

Is the Correct Pronunciation Known?

If people followed the pure doctrine of using the sacred name they would be compelled to surrender their doctrine of substitution. No longer could they claim that terms like Lord, God, Allah, *Adonai*, and the hybrid forms like Jehovah are acceptable in place of the sacred personal name Yahweh. Rather than admit error, religious leaders of various Christian groups have resorted to man-made philosophies and tenets and have devised yet one more reason why they need not utilize the sacred name יהוה. This more recently devised justification is called the “lost pronunciation.”

The “Lost Pronunciation”

The “lost pronunciation” hypothesis is based upon the circumstance that the ineffable name doctrine has been in effect among the Jews since the second century B.C.E.¹ Not only did the Jews forbid the use of the sacred name but when those reading Holy Writ came to this word they were ordered to read “*adonai*” or “*eloahim*” in its place. In the sixth and subsequent centuries C.E. (after Jewish scribes invented symbols for vowel points) the scribes went so far as to place the vowel points for “*adonai*” and “*eloahim*” with the letters of the sacred name as a reminder to the reader that the name Yahweh was not to be spoken and that *adonai* or *eloahim* were to be used as substitutes.² Further, none of the New Testament documents that have survived to us contain the sacred name. It is also known that the Roman Church, which came to be the embodiment of Christianity during the early Middle Ages, frowned on what they perceived as Judaizing. More important, they too had adopted the ineffable name doctrine.³ Therefore, this popular reasoning continues, the true pronunciation of the sacred name became lost in antiquity as a result of its disuse.

After making this assertion, religious leaders then conclude that, since we do not now possess the ancient pronunciation of the four Hebrew letters which form the sacred name, we are at liberty to freely choose a substitute word or hybrid word to take its place. For example, *The Popular and Critical Bible Encyclopaedia*, by Samuel Fallows, states:⁴

¹ For details see below Chap. XII, entitled, *The Prohibition Against the Sacred Name*.

² See our next Chap. entitled, *Should We Use 'Jehovah.'*

³ See below Chapter XVII, ns. 5, 8.

⁴ PCBE, 2, p. 914, s.v. Jehovah (1).

The true pronunciation of this name, by which God was known to the Hebrews, has been entirely lost, the Jews themselves scrupulously avoiding every mention of it, and substituting in its stead one or other of the words with whose proper vowel points it may happen to be written.

Likewise, the introduction to *The New English Bible* argues that, because the sacred name was “considered too sacred to be uttered,” in the “course of time” the true pronunciation “passed into oblivion.”⁵ *Harpers’ Bible Dictionary* states that “the known pronunciation was lost in the postexilic period.”⁶ Following the same line of logic the Jehovah Witness bible dictionary, entitled *Aid to Bible Understanding*, after going through an extensive process of proving that the sacred name יהוה was intended to be used and was extremely important, then dismantles everything it built by adding:⁷

Since certainty of pronunciation is not now attainable, there seems to be no reason for abandoning in English the well-known form “Jehovah” in favor of some other suggested pronunciation. . . . The purpose of words is to transmit thoughts; in English the name “Jehovah” identifies the true God, transmitting this thought more satisfactorily today than any of the suggested substitutes.

In another book published by this church we read that:⁸

The exact pronunciation of the name is not known today, but the most popular way of rendering it is “Jehovah.” . . . we have retained the form “Jehovah” because of people’s familiarity with it since the 14th century.

This popular argument for using a substitute in place of the sacred name demonstrates just how far religionists will go to justify their adherence to men’s doctrines rather than to keep Yahweh’s commandments. It side-steps the most basic logic. Why would Yahweh command that all men must call upon and use his sacred name—a name which he proclaims is eternal and a memorial to “all generations”—and then permit the pronunciation of that name to become lost and unattainable? Such a creator would either be very cruel, devising an unsolvable dilemma for men; or a bungler, who foolishly lost control of the situation and must now bail mankind out by permitting them to circumvent his own commandments.

⁵ NEB, p. xvi.

⁶ HBD, p. 685.

⁷ ABU, p. 885.

⁸ CGS, p. 10.

It is true that “the glory of *eloahim* is to conceal a matter,” but it is also just as true that “the glory of kings is to search out (that) matter.”⁹

Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. For everyone that asks receives, and he that seeks finds, and to him that knocks it shall be opened.¹⁰

The hard fact is, as the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* concludes, “The true pronunciation of the name YHWH [Yahweh] WAS NEVER LOST.”¹¹ Those who claim that the true pronunciation is now unattainable have either, for whatever reasons, not pressed their investigation or have simply chosen to ignore the hard evidence.

The Four Vowels

Our first step in recovering the true pronunciation of the sacred name is to rectify a common error that has contributed much to the confusion on the subject. It is the commonly held belief, especially among a great many Christian theologians and scholars, that early palaeo-Hebrew and Hebrew-Aramaic letter systems had no vowels. Vowel sounds, they reason, were always understood and the correct pronunciation of words had to be taught. The dispersion of the Jews from Judaea in the first and second centuries C.E. and the great influx of alien populations into the ranks of Judaism created circumstances that encouraged this view. Because the Jews had become largely a non-Hebrew speaking people after the second century C.E., the Jewish scribes devised a number of vowel symbols which they placed beneath and atop the Hebrew-Aramaic letters (palaeo-Hebrew letters at this time having fallen out of vogue).¹² These symbols greatly aided new students and the other Jews, whose cultural experiences in various non-Hebrew speaking countries did not allow them easy contact with the mother tongue or access to the correct sounds of many Hebrew words.

At the same time, the Jews had for generations held the tradition, bordering upon superstition, that the sacred name was not to be pronounced. After the sixth century C.E., when Jewish scribes came to the sacred name in Scriptures or polemic religious material (for they did not use the sacred name in common writing), they placed their vowel symbols for *adonai* and *eloahim* with the Hebrew-Aramaic letters יהוה. This method indicated to their readers that one was to read and say *adonai* or *eloahim* rather than think or speak the sacred name.

