

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

THEOLOGY PROPER

The Doctrine of God

UNIT 3: THE NAMES OF GOD

Lesson 7

The Revealed Names of God in the Old Testament

What God's Names Tell Us About His Character

Key Texts: Exodus 3:13–15; Genesis 17:1; Psalm 91:1; Jeremiah 23:6

Every Name a Window — Every Window a Ground of Confidence

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Series Verse

“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to Him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.”

Romans 11:33–36, NASB 1995

Introduction

With Lesson 7 we cross a second great threshold in our study of Theology Proper. Units 1 and 2 laid the prolegomenal and existential foundations: how we can know God, how we can speak of Him, that He exists, that He alone is the true God, and that He is one. Now, in Unit 3, we move from the fact of God's existence to the content of His self-disclosure, from the question "Does God exist?" to the richer and more searching question "Who is this God who exists?" And the first and most primary answer the Scripture gives to that question is not a list of attributes or a philosophical description, but a name. Indeed, a galaxy of names, each one a facet cut into the infinite diamond of the divine being, each one catching and refracting a different angle of the inexhaustible light of God's character.

The study of the divine names is not a piece of linguistic archaeology, an exercise in ancient philology detached from the living concerns of the church. It is, in the deepest sense, one of the most practical and pastorally transformative disciplines of Theology Proper. Every name by which God has revealed Himself is a promise, a declaration of who He is in relation to His people, a ground upon which faith may stand and from which prayer may spring. The Christian who knows that God is YHWH, the self-existent, covenant-keeping, I AM WHO I AM, brings a different quality of trust to the prayer of a desperate hour than the Christian who knows only that "God exists." The person who knows that God is El Shaddai, the All-Sufficient One who appeared to Abraham in his impossibility, brings a different kind of confidence to the impossible situation than one who has never lingered over that name. The names of God are not theological furniture; they are the vocabulary of a living, vital, dependence-shaped relationship with the living God.

In this lesson we will work through the primary revealed names of God in the Old Testament, attending both to their linguistic and historical backgrounds and to their theological and pastoral significance. We will examine the great primary names, Elohim, YHWH, Adonai, El Shaddai, and El Elyon, and then survey the rich tradition of compound divine names, the Jehovah-names, that disclose the character of the covenant God in His specific acts of self-revelation to His people across the sweep of redemptive history.

I. The Significance of Names in the Ancient World: A Name Reveals Nature and Character

Before we turn to the individual divine names, we must understand the framework within which those names were given and received. In the ancient Near Eastern world, a name was not an arbitrary label assigned for the purposes of social identification, as names largely function in the modern West. A name was a disclosure of essence, a revelation of the nature, character, and even destiny of the one who bore it. To know the name of a person was, in the ancient world, to possess a genuine measure of knowledge of the person himself. The name was not a pointer to the person from the outside; it was an expression of the person from the inside.

This understanding of names pervades the biblical narrative. The names of the patriarchs are not incidental biographical details but theological statements: Abram (“exalted father”) becomes Abraham (“father of a multitude”) at the moment of covenant expansion (Genesis 17:5); Jacob (“heel-grabber,” “supplanter”) becomes Israel (“one who strives with God” or “God strives”) at the Jabbok crossing (Genesis 32:28); Simon (“hearer”) becomes Peter (“rock”) at Caesarea Philippi (Matthew 16:18). In each case, the name-change is not merely a new identifier; it is a theological declaration about what God has done and who the person now is in light of that divine action.

When Moses asks God at the burning bush, “What is Your name?” (Exodus 3:13), he is not asking for a convenient label by which to introduce the God of Israel to Pharaoh. He is asking for a disclosure of the divine being, a revelation of who this God is in His nature, His character, His commitments, and His relationship to Israel. The names God gives in response are not information about Him in the way that a telephone directory entry provides information; they are self-disclosures, invitations to encounter, grounds of trust. And when the covenant name YHWH is revealed in its fullness at the burning bush, it is not a new piece of theological data to be filed and remembered; it is the foundation upon which the entire redemptive enterprise of the Exodus will be built.

With this framework in place, we turn to the names themselves, working through them with the expectation that each one will prove to be, in the language of our outline, not merely a window into the character of God but a ground of confidence for His people.

II. The Primary Names of God in the Old Testament

A. Elohim (אֱלֹהִים), The Mighty Creator and Sovereign Ruler

Elohim is the most frequently used name for God in the Old Testament, appearing more than 2,500 times. It is the name used in the majestic opening declaration of Scripture: “In the beginning God (Elohim) created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1, NASB 1995). The etymology of the name is disputed among Hebrew scholars, but the most widely accepted root connects it to a term suggesting power, might, or strength. Elohim is the name that presents God primarily in His relation to creation: as the omnipotent Creator, the supreme Sovereign, the One whose creative word calls all things into being and whose sustaining power holds them in existence.

