

The Names of God: Part 1

Why Study the Names of God?

1. To know a name implies a certain level of relationship.
2. Scriptures seem to place an emphasis on God's name: Exodus 9:16; Numbers 6:27; Psalm 91:14; Malachi 2:2; Malachi 4:2; Acts 9:15; Revelation 2:13; Revelation 3:8
 - a. How can we honor, fear, carry, hold fast to, and not deny God's name if we don't know it?
 - b. What does it mean to know God's name(s)?
3. Names Teach us About a Person/Being

Names & Titles of God in the Old Testament

1. Depending on the list, you can read of anywhere between a few to over 900 names of God.
2. Long lists included things like:
 - a. Titles and Descriptions
 - b. Messianic titles from both prophetic books and the New Testament
3. There are four predominant names/titles that serve as a basis for many of the others. This study will consider two (and their subsets)

Elohim (אֱלֹהִים)

1. "Elohim" is the very first name or title for God used in Scripture (Gen. 1:1).
2. Used roughly 2,600 times in the Old Testament.
3. The word itself has to do with majesty, greatness, or power.

"Any person characterized by greatness or power: mighty one, great one, judge" (**Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words**)

4. "Elohim" can refer to:
 - a. gods in general (Exodus 18:11; Deuteronomy 10:17)
 - i. "Dagon (1 Samuel 5:7)
 - ii. Chemos (Judges 11:24),
 - iii. Baal (1 Kings 18:24),
 - iv. Ashtoreth (1 Kings 11:33)
 - b. angelic beings (Psalm 97:7)
 - c. Even people in certain circumstances (Exodus 4:16; 1 Samuel 28:13)
5. Nearly 90% of the 2,600 uses are in reference to the one true God.
6. "Elohim" is a plural form of "El," but it is not simply used as a plural (gods instead of god).
 - a. While technically a plural noun, when referring to God, it is used with singular verbs
 - b. Genesis 1:1 "In the beginning, God (*Elohim, plural noun*) created (*singular verb*)..."
 - c. Two explanations or reasons:
 - i. This is a way of intensifying the name, or demonstrating greatness. God is singular, but using "elohim" denotes greatness

- ii. This could also be an indication of the nature of God as one god in three persons (Father, Son, Spirit).

El (אֱלֹהִים)

1. El is a generic term for deity
2. The word also can mean “strength” or “might,” (Genesis 3:29)
3. “El” can be used to refer to false or pagan gods (Exodus 15:11; Isaiah 43:10)
 - a. “El” was a common word in ancient eastern languages that were similar to Hebrew.
 - b. In the Canaanite, religion, “El” was a specific name for the highest god in the Canaanite pantheon and was the father of Ba’al (cf. Nelson Dictionary. Pg. 452).
 - c. This is evidence of a perversion of the truth over time. The Canaanites distorted who “El” was. It is not, as some argue, that Israel adopted and adapted Canaanite practices or terms.
4. “El” can be found in the names of many places and names
 - Bethel: House of God
 - Peniel: Face of God
 - Ishmael: God Hears
 - Israel: God Strives; or Strives with God
 - Gabriel: Man (or strong man) of God
 - Elijah: Yahweh is my God
 - Elisha: God is [my] salvation
5. Predominantly “El” refers to the one true God. However, it is often used with a description or as part of a fuller title.

El Elyon:

1. A combination of El (god) and Elyon (upper, highest, high) for “God Most High.” (Genesis 14:18-22)
 - a. God is the most high God—He is above all things and greater than all things. He is the supreme being

El Olam

1. Eternal, forever, everlasting | “Everlasting God” (Genesis 21:33; Isaiah 40:28)
 - a. God is truly eternal—a being with no beginning and no end. He is not constrained by time, but is in fact the creator of time.

El Shaddai

1. almighty | God Almighty (Genesis 17:1; Genesis 35:11)
 - a. God is all-powerful. His might is particularly seen in doing what we cannot do.

El Roi

1. “God who Sees” or “God who sees me” (Genesis 16:13)
 - a. Name Hagar ascribed to God when He spoke to her when she ran away from Sarai.
 - b. God is supreme, eternal, and all-powerful, and yet He sees us and our struggles!

El Qanna

1. Jealous God (Exodus 34:14; Deuteronomy 4:24)
 - a. God is supreme, all-powerful, everlasting, all-seeing, and even sees us and cares for us. But as God Most High, as God Almighty, He alone deserves our worship and adoration.

Conclusion

Most relationships begin with exchanging of names. As our relationship grows, a person's name becomes more meaningful and precious to us. God has given us His names—at least some of them. And He needs more than just a name. He is God. He is too big for one name. So He has given us many names. More importantly, God's names are not just titles of address—they are descriptions. And God is too big for one description. So, His many names help describe His nature and His character so that we don't just know what to call Him, but we know who He is.

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