

The Pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton: *Piecing Together the Evidence*

Introduction

The argument over the pronunciation of our Heavenly Father's Name has been a topic of controversy for hundreds of years now. This fact is openly acknowledged and recognized. The purpose of this study is to tie together sections in Gesenius' Grammar with historical references in the hopes that it will shed light on his age-old "mystery."

The foundation of this study is built on several important things each of which will be dealt with in turn below. Firstly, one must believe that if our Heavenly Father commands that we swear by His Name, bless others in His Name, and proclaim His Name throughout the earth, that He desires that we know it. Secondly, if we believe that, we must also believe that He would provide us with a way to know His Name. Thirdly, since He spoke His Name to Moses in the language that Moses spoke, and the language in which the Scriptures are written, that being Hebrew, we must believe that His Name is a name that would follow all the rules and/or examples of the Hebrew language. After all, why would His Name be an exception from those rules making it totally indiscernible? Finally, we must believe that since He spoke His name in Hebrew, and has provided us with resources to understand, translate, and transliterate the Hebrew Scriptures, we should be able to use these resources to discern His Name.

Knowing and Using His Name

The Name of the Father is found over 6,800 times in the Hebrew Bible. That is over 2.5 times more than the most commonly used title for the Father - אֱלֹהִים (Elohim – used approximately 2,600 times). From this it seems extremely clear that He wanted us to know and use His Name. But how are we to use it? Following are some scriptures that tell us what we are to use the Name for.

- *Blessing in the Name* -

Ruth 2:4 (WEB) – “Behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said to the reapers, ‘May יהוה be with you.’ They answered him, ‘May יהוה bless you.’”

Notice the casualness with which Boaz greeted the reapers here in the Name. What better way to identify yourself as a child of the Most High Elohim, a fellow Israelite, than to greet someone

in His Name? Even the Talmud tells us that in the past they greeted one another using the Name:

“It was also laid down that greeting should be given in [God’s] Name, in the same way as it says, ‘And behold Boaz came from Bethlehem and said unto the reapers, “The Lord be with you;” and they answered him, “The Lord bless thee;”’ and it also says, ‘The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor.’”¹

We see the same kind blessings in [Numbers 6:24-26](#):

[Numbers 6:24-26 \(WEB\)](#) – “יהוה bless you, and keep you. (25) יהוה make his face to shine on you, and be gracious to you. (26) יהוה lift up his face toward you, and give you peace.”

In similar fashion to Boaz above we see that the Aaronic priests were commanded to bless the children of Israel using these words. They blessed the children of Israel in the Name of the Father and “put His Name” on them (verse 27). The Name of יהוה is only upon those who are His, and greeting and/or blessing each other in His Name is a powerful thing.

- *Swearing by the Name* -

Several places in the scriptures tell us that we are to swear by the name of יהוה. Doing this was basically a way of calling the Creator of the heavens and the earth as a witness to something. Whatever was sworn in His Name was under all circumstances required to be done. One such occurrence is found in [Deuteronomy 6:13](#).

[Deuteronomy 6:13 \(WEB\)](#) – “You shall fear יהוה your Elohim; and you shall serve him, and shall swear by his name.”

An example of this swearing can be found in [1 Samuel 24:20-22](#):

[1 Samuel 24:20-22 \(WEB\)](#) – “Now, behold, I know that you will surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel will be established in your hand. (21) Swear now therefore to me by יהוה, that you will not cut off my offspring after me, and that you will not destroy my name out of my father’s house.” (22) David swore to Saul. Saul went home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold.”

¹ Babylonian Talmud, Seder “Zera’im”, Tractate “Berachoth”, 54a: found: <http://halakhah.com/pdf/zeraim/Berachoth.pdf> (as of 7/24/2011)

David, knowing the seriousness of Saul's request to swear by יהוה, swore not to destroy Saul's name. Just like blessing in the Name, swearing by the Name is not just swearing by the appellation of the Almighty but by all that He is as well.

- Proclaiming and Declaring the Name -

The Name of יהוה is so powerful, so awesome, and so amazing that we are to declare and proclaim it throughout the earth. We can see examples of this all throughout scripture. One can be found in the Messianic prophecy found in [Psalm 22](#).

[Psalm 22:22 \(WEB\)](#) – “I will declare your name to my brothers. Among the assembly, I will praise you.”

The Messiah proclaimed the Name and message of His Father while here on the earth. We don't only have the example of our Messiah to follow but that of Moses as well.

[Deuteronomy 32:1-3 \(WEB\)](#) – “Give ear, you heavens, and I will speak. Let the earth hear the words of my mouth. (2) My doctrine will drop as the rain. My speech will condense as the dew, as the misty rain on the tender grass, as the showers on the herb. (3) For I will proclaim יהוה's name. Ascribe greatness to our Elohim!”

Moses said that he will proclaim the Name in his day, and he did. To declare the Name of יהוה is to praise him before the nations, to proclaim him as King, and to honor him as the only true Elohim. This we must do as believers in both word and deed.

Necessary Hebrew Grammar

As mentioned above, one premise of this study is that the Heavenly Father's name will follow the normal and historically accurate grammatical rules of the Hebrew language in which it was spoken. In order to see exactly how the Name is pronounced we need to have an understanding of some essential points of Hebrew grammar. What follows are a couple tables, one that shows the Hebrew alphabet and the other that shows the vowel points. These are simply here to reference when necessary throughout the rest of the study.

- Letters & Vowels -

The “Aleph-Bet” of the Hebrew language is as follows:

א – Aleph (<i>silent</i>)	ל – Lamed (“l” as in “lion”)
ב – Bet (“b” as in “boy”)	מ – Mem (“m” as in “man”)
ג – Gimel (“g” as in “girl”)	נ – Nun (“n” as in “nice”)
ד – Dalet (“d” as in “dog”)	ס – Samekh (“s” as in “smile”)
ה – He (“h” as in “happy”)	ע – Ayin (<i>silent</i>)
ו – Waw (“w” as in “woman”)	פ – Pe (“p” as in “post”)
ז – Zayin (“z” as in “zebra”)	צ – Tsade (“ts” as in “cats”)
ח – Chet (“ch” as in “Bach”)	ק – Qof (“q” as in “quiet”)
ט – Tet (“t” as in “tool”)	ר – Resh (“r” as in “red”)
י – Yod (“y” as in “yellow”)	ש – Shin (“sh” as in “shine”)
כ – Kaf (“k” as in “kite”)	ת – Taw (“t” as in “tool”)

The vowel “points” fall into three main “classes” and are as follows (the א and ב are merely being used as placeholders for the vowel points, only those used in this study are listed):

	Short	Changeable (Tone) Long	Unchangeable Long	Reduced
A-Class	Pathah – בּ (a as in “father”)	Qameş – כּ (ā as in “fāther”)	--	Hateph Pathah – אָ (^a as in “b ^a ton”)
I-Class	Segol – גּ (e as in “get”) Hireq – חּ (i as in “pin”)	Şere – נּ (ē as in “thēy”)	Şere Yod – יֵי (ê as in “thêy”) Hireq Yod – יִי (î as in “machîne”)	Hateph Segol – אֲ (^e as in “s ^e lect”)
U-Class	Qibbutz – וּ (u as in “sure”)	Holem – וּ (ō as in “phōne”)	Holem Waw – וֹ (ô as in “phône”) Shureq – וּ (û as in “tûne”)	Hateph Qameş – אֱ (^o as in “m ^o tel”)
Shewa	ְ – (Vocal – ^e as in “s ^e lect”; Silent – brief stop, syllable divider)			

Source Text

Now that we have laid down the initial grammatical foundation for the study we need to briefly examine background behind the Hebrew text that we are going to be using throughout.

- *The Masoretes* -

Since it is not within the scope of this study to go into great detail about the texts used herein, the following quote from the article entitled “Masoretes” on Wikipedia.com should suffice to give a brief history of these people.

“The Masoretes (*ba’alei hamasorah*, Hebrew בעלי המסורה) were groups of mostly Karaite scribes and scholars working between the 7th and 11th centuries, based primarily in present-day Israel in the cities of Tiberias and Jerusalem, as well as in Iraq (Babylonia). Each group compiled a system of pronunciation and grammatical guides in the form of diacritical notes on the external form of the Biblical text in an attempt to fix the pronunciation, paragraph and verse divisions and cantillation of the Jewish Bible, the Tanakh, for the worldwide Jewish community. (See the article on the “Masoretic text” for a full discussion of their work.)

The ben Asher family of Masoretes was largely responsible for the preservation and production of the Masoretic Text, although an alternate Masoretic text of the ben Naphtali Masoretes, which differs slightly from the ben Asher text, existed. The halakhic authority Maimonides endorsed the ben Asher as superior, although the Egyptian Jewish scholar, Saadya Gaon al-Fayyumi, had preferred the ben Naphtali system, because ben Asher was a Karaite. The ben Asher family and the majority of the Masoretes appear to have been Karaites. Geoffrey Khan says that it is now believed that they were not.

The Masoretes devised the vowel notation system for Hebrew that is still widely used, as well as the trope symbols used for cantillation.”²

So, the Masorete scribes were the ones that strenuously copied the manuscripts that we currently use for virtually all versions of the Hebrew Bible today.

² “Masoretes.” Wikimedia Foundation, 21 May 2014. Web. 23 May 2014.
<<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Masoretes>>.

- Leningrad Codex -

The following quotes from Wikipedia regarding the Leningrad Codex will also suffice, for the purposes of this article, to give a basic explanation of the text that is used throughout this study.

“The Leningrad Codex (or Codex Leningradensis) is the oldest complete manuscript of the Hebrew Bible, using the Masoretic Text and Tiberian vocalization. It is dated AD 1008 (or possibly AD 1009) according to its colophon. The Aleppo Codex, against which the Leningrad Codex was corrected, is several decades older, but parts of it have been missing since 1947, making the Leningrad Codex the oldest complete codex of the Tiberian mesorah that has survived intact to this day.

