

Series: The Names of God

Title: Jehovah

Text: Genesis 2:4

Introduction

The most significant discovery of life is to discover God. The only hope of attaining eternal life is to know the Eternal. In Isaiah 43:10-11, God says, "You *are* My witnesses," says the LORD, "And My servant whom I have chosen, That you may know and believe Me, And understand that I *am* He. Before Me, there was no God formed, Nor shall there be after Me. I, *even* I, *am* the LORD, And besides Me *there is* no savior." (Isaiah 43:10-11 NKJV)

Building a stable and quality relationship takes time and effort. If you want to get to know someone, you have to spend some time learning about their character, abilities, attitudes, outlook, and expectations. If you wanted to describe someone you know very well, you probably would use various descriptive adjectives to convey their qualities and virtues. Most of those descriptions would focus on personal experience and association.

Getting to know God is also a matter of experience and association. A study on the names of God should give us some insight into the nature and character of God. Our goal is to develop a deeper understanding and appreciation for God. Last week we examined the name "Elohim." Elohim or El is translated God in our English bibles.

Elohim is The Mighty Creative God. The Elohim, as the Mighty God, brought Israel out of Egyptian bondage. The Elohim spoke the worlds into existence by the breath of His mouth. The Elohim is the Mighty God, the Creator, the Supreme Being, and the Omnipotent. The Elohim is the Mighty God of Covenant relationship. Elohim covenanted with Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, and the Patriarchs. The Elohim gives us a picture of God as the Eternal Godhead, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost who, even at creation, covenants with himself because there is none greater.

Now, we will look at the name Jehovah or YHWH (Yahweh) as He is called in Hebrew. In the King James Version, the Hebrew word *Jehovah* is translated "LORD" in capitals to distinguish it from another Hebrew word, Adonai, also translated Lord. Jehovah is, by far, the name most frequently used in the Old Testament. It occurs 6,823 times. It first appears in Genesis 2:4, with the name Elohim as Jehovah-Elohim. The name Jehovah-Elohim appears throughout the second and third chapters of Genesis, except in the story of the temptation where only the name *Elohim* appears.

After Chapter 3, we find the name of Jehovah alone, or Jehovah and Elohim together. Sometimes the two names are used separately, even in one sentence. In his dream at Beth-El, Jacob hears the voice of God say, "I *am* Jehovah, the Elohim of Abraham your father and the Elohim of Isaac; the

land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants." (Genesis 28:13 NKJV)

I. Jehovah – the Name

After the Renaissance and Reformation periods, Christian scholars used the term Jehovah for YHWH, but in the 19th and 20th centuries, biblical scholars again began to use the form, Yahweh. When you read the name Jehovah or Lord in capital letters, think about His being or His existence and life. Elohim tells us about God. But Jehovah is His name.

Jehovah is completely self-existent, the One who possesses essential life and permanent existence in Himself. He is the One who always exists, eternally and unchangeable. Isaiah 43:10, 11: "I am He: before me, there was no Elohim formed, neither shall there be after me. I, even I, am Jehovah, and beside me there is no savior." In Psalm 102:27, we read, "But You *are* the same, And Your years will have no end." (Psalms 102:27 NKJV) Literally, it should read, 'You are He, and Your years shall have no end.' Jehovah is the One of old whose years have no end. He is without beginning and without end.

The most noted Jewish commentator of the Middle Ages, Moses Maimonides, said, "All the names of God which occur in Scripture are derived from His works except one, and that is Jehovah; and this is called the plain name, because it teaches plainly and unequivocally of the substance of God." One commentary says, "In the name Jehovah the personality of the Supreme is distinctly expressed. It is everywhere a proper name denoting the person of God.

The Hebrew may say *the* Elohim, the true God, in contrast to all the false gods, but he would never say *the* Jehovah, for Jehovah is the name of the One true God. You might say "my God" or "my Elohim," but never my Jehovah, for when you say my God, it means Jehovah. A Jew would speak of the *Elohim* of Israel but never of the *Jehovah of Israel*, for there is no other Jehovah. A Jew speaks of the living God, but never of the *living Jehovah*, for he cannot conceive of Jehovah as other than living" [Girdlestone, *Old Testament Synonyms*, p. 62].

