

# Pronouncing God's Old Testament Name

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These studies are designed for believers in Jesus Christ only. If you have exercised faith in Christ, then you are in the right place. If you have not, then you need to heed the words of our Lord, Who said, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten [or, uniquely-born] Son, so that every [one] believing [or, trusting] in Him shall not perish, but shall be have eternal life! For God did not send His Son into the world so that He should judge the world, but so that the world shall be saved through Him. The one believing [or, trusting] in Him is not judged, but the one not believing has already been judged, because he has not believed in the Name of the only-begotten [or, uniquely-born] Son of God." (John 3:16–18). "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life! No one comes to the Father except through [or, by means of] Me!" (John 14:6).

Every study of the Word of God ought to be preceded by a naming of your sins to God. This restores you to fellowship with God (1John 1:8–10). If we acknowledge our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1John 1:9). If there are people around, you would name these sins silently. If there is no one around, then it does not matter if you name them silently or whether you speak aloud.

## Charts, Graphics and Short Doctrines

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**Preface:** There has been a great deal of discussion over the centuries about the correct pronunciation of God's proper name in the Old Testament (which is also called the Tetragrammaton). In fact, one cult was seemingly built upon this notion. The Jehovah's Witnesses did not actually discover anything new about the pronunciation; but they did find out that wherever we find the word *LORD* in our Bibles, that stands in for *YHWH*. This is never a secret in theological circles.

We are going to examine several topics in this study: how the pronunciation of God's name was lost to history; what about the fad of writing *G-d* rather than *God*; and what I believe is a reasonable guess as to the way that the ancients pronounced His Name.

As an aside, the last thing I want to do is start some other cult. So let me be clear: we will be able to make some reasonable guesses as to the proper pronunciation of God's Old Testament name, but these are nothing more than educated guesses. The pronunciations that I will suggest are not definitive.

This set of doctrines was taken from the weekly study in Exodus, the links given below.

[Exodus Lessons 1–100  
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This is going to be an unusual set of lessons. You may or may not find it edifying. God has a name in the Old Testament; and the pronunciation of that name has been lost—more or less—to history. We are going to examine that in great detail. I will even offer you what I believe is the accurate way to say God’s name from that era, when we come to the end of this lesson.

Moses is out in the desert-wilderness of Midian, at the Mountain of God, speaking to God, Who has manifested Himself as a burning bush.

Exodus 3:13 [Then Moses said to God, “Indeed, when I come to the children of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they say to me, ‘What is His name?’ what shall I say to them?”](#)

Moses apparently was not that pleased with the sign that God gave him (“[But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.](#)”—Ex. 3:12b; ESV). God’s sign to Moses that he will lead his people out of Israel, is this: a month or so in the future, Moses is going to find himself at this mountain serving God, having brought the people of Abraham from Egypt to here. “This is your sign, Moses,” God tells him; “you are going to do the things which I ask you to do.”

So, not really impressed with the sign that God offers, Moses tries a different approach. “Okay, let’s say I go to them, and I tell them God spoke to me. What should I say Your Name is?” Bear in mind, the last time that Moses spoke to the Hebrew people, he realized that he needed to swiftly leave Egypt or be executed. Several of them did not really take kindly to him then.

Moses is obviously apprehensive. This meeting with God is sudden and what God wants Moses to do seems like way too much. Therefore, Moses searches for a way to step back and exit from this whole deal (this is my opinion on his thinking). He has no idea on how he will be received. He is thinking quickly on his feet, trying to get out of what God has told him to do.

Exodus 3:14 [And God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And He said, “Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”](#)

God’s response is interesting. He does not even say, “I am God” or “I am Y<sup>e</sup>howah.” He said, “[I am Who I am.](#)” Or, “[I am that I am.](#)”

A lot has been said about God’s name. There are even movements and cults based upon God’s name and how some perceive it. Don’t worry—at the end of this lesson, I am not going to ask you to join anything.

## A Discussion of God's Name—It's Meaning and Pronunciation

The Hebrew copyist reverently transcribed the letters *JHWH* or *YHWH*, which is the personal name of any of the three individual members of the Godhead. These are not two different Hebrew forms but two different English forms. Such reverence for God's name (also known as the Tetragrammaton) is clearly refreshing when compared to the familiarity with which the name of our Lord Jesus Christ is used today.

Unfortunately, this Jewish reverence for God's name changed from respect to legalism. The reader of the Scriptures was enjoined, apparently by the religious class, to never pronounce this sacred name, but to substitute in a less sacred name, *Adonai* (or *Elohim*) when reading a passage of the Bible aloud. In this way, the Sacred Name never was spoken by a sinful mouth and its sound reached the ears of a sinful hearer (that was the idea). This was not at the insistence of any passage in the Bible; it just became a Jewish tradition, as an extracurricular attempt at some sort of piety.

Originally, the Hebrew language, whether narrative or poetry, was simply written in all consonants; but, it was read aloud on many occasions (entire books were read aloud during specific feast days). But, every time the sacred name of God was found in the Scripture, the reader said the word *Adonai* instead. As a result, the pronunciation of the sacred name was lost forever, because there were no vowels in the manuscripts to tell us how the word sounded. But, when they stopped reading the name of God; its pronunciation was lost—all as a result of false piety.

You see, the people of Israel had the Old Testament Scriptures, but they were written only with consonants. Just so you understand, there were no vowels anywhere in the original Hebrew Scriptures; but they were read and reread so many times, that everyone knew what they were reading. Their language was such that, they could read aloud an entire book which lacked vowels, spaces, punctuation or paragraphs. Originally, a Hebrew book was just a series of consonants.