⁹ Prov., 25:2. Though Yahweh has concealed certain things from mankind, it was not with the intention that men should never find these things out. Those who wish to become kings in the government of Yahweh are required to search for the solutions to problems and to uncover that which was concealed. In this way Yahweh tests out the desire of people to find the truth. In short, seek and you shall find.

¹⁰ Matt., 7:7-8; Luke, 11:9-11.

¹¹ EJ, 7, p. 680.

¹² For the history about the change in the Jewish alphabet from Palaeo-Hebrew to Hebrew-Aramaic (also called Aramaic, Assurith) see Vol. II, Chaps. II and III.

This Jewish custom led to the false assumption, widely prevalent even today, that the four letters forming the sacred name—the so-called tetragrammaton, a Greek word meaning “the four-letter (word)” —were four consonants. Later scholars and theologians, for example, assumed that since vowels were added by the earlier Jews, even though they were vowels to different words, the four original letters had to be consonants. Accordingly, scholars have transliterated the four Hebrew-Aramaic letters of the sacred name יהוה as the consonants Y-H-W-H, J-H-V-H, or J-H-W-H.¹³ Since the ancient Jewish scribes had not provided the correct vowel symbols for the sacred name it was further assumed that the true pronunciation had become lost.

The view that the sacred name is made up of four consonants is born out of ignorance. It starts with the false notion that all of the letters in the Hebrew alphabet (or Hebrew-Aramaic form) are consonants. The truth of the matter is that the tetragrammaton is not represented by four consonants at all, but by four vowel-consonants or semivowels. That is, it is four letters that can be used either as vowels or consonants. A comparable example would be our English letters “W” and “Y,” which can be utilized either as vowels or consonants.¹⁴ To prove this vital point one only needs to consult any good book on Hebrew grammar. For example, Weingreen states:¹⁵

However, long before the introduction of vowel-signs it was felt that the main vowel-sounds should be indicated in writing, and so the three letters ו, ה, י were used to represent long vowels.

R. Laird Harris writes in his *Introductory Hebrew Grammar*:¹⁶

Four of the Hebrew letters, ו, ה, י, and י are called vowel letters.

The Beginner's Handbook to Biblical Hebrew by Marks and Rogers and *How the Hebrew Language Grew* by Horowitz likewise report that the letters ו, ה, י, and י are Hebrew vowel-consonants.¹⁷ Therefore, every letter in the sacred name יהוה (palaeo-Hebrew יהוה) is a vowel-consonant or semivowel.

How then can we determine whether or not the letters making up the sacred name are to be understood as vowels or as consonants? The answer to this question lies in the works of the first century C.E. Jewish priest and historian Josephus. While discussing the garment of the high priest described in Exodus, 28:1-43, he makes this revealing comment:¹⁸

His (the priest's) head was covered by a tiara of fine linen, wreathed with blue, encircling which was another crown, of gold, whereon were embossed the

¹³ From the form J-H-V-H, combined with the vowel symbols for *adonai*, is obtained the popular hybrid name “Jehovah,” about which see our next chapter.

¹⁴ RHCD, pp. 1197, s.v. “semivowel,” 1478, s.v. “w,” 1524, s.v. “y.”

¹⁵ PGCH, pp. 6-7.

¹⁶ IHG, p. 16.

¹⁷ BHBH, p. 7; HHLG, pp. 333f.

¹⁸ Jos., Wars, 5:5:7 (235f).

sacred letters, to wit, FOUR VOWELS (φωνήεντα τέσσαρα; *phonhenta tessara*).¹⁹

The passage in Exodus to which Josephus refers states:

And you shall make a plate of pure gold; and you shall engrave on it the engravings of a signet, "Sacred to יהוה." And you shall put a ribbon of blue on it, and it shall be on the miter; it shall be to the front of the miter. (Exod., 28:36-37)

Josephus was a well-educated Jewish priest. He describes himself as exceeding "in the learning belonging to the Jews."²⁰ In his time the sacred name was still being privately revealed to members of the Jewish priesthood.²¹ Therefore, Josephus was among the "chosen" Jews who knew how to pronounce the sacred name. He also lived at a time long before the Jewish scribes began to place vowel symbols around the Hebrew letters. If anyone would know the correct usage of the Hebrew letters it would be someone like Josephus, and Josephus clearly states that all four "sacred letters," i.e. the letters of the sacred name,²² were vowels. Accordingly, the four sacred letters forming the sacred name יהוה were in his day pronounced as vowels, not consonants. As vowels there is no requirement or need for additional vowel sounds to be added between the letters; the name is complete in and of itself!

Hebrew vowel letters, like English vowel letters, vary in sound. The three vowel letters used in the sacred name reflect these following inflections:²³

The ה (h) could indicate ee, ay or eh.

The ו (v) could indicate ah, eh or ay.

The י (y) could indicate oo or aw.

As we shall next demonstrate, ancient testimony verifies that the vowel letters when combined to form the sacred name are more precisely pronounced as follows:

ה (h) ee as in the word see; or y as in the word yes.

ו (v) ah as in the word bah.

י (y) oo as in the word too, or long u, as in rue.

א (a) ay as in the word bay; or e as in whet.

¹⁹ That φωνήεντα in Greek means "vowels" see GEL (1968), p. 1968, s.v.; and translations by Thackeray, *Jos.*, III, p. 273, loc. cit.; Whiston, *Jos.*, p. 556, loc. cit.

²⁰ *Jos.*, *Antiq.*, 20:12:1, *Apion*, 1:10; *Life*, 1-2.

²¹ J. Yoma, 40d, and B. Kidd., 71a. Urbach notes that the rabbis regarded the concealment of the sacred name as a punishment for the general public (TS, p. 132).

²² The "sacred letters" refer to the sacred name see Vol. II, Chap. I, entitled, *The Sacred Letters*. That the sacred letters refer to the sacred name is widely acknowledged by historians. For example, in Whiston's translation of *Jos.*, *Wars*, 5:5:7, he renders the phrase about the sacred letters as, "in which was engraven the sacred name."

²³ BHBH, p. 7; HHLG, pp. 333f; PGCH, pp. 6f.

