

## 'El: Transcendent and Mysterious, yet Immanent and Expressed

The most basic word for *God* in the Old Testament is 'El. It occurs about 241 times (almost seventy-five percent in poetry) and means something like “powerful or mighty One.” Sometimes it is used in a particular Hebrew idiom to mean “might” or “power.”<sup>1</sup> The word 'El frequently occurs in conjunction with other words, either as a compound title or with other modifications to stress characteristics of God. It is also used in compound personal names, which is a window into the experiences and aspirations of the Old Testament saints. These associations with 'El indicate that He is transcendent and mysterious, yet He is also immanent and expressed, or revealed. Indeed the immanent and expressed notions are more common, indicating that although 'El is the transcendent and mysterious God, He desires to be with His people and reveal Himself to them.

## Transcendent and Mysterious

'El occurs a few times by itself (as a subject or object), with some modification (e.g., with adjectives *great*, *awesome*, *feared*, *mighty*, and *hidden*), or in compound personal names indicating transcendence and mystery. It also occurs in compound titles, such as 'El 'Elyon (the Most High God), the God of heaven, and the God of gods, indicating transcendence, and 'El 'Olam (the Eternal God), indicating hiddenness. It also occurs in the compound title 'El Shadday which contains transcendent and immanent notions of God, Almighty God and all-sufficient Sustainer.

'El occurs a few times by itself indicating transcendence. He (Jehovah) is God ('El, Isa. 43:12), and there is no one else (45:22; 46:9). Who can He be likened to? (Micah 7:18; Isa. 40:18; Deut. 3:24; 33:26). He is not a man to lie (Num. 23:19; cf. Hosea 11:9). 'El is the Creator (Isa. 42:5 as God ['El] Jehovah; Mal. 2:10). The heavens declare the glory of God (Psa. 19:1). He is God from eternity to eternity (90:2), His lovingkindness endures continually (lit., all the day, Psa. 52:1), and His way is perfect (2 Sam. 22:31 = Psa. 18:30).

A number of adjectives or participles associated with 'El indicate transcendence. He is the mighty God (Isa. 9:6; 10:21),<sup>2</sup> the great and awesome God (Neh. 1:5; Dan. 9:4), and the great, mighty, and awesome God (Neh. 9:32). He is also a God who does wonders (Psa. 77:14).

The notion of hiddenness is particularly indicated by Isaiah 45:15: “Surely You are a God who hides Himself ['El *mistatter*], / O God of Israel, the Savior.” Job and the wicked man both consider that God ('El) hides His face from them (13:24; 23:9; 34:29; Psa. 10:11). This notion of hiddenness is reinforced in other places with Jehovah or 'Elohim (or 'Eloah) as the subject and various verbs indicating hiddenness. Jehovah hides (*histir*) His face from the evil of His people (Deut. 31:17-18; 32:20; Psa. 51:9; Isa. 8:17; 54:8; 57:17; 59:2; 64:7; Jer. 33:5; Ezek. 39:23-24; Micah 3:4). But they question and petition Him not to hide His face (Psa. 44:24; 27:9; 69:17; 55:1; Lam. 3:56), which is not His desire (Ezek. 39:29). The psalmist also considers that Jehovah hides ('*lm*) Himself in times of distress (Psa. 10:1). Job considers that wisdom is hidden (*ne'elam*) from the eyes of all living and that God ('Eloah) hid (*zaphan*, “stored up,” or “treasured”) His purpose in His dealing with Job in His heart (Job 10:13). As Witness Lee notes in relation to this verse,

Job was right; something was hidden in God's heart—the mystery of the ages (Eph. 3:9). After creating man in His image and according to His likeness (Gen. 1:26), God kept His intention hidden throughout the ages. Before the New Testament time He did not unveil to anyone what His purpose was (Eph. 3:4-5).

The mystery hidden in God's heart is God's eternal economy (Eph. 1:10; 3:9; 1 Tim. 1:4), which is God's eternal intention with His heart's desire to dispense Himself in His Divine Trinity as the Father in the Son by the Spirit into His chosen people to be their life and nature that they may be the same as He is as His duplication (Rom. 8:29; 1 John 3:2), to become an organism, the Body of Christ as the new man (Eph. 2:15-16), for God's fullness, God's expression (Eph. 1:22-23; 3:19), which will consummate in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2—22:5). Not knowing God's intention, Job misunderstood God and thought that God was angry with him and was judging him and punishing him. God's intention was not to judge Job or to punish him but to tear him down and then rebuild him with Himself, to make Job a new man in God's new creation (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15). This is the answer to Job, to the book of Job, and to Job's vindication. (Recovery Version, note 1)

However, it is the request and expectation of His people that He would reveal Himself and His purpose, that He would give us the treasures of darkness and the hidden riches of secret places, that we may know that He is Jehovah (Isa. 45:3), and that if we call on Him, He will answer and tell us great and hidden things, which we do not know (Jer. 33:3). Daniel realized that He reveals the deep things and the hidden things; He knows what is obscured in the darkness, and the light dwells with Him (Dan. 2:22).<sup>3</sup> However, it is not until New Testament times that these things are revealed and developed more fully (Eph. 3:3-6).<sup>4</sup>

### 'El in Compound Personal Names

Only a few compound personal names with 'El indicate transcendence or hiddenness. The incomparableness of God is indicated in two question names, Mishael (Who is what God is?) (Exo. 6:22; Dan. 1:6) and Michael (Who is like God?) (Num. 13:13; 1 Chron. 5:13; Dan. 10:13; Jude 9; Rev. 12:7; cf. Isa. 40:18; Micah 7:18). The antiquity of God is perhaps indicated by *Kadmiel* (or *Qadmiel*), "'El is the Ancient One (*qadmah*)" (Ezra 2:40).

