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YESHUA OR JESUS
A REVIEW OF THE SACRED NAME MOVEMENT

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OCTOBER 16, 2026

1 Introduction

The Sacred Name Movement emerged in the United States during the early twentieth century, primarily within the Church of God (Seventh Day) tradition. Its central distinction is the teaching that believers should use the Hebrew forms of divine names. A key aspect of this belief is the insistence that believers should refer to the Messiah as Yeshua (or Yahshua) rather than by the English name Jesus. Proponents argue that Yeshua is the Hebrew name given to Him at His birth, meaning “Yahweh saves” or “Yahweh is salvation,” and that it accurately conveys His divine identity and purpose. In contrast, the name Jesus, which derives from the Greek *Iēsous* through the Latin *Iesus*, is viewed by followers as a later alteration that obscures the original meaning and may introduce pagan connotations.¹

For those in the Sacred Name movement, using the correct name and pronunciation is not merely a matter of linguistic preference but an issue of theological integrity. They assert that genuine worship and salvation depend upon invoking the Messiah’s actual name. Consequently, prayers, baptisms, and worship are specifically conducted “in the name of Yeshua” (or their preferred sacred name), while the name Jesus is dismissed as invalid or spiritually compromised. This emphasis reflects the movement’s conviction that restoring Hebrew names is essential to recovering authentic faith and practice.

2 Sacred Name Movement

The Sacred Name Movement originated from a growing interest in recovering what adherents believed to be God’s original divine name. This effort was influenced in part by Alexander MacWhorter’s work, in which he used the form *Yahveh*.² Its organizational roots trace back to the 1936 Church of God (Seventh Day) camp meeting in Galena, Kansas, where one of the central topics of discussion concerned the precise baptismal formula used by the apostles. The first official Sacred Name gathering followed two years later, at the 1938 Feast of Tabernacles Camp Meeting, held near Warrior, Alabama.³ Several ministers associated with the Church of God (Seventh Day) sponsored and attended the event, and A. B. Traina, pastor of Kingdom Truth Assembly in Irvington, New Jersey, served as the featured speaker. Traina, who later authored *The Holy Name Bible*, became a defining figure in shaping the movement.⁴ He practiced baptism with hyssop, upheld Old Testament dietary laws, embraced Anglo-Israelism (British Israel), and rejected the Pauline epistles.⁵ Although his early usage favored the forms *Jehovah* and *Jah-oshuah*, he later adopted *Yahweh* and *Yahshuah*, which he incorporated into his Bible translation.⁶

¹ Jacob O. Meyer, “What Must We Do to Be Saved? Part 4,” *The Sacred Name Broadcaster* 43.10 (2012): 1–12, 7: “On the other hand, J-sus cannot save anybody or anything. J-sus cannot save you, because J-sus is a name derived from idolatry;” “The Mistaken J,” *Yahweh’s Assembly in Yahshua*, 2007, <https://yaiy.org/literature/MistakenJ.html>; “Why the Savior’s True Name Is Missing in Your New Testament,” *Yahweh’s Assembly in Yahshua*, 2025, <https://www.yaiy.org/literature/SaviorsNameMissing.html>.

² Joel Bjorling, *The Churches of God, Seventh Day: A Bibliography* (New York: Garland, 1987), 198; Alexander MacWhorter, *Yahveh Christ or The Memorial Name* (Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1857), 22–3; L. D. Snow, “A Brief History of the Name Movement in America,” *The Faith* 46.1 (1982): 3–11, 9.

³ Snow, “Brief History,” 4.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 4–5.

⁵ Bjorling, *Churches of God*, 198; Snow, “Brief History,” 4–5; Robert Wells, “Origin and History of the Sacred Name Movement,” *Assembly of Yah*, 2025, https://www.assemblyofyah.com/pdfs/Origin_and_History_of_the_Sacred_Name_Movement_booklet.pdf.

⁶ Snow, “Brief History,” 5.

Over time, several independently organized Sacred Name groups arose, including the Assemblies of Yahweh, Inc., the House of Yahweh, the Assembly of YHVH, Yahveh Beth Israel, Kadesh Name Society, the Assembly of Yahvah, and Yahweh's Assembly in Yahshua (formerly Yahweh New Covenant Assembly).⁷ While certain Sacred Name groups embrace Pentecostal-charismatic views on spiritual gifts, the majority align more closely with Adventist-Sabbatarian beliefs and practices. Many Sacred Name assemblies also hold a unitarian view of the godhead, with some exhibiting Arian or subordinationist interpretations.⁸

Despite their shared concern for restoring the divine names, these organizations have proposed a wide range of pronunciations for God's name, including *Jahahveh*, *Jahvah*, *Jahweh*, *Jehovah*, *Yah*, *Yahavah*, *Yahcah*, *Yahovah*, *Yahshuah*, *Yahueh*, *Yahvah*, *Yahvahshua*, *Yahveh*, *Yahweh*, and *Yasu*. They likewise practice varying baptismal formulas that invoke the divine name, such as dipping three times "in the name of Yahveh, Yahshuah, and the Kadesh Spirit," baptizing "in the name of the Father Yahweh, the Son Yahshuah, and the Holy Spirit Yah," or baptizing solely "in the name of Yahshua."⁹

The Sacred Name Movement has remained relatively small and fragmented, as members disagree over the precise spelling and pronunciation of the divine names (*Yahweh* and *Yeshua*) as well as the correct baptismal formula.¹⁰ The movement's position generally rests on two assumptions: (1) that Jesus and the first-century church primarily spoke Hebrew, and (2) that transliteration requires a sound-for-sound transfer from one language to another. The following sections will examine each of these claims in detail.

3 Jesus Spoke Greek

The Sacred Name Movement teaches that the Savior's name should be pronounced as *Yahshua* or *Yeshua* rather than *Jesus*. They contend that Jesus primarily spoke Hebrew and that the earliest believers invoked His name in its Hebrew form. Since Hebrew was the sacred language of Scripture and the temple, they argue that the Messiah would have upheld its use. This belief reinforces their preference for Hebrew forms and reflects their conviction that Hebrew holds divine authority in matters of worship and doctrine.¹¹

First, the Hebrew form of Jesus's name is *Yēšûa* (Yeshua), not Yahshua. The first syllable of יֵשׁוּעַ is pronounced /ye/, not /yah/, and the form *Yahshua* does not appear in the MT.¹² The shortened form *Yah* occurs as an independent divine name, especially in poetry (Exod 15:2; Ps 68:4; 118:14; Isa 12:2), and as a theophoric suffix in Hebrew names (*Yēša' yāh* [Isaiah], *Yirm'yāh* [Jeremiah], *Zēkaryāh* [Zechariah]), but it is not used as a prefixed element in Hebrew theophoric personal names. Instead, Hebrew personal names containing the divine element as a prefix employ forms such as *Yeho-*, *Yehu-*, or *Yo-*.¹³ Therefore, the term *Yahshua* lacks attestation in the Hebrew

⁷ Bjorling, *Churches of God*, 201–57.

