

## **EL-SHADDAI**

IN OUR DISCUSSION of the name Jehovah it was discovered that the first great revelation of the significance of that name was given to Israel in Egypt. They were the people of His covenant with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, a separated people through whom a righteous and holy God would work out His purpose of redemption for mankind. In Exodus 3:14, 15, He thus revealed Himself: "I am that I am ... Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, Jehovah, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name forever and ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations." Then in Exodus 6:2, 3 it is written: "And God spake unto Moses, and said unto him, I am Jehovah: and I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, as God Almighty, but by my name Jehovah. I was not known [or was not made known] to them." It was suggested that by this it was meant that the Patriarchs had not understood the full significance of that name. Naturally the full significance of a name which 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 here is, however, that God was known especially to the Patriarchs by this name God Almighty, or in the Hebrew, El-Shaddai.

The name appears first in connection with Abraham. In Genesis 17:1, 2, we read, "And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, Jehovah appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am God Almighty [El-Shaddai]; walk before me, and be thou perfect. And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly." The occasion was the confirmation of a promise already made to Abram to make him a great nation (Gen. 12:2), to make his seed as the dust of the earth innumerable (Gen. 13:16), and (Gen. 15:5), like the stars of heaven, referring perhaps to a spiritual seed, also innumerable. Then we are told that Abram believed Jehovah, who reckoned it to him for righteousness. But the years passed, and Abram had no child. He was getting to be an old man and Sarai an old woman. Still there was no seed. That faith which God had reckoned to him for righteousness was beginning to dim a little. Then it lapsed for a while,

and they adopted that fleshly and unfortunate expedient which brought Ishmael and Mohammedanism into the world, but did not bring the fulfillment of the promise. Again the years went by and Abraham was ninety-nine years old, and the promise, by human reckoning, was now impossible of fulfillment. But is anything too hard for Jehovah? Nothing is impossible with Him! And it is precisely at this point and in this connection, as we shall see later, that the promise of a seed is confirmed, and the name of Abram changed to Abraham with the revelation of God as El-Shaddai, or God Almighty.

### **DERIVATION AND MEANING OF THE NAME**

Now what does the term God Almighty mean? We might begin by saying what it does not mean, and by ridding ourselves of a common misconception. True, the word almighty does suggest the all-powerful, the mighty, the power to be able to do anything and everything at any time. Certainly there cannot be anything beyond God's power. But this is indicated in the word God in this name, and not so much in the word we translate "almighty." The word for God here is El - El-Shaddai - God Almighty. In our first study, we discovered that the name Elohim is derived primarily from this word el, and that it stood for might, power, omnipotence, transcendence, the name connected especially with Creation. We learned that the word el itself is translated "God" over 200 times in the Bible with that general significance. "Thou art the El that doest wonders: thou hast made known thy strength among the peoples" (Ps. 77:14). He is "the El of Israel who giveth strength and might to the people" (Ps. 68:35). And Moses says of Him: "What El is there in the heavens or in the earth who can do according to thy works, and according to thy might?" (Deut. 3:24). It is the word Isaiah uses in the wonderful fortieth chapter of his prophecy of the mighty, incomparable God. It is the word often used to denote God's power to interpose or intervene. So Nehemiah calls upon the great, the mighty, and the terrible El to intervene in behalf of His people (9:32).

This word *el* is also translated by such words as "might" and "power," with regard to men. Laban says to Jacob: "It is in the power of my hand to do you hurt" (Gen. 31:29). The word for power is

el. In Proverbs 3:27 we read: “Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power [the el] of thine hand to do it .’“ “They practice evil,” says Micah (2: 1), “because it is in the power of their hand.” The psalmist speaks of Him as “the El that girdeth me with strength” (18:32).

It seems clear, then, with regard to this name God Almighty, or El-Shaddai, that the idea of all power is abundantly expressed in the term God or El. How, then, shall we understand that part of the name called Almighty or Shaddai?

