

THE ISSUE OF TRANSLATING PROPHETS' NAMES: PRESERVING ORIGINAL QUR'ANIC FORMS

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Introduction. Prophets' names in the Qur'an are not merely identifiers; they carry profound religious, linguistic, and cultural significance. Since the Qur'an was revealed in Arabic, the names of the prophets appear in specific phonetic and semantic forms. Some modern translators render these names in Western or Biblical equivalents—for example, **Yahya** as *John the Baptist* or **Isa** as *Jesus*—to increase accessibility for English readers. However, preserving the original Qur'anic forms ensures fidelity to the sacred text and maintains its theological integrity.¹ This study examines translation philosophies and scholarly positions, arguing for the preservation of Qur'anic Arabic forms in English translation.

Methods. This study employs qualitative textual and comparative methods: Linguistic analysis: Examining transliteration versus translation of prophets' names. Textual study: Reviewing classical Qur'anic exegesis (tafsir) regarding proper names. Comparative analysis: Comparing Arabic Qur'anic names with their Biblical or Western equivalents. Primary sources include *The Noble Qur'an* (Hilali-Khan), *The Clear Quran* (Khattab), and tafsir works of Ibn Kathir and Al-Nawawi.

Results. Here, modern English Qur'an translations differ in how they handle prophets' names: **The Noble Qur'an (Hilali-Khan)** preserves original Arabic names (e.g., *Musa*, *Ibrahim*, *Yusuf*) while providing brief explanatory notes when necessary.² This approach maintains alignment with classical tafsir traditions, emphasizing fidelity to the original text.

The Clear Quran (Mustafa Khattab) focuses on meaning and readability, occasionally using familiar English equivalents (e.g., *Isa* → *Jesus*).³ The translation includes the Arabic text alongside English to retain context and allow readers to reference the original forms.

Transliterated Arabic names, as used in *The Noble Qur'an*, maintain phonetic and theological integrity. For example, *Musa* remains *Musa*, and *Ibrahim* remains *Ibrahim*, rather than being replaced by *Moses* or *Abraham*. This ensures consistency with the Qur'anic text and minimizes confusion among Muslim readers.⁴

By contrast, *The Clear Quran* opts for dynamic equivalence in some instances to enhance comprehension among non-Arabic-speaking audiences. While effective for accessibility, this

¹ Mustafa Khattab, *The Clear Quran: A Thematic English Translation* (Canada: Al-Furqaan Foundation, 2016), 12.

² Muhammad Muhsin Khan & Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din al-Hilali, *The Noble Qur'an: English Translation of the Meanings with Commentary* (Riyadh: King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Holy Qur'an, 1996), 45.

³ Khattab, *The Clear Quran*, 15–18.

⁴ Khan & Hilali, *The Noble Qur'an*, 50–51.



approach may weaken the direct link to the Qur'anic Arabic forms. Classical scholars reinforce the preservation of original names:

1. **Ibn Taymiyyah** emphasized that religious terms, including proper names, should not be translated in ways that compromise their theological meaning.⁵
2. **Ibn Kathir** presents Qur'anic names in their Arabic forms in his tafsir, adding alternative historical names only in commentary.⁶
3. **Al-Nawawi** underscored the importance of maintaining original terminology to ensure clarity in legal and theological contexts.⁷

Modern translations such as *Saheeh International* similarly maintain original Arabic names, demonstrating that preservation is both practical and widely accepted.

Discussion. Preserving original Qur'anic names balances fidelity with comprehension. While translators like Khattab prioritize readability for Western audiences, traditional transliteration (e.g., *Musa*, *Ibrahim*, *Yusuf*) preserves historical, cultural, and theological identity. A hybrid approach—keeping the Arabic form in the text and providing explanatory equivalents in footnotes or parentheses—is considered the most academically and religiously robust method.

Conclusion. Prophets' names in the Qur'an carry intrinsic theological and cultural significance. Translating these names into Western forms can obscure their identity. Scholarly consensus, classical tafsir, and traditional translations suggest that Qur'anic Arabic forms should be preserved in translation, with optional explanatory notes for comprehension.

The list of used literature:

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3. Ibn Taymiyyah. *Majmu' al-Fatawa*. Dar al-Fikr, 1984. Vol. 3.
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⁵ Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmu' al-Fatawa* (Cairo: Dar al-Fikr, 1984), 3:201.

⁶ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2000), 1:112.

⁷ Al-Nawawi, *Al-Majmu' Sharh al-Muhadhdhab* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1990), 2:75.