The majesty of God is indicated by *Geuel* "majesty (*ga'awah*) of God" (Num. 13:15). A couple of names indicate that Jehovah is God: *Joel* (1 Sam. 8:2) and *Eliyah[u]* (1 Kings 17:1). *Eliahba*, "God hides (*habah*)," contains the notion of the hidden God (2 Sam. 23:32).

### 'El in Compound Titles

'El occurs in three main compound titles that indicate transcendence: 'El 'Elyon, 'El hashamayim, and 'El 'elim. Although these titles do not occur frequently, they are quite significant in our understanding of God.

'El 'Elyon—the Most High God: 'Elyon is an adjective that comes from the root 'lh, meaning "to go up" and means something like "higher," "the highest," or "most high." 'Elyon can be used as a comparative adjective to refer to things, e.g., the upper pool (Isa. 7:3), or people, e.g., Israel set high above all the nations (Deut. 26:19; 28:1). But when 'Elyon refers to God, it is best understood as a superlative, the Most High. 'Elyon is associated with 'El as a compound name five times, of which four times are in His interaction with Abraham and Melchizedek in Genesis 14. Melchizedek is a priest of God the Most High (Gen. 14:18; cf. Heb. 7:1). God the Most High is Possessor of heaven and earth (Gen. 14:19, 22), and God the Most High, who delivered Abraham from all His

enemies, is blessed (v. 20). God the Most High is also God ('Elohim), the rock and Redeemer of Israel (Psa. 78:35). 'Elyon also occurs twice in compound with 'Elohim (57:2; 78:56) and twice with Jehovah (7:17; 47:2). 'Elyon also occurs by itself but in poetic parallel to another divine title, such as 'El and Shadday (Num. 24:16), 'El (Psa. 73:11; 107:11), 'Elohim (46:4; 50:14; 78:17, cf. v. 10; 82:6), Jehovah (2 Sam. 22:14; Psa. 18:13; 21:7; 83:18; 91:9; 92:1; 97:9), Shadday (91:1), and 'Elahah (in Aramaic, Dan. 3:26; 4:2). 'Elyon also occurs occasionally by itself without another parallel divine title (Psa. 87:5; Isa. 14:14; Lam. 3:35, 38; Dan. 4:24, 34; 7:18 pl., 22 pl., 25 pl., 27 pl.).

The actions 'Elyon is associated with contain both elements of transcendence and immanence. He is a great King over all the earth (Psa. 47:2; Dan. 4:17, 25, 32, 34; 5:21; cf. Psa. 83:18; 97:9), He gave the nations their inheritance (Deut. 32:8), He uttered His voice (2 Sam. 22:14), He is the recipient of praise (Psa. 92:1) and vows (50:14), He has knowledge that can be obtained (Num. 24:16; cf. Psa. 73:11), and He extends lovingkindness to the king (21:7).<sup>5</sup> The Most High has sons (82:6; Luke 6:35; cf.

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Jesus in Mark 5:7 and Luke 1:32), and He can be our secret dwelling place and habitation (Psa. 91:1, 9). The city of God is the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High (46:4; cf. Acts 7:48), and the Most High establishes Zion (Psa. 87:5). In addition, 'El is also revealed as God above (*mimma'al*, Job 31:28).

'El Hashamayim—the God of Heaven: In Psalm 136:26 God is called the God of heaven ('El hashamayim). This indicates not only that He is located in heaven (Lam. 3:41), but also He is God of all that transpires there. It also indicates He is the Possessor of heaven (Gen. 14:19, 22) and the Maker of heaven (as Jehovah, Psa. 115:15; 121:2), and more intrinsically He is heavenly in nature (as the Father, Matt. 5:48) and even equivalent to heaven itself (Luke 15:18). Indeed, (the) heaven(s) are sometimes personified and occur by themselves as a subject or object; for example, "the heavens do rule" (Dan. 4:26; Job 38:33) and "they set their mouth against the heavens" (Psa. 73:9). They function as a metonymy for God, although He is exalted above the heavens (57:5, 11; 108:5) and is higher than them (cf. Heb. 7:26; Psa. 108:4), and they cannot contain Him (1 Kings 8:27).

