

YHWH / Elohim Tzva'ot (Sabaoth)

אֱלֹהִים צְבָאוֹת / יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת

YHWH of Hosts / Elohim of Hosts

If you use the NIV...

Be aware that the NIV uses "**LORD Almighty**" to represent "YHWH Tzva'ot" ("LORD of Hosts"). This is not the same as "*El Shaddai*", which is represented as "*God Almighty*" or "*Almighty God*".

To avoid any confusion, remember that "YHWH" is always represented by uppercase "LORD" or "GOD", and "El" is always represented by lowercase "God". Thus, "*LORD Almighty*" could never represent "*El Shaddai*".

This is an excellent example of why it's always good to study more than one version of the Bible to ensure a more accurate and thorough understanding of the text.

Pronounced *Yä-wá'* or *El-o-heem' Sa-bâ'ôt*, the compound names appear 284 times in the Old Testament, primarily in the Prophets. One of the most exciting and interesting qualities attributed to YHWH, it is a most appropriate name with which to conclude this main study of the titles of GOD.

It's the name David used as his primary weapon against the Philistine giant, Goliath.

David said to the Philistine, "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you **in the name** of the LORD (YHWH) Almighty (Tzva'ot), the God (Elohim) of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied."

(1 Samuel 17:45 *emphasis and parenthetical text added*)

When thinking about the boy, David, going against the Philistine giant, most people think David defeated Goliath with a stone hurled from his slingshot. But, that's not what the text says. Read it again.

David had rejected King Saul's sword and armor as too heavy and bulky and confessed his full confidence in YHWH's ability and desire to enable him to prevail against the Philistine. As he gathered the stones for his slingshot, he said he was challenging Goliath with the **only** weapon at his disposal that he **knew** full well could and **would** spell victory—not his skill with the slingshot, but the "**name of YHWH Tzva'ot**"!

**David killed Goliath.
But YHWH Tzva'ot defeated him!**

And, this is the same name that Isaiah witnessed the fiery seraphim shouting in their constant praise and exaltation around YHWH's throne.



And one cried unto another, and said,
 Holy (qadosh), holy (qadosh), holy (qadosh),
 is the **LORD** (YHWH) **of hosts** (Tzva'ot):
 the whole earth is full of his glory.
 (Isaiah 6:3 KJV *emphasis and parenthetical text added*)

It is a most wonderful name and one that should infuse every believer with courage and confidence to run the race that's been set before each of us!

Etymology

The word "tzva'ot" derives from two Hebrew words:

- The noun "tseba'ah" (tsebâ'âh) ("צְבָאָה"), meaning a "**mass**" of persons or things, especially for war, by implication an "**army**", "**host**", "**soldiers**", or "**war**".
- The verb "tsaba" (tsâbâ') ("צָבָא"), meaning to "**mass**" (an army or servants), "**assemble**", "**fight**", "**muster**", "**war**".

How are the compound names represented in Scripture?

"YHWH Tzva'ot" ("יְהוָה צְבָאָה"), "YHWH Elohim Tzva'ot" ("יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים צְבָאָה"), and "Adonai YHWH Tzva'ot" ("אֲדֹנָי יְהוָה צְבָאָה") are the most frequently used compound names or attributes of YHWH in the Old Testament.

- **YHWH Tzva'ot** is transliterated "**LORD of Armies**" or "**LORD of Hosts**" in most English Bibles. A few English Bibles, such as the NIV and CEV, display "**LORD Almighty**" or "**LORD All-Powerful**". This compound name is the one used most often and appears in 235 verses, primarily in Jeremiah, Isaiah, Zechariah, and 1 Samuel.

Who is this King of glory? The LORD (YHWH)
 of hosts (Tzva'ot), he is the King of glory. *Selah*.
 (Psalm 24:10 KJV *parenthetical text added*)

But the LORD (YHWH) Almighty (Tzva'ot) will be exalted
 by his justice, and the holy (qadosh) God (El) will be proved
 holy (qadosh) by his righteous acts (tsid'ke-nu).
 (Isaiah 5:16 *parenthetical text added*)

- 4 Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the LORD (YHWH); and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the high priest; and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the LORD (YHWH), and work: for I am with you, saith the LORD (YHWH) of hosts (Tzva'ot):
- 5 According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not.
- 6 For thus saith the LORD (YHWH) of hosts (Tzva'ot); Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land;
- 7 And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD (YHWH) of hosts (Tzva'ot)