⁸ Ibid., 199, 203, 210, 218, 233, 245; MacWhorter, *Yahveh Christ*, 134–5, 138–9.

⁹ George Kinney, personal letter to author, May 25, 2001; Bjorling, *Churches of God*, 199, 203, 210, 218; Wells, "Origin and History," 1, 3, 6.

¹⁰ J. Gordon Melton, "Sacred Name Movement," in *Encyclopedia of Protestantism*, Encyclopedia of World Religions, 2nd ed., ed. J. Gordon Melton (New York: Facts on File, 2016), eBook.

¹¹ "The Mistaken J."

¹² BDB, "יֵשׁוּעַ," 221; David Bivin, "The Fallacy of Sacred Name Bibles," *Jerusalem Perspective* 4.6 (1991): 7, 12; Karl Heinrich Rengstorff, "Jesus Christ," *NIDNTT* 2:330–1.

¹³ David Noel Freedman and M. Patrick O'Connor, "יהוה YHWH," *TDOT* 5:501–2; Jeaneane D. Fowler, *Theophoric Personal Names in Ancient Hebrew: A Comparative Study*, JSOTSS 49 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1988),

tradition and does not conform to the established pattern of Yahwistic prefixes in Hebrew theophoric names. The form appears to be a modern reconstruction associated with the Sacred Name Movement.

The fact that the divine name Yahweh begins with the syllable Yah does not support the form Yahshua. Yahweh is the divine name itself, and its precise etymology remains debated, although it has commonly been associated with the Hebrew verb *hāyâ* (“to be”) and interpreted in relation to Exod 3:14 (*’ehyeh ’ăšer ’ehyeh*, “I AM WHO I AM”).¹⁴ By contrast, Yahshua proposes a prefixed divine element that is unattested in Hebrew personal names. Consequently, the attested pattern of Hebrew theophoric names provides no linguistic basis for reconstructing Jesus’s name as Yahshua.

Second, from Abraham to Jesus, God’s people encountered and employed several different languages and writing systems, including Egyptian, various Semitic languages, Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, and Latin, with cuneiform serving as a writing system for several languages.¹⁵ Following the Babylonian Captivity (586 BC), Hebrew was no longer the only, or necessarily the primary, spoken language of most Jews. Aramaic had become widespread in Jewish life and was an important vernacular language (Ezra 4:7–11; Neh 8:8), while Hebrew continued to be used in religious, literary, and other contexts. Evidence of Aramaic appears in parts of Jeremiah (10:11), Daniel (2:4–7:28), and Ezra (4:8–6:18; 7:12–26), as well as in later Jewish writings such as the Targums, and the Babylonian Talmud.¹⁶ While Hebrew and Aramaic are closely related Semitic languages, they are not identical (see Gen 31:47; 2 Kgs 18:26; Isa 36:11).¹⁷

By the first century, Greek was widely used across the eastern Mediterranean, including Judea and Galilee. It served as the lingua franca of commerce, administration, literature and intercultural communication and was widely used among Jewish communities throughout the eastern Mediterranean, as reflected in the Septuagint (LXX), the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures.¹⁸ The very existence of the LXX indicates that for many Jews Greek had become their first language.¹⁹ The influence of Greek on early Christianity is evident in the fact that the New Testament itself was written in Greek and that many Old Testament books and figures are commonly known in forms derived from Greek, such as Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Psalms, Isaac, Moses, and Solomon. Moreover, of the roughly 350 OT quotations found in the NT, the vast

33–8; Heriberto Haber, “Theophoric Names in the Bible,” *JBQ* 29.1 (2001): 56–9, 56–7; Richard S. Hess, “Names of People: Biblical Hebrew,” in *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics*, ed. Geoffrey Khan (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 2:760; Pauli Rahkonen, “Biblical Hebrew Personal Names in Joshua, Judges, Ruth, and 1–2 Samuel: A Comparative Study,” *SEÅ* 85.1 (2020): 160–79, 170–3; Daniel L. Segraves, *The Messiah’s Name Jesus, Not Yahshua* (Kearney, NE: Morris, 1997), 32–3; Karel van der Toorn, “Ancestors and Anthroponyms: Kinship Terms as Theophoric Elements in Hebrew Names,” *ZAW* 108 (1996): 1–11.

¹⁴ Walter Brueggemann, “Exodus,” *NIB* 1:714, 733; Freedman, *TDOT* 5:500, 513–16; John I. Durham, *Exodus*, WBC 3 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 38–9, 75.

¹⁵ F. F. Bruce, *The Books and the Parchments: Some Chapters on the Transmission of the Bible*, rev. ed. (Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1963), 21–73.

¹⁶ Wilhelm Bacher, “Aramaic Language Among the Jews,” *JE* 2:68–70; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, “The Languages of Palestine in the First Century AD,” in *The Language of the New Testament: Classic Essays*, ed. Stanley E. Porter, JSNTSS 60 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 126–9; Bruce K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 26–7.

¹⁷ Fitzmyer, “Languages of Palestine,” 161–2; Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 3:3194.

¹⁸ Fitzmyer, “Languages of Palestine,” 127, 134–47; Robert H. Stein, *The Method and Message of Jesus’ Teachings*, rev. ed. (Louisville, KY: WJK, 1994), 6.

¹⁹ G. Scott Gleaves, *Did Jesus Speak Greek? The Emerging Evidence of Greek Dominance in First-Century Palestine* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2015), 140.

majority appear to follow the wording of the LXX, underscoring the extent to which Greek shaped the linguistic environment of the church.²⁰

Third, the Gospel narratives indicate that Jesus was at least bilingual, speaking Aramaic and possessing some knowledge of Greek. Aramaic expressions are preserved in passages such as Matt 27:46; Mark 3:17; 5:41; 7:34; 14:36; 15:34; and John 1:42. Evidence for Jesus's use of Greek includes his interactions with Greek-speaking or Hellenized individuals and settings (Matt 16:18; Mark 5:9; 7:26–30; John 3:3–5; 12:20–23; 18:33–38).²¹ While many older commentators assumed that Jesus's everyday conversational language was Aramaic,²² several scholars have argued that Jesus spoke Greek more extensively than traditional reconstructions have assumed.²³

