



Rooted in Scripture - Pointing to Jesus

BIBLE FOUNDATIONS

Names of God in Hebrew

What God's Names Reveal About His Character

The Short Answer

The Hebrew Bible uses several names, titles, and descriptions for God. These are not merely labels. They reveal who God is, how He relates to His people, and what He has done. The most important is YHWH - the personal covenant name by which God revealed Himself to Israel. Scripture also calls God Elohim, Adonai, El Shaddai, El Elyon, and by many other titles and descriptions. Some familiar expressions such as "The LORD Will Provide," "The LORD Is My Banner," and "The LORD Is Peace" arise from particular biblical events and reveal important truths about God's character. Learning these Hebrew words can enrich Bible study, but knowing the vocabulary is not the ultimate goal. The goal is to know the God the names describe.

Exodus 3:13-15 · Exodus 6:2-8 · Deuteronomy 6:4-5 · Psalm 23 · Isaiah 42:8 · John 8:58 · John 10:11 · Philippians 2:9-11

Opening Memory Anchor

God's names reveal God's character - but the goal is not merely to know His names. It is to know Him.



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PART ONE

BEGINNER GUIDE

1. WHY DOES THE BIBLE USE DIFFERENT NAMES FOR GOD?

The Bible speaks about God using several Hebrew names, titles, and descriptions. These do not mean that Scripture teaches several gods. Deuteronomy 6:4-5 declares one God. In that passage, LORD represents YHWH while God represents Elohim. Different words emphasize different truths about the same God: Elohim often emphasizes God as God and Creator; YHWH is God's personal covenant name; Adonai means Lord or Master; El Elyon means God Most High; and El Shaddai is traditionally rendered God Almighty. Scripture - not a dictionary definition by itself - must determine what the Bible teaches about God.

Memory Anchor

Many names and titles. One God.

2. WHAT IS ELOHIM?

HEBREW: אֱלֹהִים TRANSLITERATION: Elohim COMMON RENDERING: God

KEY PASSAGE: Genesis 1:1

Genesis opens with Elohim creating the heavens and earth. Elohim occurs thousands of times in the Old Testament. Its form is grammatically plural, but when it refers to Israel's God it normally functions with singular grammar. The same term can be used in other contexts for gods or spiritual beings, so context matters. Genesis begins not by proving God exists, but with God already there: before creation, above creation, Creator of creation.

3. WHAT IS YHWH?

HEBREW: יְהוָה TRANSLITERATION: YHWH COMMON SCHOLARLY VOCALIZATION: Yahweh

COMMON ENGLISH RENDERING: LORD KEY PASSAGES: Exodus 3:13-15; 6:2-8

YHWH is the personal divine name of Israel's God. The four letters are sometimes called the Tetragrammaton. In Exodus 3, God answers Moses, "I AM WHO I AM," and identifies Himself by YHWH. Scholars discuss the precise linguistic relationship, but Exodus connects God's name with His own existence and covenant faithfulness. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who sees suffering, remembers covenant, and acts to redeem.



4. WHY DO ENGLISH BIBLES PRINT "LORD" IN CAPITAL LETTERS?

Many English translations follow a longstanding Jewish reading tradition by rendering YHWH as LORD, usually in small capitals. This creates a useful study clue: LORD usually represents YHWH; Lord often represents a title such as Adonai; God commonly represents Elohim. Check the translation's preface. In Psalm 23:1, "The LORD is my shepherd" identifies the Shepherd as YHWH - Israel's covenant God.

Bible Study Tip

Whenever LORD appears in capital letters in the Old Testament, pause and ask whether the translation is representing YHWH.

5. WHERE DID THE NAME "JEHOVAH" COME FROM?

Jewish readers traditionally treated the divine name with great reverence and commonly said Adonai ("Lord") rather than pronouncing YHWH aloud. Later Hebrew manuscripts included vowel-pointing traditions that reminded readers to substitute another spoken word. Medieval Christian readers eventually combined the consonants associated with YHWH with vowel cues connected to the substitute reading. Through Latin and later English forms this contributed to Jehovah. Most modern scholars consider Yahweh a more likely approximation of the ancient pronunciation, although the exact original pronunciation cannot be established with absolute certainty. Christians who say Jehovah are not referring to a different God; it is a historically developed form used for YHWH.

6. WHAT DOES ADONAI MEAN?

HEBREW: אֲדֹנָי TRANSLITERATION: Adonai IDEA: Lord / Master

KEY PASSAGE: Isaiah 6:1-8

Adonai emphasizes God's authority and lordship. Isaiah sees the Lord seated on a throne, high and lifted up. The scene emphasizes holiness, majesty, and sovereign authority. Isaiah recognizes both God's holiness and his own sinfulness; God cleanses and commissions him. Calling God Lord carries an implication: He has rightful authority.

