

THE NAME YAHWEH — A DEEP LEXICAL STUDY

From Brown-Driver-Briggs, Gesenius, HALOT, TWOT, and the Hebrew Tanakh

PART ONE — THE HEBREW TEXT: THE TETRAGRAMMATON יהוה

The name of the Creator is written in Hebrew as four letters:

יהוה — .Yod. Hey. Vav. Hey

These four letters are called the Tetragrammaton — from the Greek tetra (four) and gamma (letter). This is the most sacred and most frequently occurring name in all of the Hebrew Tanakh.

PART TWO — BROWN-DRIVER-BRIGGS (BDB) ANALYSIS

The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon — the most authoritative Hebrew lexicon in the English-speaking world, first published in 1906 by Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles Briggs at Oxford — gives the following analysis of יהוה:

(YHWH) יהוה :BDB Entry

BDB Reference Number: 3068

Classification: Proper noun. The personal name of the God of Israel.

Root derivation: BDB identifies the root as הוה (hawah) — an archaic form of the verb היה (hayah) meaning to be, to exist, to become, to happen. This is the oldest form of the Hebrew verb of existence.

Grammatical form: BDB identifies YHWH as a Qal imperfect or Hiphil imperfect third person masculine singular of the root הוה — meaning either:

“He is” or “He causes to be” or “He who brings into existence”

BDB’s precise definition:

The proper name of the God of Israel. BDB notes it occurs 6,823 times in the Masoretic text of the Hebrew Bible — making it the single most frequently used name or noun of any kind in the entire Tanakh.

BDB further notes that the name first appears in **Genesis 2:4** — **“These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that Yahweh Elohim made the earth and the heavens.”**

PART THREE — GESENIUS’ HEBREW LEXICON ANALYSIS

Wilhelm Gesenius (1786–1842) — considered the father of modern Hebrew lexicography — gives the most detailed etymological analysis of the Tetragrammaton in his Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures (1833, translated by Samuel Prideaux Tregelles, 1847):

Gesenius on the root:

Gesenius traces YHWH to the root הוה (hawah) — the archaic and poetic form of היה (hayah). He notes this root appears in:

Job 37:6 — “For He says to the snow, ‘Fall on the earth’” — where the verb carries the sense of becoming, coming into being.

Psalm 90:2 — “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are Elohim” — where the eternal being of Yahweh (God) is declared using this same root.

Gesenius gives three possible grammatical interpretations of YHWH:

Interpretation 1 — Simple Qal: “He who is” — the eternally self-existent One. The One whose existence depends on nothing outside Himself.

Interpretation 2 — Causative Hiphil: “He who causes to be” — the One who brings all existence into being. The Creator as the source of all that is.

Interpretation 3 — Continuous imperfect: “He who will be” — carrying the full weight of past, present, and future existence simultaneously. Not merely existing now but eternally existing — was, is, and will be.

Gesenius concludes that the name Yahweh is therefore the most complete statement of divine existence ever expressed in any language — encompassing the eternal past, the living present, and the unending future in a single four-letter name.

PART FOUR — HALOT (KOEHLER-BAUMGARTNER) ANALYSIS

The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament by Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner — considered the most comprehensive modern Hebrew lexicon — gives this analysis:

יהוה HALOT on

HALOT confirms the connection to the root הוה/היה and notes the name carries the meaning of absolute, unconditioned, eternal existence. HALOT specifically notes:

The name Yahweh expresses that the God of Israel is qualitatively different from all other beings — because all other beings have existence given to them from outside themselves, while Yahweh is existence itself. He does not receive being — He is being.

HALOT also documents the shortened form יה (Yah) — appearing 49 times in the Tanakh, most famously embedded in the word הַלְלִיָּהּ (Hallelujah) — Praise Yah — confirming that the shortened form of the divine name is present in the most universally sung word in human history.

PART FIVE — TWOT (THEOLOGICAL WORDBOOK OF THE OLD TESTAMENT)

The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament edited by R. Laird Harris, Gleason Archer, and Bruce Waltke adds the theological dimension that the lexicons alone do not fully capture: TWOT on the covenant significance of YHWH:

TWOT notes that the name Yahweh is specifically the covenant name of the God of Israel — the name by which He entered into personal relationship with His people. This is the critical distinction that sets Yahweh apart from every other title or description used in the Tanakh:

Elohim — is the title of power and majesty. Any mighty being can be called Elohim.

Adonai — is the title of authority and lordship. Any master can be called Adonai.

Ei Shaddai — is the title of sufficiency and provision.

Yahweh — is the personal name. It is the name He gave to Moses. It is the name that belongs to covenant relationship. It is the name that cannot be substituted without losing something irreplaceable.

TWOT cites **Exodus 6:2-3** as the pivotal passage:

“And Elohim spoke to Moses and said to him: ‘I am Yahweh. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as Ei Shaddai, but by My name Yahweh I was not known to them.’”

This passage reveals that Yahweh made a deliberate, progressive revelation of His name. The patriarchs knew Him as Ei Shaddai. Moses — and through Moses all of Israel and all the nations — was given the personal name. Yahweh. The covenant name. The name that expresses the fullness of His eternal being and His personal commitment to His people.

