

# The Names Of God

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***Forerunner, "Ready Answer," March 1997***

The omnipotent God of the Bible gives this eternal command and warning to the Israelites through Moses:

If you do not carefully observe all the words of the law that are written in this book, that you may fear this glorious and awesome name, THE LORD YOUR GOD, then the LORD will bring upon you and your descendants extraordinary plagues—great and prolonged plagues—and serious and prolonged sicknesses." (Deuteronomy 28:58-59)

God is concerned about how we use His name. He strictly commands us not to take it in vain (Exodus 20:7). Jesus tells us in the New Testament that we should pray to the Father in His name (John 14:13-14). The Psalms instruct us to honor and glorify His name (Psalm 8:1; 29:2; 61:8; 83:16-18; etc.)

What, then, is the proper way to refer to Him? Some have suggested that it is wrong to use the English names "Lord" or "God" to refer to the Creator of heaven and earth because of their *seemingly* pagan origins. Does it matter what we call the members of the God Family?

Notice the secular meaning of the word *God* found in *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary*: "...the creator and ruler of the universe, regarded as eternal, infinite, all-powerful, and all-knowing; Supreme Being; Almighty." However, when spelled with a lower case *g*, "god" refers to any thing worshipped. According to the same authoritative dictionary, the word *lord* denotes "a ruler or master."

The writers of the Bible refer to God by many different names, each given with a purpose to describe some distinct virtue or characteristic of His nature. When we analyze the original Hebrew and Greek names the authors use to refer to the members of the God Family, clearly the spiritual principle of fearing God's "glorious and awesome name" is paramount to obeying Him.

## ***Elohim***

The first place a name of God is revealed is in the first chapter of Genesis. Here we find *Elohim* (God) repeated in almost every verse. *Elohim* is a plural noun, which is first and primarily used in Scripture to describe the one true God Family, which includes God the Father and our Creator-Redeemer, Jesus Christ. Wherever we find "God" throughout the Old Testament, it is most likely *Elohim*.

However, in contrast to its use to refer to the true God, biblical writers use *elohim* more than 200 times to refer to pagan idols and gods whom the pagans feared and worshipped (Exodus 12:12; 23:24; Leviticus 19:4). Does this multifaceted usage of *elohim* mean we should not use the English word "God" today in reference to the God Family because it, too, can refer to heathen gods? No, it merely underscores Satan's constant counterfeiting of any reference to the Supreme Being. In fact, the usage of *elohim* in Scripture shows that it is perfectly acceptable to use a word like "god" to refer to both the true and false deities.

## ***YHWH***

The Eternal first introduced His name as *YHWH* (LORD) in Exodus 3 where Moses records the account of receiving his commission from God. In verse 15 God calls Himself *YHWH Elohim* translated "LORD God" in most English-language Bibles. In the Authorized Version, wherever we find the name "GOD" or "LORD " printed in small capitals, the original is *YHWH* (see Genesis 2:4-5, 7-8).

The original Hebrew text consists of consonants only and no vowels, and thus the Creator's name is spelled *YHWH*. This is often referred to as the *tetragrammaton*, meaning the "four letters." *YHWH* derives from a form of the Hebrew verb *to be* and has the same meaning as the name "I AM" (*hayah*) in Exodus 3:14. Hebrew scholars say *YHWH* could mean "He exists" or "He causes to be." English equivalents to this would be "the Ever-Living" or "the Eternal." God and His name are both everlasting (Psalm 135:13). The meaning of the name and the permanency behind it are crucial to properly recognizing His sovereignty.

Scholars believe that *YHWH* was originally pronounced as *Yahweh*, but we have no concrete evidence of what the missing vowels should be. The Jews considered *YHWH* too sacred to speak, so they stopped pronouncing it after the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, when it was considered unlawful and blasphemous to vocalize it. The correct pronunciation was forgotten over time. When a Jew recites scripture and comes to *YHWH*, he substitutes the word *Adonai*, meaning "Lord" or "Master." Therefore, the name of God is written *YHWH* but pronounced *Adonai*.

Some have thought *YHWH* should be pronounced "Jehovah." In AD 1520, Peter Galatin, the confessor of Pope Leo X, invented this name by interjecting the vowels of *Adonai* (a-o-a) between the consonants *YHWH*. This produced the hybrid *YaHoWaH*, later pronounce "Jehovah." This name, contrived through human reasoning, has no biblical basis.

