

The Name(s) of God in the Old Testament

[adapted from A Survey of Bible Doctrine, by Charles Ryrie]

Yahweh (“Jehovah”)

Based on the Hebrew word, YHWH, which appears throughout the Old Testament, beginning in Genesis 2:4. Translated as “LORD” in most English versions. This is the most specific name for God in the OT. “Yahweh” is an arbitrary rendering, since there are no vowels in the Hebrew word. “Jehovah” is an artificial English word put together from the YHWH consonants and the vowels from another name for God, “*Adonai*” = YaHoWaH, or Jehovah. The Hebrews felt it was sacrilege to utter God’s name aloud, so the readers of scripture always substituted *Adonai* for YHWH.

The meaning of the word is rooted in the Hebrew verb, *to be*, or some earlier variant or form of it. It contains the idea of God’s eternal self-existence, consistent with the “I AM WHO I AM” name in Exodus 3:14. The YHWH name occurs nearly 7,000 times in the OT and is especially associated with God’s holiness (Lev. 11:44-45), with His hatred of sin (Gen. 6:3-7), and with His gracious provision of redemption (Isaiah 53:1, 5, 6, 10).

Adonai

A basic designation for God which means Lord or Master, conveying the idea of God’s absolute authority. Also used as a substitute for YHWH (YHWH is rendered LORD in English, as opposed to Lord as the English word for *Adonai*).

Elohim

The most general and least specific name for God in the OT. Exact meaning is uncertain, but may be “Strong One.” *Elohim* is the plural form of *Eloah* or *El* – see Genesis 1:26, where God (“*Elohim*”) said, “Let Us make man in Our image, in Our likeness.” Some say this is evidence for the Trinity; others say it is best understood as indicating fullness of power. *Elohim* is translated as “God” in English versions of the Bible. Appears over 2,500 times in the OT.

Other OT names for God:

El Elyon – “The Most High” (Genesis 14:22)

El Olam – “The everlasting God” (Genesis 21:33)

El Shaddai – “The Almighty God” (Genesis 17:1)

Yahweh Sabaoth – “The LORD of Hosts” (1 Samuel 1:3)

Yahweh Elohim Israel – “The LORD God of Israel” (Judges 5:3)

Qadosh Israel – “The Holy One of Israel” (Isaiah 1:4)

Recommended reading about God:

- *Knowing God*, by J. I. Packer
- *Knowledge of the Holy*, by A. W. Tozer
- *Your God is Too Small*, by J. B. Phillips

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GOD

“What we believe about God is the most important thing about us.” -- A. W. Tozer

Philosophical Arguments for the Existence of God

The **Cosmological** Argument says that the existence of the ordered universe demonstrates God's existence; every effect must have a cause, therefore God is the ultimate cause of the universe.

The **Teleological** Argument says that there is an intricate design in the universe around us, and a design requires a designer (i.e., God) with infinite power and wisdom.

The **Ontological** Argument says that the very concept of God and the worldwide belief in God demand that God truly exist: our ability to conceive of God suggests God exists.

The **Moral** Argument maintains that if there are any moral absolutes, then there must be an absolute source from which they are derived.

The **Transcendent** Argument maintains that our abilities to think and reason require the existence of God.

Presuppositional Arguments take the perspective that the basic beliefs of theists and non-theists both require God as a necessary precondition.

Logically, it is impossible to disprove the existence of God. “Only an omniscient person who has, for a fact, verified the nonexistence of God throughout the universe may honestly claim to be an atheist. This means that the only being qualified to claim that there is no God is God himself!” – Gilbert Bilezikian

Revelation – How God Makes Himself Known to Us

God has revealed Himself to us in several ways:

- 1) Through His creation: Psalm 19:1-6, Romans 1:18-20
 - 2) Through history, especially with regard to Israel
 - 3) Through the person and work of Jesus Christ
 - 4) Through the written Word: The Bible
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How do you perceive God?

- . . . as a Cosmic Killjoy?
- . . . as a heavenly vending machine or Santa Claus?
- . . . as “the Force”?

The Attributes of God

A. God's "natural" attributes

- God is *infinite* and *transcendent*: God is above and beyond His creation and not subject to the natural laws He created, and He is not bound by time. (1 Kings 8:27, Psalm 90:2-4, 2 Peter 3:8)
- God is *eternal*: God is self-existent, He has no beginning and no end. (Genesis 21:33, Deuteronomy 33:27, Revelation 1:8)
- God is *immanent* and *omnipresent*: His presence and power pervade all of creation; nowhere is God absent. (Psalm 139:7-12)
- God is *omnipotent*: He is all-powerful; His power is limited only by His nature and moral character (for example: He cannot lie, He cannot sin). (Luke 1:37)
- God is *omniscient*: He knows everything -- past, present and future. (Psalm 139:1-4, Psalm 147:4, Proverbs 5:21, Hebrews 5:13)
- God is *immutable* (changeless): God's life does not change; God's character does not change; God's truth does not change; God's ways do not change; God's purposes do not change; God's Son does not change. (Malachi 3:6, Psalm 102:27, James 1:17, Hebrews 13:8)
- God is *spirit*. (John 4:24)
- God is *creator* and *sustainer* of the universe. (Genesis 1:1, Psalm 89:11, Psalm 102:25, Isaiah 40:26, Colossians 1:17)

B. God's "moral" attributes

- God is *holy*, *righteous*, *good* and *just*: God is the absolute standard for moral and ethical purity. (Deuteronomy 32:4, Exodus 15:11, Isaiah 6:3, Psalm 119:137&160, Revelation 15:3-4)
- God is *love*. (1 John 4:8-9, 16)

The Sovereignty of God

God is the Supreme and Final Authority and Ruler of the Universe. (Jeremiah 32:17) Ultimately, it is God who is in control, and He has a plan for us, even though often we may think otherwise (Jeremiah 29:11, Romans 8:28, Ephesians 1:9-10).

God as Three in One – the Trinity

There is only one God (Deuteronomy 6:4*), but within that unity are three eternal and co-equal Persons, all sharing the same essence and substance, but each having a distinct existence.

The Bible states that there is only one true God. But it also states that there was a man named Jesus Christ who claimed to be God, and that there is Someone called the Holy Spirit who is also God. The concept of the Trinity focuses on God's tri-unity: three persons/one God.

The Father is recognized as God; Jesus Christ is recognized as God and claimed oneness with God (John 10:30-33); the Holy Spirit is recognized as God (Acts 5:3-4). See also Matthew 28:19, 2 Corinthians 13:14.

* Deuteronomy 6:4 – "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is One!" The Hebrew word for "one" used here is *echod*, meaning a "composite unity." It is the same word used in Genesis 2:4 where the husband and wife are commanded to become *one* flesh. Had the writer of Deut. 6:4 wished to express an absolute unity, he could have used the Hebrew word *yachid*.