

# Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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**Broadcast Date:** 27 November 2005

**No.** T0394

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## Names of God in the Old Testament: El Shaddai and El Elyon

### Introduction

How many names do you have? Most of us have two or three Christian names. Some have more (as was the case of a child some years ago who was given all the forenames of the players of the Manchester United soccer team of that day). However, when we consider the Perfect Being, God, we find that He has revealed Himself to us using a variety of names. Each of these express facets of His being, His person and His glory. Last week we looked at two of them. The first was Jehovah that is used to express His covenant-keeping relationship with Israel in particular. The second was Adonai which reveals Him to be the Master or Lord. Today, we will consider two other names - El Shaddai and El Elyon.

### El Shaddai

The name of God - "Almighty" (Hebrew "Shaddai") - is used forty-eight times in the Word of God (the Holy Bible). Thirty-one of these are found in the book of Job. The name is also used in the dealings of God with the Jewish fathers like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob about six times - sometimes linked with El which means God in a singular form. God is very specific in relating the name of El Shaddai to the patriarchs of the Hebrew nation. In Exodus 6:3, God speaks to Moses saying, "And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of God Almighty, but by my name Jehovah was I not known to them." Hence, we find the name El Shaddai - God Almighty. God introduces Himself in this way when promising a blessing.

The actual meaning of the word "Shaddai" is "the All-Sufficient" and the name itself also carries the idea of power to injure or to protect. Examples of this are found in Psalm 91:1 and Isaiah 13:6.

Psalm 91:1: "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." Here we find the believer safe and secure. Whereas, in Isaiah 13:6 we read: "Howl ye; for the day of the LORD is at hand; it shall come as a destruction from the Almighty." This speaks of the Great Tribulation period in particular. The wrath of God will be poured out on the earth during that time. Violent destruction under the hand of the Almighty will, unfortunately for human kind, be the order of that day. So, whether God is active in protecting or judging, He has the resources, power and wisdom to achieve it righteously and fully.

In Job 37:23, where Almighty occurs by itself, we find: "Touching the Almighty, we cannot find him out: he is excellent in power, and in judgment, and in plenty of justice: he will not afflict (or, better, oppress)." So He is not only powerful, but fair also. Job 33:4 reveals that He is the life-giver, "The Spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life." Job 5:17 shows that He disciplines those He loves, "Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty." Naomi also recognises this in Ruth 1:20-21, "And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the LORD hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the LORD hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me?"

In studying the scriptures, there is a useful principle of 'first mention' which is an aid to the interpretation of a subject where it occurs in other parts of the Bible. The first mention of Shaddai by itself is in Genesis 49:22-26 where we read of Jacob blessing his son, Joseph: "Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall: the archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him: but his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob; (from thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel:) even by the God of thy father, who shall help thee; and by the Almighty, who shall bless thee with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lieth under, blessings of the breasts, and of the womb: the blessings of thy father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills: they shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him that was separate from his brethren."

On the other hand, the first mention of Shaddai linked with El (the Almighty God) is in Genesis 17:1-2: "And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect. And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee

exceedingly.” So El Shaddai is a covenant-making God who expects those who trust in Him to walk in perfect obedience.

In Genesis 28:3-4, we find Isaac giving his blessing to Jacob: “And God Almighty bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be a multitude of people; and give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee, and to thy seed with thee; that thou mayest inherit the land wherein thou art a stranger, which God gave unto Abraham.”

In Genesis 35:9-12, we find: “And God appeared unto Jacob again, when he came out of Padan-aram, and blessed him and God said unto him, Thy name is Jacob: thy name shall not be called any more Jacob, but Israel shall be thy name: and he called his name Israel. and God said unto him, I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins; and the land which I gave Abraham and Isaac, to thee I will give it, and to thy seed after thee will I give the land.”

In these verses, El Shaddai blesses Jacob in a three-fold way. First, he changes his name from that of Jacob (meaning, ‘deceiver’) to Israel (meaning, ‘a prince with God’). This God-given change shows the importance of names and their meanings in the Old Testament. What a change in the heart of Jacob is suggested by this new name. Secondly, El Shaddai was going to increase the generations of Jacob so that the nation of Israel and other secondary nations would spring from him. Thirdly, of Jacob’s line, El Shaddai would produce royalty. Fourthly, the land of Palestine would be given to him and his descendants, as originally promised to Abraham and Isaac.

A discussion is found in Genesis 43 where Jacob is confronted with famine and needs to send his sons to Egypt to obtain food. Judah insisted that Benjamin, the youngest son, should go with them because the Prime Minister of Egypt (none other than Joseph) had previously accused them of being spies. They had denied this, speaking of their family at the same time. The unrecognised Joseph had ordered that should they come again they must bring their youngest brother as a proof of their truthfulness. He had also kept their brother Simeon as a captive in Egypt until they were proved innocent of the charge. Jacob was fearful of sending Benjamin. Nonetheless, he relents and says, “And God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may send away your other brother, and Benjamin. If I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved” (Genesis 43:14). The clause, “God Almighty give you mercy...” tells us that Jacob’s confidence was in El Shaddai. He knew that his God could act for their preservation. On the other hand, he knew that the ways of God were higher than his own and is resigned to God’s will as expressed in the words, “If I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved.” We know that the Almighty God had marked out Jacob and his family for blessing. The result was Joseph was made known to his brothers and Jacob and the rest of the family went to live in Egypt with him.

