

Title: *"In the beginning . . ."*– Elohim

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Scripture: Genesis 1v1-5; John 1v1-5; Job 38v1-7

Call to Worship: Isaiah 40v18-28

Main Idea: He is GOD my Creator

All Scripture is from the English Standard Version unless otherwise indicated

Call to Worship

Isaiah 40v18-28 (The Voice)

¹⁸ So would you try to find someone to compare to Him?

Can you think of anything that has a likeness to God?

¹⁹ An idol? Hardly. They are made by human hands.

Even if they are overlaid with gold, decorated with silver,
And shaped by the world's best artisans,

they are subject to tarnish, tearing, and breaking.

²⁰ Those who cannot afford such an extravagant offering

select a choice hardwood that will not rot,

And seek a skilled artisan to fashion an image

that will not totter and fall.

²¹ Don't you know, haven't you heard or even been told

from your earliest memories how the earth came to be?

²² Who else could have done it except God, enthroned high above the earth?

From such a vantage people seem like grasshoppers to Him.

Who else but God could stretch out the skies as if they were a curtain,

draw them tight, suspend them over our heads like the roof of a tent?

²³ God reduces the rulers and judges,

the rich and powerful of the earth, to nothing;

²⁴ They scarcely are planted, take root and start growing,

before God blows a withering breath,

And storm winds carry them away like chaff.

²⁵ The Holy One asks, "Do you really think you can find

someone or something to compare to Me? My equal?"

²⁶ Look at the myriad of stars and constellations above you.

Who set them to burning, each in its place?

Who knows those countless lights each by name?

They obediently shine, each in its place,

because God has the great strength and strong power to make it so.

“In the World”

Do you like riddles? Here’s one for you to solve.

My guess is that we all—each one of us—take these things for granted. We’ve had them pretty much for our whole lives. They personally belong to us but then we share them in common with many other people. If we didn’t have them things in our lives and work and families would be chaotic. Without them, everything would take longer and some things would not get done.

Every living person in the world has a name. There might be an exception but I have never met someone who did not have a name.

God considers names to be important. How do we know that? Two things appear in the Bible: 1. God assigned a variety of names to Himself and
2. He assigned names of some people to show the significance of their lives.

Well, first, it appears that names are important to God because He has identified Himself by a great number of names. If a human being did that, you would think that he or she had an identity crisis or was trying to be evasive. When a person has a given name and uses something else, we might call it a “nickname.” Sometimes in police reports they refer to alternate names as “aliases” or use the designation “a.k.a.” (also known as). In sports, fans and media will sometimes give high performance players special names. I’m a baseball fan and follow the Blue Jays. Jose Bautista (isn’t that a great family name . . . he would be called “Joseph Baptist” in English)—Jose Bautista is referred to as Joey “Bats” by media and by fans.

So, we have names given at birth and then we might be given other nicknames or a name of reference.

What names do you go by?
Did anyone give you a nickname?

You know her as Pastor Lynne but the truth is that she is Muriel Patricia Lynne Kennedy. I call her “Love” or “Lynnie.” Lynne doesn’t hyphenate her last name as we see some women do and actually, to my surprise, she likes our Finnish family name.

My full name is Haarl Bret Peter Maukonen. I was christened and baptized in a Roman Catholic church and the priest gave me the name “Peter.” Actually, of all the characters in the Bible, I most closely identify with the apostle Peter. So I am grateful for what the priest did on that date in February 1950 by adding that name to the ones my parents chose.

Well, we were looking at how people are named. And, for the most part, we carry the names that were given to us by parents soon after we were born into this world.

But God assigned names to Himself. Actually, they are more like descriptive titles. These titles or names had special significance because they highlighted what He was presenting to the people as an insight into who He is—I use the present tense—as well as a promise of what He is prepared to be for us.

I have a small book here that is labelled "*The Names of God.*" There are 250 names listed here. Over the next weeks, we'll be looking at some of these names and the Bible accounts and promises that are connected with them.

The second reason that I believe names are important to God is that He assigned new names to some people to show the future significance of their lives.

For example:

Abram was renamed Abraham (Genesis 17v5) because he would become the "Father of nations"

Sarai was renamed Sarah (Genesis 17v15) because she, who was once barren, would become would be a "princess" and "mother of a multitude."