One of the most theologically significant features of Elohim is its grammatical form: it is a plural noun (the -im ending in Hebrew is the masculine plural). And yet it is consistently used with singular verbs when referring to the God of Israel: “In the beginning God (Elohim, plural noun) created (*bara'*, singular verb) the heavens and the earth.” This grammatical construction, a plural noun with a singular verb, is unique in the Hebrew Bible when applied to the God of Israel. While the exact theological implications of this plurality are debated, many Christian theologians have seen in it at minimum an intimation of the inner richness of the divine being, a hint, if not a fully developed disclosure, of the Trinitarian fullness that will be more clearly revealed in the New Testament.

The pastoral significance of Elohim is that God meets us, first and most fundamentally, as the all-powerful Creator who brought the universe into being from nothing and who is

sovereign over every atom of it. There is no situation, no problem, no impossibility so vast that it exceeds the competence of the Elohim who spoke the galaxies into existence. When we are tempted to think that our circumstances are too complex, our needs too great, or our problems too intractable for God to handle, the opening verse of Scripture answers with sovereign simplicity: Elohim created the heavens and the earth.

B. YHWH (יהוה), The Covenant Name: I AM WHO I AM

The name YHWH, the four Hebrew consonants yod, he, vav, he, known as the *Tetragrammaton*, is the most sacred, the most personal, and the most theologically freighted of all the divine names in the Old Testament. It appears approximately 6,800 times in the Hebrew Bible, making it by far the most frequently occurring divine name in Scripture. Out of profound reverence for its holiness, Jewish tradition from the Second Temple period onward has customarily refrained from pronouncing the Tetragrammaton, substituting the title Adonai (“Lord”) wherever YHWH appears in the text. This practice of substitution is reflected in most English translations, which render YHWH as “THE LORD” (in small capitals), following the precedent established by the Greek Septuagint’s use of Kyrios (“Lord”) for the Hebrew Tetragrammaton.

The definitive disclosure of the meaning of YHWH comes in Exodus 3:13–15, at the burning bush:

“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, the 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-name to all generations.’”, Exodus 3:13–15, NASB 1995

The divine self-identification, ‘*Ehyeh ’Asher ’Ehyeh*, “I AM WHO I AM”, is a declaration of absolute, self-existent, underived being. God does not become; He is. He does not derive His existence from any prior reality; He is the ground of all existence. He does not exist contingently, dependent upon conditions being met; He simply, absolutely, necessarily IS. The name is both a declaration of divine aseity, the self-existence and self-sufficiency of God, and a declaration of divine faithfulness: the God who IS is the God who will always be, the God whose character and commitments do not fluctuate with the changing circumstances of history.

YHWH is the covenant name par excellence, the name by which God is known specifically in His personal, redemptive relationship with His people. Where Elohim is the name that relates God to all creation in His capacity as sovereign Creator, YHWH is the name that relates God to Israel in His capacity as redeeming Savior and covenant Partner. It is the name that stands at the head of the Decalogue: “I am THE LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (Exodus 20:2, NASB 1995). The covenant is entered into in the name of YHWH; the promises of the covenant are the promises of YHWH; the faithfulness that the covenant requires is the faithfulness of the God whose name means “I AM”, the One who cannot be other than He is.

C. Adonai (אֲדֹנָי), Lord and Master: God's Sovereign Authority

Adonai is derived from the Hebrew root *adon*, meaning “lord,” “master,” or “owner.” The plural form Adonai (literally, “my lords”, though used as a singular title of majesty) is used approximately 450 times in the Old Testament as a divine title. It is the name that presents God specifically in His role as sovereign Master and Lord over all creation and over His covenant people in particular.

The theological content of Adonai is the absolute sovereignty of God over all things and all persons. To address God as Adonai is to acknowledge oneself as His servant, His bondsman, His subject, one who owes obedience, service, and total loyalty to the One who holds supreme authority over every dimension of one's life. The prophets, in particular, use Adonai YHWH (“Sovereign LORD” or “Lord GOD”) with great frequency, especially in contexts of divine judgment and sovereign decree. When Isaiah encounters the LORD in the temple in Isaiah 6, he addresses Him as “Adonai”, and the effect of that address is immediate prostration, self-abasement, and the overwhelming awareness of his own unworthiness before the One who is enthroned in sovereign majesty above the seraphim.

