

God's Name, Jehovah, Yahweh, and the Slavic Connection

Union of Saints

Introduction

There is an interesting question surrounding the names **YHWH**, **Yahweh**, **Jehovah**, **-ov/-ev**, and **-sky/-ski**.

At first glance, the similarities can seem striking. **Jehovah** contains a sound resembling **-ov**, while Russian, Ukrainian, and other Eastern European surnames frequently contain endings such as **-ov**, **-ev**, **-ova**, **-sky**, and **-ski**. Jewish people from Eastern Europe also have many surnames containing these same endings.

The important question is whether these similarities are merely coincidental or whether there is a deeper historical connection.

The evidence shows that these naming traditions **did interact historically**, particularly because Jewish communities lived for centuries within Slavic-speaking societies. However, the available linguistic evidence does **not establish that the Slavic suffix -ov originated from the Hebrew divine name YHWH or from the word Jehovah**.

At the same time, there are genuine connections between Hebrew and Slavic naming traditions that make the subject worth examining carefully.

1. The Hebrew Name of God

In the Hebrew Bible, God's personal name is written:

יהוה

These four Hebrew consonants are commonly represented in English as:

YHWH

The four letters are traditionally called the **Tetragrammaton**, from Greek *tetra* ("four") and *gramma* ("letter").

The original Hebrew writing does not preserve the ancient vowels of the name with absolute certainty. For this reason, scholars distinguish between the ancient Hebrew consonants **YHWH** and attempts to reconstruct their pronunciation.

The pronunciation **Yahweh** is the reconstruction most commonly preferred in modern biblical scholarship, although the exact ancient pronunciation cannot be established with absolute certainty. ([Jewish Bible Quarterly](#))

Approximately:

Yahweh

YAH-weh

2. Why YHWH Became Associated With “Lord”

A major part of the history involves Jewish reading tradition.

Over time, Jewish readers generally avoided pronouncing the divine name aloud when reading Scripture. Instead, they used **Adonai**, meaning “**Lord**.”

In the later Masoretic Hebrew manuscript tradition, vowel markings were added to the consonantal text. The Tetragrammaton was marked in a way that reminded the reader to say the substitute word rather than pronounce the divine name.

Thus, the written form could appear approximately as:

YHWH + the reading tradition associated with Adonai

This is important because the vowels seen alongside YHWH in later Hebrew manuscripts were **not necessarily the original vowels of the ancient divine name**. ([Religious Studies Center](#))

3. Where “Jehovah” Came From

The English form **Jehovah** is much later than the Hebrew Bible.

Christian scholars in medieval Europe encountered the Hebrew consonants **YHWH** and the Jewish reading tradition surrounding them.

Over time, forms such as:

lehoua

lohoua

lohouah

lehouah

appeared in Christian writings.

Eventually, these forms developed into the English **Jehovah**.

An important correction to a common historical claim is that **Petrus Galatinus did not actually invent the form**.

The name had appeared before him. One documented example is the Spanish Christian scholar **Raymundus Martini**, whose *Pugio fidei* used a form resembling **Yohoua** around the late thirteenth century. Other forms appeared before Galatinus as well. (JW.ORG)

4. Petrus Galatinus

Petrus Galatinus was a Christian Franciscan friar and theologian—not a Jewish scholar.

In **1518**, he published *De arcanis catholicae veritatis*, in which he used the form:

lehoua

His importance is therefore not that he created the divine name, but that he was one of the Christian scholars who **used and helped establish the form in Christian scholarship**.

Earlier forms already existed.

This distinction matters:

Galatinus did not create YHWH.

Galatinus did not create the ancient Hebrew name of God.

Galatinus did not invent the entire idea of “Jehovah.”

Rather, he participated in the continuing Christian European tradition of representing the Hebrew divine name as **lehoua/Jehovah**. (JW.ORG)

5. Yahweh and Jehovah

The two forms ultimately refer to the same Hebrew source:

יהוה

↓

YHWH

↓

Yahweh — scholarly reconstruction of the ancient pronunciation

Jehovah — later Christian form that developed through the history of Hebrew vocalization and European Christian scholarship

Therefore, **Jehovah is not a different biblical deity or a different Hebrew name.**

The important distinction is between:

the ancient Hebrew form

and

the later pronunciation/spelling tradition.

6. The Name Jesus

The name **Jesus** has a completely different linguistic history.

His name in Hebrew/Aramaic was **Yeshua**.

It was rendered into Greek as:

īēsous

From Greek it passed into Latin and eventually into English as:

Jesus

The name is related to **Yehoshua**, represented in English as **Joshua**.