Jesus and his apostles came from “Galilee of the Gentiles” (Isa 9:1; Matt 4:15), a region associated with and surrounded by Hellenistic culture.²⁴ Nazareth, Jesus's hometown, was located near the Hellenistic city of Sepphoris and within a region connected to cities such as Caesarea Maritima, Dora, Ptolemais, and Tiberias. This cultural setting makes it plausible that Greek was known and used in Galilee. Consequently, Jesus and his hearers may have been familiar with the Greek Scriptures, even though Hebrew scrolls remained in synagogue use. Scott Gleaves argues that when Jesus read from Isaiah in the synagogue at Nazareth (Luke 4:16–20), he was likely reading from the LXX. The LXX may have been the standard text in the Galilean synagogues, making it accessible not only to Jews but also to gentile “God-fearers” who joined them in worship (see Acts 10:1–2; 13:16; 16:14; 17:4).²⁵

Moreover, Jesus ministered extensively in Hellenized regions surrounding Galilee, bordered by Greek-speaking city-states, such as Tyre and Sidon to the northwest, Hippos and Gadara to the east, and Scythopolis to the south. Large crowds also followed Jesus from Greek-speaking areas, including “all Syria” and the Decapolis (Matt 4:24–25), as well as the vicinity of Tyre and Sidon (Luke 6:17). They likely would not have traveled such distances unless they knew that Jesus could communicate with them in their own language, Greek.²⁶

In several instances, Jesus directly conversed with gentiles. Examples include his dialogues with the Syrophoenician woman (Mark 7:26–30), a Roman centurion (Matt 8:5–13), and Pontius Pilate (Luke 23:2–4). In each case, Greek served as the most natural means of communication, as it was the shared language between Jews and gentiles, unlike Hebrew or Aramaic.²⁷ None of these narratives mentions or implies that Jesus required an interpreter, and it is highly improbable that all of his gentile interlocutors possessed sufficient command of Aramaic to engage in the discussions depicted in the Gospels.²⁸ In the case of the Syrophoenician woman, Mark emphasizes

²⁰ Paul W. Barnett, “Did Jesus Speak Greek?,” *RefR* 78.2 (2019): 141–51, 142.

²¹ Nigel Turner, “The Language of Jesus and His Disciples,” in *The Language of the New Testament: Classic Essays*, ed. Stanley E. Porter, JSNTSS 60 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 184–5.

²² Gustaf Dalman, *Jesus—Jeshua: Studies in the Gospels*, trans. Paul P. Levertoff (New York: Macmillan, 1929), 7–16.

²³ Barnett, “Did Jesus Speak Greek,” 141–4; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, “Did Jesus Speak Greek,” *BAR* 18.5 (1992): 58; Gleaves, *Did Jesus Speak Greek*, 1–30; Stanley E. Porter, “Did Jesus Ever Teach in Greek?” *TB* 44.2 (1993): 199–235, 200–2.

²⁴ Porter, “Did Jesus Ever Teach in Greek,” 210.

²⁵ Barnett, “Did Jesus Speak Greek,” 141–2; Gleaves, *Did Jesus Speak Greek*, 21: “It must be borne in mind that the LXX was in many respects the ‘Bible’ of the Jews,” 141–2.

²⁶ Barnett, “Did Jesus Speak Greek,” 144, 148; Porter, “Did Jesus Ever Teach in Greek,” 209–13.

²⁷ Barnett, “Did Jesus Speak Greek,” 141–2; Gleaves, *Did Jesus Speak Greek*, 16–17, 30–1; Porter, “Did Jesus Ever Teach in Greek,” 225–9.

²⁸ Porter, “Did Jesus Ever Teach in Greek,” 224–7.

her non-Jewish background (7:26; cf. Matt 15:22 “Canaanite”), reinforcing the likelihood that her exchange with Jesus took place in Greek.²⁹

With Pilate, as a Roman prefect and given his probable disdain for Jewish customs, he may have regarded speaking in a Semitic language as beneath his dignity.³⁰ The rapid pace of the conversations between Pilate, Jesus, the Jewish leaders, and the crowd further suggests the absence of an interpreter. Most plausibly, Pilate addressed each party in Greek, to which Jesus, the leaders, and the people responded in kind.³¹

John also records that “certain Greeks” approached Philip and said, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” Philip relayed this to Andrew, and together they informed Jesus (John 12:20–22). Notably, Philip and Andrew bore purely Greek names and, along with Peter, came from Bethsaida (John 1:44).³² Given its location in a Hellenized region, many Jews living in Bethsaida would have readily understood and spoken the Greek language.³³ Moreover, as fishermen who worked the Sea of Galilee, Philip, Andrew, and Peter likely conducted at least part of their commercial activities in Greek, the common language of trade in the region.³⁴ John’s description of “certain Greeks” (*Hellēnes tines*) most naturally indicates Greek-speaking gentiles, not Hellenistic Jews (Acts 6:1). If so, this scene provides an explicit example of gentiles conversing with Jesus’s disciples in Greek and invoking the Greek form of his name, *Iēsous*.

Furthermore, certain features of the Gospels function particularly well in Greek. For instance, Jesus’s statement to Peter, “You are Peter [*Petros*], and on this rock [*petra*] I will build my church” (Matt 16:18), contains a wordplay in which *Petros* and *petra* are related forms. While some commentators, such as Joseph Fitzmyer, contend that the pun works equally well in Aramaic, Gleaves observes that the proposed Aramaic reconstruction lacks the semantic distinction and rhetorical force found in the Greek wording and does not explain why Matthew presents the saying using *Petros* and *petra* rather than simply reproducing the Aramaic name Cephas. Consequently, the saying may provide evidence that Jesus at times spoke Greek when addressing his disciples.³⁵

A similar pattern appears in the book of Acts. At Pentecost, the crowd consisted of devout Jews from various parts of the Mediterranean (Acts 2:5), many of whom were multilingual. Luke’s table of nations alludes to the tower of Babel narrative, emphasizing the various scattered languages now brought together for the outpouring of the Spirit.³⁶ Given this diversity, Greek provided a plausible common language through which Peter could communicate with his hearers.³⁷

Later, Peter traveled to Caesarea—a thoroughly Hellenized city with a substantial Greek-speaking population—where he preached to Cornelius’s household, a Roman centurion of the Italian Regiment (Acts 10:1–3, 34–44). Once again, there is no mention or hint within the narrative that Peter required a translator. Despite their cultural differences, Peter was able to communicate

²⁹ Gleaves, *Did Jesus Speak Greek*, 17; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, WBC 33b (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 441; Stein, *Jesus’ Teachings*, 6; Porter, “Did Jesus Ever Teach in Greek,” 226–7: “The description of the woman in the Gospel makes sure that the reader knows that the woman was a Greek-speaker despite her birth. Otherwise the reference is gratuitous.”

³⁰ Gleaves, *Did Jesus Speak Greek*, 15n57.

