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Lecture Series: The Doctrine of God
Lecture 7: “The Names of God”

THE NAMES OF GOD

In the Bible a person’s name is a description of his character. Likewise, the names of God in Scripture are various descriptions of his character. In a broad sense, then, God’s “name” is equal to all that the bible and creation tell us about God. To honor God’s name is to honor him (Matthew 6:9). The command, “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain” (Exodus 20:7) is a command that we not dishonor God’s reputation either by words that speak of him in a foolish or misleading way, or by actions that do not reflect his true character.

Primary Old Testament Names

Elohim - God of Creation (Genesis 1)

Jehovah – God of redemption and revelation (Exodus 3:14)

Adonai – Master (Exodus 4:10, 13)

Compound Old Testament Names

El Elyon – “the most high God” (Genesis 14:18)

El Olam – “the Everlasting God” (Genesis 21:33)

El Shaddai – “the Almighty God” (Genesis 17:1)

Jehovah Jireh – “the LORD will provide” (Genesis 22:14)

Jehovah Nissi – “the LORD our banner” (Exodus 17:8-15)

Jehovah Shalom – “the LORD our peace” (Judges 6:23-24)

Jehovah Sabbaoth – “the LORD of hosts” (I Samuel 1:3)

Jehovah Maccaddeshcem – “the LORD your sanctifier” (Exodus 31:13)

Jehovah Roi – “the LORD is my shepherd” (Psalm 23:1)

Jehovah Tsidkenu – “the LORD our righteousness” (Jeremiah 23:6)

Jehovah Shamma – “the LORD is there” (Ezekiel 48:35)

Jehovah Elohim Israel – “the LORD God of Israel” (Judges 5:3)

Jehovah Rapha – “the LORD that heals you” (Exodus 15:26)

Qadash Israel – “the Holy One of Israel” (Isaiah 1:14)

Each of these names of God are fully demonstrated and embodied in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Jehovah god of the Old Testament is the Lord Jesus Christ of the New Testament (John 10:30; John 14:9)

1. Elohim

This is the first name of God revealed in the Bible (Genesis 1:1). It is used about 2,570 times in the Old Testament and translated “God” in the English Bible. El (singular) Elohim (plural). It is used 2,310 times as a name for the true God.

Meaning

It comes from a root word, which means “to be strong” and suggests the power, authority and majesty of God as the creator and ruler of the universe who brought everything into existence out of nothing.

Usage

After the fall (Genesis 3) man departed more and more from God and the truth about Elohim was abused and turned into a lie (Romans 1:18-25). This name became a general title for God or god. The name of God was retained from his original revelation, but the nature of God was forgotten as the worship due to him alone was transferred to the sun, Moon, stars and even idols made by men’s hands. The name El became a general term or title for a deity in the ancient world.

The Apostle Paul used the name for God in Greek (theos) that the pagans in Athens were familiar with as a title for their gods and filled it with the truth about the nature of God which the term itself did not convey to their minds (Acts 17:23-31)

Plural form

The striking thing about this name for God is that it is in the plural form, yet it is accompanied by a singular verb. Genesis 1:1: “In the beginning God (Elohim, plural) created (“he created”, singular) the heavens and the earth.”

It has been the ancient belief that the Trinity is implied in this plural name Elohim.

Conclusion

There is blessing and comfort in this great name of God. It depicts the infinitely great and exalted one, who created the heavens and the earth and who preserves and governs every creature. “Those who know your name will put their trust in you” (Psalm 9:10).

2. Jehovah

This name first appears after the creation of man, in Genesis 2:4. The name Elohim emphasizes that God is the exalted creator and sustainer of the universe, while Jehovah emphasizes God's personal relationship with man and special care for him. This name is always used of God in His covenant with His people in redemption and personal revelation. It speaks of his "faithful presence" It occurs about 5,321 times in the Old Testament.

Translation

In the King James Version the Hebrew word Jehovah is translated "LORD" in capital letters to distinguish it from another Hebrew word "Adonai," also translated "Lord." The Hebrew word is transliterated "Jehovah" in the American Standard Version.

Pronunciation

The word Jehovah is actually an artificial English word put together from four Hebrew consonants, YHWH, and the vowels (a,o,a) from another name for God, Adonai. The Jews had a superstitious dread of pronouncing the name YHWH, so whenever they came to it they said "Adonai," meaning "Master." This custom sprang from a misinterpretation of Leviticus 24:16.

In the text of the Old Testament the vowels of Adonai (a, o, a) were placed under YHWH so that it came out YaHoWaH or Jehovah. We probably ought to pronounce it Yahweh.

Derivation and Meaning

The name Jehovah is derived from the Hebrew verb *hayah* "to be," or "to become." First person, "I am," third person, "he is."

In the Psalms it is sometimes shortened to Jah. We are familiar with it in the expression Hallelujah (i.e. "praise the LORD"). It is also found in compound names such as Elijah, which means "Jehovah is my God."

We can derive its meaning from Exodus 3:14 and its context, where God reveals himself to Moses as "I AM." There it implies his nearness and his power to redeem Israel out of Egypt. The root word conveys the idea of a continuous coming to be, of existence in motion, existence always making itself known in a process of becoming. G. Campbell Morgan said it refers to "the ever changeableness of the unchanging one." In short, the idea is of the unchanging, ever living God, who is personally concerned for his people and ready and willing to act on their behalf and meet their needs.

Application

Whatever man's need is, the LORD is able and willing to become to the soul that trusts in Him. As "I AM" he is the all-sufficient God who meets every need. All through the Old Testament, the LORD became and became and became whatever His people needed. Finally the Word became flesh. The LORD Jesus Christ is himself the great "I AM," the all-sufficient God who meets every need. All that I need, Jesus is! (Note how Jesus uses "I Am" in the Gospel of John).

As *Elohim*, Jesus Christ exercised Divine power

As *Jehovah*, Jesus Christ is "the same yesterday, today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8) ready to save to the uttermost those who come to God through him (Hebrews 7:25).

3. Adonai

Usage

This name occurs about 300 times in the Old Testament as a name for God, and is translated "Lord" with only the first letter a capital.

Used of men it occurs 215 times and is translated "master," "sir" and "lord." But for the most part, "master." E.g. Genesis 24 "my master Abraham."

Used of God it is always in the singular form, adon. Only of God is it in the plural, suggesting the Trinity.

Significance

The name Adonai, while translated "Lord," signifies ownership or mastership and indicates the truth that God is the owner of each member of the human family, and that He consequently claims the unrestricted obedience of all. Deuteronomy 10:17 "Lord of Lords," i.e. "master of masters."

Application

This name implies God's right as our Master to implicit obedience (John 13:13).

It also implies the servant's right to direction from his Master (Isaiah 6:8-11).

As believers, we are not our own; we have been bought with a price. We belong to God who is our Master. We are therefore to glorify God in our bodies, which belong to him (I Corinthians 6:19-20). "Lord (master) what will you have me to do?" (Acts 9:6).