

YHWH / Yehovah / Yah

יְהוָה / יְהוּוָה / יָה

Most books about the names of God start their name study with "Elohim" as it's the first name of God that appears in the Bible (Genesis 1:1). And certainly, there is much to be learned about the Most High from this name. However, I have chosen to begin with the name that is **the** name of God and the one that appears most often throughout Scripture.

What is God's personal name?

The Bible reveals to us approximately 75 different names that tell us who God is. Of these, only one is His distinctive, personal **name**. The others are actually titles or designations disclosing all that He is and desires to be in His personal interactions with us.

For example, my **name** is Linda, but I am also known as or called "Aunty", "Mom", "Mama", "Sister", "Teacher", and "Pastor" by different people, depending on the level of our relationship. While all are valid "names" by which people know me, they are not my actual name. They are titles or "attributes" that give some insight into who I am in relationship to that person.

And so it is with the GOD of the Bible. Known as the "Tetragrammaton" by Bible scholars and linguists, GOD's name is comprised of four Hebrew letters: י (Yod or Yud) ה (Heh) ו (Vav) ה (Heh); or reading right-to-left, יְהוָה (Yod-Heh-Vav-Heh). This name is usually transliterated as "YHWH", "JHVH", or "YHVH" (written in all uppercase as "LORD"/"LORD" or "GOD"/"GOD" in most English Bibles), variations of which have been further interpreted by the names "Yahweh" and "Jehovah".

Regardless of which transliteration one uses, the Hebrew Tetragrammaton "יהוה" is the **distinctive personal name** of the GOD of Israel.

Etymology.

The name derives from two Hebrew emphatic verbs:

- "hâyâh" ("הָיָה")—meaning to **exist**, to **be** or **become**, to **come to pass**; and
- "hâvâh" ("הָוָה")—meaning to **breathe**, to **be**, to **exist**.

In other words, "YHWH" ("יהוה") means the "**self-existent** and **eternal one**" or the "**one who is**" (as in "*I am what I am*" in Exodus 3:14). And, as the "**one who is**", His name can be further interpreted as "**He who imparts existence**."

How and when did YHWH reveal His name to us?

Used ±6800 times, according to the Authorized King James Bible (KJV), "יהוה" ("YHWH") is first seen in the second chapter of Genesis.¹

This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created,
when the LORD (YHWH) God (Elohim) made the earth and the heavens.
(Genesis 2:4 *parenthetical text added*)



However, GOD did not actually reveal Himself to mankind by the **name** "יהוה" ("YHWH") until many centuries later when He called Moses to deliver the children of Israel from Egypt.¹

² And Elohim (God) spoke to Mosheh (Moses) and said to him, "**I am יהוה** (the LORD).

³ "And I appeared to Abraham, to Yitshaq(Isaac), and to Ya'aqob (Jacob), as Ėl Shaddai (God Almighty). And by **My Name, יהוה** (LORD), was I not known to them."

(Exodus 6:2-3 TS *emphasis and parenthetical text added*)

¹⁴ And Elohim (God) said to Mosheh, "**I AM that which I AM**" (Hebrew: "Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh" [I am/will be what I am/will be]) And He said, "Thus you shall say to the children of Yisra'el (Israel), '**I AM** (Ehyeh) has sent me to you.'"

¹⁵ And Elohim (God) said further to Mosheh, "Thus you are to say to the children of Yisra'el, '**יהוה Elohim** (LORD God) of your fathers, the Elohim (God) of Abraham, the Elohim of Yitshaq, and the Elohim of Ya'aqob, has sent me to you. This is **My Name forever**, and this is My remembrance to all generations.'"

(Exodus 3:14-15 TS *emphasis and parenthetical text added*)

From the choice of words in the above-referenced verses quoted from *The Scriptures 2009*, it's obvious that GOD desires us to understand His character—that He wants us to know, not only His name, but to know **Him . . . through** His name!

