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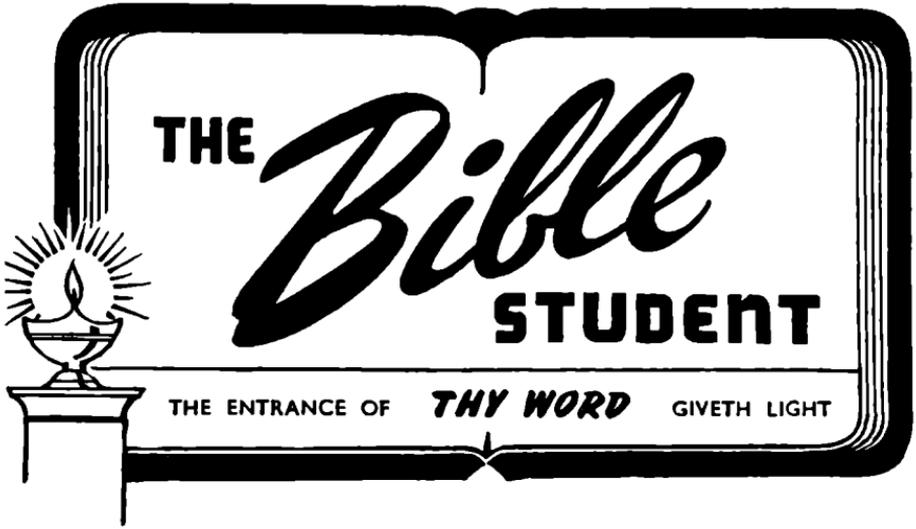
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A table of contents for *The Bible Student* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_bible-student\\_01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bible-student_01.php)



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## CONTENTS

EXPOSITORY STUDY OF JOHN'S GOSPEL	...	...	145
NEW TESTAMENT WORD STUDIES	...	...	151
PROPHECY OF EZEKIEL	...	...	154
'BEHOLD MY SERVANT'!	...	...	160
BIBLICAL HEBREW WORDS	...	...	167
SEVEN OLD TESTAMENT FEASTS	...	...	172
PROGRESSIVE REVELATION OF HOLY SPIRIT	...	...	179
NOTES ON HEBREWS	...	...	185
THE STORY OF HIGH ALTITUDES ( <i>devotional</i> )	...	...	190

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Editor: A. McDONALD REDWOOD

# BIBLICAL HEBREW WORDS

By H. L. ELLISON, B.A., B.D.

*The 'Names' of God (cont.)*

'*Eloah*, plural '*elohim*, is merely a secondary form of '*el* which it largely replaced, except in standardized phrases, because among the Canaanites it had become the name of the father of the gods. The singular is little used in Hebrew, and in fact is never used of Jehovah except in poetic passages.

It used to be argued that the plural '*elohim* was a memory of earlier polytheism in Israel, but this idea has long been abandoned by scholars. The singular meaning is not confined to its use for Jehovah, cf. Jud. 6:31; 8:33; 9:27; 11:24; 16:23; 1 Kings 11:5, 33 (there is no feminine 'goddess' in Hebrew, so '*elohim* is used for Ashtoreth), etc. On the basis of these many examples it is probable that in a number of cases '*elohim* has been wrongly rendered as a plural; an obvious and important example is Gen. 3:5 (A.V.). In fact, '*eloah*, whether used for Jehovah or for a heathen god, has no currency except in poetry and in late works. The plural will have been used from patriarchal times partly as a mark of respect—'the plural of majesty'—partly because the true God sums up in Himself all the divine powers, implied by the word itself.

Where one god is referred to by '*elohim*, irrespective of whether the true God or a false one is meant, a singular verb and adjective are normally used. There are, however, a number of cases where the plural is used particularly in earlier books. This should make us ready to consider a singular, where the traditional translation based on the concord is plural, e.g., Ex. 20:3, 1 Sa. 28:13 (R.V.), Ex. 32: 1, 4 (R.V. mg.), 1 Kings 12:28—in the two latter cases the plural may have been deliberately used by the writers to stamp the whole procedure being described as idolatry.

That '*elohim* never became a name as '*el* did among the Canaanites is shown by the fact that right through the Old Testament period we find it with the definite article. It is probable that this usage 'the true God' is the original. Sometimes our translations lose by their failure to indicate the use of the article, but it is clear that often euphony has been the only guide as to whether the article should be used in the Hebrew or not.

The same fact, which prevented the Hebrews forgetting that '*elohim* means 'the truly powerful One', and which made it possible

**CORRECTION:** In Mr. Ellison's first article of this series, July issue, page 99, line 8, the word *substantial* should have read *substantial* = the *noun* stress in distinction from the *verb* stress referred to in lines 5 and 6.

for them to use it of the heathen gods, who, even if they had a real existence, as many in Israel undoubtedly believed, yet had no power, when brought face to face with Jehovah, also made it possible to use 'elohim in contexts where 'god (s)' seems to us an illegitimate translation.

