

Yahweh

Use in the Bible: In the Old Testament Yahweh occurs 6,519 times. This name is used more than any other name of God. Yahweh is first used in Gen 2:4.

YHWH, Jehovah

Strong's Reference: H3068

Meaning and Derivation: Yahweh is the promised name of God. This name of God which (by Jewish tradition) is too holy to voice, is actually spelled "YHWH" without vowels. YHWH is referred to as the Tetragrammaton (which simply means "the four letters"). YHWH comes from the Hebrew letters: Yud, Hay, Vav, Hay. While YHWH is first used in Genesis 2, God did not reveal Himself as YHWH until **Exodus 3:13 - 14**

13 And Moses said unto God, Behold, 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 to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them?

14 And God said unto Moses, I Am That I Am: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I Am hath sent me unto you.

The modern spelling as "Yahweh" includes vowels to assist in pronunciation. Many pronounce YHWH as "Yahweh" or "Jehovah." We no longer know for certain the exact pronunciation. During the third century A.D., the Jewish people stopped saying this name in fear of contravening the commandment "Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain" (**Exd 20:7**). As a result of this, Adonai is occasionally a substitute for YHWH. The following compound names which start with "YHWH" have been shown using "Jehovah." This is due to the common usage of "Jehovah" in the English of these compound names in the early English translations of the Bible (e.g., the Geneva Bible, the King James Version, etc.).

After the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70, the name was not pronounced. Adonay was substituted for Yahweh whenever it appeared in the biblical text. Because of this, the correct pronunciation of this name was eventually lost. English editions of the Bible usually translate Adonay as "Lord" and Yahweh as "LORD." Yahweh is the name most closely linked to God's redeeming acts in the history of his chosen people. We know God because of what he has done.

When you pray to Yahweh, remember that he is the same God who draws near to save you from the tyranny of sin, just as he saved his people from oppressive slavery in Egypt.

Before we understand what the name “Yahweh” means, let’s go back to its origin story in Exodus 3. In this story, God speaks to Moses through the burning bush and gives him the mission to end all missions: freeing the Israelite people from Egyptian captivity.

Understandably, Moses has some concerns, the main one being how he will convince his fellow Israelites that this really is a mission from (and blessed by) God.

What Does Yahweh Mean?

Exodus 3:13-15 is the first Biblical usage of the name “Yahweh,” At the end of the passage, we can see that it is the name by which God has chosen to be remembered throughout all generations.

The English language doesn’t have an exact translation of the word “Yahweh,” so in our Old Testament, we see it written as “LORD” in all capital letters.

In Jewish tradition, “Yahweh” is too sacred a name to utter out loud. Over time, Jews started to substitute in “Adonai,” or “My Lord,” especially when speaking. Another common replacement is the name “Elohim,” Interestingly, these two replacement names are used for other things, not just God, whereas Yahweh is reserved exclusively as a name for God.

But why is it so significant that God’s name is “I AM”?

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Yahweh Is a Relational God

Yahweh is only used in the Bible when the author is talking about God’s personal relationship with his people. A great example of this is **Psalms 19**.

1 The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork.

2 Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge.

3 There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard.

4 Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun,

5 Which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race.

6 His going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it: and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof.

7 The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.

8 The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.

9 The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.

10 More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.

11 Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward.

12 Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults.

13 Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.

14 Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer.

The author talks in the first 6 verses about Elohim (another name for God) and his relationship with the material world. Then, in verse 7, he shifts and starts to write about Yahweh and his relationship with those who know him and who are in covenant with him.

The fact that God introduces himself to us as “Yahweh” tells us that his first priority in relating to us is making sure we know that he is the intensely personal God, seeking to have relationship with his people.

We talked earlier about how God doesn't need us...but that makes it all the more wondrous that he wants us. This is a God who was so love-motivated to know us and to be in relationship with us that he came to earth as a human and took the punishment we deserved.

This is our relational God.

Perhaps the most well-known name for God in the Old Testament is “Yahweh,” the special name that demonstrates His covenant lordship over Israel. The Lord revealed this name to Moses at the burning bush in the process of calling him to be His agent for liberating the Israelites from Egyptian slavery, an episode recorded in today’s passage.

There were no written vowels in ancient Hebrew, but vowels were vocalized whenever the text of the Hebrew Scriptures was read aloud in ancient times. During the medieval period, Jewish scholars known as the Masoretes developed a system of written vowels, although they never added them to the word Yahweh, which appears as four letters (YHWH, in the Latin alphabet) in the Hebrew text. Interestingly, the English word Jehovah derives from a German transliteration of those four letters that goes all the way back to the 1500s when translators combined YHWH with the vowels from Adonai, the Hebrew word for “Lord.” Linguists today are unanimous that “Jehovah” is a mispronunciation and that “Yahweh” best reflects the Hebrew consonants and vowels revealed to Moses. **The name Yahweh is related to the verb “to be,” as in the phrase “I Am Who I Am” (Ex. 3:14). Yahweh thus means “I Am.”**

That Yahweh means “I Am” tells us several important things about God’s identity. First, it shows that the Lord’s character is unchangeable. We can say of ourselves, “I was x last year, but now I am y, and next week I could be z,” but not our Creator. Yesterday He says, “I Am,” today He says, “I Am,” and tomorrow He says, “I Am.” He cannot learn any new information or become more holy. None of God’s perfections can be subtracted or added to. He can never be anything other than what He is today. There is absolutely no shadow of change for our Creator (James 1:17). Importantly, Jesus speaks of Himself in similar terms (the “I Am” sayings of John; see 8:58, for example), which reveals that He is one with the Father and worthy of worship and praise.

A vital difference between God’s essence and our own is also revealed in the name Yahweh. **Human beings and the Lord both possess the attribute of “beingness” — we both exist. Yet our being is derivative, as we have not always existed. On the other hand, God is self-existent: He has always been and can never cease to be (Ps. 90:2).**