What names did God call Himself by?

When Moses met with God to write the book of Genesis (Ex 24:4; 1 Kings 2:3; Luke 24:27), he was there so long that the nation of Israel wasn't sure what became of him (Ex 32:1). From that very beginning, Moses records God as revealing different names for Himself to different people.

1. In the first account of Creation, the very first name God used to describe Himself was "'elōhîm." Common to all ancient Semitic languages, "'el" was a generic noun for god and sometimes the proper name for a god. It means "strong one." The plural form for "'el" is "'elōhîm;" the "-im" ending denotes the plural. When used with a verb in the singular, "'elōhîm" is taken in the singular sense.

> In the beginning God (**'elōhîm**) created the heavens and the earth. (Gen 1:1, NASB)

> Based on the context of Hebrew, what do you make of this verse? What exactly about God is more than one? Is there any biblical evidence to support your interpretation?

2. In the second account of Creation, God calls Himself "Yĕhovah 'elōhîm." What is different between the first and second account of Creation? Is there anything that might cause you to surmise why He calls Himself a different name in the second account of Creation?

> This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord (**Yĕhovah**) God (**'elōhîm**) made earth and heaven. (Gen 2:4, NASB)

> Consider when God introduces His memorial name: **I AM WHO I AM**. **I AM** the Lord (**Yĕhovah**) God (**'elōhîm**) of your fathers. What are your observations in what God is conveying with the name "Yĕhovah 'elōhîm?"

> > Then Moses said to God, "Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you.' Now they may say to me, 'What is His name?' What shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM"; and He said, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God, furthermore, said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'The Lord (**Yĕhovah**), the God (**'elōhîm**) 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-name to all generations. (Ex 3:13-15, NASB)

3. The first human beings that Moses records God introducing Himself to are the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Gen 17:1-2; 35:11; Ex 6:2-3). Take a moment to look up **'el Shadday** in a lexicon – what does it mean?

> Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty (**'el Shadday**);
>> Walk before Me, and be blameless.
>> I will establish My covenant between Me and you,
>> And I will multiply you exceedingly." (Gen 17:1-2, NASB)

Note carefully what God told Moses, when He introduced Himself to the Patriarchs:

> God spoke further to Moses and said to him, "I am the Lord (**YHWH** / **Yĕhovah**); and I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God Almighty (**'el-Shadday**), but by My name, Lord (**YHWH** / **Yĕhovah**), I did not make Myself known to them. (Ex 6:2-3, NASB)

4. Despite introducing Himself to Moses with His memorial name YHWH, God gives Himself a title, associating an attribute to Him, that He wants the nation of Israel to remember Him by. What is God's name and what is the attribute?

> The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "But as for you, speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'You shall surely observe My sabbaths; for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the Lord (**Yĕhovah**) who sanctifies you (**qadash**).'" (Ex 31:12-13, NASB)

5. Accompanying John's opening statement to the seven churches, God introduces Himself as the first and last letter of the Greek alphabet. What does that mean? Are there any observations of the text that could help you with this interpretation?

> "I am the Alpha (**alpha**) and the Omega (**ō**)," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." (Rev 1:8, NASB)

This lesson places a focus on Hebrew terms specifically applying to God's name and emphasizes the importance of understanding the Bible from a Hebrew perspective. In addition, some Hebrew grammar is introduced to help sharpen the accuracy of one's understanding of the text.

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> Based on the context of Hebrew, what do you make of this verse? What exactly about God is more than one? Is there any biblical evidence to support your interpretation?

Elohim (God)

When God calls Himself "'elōhîm," in every instance, it is associated with a singular masculine verb.

> Then God (**'elōhîm**) said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." (Gen 1:26, NASB)

> Here, as God applies "'elōhîm" to Himself, He does not describe Himself as a group of gods. Instead, as a singular Being, God is describing His triune nature.

Jews do not recognize the triune nature of God, and instead understand this in the abstract sense as the "plural of majesty, honor, or fullness;" God is the God of gods. Christians, on the other hand, see the plural form as a literal attribution of His triune nature which was demonstrated by the active participation of both Jesus (John 1:1-3; Col 1:16) and the Holy Spirit (Gen 1:1-2) in the process of Creation.

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> Consider when God introduces His memorial name: **I AM WHO I AM**. **I AM** the Lord (**Yěhovah**) God (**'elōhîm**) of your fathers. What are your observations in what God is conveying with the name "Yěhovah 'elōhîm?"

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> **Yehovah Elohim** (Lord God)
>
> The difference between the first and second account of Creation is the detailed creation of man. As God gets more specific in His involvement with man's creation and provisions for his livelihood, He calls Himself **Yĕhovah**. Jews do not use vowels in their text, so Yĕhovah is rendered **YHWH**. When God introduces His "memorial name to all generations" (Ex 3:15), we learn that Yĕhovah means "**I AM**."
>
>> God appears to prefer being known as YHWY when dealing directly with man, and there is an implication that only the God of gods interacts with man.
>>
>> Another implication is that there is a possessive aspect to the relationship: I AM the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. I AM the Lord God of the people of God.
>>
>>> Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel." (Ex 19:5-6, NASB)

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> **El-Shaddai** (God Almighty)
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> To use an online lexicon, go to BlueletterBible.org.
>
> 1. Search "Gen 17."
>
> 2. Locate Gen 17:1 and click "Tools."
>
> 3. Locate "the Almighty" and click Strong's Number "H7706." Definitions from a variety of lexicons can be seen.
>
> El-Shaddai means "God of the Mountains" or "The Almighty God." It is the name of God that both Isaac and Jacob use when speaking to their sons (Gen 28:3; 48:3; 49:25). As the name became more widely known, others, including the pagan world, used it in the context of God's all powerful nature and Giver of life and death. Examples include the pagan prophet Balaam (Num 24:4, 16) and the Jewess Naomi (Ruth 1:20-21).
>
>> When God says to Abraham, "I am *the Lord (Yĕhovah) who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans*, to give you this land to possess it" (Gen 15:7). Based on Genesis 12:8, it appears that God did not want Abraham to know Him by His memorial name Yĕhovah. Instead God wanted Abraham to know Him from a regal perspective as "the Lord who brought you out of Ur." With the sense of high respect, Abraham includes Yĕhovah when he addresses God as Lord God ('Adonay Yĕhovah) (Gen 15:2, 8).

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> The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "But as for you, speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'You shall surely observe My sabbaths; for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the Lord (**Yĕhovah**) who sanctifies you (**qadash**).'" (Ex 31:12-13, NASB)

Yahweh-Mekaddesh (The Lord sanctifies)

The main character of God is holiness, and He requires His people be sanctified and holy.

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5. Accompanying John's opening statement to the seven churches, God introduces Himself as the first and last letter of the Greek alphabet. What does that mean? Are there any observations of the text that could help you with this interpretation?

> "I am the Alpha (**alpha**) and the Omega (**ō**)," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." (Rev 1:8, NASB)

The Alpha and The Omega

God introduces Himself as the eternal Being (of the past, present and future), the beginning and end as well as the first and last; God is the all powerful God and Giver of life and death.