

**Series: The Names of God**

**Title: Elohim**

**Text: Genesis 1:1**

The names of God used in the Bible serve as a kind of road map to teach us about the nature and character of God. We will examine in this series several names God has chosen to describe himself. They are a part of his progressive revelation to all of humanity.

Genesis Chapter One opens with a statement containing the first name God uses to reveal himself. In the English translations of the Bible, Genesis 1:1 reads, "In the beginning God." But in the original Hebrew language, the word for God is Elohim.

To understand its meaning, we need to examine its origin and how it is used. Some scholars suggest Elohim comes from the shorter word El, which means mighty, strong, or prominent.

Elohim was the God of Power and Might!

## **I. ELOHIM: The God of Power and Might**

The word El is translated "God" over 250 times. It is associated with circumstances that demonstrate God's great power and might. In Numbers 23:22, God is the great El who brought Israel up out of Egypt; the One who "has strength like a wild ox." ([Numbers 23:22 NKJV](#))

The verse emphasizes the incredible power of God's mighty arm in Israel's great deliverance. The next verse exclaims, "It now must be said of Jacob and of Israel, 'Oh, what God has done!'"

In Deuteronomy 10:17 it says, "For the LORD your God *is* God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe." ([Deuteronomy 10:17 NKJV](#))

The original reads more like, "For the Jehovah (Yahweh), your Elohim is the Elohim of elohims, and Adonai of adonais, the Elohim who is great, mighty, and dreadful."

The word "El" is used in the great name Almighty God (El-Shaddai), the name God chooses when he makes his covenant promise to Abraham and Jacob. (Genesis 17:1; 35:11).

Elohim is a name that expresses the greatness and glory of God. When God reveals himself in the name Jehovah (Yahweh), he establishes His high moral attributes. But the name Elohim expresses God's creative and governing power, revealing God's omnipotence and sovereignty. From Genesis 1:1 to 2:4, Elohim is the only term used for God. In those verses, Elohim is used thirty-five times.

It is the Elohim who by His mighty power creates the vast universe; who speaks, and it is done. It is the Elohim who creates, and as Hebrews 11:3 says, "By faith, we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible." (Hebrews 11:3 NKJV)

It is this Elohim that Paul refers to in his discussion with Greek scholars on Mars Hill, saying that this "kyrios" ( which the Discovery Bible says is used supremely of Christ *the Lord*, the sovereign over all creation who is the supreme Creator) made the world (the cosmos) and all things. And by this very fact, He is the owner and ruler of heaven and earth.

His presence cannot be confined by space, and His power is greater than any human power. All nations are allowed to exist by His great will, power, and agency. Elohim is the name God chooses to reveal Himself as the Creator - bringing order out of chaos, light out of darkness, habitation out of desolation, and life in His image.

## **II. ELOHIM: The God of Covenant**

Arabic scholars suggest that Elohim is derived from the Arabic name for God, the word "Allah." Allah was a generic title for whatever god was considered the highest or most powerful god. The different Arab tribes were polytheistic. They used "Allah" to refer to the highest god of all their many gods. "Allah" was worshipped at the Kaa'ba in Mecca by Arabs long before the time of Mohammed. Allah was the name of the chief god among the 360 idols in the Kaaba before Mohammed made them become monotheists. Historians say that the moon god "Hubal" was the god Arabs prayed to at the Kaa'ba. Hubal and Allah are both terms used to identify the moon god.

The Kaa'ba is a shrine in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, often called "the black stone" and is the remaining structure of a mosque supposedly built by Abraham and Ishmael. The Great Islamic Mosque Masjid al-Haran, has been built around the Kaa'ba. In their prayers, these descendants of Ishmael would call upon this moon god by the name "Allah." Today, the name Allah has morphed into Islam's only god, and a Muslim is considered "one who submits to Allah."