7. WHAT IS EL SHADDAI?

HEBREW: אֱלֹהֵי שַׁדַּי TRANSLITERATION: El Shaddai TRADITIONAL RENDERING: God Almighty

KEY PASSAGES: Genesis 17:1-8; 35:11; 49:25

God identifies Himself to Abram as El Shaddai while confirming covenant promises. The traditional translation "God Almighty" captures an important biblical truth, although scholars continue to discuss the precise etymology of Shaddai. A word's uncertain origin should not become the foundation for elaborate theology. The context is clearer: God is sufficient to accomplish His covenant purposes.

8. WHAT IS EL ELYON?

HEBREW: אֱלֹהֵי עֶלְיוֹן MEANING: God Most High KEY PASSAGE: Genesis 14:18-22

Melchizedek blesses Abram in the name of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth. Abram identifies YHWH as God Most High. El Elyon is not another god alongside YHWH; the title describes YHWH as supreme. No king, nation, or spiritual power outranks Him.



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9. WHAT IS EL OLAM?

HEBREW: אֵל עוֹלָם MEANING: Everlasting God KEY PASSAGE: Genesis 21:33

Abraham calls upon YHWH, El Olam. Human generations come and go; kingdoms rise and fall; God remains. Isaiah 40:28 likewise describes the LORD as everlasting. The God who made promises to Abraham is not limited by Abraham's lifespan; His purposes stretch across generations.

10. WHAT IS EL ROI?

HEBREW: אֵל רֹאֵי TRANSLITERATION: El Roi COMMONLY UNDERSTOOD: God Who Sees Me / God of Seeing

KEY PASSAGE: Genesis 16:1-16

Hagar, an Egyptian servant caught in a painful conflict, flees into the wilderness. There the angel of YHWH finds her. The precise translation of the expression is discussed, but the narrative truth is unmistakable: God saw Hagar, knew her suffering, and spoke to her. The passage should not be reduced to a sentimental slogan; her circumstances remained difficult. Yet God was not indifferent to an afflicted foreign servant.

Memory Anchor

The God Most High is also the God who sees.

11. WHAT DOES "THE LORD WILL PROVIDE" MEAN?

HEBREW EXPRESSION: YHWH Yireh TRADITIONAL FORM: Jehovah Jireh KEY PASSAGE: Genesis 22:1-14

After God provides a ram in place of Isaac, Abraham names the location with an expression commonly rendered "The LORD will provide" and related to "seeing." Genesis 22 is not simply introducing another divine name; Abraham names the place in response to what God did. Isaac is spared and a substitute dies instead. Romans 8:31-32 points to God's greatest provision: His own Son. The ultimate demonstration of provision is not material prosperity but salvation through Christ.

12. WHAT DOES "THE LORD WHO HEALS" MEAN?

HEBREW EXPRESSION: YHWH Ropheka TRADITIONAL FORM: Jehovah Rapha KEY PASSAGE: Exodus 15:22-26

At Marah, God makes bitter water drinkable and describes Himself as "YHWH, your healer." God has power to heal physical disease, but Exodus 15 should not be turned into a guarantee of immediate physical healing for every faithful believer. Scripture also records illness, weakness, suffering, aging, and death. God's ability is unquestioned; His wisdom governs how and when He acts. Revelation 21 looks toward the final defeat of sickness and death.



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13. WHAT DOES "THE LORD IS MY BANNER" MEAN?

YHWH Nissi - Exodus 17:8-16. After Israel defeats Amalek, Moses builds an altar and calls it "YHWH is my banner." A banner could serve as a rallying point or identifying standard. The emphasis is not magical words that guarantee victory; Israel's victory came from God. The altar commemorated His faithfulness.

14. WHAT DOES "THE LORD IS PEACE" MEAN?

YHWH Shalom - Judges 6:11-24. During oppression and fear, Gideon encounters the angel of YHWH. God tells him, "Peace be to you. Do not fear." Gideon builds an altar called "YHWH is Peace." The text specifically names an altar, but it commemorates something true about God. Biblical shalom is richer than absence of conflict; it can describe wholeness and well-being. Romans 5:1 brings the theme to Christ: through faith, sinners have peace with God.