Hashamayim also occurs with 'Elohim (Gen. 24:7). Sometimes the title *God of heaven* is combined with the *God of earth* (v. 3), whereas at other times the title *God of*

*earth* is lacking (2 Chron. 36:23; Ezra 1:2; Neh. 1:4-5; cf. Rev. 11:13; 16:11).<sup>6</sup>

'El 'Elim—*the God of Gods*: Another title that indicates the transcendence and superiority of God occurs in Daniel 11:36. 'El is called the God of gods ('El 'elim). 'El is superior to the gods of the peoples, which are idols (Psa. 96:5), the work of human hands (Deut. 4:28; 2 Chron. 32:19; Psa. 115:4; 135:15; Jer. 10:3), and not gods at all (2 Kings 19:18; Isa. 37:19; Jer. 5:7; Gal. 4:8). The same notion occurs with the other words for *God*—'Elohey ha'elohim (Deut. 10:17; Psa. 136:2) and 'Eloah 'elahin (Dan. 2:47). Paul continues this thought in 1 Corinthians, yet he also indicates that the believers are monotheists, having only one (triune) God, “Even if there are so-called gods, either in heaven or on earth, even as there are many gods and many lords, yet to us there is one God, the Father, out from whom are all things, and we are unto Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we are through Him” (8:5-6).

'El 'Olam—*the Eternal God*: The title 'El 'Olam indicates hiddenness in addition to transcendence. It occurs just once. After Abraham makes his covenant with Abimelech and before his sacrifice of Isaac (Gen. 22), Abraham plants a tamarisk tree and calls on the name of Jehovah, the eternal God, 'El 'Olam (21:33). As Witness Lee states,

*El*, meaning *the Mighty One*, is one of the names of God. *Olam*, meaning *eternal* or *eternity*, comes from a Hebrew root meaning *to conceal*, *to hide*. The divine title *El Olam* implies eternal life (cf. John 1:1, 4). Hence, by calling on the name of Jehovah, the Eternal Mighty One, Abraham experienced God as the ever-living, secret, mysterious One, who is the eternal life. (Recovery Version, v. 33, note 3)

'Olam occurs around 440 times in Hebrew and 20 times in Aramaic (as *'alam*) and comes from the root 'lm, meaning “to conceal” or “hide” (2 Kings 4:27; Psa. 10:1). In its basic sense *'olam* refers to what is hidden. It comes to refer to what is hidden from human experience (i.e., eternal or eternity, having a quality of otherness, outside the physical realm of our time and space with its limitations) as well as referring to something occurring a long time ago or in a distant future time (hidden from our sight).<sup>7</sup> The former sense is obtained especially when referring to God or related to God, and the latter sense when temporal human matters are being referred to. There is some debate whether *'olam* also has a primary sense of duration (i.e., everlasting or perpetual) or whether this sense is secondary.<sup>8</sup> Later it also has a sense of a (long) period of time and an age or ages, and in post-biblical literature it also means “world,” or “universe.”

This notion of hidden eternal things continues in the New Testament; for example, “the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Cor. 4:18); “the invisible things of Him, both His eternal power and divine characteristics” (Rom. 1:20); and “now to the King of the ages [the King eternal—KJV], incorruptible, invisible, the only God” (1 Tim. 1:17). In addition to invisibility, other attributes are associated with the notion of eternal in the New Testament, especially with reference to God; e.g., incorruptibility (ἀφθαρσία, Rom. 2:7; 1:23; 1 Pet. 1:4, 23) and immortality (ἀθανασία), which God alone has “dwelling in unapproachable light whom no man has seen nor can see, to whom be honor and eternal might” (1 Tim. 6:16).<sup>9</sup>

The eternal or timeless sense of *'olam* mostly involves God, both in His being and in His relationship with us. In addition to being 'El 'Olam, God is the eternal God ('Elohey 'Olam, Isa. 40:28; cf. Rom. 16:26) and the eternal King (Jer. 10:10). Jehovah's name (Psa. 135:13) and some of God's attributes are also eternal, for example, His lovingkindness (Isa. 54:8), His faithfulness (Psa. 117:2), and His testimonies (119:144). He also makes perpetual statutes related to the Passover (Exo. 12:14), the priesthood (29:9), the ordinances for offerings (Lev. 3:17; Ezek. 46:14), the boundary of the sea (Jer. 5:22), a perpetual covenant related to the Sabbath (Exo. 31:16), and an eternal covenant with David's house (2 Sam. 23:5) and with Israel (1 Chron. 16:17; Psa. 105:10; Isa. 55:3; 61:8; Jer. 50:5; Ezek. 16:60), which is the new covenant (Jer. 32:40; cf. Heb. 13:20).

Eternity is also considered from the point of view of time, especially with prepositions *from* and *to*, either looking back into eternity past, the beginning of time, or the distant past, or looking forward into the distant future, the final age, or eternity future. Sometimes a span that includes time and both eternity past and eternity future is indicated, especially referring to God; e.g., “from eternity [*me'olam*] to eternity [*'ad 'olam*], You are God [*'El*” (Psa. 90:2). On numerous occasions Jehovah the God of Israel (or His name) is blessed from eternity to eternity (1 Chron. 16:36 = Psa. 106:48; Neh. 9:5; 1 Chron. 29:10; Psa. 41:13; Dan. 2:20). Jehovah's lovingkindness is from eternity to eternity (Psa. 103:17). He is also the First and the Last (Isa. 48:12). According to Jeremiah, the land was also given to the fathers of Israel from eternity to eternity (7:7; 25:5).

The notion of extending back into eternity past is also seen a few times in the expression *me'olam* by itself. Jehovah is from eternity (Psa. 93:2), and wisdom is from eternity (Prov. 8:23). A day like the day of Jehovah with its darkness accompanied by the army of locust swarms has not occurred since the day of eternity (from the



beginning of time, from eternity past) until the years of the generation of generation(s).