The Jewish people knew how to say all of the words because they knew all of these words and they had heard the passage spoken aloud many times. But at some point, a generation came on the scene who had never heard the sacred Tetragrammaton spoken aloud and they had no vowels in the Scriptures to help them with the pronunciation.

The Scriptures were not fully vocalized in the text until the Middle Ages by the Masorites, who added vowel points to the text of the Hebrew Scriptures. These vowel points were dots and dashes and small markings made above or below the consonantal text, so that the proper pronunciation was introduced, but without changing the sacred text which lacked vowels. If one ignores all of these *jots and tittles*, one still sees the consonantal text exactly as it has been preserved for thousands of years.

You may have heard of the Masorite text or the Masorite manuscripts. These are the primary Old Testament Hebrew manuscripts which we use to make our current translations. We draw upon these manuscripts made between A.D. 800–1300. We have other manuscripts which we look back on, if a passage is difficult to unravel, or has a questionable rendering. But, perhaps 95% or more of the English text which we read is based upon a handful of Masoretic texts from this era.

[As an aside, some consonants in the Hebrew text served double-duty as consonants and vowels for many centuries, but they did not provide a full vocalization of Hebrew words.]

The Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew OT Scriptures) further concealed this Sacred

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Name by using the Greek word κύριος (kurios, meaning "Lord") to translate YHWH. They did not know how to pronounce the LORD's sacred name, so instead of providing a Greek transliteration, they used a different word altogether (virtually all Hebrew proper nouns are transliterated—in the Greek Septuagint or if they are found in the New Testament).

The Greek translators did nearly a letter-by-letter transcription of all proper names, from Hebrew letters into Greek letters. However, Hebrew and Greek are not equivalent languages. There is no such thing as an *h* in the Greek. There is a *rough breathing* before some words beginning with vowels, and we sound that out as an *h*, and often use the *h* when giving the English equivalent; but, there is no such thing in the Greek as an *h* at the end of a word. Well, many Hebrew names end in *ah* (Zechariah, Elijah); so the Greeks finish those names off with an *as* instead (Zacharias, Elias).<sup>1</sup> But, apart from a number of exceptions, Hebrew proper names are given a nearly exact representation in the Greek, letter-for-letter.

[It is significant to note here that Jesus Christ did not anywhere concern Himself with the correct way to pronounce YHWH; He most naturally accepted the title LORD (κύριος).]

The Latin Vulgate did the same thing as do most of our English translations. However, there are visual clues in the English translations: when we find the words "Lord" or "God" written in small caps, then we know that the Hebrew word behind the word LORD is *YHWH*.

To further add to the confusion, although *YHWH* occurs nearly 7,000 times in the Old Testament, it is translated *Jehovah* less than a dozen times in the RSV and in the AV.

One problem, when it comes to the correct pronunciation of the name of God, is, there is no *J* in the Hebrew (or in the Greek). Even though there are dozens of names like of Fire old Bible guys like Jacob, Joshua, Judah, Jediah, James, Jude, etc. there is no letter *J* in either language. This *J* has been inserted instead of a *Y* (and, occasionally, instead of other letters).

In the original Hebrew manuscripts, the words were in all capital consonant letters. When read, the vowels were appropriately vocalized by the speaker, but not with the tetragrammaton, because the reader said LORD instead of God's proper name. Therefore, the pronunciations of God's proper name has been lost forever to history. The vowel points were added well after the birth of Christ, millennia after some of the Scriptures were written. Now the vowel points are put in, but it is too late for them to recapture the pronunciation of *YHWH*. What has been done is the vowel points for "Adonai" have been placed within JHWH (more or less) for the present day translation *Jehovah*. This occurred as late in history as 1520 AD by Galatinus. Even several of his contemporaries objected to this pronunciation as being historically and grammatically inaccurate. Many modern era scholars prefer the pronunciation/translation *Yahweh*.

*"Yahweh* is almost always regarded as the 3<sup>rd</sup> person, singular, masculine, imperfect tense from the root hawah, an old form of the root hayah" [*The Emphasized Bible*]. *Hayah* is the word *to be* in the Hebrew.

This is a reasonable theory—possibly correct and possibly not.

<sup>1</sup> We are generally not aware of this as, almost every English Bible provides us with a transliteration that is consistent between the Old and New Testaments.

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Hâyâh (הָיָה) [pronounced *haw-YAW*] means *to be, to exist, to become*. Some scholars do not believe that this name for God is tied to the imperfect tense [*The New Bible Dictionary* by J.D. Douglas, p.478—the imperfect tense in the Hebrew often begins with a *y*] but regard it as strictly a substantive built upon the word *hâwâ*. When God told Moses to *say I AM has sent you*, this is written 'eh<sup>e</sup>yeh (הִיְיָהּ) [pronounced 'e-*h<sup>e</sup>*-YEH] (the superscript *e* is sometimes the way that the Hebrews indicated that there was not to be a vowel there). This is not the same as the tetragrammaton YHWH (יהוה), although there are some similarities. As Rotherham pointed out, God's Name is closer to the verb *to become*, which is *hâwâh* (הָוָה) [pronounced *haw-WAW* or *haw-VAW*].

One of the odd results of this confusion about God's name is that Jehovah's Witnesses have distorted the missing Proper Name of God and have touted this discovery as though they had suddenly found something that no one else knew about. Then they have distorted JHWH and do not realize (even as the Jews did not realize) that Jesus Christ is JHWH.