The pronunciation of the sacred name יהוה, Aramaic form יהוה (based upon normal Hebrew vocalization of the four letters as vowels), as a result, is ee-ah-oo-ay, y-ah-oo-ay, or y-ah-oo-eh.

The First Syllable “Yah”

יה (palaeo-Hebrew יה), the first syllable of the sacred name, is to be vocalized as “Yah.” The personal name יה (יה), which appears forty-nine times in the Old Testament,²⁴ when used as such in Scriptures, is not technically the abbreviated form of יהוה (יהוה), as so often mistakenly claimed.²⁵ Rather, when Scriptures speak of Yah they are making reference to יהוה יה (יהוה יה; Yah Yahweh), the full name of the angel Yahweh who became Yahushua the messiah.²⁶ Nevertheless, the name יה is at the same time a root word in יהוה.²⁷ *The Midrash on Psalms*, for example, tells us that יה is “only half” of *eloahim*’s name.²⁸ Therefore, the vocalization of יה would be identical in both instances. This situation is helpful in recovering the correct pronunciation of יה as the first part of the sacred name.

The pronunciation of יה as “Yah” is verified in a number of ways. To demonstrate, ancient writers lend their support to this vocalization. Epiphanius (late fourth century C.E.) renders יה in Latin as *Ia* (Yah),²⁹ as does Jerome, who adds that *IA* is the last part of the word *ALLELUIA* (Hallelu-yah).³⁰ The enunciation “Yah” is further supported by poetical passages and liturgical formulas in Scriptures.³¹ An excellent example of such a liturgical is the Hebrew word הללויה (Hallelu-Yah), in English “hallelujah,” meaning “praise you Yah.”³²

²⁴ CB, 1, app. 4.

²⁵ YAC, pp. 532, s.v. Yah, “an abbreviation of Jehovah,” 619, s.v. Lord, #7, Jah, “a contraction of Jehovah”; SEC, Heb. #3050, makes it a contraction for Yahweh; HEL, p.105, “probably an abbreviation of יהוה.” Isa., 12:2, and 26:4, which uses the full name “יהוה יה (Yahu Yahweh),” proves that יה (Yahu) is in reality a praenomen. In support of this conclusion we point to the comments of G. R. Driver when addressing the issue of whether it was possible for the forms יהוה and יה to be abbreviations for יהוה. Driver gives a negative response, stating, “no other Semitic race abbreviates the names of its gods, either when used independently or when compounded with other elements in proper names, although they not infrequently leave the name of the god to be supplied,” and “it is hard to believe that a name so sacred as יהוה would be commonly abbreviated, and the reason indeed why the shorter forms were alone used in proper names may be that they, not having the theological import of יהוה, were held less sacred and so more suitable for profane use” (ZAW, 46, p. 23).

²⁶ The name Yah Yahweh (or Yahu Yahweh) appears in the Hebrew text at Isa., 12:2, 26:4; Ps., 130:3, cf. MCM 1, p. 25, 4, p. 28f. The personal name Yah (Yahu) is used by itself forty-nine times (e.g. Exod., 15:2, 17:16; Ps., 68:5, 77:11, 89:9). For a list of references see YAC, p. 619, s.v. Lord, #7.

²⁷ For example, the Mid. Teh. reports that Rabbi Jeremiah, in the name of Rabbi Eleazar, states that Yah is “only half” of the sacred name (Pss., 113, 68). The B. Erub., 18b, states that, “Since the destruction of the Temple it suffices for the congregation to use a bi-literal sacred name. This is in accordance with the Psalm-verse: Every life praise Yah, Hallelu-Yah” (MNY, p. 51). Such statements reveal that the Talmudic writers were unable to distinguish between the praenomen Yah (Yahu) and nomen Yahweh. יה is merely a form of יהוה, meaning to “exist” (SEC, Heb. #3050, cf. 3068, 1961), “being there” (OTT, p. 180). Also see above n. 25.

²⁸ Mid. Teh., Pss. 68:3, 113:3.

²⁹ ZAW, 54, p. 264; OTS, 5, p. 5.

³⁰ Jerome, Ep. 25, *Ad Mar.*

³¹ EJ, 7, p. 680.

³² SEC, the imperative of Heb. #1984 and 3050, cf. Gk. #239; NBD, p. 500.

The Old English form “jah” derives from an archaic form of “j,” which, as in German, has the sound of “y.”³³ This pronunciation for the Old English letter “j” is why Hallelujah still retains the “y” vocalization today.

In the Masoretic text of the Old Testament the Jewish scribes placed vowel points with the word הללויה (Hallelu-Yah) so that הײ was pronounced “yah.”³⁴ The ancient Greek rendering of the Hebrew term הללויה (Hallelu-Yah) also verifies this enunciation. The Greek transliteration of this liturgical, as found in both the LXX and the New Testament, for example, is Ἀλληλοῦϊα.³⁵ As the *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* points out, this Greek form is to be pronounced “al-lay-loo'-ee-ah.”³⁶ Therefore הײ (אײ) is rendered into Greek as ἰα (ee-ah or Yah).

Personal names ending in הײ also demonstrate its correct pronunciation. The following are a few examples:

אביה (Ab-yah), meaning, “fruit of Yah.”³⁷ In English this name is Abijah (the Old English “j” being originally pronounced as “y”). The LXX renders this name in Greek as Ἀβιά (Ab-eeah).³⁸

ישעיה (Yeshu-yah), meaning, “Yah will deliver.”³⁹ In English this name is Jesaiah. The LXX renders this name Ἰεσία (Yesh-eeah).⁴⁰

ירמיה (Yerem-yah), meaning, “Yah will rise.”⁴¹ In English this prophet is called Jeremiah. The LXX has Ἰερεμία (Yerem-eeah).⁴²

זכריה (Zechar-yah), meaning, “Yah is remembered.”⁴³ In English this prophet is called Zechariah. The LXX has Ζαχαρίας (Zachar-eeah[s]), the s being a Greek ending often added to their transliterations of Hebrew names.⁴⁴

זדקיה (Zedek-yah), meaning, “Right of Yah.”⁴⁵ In English this name is Zedekiah. The LXX gives Σεδεκίας (Zedik-eeah[s]).⁴⁶

Support for the sounding “Yah” is also found in Egyptian Aramaic documents dated to the fifth century B.C.E. Discovered were thirty-nine Jewish names ending in הײ. A few, however, have אײ. The name אפליא is elsewhere

³³ NSBD, p. 418; RSV, p. vii, which notes that in the English form J-H-V-H, “The sound of Y is represented by J and the sound of W by V.”

