

The Hebrew Names of God

Lesson 1: Elohim, Adonai, and Yahweh

- I. **Elohim**, translated “God”, is used over 2,300 times and stresses His power and sovereignty as Creator and Ruler.
 - A. The name Elohim is probably derived from a verb meaning “to be in front or lead”, or perhaps from a noun meaning “strength or power”, thereby describing God as the Strong One or Mighty Leader.
 - B. All other Semitic languages use the singular El, but the Hebrews used the plural ending (-im) as an honorific, intensive, or majestic plural, which allows for additional revelation of the Trinity (*cp. Genesis 1:26; Matt. 28:19*).
 - C. Elohim denotes God as the First Cause or Creator of all that is, which assumes His power and ability to create—*Genesis 1:1; Jonah 1:9*.
 - D. Elohim denotes God as the Sovereign Ruler and Judge over all—*Deuteronomy 10:14, 17–18*.

- II. **Adonai**, translated “Lord”, is used over 400 times and stresses His absolute authority.
 - A. The singular noun Adon means lord (over subjects) or master (over servants), both of which stress His absolute authority.
 - B. The intensive or majestic plural ending (-ai) attached to Adon marks Him as “Lord par excellence” or “Lord of all”—*Psalms 136:3*.
 - C. Adonai denotes God as the One Who justifiably expects obedience—*Joshua 5:13–15; Isaiah 6:1–8*.

- III. **Yahweh**, translated “LORD”, is used over 5,300 times and stresses His eternal presence and commitment to help His people.
 - A. Although the name of Yahweh was used before, its full significance was not revealed until He appeared to Moses in the Burning Bush—*Exodus 3:1–15*.
 - B. The name Yahweh is probably from the Hebrew verb hayah, which means “to be”, thereby describing God as the One Who eternally is, exists, and is present.
 - C. The great “I am” or Yahweh denotes that He is tender toward our circumstances, incapable of forgetting His promises, and unwilling to leave our side or cast us aside.
 - D. When Jesus claimed to have existed before Abraham as “I am”, He claimed to be Yahweh in *John 8:58*.
 - E. An extreme interpretation of Exodus 20:7 led to Adonai being substituted for Yahweh, which gave rise to the man-made, unbiblical word “Jehovah.”