

## ADONAI

THE NAMES OF GOD we have studied so far have been Elohim, translated “God” in our Bibles; Jehovah, translated “LORD”; and “El-Shaddai,” translated “God Almighty” or “Almighty God.” These names have related rather to the Person of God-the power and glory of His Being, as in Elohim; the expression of Himself as a God of righteousness, holiness, love and redemption, as in Jehovah; and as a beneficent and bountiful Bestower of powers, gifts, blessings, and fruitfulness for service, as seen in El-Shaddai. While these names do imply or demand a responsibility on the part of man to conform to the Being in whose image he is made, the name under consideration in this chapter makes a definite claim upon man’s obedience and service. The name Adonai is translated in our Bibles by the word Lord in small letters, only the first of which is a capital. Used as a name of God, Adonai occurs probably some 300 times in the Old Testament. It is significant that it is almost always in the plural and possessive, meaning my Lords’. It confirms the idea of a trinity as found also in the name Elohim. This is still further confirmed by the fact that the same word is used of men some 215 times and translated variously “master,” “sir,” and “lord,” but for the most part, “master,” as throughout Genesis 24, where Eliezer, the servant of Abraham, speaks of “my master Abraham,” and over and over again says, “Blessed be Jehovah God of my master Abraham.” It is important to notice, too, that the same word Adonai is translated a number of times by the word “owner.” But, used of men, it is always in the singular form, adon. Only of God is it in the plural. The suggestion of the Trinity in this name is still more strikingly confirmed by its use in Psalm 110, in these words: “The Lord said unto my Lord,” or “Jehovah said unto my Adonai. Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool.” The Lord Jesus in Matthew 22:41-45 (as also Peter, Acts 2:34, 35; and Hebrews 1:13; 10:12, 13) refers this striking passage to Himself. How significant then that David, speaking of but one member of the Trinity, should use here not the plural Adonai, but the singular form Adoni: “Jehovah said unto my Adoni,” that is to Christ, the second Person of the Trinity!

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.” The expression, “Lord of lords,” in Deuteronomy 10:17, could be rendered “Master of masters.” An illustration of this name as a claim upon man’s obedience and service is found in Malachi 1:6: “A son honoreth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is mine honor? And if I be a master, where is my fear?” saith Jehovah of hosts ...” And in Job 28:28 it is declared that the fear of Adonai (the Lord, the Master) is wisdom.

### **THE USE OF THE WORD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT**

The use of this name Adonai in the Old Testament plainly reveals the relationship which God sustains toward His creatures and what He expects of them. A glance at a good concordance will give all the instances in which the name occurs. Let us examine a few of them.

The first occasion of its use, as with the name El-Shaddai, is with Abraham in Genesis 15:2. In the first verse of this chapter it is written: “After these things” -that is, after his rescue of Lot and his military achievement of the defeat of the four kings and their armies, where it is revealed that Abraham himself was lord or master (adon) of a large establishment-“After these things the word of Jehovah came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.” Abram then makes his reply addressing God as Adonai-Jehovah-an acknowledgment that Jehovah is also Master. Certainly Abram understood what this relationship meant; perhaps better than we nowadays understand it, for those were days of slavery. Lordship meant complete possession on the one hand, and complete submission on the other. As already seen, Abraham himself sustained the relationship of master and lord over a very considerable number of souls; therefore in addressing Jehovah as Adonai he acknowledged God’s complete possession of and perfect right to all that he was and had.

But even Abraham, thousands of years ago, understood by this more than mere ownership, more than the expression and imposition of an arbitrary or capricious will. Even in those days the

relationship of master and slave was not altogether or necessarily an unmitigated evil. The purchased slave stood in a much nearer relationship to his lord than the hired servant, who was free to come and go as he might wish. In Israel, the hired servant who was a stranger might not eat of the Passover or the holy things of the master's house, but the purchased slave, as belonging to his master, and so a member of the family, possessed this privilege (Exod. 12:43-45; Lev. 22:10, 11). The slave had the right of the master's protection and help and direction. Nor was the relationship devoid of affection. In the absence of seed, a slave, Eliezer, is the heir to Abram's entire household. So the psalmist well puts it all when he says: "Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress; so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God ..." (123:2). "The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season" (Ps. 145:15). As Adonai, or Master or Lord, God says to Abraham: "Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward." He can depend upon the faithfulness of the Master. For if a human master can sustain relationships even of affection to a slave and be faithful in provision and protection, how much more the Jehovah-God who is Adonai also to His creatures.

