

PART 1: THE FOUNDATIONAL NAMES OF GOD

ELOHIM

THE STRONG CREATOR GOD

THE ALL-POWERFUL ONE

In today's business world "branding" has become a buzzword. Branding involves the conceptual formation of perspectives that reach beyond simple jargon and into the heart and identity of that which has been branded. Businesses pour millions of dollars into branding every year in the hopes of convincing consumers that their products or services are valuable.

If I said to you the word Chanel, an image would fill your mind. Or if I said Apple or Gucci or Ford, you would associate that name with a value. Because businesses and corporations aim to sell their products to you, they focus heavily on linking a high quality and positive association with their name, their product, their brand.

In our study we will explore the names of God, so understanding what's in a name and the importance of names is critical to laying the foundation for identification with God's names.

To the beginner, branding involves designing a fancy logo, choosing a tagline, or determining what colors you'll put on your website or print materials. Yet to the expert, your brand is much more than that. The greatest logo, the catchiest tagline, and the most brilliant colors will do little to augment the value of a brand if the product lacks authenticity.

Your brand is your identity, your reputation, and the perception others have about you. When people refer to the Apple brand, they're not talking about the symbol of an apple with a bite taken out of it. They're talking about what the Apple company stands for—high-quality, creative, efficient, and cutting-edge electronic devices.

The primary focus for any branding campaign ought to be organizational strength, identity, and messaging. The best-designed, most catchy logo can't do much without the strength of a product and organization behind it.

Your brand involves the way people perceive you, your leadership, organization, service, methods, and anything else related to how you came about, how you function, or what you do.

In other words, the name matters. It matters so much that men, women, and companies will trademark their names. They register them to prevent unauthorized use of them. They don't want other people to mess with their names, thus giving an illegitimate meaning to their brands.

For example, in the global world of social networking, people will sometimes steal someone else's name in order to prosper from the integrity associated with that name. Why is that, because names do matter. As we get to know God through our discovery of His names in Scripture, we will find that He has branded His names. They are not merely words. Rather, a substance lies behind each word. People may

try to hijack God's names for all manner of self-serving endeavors, but God's name is spiritually trademarked so that no one can illegitimately access the power and authority tied to it.

God's names matter. Attached to each one is a set of character qualities, promises, and meanings. Unless you fully know and understand these things, you run the risk of not accessing or utilizing them in the way God has designed.

In the introduction, we looked at the importance and majesty of God's names. In this section, I want to introduce you to the very first name God reveals to us in Scripture—Elohim. This name is found in Genesis, the book of the beginning, and we discover it in the very first verse: "In the beginning God [Elohim] created the heavens and the earth." Pronounced: el-o-HEEM

That one line at the beginning of time reveals a deep character quality of God—Creator. It's God's introduction, His prelude. It's the first impression of Himself that He offers to His creation. In essence, God says, "Hello, I am Elohim."

First impressions are often lasting impressions. Why did God choose to introduce Himself to us as Elohim, the strong Creator God? One of the primary reasons could be that He wants us to recognize that He is transcendent—that He is distinct from His creation. God isn't merged into His creation. He is not a tree, a river, or a butterfly. Rather than being a part of His creation, God is above and outside of it.

Another reason God introduces Himself to us with His name of Elohim is that it lets us know that He's set apart from the constraints of time. When we read, "In the beginning God created," we discern that God created the beginning. God created time. And if God created time, then God preceded time because He couldn't have created something that already existed. If time didn't begin until He created it, then He must have been present before it.

When you or I discuss the concept of time linearly, we can't fit God inside it because God exists outside of time. The only thing we're aware of that is outside of time is eternity itself, so God is not limited by time, but lives in eternity. Time is a constraint with which we must contend, but it's not a problem for God.

This is why the Bible uses the language of eternity when referring to God. In addition to that, Scripture also refers to God in the present tense. You and I have a yesterday. We also have a tomorrow. We have these because we're subject to time. Yet God has neither a yesterday nor a tomorrow. Everything for God is right now because He has no past and He has no future. He is the right now, ever-present God.

When we get to heaven, we'll better understand what it means to be with a right-now God. We will experience what it's like to have no night, no measuring clock for the day, and no passage of seconds, minutes, or hours. We'll know life without an aging process. All things will be now whether they are simultaneous or a billion years apart. Everything will forever be right now. Don't wear yourself out thinking too hard about this. The bottom line is simply that Elohim, the strong Creator God, is transcendent of time.

