

# YHWH and ‘Elohîm



YHWH is the personal name for God and is written as a **Tetragrammaton יהוה** consisting of four Hebrew letters pronounced in English as Yod Heh Vav Heh and written with the Roman letters YHWH. The first instance of YHWH appears in Genesis 2:24 where it is combined with ‘Elohîm, the plural of ‘Eloah God to form the name YHWH ‘Elohîm translated in most English bibles as LORD God. ‘Elohîm is used immediately in Genesis 1:1 to identify the Creator, At first ‘Elohîm created the heavens and the Earth; so why is ‘Elohîm, the plural for ‘Eloah God not recorded as a plural Gods here, in Genesis 1:1 and everywhere in Scripture ?

The primary reason for this is the divine nature of God. Scripture does indeed reveal One God that exists in three distinct persons as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. While the plural ‘Elohîm only designates more than one, just like any plural in the English language it does not specifically designate the number as three. In Genesis 1:26 the Hebrew prefix na (we, us, our) in naâsah is we make, fashion or form man to resemble ‘Elohîm in B’tzal’mēnū in our image and Kid’mütēnū after our likeness. The plurality of God is clear in this verse so again why not Gods? Because there are many Scriptures to indicate that ‘Elohîm is One and therefore the divine nature of our incomprehensible God. The Hebrew in Deuteronomy 4:35 reads aTāh här’ētā lädaat Kiy y’hwäh hū häélohiym ēyn ôd mil’vaDô with the literal translation of You see in knowing that Yahwey He’s the God nothing else exists apart from Him. This verse and Deuteronomy 6:4-9 which is known as the shema (hear) are the two compelling passages the Hebrews look to in understanding ‘Elohîm as one God and why they are fiercely monotheistic even to the point of denying the divine nature of God. The Hebrew reads, sh’ma yis’räel yhwh élohëynū yhwh echäd.

Deuteronomy 6:4

Hear Israel, YHWH (Yahwey) is ‘Elohîm (God), YHWH (Yahwey) is One

The Hebrew echad means numerical one, each, every, first, only. This verse could also be understood as Yahwey is one of ‘Elohîm as easily as it could be understood that Yahwey is ‘Elohîm but that interpretation is weaker for as the word is a plural for ‘Eloah it appears more that the Hebrew interpretation is an early apostasy concerning the divine nature of God. God-breathed inspiration of Scripture cannot simply be dismissed in the language choices God inspired to be used and the fact that ‘Eloah is not the inspired text is strong evidence that God is revealing His divine nature to His people. I’ll summarize the other verses for One God in three persons below.

- **ONE GOD:** Deuteronomy 4:35; 6:4; Isaiah 43:10-11; 1Timothy 2:5.
- **FATHER is GOD:** John 17:1-3; 1Corinthians 8:6; 2Corinthians 1:3; Galatians 1:1; Philippians 2:11; Colossians 1:3; 1Peter 1:2.
- **SON is GOD:** Isaiah 9:6; John 1:1-18; 5:18; 8:58; 20:28; Romans 9:5; Colossians 2:9; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 1:8-12; 2Peter 1:1.

- **HOLY SPIRIT is GOD:** Acts 5:3-4; 2Corinthians 3:17-18. Implied in Mark 3:29; John 15:26; 1Corinthians 6:19-20; Hebrews 9:14. **Spirit of God:** Genesis 1:2; 31:3; Numbers 24:2; 1Samuel 19:20; 2Chronicles 24:20; Job 27:3; Isaiah 61:1; Ezekiel 11:24; Matthew 3:16; 12:28; John 4:24; Romans 8:14; 1Corinthians 7:40; Ephesians 4:30.

Let's now move our discussion to the Tetragrammaton YHWH. God inspired to Moses in recording the **first five books (Penteteuch)** of the bible that is also called Torah which means Law to use the personal name of God 1,551 times. God's name identifies his nature, so that a request for his 'name' as Moses did in Exodus 3:13 is equivalent to asking about his character. The ancient Hebrew would not write or speak the personal name of God and the Scribes would only write the word YHWH in transcribing scrolls and would never speak the name for fear of blasphemy by not speaking it properly for the Hebrews believe the personal name of God to be so sacred that it was forbidden to speak which resulted in the pronunciation of YHWH becoming lost. While this too sounds very religious this is yet another incident of apostasy and rebelliousness by God's people. When God reveals His personal name to Moses and inspires its use in more than 6,500 verses of Scripture it should be apparent that this is the name God wants His people to call Him by and use.

The tetragrammaton YHWH is most probably **YaHWeH** and the imperfect of hawâ, 'life, living' according to many scholars who believe that to be the most probable pronunciations for the personal name of God. The reason for YHWH having its root in hawâ is rejected by many because in doing so it renders the King James translation of Exodus 3:14 'I am that I am' incorrect which in reality is regardless of the root word for YHWH. Most likely the name should be translated something like 'I am he who is,' or 'I am he who exists' as reflected by the LXX ego eimi ho ov as is more properly rendered in Revelation 1:8. God's name identifies His nature so a request for His 'name' as Moses did in Exodus 3:13 is the equivalent to asking about God's character. Critical speculation about the origin and meaning of 'Yahweh' seems endless but the Bible's own explanation in Exodus 3:14 if the simple Qal imperfect of hawâ 'eh'yeh ásher eh'yeh' was translated properly would most likely read as 'exists who exists' rather than 'I am that I am' for I AM is now improperly made to be a title for God which it is not. God does not call Himself the "I AM" for it seems that God's answer to Moses is saying His presence is present in that He is near to those who seek to know Him.