In modern times, the Leningrad Codex is most important as the Hebrew text reproduced in Biblia Hebraica (1937) and Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (1977). It also serves scholars as a primary source for the recovery of details in the missing parts of the Aleppo Codex... The biblical text as found in the codex contains the Hebrew letter-text along with Tiberian vowels and cantillation signs. In addition are masoretic notes in the margins. There are also various technical supplements dealing with textual and linguistic details, many of which are painted in geometrical forms. The codex is written on parchment and bound in leather.”³

The Leningrad Codex is one of the Masoretic Texts and is the oldest complete collection of the scriptures of the Hebrew Bible. It is the Hebrew from this Codex that we will be using.

The Ancient Ban

There are several factors that immediately bring into question the pronunciations of the Name as they are found in the Masoretic Text before even getting into the text itself. One major factor can be found in the Babylonian Talmud.

“Our Rabbis taught: In the year in which Simeon the Righteous died, he foretold them that he would die. They said: Whence do you know that? He replied: On every Day of Atonement an old man, dressed in white, wrapped in white, would join me, entering [the Holy of Holies] and leaving [it] with me, but today I was joined by an old man, dressed in black, wrapped in black, who entered, but did not leave, with me. After the festival [of Sukkoth] he was sick for seven days and [then] died. His brethren [that year]

³ “Leningrad Codex.” Wikimedia Foundation, 21 May 2014. Web. 23 May 2014.
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leningrad_Codex>.

the priests forbore to mention the Ineffable Name in pronouncing the [priestly] blessing.”⁴

“The following have no portion in the world to come: ... Abba Saul says: Also one who pronounces the divine name as it is written.”⁵

“Rabbah b. Bar Hanah said in R. Johanan’s name: The [pronunciation of the Divine] Name of four letters the Sages confide to their disciples once a septennate — others state, twice a septennate. Said R. Nahman b. Isaac: Reason supports the view that it was once a septennate, for it is written, this is my name for ever [le’olam] which is written le’allem. Raba thought to lecture upon it at the public sessions. Said a certain old man to him, It is written, le’allem [to be kept secret]. R. Abina opposed [two verses]: It is written: ‘this is my name’; but it is also written: ‘and this is my memorial’? — The Holy One, blessed be He, said: ‘I am not called as I am written: I am written with yod he, but I am read, alef dalet’.”⁶

The Talmud is a compilation of different writings that were written and compiled between roughly 200 and 500 CE. They stopped saying it in the priestly blessing. They believed speaking it removed any chance you had at life in the world to come. They said it was to be kept secret. They even said that יהוה Himself said His Name was to be pronounced as אֲדֹנָי (Adonai) instead of the true pronunciation. But, it doesn’t stop there. We can go even farther back.

The Septuagint (LXX), which was written between the 3rd and 1st centuries BCE, consistently translates the Name יהוה as Κύριος (*kurios* – Master). It also mistranslates at least one verse as follows:

Leviticus 24:16 (LXX) – ὀνομάζων δὲ τὸ ὄνομα κυρίου θανάτῳ θανατούσθω· λίθοις λιθοβολεῖτω αὐτὸν πᾶσα συναγωγὴ Ἰσραηλ· ἐάν τε προσήλυτος ἐάν τε αὐτόχθων, ἐν τῷ ὀνομάσαι αὐτὸν τὸ ὄνομα κυρίου τελευτάτω

Leviticus 24:16 (Brenton) – “And he that names the name of the Lord, let him die the death: let all the congregation of Israel stone him with stones; whether he be a stranger or a native, let him die for naming the name of the Lord.”

A literal translation from the Hebrew Bible has a few extremely significant differences.

⁴ Babylonian Talmud, Seder “Moed”, Tractate “Yoma”, 39b.

⁵ Babylonian Talmud, Seder Nezikin, Tractate Sanhedrin, Mishnah Chapter X.I.

⁶ Babylonian Talmud, Seder “Nashim”, Tractate “Kiddushin”, 71a.

Leviticus 24:16 (WEB) – “He who blasphemes יהוה’s name, he shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall certainly stone him. The foreigner as well as the native-born, when he blasphemes the Name, shall be put to death.”

There is a significant difference between “naming” the Name and “blaspheming” the Name, the Greek verb of the former meaning “to assign an appellation,” and the Hebrew verb of the latter meaning “to curse.” From this gross mistranslation it is clear that even the translators of the LXX had extreme superstitions about pronouncing the Name and wanted to dissuade others from speaking it.

In addition to the above, Philo Judaeus (20 BCE – 50 CE), a contemporary of the age in which the Septuagint came in to popularity in the dispersion, says:

“But if anyone were, I will not say to blaspheme against the Lord of gods and men, but were even to dare to utter his name unseasonably, he must endure the punishment of death; for those persons who have a proper respect for their parents do not lightly bring forward the names of their parents, though they are but mortal, but they avoid using their proper names by reason of the reverence which they bear them, and call them rather by the titles indicating their natural relationship, that is, father and mother, by which names they at once intimate the unsurpassable benefits which they have received at their hands, and their own grateful disposition. Therefore these men must not be thought worthy of pardon who out of volubility of tongue have spoken unseasonably, and being too free of their words have repeated carelessly the most holy and divine name of God.”⁷

Similarly, Flavius Josephus (37 CE – 100 CE), the Jewish Historian, states:

“Moses having now seen and heard these wonders that assured him of the truth of these promises of God, had no room left him to disbelieve them: he entreated him to grant him that power when he should be in Egypt; and besought him to vouchsafe him the knowledge of his own name; and since he had heard and seen him, that he would also tell him his name, that when he offered sacrifice he might invoke him by such his name in his oblations. Whereupon God declared to him his holy name, which had never been discovered to men before; concerning which it is not lawful for me to say any more.”⁸

In ancient Dead Sea Scrolls found near Qumran, in the “Manual of Discipline” it states:

⁷ Philo, Judaeus. “De Vita Mosis, II.” The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged. Trans. C. D. Yonge. : Hendrickson, 1997. Pg. 509. XXXVIII, 206-208.

⁸ Josephus, Flavius. “Antiquitates Judaicae.” The Complete Works of Flavius Josephus, the Jewish Historian. Trans. William Whiston. Green Forest, AR: New Leaf Pub. Group, 2008. Book II, Chapter XII, IV.

“Anyone who speaks aloud the M[ost] Holy Name of God, [whether in...] or in cursing or as a blurt in time of trial or for any other reason, or while he is reading a book or praying, is to be expelled, never again to return to the society of the Yahad.”⁹

The Essenes, the supposed authors of this text, were a devout sect of Jews. Even though they were greatly separated from the common Jewish people in the cities and towns they still had rules prohibiting the speaking of the Name.

And, as if all of that information wasn't proof enough, there are 134 confirmed locations in the Masoretic Text where the scribes actually exchanged the Name for the word אֲדֹנָי. These verses¹⁰ are:

Gen. 18:3,27,30,32; 19:18; 20:4 / Ex. 4:10,13; 5:22; 15:17; 34:9 (twice) / Num. 14:17 / Josh. 7:8 / Judg. 6:15; 13:8 / 1Kings 3:10,15; 22:6 / 2Kings 7:6; 19:23 / Isa. 3:17,18; 4:4; 6:1,8,11; 7:14,20; 8:7; 9:8,17; 10:12; 11:11; 21:6,8,16; 28:2; 29:13; 30:20; 37:24; 38:14,16; 49:14 / Ezek. 18:25,29; 21:13; 33:17,29 / Amos 5:16; 7:7,8; 9:1 / Zech. 9:4 / Mic. 1:2 / Mal. 1:12,14 / Ps. 2:4; 16:2; 22:19,30; 30:8; 35:3,17,22; 37:12; 38:9,15,22; 39:7; 40:17; 44:23; 51:15; 54:4; 55:9; 57:9; 59:11; 62:12; 66:18; 68:11,17,19,22,26,32; 73:20; 77:2,7; 78:65; 79:12; 86:3,4,5,8,9,12,15; 89:49,50; 90:1,17; 110:5; 130:2,3,6 / Dan.1:2; 9:3,4,7,9,15,16,17,19 (3 times) / Lam. 1:14,15 (twice); 2:1,2,5,7,18,19,20; 3:31,36,37,58 / Ezra 10:3 / Neh.1:11; 4:14 / Job 28:28

With all of the information above is it really beyond reason to believe that the Masoretes purposely pointed the Name incorrectly to prevent it from being pronounced? All the evidence seems to say no.

Pick Your Preference

Throughout the Masoretic text seven different forms of the Name can be found, each with its own pronunciation. That's right, I said **seven** different forms! We can easily see based on the information above how the Masoretes would have desired, or even felt compelled to hide the true vowel pointing of the Name. In place of the vowels that would have revealed the true

⁹ Wise, Michael Owen, Martin G. Abegg, and Edward M. Cook. "Charter of a Jewish Sectarian Association (1QS)." *The Dead Sea Scrolls: a New Translation*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996. Column 6 line 27b through Column 7 line 2a, pg.135.

¹⁰ Ginsburg LL. D., Christian D. *The Massorah*. §§107-115 under א. Pgs. 27-29. Number of occurrences given minus the discrepancies is the number of total changes. Found <http://www.seforimonline.org/seforimdb/pdf/64.pdf> (as of 7/24/2011)

pronunciation of the Name were placed vowels that one would find when pronouncing Adonai (Master) or Elohim (God). Here are the seven different variations on the Name:

יְהוָה - Y'howah (ē - ě - hō - wä), example found in [Genesis 3:14](#)

יְהוּה - Y'hwah (ē - ě - wä), example found in [Genesis 2:4](#)

יְהוִה - Yehowih (ē - ě - hō - wī), example found in [Judges 16:28](#)

יְהוּה - Yehwih (ē - ě - wī), example found in [Genesis 15:2](#)

יְהוִה - Y'howih (ē - ě - hō - wī), example found in [1 Kings 2:26](#)

יְהוּה - Y'hwih (ē - ě - wī), example found in [Ezekiel 24:24](#)

יְהוָה - Yahwah (ē - ä - wä), example found in [Psalm 144:15](#)

An immediate question comes to mind. Why such a wide variety of vowel-pointings for one name...and the Name of the Almighty at that?

