

00328 אֱלֹהִים found in TWOT #93c

0093.0 אֱלֹהִים (*'lh*) Assumed root of the following.

(93a) אֱלֹהִים (*'ēl*) **god, God.**

(93b) אֱלֹהִים (*'ēlōah*) **god, God.**

(93c) אֱלֹהִים (*'ēlōhîm*) **gods, God.**

'lh is the assumed root of *'ēl*, *'ēlōah*, and *'ēlōhîm*, which mean "god" or "God." The Ugaritic term for "god" or the "chief god" is *'il*, plural *'ilm*, occasionally plural *'ilhm* (cf. UT 19: no. 163). The Phoenician term is *'l* "El"; the plural is *'lm* which seems to be construed sometimes as a singular (cf. Z. Harris, *Grammar of the Phoenician Language*, Jewish Publication Society, 1936, p. 77). The Aramaic is *'ēlāh*, plural *'ēlāhîn*. The Akkadian form is *ilu*.

The view that the three Hebrew terms come from one root is much disputed and a final verdict is lacking. Some hold that the two are distinct, deriving *'ēl* from the root *'wl* (strong). Others see *'ēlōhîm* derived from the root *'lh*, together with *'ēlōah*, that root meaning "fear." Still others hold that both *'ēl* and *'ēlōhîm* come from *'ēlōah*.

More probable is the view that *'ēlōhîm* comes from *'ēlōah* as a unique development of the Hebrew Scriptures and represents chiefly the plurality of persons in the Trinity of the godhead (see *'ēlōhîm*).

'ēlōah is also a basic Hebrew term for the God of Israel, but is used less frequently (see *'ēlōah* and *'ēl*, a separate though perhaps related generic term for God).

'ēl. God, god, mighty one, strength. In the common use of the word to denote either the generic name "god" or "the God" of Israel, the ASV and RSV are usually alike. However, in some specialized uses of the term they differ from KJV and from one another, e.g. ASV and RSV treat Jud 9:46 as a proper noun "El-Berith" while KJV translates "god"; Psa 29:1, RSV translates "heavenly beings" while ASV has "sons of the mighty"; Psa 50:1, ASV and RSV have "mighty one," KJV "Mighty God;" Psa 80:10 [H 11], ASV renders "cedars of God," RSV has "mighty cedars" and KJV simply "goodly cedars": Psa 82:1, ASV says "congregation of God" but RSV translates "Divine counsel"; Psa 89:6 [H 7]) ASV and KJV "sons of the mighty" but RSV "Heavenly beings"; Isa 57:5, KJV has "idols" but ASV, RSV read as another Hebrew word, "oaks"; and finally, Ezek 32:21, KJV and ASV "strong among the mighty" while RSV renders it simply "mighty chiefs."

The primary meanings of this root as used in Scripture are "god" (pagan or false gods) "God" (the true God of Israel) and less frequently, "the mighty" (referring to men or angels). By far the predominant usage is for the true God and it is to this usage that we will give major attention.

The name "El" is a very ancient Semitic term. It is also the most widely distributed name among Semitic-speaking peoples for the deity, occurring in some form in every Semitic language except Ethiopic. Pope, in his study of "El" in the Ugaritic, notes that it is the most frequently occurring name for the deity in proper name throughout the ancient Semitic world (Marvin Pope, *El in the Ugaritic Texts*, p.1).

We must agree with Pope that etymologically the bottom of the barrel has been scraped with little success (Pope, *El in the Ugaritic Texts*, p. 19). Most frequently mentioned suggestions for an original meaning are "power" or "fear" but these are widely challenged and much disputed [It may be noted that even if the origin of the word in Canaanite or proto-Semitic is from a root meaning power, this by no means indicates the connotation in Hebrew religious usage. Our word "deity" comes from a root known in Sanskrit to mean "sky" but we do not worship a sky-god R.L.H.]

The question of the relationship between the biblical use of *'ēl* and the Semitic concepts of El has received much attention particularly since the discovery of the Ugaritic texts, which have apparently established the fact that the term El was used in reference to a

personal god and not merely as a generic term in the ancient Semitic world.

