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Compound Names of Jehovah

The two most common names of the Lord in the Old Testament are Elohim and YHWH (Yahweh). The first is translated “God”, and the latter is translated “the LORD” (notice the small caps) or “Jehovah”¹ in our English Bibles. Elohim means “supreme one” or “mighty one”, and is the name whereby God is known to *all mankind*. This name emphasizes God’s incredible majesty and power as the creator and sovereign of the universe. Jehovah, on the other hand, is the covenant name of God expressing *personal relationship*. It means “He who is,” which is further explained in the burning bush passage when “God said to Moses, “I am I WHO AM” (Ex. 3:14 – Numerical Bible). What grace that the living, unchanging, independent, self-existent, eternal One wants to personally relate to His people! In the Old Testament, He revealed Himself as Jehovah to the individual patriarchs as well as the nation of Israel, with whom He entered into a covenant-relationship. We might say that Elohim is the *general* name of God, and Jehovah is His *personal* name.

Let me use my father as a comparison. He is known as “Mr. Bouter” to everyone acquainted with him. But his closest friends and associates call him by his first name, “Arnold”. You see, through their relationship and familiarity with him, they know him by his personal name. The creation account in Genesis 1 and 2 illustrates the same distinction. The word for God used in the primary creation narrative of Genesis 1 to 2:3 is Elohim. Genesis 2:4-25 provides a supplementary account of the sixth day of creation, focusing on God’s gracious relationship with mankind. This is where God is introduced as “the LORD God” (Jehovah Elohim) – not merely God as the supreme Creator, but God in relationship with the people He has created. In Genesis 1:1 it says, “God created the heavens and the earth.” But Genesis 2:4 states, “The LORD God made the earth and the heavens.” Notice the different word order. The earth now comes first, for as Jehovah, God’s interest is centered on our little planet.

There are seven² well known compound names of Jehovah in the Old Testament. These names more fully express His character of love and how He relates to His own children in grace:

1. Jehovah-Jireh: “The-LORD-Will-Provide” (Genesis 22:14)

When Isaac asked his father about their sacrifice as they climbed up Mount Moriah, Abraham responded, “My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering” (Gen. 22:8). When the fullness of time had come, He did this by giving His one and only Son, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (Jn. 1:29). He now promises to supply all our need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:19). “He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up

¹ See end note for the linguistic connection between YHWH, Yahweh, and Jehovah.

² Some Bible scholars also include Jehovah-Elohim (The-LORD-God), Jehovah-Tzevaot/Sabaoth (The-LORD-of-Hosts), Jehovah-Elyon (The-LORD-Most-High), Jehovah-Ra’ah/Rohi (The-LORD-Is-My-Shepherd) and Jehovah-Hoseenu (The-LORD-Our-Maker) as compound names of Jehovah.

for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things” (Rom. 8:32)? Our heavenly Father feeds the birds of the air. They live in hourly dependence on Him, trusting Him to provide for their future needs. Aren’t we of more value than they? God knows everything we need, so we don’t need to live in worry about the basic necessities of life. “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Matt. 6:33).

2. Jehovah-Rapha: “The-LORD-Who-Heals-You” (Exodus 15:26)

After travelling for three days in the desert without finding water, the Lord allowed the children of Israel to taste the bitter waters of Marah. The waters were miraculously sweetened when Moses cast in a tree according to the instruction of the Lord, reminding us of the cross (1 Pet. 2:24). He then promised to protect the Israelites from all the diseases that He had brought on the Egyptians if they would be obedient to Him. Some Bible scholars think that the high mineral content of the bitter water may have itself helped to cleanse their bodies of any common Egyptian ailments they were carrying or deadly microbes they were exposed to during the 10 plagues. In any case, the Lord revealed Himself there as Jehovah-Rapha: The-LORD-Who-Heals-You. He has the power to heal us from all our physical, emotional and spiritual sicknesses. Sometimes, as in the story of Lazarus, He allows us to experience tragedy in our lives. During those times, the Lord Jesus weeps with us. His grace ministers to us in our deepest needs, and He gives beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness (Isa. 61:3). “He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds” (Ps. 147:3). He has a purpose for the bitter experiences He allows us to go through. And as He did for Israel, the Lord can make the bitter waters of our lives sweet through His love, healing and blessing.

3. Jehovah-Nissi: “The-LORD-Is-My-Banner” (Exodus 17:15)

A little further into the wilderness, the Israelites faced their first battle when they were attacked by the Amalekites. Deuteronomy 25:17-19 mentions Amalek’s strategy: they attacked the rear ranks and stragglers when Israel was tired and hungry. What a fitting type of the lust of the flesh (Gal. 5:17; 1 Pet. 2:11)! In our Christian warfare, the enemy targets our weaknesses. Actually, as believers we have three main enemies: the devil (without us), the world (all around us) and the flesh (within us). Israel won the fight through Moses’ intercession and Joshua’s sword. We can also experience victory and live as overcomers through prayer and the word of God (not forgetting, of course, to wear the whole armor of God — Eph. 6:10-18). Afterwards, Moses built an altar which he named “The-LORD-Is-My-Banner” to commemorate the struggle and credit God with the victory. We fight under His banner; His name is the motto on our standards.