The word "Islam" means "submission to the will of Allah." Followers of Islam are called Muslims. The term "Muslim" originally meant the strength of a desert warrior who, even when faced with impossible odds, would fight to the death for his tribe. (Dr. M. Baravmann, *The Spiritual Background of Early Islam*, E. J. Brill, Leiden, 1972)

However, "Allah" is not derived from the same word as "Elohim." According to the Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, "The source for the name Allah goes back to pre-Muslim times. "Allah" corresponded to the Babylonian god Baal, and

the Arabs knew of him long before Mohammed instituted worship of Allah as the supreme God. (*Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* (ed. Hastings), 1:326.)

Before Islam, the Arabs recognized many gods and goddesses. Each tribe had its own deity, and there were also nature deities. Allah was the god of the local Quraish tribe, which was Mohammed's tribe before he invented Islam to lead his people out of their polytheism.

Arab worshippers believed the moon god, "Allah," had three daughters who were intercessors for the people. Their names were Al-at, Al-Uzza, and Al-Manat. Al-Manat was Allah's first created daughter and became a co-ruler with Allah.

In his book, "Islam," George Braswell Jr. says Hubal was the chief God of the Kaaba and was above the other 360 deities. "A statue of the likeness of a man whose body was made of red precious stones and whose arms were made of gold represented Hubal, the moon god of the Kaaba." (Reference *Islam* George Braswell Jr.) When Mohammad instituted Islam and the worship of only one god, he chose the name Allah, the chief name of the god of his tribe.

Historical research shows that the Hebrew God "Elohim" and the Arab god "Allah" represent two completely different deities. The god of Ishmael was much different from the God of Isaac.

The Elohim has the power and right to establish absolute authority as the Creator and Ruler of the universe. As the Elohim, He makes a covenant with Abraham, and because there is none greater, He swears by Himself. "By myself, I have sworn."

In Genesis 17:1, God says, "I am the Almighty God [El-Shaddai]; walk before me, and be perfect." In verse 7, He says, "And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God (Elohim) to you and your descendants after you." ([Genesis 17:7 NKJV](#))

It is the Elohim who says to Noah, "The end of all flesh has come before me." But Elohim cannot completely destroy the work of His hands since He has made a covenant with Adam and Eve, so He continues, " But I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall go into the ark—you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you." ([Genesis 6:18 NKJV](#))

When Noah survives the flood, he sees a rainbow, and Elohim says, "The rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I will look on it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that *is* on the earth." And God (Elohim) said to Noah, "This *is* the sign of the covenant which I have established between Me and all flesh that *is* on the earth." ([Genesis 9:16-17 NKJV](#))

The Elohim remembers Abraham when He destroys the cities Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities of the plain but spares Lot for His covenant's sake. In Genesis 50, Joseph, on his deathbed, declares to his brethren: "I die; but *Elohim* will surely visit you, and bring you up out of this land unto the land which he sware to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob" (Genesis 50:24). Our God is the Elohim who keeps covenant and loving-kindness with His servants who walk before Him with all their heart (I Kings 8:23).

Over and over, God says to Israel, "I shall be to you Elohim, and you shall be to me, my people." The connection is clearly seen in God's covenant relationship to Israel. The prophet Jeremiah uses the name *Elohim* in connection with a new covenant, an everlasting covenant, which God will one day make with His people Israel when He puts His law and His love within their hearts. To Israel, in distress, Isaiah writes, "Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, said your Elohim" (Isaiah 40:1).

The eternal God covenants with himself for us keeps His covenant.

### **III. ELOHIM: The God of Relationship**

There is one other striking peculiarity in the name Elohim. Elohim is in the plural form. It has the usual Hebrew ending for all masculine nouns but is in the plural form. The Christian and Hebrew scholar, Dr. John Parkhurst, defined the word Elohim as a name usually given in the Scriptures to the Trinity by which they represent themselves as under the obligation of an oath to perform certain conditions. [Parkhurst, *Hebrew Lexicon*--see Elohim] He suggests that Elohim covenanted, not only with the creation but, as the Godhead, with themselves, concerning the creation.