The precise name Yahweh "He is" results when others speak of Him in the third person. God's earlier promise to Moses in verse 12 is, 'Certainly I will be with you' and He follows up in verse 14 by declaring 'My presence is present.' Is not the fundamental promise of God to His people in Exodus 6:7, 'I will be your God, and you shall be my people?' This verse stands in diametric opposition to God's proclamation to Hosea in 1:9 where He emphatically states His rebellious people are to call Him Lo0Ammi which translates as not My people and He goes on to say, "You are not My people and I will not be yours." Therefore Yahweh is a 'faithful presence' in name and nature to His people to trust Him and obey Him. (Ex 6:2-4; Deut 7:9; Isa 26:4).

YHWH is transcribed LORD in small caps in most English bibles. LORD is a title and not the personal name of God. LORD is neither the true translation for YHWH nor the true transcription for the personal name of God which occurs 6,519 times in the Old Testament. Judaism when *reading* YHWH in the synagogue would supplant it with the noun Adonai meaning master and translated into English as LORD. Medieval Scribes began to insert the Masoretic vowel points for Adonai to YHWH thus rendering the actual written word as YaHoWaHo, and where we get the English word **Jehovah**. The name Jehovah therefore is not a God-inspired name or pronunciation but that of a later development by Jewish Scribes.

God affirms to Moses in Exodus 6:3 that the patriarch's Abraham, Isaac and Jacob did not have possession of the *intimate knowledge* of Yahwey 'Elohîm, Eternal God but only possessed the deeper understanding as 'El Shaddai (shad-dah'- ee) God Almighty. Many misread the verse to mean the patriarchs did not "yada" know at all Yahwey but Scripture itself refutes this notion as untrue in Genesis 15:6-8; 26:2, 24; and 28:13. What the patriarchs did not possess was the intimate knowledge 'yada' of Yahwey, but they certainly had knowledge of the name YHWH, Yahwey. The Tetragrammaton YHWH occurs in every OT book except Ecclesiastes and Esther. Only in pre-NT

times was God's personal name replaced with the less intimate title 'adonay (Gr., kurios) 'Lord.'

Scripture speaks of the Tetragrammaton as 'this glorious and fearful name' in Deuteronomy 28:58 or simply Hashem 'the name' in Leviticus 24:11. YHWH, Yahwey connotes God's nearness, his concern for man, and the revelation of his redemptive covenant. In Genesis 1 through 2:3, the general term 'elohîm 'deity' is appropriate for God transcendent in creation; but in Genesis 2:4-25 it is Yahweh, the God who is immanent in Eden's revelations to man. In Genesis 9:26-27, 'Elohim enlarges Japheth, but Yahweh is the God of Shem and especially used in references to the God of Israel. In Psalm 19:1 the heavens declare the glory of El; but the verses 7-14 the law of Yahweh is perfect; the testimony of Yahwey is upright and sure; the commandments of Yahwey are pure light; the fear of Yahwey endures forever; the judgements of Yahwey are true and altogether righteous, being more desirable than wealth and food; and Yahweh is my strength and my redeemer.

Ultimately the connotations of the name Yahweh are fulfilled in the 'covenant of peace,' when the God who has been present from the first will be fully present at the last (Isaiah 41:4); Ezekiel's stress upon God's 'sanctuary in the midst of them forevermore' (Ezekiel 37:26) and his future city named YHWH Shammâ 'Yahweh is there.'

**Yah** is a contracted form of Yahweh and occurs 50 times in English bibles and occurs primarily in poetic books and in the exclamation, Hallel -lu-yah, glory to Yahweh where the English hallelujah originates from. There are numerous proper nouns compounded with shortened forms of the divine name 'Yahweh,' with yehônatan, Jehonathan, 'Yahweh has given' along with its abbreviated form yônatan 'Jonathan,' a substitute name for the same person (compare 1Sam 13:2-3; 14:6, 8; 2Sa 17:17, 20 with 1Kings 1:42-43); and yehôshapat, Jehoshaphat, 'Yahweh has judged'; and alternatively yôshapat, 'Joshaphat,' applied only to two subordinates of David. It serves also as a terminal element in proper nouns like Elijah, 'elîyâ or 'elîyahû, 'God (is) Yahweh.

**yehôshûa-yeshûa** designates ten Hebrew leaders from Moses' successor Joshua; Jehoshua in Numbers 13:16 and 1Chronicles 7:27 to the post-exilic high priest Jeshua in Ezra 3:2 and Nehemiah 12:10. The former's name was changed from the Hiphil infinitive Hoshea, 'salvation,' to Joshua with its deeper spiritual connotation of 'Yahweh (is) salvation' in Numbers 13:8, 16. Both men are called 'Jesus' in the Greek in Acts 7:45 for which the Greek Iesous should more properly be transcribed Joshua for yeshûa 'which is our Lord's Hebrew name means 'He saves' and in Matthew 1:21 the divine descriptive is added 'for he will save his people from their sins.'