

Elohim

“In the beginning God”: what a remarkable way to introduce the story of creation. Compared to many ancient creation myths of which begin with either a sea or a great egg or the sky and ocean giving birth to the land or, more up to date, a “big bang” triggered by who knows what, the simplicity and vastness of those four simple words is dramatic. It’s as if the writer is saying, “Yes, there was a beginning to this universe. At that beginning was one God, all powerful and sovereign. He alone is original. All else is derivative.”

Those four opening words of the Bible also tell us something else. This Creator God is different from all those other “gods” created by the imaginations of the ancient world. He is much more complex than any of them. How do we know this? From the word we translate as God in Genesis 1:1—the word Elohim. The word is a plural used as a singular. What that means is that the word is the plural form of El or God, but it is treated as a singular noun within the sentence structure. To illustrate, let’s take a familiar scripture, Deuteronomy 6:4, and give a literal translation, “Hear, O Israel, Yahweh our Gods is one Yahweh”. Most English teachers and some spell checks would see the problem right away! The appositive of Yahweh, “Gods”, does not agree with the singular verb “is”.

What is the significance of this? Using the plural noun form in Genesis 1:1 was intended to reveal three great truths about our Creator. In Hebrew the plural form of a noun when used with a singular verb is making an intensive statement about the noun. Here in the context of creation the plural name declares that Elohim is all powerful. When He speaks things happen. Light happens. Sky happens. Earth happens. Water happens. Vegetation happens. Animals happen. And finally we happen! All of creation is just that, the result of the mighty Creator speaking it into existence. We cannot think of anyone or anything more powerful. By the mere utterance of will, it is accomplished. Too be derived from such a power is mind boggling. All we can do is humbly bow before the One we owe our very existence too, which leads to the next great truth.

Secondly, the plural form can be used in a majestic sense to indicate, as Creator, God’s kingly rule. He is sovereign. As the all-powerful Creator He rules. A.W. Tozer writes in *The Knowledge of the Holy* that God’s sovereignty involves knowledge, power, and freedom:

Were there even one datum of knowledge, however small, unknown to God, His rule would break down at that point. To be Lord over all the creation, He must possess all knowledge. And were God lacking one infinitesimal modicum of power, that lack would end His reign and undo His kingdom; that one stray atom of power would belong to someone else and God would be a limited ruler and hence not sovereign.

Lesson two/The Names of God

Furthermore, His sovereignty requires that He be absolutely free, which means simply that He must be free to do whatever He wills to do anywhere at any time to carry out His eternal purpose in every single detail without interference. Were He less than free He must be less than sovereign.

The amazing aspect of such an unrestricted God is that He has sovereignly decreed that we are free to respond to Him in belief or unbelief. But because God is sovereign there is no freedom to negotiate the results of our response. Clearly, in the great moral and spiritual conflict that now rages on the earth, whoever responds to God in belief is on the winning side and cannot lose. The only hope for those who oppose such a sovereign God is to repent and turn to Him.

Finally, imbedded in this grammatical oddity is the shadow of an important truth God is just beginning to reveal to His people. Today we call that truth the Trinity. This truth says that God is eternally co-existent in three persons: The Father, The Son, and The Holy Spirit. However, He remains one God. This reality about God is one of the hardest for most of us to hold steady in our minds for any length of time. We would rather He be one or the other. Either there be three distinct Gods each sitting on a separate throne, or there be One God without any of this confusing stuff about a triune godhead. God leaves open neither option. Even His name Elohim hints that although He is one God, there is something pluralistic about Him. All of this points to the fact that we are creations of an incredibly complex God who reveals just enough about His nature to let us know that we can never understand how He can be three and yet one! C.S. Lewis once observed that we should not expect to be able to understand the mystery of the triune God. Indeed, he said, we should expect not to be able to understand it. This mystery is the very thing you would expect from One who is truly God. For the creature to claim to understand the Creator is contradictory. How can those finite in knowledge and power comprehend the One who is infinite in knowledge and power?

We are not asked to explain God but to exalt Him. Speak the truth of what God reveals about Himself, and let that stand. We are called to faith not to comprehension. In exaltation we are calling others to faith as well. God cannot be put in a test tube and experimented with so that we can develop our theories and postulates. He is the self-revealing, all-powerful, sovereign, mysterious three in one; and we owe our existence (temporally and eternally) to Him. Let's proclaim with Paul:

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? Or WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen. Romans 11:33-36

Assignment:

1. In Genesis 1:1 what does the name Elohim reveal about God?

2. When Elohim is used in the Old Testament the writers often use it as the name to declare God's attributes. Look up the Scriptures below and describe from each the truth that is revealed about Elohim:

Genesis 5:1

Psalm 47:7-8

Psalm 50:6

Psalm 86:12

Hosea 13:4

Deuteronomy 4:31

Psalm 116:5

Deuteronomy 7:9

3. Which description of God speaks to you? What misconceptions have been revealed? When all of these descriptions are added up, what a God we have. What is your response to Him?

4. Consider the God of your creation. Read Genesis 1:27, Psalms 139: 13-17, and Revelation 4:11. As a human being what is your unique status in creation? Why were you created?

5. How is Elohim a strong tower? How can you run to it and be safe? What is happening in your life right now that is easier to deal with knowing and believing that your God is Elohim?