- Y'howah, Y'hwah, and Adonai -

The vowel points of two other very common words used in reference to the Almighty in the scriptures help to bring more clarity to the reason for the multiplicity of pronunciations. The first of these words is Adonai (Master) – אֲדֹנָי. You can see the similarities between the vowels of Adonai and those of Y'howah. In both cases the latter two vowels are Holem and Qameş. The only difference in their pointing lies in the first vowel. In Y'howah the first vowel is a Shewa, but in Adonai it is a Hateph Pathah. The reason for this difference lies in the rules of Hebrew grammar. "Hateph" vowels are also known as "compound Shewas."¹¹ Only guttural letters can take a compound Shewa. So, it would be against the typical rules of Hebrew grammar to place a compound Shewa under a Yod. But, we do see this happen for two of the other pointings above – Yehowih and Yehwih. These will be addressed a little later.

What other evidence do we have that proves that the Masoretes pointed Y'howah and Y'hwah similar to Adonai? The answer once again lies in the simple rules of Hebrew grammar. In Hebrew there are four prepositions known as the "inseparable" prepositions. They are called such because they are attached to the first letter of the word they are modifying. The four inseparable prepositions are:

¹¹ Gesenius, Wilhelm. Gesenius' Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures. Entry for יְהוָה. See pg. 337 for his statement regarding the Yod in the Name taking the "simple" instead of the "compound" shewa. See also §10 a-f of Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1910.

לְ - meaning “to, toward, for”

בְּ - meaning “in, by, at”

כְּ - meaning “like, as, according to”

מִן - meaning “from, out of”

Notice that the default vowel under the first three prepositions is a Shewa. Well, in every case where one of these inseparable prepositions is attached to יהוה in the text it actually appears with a Pathaḥ as the vowel instead of the Shewa: לְ, בְּ, or כְּ. The problem with this is that only one of the versions of the Name above, יהוה־, would ever take a Pathaḥ as the prepositional vowel. But this never occurs in the whole of scripture. So, what kinds of words do take a Pathaḥ as their prepositional vowel?

Here are the basic rules¹² that govern the change in those three prepositional vowels from the default Shewa:

- 1) If the first vowel of the adjoining word is a Hateph Pathaḥ, Hateph Segol, or Hateph Qameṣ, the prepositional vowel becomes the Hateph vowel of the word to which it is attached. Here are some examples of each:

לְאֲדֹנָי – meaning “to the Master” – Micah 4:13

בְּאֵמֶת – meaning “in faith” – 1 Kings 2:4

לְחֻלִּי – meaning “of sickness” – 2 Chronicles 21:18

Notice that the inseparable preposition takes the Hateph vowel in each case. The preposition takes the Pathaḥ, Segol, or Qameṣ of the corresponding Hateph vowel of the adjoining word.

- 2) If the first vowel of the word is a Shewa the prepositional vowel becomes a Hireq and the Shewa vowel at the beginning of the adjoining word drops completely. Here is an example:

לְיֵהוֹשֻׁעַ - meaning “to Joshua” – Joshua 15:13

The Shewa under the Yod in Joshua’s name has completely disappeared and the default Shewa under the preposition has changed to a Hireq.

¹² Gesenius, Wilhelm. Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1910. See §102 for the rules that govern prefixed (a/k/a “inseparable”) prepositions.

Now, what do we notice in the examples above? What similarities can we find between the above examples and the prepositions that are found attached to the Name? Notice the first example – לְאֲדֹנָי. The prepositional vowel in this case is a Pathaḥ. This can only happen if the first vowel of the adjoining word is a Hateph Pathaḥ. As we can very clearly see, only one of the various spellings of the Name above as found in the Masoretic text have a Hateph Pathaḥ as its first vowel. What other word do we know a word that has a Hateph Pathaḥ as its first vowel? – אֲדֹנָי (Adonai). This is yet another clear sign that the scribes changed the vowels of the Name and the prepositions associated with it so that all readers of the text would know to say “Adonai” instead of the Name. The case for the form Y’hwah is identical except that the middle vowel, Holem, is dropped.

The grammatical rules for the change in vowel points for the fourth inseparable preposition, מִן, are just slightly different. Frequently this preposition is attached to words by something called a Maqqef (-), a small dash between two words:

מִן־הַמֶּלֶךְ - meaning “from the king” – 2 Samuel 18:13

However, when it is linked “inseparably” to the adjoining word a slight change occurs. The final Nun, נ, typically assimilates into a Dagesh Forte¹³ in the first letter of the following word (if the letter is a begadkephat letter, see more on this below). However, guttural letters such as א in Adonai reject the Dagesh Forte. This rejection causes the vowel under the preposition, a Hireq (א), to lengthen to a Şere (א):

מִהַמֶּלֶךְ - also meaning “from the king” – 2 Samuel 3:37

Guess which form of this preposition we see when it is attached to יְהוָה?:

מִיְהוָה - meaning “from יְהוָה” – Genesis 24:50

Again, this form of the preposition, grammatically speaking, only occurs when the first letter of the adjoining word is a guttural letter. In this case the first letter is a Yod, which is not a guttural letter.

Even more evidence exists that shows that Y’howah and Y’hwah were pointed like Adonai. In Hebrew there is a mark known as a Dagesh Lene¹⁴. This Dagesh is most often used as an addition to one of the following six letters: ב, ג, ד, כ, פ, and ת (these are known as

¹³ Gesenius, Wilhelm. Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1910. See §12 for full information on the Dagesh Forte.

¹⁴ Gesenius, Wilhelm. Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1910. See §13 for full information on the Dagesh Lene.

begadkephat letters). It changes the sound of those letters into harder, more distinct sounds. So, where a Bet would sound like “v” (as in “victory”) without a Dagesh Lene, it sounds like a harder “b” (as in “bat”) with the Dagesh Lene. Similarly, where a Pe would sound like a “ph” (as in “phrase”) without the Lene, it sounds like a “p” (as in “punch”) with the Lene. There are rules in Hebrew that govern when and where the Lene will appear in the letters. One such rule¹⁵ states that when a word ends in a vowel letter, א, ה, ו, or י, the Dagesh Lene will not appear in the first letter (a *begadkephat*) of the following word. However, if a word ends in a consonantal ו or י then a Lene will appear in the first letter (a *begadkephat*) of the following word.

An example of the first case is: כִּי־מָצָא בָּהּ - meaning “because he found in her” (found in [Deuteronomy 24:1](#)). Notice that the Bet does not have the Dagesh Lene because the word מָצָא ends in the vowel letter א.

An example of the second case is: אֲדֹנָי בִּתְעַר יִגְלַח - meaning “the Master will shave with a razor” (found in [Isaiah 7:20](#)). Notice in this case that since the Yod is acting like a consonant the Bet takes the Lene.

Referring back to the rule above regarding the vowel letters and how a Dagesh Lene will not follow them, we would expect to see no Lene in words that follow the Name since it ends in the vowel letter ה. However, we see exactly the opposite. In every case the Dagesh Lene is present in words beginning with *begadkephat* letters that follow יהוה. This is even more evidence that the pointings of and around the Name were changed so the reader would read Adonai instead of the true pronunciation.

- *Yehowih, Yehwih, Y’howih, Y’hwih and Elohim* -

There are still other forms of the Name above that we need to examine. The second of the two very common words mentioned above is the word Elohim (God) – אֱלֹהִים. The forms Yehowih and Yehwih derive from the vowel pointing of this word. Notice that the vowel pattern of Elohim (Hateph Segol, Holem, Hireq) exactly matches that of Yehowih. And, similar to the difference between Y’howah and Y’hwah above, the middle vowel, Holem, is dropped to produce the form Yehwih. These two variations of the pronunciation of the name are found in phrases that contain both the Name itself and the word Adonai. To avoid saying Adonai twice in a row while reading the text the Masoretes intentionally broke the rules of Hebrew grammar and placed a Hateph vowel (Hateph Segol) under the Yod in the Name. Where this occurs in scripture it is read “Adonai Elohim.”

¹⁵ Gesenius, Wilhelm. [Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar](#). Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1910. See §21, specifically Rem. I.

The last two forms, Y'howih and Y'hwih, are similar to Yehowih and Yehwih with the sole exception being the first vowel in both cases. In the former two the first vowel is a Shewa. Y'howih and Y'hwih are again most often used in conjunction with Adonai to prevent redundancy whilst reading.

- *Yahwah* -

The form Yahwah (יְהוָה) is only used one time in scripture in [Psalm 144:15](#). In that verse the Name is prefixed by the relative pronoun prefix – ׀. This is the prefix form of the full form – אֲשֶׁר. The form ׀ is what appears when אֲשֶׁר prefixed to a word that begins with a guttural letter¹⁶. We know that the Name doesn't start with a guttural letter, so why does the relative pronoun prefix take that form? Once again, understanding that the Masoretic scribes pointed the Name and words related to the Name in such a way that all readers of the text would know to read Adonai instead of the true pronunciation, it all becomes clear. Adonai begins with a guttural letter, an Aleph, and therefore the prefix follows the grammatical rule as applies to gutturals.

- *The Exception That Proves the Rule?* -

Some say that the pronunciation given above in [Psalm 144:15](#), יְהוָה (ē - ä - wä), is proof that the Masoretes could have used the Hateph Pathaḥ in place of the Shewa in every other occurrence of the Name. This is enough proof for them to believe that the form יְהוָה is indeed the true pronunciation since, if the Masoretes wanted people to say Adonai each time, they could have pointed the Name as such. But, this is not the case. The Masoretic scribes clearly sought to obey the rules of Hebrew grammar as much as possible. As stated in a previous section it is against the rules of Hebrew grammar to point a non-guttural with a Hateph vowel. The only occurrences in scripture of where the Yod in the Name is pointed against the rules (i.e. with a Hateph vowel) are when it stands next to the word Adonai. In these cases the rules are broken so that the desired reading of Elohim could be clearly written.

