



How to Pronounce God's name (????/YHWH/the Tetragrammaton)

Description



Hebrew is read from right to left, the opposite of English; hence YHWH

The name of God in English is usually represented by four letters: YHWH (or occasionally YHVH). In the original language it's composed of four Hebrew letters: "????".

1. The Hebrew letter "?", ([Yud](#)).
2. The Hebrew letter "?", ("[Hei](#)" or "hey")
3. The Hebrew letter "?" ("[Waw](#)", in modern Hebrew, the name of this letter is "Vav" and the modern pronunciation produces a "v" sound instead of the "w" sound that it produced when the Old Testament was written. That's why you'll sometimes see it written YHVH)
4. The Hebrew letter "?", (hei/hey) again.

Hence, if you said the letters of God's name in Hebrew, it would be "Yud-hey-Waw-hey" (or "Yud-hey-Vav-hey" if you are using the modern pronunciation).

However, the original pronunciation of YHWH has been lost

Why?

The four consonants YHWH... ..are preserved from **Paleo-Hebrew where the written text only had consonants, and the reader supplied the vowels during reading**; as we today would read “blvd.” as “boulevard.” How the reader should pronounce the words was delivered from generation to generation by word of mouth.

...

During the period between 500 and 1000 CE the vowel points were invented. These markings were added to the consonants with the idea of helping the reader to pronounce the words correctly.

But before these vowel points were invented, there developed a superstition against using the Divine Name. **Easton’s Bible Dictionary** says that the Jews stopped using the Name because of a misinterpretation of Leviticus 24:16, “anyone who blasphemes the name of the LORD must be put to death.”

[Source](#) (*emphasis original*)

With that in mind, let’s see what Jeff Brenner of the Ancient Hebrew Research Center has to say.

(His ending statement about unity is explained in the YouTube description, which I’ve copy/pasted below the video.)

I’ve copy/pasted his rationale for God’s essence being unity below.

Addendum #2: DasWORTanDICH called me on my claim that the character of YHWH can be summed up with the word “unity” (Good job DasWORTanDICH) **In Zech 14:9, the end of the verse literally reads “and his name/character is one.” The Hebrew for “one” more literally means “unit” or “unity.”** Throughout the Bible we see God working in unity with himself, even when his actions are in opposition to each other. For instance, in Genesis 1 we see God “creating,” but in Genesis 6 we see God “destroying.” Two opposites, but working together in unity to bring about order. In the desert God is seen as a cloud by day (bringing coolness and shade), but at night a cloud by fire (bringing heat and light). These two manifestations are in opposition to each other, but work together to protect the people.

There seems to be a consensus among scholars that “Yahweh” is likely the correct pronunciation. Yet we don’t know that for sure.

Evidence for Pronunciations other than Yahweh

I've heard at least one alternative pronunciation that makes just as much sense, possibly more.

Buchanan also points out that “the name ‘Yahweh’ does not even sound Semitic,” and he produces examples from Exodus 15 with “Yahweh” and “Yahowah” in the same sentences. Those with “**Yahowah**” sound “smooth and poetic,” while those with “Yahweh” “sound rough and unrhythmical.” Buchanan concludes: “The accumulated data points heavily in the direction of a three syllable word, whose middle syllable was hô or hû. The first two syllables were Yahû or Yahô that were sometimes abbreviated to Yô. For poetry, liturgy, and some other reasons, the name Yâh was also used. Only from Theodoret’s Greek spelling of the Samaritan use of the term is there any basis for the pronunciation ‘Yahweh’ or ‘Jahveh.’ This is hardly enough to overpower all of the other exhibits” (Ibid., 419).

So the three-syllable pronunciation “Ye-Ho-WaH” has some support from at least one verse which uses a rhyme scheme. In that verse, two syllables – as in Yahweh – isn’t enough for make the rhythm fit; three are required.

It’s important to note that the first syllable in “Ye-Ho-WaH” is **not** pronounced with a hard “e”, as in “hear ye”. It’s pronounced more softly like in “yes”, only without the “s” sound.

YHWH = Yehowah?

One excellent argument for the pronunciation “Ye-Ho-WaH” are the places where God’s name is used as part of other Biblical names. I have a great quote that explain it clearly, but two bits of trivia are required for context first.

First, our English letter “J” isn’t new, but it’s pronunciation is quite new. Until recently, our “J” was pronounced exactly like our “Y”. Hence the spelling of all the names in the quote below will sound much more familiar if you replace the “Y” sound with a “J” sound. (*Even though the “Y” opening is more correct.*)

Second, a “[theophoric name](#)” embeds all or part of a god’s name into another name. This is typically done to honor the god or invoke its protection. For example, the name “Christopher” means “Christ-bearer” and is intended to honor Christ in the naming of the child.

Hebrew also had theophoric names:

Here are some examples of theophoric names that begin with the first three consonants of the Tetragrammaton: Yehoiakim, Yehonathan, Yehoshaphat, Yehoash, Yehoram, Yehoiada, Yehoiarib, Yehoaddah, Yehoaddan, Yehoahaz, Yehohanan, Yehoiarib, Yehonadab, Yehoshabeath, Yehosheba among others. These names were sometimes

shortened to create new names, and this resulted in Yoiakim, Yonathan, etc.

When we compare the names that begin with the three first consonants of the Tetragrammaton (YHW), we see that all the names are vocalized YeHo-.

([Source](#))

Again, this is more evidence for the pronunciation “Yehowah”.

What about “Jehovah”?

Again, our letter “J” used to be pronounced like our letter “Y”. Therefore “Jehovah” would’ve originally been pronounced “Yehovah”. If you use the modern pronunciation for the Hebrew letter “?” (Waw), it sounds like our “v” instead of our “w”. Thus Yehowah becomes Jehovah.

Interestingly, this might even be construed as more evidence for Yehowah being the correct pronunciation (*though admittedly very weak evidence*).

Conclusion

No one is sure how YHWH is properly pronounced. However despite the scholarly consensus on “Yahweh”, **I think “Yehowah” (Ye-Ho-Wah) fits the evidence best...** but again no one knows for sure. Further, I’m not a Hebrew scholar. (*I know far more Greek than Hebrew, and I wouldn’t even call myself a Greek scholar.*)

I don’t intend to get dogmatic about the pronunciation. Whether it’s Yahweh, Yehowah, or something else we all know who we mean. It’s more important to honor Him and His character than make sure we pronounce his name perfectly. After all, if the pronunciation was that important you’d think He would’ve made sure it survived. However, His character is clearly written all over the Bible.

(Also, I really like [the song Yahweh, especially the version by Kari Jobe](#). Interesting to note, they make it three syllables – “Ya-Ha-Weh” – to make it fit there too...)