

Of the Names of God.

by John Gill

John Gill's sermon explores the significance of the various names of God and their implications for understanding His nature and attributes.

Scripture: Genesis 1:1, Exodus 3:14, Job 9:4, Psalm 34:7, Psalm 83:18, Isaiah 57:15, Matthew 4:10, John 8:58, Hebrews 12:28, Revelation 1:8

Topics: "Understanding God's Nature", "Names Of God"

Description

John Gill explores the significance of the names of God, emphasizing that understanding these names is essential for knowing God Himself. He explains that God's names reflect His nature, attributes, and relationships, serving as a gateway to comprehend His divine essence. Gill discusses various names such as Elohim, El, Elion, Shaddai, and Jehovah, each revealing different aspects of God's character and His role as Creator, Sustainer, and Judge. He highlights that while God is ultimately beyond human comprehension, His names provide insight into His eternal, self-existent, and almighty nature. The sermon encourages believers to revere and worship God, recognizing the depth of His identity through His names.

Transcript

A Body of Doctrinal Divinity

Book 1--Chapter 3

OF THE NAMES OF GOD

Being about to treat of God, and of the things of God, it may be proper to begin with his names: the names of persons and things are usually the first that are known of them; and if these are not known, it cannot be thought that much, if any thing, is known of them; and where the name of God is not known, he himself cannot be known; and the rather the consideration of his name, or names, is worthy of regard, because they serve to lead into some knowledge of his nature and perfections; and therefore a proper introduction to such a subject.

Indeed, properly speaking, since God is incomprehensible, he is not nominable; and being but one, he has no need of a name to distinguish him; and therefore Plato[1] says, he has no name; and hence he commonly calls him to on , "Ens", "The Being". So when Moses asked the Lord, what he should say to the children of Israel, should they ask the name of him that sent him to them, he bid him say, "I am that I am";

that is, The eternal Being, the Being of beings; which his name Jehovah is expressive of: nevertheless, there are names of God in the Scriptures taken from one or other of his attributes, which are worthy of consideration.

The names of God, as Zanchy[2] observes, some of them respect him as the subject, as Jehovah, Lord, God: others are predicates, what are spoken of him, or attributed to him, as holy, just, good, &c. Some respect the relation the divine Persons in the Godhead stand in to each other, as Father, Son, and Spirit: others the relation of God to the creatures; and which are properly said of him, and not them, as Creator, Preserver, Governor, &c. some are common to the Three divine persons, as Jehovah, God, Father, Spirit; and some peculiar to each, as the epithets of unbegotten, begotten, proceeding from the Father and the Son: some are figurative and metaphorical, taken from creatures, to whom God is compared; and others are proper names, by which he either calls himself, or is called by the prophets and apostles, in the books of the Old and New Testament; which are what will be particularly considered. 1.

"Elohim" is the first name of God we meet with in Scripture, and is translated God, (Gen. 1:1) and is most frequently used throughout the whole Old Testament; sometimes, indeed, improperly of creatures, angels, and men, and of false deities, (Ps. 8:5, 82:1, 6; Jer. 10:11) but properly only of God. Some derive this word from a root, which signifies to curse and swear; but as to the reasons why this name is given to the divine Being on that account, it is not agreed; some[3] of late, have given this as a reason, because the three divine Persons, as they in a shocking manner express it, bound themselves with an oath, under a curse, to redeem mankind; which, to say no worse of, is indecent and unworthy of the dignity and majesty of God, "who is blessed for evermore"; for to bind himself with an oath, and that under a conditional curse; which is no other than to imprecate a curse upon himself, if his oath and covenant are not fulfilled; is so harsh, if not something worse, as is not to be endured: and though Christ agreed to redeem men, and to be made a curse for them, that they might receive the blessing; yet he was not accursed through any failure of his oath and covenant; but on another account, being the Surety of his people; nor is he ever called Eloah on that account, and still less the other two persons: besides there are other and better reasons to be given for this name of the divine Being, supposing it to be taken from the word signifying as above; as, because he adjures and causes others to swear, and binds them with an oath to himself; in which sense the word is used of men, (1 Sam. 14:24; 1 King 8:31) and is the business of judges; by which oath men are bound to God[4], and not he to them; and so, according to the Jewish writers[5], the word is expressive of God as a judge; in which they are followed by some learned men[6]: or, because he pronounces a man accursed who breaks his law, and neglects and despises the sacrifice and righteousness of Christ; so Cocceius[7]: or, because he is the object men must swear by, whenever they swear at all (see Deut. 6:13; Isa. 65:16).

