

## Names of God: *Yahweh*

*Yahweh* is the most widely used name for God in Scripture. As *Elohim* is the general name for God, *Yahweh* is His particular name – it is His awesome, majestic, memorial name. The name *Yahweh* appears as **LORD** in our English translation, found at least 6800 times in the Older Testament (700 times in Psalms alone). This number of appearances can be compared with about 2,500 for the name *Elohim* in both Testaments.

The name *Yahweh* is derived from the Hebrew verb *havah* (*hayah*) meaning “to be”, or “being”, and is connected in an essential way to the concept of “existence”, “life” and “living”. By revealing Himself through this name, *Elohim* is communicating that He, as *Yahweh*, is the ever-living One who possesses an entirely uncreated and uncaused (underived) existence; He is independent and self-sufficient; He is the Self-Existing One. The name communicates both essence of being and source of life. There never was a time throughout the infinite ages of eternity past before which God could not refer to Himself as “*I AM*”. He eternally “*is*”, and He is eternally the “*I AM*”.

“And *Elohim* said to Moses, ‘*I AM WHO I AM*’; and He said, ‘Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘*I AM* has sent me to you.’ And *Elohim*, furthermore, said to Moses, ‘Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, “*Yahweh* (the LORD), the *Elohim* of your fathers, the *Elohim* of Abraham, the *Elohim* of Isaac, and the *Elohim* of Jacob, has sent me to you.” This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations.”  
*Ex. 3:14-15.*

“But Thou, O *Yahweh*, dost sit enthroned forever; and Thy memorial name to all generations.” *Ps. 102:12.*

“Before Me there was no *Elohim* formed, and there will be none after Me. I, even I, am *Yahweh*; and there is no savior besides Me.” *Isa. 43:10-11.*

“For I, *Yahweh*, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed.” *Mal. 3:6.*

The name *Yahweh* appears in the Hebrew text as **YHWH** (referred to as the *Tetragrammaton*). Some suggest that the name *Yahweh* derives from insertion of the vowels in the name *Adonai*; i.e., *YaHoWaH*. This is most likely the root of the name *Jehovah*.

We occasionally read in Scripture statements such as “the *Elohim*” (contrasting the single entity of *Elohim* with multiple *elohim*), or “the true *Elohim*” (contrasting *Elohim* with the many false *elohim*), or “the living *Elohim*” (contrasting *Elohim* with the inanimate, lifeless *elohim*). However, we never read statements like “*the Yahweh*”, or “*the true Yahweh*”, or “*the living Yahweh*”. There is, by definition, and there can only be, one *Yahweh* who from everlasting to everlasting is the Self-Existing One – He alone is the source of life (any and all life – both physical and spiritual).

Ques. Why did ( why do) certain Jewish peoples fear to express the name *Yahweh*?  
Ans. Because of the severe penalty noted in *Lev. 24:15-16*.

“And you shall speak to the sons of Israel, saying, ‘If anyone curses *Elohim*, then he shall bear his sin. Moreover, the one who blasphemes the name *Yahweh* shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall certainly stone him. The alien as well as the native, when he blasphemes the Name, shall be put to death.’ ” *Lev. 24:15-16*

The rabbinical writings refer to the name *Yahweh* by several different euphemistic terms (i.e., terms that serve as a substitute, that are considered less direct and less awful). They use such terms as: “*The Name*”; “*The Great and Terrible Name*”; “*The Holy Name*”; or, “*The Unutterable Name*”. *Yahweh* is the ineffable name of the Creator.

*Yahweh* is the feared and awesome name of God. It is a name that immediately solicits supreme reverence and respect from all who have an understanding of the absolute existence and transcendent essence of the One who bears this title. We must attribute to God eminence, even pre-eminence, but in this name *Yahweh* we must attribute most particularly transcendence – transcendence in its most exalted and majestic fullness ... even a fullness that is most awesome and dreadful.

### The Appearance of the Name *Yahweh* in Genesis

- The name *Yahweh* first appears at the beginning of the second “toledoth” (*Heb.*, *tôl<sup>c</sup>dâh*) in Genesis, (*Gen. 2:4b – Gen. 4:26*); that is, after the creation of man. In this section of Scripture the name *Yahweh* appears frequently in combination with *Elohim* (*i.e.*, *Yahweh Elohim*, translated as the LORD God).

