

# The GREATNESS and the GRACE of GOD in GENESIS

## The NAMES of GOD in the Old Testament -- The DIVINE NATURE REVEALED

Just as the NT reveals fully Christ's *human* nature, the OT reveals fully His *Divine* attributes (Luke 24:27,44; John 5:39)

The OT names for God trace stages in His self-revelation (NOT anonymous source materials)

When a new or higher side of the Being of God is revealed to men there arises a new name of God. -- A.B. Davidson, *The Theology of the Old Testament* p. 37

## ELOHIM -- GOD'S POWER, PROVIDENCE REVEALED in CREATION

Have you ever wondered why only ONE name of God in Genesis 1, and that a plural? (*Elohim* X 35)

The plural signifies the *infinite fulness* of the might and power which lies in the Divine Being ... -- Gustav Friedrich Oehler, *Theology of the Old Testament* p. 88

God can be known in the things made, apart from special revelation (this is *general* revelation -- Romans 1:18-20)

Evidence of knowledge of ELOHIM, the SUPREME GOD, before the Patriarchal period. Even the word survives in Babylonian *Ilu*, Arabic *Allah*, the Canaanite *El*.

## EL ELYON -- The MOST HIGH SURVIVES in the MIDST of PREVAILING POLYTHEISM

As Romans 1 records, the knowledge of the One God lost, even suppressed, after the flood

By Abraham's time (2000 BC), knowledge of the Most High God (*el elyon*) becoming scarce

Melchizedek a "priest of God Most High" (14:18), whom Abraham identifies with his God

The origin of "God most high" may lie in the dominating position that some god had come to assume in an early polytheism or henotheism. -- J. Barton Payne, *The Theology of the Older Testament* p. 146

*Henotheism* (belief in one supreme deity among many) the stage between monotheism and polytheism.

The Babylonians, Egyptians and Canaanites honored a "Most High" god, and therefore the name in itself contains no indication of monotheism. In the Scriptures it is found on the lips of non-Jews. -- Paul Heinisch, *Theology of the Old Testament* p. 38

## ADONAI -- A HUMAN DESIGNATION DISPLAYING DUE SUBMISSION

In the midst of the descent to pagan polytheism, Abraham displays a knowledge of the sovereign control of the True God (15:2,8). Enquiring (respectfully!) into the seeming delay in the divine purposes, seeking assurance from Lord Yahweh (*adonai yhwh*). But LORD not a name revealed; hence used as a human title as well.

## EL SHADDAI -- GREATNESS CONDESCENDING in GRACE

*I am El Shaddai* [God Almighty]. So God answers Abraham's questions (Gen. 17:1) and confirms his covenant with a sign -- circumcision. Though we associate this title with omnipotence, it is particularly associated (in Genesis) with God's faithful promises and blessings regarding posterity.

It is no longer the powerful Divinity ruling in the world in general that is El-shaddai, but the God who testifies of Himself in *special deeds* of power, by which He subdues nature to the ways of His kingdom, making the childless Abraham the father of many nations (Gen. xvii. 1, xxviii. 3, comp. xxxv. 11), and who causes that race with which He has entered into covenant to experience His powerful presence in protection and blessing ... -- Gustav Friedrich Oehler, *op.cit.*, p. 91

The use of 'El to denote God is a feature of the patriarchal period; it emphasizes the greatness and sublimity of God, which emphasis is perhaps found even more strongly in 'El Shaddai ... A study of the names of God in Israel leads to the conclusion that they lay particular stress on the Majesty of God's Being: *`elyon, shaddai, 'adon, ba`al* and *melek* as well as *'elohim*. -- Th.C. Vriezen, *An Outline of Old Testament Theology* pp.196-97

Though God's POWER dominates his designations so far, now God's GRACE is paramount. Nothing in Abraham, nor his offspring, merits God's faithfulness, His covenant will be eternal (17:7) -- an unconditional promise The people of Yahweh was established by divine grace and survives only through his continuing mercy. -- *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, editors: G. Johannes Botterweck & Helmer Ringgren p. 518

## YAHWEH -- The GOD FAR AWAY COMES CLOSE BY

There is yet one more name, not revealed to the patriarchs, but all the way back before the flood (Gen. 4:26). Noah predicted would become the peculiar possession of the Semitic branch of the race, yet by Moses' day even Israel had forgotten its significance (Gen.