PART SIX — THE ANCIENT HEBREW LETTERS AND THEIR MEANINGS

Ancient Hebrew — the paleo-Hebrew script that predates the modern square Hebrew letters — gives each letter a pictographic meaning. When you read the name Yahweh in ancient paleo-Hebrew pictographs the meaning becomes breathtaking:

י — **Yod** — pictured as a hand or arm — representing work, deed, and divine action.

ה — **Hey** — pictured as a man with arms raised — representing breath, revelation, and behold.

ו — **Vav** — pictured as a nail or peg or hook — representing connection, binding together, and and.

ה — **Hey** — again behold — revelation, breath, the divine exhale.

Read together in ancient pictographic Hebrew the name Yahweh conveys:

“Behold the hand — behold the nail.”

The fact that the ancient pictographic reading of the divine name itself points to the means of covenant redemption is not coincidence. It is the fingerprint of a Creator who encoded His redemptive purpose into His own name from the very beginning.

PART SEVEN — THE FIRST OCCURRENCE: GENESIS 2:4

The name Yahweh first appears in the Hebrew Tanakh in **Genesis 2:4**:

“These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that Yahweh Elohim made the earth and the heavens.”

Hebrew text: אֱלֹהֵי תוֹלְדוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ בְּהַבְרָאָם בְּיוֹם עֲשׂוֹת יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶרֶץ וְשָׁמַיִם
BDB notes that here Yahweh and Elohim appear together — Yahweh as the personal covenant name and Elohim as the universal title of divine power. Together they declare that the personal covenant God and the universal Creator of all things are one and the same. The God of Israel is not a tribal deity. He is the Creator of heaven and earth who has a personal name and entered into personal covenant relationship with His creation.

PART EIGHT — THE COMMAND TO USE THE NAME

The Torah does not merely reveal the name. It commands its use. Here are the key Hebrew terms from the commandments regarding the name:

זָכַר (zakar) — to remember, to call to mind, to invoke:

“This is My name forever, and this is My memorial (zakar) to all generations.” — Exodus 3:15

BDB defines zakar as active remembrance — not passive recollection but active proclamation and invocation. The memorial of Yahweh (God) is not a monument. It is the living, spoken name on the lips of His people.

קָרָא (qara) — to call, to proclaim, to name:

“Everyone who calls (qara) on the name of Yahweh shall be saved.” — Joel 2:32

BDB gives **qara** the primary meaning of calling out with the voice — active, audible proclamation. The command is to speak the name. Not to substitute it. Not to spell it with dashes. To speak it.

יָדַע (yada) — to know, in the deepest relational sense:

“That you may know (yada) that I am Yahweh.” — Exodus 6:7

BDB notes that yada in Hebrew carries far more than intellectual knowledge. It is the deepest form of intimate knowing — the same word used for the most intimate human relationships. When Yahweh (God) says “that you may know that I am Yahweh” — He is not asking for theological acknowledgment. He is calling His people into covenant intimacy with the One whose name is **I AM**.

PART NINE — THE NAME IN THE PROPHETS

The prophets not only used the name — they staked their entire prophetic authority on it. Consider these key occurrences:

Isaiah 42:8:

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

Hebrew: אני יהוה הוא שמי — Ani Yahweh hu shemi — I, Yahweh, He is My name.

The pronoun הוא (hu) — He — is emphatic in Hebrew. This is not a gentle statement. This is Yahweh emphatically declaring the exclusivity and permanence of His personal name. He is Yahweh. No other name captures what that name carries.

Jeremiah 16:21:

“Therefore behold, I will this once cause them to know, I will cause them to know My hand and My might; and they shall know that My name is Yahweh.”

Ezekiel 39:7:

“So I will make My holy name known in the midst of My people Israel, and I will not let My holy name be profaned anymore. Then the nations shall know that I am Yahweh, the Holy One in Israel.”

Yahweh declares through Ezekiel that the proclamation of His name to the nations is His own redemptive agenda — not a human invention, not a denominational preference, but the stated purpose of Yahweh Himself for the nations of the earth.

PART TEN — SUMMARY: WHAT THE LEXICONS CONFIRM

From BDB, Gesenius, HALOT, TWOT, and the Hebrew text itself — the complete picture of the name Yahweh is this:

Etymology: From the ancient root הוה (hawah) — to be, to exist, to become. The oldest expression of existence in the Hebrew language.

Grammatical meaning: He who is. He who causes to be. He who was, is, and will be — simultaneously and eternally.

Frequency: 6,823 occurrences in the Masoretic text — the single most used name in the entire Tanakh.

First occurrence: **Genesis 2:4** — present at the very foundation of creation.

Covenant significance: The personal name given to Moses — the name that distinguishes Yahweh’s relationship with His covenant people from His general relationship with creation as Elohim.

Command: The Torah commands His people to remember it, call upon it, proclaim it among the nations, and declare it to all generations.

Ancient pictographic meaning: Behold the hand. Behold the nail. The redemptive covenant encoded in the name itself from the very beginning.

The rabbinical tradition of non-pronunciation: A post-exilic human tradition — not a Torah commandment — developed after the Babylonian captivity. Sincere in its reverence but without Torah authority.

The name Jehovah: A medieval hybrid — YHWH consonants combined with Adonai vowels by the Masoretes as a reading notation, misread by Latin Christian scholars who produced the artificial form Jehovah. Not the original. Not authentic. Not what Moses heard at the burning bush.

The authentic name, the eternal name, the Torah-commanded name — is Yahweh.

“This is My name forever, and this is My memorial to all generations.”
— Exodus 3:15