Elohim Is Here, There, and Everywhere

Elohim transcends not only time but also space. In other words, He predates His creation. He comes before the things He has made...both the heavens and the earth. (That's what we call a "merism"—two contrasting words that describe an entire thing. "Heaven and earth" stand for all of creation.) Before God created mankind, He created a location—a space—in which mankind would exist. In order for God to create this space, He had to sit outside of it Himself.

You and I know and experience only the heavens and the earth. We don't comprehend anything beyond the heavens and the earth because we exist in that space. Yet God existed when space did not. Therefore, God transcends not only time but also space and matter.

Everything that we see is tied to matter. Matter is the substance of everything we have. "Matter" refers to the physical components of the universe. In order for God to be outside of time, space, and matter, He must exist in another dimension that isn't tethered to time, space, and matter the way ours is.

If God isn't tethered to time, space, and matter, then He operates in another realm. Which is precisely why you and I can't figure Him out. We're not from His realm, His dimension. We can't conceive of all that dimension contains. We're like a gear on a watch trying to comprehend the events that go on around it rather than simply measuring the time.

We're looking at His dimension from the perspective of our dimension, which is challenging because we don't have even the slightest clue about His dimension. Therefore, we can't comprehend even a portion of God's dimension—unless He explains it to us.

Some theologians refer to Elohim as the Holy Other, which can be defined as something we are not aware of. Yet a closer look at the names of God constructed from the root word Elohim reveals a God who also abides in the realm we know. The prophet Jeremiah offers us a glimpse into this delicate balance of God's presence.

"Am I a God who is near [Elohei Mikkarov]," declares the LORD, "and not a God far off [Elohei Merachok]? Can a man hide himself in hiding places so I do not see him?" declares the LORD. "Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?" declares the LORD (23:23-24).

This passage in Jeremiah reveals that God is both transcendent and inherent. He is here, there, and everywhere. Elohim created the heavens and the earth, existing outside of it. Yet Elohim also fills the heavens and the earth, existing in it. He is immanently everywhere. The theological word used to describe this is "omnipresent." God is everywhere-present at the same time.

The best way I know to illustrate God's omnipresence is with air. Air exists everywhere. Wherever you go, you will be in the atmosphere simply because the atmosphere encompasses all of our planet. God is like the atmosphere. His atmospheric presence exists everywhere in the earth.

Yet because of His transcendence, He is not limited to the earth. That's where the illustration between air and God breaks down because when you leave earth's gravity, you leave the air. Yet when you leave God's omnipresence on earth, He is also there in the transcendent existence outside of earth. In fact,

another name of God which we won't have the time to cover fully in this study tells us of this presence. It is Jehovah Shammah, "the Lord is there."

He is here, yet He is also there. God is both there and back again at the same time. His silence doesn't indicate His absence, for He is everywhere. Nor does His distance contradict His presence.

Jehovah Shammah also refers to the city of Jerusalem as a type of the gospel church (Ezekiel 48:35). It is where He manifests His presence in the midst of His people.

Elohim Is Personal

With all of this talk about God being here, there, and everywhere, we might be tempted to think of Him as an energy source. Yet the name Elohim doesn't mean God is like that. The Bible would never say, "May the force be with you." In fact, as we continue studying Genesis 1, we see His name Elohim associated with some very personal attributes.

Then God [Elohim] said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light day, and the darkness He called night (verses 3-5).

God said, God saw, God separated, and God called. Each of these actions clearly reveals the very personal and engaging character of God. He's not merely a spirit floating around in never-never land. He is other-dimensional—and we shouldn't lose that emphasis—but He is also intensely personal. If we were to skim a few chapters forward in the Genesis account, we would discover Him walking in the garden in the cool of the day and calling out to Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:9).

So, if we refer to God as an energy, a concept, force, or a theory, we are not referring to Elohim. As Elohim, God personally interacts with His creation. In other words, you and I do not live in an impersonal universe. We don't reside in a universe with no one to relate to who is above and beyond us yet also with us.

Many people who profess the theory of evolution believe that the universe has no supreme being or God with whom we can relate. We interact with nature or with unseen, unidentifiable forces. Yet our universe is personal because Elohim is personal.

