

# Yahweh

God has no shortage of names--He is called by almost 1000 different ones in the Bible. But one of these names stands alone, and that name is Yahweh.

The name Yahweh (yah-WEH) occurs more than 6,800 times in the Old Testament. It appears in every book but Esther, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs. As the sacred, personal name of Israel's God, it was eventually spoken aloud only by priests worshiping in the Jerusalem temple. After the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70, the name was not pronounced. Adonay was substituted for Yahweh whenever it appeared in the biblical text. Because of this, the correct pronunciation of this name was eventually lost. English editions of the Bible usually translate Adonay as "Lord" and Yahweh as "LORD." Yahweh is the name that is most closely linked to God's redeeming acts in the history of his chosen people. We know God because of what he has done. When you pray to Yahweh, remember that he is the same God who draws near to save you from the tyranny of sin just as he saved his people from tyrannical slavery in Egypt.

Before we get into what the name "Yahweh" actually means, let's go back to its origin story in Exodus 3. In this story, God is speaking to Moses through the burning bush and giving him the mission to end all missions: freeing the Israelite people from Egyptian captivity.

Understandably, Moses has some concerns, the main one being how he will convince his fellow Israelites that this really is a mission from (and blessed by) God.

Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I am who I am." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'I am has sent me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'The Lord, 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 thus I am to be

remembered throughout all generations.” - Exodus 3:13-15

What Does Yahweh Mean? Exodus 3:13-15 is the first Biblical usage of the name “Yahweh,” and we can see at the end of the passage that it is the name by which God has chosen to be remembered throughout all generations. The English language doesn’t have an exact translation of the word “Yahweh,” so in our Old Testament we see it written as “LORD” in all capital letters.

In Jewish tradition, “Yahweh” is too sacred a name to utter out loud. Over time Jews started to substitute in “Adonai,” or “My Lord,” especially when speaking. Another common replacement is the name “Elohim,” which simply means “God.” What’s interesting is that these two replacement names are both used for other things as well, not just God, whereas Yahweh is reserved exclusively as a name for God.

We see in Exodus 3:14 that God uses “I AM” and “Yahweh” interchangeably, which tells us that “I am” is one way for us to translate the name “Yahweh.”

But why is it so significant that God’s name is “I AM”? Why it Matters that God Is I AM

In the Old Testament, a person’s name often reflected his character. Abraham means “Father of a great multitude.” Eve means “Living,” which is fitting because she was the mother of all living people. Jesus means “Savior.”

Names were very, very important at that time. It could point to a person’s disposition, mission in life, and more. And Moses knew that.

When he asks God in Exodus 3:13 what he should tell the Israelites when they ask who sent him, he’s essentially asking God to provide some credibility to the fantastic story he’s about to tell his people.

He’s asking God about his character and nature. If we ask God, “Who are you?” and he replies, “I AM WHO I AM,” that is

significant and we need to take time to dwell on his chosen name if we want to know him.

## **1. Yahweh Is the Self-Existent, Eternal God**

God has no need of us.

That simple fact can be a little offensive to our human nature – that part of us that wants to be significant; to be needed.

But it's true – God does not need us. He doesn't need anyone. He is completely whole within himself, and he is eternal – he has always existed, and he always will. He is the beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega.

And he is the only one in existence who can be described this way. The rest of us need quite a lot to go right in order to keep existing! The most powerful human on earth is still at the mercy of his health and fortune.

God stands alone in needing nothing, in being wholly self-sufficient.

## **2. Yahweh Is a Relational God**

Yahweh is only used in the Bible when the author is talking about God's personal relationship with his people. A great example of this is Psalm 19. The author talks in the first 6 verses about Elohim (another name for God) and his relationship with the material world. Then, in verse 7, he shifts and starts to write about Yahweh and his relationship with those who know him and who are in covenant with him.

The fact that God introduces himself to us as “Yahweh” tells us that his first priority in relating to us is making sure we know that he is the intensely personal God, seeking to have a relationship with his people.

We talked earlier about how God doesn't need us...but that makes it all the more wondrous that he wants us. This is a God who was so love-motivated

to know us and to be in relationship with us that he came to earth as a human and took the punishment we deserved. This is our relational God.

### **3. Yahweh Is with Us**

God is there, existing, right now.

If you are reading this article, there's a pretty good chance that you don't have a problem with this. It is probably a core part of your belief system.

But those of us who have the least qualms with a God who exists can start to forget the beauty and significance of the fact that God is here.

Yahweh is here, interacting with our world, among us. And he does that out of love. God is under no obligation to remain close to us, working in our lives and writing a love story between himself and the world. And yet, he chooses to do so. In fact, he chooses to build his very kingdom among believers:

"One day the Pharisees asked Jesus, 'When will the Kingdom of God come?' Jesus replied, 'The Kingdom of God can't be detected by visible signs. You won't be able to say, 'Here it is!' or 'It's over there!' For the Kingdom of God is already among you'" (Luke 17:20-21).

### **4. Yahweh Is the Unchanging God**

Heraclitus said it best: "There is nothing permanent except change." Our world is constantly shifting; everything is subjective, and lots of things seem to change day to day.

But our God does not conform to any of this. He remains constant through it all. He doesn't change his nature based on what is new and popular at the moment. Yahweh has always been who he is, from the beginning of time; he has always been the standard for absolute perfection and holiness.

We have the binary choice to either choose Him and conform to him – or

not. There is no third option where we can have a slightly different version of him.

God isn't changed by new and popular philosophies and theologies, but we can sometimes be. We need to keep a white-knuckled grip on the truth of the unchanging God.

## 5. Yahweh Is Wholly Other than Us

When was the last time we took a step back and acknowledged the holiness of God?

The most common theologies are ones that make God into our own personal servant – the ones that will get us our best life now; perfect peace and no problems.

God is not a servant. He is infinitely and entirely other than you and me.

"These things you have done, and I have been silent; you thought that I was one like yourself. But now I rebuke you and lay the charge before you" (Psalm 50:21).

"You thought I was one like yourself." He isn't like us. He relates to us more deeply than we can ever imagine, but he is not like us. His ways are higher than our own, and he is set apart from everything and everyone else in existence in holiness, strength, and power.

## **6. Yahweh Keeps His Covenant with Us**

We talked earlier about how God only uses the term "Yahweh" with his friends – the people who know him and who are in covenant with him. Yahweh is the covenant-keeping name.

God calls himself "Yahweh" when he first enters into the covenant with Abraham, a subtle promise that he will forever be faithful in keeping his word. When he reveals himself again as "Yahweh" to Moses, it is our

reminder that he is unchanging, and we can trust him not to back out or change his mind.

God will never stop wanting us, and he will never cease in his pursuit of us. He is the ultimate covenant-keeper, the one who keeps his promises and does what he said he will do.

We can trust God as much as we want and it will never be too much. He will always measure up.

### **7. Yahweh Is Full of Mystery... but Worth Seeking!**

Only a mysterious God would ask us to know him as the God who is who he is. We weren't meant to understand everything about him, as evidenced by the fact that we simply can't!

We worship a God of mystery, yet a God who is closer than our very breath. Yahweh is a paradox, one we will never reach the end of when it comes to our understanding of him. There is simply too much of him to know fully in one lifetime!

But we can always seek more.

That should be our daily goal — to move one step closer to knowing the God who is. The richness and fullness of perfect love await anyone seeking to know the one who would do anything to have us.

And that is worth the pursuit.