let all the people say, Amen. Praise ye the LORD [*halēlū-yāh*].” The Hebrew title of the book of Psalms, *sefer tēbillīm*, also derives from the lexical root HLL, “to praise,” and literally means “book of praises.”<sup>5</sup> Psalm 150:6, the last verse of the last psalm in the book of Psalms, reads, “Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD [*tēhallēl yāh*]. Praise ye the LORD [*halēlū-yāh*].” This phrase, *halēlū-yāh*, is therefore an ancient and well-attested expression of worship, communicating praise to and for the Lord.

Throughout history, various psalms have been referred to as “Hallel psalms” because they are particularly expressive of praise (HLL) to Jehovah for His saving acts and for His continued blessings (see Psalms 111–18; 146–50). Psalm 136 is often called the “Great Hallel.” This psalm proclaims thanks and praise to Jehovah, “for his mercy endureth for ever,” the phrase with which all twenty-six verses conclude. By Jesus’s

day, the singing of Hallel psalms was a standard part of the celebration of several Jewish holidays, including Passover. For this reason, it is often assumed that the hymn Jesus and His eleven Apostles sang together at the end of their Passover meal was a Hallel psalm (see Matthew 26:30).<sup>6</sup>

The Hebrew phrase *halēlū-yāh* was transliterated into Greek as *hallēlouia*, the form in which it occurs four times in the Greek New Testament (see Revelation 19:1–6). However, in the Greek alphabet, there is no letter equivalent to *h*; rather, the “h” sound is indicated by a “rough breathing” mark that is not represented in the Roman alphabet. Therefore, the Greek-to-English form of the Hebrew *halēlū-yāh* is *Alleluia*. So Revelation 19:4 reads: “And the four and twenty elders and the four beasts fell down and worshipped God that sat on the throne, saying, Amen; Alleluia.” Just as in the Hebrew Bible, *Alleluia* occurs here in the context of worship.

The expression *halēlū-yāh/Hallelujah/Alleluia* contains the name of the Lord Jehovah and has functioned as a joyful yet reverent expression of praise for His goodness and mercy for thousands of years. When modern disciples of Christ encounter either form of this phrase—“Hallelujah” or “Alleluia”—in scripture or in hymns<sup>7</sup> or employ it in some other form of worship, it can only be hoped that they will appreciate the full extent of its meaning, thereby giving heartfelt expression to their gratitude and joy by saying, “Praise the LORD.”

## Sabbath

The English word *Sabbath* is transliterated from the Hebrew noun **שַׁבָּת**/*šabbāt* (*shabbat* or *shabbath*), which occurs over one hundred times in the Hebrew Bible. It is related to a verb from the lexical root ŠBT, which means “to cease labor, rest.” The concept of resting from one’s weekday labors on the seventh day of the week is first introduced in scripture when the Lord rested after six periods of creative activity: “And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested [*wayyišbōt*] on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested [*šābat*] from all his work which God created and made” (Genesis 2:2–3). The seventh day is not specifically called the Sabbath in this passage, but the verb indicating the cessation of God’s labor [*šābat*] is the basis for the day’s name, which provides an apt description of one purpose of the day—resting from regular productivity. Genesis 2:2–3, therefore, provides a practical model for humans (resting after six days of work), based on divine example (God’s resting), and teaches the nature of the day—it was “sanctified,” making it literally a holy day.

These features are reiterated in the fourth of the Ten Commandments: “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. . . . The seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work. . . . For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth . . . and rested [*wayyānah*] the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it” (Exodus 20:8–11). Interestingly, the Israelites were practicing this pattern even before the revelation at Mount Sinai (see Exodus 20) because the manna the Lord provided for them was not given on the seventh day of the week (see Exodus 16:22–30). When Moses recounted the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy 5, he provided an additional reason for the Israelites’ Sabbath observance: their families, slaves, and livestock were to rest in remembrance of God’s giving them rest by delivering them from their servitude in Egypt (see vv. 12–15). Sabbath observance is thus connected in these two renditions of the Ten Commandments with the significant acts of creation and redemption by Jehovah, who is Jesus Christ.<sup>8</sup>

By virtue of being “sanctified,” or “hallowed,” by the Lord, the Sabbath takes on greater significance than just a day of rest. Exodus 31 is an important indicator of the Lord’s view of the Sabbath:

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,  
 Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my sabbaths [*šabtōtay*] ye shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you . . . that ye may know that I am the LORD that doth sanctify you.

Ye shall keep the sabbath [*šabbāt*] therefore; for it is holy unto you. . . . Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the sabbath of rest [*šabbat šabbātôn*], holy to the LORD. . . .

Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath [*šabbāt*] . . . for a perpetual covenant.