Elohim Is Plural

Elohim is not only personal but also plural. The word Elohim is actually the plural version of the word El, or Eloah. The interesting aspect of this plural word is that it uniquely refers to a singular Godhead. In Genesis 1 we read, "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness...God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him'" (verses 26-27).

Scripture uses both plural and singular pronouns when referring to Elohim. His works are usually described with singular verb forms. So, Elohim is a plural word by construct but often a singular word by usage, revealing the unique makeup of the Trinity. God is a plural being although He exists as one God.

God sometimes introduces a concept in the Bible and then explains it later. We call this “progressive revelation.” In this case, we find the plural form of Elohim in Genesis without more clues about the Trinity. We just know that Elohim refers to more than one. As revelation progresses, God explains the Trinity more fully so that by the time we reach the New Testament, we read, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19).

There we finally see the three distinct persons, one in essence, who make up the plural name of Elohim. It’s difficult for us to comprehend how three can also be one. The best illustration I can think of is a pretzel. A pretzel is comprised of one interlocking piece of baked dough, yet it also has three distinct holes. The three holes are separate, yet they are also connected to each other in the one pretzel.

Elohim Is the Creator

God identifies Himself as Elohim 35 times at the start of Scripture. In fact, Elohim is the only name used for God from Genesis 1:1 to Genesis 2:3. Other names come later in His personal revelation of His character throughout His Word, but Elohim is emphasized in the beginning.

I believe one reason for this focus on this particular name of God is that from the outset, He wants us to understand His power. The literal translation of the name Elohim is “strong one.” It has to do with God’s sovereignty and His authority, reflecting the greatness of His power.

The name Elohim also identifies God as the Creator. In the beginning, Elohim (the strong one) created. The term “created” is only used of God in the Bible; it is not used of men. This is because men reconfigure, recalibrate, or reform things. Mankind does not create something from nothing. We lack the power, ingenuity, and ability to create from nothing. God, on the other hand, does create from nothing—*ex nihilo*.

The book of Hebrews describes God’s creative prowess: “By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible” (Hebrews 11:3).

The author of Hebrews lets us know not only that the strong and powerful God created visible things out of the invisible but also that God created the worlds (plural). And He created the worlds without having any raw material with which to work.

Now, I don’t know how many inventors you know, but it’s highly unlikely that you know of an inventor who invented something out of nothing. Anyone who designs, builds, or creates anything on planet earth used something in order to do that. Only God, Elohim, makes something out of nothing.

In fact, God didn’t even need to use His hands to create—His mouth was enough. In Genesis 1 we marvel that all God had to do was speak the world into existence and into order.

Perhaps this is one reason why God seems to become upset or annoyed when we doubt His ability. For example, when Abraham and Sarah doubted that God could create a child through them, God replied, “Is anything too difficult for the LORD?” (Genesis 18:14). Creating a child in the aged womb of a woman was nothing compared to creating the worlds out of nothing.

In a similar vein, when the virgin Mary wondered how she, a virgin, could bear a child, the angel addressed her concerns squarely: “Nothing will be impossible with God” (Luke 1:37).

Whatever situation you’re facing today or whatever challenge you’re trying to overcome, I want to encourage you to remember the name Elohim.

The Strong One doesn’t need raw material with which to work. He doesn’t need logic or tangible solutions in order to accomplish His goal. All He needs is Himself, and all you need is faith in His name that He can do all that He purposes to do.

Too often we get hung up trying to figure out the answer to our problems. Rather than trying to visualize how God is going to straighten out our situation, tweak our trials, or fix our failures, remember His name. Elohim can create something out of nothing. He’s done it before, and He continues to do it to this day. After all, He created worlds just by speaking them into existence.

God’s act of creation makes all of life religious. God invites science to study His creation in order to learn and discover more about Him (Job 12:7-9). “But ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds in the sky, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish in the sea inform you. Which of all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this? Evolution holds that nobody plus nothing equals everything. It ultimately seeks to get rid of God. But watches have watchmakers, paintings have painters, designs have designers, and creation has a Creator.

And all God—Elohim—did was say something. He merely spoke the word, and worlds were formed. (I’m glad He didn’t shout.)

So, before God shows us His gentleness, His fatherhood, or His grace, God introduces Himself to us as Elohim, the great and powerful. He wants to establish right from the start that He is the all-knowing, all-powerful, ever-present one.