Exodus 14:4 further supports the view that the name "YHWH" embodies certain aspects of GOD's character—those inherent attributes that determine His moral and ethical actions and reactions—that no other name or god does . . . or **can**.

"And I shall strengthen the heart of Pharaoh, and he shall pursue them.

But I am to be esteemed through Pharaoh and over all his army, and the Mitsrites (Egyptians) shall **know that I am יהוה** (the LORD)" And they did so.

(Exodus 14:4 TS *emphasis and parenthetical text added*)

It isn't likely that God intended in Exodus 14:4 above that the Egyptians would simply learn His **name**. There is a strong element of Divine self-disclosure within it. He wanted them to know that יהוה ("YHWH") is not **a** god, but is **the** GOD!

GOD desires us to understand the manner of His character; He wants us to know, not only His name, but to know Him through His name!

What do we learn from the name "YHWH"?

Perhaps the most important characteristic embodied in the name "YHWH" is that He is a GOD of truth. Really, YHWH **defines** truth, for He **is** truth!



For a long time Israel was without the **true God**,
without a priest to teach and without the law.
(2 Chronicles 15:3 *emphasis added*)

Whoever invokes a blessing in the land will do so
by the **one true God**; whoever takes an oath in the
land will swear by the **one true God**. For the past
troubles will be forgotten and hidden from my eyes.
(Isaiah 65:16 *emphasis added*)

But the LORD is the **true God**; he is the living God, the eternal King.
When he is angry, the earth trembles; the nations cannot endure his wrath.
(Jeremiah 10:10 *emphasis added*)

Now this is eternal life: that they know you,
the only **true God**, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.
(John 17:3 *emphasis added*)

As **the** Truth, it logically follows, then, that YHWH is also perfectly **loving, just, and righteous**. Let us reason this out...

- In order to have true love, one must include a systematic and unbiased standard of justice. A loving parent, for instance, establishes boundaries and a meting out of legitimate and appropriate rewards or punishment for specific actions or even attitudes.
- In other words, justice without love is not justice, and love without justice is not love.
- And of course, truth must include love and justice. Without love and justice, there is no truth.
- And finally, where there is complete and perfect truth, love and justice, there is naturally unceasing **righteousness**.

It is this one **true, loving, just, and righteous** GOD who gave the Law to Israel. Oh, I know, our natural self immediately cringes when we first hear that word—**law**—and meet with its legitimacy and reality. We don't like laws. We tend to think of laws as being restrictive and prohibitive—not to mention punitive.

The fact is, however, that we imperfect, selfish mortals need boundaries, which really is just another word for "law". Without laws, humankind would have quickly fallen into brutal anarchy, which certainly would have led to our extinction long before now.

If we must have laws, then, would we all not prefer that they come from a perfectly **loving, just, and righteous** GOD of complete **truth**?

Contrary to widely-held modern thinking—even among Christians—YHWH did not give the Law to Israel to restrict, withhold, rescind, or punish. Rather, He established the Law to set Himself apart from the other gods, to set Israel apart from the other nations, to help us see our need for a Redeemer, and to make a way for Him to draw near and to **bless** Israel!

For instance...

- His laws prescribing certain sanitary practices exceeded most health and hygiene standards of today and kept Israel free from the diseases of the nations around them.



- His law about the Sabbath was a law of compassion and grace, not prohibition. In that day and culture, it was customary for them to labor seven days a week from sunup to sundown. In mandating the Sabbath, GOD's people had a day to rest from their labor, spend time with family and friends, and reflect on GOD's goodness and faithfulness. That's why Jesus told His critics, "**The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.**" (Mark 2:27)
- The law about giving tithes and offerings was a means of providing for widows, orphans, the elderly and destitute, as well as the priests and scribes.
- His laws about not gleaning or gathering all the crops provided food for poor people, orphans, and travelers.
- His laws about Sabbath rests for the land every seven years made the land more productive; and the Jubilee year enabled families to be freed of debts and to recover their families' heritage.
- And, while other nations' gods often demanded human sacrifices for no other purpose than to satisfy their own blood lusts, Israel's one true GOD required animal sacrifices and offerings to help them understand how grievous sin is—not only to Him but also to themselves—and to make a way for Him to forgive them and draw near to them. He even made allowances for poor people to bring offerings that were more within their means.

