

Yahweh/Jehovah

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I. Introduction

A. The Name of God in the Old Testament is Yahweh or Jehovah

1. Yahweh is unique among all the names of God, for it is the one personal name of God found in the Old Testament.
2. Yahweh is a distinctly proper name of God. It is never used to refer to any pagan gods; neither is it used in regard to men.
3. Yahweh is a personal name and not a title
Until the time of Moses and the Exodus, the name Jehovah/Yahweh was no more than a label or title. God reveals to Moses the significance of this exalted personal name of God (Ex 6:2-3).
4. It appears 6,823 times in the OT, occurring first in Genesis 2:4, where it is joined with Elohim.
5. Strictly speaking, Yahweh is the only "name" of God.
In Genesis wherever the Hebrew word sem ("name") is associated with "God" that name is Yahweh. When Abraham or Isaac built an altar "he called on the name of Yahweh" (Gen 12:8; 13:4; 26:25).

B. Yahweh contrasted with Elohim

1. Yahweh was the God of the patriarchs, and we read
"Yahweh the God (Elohim) of Abraham" and then
"Yahweh the God (Elohim) of Isaac" and finally
"Yahweh, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob",
concerning which Elohim says, "this is my name forever" (Ex 3:15).
2. Yahweh, therefore, in contrast with Elohim, is a proper noun, the name of a Person, though that Person is divine. As such, it has its own ideological setting:
It presents God as a Person, and so brings him into relationship with other, human, personalities.

It brings God near to man, as he speaks to the Patriarchs as one friend to another.

C. Significance of the word "name" in the Old Testament

A study of the word "name" in the OT reveals how much it means in Hebrew.

1. The name is no mere label, but is significant of the real personality of him to whom it belongs.
2. It may derive from the circumstances of his birth (Gen 5:29),
Gen 5:29 Now he called his name Noah, saying, "This one will give us rest from our work and from the toil of our hands arising from the ground which the LORD has cursed."
3. It may reflect his character (Gen 27:36),
Gen 27:36 Then he said, "Is he not rightly named Jacob, for he has supplanted me these two times? He took away my birthright, and behold, now he has taken away my blessing." And he said, "Have you not reserved a blessing for me?"
4. And when a person puts his "name" upon a thing or another person the latter comes under his influence and protection.

D. The knowledge of the name brings people into a new relationship with God.

1. The significance of "knowing by name" is personal relationship with God (Ex 33:12; 18-19; Jn 17:6).
2. The initiation of our relationship with God lies on His side; individually and collectively we the people of God are called by His name. (2 Ch 7:14; Is 43:7; Jer 14:9; 15:16; Am 9:12).
3. God's motive for acting on our behalf is for His name sake (Ezk 20:9, 14, 22, 44; 36:21-22; 39:7).
4. God makes a name for Himself through His redemptive work in the lives of His people (2 Sam 7:23; 1 Chr 17:21; Isa 63:12-14; Neh 9:10).

The name is thus a **summary** way of stating what God is in himself (his name is all that is known to be true about him and his motives of action) and also what God is to others, allowing them to know his name (letting them into his fellowship).

II. Definition

A. Explanation from Dr. Vine (Vine's Expository Dictionary)

God chose Yahweh as His personal name by which He related specifically to His chosen or covenant people. Its first appearance in the biblical record is

Ge 2:4 This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made earth and heaven.

Apparently Adam knew Him by this personal or covenantal name from the beginning, since Seth both called his son Enosh (i. e., man as a weak and dependent creature) and began (along with all other pious persons) to call upon (formally worship) the name of YHWH, "the Lord" Ge 4:26.

The covenant found a fuller expression and application when God revealed Himself to Abraham Ge 12:8, promising redemption in the form of national existence.

Ge 12:8 Then he proceeded from there to the mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the LORD and called upon the name of the LORD.

This promise became reality through Moses, to whom God explained that He was not only the "God who exists" but the "God who effects His will":

the 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-name to all generations. Go, and gather the elders of Israel together, and say unto them, The LORD [YHWH] God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared unto me, saying, I have surely visited you, and seen that which is done to you in Egypt: And I have said, I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt unto the land of the Canaanites..." Ex 3:15-17.

So God explained the meaning of "I am who I am" Ex 3:14. He spoke to the fathers as YHWH, but the promised deliverance and, therefore, the fuller significance or experienced meaning of His name were unknown to them Ex 6:2-8.

B. Translation

1. "I am who I am" means either "I reveal my active presence as and when I will"
2. "I bring to pass what I choose to bring the pass".
3. "I will cause to be what has come to be."

4. "I will be all you need Me to be when you need Me to be it."

C. Yah - an abbreviated form of Jehovah

1. Yah has the same meaning as Jehovah. It occurs mostly in the Psalms and it is always used in a context of PRAISE: "... extol him that rides upon the heavens, by His name JAH...." (Ps. 68:4)

2. Thankful, rejoicing, worshipping Israelites used the abbreviated form of Yahweh in song when they sang Hallelujah: "Praise Yah" (Psa 104:35; 106:1; 149:1; 150:1).

3. Yah is found first in Ex. 15:2 when the women of Israel danced and sang to the Lord in the overthrow of Egypt at the Red Sea.