The name is traditionally understood in connection with the Hebrew idea of salvation and is commonly explained as meaning something like:

“YHWH saves”

or

“The LORD saves.”

Thus, there really is a connection between the name **Jesus/Yeshua** and the divine name **YHWH** at the level of Hebrew name formation.

This is different from saying that **Jesus and YHWH are simply two pronunciations of the same name.**

7. Jesus and YHWH

The biblical names themselves should be distinguished from theological conclusions about Jesus.

YHWH is the Hebrew divine name found in the Hebrew Scriptures.

Jesus/Yeshua is the personal name of Jesus of Nazareth.

Traditional Christianity teaches that Jesus is the divine Son within the Trinity.

Other religious groups understand Jesus differently, including traditions that regard him as God's Messiah and Son without identifying him as God himself.

Therefore, there are two separate questions:

Linguistic question

What do the names **YHWH** and **Yeshua** mean and where did they come from?

Theological question

What is the relationship between **Jesus** and **YHWH**?

The first can be studied through historical languages and texts. The second involves theology and religious interpretation.

8. Where -ov and -ev Come From

Now we come to the part that raised the original question.

Russian, Ukrainian, Belarusian, and other Eastern European surnames frequently contain endings such as:

-ov

-ev

-ova

-eva

These are **Slavic surname-forming elements**.

They commonly express an idea such as:

“of,” “belonging to,” or associated with a particular person or ancestor.

For example:

Ivan → Ivanov

Peter → Petrov

Roman → Romanov

The feminine forms traditionally use **-ova/-eva**:

Ivanov → Ivanova

Petrov → Petrova

The precise history varies from name to name, so it is better not to translate every **-ov** surname literally as “son of.”

Nevertheless, the general idea is one of **family relationship, possession, or association**.

9. Why Biblical Names Can Have -ov

This is where the Hebrew and Slavic naming traditions can actually meet.

A person can have a name whose **root comes from a biblical/Hebrew name**, while the surname ending comes from a **Slavic naming system**.

For example:

David → Davidov

David is a biblical Hebrew name.

-ov is the Slavic surname-forming element.

Therefore:

David + ov = Davidov

The same basic phenomenon can occur with other biblical names.

Examples include names derived from:

Abraham / Abram → Abramov

Isaac → Isaakov

Jacob → forms related to Iakovlev

The presence of a Slavic ending therefore does not mean that the underlying name is non-biblical.

10. Jewish Surnames and Slavic Languages

This becomes particularly important when discussing Jewish surnames.

Jewish communities lived for centuries throughout territories that are now associated with:

- Ukraine

- Russia
- Belarus
- Poland
- Lithuania
- Moldova
- and other parts of Eastern Europe.

As hereditary surnames developed and became required or customary, Jewish families could acquire surnames formed according to the **languages of the societies in which they lived**.

Consequently, Jewish surnames can contain:

Russian suffixes

Ukrainian suffixes

Polish suffixes

German/Yiddish elements

Hebrew or biblical roots

and combinations of these.

Research on Jewish family names in Ukraine, for example, specifically records large numbers of Jewish surnames ending in **-ov**, **-yev**, **-sky**, **-ovsky**, **-yevsky**, and related forms. It also documents surnames in which a Hebrew or Yiddish root has been combined with a Russian-style ending. ([Posen Library](#))

This is a genuine historical connection between **Jewish naming and Slavic naming systems**.

11. What Does -sky / -ski Mean?

Another extremely common Eastern European ending is:

-sky

or:

-ski

Depending on the language, it appears in forms such as:

-ski

-sky

-skyi

-skiy

These endings are broadly associated with the idea of being **from, belonging to, or associated with** a place, person, or characteristic.

For example, surnames can historically have a geographic association:

[place] + -sky

meaning something like:

“from/associated with that place.”

The exact meaning depends upon the particular surname.

12. Why Russians Have So Many -sky Names

The **-sky/-ski** ending is found across several Slavic naming traditions.

It is not exclusively Russian.

It can occur in:

Russian

Ukrainian

Belarusian

Polish

and other Slavic contexts.

For example:

Russian: -ский

Ukrainian: -ський

Polish: -ski

English spellings may turn these into:

-sky

or

-ski

This is why the ending itself cannot automatically identify someone's ethnicity.

A surname ending in **-sky** does not necessarily mean:

“This person is Russian.”

It may have Ukrainian, Polish, Belarusian, Jewish, or other Eastern European historical connections.

13. Jewish Surnames With -sky

Jewish surnames can also contain **-sky/-ski**.

This is particularly understandable because Jewish communities lived in regions where these languages were spoken.

