

The Tetragrammaton

The covenantal name of God in the Hebrew Bible is written with the four consonants: Yodh He Waw He. This name is known as the Tetragrammaton (Greek for "the four letters"). Although the Tetragrammaton was pronounced freely at the time the Torah and Prophets were written, its holiness in Judaism is such that it is no longer pronounced, except under very rare circumstances. In order to avoid offending religious Jews, one should not pronounce or misuse this name.

Stringent rules also apply to writing any of the names of God. For example, once God's name is written it is to be neither erased nor discarded. It must be stored. This is why you see circumlocutions like "G-d," which do not need to be kept. ([Recent rulings](#) indicate that use in computer files or displays does not constitute erasing.)

Most English translations of the Bible represent the Tetragrammaton with "LORD" or "GOD" in all capital letters.

in the consonantal Hebrew text:

יהוה

YHWH

These are the four consonants: Hebrew to the left, and Roman transliteration to the right. Capital letters correspond to the consonants of the Hebrew.

as traditionally pronounced:

אֲדֹנָי

'aDoNaY

When one reads the Hebrew Bible, it is traditional to pronounce the word "Adonay" instead of pronouncing the Tetragrammaton. "Adonay" means "my Lord" (except that Lord is plural, in deference to the majesty of God).

In many traditional circles in the contemporary world, the circumlocution Adonay is no longer used, except in religious uses such as prayer. In uses such as study, one will instead hear "Ado-shem," a combination of Adonay and Shem ("name"). Another circumlocution is Ha-Shem ("the Name"). There are also written circumlocutions.

as represented in the Masoretic pointed text:

יהוה

YeHoWaH

In the Masoretic text, the Tetragrammaton is written with the vowels of "Adonay" to remind the reader to pronounce "Adonay" instead of the Tetragrammaton. A Christian scribe of the Middle Ages misunderstood this convention and transcribed the combination into Latin as "Jehovah," as if this were the name of God. This confused form entered English usage in several translations of the Bible.

short forms:

The Hebrew Bible and other Hebrew literature uses several shortened forms of the Tetragrammaton. These forms can be pronounced without offence. Indeed, they are parts of relatively common words.

יה		YaH
הללויה	as in	Hallelujah!
יהו		YaHU
אליהו	as in	'eLiYaHu (Elijah)
יהו		YeHO
יהושע	as in	Yehoshua` (Joshua)

the presumed original pronunciation:

יהוה	YaHWeH
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Based on philology and representations in ancient languages such as Greek (see below), most scholars consider this the original pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton. This form has been used in Christian translations such as the Jerusalem Bible.

old Hebrew script:

𐤅𐤄𐤅𐤄	YHWH
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The tetragrammaton is written in several ancient Hebrew and Greek manuscripts using this old Hebrew script.

early Greek representations:

ΠΙΠΙ	Pipi
ΙΑΩ	Iaô

IAOYE

Iaoue

Greek manuscripts of the Jewish scriptures and Greek magical texts represent the Tetragrammaton in several ways. The examples above include an attempt to mimic the Hebrew letters with Greek and two transliterations. Old Hebrew is used in a couple of old manuscripts. Another common approach is to use the Greek word Kyrios, "Lord." Occasionally, we find "Adonai" in Greek.

[jct](#)