

## Introduction

Names have meaning attached to them. They help us identify one individual from another within a family group. Names are given through various processes, depending upon the culture. Some name their children after admired relatives or friends. Others use events that occurred during the pregnancy or shortly after the birth of the child to determine what name should be given. In the Scriptures we find the name Seth, meaning 'substitution' (Genesis 4:25); Emmanuel, meaning 'God with us' (Isaiah 7:14); Noah, meaning 'comfort' (Genesis 5:29); Abraham, meaning 'father of a great multitude' (Genesis 17:5); and Malachi, meaning 'Jehovah's messenger' (Malachi 1:1).

Upon receiving his commission by God to deliver the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage, Moses asked; "When I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say unto me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them" (Exodus 3:13)? A name is a word or words that designate a person, place or thing. A person's name can be descriptive of their character or reputation.

In the Old Testament there are approximately 34 such names or designations for God. Because of who God is, no one name could possibly describe His multi-faceted character, nature or essence. Some names are used more often than others, not because they were more popular among the people, but because they fit the moment at which a person was trying to describe God concerning a given situation, or in prayer. The Word of God is the only way we can know God; His works, character, and relationship between Himself and His creation.

Keeping in mind that our Bibles are English translations from the original languages of Hebrew and Greek, the most common name our English versions have is *God* and *Lord*. Both of these designations do little to portray the true character or work of God. For our study, we do not have enough room to make this an exhaustive

study and only have the room to discuss twelve (12) of the most used names of God in the Old Testament.

### Jehovah

Used 6823 times in the Old Testament, the name Jehovah is probably the most recognized designation for God. God's name was considered by the Jews as too holy a name to be written or uttered, therefore the true name of God is unknown, being replaced with YHWH (Yahweh). Even today, Jews will not pronounce the name Jehovah.

This name refers to God as the eternal self-existent one, His unchangeableness, as well as to His righteousness, holiness and salvation. The name Jehovah is often translated as 'LORD' in our English Bibles, to distinguish between the name Jehovah and Adonai (Lord). In Exodus 6:2-3 it is said, "I am Jehovah: and I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, as El-Shaddai, and as to my name Jehovah, I was not understood by them; yet verily I have established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan." This and other passages show how God desires to establish a special relationship with His creation. The name Jehovah as a proper name unequivocally describes the person of God (Jeremiah 16:21; Psalm 83:18).

### Elohim

Used 2570 times in the Old Testament, the name Elohim is the first word used in Scripture to describe who God is (Genesis 1:1). This name describes the creative and governing power, as well as God's omnipotence and sovereignty. Thirty-five times in the first two chapters of the Bible the name Elohim is used to reveal God's power to create the universe out of nothing (Hebrews 1:2; 11:3). The power of Elohim to destroy an exceedingly wicked world is seen in Noah's day (Genesis 6:18; 9:15-16). Having the power and authority to establish covenants, Elohim tells Israel, "I shall be unto you for

Elohim and ye shall be unto me for a people" (Jeremiah 31:33; 32:40).

Another important aspect of the name Elohim is its plural form. Although the word 'trinity' is not found in Scripture, the principle is taught by this very name (among others). Three distinct persons in the Godhead (Elohim), are a united one, not a numeric one (1 Timothy 2:5; Galatians 3:20). Literally, Genesis 1:1 says, "In the beginning the Elohim created the heaven and the earth." It was also the 'Elohim' who said, "Let US make man in OUR image" (Genesis 1:26). When Jacob built an altar to God at Bethel he called it 'El Beth-El' because 'The Elohim' had revealed themselves to him (Genesis 35:7).

Between the two names 'Elohim' and 'Jehovah,' the Jews referred to God as 'the Elohim' but never 'the Jehovah,' because Jehovah was the name of the one true God. They would say 'my Elohim' but never 'my Jehovah,' because it was understood what Jehovah meant. It was always the 'living Elohim' but never the 'living Jehovah,' because it would be redundant since Jehovah means eternal self-existent one.

### Adonai

Occurring 300 times in the Old Testament, the name Adonai is often written as 'Lord' with just a capital 'L' rather than all caps like Jehovah. Like Elohim, Adonai is also plural in form, and also confirms there are three persons in the Godhead. This principle is most particularly seen in Psalm 110 where David said, "The Lord said unto my Lord," or "Jehovah said unto my Adonai. Sit thou on My right hand." The name Adonai denotes the relationship between God and mankind that is signified by 'ownership.' Because God (Elohim) is the creator of all things, consequently He is also creation's owner.

As Lord or Master (Adonai), God said to Abraham: "Fear not, Abram; I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward" (Genesis 15:1). When commissioned by God to deliver the Israelites from Egyptian bondage Moses replied, "O my Lord (Adonai), I am not eloquent .. I am

*slow of speech*" (Exodus 4:10). We find that the earth will tremble at the presence of Adonai (Ps. 114:7). Adonai is above all gods (Psalm 135:5). Over 200 times in the book of Ezekiel Adonai is used as a compound name to Jehovah to show that God is not only Master over the Israelites but over all mankind (Ezekiel 13:9; 23:49; 24:24; 29:16; et al). It is through this name that men recognize they are but servants to the one who has the authority to direct their every step.

### El-Shaddai

Found in our English translations as "God Almighty," this name is a compound of the Hebrew 'El' and 'Shaddai.' The word 'El' translated God is used over 200 times (Psalm 77:14; 68:35; Deuteronomy 3:24; et al). Sometimes it is translated 'mighty' or 'power' (Genesis 31:29; Proverbs 3:27). Shaddai is translated as 'almighty' forty-eight (48) times, but 'breast' twenty-four (24) times to signify one who nourishes or supplies. From this one name, we learn that every good and perfect gift comes from God. It denotes the fullness of His grace and mercy that is poured out to those who love Him.