It is a sign between me and [them] . . . for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested [*šābat*], and was refreshed. (Exodus 31:12–17)

The Lord indicates in this instructive passage that Sabbath observance is a sign of His covenant relationship with His people and that Sabbath observance demonstrates recognition that it is He, Jehovah, who sanctifies His people.

These scriptures outline the following sequence: (1) Jehovah rested on and sanctified, or *made* holy, the seventh day (see Genesis 2:3); (2) He has commanded His disciples to *keep* the Sabbath holy (see Exodus 20:14)—it comes to us already holy, and we are charged to maintain its holy status; and (3) our Sabbath observance—maintaining the sanctity of the day—is both a sign of our commitment to the Lord and a reminder

to us that it is He, and only He, who has the power to sanctify us (see Exodus 31:13). This means true Sabbath observance is not just resting from labor but is a major means through which we enter into the “rest of the Lord,” which is a “state of peace . . . [and] spiritual enjoyment resulting from the power or presence of the Lord. Ultimately, it is the fulness of God’s glory (D&C 84:24).” Moving beyond worldly rest to divine rest on and through *yôm haššabbāt*, “the day of Sabbath,” brings the blessings of heaven in various and powerful ways, as promised by the Lord in Isaiah 58:13–14 and elsewhere.

After Jesus’s Resurrection and Ascension to heaven, members of Christ’s Church transitioned to observing the first day of the week, the Lord’s day, as holy.<sup>10</sup> Our weekly observance of the Sabbath is thus a combination of celebration and worship. As we call the Sabbath “a delight” (Isaiah 58:13), we rest from our weekday labors, we gather to worship and renew covenants, we commemorate the mighty acts of God (in the lives of our ancestors as well as our own), especially Jesus’s atoning sacrifice and Resurrection, and we participate with the Lord in the rest and sanctification of our souls (see D&C 59:8–13).<sup>11</sup>

## Sabaoth

Not to be confused with the word *Sabbath*, which looks somewhat similar in English, **צְבָאוֹת**/*šəbā’ôt/Sabaoth*<sup>12</sup> is a plural Hebrew noun meaning “hosts, armies.” It occurs only twice in the KJV in its transliterated form, both in the New Testament: Romans 9:29 (“the Lord of Sabaoth”) and James 5:4 (“the Lord of sabaoth”).<sup>13</sup> But *šəbā’ôt/Sabaoth* and the collective singular form *šābā’* occur about five hundred times in the Hebrew Bible.

Sometimes “host(s)” refers collectively to the inanimate creations of the Lord, such as the stars and planets, as in Moses’s warning to the Israelites about false worship: “Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves; . . . lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven, and when thou seest the sun, and the moon, and the stars, even all the host of heaven [*šəbā’ haššamayim*], shouldest be driven to worship them, and serve them” (Deuteronomy 4:15, 19).

More often, “host(s)” refers to large numbers of people (see Exodus 12:41), particularly an army, as in David’s statement to Solomon: “Moreover thou knowest also what Joab the son of Zeruiah did to me, and what he did to the two captains of the hosts [*šib’ôt*] of Israel . . . whom he slew” (1 Kings 2:5).<sup>14</sup> The concept of a nonmortal, heavenly host fighting for and with Israel is also attested to in the Old Testament. For example, the being who appeared to Joshua shortly before the Israelite attack on Jericho

said, “As captain of the host [*šēbā’*] of the LORD am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship. . . . And the captain of the LORD’s host [*šēbā’*] said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy” (Joshua 5:13–15).<sup>15</sup> Such passages clearly demonstrate the use of the singular *šēbā’* and the plural *šēbā’ôt/Sabaoth* to designate human and heavenly armies. Such usage is not surprising because the Lord, Jehovah, is depicted as a warrior several times in the Bible, such as in Exodus 15:3–4: “The LORD is a man of war: the LORD is his name. Pharaoh’s chariots and his host [*hēl*, ‘army, strength’] hath he cast into the sea.”<sup>16</sup>

The Lord’s heavenly host is not just composed of fighters but of all the holy beings who surround Him and do His will: “The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens. . . . Bless the LORD, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments. . . . Bless ye the LORD, all ye his hosts [*šēbā’āym*]; ye ministers of his, that do his pleasure” (Psalm 103:19–21). Likewise: “Praise ye him, all his angels: praise ye him, all his hosts [*šēbā’ō*” (Psalm 148:2). This is perhaps the main connotation of *yhwḥ šēbā’ôt*, “the LORD of Sabaoth,” a phrase that occurs almost 250 times in the Hebrew Bible, most commonly in prophetic texts. Jehovah as King of heaven is Lord of all the many heavenly beings and spirits, as well as of people on earth.

