

Names of God, Pt 1 - Elohim

Names of God Series

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I introduced our series on the names of God in the same way that Charles Spurgeon began his Sunday morning sermon on January 7, 1855. It was then that he said this.

“The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can ever engage the attention of a child of God, is the name, the nature, the person, the work, the doings, and the existence of the great God whom he calls his Father. There is something exceedingly improving to the mind in a contemplation of the divinity. It is a subject so vast, that all our thoughts are lost in its immensity; so deep, that our pride is drowned in its infinity. No subject of contemplation will tend more to humble the mind than thoughts of God. But while the subject humbles the mind, it also expands it.”

Charles Spurgeon went on to say, “He who often thinks of God will have a larger mind than the man who simply plods around this narrow globe. The most excellent study for expanding the soul is the knowledge of the godhead. Nothing will so enlarge the intellect, nothing so magnify the whole soul of man as a devout, earnest, continued investigation of the great subject of the deity. Plunge yourself into the godhead’s deepest [?], lost in its immensity and you shall come forth as from a couch of rest, refreshed and invigorated. I know nothing which can so comfort the soul, so calm the swelling billows of sorrow and grief, so speak peace to the winds of trial as a devout musing upon the subject of the godhead.”

And for the following weeks and months we intend to study the godhead, specifically the names of God. God’s names are self descriptive. That means God’s names are not simply to identify him, but also meant to describe him. God’s names reveal his nature and his character. God’s names are not only self descriptive, they are also self designated. That is, God’s names were not given to him by man, but primarily designated to him by himself. And part of God’s progressive revelation of himself was to give himself names by which people, you and I, might know him.

Our intent is to examine the names of God as he has progressively given them to us in the Scriptures and we, of course, must begin at the beginning in Genesis chapter number one.

And I invite you to join me there in Genesis chapter one. The Hebrew words translated “God” in your English Bibles is the word אֱלֹהִים (el-o-heem’). אֱלֹהִים (el-o-heem’)

occurs 2620 times in the Scriptures, 32 times in the first chapter of Genesis alone. In fact, I would suggest that Genesis chapter one isn't so much about the creation as much as it is about the Creator, אֱלֹהִים (el-o-heem'). And the first thing that we learn about אֱלֹהִים (el-o-heem') is that he is the Creator. God is Creator and God revealed himself to us as the Creator of the universe. It was אֱלֹהִים (el-o-heem') who spoke the worlds into existence. And allow me to read Genesis chapter one this evening and as I do I would like to substitute the Hebrew name אֱלֹהִים (el-o-heem') for the English word God so that we might know that [אֱלֹהִים (el-o-heem')] is our Creator.

Will you indulge me with this? Follow as I read Genesis chapter number one.

In the beginning [אֱלֹהִים (el-o-heem')] created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of [אֱלֹהִים (el-o-heem')] was hovering over the face of the waters.

Then [אֱלֹהִים (el-o-heem')] said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And [אֱלֹהִים (el-o-heem')] saw the light, that it was good; and [אֱלֹהִים (el-o-heem')] divided the light from the darkness. [אֱלֹהִים (el-o-heem')] called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day.

Then [אֱלֹהִים (el-o-heem')] said, "Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters." Thus [אֱלֹהִים (el-o-heem')] made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament; and it was so. And [אֱלֹהִים (el-o-heem')] called the firmament Heaven. So the evening and the morning were the second day.

Then [אֱלֹהִים (el-o-heem')] said, "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear"; and it was so. And [אֱלֹהִים (el-o-heem')] called the dry land Earth, and the gathering together of the waters He called Seas. And [אֱלֹהִים (el-o-heem')] saw that it was good. Then [אֱלֹהִים (el-o-heem')] said, "Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb that yields seed, and the fruit tree that yields fruit according to its kind, whose seed is in itself, on the earth"; and it was so. And the earth brought forth grass, the herb that yields seed according to its kind, and the tree that yields fruit, whose seed is in itself according to its kind. And [אֱלֹהִים (el-o-heem')] saw that it was good. So the evening and the morning were the third day.

Then [אֱלֹהִים (el-o-heem')] said, "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years; "and let them be for lights in the

firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth"; and it was so. Then [אלהים (el-o-heem')] made two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night. He made the stars also. [אלהים (el-o-heem')] set them in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth, and to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness. And [אלהים (el-o-heem')] saw that it was good. So the evening and the morning were the fourth day.

Then [אלהים (el-o-heem')] said, "Let the waters abound with an abundance of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the face of the firmament of the heavens." So [אלהים (el-o-heem')] created great sea creatures and every living thing that moves, with which the waters abounded, according to their kind, and every winged bird according to its kind. And [אלהים (el-o-heem')] saw that it was good. And [אלהים (el-o-heem')] blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." So the evening and the morning were the fifth day.

Then [אלהים (el-o-heem')] said, "Let the earth bring forth the living creature according to its kind: cattle and creeping thing and beast of the earth, each according to its kind"; and it was so. And [אלהים (el-o-heem')] made the beast of the earth according to its kind, cattle according to its kind, and everything that creeps on the earth according to its kind. And [אלהים (el-o-heem')] saw that it was good.