In the first place, it is true that there is some difference of opinion as to the root meaning of this word. The translation of it as “almighty” is clue to the influence of that ancient Latin version of the Bible called the Vulgate, which dates back to the fourth century A.D., and was written by Jerome. ‘There are some scholars who simply dismiss the matter by saying its derivation is doubtful. Other modern scholars believe it comes from a root meaning strong, powerful, or to do violence, especially in the sense of one who is so powerful as to be able to set aside or do violence to the laws of nature or the ordinary course of nature. It is true that this is what happened in connection with the revelation of this name to Abraham, for the deadness of their bodies was overcome, and Isaac was born in fulfillment of the promise after their bodies were considered dead. Thus one scholar writes that “Elohim is the God who creates nature so that it is and supports it so that it continues, El-Shaddai the God who compels nature to do what is contrary to itself.” And so another says that as El-Shaddai He reveals Himself by special deeds of power.

It is quite likely that there is some connection between the name Shaddai and the root from which some modern scholars think it is derived, but in view of the circumstances under which it is often used and in view of the translation of another word almost exactly like it, we believe it has another derivation and a more significant meaning than that of special power.

Shaddai itself occurs forty-eight times in the Old Testament and is translated “almighty.” The

other word so like it, and from which we believe it to be derived, occurs twenty-four times and is translated “breast.” As connected with the word breast, the title Shaddai signifies one who nourishes, supplies, satisfies. Connected with the word for God, El, it then becomes the “One mighty to nourish, satisfy, supply.” Naturally with God the idea would be intensified, and it comes to mean the One who “sheds forth” and “pours” out sustenance and blessing. In this sense, then, God is the all-sufficient, the all-bountiful. For example, Jacob upon his deathbed, blessing his sons and forecasting their future, says in Genesis 49:24, 25. concerning Joseph: “. . . the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob . . . even by the God [El] of thy father, who shall help thee; and by the Almighty [Shaddai], 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 distinction and significance of names here is quite striking and obvious. It is God as El who helps, but it is God as Shaddai who abundantly blesses with all manner of blessings, and blessings of the breast.

This derivation as related to God is even more strikingly brought out in two passages in the Book of Isaiah. In 60:15, 16, speaking of the restoration of the people Israel in the future, Isaiah says: “Whereas thou hast been forsaken and hated ... I will make thee an eternal excellency, a joy of many generations. Thou shalt also suck the milk of the nations, and shalt suck the breast of kings: and [thus] thou shalt know that I Jehovah am thy Savior and thy Redeemer, the mighty One of Jacob.” Here the idea of bounty under the figure of blessings of the breast is directly associated with God. In Isaiah 66: 10-13, one of the most beautiful passages of Scripture, it is even more directly expressed. In verses 10 and 11 the prophet calls upon all who love Jerusalem and mourn over her to rejoice and be glad in her redemption and restoration. “That ye may suck and be satisfied with the breasts of her consolations; that ye may milk out, and be delighted with the abundance of her glory.” In verse 12, he continues: “For thus saith Jehovah, Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the nations like a flowing stream: then shall ye suck....” and in verse 13: “as one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you; and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem.” The point is that the word translated “breast” in these passages is the Hebrew *shad* from which is derived Shaddai, the name of God translated “almighty” in our

Bibles.

In that ancient version of the Bible we call the Septuagint, translated by Jewish scholars from the Hebrew into Greek more than 250 years B.C., this name Shaddai is rendered a number of times by a Greek word *ikanos* which can be translated “all-sufficient.” The ancient rabbis also said that the word shaddai was made up of two particles which, put together, meant “sufficient” or “self-sufficient.”

Such a conception of a god or deity was not uncommon to the ancients. The idols of the ancient heathen are sometimes termed *sheddim* in the Bible. It is no doubt because they were regarded as the great agents of nature or the heavens, in giving rain, in causing the earth to send forth its springs, to yield its increase, its fruits to maintain and to nourish life. There were many breasted idols worshiped among the heathen. One historian points out that “the whole body of the Egyptian goddess Isis was clustered over with breasts because all things are sustained or nourished by the earth or nature.” The same was true of the idol of the Ephesian goddess Diana in Acts 19, for Diana signified nature and the world with all its products. Ancient inscriptions on some of these idols of Diana read: “All-various nature, mother of all things.”<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to observe here that the common Hebrew word for field (*sadeh*)-that is, a cultivated field-is simply another form of the word shaddai. It is the field as cultivated earth which nourishes and sustains life.