Elohim Is the Restorer

So far, we’ve focused on our understanding of the name Elohim in Genesis 1:1. Yet something very interesting and relevant for our everyday lives appears in verse 2: “The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.”

The Hebrew phrase translated “formless and void” is the Tohu wabohu. This phrase basically means “a waste, or garbage dump.” It refers to a location that’s entirely uninhabitable, without form, and void of life.

The earth was a wasteland at this time—but we read in Isaiah that God did not create a wasteland. “Thus, says the LORD, who created the heavens (He is the God who formed the earth and made it, He established it and did not create it a waste place, but formed it to be inhabited) ...” (Isaiah 45:18).

This passage reveals that God didn’t create waste. Yet in Genesis, we read that the earth was a wasteland. So sometime between Genesis 1:1 and Genesis 1:2, the earth was messed up—which is

exactly what happened when Satan fell. Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 tell us that Satan rebelled against God and was kicked out of heaven to planet earth.

Thus, we have emptiness and garbage on the earth because garbage has been thrown there. Satan and his demons were cast down, making the planet uninhabitable and destructive (Isaiah 14:12-17). Satan does exactly the same thing in each of our lives through sin. He takes the beauty of God's creation—the masterpiece of each one of us—and seeks to turn our lives into wastelands.

This is why you should remember the name Elohim and hold it closely to your heart. Scripture tells us that Elohim, in His plurality, hovered over the wasteland of life and brought order, redemption, and beauty. He created light (Genesis 1:3) and turned what had been a swampland into a separation of land from water. He made the earth livable. He came into something Satan had messed up and restored it.

One of the greatest lessons to learn about Elohim is that in addition to creating something out of nothing, He can take something the devil has junked up and fix it up. He can make it right again.

When Satan attempts to make your life a mess, God's Spirit can make it beautiful again. When Satan tries to bring death where there once was life, God's Spirit can make you alive again. That alone should be enough to bring hope to the hurting. It should be enough to lift your heart into the realm of faith again. Elohim is a God who can transform a mess into a miracle. He transforms darkness into light. He transforms the desolate, uninhabitable recesses of your soul into places of fertile growth.

And when He does, He wants you and me to reflect Him. Genesis 1:26 tells us one of our primary purposes: "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.'" An image is a mirror. In the morning when you go to the mirror to get ready for the day, your image flashes back at you from the mirror. It reflects you accurately.

When God made mankind in His image—in the image of the triune, plural Elohim, He commissioned mankind at a higher level than all others of His creation. The flowers were not asked to be His image. The beasts were not asked to be His image. The fish were not asked to be His image. Only humanity was given this great and awesome privilege and capacity to mirror God.

Every other creation testifies of God's majesty, but only mankind mirrors Him. You and I have been created to mirror the Divine in history. We are to mirror Him because He stamped His image on us.

Time to Rest

As we begin our dive into the deep waters of God's names, you might be saying, "That's great, Rev. Barnum. I've learned some Hebrew. Nice. But really, what does that have to do with me in my home today with noisy kids and arguments with my spouse?" Or if you're single, "What does that have to do with the lonely nights or the search for personal significance? What about my finances? My health?"

Thus, the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their hosts. By the seventh day God completed His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

On day one, God created. On day two, God created. On days three, four, five, and six, God created. And after He created on each and every day, He said, "That's good. It's good." God left the creation of mankind for the sixth day so that mankind wouldn't have to live in the darkness. He waited until all of His creation was ready to receive man, and then He made him.

Finally, He gets to the seventh day and says, "That's very good." Up until that time, He had said things were good. After He created man, He said the creation was "very good." Then He rested, which is interesting because He didn't seem to work too hard to make His creation. After all, He had just spoken it into existence. He probably didn't even get His hands dirty. So, when we read that God rested, we shouldn't think He got tired and quit.

Rather, this means He was finished and had nothing left to do. He had completed what He had set out to do. That's when He decided to sanctify the seventh day. To sanctify something is to set it apart as unique and special. He declared His day of rest to be unlike all of the other days. Keep in mind that He didn't sanctify the workdays. He sanctified the rest day.

He didn't sanctify the day He was getting everything ready, doing all of His stuff, and bringing everything into existence. The day He declared as special was the day He chose to rest. In fact, God carries this concept of rest throughout the Old and New Testaments, relating it to other things as well. In the Old Testament, not only did God say to remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy, but He also consecrated every seventh year as a sabbatical year of rest.

