

El Elyon

אל עליון

Most High God / God Most High

Pronounced *El El-yone'*, the word "elyon" (`elyôn) is an adjective that means "**elevated**", "**lofty**", or "**supreme**".

Etymology

According to *Strong's Hebrew Dictionary*, the word "elyon" derives from two Hebrew roots, the second a root of the first:

- root "'lh" or "ly" ("לָה"), meaning "to **go up**" or "**ascend**".
- "'âlâh" ("עָלָה"), meaning "to **ascend**", "be **high**", or "to **mount**".

Before we discuss the meaning of the name and all its implications, I would like to speak to that root word "'âlâh". Obviously, it is the same root used for Islam's "Allah". Understandably, this might be a point of concern or contention for some Christians to think of YHWH—our Elohim . . . our Adonai . . . our El Shaddai—having an association with Islam's false God.

However, it should not be. Remember, the El of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Israel) is also the El of Abraham, Ismael, and Esau. GOD's covenant promise to Abraham was to bless his offspring with many descendants.

- ² "And I will make you a great nation. And I will bless you and make your name great. And you shall be a blessing.
- ³ And I will bless those that bless you and curse the one who curses you. And in you shall all families of the earth be blessed."
(Genesis 12:2-3 MKJV)

Of course, we know the blessing for the "families of the earth" was fulfilled in the Messiah's propitiatory¹ death on behalf of **all** the families of the earth and was sealed/approved by YHWH in the resurrection. Nevertheless, the promise to bless Abraham was originally given with no stated pre-condition, no stipulated restrictions insisted upon as a condition of the promise.

Many years later, YHWH told Abraham that the covenant would be fulfilled through his yet-to-be-born son Isaac. However, He did not abandon Ishmael—the son of the slave woman, Hagar—but made a similar promise to bless and increase Ishmael.

- ¹⁹ Then God (El) said, "Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him.
- ²⁰ And as for Ishmael, I have heard you: I will surely bless him; I will make him fruitful and will greatly increase his numbers. He will be the father of twelve rulers, and I will make him into a great nation.
- ²¹ But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you by this time next year."
(Genesis 17:19-21 *parenthetical text added*)



"I will make the son of the slave into a nation also, because he is your offspring."
(Genesis 21:13 NIV)

The questions, then, become:

- Are YHWH and El the same GOD or different Gods?
- Can YHWH have any association with Allah?
- Is Allah the same as YHWH?

Let's look at two key verses that assist in answering this seeming paradox.

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD (YHWH) appeared to him and said, "I am God (El) Almighty (Shaddai); walk before me faithfully and be blameless."
(Genesis 17:1 *parenthetical text added*)

- ² God (Elohim) also said to Moses, "I am the LORD (YHWH),
³ I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God (El) Almighty (Shaddai), but by my name the LORD (YHWH) I did not make myself fully known to them.
(Exodus 6:2-3 *parenthetical text added*)

Recall that even though Moses used YHWH's distinctive name in his narrative about Abraham, He made it clear that Abraham knew GOD as "El", not as "YHWH". True, the verses suggest an **identification** between YHWH and El Shaddai—and thus by inference, an identification between YHWH and Allah. However, they acknowledge a more definite and distinctive **connection** between El, the God of the **patriarchs**, and YHWH, the God of the **Mosaic** era.

Clearly, what the verses tell us is that, even though they didn't know it at the time, the Patriarchs (Abraham and his descendants) who worshiped El in the past were actually worshipping YHWH, even though they didn't yet know Him by that name.²

It is clear, therefore, that until YHWH revealed His distinctive name to Moses and He **chose** Israel as His own in fulfillment of the covenant He'd made with Abraham, **all** of Abraham's descendants worshipped El. This would include those who went on to worship Allah.

In other words, although they started out worshipping the same El, it was Israel **alone** to whom YHWH revealed Himself, whom He charged with making His name known, and through whom "all the families of the earth" have been blessed. Thus, to answer the questions posed earlier...

