

“By Jove!”

As you will see or have seen on page 166, in the Reference Grammar, three second declension nouns, **domus**, **vis** and **Iuppiter**, are declined irregularly. Much the most interesting of these is **Iuppiter**, Latin for Jupiter, which, remarkably, is declined as follows, with no obvious logic:

	<i>Singular</i>
Nom.	Iuppiter
Voc.	Iuppiter
Acc.	Iovem
Gen.	Iovis
Dat.	Iovī
Abl.	Iove

The first thing to note is that in traditional English interjection, formerly much more used than it is today, “By Jove!” is grammatically correct, and that even our fairly recent ancestors would have been offended at the thought of the ungrammatical (“By Jupiter!” would be ungrammatical.)

Much more interesting, however, is the answer to the question, 'Why on earth this strange declension?'

Well over a century ago, a distinguished scholar, the Rev. Henry Formby, worked out the reason and published his findings. Since I have never seen his solution, or anything resembling it, mentioned in any Latin textbookgrammar book or anywhere else, I shall summarise those findings here ere, for whatever the reader thinks it worth.

1. We must go back to the time when Rome was founded, in the middle of the eighth century BC. After the death of Romulus, who had killed his brother Remus during the course of the founding what was to become "the Eternal City", the second king of Rome was Numa Pompilius, chosen by the people because he was renowned for his honesty, wisdom and piety. Farming was his love, and he was the very reverse of ambitious for the “job” or being king. He was, however, persuaded to take it on by the top-ranking Romans, who appreciated his unusual virtues.

2. Numa set up a constitution: a legal system and a system of religion. He also made it clear that, as far as he was concerned, nothing was more necessary in a state, if it was to flourish, than the most excellent religion that could be found.

3. He did considerable research in many parts of the world in order to set up the most appropriate religious institution, and it can be deduced from what follows that his researches included careful consideration of the religion of the Israelites and the Jews, who, because of the exile of first the Israelites and then the Jews, had become widely scattered around the known world by then.

4. The religion he finally set up was monotheistic, as in the case of the Twelve Tribes and also as in the case of a fair number of non-Jewish people of that time.

5. Very much taken from the Jewish religion was the name for God. This is “Jehovah” in King-James-Version-of-the-Bible-speak, but “Javeh” would be a more accurate rendering of the Jewish term. Also taken from the Jewish religion was the notion of God being a Father.

6. “Juppiter”, the nominative and vocative cases of the noun, is a corruption of “Deus Pater”. Formby thought that to be more probable than “Javeh-Pater”, which was, however, another possibility. For the remaining cases of the noun, the Romans latinised “Javeh”, giving it standard third-declension endings.

7. As the centuries passed, the religion set up by Numa became corrupted, with of course lots of additional “gods” being added to the original One, and grossly immoral ones at that (hence the denunciation of them all as demons in Psalm 95:5). In consequence, “God the Father” became merely the *head*-god.

In summary: even leaving aside any more direct evidence, in the first place, this explanation fits together very credibly, as can be seen at once; and, in the second place, some such explanation is evidently necessary - such a unique and strange feature of Latin could not possibly have “just happened”.