

Unity and Plurality



God Revealed In His Names (Part 2)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again as I continue to share with you one of the richest and deepest themes of Scripture: God Revealed in His Names, what we can know about God from the various names given Him in Scripture.

Yesterday I spoke about the primary name of God in the Old Testament, Elohim. This occurs about 2500 times in the 39 books of the Old Testament. The Bible is a God-centered book for God-hungry humanity. Somewhere deep inside every human being there is a hunger to know the truth about God. The Bible is the only book that can truly satisfy this hunger. That is why it remains the unchallenged best seller among all books ever written.

In my introductory talk yesterday I dealt with the meaning and the associations of Elohim. I said these things. First, Elohim is the primary name for God in the Hebrew of the Old Testament. Second, it's plural in form but usually followed by a singular verb. Third, its primary associations are power, majesty, righteousness and justice, eternity and the heavenly dwelling place. Fourth, it's also applied to created beings who manifest some or more of these characteristics. For example, to angels (both good and bad), to rulers and to judges.

We summed up the meaning of Elohim in the phrase "the totality of all that is God."

Today I'm going to deal with one particular aspect of God as revealed in the name of Elohim, an aspect that is absolutely unique to the Bible's revelation of God, something that is not found in any other book or religion. This unique aspect of God as revealed in the name Elohim is the combination of unity and plurality within the nature of God.

Let's go back to Genesis 1:1:

> "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." (NAS)

I pointed out there that there is a kind of clash of grammar. The word God, Elohim, is plural, the verb that follows is singular. So we have a plural noun followed by a singular verb. This paradox contains the seeds of truth to be unfolded throughout the rest of Scripture.

There is a somewhat similar paradox in the famous verse in Deuteronomy 6:4 which the Jewish people call the Shama, the kind of doctrinal statement of the faith of Israel.

> "Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God, the Lord is one!" (NAS)

The very interesting thing about the Hebrew is that where we say in English "the Lord is our God, the Lord is one" it only takes Hebrew four words to say that. Only four words. Still more interesting, of those four words three are plural in form. The only word that's singular is the word for one. So, again we have this paradox of unity and plurality combined in the revelation of God.

One way to understand this is to realize that there are two different Hebrew words for "one." The one word is yachid and the other is echad. Now, the word yachid means "that which is absolutely alone and unique." For instance, in Genesis 22:2 the Lord spoke to Abraham and said:

> "Take now your son, your only son, whom you love..."

uses the word "only," yachid, because Abraham only had that one son born of his own body.

Or, again, in Psalm 25:16 the psalmist says:

> "...I am lonely and afflicted..."

the word "lonely," yachid, entirely on my own.

On the other hand, the other word for one, echad, denotes a union of a number of elements. This is very clear in many passages of the Old Testament. For instance, in the 2nd chapter of Genesis God outlines the nature of marriage and the union of Adam and Eve and He says:

> "For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh."

One, echad, where we see there are two who being united form one. So, echad describes or denotes the union of more than one to form a unity.

Again, when the spies went in to see the Promised Land they came to the valley of Eshcol and it says this in Numbers 13:23:

> "Then they came to the valley of Eshcol and from there cut down a branch with a single cluster of grapes..." (NAS)

The word "single" in Hebrew is echad. It was one cluster but it was made up of many grapes.

And then another remarkable statement in Judges 20:11 where there was civil war amongst the tribes of Israel and it says this:

> "Thus all the men of Israel were gathered against the city, united as one man." (NAS)

The word "one," echad. Many thousands of men but, nevertheless, forming a unity, one.

And then in a vision of Ezekiel in Ezekiel 37:16-17 the Lord told him to take two sticks and name them for the two leading tribes of Israel.

> "And you, son of man, take for yourself one stick and write on it, 'For Judah and for the sons of Israel, his companions;' then take another stick and write on it, 'For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim and all the house of Israel, his companions.' Then join them for yourself one to another into one stick, that they may become one in your hand."

The word "one," echad, yet we see specifically that there were originally two sticks. Being united they formed a unity and are described by the word "one."

Now this, I believe, helps us to understand the kind of unity that's represented by the word Elohim. It's a unity which is a union, a perfect union, but contains with it more than oneness.

For example, there are passages in the Bible where this is clear. After Adam and Eve had sinned and forfeited their right to live in the garden we read that in Genesis 3:22:

> "Then the Lord God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil...'" (NAS)

All through that passage the knowledge of good and evil was a distinctive characteristic of God. In the version that I read there where it says "like one of Us," "us" is printed with a capital "U." In other words, it's applied to God. So there is

both unity and plurality within the very nature of God.