## ***El***

Another example of how pagans used one of God's biblical names to refer to their deities is found in ancient Canaanite writings. The pagan Canaanites used the name *El* long before Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible known as the Pentateuch. To them *El* referred to *El the Bull*, the father of the other gods, including the infamous Baal. *El* simply means "mighty one."

Some self-proclaimed scholars have argued that it is a sin for us to use the English word "God" because the Druids used it to refer to their idols. By the same reasoning, it would also have been a sin for the authors of the Old Testament to use *El* and *Elohim* since the Canaanites used them for their pagan gods. Nevertheless, God is called *El* in Genesis 14:20 and in many other places. In addition, many Old Testament men of God had *el* as part of their names, and God expressed no displeasure in this.

## ***Elah***

Although God inspired most of the Old Testament books to be written in Hebrew, Daniel and Ezra wrote portions of their books in Aramaic or Syriac, the language spoken throughout the Persian Empire during their time. It had also replaced Hebrew as the language of common speech of the Jews.

Nowhere in the Aramaic passages do we find the names *YHWH* or *Elohim*. Examining the manuscripts reveals that in dozens of places the writers rendered the Hebrew names for God into the Aramaic word *Elah*. It is just as proper for the Hebrew *El* and *Elohim* to be translated into the English word *God*, as it was for Daniel and Ezra to use the Aramaic word *Elah*.

### ***Theos and Kurios***

The names of God that we have so far considered are all used in the Old Testament books. Do we find the authors of the New Testament books following the same principle of fear and reverence toward the names of God? In the first century AD, Greek was widely spoken by Jews and Gentiles. Most Gentiles did not understand Hebrew or Aramaic, so it made sense for the writers of the New Testament to use Greek. The apostle Paul, sent to the Greek-speaking Gentiles, had to write in Greek to be understood.

Paul uses the Greek words *theos* ("God") and *kurios* ("Lord"). In 665 places, the authors use *kurios* instead of the Hebrew word *YHWH*. If *YHWH* were as sacred as some have believed, Paul and the other apostles would most certainly have used *YHWH* to refer to the Eternal. They did not. What they did do is revere God, deeply honoring and respecting His character and attributes. The apostles were in awe of the power and authority behind the Father's name.

### ***Yahshua***

Some have used the Hebrew name *Yahshua* rather than "Jesus," believing it to be a more sacred name. That logic also has its roots in human reason. Paul used the Greek name *Iesous* for "Jesus," as did the other writers of the New Testament.

Further, what about Jesus' prophecy that many deceivers would come in His name (Matthew 24:5)? In more than 1900 years, very few deceivers have come in the name of *Yahshua*. But many deceivers have come in the name of Jesus or variations of it in different languages. The power and authority in and behind the name of Jesus, the only name by which we can be saved, is seen in many healings that God's ministers have performed in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 3:6). His name is just as sacred in one language as in another.

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## **A SAMPLING OF THE NAMES OF GOD**

<b>Hebrew Names of God:</b>	
<b>Elohim</b>	<b>Deity, The God Family</b>
<b>YHWH</b>	<b>He Exists <i>or</i> He Causes To Be</b>
<b>Adonai/Adon</b>	<b>Lord <i>or</i> Master <i>or</i> Ruler</b>
<b>El</b>	<b>The Mighty One</b>
<b>El Elyon</b>	<b>God Most High</b>
<b>El Roi</b>	<b>God Who Sees</b>
<b>El-Elohe-Israel</b>	<b>God of Israel</b>

