



Lesson 6 ~ El Olam – The Eternal God

Genesis 21:22-34

♥ Heart Talk

When you meet with your small group, review the names of God that we have studied so far; *Elohim, El, El Roi, El Shaddai and El Elyon*. Can you remember what each name means? What is something you learned about God from each lesson that you want to remember? Or, share something from doing the *Heart Therapy* exercises from **Lesson 4 or 5**. How has your relationship with God changed since you have begun these lessons? How are you *experiencing* God in a new or different way?

Introduction

The Hebrew word *Olam* (o-LAM) means "eternal," "everlasting," "forever," "lasting," and "ancient." When paired with *El* to make *El Olam*, it means **Eternal God** or **Everlasting God**. This name of God teaches us that God has no beginning, no end and stands *outside of* and *beyond* **time**. God's **nature** and **purposes** are timeless, for God created time and is not limited by time in any way. Before there was a universe and before there was time, God existed, without beginning and without end (**Psalm 90:2**).

The term *Olam* also includes the **unchangeableness** of God. Everything we know changes, in some way, over time; but God never changes. His **character**, his **Word**, his **promises**, his **purposes** and his **kingdom** never change and never end. For us, this means that God is constant, dependable, reliable and faithful!

♥ Heart Preparation

Be still and know that I am God (Psalm 46:10). Continue to try and practice the discipline of **sitting quietly before God, in silence, for 5 minutes** in order to prepare your heart to receive what God has for you. Don't be discouraged if you are not as successful as you would like to be. Just keep trying – and God will meet you where you are. If your mind wanders, gently bring it back to focus on God and if your mind wanders **a thousand times**, rejoice that you have **a thousand opportunities** to turn again to God! Remember, God would not ask us to do something that is *improbable* or *impossible*; *stillness* and *waiting* before him is for **our benefit** and **blessing**. If we seek God, we will find him! (**Jeremiah 29:13**)

Jesus' Encouraging Words to You . . .

*I Am God with you, for all time and throughout eternity. Don't let the familiarity of that concept numb its impact on your consciousness. My perpetual Presence with you can be a continual source of Joy, springing up and flowing out in streams of abundant Life. Let your mind reverberate with the meanings of My Names: **Jesus – the Lord saves**, and **Emmanuel – God with us**. Strive to remain conscious of My Presence even in your busiest moments. Talk to me about whatever delights you, whatever upsets you, whatever is on your mind. These tiny steps of daily discipline, taken one after the other, will keep you close to Me on the path of Life.*

Jesus Calling (October 25) by Sarah Young

A Prayer to Help Prepare Your Heart

Speak, O Lord, as I come to You
To receive the food of your Holy Word
Take Your Truth, plant it deep in me
Shape and fashion me in Your likeness
That the light of Christ might be seen today,
In my acts of love and my deeds of faith.
Speak, O Lord, and fulfill in me
All your purposes, for Your glory.

By Stuart Townsend and Keith Getty

Questions

Read **Genesis 21:22-34**. Make note of the name *Eternal God*.

1. **Genesis 21:22-34** portrays one short incident in Abraham's long life. From these verses, what do you learn about **Abraham**, his **life** and his **God**?

2. The course of Abraham's life before this incident is important. In the chart below, trace Abraham's movements over the previous years.

	Abraham's Movements
Genesis 11:31	
Genesis 12:1, 4-6	
Genesis 12:8-10	
Genesis 13:1-4, 18	
Genesis 20:1	

- ♥ How would you describe Abraham's life after God called him to leave his home country? If you were a member of Abraham's household, what would have been your reaction to Abraham's lifestyle? Why?
 - ♥ What events in your life, if any, make you identify with Abraham's life? What are things in your life that always seem to be in flux? How does this make you feel?
 - ♥ What, in your life, gives you a sense of *security* and *place*? How important are these things to you? How willing would you be to give these things up if God called you to do so? What does your answer reveal about you and your relationship to God?
3. What was God's promise to Abraham in **Genesis 13:14-17**? According to **Hebrews 11:8-9**, why was Abraham willing to live as a stranger in the land that God had promised to him?
 - ♥ What does all this say about Abraham and his relationship to God? Do you think Abraham is a "special case" or do you think God wants everyone to live this way? How so?
 - ♥ How do you react to "delayed" promises? How do you handle "waiting?" How do you think God views delayed promises and waiting? How can his perspective help you when you are waiting?
 - ♥ How was God faithful to Abraham as he waited for the fulfillment of God's promise (**21:22**)? What does this reveal about God? About waiting?
 4. In view of what you have learned about Abraham's life so far in this lesson, why was the incident with Abimelech (uh BIM uh lek) (**21:22-34**) and the agreement they reached important to Abraham?

