
The Grandeur of God in Genesis

Introduction How did your parents select your name?

Names in the Bible are often loaded with significance. We have seen this in Genesis. Jacob, the supplanter, is named Israel, the prevailer with God. Places are named as memorials to the life-changing events that took place there. Names invoke the character and reputation of a person.

Throughout Genesis, God is named. He names Himself, He is given names and He is called on by names. The unfolding revelation of the character and reputation of God is given through a growing succession of names. These names are how people are to know who He is.

He does not appropriate the names of the false gods worshipped by the peoples. He reveals Himself as distinct from and not be confused with the idols of man's imaginations. He does not need relational bridges derived from the pantheon of gods. He is not one of many nor one of them. The very reality of God emerges through the words He has chosen to reveal Himself. He is Divine and distinct.

Yet, the life contexts in which the names are given ensure clarity. He is the God who stands apart from all that is created. He is also the God who intentionally engages the world He has made and particularly the people He loves.

So, we will glory in the Names of God in Genesis. Now a word – this is a very limited study. Many, many of the names of God in the Old Testament do not occur in Genesis. We will only be look at the ones that were revealed in Genesis. Yet, there are unfathomable riches for the lover of God and the learner of His Word.

Elohim – God, the Creator

Genesis 1:1; 17:7

The opening verse of the Bible brings us face-to-face with Elohim, the majestic creator. This is the most frequently used name for God in the Old Testament.

The Glory of the Name

The name reveals God as the mighty source of all, supreme over all that is. He is the designer, creator, governor and sustainer of all that is. He stands apart from and stands over the cosmos. He brought it into existence. He is not made. He simply is. He offers no proof of His existence. He immediately discloses Himself as the source and ground of our being. It is relatively insignificant what we decide about Him. What He decides about us all significant.

The name is unique in that it is plural. There is one God. The one God declares that His name is a plural. What does this mean?

It denotes an intensity. The plural is one meant to convey a strong intensity, a grand majesty.

It denotes a plurality. Now this must be a plurality in unity. There is some way, which the Bible unfolds, that God is plural. The Bible will unfold the one God as being Father, Son and Spirit. He is a tri-unity of three persons in one essence and being.

The name given by God to the people of God to whom He gives His covenants (Genesis 17:7). In establishing His covenant with His people, He calls on them to own Him as their God. "He will be Elohim to them." All that He is in His great majestic name, He will be to His people. The name not only declares His transcendence, His great apartness and independence of all, but also His immanence, His connectedness to His people. He is majestic, almighty, creator, sustainer in and of Himself. He is majestic, almighty, creator, sustainer for His people.

The name is to be owned by the people of God who are the recipients of His covenants. They have the right, privilege and responsibility to call Elohim, their God. This means that they are the recipients of the all the good that God intends for them wrapped in the gift paper of His Name, Elohim.

The Use of the Name

This name will always appear in good English translations of the Old Testament as "God". When we use word God in English to refer to the one true God, the God of the Bible, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, we are using the Elohim name of God. So we should keep in mind who this name says God is when we use this name, when we call Him God.

WE SEE HIM AS CREATOR AND WE ARE HUMBLLED. We come to see our place before such a God. We can make no demands of Him. We are utterly dependent and accountable to Him. Calling Him Elohim bends my knee willingly and joyfully.

WE SEE HIM AS MAJESTIC AND WE ARE AWED. When owning Him as Elohim grips our soul, glad awe and amazement fills us. The mighty oceans of the sea of stars are but a small pond the unfathomable depths of Elohim. Worship flows from the soul filled with majesty of God, of Elohim.

WE SEE HIM AS MIGHTY AND WE ARE COMFORTED. When we own Him as God, His mightiness comforts us in our neediness. His power will complete what He has purposed and planned for us. In all the obstacles and set-backs that seem to litter the way, the almighty power of Elohim is moving to complete the good for His people.

WE SEE HIM AS OURS AND WE ARE CONNECTED. We are not only to recognize Him as God, but are exhorted on to call Him, "our God". This is the possessive of being owned by someone. This is the claim of connectedness, of relationship. It is the depth of a multi-layered and many faceted relationship. What an extraordinary thing to be told by Elohim to say of Him, the intensely

majestic, almighty One, “our God”. This is not impertinent of us, but an imperative to us. It pleases Him when He is our God.

El – God, the Strong

God is strong. As the Almighty, we are shown God’s greatness over all in His divine essence. But as El, we are shown that the power of God. He is God, the Strong. He not only has the authority to do what ever He pleases, He also has the power to do whatever He pleases. He cannot be defeated. He is never thwarted. The obstacles that seem to bring setbacks in Genesis are just hurdles in redemptive history that demonstrate the amazing power, dexterity and perseverance of God.