It is the most natural and loving thing a parent can do for their child—setting boundaries to protect them, teaching them proper standards of health and hygiene, and shaping their moral and spiritual character. YHWH's giving of the Law to Moses was His way of demonstrating to them His commitment to His covenant promise to provide their every need and protect them from harm.

In addition to YHWH being **true, loving, just,** and **righteous,** Scripture tells us that there is also **power** in His name!

Then Asa called to the LORD (YHWH) his God (Elohim) and said,
 "LORD (YHWH), there is no one like you to help the powerless against the mighty.
 Help us, LORD (YHWH) our God (Elohim), for we rely on you, and **in your name**
 we have come against this vast army. LORD (YHWH), you are our God (Elohim);
 do not let mere mortals prevail against you."

(2 Chronicles 14:11 *emphasis and parenthetical text added*)

"Therefore I will teach them—this time I will teach them my **power**
 and **might**. Then they will know that my name is the LORD (YHWH).

(Jeremiah 16:21 *emphasis and parenthetical text added*)

So, what we learn from the name "YHWH" is that He is the **one true God** . . . set apart from and superior to all other gods . . . **all-powerful,** fully **loving,** completely **just,** and wholly **righteous.**

How did we get the name "Jehovah" from "YHWH"?

There are several theories as to how this happened. Some believe we simply Anglicized the "YHVH" transliteration of "יהוה" by inserting vowels between the consonants. While that's certainly a plausible explanation, I believe it ignores some history critical to the process.



As mentioned previously, GOD's personal name is so sacred to Jews that they don't want to speak it or even write it for fear of violating the commandments to not use His name in vain or profane His name.

"You shall not misuse the name of the LORD (YHWH) your God (Elohim),
for the LORD (YHWH) will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name."
(Exodus 20:7 *parenthetical text added*)

"Do not profane my holy name, for I must be acknowledged
as holy by the Israelites. I am the LORD (YHWH), who made you holy."
(Leviticus 22:32 *parenthetical text added*)

The Complete Jewish Bible (CJB) renders those verses:

"You are not to use lightly the name of Adonai ("יְהוָה") your God (Elohim),
because Adonai ("יְהוָה") will not leave unpunished someone who uses
his name lightly."

"You are not to profane my holy name;
on the contrary, I am to be regarded as holy among
the people of Isra'el; I am Adonai ("יְהוָה"), who makes you holy."
(*Parenthetical text added*)

In order to not risk violating those commands, the Jewish practice for centuries has been to read "Adonay"/"Adonai" ("אֲדֹנָי") in place of "YHWH" ("יְהוָה"). As we will discuss in the next lesson, "Adonai" means "Master" or "Sovereign Ruler" and generally denotes **authority** and **exalted position**.

To remind the reader to not pronounce the name "YHWH" ("יְהוָה"), but instead to read the name "Adonai" ("אֲדֹנָי"), they placed the vowel points of Adonay (a, o, a) under the Tetragrammaton "YHWH", thus creating "יְהוָה".

Using the Leningrad Codex² and the Greek Septuagint³, the first translators who transcribed YHWH's name from Hebrew and Greek to Latin had no reason to believe that the vowels of יְהוָה yielded an imprecise designation. Therefore, they transliterated it as "YaHoWaH", just as it **appeared** to indicate in the Hebrew. (This is the argument Jehovah's Witnesses have used to support their claim that GOD's personal name is and "always" has been "Jehovah". However, as we now know, "Jehovah" cannot be a correct interpretation as it incorporates letters that were never a part of the name that YHWH gave to Moses in Exodus 3:14-15.)

