THEISM
Biblical Names of God

When people introduce themselves to others, they usually tell their names. In ancient times, individuals were often associated with names having particular characteristics. Characteristics of God may be realized from names associated with Him. When God stayed the hand of Abraham from sacrificing Isaac, He provided a ram for the offering. Abraham then named the place "The LORD will provide" (i.e., _Jehovah-Jireh_, Genesis 22:14). After the Israelites had escaped from Egypt and crossed the Red Sea, God promised them that if they would "keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians. For I am the LORD who heals you" (i.e., _Jehovah-Roph'echa_, Exodus 15:26). After Joshua had defeated the Amalekites who fought against Israel shortly after they had crossed over the Red Sea, Moses "built an altar and called its name, The LORD is My Banner" (i.e., _Jehovah-Nissi_, Exodus 17:15). At Mt. Sinai, God instructed the Israelites to "keep My statutes, and perform them: I am the LORD who sanctifies you" (i.e., _Jehovah-M'qaddishchem_, Leviticus 20:8). Gideon built an altar to the LORD in Ophrah of the Abiezrites, and called it "The LORD is Peace" (i.e., _Jehovah-Shalom_, Judges 6:24). Jeremiah predicted the coming safety of Judah and Jerusalem, saying, "And this is the name by which she will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGTHEOUSNESS" (_Jehovah-Tsidqenu_, Jeremiah 33:16). David wrote, "The LORD is my shepherd" (_Jehovah-Rohi_, Psalm 23:1). After Ezekiel described the city of God, he wrote, "the name of the city from that day shall be: THE LORD is THERE" (_Jehovah-Shammah_, Ezekiel 48:35). God is also described as "The LORD of hosts" (_Jehovah-sabaoth_, Isaiah 1:24; Psalm 46:7).

A significant designation of God during Patriarchal times was God's introduction of Himself to Abram as "Almighty God" (i.e., _El Shaddai_, Genesis 17:1). Isaac wanted "God Almighty" to bless Jacob as he journeyed to Paddan Aram to find a wife from the daughters of his mother's brother, Laban (Genesis 28:1-3). When Jacob returned from Paddan Aram, God appeared to him and introduced Himself as "God Almighty" (Genesis 35:11). When Jacob sent his sons to Egypt a second time, He wanted "God Almighty" to be merciful to them (Genesis 43:14). In his old age, Jacob remembered that "God Almighty" had blessed him (Genesis 48:3). God told Moses that He had appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as "God Almighty" (Exodus 6:2-3). The concept of an "Almighty God" indicates the unlimited power of God.

When God appeared to Moses at a burning bush, and commissioned him to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, Moses wanted to know God's name. "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.' Moreover God said to Moses, 'Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: The LORD 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 this is My memorial to all generations'" (Exodus 3:13-15).

God thus designates Himself as "I AM WHO I AM" and as the "LORD God." The English word "LORD" (all capitals) in some English Bibles, and as "Jehovah" in others, comes from the Hebrew term _Yahweh_, or _YHWH_ (without vowel points). Used over sixty-eight hundred times in the Old Testament, _YHWH_ was thought by the Israelites to be too sacred to pronounce. Therefore, when reading Scripture, they substituted the word _Adonai_ (translated as "Lord" without all

capitals) for *YHWH.* In their writings, they inserted vowel points used with *Adoni* under the consonants of *YHWH.* Eventually, this practice contributed to *YHWH* coming into English as "Jehovah." *YHWH* first occurs in Genesis 2:4 (". . . in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens"). The word *YHWH* (the LORD) is frequently used together with the word *Elohim* (God) – thus, 'the LORD God' or as transliterated from Hebrew, '*YHWH Elohim*' (e.g., Genesis 2:4; Exodus 3:14-16; Deuteronomy 6:4, etc.).

Elohim is the first Hebrew term that is translated as God in the Bible. "In the beginning, God (*Elohim*) created . . . ." (Genesis 1:1). *Elohim* is masculine plural. (Like "s" in English, Hebrew words ending with "im" generally indicate plurality.) *Elohim* is used occasionally in reference to creatures, angels and people in authority, and often in reference to idolatrous gods (plural). But whenever *Elohim* refers to the true God, verbs, pronouns, or adjectives associated with it are always singular. *Elohim* is used over twenty-five hundred times in the Old Testament. Whenever *Elohim* is associated with the true God, it contains ideas that He is creator, preserver, transcendent, mighty and strong. Because *El* was a common word for god, including idolatrous gods, the true God was sometimes referred to as "God most high" (Genesis 14:18-20; 22, Psalm 57:2) or as the "most high God" (*El Elyon*, Psalm 78:35, 56; Daniel 3:26; 4:2; 5:18, 21; Mark 5:7; Luke 8:28; Acts 16:17; Hebrews 7:1).

The designation "I AM WHO I AM" is not essentially different from the designation "the LORD God," i.e., Jehovah God, or *YHWH Elohim*. God's proper name, *YHWH* (i.e., Jehovah), is derived from the fundamental idea of 'Being' (i.e., "I AM"), around which are prismatic ideas, such as causation of being, independence of creation, self-identity in will and purpose, eternal existence, self-revealing and gracious, living personality, covenantal fidelity, and mystery. Hence, God's name, *YHWH*, indicates that He is changeless in His purposes, faithful to His promises, able and certain to fulfill them. God's claim to Moses – "This is My name forever, and this is My memorial to all generations" – underscored the significance of the name *YHWH*, i.e., Jehovah (Exodus 3:15).

Just as one might know the name of a person but not know the person, one could know a name of God but not know God. Samuel ministered before *YHWH*, Jehovah (1 Samuel 2:18; 3:1) but he "did not yet know Jehovah, i.e., *YHWH*" (1 Samuel 3:7). To "know" (*yadah*, in Hebrew) was to experience. So also one might know (experience) a characteristic of God by one name, but not know (experience) God as designated by another name. God told Moses, "I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty (*El Shaddai*), but by My name LORD (*YHWH*) I was not known to them" (Exodus 6:3). In fact, the Patriarchs knew that the name *YHWH* applied to God (Genesis 15:7; 22:14, 24:35, 40, 42, 48, 50-51, 56; 26:22; 27:20; 49:18; etc.) but they had not experienced the 'I AM' nature of God's being. Whenever God said that "you shall know that I am the LORD (*YHWH*) your God" (e.g., Exodus 6:7; 16:11-12; 29:46; Isaiah 52:5-6; Jeremiah 16:21), the statement was always connected with some activity of God that caused people to know (i.e., to experience) the power and person of God.

Before God gave the Ten Commandments at Mt. Sinai, he introduced Himself as the LORD (i.e., *YHWH*, Jehovah). By that name he declared Himself jealous over other gods. He warned people to "not take the name of the LORD (*YHWH*, i.e., Jehovah) your God in vain" (Exodus 20:2, 7). His names emphasize His worthiness of our respect.