

Chapter V: The Names of God

When God gives names to persons or things, they are names which have meaning and give an insight into the nature of the persons or things designated. This also applies to the names which God has given Himself. Sometimes the Bible speaks of the name of God in the singular, and in such cases the term is a designation of the manifestation of God in general, especially in relation to His people, Ex. 20:7; Ps. 113:3; or simply stands for God Himself, Prov. 18:10; Isa. 50:10. The one general name of God is split up into several special names, which are expressive of His many-sided being. These names are not of human invention, but are given by God Himself.

1. The Old Testament Names of God

Some of the Old Testament names denote that God is the High and Exalted One. *'El* and *'Elohim* indicate that He is strong and mighty and should therefore be feared, while *'Elyon* points to His exalted nature as the Most High, the object of reverence and worship. Another name belonging to this class is *'Adonai*, usually rendered "Lord," the Possessor and Ruler of all men. Other names express the fact that God enters into relations of friendship with His creatures. One of these, common among the patriarchs, was the name *Shaddai* or *'El-Shaddai*, which indeed stresses the divine greatness, but as a source of comfort and blessing for His people. It indicates that God controls the powers of nature, and makes them serve His purposes. The greatest name of God, however, always held sacred by the Jews, is the name Jehovah (*Yahweh*). Its origin and meaning is indicated in Ex. 3:14, 15. It expresses the fact that God is always the same, and especially that He is unchangeable in His covenant relationship, and is always faithful in the fulfillment of His promises. It frequently assumes a fuller form in "Jehovah of Hosts." This calls up the picture of Jehovah as the King of Glory surrounded by angelic hosts.

2. The New Testament Names of God

The New Testament names are simply the Greek forms of those found in the Old Testament. The following deserve particular attention: a. The name *Theos*. This is simply the word for 'God,' and is the most common name employed in the New Testament. It is frequently found with a possessive genitive as 'my God,' 'thy God,' 'our God,' 'your

God.' In Christ God is the God of each one of His children. The individual form takes the place of the national form, 'the God of Israel,' so common in the Old Testament.

b. The name *Kurios*. This is the word for 'Lord,' a name that is applied not only to God but also to Christ. It takes the place of both 'Adonai and Jehovah, though its meaning corresponds more particularly with that of 'Adonai. It designates God as the Possessor and Ruler of all things, and especially of His people.

c. The name *Pater*. It is often said that the New Testament introduced this as a new name. But this is hardly correct, for the name 'Father' is also found in the Old Testament to express the special relation in which God stands to Israel, Deut. 32:6; Isa. 63:16. In the New Testament it is more individual in that it points to God as the Father of all believers. Sometimes it designates God as the creator of all, 1 Cor. 8:6; Eph. 3:14; Heb. 12:9; Jas. 1:17, and sometimes the first Person of the Trinity as the Father of Christ, John 14:11; 17:1.

To memorize. Passages bearing on:

a. The name of God in general:

Ex. 20:7. "Thou shalt not take the name of Jehovah thy God in vain; for Jehovah will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain."

Ps. 8:1. "Jehovah, our Lord, how excellent is Thy name in all the earth!"

b. Particular names:

Gen. 1:1. "In the beginning God ('Elohim) created the heavens and the earth."

Ex. 6:3. "And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, as God Almighty ('*El Shaddai*); but by my name Jehovah I was not known unto them."

Ps. 86:8. "There is none like Thee among the gods, Lord ('*Adonai*); neither are there any works like unto Thy works."

Mal. 3:6. "For I, Jehovah, change not; therefore ye, sons of Jacob, are not consumed."

Matt. 6:9. "Our Father who art in Heaven, Hallowed be Thy name."

Rev. 4:8. "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord (*Kurios*) God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come."

For Further Study:

- a. What light does Ex. 3:13-16 shed on the meaning of the name Jehovah?
- b. What name of God was rather common in the times of the patriarchs? Gen. 17:1; 28:3; 35:11; 43:14; 48:3; 49:25; Ex. 6:3.
- c. Can you give some descriptive names of God? Isa. 48:3, 15; 44:6; Amos 4:13; Luke 1:78; 2 Cor. 1:3; 11:31; Jos. 1:17; Heb. 12:9; Rev. 1:8, 17.

Questions for Review

1. What does Scripture mean when it speaks of the name of God in the singular?
2. Are the special names of God of human origin?
3. What two kinds of names do we distinguish in the Old Testament?
4. What is the meaning of the names '*Elohim*, *Jehovah*, '*Adonai*, '*El Shaddai*, and *Kurios*?
5. Is the name Father ever applied to God in the Old Testament?
6. In what different senses is this name used in the New Testaments?