YHWH/YHVH

Are you against using the proper name of God? Are you for using it?

The strong aversion to using the name of God in Judasim today is that there is no complete way for us to know how to pronounce it. Scholars have debated for centuries over the exact pronunciation of God's name, based on available linguistic evidence and testimonies from ancient history. But all that anyone can provide is a best guess.

"In the earliest Hebrew the sacred name appeared as a four-letter word or tetragrammaton: YHWH (יהוה), without any vowel signs. Since the vowels were added very late, at the time of the fixing of the MT text..., the OT itself gives no clue to its original pronunciation. Some help, however, is given by the early church fathers. Theodoret of Cyrus (fourth century A.D.) testifies that the Samaritans, who shared the Pentateuchal scripture with the Jews, pronounced the name Ιαβε, and Clement of Alexandria (early third century A.D.) transliterated the 'name of four letters' as Ιαουε. Moreover, Egyptian Magic Papyri from the end of the third century A.D. attest to the patristic spelling, especially that of Theodoret. Following these hints, modern scholars believe the approximate pronunciation was 'Yahweh'" (*IDB*).[1]

"Yahweh" has become the most common pronunciation of the tetragrammaton in the scholastic community, but no complete certainty can be attached to this pronunciation. There are some variant pronunciations such as "Yahuweh" or "Yahoweh" which some prefer. A default position is to represent the name of God by the consonants YHWH or YHVH. We can, however, be confident that "Jehovah" (or "Yehovah") is not the correct pronunciation of YHWH:

"An artificial form, often attributed to Petrus Galatinus in *ca.* A.D. 1520, which results from the combination of the consonants of the Tetragrammaton...with the substitute vowel reading which was introduced in the sixth-seventh centuries A.D...One of the various substitutes that were employed, the chief was 'Adonai' ('Lord'), the vowels of which the Masoretes as a rule added to the consonants 'YHWH' to indicate that 'Adonai' should be read. The combination of the two—the Tetragrammaton and the vowels of 'Adonai'—yields the artificial name" (*IDB*).[2]

Because the Hebrew language has no vowels, the Masoretes, whose job it was to copy the texts of the Hebrew Scriptures, added special markings underneath letters to indicate vowel sounds. For the name YHWH (יְהֹוָה), the vowel markings for *Adonai* or "Lord" were applied, so the cantor would read *Adonai* (אֲדֹנָי). Some early Christian Bible translators applied the vowel markings for *Adonai* and came up with the name "Jehovah." There are still a fair number of Christians who use the form Jehovah, albeit in error. The scholastic community today is more likely to use the more correct form "Yahweh," or simply YHWH.

There are some in the Messianic community who believe that they know what the correct way to say the name of God is. The problem with this is that the pronunciation of His name has been debated for centuries, and one of the reasons why Jews today do not use it is because His name was only spoken aloud by the high priest in the Temple on *Yom Kippur*. Perhaps today we might not view it in such a sense, seeing the name YHWH or forms such as "Yahweh" used in academic journals and publications. But considering the debate over how God's name is pronounced, it would be best to respect historical precedents, knowing that our Father has a name, but treating it with the respect and holiness that it deserves.

As a ministry, we do not use the proper name of God, YHWH, in consideration for the long-standing Jewish custom of not pronouncing it. This was followed by Yeshua and the Apostles, who we never once see in the Apostolic Scriptures speaking the name YHWH. If you use the name YHWH frequently, and later travel to Israel, you may discover yourself a very unwelcome person.

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[1] B.W. Anderson, "God, names of," in *IDB*, 2:409.
[2] B.W. Anderson, "Jehovah," in Ibid., 2:817.