Then [אלהים (el-o-heem')] said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So [אלהים (el-o-heem')] created man in His own image; in the image of [אלהים (el-o-heem')] He created him; male and female He created them. Then [אלהים (el-o-heem')] blessed them, and [אלהים (el-o-heem')] said to them...¹

And you get the picture.

Is Genesis chapter one about the creation of the world or is it about the Creator of the world? Thirty-two times אלהים (el-o-heem') is named as the Creator.

Now some don't believe this. One think that we are the result of a cosmic accident. It started with a big bang and then a pollywog jumped out of a swimming hole and grew some legs and became a man. But I assure you, it wasn't goo to you by way of the zoo. You are no kin to the monkey. אלהים (el-o-heem') created.

¹ Genesis 1:1-28.

Genesis one is not the only place that declare אֱלֹהִים (el-o-heem') to be the Creator. Consider this.

Isaiah 45:18.

“For thus says the LORD, Who created the heavens, Who is [אֱלֹהִים (el-o-heem')], Who formed the earth and made it, Who has established it, Who did not create it in vain, Who formed it to be inhabited: ‘I am the LORD, and there is no other.’”²

It was Jonah also who declared, Jonah saying, “I fear the LORD, [אֱלֹהִים (el-o-heem')] of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.”³

Everybody, it seems, believes in God. But how many people believe in אֱלֹהִים (el-o-heem'), the Creator God of Genesis one?

Hebrews 11 says, “By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God.”⁴

It was אֱלֹהִים (el-o-heem'), the mighty powerful Creator of the universe who spoke, “so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.”⁵

Folks, we have a crisis in Christianity today among many other crises. It is a crisis regarding Creationism. And Evangelicalism is in trouble not because we distort some nuance of the last book of the Bible, Revelation, but because many deny the truth, the clear teaching of the first chapter of the Bible, Genesis chapter one. It is not so much an assault on creation. You hear me. It is not so much an assault on creation or intelligent design as much as it is upon the Creator, אֱלֹהִים (el-o-heem'), God.

And mainstream evangelical Christianity now embraces a variety of ideas about how the worlds came into existence, the gap theory, the day-age theory, theistic evolution and all of these ideas are an assault on the creation? No, on the Creator, אֱלֹהִים (el-o-heem').

אֱלֹהִים (el-o-heem') is Creator. אֱלֹהִים (el-o-heem') is also eternal. God is eternal.

Being the father of four young children, it is my privilege to answer every question that they ask of me.

“Daddy, why do we have to wear our seatbelts?”

Good question, right?

² Isaiah 45:18.

³ Jonah 1:9.

⁴ Hebrews 11:3.

⁵ Ibid.

Well, so that if your mother is driving and have an accident... I mean, that you will be safe. I am just kidding.

“Daddy, Daddy, how do you draw a picture of a rocket ship?”

Good question. Let me show you.

“Daddy, why do cats lick their fur?”

Good question. So they can cough up a hair ball later.

“Daddy, where did God come from?”

Good question. Genesis one verse one is a simple declaration of אלהים (el-o-heem’) existence. It doesn’t provide an explanation of origin. It simply states the fact: God is. God always has been and always will be.

Isaiah 40 verse 28 says, “Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting אלהים (el-o-heem’), the LORD, The Creator of the ends of the earth.”⁶

You see, he is not only Creator, he is also eternal, אלהים (el-o-heem’).

Jeremiah 10 verse 10.

“But the LORD is the true אלהים (el-o-heem’), he is the living אלהים (el-o-heem’), and an everlasting king.”⁷

אלהים (el-o-heem’) existence predates creation. He has always existed, always will so that I propose to you that אלהים (el-o-heem’) is eternal Creator.

Now there is one more aspect of God’s nature and character that I want to show you this evening. I think, as revealed, in the name אלהים (el-o-heem’). And then I want to give you an opportunity to interact with me in a moment.

There is something very unique in the name אלהים (el-o-heem’). אלהים (el-o-heem’) is, in fact, the plural of the singular Hebrew word for God, אל (el). אלהים (el-o-heem’) is אל (el) with the masculine plural ending in Hebrew.

Now I am not a Hebrew scholar, but allow me to show this to you. The Hebrew name for God, the generic name for God is אל (el). From that name for God we then also have the name אלהים (el-o-heem’). And if you will look at the screen there, you will notice אל

⁶ Isaiah 40:28.

⁷ Jeremiah 10:10.

(el) and then you will notice אֵל (el) in the name אֱלֹהִים (el-o-heem'), reading from right to left.

It is this plural masculine ending there, if you can see that on the screen, that presents to us the plurality of the name אֱלֹהִים (el-o-heem').

And what does that plural name mean? I will answer that for you in a moment. But also, because of the construct here, אֵל (el) can also be used in a compound sense. Consider these compound names for God, אֵל (el) meaning God.

לַע שָׁדַי (el - shad-dah' - ee), God almighty.

אֵל עֲלִיּוֹן (el - el-yone'), God most high.

אֵל רֹאֵי (el - ro-ee'), God who sees.

