

# Pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton



*Why We Are Persuaded that יהוה is pronounced Yahweh*

Condensed Version

By Larry and June Acheson

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Cover photo: Tourists examining the Tetragrammaton as it appears on the Moabite Stone.

# Pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton: *Why We Are Persuaded that יהוה is Pronounced “Yahweh”*

Condensed Version  
*By Larry and June Acheson*

## ***Introduction: Taking the Time to Be Brief***

**E**ven while June and I were in the midst of composing our full-length study titled *Pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton: Why We Are Persuaded that YHWH is Pronounced “Yahweh,”* we received requests to put together a summary of sorts that would spare readers from having to sift through pages and pages of boring data. Those who know me also know that my explanations are often “long and drawn out,” which for some folks in this age of information overload is a real turn-off. There is a reason for why my studies tend to be lengthier than some are willing to digest: I know from years of experience with presenting my rationale for believing as I do on various religious topics that someone will inevitably inform me that I left out something that he or she feels would have ultimately settled the argument. Of course, it seems that no matter how extensive my studies are, someone will still let me know that I left out something important. As a result, I have a subconscious concern about others coming away with the impression that I’m omitting pertinent arguments or relevant information due to a preconceived bias. The reasoning is that a biased person will intentionally leave out significant information that could be considered detrimental to his position. I understand this concern because I personally loathe sifting through biased material, which is precisely what I had to examine as I researched this topic, and addressing biased arguments must of necessity include incorporating them into my own report, along with my own response. Addressing arguments means paraphrasing those same arguments in our study, as unreasonable as they may be, and then answering them, which in turn means my own study is going to be fairly lengthy. When our original full-length study was completed in February 2012, it consisted of 144 pages. Even so, I committed to eventually adding more material due to having received an updated book authored by Keith Johnson just as I completed my response to his original version.

We understand that many people would much prefer an ultra-condensed version of our findings that simultaneously answers all the questions. That is way easier said than done, but that is what I am attempting to accomplish in this summary. I am reminded of a quote attributed to Mark Twain from a letter he once wrote: “I apologize for the length of my letter, but I didn’t have time to be brief.” Ironically, it is often true that, at least in my case, it takes longer to present something in a brief format than it does to offer the full, unabridged explanation. I don’t usually have time to be brief. Besides, as alluded to above, when you’re brief people tend to accuse you of not addressing the things that they consider important.

Since we now have a full, unabridged explanation available for anyone to read, we feel comfortable presenting a summary of our findings in a briefer format that the average person will hopefully appreciate. If, when you’ve finished with this mini-study, you come away with the impression that we’ve left out important information, we suggest that you turn to our full-length version. In this condensed version, we have reduced this discussion to what we feel are three primary areas of concern: *Recognizing Tell-Tale Bias, Surface Research and Reasoning that is Reasonable.*

## 1. *Obstructing the Path With Bias*

Sometimes it seems that authors of religious books and articles do more to hinder our attempts to stay on the path of righteousness than they do to help us along that path. As I sifted through the plethora of articles and books addressing the topic of our Heavenly Father's name, I couldn't help but think of the path I used to take to get from the parking lot to the building where I used to work. The parking lot was notorious for having a crosswalk that, at the slightest amount of rainfall, would become a miniature pond, making it inconvenient to use the very path that the management company created for the employees' convenience. One day I took a picture of the odd sight, which is displayed here. It seemed so ironic that, after a rainfall, it was always impractical to use the path that we were expected to use when making our way to the building. As you can see from the photo, it wasn't *impossible* to use that crosswalk, but it was obviously very inconvenient and sometimes messy. For practical purposes, nearly everyone stepped outside of the striped parameters of the crosswalk to avoid getting sloshed with bacteria-laden runoff water. In fact, I never actually saw anyone trudge through the water-logged pathway; can you imagine how silly it would look to tread through a crosswalk buried under water when you could simply avoid the water by sidestepping the path? During my tenure at that office, the management company did nothing to correct the obvious drainage problem. Maybe that's one of the reasons the company I work for decided to move to a new location.



During my research for our full-length study, as I read many of the “Sacred Name” studies addressing our Heavenly Father's Great Name, I saw a parallel between the authors of those studies and the management company where I used to work. In fact, the authors seemed to be worse than the management company because at least the management company didn't create the obstruction; they simply did nothing to resolve it. The authors of many of the “Sacred Name” studies I have read create the obstruction and then do nothing to resolve it. Like the water-obstructed crosswalk, the flood of articles about how to pronounce the Creator's name does not make it impossible for truth seekers to make their way through the path, but it can get rather messy. Since we do not want these well-intentioned authors to force us outside the path, we need to put on our spiritual boots before wading through their articles.

Before I go any further, I should point out that I am well aware that the authors whose toes I'm stepping on are very likely going to accuse me of being the “pot calling the kettle black.” After all, I am admittedly biased, at least for now, in my personal belief that the form *Yahweh* represents the most likely original pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton (יהוה). However, there are two important items separating

me from other biased authors: (1) Unlike the majority of Sacred Name authors whose studies I have read, I am very quick to point out that I do not feel that *any* of us is in a position to state with supreme confidence that we know without a doubt how the Creator’s Name is correctly pronounced. On the other hand, I get the impression that many Sacred Name authors are persuaded that their research is conclusive and that unless you see things their way you are either at best “missing the boat” or at worst calling on the devil himself. I would provide examples of this here, but in the interest of brevity, I’ll just refer you to our full-length study if you want to see first-hand what I mean.<sup>1</sup> (2) Unlike the majority of Sacred Name authors whose studies I have read, I am willing to make concessions (see chapter one of our full-length study for proof of this). For example, I am willing to concede that, grammatically-speaking, *Yahuwah*, *Yehowah*, *Yihowah*, *Yahwah* and, of course, *Yahweh*, are linguistically possible Hebrew pronunciations of יהוה. I even provide an example of a line of reasoning that nearly persuaded me to lean towards the form *Yahuwah*. How many Sacred Name authors are willing to make concessions?

### ***How to tell it’s tell-tale bias***

There are some obvious signs that the author whose study you’re reading is extremely biased and you really need to train yourself to be on the alert. By “extremely biased,” I mean this: Instead of presenting a frank evaluation of all the available evidence, the author’s primary motivation in composing his work is to prove that his pronunciation of choice is correct. When you read a study that is biased from the start, it’s a “given” that the author has no intention of giving you a balanced perspective. He just wants to convince you that he is right. The problem is, how do you recognize a biased study when you read one? Recognizing a heavily biased study is not generally easy because, after all, it is highly unlikely that a biased author is going to warn his readers to be cautious about reading his study and he is certainly not going to warn you that his perspective is not a balanced one. Let’s face it – a biased author is presenting his perspective from a biased view and he is content to ignore any conflicting or contradictory evidence. Everyone, including June and me, likes to think they are presenting their findings from a balanced perspective, but do we truly examine and report on all the pertinent contingencies? Here are a few examples demonstrating that some of the studies I read while preparing our full-length study are biased:

#### ***A. Excited to find out that יהוה cannot be pronounced “Yahweh”?***

Keith Johnson, in his book יהוה: *His Hallowed Name Revealed Again*, exhibited two obvious forms of bias that we all need to beware of. Here’s one, which appeared in his fall 2010 revision:

I remember how excited I was when Nehemia [Gordon] explained the grammatical principles that demonstrate why יהוה cannot be pronounced “Yahweh.”<sup>2</sup>

How do we know Keith Johnson’s book was written from a heavily biased perspective? We know because he was *excited* when he found out that יהוה [allegedly] cannot be pronounced ‘Yahweh.’” Let’s

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, chapter 12 of our unabridged version.

