

How to Pronounce Proper Names in the Bible

Some people think that the pronunciation of names of people and places in the Bible is too difficult. But if you follow a few simple principles, you will find that pronouncing names in the Bible isn't as hard as you may think—and actually, can be fun! Let's look at some of the principles of English grammar that we must follow to pronounce names correctly:

First, we need to define what a syllable is: A syllable is a single unit of written or spoken word, an unbroken sound used to make up words.

For example, slowly say the word, "Jehovah". You may have noticed that Jehovah's name has three separate sounds—Je • ho • vah. Those separate sounds are the syllables.

All of the names in the Bible are marked with a "stress" mark (or "accent" mark: { ' }). These stress or accent marks follow the syllable that should be given primary stress in the word. In other words, that syllable sounds "bigger" than the other ones.

Slowly say "Jehovah" again. Can you hear which syllable sound bigger? That syllable is the one with the primary stress. We will explain more about this below...

♦ If the accented syllable ends in a **vowel**, (that is, **a-e-i-o-u**) then the vowel is said to be "long" in its pronunciation. In other words, when a vowel sounds like its name, (the name of the actual letter, a-e-i-o-u), it is a long sound. See some examples below:

Long sounds of a : a'corn, a'ble, pa'per, sta'ple
Long sounds of e : re'cess, e'qual, e'ven, fe'ver
Long sounds of i : i'con, ti'ger, ri'val, si'lent
Long sounds of o : Je • ho'vah, so'da, so'lo, ro'bot
Long sounds of u : hu'mor, du'ty, tu'na, pu'pil

Can you hear the long sounds of the vowels? For instance, the "a" in "paper" sounds like "a", and so on.

Here's another example: Jehovah's name would be separated like this: Je • ho' • vah. The stress mark follows the vowel "o". The "o" sounds like the vowel's name "o", giving it a long sound.

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Let's look at some examples in the Bible. Watch for the vowel in front of the accent mark, and see how that vowel has a long sound:

In 2 Chronicles 10:1, Re·ho·bo'am is pronounced ray-huh- BOW -am

In 2 Chronicles 13:21, A·bi'·jah is pronounced "uh- BUY -juh"
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In 2 Chronicles 20:14, Mat·ta·ni'·ah is pronounced "mat-uh- NIE -uh"

Look for some names in other scriptures and see if you can pronounce them correctly. If you get stuck, go to the Bible verse in the Watchtower Library and double click on the name you are trying to pronounce. The name will appear with an icon that looks like this:  Click on that icon, and an audio recording will sound with the correct pronunciation of the name.

Now, let's look at some words with vowels that has a "short" sound. A short vowel sound does not sound like the vowel's name, as do the long vowels.

Remember what was said before about syllables? In words with short vowel sounds, the accent mark follows a [consonant](#) in the syllable. The [consonants are all the letters that are not vowels](#). In the words below, notice how the accent mark follows a consonant:

Short sounds of a : ap'ple, pat'tern, blan'ket, han'dle
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Short sounds of e : el'bow, bet'ter, med'al, speck'le
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Short sounds of i : pil'grim, gin'ger, lit'tle, in'sect
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Short sounds of o : doc'tor, clos'et, ov'en, pock'et, bot'tle
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Short sounds of u : tun'nel, but'ton, num'ber
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Let's look at some examples of short vowel sounds in the Bible. Watch for the consonant in front of the accent mark, and listen to how the vowel sounds:

In 2 Chronicles 11:20 Ab'sa·lom is pronounced " AB -suh-lom"

In 2 Chronicles 19:1, Je·hosh'·a·phat is pronounced "Juh- HOSH -uh-fat"
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In 2 Chronicles 24:1, Zib'·i·ah is pronounced " ZIB -ee-ah"
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Remember, if you get stuck, go to the Watchtower Library click on the words that you're having trouble with. Keep practicing—you will get better at pronouncing names properly if you work on it!