

NAMES OF GOD

The name of God holds an important key to understanding the doctrine of God and the doctrine of revelation. The name of God is a personal disclosure and reveals His relationship with His people. His name is known only because He chooses to make it known. To the Hebrew mind, God was both hidden and revealed, transcendent and immanent. Even though He was mysterious, lofty, and unapproachable, He bridged the gap with mankind by revealing His name.

The truth of God's character is focused in His name. The divine name reveals God's power, authority, and holiness. This accounts for Israel's great reverence for God's name. The Ten Commandments prohibited the violation of God's name (Exod. 20:7; Deut. 5:11). Prophets spoke with authority when they uttered God's name. Oaths taken in God's name were considered binding, and battles fought in the name of God were victorious. Other nations would fear Israel not because it was a mighty nation but because it rallied under the Lord's name. In the New Testament, God's name is manifested most clearly in Jesus Christ. He is called "the Word" (John 1:1), and Jesus Himself makes the claim that He has revealed the name of God (John 17:6). God's name is His promise to dwell with His people.

God of the Fathers

Before Moses' encounter with God in the Midianite desert, God was known generally as the God of the Fathers. Various names were used for God under this conception, most of which were associated with the primitive Semitic word *El*.

El-Shaddai "God of the Mountains" or "The Almighty God." This term is more closely associated with the patriarchal period and can be found most frequently in the books of Genesis and Job. Exodus 6:3 underlines El-Shaddai as the name revealed to the patriarchs. God used it to make His covenant with Abraham (Gen. 17:1-2).

El-Elyon "The Most High God" or "The Exalted One" (Num. 24:16; 2 Sam. 22:14; Ps. 18:13). Melchizedek was a priest of El-Elyon and blessed Abraham in this name (Gen. 14:19-20), referring to El-Elyon as "Maker of heaven and earth." Canaanites at Ugarit also worshiped god as El-Elyon. El-Elyon seems to have had close ties to Jerusalem.

El-Olam "God of Eternity" or "God the Everlasting One" (Gen. 21:33; Isa. 26:4; Ps. 90:2). God's sovereignty extends through the passing of time and beyond our ability to see or understand.

El-Berith "God of the Covenant" (Judg. 9:46) transforms the Canaanite Baal Berith (8:33) to show God alone makes and keeps covenant.

El-Roi "God who sees me" or "God of vision" (Gen. 16:13). God sees the needs of His people and responds.

Elohim Plural form for deity. It is a frequently used term and the most comprehensive of the "El" combinations. The plurality of this word is not a hint of polytheism. It is a plural of majesty. It is a revelation of the infinite nature of God. In the creation narrative we read: "Then Elohim said, "Let us make man in our image" (Gen. 1:26). This name suggests that there is a mystery to the Creator God which mankind cannot fully fathom. God is absolute, infinite Lord over creation and history. The Christian sees in this term a pointer to the Trinitarian reality of creation.

Covenant Name

The covenant name for God is “Yahweh.” Israel’s faith was a new response to God based on His disclosure. This name was so unique and powerful that God formed a covenant with His people based upon His self-revelation. Yahweh titles appear in English translations as Jehovah.

Yahweh-Jireh “The LORD will provide” (Gen. 22:14). This was the name given to the location where God provided a ram for Abraham to sacrifice in the place of Isaac. This name is a testimony to God’s deliverance.

Yahweh-Nissi “The LORD is my banner” (Exod. 17:15). Moses ascribed this name to God after a victory over the Amalekites. The name of God was considered a banner under which Israel could rally for victory. The Lord’s name was the battle cry.

Yahweh-Mekaddesh “The LORD sanctifies” (Exod. 31:13). Holiness is the central revelation of God’s character. God calls for a people who are set apart.

Yahweh-Shalom “The LORD is peace” (Judg. 6:24). This was the name of the altar that Gideon built at Ophrah signifying that God brings well-being not death to His people.

Yahweh-Sabaoth “The LORD of hosts” (1 Sam. 1:3; Jer. 11:20; cp. 1 Sam. 17:45). This can also be rendered “the LORD Almighty.” It represents God’s power over the nations and was closely tied to Shiloh, to the ark of the covenant, and to prophecy. The title designates God as King and Ruler of Israel, its armies, its temple, and of the entire universe.

Yahweh-Rohi “The LORD is my shepherd” (Ps. 23:1). God is the One who provides loving care for His people.

Yahweh-Tsidkenu “The LORD is our righteousness” (Jer. 23:5-6; 33:16). This was the name Jeremiah gave to God, the Righteous King, who would rule over Israel after the return from captivity. He would establish a new kingdom of justice.

Yahweh-Shammah “The LORD is there” (Ezek. 48:35). This is the name of God associated with the restoration of Jerusalem, God’s dwelling place.

Symbolic Titles

Many of the names for God are symbolic, illustrative, or figurative.

Ancient of Days (Dan. 7:9,13,22) The picture presented is of an old man who lived for many years. This, of course, is not a literal description of God but a confession that He lives forever and His kingdom is everlasting. His rule encompasses the expanses of time. Unlike the portrait presented in other religions where the gods are bound within time, Yahweh is active in time and history. He gives history meaning and is drawing it to a conclusion. He is from “everlasting to everlasting” (Ps. 90:2).

Rock (Deut. 32:18; Ps. 19:14; Isa. 26:4) God is strong and permanent. Yahweh is sometimes identified as “The Rock of Israel.”

Refuge (Ps. 9:9; Jer. 17:17) God is a haven from the enemy.

Fortress (Ps. 18:2; Nah. 1:7) God is a defense (stronghold) against the foe.

Shield (Gen. 15:1; Ps. 84:11) God is protection.

Sun (Ps. 84:11) God is the source of light and life.

Refiner (Mal. 3:2-3) God is purifier.

Adapted from: Brad Creed [England, Archie, Brand, Chad & Draper, Charles (2009). *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (p. 1173). B&H Publishing Group. Retrieved from <https://app.wordsearchbible.com.>]