³¹ Fitzmyer, “Languages of Palestine,” 145; Porter, “Did Jesus Ever Teach in Greek,” 225; Turner, “The Language of Jesus and His Disciples,” 177.

³² Gleaves, *Did Jesus Speak Greek*, 98; Porter, “Did Jesus Ever Teach in Greek,” 212.

³³ Gleaves, *Did Jesus Speak Greek*, 90.

³⁴ Porter, “Did Jesus Ever Teach in Greek,” 212.

³⁵ Barnett, “Did Jesus Speak Greek,” 143; Gleaves, *Did Jesus Speak Greek*, 168; Porter, “Did Jesus Ever Teach in Greek,” 230–3.

³⁶ Keener, *Acts: Exegetical*, 1:840–1.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 2:1255.

effectively, most likely in Greek.³⁸ Accordingly, Peter likely invoked the Greek form *Iēsous* in his sermon (Acts 10:36–38) and when baptizing Cornelius and the others (Acts 10:48), rather than the Semitic forms *Yeshu* or *Yeshua*.³⁹

The expansion of the early church into gentile regions necessitated the use of Greek as the primary means of communication. The complaint of the Hellenists in Acts 6:1 points to a significant Greek-speaking population within the Jerusalem church already. Philip, one of the Grecian Seven (Acts 6:5), also encountered an Ethiopian eunuch traveling from Jerusalem to Gaza, reading from the prophet Isaiah (Acts 8:30–33). Given his African origins, it is most plausible that this official—whether a proselyte or a God-fearer—read from a Greek translation of Isaiah, rather than an Aramaic text. As treasurer to the queen of the Ethiopians, this eunuch likely spoke several languages, including those used in commerce and diplomacy with neighboring regions such as Greek-speaking Alexandria in Egypt.⁴⁰ Philip’s inquiry, “Do you understand what you are reading?” is itself a Greek wordplay: “*ginōskeis ha anaginōskeis*.”⁴¹ This linguistic detail suggests that Philip and the eunuch conversed in Greek, including the eunuch’s baptismal confession, “I believe that Jesus Christ [*Iēsoun Christon*] is the Son of God” (Acts 8:37–38).

Furthermore, the mission in Antioch (Acts 11:1, 19–21) and Paul’s explicit turn to gentile audiences (Acts 13:46–47) presuppose the use of Greek, as it served as the common language throughout the eastern Mediterranean.⁴² Luke also records specific episodes where the apostles addressed Greek-speaking audiences: Paul and Barnabas in Lystra (Acts 14:7–14), Paul’s exorcism in Philippi (Acts 16:18; see also 19:13–17 where, in Ephesus, the sons of Sceva attempted to exorcise a demon by invoking Jesus’s name), his synagogue preaching in Thessalonica (Acts 17:3–4), and baptisms in Philippi (Acts 16:15, 33), Corinth (Acts 18:8), and Ephesus (Acts 19:5). It is therefore reasonable to conclude that the apostles conducted their ministry—preaching, teaching, baptizing, and performing miracles—primarily in Greek when engaging gentile audiences.⁴³

Apostle Paul’s early life in Tarsus (Acts 9:11) placed him at the crossroads of Greco-Roman and Jewish culture. As a Roman citizen (Acts 22:25–28) born in a major center of Hellenistic education (Acts 21:39), he likely received thorough exposure to Greek language, rhetoric, and philosophical traditions. His later studies under Gamaliel in Jerusalem (Acts 22:3) indicate that he received advanced training in Hebrew Scripture and rabbinic tradition (Gal 1:14).⁴⁴ This blend of influences suggests that Paul was fluent in Greek (Acts 21:37) and Aramaic (Acts 21:40; 22:2), and may have possessed some familiarity with Latin, due to his Roman citizenship and the civic environment in which he lived. Consequently, Paul was well equipped to engage with both Jewish scholars and educated Greco-Roman leaders. In one particular case, Paul addressed Epicurean and Stoic philosophers at the Areopagus in Athens, citing an inscription on a pagan altar—TO THE UNKNOWN GOD—and two Greek poets—Epimenides and Aratus (Acts 17:22–31).⁴⁵ It is

³⁸ Gleaves, *Did Jesus Speak Greek*, 92–3.

³⁹ BDAG, “ὄνομα,” 713; Wilhelm Heitmüller, *Im Namen Jesu: ein sprach- und religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zum Neuen Testament, speziell zur altchristlichen Taufe* (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1903), 127.

⁴⁰ Keener, *Acts: Exegetical*, 2:1566–7, 1584–5.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 2:1582.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 2:1255.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 2:1253, 1255–9. Craig Keener observes that Hellenists, whose native language was Greek, were more fluent in Greek than the average bilingual Galilean or Judean.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 2:1622, 1650–1; 3:3184, 3213–14, 3217–20. Keener suggests that Paul was raised in a prominent family from Tarsus, one of the greatest academic and philosophical centers of its day, home to various schools of rhetoric.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 3:2617–19, 2630–2, 2653–60.

therefore difficult to imagine that Paul, while speaking Greek and quoting Greek poets before an Athenian audience, deliberately avoided using the Greek form of Jesus's name (Acts 17:17–18).

Hence, the evidence indicates that Jesus and the early church regularly communicated in Greek, the common language of much of the eastern Mediterranean. This naturally included pronouncing Jesus's name in Greek rather than Aramaic. Moreover, Jesus identified himself as “the Alpha and the Omega” (Rev 1:8, 11; 21:6, 13), the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, rather than as “the Aleph and Tav,” implying that Greek linguistic forms were not viewed as inferior or unsuitable for conveying divine truth. No documentary evidence or historical narrative suggests that the early church avoided the Greek form of his name. The NT itself was either written by a Greek-speaking gentile (Luke, who composed 28% of the NT) or to predominantly Greek-speaking congregations.⁴⁶ Thus, the Sacred Name Movement is not a return to first-century apostolic worship, but rather a relatively new twentieth-century phenomenon that emphasizes using specific Hebrew names for God and Jesus, rather than reflecting historically verified early Christian practices.

4 Linguistic Pronunciations

The second misunderstanding advanced by the Sacred Name Movement is the belief that the sound of a name should be transliterated precisely from one language to another. According to this reasoning, only a precise sound-for-sound transliteration honors God and accurately identifies the Messiah. While such a claim may sound persuasive to those who value fidelity to Scripture, it does not withstand scrutiny. Linguistic, historical, and biblical evidence overwhelmingly refutes it.