Although the specific sense of “hosts” in the designation *yhwḥ šēbā’ôt* is not certain in every biblical passage (divine beings in general, heavenly fighters, stars, some combination of these), it is evident that the expression “the LORD of hosts”—“Lord of Sabaoth”—is meant to encapsulate and convey Jehovah’s exalted status in the midst of other heavenly beings and His power to accomplish all His purposes in heaven and on earth. It is, therefore, not surprising that this phrase occurs a few times in uniquely Latter-day Saint scripture.

The transliterated word *Sabaoth* is attested four times in the Doctrine and Covenants (see 87:7; 88:2; 95:7; 98:2), always in relation to a prayer that has or will “come up into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.” For example, Doctrine and Covenants 95:7 emphasizes the Lord’s creative power: “Call your solemn assembly, that your fastings and your mourning might come up into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth, which is by interpretation, the creator of the first day, the beginning and the end.” The phrase “by interpretation” here does not indicate that the word *Sabaoth* literally translates to “creator of the first day,” but rather it correlates the concepts of creation and hosts. This, of course, makes good scriptural sense, based on Genesis 2:1 (“Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them [*šēbā’ām*]”) and Doctrine

and Covenants 45:1 (“give ear to him who laid the foundation of the earth, who made the heavens and all the hosts thereof”).<sup>17</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 87:7 correlates with the military sense of many of the occurrences of *yhw̄h šēbā’ôt* in the Hebrew Bible: “That the cry of the saints, and of the blood of the saints, shall cease to come up into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth, from the earth, to be avenged of their enemies.” These attestations of “Lord of Sabaoth” (from *yhw̄h šēbā’ôt*) in the Doctrine and Covenants provide a demonstrable link between modern revelation and an age-old concept and tradition of scripture language, although in this case represented in the KJV Old Testament only in translation—“the **LORD** of hosts”—not transliteration.

The phrase “Lord of Sabaoth” expresses the majesty and dominion of the Lord, who reigns over all. Our use of this phrase expresses our conviction of the Lord’s supremacy and conveys worship and confidence. The Lord and His righteous host, both in heaven and on earth, will not be defeated.

## Satan

The name-title *Satan* is the transliterated form of the Hebrew common noun  $\text{שָׂטָן}$ /*śāṭān* (pronounced *sah-TAHN*), which means “adversary, slanderer.”<sup>18</sup> The related Hebrew verb from the lexical root  $\text{שָׂטַן}$  means “to accuse, slander, be an adversary.”<sup>19</sup>

Perhaps surprisingly, the Hebrew noun *śāṭān* occurs in the following passages to designate humans who were adversaries to someone else: David (see 1 Samuel 29:4); Abishai and his brothers (see 2 Samuel 19:22); and the collective enemies of Solomon, from whom the **Lord** had given him rest (see 1 Kings 5:4; v. 18 in the Hebrew Bible). Specific enemies of Solomon who harassed him later in his reign are also labeled *śāṭān*/“adversary”: “Then the Lord raised up an adversary [*śāṭān*] against Solomon, Hadad the Edomite. . . . God raised up another adversary [*śāṭān*] against Solomon, Rezon son of Eliadah. . . . He was an adversary [*śāṭān*] of Israel all the days of Solomon, making trouble as Hadad did” (1 Kings 11:14, 23, 25; New Revised Standard Version; hereafter cited as NRSV). Thus, in the Hebrew Bible, *śāṭān* is sometimes used in reference to human “satans,” enemies who posed a political or military threat to the well-being of a person or nation.

The Hebrew noun *śāṭān* also refers to nonhuman adversaries in the Bible. In such cases, it occurs three times without the definite article (see Numbers 22:22, 32; 1 Chronicles 21:1) and twenty-three times with the definite article (*ha-*): *haśśāṭān*, literally, “the satan” (see Job 1; 2; Zechariah 3:1–2). Demonstrating the wide-ranging use of this com-

mon noun, even an “angel of the LORD” acted as a *śātān*: “And God’s anger was kindled [against Balaam] because he went [with Balak’s messengers]: and the angel of the LORD stood in the way for an adversary [*leşātān*] against him. . . . And the angel of the LORD said unto him, Wherefore hast thou smitten thine ass these three times? behold, I went out to withstand thee [*leşātān*], because thy way is perverse before me” (Numbers 22:22, 32; the NRSV reads, “I have come out as an adversary,” in v. 32).