<b>El Olam</b>	<b>God of Eternity</b>
<b>El Shaddai</b>	<b>The Almighty, All-Sufficient God</b>
<b>Yah</b>	<b>The Independent One</b>
<b>YHWH Elohim</b>	<b>Majestic, Omnipotent Lord</b>
<b>YHWH-Hoseenu</b>	<b>LORD Our Maker</b>
<b>YHWH-Jireh</b>	<b>LORD Will Provide</b>
<b>YHWH- Ropheka</b>	<b>LORD Our Healer</b>
<b>YHWH-Nissi</b>	<b>LORD Our Banner</b>
<b>YHWH-Mekaddishkem</b>	<b>LORD Sanctifies</b>
<b>YHWH-Eloheenu</b>	<b>LORD Our God</b>
<b>YHWH-Eloheka</b>	<b>LORD Your God</b>
<b>YHWH Elohay</b>	<b>LORD My God</b>
<b>YHWH-Shalom</b>	<b>LORD Our Peace</b>
<b>YHWH-Sabaoth</b>	<b>LORD of Hosts</b>
<b>YHWH-Raah</b>	<b>LORD My Shepherd</b>
<b>YHWH-Makkeh</b>	<b>LORD Will Smite You</b>
<b>YHWH-Gmolah</b>	<b>LORD of Recompenses</b>
<b>YHWH-Shammah</b>	<b>LORD Is There</b>
<b>Aramaic Names of God:</b>	
<b>Elah</b>	<b>The Adorable One</b>
<b>Abba</b>	<b>Father</b>
<b>Greek Names of God:</b>	
<b>Theos</b>	<b>The One Supreme Deity, God</b>
<b>Kurios</b>	<b>Lord <i>or</i> Master</b>
<b>Pater</b>	<b>Father</b>
<b>Iesous (Jesus)</b>	<b>Savior, Preserver</b>
<b>Christos</b>	<b>Anointed, Christ</b>
<b>Logos</b>	<b>The Word, Spokesman</b>
<b>Archegos</b>	<b>Author, Forerunner, Captain</b>
<b>Huios Theou</b>	<b>Son of God</b>
<b>Basileus Basileon</b>	<b>King of Kings</b>
<b>Basileus Eirenes</b>	<b>King of Peace</b>
<b>Basileus Dikaiousnes</b>	<b>King of Righteousness</b>
<b>Amnos, Arnion</b>	<b>The Lamb</b>

## Meaning and Pronunciation

In Bible usage, a "name" signifies special meaning. For example, *Abraham* means "father of many nations" and *Israel* means "prevailer with God." In biblical terms a name signifies reputation and character. The Hebrew text of the Old Testament contains many names of God, each describing some aspect of His character. Among them are *El Shaddai*, meaning "Almighty God"; *El Elyon*, "Most High God"; and *YHWH Ropheka*, "The Eternal that heals." God demands fear and reverence for the attributes that His various names represent such as love, healer, holy, all-powerful, honorable and glorious.

Some idolize the sound or spelling of God's name because they do not truly understand His attributes. God allows men to observe His nature through the things He created (Romans 1:18-23). Likewise, His attributes expressed in His names reveal His character and affect the way we worship Him. Thus the proper attitude toward God's name is crucial to worshiping Him appropriately.

Would not God have preserved His name down through the ages if He were that concerned about pronunciation? Could the pronunciation of the Father's name be that critical if Jesus Christ never instructed us how to pronounce it? In John 17:6, 26, Jesus says He came to reveal and declare the name of the Father to His disciples. In John 17:11, Jesus asks the Father to "keep through Your name [the Father's] those whom You have given me." Again, He does not mention how to pronounce the Father's name.

Salvation is not based on pronunciation! Would God preclude someone from eternal life because his accent caused him to say "Gawd" rather than "God?" Indeed, God may have *intentionally* obscured the pronunciation of His name, lest we focus on pronunciation rather than the reality of who and what He is!

Many professing Christians today do not realize that they take God's name in vain by worshiping the sound of a name and treating it with superstition. They are also making an idol out of that sound and spelling. We see the reality of this in today's society when "Lord" or "Jesus" is plastered on billboards and bumper stickers or flashed across television screens.

Reverential fear and genuine respect through obedience truly honors God, not the sanctimonious or repetitious use of the sound of a name. In Matthew 7:21 Jesus says, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the *will* of My Father in heaven." Doing the will of God is absolutely necessary to truly fearing His name. He is much more interested in our obedience and growth in His way of life than our punctilious pronunciation of Hebrew words.

God's name and what it represents should be exalted, praised and loved (Psalm 34:3; 54:6; 69:36). Do we do this when we pray? Christ gives us the proper example in Matthew 6:9-10: "In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, ***hallowed [holy] be Your name*** . Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Each day we have an opportunity to extol Him regarding some aspect of His character that we see in His names.

Whether we use Yahweh, Elohim, the Eternal, the Creator, God or Lord, the pronunciation is not as critical as properly revering and fearing the One behind the name, THE LORD YOUR GOD!