- Are YHWH and El the same God or different Gods? He is the same GOD. The GOD of the Patriarchs, El/El Shaddai, later revealed His distinctive name, YHWH, to Moses.
- Can YHWH have any association with Allah? Only in the sense that YHWH is El, but El is **not** Allah.
- Is Allah the same as YHWH? No. The El whom the Patriarchs worshiped told Moses that His personal, distinctive name is "יהוה" (YHWH), not "Allah". And, YHWH's covenant promise was fulfilled in Isaac's descendants, **not** Ismael's.



How is "elyon" used in Scripture?

In each case in which the adjective "elyon" occurs, it denotes that which is **highest** or **uppermost**. It is used to describe...

- the **height** of objects or places:

The high (elyon) places, however, were not removed;
the people continued to offer sacrifices and burn incense there.
Jotham rebuilt the Upper Gate of the temple of the LORD (YHWH).
(2 Kings 15:35 *parenthetical text added*)

The king of Assyria sent his supreme commander, his chief officer
and his field commander with a large army, from Lachish to King Hezekiah
at Jerusalem. They came up (alah) to Jerusalem and stopped at the
aqueduct of the Upper (elyon) Pool, on the road to the Washerman's Field.
(2 Kings 18:17 *parenthetical text added*)

- the **prominence** or **high position** of persons:

And I will appoint him to be my firstborn,
the most exalted (elyon) of the kings of the earth.
(Psalm 89:27 *parenthetical text added*)

- the **prominence** or **elevated ranking** YHWH placed on **Israel** as a nation:

He has declared that he will set you in praise, fame and honor
high above (elyon) all the nations he has made and that you will be
a people holy to the LORD (YHWH) your God (Elohim), as he promised.
(Deuteronomy 26:19 *parenthetical text added*)

If you fully obey the LORD (YHWH) your God (Elohim)
and carefully follow all his commands I give you today,
the LORD (YHWH) your God (Elohim) will set you
high above (elyon) all the nations on earth.
(Deuteronomy 28:1 *parenthetical text added*)

When applied to YHWH—the covenant-keeping El—the name "Elyon" stresses His **highest supremacy** above all other gods who dare call themselves "gods". When the two names "El" and "Elyon" are combined, the resultant name can be literally translated as "the **Extremely-Exalted, Mighty, Highest GOD**".

I cry out to God (Elohim) Most High (Elyon), to God (El), who vindicates me.
(Psalm 57:2 *parenthetical text added*)

He is stronger than the strongest "Force", higher than the highest "Power", the Answer to every question, the superlative all-encompassing, all-surpassing GOD!



How often does the single name "Elyon" appear in Scripture?

The name "Elyon", in reference to YHWH, appears in the Scriptures 34 times—many in poetic passages, especially in the Psalms. It also appears once in Moses' final song that he recited to the whole assembly of Israel after YHWH had refused to allow him to enter the Promised Land.

When the Most High (Elyon) gave the nations their inheritance,
when he divided all mankind, he set up boundaries
or the peoples according to the number of the sons of Israel.
(Deuteronomy 32:8 *parenthetical text added*)

Other Old Testament passages that use the single name "Elyon" in reference to YHWH—sometimes as a separate name parallel to "El"—include:

the prophecy of one who hears the words of God (El),
who has knowledge from the Most High (Elyon),
who sees a vision from the Almighty (Shaddai),
who falls prostrate, and whose eyes are opened:
(Numbers 24:16 *parenthetical text added*)

The LORD (YHWH) thundered from heaven;
the voice of the Most High (Elyon) resounded.
(2 Samuel 22:14 *parenthetical text added*)

I will give thanks to the LORD (YHWH) because of his righteousness;
I will sing the praises of the name of the LORD (YHWH) Most High (Elyon).
(Psalm 7:17 *parenthetical text added*)

Let them know that you, whose name is the LORD (YHWH) --
hat you alone are the Most High (Elyon) over all the earth.
(Psalm 83:18 *parenthetical text added*)

Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High (Elyon)
will rest in the shadow of the Almighty (Shaddai).
(Psalm 91:1 *parenthetical text added*)

For you, LORD (YHWH), are the Most High (Elyon)
over all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods (elohim).
(Psalm 97:9 *parenthetical text added*)

How often does "El Elyon" appear in Scripture?

