

GOD'S TWO NAMES IN GENESIS 1 – 3

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In Genesis 1:1-2:3 the Hebrew term for God, *Elōhîm*, appears 35 times, as the subject of verbs of implementation (create, hover, say, see, separate, call, make, set, bless, rest, finish) and evaluation (see). This name displayed God's transcendence, independence, and power through thought, speech, and action. Clearly, *Elōhîm* is the source of all that came to be through creation and the fount upon which everything is dependent. He set the preconditions for existence and for all thought. He provided the sustenance that nature presupposes. He is also the goal towards which history advances.

In the Old Testament *Elōhîm* appears more than 2,500 times. He is the lord of creation, "the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land," who rightly demands our reverence (Jonah 1:9). His reign is universal, for he is designated the "God of the whole earth" (Isa 54:5), "God of all flesh" (Jer 32:27), and "God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath" (Joshua 2:11). He is the supreme judge as Proverbs declares, "The eyes of the LORD are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good" (15:3). *Elōhîm* is the lord of history and works everything according to his covenantal purpose (Gen 24:7; see also 50:20). Further, he is exalted above all gods and so the Israelites appealed to the "God [*Elōhîm*] of Heaven" in the midst of exile and paganism (2 Chron 36:23; Ezra 1:2; Neh 1:4, 5; 2:4, 20; Dan 2:18; Jonah 1:9). He is, in fact, the only God. "You are the God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth" (Isa 37:16. See also Deut 4:39).

The second name, *Yahweh Elōhîm* (2:4-3:24, "LORD God"), is quite unique. It appears 20 times in this passage with reference to God's work in the Garden and in his relationship with Adam and Eve (make, cause, plant, spring up, take, command, say, form, walk, call, send). However, whereas in Genesis 1:1-2:3 the name *Elōhîm* functions primarily at a macrocosmic and transcendent level, the name *Yahweh Elōhîm* appears chiefly with a microcosmic focus and stresses divine immanence (2:4-3:24). *Yahweh Elōhîm* "gets his hands dirty," so to speak, preparing a suitable habitat for Adam and Eve. He assumed an intimate interest in each. He was directly involved in Adam's education through deductive and inductive revelation (2:15-17 and 18-23). He pronounced the only explicit, negative evaluation in creation with reference to Adam's solitude (v. 18). He initiated a search for Adam's mate (vs. 18-23). He performed the first "surgery" in creating Eve (v. 21). He was present in the Garden, "walking" (v. 8). After they sinned, he addressed Adam and Eve personally (vs. 9-13). He spoke directly to the serpent, Adam, and Eve in judgment (vs. 14-19, 24). He clothed them (v. 21) and he banished them for their own good (vs. 23-24).

The name, *Yahweh*, of course, was God's special designation revealed to Israel during their captivity in Egypt (Exod 3:14). With echoes of Eden the name illustrates God's immanence in that context. Chapter 3, verse 2 shows how God initiated communication with Moses through theophany (the burning bush). In verse 3 God called out to Moses. In verse 6 God identified himself and did so with reference to the patriarchal covenant. "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." *Yahweh* testified, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings" (v. 7). But, he did not simply empathize with their plight, for he intervened through Moses and his mighty redemptive deeds against Pharaoh. "I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land." (v. 8). And, when Moses protested due to a sense of incapacity and doubt, God promised his ongoing presence, "I will be with you" (v. 12).

So, Genesis 1 reveals God as *Elōhîm*, the personal absolute, immutable, independent, and eternal. He is ontologically antecedent to all that was created. He is self-existent, self-explanatory, self-attesting, and self-sufficient. He is all-wise, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, and sovereign. He is the source of moral virtue, truth, and goodness. He is the standard by which every created thing and every human thought is measured and held accountable. He is the cosmic law-giver, as well as the providential foundation of sustenance and order. But, he is also *Yahweh Elōhîm*, the divinity that comes alongside Adam and Eve in Genesis 2-3. He was not remote and he did not abandon them to observation and experience alone, for he spoke to them. The transcendent king was also the immanent teacher, guide, and pastor. He provided their identity and assigned their purpose.

For all these reasons David declared, "You are great, O LORD God. For there is none like you, and there is no God [*Elōhîm*] besides you" (2 Sam 7:22).