This name is most often used hyphenated with other words to create a compound name for God. Alone, this name tells us that God is the most high one, owner of all and dispenser of all good. Thus He is both to be blessed as well as the blessing. Though out the Old Testament, many words are linked to El to create new names for God. Five of these names are revealed in Genesis.

El-Elyon – The Most High

Genesis 14:17-20

This name of God first occurs alone in this text. Here Melchizedek, the King of Salem is identified as priest of El, of God Most High (v.18). Melchizedek comes out to greet the victorious Abraham, returning from battle. He speaks the great blessing of verses 19-20 centering it on this great name of God. Abraham is blessed by El, God Most High, who owns all things. And El, God Most High, is blessed in doing good for Abraham.

There is a very common mistake being made by Christians today. In order to feel blessed by God, we want God to come down and be on our level. But our being blessed by God and our blessing of God (praise to God) is sweeter and richer when God is elevated as He ought to be. In other words, I am blessed the most when I am blessed by the Most High God. So our recognition of the Most High does not cause us to fear, but to rejoice that one so High blesses one so low.

El-Roi – The One Who Sees

Genesis 16:13-14

Sarah’s handmaiden, Hagar, has fled from Sarah and is here languishing in the desert. Sarah is jealous of her. Sarah had given her to Abraham to try to have a child. When Hagar conceived, it exposed Sarah as the reason they had no children. So Sarah, with Abraham’s permission, begins to treat her with contemptible harshness. Yet, here, God meets her and provides for her. He prophesies greatness for her son and sends her back home. He comforts her and commands her.

She names Him as the all seeing God. His absolute omniscience is a comfort to her. She is not hiding from God. She is rather aware of living before the face of God. His all seeing eye upon her is one of care and concern. He is the God who is watching over her. In His knowing her, he blesses her and sends her back to hardness. But in that hardness under Sarah’s hand, Hagar can live with contented assurance that God is watching over her and she is living before His face and under His eye.

This is huge for us. We tend to think of God's all seeing eye as a causing fear and consternation. Yes, that God sees us ought to restrain our sin. But living before the face of God and under His eye means that we are in His care. He is watching over us. Now that does not mean that He is always moving to relieve us of our hardships. He may well send us back to the hardships we tend to flee from. But then, wherever we are, His loving eye is on us.

El-Olam – The Everlasting God

Genesis 21:33

Abraham was a wanderer. At times, this wandering was a kind of flitting from place to place. At times his wandering took him to surrounding nations as his faith and trust drooped. This comes to a head here in Genesis 21. Abraham has returned to Canaan from his wandering (Ch. 20). Ishmael is now out of his home and growing up out in the desert. A final treaty is signed with Abimelech resolving years of conflict over land and wells. In the midst of all this turmoil and uncertainty, in the midst of the changeableness of a pilgrim's life, Abraham stakes out two certainties. He plants a tree in Beersheba as a testimony to what God has done. And he calls God, the everlasting One.

Pilgrims between the promise and the fulfillment need the certainty of an everlasting and unchanging God. While all around the winds of change blow the dusts of time, God is everlasting. He is unaffected by all the assaults us. His purposes are sure in heaven and earth because of who He is. Neither His character nor His cause is changed. He is a stable anchor for the soul.

We are going to need to increasingly depend on God, the everlasting God. I am certain that we are going to see unimaginable change in our lifetimes. The dark cloud of Islamic Fascism is being weakly resisted by the west. We may come to a place where Hebrews and 1 Peter and Revelation will be read with same soul-satisfying intensity that they have been in prior generations. Our pilgrimage here may soon be hard. And then, to call on God, the everlasting One! What a solace for our souls! What a refuge for our hearts!

El-Shaddai – The Almighty God

Genesis 17:1-2

God appears to Abraham to confirm and clarify His covenant. In doing so, He reveals Himself in announcing a new name. He is El-Shaddai, the Almighty God. Before one so great and almighty, Abraham must walk with openness and purity. Then God will unfold the blessings He has promised. Attended with that promise is a sign that the covenant has been accepted and is believed. The rite of circumcision is not commanded as a way to signify who god's people are.

Shaddai is an interesting word. Its root was used to speak of the bounty of the breasts, the nursing care one gives to beloved infants. Yet it also spoke of strength and might. The joining of El, the strong one and Shaddai, the bountiful one, then describes God as great in His bounty. It mixes both strength and tenderness. It mixes the high sovereign greatness of deity and the affectionate care of a nursing mother. Rightly walking with God involves holding both of these as true together. Abraham must conceive of a mighty God. He also must conceive of a God who promises with loving bounty.