During the transliteration of the Scriptures from Hebrew and Greek to Latin (known as "Romanization"), "J" replaced "Y" (as in "Ya'akov" becoming "Jacob", "Yeshua" and "Yêšû" becoming "Jesus", etc.) and "V" replaced "W", thus rendering "YaHoWaH" as "JaHoVaH". And finally, when translating the Scriptures from Latin to English, translators further Anglicized the name by changing the first vowel from "a" to "e" to coincide with the common pronunciation.

Today, Jehovah's Witnesses as well as many English-speaking Protestant Christians and people of other languages whose Bibles were influenced by the English King James Version (KJV/AV) use the English transcription "Jehovah" (sometimes, albeit rarely, "Yehovah"). Most scholars and theologians, however, agree that "Jehovah" is a philological improbability⁴ since



the original Hebrew written form was only intended to remind the Hebrew reader to say "Adonai" and was not the original name given to Moses.

The Jews also continue to use the name "Adonai" almost exclusively as the proper name of YHWH. In addition to the verses in Exodus 3:15-16 and 6:3, which we already discussed, the English Complete Jewish Bible (CJB) uses the actual Tetragrammaton "יהוה" or "Yud-Heh-Vav-Heh" only two other times:

Adonai passed before him and proclaimed: "YUD-HEH-VAV-HEH!!!
Yud-Heh-Vav-Heh (יהוה) [Adonai] is God, merciful and
compassionate, slow to anger, rich in grace and truth;"
(Exodus 34:6 CJB)

In the course of which the son of the woman of Isra'el uttered the Name
[Yud-Heh-Vav-Heh (יהוה)] in a curse. So they brought him to Moshe.
(His mother's name was Shlomit the daughter of Dibri, of the tribe of Dan.)
(Leviticus 24:11 CJB)

**GOD obviously wants us to know His name,
most likely for what it reveals about who He is
and who He *wants* to be to each of us!**

How do you *pronounce* "YHWH" or "YHVH"?

There is considerable debate among scholars, linguists, and students alike as to the correct pronunciation of GOD's formal name, as spoken by YHWH to Moses in Exodus 3:14-15.

- Some say the name should be pronounced just as it is written according to the pronunciation of the letters themselves, "Yod-Há-Väv-Há´".
- As we've already discussed, others claim it should be "Jehovah", incorporating the vowels of "Adonay" into "YHWH" or "JHVH".
- Arguing that Hebrew is more a spoken language than a written one, some have added vowels to "YHWH" to create "Yahweh" while others believe the name should be pronounced "Ye'hôvâh".
- And finally, based on the pronunciation of the verb from which the name derives, "hâyâh", perhaps GOD's name is pronounced "Yo'haw-yaw".

The fact is that the precise pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton cannot be academically and conclusively determined. Even among Israeli university scholars, there is widespread disagreement because the name has not been spoken in Israel since the Temple was destroyed in 70 CE (AD).

No doubt, countless spiritually zealous seekers will debate and wrestle with this particular issue for many years to come, until that Day when we shall all see Him face-to-face and know Him as we are known. Until then, I am deeply grateful that our extravagantly-loving God doesn't let our awkward fumbling of His name come between us. Rather, He invites us into His presence and showers us with His unrestrained love and mercy!



Meditation

At one time—based on a purely personal and admittedly subjective experience—I had believed that His name should be pronounced exactly as He revealed it to us in the Hebrew, "Yod-Há-Väv-Há'". While that may be a reasonable presumption, I have since changed my thinking on it.

When teaching languages, we normally think of the alphabet according to the **sounds** formed by each letter, not according to each letter's name. For instance, we don't pronounce the word "scuba" (an acronym) "es-see-yoo-bee-á". Therefore, to say that God's name should be pronounced according to the **names** of the Hebrew letters may not be as logical as it seems.