<sup>2</sup> Keith E. Johnson, יהוה: *His Hallowed Name Revealed Again*, Second Edition, Biblical Foundations Academy, Minneapolis, MN, 2010, p. 138. Nehemia Gordon is a Karaite Jew who supports the pronunciation *Yehovah* as representing the transliteration that comes closest to matching the original pronunciation of יהוה.

face it – if Mr. Johnson had been open to the possibility that the Tetragrammaton may be pronounced *Yahweh*, he wouldn't have been "excited" to hear news to the contrary. Keith, in the above remark, the same as stated, "I had a 'thing' against the form *Yahweh* from the very beginning, so when Nehemia explained to my satisfaction that Hebrew linguistics do not allow for the Tetragrammaton to be pronounced *Yahweh*, I was on 'Cloud 9.'" Since it is so obvious that Mr. Johnson was biased against the pronunciation from the "get go," do you *really* trust him to present a balanced view?

### ***B. Shielding Pertinent Information from Readers***

I do not mean to pick on Keith Johnson, but I cannot ignore yet another form of bias that he exhibits in his book. This form of partiality is less visible and more subtle than the one reported above and many readers will therefore not even catch it. It involves deliberately "hiding in plain sight" a vital piece of information from his readers instead of being "up front" with the facts. I refer to it as a *deliberate* act because even though I called it to Keith's attention after having read his original work, he made no changes to his revision. Upon reading the first edition, I was frustrated that he didn't let his reading audience know the year in which the manuscript that is so pivotal to his position (Leningrad Codex B19A) was copied. Was this an oversight or an intentional withholding of information? I like to give people the benefit of the doubt, so I presumed that it was an unintentional oversight and I let Keith know this during an e-mail exchange that we had. I used our discussion as an opportunity to address some of my concerns about his book, and one of the concerns I brought to the forefront was the fact that he doesn't ever come out and state the year in which Leningrad Codex B19A was copied.

The dating of this manuscript is important, especially in view of Keith's assertion that it is "an ancient Hebrew manuscript."<sup>3</sup> In terms of "ancient Hebrew manuscripts," a 1,000 year-old manuscript isn't really all that old, especially when it comes to proving anything involving the Hebrew vowel points, which had been devised over three hundred years earlier, not to mention the fact that Judaism's "Ineffable Name Doctrine" had been in effect for some 900 years by the time Leningrad Codex B19A was copied. In his defense, Keith let me know that, indeed, he *did* inform his readers that this manuscript is 1,000 years old, but they must somehow know to turn to his "Appendix B" to glean this information, and Keith, in his book, does not ever suggest that his readers go to this appendix to learn more about Leningrad Codex B19A. Should Keith expect his readers to "just know" to flip over to Appendix B if they want to find out the age of Leningrad Codex B19A or should he be "up front" in letting them know its age in the very chapter where he presents the information about this manuscript?

If I were to find myself in Keith's position and I wanted to allow my reading audience to decide for themselves whether or not Leningrad Codex B19A is too modern to merit any serious consideration regarding the original pronunciation of the Creator's name, I would let them know right away that Leningrad Codex B19A was copied in either 1008 or 1009 CE. On the other hand, if I were hopeful that my readers won't ask too many questions and I wanted them to think that "ancient" means really, really, really old, I would take steps to not make its actual age very obvious. If I did let them know that it's a

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<sup>3</sup> Keith made it abundantly clear in his original work that Leningrad Codex B19A is an "ancient manuscript." For the most part, he avoids using the term "ancient" in his revision, but the claim is exhibited in a footnote found in chapter eight (page 133). It reads, "The Leningrad Codex is an ancient Hebrew manuscript of the entire Old Testament that is housed in Russia. It was not made available to be photographed until the summer of 1990." Notice his clever avoidance of providing the actual date of Leningrad Codex. Why would Keith omit providing his readers the date of this manuscript?

thousand years old in my appendix, I would hope that they wouldn't stumble across that piece of information or, if they did, I would be hopeful that they wouldn't think about "doing the math" regarding its actual age when they came across that portion of my book.

Keep in mind that during my reading of the first edition of Keith's book, I felt obligated to presume that his not being "up front" about Leningrad Codex B19A's age was simply an oversight, which is why I let him know how important it is to make this information available to his readers. I would like to provide you with my complete e-mail of concern, but since it was a bit lengthy, I will leave it out of our condensed version; nevertheless, I plan on offering it in chapter 16 of our updated, unabridged study. For this, our abbreviated version, I will simply let you know that Keith responded to my suggestion in a positive way, leading me to believe that he would take steps to ensure that his reading audience comes away with a clear understanding of the age of Leningrad Codex B19A. Here is an excerpt of his response:

You Have once again convinced me on a revision! In appendix c [Larry's note: it's actually appendix b] I explain that the codex is 1,000 years old. There is much more that could and probably should be explained about this manuscript. I will take a very serious look at adding more info in the text of the book rather than the appendix. Larry, please feel free to keep the concerns coming.<sup>4</sup>

A few months after sending me the above e-mail, Keith sent me a follow-up e-mail to let me know that his revised book was now available. I decided against purchasing a copy, and trusted that Keith had updated the chapter in question with pertinent information about the dating of Leningrad Codex B19A. However, in January 2012 a friend sent me his copy of Keith's fall 2010 revision for review and to my amazement and dismay, Keith had made no change to his (non) dating of this manuscript in the main body of his work. That told me a lot. First, it told me that if Keith really did "take a serious look at adding more info in the text of the book," his serious answer was to *not* add that information. In other words, I am left to believe that Keith really would prefer that the reader *not* know the actual date of the manuscript. Why would he prefer such a thing? It can only be because of his bias. Keith knows that some folks are like June and me in that once they find out that Leningrad Codex B19A is in reality a relatively *modern*, not ancient document, the credibility of his argument becomes compromised. It is likely that Keith understands that many people will not think to question just exactly how old this manuscript really is and as a result they will be more prone to buying into Keith Johnson's line of reasoning.

