

# El Shaddai

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*This article is about the Judaic name of God.*

**El Shaddai** (Hebrew: אֱלֹהֵי שַׁדַּי, IPA: [el jaˈdːaj]) is one of the names of the primary Judaic God, with its etymology coming from the influence of the Ugaritic religion upon modern Judaism. Shaddai was one of the many gods in Canaanite religion.<sup>[*citation needed*]</sup> *El Shaddai* is conventionally translated as **God Almighty**. While the translation of *El* as "god" in Ugarit/Canaanite language is straightforward, the literal meaning of *Shaddai* is the subject of debate.

## Shaddai as a theonym

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According to Exodus 6:2, 3, Shaddai (אֱלֹהֵי שַׁדַּי) is the name of the God known to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The name Shaddai is again used as the God's name later in the Book of Job.

### Shaddai meaning destroyer

The root word "*shadad*" (שָׁדַד) means "to overpower" or "to destroy". This would give Shaddai the meaning of "destroyer", representing one of the aspects of the God, and in this context it is essentially an epithet. The meaning of Shaddai may go back to the original sense of "*shadad*" which was "to be strong" akin to Arabic "*shadiid*" (شديد) "strong".<sup>[1]</sup> The termination "*a*", typically signifying the first person possessive plural, functions as a pluralis excellentiae like other titles for the Hebrew deities, Elohim ("gods") and Adonai ("my lords"). The possessive quality of the termination had lost its sense and become the lexical form of both Shaddai and Adonai, similar to how the connotation of the French word Monsieur changed from "my lord" to being an honorific title.<sup>[2]</sup>

Another theory is that Shaddai is a derivation of a Semitic stem that appears in the Akkadian *shadû* ("mountain") and *shaddā`û* or *shaddû`a* ("mountain-dweller"), one of the names of Amurru. This theory was popularized by W. F. Albright<sup>[*citation needed*]</sup> but was somewhat weakened when it was noticed<sup>[*by whom?*]</sup> that the doubling of the medial 'd' is first documented only in the Neo-Assyrian period. However, the doubling in Hebrew might possibly be secondary. According to this theory, the God is seen as inhabiting a holy mountain, a concept not unknown in ancient West Asian mythology (see El), and also evident in the Syriac Christian writings of Ephrem the Syrian, who places Eden on an inaccessible mountain-top.

### Shaddai meaning fertility

Harriet Lutzky, Adjunct Assistant Professor of Psychology at John Jay College, City University of New York, has presented evidence that Shaddai was an attribute of a Semitic goddess, linking the epithet Shaddai with the Hebrew *šad* meaning "breast", giving the meaning "the one of the Breast", as Asherah at Ugarit is "the one of the Womb".<sup>[3]</sup>

## Shaddai as a toponym

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The term may mean "god of the mountains," referring to the Mesopotamian divine mountain.<sup>[4]</sup> The term was one of the patriarchal names for the tribal god of the Mesopotamians.<sup>[4]</sup> In Exodus 6:3, El Shaddai is identified explicitly with the God of Abraham and with YHWH.<sup>[4]</sup> The term appears chiefly in the Torah. This could also refer to the Israelite camp's stay at Mount Sinai where the God gave Moses the Ten Commandments.

Shaddai was a late Bronze Age Amorite city on the banks of the Euphrates river, in northern Syria. The site of its ruin-mound is called Tel eth-Thadyen: "Thadyen" being the modern Arabic rendering of the original West Semitic "Shaddai." It has been conjectured that El Shaddai was therefore the "God of Shaddai" and associated in tradition with Abraham, and the inclusion of the Abrahamic stories into the Hebrew Bible may have brought the northern name with them (see Documentary hypothesis).

## Shaddai in the Midrash

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There is a Midrashic interpretation as an acronym standing for "Guardian of the Doors of Israel" (Hebrew: שומר דלתות ישראל). This acronym is commonly found as carvings or writings on the mezuzah, which is placed on the doorposts of Jewish homes and other dwellings.

Still another view is that "El Shaddai" is composed of the Hebrew relative pronoun *she* (Shin plus vowel segol), or, as in this case, as *sha* (Shin plus vowel patach followed by a dagesh).<sup>[5]</sup> The noun containing the dagesh is the Hebrew word *dai* meaning "enough, sufficient, sufficiency".<sup>[6]</sup> This is the same word used in the Passover Haggadah, Dayeinu, which means "It would have been enough for us." The song Dayeinu celebrates the various miracles the Hebrew God performed while liberating the Israelites from Egyptian servitude.<sup>[7]</sup> The Talmud explains it this way, but says that "Shaddai" stands for "Mi she'Amar Dai L'olamo"—"He who said 'Enough' to His world." When he was forming Earth, he stopped the process at a certain point, withholding creation from reaching its full completion, and thus the name embodies the God's power to stop creation.