Comment: The “toledoths” of Genesis.

The Hebrew word “*tôl<sup>c</sup>dâh*” is translated “generations”. It is also, interestingly, the word from which the name “Genesis” is derived. The book of Genesis contains repeated use of the phrase, “*These are the generations of ...*” (see *5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10; 11:27; 25:19; 36:1; 36:9; 37:2*)

These phrases mark divisions within the book, and each division (*i.e.*, each “toledoth”) is associated with a name of a patriarch, with the singular exception of the first one appearing in *Gen. 2:4*. These distinctive markers in the book almost certainly divide the book into separate tablets that were authored by respective patriarchs. The single exception of the first “toledoth”, *Gen. 1:1 – 2:3*, strongly suggests that none other than *Yahweh Elohim* was the author of this “toledoth”.

This view has several implications regarding the authorship of Genesis. First, Moses was the *editor* of Genesis and, second, the account of creation is that inscribed by the only eye-witness to the events of creation week → *Yahweh Elohim*.

Note:

At times the name *Yah* appears in the text. For example: “*Yah* is my strength and my song, and He is my salvation;” *Ex. 15:2* “Trust in *Yahweh* forever, for in *Yah Yahweh* we have an everlasting Rock.” *Isa. 26:4*

Question: What significant revelation is communicated by the change in name from *Elohim* in *Gen. 1:1-2:3* to *Yahweh Elohim* in the remainder of *Genesis* 2?

Some Answers.

- *Yahweh* is the name that reveals in a particular and powerful way the fact that God is personal, and that He possesses moral attributes, and that man, who derives life from *Yahweh* and is created in His image, lives under a profound and direct moral obligation to Him. Man’s moral relationship with and his moral responsibility to *Yahweh* is made poignantly clear by the fact that:
  - ◆ It is *Yahweh* who has communicated directly with man.
  - ◆ It is *Yahweh* who has revealed explicit aspects of His nature to man.
  - ◆ It is *Yahweh* who has instructed man in clear and precise terms as to how he is to respond in this creature-Creator relationship to Him.
  - ◆ It is *Yahweh* who will initiate, at extreme cost to Himself, a redemptive work to rescue man out of an eternal and damnable estrangement from his Creator because of rebellion and transgression.
- The name *Yahweh* communicates the fact that God has placed Himself in covenant relationship with man, the creature who is made in the Creator’s own image – with man who owes his very existence to the powerful creative work and the glorious eternal purpose of *Yahweh Elohim*.

- It is striking that Satan, in the record of his discourse with Eve (*Gen. 3:1b-7*), only uses the name *Elohim* – he refrains from ever speaking the name *Yahweh* (*alt.*, the joined name *Yahweh Elohim* as God is referred to throughout *Gen. 2:4 – 3:24*).
- Note that it is *Yahweh Elohim* who comes walking in the garden and calls to the man and the woman, “Where are you?” (*3:8-9*); it is *Yahweh Elohim* who slaughtered animals and made garments for them (*3:21*); and it is *Yahweh Elohim* who excommunicates them from the garden (*3:22-24*).
- The name *Yahweh* appears alone only in *Gen. 4* where we read of communications between *Yahweh* and Cain. It is the personal, moral, holy Sovereign who meets Cain in his rebellion and transgression, administering judgment after mercy has been rejected. This ‘toledoth’ ends with the sentence:  
     “Then men began to call upon the name of *Yahweh*.” (*Gen. 4:26b*)
- There exists a fascinating distinction between the use of the name *Elohim* and that of *Yahweh* in the account of the Noachic Deluge in *Gen. 6 – 7*. Comparing *Gen. 6:19-22* with *Gen. 7:1-5* we can gain some insight to the distinctions being communicated by these different names.
  - In *Gen. 6:19-22* Noah is instructed to take “two of every kind” on board the ark, together with sufficient food, and he does “according to all that *Elohim* had commanded him”.
  - In *Gen. 7:1-5* Noah is instructed to take seven pairs of “every clean animal” on board the ark, and he does “according to all that *Yahweh* had commanded him”.
- We can also note that it is to *Yahweh*, not to *Elohim*, that Noah builds an altar after he leaves the ark; and it is to *Yahweh* that Noah offered “of every clean animal and of every clean bird” in burnt offering on the altar (*Gen. 9:20-22*).
- It is *Yahweh* who appeared to Abraham and called for him to depart from Haran and move to Canaan, and made a covenant with him; and it is to *Yahweh* that Abraham built altars in worship and with whom Abraham communed in prayer (*Gen. 12:1-8*)
- It was *Yahweh* who appeared to Abraham in *Gen. 15* – where we have the record of Abraham’s conversion, his justification by faith alone (*vs. 6*); and it is *Yahweh* who subsequently makes a most stunning unconditional covenant with Abraham (*vs. 18*).