A Jewish family could therefore have:

a Hebrew or Yiddish root

-

a Slavic surname ending

For example, historical Jewish surname records from Ukraine contain names with endings such as **-sky**, **-ovsky**, **-yevsky**, as well as **-ov** and **-yev**. ([Posen Library](#))

This demonstrates something important:

A surname can preserve evidence of more than one cultural or linguistic environment.

A family could be Jewish in religious and ancestral identity while possessing a surname formed according to the language of the surrounding Slavic society.

14. Is -ov Connected to Jehovah?

This is where the distinction between **similarity** and **historical derivation** becomes essential.

The words:

Jehovah

and

-ov

do sound somewhat similar.

It is reasonable to notice the resemblance and ask whether there is a connection.

However, the evidence currently available does **not establish that the Slavic suffix -ov came from Jehovah or from YHWH.**

The Slavic **-ov/-ev** surname tradition has its own linguistic history.

Likewise, **Jehovah** has its own history arising from the Hebrew Tetragrammaton and the medieval Christian representation of that name.

Therefore, the claim:

YHWH → Jehovah → Slavic -ov

is not established by historical linguistics.

15. But There Is a Real Connection

That does not mean there is **no connection whatsoever.**

There is a real historical connection between:

Hebrew names

Jewish communities

Christian scholarship

Russian/Ukrainian languages

Slavic surname formation

and **Eastern European Jewish surnames.**

For example:

**Biblical Hebrew name → Jewish family → Eastern European environment →
Slavic surname formation**

could produce a surname in which an ancient biblical name is combined with a Slavic ending.

This is a genuine interaction between the traditions.

The important point is simply that the connection is **historical and cultural**, rather than evidence that the Slavic suffix itself originated from God's name.

Please Note: Our argument is that there is a connection dating all the way back to the Greeks, Jews and Egyptian times. Please see the addendum.

16. Why the Similarity Can Feel Significant

The similarity becomes particularly noticeable when several things are placed next to one another:

יהוה

YHWH

Yahweh

Jehovah

-ov

-ova

-sky

-ski

and Jewish surnames such as names containing biblical roots plus Slavic endings.

There really is a large historical web connecting these cultures.

However, we should avoid assuming that two words are related simply because they sound alike.

Historical linguistics normally looks for things such as:

- older written forms
- chronological development
- sound changes
- grammatical function
- related words in the same language family
- evidence from historical documents
- geographic distribution

When those criteria are applied, **Jehovah and the Slavic -ov suffix currently appear to have separate linguistic histories.**

17. One Particularly Important Correction

It is tempting to say:

“Petrus Galatinus invented Jehovah.”

That is too strong.

Earlier Christian writers had already used forms resembling **Jehovah**.

For example, **Raymundus Martini** used **Yohoua** in the late thirteenth century, and other forms appeared before Galatinus.

Galatinus used **lehoua** in 1518, but he was participating in an existing Christian tradition rather than creating the word from nothing. (JW.ORG)

This actually makes the history more interesting, because it shows that the story of **Jehovah** stretches back into medieval Christian scholarship.

18. A Simple Family Tree of the Ideas

The history can be visualized this way:

Ancient Hebrew

יהוה

↓

YHWH

↓

Possible ancient pronunciation:

Yahweh

↓

Jewish reading tradition:

Adonai

↓

Medieval Christian representations:

Yohoua / Iohoua / lehoua / lehouah

↓

English:

Jehovah

Separately:

Hebrew/Biblical Personal Names

Abraham

Isaac

Jacob

David

Yeshua

↓

These names spread through many languages and cultures.

↓

In Eastern Europe, some became associated with Slavic naming forms:

Abram + ov

Isaac + ov

David + ov

etc.

And separately:

Slavic Surname Formation

-ov / -ev

= belonging to / associated with

-sky / -ski / -skiy

= associated with / from / belonging to

These suffixes were also used by Jewish families living in Slavic-speaking regions.

19. The Most Careful Conclusion

There **is a real connection** among Hebrew, Jewish, Christian, Russian, Ukrainian, and other Eastern European naming traditions.

Jewish communities lived within Slavic societies, and their surnames could therefore incorporate Slavic linguistic forms.

Biblical Hebrew names could also become the roots of surnames using Slavic suffixes.

The history of **Jehovah** likewise involves interaction between the Hebrew biblical text, Jewish reading tradition, and medieval Christian scholarship.

However, the evidence does **not currently demonstrate that the Russian/Ukrainian surname ending -ov originated from YHWH or Jehovah**.

