

Chart 5: *Yahweh* - The Covenant Name of God

During the Mosaic Period

When Moses asked which “god” he was to tell the Israelis had sent him to deliver them, the Creator instructed him to tell them that “**I AM**” had sent him to them; furthermore, that this was to be His covenant name with the nation of Israel from then on (Exodus 3:13-15).

אֲנִי (אֶהְיֶה) - *ah·wh* = “I am,” the Imperfect, 1st Common Singular of אֶהְיֶה (אֶהְיֶה - *h·wh*) “to be”
But instead of awkwardly referring to the Creator as “**I AM**,” the Israelis said of Him, “**HE IS**.”

הוּא (אֶהְיֶה) - *yh·wh* = “he is,” the Imperfect, 3rd Masculine Singular of אֶהְיֶה (אֶהְיֶה - *h·wh*) “to be”

Sometime Before the New Testament Period

At some point in their history, probably because of a strict understanding of Exodus 20:7, the Israelis began to verbally substitute a kingly title for the covenant name *Yahweh*.

אֲדֹנָי (אֲדֹנָי) - *a·dwn* = “Lord,” or more specifically, אֲדֹנָי (אֲדֹנָי) - *a·dwn·y* = “my Lord”

During the Masoretic Period

Until about AD 700, written Hebrew consisted only of consonants. When the *Masorettes* (European Jewish scribes) developed vowel markings (or “points”), they placed the vowel pointing from the kingly title, “My Lord” – אֲדֹנָי (*A^e·D^o·N^aY*) - upon the four consonants of the covenant name - YHWH - as a visual cue for readers to make the traditional substitution. In doing so, they produced a hybrid word that was never intended to be read aloud as it appeared in the text - יהוה: *Y^eH^oW^aH*.

At the Beginning of the Protestant Era

Unfortunately, when German scholars began translating the Hebrew Old Testament into their own language during the 1500’s, they simply transliterated the covenant name exactly as they saw it written in the Masoretic text. English scholars, building on the German work, also failed to differentiate between the Masoretic reading cue and the actual covenant name. In fact, they compounded the error by ignoring the phonetic fact that the German letters “J” and “V” are technically equivalent to the English letters “Y” and “W.” Thus, most English Bibles ended up with a completely incorrect pronunciation of the covenant name – J^eH^oV^aH

Today

Rather than using the actual covenant name of *Yahweh*, most of today’s versions designate it with a specially formatted typeset of an initial capital **L**, with the rest of the word in slightly smaller capitals.⁴⁸

LORD

I prefer to use the name *Yahweh* as my own means of conforming to the spirit of Exodus 3:15.

⁴⁷ Even with changes in the form of lettering, ancient Hebrew manuscripts tended to use the Mosaic-era shapes when writing out the covenant name of God. I have chosen to use the older, less familiar Hebrew lettering in this chart, but have also provided the more familiar modern equivalent for comparison.

⁴⁸ You should check the introductory articles of your particular Bible version to see how its editors handled presentation of the covenant name.