Strictly speaking, as Douglas points out, this is the only *name* for God used in the Old Testament. When anyone would "call upon the name of...", the next word would always be YHWH. God will say, "This is My Name forever" (Ex. 3:15). In the incarnation, we now call on the name of the God-Man, Jesus Christ (which is an English transliteration from the Greek).

God's name is tied directly to this passage of Scripture in Exodus that we are studying. In the authorized version, this is translated "I am that I am." *The Emphasized Bible* translates this "I will become whatsoever I please." The verb *hâyâh* in this verse is repeated, twice in succession then at the end of the verse. It means *to be, to exist, to become*. Verbs are repeated in the Hebrew to give great significance to their meaning. This could be translated, *I am that I am; I am the one existing [eternally]; I keep on being the one existing [eternally]*.

### A discussion of John 8:58:

What will help us in this translation is an examination of John 8:58. Of all the disciples, John seemed to be the only one to have a full grasp as to what was occurring during our Lord's earthly ministry. He may well of been one of the simplest disciples, or, at the very least, the least literate in the Greek language (his Greek is simple enough for the first year Greek student to translate), yet John understood that Jesus Christ claimed to be equal with God and he understood that the cross was necessary (he was the only disciple at the crucifixion). These two points seem to have eluded the other disciples during our Lord's earthly ministry, therefore we find Jesus' deity emphasized primarily in John's gospel. John 8:57–59 reads: *The Jews therefore said to Him, "You are not yet fifty years old and have You seen Abraham?" Jesus said unto them, "Truly truly I say to you, before Abraham was born, I AM." Therefore, they picked up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus was hidden and went out of the temple.* One important significance of this passage is, this is a clear reference to Jesus in the New Testament being JHWH in the Old. Certainly, many who read this in the English do not grasp this, but the Jews understood what Jesus was saying. They understood this statement to be blasphemous (in their minds), and they took up stones with which to stone our Lord.

A portion of the Greek from this passage reads: *πρὶν ἂβραὰμ γενέσθαι ἐγὼ εἰμί* (or, *prin Abraam genesthai ego eimi*). *Γίνομαι* (*to become*) is in the aorist middle infinitive, the aorist tense referring to a point in time. It is a deponent verb, which is why it is called the middle voice. The infinitive often states purpose. The word itself, in its most simple derivation means *to become*; however, *to be born*

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or *to come into existence* are also accurate renderings. The point in time referred to was Abraham's lifetime.

Ego is "I" and it is added for emphasis, because grammatically it is not needed. The final word is the absolute status quo verb "to be" in the present active indicative, which is continuous action in the present time. This puts our Lord outside of time, prior to Abraham and continuing up until that moment. Literally, this reads, "Prior to Abraham coming into being, I [even I] AM [or, I kept on existing]."

So, there is a point in human history when Abraham was born and lived (= *came into being*); but prior to that time, Jesus continued existing [= *I AM*]. Jesus is claiming to be eternal, existing prior to Abraham *and* standing right before the people in John 8:58.

In the Septuagint (Greek) version of the Old Testament, when Moses asked our Lord what is His name so that he could tell it to the Hebrews, God said, "Ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὢν." The additional two Greek words are the definite article and the present participle of *I am*. The participle is a verbal adjective, which, in this case, functions as a substantive. Or (now I am translating the Old Testament passage from the Greek Septuagint), "I, even I, keep on being the one being." Or, "I, even I, am, the I am." Or, "I, even I, keep on being the one who exists [eternally]."

To sum up, what Jesus said in John 8:58 is a direct reference back to God identifying Himself by name to Moses (this is the passage that we have been studying in Exodus 3); and in making this reference, Jesus made Himself equal to God.

Jesus, when speaking to the Jews, is saying, "What God said to Moses—that is Me speaking."

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Exodus 3:14 And God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And He said, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

The New Testament passages is presented below using *An Understandable Version* (a translation of the NT). The insertion and commentary is theirs.

### Jesus Refers to Himself as the *I am* (the AUV)

We find similar phrasing used by our Lord in John 8:52–59:

The Jews [i.e., the authorities] replied, "Now we know that you are dominated by an evil spirit. Abraham and the prophets [all] died and [yet] you are saying, 'If a person obeys my message, he will never experience death.' Are you greater [i.e., more important] than our forefather Abraham and the prophets, who [all] died? Who do you think you are?"

Jesus answered them, "If I were to honor myself, that honor would be worthless. [But] it is my Father who honors me [and] you say He is your God. Now you people have not known Him [i.e., to be your Lord], but I know Him. And if I should say, 'I do not know Him' I would be a liar like you. But I [do] know Him, and I obey His message. Your forefather Abraham was glad that he could look forward to my

## Jesus Refers to Himself as the *I am* (the AUV)

day [i.e., by faith he anticipated the coming of the Messiah. See Heb. 11:13ff]. **And he saw it [by faith] and was glad.**"

**So, the Jews said to Him, "You are not even fifty years old [yet] and have you seen Abraham?"**

**Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I tell you, before Abraham was born, I am."** [Note: The words "I am" were probably construed as a reference to being Deity. See Ex. 3:14].

**So, they picked up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus hid Himself [or "was hidden," suggesting a miraculous departure] and left the Temple [area]. (AUV)**

Even though people even argue about this today—whether Jesus told people that He is God—the Jews who spoke His language understood both what He said and how He was referencing back to God's original words to Moses; and therefore they picked up stones to stone Him for this blasphemy—*He made Himself equal to God!* The Greek-speaking, Jewish crowd fully understood that He was making Himself equal to God.