The notion of extending into eternity future (or forever) occurs much more frequently and is indicated by the use of the *'olam* with a preposition *le* ("to," 177 times) or *'ad* ("until," "unto," 64 times).<sup>10</sup> God abides forever (Lam. 5:19), He reigns forever (Exo. 15:18; Psa. 146:10; 9:7; 29:10), and He will dwell in the midst of Israel forever (Ezek. 43:7, 9). Israel is betrothed to God (Hosea 2:19), He keeps faith (Psa. 146:6), and what God does (Eccl. 3:14) are all forever. His lovingkindness (1 Chron. 16:34, more than forty times), His righteousness (Psa. 119:142), His righteous ordinances (v. 160), His name (Exo. 3:15; Psa. 135:13), His word (Isa. 40:8), and His salvation (51:6) are all forever. The earth (Psa. 78:69; Eccl. 1:4), the land for Israel (Gen. 13:15; Josh. 14:9; 1 Chron. 28:8; Ezek. 37:25), Mount Zion (Psa. 125:1), Jehovah's sanctuary (Ezek. 37:26, 28), the Sabbath (Exo. 31:16-17), the kingship of David (Ezek. 37:25), the throne of David (2 Sam. 7:13, 16; 1 Kings 2:45; 1 Chron. 17:14; 22:10), the priesthood of Aaron and his sons (Exo. 29:9; 40:15; Num. 25:13) and of Melchizedek (Psa. 110:4; Heb. 5:6), and the ministering of the Levites (1 Chron. 15:2) are all forever. It is the aspiration of the psalmists to praise (Psa. 44:8; 45:17; 145:2), thank (52:9; 79:13), glorify His name (86:12), and bless Jehovah forever (89:52; 145:1, 21). The notion of living forever occurs in Genesis related to the tree of life (3:22). Jehovah lives forever (Deut. 32:40), and living forever occurs as a wish related to kings (1 Kings 1:31; Neh. 2:3; Dan. 2:4; 3:9; 5:10; 6:6, 21). In the New Testament this notion of living forever (*εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα*, "unto the age") is related to eating the living bread that came down out of heaven (John 6:51, 58). This notion is reinforced over forty times in the New Testament with the adjectival phrase *eternal life* (*ἡ αἰώνιος ζωῆ*), especially having eternal life through believing into Christ (3:15-16; 6:40; 1 John 5:13). God is also the living God (*'El hay* Josh. 3:10; Psa. 42:2; 84:2; Hosea 1:10; cf. *'Elohim* 1 Sam. 17:26, etc.).

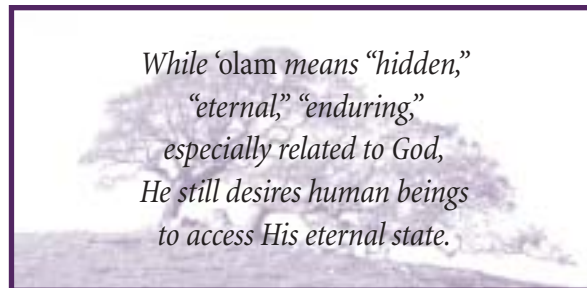
In its more strictly temporal sense *'olam* refers to age(s) of time before the present (Deut. 32:7; Ezra 4:15; Amos 9:11, all with the word *days*; Eccl. 1:10; Isa. 44:7; 46:10; 51:9; 63:9; Jer. 28:8; Ezek. 26:20) or the age(s) of time in the future. This notion of ages also occurs in many of the twelve instances in which *'olam* occurs in the plural and sometimes carries the sense of belonging to and consuming the ages. Jehovah's house is of the ages (1 Kings 8:13; 2 Chron. 6:2), His kingdom is a kingdom of all the

ages (Psa. 145:13); He is the eternal rock, or rock of ages, dependable for all the ages (Isa. 26:4); Israel is saved by a salvation of the ages, not to be ashamed unto the ages of eternity (*'ad*, 45:17); seventy weeks are apportioned to bring in the righteousness of the ages (Dan. 9:24). The plural of *'olam* also refers to past ages (Eccl. 1:10; Isa. 51:9). The plural occurs nine out of twenty times in the Aramaic sections of the Old Testament (mostly with *le*) and is used to refer to the kingdom of God, which is never destroyed and stands forever (Dan. 2:44); God who endures forever (6:26); and "the saints of the Most High [who] will...possess the kingdom," literally, "unto the age and unto the age of the ages" (7:18), perhaps referring to the millennial kingdom and the eternal kingdom. This notion of age(s) seems to occur later. *'Olam* is mostly translated αἰών in the Septuagint, which more commonly carries the notion of age, especially in the plural. This notion continues in the New Testament; e.g., from the ages (Col. 1:26), throughout the ages (Eph. 3:9), also the present age (Rom. 12:2; Gal. 1:4; 1 Tim. 6:17; 2 Tim. 4:10; Titus 2:12), the age(s) to come (Eph. 1:21; 2:7; Heb. 6:5; Mark 10:30; Luke 18:30), and the consummation of the age(s): the Old Testament age (Heb. 9:26; cf. 1 Cor. 10:11) and the

church age (Matt. 13:39-40; 28:20). In many contexts αἰών still has an eternal sense, both with the notion of ages, e.g., "before the times of the ages" (2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 1:2; cf. Jude 25) or without.<sup>11</sup> The New Testament also refers to (literally) "the age of the ages" (Eph. 3:21) and "the ages of the ages" (Gal. 1:5) or simply "the ages" (Rom. 1:25; Eph. 3:11) to refer to the ultimate eternal age, eternity future, translated frequently "forever and ever." In addition, it frequently refers to a definite singular age, "the age," when preceded by a preposition (usually *εἰς*), which also is translated "forever," lit., "unto the age" referring to the unique ultimate age of eternity future (John 4:14; 6:51).