The Israelites were instructed to rest the land from farming every seventh year (Leviticus 25:3-7). And God declared every forty-ninth year (seven multiplied by seven) to be a year of jubilee—a restoration of order through the implementation of the Sabbath principles of rest and freedom (Leviticus 25:8-17).

In the New Testament, we're never instructed to keep Saturday as the Sabbath day of rest. In fact, in the New Testament we read that we're not to allow anyone else to legislate our days for us (Colossians 2:16-17).

Typically, we experience a day of rest on Sunday during the church age because that's the day that Christ was resurrected from the grave. Regardless of the day, the principle of the Sabbath rest continues up until now. In the book of Hebrews, God lays out for us the principle of rest, particularly linking it to the work of creation. We read, "He has said somewhere concerning the seventh day: 'And God rested on the seventh day from all His works'" (Hebrews 4:4). Moving ahead to verses 9-11, we read the personal application for us today: "So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. Therefore, let us be diligent to enter that rest."

When God finished everything, He needed to do to create the worlds and all they contain, He was able to rest. The reason He could rest was that He infused His creation with the ability to reproduce.

For example, He gave the flowers seeds so they could be self-perpetuating. He gave the animals the desire and ability to reproduce. He assigned tasks to the insects and birds of the air to assist in cross-pollination for the continuation of vegetation. And when He created man and woman, He instilled in them the miracle of birth.

God only had to create once. He didn't create and then re-create, re-create, and re-create. No, when Elohim created the worlds, He built into His creation the capacity for reproduction for generations to come.

God is telling us through this passage in Hebrews 4 that He has likewise established a rest for us. First, He created a rest for the people of Israel. It was called the Promised Land. In the Promised Land, others had already dug wells, built buildings, and cultivated the land. While the Israelites were in bondage in Egypt, God was preparing a place for them. They simply had to walk into it and enjoy it.

And now God has a rest prepared for you. If you belong to Jesus Christ, you are part of the people of God. As a member of God's family, you can enter into the Sabbath rest He has for you. It's called a Sabbath rest because it's already completed.

Rather than trying to make God do something for you, you can rest in what God has already done. He has already prepared works for you to do so that you might walk in them. You don't have to scheme, manipulate, or wear yourself out trying to live your life in God's will.

Scripture says, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). Whatever God is going to do for you, He has already done. Whatever God has planned for you to do, He has already planned. Whatever God has purposed for your life, He has already purposed.

Your job as a follower of Jesus Christ isn't to try to outwit, outplay, or outsmart God—to try to figure out your personal destiny yourself. God has already drawn the map of your life, and it's a good life filled with both a future and a hope (Jeremiah 29:11). For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. It's a plan that's self-perpetuating. You just need to obey Him fully so you can enter the rest He has planned for you.

You don't need to create it. Elohim, the Creator God, has already created it. You don't need to force it. Elohim, the strong one, has already set it up. You don't need to go find it. Elohim, the personal and ever-present God, will reveal it to you as you seek Him each day.

Your purpose has your name on it. Your peace has your name on it. Your provision has your name on it. Your well-being has your name on it. Your rest has your name on it. However, keep in mind that Israelites who left Egypt didn't enter into God's rest because they wanted to quit before getting there. They wanted to go their own way in the wilderness and not go God's way. Because of this, they forfeited the rest that was rightfully theirs.

I don't want you to miss the rest Elohim has created for you. I want you to complete the obedience He has called you to and walk in His path even when it doesn't make any sense (Proverbs 3:5-6). When you do, you'll discover that the strength and power that come from an all-powerful God—Elohim—can do things for you that you couldn't even have imagined.

I love the passage of Scripture that tells us God will take care of everything when we're surrendered and obedient to Him. We read, "It is vain for you to rise up early, to retire late, to eat the bread of painful labors; for He gives to His beloved even in his sleep" (Psalm 127:2).

You can sleep peacefully at night because you are God's beloved—you have aligned yourself underneath His lordship and comprehensive rule—and He is working while you are snoring. He can handle the issues of your life, make the connections and intersections you need, and give you wisdom to make the choices that will get you closer each day to the fulfillment of His will—if you will but let Him by living a life of surrender to Him.

Elohim can make something out of nothing. He can empower it to grow into something grand even when nothing appears to be happening at all. He can bring order out of chaos. His is a great name because He is Elohim, the great and powerful.