Only 1 Chronicles 21:1 contains the noun *śātān* without the definite article in what can be considered a proper name-title for the demonic Satan, the adversary of God and His people: “Satan stood up against Israel, and incited David to count the people of Israel” (NRSV). This, of course, is the way the term *śātān* is usually used in post-Old Testament Jewish and Christian literature. Latter-day Saints generally understand *haśśātān* (“the adversary”) in Job 1 and 2 and Zechariah 3 to also be “the Adversary,” Satan, the one who slandered Job’s integrity and acted as an adversary to that righteous man. The KJV and most modern translations render *haśśātān* as “Satan” in these passages, ignoring the definite article.<sup>20</sup>

The name-title *Satan* occurs numerous times in the New Testament and in Restoration scripture as a designation for the adversary of the Lord.<sup>21</sup> When Latter-day Saints use the term *Satan* to refer to the devil, they will hopefully recall that, even more than human adversaries, this being is an eternal enemy. He rebelled against God, is “the father of all lies,” and seeks “to deceive and to blind” people “to lead them captive at his will” if they choose not to follow the Lord (see Moses 4:4). No wonder he is labeled “adversary.”

## Jehovah

Surprisingly, the name *Jehovah* occurs only four times in the King James translation of the Old Testament. It is printed in capital letters, as in Psalm 83:18: “That men may know that thou, whose name alone is JEHOVAH, art the most high over all the earth” (see also Exodus 6:3; Isaiah 12:2; 26:4).<sup>22</sup> It also occurs three times as a component of altar or place names: “And Moses built an altar, and called the name of it Jehovah-nissi” (Exodus 17:15; see also Genesis 22:14; Judges 6:24). The name *Jehovah* does not appear in the KJV New Testament at all. Despite this minimal indication, the Hebrew form of this name, יהוה/*yhwēh*, occurs about sixty-five hundred times in the Hebrew Bible! It is important for students of scripture to understand the cause of this great disparity.

*Jehovah* does not appear more often in the King James Version and other translations of the Bible because the translators were influenced by a Jewish custom, developed sometime after 500 BC, of not pronouncing the divine name *yhwh* out of respect for its sacred nature. This necessitated substituting a title in its place when the biblical text was read (the consonants *yhwh* were still written when biblical texts were copied). This development contributed to the eventual loss of the pronunciation of *yhwh*.<sup>23</sup> The substitute title most often used was, and still is, *ʾādōnāy*, “lord” (literally, “my lords,” but conventionally translated “Lord” or “my Lord”; the independent form is *ʾādōn*, “lord”; *ʾādōnī* is “my lord”).<sup>24</sup> Copies of the Hebrew Bible print the letters of the divine name, *yhwh*, but usually place the vocalization “points,” or vowel indicators, for the word *ʾādōnāy* around these four letters to remind readers to substitute the title *Lord* for the divine name *yhwh*.<sup>25</sup> This substitution is exhibited in English translations every time the divine name *yhwh* is printed as “the LORD.”<sup>26</sup> Printing “LORD” in all capitals allows readers of the English translation to distinguish between the occurrences of *yhwh* in the Hebrew text, which would be read *ʾādōnāy*, and actual occurrences of the noun *ʾādōn*, “lord.” The latter term sometimes refers to God and is printed “Lord” in translation and sometimes refers to human rulers and is printed “lord” (except at the beginning of sentences, when the “l” is always capitalized and context must indicate who the Lord is). This practice is evident in many passages, such as 1 Kings 1:36 (“And Benaiah . . . answered the king, and said, Amen: the LORD [*yhwh*] God of my lord [*ʾādōnī*] the king say so too”) and Exodus 4:13–14 (“And [Moses said to God], O my Lord [*ʾādōnāy*], . . . and the anger of the LORD [*yhwh*] was kindled against Moses”).

The consonants in the name “**Jehovah**” are transliterated from the four Hebrew letters of the divine name *yhwh* (again, the Hebrew “y” is represented in English as “j”).<sup>27</sup> And the vowels in “**Jehovah**” are derived from the vowels in the substitute title *ʾādōnāy*, with a slight variation in the first vowel.<sup>28</sup> Thus, the name “**Jehovah**,” which is very familiar to us, is a hybrid form that was written as early as the twelfth or thirteenth century but is not well attested in English until the early sixteenth century.<sup>29</sup> It was never actually pronounced “**Jehovah**” in antiquity. Based on evidence such as the shortened forms of *yhwh* that appear in Israelite personal names<sup>30</sup> and in the Hebrew Bible (for example, *Yah/JAH* in Psalm 68:4, and the last portion of the expression *halēlū-yāh*, discussed above), scholars postulate that the divine name was originally pronounced “Yahweh” or something similar.<sup>31</sup>