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There are some religious groups (both Jewish and Christian) who do not write out the word *God*, but they write *G-d* instead.

## Is *G-d* more respectful than *God*?

There has been a great deal of confusion over God's name; and this confusion has been perpetuated for thousands of years. The Jews, at some point, decided that the proper name for God was holy (It is); but then they decided that they could no longer say it aloud (perhaps the idea is, they are speaking from their corrupt mouths). So when reading Holy Scripture aloud, they said *Adonai* rather than *Y<sup>e</sup>howah*. By their calculation, *Adonai* was more of a title for God, and, therefore, less sacred than *Y<sup>e</sup>howah*. This is taking some true information and making a confused application to it. God did not want His Word changed; and saying *Adonai* rather than *Y<sup>e</sup>howah* is not better, holier, or more spiritual. This was strictly a tradition of men. Nowhere in the Old Testament did God propose that they do this. If I were to guess, this all took place during the intertestamental period (the 400 year period time between when the Old and New Testaments were written<sup>1</sup>).

The original manuscripts of the Old Testament were written with consonants only. Because these words had been read many times, generation after generation, people knew what those words were and how to pronounce them, even without the vowels being found in the text (there were no spaces between words or paragraphs either). However, since God's holy name was no longer spoken aloud, after a few generations, exactly how His name was pronounced was lost to history.

Hundreds of years later, the Masorites inserted vowel points (little dots and dashes above and below the text), which help us today to pronounce these words. The addition of these vowel points (*jots and tittles*), does not actually change the consonantal text. Block out the vowel points (above and below) and you have the original text right before your eyes (except for the fact that there were no verses, chapters, or even separations between words).

## Is G-d more respectful than God?

Centuries later, this has affected some Judaistic and Christian groups, so that, instead of *God*, they write *G-d*, because, somehow, that is more spiritual. Phony intellectuals often do that same thing (people who do not necessarily subscribe to the teachings of the Bible). I have exchanged ideas with some atheists who carefully write *G-d* rather than *God*. They think that they are privy to some inside intellectual information when they do this, but they actually reveal their abysmal ignorance by writing *G-d* (perhaps I am being somewhat hyperbolic here). They are not in possession of knowledge that you lack; they are simply confused about the limited knowledge that they have.

The reason that we know that this is silly is, the Jews originally left the vowels out of all words, not just the words for Deity. Since they decided to no longer say the proper name for *God*, they lost the pronunciation of His name. However, when the Masorites added vowels, these vowels are added for *all other* names and titles of God. So, leaving out the vowels of the Divine Name at the point was not due to some deep holy respect for God, but simply because they did not know how to say the name, and therefore, they had no idea what vowels should be inserted in His Name. So the traditional Masoretic text for the Old Testament does not leave out any of these vowels for names like *Elohim* (which is most often translated *God*).

As an aside, all divine names in the Greek text of the New Testament has vowels in it; only *YHWH* lacks vowel points in the Greek Septuagint (also call the LXX, the Greek translation of the Old Testament) *because they don't know what these vowel points are!*

There is a legitimate reason why the vowels are often left out of the Sacred Tetragramaton *YHWH* today. It is because we are not completely certain of how to actually say that name. The Masoretic text has the vowels for *Adonai* and *Elohim* and *EI* (as well as all other names for God), because we have a reasonable idea of how to say those words. Translators know what vowel points to insert.

It is legitimate for a modern translation to give the rendering *YHWH* (or, *JHWH*) when referring to *Y<sup>e</sup>howah* in the Old Testament.

Given all of this information, it is completely illogical to spell some names and titles of Deity with dashes instead of using the vowel or vowels which belong there. It is not more holy, it is not more intellectual, it is not more spiritual.

Bear with me, as I am going to say something which borders on blasphemy. Some preachers do not say *God*, they say *Gawd*, almost pronouncing it as having two syllables. Saying *Gawd* with almost two syllables is the verbal equivalent of writing *G-d*. It is not more holy, it is not more intellectual and it is not more spiritual. It is like saying *Gawd* rather than *God*.

The vowels are missing from *YHWH* because the Masorites do not know how it was pronounced. They did not leave the vowels out to be more respectful of the Name. The other titles and names for God were spoken aloud, so Masorites knew how to say those words and, thus, they put in the vowels for *all other* names and titles for *God*.

Do the same people write J-s-s and Chr-st? There is absolutely nothing in the Bible which suggests that this makes sense.



<sup>1</sup> The Old Testament was actually committed to writing over a period of about 1000 years. I believe that there is a period of time before that—1000 years or even more—when the books of Genesis and Job were *written*, their text being transmitted orally from generation to generation. Then there was 400 years, when there are no revelation given by God. And then Jesus was born and the entire New Testament was written in about 60 years (from A.D. 40–100, give or take).

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There are several questions to be answered: How should we deal with God's proper Old Testament in a translation? What should our pronunciation of God's name be? Should the Unspoken Name be spoken?

