

PRONUNCIATION OF NAMES OF GOD

Elohim	el-lo-heem'
Jehovah	je-ho'-vah
Adon ai	a-do-ni'
El-Shaddai	el shad-di'
Jehovah-jireh	je-ho'-vah yeer'-eh
Jehovah-rophe	je-ho'-vah ro'-phay
Jehovah-nissi	je-ho'-vah nis-see
Jehovah-M'Kaddesh	je-ho'-vah m'-kad'-desh
Jehovah-shalom	je-ho'-vah shal-lom'
Jehovah-tsidkenu	je-ho'-vah tsid-kay'-noo
Jehovah-rohi	je-ho'-vah ro'-ee
Jehovah-shammah	je-ho'-vah sham'-mah

INTRODUCTION

THE CHAPTERS contained in this volume were given originally as a course in the Radio School of the Bible over WMBI, Chicago. A number of requests for their appearance in a more permanent form, and the fact that comparatively little is written upon a subject worthy of more interest and attention, have led to their publication.

It has been the writer's purpose to show not only the significance of the names of God in the Old Testament, but that they find their complement and fulfillment in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ in the New-He who is the effulgence of the glory and the image of the substance of Jehovah, and in whom "dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily."

The writer acknowledges a measure of indebtedness to such works as those of Webb-Peploe, Andrew Jukes, R. B. Girdlestone, and Parkhurst's Hebrew Lexicon.

The Scripture quotations are from the King James Version and the American Standard Version (A.S.V.), while some are free translations from the Hebrew.

This little volume goes forth with the hope and prayer that we may better know Him whose name is above every name, and that some may find in Him that name apart from which "there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."

THE FIRST QUESTION in some of our catechisms is, "What is the chief end of man?" and the answer is, "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever." But we will experience God in such fashion we will glorify Him and enjoy Him-only in proportion as we know Him. The knowledge of God is more essential for the Christian, and indeed for all the world, than the knowledge of anything else-yes, of all things together. The prayer of the Lord Jesus for His disciples in John 17:3 was: "And this is life eternal that they should know thee the only true God, and him whom thou didst send, even Jesus Christ" (A.S.V.). And speaking of this, Christ, our Jehovah-Jesus, Paul sums up in Philippians 3:10 the great goal of his life: "That I may know him."

"I suppose if sin had not entered the world," says one writer, "the acquisition of the knowledge of God would have been the high occupation of man forever and ever." It is for a lack of knowledge of God that the prophet Hosea informs his people they are destroyed. And it is from the lack of knowledge of God that many are without spiritual power or life. There is little real knowledge in these days of the one, true God.

There are many ways, of course, in which we may study God. The God who of old time spoke, "unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken to us in his Son," the epistle to the Hebrews tells us. And this Son, Jesus Christ, while on earth said in the great discourse and prayer with God: "I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world .. ." (John 17:6). "And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them" (John 17:26).

True, it is in the face of Jesus Christ we best see the glory of God; yet while we are in the flesh we can only know in part at most. And it behooves us to know all we can learn of God. All the Scriptures are profitable to us for instruction and edification, but perhaps not very many people know much about the person of God as revealed in His names. Surely a study of these names should be a most profitable way of increasing that knowledge.

When Moses received a commission from God to go to His oppressed people in Egypt and deliver them from bondage, he said: "When I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them?" (Exod. 3:13).

Now the word God or even Lord, as we see it in our English Bibles, conveys little more to us than the designation of the Supreme Being and Sovereign of the universe. It tells little about His character and ways. Indeed we cannot say all that the mysterious word God means to us until we know more about Him. And we can know little of what the word God means until we go to the language from which the word God is translated, the language which is the first written record of the revelation of Himself, the language in which He spoke to Moses and the prophets.

Missionaries and translators have always had difficulty in finding a suitable word for the Hebrew word we translate God. Those who have attempted to translate this word into Chinese, for instance, have always been divided and still are as to which word is best. One of the greatest of these translations preferred a word which means "Lord of Heaven."

Now a name in the Old Testament was often an indication of a person's character or of some peculiar quality. But what one name could be adequate to God's greatness? After all, as one writer declares, a name imposes some limitation. It means that an object or person is this and not that, is here and not there. And if the Heaven of heavens cannot contain God, how can a name describe Him? What a request of Moses, then, that was -that the infinite God should reveal Himself to finite man by any one name! We can hardly understand or appreciate Moses himself unless we see him in his many sided character of learned man and shepherd, leader and legislator, soldier and statesman, impulsive, yet meekest of men. We can know David, too, not only as shepherd, warrior, and king, but also as a prophet, a poet, and musician.

Even so, the Old Testament contains a number of names and compound names for God which reveal Him in some aspect of His character and dealings with mankind. It is our purpose in this series of studies to examine these names and their meanings, their significance for ourselves as

well as for those of old.