The name *Yahweh/Jehovah* seems related to the Hebrew verb “to be” and is usually translated “he is” or “he causes to be.” Those who favor the meaning “he is” correlate it with the form of the name *Jehovah* that Moses was taught at the burning bush: “I AM” (Exodus 3:14).<sup>32</sup> Understood this way, the name *Yahweh/Jehovah* does not mean “He is . . . (something, like love or mercy),” but rather “He exists,” which conveys the duration of the Lord’s power, superiority, and eternal dominion—Yahweh/Jehovah just *is*. This is the reason Church-related publications sometimes translate “Jehovah” as “Unchangeable One” or “Self-existent One.”<sup>33</sup> But based on the preserved vocalization of short forms of the divine name, many scholars translate “Yahweh” as a causative, “he causes to be/exist.”<sup>34</sup> This emphasizes Yahweh/Jehovah’s ongoing power to create and uphold all things. The last clause in Doctrine and Covenants 88:41 nicely captures the sense of the divine name when understood this way: “all things are by him.”

The tradition of rendering Hebrew *yhwh* as “the LORD” has produced some unusual combinations, such as “the Lord GOD,” a phrase that occurs about three hundred times in the KJV. One well-known example is “Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7). In such cases, the Hebrew reads *ʾādōnāy yhwh*, literally “(my) Lord, Yahweh/Jehovah.” But because the translators were rendering *yhwh* as “the LORD” and not as *Yahweh/Jehovah* and because they wanted to avoid the odd-looking “Lord LORD,” the name *yhwh* in these passages was rendered as “GOD.” Printing it in all capitals indicates that the underlying Hebrew word is the divine name *yhwh*.<sup>35</sup> This phrase, “Lord GOD,” should not be confused with the well-attested phrase “the LORD God,” which renders the Hebrew words *yhwh ʾēlōhīm*, as found in Genesis 2:4 (“the LORD God made the earth and the heavens”), Psalm 106:48 (“Blessed be the LORD God of Israel [*yhwh ʾēlohē yisrāʾēl*]”), and hundreds of other passages.

The name *Jehovah* is not limited to the Bible. It occurs twice in the Book of Mormon, six times in the Doctrine and Covenants, and twice in the book of Abraham.<sup>36</sup> It often occurs in Latter-day Saint prophetic statements, hymns, and other Church contexts, including the temple. Even though Jehovah is a nonancient, hybrid version of the name of God the Son, Latter-day Saints and the Lord continue to use it because it represents the form of His name in our Restoration religious heritage. Similarly, English speakers do not use the original pronunciations of *John* (Yohanan/*yōhānan*), or *Jesus* (Yeshua/*yēšúaʾ*), or the names of any other ancient Saints whose names have come to us

in transliteration, impacted to a lesser or greater degree by their transition to English.

As Keith H. Meservy has observed, “We can find Jesus Christ in the Old Testament by substituting *Jehovah* for LORD whenever it appears. Then something wonderful happens. Jehovah, who is Jesus Christ, appears from beginning to end of this great book as the God of the Old Testament.”<sup>37</sup> Additionally, the meaning of *Jehovah* can remind us of the enduring nature of His love, His plans, and His creative and saving power. When ancient Saints “called on the name of the LORD [*yhw̄h*]” (Genesis 13:4) and when the Aaronic priests “put my name upon the children of Israel” (Numbers 6:27), they employed *yhw̄h*, Yahweh/Jehovah, the one of whom it is rightly said there is no other name under heaven by which salvation comes (see Acts 4:12; Mosiah 3:17).

## Conclusion

Biblical names, terms, and titles that have been transliterated into English all have meaning in their original Hebrew form. Our scripture study is much richer and more productive when we know how these words are used in scripture so we can reflect on their meanings. This discussion of terms that have been transliterated from biblical Hebrew to English has sought to demonstrate this premise. Thoughtful consideration of transliterated terms employed in our worship of Jehovah (*Hallelujah*, *Sabbath*), that express faithful involvement with and commitment to Him and His teachings (*Amen*), and that convey His power and superiority over all opposition (*Sabaoth*), including the Adversary (*Satan*), can be instructive and edifying to Latter-day Saints, whether we encounter these terms in scripture, hymns, or preaching. The importance of understanding the meaning and significance of *Jehovah*, a name of our Redeemer, cannot be overstated. Other Hebrew terms that appear in transliterated form in scripture and in our religious language that could have been discussed here include *hosanna* (*hōśa‘-nā’*), cherubim (*kērūbīm*), seraphim (*šērāpīm*), Sheol (*šē’ól*), and Messiah (*māšīaḥ*). But these must await your own study, a future article, or both.<sup>38</sup> **RE**

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## Notes

I express thanks to my colleagues Gaye Strathearn and Charles Swift, and to my wife, Jane Allis-Pike, for reading and commenting on drafts of this article.

1. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding

Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 290–91 (commenting on the “images of beasts” in Daniel 7 versus actual beasts mentioned in the book of Revelation). Consider also this comment from Joseph Smith in *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1957), 2:396: “Attended the school and read and translated with my class as usual. My soul delights in reading the word of the Lord in the original [Hebrew], and I am determined to pursue the study of the languages, until I shall become master of them, if I am permitted to live long enough.”

2. Note, for example, that the Hebrew letter *שׁ* (*shin*) is represented by *š* in transliteration and has the sound “sh.” Occasionally, this “sh” sound is carried through the transliteration process into English, as in the name *Shelemiah/šelemiāh*, but oftentimes (for various reasons) it becomes “s,” as in *Sabbath* (from *šabbāt*) and *Saul* (from *šā’ūl*). Transliteration schemes, including the one used in this article, often require extra symbols to indicate sounds not natively available in the alphabet into which the original word is transliterated.

3. The *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “J,” <http://dictionary.oed.com/> (accessed April 19, 2006), provides an informative overview of the history of the pronunciation and shape of the letter *J*. Originally, *j* was an *i* with a tail on it. This can be seen in a number of English publications, including the 1611 edition of the KJV in which, for example, the number eight is printed in lowercase Roman type as *viiij* rather than *viii*. I thank Royal Skousen and Don Chapman, both in BYU’s Department of Linguistics and English Language, for sharing their insights on this matter. See further discussion of this issue below, in connection with the name Jehovah.

4. See, for example, Exodus 15:2; 17:16; Isaiah 38:11.

5. The Hebrew title *tēbillīm* was translated into Greek as *psalmoi*, “songs of praise.” This was transliterated into Latin as *Psalmorum*, which was eventually transliterated into English as *Psalms*.

6. See Steven R. Swanson, “Hallel,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 3:30, for a convenient overview and discussion.

7. A number of hymns in the Latter-day Saint hymnal contain one or more forms of *Hallelujah/Alleluia* / “Praise the Lord.” Classic examples include Hymns 72 and 200.

8. That Latter-day Saints believe Jehovah is Jesus is well attested in both canonical scripture and latter-day prophetic statements. For example: “The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, yieldeth himself . . . to be lifted up . . . to be crucified. . . . The God of nature suffers; . . . they crucify the God of Israel” (1 Nephi 19:10, 12–13); “the Lord, . . . even the voice of Jehovah, saying: I am the first and the last; I am he who liveth, I am he who was slain; I am your advocate with the Father” (Doctrine and Covenants 110:2–4); “we commemorate the birth of Jesus Christ two millennia ago. . . . He was the Great Jehovah of the Old Testament, the Messiah of the New” (“The Living Christ: The Testimony of the Apostles,” *Ensign*, April 2000, 2). See also LDS Guide to the Scriptures ([www.lds.org](http://www.lds.org)), s.v., “Jehovah” and “Jehovah is Christ.”

9. M. Catherine Thomas, “Rest of the Lord,” in *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, ed. Dennis L. Largey and others (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 679. See also Robert L. Millet, “The Holy Order of God,” in *The Book of Mormon: Alma, the Testimony of the Word*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1992),

61–88, especially 71–75.

10. LDS Bible Dictionary, “Sabbath,” 765.

11. Latter-day prophets have repeatedly emphasized the importance of appropriate Sabbath observance and worship. See, for example, the First Presidency letter on “Sabbath Day Observance,” dated September 28, 1992, which was to be read in Church sacrament meetings.

12. The *s* with a dot under it, *ṣ*, represents the Hebrew letter *ṣade*, an emphatic *s*. It is sometimes transliterated as “ts,” and has a sound similar to the two *zs* in *pizza*.

13. Most modern translations, such as the NRSV, render “Sabaoth” in these verses as “hosts.”

14. Readers will notice that in this example the spelling is a little different. This is due to the particular grammatical construction of the word in relation to other words in the sentence. Other passages in which “host(s)” refers to a human army include Judges 4:2, 7; 8:6; 2 Kings 5:1; and Psalm 60:10.

15. 2 Kings 6:16–17 recounts the appearance of the heavenly host/army, but this passage does not contain the word *host*.

16. Some other examples of this concept include Exodus 14:14; Judges 5:4; 2 Samuel 5:23–24; Psalm 68:7; Habakkuk 3:9–12.

17. See also Nehemiah 9:6; Doctrine and Covenants 38:1. For comments on Doctrine and Covenants 95:7 see Joseph Fielding McConkie and Craig J. Ostler, *Revelations of the Restoration* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), 691; and Stephen E. Robinson and H. Dean Garrett, *A Commentary on the Doctrine and Covenants* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2004), 3:209. I strongly disagree with the suggestion of Robinson and Garrett that “Sabaoth” in Doctrine and Covenants 95:7 is not a transliteration of *šēbā’ōt*, but of *šabbāt*, Sabbath, and with their conclusion that “creator of the first day” indicates that Jehovah is Lord of the Jewish Sabbath on Saturday and the Christian Sabbath on the first day of the week. He is the Lord of both those days, but that is not the point in Doctrine and Covenants 95:7.