Jacob was renamed Israel (Genesis 32v28) because he "struggled with God and prevailed."

And then, God assigned the name "Jesus" to the child that Mary would bring into the world. Messianic Jews say "Yeshua." "Jesus" is a rendering of the name "Joshua" which means "Yahweh is salvation" or "God saves." And so in Jesus, we have a God who saves.

We recall this account from the Christmas narrative:

³⁰ *And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God.*

³¹ *And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.*

³² *He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David,*

³³ *and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."*

Jesus, Himself, renamed Simon to add the name Peter. He also nicknamed his disciples, James and John, "Boanerges" which means "sons of thunder."

The point is that, in the Bible, names had meaning and significance.

And so, as we look into the names of God, let's look for how and why they came to be and let's look for the significance that they have for our lives own today.

Elohim — אלהים

How does the Bible start off in the book of Genesis?

1 בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ :
 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth

The third word of the Bible is a reference to God. Remember that words in Hebrew flow from right to left. This common name of God occurs more than 2500 times in the Old Testament (2570 times according to Nestle).

We shouldn't be surprised that early reference is made to God in this verse of the first chapter of the first of five books written by Moses. After all, devout Jews and Christians alike agree that this book is the word of God. So, I would expect to hear about God or hear from God early on. And as we open the first pages of the Bible, we are not disappointed.

"*In the beginning*" does not mean the beginning of time because God has ever been. Our human minds naturally look for a starting point. We cannot master the notion of eternity and tend to be "forward looking"—thinking of eternity as time yet to be—time in God's presence that will never end. But He is described as God from everlasting to everlasting. And so, there ever has been an eternity in what we call the past. It is beyond my mind to grasp that.

The Bible describes things as being without form and void—what we would call chaotic—and God brings about order and balance. Darkness and then light; waters below and waters above; land and sea; night and day; man and woman.

It would be spectacular to have actually witnessed the work of God in creation.

Yet, the name of God in this creation narrative is, in itself, nothing spectacular. During this series on the "*Names of God*," we will have many colourful and descriptive titles by which the eternal God has identified Himself. But this term "Elohim" is like a generic term. It simply means "god." When it occurs in a plural form in the Bible, it refers to "gods."

In the Ten Commandments, when God says, "*You shall have no other gods before me*," the word in Hebrew for "gods" is the same "elohim" but with something that distinguishes it as a plural noun.

Capitalizing references to Him

Here is a little sidebar on something that we do in making reference to God.

How do we see the word “God” printed in our Bibles? Well, we use a capital “G” when it means the one, true God. Just the same as you capitalize the first letter of your name, we make that distinction in our writing about God.

So we see > **God** and then there are references to > **gods** with no capital letter.

In some Bible translations and hymns, they don’t capitalize the personal pronouns in reference to God—the Father, Jesus Christ or the Holy Spirit. The publisher uses “he” or “him.” I will generally change that when I set something in print on a sheet or for an overhead. So you will see “He” instead of “he” and “Him” or “His” instead of “him” and “his” and “Me” instead of “me.” I do this as a sign of respect and reverence letting others know that reference to God is special. It makes the standard consistent. After all, in books and print, we see the appearance of “God” rather than “god” when we are referring to the God of the Bible.

Common word but not so common

There are two things that we should consider about “Elohim.”

First, though it is a simple term, it sets God apart from a multitude of “gods.”
Second, Elohim is the Creator of all.

The Psalmist writes: *For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the LORD made the heavens.* (Psalm 96v5)

Listen again to some verses from our Call to Worship:

¹⁸*To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with Him?*

¹⁹*An idol! A craftsman casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and casts for it silver chains. ²⁰He who is too impoverished for an offering chooses wood that will not rot; he seeks out a skillful craftsman to set up an idol that will not move.*

The world is full of stories about different gods. When we went to high school here in Ontario, we studied Greek mythology in Grade 9 English. The stories had a multitude of gods—male and female. The ancient Greeks explained the creation of the world and the forces at play in the world and life through these many gods.