First, the Sacred Name Movement misrepresents the meaning and process of transliteration. *Transliterating* a name from one language into another does not require preserving the exact pronunciation of the original.⁴⁷ Instead, transliteration means changing the letters or characters of one language into those of another alphabet or language.⁴⁸ Hence, transliteration is not a “sound-for-sound” transference, but a representation of characters from one writing system in another. No two languages share identical sound systems; each has unique phonemes, stress patterns, and pronunciation rules. When moving between languages, exact replication of sounds is impossible because many have no precise equivalent in the target language. The primary goal of transliteration is not to reproduce the original language's phonetics but to represent the written characters consistently in another script.⁴⁹

Often, the script of one language does not align perfectly with that of another because the receiving language lacks an equivalent sound or character. This produces variation in pronunciation. For example, the Hebrew ח (*Het*) is sometimes transliterated as *ch*, the same character combination found in the English word *chair*; yet, the actual articulation is guttural, like

⁴⁶ David L. Allen, *Lukan Authorship of Hebrews*, NACSBT (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 5. David Allen offers compelling arguments for Lukan authorship of Hebrews, which, if true, means that Luke composed almost 33% of the NT.

⁴⁷ “Why the Savior's True Name is Missing”: “Transliterate means the sound of the name is the same—even if spoken in Greek, Hebrew or Latin. ... Instead, proper nouns are transliterated. This is especially noticeable in bringing Hebrew into either Greek or Latin, as each has its own alphabet. Different letters must be employed to simulate the same sound in each alphabet.”

⁴⁸ Clarence L. Barnhart and Robert K. Barnhart, eds., *The World Book Dictionary* (Chicago: Doubleday, 1981), 2:2223.

⁴⁹ Billie Jean Collins, Bob Buller, and John F. Kutsko, eds., *The SBL Handbook of Style*, 2nd ed. (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014), 56.

the German word *Bach*.⁵⁰ By contrast, the Hebrew שׁ (*Shin*), which represents the /sh/ sound, transfers neatly into English, but is transliterated with σ (*Sigma*) /s/ in Greek. Hence, *Yēšûa'* transliterates into Greek as *Iēsous* (Neh 8:17 LXX; Heb 4:8). Additionally, some languages—such as English, French, and Danish—contain silent letters that are pronounced in other languages with few or no silent letters, like Greek, Spanish, or Swahili. Similarly, while many languages pronounce the final “e” in a word, in English, it is often silent and instead marks a change in the preceding vowel sound (as in *mad* vs. *made*). The absence of certain sounds in Greek and Latin largely explains the phonetic changes that occur when names were transferred from Hebrew and Aramaic.⁵¹ Insisting on “sound-for-sound” transfer denies the reality of how languages work. Transliteration is merely an approximation, not an exact duplication. Consequently, the Sacred Name Movement imposes a standard that no language can consistently satisfy. Because transliteration necessarily adapts names to the phonological and orthographic conventions of the receiving language, exact sound-for-sound correspondence is neither expected nor achievable.

Second, the Sacred Name argument assumes there is only one correct pronunciation of divine names, even though advocates of the movement frequently disagree among themselves regarding what that pronunciation should be. Even in a single language, words often have multiple legitimate pronunciations. Dialects within a language function as linguistic fingerprints, revealing features such as a speaker’s ethnicity, geographic origin, or socioeconomic background.⁵² For instance, the plural of *you* differs regionally in American English: *y’all*, in the South, *youse* in parts of the Northeast, or *yinz* in Western Pennsylvania—all carrying the same meaning, yet the phonetic distinctions are not represented in writing.⁵³ Similarly, Boston residents may start their *cah* (car) with a set of *khakis* (car keys), while elsewhere *khakis* refer to a style of pants. In addition, coastal New Englanders with a non-rhotic accent might pronounce *Samantha* as *Samanthar*, due to the *intrusive R* phenomenon.⁵⁴ Other regional linguistic variations include lexical differences, such as *soda* in Northeast America, *Coke* in the South, and *pop* in the Midwest.⁵⁵ Phonetic differences develop naturally in any living language as speakers create and modify pronunciations over time. Language change is unavoidable, as languages, like cultures, are dynamic systems influenced by human communication. A language only stops evolving organically when it is no longer spoken as a native language—transforming into a “dead” language.⁵⁶ Hence, uniform pronunciation is unrealistic even within one language.

The same phenomenon was evident in the biblical world. The Gospels note that Peter’s regional Galilean speech betrayed him (Matt 26:73; Mark 14:70), indicating that Galileans spoke a recognizable Aramaic dialect (Acts 2:7, “Look, are not all these who speak Galileans?”). Linguistic variation in first-century Aramaic likely produced noticeable dialectal differences across regions such as Qumran, Jerusalem, and Galilee.⁵⁷ While the precise features of Galilean

⁵⁰ C. L. Seow, *A Grammar for Biblical Hebrew*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 1.

⁵¹ Jože Krašovec, *The Transformation of Biblical Proper Names*, LHBOTS 418 (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 89.

⁵² David Crystal, *The Stories of English* (New York: Overlook Press, 2004), 361–4; Jonathan M. Watt, “Of Gutturals and Galileans: The Two Slurs of Matthew 26.73,” in *Diglossia and Other Topics in New Testament Linguistics*, ed. Stanley E. Porter, JSNTSS 193 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 107.

⁵³ Crystal, *Stories of English*, 449–52; Watt, “Gutturals and Galileans,” 118.

⁵⁴ Crystal, *Stories of English*, 467–8.

⁵⁵ Watt, “Gutturals and Galileans,” 117.

⁵⁶ Bruce, *Books and Parchments*, 33; Jonathan M. Watt, “The Current Landscape of Diglossia Studies: The Diglossic Continuum in First-Century Palestine,” in *Diglossia and Other Topics in New Testament Linguistics*, ed. Stanley E. Porter, JSNTSS 193 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 25–6.

⁵⁷ Watt, “Gutturals and Galileans,” 116.

Aramaic cannot be determined with certainty, the most plausible distinctions were likely those related to phonology or accent.⁵⁸ Post-biblical sources indicate that Galileans tended to drop or blur guttural consonants,⁵⁹ and earlier biblical tradition records that some northern Israelites failed to pronounce the *Shin* (/sh/ sound; Judg 12:6). Consequently, regional speech patterns may have led some Galileans to pronounce Jesus's Aramaic name as *Yeshu*, with others perhaps reducing it further to *Yesu*.⁶⁰ Even within first-century Judaism, therefore, pronunciation likely varied from region to region, making the notion of a single universally recognized pronunciation historically improbable.

Third, the Sacred Name Movement mistakenly assumes that the affricate /dʒ/ (soft G) sound is inseparably tied to the letter *J*.⁶¹ The development of a /dʒ/ pronunciation was not unique to English. Although the letterform *J*, *j* did not come into everyday use until the seventeenth century (c. 1630), the consonantal sound associated with modern English *j* had already existed for at least a century.⁶² The letter *J* was not a new addition to medieval English but a differentiation of the letter *I*, which, inherited from Latin, functioned as both a vowel and the consonantal sound /j/ (English *y*).⁶³ Consequently, the distinction between *I* and *J* in writing merely codified a pronunciation that had already developed. It did not produce the consonant sound associated with the English pronunciation of *Jesus*.