Thus in this name God is seen to be the power or shedder-forth of blessings, the all-sufficient and the all bountiful One. Of course, the idea of One who is all powerful and all mighty is implied in this; for only an all-powerful One could be all sufficient and all bountiful. He is almighty because He is able to carry out His purposes and plans to their fullest and most glorious and triumphant completion. He is able to triumph over every obstacle and over all opposition: that is, He is sufficient for all these things. He is able, we are told, to subdue all things to Himself. But the word able applied to God refers more than anything else to what He wants

to be and to do for man. So He is able to save to the uttermost. And He is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we can ask or think. From all this it is felt that the name El-Shaddai or God Almighty is much better understood as that Et who is all sufficient and all bountiful, the source of all blessing and fullness and fruitfulness. This leads us to our next consideration.

### **THE USE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE NAME**

Let us look again for a moment at the circumstances under which this name was first revealed. To a man who apparently had some measure of understanding about the one true God and who gave some promise of faith; who left a settled and assured abode, comfortable circumstances, and family and friends to go on a long hazardous journey he knew not whither, God made certain promises: the promise of a land, a large posterity, and a spiritual mission. He was fairly well advanced in years when the promise was first made. For many years his faith stood the test of waiting while God repeatedly assured him of the promise. When it appeared, however, that soon it would be too late, humanly speaking, for such a promise to be fulfilled, he took matters into his own hands, and Ishmael was born of Hagar, of the will of man, of the will of the flesh and not of God.

God allowed thirteen years more to pass, till it was no longer possible according to the flesh that the child of promise should be born. Then when God appears to him again to repeat the promise of a seed Abraham can only think in terms of Ishmael and begs that he might be allowed to live and the promise made sure in him. Yet he laughs with a mixture of both doubt and hope within that it may yet be true. Perhaps faith predominates as he says in heart: "Shall a child be born to him that is a hundred years old? And shall Sarah that is ninety years old, bear?" (Gen. 17: 17). It was to this faith in God's promise that Paul refers in Romans 4:19-21 that Abraham "staggered not at the promise of God," and did not consider his own body as good as dead or Sarah's, and was fully persuaded that what God promised He was able to perform. And the Epistle to the Hebrews refers to Sarah's faith, who received strength to give birth when past age (11:11). It is

then that God reveals Himself to Abraham as El-Shaddai, mighty in sufficiency and dispensing of His bounty. He is, first of all, sufficient to revive the deadness of the human body in order to show His great power and bounty.

It was a staggering promise by the time it was finally repeated, but they did not stagger at it. It is by this new name, in this connection, that God now reveals Himself as the Mighty Promiser and Giver of gifts. Abraham and Sarah had to learn that what God promises only God can give, that the promise was not to be made sure by the works of the flesh. So the bodies of both of them must die first to make them realize that it was all of God. Jacob had to be made lame and halt before he could finally reenter the land of promise, lest he should claim it as acquired by his own hand and cunning, and boast of his own sufficiency. So, too, God's salvation in Christ is His gift to us and not to be earned by anything we may do—"not of works lest any man should boast." Thus this name also taught Abraham his own insufficiency, the futility of relying upon his own efforts and the folly of impatiently running ahead of God. Numberless Christian people have been guilty of just this, often to their sorrow and loss. The birth of Ishmael proved to be a sore trial, not only in Abraham's household, but to Abraham's descendants, both physical and spiritual, all through the ages. God as El-Shaddai is sufficient for all things. Man's meddling only mars His working. It is significant that with the revelation of this name Abraham is enjoined to "walk before me, and be thou perfect." Instead of perfect, the word complete or wholehearted would much better express what is meant. The point is that Abraham's faith had been marred by the fleshly and self-sufficient expedient to which he had resorted. The mighty all-sufficient One demands and deserves our complete faith-a wholehearted faith.

Then this name introduces God to us as the all bountiful in the fullness and fruitfulness He imparts to all who trust Him and wait patiently upon Him. This is most clearly set forth and illustrated in the first few occasions of the use of this name. As God Almighty or El-Shaddai, God changes the name Abram, which means "exalted father," to Abraham, which means "father of a multitude," many nations. "I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee" (Gen. 17:6). In blessing Jacob, Isaac says (Gen. 28:3):

“ElShaddai bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be a multitude of people.” In Genesis 35: 11, God Himself says to Jacob: “I am El-Shaddai: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins.” Jacob upon his deathbed repeals the promise of a great posterity made in the name of El-Shaddai (Gen. 48:3, 4), and in that name pronounces the same blessing upon Joseph., the blessings of Heaven and earth and of the breasts and of the womb (Gen. 49:25).