When Lynne and I lived in Japan, we saw idols in different places in the cities and countryside. We were on a Japanese ship in Yokohama harbour and behind the place where the wheelsman would stand was a “god shelf.” The god on that ship was looked upon to bring the crew safety and good fortune.

If you have read the account of Jonah in the Bible, you may recall that when the ship was in that fierce storm, ⁵ *Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god.*

The sailors try to save themselves by jettisoning cargo into the sea. Meanwhile Jonah goes and hides himself down below.

So the captain came and said to him, "What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we may not perish."

⁷ *And they said to one another, "Come, let us cast lots, that we may know on whose account this evil has come upon us." So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah.*

⁸ *Then they said to him, "Tell us on whose account this evil has come upon us. What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?"*

⁹ *And he said to them, "I am a Hebrew, and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land."*

¹⁰ *Then the men were exceedingly afraid and said to him, "What is this that you have done!"*

The sailors worshipped local gods—idols—but Jonah points to the Creator of sea and land who transcends His whole creation.

As Jonah identifies himself to be a Hebrew, he is taking a position with a people who were monotheists—that is, they believed that there was only one true God. Yes, men would come up with many gods who were creations of their imaginations and, sometimes, craftsmanship. In that sense, the gods have been made in man’s image.

But, we learn in Genesis that “Elohim” made everything including man whom He made in His own image.

The apostle Paul gives us this perspective in Romans 1:

- ¹⁹ *For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.*
²⁰ *For His invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.*
²¹ *For although they knew God, they did not honour Him as God or give thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.*
²² *Claiming to be wise, they became fools,*
²³ *and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.*
²⁴ *Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves,*
²⁵ *because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.*

We are, as human beings, very religious. What I mean, is that we want and even need to believe in something. Even today, we find people living in primitive conditions who have a god or gods in their system of things. It is their way of explaining the days and seasons, good and evil, life and death. Even modern man who claims to be an atheist or agnostic believes in something—that generally is his opinion as the standard by which to measure of all things.

Scientific study and scientific theories that exclude the possibility of God, the Creator, cannot adequately explain the origins of the cosmos. Scientists cannot explain what was before all that we see or first causes of where it all started and even when time began. We can study things and speculate but we are incapable as human beings of saying, “Yes, for certain, this is how it came to be.” In fact, the more we probe with scientific study, the more in awe are we about our world and the universe. More and more am I hearing about scientists giving credence to the role of a supreme being—One who is wholly other, apart from and above what we call the universe.

And so, with a simple reference, “Elohim,” God introduces Himself as Creator of all. And let’s not think that His creative activities were just on those six days in Genesis.

There is a particular Psalm that I love and will refer to it often. It is Psalm 139. Listen to the psalmist and allow yourself to echo his words:

- ¹ *O LORD, You have searched me and known me!*
- ² *You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You discern my thoughts from afar.*
- ³ *You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways.*
- ⁴ *Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, You know it altogether.*
- ⁵ *You hem me in, behind and before, and lay Your hand upon me.*
- ⁶ *Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it.*
- ⁷ *Where shall I go from Your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from Your presence?*
- ⁸ *If I ascend to heaven, You are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, You are there!*
- ⁹ *If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,*
- ¹⁰ *even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me.*
- ¹¹ *If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night,"*
- ¹² *even the darkness is not dark to You; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with You.*
- ¹³ *For You formed my inward parts; You knitted me together in my mother's womb.*
- ¹⁴ *I praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are Your works; my soul knows it very well.*

The Creator of the universe is responsible for my being alive. I am thankful for my parents who gave birth to me biologically. But I am a person body, spirit and soul.

The everlasting God knew about me even before my parents were born.
 The everlasting God knew about you even before your parents were born.
 He knew about me and knew about you even when He was making the stars and galaxies, our sun and moon and this planet Earth. He knew about us even then because He is from everlasting to everlasting.

Over the coming weeks we will be learning about other ways in which Elohim makes Himself known to us through the Scriptures. But today, we have start with the simple recognition that He is God—Elohim. God who was in the beginning—from everlasting to everlasting—eternal and all-powerful Creator.

