

El / Elohim – God

אֱלֹהִים

*Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of your name;
deliver us, and atone for our sins, for your name's sake! PSALM 79:9*

El and Elohim¹ are found about 2500 times in the Old Testament. The Greek equivalent, *Theos*, is found about 1300 times in the New Testament. These were common words for deity, conveying supremacy and might. El and elohim can also refer to false gods, heavenly angels, and human rulers and judges (and in such cases are usually not translated *god* in English).

El Shaddai – Almighty God (Genesis 17:1)

El Elyon – God Most High (Genesis 14:19-20)

El Olam – Everlasting God (Isaiah 40:28)

El Qanna – Jealous God (Exodus 34:14)

Elohim Chayim – Living God (1 Samuel 17:36)

Daniel – God is my Judge (Daniel 1:6)

Elijah – Yahweh is God or My God is Yahweh (1 Kings 17:1)

Bethel – House of God (Genesis 12:8)

Adonai – Lord

אֲדֹנָי

O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. PSALM 51:15

Adonai is found about 450 times in the Old Testament. The Greek equivalent, *Kurios*, is found about 650 times in the New Testament. Adonai is a term used almost exclusively for God. It's derived from *adon*, a title meaning master. Adonai shows respect to God, acknowledging his authority over us. "Lord of lords" indicates the highest rank.

Adonijah – My Lord is Yahweh (1 Kings 1:5)

Adoniram – My Lord is Exalted (1 Kings 4:6)

Adonai ha adonim - Lord of lords (Deuteronomy 10:17)

YHWH / Yahweh / Jehovah

יהוה

Come, let us worship and bow down,

Let us kneel before Yahweh our Maker. PSALM 95:6 LSB

YHWH² is found over 6500 times in the Old Testament. YHWH is God's personal name in Hebrew. The shortened form, YH, is found about 50 times by itself, mostly in the Psalms, and also many times within words and names. YHWH means "The Existing One."

Jews in the intertestamental period³ used Adonai (Lord) in place of YHWH out of reverence for God's name. The Septuagint⁴ likewise used Kurios (Lord). The New Testament writers used Kurios when quoting the Old Testament. Most English translations use LORD⁵ for YHWH in the Old Testament.

Biblical Hebrew did not have vowels. Vowels from Adonai were added to YHWH in the Middle ages by Jews called the Masoretes to create Yahweh. Yahweh was Latinized⁶ to Jehovah. A few translations retain YHWH or Yahweh (LSV, LSB, WEB)⁷ in the Old Testament.

Hallelujah - Praise Yah (imperative)

Hezekiah – Yahweh Strengthens

Isaiah – Yahweh is Salvation

Joshua/Jesus – Yahweh is Salvation

Joab – Yahweh is Father

Abijah – My Father is Yahweh

John – Yahweh is Gracious

*Give thanks to Yahweh, for He is good,
For His lovingkindness endures forever.
Give thanks to the God of gods,
For His lovingkindness endures forever.
Give thanks to the Lord of lords,
For His lovingkindness endures forever.*

PSALM 136:1-3 LSB

Footnotes:

¹ El is singular. Elohim is plural but is paired with singular verbs, indicating a singular collective term (like humanity). Deity, Godkind, or Godhead may better convey the nuance of Elohim. Both forms are rendered “God” in English translations when referring to the true God.

² The intertestamental period refers to the period between Malachi and Matthew (about 430 to 4 BC). Replacing YHWH with “Adonai” was probably first used when reading aloud in the synagogues that arose after the exile.

³ YHWH is called the Tetragrammaton (“The Four Letters” in Greek).

⁴ The Septuagint (abbreviated LXX) is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. It is named after the tradition that a team of seventy Jews made the translation in Egypt around 200 BC.

⁵ This style is called small caps. In texts where Adonai and YHWH are used together, various techniques are used, such as Lord GOD.

⁶ The Hebrew form of Yahweh was converted into the nearest equivalent spelling and sound in Latin.

⁷ The Literal Standard Version (LSV, 2020) retains YHWH. The Legacy Standard Bible (LSB, 2021), an update of the New American Standard Bible (NASB), uses Yahweh. The World English Bible (WEB, 2020), an online translation derived from the American Standard Version (ASV), uses Yahweh.

~ SR

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