

The Names of God

Part One: The Words for God

First there is a Hebrew word which generically means 'god' which is 'el,' which denotes power/strength. We see this first in the first verse of the Bible, Genesis 1:1, but it is used in the plural sense, "In the beginning, 'Elohim' created the heavens and the earth."

Without getting too deep too fast, the use of the plural form of 'el', 'elohim,' is indicative of the divine trilogy of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. 'Elohim' is the Hebrew word used for 'God' for the vast majority of Old Testament scriptures. The word 'Elohim' is not the only word-forms used for God, as both 'El' (Job 37:10) and 'Eloah' (Deuteronomy 32:15) are also used in multiple instances. Also, 'elohim' is a word which means gods, and is not used exclusively for the Trinity, but is also used for false gods (Exodus 20:23), angels (Psalm 8:6), and even referring humans (Psalm 82:6).

Finally, both forms of this word are used as prefixes for various titular names of God:

- El-Elyon (Genesis 14:18-20) Most High God
- El-Shaddai (Exodus 6:3) All-Sufficient God
- El-Olam (Genesis 21:33) Everlasting God
- El Gibbor (Isaiah 9:6) Mighty God
- Elohim-Elon (Psalm 78:56) God Most High
- Elohim-Sabaoth (Psalm 80:7-14) God of Hosts

Part Two: The Name of God

God has a specific unique name, which was revealed to Moses by God in the burning bush. Moses asked for God's name and it was given, "I Am that I Am."

That name is spelled with "the tetragrammaton," the characters YHWH (or YHVH), which means "I Am" ('underived' self-existence).

Pronouncing the Name of God

There are two pronunciations used for YHWH, Jehovah and Yahweh, but the ancient Jewish pronunciation is unknown. The reason that Yahweh is used is because modern scholarship has deduced that this is the most appropriate based on ancient Greek translations, as the Greek language provided vowels which the ancient Hebrew lacked. The Jerusalem Bible (1966) is probably the earliest Bible use Yahweh for all instances of YHWH.

The reason that Jehovah is used is because in the 6th or 7th century some Jews began placing the vowel marks for Adonai above instances of YHWH to remind the reader to pronounce "Adonai." This led to those vowels being inserted into YHWH by AD 1270ⁱ, resulting in a pronunciation of "Yohowah," which latinizes into "Jehovah." This was used in a few instances by the King James Bible (1611), and used for every instance of YHWH by the Young's Literal Bible (1862), the Darby Bible (1890), and the American Standard Bible (1901). Jehovah is also used as the denominational name of the Jehovah's Witnesses.

So the pronunciation of Yahweh is thought to be more accurate, but the pronunciation of Jehovah has been traditionally used since the Middle Ages. The bottom line is that both Jehovah and Yahweh are widely accepted representations of YHWH.

Using "LORD" instead of "Jehovah" or "Yahweh"

The name of God is commonly replaced with LORD because of an emphatic religious tradition of post-exilic Jews to **verbally** replace the name of God, YHWH, (Strong's H-3068 meaning "I Am") with a completely different word, Adoni (Strong's H-113 meaning "Lord"). The verbal-replacement word was **never used to replace the proper name in written form**, but was **only used verbally**, in order to avoid using the name of God in vain.

Unfortunately, today's English Bibles, starting with Tyndale-family translations which developed into the King James Version, conformed to this Jewish tradition of replacement-identification by representing instances of YHWH with the word "LORD" using a small-caps font style. With some exceptions noted in the section above, virtually all other English translations kept with the tradition of rendering YHWH as LORD, which had become a de facto practice.

The Importance of the Name of God

This specific name of God, YHWH, is used in the Hebrew Old Testament 6,828 times. Below are some examples of important verses regarding this specific name of God (using Jehovah, from ASV).

