

Series: *Names of God*

Title: "El Shaddai: God Almighty" (Genesis 17:1)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 10-28-2012

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One of the most interesting studies that a student of the Bible can undertake is the study of names in the Bible. The names of people, and places, and things that we find in the Bible are not merely labels. They serve a purpose. They serve a function. This is especially the case in the Old Testament. Names that we find in the Old Testament not only identify people and places and things for us, they also tell us something about that person, or place, or thing.

For example, Genesis chapter three, verse twenty tells us that "Adam called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living." The name "Eve" means "life" or "living." Eve's own name is an argument against the ungodly theory of evolution. Evolutionists say that different races of human beings are probably descended from different ape-like ancestors in different parts of the world. But God's Word tells us, through Eve's own name, that she is "the mother of *all* living" – the woman who is the first female ancestor of *all* humanity – and she is the special creation of God, not some being whose ancestors rose out of some primordial slime. So in Eve's case, as in so many others that follow in the pages of Scripture, a person's name has significance.

The names of places also have significance in Scripture. We find the first instance of this in Genesis chapter eleven. When human beings after the flood attempted to exalt themselves above God, the record tells us that God confused their languages so that they could not understand each other, and so they had to stop building the great tower to the heavens and the great city they were building, and the people were scattered over the earth.

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And so we read in Genesis chapter eleven, verse nine that the name of the place was called *Babel* – which means, literally, confusion – “because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth” and caused the human population to be scattered over the earth. And so the names of places in Scripture also have significance.

The names of things likewise often have significance in Scripture. We find an example of this in Genesis chapter thirty-three. Jacob, had returned to the land of Canaan, the land of his birth, after spending many years with his father-in-law Laban. And when Jacob came back into the Promised Land, Genesis chapter thirty-three, verse twenty tells us that “he erected an altar there and called it ‘*El Elohe Israel*’ ” which means, “God, the mighty God of Israel.”

Jacob had come back into the midst of pagan peoples who lived in the land of Canaan at that time. They had many altars to many gods. Jacob wanted it to be known that the altar he erected was not an altar to any of their false gods. Jacob’s altar was an altar to the one true and living God, the mighty God who had met with him and protected him over many years. And so he named the altar, *El Elohe Israel* – God, the mighty God of Israel.

So the names of people, places, and things in Scripture have significance. And what is true of earthly people, places, and things in Scripture is even more significant as we look at the names that God Himself has given to us to describe

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Himself in Scripture. Throughout both the Old and New Testaments, God reveals Himself through His names.

The singular focus of the New Testament is on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Gabriel told Joseph, “You shall call His name *Jesus*” – meaning Jehovah is Salvation – “because He shall save His people from their sins.” And the genealogy that we find in Matthew chapter one tells us that Mary was the mother of “Jesus who is called ‘*Christ*’” – the anointed one, the Messiah, the Son of God. “Jesus” is the name at which every knee shall one day bow. Every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. The name of Jesus is the focus of the New Testament.

But in the Old Testament the names of God are manifold, and the meanings of God's names in the Old Testament reveal God to us in many different ways. By His names, we understand who God is, how God operates, how God governs, how God deals with individuals and nations, how God deals with believers and unbelievers.

The Origin of the Name

Today I want to call your attention to one particular name of God that we find in the Old Testament, and that name is *El Shaddai*, which means “God Almighty.” First, let me say a few words about the name itself. The name *Shaddai* or Almighty appears fifty-two times in the Old Testament. Each time it refers to God. And the compound name *El Shaddai*, “God Almighty,” appears seven times.

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In the past two hundred years, unbelieving scholars have tried to make a case for another meaning of *El Shaddai*, one that has its roots in the false idea that the Old Testament is not the inspired Word of God but merely a collection of earlier pagan myths assembled and retold by later men. But the long-standing position of believing scholars, going back many centuries, is that the origin of the name *El Shaddai* is, literally, "God of the mountain." God who possesses overwhelming strength, God who is completely unmovable and unchangeable, God Almighty, who is supremely powerful.

And this is the meaning of the name that fits the context of the fifty-two places where it is used in the Bible. The other meaning, this pagan name, this invention of the unbelieving higher critics, simply does not fit the facts. It does not fit the context.

And so it is easy to see who is right and who is wrong. It is easy to see who has a Biblical view of the nature of God, and who has a perverted and even feministic view of the nature of God. The problem is that today many even in the Evangelical church are not being as careful as they should be about these things. Many Evangelicals are listening to the unbelieving scholars in matters like this. But dear friends, we must reject such thinking. Unbelieving scholars by the very nature of the case usually have a very anti-Biblical agenda, and so Bible believing Christians must view their claims about archaeology and the ancient languages and the supposed origins of the Old Testament with great skepticism.

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El Shaddai is the God of the mountain. God Almighty. The God of infinite strength. The God whose person and purposes stand forever. God the most powerful.

The first time we find this particular name of God is in the passage we are going to come to in a few moments, in Genesis chapter seventeen. We find in Genesis seventeen that God comes before Abraham, for the third time in a span of twenty-four years, to declare His covenant promises to Abraham.

But before we come to Genesis chapter seventeen, it will be helpful for us to look at the things that have brought Abraham to this particular occasion. And so I want to briefly call your attention to the two previous occasions on which God has declared His promises to Abraham.

