

4. Thy Name

In the Lord's Prayer we read:

Matthew 6:9 In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be thy name (Matthew 6:9).

What is the name of the Father? In the 17th Chapter of John, Jesus prays:

O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them (John 17:25-26).

Jesus was talking to God, his Father. So, the name of God is the name of the Father. God is the Father. Jesus verifies this when he said: **"It is My Father who honors Me, of whom you say that He is your God" (John 8:54).**

God is first mentioned and addressed in the Old Testament. In fact, the third word in the Bible is God. Let us look at this name of the Father.

1. The Name of God in Hebrew

a) El, Elohim, El Shaddai, El Elyon, El Olam, El Roi

The root name for God is El. El is the Hebrew word for God. The plural of El is Elohim. In Genesis 1 we read:

In the beginning God (Elohim) created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God (Elohim) was hovering over the face of the waters. Then God (Elohim) said, "Let there be light"; and there was light (Genesis 1:1-3).

Here we have Elohim speaking, and the Spirit of Elohim hovering over the deep. The Word became flesh according to John chapter 1 and was revealed in the flesh as Christ. Since the Spirit of God was also hovering or brooding over the waters, we have the three in one at work in creation. Although God is one, he is manifested as God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Some have suggested the Trinity is the reason why the plural form of God's name is most often used when talking about God in the Old Testament. However, it is not uncommon to use the plural in Hebrew, when addressing very high majesty. For example in Genesis 24:9-10 the plural of master is used to describe Abraham, when Abraham's servant swears to him before setting out to seek a bride for Isaac. Using Elohim when talking about El shows us that we are dealing with a very high and revered majesty. The name is plural but the verbs associated with it are singular proving that we are not talking about more than one.

Besides El and Elohim, God is referred to as El Shaddai, El Elyon and El Olam. The word El Shaddai means God Almighty. There are 31 occurrences of Shaddai, the Almighty and El Shaddai, God Almighty in the book of Job. We first encounter the term in Genesis 17.

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am Almighty God (El Shaddai) walk before Me and be blameless. (Genesis 17:1)

How could Abraham believe that he would become the father of many nations, when he did not even have a son? Well it was El Shaddai that was talking to him, and as the Almighty, he could do anything. So God's name here reveals who he is and that despite something looking impossible, if El Shaddai says it we can believe it. Do you realize that God is El Shaddai in your life? When God changed Jacob's name to Israel he again identifies himself as El Shaddai.

And God said to him, “Your name is Jacob; your name shall not be called Jacob anymore, but Israel shall be your name.” So He called his name Israel. Also God said to him: “I am God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall proceed from you, and kings shall come from your body (Genesis 35:10-11).

God was identified as the source of blessing by his name El Shaddai. He is also the one who has all power, who gives and takes away. Nobody is able to go against his final decision.

El Elyon means God, the Highest. El Elyon is found in Genesis 14:18.

Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he *was* the priest of God Most High. And he blessed him and said: “Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth (Genesis 14:18-19).

Jesus is called a priest after the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 6:20). Jesus often talked about his Father in heaven. El Elyon, translated here as God Most High is Possessor of heaven and earth. How fitting that the angels on the plains of Bethlehem sang glory to God in the highest at the birth of Christ. They sang glory to El Elyon. Jesus is known as the King of Righteousness and the Prince of Peace. Priest and King, Peace and Righteousness are also adjectives for “Melchizedek king of Salem” since “Melchi” means “king of” and “zedek” means “righteous.” He was king of Salem. Salem comes from the word Shalom, which means Peace. So the King of Peace, named King of Righteousness was priest of El Elyon. And when Jesus, the spiritual Melchizedek was born, the angels sang glory to El Elyon, which means God in the highest.

The Hebrew term, El Olam, is translated as the everlasting God. The term is found in Genesis 21:33: **“Then Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba, and there called on the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God. (El Olam)”** This tells us that the name of the Lord is also El Olam. When Hagar fled from Sarah, God appeared to Hagar as El Roi. **“Then she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, You–Are–the–God–Who–Sees; for she said, ‘Have I also here seen Him who sees me?’ (Genesis 16:13).** God the everlasting is all-seeing.

So in the conjunction with the name of El, the everlasting nature of God, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, the Source of all blessing, the All-powerful one, and the All-seeing One is made manifest. However we also notice, that when the word God is used in the Bible, often LORD is part of the title. In the last two scripture verses it is the LORD who spoke to Hagar, and the Everlasting God on whom Abraham is calling. LORD is his name. LORD is the name of the Everlasting God. The name of God, YHWH in the Hebrew, is translated by the King James and New King James Versions of the Bible using four capital letters: LORD. When we see LORD in our Bibles that means the original Hebrew from which it was taken is YHWH.

b) YHWH

YHWH is a transliteration of the name of God in Hebrew. In English we usually say LORD. There are some preachers who insist on using the Hebrew name, Yahweh. The Jewish people say Adonai. There are some older translations of the Bible that translate the name as Jehovah. Because of their high respect and reverence for the name of God and because of Exodus 20:7, the Jewish people will not say YHWH, the name of God. Instead they say Adonai, which means master or Lord. In Exodus 20:7 it is written: **“You shall not take the name of YHWH, your God in vain, for YHWH will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.”**¹

The meaning of God’s name was revealed to Moses in Exodus 3:14:

And God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And He said, “Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’ ”

God also said to Moses: **“I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by My name LORD I was not known to them (Exodus 6:3)”** Was the name YHWH unknown before the time of Moses?