As immense as the universe is “Elohim” has not lost sight of you. Live with that truth in mind.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elohim>

The word *Elohim* occurs more than 2500 times in the [Hebrew Bible](#), with meanings ranging from "god" in a general sense (as in Exodus 12:12, where it describes "the gods of Egypt"), to a specific god (e.g., 1 Kings 11:33, where it describes Chemosh "the god of Moab", or the frequent references to [Yahweh](#) as the "elohim" of Israel), to demons, [seraphim](#), and other supernatural beings, to the spirits of the dead brought up at the behest of King Saul in 1 Samuel 28:13, and even to kings and prophets (e.g., Exodus 4:16).^[3] The phrase *bene elohim*, usually translated "sons of God", has an exact parallel in [Ugaritic](#) and [Phoenician](#) texts, referring to the council of the gods.^[3]

Elohim occupy the seventh rank of ten in the famous medieval Rabbinic scholar [Maimonides' Jewish angelic hierarchy](#). Maimonides said: "I must premise that every Hebrew knows that the term Elohim is a homonym, and denotes God, angels, judges, and the rulers of countries, ..."^[5]

Grammar – singular or plural

In Hebrew the ending *-im* mainly indicates a masculine plural. However with *Elohim* the construction is grammatically singular (i.e. it governs a singular verb or adjective) when referring to the Hebrew God, but grammatically plural *elohim* (i.e. taking a plural verb or adjective) when used of pagan divinities ([Psalms 96:5; 97:7](#)). Similarly, the [Quran](#) uses *alīha* as the plural of *īlah* for pagan divinities, and occasionally uses "Allahum" (O God! - plural) for the sole god (as opposed to "Allah"). The exact equivalent, in modern Arabic, of *Elohim* as meaning plural gods would be *īlahīn* (إِلَهِينَ), although it is rarely used in Arabic parlance. Note that human beings can also have names with plural endings, such as [Ephraim](#), the son of [Joseph](#).

Plural "gods", with plural verb

The noun *elohim* is used with a plural verb in [1 Samuel 28:13](#). The [witch of Endor](#) told Saul that she saw "gods" (*elohim*) ascending (*olim* אֲלֵימָ, plural verb) out of the earth.^[2]

God of Israel, with singular verb

In the [Hebrew Bible](#) *Elohim*, when meaning the God of Israel, is mostly grammatically singular. Even in Genesis 1:26 "Then God said (singular verb), 'Let us make (plural verb) man in our image, after our likeness'", *Elohim* is singular. [Wilhelm Gesenius](#) and other Hebrew grammarians traditionally described this as the [pluralis excellentiae](#) (plural of excellence), which is similar to the [pluralis majestatis](#) (plural of majesty, or "Royal we").^[8]

Gesenius comments that *Elohim* singular is to be distinguished from *elohim* plural gods and remarks that:

the supposition that *elohim* is to be regarded as merely a remnant of earlier polytheistic views (i.e. as originally only a numerical plural) is at least highly improbable, and, moreover, would not explain the analogous plurals (below). To the same class (and probably formed on the analogy of *elohim*) belong the plurals *kadoshim*, meaning "the Most Holy" (only of Yahweh, Hosea 12:1, Proverbs 9:10, 30:3 (cf. *El hiym kadoshim* in Joshua 24:19 and the singular Aramaic "the Most High", Daniel 7:18, 22, 25); and probably [teraphim](#) (usually taken in the sense of [penates](#)) the image of a god, used especially for obtaining oracles. Certainly in 1 Samuel 19:13, 16 only one image is intended; in most other places a single image may be intended; in Zechariah 10:2 alone is it most naturally taken as a numerical plural.

There are a number of notable exceptions to the rule that *Elohim* is treated as singular when referring to the God of Israel, including Gen. 20:13, 35:7, 2 Sam. 7:23 and Ps. 58:11, and notably the epithet of the "Living God" (Deuteronomy 5:26 etc.), which is constructed with the plural adjective, *Elohim Haiyim* אֱלֹהִים חַיִּים but still takes singular verbs.

In the [Septuagint](#) and [New Testament](#) translations *Elohim* has the singular ὁ θεός even in these cases, and modern translations follow suit in giving "[God](#)" in the singular. The [Samaritan Torah](#) has edited out some of these exceptions.^[9]