### ***C. Amused that the Pronunciation Isn't "Yahweh"***

Just as Keith Johnson unwittingly revealed his extreme bias against the pronunciation *Yahweh* when he wrote of how "excited" he was when he learned that it isn't "grammatically correct," author Gérard Gertoux gave away his own bias by writing how "amusing" it is that *Yahweh* isn't correct (in his own estimation, of course). Let's be reasonable here: Even before we begin an investigation of this topic, why would we approach it with a frame of mind that would cause us to be *amused* to learn that the pronunciation we disagree with isn't correct? What would make such a revelation "amusing"? I just don't get it and frankly, I hope I never do. This issue shouldn't be about rejoicing to find out the other guy is mistaken, nor should we think it's funny. For June and me, this issue has always been about earnestly seeking to call upon our Heavenly Father and refer to Him by name with the pronunciation that

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<sup>4</sup> Excerpt from the e-mail that Keith Johnson sent me on 7/4/2010.

matches the one He gave to Moses at the Burning Bush (Exodus 3:15-16). It has never been about seeking to prove that “Yahweh” is more correct than “Yehovah” or “Yahuwah,” as though this is some sort of competition to see who’s the brightest scholar. Gérard Gertoux, like Keith Johnson, authored a book in which he expresses support for the form *Yehowah* or *Yehovah*. In view of the fact that Gérard Gertoux is a Jehovah’s Witness, it struck me that he might be biased in favor of the pronunciation *Jehovah* or *Yehovah*, but as with Keith Johnson, I had every intention of giving him the benefit of the doubt. Nevertheless, he let me down by portraying commentators who favor the form *Yahweh* as being the ones who are biased, overlooking the extreme likelihood that folks who support the pronunciation *Yahweh* will undoubtedly think the same thing about him. You can read our full commentary on Gérard Gertoux in chapter 14 of our full-length study, but we will at least quote Mr. Gertoux’s expression of amusement that (in his estimation) the Tetragrammaton is not pronounced *Yahweh*:

It is amusing to note that the form of Yahweh, which was supported by some of the most brilliant theologians, the most competent grammarians, the most eminent biblicists, the most prestigious dictionaries, is known finally to be false.<sup>5</sup>

Regardless of whether or not the pronunciation *Yahweh* is incorrect, the fact that Mr. Gertoux would find it amusing for it to be shown as false gives away his own extreme bias. If we exhibit a balanced perspective, our attitude will be such that we simply want to find out the original pronunciation, whatever it might be, and go with that form without being “amused” that other pronunciations are not correct. In view of Mr. Gertoux’s unflattering remark about the pronunciation *Yahweh*, would you trust his reporting to be unbiased?

#### ***D. Offering Loads of Supportive Evidence for the Position We Support While Ignoring Contradictory Evidence***

It is not easy to recognize a bias wherein the author provides what he feels is a boatload of evidence supporting his position while leaving out “counter-evidence” that would trump his offering. That’s because our minds want us to believe that these authors really do present a balanced view. Sadly, the opposite is often true. Perhaps the most glaring example of this form of extreme partiality, insofar as this issue is concerned, was exhibited by author Brian Allen. Mr. Allen recently composed a study titled *Publish the Name Yahuwah*, but several years earlier he personally gave us a tract that he put together; in that handout, he offered ten sources supporting the “-ah” sound at the end of the Tetragrammaton, but only five sources supporting the “-eh” ending. Not only that, but he offered dates for his ten sources, but no dates for the five contradictory sources. The intent appears to be that of attempting to persuade the reader that his sources not only outnumber those of the opposing view, but they must also be older. However, Brian Allen’s most ancient source, “Sabbathkeepers on the island of Iona,” only goes back to the seventh century CE. What Brian Allen left out is the fact that Greek scholar Epiphanius, who reported a pronunciation with an “-eh” ending, lived from 320 CE until 403 CE. Why did Mr. Allen fail to report that a source that doesn’t support his conclusion is dated at least three hundred years prior to his own earliest source? It is fairly obvious that Mr. Allen presented his tract in such a way as to persuade novice

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<sup>5</sup> From “Paradox of the Anonymous Name,” by Gérard Gertoux. This study may be read in its entirety by accessing the following URL: <http://digilander.libero.it/domingo7/Gertoux.htm>.



and naïve students that his sources are greater in number and more ancient than those of the opposing view. Who will take the time to seriously evaluate Brian Allen's information?

Brian Allen takes an extra biased leap by presenting the pronunciation he favors (*Yahuwah*) as representing the Hebrew pronunciation, whereas the opposing form (*Yahweh*) is depicted as being Greek. We might add that Mr. Allen pulls out all the stops in portraying the Greek language as being heathen to the core. With this backdrop, he pits the two forms against each other and asks the same question that Elijah asked the prophets of Baal: "*How long halt ye between two opinions?*" Brian is convinced that if you choose *Yahweh*, then you have chosen to follow the same course taken by the prophets of Baal. The problem with this approach is that it can be demonstrated that both forms, *Yahuwah* and *Yahweh*, are linguistically possible pronunciation options in the Hebrew language. Thus, it is unfair to classify *Yahweh* as being "Greek." The question that Brian cleverly avoids is, "How was יהוה transliterated in other languages?" Unless he can prove otherwise, the only known language in which יהוה was anciently transliterated is the Greek language, and it was consistently transliterated with an *-eh* ending in that language. This transliteration most certainly does not make the pronunciation *Yahweh* a Greek form. It only reveals that it is the Hebrew pronunciation that most closely parallels what Greeks heard while listening to Hebrew-speaking Samaritans as they vocalized the Name. By the way, you can view Brian Allen's biased tract in chapter 13 of our unabridged version.

## *2. Arguments That Fail*

Over the years, we have read many arguments outlining how and why the Creator’s name cannot be pronounced *Yahweh*. For those who only do surface research, the combined arguments against *Yahweh* may seem compelling. For those who dig deeper, the arguments against the pronunciation *Yahweh* fall apart one by one. In this chapter, we summarize five of what are considered by some to be the most compelling arguments against the form *Yahweh*:

### *A. Yahweh Comes From Jove*

For those who are not familiar with “Jove,” it is another name for “Jupiter,” the supreme deity of the heathen Roman pantheon. Certainly, if *Yahweh* comes from the heathen *Jove*, this must mean that *Yahweh* is a heathen idol, which in turn must mean that it cannot represent the pronunciation of the Creator’s name. This is an argument that Brian Allen effectively uses in persuading his adherents that the original pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton is *Yahuwah* and that *Yahweh* is a heathen name. Is his reasoning valid?

In our full-length study, we demonstrate that an alternate possibility disproves Mr. Allen’s claim. The possibility presented by this scenario allows that the form *Yahweh* is the original pronunciation that reprobate men, as they wandered from the true path, corrupted, even to the point of changing the pronunciation from *Yahweh* to *Yohweh*, which in turn became *Jove*. If this chain of events describes what unfolded with our Creator’s name, would it invalidate the original pronunciation *Yahweh*? We address the “heathen pronunciation” argument against the form *Yahweh* in chapter 13 of our full-length study, where we present the example of King Manasseh, a king who as the son of righteous King Hezekiah, grew up knowing how to pronounce the Creator’s name, but later abandoned that faith to the point that he even sacrificed his own son in the fire, leading the nation of Judah astray with his own corrupt worship of the Baals. Regardless of how King Hezekiah taught his son Manasseh to pronounce the Tetragrammaton, the fact remains that King Manasseh eventually corrupted the true worship of יהוה. If we were to employ the reasoning used by such authors as Brian Allen, we would have to conclude that however it was that King Manasseh pronounced the Tetragrammaton, that pronunciation cannot be valid because it was contaminated with idol worship. Of course, if we read the account of King Manasseh as recorded in 2 Chronicles 33, we know that he eventually repented of his idol worship and commanded the people to serve YHWH. Should we believe that when Manasseh corrupted the worship of the Almighty, he lost track of how יהוה is pronounced, but then when he later restored the true worship, he once again had the correct pronunciation of יהוה revealed to him? This, in a nutshell, appears to be the line of reasoning reflected in some of the writings that June and I read, including Brian Allen’s writings.

