

Adonai

¹Then Moses answered, "But behold, they will not believe me or listen to my voice, for they will say, 'The LORD did not appear to you.'" ²The LORD said to him, "What is that in your hand?" He said, "A staff." ³And he said, "Throw it on the ground." So he threw it on the ground, and it became a serpent, and Moses ran from it. ⁴But the LORD said to Moses, "Put out your hand and catch it by the tail"—so he put out his hand and caught it, and it became a staff in his hand—⁵"that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you." ⁶Again, the LORD said to him, "Put your hand inside your cloak." And he put his hand inside his cloak, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous like snow. ⁷Then God said, "Put your hand back inside your cloak." So he put his hand back inside his cloak, and when he took it out, behold, it was restored like the rest of his flesh. ⁸"If they will not believe you," God said, "or listen to the first sign, they may believe the latter sign." ⁹If they will not believe even these two signs or listen to your voice, you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground, and the water that you shall take from the Nile will become blood on the dry ground."

¹⁰But Moses said to the LORD, "Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent, either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and of tongue." ¹¹Then the LORD said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?" ¹²Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak." But he said, "Oh, my Lord, please send someone else." — Exodus 4:1-13 ESV

'ăḏōnāy – "The Lord." This post will conclude our study of God's names. I chose to end with this name because it communicates an essential characteristic of God that often gets overlooked. The term 'ăḏōnāy is actually a title of respect more than a name and is used more than 400 times in the Old Testament. What makes it confusing is that it is also used when referring to God and men. David referred to King Saul as his Adonai.

Saul recognized David's voice and said, "Is this your voice, my son David?" And David said, "It is my voice, my lord ['ăḏōnāy], O king." — 1 Samuel 26:17 ESV

Abner also used this common title of respect when referring to David.

And Abner said to David, "I will arise and go and will gather all Israel to my lord ['ăḏōnāy] the king, that they may make a covenant with you, and that you may reign over all that your heart desires." So David sent Abner away, and he went in peace. — 2 Samuel 3:21 ESV

In Hebrew, adonai means "lord" or "master" and is typically used to convey deference and respect for someone of higher rank or order. When used of God, it communicates an awareness of His sovereignty as "the Lord ['ăḏōnāy] of all the earth" (Zechariah 6:5). He is the master over all He has created and rules with unsurpassed power and undeniable authority.

Exodus chapter 3 describes an unexpected and highly disturbing encounter between Moses and God. While shepherding his father-in-law's sheep near Mount Horeb, Moses saw an incredible sight: a bush that appeared to be on fire but was not consumed by the flames. Curious, he stepped up to get a closer look and heard a voice from heaven.

"I am the God ['ēlōhîm] of your father, the God ['ēlōhîm] of Abraham, the God ['ēlōhîm] of Isaac, and the God ['ēlōhîm] of Jacob." – Exodus 3:6 ESV

God introduces Himself by using the name that was most familiar to Abraham and his descendants. But the name Elohim was a somewhat generic appellation that was used of all gods, including the God of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In Hebrew, Elohim is the plural form of El and since Moses had grown up in Egypt, he knew that there were gods (Elohim) everywhere. So, God's introduction of Himself as Elohim left Moses wondering which Elohim he was speaking to.

When Moses heard that *this* Elohim had a job for him to do, he was perplexed. This God was demanding that he return to Egypt and deliver the people of Israel out of their slavery and into the Promised Land. But Moses wasn't sure about the message or the messenger and asked, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God ['ēlōhîm] of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" (Exodus 3:13 ESV). Moses was looking for further clarification. He wanted to know which Elohim he was dealing with and God graciously responded to his question.

God ['ēlōhîm] said to Moses, "I am ['ehyeh] who I am." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'I am has sent me to you.'" God ['ēlōhîm] also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'The Lord, the God ['ēlōhîm] of your fathers, the God ['ēlōhîm] of Abraham, the God ['ēlōhîm] of Isaac, and the God ['ēlōhîm] of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations." – Exodus 3:14-15 ESV

That phrase, "I am who I am" contains the Hebrew word, *'ehyeh*, which is the verb form of the word, *hayah*, which means, "to be." God is essentially saying, "I am and I have always been." In other words, He is the ever-existing One. This speaks to His eternity; He is unbound by time and space. He operates outside the temporal and time-oriented confines of His own creation. In response to Moses' question, God essentially said, "I am and will always be."