- *Conclusion* -

From all of this information it is pretty clear that we cannot accept any of the seven forms of the Name found in the Masoretic text as being indicative of the true pronunciation. It is plainly

¹⁶ Gesenius, Wilhelm. Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1910. See §36 for full information on the Relative Pronoun.

seen that the Masoretic scribes blatantly broke the rules of Hebrew grammar to prevent readers of the manuscripts from speaking the true pronunciation of the Name. So, where do we go from here? All we have left are the four consonants of the Name. How can we possibly determine the true pronunciation of the Name of יהוה from just those? Well, the answer lies once again in the rules of Hebrew grammar.

The Source of the Name

We must now closely investigate what the Name יהוה comes from. Determining exactly what the source of the Name is will help us to truly discern its proper meaning and pronunciation.

- Moses' Sinai Experience -

Exodus 3 details the events surrounding יהוה's revealing of His Name to Moses. The words that יהוה uses to reveal Himself and His Name to Moses are very telling. If we closely examine the following passage the origin and meaning of the name reveals itself. Verses 13-15 are the most relevant to the topic at hand and they read as follows.

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתַי הֲנֵה אֵלֵיךָ יְהוָה וְאָמַרְתִּי לָהֶם
אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם שְׁלַחְנִי אֵלֵיכֶם וְאָמְרוּ-לִי מִה-שְּׁמוֹ מָה אָמַר אֱלֹהִים:
וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל-מֹשֶׁה אֲהִיָּה אֲשֶׁר אֲהִיָּה וַיֹּאמֶר כֹּה תֹאמַר לְבְנֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲהִיָּה שְׁלַחְנִי אֵלֵיכֶם:
וַיֹּאמֶר עוֹד אֱלֹהִים אֶל-מֹשֶׁה כֹּה-תֹאמַר אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי
אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם אֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק וְאֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב שְׁלַחְנִי אֵלֵיכֶם זֶה-שְּׁמִי
לְעֹלָם וְזֶה זִכְרִי לְדֹר דָּר:

Exodus 3:13-15 (WEB) – “Moses said to Elohim, ‘Behold, when I come to the children of Israel, and tell them, “The Elohim of your fathers has sent me to you;” and they ask me, “What is his name?” What should I tell them?’ (14) Elohim said to Moses, ‘**I AM WHO I AM,**’ and he said, ‘You shall tell the children of Israel this: “**I AM** has sent me to you.”’ (15) Elohim said moreover to Moses, ‘You shall tell the children of Israel this, “יהוה, the Elohim of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the Elohim of Isaac, and the Elohim of Jacob, has sent me to you.” This is my name forever, and this is my memorial to all generations.’”

The Hebrew words behind the words in bold are what we are going to focus on. The phrase “I AM THAT I AM” in Hebrew is אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה. אֶהְיֶה comes from the verb הָיָה and means “to be, exist.” In order to best explain how הָיָה becomes אֶהְיֶה we must take a little time to examine the Hebrew grammatical rules¹⁷ that govern verbs.

- Hebrew Verb Basics -

In Hebrew virtually every verb has a 3-letter root. There are some that only have two consonants in the root, but because they are inapplicable to the topic at hand detail will not be given to them. There are seven main verbal stems. Each stem carries with it its own action or voice. The seven main stems are the Qal, Niphal, Piel, Pual, Hiphil, Hophal, and Hithpael. We will only be dealing with two of these throughout the entire study, the Qal and the Hiphil, so detail will not be given to the others.

In Hebrew there are seven main verb tenses. Some verb stems can conjugate in all seven stems and others only a few. The seven tenses are the Perfect, Imperfect, Imperative, Cohortative, Jussive, Infinitive, and Participle. Only four of these tenses, the Perfect, Imperfect, Imperative, and Jussive will be dealt with in this study so no detail will be given to the others.

Hebrew verbs can also be considered either Strong or Weak. Strong verbs are those that contain no guttural letter in the root. Weak verbs are those that contain at least one guttural letter in the root. Some verbs contain more than one guttural letter and are known as “doubly-weak.”

- The Stems -

As mentioned above only two of the seven main verbal stems will be dealt with in this study. The Qal stem, by far the most used in the scriptures, is one that expresses a simple action. “He killed,” “he lived,” “she jumped,” and “they threw” are all examples of verbs that express a simple action. The Hiphil stem is one that expresses an action or event in the causative sense. So, using the same examples given above, the Hiphil stem would read “he caused to kill,” “he caused to live,” etc.

¹⁷ Gesenius, Wilhelm. Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1910. See all of Chapter II for full information the grammatical rules that govern Hebrew Verbs.

- The Tenses -

The four tenses that we will address in this study are the Perfect, Imperfect, Imperative, and Jussive. The Perfect tense expresses an action that has occurred in the past. All of the examples in the previous section would be examples of verbs in the Perfect tense. The Imperfect tense is one that expresses an incomplete or ongoing action, or an action or event that has not yet happened. “He will kill,” “he lives,” “she will jump,” and “they will throw” are all examples of verbs in the Imperfect tense. The Imperative tense is one that expresses a command. “Kill!,” “live!,” “jump!,” and “throw!,” are all examples of verbs in the Imperative tense. The Jussive tense is extremely similar to the Imperfect tense and in fact derives from it, but similar to the Imperative it expresses a wish or command. So, examples of the Jussive would include “let him kill,” “let him live,” etc.

- Strong and Weak -

As mentioned above verbs whose roots do not contain any guttural letters are considered Strong and those that do contain gutturals are considered Weak. The five guttural consonants in Hebrew are א, ה, ח, ע, and ך (sometimes). Knowing this, here are some examples of Strong verbs:

קָטַל – “to kill”

לָמַד – “to study”

כָּתַב – “to write”

And here are some examples of Weak verbs:

בָּתַח – “to trust”

יָשַׁב – “to dwell”

עָבַד – “to work, serve”

And here are some examples of verbs that are classified as “doubly-weak” (i.e. they have attributes of two different types of Weak verbs):

עָשָׂה – “to do”

יָצָא – “to go out, go forth”

הָיָה – “to be”

It is very important to note that although **הָיָה** is technically a “doubly-weak” verb it conjugates just like any other weak verb of the III-ה class (the final consonant in the root is a ה). We will see more on this below.

- Back to the Source –

Notice that the final verb in the examples above, **הָיָה**, it is what was mentioned earlier that **אָהֵיָה** comes from. When **הָיָה** is conjugated in the 1st person/masculine/singular (1ms), in the Qal stem (Q), and in the Imperfect (Impf) tense the result is **אָהֵיָה** (eh’yeh – I am). So, when we refer back to [Exodus 3:13-15](#) we can see that **יְהוָה** is presenting Himself and His Name using the Qal stem and the Imperfect tense. Now, when a Hebrew verb is conjugated in the 3rd person/masculine/singular (3ms), in the Qal stem, and in the Imperfect tense the prefix **יְ** is added instead of the prefix **אָ**. So, if we were to see **הָיָה** conjugated in the 3ms/Q/Impf it would look like **יְהֵיָה** (yih’yeh – he [or it] is). We can see from this that, if indeed **יְהוָה**’s Name comes from a verb, it would be in the 3ms/Q/Impf due to the **יְ** at the beginning. However, there is no conjugation of the verb **הָיָה** that would result in a Waw being in the second root position as it is in the Name **יְהוָה** – **יְהוָה**. So, what verb can be conjugated in the 3ms/Q/Impf that results in the same four consonants as in the Name?

- The Ancient Version -

Gesenius gives us a great introduction to the verb we are about to discuss in his Lexicon¹⁸:

¹⁸ Gesenius, Wilhelm. [Gesenius’ Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures](#). Entry for **הָיָה**. Pg. 219.

הָנָה prop. TO BREATHE (هوئ to blow, as the wind, هوأ air, breeze), like the cognate roots הָנַח, בָּנַח which see. This primary signification is applied — (1) to the breath of living creatures; hence, to live (see הָנַח, הָנִיחַ), and in the use of the language, *to be*, i. q. the common word הָנַח. In Aramæan this form of the verb is the most in use for the verb substantive (הָנַח, ܢܘܚܐ), in Hebrew it is peculiar to the poets and the more recent writers [but see the occurrences], and it is found but rarely. That it is older than the common form הָנַח and itself primitive, may be seen, both from the Vav conversive (see 1) derived from it, and also from this form being originally onomatopoeic; הָנַח therefore has its origin from הָנַח, like הָנַח from הָנַח, which latter indeed appears to be a primary word. Part. הָנַח Neh. 6:6; Ecc. 2:22. Imp. הָנַח, הָנַח Gen. 27:29; Isa. 16:4. Fut. apoc. הָנַח Ecc. 11:3, for הָנַח from הָנַח.

There is a more ancient form of the verb הָנַח that not only carries along the same meaning but fills in all of the gaps necessary when piecing together the Name – הָנַח. Just like הָנַח, הָנַח also means “to be, exist, or breathe (in the sense of the breath of life)” and, when conjugated in the 3ms/Q/Impf, it has all four consonants of the Name – יְהוּה. This verb conjugates identically to its common form הָנַח. But, because controversy exists over whether הָנַח conjugates like הָנַח as opposed to a doubly-weak verb of the I-Guttural (a guttural in the first root position) and III-ה classes, we will examine the evidence that we have in the scriptures to establish the truth.

- The Doubly-Weak Argument & Yeheweh -

The argument in favor of הָנַח conjugating just like any other doubly-weak verbs of its class is used to prove that the true pronunciation is יְהוּה (ē - ě - hě - wě). As mentioned above הָנַח is indeed technically a doubly-weak verb because it contains a guttural (ה) letter in the first root position and a ה in the third. But, what does the evidence we have available show us regarding how it conjugates?