לַע עֹלָם (el - o-lawm'), God everlasting.

אֵל גִּבּוֹר (el - ghib-bore'), God who is mighty.

אֵל אֱמוּנָה (el - em-oo-naw'), God of truth.

אֵל קָדוֹשׁ (el - kaw-doshe'), God who is holy.

These are the compound names with אֵל (el). So what does the plural name mean? The first name of God in the Scriptures, אֱלֹהִים (el-o-heem'), allows for plurality in the godhead. אֱלֹהִים (el-o-heem') is triune.

God is a trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And the Bible makes it very clear, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God [אֱלֹהִים (el-o-heem')], the LORD is one!"⁸ Deuteronomy six, part of the שְׁמַע (shaw-mah') there.

However, a full reading of the Scriptures teaches us that God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are fully God, were each intricately involved in Genesis chapter one. Of course, אֱלֹהִים (el-o-heem') was present as the eternal Creator.

Genesis one verse two, if you have it laid open before you on your lap, explains that "the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters,"⁹ and is now involved in sustaining creation.

Job says by his Spirit he made the heavens.

⁸ Deuteronomy 6:4.

⁹ Genesis 1:2.

John 1:3 makes it clear that Jesus, God the Son was present and participated in creation. Colossians ascribes creation to Jesus Christ.

So, you see, the plural form of אֱלֹהִים (el) makes provision of the godhead before anybody understood the triune godhead, not that we understand it today fully. But provision is made for it in the plurality of the name אֱלֹהֵינוּ (el-o-heem').

The best we can do is the picture with this model and I am sure you have seen this model on a number of occasions. God is the Father. God is the Son. God is the Holy Spirit. However, the Father is not the Son, the Father is not the Spirit and the Spirit is not the Son. And in this triunity, the triune godhead, there is provision for that even in Genesis chapter one verse one with the plural name אֱלֹהֵינוּ (el-o-heem').

So, then, and this is where I need you to help me. What do we do with all of this? If אֱלֹהֵינוּ (el-o-heem') is Creator, אֱלֹהֵינוּ (el-o-heem') is eternal, אֱלֹהֵינוּ (el-o-heem') is triune, what do we do with what we have learned this evening?

The first point of the revelation of God to man in the name אֱלֹהֵינוּ (el-o-heem'), what do we do with this? Somebody help me from the floor.

Ok, honor. Good. Another one? Worship. Obey. Good. Ok, proclaim and declare him as the Creator. Good. I have got a Scripture here I can present to you here.

All nations whom You have made [the Creator] Shall come and worship before You, O Lord, And shall glorify Your name. For You are great, and do wondrous things; You alone are [אֱלֹהֵינוּ (el-o-heem')]¹⁰

Now here is a more important question, perhaps. What if we don't honor and obey and worship and proclaim? What if we don't embrace אֱלֹהֵינוּ (el-o-heem') as the Creator, as the eternal, as the triune God? Then what?

You have got nothing, ok. Everything else falls away, ok. People won't see Christ in our life. Ok.

There are implications and I want you to turn to Romans chapter one. And I want to show you what happens if we don't respond in worship and honor and obedience, et cetera, et cetera to God the Creator, God the eternal, God the triune.

You are familiar with the text, Romans chapter one verse 20.

“For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made [the creation], even His eternal...”¹¹

¹⁰ Psalm 86:9-10.

¹¹ Romans 1:20.

Ok, so let's find the elements. Let's find the elements here. We have אֱלֹהִים (el-o-heem') the Creator here. We have him being eternal and the godhead, the triunity of God

...so they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. Therefore God also gave them up...¹²

And you know the rest of the story.

God almighty, the powerful deity אֱלֹהִים (el-o-heem') revealed himself in the first chapter of the Bible as the eternal, triune Creator. And we are compelled to worship and to trust and to obey and to believe and to honor and to proclaim אֱלֹהִים (el-o-heem'). If we don't respond like that, we find ourselves in Romans chapter one. And there are few men that I have heard unpack Romans chapter one as well as pastor McLaughlin. And I am sure that you have heard his exposition of this very text.

I think it behooves us, as we begin the rediscovery of our great God as revealed in his names, to take this to heart.

I want you to remember אֱלֹהִים (el-o-heem') because in the coming weeks there will be a bit of review. אֱלֹהִים (el-o-heem') is Creator. אֱלֹהִים (el-o-heem') is eternal. אֱלֹהִים (el-o-heem') is triune.

Let's pray.

Father God, we bow our heads and our hearts before you as our אֱלֹהִים (el-o-heem'). We acknowledge that you are the Creator of all that is. We acknowledge that you are the eternal one and, God, we acknowledge that you are triune in the persons of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Oh God, we worship you for who you are. We believe and trust you for who you are and, God, may we be careful also to proclaim and declare. Forgive us for the occasions when we have not glorified you as God, when we were not thankful, when we were futile or vain in our thoughts and our hearts were darkened.

I pray, God, that you would enlarge our hearts with a greater understanding of who you are as revealed in your names, in Jesus' name. Amen.

¹² Romans 1:20-24.