³⁴ See for example at Pss., 105:45, 106:48, 111:1, 112:1, 113:9, 135:1, 3, 21, etc.

³⁵ For example see LXX Pss., 105 (106):1, 106 (107):1, 110 (111):1, 111 (112):1, 112 (113):1, etc.; Rev., 19:1, 3, 4, 6.

³⁶ SEC, Gk. #239.

³⁷ SEC, Heb. #3 and 3050.

³⁸ For example, LXX 2 Chron., 11:20, 22.

³⁹ SEC, Heb. #3470 (3467 and 3050).

⁴⁰ For example, LXX Neh., 11:7; 1 Chron., 3:21.

⁴¹ SEC, Heb. #3414 (7311 and 3050).

⁴² For example, LXX 1 Chron., 12:4, 10, 13.

⁴³ SEC, Heb. #2148 (2142 and 3050).

⁴⁴ For example, LXX 2 (4) Kings, 14:29, 15:8.

⁴⁵ SEC, Heb. #6667 (6664 and 3050).

⁴⁶ For example, LXX 1 (3) Kings, 22:11.

found for the identical person as צפליה.⁴⁷ The sound of ה, therefore, as G. R. Driver notes, was very nearly the same as נ (ah, aw).⁴⁸ These variant spellings prove that the pronunciation of ה is Yah. Even today the Jews still pronounce these endings as “Yah,” and our English form “iah” retains the sound “ee-ah.” As a result, based upon normal Hebrew vocalization and supported by ancient Greek transliteration, ה is “Yah.”

By the first century C.E. many Jewish scribes became superstitious about using the name ה, contending that, since it was part of the sacred name, it too was sacred and should not be spoken. Therefore, when they later developed vowel points for the Masoretic Text, a sheva (ְ) and a gamets (ֿ), the vowel points for the abbreviation of *adonai*, were provided in some instances with this name as well (i.e. הֹ).⁴⁹ Nevertheless, there are notable exceptions. For example, in statements where the expression יהלל (shall praise Yah) is used instead of הללויה (Hallelu-Yah), ה is vowel pointed to read הֹ (Yah).⁵⁰ Even more importantly, in Psalms like 68:5 and 89:8 Jewish scribes vowel pointed the personal name ה, unconnected with the term הללו, to read “Yah.” There is no effort here to disguise it. This form was picked up in the King James Version at Psalm, 68:5, and became “Jah” (the Old English “J” in the days of the KJV being equivalent to the German “J,” which is pronounced “ee” or “Y”).⁵¹

The ancient Jews often substituted the sacred name with the word אהיה (*ahayah*), a term found in Exod., 3:15. This word was used by Yahweh when he angrily responded to Moses after the latter had asked him about his name.⁵² For our present concerns we can take note that אהיה (*ahayah*) contains the root ה (yah), which itself is both part of the sacred name יהוה (Yahweh) and the praenomen in יהיה יה (Yah Yahweh). The term היה (*hayah*) means “to exist.”⁵³ Therefore the word is translated as “I am” or “I exist.” We find in the Greek edition of Theodoret (first half of the fifth century C.E.) that the Jews he contacted referred to the almighty as Ἀϊό; transliterated *Aia* in the Latin copies.⁵⁴ Some Greek manuscripts, meanwhile, retain the form Ἰά.⁵⁵ As D. Williams observes, Ἰά is the Graecized form of the “surrogate” אהיה (*ah-yah*).⁵⁶ Theodoret shows that the word was pronounced “ha-Yah.” Again the enunciation “Yah” for ה is confirmed.

⁴⁷ AP, pp. 273–315; ZAW, 46, pp. 17f.

⁴⁸ ZAW, 46, p. 18. Also see BASOR, 222, pp. 25–28. Alexander Sperber likewise notes that “ה is without consonantal value, like נ” (HUCA, 13–14, p. 129).

⁴⁹ For example at Exod., 15:2, 17:16. The rabbis taught, “the world to come is not like this world; in this world (the Ineffable Name) is written with Yod He’ (יה),” i.e. the initial letters of the Tetragrammaton, “and read Ḳaleph Dalet (קד),” i.e. the initial letters of Ḳadonai, “but in the world to come it will all be one—(his name) will be read with Yod He’ (יה), and written with Yod He’ (יה)” (B. Pes., 50a; TS, p. 133). Also see Chap. X, n. 1.

⁵⁰ For example, Pss., 102:18, 115:17.

⁵¹ See above n. 33.

⁵² Exod., 3:13–14; and see above pp. 57–61.

⁵³ SEC, Heb. #1961, cf. 1932, 1936, 3050, 3068; NCE, 14, p. 1065.

⁵⁴ Theod., *Quaest. in Exod.*, 15; see Bib., 30, pp. 520–523.

⁵⁵ OTS, 5, p. 4.

