

# *Worship Reflections*

## *Names of God, Introduction & YHWH (part one)*

*Phillip Hardy, Lead Worshipper*

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We're going to begin a new **series** of worship reflections today, a series that, God willing, will guide and focus our corporate worship for the next several weeks.

We're calling this series "The NAMES of GOD."

Names are important, because they are a way we reveal ourselves to others.

When you meet someone new, the first question is usually, "what's your name?"

And sometimes, if I'm suspicious of a person's intent towards me (maybe trying to rip me off or take advantage of me), I'm very reluctant to reveal my name to them.

"Names" are important to us!

Those of you who are parents – do you remember the process of choosing a name for your first child? It's a big deal to "name" a person, isn't it?

Interestingly, most of us actually have **several** names to which we'll respond.

I respond to Phillip, or Mr. Hardy, or Dad, or Sweetie... it depends on who's talking to me. Those different *names* reflect different *relationships*.

Only my kids call me Dad. Only my wife calls me Sweetie.

Calling me "Mr. Hardy" probably means you don't know me very well, or maybe only in a business sense.

So names have a lot of significance in our day.

But they had even more importance in earlier times. (For example...)

Rulers of France were once named according to personal, defining characteristics.

So you had rulers named "Pepin the Short," John the Good," "Charles the Wise."

Their name told you something *about* them.

We do something similar to this in our day with sports nicknames.

Air Jordan, Magic Johnson, Too Tall Jones, Refrigerator Perry... their nicknames told you something about those players.

If you've ever seen the movie "Gladiator," you'll remember a very powerful scene where the hero reveals his name. As a gladiator slave, he'd been known only as "the Spaniard." But when the evil emperor forced him to take off his mask and make himself known, he declared,

"My name is Maximus Decimus Meridius; Commander of the Armies of the North; General of the Felix Legions; loyal servant to the true emperor; father to a murdered son; husband to a murdered wife... and I will have my vengeance..."

You learned a lot about that man – who he was and what was important to him - through his revealing of his name.

Similarly, in ancient OT times, a person's name was often meant to depict something important about that person. Moses name means "to draw out of water."

Abraham means "father of a multitude."

And this same principle is true of the Names of God.  
God's names reveal His identity, His character, His relationships, and His purpose.

It's interesting that the Bible reveals many different "names" for God.  
Why? Why multiple names? (it seems confusing)  
But, if you think about it, a name implies certain limitations.  
It says that you are "this," which implies that you're not "that."  
And limitations become a problem when you're describing God!  
What single name could be possibly be adequate to express His greatness?  
Even great *men*, like David – yes, he was a shepherd. But he was also a warrior and a king and a poet and a musician and a prophet. It requires multiple names to describe him. And that's infinitely *more* true of GOD.  
So, the OT contains a number of different names for God, names that reveal different aspects of His character.

It's almost like viewing a diamond.  
If you hold a diamond in your hand, as you turn the stone, you see different facets of its beauty revealed, as light is refracted into prisms of color.  
In the same way, as we study the names of God, each name will show us something *more* about His character, another aspect of His multi-faceted beauty & greatness.

The names we're going to look at are *Biblical* names, names that GOD has *revealed* to us. They aren't names that somebody "made up."  
They are a means God uses to disclose His character and His nature to us.

And that's an important point. Because a God who chooses to reveal Himself by name to us is demonstrating His desire to be *known* by us.

Each name is an invitation to worship.

Each name is an opportunity to know God.  
An opportunity to grow in intimacy and relationship with Him.  
An opportunity to ask yourself if **you** know God in **your own** life to be a manifestation of this particular truth, this "name."

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We're going to begin our series this morning by looking the most personal and most frequently used name for God in all of scripture – YHWH.  
The Hebrew word "YHWH" occurs over 6000 times in the Old Testament.

Now, you might immediately have some questions about this.  
Like, "If YHWH is in the Bible over 6000 times, why haven't I ever *seen* that word before?"  
And, "Where are the vowels? That can't be spelled right, 4 consonants crammed together like that."

Why aren't we more familiar with this name?  
Well, in most English Bibles, this is a name that never *really* even gets translated!

Have you ever noticed in your Bible that sometimes the word "LORD" is printed like this – with the "ORD" in small capital letters?  
(Not *all* Bible translations do this, but *most* do.)

Whenever you see the word LORD printed like this, it's telling you that it's a translation of the original Hebrew word YHWH.

Why? Why would they translate YHWH as "Lord" and then print it in an odd way?  
There's an interesting story behind that.

In ancient times, the Jews regarded the name YHWH with such reverence that they would never speak it. So, whenever they came to this word in their reading, they would pronounce the word "adonai" which means "my lord."

Eventually they began to write the word adonai in place of YHWH to remind them not to speak it. And our English Bibles have basically followed that same pattern. They translate the proper name YHWH with the word LORD in capital letters (to distinguish it from the normal word "Lord.")

Ok, so where are the vowels?

Well, the oldest Hebrew texts contain no vowels. The vowels are implied.

(understand, I'm not a Hebrew scholar AT ALL, but I think I've got this straight)

So, in the case of a word like YHWH, which was not spoken, it's impossible to be absolutely certain what the exact vowel sounds should be.

Interestingly, this is how the word Jehovah originated.

(Jehovah is probably a name for God that you've heard before.

It's just that, technically, it's probably incorrect.)

At some point in the distant past, it appears that the consonants from YHWH were combined with the vowels from Adonai. Scholars aren't sure if this happened accidentally or on purpose. That gives you something like Ye-Ho-Wah.

Add a little mispronunciation in there (because there is no "J" sound in Hebrew) and you have Jehovah. I'm not saying that it's "wrong" to say or sing the name "Jehovah."