18. The other two common name-titles for Satan—*devil* and *Lucifer*—have their own interesting etymological histories. In brief, the word *devil* is an anglicized, transliterated form of the Greek term *diabolos*, which means “accuser, slanderer,” thus having a similar range of meaning as “satan,” and can be seen as a translation of Hebrew *šātān*. *Lucifer* was transliterated into English from Latin (*lux + ferre*, “light-bringer”). It is a translation of the Hebrew in Isaiah 14:12: “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer [*hēlēl* (“bright/shiny one”)], son of the morning [*ben-šāḥar*]!”

19. The verb occurs only six times in the Hebrew Bible: Psalm 38:21 (38:20 in English versions); 71:13; 109:4, 20, 29; and Zechariah 3:1.

20. Textually, this is a complicated situation because other nouns, such as *’ēlōhīm* (elohim; God), sometimes occur with the definite article, *hā’ēlōhīm*, as in Job 1:6, similar to *haššātān*. The definite article is not translated in these cases when it is understood that *’ēlōhīm* refers to God, not “the gods,” as it sometimes does in the Hebrew Bible (see, for example, Exodus 12:12; Joshua 24:15; Judges 10:6).

21. This raises a tricky issue. Given the paucity and late date of most attesta-

tions of the concept of a demonic Satan in the Hebrew Bible, we can more easily understand why some scholars, without the benefit of a Restoration view, accept a developmental or evolutionary approach to the human invention of Satan. Linguistically, it is clear that English *Satan* is a transliteration from Hebrew *śāṭān*. But it may not be clear to everyone what should be made of the fact that the “fallen one” is called “Satan” in premortal (see Moses 4:3–4) and early mortal (see Moses 5:13, 18) contexts. Presumably, this usage indicates that *śāṭān* was part of the vocabulary of the Israelites from at least Moses’s day onward. Because it is not certain what the link between the Adamic language and Hebrew is, occurrences of *Satan* in Moses 4 and 5 should not be taken as evidence that Satan was called “Satan” in the language(s) of heaven or Adam.

22. There are no capital (uppercase) letters in Hebrew. The practice of rendering JEHOVAH in all capitals represents a decision on the part of the translators and printers to show respect for the divine name.

23. It seems that the divine name *yhwh* was pronounced until after the Babylonian Exile and building of the Second Temple in Jerusalem in 515 BC. According to the traditional explanation, in the following centuries the full form of the name was pronounced only by the Aaronic high priest when he was alone in the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), so it eventually became lost to all. (As a point of interest, Yom Kippur is transliterated from Hebrew *yôm kippûrim* and translates as “Day of Atonement.”) The divine name *yhwh* is sometimes called the Tetragrammaton, a Greek term that means “four letters.”

24. This (*ʾādōnāy*) is the most common form of *ʾādōn* used in relation to deity in the Hebrew Bible. The use of this grammatical plural (“my lords”) is generally thought to convey majesty.

25. Actually, only the first and last of the three vowels are usually indicated in print. The Hebrew alphabet consists only of consonants. Vowel sounds are part of the language but were not originally indicated in written texts because there were no vowel letters. Systems were developed in the second half of the first millennium AD to indicate vowel sounds when dots and other small marks were placed in relation to the consonantal letters.

26. The word *the* in the phrase “the LORD” is not in the Hebrew text but is added to make sense in English because the name is replaced by a title. Technically, the “L” in “LORD” is capitalized and the “ORD” are printed as small capitals: LORD.

27. Because the Hebrew letter *waw* (ו) is pronounced *vav* in modern times (and because the pronunciation of “w” and “v” alternates in other languages as well; for example, “w” in German is pronounced “v”), the four letters of the divine name are variously written as YHWH, YHVH, JHVH, and so on. Whatever the variations in English, the Hebrew letters are always the same: יהוה.

28. The first vowel in English is different because the first vowel in *ʾādōnāy* is a shortened sound that would normally be represented by a short “eh.” But because *ʾādōnāy* begins with the letter *ʾaleph*, what would be a short “eh” is pronounced as a short “ah.”

29. The Hebrew *yhwh* went into Latin as IHVH, the form by which it transferred into English and other European languages. The letter *J* “is, in its origin, a comparatively late modification of the letter *I*. In the ancient Roman alphabet, *I*, besides its vowel value [in certain words] had the kindred consonantal value of modern English *Y*” (*Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “*J*”; accessed April 19, 2006).