The ESV; capitalized is used below:

### How Should We Deal with the Pronunciation of YHWH?

1. There seems to be general agreement that YHWH has been built upon the Hebrew verb "to be." There is disagreement upon whether or not His proper Name is built upon the imperfect tense. However, it seems to be clear that, somehow, God's Name is based upon or related to the Hebrew verb for "to be." Verses like Exodus 3:8 and John 8:58 seem to suggest that.
2. YHWH or JHWH depends upon the transliteration of the Hebrew letters. Over time, many have taken the Hebrew *y* (yodh) and have substituted in a *j*.
3. YHWH does seem to be the only proper name for God in the Old Testament. Elohim (God) is more of a title or designation. Elohim also refers to the Godhead. It is in the plural and sometimes refers to the Trinity. JHWH refers to individual members of the Trinity.
4. Jesus Christ is YHWH.
  - 1) Jesus testifies as to Who He is. Exodus 3:14 **God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"** Compare this to John 8:58 **Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am."** Jesus makes Himself equivalent to the God of Exodus 3:14. Those who heard Him understood this and took up stones to stone Him for blasphemy in John 8:59.
  - 2) Both Peter and John identify Jesus with YHWH of the Old Testament. Isaiah 43:14–15 **Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: "For your sake I send to Babylon and bring them all down as fugitives, even the Chaldeans, in the ships in which they rejoice. I am the LORD, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King."** Note these names by which God identifies Himself. Peter calls Jesus *the Master Who bought them*: 2Peter 2:1 **But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction.** John writes, in Rev. 5:9 **And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for You were slain, and by Your blood You ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation,..."** God is the Redeemer in the Old Testament and Jesus is the Redeemer (Purchaser) in the New. See also Gal. 3:13 (which is Paul's writing).
  - 3) Isaiah 43:3a **For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.** Then God testifies: Isaiah 43:11 **I, I am the LORD, and besides Me there is no Savior.** God is Savior and Redeemer in Isa. 49:26 60:16. Jesus is Savior and Lord in Luke 2:11; Savior of the world in John 4:42; He is the Savior of all people 1Tim. 4:10; and Jesus is called *Savior* in many passages, including Philip. 3:20 1Tim. 1:1 2:3 Titus 1:4 2:13 2Peter 1:11. If God's testimony is, **"There is no other Savior besides Me,"** then Who is this Jesus?

## How Should We Deal with the Pronunciation of YHWH?

- 4) Jesus is called *God* in John 1:1–3, 14; and in 2Peter 1:1.
- 5) Many other titles and passages could be offered here. See also Mark 1:24 Luke 1:49 Isa. 43:11 Hosea 13:4 compared with Luke 2:11 John 4:42 1John 4:14.
- 6) We need not worry too much about how we pronounce YHWH as He is Jesus Christ (and our pronunciation is somewhat different than found in the Greek, Hebrew or Aramaic). We transliterate *Jesus* and *Christ*; giving them an English spin. If we heard His name in the Greek or Aramaic, most of us probably would not recognize it.
5. I should add this point: the Holy Spirit is YHWH. Ex 17:7 Heb 3:7-9 Num 12:6 2Peter 1:21
6. Also, the Holy Spirit is God. Heb 10:15-17 compared with Jer. 31:33-34; Heb. 3:7-11 compared with Psalm 95:7-11; Isa. 6:8-10 with Acts 28:25-27.
7. God the Father is YHWH Psalm 143:1 (all prayer is directed toward God the Father).
8. God's Word is placed above His Name Psalm 138:2.
9. Despite all of the discussion in this special study, **Jesus Christ nowhere makes an issue out of His name YHWH.** Some of offered up poor explanations for this.
  - 1) One of the poorer explanations for this which I have heard for this is that, Jesus was not a scribe or a literary critic. He was not learned in textual criticism.
  - 2) Another explanation is that He did not want to confuse the religious people of that day by bringing up deep theological issues. He was being accommodating to the populace by not using God's true name but instead He followed the conventions of the day.
  - 3) To refute these positions, it is certain that Jesus Christ is YHWH and therefore He knows His Own name. He often taught things which were difficult for the disciples and for others to understand. He knew the Scriptures. Jesus Christ was neither illiterate in the Scriptures nor was He necessarily condescending to man. Jesus did not leave out the deeper theological points. And He was certainly not ignorant of His Own Name.
  - 4) Furthermore, Jesus did not accept the religious conventions of His day. We are saved by believing in *Jesus Christ*. To press a point, this was not the way the early Jews or Greeks pronounced His name. This is not how His name is pronounced in Mexico. This is not how His name is pronounced in France or Germany or in Japan. The pronunciation is a matter of regional significance. We believe in Jesus Christ, in His work and in His Person. Just because we pronounce His name differently than those in other countries; and, more significantly with respect to this study, differently than He pronounced it, we are not any less saved. Furthermore, if this were an issue of great importance, then Jesus would have spoken about it. He did not accommodate anyone when it came to blasphemy or spiritual ignorance. My point is, when it comes to the pronunciation of *Jesus*, there is probably no one today who says it the way others said His Name in A.D. 30. However, the exact pronunciation of His Name is not an issue in our salvation. The Person and Work of Christ are the issues in salvation.
10. There is a problem if we maintain that Jesus is not God; or believe that Jesus is simply a really good moral teacher. Then we are preaching another Jesus (2Cor. 11:4).
11. Paul, who undoubtedly delves into deep theological issues, nowhere in the New Testament epistles makes an issue out of the pronunciation of YHWH nor does he make any allusions to correcting the way YHWH's name was buried in the Septuagint. The same goes for the other writers of Scripture.
12. When quoting Old Testament Scripture, both Jesus and Paul use the word κύριος to translate YHWH. They do not use a transliteration. Matt. 4:7,10 Mark 13:36 Rom. 9:28-29 2Cor.6:17-18
13. Therefore, if Jesus never made an issue out of this and Paul never made an issue out of this,

## How Should We Deal with the Pronunciation of YHWH?

we should not. That is, if we can figure out how to pronounce *YHWH*, that will not make us any more spiritual or any more mature. That does not mean, however, that we will not delve into that. In this particular doctrine, there were many things that we touched upon that were important, and yet related, at least tangentially, to His name.

