

**Series: The Name of God #1652**

**Title: Various Scriptures**  
***El, Elohim***

Thank you for joining me today from wherever you are and by however you listen as we meet together coast-to-coast here in the United States and all the way around the world. We continue now in our series by the title *The Name of God* in which we are identifying the names the Bible gives us for God. And thus far I have given an introduction in which I raised three points for your consideration. Our first point is that only God can name Himself. Our second point is that when God does name Himself He does so in human language. We talked about how the Bible uses anthropomorphic language to help us understand God. And our third point is that we must avoid the temptation to over-emphasize one of God's attributes against all the other attributes in His divine being. Name God we must, but we must also be careful *how* we name Him.

And for those of you thinking, "OK, Swallow, we got it. Now get on with the names please!" We *will* get onto the names today, but I do want us to take these insights along with us on our journey. We will find application of these in naming God. Also, up front, I want you to know that we do not have time to cover every single name of God given to us in the Old and New Testaments. I have chosen to be selective so that if one of the names of God that has interested you is not discussed, write to me and ask about it. I will write back with some insights for you to consider.

The first name we will explore is El (spelled E-L in English) and its various forms, such as Eloah, Elohim, El Shaddai, and El Elyon. This is the most simple name by which God is named in the Old Testament and it has the sense of being first. The Hebrew name El tells us that the One True and Living God is supreme power, strength, and might. He is the exalted One. Creator of heaven and earth and the Almighty. We really should not miss Elohim because this name is used for God in the very first verse of the very first chapter in the very first Book of the Bible. Genesis chapter 1 and verse 1 reads, **"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."** The name God in Hebrew is Elohim. And Elohim is commonly used, more than two thousand times in the Old Testament, so we must grapple with its meaning.

It is *very* intriguing that God chose to use His name Elohim here in Genesis 1.1. Why? Because El (the root of Elohim) is a name that God goes by, but it is not really His proper name. The reason is that Elohim is also used in the Scripture for gods (small g, meaning pagan gods and s, meaning plural, multiple gods). Let me give you two examples. We will read Exodus chapter 12, verse 12 in a moment. A word on context: this is when God is giving Moses instructions regarding the Passover and the Passover lamb. And in the twelfth verse of the twelfth chapter of Exodus God says, **"For I will go through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments—I am the Lord."** The word "gods," "all the gods of Egypt" – that is the word Elohim. Exodus 12.12.

And now let's turn ahead to another book in the Pentateuch, Deuteronomy, and chapter 4. The context here is that Moses is reminding the people of God's commandments for them and he is warning the Israelites to obey God or the Lord will discipline them and remove them from the land to which they are going to possess and God's people will wind up scattered among the surrounding pagan nations. And in verse 28 of this fourth chapter of Deuteronomy we read this, **"There you will serve gods, the work of man's hands, wood and stone, which neither see nor hear nor eat nor smell."** That word for "gods" (small g, plural s), that is the word Elohim. Deuteronomy 4.28.

Here is my question: if Elohim is used for both *The God* (Genesis 1.1 and other passages) and gods (Exodus 12.12, Deuteronomy 4.28, and other passages) why is this God's name in the very first sentence of our Bible? Actually, we can ask an even broader question: how is it that Elohim can even be *both* a name for *The God* (capital G) and at the same time a name for the gods (small g) and idols? Doesn't this seem odd? I think it does. And it may even seem confusing, but not if you understand that God accommodates Himself to us, that He speaks in a language we can understand, that (point two of my introduction) God speaks in human language.

And the human language in which He has chosen to communicate Himself throughout much of the Old Testament period is a Canaanite dialect that eventually becomes biblical Hebrew! And this leads us to learn something about the Canaanites, their language, their religion, and the use of their language in their religion. Let's do that. And you will remember that Canaan was first a man, the grandson of Noah. And God cursed Canaan because his father had witnessed the nakedness of Noah. So Canaan is a cursed man and he becomes the father of the Canaanites. And it is the Canaanite people who occupy the land God has promised to His people, the Israelites. "The land of Canaan" will ring out in your mind about now if you know the Bible. Listen to a few verses of Scripture to solidify in your mind how entrenched the Canaanites and associated peoples were.

I am reading Genesis chapter 10 and verse 19, "**The territory of the Canaanite extended from Sidon as you go toward Gerar, as far as Gaza; as you go toward Sodom and Gomorrah and Admah and Zeboiim, as far as Lasha.**" Notice how the territory of the Canaanite covers what is the Promised Land. And then let me move way ahead in history to three texts that highlight how entrenched the Canaanites were as a people, a religion, a nation, and a country. Joshua 5, verse 1, as Israel enters their land, "**Now it came about when all the kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan to the west, and all the kings of the Canaanites who were by the sea, heard how the Lord had dried up the waters of the Jordan before the sons of Israel until they had crossed, that their hearts melted, and there was no spirit in them any longer because of the sons of Israel.**" A note here, the Amorites are essentially interchangeable with the Canaanites. Canaanites are broadly defined ethnically as Amorites. Both refer to the general population of the Holy Land. And here, the Canaanites and Amorites have a *big* problem. The Israelites are trouncing through the Jordan River right into *their* land!

Joshua 11, verses 3-5, "**The Canaanite on the east and on the west, and the Amorite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Jebusite in the hill country, and the Hivite at the foot of Hermon in the land of Mizpeh. <sup>4</sup>They came out, they and all their armies with them, as many people as the sand that is on the seashore, with very many horses and chariots. <sup>5</sup>So all of these kings having agreed to meet, came and encamped together at the waters...to fight against Israel.**" Here again we have the pagan peoples, the Canaanites most prominent among them, living in the land Israel has come to conquer. And finally, Judges 4, verses 23 and 24, "**So God subdued on that day Jabin the king of Canaan before the sons of Israel. <sup>24</sup>The hand of the sons of Israel pressed heavier and heavier upon Jabin the king of Canaan, until they had destroyed Jabin the king of Canaan.**"

The point I am making in sharing these Scriptures with you is that the Canaanites are well entrenched. They are a well populated people, and they have a culture, a language, and a religion. Their god is *not* the God of the Hebrews, but they do worship a god and the name they gave this god was...*El*. Actually, the Canaanites worshiped a pantheon of gods and goddesses of which the chief god, the god of all gods and goddesses was El. That's right. El, as in Elohim. El is *both* a name for *The God* of the Bible and the name of the chief god, the high god of the Canaanites. That is why in the Bible, Elohim is used for gods (as we have seen).

And a good question to ask about now, in fact a question you might have is: how do we know the Canaanites worshiped a god called El? To answer this, we have to access the discipline of archaeology and a stunning find! And we will talk about this next time. We do not have enough time now to delve into this, but I trust I have properly whet your appetite. To love the Lord our God means that we love Him with our whole minds, and so I hope that you will bring your mind to the study of the Bible as it interacts with the history, language, religion, culture, and archaeological discoveries of ancient peoples. The Bible is written in a certain context and we dare not miss it.

Now, do not lose the plot. Remember what we are doing. We have before us the name of God that is El, specifically the plural form Elohim (from Genesis 1 and other texts), and we want to understand what this name means. To do that, we have to explore the roots of El, which is used more broadly. So stick with us and come back next time, and every time we meet, as we continue to discover who God Is.

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