It is ironic that the very reasoning that Brian Allen and other opponents of the form *Yahweh* use for teaching their followers that *Yahweh* cannot be the correct pronunciation is in fact a valid reason for concluding that it *is* the correct pronunciation of our Heavenly Father’s name.

## B. Vowel Points are “Preachers of the Name”?

In the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE, a group of Jewish scribes known as the Masoretes invented a system of vowel points that helped to clarify and preserve the proper pronunciation of the ancient Hebrew words. One of the worst-kept secrets about Hebrew vowel-pointing is that the Masoretes deliberately mis-vowel-pointed the Tetragrammaton so as to prevent the reader from inadvertently blurting out the Sacred Name. In fact, this is no secret at all, for virtually every Hebrew scholar whose works we have reviewed, including 19<sup>th</sup> century theologian Wilhelm Gesenius, agrees that the Masoretes intentionally substituted the vowel points from the word *adonai* for the vowel points that would have otherwise correctly vowel-pointed the Tetragrammaton. The following quote is taken from the 1893 edition of *Gesenius’s Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*:

The later Hebrews, for some centuries before the time of Christ, either misled by a false interpretation of certain laws (Ex. 20:7; Lev. 24:11), or else following some old superstition, regarded this name as so very holy, that it might not even be pronounced (see Philo, Vit. Mosis t. iii. P. 519, 529). Whenever, therefore, this *nomen tetragrammaton* occurred in the sacred text (שֵׁם הַמְּפֹרָשׁ הַשָּׁם), they were accustomed to substitute for it אֲדֹנָי [adonai], and thus the vowels of the noun אֲדֹנָי [adonai] are in the Masoretic text placed under the four letters יהוה, but with this difference, that the initial Yod receives a simple and not a compound Sh’va (יְהוָה, not יֵהוָה).<sup>6</sup>

Until recently, we had no idea that anyone contested the above information, i.e., the notion that the Jewish scribes deliberately placed the vowel points from the noun *adonai* (אֲדֹנָי) under the four letters of the Tetragrammaton (יהוה). However, not only has one author promoted the view that the Masoretes *correctly* vowel-pointed the Tetragrammaton in fifty select verses of Scripture, but a large following of believers has apparently accepted his conclusion. In this, our condensed version, the argument regarding the vowel-pointing of the Tetragrammaton by the Masoretic scribes is a difficult one to condense. Nevertheless, in this section, I’ve decided to not only give the briefest summary I can of the argument, along with our response, but I will also provide a semi-detailed explanation for those who would like to know more about this discussion without having to read our unabridged study.

June and I are acquainted with many Bible students who own *The Interlinear Bible*, which is a Bible displaying the Masoretic Hebrew text (along with the vowel points).<sup>7</sup> For those who do not own an interlinear Bible, one option is to download a program called *Interlinear Scripture Analyzer*.<sup>8</sup> If you examine the Tetragrammaton as found in these interlinear Bibles, you will find that it is vowel-pointed יְהוָה. However, as we are about to see, author Keith Johnson is persuaded that whoever came up with this vowel-pointing left out a tiny dot, called a *holem*, that should have been placed over the first ה in the Tetragrammaton. In other words, Mr. Johnson claims that the correctly vowel-pointed Tetragrammaton looks like this:

<sup>6</sup> From *Gesenius’s Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures*, with additions and corrections from the author’s Thesaurus and other works, by Samuel Prideaux Tregelles, John Wiley & Sons, New York, NY, 1893, p. 23.

<sup>7</sup> The version that we own is *The Interlinear Bible*, Jay P. Green, Sr., General Editor and Translator, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 1986.

<sup>8</sup> ISA Basic 2.1.3 Copyright © 2010 by André de Mol of The Netherlands. All rights reserved. The web site for downloading this program is found at <http://www.scripture4all.org>.

## יהוה

Did the Jewish scribes known as the *Masoretes* cleverly mis-vowel-point the Tetragrammaton by simply omitting the dot that would otherwise go above the ה? Keith Johnson, in his book, answers yes and cites fifty instances in what he calls an “ancient manuscript,” where the scribes presented the above vowel-pointing. That “ancient manuscript” is none other than the previously-mentioned Leningrad Codex B19A. The appearance of these fifty instances, in Keith’s estimation, proves that they represent the original pronunciation of the Creator’s name. Keith’s argument is based on speculation, which even he concedes when he writes, “If the earliest vocalized manuscripts are correct ....”<sup>9</sup>

I previously described Keith Johnson’s decision to “hide in plain sight” the age of the Hebrew Leningrad Codex B19A. The dating of this manuscript is important because its relatively modern age effectively makes it irrelevant in our quest for the original pronunciation of יהוה. To a novice student who is casually looking into the issue of how the Tetragrammaton was originally pronounced, a manuscript dating to the eleventh century CE may seem very, very old, and that is apparently Keith Johnson’s desired effect (hence his use of the term “ancient” when describing Leningrad Codex B19A in his book יהוה: *His Hallowed Name Revealed Again*). Anyone who conducts a basic investigation into the Ineffable Name doctrine soon finds out that Judaism came up with a system of vowel points in the seventh century CE, which is between 300-400 years prior to the year when Leningrad Codex B19A was copied. Many centuries before the invention of these vowel points, Jews had already begun avoiding the pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton. In their efforts to prevent readers from pronouncing יהוה when they come across this name in the Hebrew text, they inserted the vowel points from *Adonai*.

Keith Johnson, in his research of the Ineffable Name doctrine, dug a little deeper and upon comparing the vowel points from יהוה with the vowel points from *Adonai*, he found that there isn’t an exact match. For example, if the first vowel sound from *Adonai* is “ah,” then why is the first syllable of יהוה vowel-pointed as “eh”? Keith then points out that in Leningrad Codex B19A there are fifty examples of where יהוה is vowel-pointed, not only with the *-eh* sound in the first syllable, but with a “holem” vowel point (which, as it turns out, is a vowel point borrowed from *Adonai*). The *holem* is a tiny dot ( · ) that, in those fifty instances, appears over the first יהוה. Keith refers to these vowel points as the “preachers of the Name”:

Hopefully by now you are familiar enough with seeing יהוה that you noticed that there are some very small but important dots and symbols associated with the name. These are the keys to knowing how to pronounce the name. I call these dots and symbols, which are called vowel points, “the preachers of the name.”<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Keith E. Johnson, יהוה: *His Hallowed Name Revealed Again*, Biblical Foundations Academy, Minneapolis, MN, 2010, p. 111 (pp. 145-146 of his revised edition).