15. WHAT DOES "THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS" MEAN?

YHWH Tsidqenu - Jeremiah 23:5-6. Jeremiah promises a righteous Branch from David's line who will reign wisely and execute justice. He will be called "YHWH is our righteousness." Christians see the promised righteous Davidic King fulfilled in Jesus. Read 1 Corinthians 1:30 and Philipians 3:8-9. Human beings cannot establish righteousness before God through moral achievement; the Gospel announces righteousness received through Christ.

16. WHAT IS YHWH SABAOTH?

HEBREW: יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת, TRANSLITERATION: YHWH Tseva'ot RENDERING: LORD of Hosts / LORD of Armies

KEY PASSAGES: 1 Samuel 1:3; Isaiah 6:3; Psalm 46:7

The title portrays YHWH as sovereign over the hosts of heaven and all powers under His command. Isaiah hears, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts." God's throne is not threatened. Psalm 46 combines divine power with security: "The LORD of hosts is with us."

QUICK REFERENCE

ELOHIM	God	Gen. 1:1	Creator and sovereign God
YHWH	The LORD	Ex. 3:13-15	Personal covenant name
ADONAI	Lord / Master	Isa. 6:1	Authority and lordship
EL SHADDAI	God Almighty	Gen. 17:1	Covenant power
EL ELYON	God Most High	Gen. 14:18-22	Supremacy
EL OLAM	Everlasting God	Gen. 21:33	Eternal nature
EL ROI	God who sees	Gen. 16:13	God sees Hagar
YHWH YIREH	LORD will provide	Gen. 22:14	God provides
YHWH ROPHEKA	LORD your healer	Ex. 15:26	God heals/restores
YHWH NISSI	LORD my banner	Ex. 17:15	Victory and identity
YHWH SHALOM	LORD is peace	Judg. 6:24	Peace from God
YHWH TSIDQENU	LORD our righteousness	Jer. 23:6	Righteousness
YHWH TSEVA'OT	LORD of Hosts	Isa. 6:3	Rules heaven's armies



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PART TWO

WANT TO GO DEEPER?

INTERMEDIATE

17. ARE ALL OF THESE ACTUALLY "NAMES OF GOD"?

Not in exactly the same sense. Popular Christian teaching often groups Elohim, El Shaddai, Jehovah Jireh, Jehovah Nissi, and Jehovah Shalom together as "Names of God." That can be useful devotionally, but careful study recognizes categories: YHWH is the distinctive personal divine name; Elohim and Adonai often function as titles or designations; El Elyon and El Shaddai are descriptive divine titles; and some familiar YHWH expressions arise because a person names an altar or location after something God revealed or did. Genesis 22:14 names a place; Exodus 17:15 and Judges 6:24 name altars. The distinction does not make these expressions unimportant; it makes the study more faithful to the text.

18. DOES THE PLURAL FORM ELOHIM PROVE THE TRINITY?

No. Christians believe in the Trinity because of the Bible's broader revelation of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - not simply because Elohim has a plural form. When Elohim refers to Israel's God, it commonly takes singular verbs and adjectives. The doctrine of the Trinity rests on the whole biblical witness. Genesis 1 presents God creating, the Spirit of God present, and God speaking; the New Testament later teaches that creation came through the Son (John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:15-17).

19. DOES "I AM" IN EXODUS 3 CONNECT TO JESUS?

There is an important connection, but it should be handled carefully. In Exodus 3 God says, "I AM WHO I AM," then reveals YHWH. In John 8:58 Jesus says, "Before Abraham was, I am," and His hearers pick up stones. Christians have historically understood this as an extraordinary claim about His identity. John was written in Greek, so the point should not be reduced to saying Jesus merely pronounced the Hebrew name YHWH. Yet John's Gospel repeatedly presents Jesus in categories belonging to God's identity and work: preexistence, divine glory, eternal life, and the honor due to the Father.

20. HOW DOES THE OLD TESTAMENT TITLE "LORD" HELP READERS UNDERSTAND JESUS?

The Greek Old Testament commonly translated YHWH with Kyrios, "Lord." The New Testament repeatedly calls Jesus Kyrios. The word can sometimes mean master or sir, so it does not automatically prove deity. But Romans 10:9-13 centers on confessing Jesus as Lord and quotes Joel 2:32, where the Hebrew text has YHWH. Philippians 2:9-11 says every knee will bow and every tongue confess Jesus Christ as Lord, echoing Isaiah 45:22-23 where YHWH declares that every knee will bow to Him. These are profound claims about Jesus.



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21. HOW DO OTHER OLD TESTAMENT DESCRIPTIONS OF GOD POINT TOWARD JESUS?

Shepherd: Psalm 23 calls YHWH Shepherd; John 10 records Jesus saying, "I am the good shepherd." Ezekiel 34 promises that God Himself will shepherd His people and also promises a Davidic shepherd.