Therefore, the strongest historical conclusion is:

The traditions are historically connected through centuries of Jewish, Christian, Hebrew, and Slavic cultural interaction, but the specific linguistic origins of “Jehovah” and the Slavic suffix “-ov” are different.

That distinction allows us to recognize the genuine historical connection without claiming more than the evidence can establish.

20. The Simplest Way to Remember Everything

יהוה

The four Hebrew consonants of God's personal name.

YHWH

The English representation of those four Hebrew letters.

Yahweh

The scholarly reconstruction most commonly preferred for the ancient pronunciation, although absolute certainty is impossible.

Adonai

The Hebrew word meaning “**Lord**”, traditionally used when reading YHWH aloud.

Jehovah

A later Christian European form that developed in the history of representing YHWH.

Petrus Galatinus

A Christian Franciscan scholar who used **lehousa** in 1518, but did not invent the form.

Yeshua

The Hebrew/Aramaic name associated with Jesus.

Jesus

The English form that developed through Greek and Latin.

-ov / -ev

Slavic surname-forming endings expressing belonging or association.

-ova / -eva

Traditional feminine forms of many -ov/-ev surnames.

-sky / -ski / -skyi

Slavic surname endings generally associated with being from, belonging to, or associated with a person or place.

Jewish + Slavic surnames

A natural result of Jewish communities living for centuries in Slavic-speaking Eastern Europe.

Final Perspective

The observation that started this discussion is worth making:

Jehovah, Jewish names, Russian names, Ukrainian names, -ov, and -sky can appear remarkably intertwined when viewed through the history of Eastern Europe.

The important question is not merely whether two names **sound alike**, but **how they traveled through history**.

The evidence gives us a fascinating picture:

Hebrew Scripture → Jewish tradition → Christianity → medieval European scholarship → Russian/Ukrainian and other Eastern European cultures → Jewish family names formed within those societies.

That is a real historical network.

Addendum: The Broader Ancient Language Connection

A Broader Perspective on the Connection

Our argument is not limited to the similarity between “**Jehovah**” and the Slavic “**-ov**” ending.

The larger argument is that these names and linguistic forms should be viewed within the **thousands of years of language interchange among Egyptians, Jews, Greeks, Romans, and later European and Slavic peoples.**

Ancient peoples were not linguistically isolated. Through trade, migration, conquest, intermarriage, religious communities, scholarship, and political expansion, words and names moved from one language into another.

As they moved, they could be:

- translated,
- transliterated into another alphabet,
- pronounced according to the sounds of another language,
- shortened or expanded,
- combined with local naming conventions,
- or altered gradually over generations.

Therefore, a name that appears very different in a modern language may still preserve a historical connection to an older form.

Egypt, the Jews, and the Greek World

The connection goes back much farther than Russia or Ukraine.

Ancient Egypt had extensive contact with the peoples of the Levant, including the peoples associated with ancient Israel and Judah.

Later, Jewish communities became established throughout the Greek-speaking world.

One particularly important center was **Alexandria in Egypt**, where a major Greek-speaking Jewish population developed.

The Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek, creating an important linguistic bridge between:

Hebrew → Greek → Latin → later European languages

Jewish people themselves could also be multilingual, using Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, and eventually other languages depending upon their location and historical period.

This created an environment in which **names and religious terminology could cross linguistic boundaries repeatedly.**

The Importance of Greek

Greek became one of the great international languages of the ancient Mediterranean world.

Following the Hellenistic period, Greek was widely used across the Eastern Mediterranean.

This was enormously important for Jewish history.

Hebrew names and concepts were represented using Greek letters and Greek pronunciation.

For example:

Yeshua

became:

lēsous

which eventually passed through Latin and became:

Jesus

in English.

This is a clear example of a name traveling through several languages while remaining historically connected to its original form.

It demonstrates an important principle for our larger argument:

Names can survive while their spelling and pronunciation change as they pass from one language into another.

The Same General Principle and the Divine Name

The divine name provides another example of a name being transmitted through different linguistic traditions.

The Hebrew Bible gives:

יהוה

represented as:

YHWH

The ancient pronunciation cannot be known with absolute certainty.

Yahweh is the pronunciation most widely preferred by modern biblical scholarship.

The later form:

Jehovah

developed through the history of Jewish reading tradition and medieval Christian representation of the Hebrew name.

Christian scholars encountered the Hebrew consonants together with the later vowel notation associated with the reading of **Adonai** (“Lord”), and forms such as **lehoua** eventually developed into **Jehovah**.

Thus, the history of Jehovah itself demonstrates that **a name can pass through different languages, writing systems, religious traditions, and pronunciations.**

From the Ancient World to Eastern Europe

Centuries later, biblical names and Christian terminology entered Slavic-speaking societies.

