

## THE PRIMARY NAMES OF GOD

The various names and titles given to God in the Bible contain a revelation of His Person and character, and His purpose toward mankind, of which even Christian people are often unaware. Names mean little to us. We use them merely as labels for the identification of one person from another. But in the East it is quite different. Bible names are significant. Some parents endeavored to express the character of their children in the names they gave them. Occasionally names were changed in later life to match the character. Our Lord did not do anything extraordinary in giving Simon the new name of Peter.

Of course, in the majority of cases names indicated the faith or the hopes of the parents rather than the character of their offspring. But the names by which God chose to make Himself known to His people are not tinged by any of our human weaknesses or limitations. They are a true indication of what He is like. They are part of the self-revelation by which, at various times and in different manners, He led His people into a better knowledge of Himself. Andrew Murray frequently said, "The trouble with us Christians is that we do not know our God." He also remarked, "Our God is very glorious. Would to God we knew Him better." It is my hope that our study of the names of God may enlarge greatly our ideas of what God is and of what He is able to do for us.

There are many names for God. The reason for this is that no one name could express all that He is in Himself and in His grace toward sinners. In the use of these different names in the Bible there is a progressive and wonderful revelation of God. The study of them is not only most illuminating, but it should bring us very near to Him. By this study we can enter into the heritage of all His people, in the unfolding of the progressive self-revelation of God through the ages.

In the Scriptures there is not that distinction between name and reality which is commonly made in our conversation, as when we speak of some as being Christians in name only as distinguished from those who are really given up to the will of God. Such a distinction does not exist in the Bible. What a thing is in name, that it is in reality; its name is the expression of its actual nature. The highest example of this is found in connection with the names of God. What God is in name, He is in reality. The names of God are a wonderfully rich revelation of what God is and of what He will do for His people. Moreover, the development of God's revelation of Himself was the history of fresh names by which He made Himself known to His people. "The Lord also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble. And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee: for thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee" (Psalm 9:9-10). When God was calling His people to a new trust in Himself He made that call the occasion for a fuller revelation of Himself by giving Himself a new name, or showing the old name in a new light. So, our trust is called forth by God's revelation of Himself.

In these studies I want to show how the Bible lays tremendous stress upon the names by which God has revealed Himself. If the name of God is the basis of our trust, how important it is then that we shall become thoroughly conversant with His name or names. Not only is God as good as His word, but He is as good as His name. In His names God reveals His character and actions, as well as His manifold relations to His creatures. It has pleased Him to reveal Himself by different names, each of which enshrines precious truths that reveal fresh possibilities for us in Him. There cannot be any emergency in the lives of believers to which some name of God does not apply.

It has been said that "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever." But, we can glorify Him and enjoy Him only in proportion as we know Him. The knowledge of God is more important than the knowledge of anything else. It is from the lack of

knowledge of God that many are without spiritual power. It behooves us to learn all that we can of God. A study of His names is one way of increasing our knowledge.

With these thoughts in our minds, let us now consider three of the primary names of Deity.

## I. Elohim (God).

This is the name which was used of God more than 2,500 times in the Old Testament. Elohim means "The Strong One," and where it was used it revealed God as the One Who was mighty in power. The very opening words of the Bible, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth," reveals Him as the Creator of the universe. The name "Elohim" signifies "the putter forth of power." He is the Being to Whom all power belongs. Elohim is the Almighty Creator, the Fount or Source of all life and being.

Elohim is the name by which God first revealed Himself to men. Man's first conception of Him was that He was the God of power. Men stand in the midst of the forces of nature, and know that these forces are beyond their control, but they believe that they are in control of "The Strong One" or God. God the Creator built the hills, holds the sea in the hollow of His hand and guides the stars in their courses. Some people would be freed from much fear if they would only remember that the God of power lives and moves in the nature which surrounds them.

Elohim is a plural noun, suggesting the manifoldness of the Person of God. Devout Christians have ever seen in this plural form of His name a fore-shadowing of the truth of the Holy Trinity. The plural does not declare the truth that within the Godhead there is a plurality of Persons, but it does contain it. That truth could not have been realized or understood prior to the revelation of it in the Person and ministry of Christ. Even though those who lived in the early centuries could not understand the truth of the Trinity, it was indicated in the first chapter of Genesis.

Alongside the fact of the almightiness of God is the truth that He is the only true object of worship. He is our Creator, therefore, we owe Him our allegiance. Because He makes His strength available to us, let us lift our hearts to Him in gratitude and our voices to Him in adoration and praise.

## II. Jehovah (LORD).

Of all the names of God in the Old Testament, Jehovah is used far more than any other, occurring some 6,823 times. This name is the most precious to the Jews, and it is the most revealing of His grace toward His people. Jehovah is the name which signifies the Being Who is absolutely self-existent. To the Jews the name of Jehovah was too sacred for them to pronounce, so in their reading of the Scriptures in public they substituted Adonai for it.

At the Exodus God's revelation of Himself entered upon a new stage. Until then the revelation had been committed and confined to a family. Then God took a nation and made it the instrument by which He was to reveal Himself to the world. We find the meaning of the word "Jehovah" explained in Exodus 3:13-14. At the burning bush Moses said to God, "Behold, when I come unto the children, 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?" Moses wanted a new name for God so that the people might be led to trust Him better. Then God said to Moses, "I AM THAT I AM."

From the name "Jehovah," which is translated "LORD" in capital letters, we learn three things about God:

1. His self-sufficiency.

It teaches us that God does not have any explanation outside Himself for what He is or for what He does. What a lesson that was to the Israelites, who were living in the midst of people who made their own gods!

2. His sovereignty.

The very name Jehovah called to the minds of the Israelites the fact of His sovereignty. Men are the clay and God is the potter. He has a right to all that we are and all that we have. We only know what real freedom is when we surrender everything to Him for the doing of His blessed will.

3. His immutability.

The name Jehovah revealed to the Israelites God's unchangeableness. "I AM WHAT I AM." It is good to know that also implies, "I AM WHAT I WILL BE." It was as if He had said, "I WILL BE WHAT I AM." In other words, He was telling the Israelites that they would never find Him changing; that, if you will trust Me now, I will never fail you; that He would be the same always. If we will only learn and apply this lesson to our own lives, one of our greatest difficulties will be solved instantly. "I AM THAT I AM" will be the same tomorrow and the day after tomorrow as He is today. He will be as strong and helpful then as He is now. Every need of Israel was met in Jehovah her God.

III. Adonai (*Lord* in italics).

This name occurs 340 times in the Old Testament. To the Jews it was of special interest in that they always substituted it for Jehovah, which name they regarded as too holy for them to pronounce. It signifies ownership and mastership. It is expressive of a relationship of authority on the part of God and of allegiance and love on the part of His people. Lordship means complete possession on the part of God and complete submission on the part of His children.

In Psalm 8:1 we read, "O Lord (Jehovah) our Lord (*Adonai*), how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who has set thy glory above the heavens." The One Who has entered into covenant relations with men in providing redemption from sin is worthy to be our Lord and Master. His slightest wish should command our highest respect, and His least command should merit our immediate obedience.

Our concern should be to comply with the will of God, even though this is contrary to the very spirit of our age, which is characterized by independence and self-will. Few are ready to pray sincerely concerning all the aspects and interests of life as Christ did, "Thy will, not mine, be done." Since He is our Master, we certainly owe Him implicit obedience. As we walk in the pathway of obedience to Him He will meet all of our needs. "But my God shall supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory through Christ Jesus our Lord" (Philippians 4:19).