II. Jehovah and Israel

The origin and meaning of the name *Jehovah* are seen in relation to Israel. At the burning bush, "Moses said to God, "Indeed, *when* I come to the children of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they say to me, 'What *is* His name?' what shall I say to them?" And God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And He said, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" (Exodus 3:13-14 NKJV)

Its origin is exactly the same as that of Jehovah. It refers to the One who will always be in personal, continuous, and absolute existence. When God wished to make a special revelation of Himself, He used the name *Jehovah*.

In verse 15, God said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: 'The Jehovah the Elohim 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 to all generations.' Go and gather the elders of Israel together, and say to them, 'Jehovah, the Elohim of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared to me, saying, "I have surely visited you and *seen* what is done to you in Egypt. ([Exodus 3:15-16 NKJV](#))

In Exodus 6:2, "God spoke to Moses and said to him: "I *am* the Jehovah. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as El-Shaddai, but *by* My name Jehovah I was not known to them." ([Exodus 6:2-3 NKJV](#))

The name Jehovah appears as early as Genesis 2 and is used with special significance regarding God's rational and moral creatures. Even though the name Jehovah was frequently used as the title of the Elohim by the Patriarchs, its full significance was not revealed to them. But now Jehovah reveals Himself in connection with covenant promise to the nation.

After hundreds of years, the true significance of the name was to be revealed as a personal, living Being who was now fulfilling the promises made to their fathers. The ever-living God reveals Himself to His covenant people as the unchanging God who remains faithful to His word through many generations. God's existence, the continuity of His dealings with mankind, the unchangeableness of His promises, and the whole revelation of His redeeming mercy are wrapped up in the name Jehovah.

Elohim is the general name of God. Jehovah is the God of revelation who expresses Himself in His essential moral and spiritual attributes. His name is Jehovah. He is the God of revelation to Israel. All the nations had their *Elohim*. But the Elohim of Israel (at least when they were not backsliding) was Jehovah. The constant cry of the faithful Israelite was, "O Jehovah, you are our Elohim" (II Chronicles 14:11), "You are Elohim alone" (Psalm 86:10).

It is interesting that after Exodus 6:3, Jehovah and Elohim's names appear in reverse order. The books of Ecclesiastes, Daniel, and Jonah use the name Elohim almost exclusively. But the solid theocratic and historical books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and the Kings, use the name Jehovah. The same is true of the Psalms. Psalms 42 to 84 almost exclusively use Elohim or other compound names of God, while the other psalms primarily use Jehovah. Both sections are attributed to David, so why the difference of names? It's because of a difference of purpose.

God reveals himself as the written Word, but He also reveals himself in flesh as the living Word. He is specifically Jehovah, the God of revelation and the ever-becoming One, but He is also "the coming One," who will appear for man's redemption. Israel's God is the permanent and unchangeable One, who says, "I am Jehovah; I change not."

The book of Hebrews called him the God who is "the same yesterday, today and forever." It is never "thus saith the Elohim," but always "thus saith Jehovah."

III. Jehovah – His Holiness and Love

The name Jehovah also reveals God as a God of moral and spiritual attributes. We might assume that the Elohim would be moral with righteous attributes, but the name Jehovah clearly reveals it. The name Elohim assumes God's love for all creation as the work of His hands, but the name Jehovah reveals this love.

The name *Jehovah* does not appear until Genesis 2:4. That is when the account of man's creation and God's unique relationship with humanity is distinct from the rest of creation. God enters into fellowship with the people he has created and called to be in covenant relationship, so the Elohim is now called Jehovah-Elohim. It is Jehovah-Elohim who blesses the earth for the sake of Abraham and sets Israel as His representative upon the earth.

Initially, the Creator (Elohim) called man into existence as the one being on earth who had the capacity to enjoy God. The attributes in the name 'Jehovah' were not needed to create the material world. They were only made visible as mankind became fruitful and multiplied. As Jehovah, God places man under moral obligations with a warning of punishment for disobedience. That is how we wind up with the "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not."

When Satan tempts Eve to disobey God, he doesn't mention the name *Jehovah*, only Elohim, and in response, Eve doesn't mention Jehovah in her reply. It's significant, too, that after their sin, both Adam and Eve hide. When they hear the voice of Jehovah-God in the garden, saying, "Where are you?" seeking an account of their actions, they are full of guilt and fear.

Jehovah is revealed in the New Testament as a God of "righteousness and true holiness" (Ephesians 4:24). To Israel, righteousness and holiness were the two great attributes associated with the name Jehovah. Jehovah was so holy and sacred that the Jews were afraid to pronounce it. To this day, the name Jehovah is never read in the synagogue or uttered by Jewish people. The word Adonai is substituted for the name Jehovah. It is a term that simply means "the name of the Lord" or "the Name."