Space will not allow us to develop the various points of view on this matter. The article by Frank M. Cross, published in 1975, in the first volume of the *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, gives much attention to this. Certainly we do not have to accept the view that assumes an ancient polytheism in Israel which was gradually refined so that various gods such as El, Shaddai, and Elyon were finally merged into Hebrew monotheism under the heading of Elohim or Yahweh. The bibliography following this article suggests further reading for those who would like to pursue this matter.

A. B. Davidson has observed the pronounced tendency in Scripture to accompany 'ēl with epithets. Indeed, as we study the word as used in Scripture, we must conclude that it is almost always qualified by words or descriptions which further define the word. This leads A. B. Davidson to conclude that these qualifications both elevate the concept of El in Scripture and distinguish the term as used biblically from others who might be so named (A. B. Davidson, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 61).

A study of the various accompanying descriptions of El where the name occurs in Scripture leads to the rather solid conclusion that, from the beginning of the use of this word in Scripture, it was intended to distinguish the true El (God) from all false uses of that name found in other semitic cultures.

We note first the use of El in terms denoting God's greatness or superiority over all other gods: ha'ēl haggādōl "the great El" (Jer 32:18; Psa 77:13 [H 14]; Psa 95:3); hā'ēl 'ōsēhpele' "El doing wonders" (Psa 77:14 [H 15]); 'ēl 'ēlīm "El of els" ("God of gods," Dan 11:36); 'ēl 'ēlōhē hārūḥôt l^c kol- bā šār "El, the God of the spirits of all flesh" (Num 16:22; Num 27:16).

Next, consider epithets relating to El's position: 'ēl hashshāmāyim "El of heaven" (Psa 136:26); 'ēl mimā'al "El that is above" (Job 31:28); 'ēl'elyôn "El most high" (Gen 14:18-19, 20, 22; Psa 78:35).

Again, as a precaution against overfamiliarity with God because of the use of a common Semitic term, God is described as 'ēl mistatēr "El who hides himself" (i.e. known only by self-revelation, Isa 45:15). Yet God does see us at all times as Abraham affirmed, 'ēl rō'ī "El who sees me" (Gen 16:13).

Most specially El is accompanied in Scripture by those epithets which describe him as the Savior God of Israel. As such he is called hā'ēl hanne'ēmān "Faithful El" (Deut 7:9); hā'ēl haqqādōsh "Holy El" (Isa 5:16); 'el 'ēmet "El of truth" (Psa 31:5 [H 6]; Deut 32:4); 'ēl shadday "Almighty El" (Gen 17:1; Gen 28:3; Gen 35:11; Gen 48:3; Exo 6:3; Ezek 10:5); 'ēl gibbōr "El the heroic" (Isa 9:6 [H 5]; Isa 10:21); 'ēl' dē'ōt "El of knowledge" (1Sam 2:3); 'ēl hakkābōd "El of glory" (Psa 29:3); 'ēl 'ōlām "El of eternity" (Gen 21:33); 'ēl-ṣaddīq "Righteous El" (Isa 45:21); and 'ēl qannā' "Jealous El" (Exo 20:5; Deut 4:24; Deut 5:9; Deut 6:15; Josh 24:19; Nah 1:2).

In contradistinction from all false "els" (gods), he is declared to be 'ēl ḥay the "Living El" (Josh 3:10; 1Sam 17:26, 36; 2Kings 19:4, 16; Psa 42:2 [H 3]; Psa 84:2 [H 3]; Isa 37:4; Jer 10:10; Jer 23:36; Dan 6:20, 26 [H 21,27]; Hos 1:10 [H 2:1]). In accord with strict biblical monotheism he is therefore 'ēl 'eḥād, the one El (Mal 2:10). And in the passage most quoted elsewhere in the Old Testament El is described in terms of those attributes by which God desired to be known by his people (Exo 34:5-7; cf. Deut 4:31; 2Chr 30:9; Neh 9:17, 31; Psa 103:8; Joel 2:13 etc.).