Another interesting passage is in Isaiah 6:8 where Isaiah has a vision of the Lord and he says:

> "Then 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!'"

It is God speaking and He uses both singular and plural. He says, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?"

So, all through the Bible there is this fascinating paradox that God is one and yet within that oneness of God there is more than one. The full truth of this paradox of the unity and yet the plurality of God is brought out to the light and into open revelation in the New Testament. I cannot take time to read many, many passages. I'll read one of the most distinctive. The final commission of Jesus to His disciples as recorded at the end of Matthew's gospel. Matthew 28:19:

> "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit..."

Actually, the Greek says "baptizing them into the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit." That's the name of God. We are to be baptized into the name of God that signifies taking up our place in God, losing our personal life in God. And the fullness of God is there stated in three names: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. When we see that, we understand why right from the beginning of the Bible, the very first verse of the Old Testament, the word for God is plural in form. The truth brought out in the New Testament is not new, it's merely an unfolding and fulfillment of that which was already present by implication in the Old Testament. All these elements are already present there in the Old Testament.

Let me give you two examples. In Proverbs 30:4 the writer says this:

> "Who has gone up to heaven and come down? Who has gathered up the wind in the hollow of his hands? Who has wrapped up the waters in his cloak? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is his name, and the name of his son? Tell me if you know!" (NIV)

Now, everybody who is familiar with the revelation of Scripture will understand that the person who has done all those things is Himself, God. No one but God has done those things. And yet, it says, "What is his name, and the name of his son?" So, there is a beginning of the revelation of the Father/Son relationship even in the Old Testament.

And then in Isaiah 48:12-13 and 16 a person is speaking and he says this:

> "Listen to me, O Jacob, even Israel whom I called; I am He, I am the first, I am also the last. Surely My hand founded the earth, And My right hand spread out the heavens; When I call to them, they stand together." (NAS)

Again, the whole revelation of Scripture would agree that the person who says that is God, no less than God himself, the first, the last, the Creator, the sustainer of heaven and earth. But then he says:

> "Come near to Me, listen to this: From the first I have not spoken in secret, From the time it took place, I was there. And now the Lord God has sent Me, and His Spirit."

An alternative translation says, "The Lord God and His Spirit hath sent Me." So there is a divine person speaking and yet He says that God and His Spirit hath sent Me. Or, God hath sent Me and His Spirit. Whichever way you look at it, the fulfillment is there in the New Testament where God sent Jesus and the Holy Spirit. And all three are God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. So we see that in Elohim there is a perfect unity that is more than one. You see, everything in the created universe has its source in God. There's nothing in the universe that doesn't originate with God. The universe contains both unity and plurality. Therefore, both have proceeded from God. God is essentially one, and essentially more than one. That's the mystery of the nature of God, this unique blending together of unity and plurality.

Our time is up for today. I'll be back with you again tomorrow at this time. Tomorrow I'll continue with this theme of God Revealed in His Names. I'll be speaking about the second great Hebrew name of God of which the traditional English translation is Jehovah.

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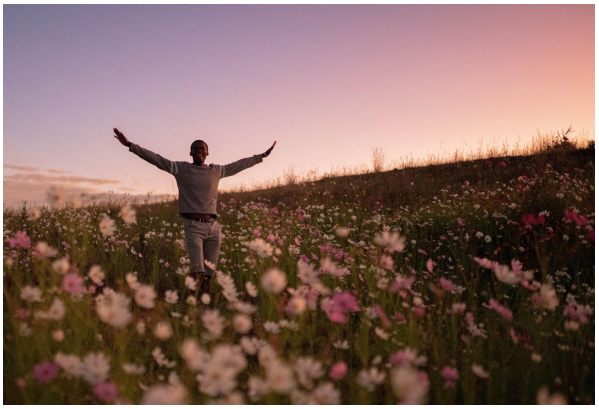

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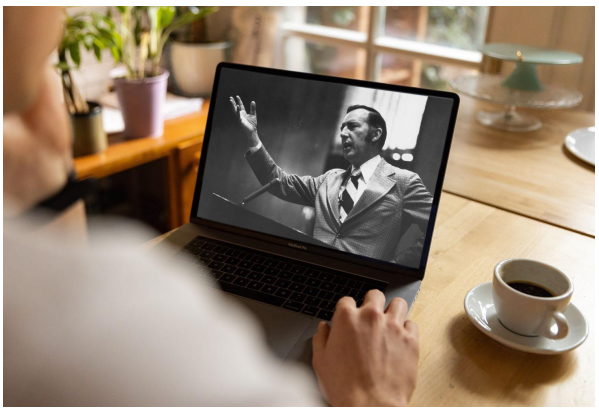

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