King: the Old Testament repeatedly describes YHWH as King; Jesus announces God's kingdom and is revealed as the promised Davidic King.

Savior: Isaiah repeatedly identifies YHWH as Savior; the New Testament repeatedly identifies Jesus as Savior.

Bridegroom: Old Testament covenant imagery describes YHWH's relationship with His people using marriage; Jesus presents Himself as bridegroom.

Judge: the Old Testament teaches that God judges the world; the New Testament says the Father has entrusted judgment to the Son.

These connections should not be forced into every Hebrew name, but together they reveal a central New Testament truth: Jesus shares in God's identity, authority, works, and glory.

Memory Anchor

The Old Testament reveals the God of Israel. The New Testament reveals Jesus within the identity and saving work of that one God.

22. WHAT ABOUT "EMMANUEL"?

HEBREW: עִמָּנוּאֵל . TRANSLITERATION: Immanuel MEANING: God With Us

KEY PASSAGES: Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:18-23

Immanuel differs from YHWH or Elohim. It appears within Isaiah's prophetic context and means "God with us." Matthew explicitly applies Isaiah 7:14 to Jesus' birth. Jesus' arrival means God with us: the God revealed throughout Israel's Scriptures has acted decisively to save through Jesus Christ.

23. DOES KNOWING HEBREW REVEAL SECRET BIBLICAL MEANINGS?

No. Hebrew can help readers notice repeated words, wordplay, grammar, and translation choices, but it is not a secret code. A common mistake is importing every dictionary meaning of a word into one verse. Words receive meaning from context. Another mistake is constructing theology from supposed meanings of individual Hebrew letters or pictographs. Biblical Hebrew should be studied as a real language. Ask: What does this word mean here? How is it used in the sentence and passage? How does the passage fit the rest of Scripture? Original-language tools are servants of Scripture, not shortcuts around careful reading.

24. WHY DOES GOD REVEAL HIS NAME AT ALL?

God's self-revelation is relational. He does not reveal His name merely to satisfy curiosity. Exodus 6:2-8 repeatedly says, "I am YHWH," then describes what God will do: bring out, deliver, redeem, take Israel as His people, and be their God. God's name is connected to His character, covenant, and actions. His people learn who He is by seeing what He does: Creator, Provider, Shepherd, King, Judge, Redeemer, Savior.



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25. WHAT IS THE GREATEST REVELATION OF WHAT GOD IS LIKE?

For Christians, the answer ultimately leads to Jesus. John 1:14-18 says the eternal Word became flesh and makes the Father known. Hebrews 1:1-3 says God has spoken through His Son, the radiance of God's glory and exact imprint of His nature. Colossians 1:15-20 calls Jesus the image of the invisible God. The Hebrew names help readers understand God's character throughout the Old Testament, but the biblical story does not end with a vocabulary list. It leads to a Person: Jesus reveals the Father, fulfills God's promises, bears sin, defeats death, and reconciles sinners to God.

THE GOSPEL CONNECTION

God is holy. Humanity is sinful. Sin separates people from the God who created them. No knowledge of Hebrew can solve that problem, and no amount of religious vocabulary can make a sinner righteous. But the God who revealed Himself as Creator, covenant Lord, Provider, Shepherd, King, and Savior acted to rescue sinners. Jesus Christ, the eternal Son, became truly human without ceasing to be divine. He lived without sin, died for sins, and rose bodily from the dead. Through repentance and faith in Christ, sinners receive forgiveness, reconciliation with God, and eternal life. The purpose of studying God's names is therefore not merely to know more information about God. It is to know God. Read John 17:3.

HOW TO STUDY THE NAMES OF GOD FOR YOURSELF

1. Find the name or title. Notice LORD, God, Lord, Most High, Almighty, Shepherd, King, or Savior.
2. Check the translation notes. Many Bibles explain how divine names are represented.
3. Read the entire passage. Do not isolate the name from the surrounding story or argument.
4. Ask what God is doing. Creating? Making covenant? Providing? Judging? Saving? Leading? Forgiving?
5. Ask what the passage explicitly reveals about God. Let Scripture define God's character.
6. Follow the theme through the Bible. Use cross-references or a concordance.
7. Look for legitimate connections to Jesus. Especially where the New Testament applies Old Testament language about God to Christ.
8. Respond to what God has revealed. Knowledge should lead toward worship, trust, obedience, repentance, and faith.