The pastoral significance of Adonai is twofold. For the believer, it is a name of comfort: the God who is my Adonai, my Lord and Master, holds every dimension of my life under His sovereign authority, and nothing that touches me falls outside His governance. But it is also a name of solemn obligation: to know God as Adonai is to know oneself as His servant, accountable to His commands, subject to His sovereign will, and called to the kind of whole-life obedience that the lordship of God demands.

D. El Shaddai (אֱלֹהֵי שַׁדַּי), God Almighty: The All-Sufficient One

El Shaddai is the name by which God revealed Himself primarily to the patriarchs, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, before the fuller disclosure of the covenant name YHWH at the burning bush. This is explicitly stated in Exodus 6:3: “I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God Almighty (El Shaddai), but by My name, LORD (YHWH), I did not make Myself known to them” (NASB 1995). The etymology of Shaddai is among the most debated in Hebrew lexicography. The traditional rendering is “Almighty,” reflecting the Greek Pantokrator (“All-powerful”) of the Septuagint and the Latin Omnipotens of the Vulgate. Some scholars have connected the root to the Hebrew shadad (“to overpower” or “to be violent”), others to the Akkadian shadu (“mountain”, suggesting immovability and strength), and others still to the Hebrew shad (“breast”), suggesting the idea of nourishing, all-sufficient provision.

Whatever the precise etymology, the theological context of El Shaddai's appearances in Genesis makes its meaning unmistakably clear. It is the name used when God appears to Abraham at the age of ninety-nine, when the promised son is still entirely beyond natural possibility, and declares:

“Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, ‘I am God Almighty (El Shaddai); walk before Me, and be blameless. I will establish My covenant between Me and you, and I will multiply you exceedingly.’”, Genesis 17:1–2, NASB 1995

El Shaddai is the name of the God who is sufficient for what is naturally insufficient, who can do what is humanly impossible, who is the inexhaustible supply of everything His people need when all human resources have been exhausted. The patriarchs encountered this God at precisely the points of their deepest impossibility: Abraham's barrenness, Isaac's vulnerability, Jacob's poverty and exile. In each case, the name El Shaddai is the declaration that the sufficiency required exceeds what the circumstances can provide, and that God Himself is the supply. This is the name that makes Paul's confidence in Philippians 4:19 intelligible: "And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (NASB 1995). The God who supplies is El Shaddai, the All-Sufficient One who has never yet been found wanting.

E. El Elyon (אֱלֹהֵי עֶלְיוֹן), God Most High: Supreme Exaltation Above All Things

El Elyon, God Most High, is among the most exalted of the divine names in the Old Testament, emphasizing the absolute transcendence, supremacy, and incomparable elevation of God above all other beings and powers. The name first appears in Genesis 14:18–20, where Melchizedek, the enigmatic priest-king of Salem, blesses Abram in the name of "God Most High (El Elyon), Possessor of heaven and earth" (NASB 1995). The title echoes throughout the Psalms, the prophets, and the Wisdom literature as the name that expresses God's unchallengeable supremacy over all creation, all nations, all kings, and all powers.

The theological content of El Elyon is the absolute, incomparable, unrivaled superiority of God over every other being or power that claims any form of authority or exaltation. He is Most High over the rulers of the earth: "For the LORD Most High is to be feared, a great King over all the earth" (Psalm 47:2, NASB 1995). He is Most High over the angelic orders and the spiritual powers: "For who in the skies is comparable to the LORD? Who among the sons of the mighty is like the LORD?" (Psalm 89:6, NASB 1995). He is Most High over the forces of history, raising up and bringing down kingdoms and powers according to His sovereign purpose, as the book of Daniel especially emphasizes in its repeated declarations that "the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whom He wishes" (Daniel 4:17, NASB 1995).

The pastoral significance of El Elyon is immense for Christians who live in a world of competing powers, political powers, cultural powers, spiritual powers, that seem to challenge the sovereignty of God. The name El Elyon is the reminder, pressed into the very vocabulary of prayer and worship, that no power in heaven or on earth stands above the God who is Most High, and that the ultimate outcome of all human history, including the history through which we ourselves are living, is entirely in His hands.

III. The Compound Names of God: The Jehovah-Names

Among the most beloved and most practically suggestive names of God in the Old Testament are the compound names formed by joining the covenant name YHWH (rendered in English as "Jehovah" in the older tradition, or "THE LORD" in most modern translations) with a descriptive element that discloses a particular dimension of His character as it was revealed in a specific redemptive encounter. These compound names are not theological abstractions; they are memorial-names, monuments to

specific moments in the history of redemption at which God disclosed Himself as the particular kind of God that His people at that moment most needed Him to be. Each one is, in the truest sense, a window into the character of the God who is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and therefore a ground of confidence for His people in every subsequent generation.