While *'olam* means "hidden," "eternal," "enduring," especially related to God, He still desires human beings to access His eternal state. One indication of this is found in Ecclesiastes 3:11: "He has put eternity [*ha'olam*] in their heart, yet so that man does not find out what God has done from the beginning to the end." However, there is some debate as to what God has put into man's heart. The most common notion is that God has put something like His eternal work, perpetuity, a consciousness of eternity, or a desire to know the future. The Amplified Bible translation of Ecclesiastes 3:11 is quite striking:

He also has planted eternity in men's hearts and minds [a divinely implanted sense of a purpose working through



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the ages which nothing under the sun but God alone can satisfy], yet so that men cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.

Others with a revocalization of the consonants prefer a notion of ignorance or darkness, and a few would like to transpose the consonants to read *toil*, perhaps more in keeping with Ecclesiastes' notion of everything under the sun being vanity (cf. Gault, 39, who prefers the second notion). Perhaps the best solution combines the first two notions, which corresponds to the root of the word and its derived meaning. God has placed an eternal sense of the divine and mystical realm in our heart so that we can even think about such notions of eternity beyond the limits of our spatial temporal existence. Keil and Delitzsch also capture this notion well in their commentary on this verse:

He has also established in man an impulse leading him beyond that which is temporal toward the eternal: it lies in his nature not to be contented with the temporal, but to break through the limits which it draws around him, to escape from the bondage and the disquietude within which he is held, and amid the ceaseless changes of time to console himself by directing his thoughts to eternity.

This saying regarding the *desiderium aeternitatis* being planted in the heart of man, is one of the profoundest utterances of Koheleth. In fact, the impulse of man shows that his innermost wants cannot be satisfied by that which is temporal. He is a being limited by time, but as to his innermost nature he is related to eternity. That which is transient yields him no support, it carries him on like a rushing stream, and constrains him to save himself by laying hold on eternity...

It is not enough for man to know that everything that happens has its divinely-ordained time. There is an instinct peculiar to his nature impelling him to pass beyond this fragmentary knowledge and to comprehend eternity; but his effort is in vain, for "man is unable to reach unto the work which God accomplisheth from the beginning to the end." (261-262)<sup>12</sup>

Human beings living under the sun are trapped in ignorance. The only hope to escape the sense of vanity prompted by this aspiration for eternity is for God to actually bring eternity into the temporal physical realm and to bring the temporal physical human beings into the divine and mystical realm of eternity, revealed more fully in the New Testament.

### ***'El with Other Names of God Indicating Both Transcendence and Immanence***

God is also revealed seven times as *'El Shadday*, the All-sufficient, Almighty God (Gen. 17:1; 28:3; 35:11;

43:14; 48:3; Exo. 6:3; Ezek. 10:5). *Shadday* by itself also occurs over forty times, particularly in Job and poetry. As was indicated previously,<sup>13</sup> *Shadday* points toward the nourishing, sustaining, nurturing, and all-inclusive supplying aspects of God, just as an udder supplies nourishing milk as the all-sufficient food of a babe (Gen. 49:25). The name was later understood as *Almighty*, stressing more the awesome power of God's omnipotence and an objective, more distant, or transcendent view of God. The name *Shadday* declined in use relative to the name *YHWH*, or *Jehovah*, as the more prevalent name of God (associated with His dealing with humanity and His revelation to them as the I AM),<sup>14</sup> perhaps indicating a deeper revelation of God's being as well as His coming as the fulfiller of promises, both in the Old Testament and ultimately in the New Testament in the person of Jesus (cf. Exo. 6:3).

*'El* occurs a few times with *Jehovah*. He is *'El 'Elohim Jehovah*: the Mighty One, God Jehovah (Josh. 22:22; Psa. 50:1) and God Jehovah (85:8; Isa. 42:5).

### **Immanent and Expressed**

*'El* is also related to humanity in a more immanent way, both occurring alone and in other titles and with words associated with the name. The fact that He is immanent indicates that although He is transcendent and mysterious, it is His intention and desire to reveal Himself to His people in a personal and intimate way.

People call and cry out to *'El* (Num. 12:13), and He hears and answers them (Psa. 17:6; 55:19). They praise Him (Exo. 15:2; Psa. 149:6; 150:1). He is sought after (Job 5:8; 8:5; Psa. 63:1), and He preserves (cf. 16:1). He has His sanctuary(ies) (73:17; 150:1) or assembly places (74:8) among His congregation (82:1). He was tested by Israel in the wilderness (78:18, 41), forgotten (106:21; Deut. 32:18), and spoken against (Psa. 78:19).