It is often paraphrased in English translations as "Almighty" although this is an interpretive element. The name then refers to the pre-Mosaic patriarchal understanding of the deity as the "God who is sufficient". The God is sufficient, that is, to supply all of one's needs, and therefore by derivation "almighty". It may also be understood as an allusion to the singularity of deity, "El", as opposed to "Elohim" (plural), being sufficient or enough for the early patriarchs of Judaism. To this was later

added the Mosaic conception of the tetragrammaton YHWH, meaning a God who is sufficient in Himself, that is, a self-determined eternal being qua being, for whom limited descriptive names can not apply. This may have been the meaning the Hebrew phrase "ehyeh asher ehyeh" (which translates roughly as "I will be that which I will be") and which is how the God describes Himself to Moses cf. Exodus 3:13–15. This phrase can be applied to the tetragrammaton YHWH, which can be understood as an anagram for the three States of Being: past, present and future, conjoined with the conjunctive Hebrew letter vav.<sup>[*citation needed*]</sup>

## Biblical translations

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The Septuagint and other early translations usually translate "El Shaddai" as "God Almighty." However in the Greek of the Septuagint translation of Psalm 91.1, "Shaddai" is translated as "the God of heaven."<sup>[9]</sup>

"God Almighty" is the translation followed by most modern English translations of the Hebrew scriptures, including the popular New International Version<sup>[9]</sup> and Good News Bible.

The translation team behind the New Jerusalem Bible (N.J.B.) however, maintains that the meaning is uncertain, and that translating "El Shaddai" as "Almighty God" is inaccurate. The N.J.B. leaves it untranslated as "Shaddai," and makes footnote suggestions that it should perhaps be understood as "God of the Mountain" from the Akkadian "shadu," or "God of the open wastes" from the Hebrew "sadeh" and the secondary meaning of the Akkadian word.<sup>[8]</sup>

The translation in the Concordant Old Testament is 'El Who-Suffices' (Genesis 17:1) from the Hebrew Al-sh-di, Subjector-Who-Suffices.

## Use by Bunyan

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The Christian God is referred to as "Shaddai" throughout the 1682 Christian allegorical novel, *The Holy War* by John Bunyan.

## References

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1. "Hebrew Lexicon :: H7703 (KJV)". *Blue Letter Bible*. Retrieved 12 January 2015.
2. "Hebrew Lexicon :: H7706 (KJV)". *Blue Letter Bible*. Retrieved 12 January 2015.
3. Lutzky, Harriet (1998). "Shadday as a goddess epithet". *Vetus Testamentum* **48**: 15–36. doi:10.1163/1568533982721839.
4. <sup>a</sup> <sup>b</sup> <sup>c</sup> Harris, Stephen L., *Understanding the Bible*. Palo Alto: Mayfield. 1985.
5. *A Beginner's Handbook to Biblical Hebrew*, John Marks and Virgil Roger, Nashville: Abingdon, 1978 "Relative Pronoun, p.60, par.45

6. *Ben Yehudah's Pocket English-Hebrew/Hebrew-English*, New York, NY: Pocket Books, Simon & Schuster Inc.,1964,p. 44
7. It is understood as such by The Stone Edition of the Chumash (Torah) published by the Orthodox Jewish publisher Art Scroll, editors Rabbi Nosson Scherman/Rabbi Meir Zlotowitz, Brooklyn, New York: Mesorah Publications, Ltd. 2nd edition, 1994, cf. Exodus 6:3 commentary p. 319
8. <sup>a b</sup> *New Jerusalem Bible Standard Edition*. London: Dartman, Longman & Todd. 1985. p. 908. ISBN 0-232-51650-2.
9. Goodrick, Kohlenberger (1990). *The NIV Exhaustive Concordance*. London: Hodder & Stoughton. p. 1631. ISBN 0-340-53777-9.

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### ***El-Shaddai***

#### **Definition:**

El-Shaddai means God Almighty. El points to the power of God Himself. Shaddai seems to be derived from another word meaning breast, which implies that Shaddai signifies one who nourishes, supplies, and satisfies. It is God as El who helps, but it is God as Shaddai who abundantly blesses with all manner of blessings.