The original pronunciation of the name Jehovah (Yahweh), regarded as too sacred to utter, is now lost to this generation. Orthodox Jews regard it as a sign of the Messiahship because he is the only one who will truly be able to pronounce it.

Jehovah declares His holiness throughout the Old Testament. In Genesis 18:25, Abraham says to Jehovah, "shall not the Judge of all the earth do right." The first requirement of His people is found in Leviticus 19:2, "You shall be holy: for I Jehovah your Elohim am holy." The Seraphim cry, "Holy, holy, holy is Jehovah of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory."

Jehovah is known as the "Holy One of Israel." When a person sins, it is against the righteousness of Jehovah. Those who violate Jehovah's holiness must face God's righteous punishment. So it is Jehovah who pronounces judgment and metes out punishment. It is Jehovah who bans Adam and Eve from the garden, for Jehovah is of purer eyes than to behold evil (Habakkuk 1:13).

It is Jehovah who created man to enjoy and display His righteousness. Jehovah demands righteousness, justice, and holiness from every creature made in His image. Jehovah looks upon a wicked and corrupt earth and says, "I will destroy it." It is Jehovah who rains fire and brimstone upon Sodom and Gomorrah for their iniquity. It is Jehovah that is angered so often against a sinning, wicked Israel. And it is Jehovah who says to Moses: "Whosoever sins against me, I blot out of my book" (Exodus 32:33).

But as Jehovah, God is also Love. His love causes Him to grieve and suffer for the sins and sorrows of humanity. In Jeremiah 31:3, Jehovah tells Israel, "I have loved you with an everlasting love." In the Book of Judges, Jehovah's anger brought intense punishment upon them. But the same Jehovah also says, 'His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel' (Judges 10:16). The prophet Isaiah writes in Chapter 63 verse 3 that "In all their afflictions Jehovah was afflicted."

As Jehovah, His holiness must condemn, but His Love redeems and seeks to bring us back into fellowship. Jehovah comes seeking after Adam and Eve in love even though they have sinned. He teaches them how to approach Him through sacrifice and a substitute. It is the clear implication of Abel's approach to God through sacrificing a life and the rejection of Cain's approach for lack of it. Throughout the sacrificial system, the way of approaching Jehovah is distinct from that of Elohim.

At the end of the fourth chapter of Genesis, a new son is born to Adam and Eve. They name him Enoch, a word acknowledging their helplessness. The scripture says, "It is then that men began to call on the name of Jehovah." When we acknowledge our helplessness, we learn that Jehovah is more than the mighty, omnipotent, and transcendent; he is also a God of love who rescues us.

We need the favor and fellowship of Jehovah, who made us. Jehovah's love restores those who sin against His righteousness and holiness, and He welcomes us back to communion and fellowship with Him. Jehovah embodies the hope for the human race, which finds its expression in our sacrifice and prayers. Jehovah's love will not forsake the fallen.

Conclusion

Jehovah continues to reach out even during periods of utter corruption. Jehovah continues to reveal Himself in covenants and acts of deliverance and redemption. To the children of Israel in cruel bondage, He says, "I am Jehovah, I will bring you out." (Exodus 6:6). Jehovah remains in constant communication with Moses even when the people are stubborn and rebellious. Jehovah's glory descends upon the tabernacle like a cloud, and He speaks with Moses face to face as a man speaks to his friend (Exodus 33:9, 11).

Zechariah speaks of a day of redemption and grace when he writes, "I will say it is my people, and they shall say, Jehovah is my Elohim" (Zechariah 13:9). Jehovah, yea, even Jehovah is my God. Isaiah says Jehovah is "a just God and a Saviour." Jehovah says, "Look unto me and be saved all the ends of the earth.

Only in Jehovah do we find righteousness and strength and holiness and love. (Isaiah 45:22, 24). In Psalm 89, David writes, "You have a mighty arm; Strong is Your hand, *and* high is Your right hand. Righteousness and justice *are* the foundation of Your throne; Mercy and truth go before Your face. Blessed *are* the people who know the joyful sound! They walk, O LORD, in the light of Your countenance. In Your name, they rejoice all day long, And in Your righteousness they are exalted." ([Psalms 89:13-16 NKJV](#))

Jehovah is righteous and holy, but He loves you and can help you and rescue you if you are willing to obey and follow Him.