Most of the adjectives (and nouns) associated with *'El* indicate immanence in the sense that they are expressed toward an object, usually God's people. He is a jealous God (Exo. 20:5; 34:14; Deut. 4:24; 5:9; 6:15; Josh. 24:19; Nahum 1:2). He is a faithful God (Deut. 7:9), and the God of faithfulness (32:4). He is a compassionate God (4:31), and compassionate and gracious (Exo. 34:6; Neh. 9:31; cf. *'Elohim*, 2 Chron. 30:9), compassionate and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in loving-kindness and truth (Psa. 86:15), and compassionate and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in lovingkindness and repentant of evil (Jonah 4:2; cf. Joel 2:13). He is also God of knowledge (1 Sam. 2:3), God of truth (Psa. 31:5), God of glory (29:3), God of vengeance (94:1), God who executes vengeance (2 Sam. 22:48; Psa. 18:47), God the Savior (106:21), God of salvation (Isa. 12:2; Psa. 68:19), and God of deliverance (v. 20). *'El* occurs with a number

of participles. 'El is a God who reveals Himself (Gen. 16:13), who appeared to Jacob (35:1) and who answered him (v. 3). He is the One who brought the Israelites forth out of Egypt (Num. 23:22; 24:8), the God who traveled with them (Deut. 32:18), and the God who accomplishes all things for people (Psa. 57:2). He is the God who girds with strength (18:32), a God who keeps covenant and lovingkindness (Deut. 7:9; Neh. 1:5; 9:32; Dan. 9:4), and a God who has indignation (Psa. 7:11).

### 'El in Compound Personal Names

The compound names with 'El mostly indicate immanence more than transcendence. 'El is associated with a number of nouns and verbs that indicate some intimacy between God and His people.

Two names indicate that 'El is a personal God: *Elihu*, "He is [my] God" (1 Sam. 1:1), and *Eliel*, "'El is God," or "my God is God" (1 Chron. 5:24). *Samuel* indicates that the name [of God] is 'El (1 Sam. 1:20). *Abiel* and *Eliab* indicate that God is a Father ('Ab, 1 Sam. 9:1; Num. 1:9). *Ammiel* and *Eliam* indicate that God is my kinsman or people (13:12; 2 Sam. 11:3), and *Reuel* indicates that God is a friend (Gen. 36:4). *Malchiel* and *Elimelech* indicate that my king is God, or my God is King (46:17; Ruth 1:2), and *Gabriel* means a "man of God" (Dan. 8:16).

*Shealtiel*, "I have asked [him] of God," indicates that God was asked (1 Chron. 3:17); *Ishmael* and *Elishama* indicate that God hears (Gen. 16:11; Num. 1:10); and *Hazael* and *Jahaziel* indicate that God sees (1 Kings 19:15; 1 Chron. 16:6). *Eliezer* and *Azriel* indicate that God helps (Gen. 15:2; 1 Chron. 5:24); *Nethanel*, *Elnathan*, *Elzabad*, and *Zabdiel* all indicate that God has given (Num. 1:8; 2 Kings 24:8; 1 Chron. 12:12; Neh. 11:14).

*El[i]zaphan* indicates that God has protected (Exo. 6:22; Num. 3:30); *Paltiel* and *Eliphelet*, God has rescued (34:26; 2 Sam. 5:16); *Pedahel*, God has ransomed (Num. 34:28); *Elishua* and *Elisha*, God is salvation (2 Sam. 5:15; 1 Kings 19:16); *Eliashib*, God restores (1 Chron. 24:12); *Jehezkel* and *Ezekiel*, God strengthens (v. 16; Ezek. 1:3); *Elishaphat*, God has judged (2 Chron. 23:1); *Barachel*, God has blessed (Job 32:2), and *Asahel* and *Elasah*, God has done (2 Sam. 2:18; Ezra 10:22).

*Uzziel* and *Eluzai* indicate that my strength is God (Exo. 6:18; 1 Chron. 12:5); *Uriel* indicates my light is God (1 Chron. 6:24); *Elizur* and *Zuriel*, a rock is my God, and

my rock is God (Num. 1:5; 3:35); *Bezalel*, in the shadow (protection) of God (Exo. 31:2); *Gamaliel*, reward of God (Num. 1:10); *Hanniel*, *Hananel*, and *Elhanan* indicate that God has been gracious or shown favor (34:23; Neh. 3:1; 2 Sam. 21:19); *Jerahmeel*, may God have compassion (1 Chron. 2:9); and *Eleadah* and *Adiel* indicate that God has adorned, and an ornament is God (7:20; 4:36).