A. Jehovah-Jireh (יהוה יִרְאֶה), The LORD Will Provide

The name Jehovah-Jireh appears in Genesis 22:14, in the aftermath of the binding of Isaac on Mount Moriah. After the angel of the LORD had stayed Abraham's hand and provided a ram caught in the thicket as a substitute sacrifice, "Abraham called the name of that place 'The LORD Will Provide,' as it is said to this day, 'In the mount of the LORD it will be provided'" (Genesis 22:14, NASB 1995). The Hebrew *yir'eh* means "to see" or "to provide" (to see to it; to make provision), and the provision God makes on Moriah is not merely a ram in a thicket but the most comprehensive disclosure of His providential character that the Old Testament contains.

Jehovah-Jireh is the God who sees the need before the need is expressed, who provides the substitute before the knife falls, who meets His people at the point of their greatest extremity with the precise provision their need requires. The New Testament will reveal that what God provided on Moriah was not merely a ram but a preview, a typological anticipation of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29), the One whom God would provide on a hill not far from Moriah when He "did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all" (Romans 8:32, NASB 1995). Jehovah-Jireh is the name that stands behind every act of divine provision, from Abraham's ram to the Bread of Life who feeds the hungry soul.

B. Jehovah-Rapha (יהוה רַפָּאִי), The LORD Who Heals

The name Jehovah-Rapha appears in Exodus 15:26, immediately after the song of Moses at the Red Sea and the bitter waters of Marah made sweet by the wood God showed Moses. The LORD declares: "I, the LORD, am your healer" (Exodus 15:26, NASB 1995). The Hebrew *rapha'* means to heal, to restore, to make whole. In its immediate context, the promise concerns physical healing and the absence of the diseases of Egypt; but in the wider canonical context, the healing God offers encompasses the full range of human brokenness, physical, moral, relational, and spiritual.

The Psalms especially draw upon the healing character of YHWH: "Who pardons all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases" (Psalm 103:3, NASB 1995). The juxtaposition of pardon and healing in Psalm 103:3 captures the full depth of what Jehovah-Rapha offers: a healing that addresses not merely the symptoms of human suffering but their root cause in sin and its consequences. And the prophets look forward to the day when the Servant of the LORD, the One upon whom the LORD lays "the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6, NASB 1995), becomes the ground upon which God's deepest and most radical healing is accomplished: "By His scourging we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5, NASB 1995).

C. Jehovah-Nissi (יהוה נָסִי), The LORD Our Banner

Jehovah-Nissi appears in Exodus 17:15, after the defeat of Amalek at Rephidim when Joshua prevailed in battle while Moses held up his hands in intercession. “Moses built an altar and named it The LORD is My Banner” (Exodus 17:15, NASB 1995). The Hebrew *nes* means a banner, standard, or rallying-point, the signal raised in battle around which the troops gather and beneath which they fight. To name the LORD as the banner is to declare that He is the One under whose authority the battle is fought, in whose strength the victory is won, and to whose glory the outcome belongs.

Jehovah-Nissi is the name for every spiritual battle. It declares that the victories of the people of God are not won by human strategy, military prowess, or intellectual superiority, but by the power and under the banner of the LORD who fights for His people. The New Testament fulfillment is the victory of the cross, where Christ “disarmed the rulers and authorities” and “triumphed over them” (Colossians 2:15, NASB 1995), the supreme moment at which the Banner of the LORD was raised over the forces of sin, death, and the devil, and the victory that can never be undone was won.

D. Jehovah-Shalom (יהוה שלום), The LORD Our Peace

Jehovah-Shalom appears in Judges 6:24, where Gideon, having received the divine commission and the assurance that the LORD is with him, builds an altar: “Then Gideon built an altar there to the LORD and named it The LORD is Peace” (Judges 6:24, NASB 1995). The Hebrew *shalom* encompasses far more than the absence of conflict; it denotes a positive, wholistic flourishing, wholeness, completeness, the well-being that results from rightness in every dimension of existence.