The Form “Yah-u”

The name יה (Yah) is also often found under its longer form יהו (Yah-u). Since this form represents the first three letters of the sacred name, and the first two syllables, it further aids us in recovering the correct pronunciation for יהוה. The יהו (yahu) ending, by the way, is often used for an individual whose name elsewhere ends with יה (yah).⁵⁷ We also find that names using יהו in the Masoretic text are vowel pointed by the Jewish scribes to read Yeho, while the same Yahwistic names in the Murašû text, written at Nippur in the fifth century B.C.E., are written Yahu. For example, the Masoretic Text has Yeho-zabad and Yeho-nathan, while the Murašû text renders these names as Yahu-zaba and Yahu-natanu.⁵⁸ This fact brings us to a most interesting fact. יה (Yah) was anciently pronounced יהו (Yahu), the ה being understood as ו. This fact is immediately recognized once we compare those names which begin with Yahu against those names which end with Yahu. Some examples of the יהו ending in personal names are as follows:

יריה (Yer-yah), meaning “Yah will teach,” is also found as יריהו (Yer-yahu).⁵⁹ Nevertheless, the LXX transliterates Yer-yahu as Ἰεριὰ (Yer-eeah).⁶⁰

Zechariah (“Yah is remembered”) is called both זכריה (Zekar-yah) and זכריהו (Zekar-yahu).⁶¹ In the LXX these are transliterated as Ζαχαρίασ (Zachar-eeah[s]) and Ζαχαρίου (Zachar-eeou).⁶² The Greek ου is pronounced “ee-ah-oo.”

ישעיה (Yesha-yah [Isaiah]), meaning “Yah will deliver,” is also found as ישעיהו (Yesha-yahu [Isaiahu]).⁶³ The LXX renders Yesha-yahu Ἡσαΐα (Yesa-eeah),⁶⁴ showing the interchangeability between יה and יהו; Ἰεσσίου (Yess-eeou);⁶⁵ and Ἡσαΐου (Yesa-eeou).⁶⁶

Jeremiah (“Yah will rise”) is called both ירמיה (Yerem-yah) and ירמיהו (Yerem-yahu).⁶⁷ Yerem-yahu is found in the LXX as Ἰερემίου (Yerem-eeou).⁶⁸

⁵⁶ ZAW, 54, p. 263f.

⁵⁷ ZAW, 46, pp. 7–25. For example, מִיכָיָה (Mik-Yah [SEC, Heb. #4320]) is also found as מִיכָיָהוּ (Mik-Yahu [SEC, Heb. #4321-2]); זִכְרִיָּה (Zekar-Yah) is זִכְרִיָּהוּ (Zekar-Yahu [SEC, Heb. #2148]), and in 2 Kings, 15:8, one is called זִכְרִיָּהוּ, while in 2 Kings, 15:11, the same one is called זִכְרִיָּה; זִדְקִיָּה (Zedek-Yah) is also found as זִדְקִיָּהוּ (Zedek-Yahu [SEC, Heb. #2148]), and in 1 Kings, 22:11, one is called זִדְקִיָּה, while the same one is called זִדְקִיָּהוּ in 1 Kings, 22:24; יֵרֵמְיָה (Yerem-Yah) is also found as יֵרֵמְיָהוּ (Yerem-Yahu [SEC, Heb. #3414]); and so forth. For an extensive list see MCE, pp. 387–394. It is very clear that יה is actually pronounced “Yahu,” and that the ו (u) is only sometimes added because, although vowels were generally understood, in a name made up of vowel letters it helped clarify the point. Also see below n. 89.

⁵⁸ WSPN, pp. 1–62.

⁵⁹ SEC, Heb. #3404.

⁶⁰ LXX 1 Chron., 23:19.

⁶¹ SEC, Heb. #2148.

⁶² LXX 2 (4) Kings, 14:29, 15:8, 11, 18:2.

⁶³ SEC, Heb. #3470.

⁶⁴ LXX Isa., 39:8.

⁶⁵ 2 Chron., 32:20.

⁶⁶ 2 Chron. 32:32.

⁶⁷ SEC, Heb. #3414.

⁶⁸ LXX 2 (4) Kings, 23:31, 24:18.

The Jewish scribes of the Middle Ages took effort to disguise the name Yahu by adding to it the vowel points for *adonai*. This technique was especially used in those cases where the name יהו formed the beginning of a personal name, e.g. יהושע (Yahu-shua), which was altered to יהושע (Yeho-shua);⁶⁹ יהוחנן (Yahu-khanan), which became יהוחנן (Yehu-khanan);⁷⁰ יהונתן (Yahu-nathan), which became יהונתן (Yehu-nathan);⁷¹ יהועדן (Yahu-addan), which became יהועדן (Yehu-addan);⁷² and so forth.

The form Yah-u was also known among ancient non-Jewish historians and theologians. This form became widely used in early centuries because at that time many Jews saw Yah-u (like Yah) as only half of the sacred name and believed this much was allowed to be spoken during our present world.⁷³ (This opinion changed in Masorete times.) Because of this earlier and less restrictive view, many Hellenic Jews and non-Jews became aware of and used this name, translating it into Greek letters. To demonstrate, the noted pagan Greek historian Diodorus (first century B.C.E.) says:⁷⁴

Among the Jews, Moses referred his laws to the deity
who is invoked as 'Ιαώ.

'Ιαώ is pronounced "Yah-u," 'Ια being identical in form with the ia ending found in Greek transliterations of Hebrew liturgicals and names ending with יה (Yah). The ω at the end of Greek names carrying the sound of aw and oo. Notice also that the three Greek letters used (ι, α, and ω) are all Greek vowels, and therefore approximate the three Hebrew vowels יהו (Y-ah-u).

'Ιαώ is also found in the second century C.E. *Jewish Prayer of Jacob*.⁷⁵ Porphyry, citing Sanchoniathon, used the Greek form 'Ιενώ (Y-e-uō),⁷⁶ the ε being pronounced "ah" and the ω being pronounced "oo." Ancient Christian writers also knew this version of the name. Origen, for instance, gives the Greek form 'Ιαώ,⁷⁷ as does Irenaeus and Theodoret.⁷⁸ The margin of Codex Marchalianus (Q), dated no later than the sixth century C.E., likewise, gives 'Ιαώ.⁷⁹ Clement of Alexandria has 'Ιαού (Yah-u).⁸⁰ Jerome, meanwhile, gives the

⁶⁹ SEC, Heb. #3091.

⁷⁰ Ibid., Heb. #3076.

⁷¹ Ibid., Heb. #3083.

⁷² Ibid., Heb. #3086.