Its laxest use is found in 1 Sa. 28:13. The 'witch' of Endor saw Samuel coming up and said, 'I see a god (so R.V. correctly) coming up out of the earth'. To understand we must remember who is speaking. She was no loyal Jehovah worshipper, and her very craft was linked with the age-old ancestor worship, in which the dead were endowed with more than human power.

It is often thought that 'elohim is used of the angels, but this is an old misunderstanding going back at least to LXX. In Ps. 8:5 it should be translated 'God' (so R.V., R.S.V.) and there is no reason for querying the traditional English translation of Ps. 97:7. Even if we apply Ps. 82 to angels, it can only be in a secondary sense—cf. John 10:32, which shows that it refers first of all to men—and even then it would be for the same reason that the name 'elohim can be given to men.

The angels are called *bene 'elohim* (also *bene 'elim*, Ps. 29:1; 89:6, cf. R.V. text and mg.). The use of 'elohim alone to designate the angels would have opened the possibility to serious misinterpretation, which cannot arise when it is used of men; the compound expression, while stressing their supernatural nature and powers, yet clearly differentiates them from God (see note on *ben* in next issue). The interpretation of Gen. 6:2 which makes 'the sons of God' the descendants of Seth cannot claim any linguistic support from other Old Testament passages, whatever one may think of other arguments in its favour.

The title 'elohim is applied a few times to men, viz., Ex. 21:6; 22:8, 9, 28 (cf. R.V. text and mg.), 1 Sa. 2:25 (cf. R.V. text and mg.), Ps. 82:1, 6; 138:1 (?). In all these cases the men concerned are judges. For the Israelites perhaps the most outstanding prerogative of Jehovah was His justice, cf. Gen. 18:25. This is the fundamental message of Amos. It is brought out strongly in Ex. 22:21-24. That is why injustice constantly stands beside idolatry as a cause of God's judgment and why it is so condemned in kings, for they were especially God's representatives. The outstanding mark of the Messianic king was that he should do justice cf. Is. 11:3-5; 32:1, Ps. 45:6, 7; 72:2-4, etc. For this

reason, and this alone, the title '*elohim*' could be given to the judges. In the first five cases cited above it is clearly indifferent whether we follow the R.V. text or margin. To come to God for justice meant coming to the judges, coming to the judges should mean coming to hear God's verdict. Ps. 82 seems clearly to show that the divine title is given to those men that exercise His supreme prerogative of Justice.

For completeness it may be added that while Grown, Driver and Briggs in their Hebrew Lexicon list six examples of '*el*' (singular or plural) used of men—in all cases translated 'mighty'—Koehler derives them all from '*ayil*' and rightly removes the secular use of a divine title.

#### Jehovah

However deeply embedded the form Jehovah may be in certain expressions of Christian piety, it is merely a product of lack of knowledge of Hebrew. It is first found about A.D. 1100 and was first popularized about 1520; it is completely unknown to Jews who have not come into close contact with Christians.

There seems no doubt that *Yahveh* (Jahveh, Yahweh) is the nearest we can get to its original form. The consonants of the name, YHVH, were by the scribes written with the vowels of '*adonay*' or '*elohim*', according as they wished it read LORD or GOD. Apparently the actual pronunciation of the Name had been confined to the Aaronic blessing (Num. 6:24-26) in the temple already before the time of Christ. The correct pronunciation was not forgotten for some time after the destruction of the Temple as is shown by its preservation in the writings of Clement of Alexandria (early 3rd cent.) and Theodoret (5th cent.). I am not suggesting that accuracy should take the place of traditional devotion. The use of *Yahveh* in public worship would be an abomination, except possibly if the congregation were composed of teachers of theology and theological students. At the same time we should not lightly carry the form Jehovah to those parts of the mission field where it is unknown, nor should we inflict it on those for whom it has no devotional meaning. In this section of our study, and here alone, we shall use the form *Yahveh*.

In fifty cases, all poetic, the shortened form *Yah* is used. No difference of meaning is involved. When it is used as portion of a proper name, it is shortened down to Je—, Jo—, —jah,—iah,—ah (English spelling in all cases).

Though it may not always be possible to recover their original meaning with certainty, there can be little doubt that the names of the gods of the nations of the Bible lands all expressed some outstanding characteristic of the god. It is in this sense that we say that *Yahveh* is the 'name' of the God of Israel. We do not mean that He bears it as part of His essential being, but that He deigns to use it of Himself and allows it to be used of Him as part of His self-revelation to Israel. That is why in Ex. 3:14 God can change its form, but not its meaning, and call Himself '*ehyeh*'. It is preserved for us in the New Covenant in the Name above all others, for Jesus=*Yehoshua*'=*Yahveh* is salvation.

This is not the place to discuss the difficulties created by the combination of Gen. 4:26 and Ex. 6:2 f, or to consider whether archaeology has discovered any trace of the Name before the time of Moses. It should be noted though that already the name of Moses' mother, Jochebed (Ex. 6:20) is compounded with the Name.