We already saw this title in Genesis 21:33, and as early as Genesis 2:4 we are told “the LORD God, (YHWH Elohim) made the earth and the heavens”. However, they did not know God as Lord, as YHWH, in the sense of Saviour, or Liberator. They knew him as El, El Shaddai, El Elyon, the Almighty, the Creator, the source of blessings. Now God would reveal himself as Lord or liberator of his people through Moses. He would free them out of slavery. He would be their LORD, their Saviour. YHWH is the self-existent one, the eternal I AM. But Isaiah 43:11 also states: **“I, even I, am YHWH; and besides me there is no Saviour.”** Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob did not know God as liberator or Saviour.

“In the ancient world, knowing another’s name was a special privilege that offered access to that person’s thought and life. God favoured his people by revealing himself by several names.”²

Today many people know that God exists, that He is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, that He is Almighty. But do they know him as Saviour? YHWH is translated as LORD. Yet, what does LORD mean? You know that God exists. But do you know him as Lord? James says

¹ Since 2008 the Catholic Church has banned the use of the name YHWH during mass. Source: Catholic News Service 2008 /USCCB. CNS · 3211 Fourth St NE · Washington DC 20017 · 202.541.3250

² pg 503 of Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Dictionary

even the demons believe that there is one God and tremble (James 2:19). If you want to get to heaven, you need to know Him as LORD and Saviour. You need to be freed from the bonds of sin. God revealed himself in Christ Jesus as Lord and Saviour, so that that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

Jesus says **“Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed” (John 8:34 & 36).**

It is not enough not know God as El. You need to know him as YHWH. 1 John 1:9 will show you how to experience him as Saviour.

c) YHWH Elohim, YHWH Sabbaoth, YHWH Shalom, and YHWH Shammah.

From time to time we see the name YHWH in conjunction with some other title of God. We have already seen the title YHWH Elohim which is translated Lord God in Genesis 2:4. In 1 Samuel 1: 3 we read that Hannah and her husband **“went up from his city yearly to worship and sacrifice to YHWH Sabaoth in Shiloh.”** The German translation is Herr Zebaoth meaning LORD Zebaoth. The English translation is Lord of Hosts. Saba means host or army. Sabaoth is the plural. Here YHWH is the one who acknowledged as the Deliverer in the battles against the enemy. And it is this Saviour, Hannah and her husband worshipped in Shiloh.

In Judges 6:24 we read: **“So Gideon built an altar there to the LORD, and called it YHWH Shalom (The-LORD-Is-Peace).”**

And in Ezekiel 48:35 it is written: **“All the way around shall be eighteen thousand cubits; and the name of the city from that day shall be YHWH Shammah (THE LORD IS THERE).”**

Every title of God reveals something about his character. Adam Clarke quotes the Hebrew rabbis as saying: “When God judgeth his creatures, he is called Elohi ; when he warreth against the wicked, he is called Sabaoth; but when he sheweth mercy unto the world, he is called YHWH. ¹ That is God, the Lord of Hosts. This is YHWH, whose name is translated as LORD or Jehovah.

2. God has revealed Himself.

God is revealed through his attributes. We have seen that the various names of God show various attributes of God. In the New Testament God reveals himself in Jesus Christ. But already in the Old Testament the Israelites had a knowledge of God. For example, God spoke to Moses. In Exodus 34:6-8 God reveals to Moses who He is.

And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the

children's children to the third and the fourth generation.” So Moses made haste and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshiped.

Here YHWH again is translated as LORD. The LORD, our Saviour is gracious, merciful, and forgiving. That is one aspect of his nature if we accept Him as Lord. However, He is also the Holy God who demands that we confess our sins or guilt. He cannot condone sin. He by no means clears the guilty and visits iniquity and transgression that is not forgiven. But He has made a way for us to receive forgiveness by taking upon himself in Christ our guilt and paying the penalty for sin.

3. El (Elohim) and Ya or Je (short for YHWH), refering to God and Lord are part of some names

- Samuel means petitioned of God, or name of God.
- Daniel means my judge is El, or God is my judge
- Immanuel means with us is El, or God with us.
- Isaiah or Jesaiah means the Lord has saved
- Jeremiah means the Lord hurls.
- Eli means my God, and Jah is the Lord. So Elijah means My God is Lord.

4. I AM

Then Moses said to God, “Indeed, when I come to the children of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they say to me, ‘What is His name?’ what shall I say to them?” And God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And He said, “Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” Moreover God said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: ‘The LORD 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 to all generations’ (Exodus 3:13-15).