Finally, two names indicate particular intimacy with God: *Penuel*, "face of God" (Gen. 32:31-32); and *Immanuel*, "with us is God," or "God with us" (Isa. 7:14), which was fulfilled by the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

### 'El in Compound Titles

There are a few compound titles with 'El indicating immanence. 'El is the personal God of individuals: He is God ('El), the God ('Elohey) of the spirits of all flesh (Num. 16:22), and "my God" (Exo. 15:2; Psa. 18:2; 22:1, 10; 63:1; 68:24; 89:26; 102:24; 118:28; 140:6). He is the God of Israel, both of the individual and the nation, Jacob-Israel. He is 'El, the God ('Elohey) of Israel (Gen. 33:20);

'El, the God ('Elohey) of his father (46:3); the God of Israel (Psa. 68:35); the God of Jacob (146:5); and the God of their father(s) (Gen. 49:25).<sup>15</sup> He is also the God of Jeshurun (meaning "the upright one," which is a poetic name of Israel, designating it under its *ideal* character, Deut. 33:26). Some of these expressions occur many times with the longer form of *God*, 'Elohim; e.g., God of Israel (Exo. 5:1) and God of Jacob (2 Sam. 23:1). In addition, He is 'El Bethel, the God of Bethel (God of the house of God, Gen. 31:13; 35:7). This title indicates a progression in the experience of Jacob. When Jacob left Succoth and journeyed to Shechem, he erected an altar, which he called 'El 'Elohey-Israel (33:18-20). As Witness Lee says, "This altar was built to the God of Jacob's individual, personal experience. In calling the altar El-elohe-Israel, he was actually calling it the God of himself" (*Life-study* 1028). But in Genesis 35:1 God told Jacob to go up to Bethel and make an altar there to God. After Jacob arrived at Bethel, he made an altar and called it 'El-Bethel. As Witness Lee goes on to say, "The altar in Shechem is an individual altar, but the altar in El-Bethel is a corporate altar. This is the altar of the house of God" (1031) for His corporate expression.

Another compound title is 'El Berit, God of the covenant (Judg. 9:46). 'El also combines with *Spirit* as *Ruah* 'El, the Spirit of God who has made us (Job 33:4).

*The fact that God is immanent indicates that although He is transcendent and mysterious, it is His intention and desire to reveal Himself to His people in a personal and intimate way.*



All these titles indicate immanence and indicate that God desires to reveal Himself to His people for the carrying out of His purpose. This is implied in the development from the title 'El 'Elohey Israel to 'El Bethel, indicating God's desire for a corporate expression of Himself in His house. However, His economy of the mystery according to His eternal purpose still remained hidden in Himself (Eph. 3:8-11). This is the mystery kept in silence in the times of the ages but which was manifested in New Testament times (Rom. 16:25-26).

## Conclusion

The name 'El, the Mighty One, at first glance seems to indicate the transcendence of God. It is used more commonly in earlier Hebrew or especially in poetry and could be considered a more basic or primitive revelation of God. It is quite striking that 'El occurs with a number of notions indicating transcendence or hiddenness. However, it is also striking that a number of notions of immanence and closeness are also associated with 'El. This indicates that although God is a transcendent and mysterious God, it is His desire to reveal Himself to His people in a most intimate way. He prepared His Old Testament people for this through their experiences of Him. However, there is still much hidden in God that He desires to reveal in New Testament times. Indeed the transcendent, mysterious, eternal God brought the hidden divine realm of eternity into time with the incarnation (John 1:14, 18). Through the process of death and resurrection He also brought redeemed humanity in the physical, temporal, material realm into the divine and mystical realm. This is the mystery of godliness, God manifested in the flesh (1 Tim. 3:16). Indeed, there are two great mysteries, the mystery of God—Christ (Col. 2:2), and the mystery of Christ—the church (Eph. 3:4), that He has hidden from the ages and generations of Old Testament saints but He desired to make known (to His holy apostles and prophets in spirit) in the New Testament times (1:9; 3:3-5; Col. 1:26).

by Roger Good

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>For example, "When it is in the power [*el*] of your hand to do so" (Prov. 3:27; so also Gen. 31:29; Deut. 28:32; Neh. 5:5; Micah 2:1).

<sup>2</sup>He is also the Mighty One 'Abir [of Jacob or of Israel] (Gen. 49:24; Psa. 132:2, 5; Isa. 1:24; 49:26; 60:16).

<sup>3</sup>In addition, Jehovah also hides His people in Himself as their hiding place (Psa. 32:7; 119:114), or in the hiding place of His tent (27:5), or in the hiding place of His presence (31:20). Jehovah made Isaiah's mouth like a sharp sword; He concealed him in the shadow of His hand, and He made him a polished arrow and hid him in His quiver (Isa. 49:2).

<sup>4</sup>God desires to reveal many things to us, yet some matters remain mysterious and unfathomable, hidden in God, "The things that are hidden belong to Jehovah our God; but the things that are revealed, to us and our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deut. 29:29).

<sup>5</sup>In addition, the Davidic Messiah is made the highest (*'elyon*) of the kings of the earth (Psa. 89:27).

<sup>6</sup>As Witness Lee indicates,

When God's people were defeated by His enemy, God was called "the God of heaven" (Ezra 5:11-12; Dan. 2:18, 37). But when there was a man standing for Him on the earth, God was called the "Possessor of heaven and earth" (Gen. 14:19, 22). [In Matthew 11:25] the Lord as the Son of Man called the Father "Lord of heaven and of earth," indicating that the Lord was standing on the earth for God's interest. (Recovery Version, Matt. 11:25, note 3)

<sup>7</sup>Tomasino gives the basic meaning of '*olam* as "obscure time" (345).