By the sixth century, the consonantal *i* (/j/) sound had, through compression of articulation and the development of an initial stop, evolved into a consonantal affricate similar to the modern /dʒ/. Around the same time, the original velar /g/, before front vowels, shifted to a /dʒ/, so that consonantal *I* and soft *G* shared the same value in emerging Romance languages. In late Latin and early Italian, this sound was represented by *G* before *e* and *i*, and *Gi* before *a*, *o*, and *u*.⁶⁴

A notable example occurs in inscriptions from Jewish catacombs at Venosa in southern Italy. An epitaph dating c. AD 500–550 preserves the name *Yeshua* as *Gesua*, together with the feminine form *Gesues* (approximately /dʒe'su.es/).⁶⁵ The name *Gesua* corresponds with *Jeshua* (*Yēšûa'*; LXX *Iēsou*, 1 Ch 24:11), the OT name associated with Jesus. The inscription thus provides an unusually early example of the name *Yēšûa' / Iēsous* being rendered with a *G* in a Romance-

⁵⁸ Ibid., 117–18.

⁵⁹ Craig A. Evans, *Matthew*, NCBC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 444; R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 1033; Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 655; Watt, "Gutturals and Galileans," 114–15.

⁶⁰ Jerome's commentary on Matthew associates the Galilean "vernacular sound of speaking" with the Ephraimites inability to pronounce "Shibboleth" (Judg 12:6); cf. Matthew W. Mitchell, "Matthew 26:73 and the Case of the Disappearing Galilean Accent," *JBL* 139.1 (2020): 108.

⁶¹ Jacob O. Meyer, "What Is the Messiah's Name?" *Assemblies of Yahweh*, <https://assembliesofyahweh.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/A-3-What-is-the-Messiahs-Name.pdf>: "Since it is provable that there was no consonantal 'J' sound in the English language before 1565 when it was created by a printer named Grille Beys, how was the Savior's Name pronounced before then?" "The Mistaken J": "The Savior's name could not begin with the letter J because it did not exist when He was born—not even a thousand years later! All good dictionaries and encyclopedias show that the letter J and its sound are of late origin" [italics added].

⁶² J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner, eds., *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), 8:159: "Thus, L[atin] *gestus*, *Iēsūs*, *iam*, *iocāre*, *iūdicem*, are represented in Italian by *gesto*, *Gesù*, *già*, *giocare*, *giudice*."

⁶³ David Diringer, "J" in *Encyclopedia Americana*, international ed., eds. Michael Shally-Jensen and Doris E. Lechner (Danbury, CT: Scholastic Library Publishing, 2005), 15:636.

⁶⁴ Simpson and Weiner, *Oxford English Dictionary*, 8:159.

⁶⁵ Werner Foerster, "Ἰησοῦς," *TDNT* 3:286; David Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions of Western Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 1:114, 123–7. While the form *Gesues* is feminine, the epitaph refers to a man—*Gesua*, Agnella's husband.

speaking environment. The spelling suggests a pronunciation similar to the soft *G* later characteristic of the Italian *Gesù* and reflects the broader linguistic development whereby the consonant *I* and the soft *G* came to share an affricated pronunciation.

The /dʒ/ sound became significantly more prominent in English primarily through Old French following the Norman Conquest, although related palatal developments may have already occurred in native Old English speech. By this time, the consonantal value of *I* in Old French had developed from an earlier /j/ pronunciation to the affricate /dʒ/, a value it shared with soft *G*, the latter having undergone palatalization before front vowels. Some native Old English palatal consonants likewise appear to have passed through an intermediate /dj/ stage before developing into /dʒ/, a development reflected indirectly in the behavior of adjacent vowels.⁶⁶ English subsequently adopted and expanded this consonantal value, particularly in words of French origin. As a result, from the eleventh to the seventeenth centuries, the letter *I* served a dual function, representing both the vowel /i/ and the consonant /dʒ/ sound. In Middle English, the initial consonantal *I* before a vowel in many French loanwords was pronounced as /dʒ/. This pronunciation later became standard for the letter *J* in Modern English.⁶⁷

The J-shaped form developed gradually as a variant of *I*. The letterforms *J* and *j*, elongated forms of *I* with a curved lower stem, emerged gradually during the later Middle Ages and were not widely adopted until the mid- to late seventeenth century.⁶⁸ Even before the invention of the printing press, however, decorative or hooked forms of the capital *I* had developed in manuscript writing. In the *Holkham Bible* (c. 1320–1340), an Anglo-Norman collection of biblical and apocryphal narratives, a J-shaped form of *I* appears in names such as *Jesse*, *John*, and *Jhesu*, a form of the name Jesus.⁶⁹ At this stage, however, *I* and *J* were not yet regarded as separate letters; the J-shaped form was simply an alternate graphic form of *I*. As a result, the spellings *Iesus*, *Ihesu*, and *Jhesu* should be viewed as different orthographic variants that reflect the changing practices of scribes in writing the initial consonantal sound.⁷⁰

The Anglo-Norman French affricate /dʒ/ entered Middle English, where it was commonly written with initial *I* or *J(h)*, contributing to the development and expansion of the phoneme /dʒ/ in English.⁷¹ This phonological development is reflected in Middle English spellings such as *Jhesu*. For example, the Wycliffe Bible (c. 1382) employs the J-shaped consonantal form in its index for book titles such as *Judith*, *Joel*, and *Jonas*, and within the biblical text itself for names such as *James*, *Joseph*, and *Judas*. It translates Matt 1:1 as “The book of the generacioun of Jhesu

⁶⁶ Richard Jordan, *Handbook of Middle English Grammar: Phonology*, trans. and rev. Eugene J. Crook, Janua Linguarum, Series Practica 218 (The Hague: Mouton, 1974), 72.

⁶⁷ Diringer, *Encyclopedia Americana*, 15:636; Peter Giles, “J” in *The Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11 ed., ed. Henry Hooper (New York: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1911), 15:103; Jordan, *Middle English*, 176–8, 225–6; Simpson and Weiner, *Oxford English Dictionary*, 8:159.

⁶⁸ Diringer, *Encyclopedia Americana*, 15:636.

⁶⁹ *The Holkham Bible Picture Book* (ca. 1330), f. 14, “The Flight into Egypt; Joseph and Mary Are Robbed,” *The Public Domain Review*, January 20, 2022, <https://publicdomainreview.org/collection/holkham-bible/>; cf. F. P. Pickering, ed., *The Anglo-Norman Text of the Holkham Bible Picture Book*, Anglo-Norman Texts 23 (Oxford: Anglo-Norman Text Society, 1971), 24, 31–32; Ellen M. Ross, *The Grief of God: Images of the Suffering Jesus in Late Medieval England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 50.