Gideon had been gripped by fear and a crushing sense of unworthiness; the LORD’s word “Peace to you, do not fear; you shall not die” (Judges 6:23, NASB 1995) is the declaration of the God who is Himself the source and substance of all true peace. The New Testament fulfillment is the Lord Jesus Christ, whom Isaiah calls the “Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6, NASB 1995) and Paul calls “our peace” (Ephesians 2:14, NASB 1995), the One in whom the deepest alienation of the human soul from God has been addressed and resolved through the reconciling work of His cross. Jehovah-Shalom is the name that grounds the peace that “surpasses all comprehension” (Philippians 4:7, NASB 1995).

E. Jehovah-Tsidkenu (יהוה צדקנו), The LORD Our Righteousness

Jehovah-Tsidkenu comes from the prophetic vision of Jeremiah, who declares that a day is coming when a righteous Branch from the line of David will reign as king, and this will be His name: “The LORD our righteousness” (Jeremiah 23:6, NASB 1995). The Hebrew *tsidqenu* means “our righteousness”, a righteousness that is not achieved by the people but given to them by God, that is not earned by moral performance but bestowed by divine grace.

Jehovah-Tsidkenu is perhaps the most explicitly gospel-laden of all the compound divine names, pointing directly to the heart of the New Testament doctrine of justification by faith alone. The righteous Branch of Jeremiah 23 is the Lord Jesus Christ, who “became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption” (1 Corinthians 1:30, NASB 1995), the One in whom God the Judge

provides for the sinner the very righteousness that God the Law demands, so that the one who believes in Him may be counted righteous, not on the basis of his own merit but on the basis of the righteousness of the One who is Himself THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

F. Jehovah-Shammah (יהוה שםָה), The LORD Is There

Jehovah-Shammah appears at the very end of the book of Ezekiel, the last words of the book, in fact, as the new name given to the restored and glorified city of God: “The name of the city from that day shall be, ‘The LORD is there’” (Ezekiel 48:35, NASB 1995). The name is eschatological: it points forward to the final consummation of all things, the coming of the new Jerusalem, the dwelling of God with His people in its fullness. It is the answer to every experience of divine absence, every cry of desolation, every lament of the one who feels forsaken.

Jehovah-Shammah is realized proleptically in the incarnation, Emmanuel, “God with us” (Matthew 1:23, NASB 1995), and will be realized in its ultimate fullness in the consummation of the new creation: “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them” (Revelation 21:3, NASB 1995). The last name of the Old Testament canon, the eschatological name, is the name of presence, the declaration that the story of God and His people ends not in separation but in the eternal, unmediated, face-to-face fellowship of the God who is there.

IV. Each Name a Window, Each Name a Ground of Confidence

Having worked through the primary names and the compound Jehovah-names, we are now in a position to state the pastoral and theological principle that governs the entire study of the divine names: each name is a window into the character of God, and each window is a ground of confidence for His people.

The diversity of divine names in the Old Testament is not theological redundancy; it is theological abundance. No single name can capture the inexhaustible fullness of the divine being; the multiplicity of names is a multiplicity of disclosures, each one opening a different angle of vision onto the One who is too great to be captured in any single name or concept. Elohim shows us God in His omnipotent relation to the whole of creation; YHWH shows us God in His personal, covenant-keeping relation to His redeemed people; Adonai shows us God in His sovereign mastery over all things; El Shaddai shows us God as the inexhaustible supply of every need; El Elyon shows us God as the Most High above every competing power; and the Jehovah-names show us God as He has revealed Himself in specific acts of provision, healing, victory, peace, righteousness, and presence in the lives of His people.

The practical implication is that the study of the divine names is never merely lexicographical; it is always also devotional. To learn the name El Shaddai is to be invited to bring every impossibility to the God who is All-Sufficient. To learn the name Jehovah-Rapha is to be invited to bring every wound to the God who heals. To learn the name Jehovah-Shammah is to be invited to rest in the God who is present even in the desolation that feels most like abandonment. The names of God are not information to

be stored; they are invitations to be accepted, and the God who gave them stands behind each one with the full weight of His character, His faithfulness, and His inexhaustible grace.

Psalms 91:1 gives us the language for inhabiting this truth: “He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High (El Elyon) will abide in the shadow of the Almighty (El Shaddai)” (NASB 1995). Two of the great divine names appear in a single verse as the double assurance of the one who has made the LORD his refuge and his fortress. This is the posture of the student of the divine names: not mere familiarity with theological vocabulary, but the dwelling, the abiding, in the presence of the God whom each name discloses.

Key Texts (NASB 1995)

Exodus 3:13–15

“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, the 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-name to all generations.’”

Genesis 17:1–2

“Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, ‘I am God Almighty (El Shaddai); walk before Me, and be blameless. I will establish My covenant between Me and you, and I will multiply you exceedingly.’”