<sup>8</sup>Cf. Nordell who defines '*olam* as "an unending life of illimitable existence" and in its temporal sense as "a duration whose limits are hidden from human sight" (376). Barr defines it as "the remotest time, or... 'perpetuity'" (117), Preuss as "long time...or...farthest, remotest time" (531), and Jenni as "most distant time" (853). '*Olam* can be compared to the words used to translate it in Greek, Latin, and English. *Eternal* meaning "no beginning or end, existing outside of time, infinite" from the Latin *aeternalis*, *aeternus* (contracted from *aeviternus*) from the Latin word for "age," *aetas* (from *aevitas*, *aevum*), meaning "eternity, lifetime, age." *Eternity* (time without beginning or end) comes from *aeternitus* (from the adjective *aeternus*). Both these words are related to the Greek αἰών (*eternity, age, eon*) that comes from αἰφεῖ (αἰέ), meaning "always." Some even consider αἰών as a compound of αἰέ (*always*) and ὄν, meaning "being" (e.g., Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, proposition 88). The word *ever* (from αἰω- *aefre*) also comes from the same root, from which comes *forever* (i.e., for always, everlasting time).

Scholars debate whether *eternal* means "everlasting duration...timelessness...or atemporal duration" (Nelson 3). Alan Padgett considers that God is timeless only in a relative sense. Although "God transcends time, and he is the Creator of our space-time" (209), he argues that "God is temporal in some sense...in his own time, different from ours" (210). God is temporal in the sense that He sustains the temporal universe and "acts in our time, and his life is sometimes simultaneous with our time" (212). Robinson's summary of Padgett argues that "God exists in a durational mode of being where genuine process and change are possible, but this existence is not identical to the temporal existence of the created world" (117). For four different views on God and time, which all consider eternity from the perspective of time rather than as a quality, see Gregory E. Ganssle, ed., *God and Time*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2001.

<sup>9</sup>These words also occur with reference to the experience of the believers: we have been regenerated with incorruptible seed (1 Pet. 1:23); our inheritance is incorruptible, undefiled (ἀμίαντος), and unfading (ἀμόραντος) (v. 4); and at the time of resurrection “this corruptible [our corruptible mortal body] must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality” (1 Cor. 15:53). Eternal life is also considered indestructible (ἀκατάλυτος) life (Heb. 7:16) and resurrection life (cf. John 11:25), demonstrated through our Lord’s process of death and resurrection.

<sup>10</sup>Jenni distinguishes between *‘ad ‘olam*, “employed when a temporal point of departure is indicated and when a temporal progression is to be expected,” and *le-‘olam*, indicating “a static continuity, durability, or finality” (51), quoted in Harrelson (290). *‘Ad* also is used as a noun meaning “eternal.” It is related to the root *‘dh*, meaning “to pass on,” or “advance.” It refers mostly to future time, especially with the preposition *le* (typically in the Psalms and poetry). God inhabits eternity (Isa. 57:15), and the Son given to us is called the Eternal Father, or Father of eternity (*‘Abiad*, 9:6). A few times the notion of forever, (*le‘olam*, is extended further with the addition of the conjunction and noun *we‘ad*, “forever and ever.” Jehovah shall reign and is King (Exo. 15:18; Psa. 10:16), and His throne is forever and ever (45:6). People will praise, bless, and thank Him (45:17; 145:1-2, 21; 52:9; 79:13), those who turn many to righteousness will shine like the stars (Dan. 12:3), and the Israelites will walk in the name of Jehovah their God (Micah 4:5) forever and ever. The earth shall not be moved (Psa. 104:5), and the heavens are established (148:6) forever and ever (*le‘ad le‘olam*).

<sup>11</sup>J. N. Darby, in “On the Greek words for Eternity and Eternal.” *The Writings of J. N. Darby*. Online: 20 Feb. 2010. <http://stempublishing.com/authors/darby/DOCTRINE/31003E.html>, argues for the sense of “eternal” as well as “age” for αἰών and αἰώνιος, citing examples from classical Greek. In addition, expressions such as “unto the age(s) of the ages” (Eph. 3:21; Gal. 1:5; Phil. 4:20; 1 Tim. 1:17; 2 Tim. 4:18; Heb. 13:21; 1 Pet. 4:11; 5:11; Rev. 22:5) have the superlative sense, unto the ultimate age, eternity future (cf. with many Hebrew adjectival expressions, e.g., “the Holy of Holies,” which means “the most holy”). Similarly the definite article is used or understood with αἰών, “the age,” to mean the unique, ultimate future age (John 10:28; 14:16). The adjective αἰώνιος, “eternal” (lit., of or belonging to the age), also carries this sense (4:14).

<sup>12</sup>Quoted in Gault (48). See his article for a thorough presentation of the different interpretations of *‘olam* in this verse.

<sup>13</sup>See the October 2007 issue of *Affirmation & Critique*, “*El Shadday*: Its Meaning and Implications,” 67-71.

<sup>14</sup>See the April 2007 issue of *Affirmation & Critique*, “The Purpose of God in the Name of Jehovah,” 59-67.

<sup>15</sup>A few times *‘El* occurs in sequence with or in apposition to *‘Elohim*. *‘El* precedes *‘Elohim* in the three examples mentioned here (Gen. 33:20; 46:3; Num. 16:22) and in “the Mighty One [*‘El*], God Jehovah” (Josh. 22:22; Psa. 50:1). *‘El* follows *‘Elohim* in the expressions “God, the faithful God” (Deut. 7:9) and “our God, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God” (Neh. 9:32).

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