

The Names God Calls Himself **A Series on the Names of God: Part 2**

When Moses met with God to write the book of Genesis (Ex 24:4; 1 Kings 2:3; Luke 24:27), he was there so long that the nation of Israel wasn't sure what became of him (Ex 32:1). From that very beginning, Moses records God as revealing different names for Himself to different people. In disclosing Himself in this personal manner, God made known that He was a God that valued human relationships.

Elohim (God)

The very first name God used to describe Himself was "elōhîm."

In the beginning God (**elōhîm**) created the heavens and the earth. (Gen 1:1)

Common to all ancient Semitic languages, "el" was a generic noun for god and sometimes the proper name for a god. It means "strong one." The plural form for "el" is "elōhîm;" the "-im" ending denotes the plural. When used with a verb in the singular, "elōhîm" is taken in the singular sense. There are a few examples of this in the Bible in which the noun "elōhîm" is used for a pagan god or goddess (Judg 11:24; 1 Kings 11:5; 2 Kings 1:2).

Do you not possess what Chemosh your god (**elōhîm**) gives you to possess? So whatever the Lord our God has driven out before us, we will possess it. (Judg 11:24)

When God calls Himself "elōhîm," in every instance, it is associated with a singular masculine verb. In using the plural form, God's name "elōhîm" produces an image of a mysterious Creator God who cannot be fully understood. It begs the question, what exactly about God is more than one?

Then God (**elōhîm**) said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." (Gen 1:26)

Here, as God applies "elōhîm" to Himself, He does not describe Himself as a group of gods. Instead, as a singular Being, God is describing His triune nature.

Jews do not recognize the triune nature of God, and instead understand this in the abstract sense as the "plural of majesty, honor, or fullness;" God is the God of gods. Christians, on the other hand, see the plural form as a literal attribution of His triune nature which was demonstrated by the active participation of both Jesus (John 1:1-3; Col 1:16) and the Holy Spirit (Gen 1:1-2) in the process of Creation.

Yehovah Elohim (Lord God)

In the second account of Creation, God calls Himself "Yēhovah 'elōhîm."

This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord (**Yēhovah**) God (**elōhîm**) made earth and heaven. (Gen 2:4)

One can only surmise why "Yēhovah" was added to the name "elōhîm," but as God gets more specific in His involvement with man's creation and provisions for his livelihood, He includes His "memorial name to all generations" (Ex 3:15). There is the implication that from the beginning, God preferred to be known as YHWY when dealing directly with man, and a distinction is being made: only the God of gods interacts with man.

On a more personal level, God uses this same name to indicate a possessive aspect to the relationship: I AM the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. I AM the Lord God of the Hebrews.

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God, furthermore, said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'The Lord (**Yĕhovah**), the God (**'elōhîm**) of your fathers, the God (**'elōhîm**) of Abraham, the God (**'elōhîm**) of Isaac, and the God (**'elōhîm**) of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations. Go and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, 'The Lord (**Yĕhovah**), the God (**'elōhîm**) of your fathers, the God (**'elōhîm**) of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, "I am indeed concerned about you and what has been done to you in Egypt."' (Ex 3:15-16)

They will pay heed to what you say; and you with the elders of Israel will come to the king of Egypt and you will say to him, 'The Lord (**Yĕhovah**), the God (**'elōhîm**) of the Hebrews, has met with us. So now, please, let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God.' (Ex 3:18)

El-Shaddai (God Almighty)

The first human beings that Moses records God introducing Himself to are the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Gen 17:1-2; 35:11; Ex 6:2-3).

Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty (**'el Shadday**);

Walk before Me, and be blameless.
I will establish My covenant between Me and you,
And I will multiply you exceedingly." (Gen 17:1-2)

El-Shaddai means "God of the Mountains" or "The Almighty God." It is the name of God that both Isaac and Jacob use when speaking to their sons (Gen 28:3; 48:3; 49:25). As the name became more widely known, others, including the pagan world, used it in the context of God's all powerful nature and Giver of life and death. Examples include the pagan prophet Balaam (Num 24:4, 16), the Jewess Naomi (Ruth 1:20-21), the suffering Job (Job 5:17; etc), the psalmists (Ps 68:14; 91:1) and the prophets (Is 13:6; Ezek 1:24; 10:5; Joel 1:15).

It is of interest to note that God mentioned to Moses, when introducing Himself to the Patriarchs, the exception of using His forever name YHWH (Ex 6:2-3).

God spoke further to Moses and said to him, "I am the Lord (**YHWH / Yĕhovah**); and I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God Almighty (**'el-Shadday**), but by My name, Lord (**YHWH / Yĕhovah**), I did not make Myself known to them. (Ex 6:2-3)

This is significant, because in two prior instances (Gen 12:8; 13:4), the Bible does not indicate the name of God that Abraham calls upon so one is left with the presumption that it was 'el-Shadday.

In another instance, God says to Abraham, "I am *the Lord (Yĕhovah) who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans*, to give you this land to possess it" (Gen 15:7). Based on Genesis 12:8, it appears that God did not want Abraham to know Him by His memorial name Yĕhovah. Instead God wanted Abraham to know that He was "the Lord who brought you out of Ur." With the sense of high respect, Abraham still includes Yĕhovah when he addresses God as Lord God ('Adonay Yĕhovah) (Gen 15:2, 8).

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Ei-Betel (God of Bethel)

In this unusual instance, it is the Angel of the Lord who introduces Himself as the God of Bethel to the patriarch Jacob.

Then the angel of God said to me in the dream, "Jacob," and I said, "Here I am." He said, "Lift up now your eyes and see that all the male goats which are mating are striped, speckled, and mottled; for I have seen all that Laban has been doing to you. I am the God ('**el**) of Bethel (**bêt'el**), where you anointed a pillar, where you made a vow to Me; now arise, leave this land, and return to the land of your birth." (Gen 31:11-13)

When Jacob receives a confirmation of the Abrahamic Covenant blessing through a dream, he memorializes the place, renames it Bethel (house of God) and makes a vow of commitment and tithe (Gen 28:10-22). In Genesis 31, the Angel of the Lord confirms His deity by revealing Jacob of His knowledge of Jacob's memorial pillar and vow.

Jacob would later be instructed by God to return to Bethel, build an alter, receive a blessing and reconfirm his new name Israel (God strives) (Gen 35:1-15; 32:27-29).

Yahweh-Mekaddesh (The Lord sanctifies)

Despite introducing Himself with His memorial name YHWH, God gives Himself a title that associates an attribute that He wants the nation of Israel to remember Him by.

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "But as for you, speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'You shall surely observe My sabbaths; for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the Lord (**Yĕhovah**) who sanctifies you (**qadash**).'" (Ex 31:12-13)

The main character of God is holiness, and He requires His people be sanctified.

Yahweh-Shammah (The Lord is there)

At the very end of his apocalyptic vision, Ezekiel records what God reveals about the future restoration of Jerusalem. While it has similarities to Revelation, it is uncertain if it is the same; nonetheless, God tells Ezekiel that Jerusalem will be renamed "The Lord is there."

The city shall be 18,000 cubits round about; and the name of the city from that day shall be, 'The Lord (**Yĕhovah**) is there (**shammah**).'" (Ezek 48:35)

The Alpha and The Omega

Accompanying John's opening statement to the seven churches, God introduces Himself as the eternal Being (of the past, present and future), the beginning and end as well as the first and last.

"I am the Alpha (**alpha**) and the Omega (**ō**)," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." (Rev 1:8)

References:

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