⁷³ Rabbi Jeremiah states, "The world is not worthy enough to praise *eloah* with his whole name, but with only half of his name" (Mid. Teh., Ps., 91). Rabbi Joshua ben Levi answers the question, "Why is it that when the children of Israel pray in this world, they are not answered?" stating, "It is because they do not know the ineffable name; but in the time-to-come, when the Holy One, blessed be he, will let them know his name, as it said, Therefore my people shall know my name, then, when the children of Israel pray, they will be answered, for it is said, He shall call me, and I will answer him."

⁷⁴ Diodorus, 1:94:2.

⁷⁵ Pr. Jac., 8.

⁷⁶ Cited in Eusebius, *Praep. Evang.*, 1:9; OTS, 5, p. 6.

⁷⁷ Origen, *Joan.* II, 49; OTS, 5, p. 5.

⁷⁸ Theod., *Quaest. in Exod.*, 15; Iren., 30:5, and cf. 35:3; also see OTS, 5, pp. 3, 5.

⁷⁹ Cod. *Marchalianus* (Q), at Ezek. 11:1; ZAW, 54, p. 266.

⁸⁰ Clement, *Strom.*, 5:6; OTS, 5, p. 5.

Latin form *IAHO*,⁸¹ the old Latin “o” at the end of such names being vocalized as a long u, or *oo*. An ancient Coptic Christian text renders this name as *Δ* in Coptic,⁸² and as *ά* in Greek,⁸³ both enunciated as Yah-oo. On a number of magical papyri from Egypt the name *Ἰαω Σαβωθ* (Yahu *sabauth*, i.e. Yahu of hosts) appears in place of the Hebrew “Yahweh of hosts.”⁸⁴ This evidence shows that the first two syllables of the sacred name *יהוה*, being the first three letters (i.e. *יה*), are recovered as Y-ah-oo or Yah-u.

The Ancients Pronounce יהוה

Ancient writers were not negligent in preserving for us the correct pronunciation of the entire sacred name. Despite Jewish and Roman Church prohibitions against its use, the vocalization of the complete name was revealed and is preserved by a few. Clement of Alexandria (second century C.E.), for instance, tells his readers that the sacred name was pronounced *Ἰαουέ*, and *Ἰαουαί*,⁸⁵ both words which approximate the sound Yah-oo-ay. In various Jewish-Egyptian magic-papyri it appears most frequently as *Ἰαωουηε*, but is also found written *Ἰαωουηι*, *Ἰαωουηη*, *Ἰαωουε*, and *Ἰαωουεα* (all approximating “Yah-ou-ay”).⁸⁶ It should not go unnoticed that these writers use only Greek vowels to represent the sacred name, again demonstrating that we are dealing with four Hebrew vowels.

Origen (early third century C.E.) gives the Greek form *Ἰαῆ* (Yah-ay).⁸⁷ *יהῖ* (Yah-ay) is also found once in the *Elephantine Papyri*.⁸⁸ This form seems built upon the notion that *יה* (Yah) and *יהו* (Yahu) were synonymous. Therefore, *יהῖ* was thought to equal *יהוה*. It was understood in Hebrew that *יה* (Yah) carried the value of *יהו* (Yahu).⁸⁹ Nevertheless, when it was transliterated into Greek, as it was by Origen, the value was lost. Yet both the first and last part of the sacred name (i.e. “Yah” and “ay”) were retained. The old Ethiopian Apocrypha writings, recorded by the French historian Basset, retains the sound *Yahoué*.⁹⁰

⁸¹ Jerome, *Brev. Pss.*, Ps. VIII.

⁸² Pis. So., 1:7, 2:86, 4:140, which speak of a greater and lesser Yahu (i.e. Yahweh the father and Yahweh the son). By this period, because of the Jewish interpretation that Yahu was a short form of the name Yahweh, many had come to believe that each Yahweh was called Yahu. The greater Yahu being father Yahweh and the lesser Yahu being the angel Yahweh.

⁸³ Pis. So., 4:136.

⁸⁴ MNY, p. 44.

⁸⁵ JE, 9, p. 161; MNY, pp. 36, 101, n. 174.

⁸⁶ JE, 9, p. 161; OTS, 5, pp. 45f; MNY, pp. 36f.

⁸⁷ Origen, *Joan.* II, 49; OTS, 5, p. 33.

⁸⁸ ZAW, 54, p. 267.

⁸⁹ F. C. Burkitt makes a similar conclusion, see JTS, 28, pp. 407–409. Also see above n. 57. M. Reisel notes that the assertion by L. Williams that the *Ἰαω* is the same as the Hebrew *יהוה* “is by no means obvious” (MNY, p. 112, n. 303). To this we must agree. Though the form Yahu was later used as a substitute for Yahweh, the two must be distinguished from each other. Indeed, Yahu was most likely used as a surrogate because of the belief, however false, that it represented half of the sacred name Yahweh, and therefore was not as objectionable. In reality, Yahu was the name of the angel called Yah (or Yahu) Yahweh, the son of Yahweh.

⁹⁰ LAE, p. 30.

The vocalization of the sacred name was also preserved among the ancient Samaritans. The non-Israelite Samaritans, during the latter part of the eighth and early seventh centuries B.C.E., were forced by the Assyrian empire to settle into what was then known as part of Israel. In the process of events the Samaritans came to adopt the Jewish religion as their own.⁹¹ Under domination by the Jews, the Samaritans also came to adopt the ineffable name doctrine.⁹² Yet the pronunciation was still revealed by textual evidence. For example, in Samaritan poetry we find that יהוה (יהוה) rhymes with words having similar endings and sounds as we find with Yah-oo-ay.⁹³

Some minor confusion has arisen because Theodoret, supported by Epiphanius, states that the Samaritans of that day (fifth century C.E.) pronounced the sacred name Ἰαβαι and Ἰαβέ (Greek text), *Jabe* in Latin.⁹⁴ Epiphanius ascribes the same pronunciation to an early Christian sect.⁹⁵ In English letters these words would be transliterated as “Yabay” and “Yabe” (or “Yabeh”). It is also known that the ancient Greek letter β (the text being first composed in Greek and then later translated into Latin) carried the value of the Latin *v* and not the English *b*.⁹⁶ For example, the Latin name for the famous Gothic tribe that ravaged Europe during the later fourth and early fifth centuries C.E. is *Vandali*.⁹⁷ Yet in Greek texts, such as that written by Procopius, the name Vandali is rendered Βανδίλους (Bandilous).⁹⁸ Because of this detail some have contended that the third letter of יהוה (i.e. ה) should be rendered as a “v.” They propose that the name should therefore be vocalized as Yahveh, Yahva, Yahve, Jahveh, or some other like form.