The very personal relationship between the El of Scripture and his believers is seen in the following epithets: hā'ēl bēt-'ēl "the El of Bethel" (Gen 31:13; Gen 35:7); 'ēl sal'ī "El my rock" (Psa 42:9 [H 10]); 'ēl y^eshū'ātī "El my Savior" (Isa 12:2); 'ēl ḥayyāy "El of my life" (Psa 42:8 [H 9]); 'ēl gōmēr 'ālāy "El the performer on me" (Psa 57:3); "the El of..." (Gen 49:25; etc.); 'ēlī "My El" (Psa 89:26 [H 27]; Psa 102:24 [H 25]; Psa 118:28); hā'ēl mā'ūzzī "El my fortress" (2Sam 22:33); hā'ēl ham'az^erēnī ḥāyil "El the girder of me with strength" (Psa 18:32 [H 33]); hā'ēl hannōtēn n^eqāmōt lī "the El giving me vengeance" (Psa 18:47 [H 48]; 2Sam 22:48).

Thus, in an evangelistic sense, he is described in such epithets as *'ēl m^ehōllekâ* "El who begat you" (Deut 32:18); *'ēl mōshî`ām* "El their Savior" (Psa 106:21); *'ēl mōšî'ô mimmišraim* "El his (their) bringer from Egypt" (Num 24:8; Num 23:22); *'ēl y^eshūrûn* "El of Jeshurun" (Deut 33:26); and *'ēl 'ēlōhē yiśrā'el* "El the God of Israel" (Gen 33:20).

Frequently therefore we find the term "El" combined with or associated with the personal name for Israel's God, Yahweh (Josh 22:22; Psa 85:8 [H 91; Psa 118:27; Isa 42:5; etc.) which testifies that he is indeed *'ēl nōsē'* El who forgives (Psa 99:8) and consequently *hā'el y^eshû`ātēnû* "El of our salvation" (Psa 68:19-20 [H 20-21]).

Whether or not the name El can be identified etymologically with the concept of fear, it is clearly often associated with this idea in biblical epithets. He is called *hā'ēl haggādōl w^ehannōrā'* "El, great and terrible" (Neh 1:5; Neh 4:14; Neh 9:32; Deut 7:21; Deut 10:17; Dan 9:4) or simply, *'ēl na`ārās* "Terrible El" (Psa 89:7 [H 8]). He is also described as *'ēl g^emūlôt* "El of recompenses" (Jer 51:56) or more severely *'ēl nōqēm* "El the revenger" (Psa 99:8; Nah 1:2), and sometimes simply *'ēl n^eqām* "El of vengeance" (Psa 94:1). Being indignant is a continuous characteristic of El in Scripture (Psa 7:11 [H 12]).

Only in Job do we find extensive use of El without epithets. There the term is treated by Job and his friends as the common term for the true God and its use there, unlike other parts of Scripture, far outnumbers the occurrence of Elohim (q.v.).

'ēlōah. God, god (ASV, RSV similar). The exact relationship between this name for God in Scripture and *'ēl* or *'ēlōhîm* is disputed and far from settled. It occurs in some of the oldest OT poetry (Deut 32:15, 17) and very frequently (forty-one times) in the debates between Job (an ancient believer) and his friends. It appears therefore to be an ancient term for God which was later dropped for the most part until the time of the exile and after, when there was great concern for a return to the more ancient foundations. It is not frequently used outside Job. It occurs once in Isa, once in Prov, twice in Hab, four times in the Ps, and then in the postexilic books: 2Chr, Neh, and Dan, a total of five times.

Marvin H. Pope in his Book, *El in the Ugaritic Texts*, has noted that *'ēlōah* never has the article although it is once determined by the suffix (Hab 1:11) and found once in the construct (Psa 114:7). He further points out that it never occurs in combination with another divine name.

We shall first look at the usage outside Job. Three times it occurs in parallel to "rock" as a descriptive term for God (Deut 32:15; Psa 18:31 [H 32]; Isa 44:8). Once it is found in a context in which God is described as a shield to those who take refuge in him (Prov 30:5). Three times it is used in a context of terror for sinners (Psa 50:22; Psa 114:7; Psa 139:19).

This would suggest that the term conveyed to God's people comfort and assurance while conveying fear to their enemies. The concepts of strength and might conveyed by the term are further seen in the three successive verses of Daniel's vision about the great anti-god (Dan 11:37-39). Here the anti-god's god (*'ēlōah*) seems to be "strength" itself. In Hab 1:11 the term is used similarly.

