

What We Can Learn From the Descriptive Names of God

More than 100 “descriptive” names of God are woven throughout the stories in the Bible. Most of them were assigned to God by His people, and describe one aspect of His character or are a reminder of one of His great acts.

There is much we can learn from these ancient names because God’s character does not change. He is the same today and forever.

El Shaddai

One of those descriptive names is Almighty God, or in Hebrew, El Shaddai. The first part of that Hebrew word, el, is a shortened form of Elohim that speaks of God’s strength; Shaddai means “mighty” or “strong one.” In Genesis 17 God revealed Himself to Abraham as El Shaddai, Almighty God. It was a name that conveyed God’s ability to do what He intended to do, despite how impossible it looked. He would make of Abraham, and his barren wife, a great nation.

As El Shaddai, He will do the same for us and we can trust in the one who is sufficient to carry out what He has promised. With Almighty God “all things are possible” (Matt. 19:26).

El Gibbor

Another similar descriptive name for God also based on el is El Gibbor, which means “the Mighty God” in the sense of a warrior—a valiant, strong and mighty God. This Hebrew word for God shows up in one of the most famous verses in Isaiah, often quoted in churches around Christmastime, about the coming Messiah:

For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the

government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God [El Gibbor], Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6, emphasis added).

Here, Isaiah groups El Gibbor with Messiah's ability to govern with great wisdom and the might to carry it out. This descriptive name for God reminds us to turn our eyes steadfastly on El Gibbor—who is mighty in wisdom and will help us not grow weary or lose heart—when we experience difficult circumstances beyond what we think we can handle. But at the same time, He is also our everlasting Father and Prince of Peace.

El Elyon

Another el name in Hebrew is the word El Elyon, the name “Most High God.” Elyon can be translated “strongest.” It's derived from the Hebrew root word that means “to ascend” or “to go up,” which implies that God is not just exalted but the strongest and highest one, or the “strongest strong one.”

We see this word as a description of the God of the mysterious king of Salem, Melchizedek:

Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of *God Most High [El Elyon]*. (Gen. 14:18, emphasis added)

But notice that in the very next verse, Melchizedek blesses Abraham, saying: “Blessed be [Abraham] of God Most High [El Elyon], *possessor of heaven and earth*” (Gen. 14:19, emphasis added). This “God Most High” has no bounds and possesses all created things.

The name El Elyon also shows up several times in the Psalms. For example, in Psalm 57:2 (ESV), the psalmist says he cries out “to *God Most High*, to God who fulfills his purpose for me” . El Elyon is a reminder that our God is limitless. As the

“strongest strong one,” He will carry out His purposes on earth—and in our lives.

El Olam

El Olam, or “Everlasting God, is yet another el name for God. God’s nature is without beginning or end, free from all the constraints of time human beings live in. He is the God who was, who is and who is to come. This means His characteristics are eternal and do not weaken! Consider Isaiah 40:27–29:

Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel: “My way is hidden from the Lord, and my just claim is passed over by my God”? Have you not known? Have you not heard? *The everlasting God [El Olam]*, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength (Emphasis added).

The Everlasting God is abounding in eternal strength. He does not get tired or grow weary; therefore, we can go to Him in times of weakness and receive the power and strength we need. We can trust in the eternal nature of El Olam, who is always faithful, longsuffering, loving and merciful. His character is the same today as it was yesterday and will always be.

El Roi

After Sarah’s maid Hagar conceived a child with Sarah’s husband, Abraham, Sarah dealt harshly with her, and Hagar fled to the wilderness. Alone and desperate, the angel of the Lord met her there:

“Behold, you are with child, and you shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael, because the Lord has heard your affliction. He shall be a wild man; his hand shall be against every man, and every man’s hand against him. And he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren.” Then she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her, *You-Are-the-God-Who-*

Sees [*El Roi*]; for she said, “Have I also here seen *Him who sees me?*” (Gen. 16:11–13, emphasis added).

Note from this passage that the “God Who Sees” (El Roi in Hebrew) is also the God who hears—and these two descriptions of God are beautifully connected. In this passage, God acknowledges Hagar’s pregnancy and gives her the child’s name: Ishmael, which means, “God hears.” Hagar responds by calling the name of the Lord who spoke to her, the “God who sees.” God’s name El Roi reminds us that when we feel invisible or unheard, God sees us and hears the cries of our hearts.

Jehovah Jireh

Interestingly, El Roi is connected to another name for God, Jehovah Jireh. Some versions of the Bible translate God’s premier name, the unpronounceable YHVH, as Jehovah in English. Several names for God in the Bible use Jehovah—but Jehovah Jireh shows up only once, in Genesis 22.

God had instructed Abraham to take his son Isaac up the mountain and offer him as a sacrifice. Abraham obeyed, but God intervened and stopped him, telling Abraham that He would instead provide a ram in a thicket. In response, Abraham dedicated the altar on which he almost sacrificed his son as “The Lord Will Provide,” or Jehovah Jireh.

Incredibly, the Hebrew word yireh (Jireh in English) is based on the same Hebrew root word for roi seen in God’s name El Roi, the “God who sees.” Therefore, the “God who sees” is the “God who provides.”

Our God is mighty and strong, from everlasting to everlasting, with no beginning and no end. Yet He is not distant—He is so close He sees you, just as He saw Hagar. He sees you in your difficulties and hears the cries of your heart.

Though you may feel exhausted or drained, God never grows tired or weary. No matter what you are experiencing, no matter

how challenged, lonely or defeated you feel, God will give you strength.

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