

### El Elyon

So the story goes like this, Abram (Abraham) begins his journey of faith by obeying God's word to leave His homeland and move to Canaan. (Genesis 12:1-9) After getting there, he encounters a famine that leads him to Egypt in search of food. Then, through his scheming deceptions he nearly gets his wife, Sarah (apparently a very attractive woman), and himself into hot water with the Pharaoh of that day. But God intervenes in spite of Abram's foolish actions and delivers them. (Genesis 12:10-20) It wasn't long after that imprudent escapade that Abram experiences difficulty with Lot, his nephew, whom Abram had invited along, but evidently God had not! It seems that Abram's and Lot's herdsmen couldn't get along. In order to bring peace, Abram gives Lot the first choice of pasture land, and Lot chooses the lush well-watered valley of the Jordan and leaves Abram with the badlands of Canaan! Lot's land includes that wicked place known as Sodom, which would eventually be his undoing. Once again, God intervenes and reminds Abram that in spite of being left with the short end of the stick, He was going to eventually give him and his myriad of children (he was childless at the time!) all the land as far as his eye could see. (Genesis 13) Lot's choice of habitation produces the next crisis. Lot, his family and possessions, ends up being taken captive by an alliance of victorious city-kings embroiled in a local land war. Abram hears about his nephew's dilemma and leads 318 of his choicest men in hot pursuit of the triumphant kings along with their captured plunder. Abram and his men save the day, deliver Lot and his possessions, and return them all to Sodom. (Genesis 14:1-16)

Are you getting the picture? Abram's life, like ours, was filled with distracting circumstances (some produced by his own foolish choices yet others, like famine, beyond his control) and people that at first glance could appear to rule the day. In Abram's time those people were comprised of powerful kingdom rulers like Pharaoh, as well as lesser local powers. Those persons also included a troublesome relative like Lot, who created various time consuming diversions in Abram's life. Yet behind it all, the command and promise of God stands.

We learn this about Abram: in spite of the circumstances, personal failures and people pressures Abram keeps responding to God. Upon arriving in Canaan and hearing the promised plan for him and his descendants, Abram builds an altar to God, the One whose presence he has experienced. (Genesis 12:7) Soon afterwards, he builds another altar and calls upon the name of the Lord, an act of worship. (Genesis 12:8) After the misadventure with Pharaoh and experiencing God's deliverance, he returns to one of the altars he had previously set up and again calls upon the name of the Lord. (Genesis 13:4) Finally, after given the God sized visual of the land promised to his descendants (which Lot had just chosen to occupy), Abram builds another altar to the Lord. (Genesis 13:18).

These early defining moments help illumine Abram. Prior to his move to Canaan, we don't really know too much about him, except that he, at God's command, had left Haran, a northern Mesopotamian city (modern southern Turkey) to which his father, Terah, had moved from Ur, just south of Babylon. (Genesis 11:24-32) Abram comes from the long line of one of Noah's sons, Shem. If you read the genealogy in Genesis 11 coupled with the building story of Abram you cannot help but notice the hand of God throughout, with an apparently unstoppable plan that is on the move regardless of

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circumstantial and/or human hindrances. And according to that plan, Abram has been chosen by God to play a central role. With all of his faults he is responding to God's call. As it turns out we really don't need to know a lot about Abram, because this story is not about him! The One that we are really learning about is the One who commanded him, delivered him, and gave him victory.

It is here, just after the triumph over the marauding kings that we are introduced to a name for this unstoppable God. (Genesis 14:17-24) Upon his return with Lot and all that belonged to him, they are greeted first by the remaining king of Sodom (the others had fallen into the tar pits in the valley of Siddim where the battles had been fought!) But quickly, the Sodom king and his offer of spoils are overshadowed by another. Melchizedek, king of Salem and priest of God Most High, steals the scene with a simple peace treaty meal of bread and wine along with a blessing and an acknowledgment of who was responsible for Abram's victory:

Blessed be Abram of **God Most High**,  
Possessor of heaven and earth;  
And blessed be **God Most High**,  
Who has delivered your enemies into your hand.

Abram acknowledges the blessing and the offering of Melchizedek with a tithe and declines the lavish reward of the King of Sodom, agreeing with Melchizedek that the One who deserves blessing is the One he has been responding to through faith, God Most High. He gave victory to Abram. Behind it all is the promise of God, the inheritance of the very land the King of Sodom was standing! God Most High would make Abram rich too, according to His promise!!

Who was Melchizedek? The writer of the New Testament book of Hebrews, in chapter 7:1-10, gives a little more detail and significance. But we still don't know much. Who is Abram, some trusting soul from the north country? The more important question is who is the Possessor of heaven and earth? He is God Most High or El Elyon in Hebrew. He is the God above all others. He is ruler. He is sovereign. He is the Unstoppable One. El Elyon is the name that designates God as the sovereign ruler of the universe, the One whose plan cannot be stopped. No one and no thing can hinder Him or compel Him or stop Him. He possesses all authority. Even though in His sovereignty He has decreed that we humans have free choice, there is nothing that we can do in that freedom to stop His movement of history. Like Abram we can join by faith in His plan or foolishly choose to go our own way, a way that ends separated from our Maker for eternity. A.W. Tozer, in *The Knowledge of the Holy*, puts it this way:

Certain things have been decreed by the free determination of God, and one of these is the law of choice and consequences. God has decreed that all who willingly commit themselves to His Son Jesus Christ in the obedience of faith shall receive eternal life and become children of God. He has also decreed that all who love darkness and continue in rebellion against the high authority of heaven shall remain in a state of spiritual alienation and suffer eternal death at last.

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El Elyon is the name we can run to and be safe. Like Abram we can discover by grace through faith that we are not in the hands of fate, circumstances, people or even the devil, but in the hands of the Possessor of heaven and earth.

### **Assignment:**

1. Read Genesis 14. Don't get bogged down in all the kings' names! But instead, think through how these circumstances led up to the identity of El Elyon. Can you recall some circumstances in your life that triggered growth in your understanding of God?
2. Look at the following Scriptures. How does each passage demonstrate that El Elyon is sovereign?

Deuteronomy 32:39

Job 1:6-12

1 Samuel 2:6-10

Isaiah 45:6-7

John 19:10-11

3. Now let's look at a testimony that reveals the sovereignty of God. Nebuchadnezzar, the "mighty" king of Babylon, learned the hard way that he was not the ruler of the universe. Read Daniel 4 and listen to Nebuchadnezzar's witness of El Elyon, God Most High.
4. El Elyon is the Most High God. If you could really understand what that means, as Nebuchadnezzar experienced first-hand, what would it alter in your thinking about:
  - a. Your government

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- b. Your financial circumstances
  - c. Your marriage
  - d. Your children
  - e. Your parents
  - f. Satan
5. There is another significant story in scriptures that reveals El Elyon (even though the name is not used). It is found in Genesis 37, 39-45. If you only have time to read the climax of the story, read Genesis 45:1-15. How did the sovereignty of God reveal itself in the life of Joseph? Now, stop and consider your life. Can you see El Elyon's hand throughout?
6. As you consider your life, reflect on Paul's words in Romans 8:28-30. How has God even used the bad things to accomplish good? How is El Elyon a strong tower? Why can the righteous run there and be safe? Stop and give express to God what you are feeling right now.