As one would expect, the opening statement of the Scriptures contains the name God. "In the beginning God!" The Hebrew word from which this word God is translated is Elohim. While not the most frequently occurring word for the Deity, it occurs 2,570 times. The one which occurs most frequently is the word in the King James Version translated Lord, and in the American Standard Version, Jehovah.

Elohim occurs in the first chapter of Genesis thirtytwo times. After that, the name Jehovah appears as well as Elohim; and in many places a combination of the two-Jehovah-Elohim. As far back as the twelfth century students noticed that these different names were used in the Bible, but thought little of it until about the eighteenth century when a French physician thought he discovered the reason for the use of different names of God. He said that the Book of Genesis (especially) was based on two other documents, one written by a man who had apparently known God only as Elohim-this was called the Elohistic document-and the other written by a man who had known God only by the name Jehovah-this was called the Jehovistic document.

Scholars pursued this theory until they thought there had originally been five or six documents, and even many fragments of documents all pieced and fitted together by a later editor, and then altered and added to by still later editors so that some of the stories we now read in Genesis and other books were made up of parts of stories from various documents and fragments. Moses was denied authorship of most of the Pentateuch. The theory was carried to such lengths of absurdity that it was far more difficult to believe than the simple, plain declaration of the Bible itself that Moses wrote these things. And indeed who, of all people, could have been in a better position and better able to write them than he? One can only think of many of these scholars that much learning hath made them mad. The point is that they could see no other basis, no other significance for the use of different names for God in the Old Testament than a literary basis-a literary significance which is no significance at all for the spiritual mind. There is a spiritual significance in the use of these different names. It is much more "rational" to believe that the great and infinite and eternal God has given us these different names to express different aspects

of His being and the different relationships He sustains to His creatures.

THE MEANING OF THE WORD

In order to gain some idea of the meaning of this name of God, Elohim, we must examine its origin and note how, generally, it is used. There is some difference of opinion as to the root from which Elohim is derived. Some hold to the view that it is derived from the shorter word El, which means mighty, strong, prominent. This word El itself is translated "God" some 250 times and frequently in circumstances which especially indicate the great power of God. For instance, in Numbers 23:22 God is spoken of as the El who brought Israel up out of Egypt-"he hath as it were the strength of an unicorn" (wild ox). The Scriptures make very much of God's mighty arm in that great deliverance. So in the next verse follows: "it shall be said of Jacob and Israel, what bath God [El] wrought."

In Deuteronomy 10:17 we read that "Jehovah your Elohim is God of gods, and Lord of lords, the God or El who is great, mighty, and dreadful." It is this word El which is used in that great name Almighty God, the name under which God made great and mighty promises to Abraham and to Jacob (Gen. 17: 1; 35: 11) . It is also one of the names given to that promised Son and Messiah of Isaiah 9:6, 7 God, the Mighty.

Thus, from this derivation, Elohim may be said to express the general idea of greatness and glory. In the name Jehovah, as we shall see more fully, are represented those high moral attributes of God which are displayed only to rational creatures. The name Elohim, however, contains the idea of creative and governing power, of omnipotence and sovereignty. This is clearly indicated by the fact that from Genesis I: 1 to 2:4 the word Elohim alone is used, and that thirty-five times. It is the Elohim who by His mighty power creates the vast universe; who says, and it is done; who brings into being what was not; by whose word the worlds were framed so that things which are seen were not made of the things which do appear (Heb. 11-:3). It is this Elohim with whose Greek equivalent Paul confronts the philosophers on Mars' hill saying that He made the world (cosmos) and all things, and by this very fact is constituted possessor and ruler of heaven and

earth; whose presence cannot be confined by space; whose power doesn't need man's aid, for through His great will and power and agency all things and nations have their very being.

It is most appropriate that by this name God should reveal Himself-bringing cosmos out of chaos, light out of darkness, habitation out of desolation, and life in His image.

There is another word from which some say Elohim is derived. It is Alah, which is said to mean to declare or to swear. Thus it is said to imply a covenant relationship. Before examining this derivation, however, it may be well to say that in either case, whether El or Alah, the idea of omnipotence in God is expressed. To make a covenant implies the power and right to do so, and it establishes the fact of "absolute authority in the Creator and Ruler of the universe." So the Elohim is seen making a covenant with Abraham, and because there is none greater He swears by Himself. "I myself I have sworn." In Genesis 17 we see perhaps a combination of both of these derivations. In verse 1 we have: "I am the Almighty God [El-Shaddai]; walk before me, and be thou perfect"; in verse 7: "I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be to thee Elohim and to thy seed after thee" that is, to be with them in covenant relationship.