We see the following in Basics of Biblical Hebrew (BBH):

“Study the Imperfect forms of הָיָה with care. You will observe that this doubly weak verb inflects exactly like the Imperfect of בָּנָה (16.6).”¹⁹

בָּנָה is a weak verb of the III-ה class. Below is the verb paradigm found in section 16.6 of BBH with the third column added to show the conjugation of הָיָה and the fourth column added to show the conjugation of the verb חָזָה, another doubly-weak verb of the I-Guttural and III-ה classes:

	בָּנָה (III-ה)	הָיָה	חָזָה
3ms	יִבְנֶה	יִהְיֶה	יִחְזֶה
3fs	תִּבְנֶה	תִּהְיֶה	תִּחְזֶה
2ms	תִּבְנֶה	תִּהְיֶה	תִּחְזֶה
2fs	תִּבְנִי	תִּהְיִי	תִּחְזִי
1cs	אֶבְנֶה	אֶהְיֶה	אֶחְזֶה
3mp	יִבְנוּ	יִהְיוּ	יִחְזוּ
3fp	תִּבְנֶינָה	תִּהְיֶינָה	תִּחְזֶינָה
2mp	תִּבְנוּ	תִּהְיוּ	תִּחְזוּ
2fp	תִּבְנֶינָה	תִּהְיֶינָה	תִּחְזֶינָה
1cp	נִבְנֶה	נִהְיֶה	נִחְזֶה

(The form in blue is not found in the Tanakh)

It can be clearly seen that הָיָה conjugates exactly as any verb of the III-ה weak class does. It is just as clear that it does not conjugate like a doubly-weak verb of the same exact classes. However, as mentioned above, we really aren't trying to deal with the verb הָיָה. It is its older form הָיָה that we need to examine. So, does הָיָה follow the exact same conjugational pattern as הָיָה, or does it follow the conjugation of חָזָה, a verb of the I-Guttural and III-ה classes?

We only have two examples in all of scripture that we can use to compare these two verbs. The two common verb forms for each verb are in the following table:

¹⁹ Pratico, Gary D. & Van Pelt, Miles V. Basics of Biblical Hebrew Grammar. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001. See Section 16.21.3.

	הָנָה	חָנָה
Imperative (2ms)	הָנָה (Example found in Genesis 27:29)	חָנָה (Example found in Isaiah 33:20)
Jussive (apocopated 3ms/Imperfect)	יְהוּא (Example found in Ecclesiastes 11:3)	תַּחַח (Example found in Micah 4:11)

Notice the subtle yet significant difference in the vowel points under the first consonants of both words in the 2ms/Imperative. The verb הָנָה has a Hateph Segol vowel and חָנָה has a Hateph Pathaḥ. But, what does this tell us? חָנָה is the perfect verbal conjugation of a doubly-weak verb of the I-Guttural and III-ה classes²⁰. הָנָה however conjugates exactly like its younger, more common form (הָנָה), in the 2ms/Imperative - הָנָה (Example of הָנָה can be found in [Exodus 18:19](#)).

The other example we have is the Jussive (apocopated 3ms/Imperfect) form of the verbs. The verb הָנָה in the Jussive is יְהוּי. Notice that the final He of the Imperfect form is dropped (more on this below), the first vowel (Hireq) of the Imperfect form is reduced to a Shewa, and the silent Shewa in the Imperfect is lengthened to an unchangeable long vowel (Hireq Yod). The same exact pattern occurs in the Jussive form of הָנָה. The final He of the Imperfect form is once again dropped, the first vowel is reduced to Shewa, and the silent Shewa is lengthened to an unchangeable long vowel (Shureq). חָנָה on the other hand conjugates just like any other doubly-weak verb of its class in the Jussive. The form above is the 3fs form.²¹

Before concluding anything in this section there are a couple of quotes from notable Hebrew Lexicons that speak about the form יְהוּי that need to be addressed.

“[taken from the quote from Gesenius’ Lexicon above]...Part. הָנָה Neh. 6:6; Ecc. 2:22. Imp. הָנָה, הָנָה, הָנָה Gen. 27:29, Isa 16:4. Fut. Apoc. יְהוּא Ecc. 11:3, for יְהוּ from יְהוּי.”²²

Here Gesenius clearly makes the implication that the Jussive form of הָנָה, יְהוּי, is derived from the full form – יְהוּי. But is this accurate? Let’s take a look at the second quote.

“הָנָה”²³ Kal fut. 3 pers. sing. masc. [for יְהוּי ap. for יְהוּי §24. Rem. 3] . . .

²⁰ Pratico, Gary D. & Van Pelt, Miles V. Basics of Biblical Hebrew Grammar. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001. See Section 18.11.

²¹ Pratico, Gary D. & Van Pelt, Miles V. Basics of Biblical Hebrew Grammar. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001. See Section 18.14 for full information on the Jussive.

²² Gesenius, Wilhelm. Gesenius’ Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures. Entry for הָנָה. Pg. 219.

Davidson seems to follow suit with Gesenius in his implication. But, Davidson points us to a section and remark in the Grammar at the beginning of his Lexicon. It says:

“The verbs **הָיָה** *to be*, and **חָיָה** *to live*, which would properly have in the fut. apoc. **יְהִי**, **יְחִי**, change these forms into **יְהִי** and **יְחִי** (like the derivative **פָּרַי** for **פָּרַי** 27. V). Another example is **תָּשִׂי**. De. 32.18 (in pause for **תָּשִׂי**, comp. §35. r. 14), if directly derived from **שָׂיָה**. A perfectly Syriac form is **יְהוּא** Ec. 11.3, for **יְהוּהָה**, ap. **יְהוּ** (from **הוּהָה** *to be*).”²⁴

We can clearly see that Davidson gives us a second option as the root for **יְהוּהָה** – **יְהוּא**. But why does he give us two different forms?

The truth is that both **יְהוּהָה** and **יְהוּהָה** are hypothetical forms of the verb **הוּהָה** that are found nowhere in scripture. In order to properly ascertain which of those two forms is the correct one we need to examine the similarities and differences between the conjugations of verbs of the same weak classes. That is exactly what we have done above. And, based on all of the evidence we have we can clearly see that the correct form is **יְהוּהָה**. Just as **הוּהָה** conjugates exactly like the 2ms/Imperative and Jussive forms of its common form **הָיָה**, it likewise conjugates the same in the 3ms/Q/Impf – **יְהוּהָה** (**יְהוּהָה**).

All of the information in this section and the previous section goes a long way to prove two things. First, it proves exactly what Gesenius says in the quote above: **הוּהָה** “is older than the common form **הָיָה** and itself primitive.” It is the same exact verb only older. It carries the same meaning and conjugates just the same. Second, it proves that **יְהוּהָה** is not a valid option for the pronunciation of the Name. Even if that form did exist outside of hypothesis it would still only be a strict verbal conjugation and not a Name.

- Conclusion -

Above we established in great detail that the root of the Name is the verb **הוּהָה**. Gesenius has additional information to provide on verbal roots like this one, those of the III-הָ class²⁵:

²³ Davidson, Benjamin. The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon. London, UK: S. Bagster & Sons, Limited. Pg. 300.

²⁴ Davidson, Benjamin. The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon. London, UK: S. Bagster & Sons, Limited. Pg. 51 of the Grammar.

²⁵ Gesenius, Wilhelm. Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1910. §75a.

§ 75. Verbs ה"ל, e. g. גלה to reveal. Paradigm P.

Brockelmann, *Semit. Sprachwiss.*, p. 149 ff.; *Grundriss*, p. 618 ff.—G. R. Berry, 'Original Waw in ה"ל verbs' in *AJSL*. xx. 256 f.

These verbs, like the verbs פ"ל (§§ 69, 70), belong to two different α classes, viz. those originally ו"ל and those originally י"ל,¹ which in Arabic, and even more in Ethiopic, are still clearly distinguished. In Hebrew, instead of the original ו or י at the end of the word, a ה always appears (except in the *ptcp. pass. Qal*) as a purely orthographic indication of a final vowel (§ 23 k); hence both classes are called ה"ל, e. g. גלה for גלי he has revealed; שָׁלַח for שָׁלוּחַ he has rested. By far the greater number of these verbs are, however, treated as originally י"ל; only isolated forms occur of verbs ו"ל.

The vast majority of what are known as ה"ל verbs, verbs with a ה in the third radical, were formerly י"ל verbs, verbs with a י in the third radical. He goes on in §75c to explain that the ה currently at the end of ה"ל verbs is merely orthographic. It is the elision of the final י in the original forms that caused the lengthening of the characteristic vowel in the root (the vowel under the second radical). So, what was originally יְהוּי became יְהוּה. As we move on to the final section of this study this morphological transformation is important. Thus, the conclusion is that the original root of the name יהוה is יְהוּי.

The Pronunciation of the Name

Whew!! Congratulations, you made it through the hardest part! Some may ask, "Why did you have to go through all of that in order to tell us about the pronunciation of the Name?" Well, the fact is that the Name is in Hebrew. Many followers of Yeshua, though they may quote from Strong's concordance occasionally, or even use biblical Hebrew words in their own studies and messages, know very little about the language themselves. Hebrew, just like any other realy language, is governed by grammatical rules. A proper understanding of these is absolutely essential if one expects to actually make an informed conclusion on the pronunciation of the Name. So, now that you've made it through that (and hopefully understand it) let's get to the main purpose of this article – the pronunciation of the tetragrammaton.

There are two different aspects to come from when establishing the pronunciation of the tetragrammaton: Historical (testimony of ancient witnesses) and Linguistic (phonology/morphology/grammar).

- Linguistic Evidence -

Since we just took all that time and effort going through the grammatical rules of Hebrew I'll discuss the Linguistic approach first. Initially, however, let's see what other learned scholars, lexicographers, and/or grammarians have to say.