### Jehovah-jireh

This name is the first in line to a number of compound names attached to the name 'Jehovah.' If you will remember, the name Jehovah reveals the moral and spiritual attributes of God as well as His eternal self-existence. The appearance of the name 'Jehovah-jireh' first came when Abraham was asked to sacrifice his son Isaac. The place where the sacrifice was to take place was called "Jehovah-jireh" meaning "it shall be provided" (Genesis 22:7-14). Through this name we find the idea of deliverance as well as providential care. God delivered Isaac from being sacrificed as a providential lesson that neither the blood of bulls and goats or of Isaac could take away sins. Only a spotless lamb provided by God could atone for man's sins; a lamb provided by 'Jehovah-jireh.'

### **Jehovah-tsidkenu**

This name appears in a prophecy by Jeremiah concerning a 'righteous branch' and 'king' (Jeremiah 23:5-6). Jeremiah was a prophet to the Southern Kingdom of Judah, who apparently had not learned from the captivity of their Northern tribes of Israel. The prophet writes to warn Judah that they will face the same doom if they do not repent and return to serving Jehovah. Jeremiah informs the Jews that Jehovah is a 'tadik' (righteous one). But there is more behind the meaning than one English word can describe. This name portrays not only God's righteousness, but brings with it the idea that His ways are the standard by which we must live (Job 31:6; Psalm 62:9).

### **Jehovah-rohi**

This designation is found in the Twenty-Third Psalm and means 'Jehovah my Shepherd.' Despite Jehovah's holiness that prevents Him from fellowship with sinful man, His love and mercy causes Him as Shepherd, to seek out lost sheep and bring them to good pasture (Ezekiel 34:11-16; Psalm 80:1; 78:70-72). Even Jesus is referred to as the Shepherd (John 10:1-18).

### **Jehovah-shammah**

Meaning "Jehovah is there" (Ezekiel 48:35), this name denotes God's presence among His people. God had promised the Israelites that He would be present among His people always (Exodus 23:20; 33:14-16; Deuteronomy 4:37). In the Old Testament the tabernacle and temple were 'Jehovah-shammah's' abode (Exodus 40:34-38; 2 Samuel 7:5-7). It is from this name that the Jews of old and today falsely believe in a literal reigning of the Messiah from Jerusalem and restoration of the sacrificial system (Dispensational Pre-millennialism). Today, 'Jehovah-shammah's' presence is found in temples not made with hands (1 Corinthians 3:16; 2 Corinthians 6:16). Christ has promised His presence to His church (Matthew 28:20).

### **Jehovah-rophe**

This name arises from the experiences of the Israelites as they walked through the wilderness towards Mount Horeb. The word 'rophe' appears 70 times in the Old Testament always meaning, to heal, restore, cure; not only in the physical sense but in the spiritual as well. In Exodus 15:22-26 we find the first use of this name where, at the waters of Marah Moses cast a tree into the water to turn it from bitter to sweet. God told them that He was "Jehovah that healeth thee" (Jehovah-rophecha). Today, Jesus is Jehovah-rophe (John 7:37-38).

### **Jehovah-nissi**

Meaning, "Jehovah, my banner" (Exodus 17:15), this name came into being because of Israel's defeat over Amalek. Moses was to stand on a high place so the Israelites could see him and the staff of God held up to demonstrate God's presence. As long as the rod was lifted up Israel was victorious, but when Moses let it down Amalek won the battle. This name denotes that through Christ who strengthens me I can do all things (Philippians 4:13).

### **Jehovah-M'Kaddesh**

From the book of Leviticus we find the appearance of this name, "*I am Jehovah which sanctifies you*" (Leviticus 20:7). How appropriate that this name should be found in this book that teaches Israel about sanctification once they were redeemed. Sanctify is defined as '*consecration, dedication, hallowed, and holy.*' The word 'holy' stands for that which has been 'set apart.'

In the book of Leviticus Jehovah 'set apart' certain things and individuals for His presence as well as for worship (Leviticus 25:10). Jehovah demands that His people set themselves apart from the world and be holy as He is holy (Leviticus 19:2; Matthew 5:48). Today Christians have been set apart because they have been called

out of the world (1 Corinthians 1:2; 1 Peter 2:5-10).

### **Jehovah-shalom**

Found in the pages of Judges 6:24, this name means 'Jehovah is peace.' The word 'shalom' has several English translations which include 'finished' (Daniel 5:26); 'make good' (Exodus 21:34); 'pay' or 'perform' (Deuteronomy 23:21); 'recompense' (Deuteronomy 32:35); 'full' (Genesis 15:15). The basic idea is payment of a debt, reconciliation upon a completed transaction, and harmony in relationship – expressing the deepest desires of contentment and satisfaction of the human heart – thus 'peace.' Perhaps the greatest use of this word is found in Isaiah 9:6 where the Messiah is said to be called the 'Prince of peace.' Because through His atoning sacrifice He is able to once and for all bring peace and contentment between man and his Creator.

There are many names found in the Old and New Testaments that help bring to life who our Creator really is. Each designation opens up a different and more complete understanding of who God is, and how He desires that each of us take seriously our opportunity in this life to prepare for what is to come – eternity. Do you truly know God as He would have you know Him?

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# **The Names of God**



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