14. It is important to understand that God was revealed to man in the Old Testament and that the God that was revealed to them was Jesus Christ. 95% of the references to YHWH in the OT refer directly to Jesus Christ, the revealed member of the Trinity. In His incarnation, as the unique Person of the universe, as the God-man, YHWH is now known to us by a different name: Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament prior to the cross, His name was YHWH (or, more properly, *Yahweh* or *Y<sup>e</sup>howah*). In the New Testament times, in the church age, His name is Jesus.

This information was not given to you so that you can grab the first Jehovah's witness that you see and corner him. They are like any other religious unbeliever<sup>2</sup>—this issue is Who and What Jesus Christ did and what He did for them on the cross. They trust completely in His finished work on the cross and they are saved; if they do not, then they will spend eternity in the Lake of Fire (another issue which you do not need to argue with them).

Unbelievers who are trying to earn their way into heaven are the most difficult of all to deal with. Jesus Christ and John the Baptist called religious legalists vipers and serpents because they led the Jews astray. If a Jehovah's Witness is interested in the gospel, then they will approach you or God will call you specifically to work with them; but in general, you are wasting your time to argue with a Jehovah's Witness (or any other kind of cult member) when they are out in pairs *evangelizing* for their cult.

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This doctrine might be interesting to some. It is my theory about the pronunciation of the Sacred Tetragrammaton.

## The Actual Pronunciation of God's Name

1. The Hebrew was originally written without vowels (the vowel points being added actually quite a bit after the incarnation of Jesus Christ).
2. The Jews did not pronounce the name of God, as that was considered too sacred for their tongues, so they, in reading, substituted in the name *Adonai*, which is more of a title than a name. Our English Bibles do much the same thing by substituting in LORD (in small caps), rather than the English version *Jehovah* (which is definitely *not* the way God's name was ever pronounced in Old Testament times). We came upon the pronunciation *Jehovah* by interspersing the sacred Tetragrammaton (JHWH) with the vowel points from *Adonai* (or, that is my understanding).
3. The hidden pronunciation of God's proper Name was the influence of legalistic religion. Man was obviously not to use God's name in vain—for empty, cheapening phrases, such as language punctuation and emphasis (as we see constantly today). So religion essentially banned the use of His name under any circumstance, until His Name (more properly, His Name's pronunciation) was lost to history.
4. Now this is not quite as bad as you would think, as the God of the Old Testament and Jesus Christ are one and the same Person and our God is more important to us as the one who paid

<sup>2</sup> Some JW's are believers.

## The Actual Pronunciation of God's Name

for our sins and thus brought us to Himself.

5. There was no reason to lose this Name to history except by legalism. However, we can make a reasonable guess as to how God's name was pronounced.
6. His name is often called the sacred Tetragrammaton—which means *four letters*—because what we have are the letters YHWH or YHVH. The trick is the insertion of which vowels and the pronunciation of the third letter.
7. The first letter is י (yôwd), pronounced like a *y*. There is no *j* in Hebrew, so there is no way God's name was pronounced Jehovah (as you may have noticed, many Hebrew names which begin with a *j* were transliterated from names beginning with the Hebrew *y*—also known as a *yodh*).
8. There are twenty or more names in the Old Testament based upon God's Old Testament name. If these names and their translations were as lost to history as was our Lord's name, then what I am about to propose is untenable. However, if their pronunciations remained somewhat accurate, then the pronunciation of our Lord's proper Name can be ascertained with the same amount of accuracy.
9. In names based upon God's name, the second letter is a vowel known as sh<sup>e</sup>va [pronounced *sh'VAW* or *shi-VAW*]. This letter is a vowel point, often indicating that actually no vowel goes there. At other times, it represents a very short *e*. I have represented this with <sup>e</sup> or with an apostrophe to indicate a quick movement from one syllable to the next, almost a slurring together of the consonants (or crowding together of the syllables). There are rules to differentiate between the silent sh<sup>e</sup>va and the short-*e* sh<sup>e</sup>va, however, throughout most of my translations of words, I have personally inserted a very short *e* slurring of the syllables just for the sake of consistency. Properly speaking, we have a very short *e* and not a silent sh<sup>e</sup>va in God's name. Now you may be wondering at this point, how do we know the second vowel point is a sh<sup>e</sup>va and not, for instance, a pattach? After all, there were no vowel points inserted until well into the first millennium AD. Simple: we have over twenty names which mean *Jehovah* saves or *Jehovah* followed by some other verb; and all of those names have this short *e* as the second letter.
10. The second consonant (3<sup>rd</sup> letter) is an *h* followed by a chôwlem over a wâw (i.e., a dot placed above the Hebrew *w/v*). Together, these form a long *o* sound and often the *w* is silent (it is a part of the long *o* sound). Again, this is based upon over twenty other proper names found in the Old Testament.
11. The third letter is vâv [pronounced *vawv*] or wâw [pronounced *wow*]. This, in modern Hebrew, is pronounced like our letter *v* and in Biblical Hebrew like our letter *w*. As was said, this can be a silent letter also. In the half-dozen names beginning in this way, the wâw is silent.
12. In the Hebrew, the emphasis generally falls upon the last syllable, and, on occasion, on the second to the last syllable.
13. The last vowel is the only really missing vowel. In all of the Hebrew proper names, the last vowel and consonant are left off to attach to the verb. So, here, we must take an educated guess: When a word in the Hebrew ends in an *h*, the preceding vowel is often a long *a* (I use â) and the vowel point is called qâmêts [pronounced *kaw-MATES*]. This ending either indicates a perfect tense (completed action) or a feminine noun. A long *a* in Hebrew is pronounced like the *a* in *all*. For pronunciation purposes, I have been using an *aw*. Sometimes, before a final *h*, we have a short *a* instead (probably pronounced *ah*).
14. Therefore, we have several possible pronunciations: Y'ho-AWH, Y<sup>e</sup>-ho-AWH, Y'ho-WAWH, Y<sup>e</sup>-ho-WAWH, Y'ho-VAWH or Y<sup>e</sup>-ho-VAWH. In examining hundreds of Hebrew words, we often have a consonant beginning the last syllable when the consonant previous has a silent *e* vowel point below it or when the consonant has been doubled with a dâgêsh (a vowel point placed in

