Bite Size Bible Study
YHWH #185   By Pastor Lee

To understand this name in the minds of Ancient Middle Eastern peoples we need to temporarily think like they did.

The prevailing understanding of these peoples was that there were many gods. Each god had power and authority over an area and/or certain physical functions.

These deities only existed because they had a name and a function. To our way of thinking something exists because it is material. To them it may be material but still not exist without the name and function.

We can see this in a literal translation of Genesis 1:3-4.
*and Elohiym said, **light** (it's name) will exist, and light existed, and Elohiym saw the light, **given that it was functional**, and Elohiym made a separation between the light and the darkness,* (Benner Mechanical Translation)

It was not unusual for a god to have many different names or titles, given the diversity of languages. Even the function of a god may change over time. A god may be created by another god or killed by another god. They were not generally considered to be immortal, and wars between gods were considered inevitable.

What is important is that in most all instances they were a part of a pantheon of gods, each controlling a part of the known world.

Genesis is telling us that He (the creator God) is the cause of everything. He names everything and gives it function, He is the One who rules over all of this – not a pantheon of lesser gods. There is no other role or jurisdiction given to any other deity. His decision is His own and not that of a divine community or assembly.

The contrast between the religious beliefs of Israel and the rest of the Ancient Near Eastern religions, cannot be more diverse. One all powerful God vs. a pantheon of gods competing for rulership.

The first place we find His name is in Genesis 2:4.
These are the birthings of the skies and the land in their being shaped in the day YHWH the Elohiym made land and skies, (Benner Mechanical Translation)

Now we need a little background on ancient Hebrew letters. Jeff Benner in his book "Ancient Hebrew Language and Alphabet" gives us the following information on the letters Y H and W.

ᛃ Yad

**Pictograph:** The most Ancient form of the letter is ᛃ, an arm and hand.

Mnemonic (meaning): *Work, Make, Throw* -- from the function of the hand; Shout -- from the placing of the hands at the mouth for amplification; *Worship, Thanks* -- a giving of the hand as a gesture.

ⵛ Hey

Pictographic (form): Most all sources agree that the original picture is ⵛ, a man with his arms raised out as if pointing toward something.

Mnemonic (meaning): *Look* -- when one sees a great sight he throws his arms toward it and sighs saying "look at that"; *Reveal* -- a pointing to a sight to show to another; *Breath* -- as when sighing.

Y Waw

Pictographic (form): Ancient alphabet charts include two possibilities for the Ancient pictographic form for this letter, Y and ᛉ. The Hebrew word vav / waw means a peg. The tent pegs were made of wood and may have been Y-shaped as in the first picture to prevent the rope from slipping off.

Mnemonic (meaning): *Add, Secure* -- the peg is used for securing or tying the tent or other items together.

Just from the meanings of the letters we may surmise that the Israelites might have had an understanding of this God somewhat like:
- (Y) A God that works, speaks to them, and one that reaches out a hand to greet them.
- (H) A God that causes them to look a Him in amazement.
- (W) A God that they could feel secure in their relationship with Him.
- (H) A God who is near, revealing Himself to them.

Because a name in the ancient Near Eastern cultures was not just a moniker or handle but a description of the person's character, we need to see YHWH as the description of the character of the God of Israel. Using the description of the letters in the name of God allows us to have a peek into His character.