Psalms 91:1–2

“He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the LORD, ‘My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust!’”

Jeremiah 23:5–6

“‘Behold, the days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch; and He will reign as king and act wisely and do justice and righteousness in the land. In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely; and this is His name by which He will be called, “THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.”’”

Theological Terms and Definitions

Name / Term	Meaning and Significance
Elohim (אֱלֹהִים)	The most frequently used divine name in the Old Testament (2,500+ occurrences). Connotes divine power, might, and sovereignty. Used especially in relation to God as Creator. Its grammatical plurality (with singular verbs) hints at the inner richness of the divine being. Translated “God” in English versions.
YHWH / Tetragrammaton (יהוה)	The four-consonant covenant name of God (yod-he-vav-he), appearing approximately 6,800 times in the Hebrew Bible. Revealed at the burning bush as ‘Ehyeh ‘Asher ‘Ehyeh (“I AM WHO I AM”, Exodus 3:14). Declares God’s absolute self-existence (aseity), eternal constancy, and covenant faithfulness. Rendered as “THE LORD” (small capitals) in most English translations.
Adonai (אֲדֹנָי)	From adon (“lord,” “master”). Used as a title of sovereign lordship and authority, appearing approximately 450 times as a divine title. Substituted for YHWH in Jewish liturgical reading out of reverence for the Tetragrammaton. Declares God’s absolute sovereignty over all creation and His people’s status as servants under His governance.
El Shaddai (אֵל שַׁדַּי)	Traditionally rendered “God Almighty.” The name by which God revealed Himself to the patriarchs (Exodus 6:3). Used especially in contexts of divine promise in the face of natural impossibility. Connotes God’s inexhaustible sufficiency and omnipotent power to fulfill His promises regardless of creaturely limitations.
El Elyon (אֵל עֶלְיוֹן)	God Most High. First appears in Genesis 14:18–20. Emphasizes God’s absolute transcendence, supremacy, and unchallengeable sovereignty over all nations, powers, and kingdoms. Especially prominent in the Psalms and in Daniel’s accounts of God’s governance over earthly rulers.
Tetragrammaton	From the Greek for “four letters.” The four Hebrew consonants YHWH constituting the personal covenant name of God. Out of reverence, Jewish tradition substitutes Adonai in speech and the LXX substitutes Kyrios (“Lord”) in translation. The LORD Jesus’ use of “I AM” (ego eimi) in John’s Gospel is a deliberate identification with the Tetragrammaton.
Jehovah-Jireh (יהוה יֵרֵא)	“The LORD Will Provide.” Genesis 22:14. Named by Abraham on Mount Moriah after God provided the ram as a substitute for Isaac. Points typologically to God’s provision of the Lamb of God (John 1:29) and to the comprehensive provision of all spiritual and material needs (Romans 8:32; Philippians 4:19).
Jehovah-Rapha (יהוה רַפָּא)	“The LORD Who Heals.” Exodus 15:26. Declared at Marah after the bitter waters were made sweet. Encompasses physical, moral, and spiritual healing; the full range of human brokenness addressed by

	the One who heals. Ultimately fulfilled in the suffering Servant who bears sin and whose scourging brings healing (Isaiah 53:5).
Jehovah-Nissi (יהוה נָסִי) (נָסִי)	“The LORD Our Banner.” Exodus 17:15. Named by Moses after the defeat of Amalek when Moses’ raised hands (intercession) brought victory. Declares that the battles of God’s people are fought under His authority and won by His power. Fulfilled in Christ’s triumphal victory over principalities and powers at the cross (Colossians 2:15).
Jehovah-Shalom (יהוה שָׁלוֹם) (יהוה שָׁלוֹם)	“The LORD Our Peace.” Judges 6:24. Named by Gideon after God’s assurance to the fearful and unworthy. Shalom denotes comprehensive flourishing and wholeness. Fulfilled in Christ the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6), who is our peace (Ephesians 2:14) through His reconciling death, grounding the peace that surpasses comprehension (Philippians 4:7).
Jehovah-Tsidkenu (יהוה צְדִיקֵנוּ) (יהוה צְדִיקֵנוּ)	“The LORD Our Righteousness.” Jeremiah 23:6. The prophetic name of the coming righteous Branch from David’s line. The most explicitly gospel-laden compound name, pointing directly to justification by faith alone: God provides in Christ the righteousness that God in the Law demands. Fulfilled in Christ who became our righteousness (1 Corinthians 1:30).
Jehovah-Shammah (יהוה שָׁמָּה) (יהוה שָׁמָּה)	“The LORD Is There.” Ezekiel 48:35. The eschatological name given to the restored city of God at the close of Ezekiel’s vision. Declares the fullness of divine presence as the ultimate destiny of God’s people. Proleptically fulfilled in the incarnation (Emmanuel, Matthew 1:23) and ultimately fulfilled in the new creation (Revelation 21:3).