There are many examples of the use of this name which well illustrate this truth: Moses, when commissioned to go to Egypt to deliver Israel, addresses God as Adonai, acknowledging thus God's right to his life and service when he replies: "O my Lord" (that is, Adonai), "I am not eloquent . . . I am slow of speech" (Exod. 4:10). And again he says after God's reply, "O my Lord [Adonai] send someone else." Then God's anger kindled against him, against a servant who seeks to evade his responsibility of carrying out the will of his rightful Lord. For God, who is never a capricious or unjust Master, does not ask what cannot be performed, and never requires a task for which He does not equip His servants. Thus He assures Moses that He will be his sufficiency for the task (Exod. 4:10).

As the eye of a servant looks to the master, so Joshua, in defeat and distress, looks for direction to the Lord God who is his Adonai. When Gideon is called to deliver the children of Israel from the Midianites, he asks: "O my Lord [Adonai], wherewith shall I save Israel? Behold my family

is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house" (Judges 6:15). Then God gives answer: "Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man." The name Adonai is found frequently on the lips of David, and in one especially significant passage in this connection (2 Sam. 7:18-20), it appears four times in three verses. To David, of humble origin, a shepherd lad, and now king of Israel, God comes and promises to establish his dynasty, his throne, forever. Overcome by this great promise, for he recognizes in it also the promise of Messiah who shall come from his loins, David, king and lord of God's people, calls God his Lord, coupling it with the name Jehovah. He acknowledges his humble origin, his own unworthiness, and the goodness and greatness of God the Adonai who has exalted him, and he says: "Who am I, O Adonai Jehovah" And what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto? . . . And what can David say more unto thee? For thou, Adonai Jehovah, knowest the servant."

The psalmists, too, make frequent use of the name in its proper significance. It is Jehovah, Adonai, whose name is so excellent in all the earth, who has put all things under His feet (Ps. 8). He is the Adonai of the whole earth (Ps. 97:5). The earth is hidden to tremble at the presence of the Adonai, its Lord (Ps. 114:7). Adonai is above all elohim or gods (Ps. 135:5). As Master or Lord, Adonai is besought to remember the reproach of His servant (Ps. 89:50). "My eyes are unto thee, O God, the Adonai" (Ps. 141:8) says the psalmist as of a servant to his Lord. And he asks Adonai, his Master, to take up his cause and defend him against his enemies (Ps. 109:21-28). The use of this name by Isaiah the prophet is especially significant. It is the vision of God as Adonai which started him out on his prophetic career. One of the most stirring portions of Scripture describes this vision. It was a time of national darkness, for Uzziah, Judah's great king, had died. Uzziah was the prophet's king, therefore his lord and master, and perhaps his hero too, in spite of his tragic end. It is then that the young man experiences one of the most solemn and significant visions of Scripture. In the sixth chapter he tells us, "In the year that King Uzziah (died) I saw the Lord" Adonai. His earthly lord and master had died, but what does that matter when the Lord of lords, the Adonai in the heavens, lives and reigns. This Adonai is seated upon a throne too, but high and lifted up, above all earthly lords and monarchs, for this Adonai is also Jehovah of hosts, whose train fills the Temple and whose glory covers the whole earth. This

Adonai is surrounded by the fiery seraphim, who not only cover their eyes before their thrice holy Lord, but with their wings are ready instantly to do His bidding. Then after the prophet's confession and cleansing in proportion for his service, he hears a voice saying: "Whom shall I send and who will go for us?" "This call for service comes from Adonai, for this is the name used in verse 8.

So prophet after prophet is called and commissioned for service by Adonai, the Lord who claims obedience and service. The shrinking Jeremiah, ordained from before his birth to be a prophet, answers the call to service by saying, somewhat like Moses: "Ah, Adonai Jehovah! Behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child" (Jer. 1 :6). As with Moses, the Lord of life and service enables His servants to carry out His commands when they yield themselves to Him and obey. He touches the lips of Jeremiah, as of Isaiah, and promises His presence and protection.

In the prophecy of Ezekiel the name Adonai Jehovah occurs some 200 times. It has added significance here in that the name occurs in connection with prophecies not only concerning Israel but concerning the nations round about. It reveals that Adonai claims lordship not only over Israel but, whether they will or not, over all the peoples of the earth. It is, "Thus saith Jehovah who is Adonai," and again, "Ye shall know," and "They shall know that I am Adonai Jehovah" (Ezek. 13:'), 23:49; 24:24; 28:24; 29:16).