<sup>10</sup> Keith E. Johnson, יהוה: *His Hallowed Name Revealed Again*, Biblical Foundations Academy, Minneapolis, MN, 2010, p. 100 (p. 129 of the revised edition).

While Keith Johnson definitely dug deeper into the issue of vowel-pointing the Tetragrammaton, we are persuaded that he didn't go deeply enough. The problem with Keith's reasoning is the fact that the entire vowel-pointing method used by medieval Judaism to vowel-point the Tetragrammaton actually follows the rules of Hebrew linguistics necessary for vowel-pointing it with the vowel points from *Adonai*. This fact was never even questioned until very recent times, and frankly, we question the Hebrew credentials of those who question the method used by medieval Judaism. We provide a detailed explanation of this discussion in our full-length study. We can very briefly summarize our findings here by proposing the likelihood that the fifty instances in which the "holem" is used to vowel-point the Tetragrammaton in Leningrad Codex B19A most likely demonstrate fifty instances in which the scribe "forgot himself" while supplying the vowel points from *Adonai*. You see, when the *holem* ( · ) is left out of יהוה, the resulting vowel-pointing (יהוה) is actually grammatically incorrect, since the first ה of יהוה *must* be pronounced and is therefore *required* to be vowel-pointed. Omitting the *holem* vowel point ( ה ) over the ה would in turn result in an unpronounceable ה, which is yet another indication that this name was intentionally vowel-pointed so as to require a substitute word to be pronounced in its place. That substitute word is *Adonai*.

I understand that the above explanation may come across as though I feel I am a qualified Hebrew scholar, and since I have a major problem with unqualified Hebrew students asserting themselves as though they are scholars, I know I must be careful in stating that the above is information that anyone can validate by either contacting Hebrew scholars or by reviewing the Hebrew grammar books, which is what I did. In fact, in our full-length study, we quote Page H. Kelley, who, in his *Biblical Hebrew: An Introductory Grammar*, explains the vowel-pointing of the Tetragrammaton. A basic question that anyone who gives credence to Keith Johnson's reasoning really needs to ask himself is, "Why do Hebrew scholars agree that the Masoretes vowel-pointed יהוה in such a way as to prevent the reader from blurting out the Sacred Name, but opponents of the form *Yahweh*, as well as non-Hebrew scholars, argue that the scribes who copied Leningrad Codex B19A vowel-pointed the Tetragrammaton as it was originally pronounced?"

An even better question would be, "Why would Judaism teach its members to not utter the Sacred Name, and to assist with that process also teach that the Masoretic scribes deliberately mis-vowel-pointed it with the vowel points from *Adonai*, all the while lying since (according to Keith Johnson) the Tetragrammaton was correctly vowel-pointed so as to reflect its original pronunciation?" Keith does not answer these questions in his book and he admits to not even knowing if the vowel-pointing found in Leningrad Codex B19A represents the correct vowel-pointing of יהוה:

If we compare יהוה (Yehovih) with יהוה (Yehvah) the evidence points toward the *holem* which is the dot over the *hey* as being the missing vowel. This would mean that the scribes knew that the name was pronounced יהוה **Yehovah**, but they dropped the *holem* so that the name could not be pronounced correctly. This is a holy moment. If the earliest vocalized manuscripts are correct, then you have just read the holiest name in the universe.<sup>11</sup>

Keith's comment, "**If** the earliest vocalized manuscripts are correct" demonstrates his own uncertainty, which in turn reveals that he is speculating.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p. 111 (pp. 145-146 of the revised edition).

### C. *How Was the Ancient Hebrew Pronounced?*

One assertion that totally amazes me is made by folks who actually claim to know how the ancient Hebrew was pronounced. They apparently believe that they are so gifted in ancient Semitic languages that they are able to look at **יהוה** and confidently state, “This is pronounced *Yahuwah*.” Typically, the authors making these claims are not Hebrew scholars, yet we are expected to trust their conclusion because they claim they are going all the way back to the ancient “Paleo-Hebrew” characters. The desired effect, of course, is that of stopping all arguments because, after all, they have gone to a more ancient source. But wait! *Of what benefit is going to the ancient Paleo-Hebrew to determine how the Creator’s name is pronounced if we don’t know how to vocalize words in Paleo-Hebrew?* In other words, how did they come up with their “Paleo-Hebrew Pronunciation Guide”? To be fair, I should add that even those who are persuaded that the original pronunciation is *Yahweh* have made the claim that they, too, can determine the correct vocalization of **יהוה** just by looking at the Paleo-Hebrew characters. Thus, we should make it clear that we may agree with the conclusion reached by those who lean towards the pronunciation *Yahweh*, but this should not be construed as an agreement that we endorse their research methods.

Author Sean M. McDonough summarizes the problem with attempting to determine the precise pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton:

We must emphasize from the start that a final resolution of the problem of *precisely* how the name was said is impossible. We have no tape recordings of people saying the tetragrammaton; and even if we had one from, say, Jerusalem, there would still be the possibility that there were significant local variations elsewhere in the Mediterranean. The somewhat mysterious status of this divine name during our period exacerbates the problem. At best, we can raise the question of whether the name may have been said *something like* Yahu or Yaho, or *something like* the currently favored pronunciation *Yahweh* – or we may conclude that both forms were current among different groups.<sup>12</sup>

In spite of the enormous difficulty in determining the precise original pronunciation of **יהוה**, there is no shortage of individuals claiming special insight into ancient Hebrew linguistics who are apparently not interested in considering any external data. Interestingly, a well-known advocate of the pronunciation *Yehovah* has conceded that no one should rely on the ancient written languages to know the precise vocalization of the Tetragrammaton. The advocate we’re referring to is Nehemia Gordon. Mr. Gordon was asked about the claim that cuneiform writings validate the *Yah* pronunciation and this was his response:

The pronunciation of ancient cuneiform documents is pure speculation. Scholars have been able to decipher the words but they by no means know how the words were pronounced and certainly not how the vowels of the words were pronounced.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> McDonough, Sean M., *YHWH at Patmos*, J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), Publisher, Tübingen, Germany, 1999, p. 117.

<sup>13</sup> Gordon, Nehemia, quoted in an online article titled “What is the Proper Name of the Most High?” The author of the article only identifies himself as “Hanok ben Isaak,” and it can be accessed at the following URL: <http://jewsandjoes.com/yhvh-yhwh-ha-shem-the-great-name.html>.

We wholeheartedly agree with Mr. Gordon's conclusion that it is one thing to decipher the words from ancient cuneiform documents, but something entirely different to know how those words were pronounced. If we can agree that ancient writings should not serve as a reliable source when it comes to validating the pronunciation that we support, then we shouldn't need to address claims that certain ancient writings "prove" how the Tetragrammaton was originally pronounced. Nevertheless, a researcher named Gérard Gertoux has emerged with a claim that an ancient Egyptian carving consisting of two feathers, a sideways "9," a noose and a bird proves that the Tetragrammaton was originally pronounced *Yehua*. Can you or anyone explain to our satisfaction how two feathers, a sideways "9," a noose and a bird can be



*Does this ancient Egyptian hieroglyph prove how the Tetragrammaton was originally pronounced?*

used to prove that the Tetragrammaton was originally pronounced *Yehua*? Mr. Gertoux offers us no such assistance in his study, even though he writes that the text is "easy to decipher." We are apparently expected to just accept his explanation without question. We address this and other claims in chapter 14 of our full-length study.

