

# HOW TO UTTER HEBREW VAV: “VAV” OR “WAW”?

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There are scholars who teach that because Hebrew and Arabic are Semitic languages the Hebrew letter ו vav must have been pronounced waw [w] in ancient Hebrew, as it was in Arabic, instead of vav [v]. Although, it is true that both languages are closely related they are not identical and letters from one do not necessarily vocalize the same way in the other.

It is also true that vav is vocalized by the Jews in most Arabic-speaking communities as the semivowel [w], i.e. waw; but in some communities of Syria and Egypt, as well as in northwest Morocco, it is vocalized as [v] and in the communities of northeast Morocco the vocalization [w] has the variant [v].

In the Aramaic-speaking communities the same letter is vocalized as [w] while in the Persian-speaking communities the realization is identical to that of soft ב bet, [v]. In all Ashkenazi communities Jews vocalize vav as [v], not waw [w]. Therefore, we can notice that all realizations of vav as waw [w] come from Arabic influence; they are not Hebraic.

So, can we be sure as to how to vocalize the Hebrew letter vav? Is it vav or waw? What does the Hebrew text of the Tanak say regarding this matter?

There is a peculiar occurrence of a Hebrew word which can be spelled in two different ways. This is the word גַּב gav, and means “back” as of a human being; it is a masculine noun. It comes from the verb גָּאָה ga’ah, to rise up, grow up, to be lifted up, be raised up, be exalted, as one becomes or appears high or tall by rising his back. גַּב gav has total of eight occurrences in the Tanak: in 1Ki 14:9, Pro 10:13, Pro 19:29, Pro 26:3, Isa 38:17, Isa 50:6, Eze 23:35, and Neh 9:26.

גַּב corresponds to another Hebrew word בַּב gav with the same meaning, “back”. Actually, this is the same word but spelled with letter bet instead of letter vav. It is a noun masculine or feminine with an occurrence only in Dan 7:6, as we read from the Aramaic section of the book,

*After this I looked and saw another, like a leopard, which had on its **back** four wings of a bird. The beast also had four heads, and rule was given to it. (Dan 7:6)*

**Note:** Daniel 1-7 are written in Aramaic and Daniel speaks in them in the third person (Dan 7:1-2) in a historical narrative. They separate themselves from the following chapters written in Hebrew, in which Daniel speaks in the first person. The other thing that separates Daniel 1-7 from Daniel 8-12 is the absence of the Tetragrammaton (the Name of the Creator) in the

Aramaic section of the book. We do not know the reason for this separation, but we can only speculate that the prophet did not want to write down the Set-apart Name of the Creator in a tongue other than Hebrew.

With that being said, we have no evidence to believe that the Hebrew word *gav* is written in a defective way in Aramaic, but that **גב** *gav* is a variant of **גב**. The word **גב** *gav*, “back”, comes from the root verb spelled identically with the meaning to hollow or curve, hence the back as rounded. This same word **גב** *gav*, “back”, appears in the Hebrew text of Eze 10:12 in the description of the heavenly beings *cheruvim*,

*And their entire bodies, and their **backs**, and their hands, and their wings, and the wheels that the four had, were covered with eyes all around. (Eze 10:12)*

Therefore, we conclude that both spellings of the word *gav* are interchangeable, since they have the same meaning in Hebrew and in Aramaic. From the spellings of *gav* we see that the vocalizations of *vav* and *bet* are also interchangeable.

Hence, we may conclude that letter *vav* is vocalized in Hebrew only as [v] since letter *bet* always vocalizes as either [b] or soft [v], but never *waw* [w].

It is not in the scope of this article to prove that all languages are corrupted but one: Hebrew. After the confusion of the languages at the tower of Babel, Hebrew has been preserved as the pure language of the Creation. But, before Babel the entire mankind at that time spoke one language, Hebrew, which when traced back leads to the language spoken by Adam. This is the language of Creation; this is the language spoken by the Creator, when He literally spoke out the words and the things came into existence.

How do we know that Hebrew was the language of Creation and all other languages had been corrupted? The answer is simple. All Biblical names starting with Adam through the line of Shem son of Noach have meanings in Hebrew. All other names after the confusion of the languages at Babel through the lines of Yaphet and Ham sons of Noach have no meanings in Hebrew.

The cousin languages of Hebrew such as Arabic, Aramaic, Acadian and others appear to be corrupted versions of Hebrew, not the other way around as some scholars teach.

Therefore, the correct pronunciation of the Hebrew letter *vav* is [v], not *waw* [w] as in Arabic. The influence of the Arabic language into Hebrew (brought in by the Arabic speaking Jewish communities) has made the confusion that the Hebrew letter *vav* is vocalised as *waw* [w].

For the importance of the correct vocalization of **ו** *vav* in the Creator’s distinctive Name read the article [The Hebrew Yehovah vs. the Roman Yahweh](#).

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