## The Actual Pronunciation of God's Name

the middle of the letter). In other words, this is not too far removed from our enunciation *Jehovah*, yet we came upon this by an approach much more logical than simply inserting the vowel points taken from Adonai.

15. I particularly like the first and third pronunciations (*Y'ho-AWH*, *Y'ho-WAWH*) because these pronunciations are onomatopoeic—they sound like breathing out, which is significant to us in two ways. (1) God breathed out into our nostrils to give us human life when we were created. And (2) when our Lord had paid for our sins on the cross, He breathed out at the very end, because His work was finished, and gave up His Spirit. Therefore, His breathing out signifies both giving us life and the completion of His work for our salvation; and leads to His giving to us our spiritual life.
16. This differs, of course, from the opinion expressed by Rotherham in *The Emphasized Bible*. Rotherham builds the name of Y'howâh upon the verb hâwâh (an old form of hâyâh) and ends with the name Yahweh and an interpretation from Ex. 3:14. You will find a fuller and rather verbose explanation of his opinion in *The Emphasized Bible*, pp. 22–29. If these names which I used were also totally lost to history, then my viewpoint does not have any foundation.
17. Certainly God's name should mean something, as Rotherham asserts, and it appears as though it would be a combination of the participle and the perfect tense of hâwâh, meaning something along the lines of *in becoming, I have become; in being, I have become* or *in being, I am*. (however, since this name is used by man, it would be in the third person masculine (*in becoming, He is; in being, He is; or in becoming, He has become*). This makes perfect sense when God dramatically steps into history as a man and removes us from our sins and from the punishment we deserve.

Knowing this information is helpful in several ways:

- a. The pronunciation of God's name means something. As the exhale of a breath, it is quite significant.
- b. The meaning of His name is significant.
- c. This cuts through the claptrap which is portrayed by the cult, the Jehovah's witnesses. Not only do they mispronounce God's name (no matter how you slice it, there is no *j* in Hebrew), but they have the same problem as the unregenerate Jew: they do not know the Lord Who bought them—they do not recognize the Jesus Christ is Y<sup>e</sup>howah, God of the Universe.

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## Addendum

Exodus 6:2–3 Later, God told Moses, “I am the Lord. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as God Almighty, [Heb. *El Shaddai*] and did I not reveal to them my name ‘Lord’? (ISV)

Webster's translation of Exodus 6:2b–3: "I *am* the LORD. And I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, by *the name of God Almighty*, but by my name JEHOVAH was I not known to them." (I added the quotation marks)

We are enjoined to believe in Jesus Christ as they of that era were enjoined to believe in Y<sup>e</sup>howah. In the Old Testament, those who placed their faith in the Revealed God were justified (Gen. 15:6).

### The Name of God (Explaining Exodus 6:2–3)

1. Moses was the writer of the last 4 books of Pentateuch. He probably assembled the book of Genesis from memory or from existing source material, which he (possibly) edited under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The five books of Moses are originally presented as a singular narrative. The only portion that Moses did not write was the account of his death; this was likely added by Joshua. It is possible that Joshua inserted the genealogy found in this chapter of Exodus and it is also possible that Joshua acted as Moses' secretary.
2. *To know* is not a word which means simple knowledge; it is rarely used in that way in the Old Testament. It can refer to anything between carnal knowledge to full and intimate knowledge.
3. Jesus Christ is the only God and He was known to the Hebrews (and the saints prior to the Hebrews) in several ways.
4. Exodus 6:3 is rhetorical. "[Was I not known to them also as Y<sup>e</sup>howah?](#)" God is telling Moses that He is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and He has now come to begin to fulfill His covenant to them.
5. As El Shaddai, God was the One who provided for all of the patriarchs' needs; however, as Y<sup>e</sup>howah, there is a more personal relationship.
6. God for the first time in Exodus 5:1 identified Himself as Y<sup>e</sup>howah, the God of Israel.
7. As *Y<sup>e</sup>howah Elohim of Israel*, God will now begin to fulfill the promises which He made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob some 400 years previous.
8. Another contrast between El Shaddai and Y<sup>e</sup>howah Elohim is that the Jews will now see miracles and signs unlike anything witnessed in the past 600 years. In fact, only Noah, his family, and corrupted mankind in the flood had ever seen power which was similar to the power about to be unleashed against Pharaoh of Egypt.
9. Moses is discouraged (Exodus 5:22), the elders oppose him (5:21) and Pharaoh does not take his demand seriously (5:2-9). Therefore Moses is having second thoughts about this. God is reassuring Moses that He really is Who He claims to be.
10. El Shaddai, which is the English transliteration of the Hebrew word for "Almighty God," was the way in which many pre-Abrahamic saints knew Jesus Christ. It occurs thirty-one times in the book of Job (which predates the law), which is as often as the name Y<sup>e</sup>howah occurs.
11. However, Y<sup>e</sup>howah is used much more often than El Shaddai in Genesis, which appears to support the translation, "[was I not also known to them as Y<sup>e</sup>howah?](#)"
12. This question, with the negative particle, demands the answer, *yes, You were known to them as Y<sup>e</sup>howah.*
13. The point here is that Jesus Christ is one and the same God and, from this point on, He will be known to them as "Y<sup>e</sup>howah, God of Israel." The first use of this is found, as previously mentioned, in Exodus 5:1.
14. The problem with situations like this, is that liberal theologians and Biblical critics begin with a certain mindset, get an hypothesis from the barest of evidence, and then try to justify this hypothesis by any and all means possible. The mindset involved here, in one case, is that the Pentateuch was composed by four different authors, woven from tales of old, long after the death of Moses and that this is one of the authors who is unaware of the other three, who has not used