Gesenius, in his Grammar, while discussing the concepts of the Qere/Kethiv, says the following²⁶:

Other instances are: יִשְׁכָּר (Q. יִשְׁכָּר) Gn 30¹⁸ &c., see the *Lexicon*, and Baer and Delitzsch, *Genesis*, p. 84, and below, note to § 47 b; יְרוּשָׁלַם (Q. יְרוּשָׁלַיִם), properly יְרוּשָׁלַיִם; יְהוָה (Q. אֲדֹנָי *the Lord*), or (after אֲדֹנָי) יְהוָה (Q. אֱלֹהִים) properly יְהוָה *Yahwè* (cf. § 102 m, and § 135 q, note); on שְׁנַיִם, שְׁתַּיִם for שְׁנֵי, שְׁתֵּי, see § 97 d, end.

In another section²⁷ he says:

m Rem. The divine name יְהוָה, which has not its original vowels (יְהוָה) but those of אֲדֹנָי (see § 17 c), except that the י has simple not compound *S^ewá*, takes the prefixes also, after the manner of אֲדֹנָי, thus בְּיְהוָה, לְיְהוָה, וְיְהוָה, מִיְהוָה (since they are to be read בְּאֲדֹנָי, לְאֲדֹנָי, וְאֲדֹנָי, מִאֲדֹנָי); for the א of אֲדֹנָי, as of אֲרָנִים, אֲרָנִים, &c. (see below), *quiesces* after the prefixes ב, ל, ו, but is *audible* after מ (for מֵן), ש (no instance in the O. T.), and ה (in הָאֲרָנִים Dt 10²⁷, ψ 136³, the article, not הֲ interrog., is intended; the only example with ה interrog., Jer 8¹⁹, is to be pointed הָיְהוָה, i.e. הָאֲדֹנָי, not הֵיְהוָה). Hence the rule, מֹשֶׁה מוֹצִיא מֹשֶׁה, ה, ש, מ make the א audible), וְכָלֵב מְבִיִּים and כָּלֵב מְבִיִּים (i.e. ו, כ, ל, ב allow it to quiesce).¹—As regards the other plural forms of אֲדֹנָי, elision of the א always takes place after ב, ו, ל, except in the form אֲדֹנָיו, thus לְאֲדֹנָיָהּ, &c.; but לְאֲדֹנָיָם, &c., לְאֲדֹנָיוּ, &c., לְאֲדֹנָיהֶם.

There are several other locations between his Grammar and Lexicon where he illustrates his learned opinion, in addition to proving that the traditionally accepted pronunciation יְהוָה (*Y'howah*) is not original based on the adjectival and pronoun behaviors surrounding it,

²⁶ Gesenius, Wilhelm. *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1910. \$17c.

²⁷ Gesenius, Wilhelm. *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1910. \$102m.

amongst other things. We have gone through these in great detail in the previous sections above. What is important to note about these two sections in Gesenius' grammar, though, is that he states in no uncertain terms that the pronunciation of the Name is יהוה, *Yah'weh* (ē-ă-û-ě).

Franz Delitzsch, the famed translator of the Greek New Testament into Hebrew, originally concluded the Name was *Yahawa* (יהוה?). This information can be found in the First Edition of his "Biblical Commentary on the Psalms." Later, however, after correspondence²⁸ back and forth with a trusted friend and Hebrew scholar, Franz Deitrich, he was persuaded differently.

After this the Second, Third, and Fourth editions were produced. In the preface of his Second Edition we read the following²⁹:

NOTE ON יהוה.

Jahve is (1) the traditional pronunciation, and (2) the pronunciation to be presupposed in accordance with the laws of formation and of vowel sounds. It is the traditional, for Theodoret and Epiphanius transcribe 'Iaβé. The mode of pronunciation 'Aïá (not 'Iaβá), on the contrary, is the reproduction of the form of the name יה, and the mode of pronunciation 'Iaô of the form of the name יהו, which although occurring only in the Old Testament in composition, had once, according to traces that can be relied on, an independent existence. Also the testimonies of the Talmud and post-talmudical writings require the final sound to be הַֿ, and the corresponding name by which God calls Himself, יהוה, is authentic security for this ending. When it is further con-

²⁸ Delitzsch, Franz. *Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*. 15 Oct. 2015. <<https://archive.org/stream/zeitschriftfrd04berluoft#page/n289/mode/2up>>. Pages 280-298.

²⁹ Delitzsch, Franz. *Biblical Commentary on the Psalms*. Edinburgh, UK. T. & T. Clark, 1853. Preface: Note on יהוה.

sidered that יְהוָה (whence יְהוֹה) according to analogous contractions has grown out of יְהוֹה, and not out of יְהוָה, and that the Hebrew language exhibits no proof of any transition from הַֿ to הַֿ which would not at the same time be a transition from the masculine to the feminine, it must be conceded that the pronunciation *Jahve* is to be regarded as the original pronunciation. The mode of pronunciation *Jehova* has only come up within the last three hundred years; our own "*Jahavā*" [in the first edition] was an innovation. We now acknowledge the patristic *Ἰαβέ*, and hope to have another opportunity of substantiating in detail what is maintained in this prefatory note.

He abandoned his previous view in favor of *Jahve*, which in English would be pronounced *Yahwe*, exactly the same as was proposed and established by Gesenius.

This raises the question: "Where in the world did Gesenius and Delitzsh get their views of this?" Well, unfortunately Gesenius never lays it out in one single section of his Grammar or Lexicon. However, the information necessary to determine where he derived his view is readily available in his Grammar if it is studied in detail. We will approach the following from two directions: Firstly, from the morphological and phonological concepts of Biblical Hebrew. Secondly, from the derived forms of the Name that we have present in the Hebrew text today (prefix, suffix, and shortened forms).

- Direction #1 – Morphology/Phonology -

Gesenius, discussing what are known as "Verbal Nouns" (i.e. nouns that derive from various forms of verbs) has the following to say³⁰:

³⁰ Gesenius, Wilhelm. Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1910. §84d.

In nouns of the perfect stem, the vowels *i* and *u* indicate intransitive formations, the vowel *a* a transitive sense. In nouns of the imperfect stem on the contrary, *u* and *i*, being characteristic vowels, indicate a transitive and *a* an intransitive sense: for *yaqtülü* is imperfect of the transitive perfect *qatala*, and *yaqtälü* imperfect of the intransitive perfects *qalila* and *qatula*, &c. This explains how nouns, apparently identical in form, may yet in sense belong to different classes: a *qull*-form from a *u*-imperfect has a transitive meaning, but the same form from a *u*-perfect has an intransitive meaning. This double system of perfect and imperfect forms runs through the whole scheme of noun-formation, not only the forms connected with the conjugations, but also the forms with prefixes and suffixes.

A couple points need to be mentioned here to properly understand this portion. First, when illustrating verb forms in Hebrew Grammars, grammarians universally use the verb קָטַל, *qatal*. This is because it is a “regular” verb that conjugates accordingly in all forms and is thus easy to reference and display. So, when words such as *qatala* and *yaqtülü* are found above the *q-t-l* in the words are placed to represent the 3-letter root of the verb being used. To determine what a word would look like in that form for a different root we simply replace the *q-t-l* with the corresponding letters of the root. In our case the root we already established is הָוַי, *h-w-y*.

Second, we need to understand that the Name is in the Imperfect tense. This is also universally acknowledged by various lexicographers and grammarians. The י–prefix identifies it as such. The verb’s meaning, *to be*, also renders it an “intransitive” verb³¹. Thus, the relevant portion in Gesenius’ Grammar above for our purposes would read:

“for *yahwüyü* is imperfect of the transitive *hawaya*, and *yahwäyü* imperfect of the intransitive perfects *hawiya* and *hawuya*.”

Gesenius is discussing what are known as “ground forms.” Ground forms are the forms of Hebrew verbs as they derived from a much older, primitive language. Biblical Hebrew scholar Joshua Blau in his *Phonology and Morphology of Biblical Hebrew* states the following about verbal nouns that end in *-ayu*, like our *yahwäyü* above³²:

“3.4.5.2 A **word-final triphthong** composed of an originally short vowel and *yu*, *yi*, *wu*, *wi* changes to *segol* (spelled הֶ-), e.g. **samaniyu/i* > שְׁמוֹנֶה ‘eight (FS)’; **yagliyu* > **yigliyu* > יִגְלֶה ‘he will be exiled’; **galiyu/i* > גּוֹלֶה ‘exiled’; **sadayu/i* ‘field’ > שָׂדֵה; **mariyu/i* ‘teacher’ > מוֹרֶה (The nouns here are the absolute forms. For construct forms, see immediately below.)”

³¹ “Intransitive Verb.” *Dictionary.com*. 15 Oct. 2015.

<<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/intransitive%20verb>>.

³² Blau, Joshua. *Phonology and Morphology of Biblical Hebrew*. Eisenbrauns, 2010. Section 3.4.5.2.

So, the phonological and morphological evidence shows that the ending of our *yahwäyü* verbal noun, with the originally short vowel *pataḥ* (ǎ) followed by *yu*, becomes *yahweh* or יהוה. Thus far the evidence is pretty strong for Yahweh being a very possible and even very plausible pronunciation.

- Direction #2 – Derived Forms -

We now need to investigate whether the form יהוה can be explained from the various derived forms in the Hebrew text. Here are the three derived forms that we have:

- יהו - used as the prefix of theophoric names
- יהו - used as the suffix of theophoric names
- יה - the abbreviated form of the Name, most often used poetically

What is evident from the first two forms initially is that when they are joined to another word the orthographic ה- is elided. Let's examine the suffix form first. We do this because the suffix form doesn't undergo any vowel changes as the prefix form does due to its position in the words it is found (more on the vowel changes below). Vowel changes occur due to other, non-positional rules, however.

