



# Goahead Theological Seminary & College

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## God

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"God" (\*Hananim\*) is the term used to refer to the one true God in Korean Protestantism, parts of Anglicanism, Orthodoxy, and Islam. He is the supreme and sole Absolute Being who created the heavens and the earth.

### Meaning and Etymology

- **One True God:** Refers to the true God who is the only one in existence.
- **Etymology:** It originated from \*Haneul-nim\*—a combination of an archaic word for "heaven" (\*haneul\*) and the honorific suffix \*-nim\*. Later, the meaning of "one" (\*hana\*) was added alongside the faith in a single God, resulting in the term \*Hananim\*.

### Terminology

- Generally, the term refers to the Creator who brought the world into existence. In Judaism, the concept of the one God (Jehovah) specifically denotes God the Father; conversely, in modern Protestantism, "God" encompasses the Trinity: God the Father, God the Son (Jesus), and God the Holy Spirit (the Comforter). Consequently, Korean translations of the Quran also use the term "Hananim" (God) to refer to Allah. However, since Islam recognizes only the Quran written in Arabic, the use of "Hananim" within the Korean Islamic community serves merely as a local equivalent to the English word "God." Similarly, the term "Allah"—used in countries such as Egypt, Lebanon, Iraq, and Indonesia—predates the advent of Islam and is also used by Christians to refer to God.

### Meaning

- The Hebrew word translated as "God" is \*Elohim\* (אלהים). This was first translated into the Sino-Korean term \*Cheonju\*



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(天主—"Lord of Heaven") and subsequently into the modern Korean term \*Hananim\*.

## Origin

- This term was first used in Korea in the \*Gospel of Luke\* (titled \*Yesu Seonggyo Nuga Bok-eum Jeonseo\*), the earliest Korean-language Bible translated by John Ross. In a mission report from that time, Reverend Ross stated that "Haneunim"—a compound of \*haneul\* (heaven) and \*nim\* (prince/lord)—would be the most appropriate translation. While the 1882 edition of this \*Gospel of Luke\* used the term "Haneunim," the 1883 edition contains the phrase "...two people [stood] before \*Hananim\*..."
- The term evolved into "Hananim" as the \*arae-a\* (·) vowel was dropped from modern Korean; the \*arae-a\* typically shifted to various vowels during modernization, such as 'ㅡ', 'ㅣ', or 'ㅓ'. In contemporary folk religion, both "Hananim" and "Haneunim" are used interchangeably. Within Korean Protestantism, the term is sometimes interpreted as "Hananim" to reflect the confessional meaning of \*hana\* (meaning "one" or "the Only One"); however, linguistically speaking, the word is not formed by simply attaching the honorific suffix \*-nim\* to the numeral \*hana\* (one)..

## Translation

- Early Protestantism employed various terms—such as \*Sangje\*, \*Cheonju\*, \*Haneunim\*, and \*Hananim\*—to refer to the Divine; however, during the translation and publication of the \*Revised Version\* (Gaeyeok Seongseo), the term \*Hananim\* came into use as the \*arae-a\* (·) character was uniformly replaced with the vowel 'a' (ㅏ). In the \*Common Translation Bible\* (Gongdong Beonyeok Seongseo) of 1977, which adopted the standard Korean of that era, the term was rendered as \*Haneunim\*. Although the \*Common Translation Bible\*—a modern-language version produced jointly by Protestants and Catholics—sought to establish \*Haneunim\* as the standard term for God, most Protestant denominations insisted on the spelling \*Hananim\*. Due to issues regarding



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this terminology and other factors, Protestant denominations generally utilized the *\*Common Translation Bible\** for educational purposes while retaining the existing *\*Revised Version\** for worship services. Jeong Jung-ho, a professor of Christian Studies at Keimyung University, analyzed the situation by noting, "The name *\*Hananim\** strongly conveys the concept of a singular God, and it was likely difficult to break the established habit of using that specific term." Denominations that adopted the *\*Common Translation Bible\** for worship—namely the Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church, and the Anglican Church—use the spelling *\*Haneunim\**. *\*Sangje\** (上帝) is the Hanja (Sino-Korean) equivalent of *\*Hananim\**.

## Other

- As of 2014, "Hananim" (하나님) is recognized as a standard term, though there is debate regarding this status. From the perspective that it is "unsuitable" as a standard term—supported by texts such as *\*Introduction to Korean Linguistics\**—"Hananim" is considered a misreading of "Haneunim" (하느님). While the vowel "ㆍ" (arae-a) is commonly understood to have the sound value of "ㅏ" (a), it is pronounced as "ㅡ" (eu) when appearing in a non-initial syllable; therefore, the argument holds that "Haneunim" (하느님) should properly be read as "Haneunim" (하느님), though this remains merely one perspective.
- From the perspective that it is "appropriate" as a standard term, the vowel underwent a shift to "ㅡ" (eu) during the first stage of the sound's disappearance in the 16th century; however, by the mid-18th century, a replacement with "ㅏ" (a) occurred, causing the previous "ㅡ" (eu) form to vanish. Consequently, there is also an opinion that there is no issue with using the term "Hananim" (하나님).
- Amidst allegations regarding the unauthorized use of the term "Hananim" (God), a peculiar lawsuit was filed in 1992; on November 11 of that year, Jeong Geun-cheol of Gangwon Province submitted a complaint against the Christian community, seeking damages for the misappropriation of the name "Hananim." He initiated legal proceedings demanding



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**100 million won in compensation, alleging that Protestant groups had been using the term without permission.**