## The Name of God (Explaining Exodus 6:2–3)

Yahweh in his portion of Genesis (I think that I am getting that theory straight).

15. There is nothing wrong with a search for the truth about the interpretation of a passage or a concept. Nor, is there anything wrong with forming hypotheses and testing them out. Every good teacher of God's Word will do this. However, when we come across an interpretation or a translation which is not mainstream, so to speak, then we had better investigate it quite thoroughly before purporting it to be truth. There are fundamental Biblical truths accepted throughout the ages; this is often referred to as orthodoxy or orthodox truth. Interpretation of Scripture must conform to orthodoxy.
16. When such a theory does not hold up, then it should be discarded.

Here, the point is that, God was known to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as both an All-Powerful God and also as a personal God—not like the personal gods of various nations, but One Who cares about them and One Who keeps His Word.

This doctrine was taken from Lesson #053 of the **Basic Exodus Study** ([HTML](#)) ([PDF](#)) ([WPD](#)), along with the information which follows.

The exodus was the primary method of evangelism for the next several centuries. When people heard of it and believed in the God of the exodus, this was salvation. Salvation is by faith in the Revealed God. He revealed Himself as the Savior of Israel, Who took Israel out of Egypt. This story would be well-known throughout the world that God's power over Pharaoh was absolute. This standoff between the God of Israel and the Pharaoh of Egypt will have some symbolic references as well as literal. By this I mean that the plagues which God uses to glorify Himself all cut deeply into the false religion and corrupt culture of Egypt. All that which is held sacred by the Egyptians will face God's wrath.

Bear in mind that, at this time, Egypt was one of the most powerful nations in human history. For them to be devastated over a period of a few months by the God of their slaves is a completely unique occurrence in history. God redeems His people from a hopeless situation, bringing them out of a great and powerful nation, supposedly guarded over by a plethora of gods. Faith in this God resulted in salvation.

Exodus 6:2–3 [Later, God told Moses, "I am the Lord. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as God Almighty, \[Heb. \*El Shaddai\*\] and did I not reveal to them my name 'Lord'? \(ISV\)](#)

**Another approach to Exodus 6:3:** We may want to reverse engineer this problem/question. What is different between God's dealings with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and His dealings with Moses? Almost everything that God promises Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was about the future—they did not see a fulfillment of any of God's big promises, yet they believed. It is with Moses that he will be the first man to know these promises and to see them fulfilled (or begin to be fulfilled) with his own eyes. He will see nation Israel, not completely in the land, but Moses will see the sons of Jacob as a 2 million person nation—a separate and independent and powerful people—on the verge of stepping into their land, given to them by God, and taking it. I believe that this is key in understanding what God is saying to Moses.

This seems to be backed up with the passage which follows, which is all about God's covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Whereas, v. 3 might be difficult to understand; the entire context seems to be the contrast between the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and the beginning of the fulfillment of these promises to Moses. Exodus 6:2–8 [God spoke to Moses and said to him, "I am the](#)

LORD. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by my name the LORD I did not make myself known to them. I also established My covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they lived as sojourners. Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the people of Israel whom the Egyptians hold as slaves, and I have remembered My covenant. Say therefore to the people of Israel, 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. I will take you to be My people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. I will give it to you for a possession. I am the LORD.'" (ESV; capitalized)

In Exodus 6:2–8, God looks both backwards and forwards. In looking forward, He will purchase His people and bring them out of Egypt and He will guide them to Canaan, the land which He promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The patriarchs received these promises, but this next generation or two of Israel would see these big promises fulfilled.

The exodus was the primary method of evangelism for the next several centuries. When people heard of it and believed in that God, this was salvation. Salvation is by faith in the Revealed God (the Hebrew people knew Him as *Y<sup>e</sup>howah Elohim*). It will be well-known throughout the world that God's power over Pharaoh is absolute. This standoff between the God of Israel and the Pharaoh of Egypt will have some symbolic references as well as literal. By this I mean that the plagues which God uses to glorify Himself all cut deeply into the religion and culture of Egypt. All that which is held sacred by the Egyptians will face God's wrath.

Now, there come a time in not the too distant future (in the book of Exodus) where Israel will exit Egypt and move about in the desert. While in the desert, several nations will oppose Israel on their path into the Land of Promise. If this great thing about God taking Israel out of Egypt was known, why would any nation try to oppose them? Simple—the people of these opposition nations did not believe in their God. Therefore, opposition to Israel was the logical outcome of their negative volition.

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