

The Meaning of El Shaddai

El is the generic name for god; it is used of Yahweh as well as the other pagan gods of the culture. It is the equivalent to the English lower case *god*. El and Shaddai thus form a compound name for God.

Grammatical Description

Shaddai is often translated as “God Almighty;” however, this does not seem to be the best translation of the name. The focus does not seem to be so much on power and might (although that is implied) but more on sovereignty and kingship.

The most likely proposal is that the name Shaddai means “God, the one of the mountain.” The closest association of Shaddai is to the Akkadian word *Shadu*, which means “mountain.”

In the Hebrew the word for “mountain” is *har*, but Hebrew does have the word *shad*, which means “breast.” One can see the connection between mountain and breast, which is also a play on words for fertility and blessings (Ex. 49:25; see *Uses of El Shaddai* below).

Occurrences of El Shaddai

The use of the name El Shaddai is the name that is associated with the patriarchal period and seems to fade away after that.

The first occurrence of El Shaddai is in Gen. 17:1 when Yahweh is giving Abraham the sign of His covenant with him. “When Abram was ninety-nine years old, Yahweh appeared to him and said, ‘I am the *Sovereign God*.’”

In Ex. 6:3 Yahweh tells Moses that the patriarchs knew Him by only the name El Shaddai. “I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as the *Sovereign God*, but by my name ‘Yahweh’ I was not known to them.”

The divine name El Shaddai occurs 48 times in the Bible. Out of the 48 occurrences it appears 42 times in the patriarchal period: 9 times in the Pentateuch, 2 times in Ruth and 31 times in Job. It occurs only 6 times outside of this period: 4 times in the prophets and 2 times in the Psalms.

Uses of El Shaddai

Mountains in the ancient cultures were seen as the dwelling places of the gods and represented their thrones and their sovereignty and kingship upon sitting on them. In Hebrew literature Mount Zion was seen as the mountain from which El Shaddai rules.

“Certainly Yahweh has chosen Zion; He decided to make it his home.” (Ps. 132:13)

“Sing praises to Yahweh, who rules in Zion! Tell the nations what He has done!” (Ps. 9:11)

“May Yahweh bless you from Zion, that you might see Jerusalem prosper all the days of your life, and that you might see your grandchildren. May Israel experience peace!” (Ps. 128:5-6)

When Yahweh reveals Himself as El Shaddai in Genesis, it is in connection with blessings of fertility and multiple descendants.

In Genesis 17 when Yahweh reveals Himself as El Shaddai, He exhorts Abram to go the extra mile in obedience and then He will confirm His covenant with Abram of multiple descendants. “Then I will confirm my covenant between me and you, and I will give you a multitude of descendants” (Gen. 17:2). Yahweh goes on and elaborates on how He will bless Abram with fertility and multiple descendants, saying, “...because I will make you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you extremely fruitful” (Gen. 17:5).

In Jacob’s farewell address in Gen. 49:25 Jacob makes a connection between the title of El Shaddai and the promises of blessings of the breast and womb, which is a word play between *Shaddai* and *shad* (breast). “...because of the *Sovereign God*, who will bless you with blessings from the sky above, blessings from the deep that lies below, and blessings of the breasts and womb.”

Throughout the rest of the Bible, the title El Shaddai is used in the context of the sovereign God of blessing, and it will bring with it all of the concepts of the Yahweh of the covenant of multiple descendants as developed in Genesis.