It is Adonai Jehovah who commands the four winds to breathe upon the dry bones and make them live (Ezek. 37:9).

The use of this name is especially notable in Daniel 9 where it occurs ten times in seventeen verses. Daniel is living in the land of Israel's captivity, whose king is lord or adon over many nations; but only Jehovah is the Adonai of Daniel and his people. This is a chapter of confession of Israel's faithlessness as God's servant, hence Daniel addresses God as Adonai in his prayer for forgiveness and restoration of the people and Jerusalem. "O Adonai," he cries, "the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments; we have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and

have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments” (9:4, 5). Since it is God as Lord and Master whose will they have disobeyed, it is He to whom they must address their prayer for forgiveness, for acceptance, for restoration. Thus it is in verse 19, “O Adonai, hear; O Adonai, forgive; O Adonai, hearken and do; defer not, for thine own sake, O my God ...” So throughout the Old Testament those who know God as Adonai acknowledge themselves as servants: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are thus spoken of (Exod. 32:13). Over and over again we read, “Moses, my servant,” and “Moses, the servant of the Lord.” In the same significant passage in which he addresses God as Adonai, a number of times David the king speaks of himself as “thy servant.” “I am thy servant; give me understanding,” says the psalmist (Ps. 119:125). The word translated servant is also slave. Thus prophets, priests, kings, all God’s people acknowledged themselves His servants, recognizing His right to command and dispose of them according to His will as the Lord of their lives. It is this which is suggested by the name Lord or Adonai.

### **ITS USE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**

The meaning of Adonai as Lord and Master is carried over into the New Testament. Between two and three centuries before Christ the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek by a group of Jewish translators at Alexandria in Egypt. It is interesting to note that they translated the word Adonai in Genesis 15:2 as “Master.” In the Greek it is “Despot.”

In the New Testament, too, it is the word used of men as lord and master in relationship to servants. It is used hundreds of times of the Lord Jesus Himself.

We are said to be not our own; we have been bought with a price. We belong to God who is our Lord and Master. We are therefore bidden to glorify God in body and spirit, which are His (I Cor. 6:19, 20). Many Scriptures set forth this relationship to God as His servants. We are exhorted to present our bodies as a living sacrifice to God, holy, and acceptable, and this as our reasonable service (Rom. 12:1) . We are to understand what is the will of the Lord-our Adonai (Eph. 5:17).

And Peter calls us children of obedience to Him who has called us (I Peter 1:14, 15); and He is the Master who has bought us (2 Peter 2:1).

A striking illustration of this is found in the life of the apostle Paul. He felt himself to be a zealous servant of the Lord God of his fathers even in his first opposition to and persecution of the Church, believing he was doing God great service. The first words that fall from his lips on his conversion are: “Lord [Master], what wilt thou have me to do?” (Acts 9:6). Like a good servant, he tells us that when it pleased God to reveal His Son in him that he might preach Him among the nations, “immediately he conferred not with flesh and blood,” but he went away in complete surrender to be alone with his Lord to prepare himself as quickly as possible to do His will (Gal. 1:16, 17). He seems to take even a little pride in emphasizing the Lordship of Jesus Christ by calling himself His bondservant or slave. As such he bore in his body the marks of his Lord Jesus (Gal. 6:17). “Christ Jesus, my Lord [my Master, my Adonai], counted me faithful, appointing me to his service” (I Tim. 1:12). “I count not my life dear to myself so that I may accomplish my course, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus” (Acts 20:24). Whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s (the Master’s).

As in the Old Testament, so in the New, God as Lord is represented as the One who bestows gifts upon and equips His servants for their service. He made some apostles, others prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers—all for the accomplishment of His purpose and will in the perfecting of the saints, the work of the ministry, and the edifying of the Body of Christ (Eph. 4:11, 12). Having these gifts from our Lord, Paul exhorts us, let us wait on them and minister them, as faithful servants, with diligence (Rom. 12:6-8). God, as Lord, is said to protect, to provide for and sustain His servants. In the Old Testament, Adonai says to Abram, “I am thy shield.” He is a rock, a fortress, a deliverer. Luke says of Paul, in great danger: “The Lord stood by him and said, Be of good cheer” (Acts 23:11). Again: “The Lord stood with me and strengthened me” (II Tim. 4:17). The Lord delivers His servants from every evil (II Tim. 4:18). The grace of the Lord is continually with His servants. It is the Lord who says to Paul, “My grace is sufficient for thee” (II Cor. 12:9). The Lord directs the service of His servants, opening doors (II Cor. 2:12), and closing

them, too (Acts 16:6). We are exhorted to abound in the work of the Lord for such work is never in vain (I Cor. 15:58).