As we delve into the ancient Hebrew in our quest for the original pronunciation of our Heavenly Father's name, I would like to add something here in our condensed version that I left out of our unabridged version. I personally believe that one of the major aspects we tend to leave out of these discussions is the fact that there is more than one dialect of the Hebrew language, which will result in different vocalizations of the same words. This point was addressed earlier in the quote from author Sean M. McDonough's book. If it is true that even modern Hebrew consists of different variations, I can well imagine that that same principle was also true with the ancient Hebrew. It is certainly true with our English language. For example, I am reminded of a phone conversation that I had with a manager of a tractor assembly plant shortly after moving to Texas. At that time I was working with a staffing agency and I was assisting with the recruitment of workers at the facility. During the phone conversation, the man gave me one of the requirements for all employees that we were to recruit. He said, "They must wear stilted cheese." The phone line was quite clear and there was no background noise, so I was literally flabbergasted and confused by the requirement to wear "stilted cheese." I apologized and asked him if he could repeat that requirement. He reiterated, "They must wear *stilted cheese*." By that time, I was so confused that I couldn't even *imagine* what he was trying to convey to me. It seems so obvious now, in view of the work environment in which our employees would be working, but at that precise moment, I was totally bewildered and stumped. Knowing that I *had* to put together an accurate job description, and knowing that our job applicants would have no idea what was meant by "stilted cheese," I had to once again apologize and ask the man to *spell* what he was telling me they had to wear. He slowly spelled, "S - T - E - E - L - T - O - E - D - S - H - O - E - S." I was at last relieved to understand what he had been trying to convey to me, but I was simultaneously very apprehensive about this new language spoken by Texans! Of course, it wasn't a new language, but what I experienced was the difficulty in learning a new *dialect*.

Since that educational conversation, I have run into a few Texans with accents/dialects as difficult to understand as that man, but thankfully I have adjusted to this environment. I have learned to adapt to a variation within our own English language. That experience certainly gave me a deeper appreciation for the age-old debate regarding which pronunciation of the Almighty's name is the "most correct" one.

Something tells me the Almighty is more concerned about how understanding we are of each other's views than about how close we come to pronouncing His name with 100% accuracy. We may well find out that there are many variations that are equally “correct,” but simply represent the different Hebrew dialects. If we can somehow learn to appreciate and respect these variations, as well as the individuals who use them, I believe we will come that much closer to becoming the children that our Creator wants us to be. Until that time comes, all we can do is offer our own personal explanation in defense of the pronunciation that we believe most closely matches the name He revealed to Moses.

#### ***D. “The Pronunciation We Use Fits All the Hebrew Grammar Rules!”***

Following very closely on the heels of those who claim to know how ancient Hebrew was pronounced is a group of individuals who claim that their pronunciation is the only one that “fits all the Hebrew grammar rules.” What is uniquely bizarre about the claims of these individuals is the fact that, in their attempt to prove their case, they turn to *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*. They provide quote after quote from this grammar book, and for those who are only able to conduct surface research, I’m sure their information is sufficient. However, does anyone reading these claims ever stop to ask, “Why does this author use Wilhelm Gesenius’ book to validate the pronunciation *Yahuwah* when Gesenius himself wrote that the original pronunciation is *Yahweh*?”

The first claim made by these supporters of the form *Yahuwah* is that, according to Hebrew grammar rules, the Tetragrammaton must consist of three syllables instead of the two syllable pronunciation of *Yahweh*. In chapter two of our full-length study, we demonstrate that the author of a study titled *Publish the Name Yahuwah* apparently overlooked another Hebrew grammar contingency involving the Hebrew *sh<sup>e</sup>wâ*, which is a syllable-divider. It is the *sh<sup>e</sup>wâ* that reduces the Tetragrammaton from being a three-syllable name to a two-syllable name. Gesenius offered information about the *sh<sup>e</sup>wâ* in his grammar book, but *Yahuwah* proponents either missed it or ignored it.

Those who take the time to check out Wilhelm Gesenius’ credentials will find that he is one of the most highly respected authorities on the Hebrew language. In the Preface to *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew-English Lexicon*, the editors refer to him as “the father of modern Hebrew lexicography.”<sup>14</sup> He is even well-respected by those who disagree with his conclusion about the original pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton – to the point that they cite his works in their attempts to validate their own conclusions to the contrary. It certainly follows that if one of the most respected Hebrew scholars of all time reaches a certain conclusion about how the Tetragrammaton was originally pronounced, no one in their right mind would challenge that conclusion without at least attempting to demonstrate that Gesenius wasn’t as knowledgeable about Hebrew grammar as he let on.

Nevertheless, over the years various individuals have come forward with the claim that, according to the grammatical principles of the Hebrew language, the pronunciation *Yahweh* cannot be correct. We have already seen this claim from a purported Hebrew scholar named Nehemia Gordon. Mr. Gordon is certainly not the first to produce this claim and he most likely will not be the last. Prior to Nehemia

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<sup>14</sup> C.f., *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew-English Lexicon*, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 1979, Preface, p. v.



Gordon, well-respected Hebrew scholar Franz Delitzsch, who is perhaps best known for his translation of the New Testament from Greek into Hebrew, made the claim that the pronunciation *Yahweh* is not grammatically feasible in Hebrew. Years later, however, Delitzsch retracted his claim. Here is an excerpt of what he wrote:

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.<sup>15</sup>

If the scholar who translated the New Testament from Greek into Hebrew is able to recognize the fact that the form *Yahweh* does indeed fit the Hebrew grammar rules, why do authors such as Nehemia Gordon, Keith Johnson and Brian Allen not share this same understanding? Do they know something that Franz Delitzsch and Wilhelm Gesenius didn't?