The suggestion that the third letter of the sacred name should be read as a “v” is an error for two reasons. First, the Latin *v* is not equivalent with the English letter “v.” *Harpers’ Latin Dictionary*, for example, informs us:⁹⁹

The sound of V seems to have been the same with that of English initial W. . . . V has the closest affinity to the vowel *u*, and hence, in the course of composition and inflection, it often passed into the latter.

The connection between the Latin *v* and the initial English “w” (as in the word *wet*), which is also the early English and Germanic letter “w,” is further

⁹¹ 2 Kings, 17:24-41; Jos., *Antiq.*, 9:14:3.

⁹² The Samaritans followed the same custom as the Jews with regard to substitution of the sacred name in their Pentateuch (PCBE, 2, p. 914). D. Williams remarks that the Samaritans “were even more punctilious not to pronounce the Sacred Name than the Jews have been. They even struck out (as we have seen) the Name from most of the Pentateuch, inserting Elohim instead” (ZAW, 54, p. 265).

⁹³ JBL, 25, p. 50; JE, 9, p. 161.

⁹⁴ Theod., *Qaest. in Exod.*, 15, and *Haer. Fab. Com.*, 5:3 (393); OTS, 5, p. 2; OTS, 5, p. 33; Bib., 30, pp. 520-523.

⁹⁵ Epiph., 34:20f; JE, 9, p. 161.

⁹⁶ NBD, p. 478.

⁹⁷ For example see HLD, p. 1956; Sidonius, *II. Pan. of Anth.*, 348, 364, 369, 379.

⁹⁸ For example see Procopius, 3:1:1, 3:2:2, 3:3:2, 3:22:3, 8:5:5, etc.

⁹⁹ HLD, p. 1949.

attested to by the above example, the name *Vandali*, which in Old German is *Wandal*, and in Old Anglo-Saxon *Wendil*. In the Anglo-Saxon and Germanic tongues, the Latin *v* was understood to mean *uu* or *u*, hence our present name for the letter “w,” i.e. “double u.” The modern letter “W” was originally formed by placing two Latin *v* letters together (*vv* = *w*). *Webster’s New World Dictionary* makes the following comments about the letter “W”:¹⁰⁰

1. the twenty-third letter of the English alphabet: its sound was represented in Anglo-Saxon manuscripts by *uu* or *u* until 900 A.D., then by *p* (*wen*) borrowed from the runic alphabet, or sometimes by *wu*, *v*, *wo*, *vo*, *uo*, or *o*. In the 11th century a ligatured *VV* or *vv* was introduced by Norman scribes to replace the *wen*. 2. the sound of *W* or *w*: in English, it is a lip-rounded tongue-back semivowel like a quickly cut-off *oo* at the beginning of words; concluding a diphthong it is a *u*-glide. Before *r*, as in *wrist*, and in some words, as *answer*, *sword*, *two*, it is silent.

This fact means that the Greek β and Latin *v*, which come across into English as the early Anglo-Saxon “w,” are in fact vowel consonants and like the Hebrew $\beth$ stand for a “double u” or *oo* sound. This conclusion is further verified by a variant text reading belonging to Epiphanius. Here we find the Greek terms $\iota\alpha\beta\acute{\epsilon}$ and $\iota\alpha\beta\alpha\iota$ are rendered into Latin as *IAUE*,¹⁰¹ once again demonstrating the “u” value of “ β .”

The second reason that the form *Yahveh* or its variants are in error is due to the fact that the four Hebrew letters which make up the sacred name are all pronounced as vowels.¹⁰² If the Hebrew scribes believed that the third letter of the sacred name was pronounced as an English consonant “v” they would have used the Hebrew letter $\beth$ instead of $\daleth$. For example, the word נגב (N-g-b) is often transliterated into English and vocalized by the Jews as “Negev.”¹⁰³ Since $\beth$ is not used and the English “v” is a consonant, the form *YHVH* (*Yahveh*) or its variants are improper. These details also lead us to mention a caution about the English form of the sacred name *YHWH* (*Yahweh*). The “w” must not be sounded as a hard consonant “w” but as a vowel “double u.”

The attempt to transliterate the sacred name from the ancient Samaritan language into Greek resulted in the forms $\iota\alpha\beta\acute{\epsilon}$ and $\iota\alpha\beta\alpha\iota$, which is understood to mean *Yah-oo-ay* since the Greek β has the value of an English “double u.” This fact is further supported by the Samaritan priesthood, which for centuries continued to pass on the early pronunciation of the sacred name to its succeeding High Priests. That the Samaritans knew the correct pronunciation

¹⁰⁰ WNWD, p. 1638, s.v.

¹⁰¹ Epiph., 40:5, var. lect.; ZAW, 54, p. 264; OTS, 5, p. 5.

¹⁰² See Jos., Wars, 5:5:7; and see above pp. 101-104.

¹⁰³ For example see, EJ, 12, p. 926.

of the sacred name is confirmed by the Jews of the Middle Ages. In the Gemara Yerusemi Sanhedrin, for example, we are told:¹⁰⁴

The following persons have no portion in the world to come: Abba Saul says: The same applies to him who pronounces the name (Yahweh) according to the letters. Rabbi Manna has said: Like the Samaritans do when taking an oath.

If the Samaritans had not known the correct pronunciation there would have been no cause for the Jewish rabbis, who prohibited utterance of the sacred name, to condemn them.