Ah, how we need this word for us today. Too many are down-slope either way. There are those who love to emphasize the tender love and nursing care of God. He is full of life giving sustenance. There are those who love to emphasize the mighty power and elevated greatness of God. He is full of holiness, authority and power. We must ever hold both of these as equally true. God's people are blessed with both the greatness and the goodness of God. He is big and big in His bounty. Through His covenants, His promises to and for His people, that mighty bounty is secured and sure. What hope and assurance rises in our souls when we call on El-Shaddai, the Almighty God.

El-Elohe Israel – The God of Israel

Genesis 33:18-20

Jacob had returned safely home from Haran, bringing his wives, Rachel and Leah, his sons and all his wealth. He had been given a new name when he had met and wrestled with God. He had been reconciled with Esau. He now has bought a piece of land for his own. There, he pitches a tent. There, he builds an altar. There, he calls on El, the El of Israel, God, the God of Israel. Through all his trouble and trials, he affirms his relationship with God.

For Israel, this is significant. They need to know that though they sin, though they flee, though they wander, though they prosper and though they return to actually possess what was promised, God is their God. God is the God of His people. We are so used to this sense of mutual relationship that we often have the lost of it. The mighty One is the mighty One of and for His people. He is the God of Jacob. He is the God of Israel in the Old Testament. He is the God of Christians. He is the God of His people. Do you ever just revel in that? Is it ever just a wonder to you? Or have we become so used to the idea of having a relationship with God that we actually don't have an engagement with God?

So, may you be awakened in your soul to all that the Mighty God is to you.

Yahweh – The LORD, Who Is

Yahweh is the Englishinization of the unpronounced and unspoken name of God. The Jews so revered this name that they stopped saying the name itself substituting Adonai in the public reading and teaching of the Old Testament. This turned the name of God into an idol. The names of God were not to be used or taken in vain but those names were to be spoken in reading and teaching and discussing God. They were to be invoked in prayer and worship. In typical fallen fashion, the representation for God was elevated and actually revered more than God Himself. In older English Bibles, Puritan writings and hymns, this name is commonly translated into the English, Jehovah. Many resist the use of this as a translation for Yahweh. I have argued that it is as good a translation as any other. In fact, if we are going to have trouble with this, why call Yeshua, Jesus? I am content to speak of Yahweh or to sing, "Guide me O thou great Jehovah."

Yahweh or Jehovah is the name that represents the ineffable existence of God. It means, *the One who is*. Moses at the burning bush is confronted by Yahweh who then says, “Tell Israel the I AM has sent you.” Yahweh is the self-existent, self-revealing, all-sufficient God. There is no argument for His existence. This name simply declares that He is, that He is the eternal present. In Him there is neither past nor future. Yahweh never *was* nor *will be*. Yahweh always *is*. The I AM is all He needs to say for us to remove our shoes and bow down for where that name is spoken and where the God of that name resides is holy ground.

The LORD God

Genesis 2:4

This name for God is used around 311 times in Genesis alone. It is identifiable in our English Bibles by the LORD being in small caps. In the ESV (as in most good translations) it is translated LORD God. Often the name is combined with other words to broaden the name and reveal God in a richer, fuller way. Over the course of redemptive history, Yahweh disclosed Himself as the eternally existent One who is our shepherd, our righteousness, our warrior and so on. But here in Genesis, the emphasis is on the Yahweh as the name alone.

Why this emphasis? Because Moses wants to establish once and for all that the God of the Bible is the only God. He is sovereign and supreme. This message we need for today when our western culture is becoming more and more pluralistic. It is one thing to recognize that many religions exist. It is quite another to say that all religions are equal. There is only one true God. All the rest of the gods are false idols. Those who worship them are unbelievers and will die in their sins and face eternal condemnation in hell. We do them no favor by playing this down. We must not be cowed by political or cultural correctness. The great problem for mankind is God – His violated holiness and His eternal wrath. The LORD God, the eternal, existent One is God alone. Believe this, repent of your rebellion and bow to Him. Plea for mercy and seek the forgiveness that comes only through the doing and dying of Jesus Christ, our Redeemer.