The compound name "El Elyon" (translated "**God Most High**" or "**Most High God**", depending on which English Bible translation you are using)—occurs 12 times in the Old Testament.

The name first occurs four times in Genesis when the Priest Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:1) meets Abram upon his return following a great military victory.

¹⁸ Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High (El Elyon),



- 19 and he blessed Abram, saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High (El Elyon), Creator of heaven and earth.
- 20 And praise be to God Most High (El Elyon), who delivered your enemies into your hand." Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.
- 21 The king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the people and keep the goods for yourself."
- 22 But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "With raised hand I have sworn an oath to the LORD (YHWH), God Most High (El Elyon), Creator of heaven and earth
- 23 that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the strap of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, 'I made Abram rich.'

(Genesis 14:18-23 *parenthetical text added*)

They remembered that God (Elohim) was their Rock,
that God Most High (El Elyon) was their Redeemer.
(Psalm 78:35 *parenthetical text added*)

But they put God (Elohim) to the test and rebelled against
the Most High (Elyon); they did not keep his statutes.
(Psalm 78:56 *parenthetical text added*)

"I will ascend above the tops of the clouds;
I will make myself like the Most High (Elyon)."
(Isaiah 14:14 *parenthetical text added*)

See also Psalms 7:10, 9:2, 57:2, 78:35;
Hosea 11:7; Mark 5:7; Luke 8:28; Acts
16:17; Hebrews 7:1.

El Elyon is the *Highest Power!*

The phrase, "*May the force be with you!*" has become a part of our popular culture vernacular. Another term that people use frequently, and without threat of antagonizing or alienating anyone, is "*Higher Power*". In religious circles, some see those two terms as being offensive to GOD, as they think they deny His existence.

But, do they . . . really? For many who claim to be "Christian", not because they've accepted Christ as Savior, but because of what they *aren't*—they aren't Buddhist or Hindu or Muslim or Atheist or whatever—"God" is essentially the same as "the Higher Power" or "the Force". They all refer to a metaphysical, omnipotent and omnipresent, indescribable and impersonal energy. The only difference is that those who want to

Did you know...?

All the references to the "*Most High God*" in the book of Daniel do *not* represent "*El Elyon*". Rather, they come from the Chaldee language, or the "Aramaic dialect", as it is sometimes called. Also referred to as "Syrian", it was the common language in Western Asia, and after the Exile gradually came to be the popular language of Palestine.

"*Most High*" in the book of Daniel represents "*illay*" ("עִלַּי"), which means "*supreme*" or "*high*" and actually has its roots in "*âlâh*"; and "*God*" represents "*êlâhh*" ("אֱלֹהִים"), the root of which is "*Eloah*".

Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High ('*illay*) God ('*êlâhh*), come out! Come here!" So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire,"
(Daniel 3:26 *parenthetical text added*)



deny His existence or who want to be their own "gods" can use words like "the Force" and "the Higher Power" without violating their need to claim self existence.

GOD's Word, however, says that YHWH is **the** "Most High God". That means He is **Stronger** than the strongest "force", **Higher** than the highest "power", the **Answer** to every question, the superlative **all-encompassing, all surpassing** GOD! His dominion is everlasting, and His kingdom endures forever!

³⁴ "At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High (Elyon); I honored and glorified him who **lives forever**. His dominion is an **eternal** dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation.

³⁵ "All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does **as he pleases** with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. **No one can hold back** his hand or say to him: 'What have you done?'"
(Daniel 4:34 *emphasis and parenthetical text added*)

He is the **Supreme Authority**, which no power in the universe can challenge, question, or conquer. No external force can cause Him to change His mind or alter His plans, but He has the **absolute** ability and authority to exercise His right according to His will.

I believe Kay Arthur said it best when she wrote about the name "El Elyon":

"..if God is not sovereign, if He is not in control, if all things are not under His dominion, then He is not the Most High, and you and I are either in the hands of fate (whatever that is), in the hands of man, or in the hands of the devil."³

And Bruce Hurt, otherwise known online as *Precept Austin*, shared this:

"God gave me this song (by Robin Mark) to remind me that He is the Most High God, El Elyon, and that 'He brings death and makes alive . . . He humbles and He exalts . . . He lowers us to raise us so that we can sing His praises. Whatever is His way all is well.'