Though this word Elohim cannot be derived from the word so signifying, because it has the immoveable and immutable h, as appears from the point "mappick", in its singular Eloah, and from the construction of it, which that word has not; and besides, that is never used of God when he is said to swear, but always another. The word Elohim may be better derived from a word in the Arabic language, which signifies to "worship", as is thought by many learned men[8] and so is a fit name for God, who is the sole object of religious worship and adoration; not idols of gold, silver, &c. nor living men, nor persons deified after death, nor angels; but the Lord God only, (Matt. 4:10).

It is a word of the plural number; and though it has a singular, which is sometimes used, yet it is most frequently in this form; and being joined with a singular verb, as in (Gen. 1:1 it is thought[9] to denote a plurality of persons in the unity of the divine essence; and certain it is, that three persons, Father, Son, and Spirit, appeared, and were concerned in the creation of all things (Gen. 1:1-3; Ps 33:6). 2. Another name

of God is "El"; and which may be observed in the word Beth-el, which signifies, "The house of God" (Gen. 12:7, 8).

Both the singular and plural, El Elim, the God of gods, are used in Daniel 11:36 and the word is left untranslated in Matthew 27:46 "Eli, Eli; my God, my God". It is commonly rendered, by Junius and Tremellius, the strong or mighty God; an epithet that well agrees with the divine Being, (Job 9:4, 19; Ps. 89:8, 13) and is one of the names of the Messiah (Isa. 9:6). Hillerus[10] takes this to be a part of the word Eloah, the singular of Elohim; which, according to him, signifies the first in essence; being the first and the last, the beginning and the end, (Isa. 44:6; Rev. 1:8) it is expressive of the power of God. 3.

The next name of God we meet with is "Elion", the most high, (Gen. 14:18-20, 22). So Christ is called "The son of the Highest", and the Spirit, "the power of the Highest", (Luke 1:32, 35) and which name God has either from his habitation, the highest heavens; which is his palace, where he keeps his court, and which is his throne; in which high and holy place he, the high and lofty One, dwells, (Isa. 57:15, 56:1) or from his superiority, power, and dominion over all creatures, over the highest personages on earth, and the highest angels in heaven, (Ps. 83:18, 97:9; see also Eccl. 5:8) or from the sublimity of his nature and essence, which is out of the reach of finite minds, and is incomprehensible, (Job 11:7, 8).

This name was known among the Phoenicians, and is given to one of their deities, called Elioun, the most high[11]; it is expressive of the supremacy of God. 4. Another name of God is "Shaddai": under this name God appeared to Abraham, (Gen. 17:1) and to which reference is had, (Exo. 6:3) we translate it Almighty in both places, and in all others, particularly in the book of Job, where it is often mentioned; and it well agrees with him whose power is infinite and uncontrollable, and appears in the works of his hands, creation and providence.

Some choose to render it "sufficient", or "all-sufficient"[12] God; having a sufficiency in and of himself, and for himself, to make himself completely and infinitely happy; nor does he need, nor can he receive any thing from his creatures to add to his happiness; and he has a sufficiency for them; he can, and does, supply all the wants of his people, temporal and spiritual; "his grace is sufficient for them." Others render it "Nourisher"[13]; deriving it from a word which signifies "a breast"; that being what creatures nourish their young with; and is made mention of when this name of God is spoken of (Gen. 49:25).

God not only fills mens' hearts with food and gladness, but "he opens his hand, and satisfies the desire of all creatures, and gives them their meat in due season" (Acts 14:17; Ps. 145:15, 16). Hillerus[14] derives it from a word which signifies to pour out, or shed; and it well agrees with God, who pours forth, or sheds his blessings, in great plenty, on his creatures; and which flow from him as from a fountain; to which he is often compared: though others give a very different etymology of it; deriving it from a word[15] which signifies to "destroy"; to which there seems to be a beautiful allusion in (Isa. 13:6).

