

# Elohim

“God” has become a generic title. It conveys the idea that there is some sort of supreme being. At many interfaith gatherings the representatives of various religions address “God” as if each of them were talking to and about the same person – only from a peculiar cultural perspective.

For example: The average person thinks that when the Muslim addresses Allah he is talking to the same person revealed as God in the Bible. It’s important for the Muslim to convince you that Allah is the God of the Bible. If he isn’t, then there is no continuity in what they believe and Islam is not a further revelation from God but a false religion.

The hard historical evidence demonstrates that the god Allah was a pagan deity. In fact, he was the Moon-god who was married to the sun goddess and the stars were his daughters. Mohammed consolidated the worship of many pagan gods to the worship of one, to him the greatest of many gods, Allah the Moon-god.

About twelve years ago now I was at my initial training to be certified as a law enforcement chaplain. It was a fairly large group – over one hundred from all over California and other states. A few of us Calvary Chapel types somehow found one another. There were Jews and Muslims and various Christian denominations.

After a role play that was to demonstrate how a chaplain should act, react, and interact, the instructors asked for comments. They were generally positive – until George Sabolick sated that he thought it was lame because there was nothing about Jesus! The ensuing discussion was intense. We were in a very small minority.

Later that night we were telling the tale to one of our little group who had missed the meeting. When we got to the part where George spoke up, this guy said, “He must have used the “J” word.” He meant Jesus! It was true. As long as we used the generic title, “God,” we were OK. As soon as we mentioned Jesus battle lines were drawn.

The God of the Bible has revealed Himself in many ways. One of those ways is by giving Himself various names, each of which describes different aspects of His nature and character. In our pre-communion devotions I want to look at some of those names.

The first is Elohim. It is the first name we have for God. It occurs in the opening verse of the opening chapter of the first book, Genesis, where we read,

**Genesis 1:1** In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

In the beginning, Elohim... It occurs thirty-one more times in the first chapter of Genesis and a total of two-thousand five-hundred seventy times in the Bible.

Elohim derives from the shorter word El which, by itself, means mighty, strong, prominent. This word El itself is translated “God” some two hundred fifty times and frequently in passages that indicate the great power of God.

The most striking thing about the name Elohim is that it is in a plural form. Elohim is formed by El and a masculine plural suffix. Although in a plural form it is constantly accompanied by verbs and adjectives that are singular. One Jewish scholar writes, “Indeed, the word Elohim appears in its plural form over 2000 times throughout the Hebrew Scriptures and in virtually every instance it has a singular verb” (Nehemia Gordon).

In the very first verse of Genesis the verb **create** is singular, and so all through the chapter.

This statement from Deuteronomy 32:39 is typical:

**Deuteronomy 32:39** 'Now see that I, *even I, am* He, And *there is* no God besides Me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; Nor *is there any* who can deliver from My hand.

Literally it reads, **there is no Elohim** [plural] **besides Me** [singular].

This one Elohim speaks of Himself as Us:

**Genesis 1:26** Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image...

Later in Genesis 11:7 you read,

**Genesis 11:7** Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech."

Later still, in Isaiah, there is the famous and wonderful scene in which Isaiah sees the Lord high and exalted. The Lord is looking for someone to commission and send. It reads like this:

**Isaiah 6:8** Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: "Whom shall I send, And who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here *am* I! Send me."

A plural name; singular verbs and adjectives. It sounds like one God existing in more than one Person.

From the beginning God reveals Himself as one God existing in more than one Person. Evangelical theology embraces the doctrine of the triune God because of the total revelation of Scripture. Three Persons, each possessing full and equal deity, are presented.

Equally as emphatically the Bible describes only one God. When everything Scripture has to say is put together there is a stress on unity and diversity in unity within God. He is seen as One in Three and Three in One.

1. God is not one person, the Father, with Jesus as a creation and the Holy Spirit is a force. That is what the Jehovah's Witnesses believe.
2. Neither is He one person who took three consecutive forms, i.e., the Father, became the Son, who became the Holy Spirit. That is what Oneness theology teaches.

3. Nor is the Trinity an office held by three separate Gods as Mormonism teaches.

What about Islam and Allah? The word "Trinity" only appears in the Qur'an in verses 4:171 and 5:73:

O People of the Book, commit no excesses in your religion; nor say of God anything but the truth. The Messiah Jesus son of Mary was (no more than) a Messenger of God, and His Word, which He bestowed on Mary, and a Spirit proceeding from Him; so believe in God and His Messengers. Say not "Trinity": desist! It will be better for you: for God is One: Glory be to Him! (far exalted is He) above having a son. To Him belong all things in the heavens and on earth. And enough is God as a Disposer of affairs. (Qur'an 4:171)

They do blaspheme who say: God is one of three in a Trinity: for there is no god except One God. If they desist not from their word (of blasphemy), verily a grievous penalty will befall the blasphemers among them. (Qur'an 5:73)

"Trinity" is a term that is not found in the Bible but a word used to describe what is apparent about God in the Scriptures. The doctrine of the Trinity is arrived at by looking at the whole of Scripture, not in a single verse. It is the doctrine that there is only one God, not three, and that the one God exists in three persons: Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

There are some important implications and applications of the doctrine of the trinity. Not just theologically, but practically.

First, God cannot be a God of love unless He exists as more than one Person! Love has a source and love has an object. Since human beings are created in the image of God, then He must be capable of love in His very self. When we hear, "God is love," (First John 4:16) we must realize that in Himself God must be at least two.

J. Scott Horrell writes, "In short, it seems from every vantage that for God to be infinitely personal and to be love, he must exist as at least two persons. A mono-personal God is not 'big enough' to be God."<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> J. Scott Horrell, In the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit: Constructing a Trinitarian Worldview (1998)

Second, God could not save you unless He existed as more than one Person. In Romans 3:25-26 we read that Jesus Christ is **a sacrifice of atonement** (NIV) and that God the Father is **just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus**. Unless God is more than one Person He cannot be both just and the justifier.

If God shows mercy and forgives the sinner, then he has violated His righteous justice. And if God exercises justice against the sinner, then He has denied His mercy.

God the Father is the righteous judge, and God the Son is the only One who can satisfy the judgment of God the Father, and therefore the only worthy object of saving faith.

The Trinity is complete as we understand that the Holy Spirit is the One who, in Jesus' words, **when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment** (John 16:8).

On an everyday level, the doctrine of the trinity affects our worship. In the words of an old hymn, "Thank you, O my Father, for giving us Your Son; And leaving Your Spirit 'til the work on earth is done."

It affects our praying. Do you ever wonder just who to address when you pray? In his book, *God: Who He Is, What He Does, How to Know Him Better*, J. Carl Laney writes, "Although God is one divine essence, He is also three persons. Which of these should we address in our prayers?"

We are taught by Jesus to address God the Father:

**Matthew 6:9** In this manner, therefore, pray: **Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.**

In another statement on prayer Jesus says,

**John 14:14** If you ask anything in My name, I will do *it*.

The Holy Spirit is portrayed as helping us in our prayers:

**Romans 8:26** Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

**Ephesians 6:18** praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit...

## Conclusion

Elohim, our one God in three Persons, is love. He saves. We can approach Him in worship as the Father Who gave us His Son and sent His Spirit 'til the work on earth is done. We can pray to the Father through the Son in the power of the Spirit.

Only the Elohim of the Bible is sufficient for these thing.