Exodus 3:13-15

And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? What shall I say unto them? **And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.** And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, **Jehovah**, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: **this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations.**

Exodus 6:2-3

And God spake unto Moses, and said unto him, I am Jehovah: and I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, as God Almighty; but by my name Jehovah I was not known to them.

Exodus 20:1-10+

And God spake all these words, saying, I am Jehovah thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image... for I Jehovah thy God am a jealous God... Thou shalt not take the name of Jehovah thy God in vain; for Jehovah will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain. Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy... the seventh day is a sabbath unto Jehovah thy God...

Deuteronomy 6:4-5

Hear, O Israel: Jehovah our God is one Jehovah: and thou shalt love Jehovah thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.

Psalms 110 vs 1, 4

Jehovah saith unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, Until I make thine enemies thy footstool...
Jehovah hath sworn, and will not repent: Thou art a priest for ever After the order of Melchizedek.

Like Elohim, Jehovah (YHWH) is also used for compounded names of God:

- Jehovah Jireh (Genesis 22:14) "The LORD will provide a sacrifice"
- Jehovah Rapha (Exodus 15:26) "The LORD our Healer"
- Jehovah Nissi (Exodus 17:15) "The LORD our Banner"
- Jehovah Shalom (Judges 6:24) "The LORD our Peace"
- Jehovah Raah (Psalms 23:1) "The LORD our Shepherd"
- Jehovah Tsidkenu (Jeremiah 23:6) "The LORD our Righteousness"
- Jehovah Shammah (Ezekiel 48:35) "The LORD is Present"

Part Three: The Name of Jesus Christ

Jesus - In Luke 1:26-38 Gabriel announces to Mary that she will bear the Son of God, conceived of the Holy Spirit, and that His name is to be Jesus. Similarly, in Matthew 1:18-25, Joseph was told that by an angel that Mary had conceived of the Holy spirit, and that the child was to be named Jesus. So far, so good, but that's in the English translation.

Joshua - In the Old Testament, Joshua, son of Nun, was the successor of Moses who led the nation of Israel into the promised land, and is the namesake for the Book of Joshua. This is the name given by Gabriel to be given to the Son of God. The Hebrew name 'Joshua' is 'Yeshua' and means 'salvation' or 'to deliver/rescue' - this is shortened to the Aramaic name 'Yeshu,' so the name Jesus would have used during his life would have been Yeshua or Yeshu.

The **Greek and Latin** translations take the name from Hebrew 'Yeshua' to 'Iesusu' in Greek, and 'IESVS' in Latin. The modern English name of 'Jesus' was derived around the 15th century and is from the nominative form of the Latin IESVS.

Christ - The word 'Christ' is Greek for 'anointed', and is equivalent to the word 'Messiah' which is Hebrew for 'anointed'. This is a title, not a name (Matthew 16:16). The significance of being anointed is that this is how Kings were identified, starting with the anointing of Saul (1 Samuel 10), and then David (1 Samuel 16). The Messiah (Christ) is the prophesied King, the son of David, who would rule forever.

Immanuel - In Isaiah 7, the prophet Isaiah is addressing King Ahaz, and provides the prophecy which the angel quotes to Joseph, in the same dream when he tells Joseph to name the child Jesus (Matthew 1:18-25). This prophecy says that his name shall be called 'Immanuel', which means 'God with us'. Since the declaration of his name being Immanuel is quoted in the same breath as the instruction to name the child 'Jesus', the name Immanuel is seen as a descriptive title. There is no Scriptural reference of Jesus being called by Immanuel, rather, this is the Angel identifying the child as the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, and a bold declaration of the deity of Christ. This is in line with other names given for the Messiah just 2 chapters later in Isaiah 9:6:

"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called **Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.**"

ⁱ “The first recorded use of this spelling was made by a Spanish Dominican monk, Raymundus Martini, in 1270,”
info from <https://www.catholic.com/qa/is-gods-name-yahweh-or-jehovah> - accessed 9/23/2025.