God's requirements of service and usefulness are clearly set forth in the parables of the Lord Jesus, especially in the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14-30), and the parable of the pounds (Luke 19:11-27). As Lord, He rewards the faithfulness of His servants and punishes their lack of it. The reward is far more than commensurate with the service rendered. In the parables, the reward is represented in terms of the material, but the real reward is in the realm of the spiritual, of which the material is only a feeble analogy. Even so, the greatness of our reward for faithfulness as servants lies in our increasing apprehension and possession of our Lord Himself. Adonai said to Abram, "I am thy exceeding great reward." Frequently in the Old Testament the Lord is said to be the inheritance, the portion and possession of His people (Num. 18:20; Ps. 73:26; 16:5; Ezek. 44:27, 28). So Christ our Lord gave Himself for us and to us. If we are His, He is ours, and He is ours in proportion as we are His.

Apart from this, however, there is a day of reckoning for His servants. In the Old Testament, Adonai renders to every man according to his work (Ps. 62:12). Every servant's work is to be made manifest. The test of fire will prove its worth. If it stands the test, it will receive a reward. If not, it will be lost (I Cor. 3:13-15). "To whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required: and to whom they commit much, of him will they ask the more" (Luke 12:48, A.S.V.) "It is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful" (I Cor. 4:2, A.S.V.).

But since God is Lord of all men whether they acknowledge Him or not, there is a day of reckoning for all men apart from His servants. Jeremiah calls it the day of Adonai, Jehovah of hosts (46:10). It is a day of vengeance, for Adonai the Lord will demand a reckoning from all His creatures. But, thank God that the Lord Jesus Christ will be deliverance and surety in that day for all who have believed on and served Him.

It is the Lord Jesus Christ, however, who, though He is our Lord and Master, is the supreme



example of the true and faithful servant. He is the ideal servant. It is in Him we realize the full import and blessedness of the relationship that exists between ourselves and God as servant to a Lord. He is revealed in the Old Testament as the Servant. "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him" (Isa. 42:1). "He shall not fail" (v. 4). "I the Lord ... will hold thine hand, and will keep thee ..." (v. 6). So the New Testament tells us He took the form of a servant-the same word Paul uses of himself, a bondservant, a slave. He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death (Phil. 2:7, 8). "Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God" (Heb. 10:7). This is in fulfillment of Psalm 40:6-8 where He is spoken of as the slave whose ear is bored, because he loves his master and elects to serve him forever (Exod. 21:6). He said of Himself, "I do always those things that please him" (John 8:29). "Even Christ pleased not himself," says Paul (Rom. 15:3). "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28). "I am among you as he that serveth" (Luke 22:27). As a servant He also suffered, being made perfect through sufferings (Heb. 2:10). In that wonderful thirteenth chapter of John, He sets Himself forth as our Example as a servant. "Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well, for so I am" (v. 13). "I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord ..." (vv. 15, 16). He exhorted to faithful service to the end, and spoke of the blessedness of those servants whom the Lord when He comes will find faithful and watching (Luke 12:36, 37).

To be servant of the Lord is the greatest liberty and joy of all. Man needs lordship. With faculties and judgments impaired, distorted by sin, original and personal, he needs direction, guidance, authority in this world. Man is born to worship and serve. If he does not serve God, then directly or indirectly he serves the Devil, the usurper of authority. But no man, as our Lord said, can serve two masters-that is, God and the Devil at the same time. "Know ye not," says Paul, "that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" (Rom. 6:16). To be subject to Satan is to be abject. His lordship makes service servile. He has made service degraded and a badge of inferiority. Christ, our Lord, Himself the ideal servant, has invested service with dignity, nobility, liberty,

joy. “For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord’s freeman” (1 Cor. 7:22). To be the servant of God is eternal life (Rom. 6:22). And the faithful servant of the Lord will one day hear those joyful words from the lips of the Lord: “Well done, good and faithful servant . . . enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”

1 Girdlesnone, Old Testament Synonyms, p. 59