In Psalm 110, David speaks of the coming Anointed One or the Messiah when he says, "The LORD (Yahweh) has sworn And will not relent, "You *are* a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek." ([Psalms 110:4 NKJV](#))

The Book of Hebrews confirms this Messiah is the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, the first and the last, the eternally begotten Son of God, the object of God's love before the foundation of the world (John 17:24); who shared God's glory before the world was (John 17:5). Colossians 1:16 tells us that "by Him, all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him." ([Colossians 1:16 NKJV](#))

But creation is the act of the Elohim. If Christ is the Creator of all things, Christ is in the Elohim. He is a member of the Godhead. In Genesis 1:3, we read that the spirit of the Elohim moved or brooded over the face of the waters. It means that the entire creation, animate and inanimate, was not only the work of the Elohim but the object of a covenant within the Elohim, guaranteeing its redemption and continued existence. It is pretty clear that the Elohim is a

plurality in unity. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are One as the Elohim.

The Godhead created a world and a people who were to have a special relationship with him because of his covenant with Himself. The Elohim agreed upon it before anything was ever created.

The name Elohim is a plural noun, yet accompanied by verbs and adjectives that are singular. In the very first verse of Genesis, the verb create is singular. Throughout the Bible, when the name Elohim is used, it is with a singular verb and singular adjectives. Dr. Parkhurst continues, "Accordingly Jehovah is at the beginning of creation called Elohim, which implies that the divine persons had sworn when they created."

This one Elohim says in Genesis 1:26, "Let us make man in our image," and in Genesis 3:22, He speaks of man becoming like one of us. In Genesis 11:7, when God inspects the tower of Babel, He says: "Let us go down and confound their language." In Genesis 35:7, Jacob builds an altar at Bethel, calling it El Beth-El, the God of the House of God, because there the Elohim revealed themselves to him. Ecclesiastes 12:1 is, "Remember the Creators "--plural, not singular. When Isaiah sees the sovereign Lord of the universe, the Jehovah of hosts, highly exalted upon His throne, he cries out with a threefold Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty. And that same One from the throne calls to the prophet, "Whom shall I send and who will go for us?"

Some object to the idea of the Trinity in the word Elohim. They say that the plural is only a plural of majesty like a King or Queen would say, "We instead of I – but meaning I." But the plural was not known then. No king of Israel spoke of himself as "we" or "us."

Others call it the plural of intensity and argue that the Hebrews often expressed a word in the plural to give it a stronger meaning--so blood, water, life are expressed in the plural. But as one writer points out, these arguments only favor the idea of a Trinity in the Elohim.

The use of the plural only implies that the word in the singular is not enough to describe all that is intended. Elohim, the Creator, the Sovereign Lord, the Omnipotent One, the One True God, reveals in this one name that he is not only a God of might and power but that he created all that there is for his own glory and majesty. He is not the moon god or any other part of His creation. Elohim has created us to glorify Him and enjoy His fellowship.

## **Conclusion**

Elohim is the God of relationship. He establishes covenant. And He redeems, sustains, and provides for every need of his creation. But what impresses me most is His promise that He will always be with us. It's a promise the Godhead made to themselves before He ever created us.

Why is that so important? Because a relationship requires two parties. Unfortunately, because of sin, we are covenant breakers. God cannot break the covenant He made with himself on our behalf. Even when we fail and sin, God remembers the terms of the covenant he made with himself, and He reaches down to us to redeem and renew and restore us to fellowship with the One who created us.

In the beginning, Elohim:

- The God of Might and Power
- The God of Greatness and Glory
- The Creator
- The Omnipotent
- The God of Covenant
- The One True God
- The Eternal Godhead of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

The God of Genesis is Elohim. No finite word can adequately convey the idea of the infinite personality or the unity of persons in the Godhead. Elohim in the plural definitely corresponds with the doctrine of the Trinity. There is a great blessing and comfort in this great name of God. Elohim is the God of supreme power, sovereignty, and glory, for "Thine [Elohim] is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever!" Elohim is the God of covenant relationship, which He is always faithful to keep. It is the Elohim who says to us, "I will be to you, Elohim, so that we can say, as David writes in Psalm 91:2, "My Elohim; in him will I trust."