

The Names Men Call God

A Series on the Names of God: Part 4

Through the display of great works, power and miracles, human beings became aware of the reality of God. When God introduced Himself, human beings called upon His name, and identified Him with words of their own special meaning that commemorated a special connection or reflected a certain aspect of His nature.

Perhaps because God introduces Himself initially to Abraham as “El-Shaddai,” the earliest names that men called God were compounds of “el,” which was the common noun for “the god” or “god” including pagan references.

EI-Elyon (The Most High God or The Exalted One)

Devoted to the same God as Abram (later renamed Abraham), Melchizedek, the king of Salem and priest, blessed Abram and his God “elohim ‘elyôn ‘elyôn” the Possessor of heaven and earth. The name is used later by other inspired authors to express God’s exalted position over and above all other gods (Num 24:16; 2 Sam 22:14; Ps 18:13).

And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a priest of God Most High (**‘el ‘elyôn ‘elyôn**). He blessed him and said,

“Blessed be Abram of God Most High (**‘elohim ‘elyôn ‘elyôn**),
Possessor of heaven and earth;
And blessed be God Most High (**‘elohim ‘elyôn ‘elyôn**),
Who has delivered your enemies into your hand.”

He gave him a tenth of all. The king of Sodom said to Abram, “Give the people to me and take the goods for yourself.” Abram said to the king of Sodom, “I have sworn to the Lord God Most High (**‘elohim ‘elyôn ‘elyôn**), possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take a thread or a sandal thong or anything that is yours, for fear you would say, ‘I have made Abram rich.’ (Gen 14:18-23)

EI-Roi (God Who sees me or God of vision)

Mistreated because she was pregnant, Hagar flees from Sarai, but does not know where to go (Gen 16:8). The Angel of the Lord, tells her to return and submit to Sarai, because He will increase her descendants such “that they will be too numerous to count.” (Gen 16:10)

Then she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her, “You are a God (**‘el**) who (**rō’î**) sees (**ra’ah**)”; for she said, “Have I even remained alive here after seeing Him?” (Gen 16:13)

Hagar’s name for God identifies Him as the One who looks out for her or sees her need.

EI-Olam (God of Eternity or God the Everlasting One)

Abraham used this name for God when he successfully reclaimed his well at Beersheba.

Abraham planted a tamarisk tree at Beersheba, and there he called on the name of the Lord, the Everlasting (**‘ôlām**) God (**‘el**). (Gen 21:33)

The Bible provides little clarity to what Abraham meant with this name for God. Because the biblical account places an emphasis on Abraham’s alien status in the “land of the Philistines” (Gen 21:23, 34), perhaps it reflects Abraham’s recognition that God will never forsake him. In this instance, Abraham called upon the Lord after Abimelech and Phicol, acknowledging the supremacy of Abraham’s God, sought a covenant of peace and restored all that was belonging to Abraham.

This sense of God’s everlasting faithful fidelity is conveyed by Isaiah (Isa 26:4) and the Psalmist (Ps 90:2).

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Adonay Yahweh (Lord God)

When Abraham addresses God for the very first time in the Bible (Gen 15:2, 8), it is in the context of a title instead of a proper name. After the Exodus, God explicitly tells Moses that Abraham did not know God by His name YHWH / Yahweh / Yēhovah (Ex 6:2-3).

Abram said, “O Lord (“**adonay**) God (**Yēhovah**), what will You give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” (Gen 15:2)

“Adonay” is the plural form of “adon” which means “lord.” When the singular form “adon” is used, it is usually as a royal title (1 Sam 29:8) or distinguished person. When the plural form “adonay” is used in reference of God, it is paired with a singular verb just like “elohim.” In like fashion, the Jews understand the plural form as the “fullness of majesty” whereas Christians understand it as a reference to the triune nature of God.

In one passage, Abraham uses the title “adonay” without “Yēhovah” when speaking to God about Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18:3, 27, 30-32).

Yahweh-Jireh (The Lord will provide)

In one instance, in lieu of a personal name, God introduced himself to Abraham as “the Lord (**Yēhovah**) who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans” (Gen 15:7), and Abraham follows this pattern of address when he commemorates an area where God provides a sacrifice in lieu of Isaac (Gen 22:14).