9:26,27; Ex. 6:2,3)

It seems a name peculiar to the people of Israel, to this branch of the Semitic family. -- Davidson, *op.cit.*, p.45

The true Old Testament divine name, to which all the others are secondary, is Jahweh. -- Ludwig Koehler, *Old Testament Theology* p. 40

Yahwe, the proper name of the God of Israel, and in fact *the name par excellence* of the true God ... -- John Skinner, *The Divine Names in Genesis* p. 12

Yahweh occurs 6700+ times in the OT (about 2X as frequently as ALL other names), often in 3 contexts

1. God in special revelation:

Gen. 17:1 expresses the same idea: "Jahweh appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am El Shaddai". What we have here is progressive revelation. At the first and preparatory stage, God makes Himself known to Abraham, from whom stems not only Israel but also Ishmael, as El Shaddai. At the second and final stage where Moses plays the chief role, Moses, who through the Exodus founded the people of the Old Covenant, the same God makes Himself known as Jahweh: and this name remains for all time. -- Koehler, *op.cit.*, p.43

When God is spoken of in those general aspects of his being in which he related alike to the whole world and to all mankind, e.g., in creation and providence, Elohim is the proper word; but when he is spoken of in his special relation to the chosen race as the God of revelation and of redemption, and the object of their worship, Jehovah is the appropriate term. -- W.H. Green, *The Unity of the Book of Genesis* p. 542

The Targum of Pseudo-Jonathan: And Jehovah spake with Moses and said to him: "I am Jehovah who revealed himself unto thee in the midst of the bush and said to thee, I am Jehovah, and I revealed myself to Abraham, to Isaac, and Jacob as an Almighty God, and my name Jehovah, but as the face of my Shekina I was not made known to them. -- Robert Dick Wilson, *Classical Evangelical Essays in Old Testament Interpretation*, edited by W. Kaiser, Jr. p. 39

2. God as personally present (theophany):

Israel clearly understood by the name Yahweh *the being of God* (see p. 147; Exod. iii; Hos. 1:9), in the sense of a personal presence. ... As a primary religious feeling the name Yahweh called up the idea of the living, *awe-inspiring presence of God*. -- Th.C. Vriezen, *An Outline of Old Testament Theology* p. 195

Elohim, as such, remains transcendent to the world of phenomena; Jehovah, on the contrary, enters into the phenomena of space and time, in order to manifest Himself to mankind; a difference which appears at once in the relation of Gen. i. 1 sqq. to ii. 4 sqq. ... *Theophany* in general is predicated of Jehovah, who, and not Elohim, holds intercourse with man in the manner of men. -- Gustav Friedrich Oehler, *op.cit.*, pp. 98-99

3. God in the commitment of covenant:

... the personal name for the God of Israel in the Bible. -- Louis Jacobs, *A Jewish Theology* p. 136

The words express not that Israel had God among them, one who was unchangeable, self-existent in His nature, but rather what kind of God they had -- one constant, faithful, ever the same, in whom they could trust, to whom they could flee, who was their dwelling-place in all generations. -- Davidson, *op.cit.*, p. 57

In this NAME ABOVE ALL NAMES (again hidden, in Jesus) Israel -- and the world -- will know the fullness of God.

Scripture speaks of the tetragrammaton as "this glorious and fearful name" (Deut. 28:58) or simply "*the name*" (Lev. 24:11,16). It carries the connotation of God's nearness, of His concern for man, and of His redemptive, testamentary revelation. So Moses selected Elohim as the appropriate term for Genesis 1-2:3, God transcendent in creation; but Yahweh for Genesis 2:4-25, God immanent in Eden's revelations. Similar shifts in names, corresponding to God's shift in activity from general sovereignty to personal redemption, appear in the Genesis passages that follow. For example, Elohim gave commands, but Yahweh shut the door for Noah. In Genesis 9:26,27, Elohim enlarges Japheth, but Yahweh is the God of Shem. In Psalm 19 (vv. 1-6), the heavens declare the glory of Elohim; but (vv. 7-14) the law of Yahweh is perfect, and Yahweh is my Strength and my Redeemer. The implications of the name Yahweh gain ultimate fulfillment only in the final testament of peace, when the God who has been present from the first will be fully present at the last (Isa. 41:4; 48:12). "I will set My sanctuary in the midst of them forevermore" (Ezek. 37:26). -- J. Barton Payne, *op.cit.*, p. 148