

# Pronouncing the Creator's Name

By Norman B. Willis

## TRADITION VS. SCRIPTURE:

Most scholars agree that the Creator's name is four letters long in Hebrew.

This name is often called, "the Tetragrammaton", meaning, "a word of four letters."

# TRADITION VS. SCRIPTURE:

In Hebrew,  
The Tetragrammaton is spelled,  
Yod-Hay-Vav-Hay.

יהוה

# TRADITION VS. SCRIPTURE:

The Third Commandment,  
tells us not to take our  
Creator's name in vain.

However,  
people differ as to what this  
commandment really means.

Traditional Judaism interprets this to mean we should not pronounce the Tetragrammaton, but that we should substitute other words for it, such as “Adonai” (אֲדֹנָי), (meaning ‘Master of Masters’), or “HaShem” (הַשֵּׁם, the Name).

We explain why this practice, while well-meaning, is against Scripture, in the study, 'The Set-Apart Names', found on the Nazarene Israel website.

In ancient Israel, Israelites were  
expected to pronounce the  
Creator's name.

In Ruth 2:4, we see  
the Creator's name used  
as an everyday greeting,  
and also a blessing.

In the High Priestly Blessing,  
at Numbers 6:24,  
the Creator commands us  
to put His name on His people  
three separate times,  
so they can receive their blessing.

And in Psalms 91 and Verse 14  
the Creator tells us  
He will bless those  
who know His name,  
and call on His name.

There are many more examples of why the Creator wants us to use and to pronounce His name, but these should illustrate the point that we are to pronounce His name, and not hide it.

Our purpose here is to explain how we can pronounce the Tetragrammaton, for those who understand that our Maker wants us to make His name known.

## DISAGREEMENT:

This, however,  
represents a challenge,  
for scholars disagree  
as to how the Divine Name  
is correctly pronounced.

We will not go into all of the  
details here,  
however,

We have some tutorials on  
how to pronounce the  
basic Hebrew letters  
(and their associated vowels)  
on the Nazarene Israel website,  
[www.nazareneisrael.org](http://www.nazareneisrael.org).

However, just to review,  
The Hebrew letter Yod (or Yud)



is pronounced:  
yuh, ee or yee,  
depending on its vowel;  
but basically an E, I or Y sound.

# The Hebrew letter Hay

ה

is pronounced:  
ah, eh, or huh  
(basically it contains  
an 'h' sound).

# The Hebrew letter Vav



is pronounced  
vuh, wuh, oh, or oo,  
depending on its vowel,  
but basically it gives a V, a W,  
an O or a U sound.

And again, the Hebrew letter Hay

ה

is basically pronounced:  
like 'huh', 'ah' or 'eh',  
as if it contained an 'h'.

We'll talk about how  
all these letters fit together  
in a moment,  
but first, let us discuss  
the Hebrew Text in which  
our Creator's name is found,

because it will show us some  
important things about  
how His name  
is and is not pronounced.

# THE HEBREW MASORETIC TEXT

The Hebrew Text that underlies most mainstream Scripture translations today is called the Hebrew Masoretic Text.

# THE HEBREW MASORETIC TEXT

It was compiled by a group called 'The Masoretes', which translates roughly to, 'the traditionalists.'

# THE HEBREW MASORETIC TEXT

The Masoretic Text  
was compiled between roughly  
700 and 1000 CE,  
or roughly seven hundred to  
a thousand years  
after the Messiah and His apostles.

Like English, Hebrew is made up of both consonants and vowels; and, much like English, the pronunciation of letter combinations can change depending on how they are put together.

For example, consider the words:

Through

Cough

Bough

Brought. and

Tough.

These words all contain the letters  
O-U-G-H,  
yet they are all  
pronounced differently.

Hebrew can be similar.

The Hebrew Masoretic Text  
supplies certain vowels  
with the Tetragrammaton.

Scholars differ as to how and when these vowels were put there, but if one pronounces the Tetragrammaton the way it is spelled in the Hebrew Masoretic Text, one gets the pronunciation, “Yehovah.”

יְהוָה

Here the Yud  
with the two dots below it  
sounds like “Yee.”

יְהוָה

The Hay makes an  
“h” sound, and sometimes  
an ‘O’ sound is supplied  
by adding an additional dot  
above the Hay and to the left.

יְהוָה

The combination of the Vav, its vowel that looks like a small letter T, and the final Hay, sounds like “vah.”

יְהוָה

However, this pronunciation  
is not without problems.

יְהוָה

The first problem is that it requires the artificial insertion of an 'O' sound just after the first letter Hay.

Another problem is that while Hebrew today uses both consonants and vowels, the vowels were never recorded in writing in any document before the Hebrew Masoretic Text.

That is to say that  
the Masoretic Text, (which was  
written circa 700 to 1000 CE)  
is the first document on record  
that uses Hebrew vowel points.

