

“Jehovah of Armies.”

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This expression, found 285 times, with variations, in the Scriptures, translates the Hebrew *Yeho-wah' tseva-'ohth'*. The prophetic books, particularly Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Zechariah, contain by far the majority of its occurrences. Paul and James, quoting from or alluding to the prophecies, used its equivalent (transliterated into Greek) in their writings. – Ro 9:29; Jas 5:4; compare Isa 1:9.

The Hebrew word *tsa·va'* (singular; plural, *tseva-'ohth'*) basically means a literal army of soldiers, or combat forces, as at Genesis 21:22; Deuteronomy 20:9, and many other texts. However, the term is also used in a figurative sense as in “the heavens and the earth and all their army,” or “the sun and the moon and the stars, all the army of the heavens.” (Ge 2:1; De 4:19) The plural form (*tseva-'ohth'*) is employed a number of times as applying to the Israelite forces, as at Exodus 6:26; 7:4; Numbers 33:1; Psalms 44:9; 60:10. Some scholars believe that the “armies” in the expression “Jehovah of armies” include not only the angelic forces but also the Israelite army and the inanimate heavenly bodies. However, it appears that the “armies” signified are primarily, if not exclusively, the angelic forces.

When Joshua saw an angelic visitor near Jericho and asked him if he was for Israel or for the enemy side, the reply was, “No, but I – as prince of the army of Jehovah I have now come.” (Jos 5:13-15) The prophet Micaiah told Kings Ahab and Jehoshaphat, “I certainly see Jehovah sitting upon his throne and all the army of the heavens standing by him, to his right and to his left,” clearly referring to Jehovah’s spirit sons. (1Ki 22:19-21) The use of the plural form in “Jehovah of armies” is appropriate, inasmuch as the angelic forces are described not only in divisions of cherubs, seraphs, and angels (Isa 6:2, 3; Ge 3:24; Re 5:11) but also as forming organized groups, so that Jesus Christ could speak of having “more than twelve legions of angels” available at his call. (Mt 26:53) In Hezekiah’s plea to Jehovah for help he called him “Jehovah of armies, the God of Israel, sitting upon the cherubs,” evidently alluding to the ark of the covenant and the cherub figures on its cover, symbolizing Jehovah’s heavenly throne. (Isa 37:16; compare 1Sa 4:4; 2Sa 6:2.) Elisha’s fearful servant was reassured by a miraculous vision in which he saw the mountains around the besieged city of Elisha’s residence “full of horses and war chariots of fire,” part of Jehovah’s angelic hosts. – 2Ki 6:15-17.

The expression “Jehovah of armies” thus conveys the sense of power, the power held by the Sovereign Ruler of the universe, who has at his command vast forces of spirit creatures. (Ps 103:20, 21; 148:1, 2; Isa 1:24; Jer 32:17, 18) It thus commands deep respect and awe, while at the same time being a source of comfort and encouragement to Jehovah’s servants. David, alone and unaided by any earthly military force, challenged the formidable Philistine Goliath in “the name of Jehovah of armies, the God of the battle lines of Israel.” (1Sa 17:45) Not only in times of literal battle but also in all other trialsome situations or occasions of importance God’s people as a whole and as individuals could take courage and hope from recognizing the majesty of Jehovah’s sovereign position, reflected in his control over the mighty forces serving from his heavenly courts. (1Sa 1:9-11; 2Sa 6:18; 7:25-29) The use of the expression “Jehovah of armies” by the prophets supplied yet one more reason for those hearing the prophecies to be certain of their fulfillment.