Many far-fetched and fanciful explanations of the name *Yahveh* have been proposed, but only one need be mentioned here, and that only because it claims to have the support of Scripture. Albright, one of America's greatest archaeologists, maintains\* that *Yahveh*=He causes to be, and suggests that the original form of Ex. 3:14—now '*ehyeh*' *asher* '*ehyeh*—was *Yahveh* '*asher yihveh*'=He causes to be what Comes into Existence, the change in text being due to later modifications in language. Though the meaning attributed to *Yahveh* is worthy, it seems impossible to accept it. Though we cannot rule out *a priori* the possibility of an editing of the Pentateuch to bring its language up-to-date, it seems impossible—quite apart from the fact of inspiration—that the meaning of a key passage like Ex. 3:14 should have been lost.

It is generally believed that *Yahveh* is a verbal form from *hayah*, to be, or to become, but Koehler is probably correct in claiming that it is a pure noun meaning 'Existence'. Its interpretation is given by the formula in Ex. 3:14: '*ehyeh*' *asher* '*ehyeh*'. Part of the wide range of possible translations may be seen by consulting the text and margin of the R.V. and R.S.V.; though they give the main translations, there are a number of others possible. Presumably, if God chose to reveal Himself thus enig-

\* Albright: *From the Stone Age to Christianity*, p. 198f.

matically, we may legitimately apply each legitimate *translation* and learn from it.

The A.V., R.V. text, I AM THAT I AM, stresses the immutable nature of God, and hence His loyalty to His covenant and promises. It further stresses that He can only be explained in terms of His self-revelation, not in terms of nature and humanity around us.

The translation, however, which best seems to do justice to Hebrew idiom is I WILL BE THAT I WILL BE. Just as the sign that it was really God that had sent Moses depended on Moses' first going to Egypt in faith—Moses would know for certain that God had sent him only when he saw the people worshipping at Sinai (Ex. 3:12)—so the knowledge of God's name, i.e., character (Ex. 3:13), depended on a walk of trust in Him. When man trusts *Yahveh*, He reveals Himself ever more and more to him, but that progressive revelation does not mean a changing God; it is merely the outworking of what He is eternally in the measure that man can bear and grasp.

#### Yahveh in Compound Names

In certain circles great stress is laid on certain *translation* names or titles in which *Yahveh* is the first component. A well known edition of the A.V. cites seven of them, viz., *Yahveh yir'eh* (Gen. 22:14), i.e., the LORD will provide, *Yahveh rope'eka*, I am the LORD that healeth thee (Ex. 15:26), *Yahveh nissi* (Ex. 17:15), i.e., the LORD is my banner, *Yahveh shalom* (Jdg. 6:24), i.e., the LORD is peace, *Yahveh ro'i*, the LORD is my shepherd (Ps. 23:1), *Yahveh tsidkenu*, the LORD is our righteousness (Jer. 23:6, R.V.), *Yahveh shammah*, the LORD is there (Ezek. 48:35). I have not reproduced either the spelling or the interpretations given.

The confining of the 'names' to seven is entirely arbitrary, for many more such can be found, especially in the Psalms. In addition, however, it should be clear that none of these are names of God at all but statements about Him. There are, however, two compound names given to *Yahveh* which call for closer attention.

The use of *Yahveh 'elohim*, LORD God, in Gen. 2 and 3 is really without parallel in the Old Testament. The combination is apparently found fairly frequently, but with the exception of

1 Ch. 22: 19, 2 Ch. 1: 9 it is really *Yahveh*, the God of (heaven, your fathers, Israel, etc.). The combination was probably used in Gen. 2 and 3 to make it clear that the Creator God dealt with His first creation as personally and as much in grace as He did with Israel in the wilderness.

The title *Yahveh tseba'oth*, the LORD of hosts, is used very widely. It seems really to be a contraction of *Yahveh 'elohe haseba'ot*, the LORD, the God of hosts (Am. 6:14, etc.). The name is first found in 1 Sa. 1:3, but there are no valid grounds for thinking that the origin of it must be sought in the later period of the Judges. On the basis of verses like 1 Sa. 17:45 ('... the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel') it has been widely assumed that the title first meant that *Yahveh* was Israel's war-god. It is much more probable that the inclusion in the 'hosts' of the stars and angels is as old as the title, and that from the first it hailed *Yahveh* as Lord of all power whether celestial or terrestrial.

(In the next issue, 'Words of Relationship')

## SEVEN OLD TESTAMENT FEASTS

### A TYPOLOGICAL STUDY OF LEVITICUS 23

By THE EDITOR

#### IV. The Subject Considered Analytically

#### 3. THE FEAST OF FIRST-FRUITS

##### (a) VIEWED TOGETHER WITH FEAST OF WEEKS

In taking these two Feasts together first we need to remind ourselves of what has already been pointed out—that *together* they form the second pair of the seven, and are related to the first pair by being dependent upon them. Further, in these two pairs of Feasts the first members of each pair refer their teaching to Christ, whilst the second members refer to the believer and the church. A reference to previous chapters will make this clear.

Looking at the two Feasts, let us note four points of comparison and contrast:

1. *Both were to be celebrated in the land of Canaan*, in fact, they could not have been celebrated outside of it.

The teaching implied has already been referred to under the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And remembering that both