As previously mentioned, in all derived forms of the Name the ה- is elided. So, eliding this from our starting, full form יהוה makes it יהו. This is a very confusing and unintelligible Hebrew word as-is. In fact, it cannot remain this way and be a legitimate word. We read the following about this specific scenario in Gesenius' grammar³³:

(b) When ו and י without a vowel would stand at the end of the *d* word after *quiescent Šewā*, they are either wholly rejected and only orthographically replaced by ה (e.g. בָּכָה from *bikhy*, as well as the regularly formed בָּכָה *weeping*; cf. § 93 *x*) or become again vowel letters. In the latter case י becomes a homogeneous *Hireq*, and also attracts to itself the tone, whilst the preceding vowel becomes *Šewā* (e.g. פָּרָה from *piry*, properly *pariy*); ו is changed sometimes into a toneless *u* (e.g. תָּהוּ from *tuhw*).

³³ Gesenius, Wilhelm. *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1910. §24d.

In the full form **יְהוָה** the *Shewa* under the **ה** is known as a silent, or quiescent *Shewa*. The resulting form from the elision, **יְהוּ**, still retains this quiescent *Shewa*, but it now leaves the vowel-less **ו** at the end of the word. This meets the criteria of the above rule perfectly. As a result, per the rule the **ו** becomes the unchangeable long vowel of the homogenous class. In the case of a **י**, it becomes a Hireq-yod - **יִ**. In our case the **ו** becomes a Shureq - **וֹ**. The quiescent *Shewa* is also dropped. Thus we are now left with the form **יְהוֹ**. So, this is close to the suffix form above, but not exact. The initial vowel of the suffix form is a Qames while the initial vowel of the form we have thus far is a Pataḥ. However, the vowel changes aren't yet complete.

In Hebrew, when a syllable goes from being closed (ending in a consonant), as it is in **וָה**, to open (i.e. ending in a vowel), as in **וֹהוּ**, the preceding vowel must lengthen to compensate for the change. This rule can also be found in Gesenius' Grammar³⁴:

3. *Open or simple syllables have a long vowel, whether they have the tone as in בָּרָךְ in thee, יֵלֵךְ he goes, or are toneless as in עֲנַב, קֶטֶל, a bunch of grapes.*³ A long vowel (Qames, less frequently Sere) is especially common in an open syllable before the tone (pretonic vowel), e. g. לֵבָב, יָקִים, קֶטֶל, לֵהֵם.¹

In names such as **יִרְמְיָהוּ** *Yirmeyahu* (Jeremiah) the tone falls on the open syllable **יְ**, as indicated by the accent. There are a few, very specific exceptions to this rule³⁵, none of which apply in our case. So, we now have our current suffix form of **יְהוֹ** being changed into its final, grammatically correct form - **וֹהוּ**.

Next we will deal with the prefix form. For this form we are going to use the name **יְהוֹשֻׁעַ** *Yhoshua* for our illustrations. The prefix form is derived from the use of the suffix form being placed in a different position in the word. Any student of Hebrew will readily admit that as a word becomes longer for any reason, whether it is the appending of the theophoric element as in *Yhoshua* or because the word is becoming plural, the vowels change in the word. Gesenius goes into great detail on this issue in his Grammar³⁶. A very simple example we can use to illustrate this vowel change is if we use the word **דָּבָר** *davar* and pluralize it. When pluralized it becomes **דְּבָרִים**, *d'varim*. The addition of letters in a Hebrew word by definition changes the syllable on which the tone falls. The syllable on which the tone falls is called the "tonic"

³⁴ Gesenius, Wilhelm. *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1910. \$26e.

³⁵ Gesenius, Wilhelm. *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1910. \$26f-l.

³⁶ Gesenius, Wilhelm. *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1910. \$27, et al.

syllable, the syllable before the tonic syllable is called the “pretonic” syllable, and the syllable before that is called the “propretonic syllable” (רַמְיָהוּ above is another example that has all three types). Different grammars use different words to describe the last syllable type, but the concept remains the same – it is the syllable two places before the tonic syllable.

In the word דְּבָרַי the tonic syllable is a closed one - בָּרַי. Therefore the pretonic syllable is דְּ. Pluralizing it adds a whole new syllable, though - יַיִם. The tone falls on that syllable, making דְּ the pretonic syllable and יַיִם the propretonic syllable. Gesenius describes this shift as follows³⁷:

Thus the change into *Šewá* takes place in—
k: (a) The *ā* and *ē* of the first syllable, especially in the inflexion of nouns, e. g. דְּבָרַי *word*, plur. דְּבָרַיִם; גְּדוֹלָה *great*, fem. גְּדוֹלָהּ; לֵבָב *heart*,

The *ā* (*qameṣ*) in דְּ reduces to a *Shewa* in its propretonic position. So we now go back and apply this rule to the suffix form יְהוֹ when it is added to the beginning of another word to form a proper noun. The name יְהוֹשֻׁעַ is made from the joining of two words - יְשׁוּעַ, a modified form of the verb יָשַׁע and the modified suffix form of יְהוֹ. Putting those two together with no further vowel modifications we get יְהוֹשֻׁעַ. Indeed some would argue that *Yahushua*, as that form would be pronounced, is the more accurate pronunciation of Messiah’s name. However, they would not be accounting for the very important vowel shift rules we have been discussing and therefore defy the rules of Hebrew grammar either willfully or ignorantly (more likely).

As can be found in the Masoretic Text, the name יְהוֹשֻׁעַ has the tone falling on the final syllable - יְשׁוּעַ, *shua*. This makes הוֹ the pretonic syllable and יְ the propretonic syllable. Using our incorrect form above, יְהוֹשֻׁעַ, we apply the vowel change rule to the propretonic syllable, which causes it to reduce to a *Shewa*, resulting in יְהוֹשֻׁעַ – *Y’hushua*. What happens to the *shureq* in the הוֹ syllable is due to a concept known as vowel dissimilation, where a vowel in a modified word changes to one completely heterogeneous. Here is what Gesenius has to say on the matter in his Grammar³⁸:

³⁷ Gesenius, Wilhelm. Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1910. §27k.

³⁸ Gesenius, Wilhelm. Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1910. §27w.

70 6. To the chapter on vowel changes belongs lastly the *dissimilation* of vowels, i. e. the change of one vowel into another entirely heterogeneous, in order to prevent two similar, or closely related vowels, from following one another in the same word.² Hence לֹלֵא for *lú ló* (unless). Cf. also חִיצוֹן from חִיץ; ראשון from ראש; תִּיכוֹן from תִּיָּק; נִכְחוֹ from נִכַּח; עִירִם from עִיר; most probably also יְלוֹר *offspring*, קַפּוֹר *porcupine*, for יָלַ', קַפּ', see § 68 c, note.— On the proper names יְהוּא and יִשָּׁע, which were formerly explained in the same way, see now Prätorius, *ZDMG.* 1905, p. 341 f.

The examples given above that are applicable to our case are those in which the total number of syllables changes. For example, ראשון (“first”) comes from the word ראש (“head”). The addition of the syllable changes the “o”-class vowel *holem* to a completely different class of vowel – *hireq*, an “i”-class vowel. Other examples are also found above that I need not detail explicitly. For our case, the “u”-class vowel *shureq* in our יהושע changes through vowel dissimilation to an “o”-class vowel – *holem-waw*, making our final form - יהושע.

Now the final derived form to address is יהי. Davidson, Gesenius, and others agree that this is an “abbreviated” form of the name, not a contraction. This distinction is important because there are teachers out there who desire to say that יהי is a contraction of יהוה, the first and last sounds being maintained. To teach this, however, would be to oppose those who have been learned, taught from, and trusted regarding Hebrew grammar for decades. Gesenius, in his lexical entry for this Name³⁹, states that the omission of the toneless *shureq* of the prefix form results in the abbreviated form:

יהי *Jah* a word abbreviated from יהוה *Jehovah*, or rather from the more ancient pronunciation יהוה or יהוה [this rests on the *assumption* that one of these contradictory pronunciations is the more ancient], whence by apocope יהי (as ישתחו for ישתחוה) then by the omission of the unaccented וי, יהי, *Lehrg.* 157. Either of these forms is used *promiscuously*

(Note: the statement in square brackets [] is that of the editor, not Gesenius himself)

³⁹ Gesenius, Wilhelm. *Gesenius' Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures.* Entry for יהי.

The ה then takes a *mappiq* in the middle to emphasize its consonantal value (which is never lost in the full or other derived forms). If the *mappiq* isn't added, the consonantal value of the ה is eliminated completely, not to mention we never find a version of the Name with only a ה. This version would be properly pronounced *Yahh* (with a forceful outward breath completing the Name). Note also that in this lexical entry Gesenius confirms our conclusion above of the derivation of the suffix form is correct.



In conclusion, we can see that יהוה, as proposed and accepted by Gesenius, Delitzsch, and many other grammarians since, can be proven grammatically from antiquity and through its derived forms.

- Historical Evidence -

In addition to the grammatical explanation of the Name the same pronunciation is testified to in many historical witnesses from the 2nd century CE through the 5th century CE. Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150 CE – 215 CE) states the following in his *Stromata*⁴⁰:

κέκρυπται διακονία καὶ τοὺς ἐν αὐτῇ πονουμένους πολὺ τῶν ἔξω 5.6.34.4 εἶργει. πάλιν τὸ παραπέτασμα τῆς εἰς τὰ ἅγια τῶν ἁγίων παρόδου, κίονες τέτταρες αὐτόθι, ἁγίας μήνυμα τετράδος διαθηκῶν παλαιῶν, 5.6.34.5 ἀτὰρ καὶ τὸ τετράγραμμον ὄνομα τὸ μυστικόν, ὃ περιέκειντο οἷς μόνοις τὸ ἄδυτον βάσιμον ἦν· λέγεται δὲ Ἰ̅α̅ο̅υ̅ε̅, ὃ μεθερμηνεύεται 5.6.34.6 ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἐσόμενος. καὶ μὴν καὶ καθ' Ἑλληνας θεὸς τὸ ὄνομα 5.6.34.7 τετράδα περιέχει γραμμάτων. εἰς δὲ τὸν νοητὸν

The translation of 5.6.34.4 through 5.6.34.6 is as follows:

“Again, there is the veil of the entrance into the holy of holies. Four pillars there are, the sign of the sacred tetrad of the ancient covenants. Further, the mystic name of four letters which was affixed to those alone to whom the adytum was accessible, is called Ἰαουε, which is interpreted, ‘Who is and shall be.’ The name of God, too, among the Greeks contains four letters.”

