

The Meaning of El Shaddai

As described by Nathan Stone in his book *Names of God*, **El Shaddai** was the first great revelation of the significance of the divine name given to **Isra'el** in Egypt. They were a covenant people, a separated people through whom a righteous and holy **God** would work out His purpose of redemption for mankind. In **Exodus 3:14-14**, He thus revealed Himself: **I am that I am . . . say to the Israelites, "ADONAI, the God of your fathers - the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob - has sent me to you."** This is **My name forever, the name by which I Am to be remembered from generation to generation,**" or eternity (3:14-15). Then in **Exodus 6:2-3** God spoke to Moshe and said to him, **"I am ADONAI. I appeared to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as El Shaddai, although I did not make myself known to them by my name, YHVH [ADONAI].** It is suggested that by this it was meant that the Patriarchs had not understood the full significance of that name. The full significance of a name that means *the ever-existent One, the eternal, the ever-becoming One* - that is, **the One** continually revealing Himself and His ways and purposes could not be understood except after centuries and centuries of unfolding of events and experiences. The point is, however, that the Patriarchs knew Him as **God Almighty**, or in Hebrew, **El Shaddai**.

The name appears first in connection with Abram: **When Abram was ninety-nine years old ADONAI appeared to him and said: I am El Shaddai. Walk before Me and be perfect (Hebrew: tam). I will confirm My covenant between Me and you and I will greatly increase your numbers (Genesis 17:1-2).** The occasion was the confirmation of a promise already made to **Abram** to make him a great nation (**Genesis 12:2**), to make his seed as the dust of the earth innumerable (**Genesis 13:16**), and like the innumerable stars of heaven (**Genesis 15:5**). But thirteen years passed and still **Abraham** and **Sarah** had no child. When, humanly speaking, it was no longer possible for her to conceive, **Sarah** took things into her own hands and suggested that her husband have a child with her handmaiden (which technically in their culture would have been hers). The result was Ishmael, but still no son of promise. Seemingly a dead-end again. But is anything too hard for YHVH? Nothing is impossible for Him! And it was precisely at this point and in this connection that the promise of a seed was confirmed, and the name of **Abram** was changed to **Abraham** with the revelation of YHVH as **El Shaddai**, or **God Almighty**.

The word **El** is translated **God** over 200 times in the Bible with that general significance: **You are the God who does wonders, You reveal Your strength to the peoples. With Your mighty arm You redeemed Your people, the descendants of Jacob and Joseph (Psalm 77:14). He is the El of Isra'el, who gives strength and power to the people (Psalm**

68:35b). And Moshe says of Him, "What other god is there in heaven or on earth that can do the works and mighty deeds that You do by Your strong hand" (Deuteronomy 3:24)? It's the word Hezekiah used when he spread Sennacherib's blasphemous letter before Him in the Temple (Isaiah 37:15). It is the word often used to denote God's power to interpose or intervene. So Nehemiah called upon the great, the mighty, and the terrible El to intervene on behalf of His people (Nehemiah 9:32). **El reveals Himself with special deeds of power as He sees fit.**

In addition, **El Shaddai** is *the One who fills and makes fruitful*. As we experience God's sufficiency, we must realize our insufficiency. To experience God's fullness, we must experience our emptiness. It is not an easy thing to empty ourselves. But the less empty we are, the less blessing El can pour into us; the more pride and self-sufficiency, the less fruit we can bear. Sometimes only divine discipline can make us realize this. Therefore, it is that the name **El Shaddai** is used in connection with judging, chastening or purging. It is not significant that it is when Na'omi loses her home, her husband and her two sons, that she declares: **Don't call me Na'omi [pleasant], call me Marah [bitter], because Shaddai has made my life very bitter. I went out full, and ADONAI has brought me back empty. Why call me Na'omi? ADONAI has testified against me, Shaddai has afflicted me (1:20-21 CJB).**

The same **El Shaddai** of the TaNaKh is **the One** who chastens those whom He loves in the B'rit Chadashah. He is the same **One** who has chosen us to bring forth fruit, much fruit - fruit that will last (John 15:16). As the all-sufficient **One** says: **Without Me you can do nothing (John 15:5)**. Sometimes He finds it necessary to purge us so that we may produce more spiritual fruit (John 15:2). But even in discipline, His ultimate purpose is love and mercy. Even though millions will be judged during the Great Tribulation, that time will witness the greatest revival in the history of the world. Many will be martyred, but ADONAI will see them **standing on the sea of glass singing the song of the Lamb** (see the commentary on **Revelation Dz - The Seven Angels with the Seven Last Plagues**).

So we see that the name **El Shaddai, Almighty God**, speaks to us of the riches and fullness of His grace in self-sacrificing love pouring itself out for others. It tells us that from YHVH comes every good and perfect gift, that El never gets tired of pouring out His mercies and blessings upon His people. But we must not forget that His strength is made perfect in our weakness (**Second Corinthians 12:9**); His sufficiency is most clearly seen in our insufficiency; and His fullness in our emptiness, that we being filled, may flow rivers of living water to a thirsty and needy world.¹¹