Ezekiel 10:5 states, “And the sound of the cherubims’ wings was heard even to the outer court, as the voice of the Almighty God when he speaketh.” In this chapter we find the glory of the Lord departing in stages from the temple at Jerusalem. The sinfulness of His people had been immense. God was disgraced by their behaviour and was leaving them. He does so in stages because He always allows some time for repentance.

The cherubim are those living creatures who protect the presence of God and execute His judgements. The voice of El Shaddai being compared to the sound of their wings expresses that judgment and the speed with which it is implemented. True Christians have a God who will never leave them nor forsake them; but a nation like ours that professes to be Christian, but is totally unfaithful and corrupt, will find God deserting them. Therefore, as a nation we can expect the kind of cursings placed upon disobedient Israel to fall upon us (Deuteronomy 28). They include:

- Failures in the city – a symbol of administration, trade and industry;
- Failures in the countryside – a symbol of farming prosperity;
- Failures in child bearing and a decrease in the healthy offspring of animals;
- Failures in the implementation of governmental policies and plans;
- Failures in health with increased epidemics, prolonged sicknesses and mental problems;
- Failures in rainfall;
- Failures in battling external enemies;
- Increased adultery;
- Increased calamities and pestilence;
- Increased dependence on an enemy within from whom money has to be borrowed.

It is time for Britain to repent! It is time for real Christians to nationally cry out to the Lord for help because there has not been a time of such impending disaster for centuries. People will say that God would not do these things because He is a God of love. Examine the history of Israel and see the holy hand of the Lord. His holiness is emphasised in Revelation 4:8. There the seraphim declare the three-fold holiness of the Lord God Almighty and acknowledge Him to be eternal.

In Revelation 11:17-18 we find the Almighty God being praised again in view of the setting up of His kingdom on earth. The words speak for themselves and reveal the One who is able both to injure and to bless: "We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned. And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldst give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldst destroy them which destroy the earth."

A further revealing of the character of the Almighty God is found in the song of Revelation 15:3-4, "Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints (or, better, "nations"). Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgements are made manifest."

These judgements of the Almighty are declared to be true and righteous in Revelation 16:7. One of the final judgements of God relative to this world is found in Revelation 16:14. It is the Battle of Armageddon which is here called "the battle of that great day of God Almighty". In that day, the Lord will destroy all the nations that gather to attack Jerusalem. How? Read Zechariah 14:12-15. It is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ who will lead Judah in that day and go on to reign. Of Him it is written, "And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God" (Revelation 19:15).

However, when we read of New Jerusalem in Revelation 21:22 we find that there is no temple in it because "the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it". It is therefore a most terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God if you have not trusted in Him. On the other hand, there is nothing more wonderful for Christians to be able to declare, "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

## El Elyon

Genesis 14:18-20: "And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: and blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all."

This is the first mention of the Most High God (El Elyon) in the Old Testament. He obviously had been known as such for some time because there was a priesthood linked with the name as shown by the words "he was the priest of the most high God". El Elyon is literally God (with an emphasis on power or strength) and the most high (emphasising His supremacy). It is no wonder that He is called the Possessor of heaven and of earth. Both belong to Him. The word for 'Possessor' is an extension of another word meaning 'Creator'. So it indicates that the most high God is the original Creator of heaven and earth. We are also reminded that all things were made by the Son of the Father's love and for Him (Colossians 1). This would make the Son of the Father's love the Most High God – a distinct Person in the Godhead.

It is this God whom the royal priest, Melchizedek, worshipped. Today, God the Father seeks worshippers to worship Him in spirit and in truth out of sincere hearts. The teaching of Jesus in John 4 reveals that such worshippers require no special city, no special building and no special artefacts to assist their worship. These worship by the power of the Spirit of God (Philippians 3:3).

Furthermore, the fact that the most high God delivered the enemies of Abram into his hand reveals that He is the One who comes to the aid of His own people. This name was recognised by King Nebuchadnezzar in relation to the furnace of fire endured by Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego in Daniel 3:26: "Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the mouth of the burning fiery furnace, and spake, and said, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, ye servants of the most high God, come forth, and come hither. Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, came forth of the midst of the fire." Today, those who live godly in Christ Jesus suffer persecution. Are you being persecuted for your faith? Know that God in the character of El Elyon is active on your behalf through the priesthood of Christ.

Also, in the book of Daniel, Belshazzar is found abusing the vessels captured from the temple of God in Jerusalem. As a result, a man's hand appears and writes upon the palace wall. The king trembled with fear. His wife advised him to call for Daniel knowing of his previous interpretation of dreams to help Nebuchadnezzar. Hence, we find the prophet speaking to the King Belshazzar using the name of the most high God, saying, "O thou king, the most high God gave Nebuchadnezzar thy father a kingdom, and majesty, and glory, and honour" (Daniel 5:18).