No existing Hebrew document  
written prior to  
the Hebrew Masoretic Text  
has an written vowel points in it.

## DEAD SEA SCROLLS:

For example,

there are no written vowel points  
in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

The Dead Sea Scrolls were written  
perhaps in the first century,  
approximately 700 to 1000 years  
earlier.

Many scholars ask  
how we can know that  
the Hebrew language really  
uses vowels.

It is difficult, if not impossible to make sense of Hebrew without understanding vowels, but scholars ask how we can know that the vowels recorded in the Masoretic Text are the right ones.

There is an old children's game called "Telephone", whereby information is passed by mouth around a circle. After so many children pass the information, it comes out being very distorted.

## THE SEPTUAGINT (LXX)

Along this same vein,  
we might also note that  
the Hebrew Masoretic Text  
disagrees with another version  
called the Septuagint.

## THE SEPTUAGINT (LXX)

The Septuagint is not widely favored in Nazarene-Messianic circles, probably because it is written in Greek.

However, the Septuagint was originally written as an official translation of the priestly Hebrew scrolls, and this translation was officially commissioned by the High Priest, for the use of other Jews.

Since it was an official translation,  
for use by other Jews,  
it should be a perfect translation  
of the Hebrew texts that were  
in use at the time of its translation,  
some 300 to 400 years before Yeshua.

## THE SEPTUAGINT (LXX)

At the time the Septuagint was translated, it was considered highly authoritative, and it was widely used, and trusted.

So if we remember that the Septuagint was an official translation of the Hebrew texts that the priests were using, we can see some surprising things.

The Renewed Covenant  
(or some say the New Testament)  
quotes many passages which  
do not appear in the  
Hebrew Masoretic Text  
(which was issued later).

However, these same passages do appear in the Septuagint, which was issued perhaps 300 to 400 years before it.

Some Jewish scholars tells us that the fact that the Renewed Covenant does not match the Hebrew Masoretic Text (which was issued some 1400 years later) is proof that the Renewed Covenant is unreliable.

They say that since the  
Renewed Covenant matches  
the more ancient document  
but does not match  
the more current document,  
it is unreliable.

However,  
this is generally the exact opposite  
of how accuracy in ancient texts  
is normally determined.

Normally the earlier a document is,  
the more authoritative  
and reliable  
it is considered to be.

Since the Septuagint was an official translation of the priestly Hebrew Text, the fact that the Masoretic does not match the Septuagint seems to indicate that it is the Masoretic Text which is the one that is not reliable.

Some scholars see this as evidence that the Masoretic Text may have been altered, perhaps in order to undermine the reputation of the Renewed Covenant.

Sometimes it happens today that believers in Yeshua read the Renewed Covenant, and then they look for the passages that are quoted from the Tanach (or the OT), and they are unable to find them.

Or, the passages read differently  
in the Tanach than they do in the  
Renewed Covenant.

These then lose their faith,  
because they see the  
Renewed Covenant  
as being unreliable.

Some scholars suggest that this was one of the Masoretes' secret purposes in issuing a 'Masoretic' Text.

These also point out that  
the term 'Masoretic'  
derives from the Hebrew word  
Masorah (מסורה),  
which refers to the furtherance  
of rabbinical traditions,

And we know that the  
rabbinical tradition is to  
deny Yeshua as the Messiah.

Yet while the Masoretic Text does appear to have been altered, it is nonetheless the most accurate extant Hebrew Tanach we have.

For these reasons,  
scholars continue to use it;  
and we can continue to use it,  
just so long as we are sure to  
check it  
against the Septuagint.

# TRADITION OF HIDING THE NAMES:

But how does this impact the  
Jewish tradition of  
hiding our Father's name?

## TRADITION OF HIDING THE NAMES:

Scholars differ as to exactly when, why and how the practice originated, but Jewish tradition is not to pronounce the Creator's name.

Some scholars believe that when the Jews went into Exile in Babylon, they stopped pronouncing the Father's name, so as to keep the Babylonians from speaking it.

They say that the Jews  
hid the Father's name,  
to keep non-Jews from  
'taking it in vain.'

## TRADITION OF HIDING THE NAMES:

There are other theories as to how this practice originated, but rabbinical tradition has become that of hiding, rather than speaking our Creator's name.

## TRADITION OF HIDING THE NAMES:

Rabbinical tradition is to use the term  
'Adonai' (meaning 'Master of Masters')  
during prayers,  
and 'HaShem' (meaning 'the Name')  
at all other times,

According to rabbinic tradition,  
the Divine Name is only to be spoken  
by the High Priest; and even then  
only once a year.

In order to keep the name  
from being pronounced  
by anyone else,  
the Divine Name was hidden  
from all but a few select persons,  
who were to pass it on from  
generation to generation.