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REVIEW AND RETENTION

1. What is the personal covenant name of Israel's God? YHWH.
2. How is YHWH commonly represented in English Bibles? LORD, usually in small capital letters.
3. What Hebrew word is commonly translated "God"? Elohim.
4. What does Adonai communicate? Lordship or mastery.
5. What does El Elyon mean? God Most High.
6. What does El Olam mean? Everlasting God.
7. Who used the expression associated with El Roi? Hagar.
8. What event produced "YHWH will provide"? God provided a ram in place of Isaac in Genesis 22.
9. Are YHWH Yireh, YHWH Nissi, and YHWH Shalom introduced exactly like YHWH? No. Some arise as names given to places or altars in response to what God revealed or did.
10. Does the plural form Elohim by itself prove the Trinity? No. The Trinity comes from the Bible's broader revelation of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
11. Why is "Jehovah" different from "Yahweh"? Jehovah developed historically through the consonants YHWH and traditional reading cues; Yahweh is widely regarded as a more likely approximation of the ancient pronunciation.
12. What is the ultimate goal? Not merely learning Hebrew vocabulary, but knowing the God Scripture reveals.

KEY TERMS

Adonai - Lord or Master.

Elohim - A common Hebrew designation translated God; context determines its referent.

Tetragrammaton - "Four letters," referring to YHWH.

YHWH - The personal covenant name of Israel's God, commonly rendered LORD.

Yahweh - A common scholarly reconstruction of the pronunciation of YHWH.

Jehovah - A historically developed form associated with YHWH and traditional reading cues.

Shalom - Peace, wholeness, or well-being, depending on context.

Transliteration - Representing the letters/sounds of one language with another writing system.



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FINAL MEMORY ANCHORS

- Many names and titles. One God.
- God's names reveal God's character.
- Context determines meaning.
- The LORD is not an abstract idea - He is the God who acts, saves, provides, leads, judges, and keeps covenant.
- The God Most High is also the God who sees.
- God's provision reaches its greatest expression in Jesus Christ.
- Original-language tools should lead readers deeper into Scripture, not away from it.
- The goal is not merely to know God's names. The goal is to know God.

A SCRIPTURE PATH FOR CONTINUED STUDY

Genesis 1:1-3 - Elohim, Creator
Genesis 14:18-22 - El Elyon
Genesis 16:7-13 - El Roi
Genesis 17:1-8 - El Shaddai
Genesis 21:33 - El Olam
Genesis 22:1-14 - YHWH Yireh
Exodus 3:1-15 - YHWH and "I AM"
Exodus 6:2-8 - God's name and covenant faithfulness
Exodus 15:22-26 - YHWH the Healer
Exodus 17:8-16 - YHWH Nissi
Judges 6:11-24 - YHWH Shalom
Psalm 23 - YHWH the Shepherd
Isaiah 6:1-8 - Adonai and YHWH of Hosts
Jeremiah 23:5-6 - YHWH Our Righteousness
Matthew 1:18-23 - Immanuel
John 1:1-18 - The Word reveals God
John 8:48-59 - "Before Abraham was, I am"
John 10:1-18 - Jesus the Good Shepherd
Romans 10:9-13 - Calling upon the Lord
Philippians 2:5-11 - Jesus Christ is Lord
Revelation 21:1-5 - God dwelling with His people



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WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE?

Useful tools for further study include a Bible with cross-references and translation notes, a reliable Hebrew-English lexicon, a Bible concordance, an interlinear Bible used alongside - not instead of - a normal translation, and multiple reputable Bible translations for comparison. BibleProject resources on the divine name, God's character, and biblical themes can provide helpful visual introductions. Blue Letter Bible and STEP Bible provide accessible original-language tools for readers who want to examine Hebrew words and their occurrences. Original-language tools are most helpful when they send readers back into the biblical text rather than encouraging isolated word studies.

Resource Safeguard

Listing a resource does not mean 3Nails endorses every theological position, methodology, publication, or conclusion it produces. Compare sources and continually return to Scripture.

FINAL THOUGHT

Moses asked God His name. Abraham discovered that God provides. Hagar discovered that God sees. Gideon discovered that peace comes from God. David knew YHWH as Shepherd. Isaiah saw Him as the holy King. Jeremiah promised a righteous King whose name proclaimed that YHWH is righteousness. And the New Testament announces Jesus Christ as Lord, Savior, Shepherd, King, and the One through whom the invisible God is made known.

The names are worth learning. The Hebrew is worth studying. But every name points beyond the word itself. Scripture invites readers to know the God who speaks, creates, sees, provides, heals, shepherds, saves, and keeps His promises. And the clearest revelation of that God is found in Jesus Christ.

Closing Memory Anchor

The goal is not merely to know God's names. The goal is to know God.

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