In Hab 3:3, the prophet speaks of *'ēlōah* coming from Teman. In Job, Teman is associated with one of Job's three friends, Eliphaz (Job 4:1). Interestingly, the term *'ēlōah*, used for God, is predominantly used in Job by Job and Eliphaz in their debating. Only in one context does Zophar use the term (Job 11:5-7). Bildad never does. Of course Elihu uses it, perhaps in imitation of the former speakers (six times in chapters 33-37). God himself, in speaking to Job, uses the term twice: once in a context of his providence and once in parallel to "the Almighty" (see our discussion on the concept of might associated with the name).

This term for God was usually clearly used for Israel's God, the true God. This is evident from the fact that the Levites in the postexilic period used the term in quoting the descriptive revelation of God given in Exo 34:6-7, where the original revelation to Moses had used El and Yahweh (Neh 9:17).

The Hebrew word is quite similar to the Aramaic *'ēlah*, the usual name for God in Biblical Aramaic. It has been suggested that the term has come, via Aramaic, from two elements: El and Ah (a shortened form of *Ahyeh*, Exo 3:14, "I shall be," the designation of Yahweh in the first person; Feigin, Samuel I., "The Origin of Eloh, 'God', in Hebrew," *JNES* 3: 259). This suggests the possibility that originally two separate gods were involved and later combined. Such a suggestion does not seem likely inasmuch as the term is in Scripture almost always used as a designation of the true God.

It is probably akin to the term El. It was in use quite early, then, after a period of neglect among God's people, the term was revived to a limited use perhaps through the contacts with Aramaic, where a similar term was in constant use.

'ēlōhîm. God, gods, judges, angels (Generally, agreement is found in ASV and RSV, however in some passages where the meaning is not clear they differ from KJV: Exo 31:6, where RSV has "God" but KJV "the judges"; similarly in Exo 22:28 [H 27] where RSV has "God" but KJV "the gods" or as a margin "judges.") This word, which is generally viewed as the plural of *'ēlōah* is found far more frequently in Scripture than either *'ēl* or *'ēlōah* for the true God. The plural ending is usually described as a plural of majesty and not intended as a true plural when used of God. This is seen in the fact that the noun *'ēlōhîm* is consistently used with singular verb forms and with adjectives and pronouns in the singular.

Albright has suggested that the use of this majestic plural comes from the tendency in the ancient near east toward a universalism: "We find in Canaanite an increasing tendency to employ the plural *Ashtorot* 'Astartes', and *Anatot* 'Anaths', in the clear sense of totality of manifestations of a deity" (William F. Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity*, 2d ed., p. 213). But a better reason can be seen in Scripture itself where, in the very first chapter of Gen, the necessity of a term conveying both the unity of the one God and yet allowing for a plurality of persons is found (Gen 1:2, 26). This is further borne out by the fact that the form *'ēlōhîm* occurs only in Hebrew and in no other Semitic language, not even in Biblical Aramaic (Gustav F. Oehler, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 88).

The term occurs in the general sense of deity some 2570 times in Scripture. Yet as Pope has indicated, it is difficult to detect any discrepancy in use between the forms *'ēl*, *'ēlōah*, and *'ēlōhîm* in Scripture (Marvin H. Pope, *El in the Ugaritic Texts*, p. 10).

When indicating the true God, *'ēlōhîm* functions as the subject of all divine activity revealed to man and as the object of all true reverence and fear from men. Often *'ēlōhîm* is accompanied by the personal name of God, Yahweh (Gen 2:4-5; Exo 34:23; Psa 68:18 [H 19], etc.).

While the individual occurrences of the term *'ēlōhîm* for God are far too numerous to treat here, some significant appositives and descriptive phrases or clauses associated with the name are given below. These descriptive words attached to the noun *'ēlōhîm* really serve as titles and indicate the various titles by which God's people came to know him. The term *'ēlōhîm* is the favorite term in titles. They are usually attached by means of the construct, the relative clause or by participial phrases rendered as titles.

The first category of titles pertains to his work of creation: Isa 45:18, "God, Former of the Earth"; Jon 1:9 "God of Heaven Who Made the Sea and the Dry Land."