In the Third Epistle of the Samaritans to Ludolf, 1689 C.E., the Samaritans still claimed knowledge of the true pronunciation.¹⁰⁵ Subsequent to this, we have a letter from the Samaritan High Priest to Silvestre de Sacy in 1820. Written in Arabic, this document contains a formula of benediction which gives the sacred name as “يَهْوَه” (Yah-oo-ay).¹⁰⁶ It is also recorded that the son of the Samaritan High Priest, while he was at the Holy City of Jerusalem in 1904/05, pronounced the name יהוה as “Yah-oo” and the complete sacred name יהוה as “Yah-oo-ay.”¹⁰⁷

G. J. Thierry concludes from this evidence:¹⁰⁸

But: the Samaritans have preserved the *old pronunciation* of God’s name, which the Jews too had used in older times, but which they have dropped. So Yabai and Yabe probably maintain the old Israelitic tradition which the Jews themselves lost.

It therefore is manifest that the ancient Samaritan form of the sacred name, revealed with the Greek letters (Ἰαβέ and Ἰαβαί), rather than creating a new variant, actually agrees with other ancient sources and with proper Hebrew vocalization of the four sacred letters as vowels.

The Testimony of Scholars

That the correct pronunciation of the sacred name was never lost and is to be enunciated as Yahweh (ee-ah-oo-ay) has the support of both Jewish and Christian scholars alike. For example, the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* unequivocally states:¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ J. Sanh., 10:1; MNY, p. 58. Also see H. Freedman’s translation of B. Sanh., 101a, “ABBA SAUL SAID; ALSO HE WHO PRONOUNCES THE DIVINE NAME AS IT IS SPELT etc. It has been taught: [This holds good] only in the country, and in the sense of [the Samaritan] *aga* [blaspheming].” In Freedman’s note 4 to this verse he demonstrates that by “*aga*” the rabbis meant the Samaritans (Freedman, *Sanh.*, 2, p. 688). This evidence proves that the rabbis were condemning the Samaritans because they pronounced the name “as it is spelt,” i.e. with the letters יהוה.

¹⁰⁵ JBL, 25, p. 49.

¹⁰⁶ ZAW, 53, p. 76; ZAW, 54, pp. 264f. These sources use the spellings Jahwe and Jahū, but the English pronunciations are Yah-oo-ay and Yah-oo (i.e., j = y; u and w = oo; and the final e = ay or eh).

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. ; OTS, 5, p.3; JBL, 25, pp. 50f, n. 5.

¹⁰⁸ OTS, 5, p. 36.

¹⁰⁹ EJ, 7, p. 680.

The true pronunciation of the name YHWH was never lost. Several early Greek writers of the Christian Church testify that the name was pronounced "Yahweh." This is confirmed, at least for the vowels of the first syllable of the name, by the shorter form Yah, which is sometimes used in poetry (e.g., Ex. 15:2) and the -yahu or -yah that serves as the final syllable in very many Hebrew names.

The *Jewish Encyclopedia* comments:¹¹⁰

If the explanation of the form above given be the true one, the original pronunciation must have been Yahweh (יהוה) or Yahaweh (יהוה). From this the contracted form Jah or Yah (יה) is most readily explained.

Bible scholars for numerous Christian groups also acknowledge the ancient pronunciation of the sacred name. Professor Paul Haupt, for instance, concludes:¹¹¹

The true pronunciation seems to have been Yahwè (or *Iahway*, the initial I = y, as in *Iachimo*). The final *e* should be pronounced like the French ê, or English *e* in *there*, and the first *h* sounded as an aspirate. The accent should be on the final syllable.

The late G. T. Manley, sometime Fellow of Christ's College, writes in the *New Bible Dictionary* (1962):¹¹²

The pronunciation Yahweh is indicated by transliterations of the name into Greek in early Christian literature, in the form *iaoue* (Clement of Alexandria) or *iabe* (Theodoret; by this time Gk. *b* had the pronunciation of *v*).¹¹³

In the Smith-Goodspeed version, called *The Bible, An American Translation*, we are told the following:¹¹⁴

One detail of the translation which requires explanation is the treatment of the divine name. As nearly as we can now tell, the Hebrews called their Deity by the name Yahweh, and in a shorter form, Yah, used in relatively few cases. . . . Anyone, therefore, who desires to retain the flavor of the original text has but to read "Yahweh" wherever he sees LORD or GOD.

¹¹⁰ JE, 9, p. 161.

¹¹¹ PB, 14, Ps., pp. 163–164.

¹¹² NBD, p. 478.

¹¹³ As explained above, the ancient Latin *v*, in turn, has the sound of an English "double u."

¹¹⁴ BAT, pref., p. xvi.

Other Christian works also agree. *A New Standard Bible Dictionary* states that the sacred name is “properly יהוה, *yahweh*”;¹¹⁵ the *Revised Standard Bible* testifies that the “name is *Yahweh*”;¹¹⁶ G. J. Thierry pronounces the name ‘*Yahwê*’;¹¹⁷ and the list goes on and on.

Conclusion

The evidence proves that the pronunciation of the sacred name was never lost; it has always been there for anyone willing to seek it out. As Joseph Rotherham concludes, “The exact *pronunciation* claims a word to itself.”¹¹⁸ Remarkable is the fact that the four sacred letters forming the sacred name are all vowels, thereby making them free from any need of other vowels to aid in their enunciation. The name stands by itself; a perfect name in its structure. Its original sounds are easily and completely understood by the four vowel letters alone.

Despite the fact that many still try and force the four letters of the sacred name into the role of consonants, and therefore try to place vowels between them, they cannot escape the compelling conclusion that the sacred name is pronounced “Yah-oo-ay.” In English we can transliterate יהוה as “Yahweh” if we understand that our “w” is to be sounded as “oo” and our “eh” as “ay”. Once it is realized that we are dealing with four vowels rather than four consonants, this conclusion becomes inescapable.

¹¹⁵ NSBD, s.v. Jehovah, p. 418.

¹¹⁶ NEB, p. xvi.

¹¹⁷ OTS, 5, p. 30.

¹¹⁸ REB, p. 25.