⁷⁰ See Michael G. Sargent, *Nicholas Love: The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus: A Full Critical Edition*, Exeter Medieval Texts and Studies (Exeter, Devon: University of Exeter Press, 2005), 401.

⁷¹ Charles Jones, *A History of English Phonology*, Longman linguistic library (New York: Routledge, 2014), 55–7; Roger Lass, “Phonology and Morphology,” in *The Cambridge History of the English Language*, ed. Norman Blake (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 2:36–7.

Crist, the sone of Daud, the sone of Abraham.”⁷² A Wycliffe Bible manuscript dated to the late fourteenth century contains a prologue attributed to Jerome in which the name *Jerom* is written with a hooked, J-shaped form of consonantal *I*. Immediately below, the opening word of John 1:1, “In þe bigynnyng,” begins with a capital vowel *I* written as a simple vertical stroke with horizontal terminals, closely resembling the modern capital *I*.⁷³ This juxtaposition demonstrates the emerging graphic distinction between consonantal and vocalic forms of *I* in late medieval English manuscripts.

Comparable evidence appears in Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* (c. 1387–1400), although medieval scribal practices remained far from standardized. Graphic distinctions between consonantal and vocalic *I* could vary not only from one manuscript to another but even within the work of a single scribe. In the Ellesmere manuscript (c. 1404), for example, the initial consonant in *Jhū* is written in a form closely resembling the vowel *I* in the phrase “I haue,” while elsewhere the name *Jereme* appears with a more pronounced hooked initial form that more clearly anticipated the later letter *J*.⁷⁴ The spelling *Jhesu* nevertheless occurs repeatedly. One example appears in “The Parson’s Tale”: “Remembrance of the passioun that oure Lord Jhesu Crist suffred for our synnes.”⁷⁵ William Caxton’s 1476/7 edition of Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales*, generally regarded as the first printed edition of the work, employs two distinct forms of a hooked J-shaped consonant, including the spellings *Jeremye* and *Jhesu*.⁷⁶ This usage continues in Richard Pynson’s 1492 edition, which preserves a J-shaped consonantal form in *Jheremye*, *Jherusalem*, and both the abbreviated and full forms of Jesus, *Jhū* and *Jhesu*.⁷⁷ Accordingly, the evidence indicates that the emergence of the /dʒ/ sound in English preceded the later orthographic differentiation of *J* from *I*, rather than resulting from it.

Further evidence appears in Nicholas Love’s *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, an early fifteenth-century translation of the pseudo-Bonaventuran *Meditations on the Life of Christ*. In this work, a notable distinction appears between the graphic forms used for vocalic and consonantal *I*. The vowel *I* features a curved flourish extending to the left from its top, with a short horizontal line at the bottom. By contrast, the consonant *I* takes on a more defined J-shaped appearance, characterized by a large, looped top and a curved, hooked bottom. This work employs both the spelling *Jhesu* and the abbreviated form *Jhu*, highlighting the growing visual distinction between the two forms while they still functioned as a single letter of the alphabet.⁷⁸

⁷² “John Wycliffe Bible 1382: Matthew Chapter: 1,” *Textus Receptus Bibles*, 2025, <https://www.textusreceptusbibles.com/Wycliffe/40/1>; “Wycliffe Bible: Christ Church MS 145,” *Digital Bodleian*, 2025, <https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/objects/4b61db42-3ac8-4973-8ae6-d404cb7f89c2/surfaces/3445956e-3059-491b-acaf-8c8997d3b2e6/>.

⁷³ “Wycliffe John Gospel,” *Wikimedia Commons*, 2005, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Wycliffe_John_Gospel.jpg; cf. Thomas Graves Law, ed., *The New Testament in Scots*, The Scottish Text Society (Edinburgh: Blackwood and Sons, 1903), 2:1–2.

⁷⁴ “Canterbury Tales,” *The Huntington Digital Library*, <https://hdl.huntington.org/digital/collection/p15150coll7/id/2777>, f. 206v, f. 207r.

⁷⁵ Thomas H. Bestul, “Chaucer’s Parson’s Tale and the Late-Medieval Tradition of Religious Meditation,” *Speculum* 64.3 (1989): 600–19, 607–8; Ross, *Grief of God*, 144n55; cf. Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales* (Westminster: William Caxton, 1476/7) [666]; Alfred W. Pollard, ed., *Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales* (London: MacMillan, 1894), 2:355.

⁷⁶ Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, [651].

⁷⁷ Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales* (London: Richard Pynson, 1492), [591].

⁷⁸ “Myrrour of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ (Dodesham),” *Wikimedia Commons*, 2020, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Myrrour_of_the_blessed_lyf_of_Jesu_Christ_\(Dodesham\).jpeg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Myrrour_of_the_blessed_lyf_of_Jesu_Christ_(Dodesham).jpeg); Sargent, *Mirror*, Intro 72, 3–4. Sargent transcribes *Jhesu* simply as *Jesu*.

The N-Town manuscript (c. 1468), Play 28, “Betrayal; Procession of Saints,” contains a J-shaped form of I in the spelling *Jhesus*.⁷⁹ The form *Jhesu* also appears several times in Richard Foxe’s letters, dated between 1493 and 1519.⁸⁰ Notably, J-shaped forms are generally absent from the 1611 KJV and the Shakespeare Folio of 1623; however, the latter used a capital Italic *J* in the headings of proper names such as *John*, *Juliet*, and *Julius*, as well as in the list of actors, illustrating the transitional status of the letterform.⁸¹ Thus, while the 1611 KJV spelled the Savior’s name as *Iesus*, the consonantal *I* in English had long been associated with the affricate /dʒ/ inherited through French influence. The spelling *Iesus* therefore does not indicate that the name was pronounced with the /j/ sound of English *yes*. Nor does the absence of the independent letter *J* imply the absence of the consonantal sound that the letter later came to represent. Rather, it reflects the continued use of the traditional *I* for a consonant whose pronunciation had already developed toward /dʒ/.

The *Baptist Confession of Faith* of 1644 provides particularly useful evidence of this transitional practice. It employs the J-shaped forms in spellings such as *Jesus* and *Jefus*, while also retaining *Iefus* as in the expression *Lord Iefus Chrif*.⁸² The appearance of *Jesus*, *Jefus*, and *Iefus* on the same page suggests that the printer treated the forms as orthographic variants of the same name. Such variation may reflect the transitional state of English spelling and typography during the mid-seventeenth century, when *I* and *J* were not yet used with complete consistency.⁸³ These spellings provide clear evidence that both the traditional *I*-form and the emerging *J*-form could represent the same /dʒ/ pronunciation, indicating an orthographic distinction rather than a difference in sound.