Practical Application

A. For the Mind: What Must We Believe?

We must believe that the names of God are not merely historical or linguistic curiosities to be studied and shelved, but are living, active, and permanently valid disclosures of the character of the God who does not change. Because He is the I AM, the self-existent, eternally consistent God, every name He gave in the context of a specific redemptive encounter remains a reliable description of who He is today. The God who provided for Abraham on Moriah is still Jehovah-Jireh; the God who healed at Marah is still Jehovah-Rapha; the God who appeared to Abraham in his impossibility is still El Shaddai. The names are permanent because the God who bears them is immutable. We must also believe that knowing these names enriches and deepens our faith in ways that mere propositional knowledge about God cannot; the names put flesh on the bones of theology, grounding the abstract attributes of God in the concrete history of His redemptive faithfulness to His people.

B. For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?

The study of the divine names should produce in us a growing sense of wonder at the inexhaustible richness of the God we know. Every name is a new facet of an infinite diamond; every facet catches light that none of the others catches in quite the same way. We should feel a deepening gratitude for the God who has not left us to imagine Him but has revealed Himself, specifically, concretely, by name, in the encounters and experiences of His people throughout the sweep of redemptive history. And we should feel an increasing desire to inhabit the names, to bring our provision-needs to Jehovah-Jireh, our wounds to Jehovah-Rapha, our fears to Jehovah-Shalom, our guilt to Jehovah-Tsidkenu, our desolation to Jehovah-Shammah, finding in each name not merely information but invitation.

C. For the Hands: What Must We Do?

1. **Learn and memorize the names.** The divine names reward memorization not as a feat of academic retention but as an act of spiritual preparation. A person who has the Jehovah-names stored in memory has a treasury of divine character immediately accessible in every situation of need. When provision fails, “Jehovah-Jireh” rises to the lips. When healing is needed, “Jehovah-Rapha” shapes the prayer. The names are not information to be filed; they are promises to be prayed.
2. **Pray using the names.** Incorporate the divine names into your prayers, addressing God by the name most relevant to your specific need. This is not a magical invocation; it is the intelligent, scripturally-shaped prayer of a person who knows who God is and brings that knowledge to bear on the specific situation at hand. It is the prayer that says: “Because You are El Shaddai, I bring this impossibility to You. Because You are Jehovah-Tsidkenu, I rest my guilty conscience in You.”
3. **Teach the names to your family and your congregation.** The divine names are among the richest and most accessible theological treasures that can be given to a child or a new believer. They are concrete, memorable, and laden with redemptive history. A child who learns that God is El Shaddai has learned something that will sustain faith through decades of life; a new believer who learns that God is Jehovah-Shammah has a theological anchor that will hold in every experience of desolation.
4. **Trace the names through to their New Testament fulfillment.** Every compound Jehovah-name finds its ultimate fulfillment in the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Yes and Amen of every promise of God (2 Corinthians 1:20). As you study each name, ask: How does the Lord Jesus fulfill what this name promises? Where do I see this name lived out in the life, death, resurrection, and reign of the Savior? The exercise will deepen both your knowledge of the names and your love for the Christ in whom they are fulfilled.
5. **Let the names correct your functional view of God.** Our functional view of God, the God we actually relate to in the moments of daily life, is often far smaller and less richly textured than the God the names disclose. Identify the dimension of God’s character that you most need at this particular season of your life, find the name that addresses that need, and make it the center of a season of

Scripture meditation and prayer. Let the revealed name of God expand your faith to the measure of the God who bears it.

D. For Every Season of Life

For the new believer: Begin with YHWH and Elohim, the two great foundational names that establish who God is in relation to all of creation and in His covenant relationship with His people. Then, as the needs of your life present themselves, discover the Jehovah-names one by one in the context of those needs, finding in each one a God who has been there before and who meets you where you are.

For the parent: Teach your children the divine names early and often, in the context of real life. When your family faces a financial impossibility, tell your children: “God is Jehovah-Jireh, He will provide.” When your child is ill, pray together to Jehovah-Rapha. When fear grips a young heart, whisper Jehovah-Shalom. The names of God, taught in the context of real need, become the vocabulary of a lifelong faith.