⁴⁰ Clement of Alexandria. *Stromata*. 15 Oct. 2015.
<http://kharzar.skeptik.net/pgm/PG_Migne/Clement%20of%20Alexandria_PG%2008-09/Stromata.pdf>. 5.6.34.5.

The relevant word for us, as it pertains to the current study, is that which is in bold: Ἰαουε. In this word the letter ἰ (*iota*) is pronounced like “i” in the word “machine”; the α (*alpha*) is pronounced like the “a” in the word “father”; the letters ο (*omicron*) and υ (*upsilon*) form what is known as a diphthong⁴¹ and combine to make the same sound that the English letters o and u make in the word “soup”; finally, the letter ε (*epsilon*) is pronounced like “e” in the word “egg.” Put them together and you get “ē-ă-û-ě,” the exact same phonetic pronunciation as the Hebrew יהוה above. Clement, unlike the ultra-orthodox Jews before him, had no need to maintain the superstitions regarding the pronunciation of the Name. In other words, he had no motives to hide the pronunciation of the Name and therefore stated it very matter-of-factly.

Other testimonies as to the pronunciation of the Name come from Epiphanius of Salamis (ca. 310 CE – 403 CE) and Theodoret of Cyrus (ca. 393 CE – 466 CE). In Epiphanius’ *Panarion* we read the following⁴²:

The translation of verse 10 is as follows:

“‘El’ means ‘God’; ‘Elohim,’ ‘God forever’; ‘Eli,’ ‘my God’; ‘Shaddai,’ ‘the Sufficient’; ‘Rabboni,’ ‘the Lord’; ‘Yah,’ ‘Lord’; ‘Adonai,’ ‘He who is existent Lord.’ ‘Yave’ means, ‘He who was and is, He who forever is,’ as he translates for Moses, “‘He who is’ hath sent me, shalt thou say unto them.” ‘Elyon’ is ‘highest.’ And ‘Sabaoth’ means, ‘of hosts’; hence ‘Lord Sabaoth,’ means, ‘Lord of Hosts.’”

In Theodoret’s *Quæstiones in Exodum* we read the following⁴³:

⁴¹ “Diphthong.” [Dictionary.com](http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/diphthong). 15 Oct. 2015. <<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/diphthong>>.

⁴² Holl, Karl. *Epiphanius (Ancoratus und Panarion)*. Leipzig, 1922. <<https://archive.org/stream/epiphanius02epip#page/n97/mode/2up>> Page 86.

⁴³ Theodoret. *Quæstiones in Exodum*. <https://books.google.com/books?id=AxxRAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false> 15 Oct. 2015. Col. 244.

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Quidnam hoc est : « Et nomen meum Dominus non indicavi illis » ?

Ostendit quanto honore, quantaque benevolentia sit eum prosecutus. Quod enim patriarchas celaverat nomen, hoc ipsi aperuit. Dixit enim illi : « *Ego sum qui sum* ». Hoc autem apud Hebræos dicitur inenarrabile : prohibitum enim est eis hoc lingua pronuntiare. Scribitur autem quatuor litteris, et ob id appellant illud quadrilaterum. Inscriptum etiam fuit illud laminæ aureæ, quæ vittæ capitis alligata pendeat ad frontem pontificis. Samaritani porro vocant illud *Jabe*, Judæi vero *Aia*.

ΕΡΩΤ. ΙΕ΄.

Τί ἐστὶ, « Καὶ τὸ ὄνομά μου Κύριος οὐκ ἐδήλωσα αὐτοῖς ; »

Διδάσκει πόσῃς αὐτὸν καὶ τιμῇς καὶ εὐμενείας ἡξίωσεν. Ὁ γὰρ τοῖς πατριάρχαις οὐκ ἐδήλωσεν ὄνομα, τοῦτο αὐτῷ δῆλον ἐποίησεν· ἔφη γὰρ πρὸς αὐτὸν, « Ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ὢν. » Τοῦτο δὲ παρ' Ἑβραίοις ἀφραστον ὀνομάζεται· ἀπείρηται γὰρ αὐτοῖς τοῦτο διὰ τῆς γλώττης προφέρειν. Γράφεται δὲ διὰ τῶν (67) τεσσάρων στοιχείων· διὸ καὶ τετράγραμμον αὐτὸ λέγουσι. Τοῦτο δὲ καὶ τῷ πετάλῳ ἐπεγέγραπτο τῷ χρυσῷ, ὃ τῷ μετώπῳ τοῦ ἀρχιερέως ἐπιτίθετο τῇ ταινίᾳ (68) τῆς κεφαλῆς προσδεσμούμενον. Καλοῦσι δὲ αὐτὸ Σαμαρεῖται μὲν Ἰαβὲ, Ἰουδαῖοι δὲ Ἀϊά (69).

A translation of the relevant portion of the Latin version reads as follows:

“Again, it was found written on leaves of gold, which were bound by linen cloths to the front of the head of the high priest. By the Samaritans it was called Yave but by the Jews Aia.”

Both of these two testify to the name sounding like the Hebrew equivalent to the Greek Ἰαβέ. In their day the letter β (*beta*) was pronounced as a labial spirant (as a “v”), thus resulting in the pronunciation Yahveh. Once again, moving that into the Hebrew equivalent using the sounds available, knowing what the Hebrew consonants are, we would arrive once again at יהוה.

Theodoret’s testimony is especially interesting as he says it was spoken as such by the Samaritans. In the Jerusalem Talmud we read:

R. Joshua b. Levi said, “Even if one has said, ‘When a man has on the skin of his body a swelling or an eruption or a spot, and it turns into a leprous disease on the skin of his body’, and then has spat—he has no portion in the world to come.”

Abba Saul says, “Also: he who pronounces the divine Name as it is spelled out.”

R. Mana said, “For example, the Cutheans, who take an oath thereby.”

R. Jacob bar Aha said, “It is written YH[WH] and pronounced AD[onai].”

These “Cutheans” the Rabbis mention are none other than the Samaritans. It is beyond the scope of this study to go through the history of that; I will let you research that on your own. The above scenario begs the question, though: “If the Samaritans weren’t pronouncing the Name correctly, why would the Rabbis even care? If they pronounced the Name ‘Joe-Bob,’ would the same curse have been spoken over them?” I’d say that is doubtful.

So, though the latter two witnesses are relatively late, both testify to the exact same pronunciation. A pronunciation which would have likely been retained in that closed culture, and was condemned by the Pharisaic Rabbis a couple centuries earlier.

- Ἰαβέ = *Yaphe?* -

As a brief interjection there is another common argument that needs to be briefly addressed. It has been proposed by one author⁴⁴ that the Ἰαβέ of Epiphanius and Theodoret is actually equivalent to the Hebrew word יָפֵה (yapheh), meaning “fair, beautiful,”⁴⁵ and not the Hebrew יְהוָה (Yahweh). However, not only is this pure and unconfirmed assumption, but it is completely illogical as well given all the information above and below. First, in Greek there is a perfectly good letter that expresses the exact same “ph” sound as the Hebrew letter פ (pe) – the Greek φ (phi). Why would both of these native-Greek speakers use a completely different and illogical letter when they had a perfectly equivalent option? If they were trying to spell Yapheh in Greek they would have written Ἰαφέ, but, as we can see above, they didn’t do that.

Second, while the gross assumption may be applied to Theodoret’s writing, it is impossible to apply it to the testimonies of the two older witnesses. Both Clement and Epiphanius not only provide their transliterations of the name, Ἰαουε and Ἰαβέ, respectively, but they also provide their understandings of the meaning of the Name as well, “Who is and shall be” and “He who was and is, He who forever is,” respectively. Clearly neither of them thought the words they were writing carried the meaning of “fair, beautiful.” The aforementioned author should consider quoting the quotes they use against the pronunciation Yahweh in context to give his readers the full story.

CONCLUSION

We have now examined the phonology, morphology, and grammar of the Hebrew language, as well as the testimonies from several ancient witnesses that heard the Name spoken first

⁴⁴ Johnson, Keith E. יְהוָה: His Hallowed Name Revealed Again, Second Edition. Minneapolis, MN: 2010.

⁴⁵ Gesenius, Wilhelm. Gesenius’ Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures. Entry for יָפֵה.

person. In light of all of the evidence I believe the most probable and accurate pronunciation for the tetragrammaton is יהוה, Yahweh (ē-ă-û-ě). Having said that, there is no way we can know this with **100%** certainty at this time. I am not aware of anyone living today who was with Moses on the mountain when the Father told him His Name. However, unlike the alternative options above, the pronunciation “Yahweh” carries with it the weight of proper Hebrew grammatical structure, phonology, and morphology, the testimony of the worlds most renowned, taught, and trusted Hebrew Grammarians and Lexicographers, and the testimony of many ancient witnesses. One should be very confident when speaking the Name using this pronunciation, in my personal opinion. To sum it up in a sentence I’ll let Drs. Brown, Driver, and Briggs speak:

“The traditional Ἰαβέ of Theodoret and Epiphanius, the יהוה-, -יהו of compound n.pr. and the contracted form יה, all favour יהוה.”⁴⁶

May Yahweh bless all those who read this study to the glory of His Name.

HalleluYah!

⁴⁶ Brown, Francis. Driver, S.R. Briggs, Charles A. A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament. Oxford, UK. 1939. Page 218.