Consequently, the evidence does not support the claim that the /dʒ/ sound in *Jesus* was invented with the letter *J* in the seventeenth century. Rather, the /dʒ/ value of consonantal *I* substantially predates the independent letter *J*: it developed in portions of the Romance-speaking world in late antiquity, entered English through Old French after the Norman Conquest, and continued to be represented by *I* and its J-shaped variants throughout the Middle English and early modern periods.⁸⁴ The spelling *Jesus* therefore reflects the later orthographic standardization of an already established consonantal pronunciation.

5 Conclusion

The process by which *Yēšūa* ‘ (Yeshua) passed from Hebrew into Greek (*Iēsous*), then into Latin (*Iesus*), and ultimately into English (*Jesus*) is not an attempt to corrupt the Messiah’s actual name. Rather, the changes in spelling, sound, and pronunciation are simply the results of the differences

⁷⁹ “Play 28, Betrayal; Procession of Saints,” *The Middle English Texts Series*, The Rossell Hope Robbins Library at the University of Rochester, 2024, <https://metseditions.org>: “[Here Jhesus goth to Betany ward (toward Bethany), and his dyscipulys folwyng with sad contenawns (countenance), Jhesus seyng:]”.

⁸⁰ P. S. Allen and H. M. Allen, eds., *The Letters of Richard Fox 1486–1527* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929), 14, 85, 88, 119 [The editors state on p. xvii that they attempted to reproduce every letter of the alphabet from the originals as faithfully as possible]; Joan Greatrex, “On Ministering to ‘Certayne Devoute and Religious Women’: Bishop Fox and the Benedictine Nuns of Winchester Diocese on the Eve of the Dissolution,” in *Women in the Church*, eds. W. J. Sheils and Diana Woods, *Studies in Church History* 27 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 223.

⁸¹ Simpson and Weiner, *Oxford English Dictionary*, 8:159.

⁸² *The Confession of Faith [...] Anabaptists* (London: n.p., 1644), [1, 4–5], <https://archive.org/details/early-baptist-the-confession-of-faith-1644>.

⁸³ It is even possible that some variations in spellings reflect practical considerations of seventeenth-century printing, such as the available number of pieces of moveable type (sorts) needed to set a page.

⁸⁴ Simpson and Weiner, *Oxford English Dictionary*, 8:159, 222.

in writing systems and languages. Yet, each of these names refers to the same person—Jesus the Messiah (Matt 1:21; Luke 1:31). Moreover, the evidence examined in this study does not support the Sacred Name reconstruction *Yahshua*. The form is unattested in the Hebrew Scriptures and does not conform to established patterns of Hebrew theophoric personal names. Instead, the historical form underlying the Greek *Iēsous* is *Yēšúaʿ* (Yeshua).

If the Sacred Name Movement’s logic were correct that the validity of the Messiah’s name depends upon reproducing its Hebrew pronunciation, Christians would face an impossible dilemma—every language community on earth would need to precisely reproduce ancient Hebrew phonetics, despite lacking equivalent sounds or letters. Interestingly, while Sacred Name proponents insist on invoking forms such as Yahweh and Yahshua, they tend to have no issues with pronouncing the /dʒ/ sound in other biblical names such as Jerusalem, Jews, John, Jordan, Jotham, and Judah.⁸⁵

Throughout Scripture, God’s people have spoken, worshipped, and prayed in various languages—Hebrew (Gen 31:47; 2 Kgs 18:26–28; Neh 13:24), Aramaic (Dan 2:20–23; Ezra 4:7–10; Rom 8:15), Greek (Acts 21:37; Rev 1:8, 19:1–6), and Latin (Mark 5:9; Luke 23:38; Acts 2:10).⁸⁶ This linguistic diversity is also evident in the ministry of Jesus and the early church. Rather than operating exclusively in Hebrew or Aramaic, Jesus and his apostles ministered in a multilingual environment in which Greek served as the common language of communication throughout much of the eastern Mediterranean. Consequently, the use of the Greek form *Iēsous* was not an accommodation to later Christianity but part of the church’s earliest missionary practice. From the beginning, the gospel crossed linguistic boundaries without requiring converts to adopt Hebrew pronunciation as a prerequisite for faith, worship, or baptism.

Moreover, while church historians note various disputes over issues such as water baptism and the nature of Christ’s deity, they do not report any controversies over the pronunciation of the Savior’s name. The book of Acts and the Epistles provide no evidence that the early church deliberately employed the Aramaic pronunciation of Jesus’s name in preference to the Greek form. Likewise, the ongoing disagreement among Sacred Name groups over the proper pronunciation of the divine names demonstrates the difficulty of making acceptable worship or salvation depend on a single precise phonetic form. If exact pronunciation were essential, one would expect far greater certainty regarding what that pronunciation actually was.

The Bible proclaims that everyone—regardless of their language—who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved (Acts 2:21; Rom 10:14; 14:11; Phil 2:11). Revelation 7:9 portrays a vast multitude from “every nation, tribe, people, and tongue” standing before the Lamb, highlighting the linguistic and cultural diversity in God’s kingdom. Genuine faith is not dependent on a rigid phonetic pronunciation but on sincerely calling upon the Lord, whether one says *Yeshua*, *Yesu*, *Iēsous*, *Gesua*, *Jésus*, or *Jesus*.

⁸⁵ Meyer, “What Must We Do to Be Saved,” 1, 5–9.

⁸⁶ Bruce, *Books and the Parchments*, 33–73.

7. Linguistic Timeline

Hebrew (Pre-Christian Era)

יֵשׁוּעַ (*Yēšúaʿ*) [/j/ = English y]



Greek (3rd century BC onward)

Ἰησοῦς (*Iēsous*) [/i.e'sus/ or /je'sus/]



Latin (Christian Antiquity)

Iesus [/j/ = English y]



Late Latin and Early Romance (5th–6th centuries AD)

Gesua, *Gesues* (Venosa inscriptions, c. AD 500–550) [approximately /dʒe'su/, /dʒe'su.es/]



Medieval Italian (Early Middle Ages)

Gesù [/dʒe'zu/]



Old French and Anglo-Norman French (10th–12th centuries)

Ihesus, *Jhesus* [initial /dʒ/ established]



Middle English (11th–15th centuries)

Iesus, *Ihesus*, *Jhesus* (initial consonantal *I* frequently pronounced /dʒ/)



Early Modern English (16th–17th centuries)

Jesus (orthographic distinction between *I* and *J* becomes standardized)



Modern English (17th century to present)

Jesus [/'dʒi:zəs/]

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