- 8 The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the LORD (YHWH) of hosts (Tzva'ot).
- 9 The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the LORD (YHWH) of hosts (Tzva'ot): and in this place will I give peace (shalom), saith the LORD (YHWH) of hosts (Tzva'ot).
(Haggai 2:4-9 KJV *parenthetical text added*)

- **YHWH Elohim Tzva'ot** is transliterated "**LORD God of Hosts**"/"**Armies**" (or "**the LORD God Almighty**") in the NIV) and appears in 23 verses, as in...

And David went on, and grew great, and the LORD (YHWH) God (Elohim) of hosts (Tzva'ot) *was* with him.
(2 Samuel 5:10 KJV *parenthetical text added*)

Who is like you, LORD (YHWH) God (Elohim) Almighty (Tzva'ot)?
You, LORD (YHWH), are mighty, and your faithfulness surrounds you.
(Psalm 89:8 *parenthetical text added*)

When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear your name,
LORD (YHWH) God (Elohim) Almighty (Tzva'ot).
(Jeremiah 15:16 *parenthetical text added*)

- 14 Seek good, not evil, that you may live. Then the LORD (YHWH) God (Elohim) Almighty (Tzva'ot) will be with you, just as you say he is.
- 15 Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts. Perhaps the LORD (YHWH) God (Elohim) Almighty (Tzva'ot) will have mercy on the remnant of Joseph.
- 16 Therefore this is what the Lord (Adonai), the LORD (YHWH) God (Elohim) Almighty (Tzva'ot), says: "There will be wailing in all the streets and cries of anguish in every public square. The farmers will be summoned to weep and the mourners to wail."
(Amos 5:14-16 *parenthetical text added*)

See *also* 1 Kings 19:10,14; Psalms 59:5, 80:4,7,14, 80:19, 84:8; Isaiah 3:15; Jeremiah 5:14, 35:17, 38:17, 44:7; Hosea 12:5; Amos 4:13, 5:27, 6:14.

- **Adonai YHWH Tzva'ot** is primarily transliterated "**Lord GOD of Hosts**"/"**Armies**" (or "**the Lord, the LORD Almighty**") in the NIV) and appears in 16 verses, as in...

"See, I am against you, you arrogant one,"
declares the Lord (Adonai), the LORD (YHWH) Almighty (Tzva'ot),
"for your day has come, the time for you to be punished."
(Jeremiah 50:31 *parenthetical text added*)

See *also* Psalm 69:6; Isaiah 10:23-24. 22:5,12-15, 28:22; Jeremiah 2:19, 46:10, 49:5, 50:25; Amos 3:13, 6:8, 9:5.

What is the historical significance of the names?

The entire Old Testament provides the backdrop for GOD's use of these names in His dealings with Israel, both in defeating their enemies, caring for the Ark of the Covenant, and in bringing judgment against Israel for their unfaithfulness. The one constant throughout Israel's history with YHWH Tzva'ot is **His** faithfulness to His Word and to His holiness and perfect righteousness.



...man's extremity is GOD's opportunity!

In addition to the story of David defeating Goliath, one of my favorites is that of GOD delivering Jericho into Israel's hand. In the following narrative, Joshua and Israel had crossed the Jordan and celebrated their first Passover in the Promise Land.

They were now preparing to go against Jericho, a city surrounded by a wall with its gates securely barred and closely guarded. Joshua hadn't received any Divine guidance since crossing the Jordan and, understandably, he might have been anxious about what to do next.

- ¹³ Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up to him and asked, "Are you for us or for our enemies?"
- ¹⁴ "Neither," he replied, "but as commander of the army (tzva'ot) of the LORD (YHWH) I have now come." Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, "What message does my Lord (Adon) have for his servant?"
- ¹⁵ The commander of the LORD's (YHWH) army (tzva'ot) replied, "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy (qodesh)." And Joshua did so.