"Destruction from Shaddai, the destroyer", who destroyed the old world, Sodom and Gomorrah, the firstborn of the Egyptians, and Pharaoh and his host: though God is so called, previous to most of these instances; indeed he is "the lawgiver, that is able to save and to destroy"; even to destroy body and soul in hell, with an everlasting destruction. And some render the word the "Darter", or "Thunderer"[16]; whose darts are his thunderbolts (Job 6:4; Ps. 18:13, 14). The heathens called their chief god, Jupiter, "Tonans, The Thunderer": and, perhaps, from another etymology of this word before given, from dv "a breast".

Some of their deities are represented as full of breasts; so Ceres, Isis, and Diana. This name seems to be expressive of the all-sufficiency of God, and of the supply of his creatures from it. 5. Another of the names

of God is, the "Lord", or "God of hosts"; it is first mentioned in 1 Samuel 1:3, 11 but frequently afterwards; and is left untranslated in James 5:4 where the Lord is called, "the Lord of Sabaoth", not "Sabbath", as it is sometimes wrongly understood; and as if it was the same with "Lord of Sabbath", (Matt. 12:8) for though the words are somewhat alike in sound, they are very different in sense; for "Sabbath" signifies "rest", and "Sabaoth" means "hosts" or "armies": the Lord is the God of armies on earth, a man of war, expert in it; that teacheth mens' hands to war, and their fingers to fight, and is the generalissimo of them, as he was particularly of the armies of Israel, as they are called, (Exo. 7:4) which he brought out of Egypt, and went at the head of them, and fought their battles for them; (see Exo. 14:14, 15:3) and who gives success and victory on what side soever he takes: and he is the Lord of the hosts of the starry heavens; the sun, moon, and stars, called the host of heaven, (Gen. 2:1; 2 King 21:3, 23:5) and by this military term, because under the Lord they sometimes fight as the stars did against Sisera, (Jud. 5:20) and also of the airy heavens; and the locusts that fly there are his army, (Joel 2:7, 11) and the meteors, thunder and lightning, snow and hail, which are laid up by him against the day of battle and war, are the artillery he sometimes brings forth against the enemies of his people; as he did against the Egyptians and Canaanites, (Job 38:22, 23; Exo. 9:24, 25; Joshua 10:11) the angels also are the militia of heaven, and are called "the heavenly host", (Luke 2:13; see 1 King 22:19) the place where the angels of God met Jacob, was called from thence Mahanaim, (Gen. 32:1, 2) two hosts or armies, one going before him, and the other behind him; or the one on one side him and the other on the other, to guard him; hence they are said to "encamp" about them that fear the Lord (Ps. 34:7).

These are the creatures of God by whom he is adored and served; they are at his command, and sometimes employed in a military way, to destroy his and his peoples' enemies (see 2 King 19:35). This name is expressive of God's dominion over all his creatures, and the several armies of them. 6. Another name of God is "Adonai", or "Adon", (Gen. 15:2) and is commonly rendered Lord. Hence the Spanish word "don" for "lord". God is so called, because he is the Lord of the whole earth (Zech. 4:14).

Some[17] derive it from a word which signifies the basis, prop, or support of any thing[18]. So a king in the Greek language is called basileuv, because he is the basis and support of his people: and so God is the support of all his creatures; "he upholds all things by the word of his power"; he bears up the pillars of the earth; all men move and have their being in him; and "he upholds his saints with the right hand of his righteousness"; and even his Son as man and mediator, (Isa. 41:10, 42:1).

Some think it has the signification of a judge[19]; "God is the judge of all the earth"; and is a righteous one, protects and defends good men, and takes vengeance on the wicked; and will judge the world in righteousness at the last day. Though, perhaps, Hillerus[20] is most correct in rendering it "the Cause", from which, and for which, all things are; as all things are made by the Lord, and for his will, pleasure, and glory (see Rom. 11:36; Heb. 2:10; Rev. 4:11). Adon is used in the plural number of God, (Mal. 1:6) and so Adonai is used of the Son, as well as of the Father, (Ps. 110:1) and of the Holy Spirit, Isaiah 6:8 compared with Acts 28:25.