4. Yah is used 50 times in the following versus (Ex 15:2; 16; Ps 68:4; 77:11; 89:8; 94:7; 94:12; 102:18; 104:35; 105:45; 106:1, 48; 111:1; 112:1; 113:1, 9; 115:17, 18, 18; 116:19; 117:2; 118:5, 5, 14, 17, 18, 19; 118:19; 122:4; 130:3; 135:1, 3, 4, 21; 146:1, 10; 147:1, 20; 148:1, 14; 149:1, 9; 150:1, 6, 6; SS 8:6; Isa 12:2; 26:4; 38:11, 11)

D. Yahweh occurs:

1. Yahweh occurs 6,823 times in the Old Testament, more than twice as often as Elohim.

2. It's not necessary to know Hebrew to tell where this name occurs in the Old Testament text. This name is so significant that the translators of many English versions identify its every occurrence by printing it with a capital "L" followed by "ord" in small capitals: LORD.

3. Yahweh is used 164 times in Genesis, and it appears 1800 times in Exodus through Joshua. It never appears in a declined form in the Hebrew language, and it never occurs in the plural form or with suffixes.

4. Yahweh is the personal name of God in His relationship as Redeemer.

Ex 3:13-15 Then Moses said to God, "Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you.' Now they may say to me, 'What is His name?' What shall I say to them?" God 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.'" 15 God, furthermore, said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ' The LORD [Jehovah], the 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-name to all generations.

5. This personal name has caused much debate.

Ex 6:2-3 God spoke further to Moses and said to him, "I am the LORD (Yahweh); and I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God Almighty (El Shaddai), but by My name, LORD (Yahweh), I did not make Myself known to them.

This passage has been understood to mean that the name Yahweh was not known or used prior to the time of Moses. But that is not what the passage states; rather it speaks of the patriarchs not knowing God as Yahweh. They knew him as El Shaddai in actual revelatory historical deeds. They had not come to know God according to his unique character, that is, as Yahweh. In other words, God had always been Yahweh; he is saying to Moses that the descendants of the patriarchs would come to know the full rich meaning of the name by the way God dealt with them.

E. Yahweh reveals God's nature in the highest and fullest sense possible.

1. It includes, or presupposes, the meaning of the other names of God.

2. Yahweh particularly stresses the absolute faithfulness of God.

God had promised the patriarchs that he would be their God, that he would be with them and deliver and bless them, keep them, and give them a land as a place of service and inheritance.

Moses is told by God that Israel is about to behold and experience the unchangeableness of God as he steadfastly and wondrously remembers His word and executes it to the fullest degree.

God would prove to be a faithful, redeeming, upholding, restoring God. In working out this redemption, God would demonstrate that he is all that His name implies: merciful, gracious, patient, full of loving-kindness, truthful, faithful, forgiving, just, and righteous (Ex 34:5–6).

Truly, Jacob had received an insight into the meaning of the name when he exclaimed, "I wait for thy salvation, O Yahweh" (Gn 49:18).

3. Yahweh, then, is the name par excellence of Israel's God. As Yahweh, he is a faithful covenant God who, having given his word of love and life, keeps that word by bestowing love and life abundantly on His own.

III. Yahweh is the Holy Trinity

A. In the New Testament, we see the truth that God (Jehovah) is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Mk 1:9-11 From the beginning of the redemptive ministry of Jesus we see the Trinity.

Mk 1:9-11 In those days Jesus (Son) came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. Immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opening, and the Spirit (Holy Spirit) like a dove descending upon Him; and a voice (Father) came out of the heavens: "You (Son) are My (Father) beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased."

John 1:29 John sees the significance of this in his deliberate association of Jesus at his baptism with the Lamb of God.

John 1:29 The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

Mat 28:19 In the great commission, Jesus tells his disciples to baptize converts in the name (Jehovah) of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Mat 28:19).

This comparison should warn against identifying the God of the OT ("Jehovah") with the NT revelation of God the Father. Jehovah is rather the Holy Trinity incognito

B. JEHOVAH compared to the "I am" used by Jesus

Jehovah means "I AM THAT I AM"

Jesus identifies Himself with this name when he said to the Jews,

"I am the bread of life" (Jn 6:35, 48, 51)

"I am the light of the world" (Jn 8:12; 9:5)

"Before Abraham was born I am." (Jn 8:58)

"I am the door of the sheep" (Jn 10:7, 9)

"I am the good shepherd" (Jn 10:11, 14)

"I am the Resurrection and the Life" (Jn 11:25)

"I am the Way, the Truth and the Life" (Jn 14:6)

"I am the vine" (Jn 15:1, 5)

IV. Application

Heb 8:10-12 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws into their minds, and I will write them on their hearts. And I will be their God and they shall be My people. And they shall not teach everyone his brother, saying, 'know the Lord,' for all will know Me from the least to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful to their iniquities and I will remember their sins no more.

I choose to know the Lord personally, firsthand, to be in relationship with Him. I refuse every lie that says that I do not know the Lord nor hear His voice.

Phil 3:8-15 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, 9 and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, 10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; 11 in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. 12 Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. 13 Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

I choose His righteousness as I press on to know the Lord intimately and personally. I renounce every lie that embraces self-righteousness and self-justification.

The following References were used in this study:

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