A second category of titles expresses God's sovereignty: Isa 54:5, "God of All the Earth"; 1Kings 20:28, "God of the Hills"; Jer 32:27, "God of All Flesh." "The God of All the Kingdoms of the Earth" (cf. Isa 37:16); God of Heaven (Neh 2:4, 20); "Yahweh God of the Heaven" (Gen 24:7; 2Chr 36:23); God in the Heaven (2Chr 20:6); "The Lord God of the Heaven and God of the Earth" (Gen 24:3; see Deut 4:39; Josh 2:11); and finally "God of gods and Lord of Lords, the Great, the Mighty, and the Terrible Who Does Not Regard Favorites and Does Not Take Bribes" (Deut 10:17). All of these titles may be subsumed under the rather brief "God Most High" (Psa 57:2 [H 3]).

As sovereign God, *'ēlōhîm* is often described as Judge: simply "God Judge" (Psa 50:6; Psa 75:7 [H 8]) or "GodJudge in the Earth" (Psa 58:11 [H 12]). Another category of titles focuses around God's majesty or glory. Among these we find "God of Eternity" (Isa 40:28); "God of Justice" (Isa 30:18); "God of Certainty" (Isa 65:16); "Living God" (Jer 10:10); and "This Holy God" (1Sam 6:20).

By far the most frequent category of titles are those pertaining to the Savior God. Here we include numerous constructs in which God is linked to individuals whom he has called: "Their God" (Gen 17:8); "The God of Abraham" (Gen 26:24); "The God of Abraham... and the God of Isaac" (Gen 28:13); "The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Exo 3:6), etc. (More than one hundred such titles are found in the Old Testament.) Sometimes to these titles is added the personal name, "Yahweh" (Gen 24:12).

Similarly, we find titles linking God by the construct grammatical form to Israel as a whole or to some part of it: "God of the Armies of Israel" (1Sam 17:45) or "God of Jerusalem" (2Chr 32:19).

All of these represent God as savior of his people as does the simple "God of Salvation" (1Chr 6:35; Psa 18:46 [H47], etc.; cf. Psa 88:1 [H2]).

Some titles reflect God's actions on behalf of his people in the past: "The Living God, Speaker from the Midst of the Fire" (Deut 5:23 [H 26]; cf. 1Kings 18:24); "God, the Bringer of Prisoners into Prosperity" (Psa 68:7); "God... the Bringer out to you Water from the Flinty Rock" (Deut 8:15); "Your God Who Separated You from the Peoples" (Lev 20:24).

And finally, we find titles expressing the intimacy of God with his people: "The God of Nearness" (Jer 23:23); "Your God in Whom you Trust" (2Kings 19:10); "God Your Chastener" (Deut 8:5); "The God Feeding Me My Life Long Until Now" (Gen 48:15); "God of My Righteousness" (Psa 4:1 [H 2]); "God of My Mercy" (Psa 59:17 [H 18]); "God of My Strength" (Psa 43:2) and "Our God Being Merciful" (Psa 116:5).

In reference to one particularly difficult passage from the point of view of interpretation, which therefore bears on the translation, Cyrus Gordon has said, "It is my contention that here (Exo 22:8-9 [H 7,8]) *'ēlōhîm* does not mean God as the LXX translates, nor judges, which is the interpretation of Peshitto and Targum Onkelos, followed by Rashi and Ibn Ezra, by several English versions and by the Lexicon" (Cyrus H. Gordon, " *'ēlōhîm* in its reputed meaning of rulers, judges," *JBL* 54: 140, 149). He goes on to demonstrate to his own satisfaction that from our knowledge of the Nuzi tablets we can conclude that "gods" is the better translation and that the passage refers to the "oaths of the gods" which he calls a well attested ancient oriental court procedure. He therefore sees this text as a heathen survival in the Mosaic legislation, one that was obliterated in the later Deuteronomic and priestly recensions.

This is unacceptable from the point of view of Scripture's attestation to being God's Word and its clear doctrine of the existence of only one God. The question of whether "God" or "judges" is to be used here is difficult. If "God" is correct, we understand by the passage that every man is ultimately answerable to God and stands or falls before God no matter what judgment men may make.

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