It should be noted that there are scholars supportive of the pronunciation *Yahweh* who argue that this pronunciation does indeed fit the Hebrew grammar rules. For example, the late Professor Anson F. Rainey wrote:

It should be noted that there are many strong linguistic and epigraphic arguments in favor of *Yahweh* as the correct form. There are Greek transcriptions from religious papyri in Egypt; there are personal names in Biblical Hebrew ending in *-yahu*, which is the typical “short form” (jussive, i.e., commands, and past tense) for verb forms of the particular type in which the last two consonants were originally *waw* (w) and *yod* (y). The “long form” of these same verbs ends in *-eh*.<sup>16</sup>

By now, we hope you are able to see through the arguments of those who claim that the pronunciation *Yahweh* cannot be correct in view of Hebrew grammar principles. If it were true that *Yahweh* cannot be correct, it follows that Professor Rainey, who certainly knew Hebrew, would have conceded such a fact. Author Sean M. McDonough also weighed in on whether or not, grammatically-speaking, the Tetragrammaton can be pronounced *Yahweh*:

We begin with the evidence for the pronunciation *Yahweh*. Old Testament scholars over the last century are generally agreed that this is how the name would have been said in ancient Israel. G. J. Thierry, among others, has asserted that יהוה should be understood as a verbal form, in parallel with אהיה in Ex. 3:14. While “*Yahweh*” does not correspond to a Qal imperfect of היה (which would be יהיה), the form can be accounted for by: a) the existence of an early form of the verb to be יהה; b) by the retention of the original *pathah* of the first syllable; and c) the tendency to treat divine names conservatively

<sup>15</sup> C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Vol. 5, “Psalms,” by F. Delitzsch, Translated by Francis Bacon, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, originally published by T. & T. Clark, Edinburg, Scotland, 1866-91, 2001, Preface, p. xiii.

<sup>16</sup> Anson F. Rainey, quoted from the “Queries & Comments” section of the July/August 1985 issue of *Biblical Archaeology Review*, p. 78. This section contains a letter / editorial titled “How Was the Tetragrammaton Pronounced?” contributed by Rainey, who was Professor of Ancient Near Eastern cultures and Semitic Linguistics at Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv, Israel.

and preserve the archaic form. Freedman and O'Connor come to a similar conclusion about pronunciation, but they base it more on parallel forms in Amorite. The discussion is difficult to follow for those without a deep knowledge of comparative Semitics, but one must admit that the virtual unanimity of the *cognoscenti* on the matter counts for something.<sup>17</sup>

McDonough presents a valid case for the tendency to treat divine names conservatively so as to preserve the archaic form, which could account for any changes from the paleo-Hebrew as it transitioned to the modern Hebrew. Certainly, in addition to losing the paleo-Hebrew characters, we can expect that there were other changes to the Hebrew language, however subtle they may have been, which could have impacted the “grammatical” pronunciation of יהוה versus יהוה. Not only does Sean McDonough present a reasonable argument supporting retention of an archaic form in spite of the more modern grammatical principles, but he also finds grammatical support in modern Hebrew for the pronunciation *Yahweh*. For those who continue to make an issue out of whether or not, grammatically-speaking, the Tetragrammaton can be pronounced *Yahweh*, we can pit their scholars, such as Nehemiah Gordon and Brian Allen, against the likes of Professor Anson F. Rainey, Sean M. McDonough, Franz Delitzsch and Wilhelm Gesenius. If anyone can demonstrate how incompetent these latter scholars were/are, we will be glad to give their reasoning deeper consideration. Until then, we are persuaded that grammatical arguments against the pronunciation *Yahweh* are *non sequitur*.

### ***E. Does a Hebrew Rhyme Scheme Validate the Original Pronunciation?***

I fervently believe that we should always remain open to new ideas and the possibility that our present conclusions may be faulty. As Daniel J. Boorstein once wrote, “The greatest obstacle to discovery is not ignorance ... it is the *illusion* of knowledge.” We all want to believe our conclusions are correct, but if we seriously ponder where we are and how far we’ve come, we should readily acknowledge that we’ve had to re-think many of our previously-cherished beliefs. We all had an illusion of being right that presented a difficult barrier to break through. When it comes to the Creator’s name, some folks are bound to reach the conclusion that I’m closed-minded and unwilling to consider any possible pronunciation other than *Yahweh*. Of course, only the Almighty Himself knows my heart and how open my mind is to new understanding, but I will here testify that I came very close to changing my mind about the most likely pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton when I read an article written by George Wesley Buchanan, Professor Emeritus of New Testament, Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington, DC. Actually, his article was in the form of a letter submitted to *Biblical Archaeology Review* in 1995. In that letter, he expressed some of the same notions that we address in our full-length study, including linguistic reasoning that doesn’t really prove anything. However, he made one point that garnered my attention. Professor Buchanan remarked that the form *Yahweh* doesn’t fit the “rhyme scheme” of the Song of Moses (Exodus 15). Not knowing any Hebrew at that time, I was prepared to blindly accept his reasoning without question, especially since it came from such a well-respected professor. The pronunciation favored by Buchanan is *Yahowah*. Here is what he wrote:

There is still one other clue to the pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton—Hebrew poetry. For example, from the poem of Exodus 15, read aloud verses 1, 3, 6, 11, 17 and 18, first pronouncing the Tetragrammaton as “Yahweh” and

<sup>17</sup> McDonough, Sean M., *YHWH at Patmos*, J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), Publisher, Tübingen, Germany, 1999, p. 117.

then read it again, pronouncing the same word as “Yahowah.” Notice the rhyme and poetic beat of the two. In this way the reader can judge which one is the more likely pronunciation used in antiquity.<sup>18</sup>

As I further pondered Professor Buchanan’s reasoning, it occurred to me that the “Song of Moses” isn’t the only poetry found in Scripture. The Psalms must also be considered. As it turns out, with our very first attempt in examining one of the Psalms (Psalms 127:1), June and I found a situation in which *Yahweh* rhymes with a word pronounced “yibneh.” This verse reads, “Shir hama’alot li-Shlomoh: Im-Yahweh lo yibneh ...,” which means “Song of ascents to Shlomoh: If Yahweh does not build ....” Here is how the opening words of this verse appear in the Hebrew text:

**Psalms 127:1**

|               |              |             |             |       |
|---------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|-------|
| לֹא - יִבְנֶה | אִם - יְהוָה | לְשִׁלְמוֹה | הַמַּעְלוֹת | שִׁיר |
| yibneh - lo   | Yahweh - im  | li-shlomoh  | hama’alot   | Shir  |
|               |              |             |             | ←     |

In the above verse, the word “hama’alot” ends with the same vowel sound as “Shlomoh” (Solomon) and the pronunciation “Yahweh” ends with the same sound as the word “yibneh.” We also couldn’t help but notice that in verse three of this same psalm, the word “hineh” (pronounced *hee-neh*) rhymes with “Yahweh”:

**Psalms 127:3**

|           |        |        |         |        |          |        |
|-----------|--------|--------|---------|--------|----------|--------|
| הַבֶּטֶן  | פְּרִי | שָׂכָר | בָּנִים | יְהוָה | נַחֲלַת  | הִנֵּה |
| .habatehn | phri   | shakar | banim   | Yahweh | nachelat | Hineh  |
|           |        |        |         |        |          | ←      |

The above Hebrew phrase, transliterated, reads, “Hineh nachelat Yahweh banim shaker phri habatehn,” which means, “Behold, children [are] a heritage of YHWH [and] the fruit of the womb [is His] reward.”

On the surface, Professor Buchanan’s explanation that his pronunciation of choice rhymes with other Hebrew words seems like neat and even plausible rationale for accepting that pronunciation as the “correct one.” However, as the late journalist H. L. Mencken wisely noted, “There is always an easy solution to every human problem – neat, plausible, and wrong.” We need to be careful that our “solutions” are based on facts, not on rhyme schemes.