4. Jehovah-M’kaddesh: “The-LORD-Who-Sanctifies-You” (Exodus 31:13; Leviticus 20:8)

The nation of Israel was set apart to be a holy people to the LORD. Quoting from Leviticus, the Apostle Peter exhorts that “as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy’” (1 Pet. 1:15-16). We have been sanctified *positionally* through the new birth (sanctification of the Spirit), but need to be sanctified *practically* on an ongoing basis as believers. “He who is holy, let him be holy still” (Rev. 22:11). The will of God is our

sanctification (1 Thess. 4:3), and it is only by cleansing ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit that we can be vessels of honor, sanctified and useful for the Master (2 Cor. 7:1; 2 Tim. 2:21). Filthiness of the flesh includes all forms of physical impurity. Pornography is more accessible than ever in our age of electronic devices. But we must be equally aware of filthiness of the spirit: our thoughts, motives, pride and unbelief. Impurity and idolatry; outward and inward — the prodigal son and his older brother are good examples of each category of sin. The Holy Spirit is the source of both our positional and practical sanctification: “Since we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit” (Gal. 5:25).

5. Jehovah-Shalom: “The-LORD-Is-Peace” (Judges 6:24)

After Gideon realized he had seen the Angel of the Lord face to face, he feared for his life. The Lord comforted him by saying, “Peace be with you; do not fear.” One of the paradoxes of the Christian life is that the Lord gives us peace that He might send us out to war! In response, Gideon built an altar to worship God, which he called Jehovah-Shalom: The-Lord-Is-Peace. As believers, we possess a twofold peace: *peace with God*, and the *peace of God*.³ First of all, “having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1). Christ Himself is our peace, and has reconciled us to God through His work on the cross. As children of God, we can also experience inner tranquility in all our circumstances through confidence in His love and power. “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:6-7).

6. Jehovah-Tsidkenu: “The-LORD-Our-Righteousness” (Jeremiah 23:6; 33:16)⁴

The prophet Isaiah wrote that we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6). Even our best efforts could never tip the balance to earn favor with God. It is only of His doing that we are in Christ Jesus, who became our righteousness (1 Cor. 1:30). “In Christ Jesus” expresses a new position, a vital union like a branch abiding in the vine. “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21). On the cross, our iniquity was laid on the Lord Jesus in exchange for His perfect righteousness. “God sees my Savior, and then He sees me, ‘In the Beloved,’ accepted and free” (Civilla Martin). Although we couldn’t do anything to earn our own righteousness, it is a family trait of the new birth: “If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practises righteousness is born of Him (1 Jn. 2:29). It is interesting to compare Ephesians 6:14 with 1 Thessalonians 5:8, where the breastplate of righteousness is called the breastplate of faith and love. Righteousness is faith working through love (Gal. 5:5-6)! Let’s practise expressing our faith through love as we witness to others about the gift of righteousness.

³ Similarly, Jesus told His disciples, “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you” (Jn. 14:27).

⁴ Jehovah-Tsidkenu and Jehovah-Shalom are combined in Psalm 85:10: “Mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed.” God’s essential attributes of love and holiness intersected at the cross of Christ; His mercy provided what His righteousness demanded. “The law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17).

7. Jehovah-Shammah: "The-LORD-Is-There" (Ezekiel 48:35)

The amazing prophecy of Ezekiel ends with a description of the Millennial temple in the city of Jerusalem, which will be filled with the glory of God and will be called "The-LORD-Is-There." In Revelation 21:2-4 we are given a vision of New Jerusalem, our heavenly home: "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." What a hope! Even now, throughout our journey of life, the Lord Jesus has promised to never leave us nor forsake us (Heb. 13:5). He is always with us: "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20). May we also be encouraged in our corporate fellowship around the Lord Jesus, realizing that "where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20).

As others have observed, these seven compound names of Jehovah are beautifully incorporated into Psalm 23:

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. [Jehovah-Jirah]

He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. [Jehovah-Shalom]

He restores my soul; [Jehovah-Rapha]

He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. [Jehovah-Tsidkenu]

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. [Jehovah-Shammah]

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; [Jehovah-Nissi]

You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over. [Jehovah-M'kaddesh]

[Yes, because Jehovah is my Provider, my Peace and my Righteousness; because He is always with me; because He is my Banner and my Sanctification]:

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

End Note: Linguistic Connection between YHWH, Yahweh, and Jehovah

The original Hebrew written language didn't have any vowels. The four consonants that spell the divine name YHWH are called the *Tetragrammaton* (which means "having four letters" in Greek). The most likely pronunciation is "Yahweh." After the Babylonian exile, the Jews began considering the divine name too sacred to be uttered out of a fear of accidentally blaspheming (Ex. 20:7; Lev. 24:16). They even substituted it with the Hebrew word "Adonay" ("Lord") when they read the scriptures aloud in their synagogues. Much later, the Masoretes (who worked to reproduce the original text of the Hebrew Bible from the 6th to the 10th centuries) added the vowel points of "Adonay" ("a-o-a")⁵ in-between the consonants of YHWH, although it was still vocalized as "Adonay." According to Hebrew grammar, the first "a" (*composite sheva* under the guttural consonant *aleph*) becomes an "e" (*simple sheva* under the consonant *yod*), thus producing "YeHoWaH" in the text. When translating the Hebrew Bible into Latin, the Y and W (which don't exist in Latin) were substituted with J and V, forming the name "Jehovah."

⁵ The vowel points in Hebrew are "hataf patah-holam-quamats."

Consonantal text for Adonai
with vowel pointing in red

אֲדֹנָי

YHWH combined with the vowels from
Adonai forming Yehovah or Yehowah

יְהוָה

Shewa replaces
the compound shewa,
mandated by rules
of Hebrew grammar

יְהוָה

The Hebrew consonantal text for Yahweh YHWH
(The Tetragrammaton)

The combination of the consonants from YHWH written with the vowels from Adonai. This was never meant to be vocalized but was a scribal reminder to the readers to say Adonai when they came to the Tetragrammaton in the text.

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