Hence Adonis, with the heathens, the same with the sun, their chief deity, according to Macrobius[21], by whom Bacchus is called[22] Ebon, or rather Edon; who, he says, is also the same with the sun. 7. The famous name of God is "Jehovah"; this is a name he takes to himself and claims it, (Exo. 6:3; Isa. 42:8) and is peculiar to him; his name alone is Jehovah, and incommunicable to another, (Ps. 83:18) because this name is predicated of God, as a necessary and self-existent being, as a learned Jew[23] observes, which no other is; for though it is sometimes spoken of another, yet not singly and properly, but with relation to him.

So the church is called "Jehovah-shammah", because of his presence with her, (Ezek. 48:35). The Jews, from a superstitious abuse of it, assert it to be ineffable, and not to be pronounced, and even not to be read and written, and therefore they substitute other names instead of it, as Adonai, and Elohim. This might arise, originally, from their very great awe and reverence of this name, according to Deuteronomy 28:58 but every name of God is reverend, and not to be taken in vain, nor used in common, nor with any degree of levity, (Ps. 111:9).

It is written with four letters only; hence the Jews call it "tetragrammaton", and is very probably the tetraktuv of the Pythagoreans, by which they swore; and it is remarkable, that the word for God is so written in almost all languages; denoting, it may be, that he is the God of the whole world; and ought to be served and worshipped, and his name to be great and had in reverence in the four quarters of it; it takes in all tenses, past, present, and to come[24]: the words of the evangelist John are a proper periphrasis of it; "which is, and which was, and which is to come", (Rev. 1:4) or, "shall be", as in Revelation 16:5 it comes from the root hyh or hwh which signify, "to be", and is expressive of the essence of God; of his necessary and self-existence, for God naturally and necessarily exists; which cannot be said of any other: creatures owe their being to the arbitrary will of God; and so might be, and might not be, as he pleased; but God exists in and of himself, he is a self-existent and independent Being, as he must needs be, since he is before all creatures, and therefore cannot have his being from them; and he is the cause of theirs, and therefore must be independent of them; and yet, when we say he is self-existent, it must not be understood as if he made himself; for though he exists, he is not made.

He is the Being of beings; all creatures have their beings from him and in him, "the heavens, earth, and sea, and all that is in them"; he is the former and maker of all things; he is eminently "the Being", and all in comparison of him are mere non-entities; "all nations", and the inhabitants of them, "are as nothing before him; yea, less than nothing, and vanity" (Isa. 40:17). 8. "Jah" is another name of God, which is mentioned in Psalm 68:4, 150:6, Isaiah 26:4, though it may be only an abbreviation or contraction of the word Jehovah, and may signify the same; according to Cocceius[25], it comes from hay (Jer. 10:7) and signifies "decency", or what is meet and becoming. 9.

"Ejeh" is a name God gave as a name of his to Moses, when he sent him to the children of Israel; and is translated "I AM that I AM", (Exo. 3:13, 14) and may be rendered, "I shall be what I shall be", and what I have been; so the Jews[26] interpret it; "I am he that was, I am he that is now, and I am he that is to come, or shall be." It seems to be of the same signification with Jehovah, and to be derived from the same word, and is expressive of the same things; of the being and existence of God, of his eternity and immutability, and of his faithfulness in performing his promises: our Lord has a manifest respect unto it, when he says, "Before Abraham was I AM", (John 8:58).

Hillerus[27] renders it "I remain", that is, always the same. 10. The names of God in the New Testament are these two kuriou and yeov, the one is usually rendered Lord and the other God. The first is derived either from kurw, "to be"[28], and signifies the same as Jehovah, to which it commonly answers, and denotes the essence or being of God; or from kurov[29], "power and authority"; and agrees with God, who has a sovereign power and authority over all creatures, having a property in them, by virtue of his creation of them; it is generally used of Christ, "who is Lord of all", (Acts 10:36; 1 Cor. 8:6; Eph. 4:6).

The etymology of yeov, "God", is very different; as either from a word which signifies "to run", or from one that signifies "to heat", or from one that signifies "to see"; which seem to be calculated by the heathens for the sun, the object of their worship, applicable to it, for its constant course, being the fountain of light and

heat, and seeing all things, as they affirm: though each of them may be applied to the true God, who runs to the assistance of his people in distress, (2 Chron. 16:9; Ps. 46:1) is light itself, "the Father of lights", and "a consuming fire" (1 John 1:5; James 1:17; Heb. 12:29) and sees all men, their ways and works, and even their hearts, and the thoughts of them (Job 34:21, 22; 1 Sam. 16:7).