Nebuchadnezzar had been the head of the Babylonian Empire. His increase in power had led to pride and boasting. He had claimed the honour for establishing such a glorious kingdom; but God had disciplined him. The result was he humbled himself before the Supreme God and acknowledged that God alone was the One responsible for raising up kingdoms and their kings.

Also, in Daniel 5:21, it is El Elyon who rules in the kingdom of men and appoints its ruler. Are you in government? Are you proud and boastful about the position you hold? Humble yourself before God like Nebuchadnezzar did because God holds the future in His hands and He is a God who disciplines.

Genesis 14:22 reveals that El Elyon is also known as the self-existent One – the LORD or Jehovah. This name was discussed last week.

Psalms 78 gives an historical outline of the relationship of Jehovah with Israel. Verse 56 it tells us that it was the Supreme God who was tested and provoked by the children of Israel in the wilderness. Can you imagine it? Mere humans moaning and groaning about God's provision and making demands upon the most High! Are you content with the lot that God has given you? If not, then make a list of the blessings He has given you.

*When upon life's billows you are tempest tossed,  
When you are discouraged thinking all is lost,  
Count your many blessings,  
Name them one by one,  
And it will surprise you what the Lord has done.*

It is then you will realise that godliness with contentment is great gain (1 Timothy 6:6).

It is in Psalm 78:56 that we find that El Elyon is the source of testimonies. In 1 Kings 2:3 we read about His testimonies, "And keep the charge of the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgements, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, that thou mayest prosper in all that thou doest, and whithersoever thou turnest thyself..." Note that there is a blessing linked with the keeping of His testimonies and the LORD God in this verse is the same Person as the most high God.

In Mark 5:7 we find a meeting of Jesus with a man possessed with a legion of devils. The man cried out with a loud voice, and said, "What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most high God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not." Although Christ accepted no witness of devils, we can see that He was recognised as the Son who will, in the future, execute God's judgement. He was seen as the Judge who could torment such devils. He was also recognised as the Son of the most high God. The proof of this was seen in the power of Jesus over demons. The man was delivered by Jesus from his devil-possession. He was then found sitting (calm), clothed (rather than naked) and in his right mind.

Acts 16:17 reveals a young woman who was possessed with a spirit of divination (or, fortune telling). She followed Paul and his companions shouting, "These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation." Paul tolerated this for many days before he commanded the spirit, in the name of Jesus Christ, to come out of her. The spirit left her. Nevertheless, it is clear that the spirit recognised Paul and his companions as servants of the most high God who revealed His salvation. In this day and age, there are professing believers who despise the teachings of Paul. How do they compare with this spirit of divination? Paul's ministry is a heavenly one. It deals with Christ and His church. It is vital for real Christians to hold fast to Paul's teaching today and earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints.

Finally, in Hebrews 7:1 we again read of Melchisedec in relation to the Most High God, "For this Melchisedec, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him..." This order of priesthood is the one that Jesus was given following His resurrection and ascension. This is declared by David in Psalm 110, "The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool...The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek."

This same order is also indicated by the prophecy concerning the Branch of the Lord in Zechariah 6:12-13, "And speak unto him, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD: even he shall build the temple of the LORD; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both."

The Lord Jesus is therefore King of Righteousness which is the meaning of Melchisedec and King of Peace which is the meaning of Salem. He has the position of Great High Priest for as long as He lives, namely, endlessly for He lives after the power of an endless life. He holds the position as the Son of God as revealed by the application of Hebrews 7:3: "Melchisedec...without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually." Our High Priest is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and higher than the heavens. He sits at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens showing that He has sovereign rule and power. He is able to sit because there is no longer the need of

offerings for He has once offered Himself – the perfect fulfilment of every offering in the past. He is able to succour, sympathise and support us in every way because He has been gone through trial and trouble while a man on earth. He suffered in spirit, soul and body as the Man of Sorrows and the Lamb of God. Furthermore, He is able to intercede perfectly on our behalf. In the knowledge of these things we may sing:

*Our great High Priest is sitting  
At God's right hand above,  
For us His hands uplifting  
In sympathy and love;  
Whilst here below, in weakness,  
We onward speed our way;  
In sorrow oft and sickness  
We sigh and groan and pray.*

*Through manifold temptations,  
My soul holds on her course,  
Christ's mighty intercession,  
Alone is her resource;  
My gracious High Priest's pleadings,  
Who on the cross did bleed,  
Bring down God's grace and blessings,  
Help in each hour of need.*

*O Jesus, blessèd Saviour,  
We hope to see Thee soon,  
Who once on earth didst suffer,  
Who soon for us wilt come;  
'Twas God's most gracious favour,  
Gave Thee, His Son, to die,  
To live our Intercessor,  
To plead for us on high.*

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