Space for thoughts

Names matter

It is often the case that when we think of God, we have an image or notion of what he is like. This may serve us well on most occasions, yet if the picture provides less than the multi-faceted nature revealed to us then it can leave us with a limited understanding of who he is. As such, when we find Job crying out to *El-Shaddai* he is calling upon an aspect of God that would not be conveyed if he had used '*Elohim* or *El-yon*.

Word 1: *El-ohim* (אֱלֹהִים) 'God of gods'

- '*El* (אֵל) occurs in a variety of contexts 242 times. Most commonly translated as 'God'. It is often used as part of some compound titles for God in the Hebrew text.
- Not originally Hebrew or even unique to God.
- '*El* = 'mighty or strong one' (Psalm 29:1; Deuteronomy 28:32)
- Sometimes specifically used of people (Gen.31:29; Neh.5:5; Psa.89:6; Pro.3:27; Eze.32:21; Mic.2:1).
- When used of God it emphasises his dominance and power over creation particularly mankind (Num.23:22; Deu.3:24). It often stresses a degree of separation and distance between God and man.
- **Application:** '*El* underlines the sovereignty of God due to his power, and it is he who provides the strength that upholds each believer.

- '*Elohim* is used 2601 times but there is something of a thought gap between the Hebrew and the English
- Superlative of '*El* = the mightiest amongst the mighty or the God of gods.
- Used in a context of creative and governing power, of utter omnipotence and sovereignty. This is clearly indicated by the fact that from Genesis 1:1 to 2:4 the word '*Elohim* is used thirty-five times.

- The pluralisation provides two effects.
  - A superlative denoting the mightiest (God^2)
  - By using the plural term it effectively says to the nations around them that in contrast to their pantheon of gods, the people of the living God find their entire pantheon in him.
- **Application:** Due to the incomparable might the covenant and his people are secure (Gen.6:18; 50:24; 1Kg.8:23).

Word 2: El-Shaddai (אֵל שַׁדַּי /אֵל־שַׁדַּי)
'Mighty provider/ protector' (Nursing mother)

- More than a thought gap.
- Term used 46 times, primarily in the books of Genesis (x 6) and Job (x13).
- God Almighty? (Genesis 17:1)
- *Shaddai* itself occurs forty-eight times in the Old Testament
- Used to denote the source of blessing, *Shadey* meaning breast (Genesis 49:25).
- The mother as a protector of the most vulnerable and a provider of everything that little one needs.
- So, there is something of the feminine when it comes to this title of God.
- The title *Shaddai* may well then signify one who nourishes, supplies or satisfies.
- **Application 1:** Where *Shaddai* is used we should read into it something of the parent and particularly the maternal.
- **Application 2: T**here are a wide array of titles and each adds something to the picture that we have of God. To lose one denies us the opportunity to see the wider perspective.

Word 3: '*El-roi* (אֵל רֳאִי) 'The God who sees/ willing to be seen'

- It only occurs once (Genesis 16:13)
- Every title has an important backstory
- Dictionary definition = the God who sees (not wrong).
- When we look closely at the verse we see that there is something even more incredible taking place:

13 So she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, 'El-Roi," for she said, "Truly here I have seen the back of him who sees after me."

(Genesis 16:13)

- When we take the wider context we see that there is a double meaning inferred by the title.
- The God who sees and who is willing to be seen'.

Word 4: YHWH (יְהֹוָה) The name of God

- The tetragrammaton (four letter word), is famously not even pronounced by Jewish readers of the text, substituting *Adonai* (Lord) or *Ha-Shem* (the name).
- Lost pronunciation or never spoken
- The invention of vowels: yod (י), hey (ה) and waw (ו).
- Genesis 28:13 = A description of a personal God with a history of relationship
- Occurs 6,521 times.
- YHWH comes from the verb *Hawyah* 'to be' and is often associated with 'I AM'
- Jesus claimed to be I AM (e.g. John 8:58-9
- Psalm 19

Word 5: YHWH-Tsabaoth (יְהֹוָה צְבָאוֹת) 'The Lord of Hosts/ YHWH of all'

- Usually understood to describe God in the role of a warrior, (1 Sam.17:45, Isa.23:9)
- Literally = the Lord over all that has been made (such as Psalm 84).
- Eichrodt = 'The Lord of all that exists in heaven and earth'