It is the name used by Balaam, who, being hired to curse Israel, was compelled to turn it into a blessing. It is the “vision of the Almighty” (Num. 24:4, 16) which makes him see Israel a goodly people, spread out, with its seed in many waters, and as final victor over all its enemies through that Star of Jacob and the Scepter of Israel, its Messiah. Certainly this significance of the name may be gathered from the Book of Job, where it occurs thirty-one out of the forty eight times it appears in the Old Testament, for the end of Job was even more blessed and abundantly fruitful than his beginning.

It is in, this connection that another aspect of the name El-Shaddai, as the One who fills and makes fruitful, appears. We have already seen that to experience God’s sufficiency one must realize one’s own insufficiency. To experience God’s fullness one must empty self. It is not easy to empty self. It was never easy to do that. The less empty of self we are, the less of blessing God can pour into us; the more of pride and self sufficiency, the less fruit we can bear. Sometimes only chastening can make us realize this. Thus it is that the name Almighty God or El-Shaddai is used in connection with judging, chastening, purging. Is it not significant that it is in connection with the loss of her home, her husband and her two sons, the fruit of her womb, that Naomi says: “The Almighty [Shaddai] hath dealt very bitterly with me”? “I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty .. the Almighty [again Shaddai] has afflicted me” (Ruth 1:20, 21). And as in the case of Naomi is it not also true of Job that even this “perfect and upright” man was made more upright or whole through sufferings; that he was purged, through chastening, of some imperfections which hindered his fullest blessing and fruitfulness; that this chastening emptied him so completely of self that he could be “filled with all the fullness of God”? (Eph.



3:19). He understood this in the day when he said: “But now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:5, 6). Then he received power with God to intercede for his friends, and he was filled with double blessings.

The same El-Shaddai of the Old Testament is the One who in the New chastens whom He loves that, being exercised thereby, they may yield the peaceable fruit of holiness or righteousness. He is the same One who has chosen us to bring forth fruit, much fruit, and that this fruit should remain (John 15: 16). As the allsufficient One He says, “Without me ye can do nothing” (John 15:5). As the all-abounding One who makes us fruitful with His gifts, He finds it necessary to purge us that we may bring forth more fruit (John 15:2).

In the Book of Revelation the name Almighty appears in connection with the pouring out of judgments. Of the Lord God Almighty it is said, “True and righteous are thy judgments” (16:7) . We read of “the war of the great day of God, the Almighty” (16:14), and 19:15 speaks of “the fierceness of the wrath of God the Almighty.” May it not be that this is simply the opposite aspect of that name which signifies the pouring forth of blessings! Of the new heavens and new earth in chapter 21 we are told that the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple (v. 22), and its glory and light (v. 23). But the Lamb which was the last word and full manifestation of God’s outpouring of love and life upon man is the Lamb slain-rejected and slain of man. It is from the wrath of the Lamb that men hide. It is the Lamb, too, who opens the seals and pours out judgment. If man will not receive fullness of love and life from God, he must receive judgment. For He who poured out His blood that men might have life and have it more abundantly must pour out the judgment of sin and death upon all who will not receive it.

But even here the ultimate purpose is of love and mercy. The judgment of some is to turn to the mercy of many, that He may see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied, that ten thousand times ten thousand may gather about the throne and sing the song of the all-bountiful, all-merciful God and of the Lamb.

So we see that the name Almighty God speaks to us of the inexhaustible stores of His bounty, of the riches and fulness of His grace in self-sacrificing love pouring itself out for others. It tells us that from God comes every good and perfect gift, that He never wearies of pouring His mercies and blessings upon His people. But we must not forget that His strength is made perfect in our weakness; His sufficiency is most manifest in our insufficiency; His fullness in our emptiness, that being filled, from us may flow rivers of living water to a thirsty and needy humanity.

1 Parkhurst, Hebrew Lexicon (see Sheddim).