Lord (Jehovah): The Most Frequently Used [Content] Word in the Hebrew Bible

The sacred name *Jehovah*, derived from the Hebrew *YHWH*, is found more than 6,800 times in the Old Testament. *Jehovah* is "the covenant and proper name of the God of Israel," and Jehovah Himself is none other than "the premortal Jesus Christ."[18] Most English translations of the Bible, however, use Lord in place of *Jehovah*.

Stated plainly, Jesus Christ, under the designation *Jehovah*, is referred to more than 6,800 times in the Old Testament. This is extremely important because it demonstrates that Jehovah (= Jesus Christ) is more prominent than any other Old Testament topic; *Jehovah* is the most important word, not only in terms of frequency but also in terms of what this sacred name represents. And each attestation of *Jehovah* belongs to a context that provides us with understanding regarding His mission, character, or attributes.

Jehovah is frequently referred to nominally, but more often the name is pronominalized, meaning *Jehovah* is very frequently the referent of inflectional elements (e.g., affix of a verb, preposition, noun); referential elements include possessive determiners (e.g., *your*, *his*, *my*), independent pronouns (e.g., *he*, *you*, *I*), or direct or indirect objects (e.g., *me*, *him*). Thus, linguistically, *Jehovah* is the most frequently used content word in the Old Testament, and through pronominal forms, Jehovah possesses the most prominent character zone. In the Old Testament, Jehovah's topical apportionment is abundantly greater than any other topic. What does this mean to us? It means that Jesus Christ is the most prominent character in the Old Testament, but under the title *Lord*.

Specifically, *Lord* is found in the Pentateuch (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy) in about 1,800 instances. Isaiah and Psalms use the Tetragrammaton (the Hebrew name of the Lord, which is transliterated in four letter as YHWH) more than 1,100 times. Lord is also found throughout most of the other Biblical books.

Excursus: Function versus Content Words: All literary writings, including the Old Testament, consist of function and content words. Function words (or discourse particles) serve in utilitarian capacities in the sentence structure. They are generally small words (single-character words, two-character words, three-character words, etc.), such as conjunctions, definite articles, interrogatives, negative particles, prepositions, and pronouns. Examples of English function words include *a*, *all*, *an*, *and*, *as*, *at*, *be*, *but*, *by*, *for*, *from*, *he*, *her*, *I*, *in*, *it*, *no*, *not*, *of*, *on*, *or*, *she*, *so*, *than*, *that*, *the*, *their*, *this*, *to*, *up*, *we*, *what*, *which*, and *who*.

Content words have a major role, regardless of the text-type or genre, because they provide substance to a composition. Content words are adjectives, adverbs, common nouns, proper nouns, and verbs. English examples include *Assyria*, *cart*, *dancing*, *earth*, *field*, *grass*, *heaven*, *horse*, *house*, *Israel*, *king*, *queen*, *riding*, *rope*, *Sarah*, *tree*, *walking*, and *wheat*.

Both function and content words are vital to a literary work, but content words provide its meaning and significance. Function and content words interact to make up an infinite number of expressions, which formulate sentences, paragraphs, and compositions.

The first six words in the Hebrew Bible, in terms of frequency, are function words (see table below). These six words, in order of frequency, are translated as follows: *and*, *the*, *to/for*, *in/with*, object marker (non-translatable), and *from*. The first content word is *Lord*, which is attested in the Hebrew Bible more than 6,800 times.

High-Frequency Words in the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) Lexical Forms

Hebrew	English Translation	Frequency of Use*	Percentage of the Total Text**
ו	and	50,524	1 word is 11.68% of total
ה	the	30,477	2 words are 18.73% of total
ל	to, for	20,322	3 words are 23.43% of total
ב	in, with	15,607	4 words are 27.04% of total
תא	object marker—no translational value	10,980	5 words are 29.58% of total
מן	from	7,592	6 words are 31.33% of total
הוהי	Lord	6,828	7 words are 32.91% of total

Frequency of Use: How many times each word is attested in the Old Testament. For example, the Hebrew word *and* occurs 50,524 times in the Hebrew Bible.

**Percentage of the Total Text:* The Hebrew word for *and* signifies 11.68% of all Hebrew words in the Hebrew Bible.

The Word *Lord* in Each of the Books of the Old Testament

Book	#hits*	fpt*
Genesis	165	5.13
Exodus	398	15.36
Leviticus	311	16.65
Numbers	396	15.81

Book	#hits*	fpt*
Deuteronomy	550	23.89
Joshua	224	14.15
Judges	175	11.33
Ruth	18	8.88
1 Samuel	320	15.38
2 Samuel	153	8.92
1 Kings	257	12.68
2 Kings	277	14.80
1 Chronicles	175	10.44
2 Chronicles	384	18.07
Ezra	37	6.23
Nehemiah	17	1.99
Esther	0	0.00
Job	32	2.56
Psalms	695	23.25
Proverbs	87	8.92
Ecclesiastes	0	0.00
Song of Solomon	0	0.00
Isaiah	450	17.67
Jeremiah	726	22.10
Lamentations	32	13.70
Ezekiel	434	14.65
Daniel	8	0.84
Hosea	46	12.77

Book	#hits*	fpt*
Joel	33	22.84
Amos	81	26.70
Obadiah	7	16.06
Jonah	26	23.96
Micah	40	18.83
Nahum	13	15.64
Habakkuk	13	12.87
Zephaniah	34	30.14
Haggai	35	38.08
Zechariah	133	27.56
Malachi	46	35.06

*Column 1 gives the name of the Old Testament book. Column 2 provides the number of actual occurrences of the word *Lord* in each of the books. For example, *Lord* occurs 165 times in Genesis, 398 times in Exodus, 450 times in Isaiah, and so forth. Column 3 sets forth the hits per thousand words in each book. In this study, all texts have been normalized using a frequency-per-thousand (fpt) technique. Normalization converts the actual token count to a norm for purposes of comparison. The computerized tool that provides the fpt count is Accordance.[19]