### Essential Moral Attributes Ascribed to *Yahweh*

*Yahweh* is holy – this is the most distinguishing attribute to be associated with the name..

“For I am *Yahweh* your *Elohim*.  
 Consecrate yourselves therefore,  
 and be holy; for I am holy. ... For  
 I am *Yahweh*, who brought you up  
 from the land of Egypt, to be your  
*Elohim*; thus you shall be holy for  
 I am holy.” *Lev. 11:44-45*

“You shall be holy, for I *Yahweh*  
 your *Elohim* am holy.” *Lev. 19:2*

“Who is like Thee  
 among the *elohim*,  
 O *Yahweh*? Who  
 is like Thee,  
 majestic (glorious)  
 in holiness,  
 awesome (fearful)  
 in praises,  
 working wonders.”  
*Ex. 15:11*

“Holiness befits Thy  
 house, O *Yahweh*,  
 forevermore.”  
*Ps. 93:5*

“Exalt *Yahweh* our  
*Elohim*, and worship  
 at His holy hill; for  
 holy is *Yahweh* our  
*Elohim*.” *Ps. 99:9*

**Yahweh** is righteous – although distinct from holiness, righteousness is nevertheless inseparably associated with **Yahweh** in His holiness. Furthermore, the attribute of righteousness pertains both to the intrinsic righteousness that defines His Being and to the righteousness that permeates all His dealings with creation, especially in regard to man.

“For **Yahweh** is righteous;  
He loves righteousness; the upright will behold His face.”  
*Ps. 11:7*

“For thus says **Yahweh**, who created the heavens ... I am **Yahweh** and there is none else. ... I, **Yahweh**, speak righteousness declaring things that are upright.”  
*Isa. 45:18-19*

“Therefore, **Yahweh** has kept the calamity in store and brought it on us; for **Yahweh** our **Elohim** is righteous with respect to all His deeds which He has done.” *Dan. 9:14*

Comment: It is against the righteousness of **Yahweh** that man, who exists in covenant relationship with Him, sins; and the violation of **Yahweh’s** righteous standards offends and outrages His holiness, with the consequence that **Yahweh** must, in righteousness and holiness, condemn and judge the sinner who sins.

**Yahweh** is love – **Yahweh’s** love is a covenant love related to His purpose in redemption ... it is a love directed mercifully and graciously toward sinners He purposes to redeem

“**Yahweh** did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples ... but because **Yahweh** loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers,” *Deut. 7:7-8*

“**Yahweh** appeared to me from afar, saying, ‘I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have drawn you with loving kindness.’ ”  
*Jer. 31:3*

“The oracle of the word of **Yahweh** to Israel through Malachi. ‘I have loved you,’ ”  
*Mal. 1:1-2a*

“Then **Yahweh** passed by in front of him and proclaimed, ‘**Yahweh, Yahweh Elohim**, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations.’ ” *Ex. 34:6-7.*

**Yahweh** is jealous

“You shall not worship any other god (elohim), for **Yahweh**, whose name is **Jealous**, is a jealous **El**.”  
*Ex. 34:14.* (see also *Ex. 20:4-6*)

Note: **Yahweh’s** holiness is a jealous holiness; so also His love is a jealous love. Love that is not jealous does not fit the divine definition of love.

**Yahweh** is a warrior

“**Yahweh** is a warrior; **YHWH** is His name.”  
*Ex. 15:3*

Comment: That **Yahweh** is a warrior is amply emphasized throughout Scripture by the frequent use of a particular compound name for **Yahweh**; namely, **Yahweh Sabaoth** – usually translated as “the LORD of hosts”

The compound name **Yahweh Sabaoth** speaks of **Yahweh’s** jealous defense of His glory; and His passionate defense of righteousness; and His vigilant exercise of judgment in vindication of His great name.