The Slavic languages developed their own naming systems.

Among the common surname endings are:

-ov

-ev

-ova

-eva

and:

-sky

-ski

-skyi

These endings have their own Slavic linguistic histories.

However, this does not mean that they existed in complete isolation from older names and traditions.

A biblical name could become the root of a Slavic surname.

For example:

David → Davidov

Here we can see two linguistic layers:

David = ancient Hebrew/Biblical name

-ov = Slavic surname-forming element

This is an example of how **different linguistic traditions can become combined within a single name.**

Jewish Families and Slavic Naming Traditions

This becomes especially important when examining Jewish surnames.

Jewish communities lived for centuries throughout territories that are now associated with:

- Ukraine
- Russia
- Belarus
- Poland
- Lithuania
- Moldova
- and other parts of Eastern Europe.

These Jewish communities lived within societies whose everyday languages were Slavic, Polish, Germanic, Yiddish, and others.

As hereditary surnames became established, Jewish families could acquire or adopt surnames that reflected the linguistic environment in which they lived.

Therefore, a Jewish surname could contain:

a Hebrew or Biblical root

combined with:

a Slavic surname ending

or could be entirely derived from a local language or place.

This helps explain why Jewish surnames can sometimes look strongly Russian, Ukrainian, Polish, or German even though the families themselves had Jewish religious and ancestral traditions.

Why This Matters to Our Argument

The argument is therefore broader than:

Jehovah sounds like -ov.

The argument is:

Ancient languages and cultures interacted continuously, and names were carried through those interactions for thousands of years.

The historical chain is enormous:

Egyptian

↓

Levantine / Canaanite

↓

Hebrew

↓

Aramaic

↓

Greek

↓

Latin

↓

Medieval European languages

↓

Slavic languages

↓

Modern Russian, Ukrainian, Polish, English, and other languages

This does **not** mean that every word in one language directly originated from a word in the earliest language.

Rather, it means that there was a vast network of **linguistic transmission, adaptation, borrowing, and cultural contact**.

Connection Versus Direct Derivation

This distinction is important.

There is a difference between saying:

“These languages and cultures were historically connected.”

and saying:

“This particular suffix directly originated from this particular ancient word.”

The first statement is strongly supported by history.

The second requires specific linguistic evidence.

Therefore, our investigation into **Jehovah, YHWH, -ov, -ev, and -sky/-ski** should remain open to possible historical relationships while distinguishing:

direct derivation

from

cultural transmission

from

linguistic influence

from

coincidental similarity.

The Larger Question

The larger question we are investigating is therefore:

Could ancient linguistic interchange have preserved relationships among names and words that are difficult to recognize in their modern forms?

That is a legitimate historical question.

To investigate it properly, we should trace the **oldest documented forms**, their dates, geographic locations, meanings, pronunciations, and the languages through which they passed.

The fact that a modern word sounds similar to an ancient word is a starting point—not by itself the conclusion.

A Working Historical Framework

For the purposes of this study, the broader framework is:

Ancient Egypt

↓

Contact with the Levant and surrounding peoples

Ancient Hebrew and Jewish Communities

↓

Interaction with Aramaic and neighboring Semitic languages

Greek World

↓

Hebrew and Jewish names represented in Greek

Hellenistic Judaism

↓

Major Jewish communities, including Alexandria

Early Christianity



Hebrew/Aramaic names transmitted through Greek and Latin

Medieval Europe



Christian scholarship interacting with Hebrew texts and traditions

Eastern Europe



Biblical and Jewish names entering Slavic linguistic environments

Russian, Ukrainian, Polish, and Other Slavic Naming Systems



Development of surnames containing forms such as **-ov**, **-ev**, **-sky**, and **-ski**

Conclusion of the Addendum

The key point is that **the history of names cannot always be understood by looking only at their modern spelling or pronunciation.**

The ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern worlds were deeply interconnected.

Egyptian, Hebrew, Jewish, Aramaic, Greek, Roman, and later European and Slavic cultures interacted across enormous stretches of time.

Names could therefore travel across languages and emerge in forms that looked very different from their original forms.

The connection we are investigating should therefore be understood within this much larger history of **language interchange and transmission.**

This does not, by itself, prove that **-ov came from YHWH or Jehovah.**

But it does establish the historical framework in which such questions can reasonably be investigated:

Ancient names and words did not remain confined to one people or one language. They traveled, changed, merged with local linguistic traditions, and were passed down through generations.

That broader historical connection is an essential part of the investigation.