“Get Up and Go”

The first of these is in Genesis chapter twelve. Please open your Bibles with me, if you are able, to Genesis chapter twelve, beginning at verse one. Here we find God appearing to Abraham, who at this point is still called by his given name, Abram, for the first time. Genesis chapter twelve, verse one –

Now the Lord had said to Abram: “Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse

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him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

So Abram departed as the Lord had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. And Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. Then Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people whom they had acquired in Haran, and they departed to go to the land of Canaan. So they came to the land of Canaan. Abram passed through the land to the place of Shechem, as far as the terebinth tree of Moreh. And the Canaanites were then in the land.

Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." And there he built an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him. And he moved from there to the mountain east of Bethel, and he pitched his tent with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; there he built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord. So Abram journeyed, going on still toward the South. (Genesis 12:1-9)

And so here we have the first statement of God's promise. God tells Abram, Get out of your native country. Get up and go to a land that I am going to show you. I am going to give you that land. I am going to give you descendants. I am going to make you a great nation. I am going to bless you as no one else has ever been blessed. And I am going to bless all the nations of the earth through you.

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And so Abraham believed God. Abraham obeyed God. Now keep in mind, as we are told here, that Abraham is not a young man. He is 75 years old – and childless – when he sets out on this journey.

“I Am Your Shield”

Now turn over with me, please, just a page or two, to Genesis chapter fifteen. Genesis chapter fifteen, verse one. Here is the scene: We read in chapter fourteen, just before this, that Abraham has just returned from his battle with four kings, and Abraham has rescued his nephew Lot and his family from captivity. Abraham has had his encounter with Melchizedek the King of Salem. Abraham has been in the land of promise now for about ten years at this point. And so God now appears to Abraham a second time to confirm His promise. Genesis chapter fifteen, verse one:

After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.”

But Abram said, “Lord God, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” Then Abram said, “Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!”

And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, “This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be

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your heir." Then He brought him outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be."

And he [Abram] believed in the Lord, and He [the Lord] accounted it to him for righteousness. Then He said to him, "I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it." (Genesis 15:1-7)

And so once again, God has repeated His promises. And God has stated some important aspects of His promise more specifically and more emphatically than He did the first time, ten years ago: God says to Abram, One who will come from your own body will be your heir. Your descendants are going to be beyond the ability of man to number, Abram. And remember, I am the One who brought you here. I brought you to this land. You are going to inherit this land. And God says to Abram, Do not be afraid. I am your shield. I am your exceedingly great reward – I myself.

"I Am *El Shaddai*"

And so now with these things in mind, please turn over with me, just another page or two, to Genesis chapter seventeen, verse one. And as you are finding your place there, let me set the scene for you once again.

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Twenty-four years have now passed since God first made His promises to Abraham in Genesis chapter twelve. Fourteen years have now passed since God appeared to Abraham a second time to confirm His promises in Genesis chapter fifteen.

And twenty-four years after God's original promise, fourteen years after God's confirmation of that promise, as we come to Genesis chapter seventeen, verse one, here sits Abraham. He still possesses no land. And he still has no son.

Abraham is a man of great wealth, but he doesn't own a single square foot of the land God has promised to him.

And what about the promised son? Abraham has tried to make his own way. In the time since God last appeared, Abraham has fathered Ishmael with Sarah's handmaid. But God is about to make it clear that Ishmael is not the son that God has promised. Please read with me, if you are able, Genesis chapter seventeen, beginning at verse one:

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am Almighty God [in the Hebrew, *El Shaddai*]; walk before Me and be blameless. And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly."

Then Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying: "As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many

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nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you.

“And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.”
(Genesis 17:1-8)

And then, notice verse fifteen:

Then God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. And I will bless her and also give you a son by her; then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall be from her.”

Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, “Shall a child be born to a man who is one hundred years old? And shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?” And Abraham said to God, “Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!”

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Then God said: "No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him. And as for Ishmael, I have heard you. Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall beget twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation.

"But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this set time next year." (Genesis 17:15-21)

Here are Abraham and Sarah, in their old age. As the writer to the Hebrews tells us in chapter eleven, Abraham is "as good as dead" as far as having children is concerned.

But that is no obstacle to God. "I am God Almighty!" I am *El Shaddai*! I am the One who is able to do anything, at any time, in any way. I am not bound by time. I am not bound by My creation. I am not bound by the normal workings of the natural order I have established. I am God Almighty! I am *El Shaddai*! I can do anything, but I cannot fail. I will not fail.

God in effect is saying to Abraham, You may think that I have failed. You may think you have come to the end of the line. You may think that the promise has not been fulfilled and cannot now be fulfilled. You may think that the last chapter has been written.

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But think again, Abraham. I, *El Shaddai* – I, God Almighty – have only begun to work. I have only begun to do. You are about to see, Abraham, not the end, the beginning! You may be in the last phase of your life on earth, Abraham. But thousands of years of My plan lie ahead! Hundreds of generations of My people are still in the future!

Through you all the nations of the earth are going to be blessed, because through you, Abraham, will come the One who will redeem a people for Himself – a people who will call you, Abraham, their father in the faith! I am God Almighty! I am *El Shaddai*.

And here we are dear friends, four thousand years later, all of us who are in Christ – we are the spiritual descendants of Abraham. We are living proof that El Shaddai is faithful to every one of His promises.

And across the seas tonight there is a people, ethnic Israel, once again in the land – physical descendants of Abraham. And according to the sure promise of *El Shaddai*, Romans chapter eleven, after the fullness of the Gentiles has come in, there will be a great ingathering of ethnic Jews into the kingdom of God through faith in Jesus Christ. Their time is coming.

[TO BE CONTINUED ON THE NEXT BROADCAST]

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