I suggest that the reason no one today knows how to pronounce His name is because there is **no natural** human sound that can adequately replicate the unique sound and significance of the name of the Most High GOD.

Since YHWH's desire has been for us to know **Him** and His **heart** of overflowing love for us, I propose that it isn't the **pronunciation** that matters, but what the name **represents**. I believe His name isn't a word to be **verbalized**, but is perhaps more a **deep sigh** to be **breathed** from within the heart.

After all, is that not where the Most High abides—within the heart? Is that not where YHWH has written His laws and placed His set-apart name—on our hearts?

As the **one true, loving, just, and righteous** GOD, His name tells us **who** He is and who He **wants to be** to each of us!

Stop and consider for a moment: The Tetragrammaton "YHWH" literally means "**I AM**". GOD who **is** is telling us in Exodus 3:14 that He **Is!** He is . . . He always has been . . . He will always be . . . and He causes all things to be (exist).

In reading the Scriptures with this new information, I pray that we all would develop a zeal and affection for the **true name** itself over such inferior titles as "God" and "Lord" and that we would simply allow **Him** to speak His name into our hearts.

15 And the nations shall fear the Name of יְהוָה, And all the sovereigns of the earth Your esteem,

16 For יְהוָה shall build up Tsiyon, He shall appear in His esteem.

(Psalm 102:15-16 TS)

1 Praise Yah⁵! Praise, O servants of יְהוָה, Praise the Name of יְהוָה!

2 Blessed be the Name of יְהוָה, Now and forever!

3 From the rising of the sun to its going down, The Name of יְהוָה is praised.

4 יְהוָה is high above all nations, His esteem above the heavens.

5 Who is like יְהוָה our Elohim, Who is enthroned on high?

(Psalm 113:1-5 TS)



- 1 Praise Yah! Praise the Name of יְהוָה; Praise, you servants of יְהוָה,
- 2 Who are standing in the House of יְהוָה, In the courts of the House of our Elohim,
- 3 Praise Yah, for יְהוָה is good; Sing praises to His Name, for it is pleasant.
- 4 For Yah has chosen Ya'aqob for Himself, Yisra'el for His treasured possession.
- 5 For I know that יְהוָה is great, And our Master is above all mighty ones.
- 6 has done whatever pleased Him, In the heavens and in earth...

(Psalm 135:1-6a TS)

Let them praise the Name of יְהוָה, For His Name alone is exalted,
His splendour is above the earth and heavens.

(Psalm 148:13 TS)

-
- 1 Although God didn't reveal His actual name until many centuries later, Moses is credited as being the author of the Pentateuch (first five books of the Bible). As the author of Genesis, therefore, it is reasonable that he would use the name in the Genesis narration that God had revealed to him in Exodus.
 - 2 **Leningrad Codex** - The oldest complete manuscript of the Hebrew Bible in Hebrew dated 1008 CE (AD), using the Masoretic Text and Tiberian vocalization.
 - 3 **Greek Septuagint** - The earliest Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures from the original Hebrew. It is estimated that the Torah (Pentateuch or first five books of the Old Testament) was translated around 200 BCE (BC) and the remaining texts were translated 100 BCE
 - 4 **Sources:**
 Make Sure Ministries, "*Jehovah vs. YHWH*", <https://www.makesureministries.com/jehovah-yhwh/>, np, 12/2018
The Jewish Encyclopedia, public domain, <http://jewishencyclopedia.com/8568-articles/jehovah>, np, 12/2018.
Encyclopaedia Judaica © 2007 by Thomson Gale. Lewisohn, Ludwig (Jerusalem), Vol. 7, p. 680.
 - 5 The Hebrew יְהוָה, the contracted/abbreviated form of יְהוָה, occurs 49 times in the Hebrew Scriptures, primarily in the Psalms. That is the origin for the word "Hallelujah", the Hebrew being "הַלְלֵי יְהוָה" ("Hâlâl Yah").