It is commonly accepted that  
since rabbinical custom  
and tradition was to  
hide the name,

The Masoretes supplied vowels  
with the Tetragrammaton  
in order to indicate that  
those reading the text aloud  
should say, “Adonai.”

Others believe these vowel points were put there to disguise the true pronunciation, and to keep anyone but the elect few from speaking it.

Since there is a  
great deal of evidence  
to support both of these theories,  
many scholars reject the  
traditional pronunciation,  
“Yehovah.”

## HOW TO PRONOUNCE:

But if the Masoretes  
(or the Traditionalists) originally  
put their vowel points on the  
Creator's name in order to  
disguise it,  
then how is our Creator's Name  
pronounced?

## HOW TO PRONOUNCE:

Because Hebrew pronunciation can change, depending on the vowel and letter combinations, the truth is that no one really knows how the name is supposed to be pronounced.

## HOW TO PRONOUNCE:

However, there are several theories that have gained widespread acceptance.

To review,  
The Hebrew letter Yod (or Yud):



is pronounced:  
yuh, ee or yee,  
basically an E, I or Y sound.

The Hebrew letter Hay:

ה

is pronounced:  
ah, eh, or huh  
(basically an 'h' sound).

# The Hebrew letter Vav



is pronounced

vuh, wuh, oh, or oo.

either a V, W, an O, or a U sound.

And again, the Hebrew letter Hay:

ה

is basically pronounced  
like an 'h'.

Many scholars accept  
the following explanation  
as to how to pronounce  
the Divine Name:

יהוה

The letter Yud sounds  
like “Yee”

יהוה

The letter Hay sounds  
like '-ah'

יהוה

The letter Vav sounds like  
'-oo'

יהוה

And the final Hay  
sounds like 'eh.'

יהוה

This gives a pronunciation  
‘Yah-oo-eh’  
or ‘Yahu-eh.’

יהוה

This name is often written  
'Yahweh' in English.  
Others suggest 'Yahuweh.'  
Other variations exist.

It is a common mistake to try to apply English rules of grammar to Hebrew.

Let us remember that  
Hebrew grammar is different than  
English grammar.

Nonetheless,  
consider the English words,  
'Omni-' and 'potent',  
Together there are pronounced  
'omnipotent', which has a  
different sound.

One popular variation of the Tetragrammaton is to begin with the name of the tribe of Judah, which is “Yehudah”, (or some say “Yahudah”; but “Yehudah”).

יהודה

Subtract out the Dalet,  
which gives a 'D' sound,  
and one is left with "Yahuwah."  
The spelling is the same as  
the Tetragrammaton.

Whatever the correct  
pronunciation,  
we should remember not to place  
too much emphasis  
on how it is spelled in English.

There is no truly correct  
spelling in English,  
since English is not Hebrew  
or Aramaic.

We might also  
consider the possibility  
that there is no 'correct' pronunciation,  
per se.

Genesis 2 and Verse 7 tells us  
that YHWH breathed into man  
the 'breath of life.'

These suggest that יהוה  
is our 'Breath of Life';  
and that the sound of  
His name is supposed to  
approximate human breathing.

יהוה

The Yod-Hay sounds perhaps  
like “yee-ah”  
(or an inhaling sound)

יהוה

The Vav-Hay sounds perhaps  
like “oo-eh”  
(or an exhaling sound)

יהוה

(pronounce)

“yee-ah”

יהוה

(pronounce)

“oo-eh”

יְהוּה

(inhale)

“yee-ah”

יהוה

(exhale)

“oo-eh”

יְהוּה

(inhale)

“yee-ah”

יהוה

(exhale)

“oo-eh”

We might emphasize that  
this is only a hypothesis,  
and that no one really knows  
how to pronounce the Divine Name.

However, if this is true, then perhaps all of the softer pronunciations, Yahweh, Yahuweh, and Yahuwah might all be correct, since these all approximate the sound of human breath.

## THE TRUTH:

In all honesty,  
no one really knows  
how to pronounce the Divine Name,  
as the original pronunciation at the  
time of the Burning Bush was  
not recorded in writing.

YHWH is usually very specific  
about points that can be known;  
and yet the pronunciation of  
His name has been hidden from us.

Could it be that YHWH allowed  
the pronunciation of His name  
to be hidden from us,  
so He can see how His people  
treat each other  
when confusion exists?

1<sup>st</sup> John 4 and verse 8 tells us that  
YHWH is love;  
so if we have a deep,  
abiding relationship in Him,  
then our walk should reflect this.

If we are dealing with brother  
who are seeking Truth,  
and who are seeking YHWH,  
then shouldn't we show  
patience and love to our brothers?

May YHWH give all of us  
this patience and love,  
for every brother  
who is genuinely seeking to keep  
the Father's Instructions,  
because of his faith in Messiah.

אמן

In the Messiah's name,  
Amein.

For more resources:

[www.nazareneisrael.org](http://www.nazareneisrael.org)