"God is sovereign and He is in absolute control. Our world may feel like no one is in control, but please know that El Elyon has perfect control of all that happens in this world and nothing happens that He does not permit. Do you acknowledge Him as the Most High? Rest assured that you will bend your knee to Him one day, either by compulsion or conviction. I encourage you to begin today."⁴

I will give thanks to the LORD (YHWH) because of his righteousness;
I will sing the praises of the name of the LORD (YHWH) Most High (Elyon).
(Psalm 7:17 *parenthetical text added*)

For the LORD (YHWH) Most High (Elyon) is awesome,
the great King over all the earth.
(Psalm 47:2 *parenthetical text added*)



Meditation

What the Bible says...

about יהוה (YHWH)

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.
(Genesis 1:1)

It is I who made the earth and created mankind on it. My own hands stretched out the heavens; I marshaled their starry hosts.
(Isaiah 45:12)

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.
(Isaiah 7:14)

"I the LORD **do not change.**"
(Malachi 3:6a *emphasis added*)

It is written: "'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, '**every knee will bow** before me; **every tongue will acknowledge God.**'"
(Romans 14:11 *emphasis added* ref. Isaiah 45:23)

"I, the LORD--with the **first** of them and with the **last**--I am he."
(Isaiah 41:4b *emphasis added*)

"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."
(Revelation 1:8)

"do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God **will be with you** wherever you go."
(Joshua 1:9b *emphasis added*)

about Jesus

- ¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
- ² He was with God in the beginning.
- ³ Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.
(John 1:1-3)

"The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"(which means "God with us").
(Matthew 1:23)

Jesus Christ is **the same** yesterday and today and forever.
(Hebrews 13:8 *emphasis added*)

that at the name of Jesus **every knee should bow**, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
(Philippians 2:10 *emphasis added*)

"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the **First** and the **Last**, the **Beginning** and the **End.**"
(Revelation 22:13 *emphasis added*)

"And surely **I am with you always**, to the very end of the age."
(Matthew 28:20b *emphasis added*)

In His exalted position as our **Sovereign Ruler** and **Righteous Judge**, YHWH Elohim determined the penalty for sin.

For everyone belongs to me, the parent as well as the child--
both alike belong to me. The one **who sins** is the one who **will die**.
(Ezekiel 18:4 *emphasis added*)

As the **Most High God**—who does what He pleases and no one dares ask or accuse Him—
He stepped out of Heaven, put on flesh, and came to do what we could not do for ourselves.
He took our beating, shed His blood, and paid the penalty for us that He Himself had
decreed had to be paid!

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God
is **eternal life in Christ Jesus** our Lord.
(Romans 6:23 *emphasis added*)

To **know Jesus** is to **know El Elyon!** Jesus Christ **is** the **Most High God!** Paul Wilbur
said it best in the reprise to his song, "El Elyon"⁵:

"El Elyon Most High God
Holy is Your Name
Elohim El Shaddai
Yeshua Adonai
Let the glory of Your name be magnified
Lord Most High!"

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- ¹ **propitiatory** – Having power to atone for or reconcile by way of compensation. Christ's death on Calvary paid the debt we owe for our sin so that we won't have to.
 - ² Source: DiMattei, Steven. *Contradictions in the Bible, Are Yahweh and El the same god OR different gods?* <http://contradictionsinthebible.com/are-Yahweh-and-el-the-same-god/>, np, 10/08/18.
 - ³ Arthur, Kay, *LORD, I want to Know You*, Copyright © 1992, 2000 by Kay Arthur. p. 15.
 - ⁴ Precept Austin, *El Elyon – God Most High*, https://www.preceptaustin.org/el-elyon-_god_most_high, 01/08/18, 10/08/18.
 - ⁵ *El Elyon*, written and performed by Paul Wilbur. Copyright © 2005 by Paul Wilbur.