On the historical relationship between the letters u and v, see the discussion in *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “U” and “V.”

The *Oxford English Dictionary* indicates that “Jehovah,” spelled “Jehouah,” appeared in William Tyndale’s translation of the five books of Moses, the Pentateuch, in 1530. This form, sometimes with minor variations, is how it was commonly spelled in other attestations at that time. In the first edition of the KJV (1611), the block Roman print of the divine name in Exodus 6:3 is “IEHOVAH,” whereas the blackletter script of the rest of the biblical text utilizes a capital J, (an I with a tail), illustrating the ongoing process that eventually culminated in the distinction between these two letters.

It is often claimed that the English word *Jehouah/Jehovah* was first used in the early 1500s; however, it has been observed that “the writers of the sixteenth century, Catholic and Protestant (e.g. Cajetan and Théodore de Bèze), are perfectly familiar with the word [*Jehouah*]. Galatinus himself (Areana cathol. veritatis, I, Bari, 1516, a, p. 77) represents the form as known and received in his time [early 1500s]. Besides, Drusius (loc. cit., 351) discovered it in Porchetus, a theologian of the fourteenth century. Finally, the word is found even in the Pugio fidei of Raymund Martin, a work written about 1270 (ed. Paris, 1651, pt. III, dist. ii, cap. iii, p. 448, and Note, p. 745). Probably the introduction of the name *Jehovah* antedates even R. Martin” (*Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Jehovah (Yahweh),” [www.newadvent.org/cathen/08329a.htm](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08329a.htm) [accessed April 19, 2006]; I thank Stan Thayne for this reference). Similarly, Henry O. Thompson “Yahweh,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6:1011–12, claims, without providing support, that “this confused usage [the hybrid *Jehouah/Jehovah*] may, however, have begun as early as 1100 A.D.” For other remarks on this issue, see Kent P. Jackson, *The Restored Gospel and the Book of Genesis* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2001), 6, 15–16.

30. A very brief description of this is contained in the LDS Bible Dictionary, “Names of persons,” 737. See also Dana M. Pike, “Names, Theophoric,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 4:1018–19.

31. This is briefly mentioned in the LDS Bible Dictionary, “Jehovah,” 710–11. See also Henry O. Thompson, “Yahweh,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6:1011–12.

32. Hebrew *yhw* is related to *yihyeh*, the *Qal* third masculine singular imperfect form of the verb “to be.” Exodus 3:14 contains the *Qal* first singular imperfect form of this verb, *’ehyeh*. The imperfect aspect, or tense, in Hebrew conveys present, ongoing, and future action. So “I AM” is a translation, not a transliteration, of the Hebrew.

33. See LDS Bible Dictionary, “Jehovah,” 710; see also James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 36. Talmage’s rendition “*Self-existent One*” is probably the basis for all later uses of this in other Church-related publications.

34. See, for example, Jackson, *The Restored Gospel and the Book of Genesis*, 7; and Thompson, “Yahweh,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6:1011–12.

35. Rendering *’ādōnāy yhw* as “the Lord GOD” is based on the practice of scribes who copied the Hebrew Bible, who in these cases placed the vocalization of the word *’ēlōhīm*, “God,” in conjunction with *yhw*, rather than the vowels of *’ādōnāy*, to remind readers to say this substitute for the divine name. Combinations that are more rare than “Lord GOD” in the KJV include “LORD GOD” (in Isaiah 3:15 and Zechariah 9:14; the rendering of Hebrew *’ādōnāy yhw*, which is “Lord GOD” else-

where in the KJV); “LORD JEHOVAH” (the KJV rendition of Hebrew *yh yhw*, the short and full form of the divine name, in Isaiah 2:12; 26:4); and “GOD the Lord” (Psalms 109:21; 141:8; the Hebrew here is *yhw* *’ādōnāy*, literally “Yahweh, Lord,” or “LORD, Lord”).

36. See 2 Nephi 22:2 (where it is rendered in all capitals as in the KJV of Isaiah 12:2); Moroni 10:34; D&C 109:34, 42, 56, 68; 110:3; 128:9; Abraham 1:16; 2:8. It is presently impossible to know how many times *yhw*/*Yahweh* may have been written in Nephite scripture prior to its translation into English.

37. Keith H. Meservy, “LORD=Jehovah,” *Ensign*, June 2002, 29.

38. These terms can be further researched by consulting the LDS Bible Dictionary and other more in-depth resources such as *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary* (1996), *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (2000), and *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (1992), as well as a good concordance. Some are also discussed in *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*.