It is the Elohim who says to Noah, "The end of all flesh is come before me." But He cannot completely destroy the work of His hands concerning which He has made a covenant and so He continues: "But with thee will I establish my covenant" (Gen. 6:18). "And the how shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh . . . and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh" (Gen. 9:16, 15).

The Elohim remembers Abraham when He destroys the cities of the plain and for His covenant's sake spares Lot. 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 swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob" (Gen. 50:24). He is the Elohim who keeps covenant and lovingkindness with His servants who walk before Him with all their heart (I Kings 8:23).

With regard to Israel, over and over again it is written: "I shall be unto you for Elohim and ye

shall be unto me for a people." The covenant element in this name is clearly seen because of God's covenant relationship to Israel, and this is especially brought out in such a passage as Jeremiah 31:33 and 32:40, where the name Elohim is used in connection with that new covenant, an everlasting covenant which God will one day make with His people Israel when He will put His law and His fear within their hearts.

To Israel in distress comes the word: "Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, said your Elohim" (Isa. 40:1) . For the eternal God who covenants for and with them and us will keep His covenant.

THE PLURAL FORM

There is one other striking peculiarity in the name Elohim. It is in the plural. It has the usual Hebrew ending for all masculine nouns in the plural. A devout saint and Hebrew scholar of two centuries ago, Dr. Parkhurst,¹ defined the word Elohim as a name usually given in the Scriptures to the ever blessed Trinity by which they represent themselves as under the obligation of an oath to perform certain conditions. According to this definition the Elohim covenanted not only with the creation but, as the Godhead, within itself, concerning the creation. This is seen from Psalm 110, where David says concerning his Lord, the coming anointed One or Messiah: "The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." This is, of course, as the Book of Hebrews confirms, 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 or in Him were all things created. But creation is the act of the Elohim. Therefore, Christ is in the Elohim or Godhead. Then even in Genesis 1:3 we read that the spirit of the Elohim moved or brooded over the face of the waters. The entire creation, animate and inanimate, was, then, not only the work of the Elohim, but the object of a covenant within the Elohim guaranteeing its redemption and perpetuation. It is quite clear that the Elohim is a plurality in unity. So, Dr. Parkhurst continues: "Accordingly Jehovah is at the beginning of creation called Elohim, which implies that the divine persons had sworn when they created."²

It is significant that although plural in form it is constantly accompanied by verbs and adjectives in the singular. In the very first verse of Genesis the verb create is singular, and so all through the chapter and indeed through the Bible. In many places (as in Deut. 32:39; Isa. 45:5, 22, etc.) we find singular pronouns. "I am Elohim and there is no Elohim beside me." Other places in the Scriptures (11 Kings 19:4, 16; Ps. 7:9; 57:2, etc.) use adjectives in the singular with Elohim. In contrast with this, when the word *elohim* is used of heathen gods, plural adjectives are used, as in I Samuel 4:8, etc. Then again this one *Elohim* speaks of Himself as Us, as in Genesis 1 :26, "Let us make man in our image"; in Genesis 3:22, which speaks of man becoming like one of us; in 11 :7 God 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 rather, "Remember thy Creators"-plural, not singular. To the sovereign Lord of the universe, the Jehovah of hosts, whom Isaiah saw exalted high upon a throne, is ascribed the threefold Holy, and that same One from the throne calls to the prophet, "Whom shall I send and who will go for us?" So instances could be multiplied.

There are some who object to the idea of the Trinity in the word Elohim, and it is only fair to say that some conservative scholars as well as liberal and critical would not agree with it, among them John Calvin. They say that the plural is only a plural of majesty such as used by rulers and kings. But such use of the plural was not known then. We find no king of Israel speaking of him-self as "we" and "us." Besides, the singular pronoun is so often used with Elohim. To be consistent with that view we should always find not "I am your Elohim," as we do find, but "We are your Elohim."³

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,⁴ these arguments only favor the idea of a Trinity in the Elohim. The use of the plural only implies (even in the plural of majesty) "that the word in the singular is not full enough to set forth all that is intended." With Elohim the plural form teaches us that no finite word can adequately convey the idea of the infinite personality or the unity of persons in the Godhead. Certainly the use of this word in the plural is wonderfully consistent with that great and precious

doctrine of the Trinity, and its use as already shown in the Old Testament surely must confirm that view.

There is blessing and comfort in this great name of God signifying supreme power, sovereignty, and glory on the one hand, for "thine [Elohim] is the power and the kingdom and the glory"; and on the other hand signifying a covenant relationship which He is ever faithful to keep. Thus He says to us, "I will be to you a God" (Elohim), and we may say, "My God [Elohim]; in him will I trust" (Ps. 91 :2).

1 Parkhurst, Hebrew Lexicon-See Elohim

2 Ibid.

3 Girdlesnone, Old Testament Synonyms, p. 39.

4 Ibid.