But while Moses had received the name of God, he was still wrestling with the calling of God. He continued to push back against the message he had received, questioning its authenticity and viability. Still reluctant to take this dangerous-sounding assignment from God, Moses countered, "What if they won't believe me or listen to me? What if they say, 'The LORD [*Y'hōvā*] never appeared to you'?" (Exodus 4:1 NLT). Here the text contains the name, Jehovah or Yahweh. God's self-description of *hayah* later morphed into the name, Yahweh, the third-person masculine singular form of the same verb. So, whenever the people of Israel used the

name Yahweh, they were saying, “He is.” Unlike the Elohim of Egypt, their God was real. He *is* and *will always be*. He is not the figment of someone’s overly active imagination.

This adds another layer of confusion to this passage that needs clarification. God referred to Himself as Elohim. Then He added the designation “I am” (*hayah*), which later became Yahweh, and translates as Jehovah in English. That is the name Moses uses in verse 1 of chapter four. In our English Bible, the name Yahweh (Jehovah) is typically translated as LORD. Since the ancient Hebrews did not use vowels when writing their language, Yahweh appeared as YHWH. To this day, we are not sure which vowels were left out, which makes any assessment of the exact pronunciation virtually impossible.

In the Latin translation of the Bible, the letters became JHVH. Eventually, the English translators of the Bible changed JHVH to Lord. But because there was another Hebrew word that meant the same thing, the English translators of the Bible changed Yahweh to LORD using all caps. So, whenever we see the word “Lord” using lowercase letters, it means Adonia. When it appears in all caps, it is Yahweh. This brings us back to Exodus 4, and particularly verses 10-11. Here Moses speaks to the LORD and uses the designation “Lord” (Adonai).

“O Lord [Adonai], I’m not very good with words. I never have been, and I’m not now, even though you have spoken to me. I get tongue-tied, and my words get tangled.” – Exodus 4:10 NLT

He refers to God as his lord or master. While he did not like the assignment the LORD had given him, Moses still treats the LORD with dignity, awe, and respect. He was arguing his case and attempting to persuade his superior that he was the wrong man for the job, yet he treated the Lord with appropriate awe and honor.

This is where many of us fail in our relationship with God. We will confess Him to the great “I am,” the ever-present, eternal God of the universe, but we neglect to treat Him as our Lord and Master. We love to think of God as the LORD Who Sanctifies, the LORD My Redeemer, the LORD My Deliverer, the LORD of Hosts, the LORD of Peace, and the LORD Who Provides. But are we willing to think of Him as our Lord and Master? We may use the words but do we live as if we believe them?

Jesus made an interesting statement concerning the use of the name Lord without the appropriate heart to match.

“So why do you keep calling me ‘Lord, Lord!’ when you don’t do what I say? I will show you what it’s like when someone comes to me, listens to my teaching, and then follows it.” – Luke 6:46-47 NLT

He goes on to tell a parable that illustrates the futility of using lip service when speaking of His mastery over our lives as our Lord and King.

“It is like a person building a house who digs deep and lays the foundation on solid rock. When the floodwaters rise and break against that house, it stands firm because it is well built. But anyone who hears and doesn’t obey is like a person who builds a house right on the ground, without a foundation. When the floods sweep down against that house, it will collapse into a heap of ruins.” – Luke 6:48-49 NLT

To call Him Lord but to fail to treat Him as such, is nothing short of blasphemy. It is submission to His Lordship that results in a “well-built” life. To hear the Lord speak and not obey is to guarantee a storm-tossed life with no foundation and no escape from the inevitable floods that come our way.

*“When life is chaotic and things seem to be falling apart, those who worship God as Adonai and do what He says will remain steadfast.” – Rabbi Kurt A. Schneider, *To Know Him By Name**

The apostle Paul describes his own submission to the Lordship of Christ.

But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ. – Philippians 3:7-8 ESV

Paul used the Greek word, *kyrios*, which translates into “Lord” and means “the owner; one who has control of the person, the master.” Paul was willing to give Jesus complete mastery over his life, submitting to His will and suffering the loss of anything that might stand in the way of their relationship. He knew he belonged to Christ, but he also believed that he was the true beneficiary in the relationship. From his perspective, he had “gained” Christ. In submitting his life to Christ’s lordship, Paul had won because he now enjoyed Christ’s favor and fellowship. Paul provides a powerful word of encouragement to all those who have placed their faith in Jesus as Savior and who recognize Him as the Lord over their lives.

For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. – Romans 8:38-39 ESV