<sup>18</sup> Excerpt from George Wesley Buchanan’s letter to the editor of *Biblical Archaeology Review*, “Queries and Comments,” March/April 1995, Vol. 21, No. 2, p. 31.

### 3. Reasoning That is Reasonable

As we bring this study to a close, we hope you are able to see that the arguments against the pronunciation *Yahweh*, at least the ones we have read to this point, are simply unreasonable. We have seen that, grammatically-speaking, the pronunciation *Yahweh* is just as feasible as *Yahuwah* or even *Yehowah*, and those who write that the form *Yahweh* cannot be correct in view of Hebrew grammatical principles offer no explanations as to why the author of the grammar book they cite supported the form *Yahweh*. Did renowned scholar Wilhelm Gesenius defy the grammar rules that he laid out in his own grammar book?

We have seen that those who argue that *Yahweh* is a heathen name derived from the idol *Jove* overlook the possibility that *Yahweh* came first, but as reprobate mankind wandered away from the Faith, they corrupted that name by applying it (or a very similar name) to idols. We know, for example, that just because King Manasseh abandoned the worship of יהוה and committed such detestable acts as sacrificing his sons in the fire, this did not invalidate whatever pronunciation of יהוה was commonly used at that time. To bring this argument even closer to home, we would ask those who favor the form *Yahuwah* what they would do if someone carved an image of some creature, giving it the name *Yahuwah*, and then bowed down to worship their idol named *Yahuwah*. Would such a despicable act eliminate any possibility that the original pronunciation of יהוה is *Yahuwah*? Of course it wouldn't, and neither does the fact that heathens worshipped an idol named *Jove*, whose name closely parallels the pronunciation *Yahweh*.

Recapping some other items that we covered in our study, we have hopefully learned to beware of those who claim the ability to examine the ancient paleo-Hebrew rendering of the Tetragrammaton and know, just by examining it, how יהוה is pronounced. We also know that studying cuneiform writings will not reveal the pronunciation of those words, nor will deciphering two feathers, a sideways “9,” a noose and a bird, which some self-proclaimed experts believe they can do. Contrary to what other self-proclaimed experts would have you to believe, the vowel points inserted by medieval scribes are not the “preachers of the name,” and a rhyme scheme found within the Hebrew text does not necessarily validate the original pronunciation. We may have left out some of the other reasoning used against the pronunciation *Yahweh*, but one by one, the errors of each are eventually exposed.

What, then, is the reasoning that is reasonable? Quite frankly, the best way to determine how a certain name was pronounced in a certain language is to determine how it was transliterated in another language, and the only language into which the Creator's name was transliterated – as far back as anyone can go – is the Greek language. In fact, in our unabridged version of this study, we demonstrate that the Greek language was actually borrowed from the paleo-Hebrew. Regrettably, many of those who argue against the pronunciation *Yahweh* exhibit a special loathing of the Greek language, making it virtually impossible for them to accept the possibility that the Greek language may have preserved the original pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton. The Hebrew scholar whose grammar book they frequently cite, however, has a much higher regard for the Greek language's preservation of ancient Hebrew names. Here is what Wilhelm Gesenius wrote:

The pronunciation of the Jews of the present day is very divergent. The Polish and German Jews adopt a worse one, partly like the Syriac, while the Spanish and Portuguese Jews, whom most Christian scholars (after the

example of Reuchlin) follow, prefer a purer one, more in harmony with the Arabic.

The manner in which the Septuagint (LXX) wrote Hebrew proper names in Greek letters, furnishes an older and more weighty tradition. Several, however, of the Hebrew sounds they were unable to represent for want of corresponding characters in the Greek language, e.g., **א**, **ב**, **ג**, **ד**, **ה** (in which cases they made the best shifts they could).<sup>19</sup>

With all due respect to those who paint such a vile picture of the Greek language, we are persuaded that Wilhelm Gesenius knew something that they do not – that this language is our best resource for determining how the Tetragrammaton was originally pronounced.

We have demonstrated that, contrary to the explanations and aspirations of those who spurn the pronunciation *Yahweh*, this form fits the Hebrew grammar rules. Moreover, in our unabridged version, we demonstrate how Greek scholars Theodoret and Epiphanius recorded that the Samaritans used a pronunciation that is very close to *Yahweh* in reference to the Almighty, much to the chagrin of the Jewish rabbis, who consequently relegated those Samaritans to the abyss. Our question is this: “If those Samaritans were incorrectly pronouncing the Tetragrammaton, then why did the Jewish rabbis write that they have no part in the world to come as a consequence to pronouncing the divine Name ‘as it is spelled out?’” Were the Samaritans pronouncing the divine name “as it is spelled out” or not? If they were, then they said something very close to *Yahweh*.

Modern-day scholars, looking back at all the available evidence supporting the ancient pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton, agree with Wilhelm Gesenius’ conclusion that transliterations from the Greek language provide the most compelling support:

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.”<sup>20</sup>

*The New Encyclopædia Britannica* expounds on the above commentary as follows:

The Masoretes, who from about the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup> century worked to reproduce the original text of the Hebrew Bible, replaced the vowels of the name YHWH with the vowel signs of the Hebrew words Adonai or Elohim. Thus, the artificial name Jehovah (YeHoWaH) came into being. Although Christian scholars after the Renaissance and Reformation periods used the term Jehovah for YHWH, in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries biblical scholars again began to use the form Yahweh. Early Christian writers, such as Clement of Alexandria in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, had used a form like Yahweh, and this pronunciation of the tetragrammaton was never really lost. Other Greek transcriptions also indicated that YHWH should be pronounced Yahweh.<sup>21</sup>

Responsible scholarship acknowledges that although the linguistic mechanics of Hebrew allow for several possible pronunciations of **אֱלֹהִים**, the available Greek transliterations offer compelling insight into

<sup>19</sup> From *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, Translated by Benjamin Davies, LL.D, Ira Bradley & Co., Boston, MA, 1880, p. 26.

<sup>20</sup> From the *Encyclopædia Judaica*, Vol. 7, Encyclopædia Judaica Jerusalem, The Macmillan Company, Copyright 1971 by Keter Publishing House, Ltd., Jerusalem, Israel, p. 680.

<sup>21</sup> From *The New Encyclopædia Britannica*, Vol. 12, 1998, Chicago, IL, p. 804.

which pronunciation is most likely the original one. While we will stop short of declaring *Yahweh* as the only possibility, we are nevertheless persuaded, based on the available evidence, that it is the most likely one. We respect the conclusions of others, even if we may not agree with them. As we have told others, “We may not know *exactly* how it is pronounced, but we do know exactly how it is *not* pronounced.” The name we were taught from our youth is *God*, and if we can agree that this is not his name, then hopefully we can mutually respect the sincere conclusions reached by those who strive to call upon the Father by the name He gave to Himself, even if we do not agree on the precise pronunciation. On the other hand, if we are going to dogmatically assert our pronunciation of choice as the “only one that fits,” then we had better be very careful lest it be found that we have been disseminating misleading and even false information, effectively obstructing the sincere paths of others with our misguided bias.

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