Some derive it from a word which signifies to dispose; and which agrees with God, who disposes of, and orders all things "in the armies of the heavens, and among the inhabitants of the earth, according to the council of his will", and to answer the purposes of his own glory, and the good of his creatures. Though, perhaps, it may be best of all to derive it from a word which signifies "fear"[30], and so describes God as the object of fear and reverence; who is not only to be stood in awe of by all the inhabitants of the earth, (Ps. 33:8) but more especially is to be feared with a godly fear by his saints, (Ps. 87:7; Heb. 12:28) and fear sometimes takes in the whole worship of God, both internal and external; and so the true God, in distinction from others, is called, "the fear", that is, the God of Isaac, (Gen. 31:53), and alxd "fear", is sometimes used in the Targum[31] for the true God, as it sometimes is of idols.

From all these names of God we learn that God is the eternal, immutable, and almighty Being, the Being of beings, self-existent, and self-sufficient, and the object of religious worship and adoration. ENDNOTES:

[1] oud' ara onoma estin austo, in Parmenide, p. 1120. Ed. Ficin. So. Trismegistus apud Lactant. Institut. l. 1. c. 6.

[2] De Natura Dei, l. 1. c. 4.

[3] Called Hutchinsonians; see Catcott's Sermon, called The Supreme and Inferior Elahim, p. 8.

[4] Marckii Compend. Theolog. c. 4. s. 5. Mastricht. Theolog. l. 2. c. 4. s. 9. Leigh's Critica Sacra in voce hla.

[5] T. Bab. Yoma, fol. 87. 1. Sepher Cosri, par. 4. fol. 197. 2. Maimon. Moreh Nevochim. par. 2. c. 6.

[6] Lud. Capellus et alii.

[7] Lexic. col. 35.

[8] Stockii Clavis S. Ling. p. 61. Hottingeri Smegma Oriental. l. 1. c. 8. p. 123. Schultens in Job i. 1. Noldius, No. 1093, Alting. Dissert. 4. de plural. Elohim, p. 177.

[9] Schindler. Lexic. Pentaglott. col. 78.

[10] Onomastic. Sacr. p. 254, 256.

[11] Sanchoniatho apud Euseb. Evangel. praepar. l. 1. c. 10. p. 36.

[12] So Cocceius in Lex. col. 859. Jarchi in Gen. xvii. 1. Maimon. Moreh Nevochim, par. 1. c. 63.

[13] Paschii Dissert. de Selah p. 2. s. 6.

[14] Onomast. Sacr. p. 260, 261.

[15] ddv "vastavit", Buxtorf.

- [16] So Schmidt in Job vi. 4.
- [17] Paschius in Dissert. de Selah, ut supra. Alsted. Lexic. Theolog. p. 82.
- [18] ynda "foundations", "bases", Job xxxviii. 6. often rendered sockets in Exodus.
- [19] A Nwd "judicavit".
- [20] Onomastic. Sacr. p. 258.
- [21] Saturnal. l. 1. c. 21.
- [22] Ibid. c. 18.
- [23] R. Joseph Albo in Sepher Ikkarim, l. 2. c. 28.
- [24] Buxtorf. de Nomin. Dei, Heb. s. 10.
- [25] Lexic. p. 283.
- [26] Shemot Rabba, s. 3. fol. 93. 3.
- [27] Onomast. Sacr. p. 248.
- [28] kurei, "est, existit", Suidas: kuriw, "sum", Scapula.
- [29] kurov, "autoritas"; kuriov, "autoritatem habens", Scapula; so Philo, quis rer. divin. Haeres, p. 484.
- [30] apo tou yeein, "currere", so Plato in Cratylo, p. 273. Clem. Al. protrept. p. 15. vel ayein "adurere, accendere", vel yeasyai, "cernere", vel a yw "dispono"; so Clem. Al. Stromat. in fine, Herodot. Euterpe, c. 52. vel a deov "timor", Philo ut supra. These several etymologies may be seen in Zanchy de Natura Dei, l. 1. c. 16. Alsted. Lexic. Theolog. p. 8.
- [31] Targum Hierosol. in Deut. xxxii. 15.

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