(Joshua 5:13-15 *parenthetical text added*)

Imagine! Joshua had no reason to think the man was one of his own troops, so he logically might have anticipated that the man was an enemy soldier or spy. He asked if the man was an enemy or friend, and the man replied that he was **neither**. What did that mean? Any confusion Joshua felt at that moment was cleared up with the next announcement that the stranger was the "commander of the **LORD's** army". In his exalted position, he didn't concern himself with forming opinions about human affairs, which is why he answered, "Neither." His allegiance was to the King of Glory, to the One who is "before all things and who holds all things together" (Colossians 1:17).

Imagine how Joshua must have felt in that moment . . . He was the man who had stepped into Moses' position as the leader of Israel and Commander of Israel's armies. Now, he was standing before the Commander of **YHWH's** army! This Man was the one in charge, not of mere **human** armies, but of all angelic principalities, powers, and might and dominion . . . !

As William Nicoll wrote in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*:

"There could be little doubt in his mind who this "Captain of the host of Jehovah" was, and no hesitation on his part in yielding to Him the Divine honour due to the Most High. And then he must have felt warmly how very kind and seasonable this appearance was, just at the very moment when he was in so great perplexity, and when his path was utterly dark. It was a new proof that **man's extremity is God's opportunity**."¹ (*emphasis added*)

Joshua's compliant and immediate response says that he knew this was no ordinary angel. Having prostrated himself before the Man, Joshua now boldly asked, "What do you want me to do?" If there was any doubt in Joshua's mind about the Presence before him, it was addressed and removed with the Angel's next statement: "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy." Like his predecessor, Moses, to whom the LORD appeared in the burning bush in the desert near Mount Sinai, Joshua was now in the presence of the pre-Incarnate Christ, YHWH Himself!



Then the LORD (YHWH) said to Joshua, "See, **I have delivered Jericho** into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men."
(Joshua 6:2 *emphasis and parenthetical text added*)

The Bible indicates that Joshua never hesitated in carrying out the attack on Jericho exactly as instructed even though, let's admit it, the instructions were **anything** but conventional. However, the One who commanded all of the Heavenly Host of angels had assured him of his success. Defeat was **not** possible!

How does this apply to me?

We imperfect, erratic humans are indecisive, temperamental, consistent in our inconsistencies, and reliable in our unreliableness. However, as Scripture assures us, when we are faithless, He remains faithful. He is YHWH Tsid'Ke-nu who **always** does what is right. He is YHWH Jireh who always accomplishes whatever He desires in accordance with His eternal, perfect foreknowledge.

Know therefore that the LORD (YHWH) your God (Elohim) is God (Elohim); he is the **faithful** God (El), **keeping his covenant** of love to a **thousand generations** of those who love him and keep his commandments.
(Deuteronomy 7:9 *emphasis and parenthetical text added*)

For the word of the LORD (YHWH) is **right** and **true**; he is **faithful** in all he does.
(Psalm 33:4 *emphasis and parenthetical text added*)

The LORD (YHWH) is **righteous** (tsid'ke-nu) in all his ways and **faithful** in all he does.
(Psalm 145:17 *emphasis and parenthetical text added*)

- 8 "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD (YHWH).
9 "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.
10 As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,
11 so is my **word** that goes out from my mouth: It will **not return** to me **empty**, but **will accomplish** what I desire and **achieve the purpose** for which I sent it.
(Isaiah 55:8-11 *emphasis and parenthetical text added*)

"I the LORD (YHWH) **do not change**."
(Malachi 3:6a *emphasis and parenthetical text added*)

"Jesus Christ is the **same yesterday** and **today** and **forever**."
(Hebrews 13:8 *emphasis added*)

GOD's perfection cannot be communicated to our imperfection!



This same faithful, true, and righteous GOD has promised to always be a refuge and to do battle on behalf of **all** who are in covenant with Him. That includes His covenant people, Israel, and it includes **spiritual** Israel— those who have been grafted in through faith in Christ's atoning work.

The LORD (YHWH) of hosts (Tzva'ot) is **with us**;
the God (Elohim) of Jacob is our **refuge**. *Selah*.
(Psalm 46: 7 & 11 KJV *emphasis and parenthetical text added*)

- 4 This is what the LORD (YHWH) says to me: "**As a lion growls**, a great lion **over its prey**—and though a whole band of shepherds is called together against it, it is not frightened by their shouts or disturbed by their clamor—so the **LORD (YHWH) Almighty (Tzva'ot) will come down to do battle** on Mount Zion and on its heights.
- 5 **Like birds hovering** overhead, the **LORD (YHWH) Almighty (Tzva'ot)** will **shield** Jerusalem; he will shield it and **deliver** it, he will 'pass over' it (*ref. Exodus 12:27*) and will **rescue** it."
(Isaiah 31:4-5 *emphasis and parenthetical text added*)

I was watching a nature show on TV about predatory animals and was impressed with how zealously the lion was guarding his prey. Even the lioness seemed as aggressive in protecting her kill as she was in protecting her cubs!