The LORD Provides

Genesis 22:14

Genesis highlights the hyphenated Yahweh name at the high point of the book. Abraham is passing the test of who is his first love. But greater than that, this story set the sacrifice of bulls and goats in their proper place. They are a substitute until the true sacrifice, the true and future son of Abraham, the Lord Jesus Christ comes. At the heart of all our sins are idols of the heart, things and people we love more than God. In the face of our falling short of the glory of God and not loving Him with all our heart, soul, mind, being and strength, God has dealt with our sin so that we might be forgiven and reconciled to Him.

On Mount Moriah, God provided Himself a lamb. Here the lamb takes the place of Isaac. On that same mountain, thousands of years later, the Lamb of God, the Son of God was sacrificed in our place. There God has provided for Himself, the final Lamb. Thus, Abraham calls the LORD God, Yahweh-Jireh (Jehovah-Jireh). God will be known as the One who provides. Yes, He will provide much for His people. But there will be not greater provision than when Yahweh-Jireh provides Himself the Lamb, the lamb slain for our sin.

Adonai – The Lord, our Master

In Genesis, this word is always plural when used to refer to God. It is not properly a name of God, but rather a title applied to God. It is a way of addressing God that shows deference to Him as master and king. The plural is one of intensity – Adonai is King of kings and Lord of lords. His lordship and kingship is ultimate, without peer. He is lord all the richest and royalist sense of the word. He is the One who rules me and to whom I owe allegiance (fealty) and obedience (love).

In our Struggles

Genesis 15:2ff

Abraham is struggling with perplexities. God is His shield and His great reward. Yet, one of the basic promises God has made has not yet been fulfilled and frankly makes a mockery of all the rest. But this is the Lord, the Master speaking. So he may ask God a question, but he may not question God. As he seeks for God to solve his perplexity, God announces that he will surely see the fulfillment of the promise of a son.

In our struggles, we may ask God questions, but we may not question God. He is the Lord and Master. He has the free sovereign right to do what ever pleases Him. He can fulfill His promises in His own time. But when it all seems confusing, God is still pleased when we humbly come and seek to know what He is doing. Too many Christians in their struggles are questioning God. This is not allowed. If you have questions for the Master, you come with humbleness and sincerity. This is, after all, the Lord you are talking to!

In our Serving

Genesis 18:3ff

Abraham is here serving with hospitality. He has recognized the strangers on the road as heavenly guests. One he particularly treats with the respect and reverence usually reserved for God. When he invites them into his home, Abraham addresses them using this title, Adonai. It is difficult to know whether he is just being respectful to visitors or has recognized the Lord.

What we see here though is a concern to serve, in this case with hospitality. Initially, Abraham may be expressing the cultural norms for hospitality, but as this story unfolds, layer after layer of humility and discernment is peeled back. This sense of humility, of serving the Lord our Master, is the strong foundation for Christian ministry. We are not promoting ourselves. We are not pushing our agenda. We are not protecting our interests. We are performing service to our God who is our master.

As we close, let me point to some personal lessons and instructions to take away **Lessons** with you.

Let us humble ourselves under such a mighty God. His Names are meant to invoke awe and draw out worship. They reveal a mighty, sovereign, creating God who is our Lord and Master, sufficient and supreme in Himself.

Let us run with delighted joy towards such a great God. May the mighty Names of God ever be a source of help and hope in darkness. The mighty God meets us in our need with these magnificent names.

Let us rest in who God is through how God names Himself. He is all we need. He has given Himself to us in His Names so that we will cling to Him and hope in Him.

All the names of God find their grandest fulfillment and greatest expression in our Lord Jesus. He is all that God has revealed Himself to be. And above all the names in all creation, God has given Him a Name that at His Name all will bow.

Isaac Watts wrote a great old hymn I want to quote in closing: *Join all the Glorious Names*.

Join all the glorious names
Of wisdom, love, and power,
That ever mortals knew,
That angels ever bore:
All are too mean to speak His worth,
Too poor to set my Savior forth.

Great Prophet of my God,
My tongue would bless Thy Name,
By Thee the joyful news
Of our salvation came,
The joyful news of sin forgiv'n
Of hell subdued, and peace with
Heav'n.

Be Thou my Counsellor,
My Pattern, and my Guide,
And through this desert land

Still keep me near thy side:
Nor let my feet e'er run astray
Nor rove nor seek the crooked way.

Jesus, my great High Priest,
Offered His blood, and died;
My guilty conscience seeks
No sacrifice beside:
His powerful blood did once atone,
And now it pleads before the throne.

My dear almighty Lord,
My Conqueror and my King,
Thy scepter and Thy sword,
Thy reigning grace I sing:
Thine is the power; behold I sit
In willing bonds beneath Thy feet.

May our hearts rise up to join all the glorious names that God is richly known by for our good and His great glory.