

Jehovah

¹³ Then Moses said to God, “If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?”

¹⁴ God said to Moses, “I am who I am.” And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel: ‘I am has sent me to you.’” – Exodus 3:13-14 ESV

This blog post is the first in a series that will investigate the names of God. Throughout the Old Testament, God is referred to by a wide range of different names or appellations that provide insight into His interactions with mankind. We will be focusing our attention on the name Jehovah and its many variations. Jehovah is the name that most consider to be the proper name of God. Its first use is found in the Book of Exodus when God spoke to Moses in the wilderness.

One day Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian. He led the flock far into the wilderness and came to Sinai, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire from the middle of a bush. Moses stared in amazement. Though the bush was engulfed in flames, it didn't burn up. – Exodus 3:1-2 NLT

As Moses approached this supernatural and inexplicable phenomenon, he was confronted by the voice of God.

When the Lord saw Moses coming to take a closer look, God called to him from the middle of the bush, “Moses! Moses!”

“Here I am!” Moses replied.

“Do not come any closer,” the Lord warned. “Take off your sandals, for you are standing on holy ground. I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” When Moses heard this, he covered his face because he was afraid to look at God. – Exodus 3:4-6 NLT

In His divine encounter with Moses, God introduces Himself as *'ēlōhîm*, the same name used throughout the early chapters of Genesis.

In the beginning, God ['ēlōhîm] created the heavens and the earth. – Genesis 1:1 ESV

Elohim is the plural of *Eloah* and is the most common name used for God in the Hebrew Bible, occurring more than 2500 times. It is sometimes abbreviated to its two-letter form of *El*. But in all of its forms, *Elohim* is a name that is used to refer both to men and false gods throughout the Hebrew Bible. Exodus 20 contains God's proclamation to Moses of the Ten Commandments, which includes the following prohibition:

“You shall have no other gods [’ēlōhîm] before me.” – Exodus 20:3 ESV

So the name Elohim was a common designation used by the Hebrews to refer to any deity. But throughout the Book of Genesis, it was the name used by the patriarchs when speaking of the one true God. Even in His initial encounter with Moses, God introduces Himself by the name Elohim.

“I am the God [’ēlōhîm] of your father—the God of Abraham, the God [’ēlōhîm] of Isaac, and the God [’ēlōhîm] of Jacob.” – Exodus 3:6 NLT

Yet, when God informs Moses that he is to be the deliverer of the people of Israel who are living as slaves in Egypt, Moses is reticent to accept his commission. Instead, he asks Elohim for further clarification.

*“If I go to the people of Israel and tell them, ‘The God [’ēlōhîm] of your ancestors has sent me to you,’ they will ask me, ‘**What is his name?**’ Then what should I tell them?” – Exodus 3:13 NLT*

Moses knew that his people had long ago lost interest in Elohim, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. During their 400-year stint in Egypt, they had acclimated to the ways of their Egyptian hosts. In time, they had assimilated into the surrounding culture, adapting themselves to the local customs and even adopting the Egyptian gods as their own.

In the book of Ezekiel, God confirms that during their stay in Egypt, the Israelites had developed an unhealthy attachment to the false gods of Egypt.

“When I chose Israel—when I revealed myself to the descendants of Jacob in Egypt—I took a solemn oath that I, the Lord, would be their God. I took a solemn oath that day that I would bring them out of Egypt to a land I had discovered and explored for them—a good land, a land flowing with milk and honey, the best of all lands anywhere. Then I said to them, ‘Each of you, get rid of the vile images you are so obsessed with. Do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt, for I am the Lord your God.’” – Ezekiel 20:5-7 NLT

Having lived in Egypt most of his adult life, Moses was well aware of this problem and knew the people of Israel would be reluctant to obey the commands of a God they didn’t know. How were they to know that the Elohim of Abraham was any different than the *Elohims* of Egypt? It didn’t help that there had been a 400-year period when God seemed silent. Their increasing apostasy had led Him to cut off all communication with His people. But with His appearance at the burning bush, God broke that silence. Now, Moses wanted to know how he was supposed to reintroduce this long-forgotten God to the people of Israel.

At this point, even Moses is unsure of his visitor's identity. While he seems to know that he is conversing with a deity, he has no way of knowing that it is the God of his forefathers. So, he seeks a name, an appellation to identify the God he is speaking to. And God responds:

"I AM that I AM." And he said, "You must say this to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" – Exodus 3:14 NLT

The answer Moses receives is not so much a name as it is a declaration of authority. God informs Moses that He is the "self-existing one," the eternal, all-powerful creator of heaven and earth. He is uncreated and has always existed. Unlike the *Elohims* of the Egyptians, God is not the byproduct of man's imagination.