(It has a place in Christian history. And God sees our hearts, whether we get the pronunciation of this name exactly right or not.)

It's just that, today, most modern Biblical scholarship has identified YHWH as the most likely pronunciation and the correct usage.

Now, at this point, you might be thinking, "if there's some uncertainty about this, why even focus on it at all?" Why not just be "safe" and avoid any confusion and just skip YHWH altogether?

I'll tell you why – because this is a PRICELESS name of GOD!

As I said, it appears in scripture over 6,000 times!

It's actually the most repeated word in the Bible, except for little connecting words like and & the & of. Clearly, this name is important to God!

And *knowing* this "name of God" sheds new light on lots & lots of Bible verses...

*Psalm 8:1*

O LORD, our Lord... see the difference in those two "lords?"

Those are two different words! The second lord means "master."

The first means God's name, YHWH. So what this verse is saying is:

O YHWH, our Lord, How majestic is Your **name** in all the earth,  
Who have displayed Your splendor above the heavens!

In Isaiah chapter 42, God says:

*Isaiah 42:8*

“I am... **YHWH**, *that is My name*; I will not give My glory to another...”

Knowing that GOD is speaking His personal name of YHWH here has forever changed the way I understand this verse! Deuteronomy chapter 5:

*Deuteronomy 5:11*

‘You shall not take the **name** of YHWH your God in vain...

Psalm 113:

*Psalm 113:1-3*

Hallelujah!

Right there - see the “jah” in “Hallelujah?” That’s short for “Yahweh.”

Hallel is praises. So Hallel – u – jah means, “praise Yahweh!”

Just one more indication that this name is pronounced “Yahweh.”

Praise the **name** of YHWH.

Blessed be the **name** of YHWH from this time forth and forever.

For me, one of the big differences this makes is that “the Lord” sounds more like a title than a name. Our ears don’t hear “the Lord” as a proper name like YHWH.

It’s like the difference between saying, “I love you wife,” and “I love you Amy.”

The 2<sup>nd</sup> one feels more “personal.”

And, the fact that this proper name for God appears over 6,000 times in scripture demonstrates that **God aims to be known personally** - not as a generic deity, but as a specific Person.

Now... we’ve said that Biblical names tell us something *about* the person.

So, when God names Himself, we can be sure that His name is packed with meaning.

So, what meaning is there behind this name, “YHWH?”

Exodus chapter 3 gives us some insight.

This isn’t the *first* time God reveals this name. But it may be the most important.

God has just spoken to Moses at the burning bush and commanded him to go back to Egypt and to bring his people Israel out of captivity. Moses says to God in verse 13:

*Exodus 3:13-15*

"If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what should I tell them?"

God said to Moses, "**I AM WHO I AM.**"

And He said, "Say to the people of Israel, ‘**I AM** has sent me to you.’"

God also said to Moses, "Say to the people of Israel, ‘**YHWH**, the God of your fathers... has sent me to you.’ This is My name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations."

A couple of things about this. First of all, a footnote in my Bible tells me that the Hebrew word for “I Am” – Hayah (hah-**yah**) – is also the root word for YHWH!

Did you get that? The name YHWH is built from the Hebrew word for I AM.

Clearly, that’s significant.

Especially in light of the way that God uses YHWH and I AM interchangeably here. In one verse He says “I AM has sent me to you” and in the next verse He says, “YHWH has sent me to you.”

And then there’s this:

the Hebrew word for “I Am” is actually not a noun but a **verb**, an action word, a word that is translated “to be, happen, exist, to come to pass.”

What all this says is that God’s very name *means* “to be.”

His very name means existence. YHWH means “I exist! I AM!”

“This is my name forever,” He says. “I am revealing myself to you as YHWH: the great I AM, the Ever-Existing One, the One Who Always Is.”

I Am ultimate existence. I AM WHO I AM.

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This just *demands* that we pause and meditate. This calls for some careful thought.

What does it mean when you ask your God, Who are you? and He answers, I AM WHO I AM?

There is *so* much truth here, we’ll have to talk more about this next week.

But for this morning, let’s just deal with the simple fact that GOD **exists**.

He is the always-existing-One, the great “I Am.” He **exists**.

Now, that seems pretty basic. “God exists.” Most people believe *that*, right?

I mean, if you take a poll, most people will tell you they believe that God exists.

The problem is that most people then proceed to live as if it’s either not *really* true, or, if it is true, it makes no difference in my day-to-day life.

It’s kinda like, you could take a poll, and most people would say that hydrogen exists too. But how many times have you thought about hydrogen this week?

It’s in the air you breathe, it’s in the water you drink, it fuels the sun that sustains life on this planet. And we never even think about it. If someone asks, you say, “of course hydrogen exists.” Then you return to things that you actually care about.

Now, hydrogen is a lifeless chemical, so it’s ok not to think about it very often.

But our GOD is NOT a lifeless chemical.

He is NOT some vague “feel good” thing, or some spirit that’s in the rocks & trees.

He is a specific personality, named YHWH – the great I AM. He exists!

And He says of Himself – “I AM WHO I AM!”

We live in a day when so many people will tell you that anybody’s view of God is just as good and valid as anybody else’s. Nobody really knows, so I’ll just borrow parts of different religions that I like, I’ll define who God is to me, and I’ll let you define who God is to you, and as long as we’re sincere, it’s all valid.

And aren’t we all so tolerant and humble?

NO!! It’s not humble to think you can define who GOD is!

That’s NOT humble! It’s outrageously prideful!

It assumes He doesn’t *really* exist, He’s just make-believe, so I’ll “make Him up” in my mind to suit my preferences.

But YHWH says “I AM WHO I AM.”

He is totally *self*-determining!