GOD's Word parallels YHWH Tzva'ot, our Warrior GOD and Commander of "the armies", with the fearless lion guarding its prey. That means our defeat is simply **not** possible! The sovereign King of the Universe promises to bring **all the armies** of Heaven to do battle against our adversary on our behalf.

Therefore the Lord (Adonai), the LORD (YHWH) Almighty (Tzva'ot),
the Mighty One of Israel, declares: "Ah! I will vent my wrath
on my foes and avenge myself on my enemies."
(Isaiah 1:24 *parenthetical text added*)

We must remember that all who are in covenant with Him today can call upon the same Name for shelter and defense. When all hope seems lost . . . when defeat appears inevitable . . . when foes sneer and accuse and friends abandon . . . we can cry out to our Warrior GOD, the LORD of Hosts, for rescue. The **battle** is His; the **victory** is already **ours!**

Thus, we can say with all confidence, "**No weapon forged against me will prevail, and I will refute every tongue that accuses me,**" (Isaiah 54:17) and "**nothing shall separate me from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.**" (Romans 8:39).

Meditation

Although it is not given to us to fully understand the precise details—nor is it the purpose of this study to delve into such—in Israel's greatest hour of need YHWH Tzva'ot will wage war and rescue a remnant of His covenant people for all eternity.

- 8 In the whole land," declares the LORD (YHWH), "two-thirds will be struck down and perish; yet one-third will be left in it.
- 9 This third I will put into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my name and I



will answer them; I will say, 'They are **my people,**' and they will say, 'The LORD (YHWH) is our God (Elohim).'"
(Zechariah 13:8-9 *emphasis and parenthetical text added*)

25 As he says in Hosea: "I will call them '**my people**' who are **not my people;** and I will call her 'my loved one' who is not my loved one," (*ref. Hosea 1:9 and 2:23*)

26 and, "In the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they will be **called 'children** of the living God.'" (*ref. Hosea 1:10*)

27 Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea, only the remnant will be saved. (*ref. Isaiah 10:21-22*)

28 For the Lord will carry out his sentence on earth with speed and finality."

29 It is just as Isaiah said previously: "Unless the Lord (YHWH) Almighty (Tzva'ot) had left us descendants, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah."
(*ref. Isaiah 1:9*)

(Romans 9:25-29 *emphasis and parenthetical text added*)

12 For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile--the same Lord is **Lord of all** and richly **blesses all** who call on him,

13 for, "Everyone **who calls on the name** of the Lord will be saved." (*ref. Joel 2:32 "...name (shem) of the LORD (YHWH)..."*)

(Romans 10:12-13 *emphasis and parenthetical text added*)

YHWH, our Elohim, is perfect in wisdom, power, righteousness, and goodness. We may not understand everything involved in Him accomplishing what He has promised concerning Israel. However, we must remember that His thoughts are higher than our thoughts and His ways higher than our ways. GOD's perfection cannot be communicated to our imperfection, but we can rest assured that He is attending all the steps necessary to complete His divine and mysterious processes.

All who hear and obey when YHWH calls have become the **children** of the living GOD. We are heirs and joint heirs with Jesus Christ, the beloved recipients of His eternal love! It is not a state or condition to be earned, but simply to be received by faith. And in the receiving, we are assured that in Christ, **all** of GOD's promises are **"yes"** and **"amen"**! (2 Corinthians 1:20)

Therefore, we can say with the Psalmist, the Prophets and Apostles, and all the saints, "If **YHWH Tzva'ot** be for us, who can be against us?" (*cf. Romans 8:31*)
Let us forever adore and worship His matchless grace!

¹ Nicoll, William R. "Commentary on Joshua". "The Expositor's Bible Commentary".
<https://www.studydrive.org/commentaries/teb/joshua-5.html>, np., 01/2019.