"I AM is the ultimate statement of self-sufficiency, self-existence, and immediate presence. God's existence is not contingent upon anyone else. His plans are not contingent upon any circumstances. He promises that He will be what He will be; that is, He will be the eternally constant God. He stands, ever-present and unchangeable, completely sufficient in Himself to do what He wills to do and to accomplish what He wills to accomplish." –
<https://www.gotquestions.org/I-AM-WHO-I-AM-Exodus-3-14>

Moses is being sent by the one true God. And to ensure that Moses fully comprehends who it is that is speaking to him, God adds:

"You must say this to the Israelites, 'The LORD—the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you. This is my name forever, and this is my memorial from generation to generation.'" – Exodus 3:15 NLT

For the very first time, God refers to Himself as *Y^hōvâ 'ēlōhîm*. In ancient Hebrew, *Y^hōvâ* is rendered as YHWH because no vowels were used in their written language. The sound of the vowels was added when the text was read and the exact pronunciation of each word was clarified. But because the vowels were added verbally and passed down through oral tradition, some of the pronunciation of Hebrew words has been lost to time. The name YHWH is often referred to as a tetragrammaton and over the centuries there has been much debate as to its pronunciation.

The most common usage is "Yahweh" (YAH-way); while other variations include "Yehowah," "Yahuweh," or "Yahawah." For most Christians, the form of "Jehovah" is the most familiar and is the result of "a Germanic pronunciation of the Latinized transliteration of the Hebrew YHWH. It is the letters of the tetragrammaton, Latinized into JHVH, with vowels inserted. 'Yahweh' or 'Yehowah' is far more likely to be the correct pronunciation" ("Is Jehovah the true name of God." – GotQuestions.org. <https://www.gotquestions.org/jehovah.html>).

But regardless of how the word is pronounced, its meaning is clear. God was letting Moses know that He was the ever-present God, who was ready, willing, and able to act on behalf of His enslaved people.

“I am that I am” means “God will reveal Himself in His actions through history.” - Charles Gianotti, “The Meaning of the Divine Name YHWH,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 142:565 (January-March 1985):45.

Yahweh was not distant or disinterested; He had not been absent or uninformed as to their suffering. In fact, He clearly states that He had been fully aware of all that had been going on over the last four centuries.

“I have certainly seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their cries of distress because of their harsh slave drivers. Yes, I am aware of their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians and lead them out of Egypt into their own fertile and spacious land. It is a land flowing with milk and honey...” – Exodus 3:7-8 NLT

Yahweh was ready to intervene on their behalf and He was informing Moses of the role he would play.

“Now go, for I am sending you to Pharaoh. You must lead my people Israel out of Egypt.” – Exodus 3:10 NLT

Moses was getting the unexpected news that the people of Israel were about to be set free and he was Yahweh’s designated choice to serve as their deliverer. Though Moses attempted to get out of this God-ordained assignment, he eventually recognized that Yahweh’s call was non-negotiable, and God once again communicated the message Moses was to deliver to the captive Israelites.

“Say this to the people of Israel: Yahweh, the God of your ancestors—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.

*This is my eternal name,
my name to remember for all generations.”* – Exodus 3:15 NLT

The name Yahweh (Jehovah) was to become the Israelite’s primary designation for their God. This personal name would help to set Him apart and would soon be attached to a variety of other names that further helped to enhance the nature of His character and their unique relationship with Him.

Jehovah-Rohi – The LORD My Shepherd

Jehovah-Jireh – The LORD Shall Provide

Jehovah-Rapha – The LORD Who Heals

Jehovah-Nissi – The LORD Is My Banner

Jehovah–M’Kaddesh – The LORD Who Sanctifies

Over the next few weeks, we will explore each of these names and others as we attempt to learn the nature of God by investigating the names of God. These appellations provide insight into His character and provide a well-rounded understanding of who He is and how He interfaces with His people.

When Moses returned to Israel, he stood before Pharaoh and declared, “This is what the LORD [Jehovah], the God of Israel, says: Let my people go so they may hold a festival in my honor in the wilderness” (Exodus 5:12 NLT). But Pharaoh, the self-proclaimed deity and ruler of the Egyptian people was not impressed. He boldly proclaimed, “Is that so? And who is the LORD [Jehovah]? Why should I listen to him and let Israel go? I don’t know the LORD [Jehovah], and I will not let Israel go” (Exodus 5:2 NLT).

But Pharaoh would eventually have a change of heart. In time and after a series of devastating plagues, this pride-filled potentate would recognize that Jehovah was the one true God. Pharaoh would discover that the God of the Israelites was the “self-existing one” who was the eternal, all-powerful creator of heaven and earth. He had no equal and Pharaoh had no chance of standing against Him.