God is the eternal I Am. He is in the past, and He is already in the future. He stands outside of time. Consider a lady-bug crawling up your arm and staying on you for five minutes. You are already there where it will be a minute from now, and you are still there where it was a minute ago. Jesus Christ, as God is also eternal.

Note that God is the eternal present. We talk of the past, present, and the future, but God holds the future in his Hand. He refers to himself as in the present. He is the same yesterday, and today, and tomorrow. God is not two-faced, nor is he like the Egyptian magicians that Moses knew. He did not deal with illusions but is unchanging and upfront. I AM WHO I AM.

Hebrews 13:8 confirms that as God, the Father, so **“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.”** In fact this declares the divinity of Christ. The contemporaries of Jesus understood this. At one time

Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.” Then they took up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple (John 8: 58-59).

It may be unclear to today’s casual reader of the Bible, but the Jews knew that in saying this Jesus was equating himself with God.

Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him. Jesus answered them, “Many good works I have shown you from My Father. For which of those works do you stone Me?” The Jews answered Him, saying, “For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God” (John 10:31-32).

This is also the reason why Christ was crucified. The trial was not about what He did, but about his identity. That is still the central issue today. Who is Jesus? We have proof that He is the I AM. Even the group that came to arrest him in the Garden of Gethsemane were awestruck when Jesus used the name of God, I AM.

Jesus therefore, knowing all things that would come upon Him, went forward and said to them, “Whom are you seeking?” They answered Him, “Jesus of Nazareth.” Jesus said to them, “I AM.” And Judas, who betrayed Him, also stood with them. Now when He said to them, “I AM” they drew back and fell to the ground (John 18:4-6).

5. The Importance of the Name

It has been shown that YHWH or LORD reveals the Saviour. Isaiah already indicated that there is no other Saviour than YHWH (Isaiah 43:11). So when God was revealed in Christ the importance in believing in the name of the LORD was made manifest. Christ, God incarnated is our only hope. Peter says:

Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

6. The Lord has many names

We have already looked at a number of the names of God, the Father. But what holds for God, also holds for Jesus, the Son of God, equal to God. For example, let us consider the following Scripture:

**For unto us a Child is born,
Unto us a Son is given;
And the government will be upon His shoulder.
And His name will be called
Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6)**

When the New Testament uses the word Lord, it is not a translation of Adonai or YHWH. It is a translation of the the Greek word Kurios, since the New Testament was written in Greek, not in Hebrew. When Christians talk about the Lord in the New Testament they mean Jesus Christ. I am reminded of the song: He is Lord, He is Lord, He is risen from the dead and he is Lord. Every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

In a thorough study of scripture, Howard Kern³ has shown that both the God of the Old Testament and Jesus revealed in the New Testament share the same names and attributes, giving proof once again, that Jesus is God, Immanuel, God with us. He shows that both are referred to as Saviour (Isaiah 12:2, Acts 4:12), First and Last (Isaiah 44:6, Rev. 1:17-18), and Father (Matthew 23:9, Isaiah 9:6). Only God is worthy to be worshipped, but all knees shall bow to Christ (Isaiah 45:23, Phil. 2:10-11). Angels worship both (Nehemiah 9:6, Hebrews 1:6). Receiving prayer (Psalm 65:3, John 14:14) and forgiveness of sin (Jeremiah 31:34, Matthew 9:2) are divine functions. Omniscience (1 John 3:20, John 21:7), supernatural power over nature (Psalm 107:29, Luke 8:25) and seeing into the human heart (1 Kings 8:39, John 2:25) are attributed to God and to Christ. Retribution (Jeremiah 19:10, Revelations 2:23) and judging the world (Psalm 96:13, John 5:22) are ascribed to God in the Old Testament and to Jesus in the New Testament.

All of this can be summarized by the words in Matthew 1:21.

She will give birth to a son and you shall give him the name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin shall be with child and give birth to a son and they will call him Immanuel,” – which means God with us (NIV 2011).

Questions

1. El means God. Why is the plural Elohim often used instead of the singular El?
2. God is not just El but Elohim. What significance does that have for your life?
3. Job referred to God as El Shaddai, God Almighty. What does that mean to you?
4. El Elyon, means God Most High. Why did the angels give glory to El Elyon in Bethlehem at the birth of Christ?
5. Why would Abraham call the name of God, El Olam, the everlasting God?
6. Why is God referred to in multiple ways, using various names?
7. What does YHWH mean?
8. How do you interpret Exodus 6:3?
9. If God is truly LORD in your life, what does that entail?
10. What do the titles YHWH Sabaoth, YHWH Shalom, and YHWH Shammah signify?
11. How does Isaiah 9:6 indicate that God will be revealed in Christ?
12. Name some of the divine attributes of Jesus indicating that he is God.
13. What does Immanuel mean?

³ Howard Kern in his booklet: How to respond to Jehovah Witnesses.

14. El means God. Eli means my God. Jah is short for YHWH. What does Elijah mean?
15. How is the divinity of Jesus revealed through his names?