Abraham called the name of that place The Lord (**Yēhovah**) Will Provide (**yir’eh**), as it is said to this day, “In the mount of the Lord (**Yēhovah**) it will be provided (**yir’eh**).” (Gen 22:14)

Once God revealed His covenant name YHWH to Moses, Yēhovah was combined with other Hebrew words to describe the God of Israel.

Yahweh Elohe Israel (The Lord God of Israel)

Commanded by God to return to his land, Jacob fears the prospect of meeting his brother Esau, who he assumes desires to take revenge for stealing the birthright, and prays to the God of Abraham and Isaac for deliverance from Esau’s wrath (Gen 32:9-12). While alone, Jacob meets and wrestles God who renames him Israel, one who strives with God (Gen 32:28). When met by Esau’s loving welcome, Jacob realized his prayers were answered and he commemorates the spot.

Then he erected there an altar and called it El-Elohe-Israel. (Gen 33:20)

Moses uses God’s memorial name “YHWH” in place of “El” which renders the title “The God of Israel” to “Lord God of Israel.” This title would be used elsewhere in the Old Testament (Ex 32:27; 34:23; Num 16:9; Josh 7:13, 19).

And afterward Moses and Aaron came and said to Pharaoh, “Thus says the Lord (**Yēhovah**), the God (‘**elohim**) of Israel (**yisrā’ēl**), ‘Let My people go that they may celebrate a feast to Me in the wilderness.’” (Ex 5:1)

Yahweh-Nissi (The Lord is my banner)

When battling the Amalekites (Ex 17:8-13), the tide of the battle was determined by whether Moses held the staff of God high or not. In acknowledgment of victory through the divine enablement of the raised staff of God, Moses commemorates the visual encouragement it provided the fighting Israelites.

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Moses built an altar and named it The Lord (**Yĕhovah**) is My Banner (**nissi**); and he said, "The Lord has sworn; the Lord will have war against Amalek from generation to generation." (Ex 17:15-16)

Yahweh-Shalom (The Lord is peace)

Reassuring Gideon who was surprised to behold the face of the Angel of the Lord, God tells him "do not fear, you shall not die." Gideon commemorates the spot where God wished him peace (Judg 6:24).

Then Gideon built an altar there to the Lord and named it The Lord (**Yĕhovah**) is Peace (**šālôm**). To this day it is still in Ophrah of the Abiezrites. (Judg 6:24)

Yahweh-Sabaoth (The Lord of hosts or The Lord Almighty)

Introduced around the time when Israel demanded a king, the name Yahweh-Sabaoth was frequently used by the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah and Zechariah.

Now this man would go up from his city yearly to worship and to sacrifice to the Lord (**Yĕhovah**) of hosts (**sēbā'ôt**) in Shiloh. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were priests to the Lord there. (1 Sam 1:3)

The meaning of "hosts" is uncertain; however, interpretations include the earthly army of Israel and / or the heavenly army of angels. In the figurative sense, "the Lord of hosts" depicts an image of a warrior God and alludes to God's power over all nations.

Yahweh-Rohi (The Lord is my shepherd)

As one of the most loved names of God, it reflected one's appreciation of being in the personal care of God.

The Lord (**Yĕhovah**) is my shepherd (**rā'âh**), I shall not want. (Ps 23:1)

Ab (Father)

Moses' use of "Father" introduces a special relationship between the nation of Israel and God. It is not a biological relationship but one based solely on the concept of salvation as God, faithful to His promises to Abraham, redeems his descendants. Moses exhorts his people, as children of the redeeming God, respect and obey your Father!

"Do you thus repay the Lord (Yĕhovah),
O foolish and unwise people?
Is not He your Father (**âb**) who has bought you?
He has made you and established you." (Deut 32:6)

In the New Testament, the apostles, knowledgeable of the Old Testament, brought with them the Hebrew concept of God.

Only Sovereign, The King of kings and Lord of lords

In his letter, Paul encourages Timothy to be steadfast in his faith and commitment to teach the truth with a focus on a holy life with God.

I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate, that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which He will bring about at the proper time—He who is the blessed and only **Sovereign**, the **King of kings** and **Lord of lords**, who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen. (1 Tim 6:13-16)

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Paul places the sovereignty of God above all as a reminder that, regardless of the challenges by earthly authorities or cultural norms, the life of a Believer goes beyond the earthly present.

References:

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