For the one who is suffering: The Jehovah-names are the vocabulary of the psalms of lament, the prayers of those who are in the valley, crying out to the God who has revealed Himself as present, healing, providing, and bringing peace. In your suffering, you are not addressing an anonymous deity whose character is unknown; you are addressing the God who has revealed Himself, by name, as the very kind of God your suffering needs. Bring your specific need to His specific name.

For the pastor and teacher: Unit 3 on the names of God offers some of the richest homiletical and teaching material in all of Theology Proper. Each divine name is a sermon waiting to be preached, a lesson waiting to be taught, a truth waiting to be embedded in the hearts of God’s people. Preach the names. Teach the names. Let the people of God learn to pray the names. It will transform the quality of their faith and the depth of their communion with the God who bore those names in the dust and heat of redemptive history.

Study and Discussion Questions

Opening Question

1. Is there a particular name of God, from the names studied in this lesson or from your own prior knowledge, that has been especially meaningful or comforting to you at a particular season of your life? Share briefly with the group. What was it about that name that spoke to your specific need?

Observation Questions (What Does the Text Say?)

2. Read Exodus 3:13–15. Why does Moses ask for God’s name? What is the significance of God’s answer: “I AM WHO I AM”? Why does God specify that this is His name “forever” and His “memorial-name to all generations”?

3. Read Genesis 17:1–2. In what specific circumstances does God reveal Himself as El Shaddai to Abraham? What is the relationship between the name El Shaddai and the covenant promise that follows? Why is it significant that this name is used precisely at the point of Abraham’s natural impossibility?
4. Read Psalm 91:1–2. Which two divine names appear in verse 1? What does the psalmist’s posture of “dwelling” and “abiding” suggest about the appropriate response to the knowledge of these names? What are the two ways the psalmist personally identifies God in verse 2?
5. Read Jeremiah 23:5–6. What is the character of the coming “righteous Branch” described in verse 5? What is His name, and what does that name promise to God’s people? How is this name different from a name that merely describes who God is in Himself, as opposed to what He is for His people?

Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)

6. Explain the theological significance of the fact that Elohim (a plural noun) is consistently used with singular verbs when referring to the God of Israel. What does this tell us about both the unity and the inner richness of the divine being?
7. What is the difference between Elohim and YHWH as names for God? In what contexts is each name predominantly used? What does this distinction tell us about the two primary ways in which God relates to the world He has made?
8. Choose two of the compound Jehovah-names studied in this lesson. For each one, identify (a) the specific redemptive encounter in which it was given, (b) what it reveals about the character of God, and (c) how it finds its New Testament fulfillment in the Lord Jesus Christ.
9. Why is the study of the divine names described in this lesson as not merely lexicographical but also devotional? What is the difference between knowing a divine name as a piece of theological information and inhabiting a divine name as an invitation to faith and prayer?

Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)

10. Think of a specific need, fear, impossibility, or wound in your life at this present moment. Which of the divine names studied in this lesson most directly addresses that need? How might knowing and praying that specific name of God shape your response to the situation you are facing?
11. The lesson suggests incorporating the divine names into your prayers. What would it look like, practically, to address God by the name most relevant to your specific prayer request? How might this practice deepen the quality and the faith of your prayer life?
12. Jehovah-Shammah, “The LORD Is There”, is the last name of the Old Testament canon, looking forward to the fullness of God’s presence in the consummated new creation (Revelation 21:3). How does this eschatological name shape the way you think about the suffering, absence, and desolation you may experience in the present age? What difference does it make to know that the story of God and His people ends not in separation but in unmediated, eternal presence?

Prayer Focus

Close this lesson by praying through the divine names as an act of corporate confession and praise. Begin with the two great foundational names: acknowledge God as Elohim, the omnipotent Creator before whose word the universe springs into being and in whose sustaining power it continues to exist. Then confess Him as YHWH, the I AM, the self-existent and covenant-faithful One, the God whose character is the most reliable reality in the universe.

Then move through the Jehovah-names, bringing the specific needs of your group before the specific names that address them: bring your provisions-needs to Jehovah-Jireh; your wounds and illnesses to Jehovah-Rapha; your spiritual battles to Jehovah-Nissi; your anxieties and fears to Jehovah-Shalom; your guilt and need for righteousness to Jehovah-Tsidkenu; your loneliness and sense of abandonment to Jehovah-Shammah. Let the names of God shape the content of your prayer and the confidence of your faith. And let the prayer end where Psalm 91 begins: “He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty”, resting in the God who is all that His names declare.

Soli Deo Gloria

To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

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