5. What did Abraham do after he reached an agreement with Abimelech (21:33)?

This is the first time in scripture that the name *El Olam - The Eternal God* is used. Review the meaning of *El Olam* in the *Introduction*. Why do you think Abraham called on and worshipped the *Eternal God* at this **time** and this **place**?

- ♥ What images come to mind when you think of the *Eternal God* or *Everlasting God*? How do you picture God being *outside of* and *beyond* time? What connection do you see between God being *eternal* (timeless) and *unchanging*? How do these two characteristics work together?
 - ♥ The word "promise" implies something not yet received. How does knowing that God is *eternal* and *unchanging* help you trust God's promises? What promise(s) are you believing now?
 - ♥ Do you *live* and *act* as if God's promises are an "if" or a "when?" How so? What is the difference between these two positions? What difference would living from each position make in everyday life?
6. A **tamarisk tree (21:33)** is a large, long-living tree that grows in sandy soil producing rich, green foliage that provide grazing for animals and shade from the heat of the sun. What is symbolic about Abraham planting this tree? What statement was he making to God, himself and others?

- ♥ What connection do you see between Abraham planting a tree on land that was promised him, but did not yet belong to him and his calling on and worshipping *El Olam - the Eternal God* whose character, promises and purposes never change? What is the significance of the statement in **22:34**?
- ♥ Have you ever commemorated a significant encounter with God or an important spiritual milestone with a physical act (like Abraham planting a tree) or displaying some token that helps you remember and celebrate what God has done for you? What is the value in doing something like this? Discuss with your small group some ways this could be done.

Eternal God - The implications of God being **eternal, unchanging** and thus **everywhere present at all times** is mind-boggling and certainly more than we can address in this lesson. However, there are some very useful things we can note about **God and his relationship to time** that will help us in our understanding and our relationship to *El Olam - Eternal God*. Below are some facts and observations that may be helpful in your insights about the *Eternal God*.

- God has no beginning, end, or succession of moments (time) in his own being. God's life is from within himself and not from anything that had a beginning in the space-time world (**Psalm 90:2**).
- Although God is not limited by space and time (the succession of passing moments), he created the world to have space and time. God fills space and time with his presence and gives it purpose and value. He uses time to act and accomplish his purposes.
- Before God made the universe, there was no matter. The science of physics tells us that matter, time and space must all occur together: if there is no matter, there can be no space or time either. Before God created the universe there was no time (the succession of passing moments); so, when God created the universe, he also created time. Time, therefore, does not have existence in itself, but, like the rest of creation depends on God's eternal being and power to keep it going.
- God transcends time; he is beyond the range or limit of time. God stands above time and is able to see it all as present in his consciousness. He is present at all times in all places and acts in time and space.

- **2 Peter 3:8** says: *With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.* It is often difficult for us to remember events that happened some time ago; we remember recent events more vividly. However, in God's perspective, any extremely long period of time (since creation, for example) seems to just have occurred. And any very short period of time (such as one day) seems to God to last forever: it never ceases to be "present" in his consciousness. Thus, God sees and knows all events past, present, and future with equal vividness.
 - Time does not affect God like it does humans; it does not change him in any way. The universe is constantly undergoing a transition from one stage to another and human existence is marked by continual changes and growth. With God, however, there is no change. He is not evolving from one stage to another. He is the same yesterday, today and forever (**Hebrews 13:8**).
 - The importance of God's changelessness can be seen if we imagine that God *could* change. If God *could* change, any change would be for the **better** or the **worse**. If God changed for the better, then he was not *the best possible God* when we first trusted him. How could we be sure he is the best possible God now? If he could change for the worse, then what kind of God might he become over time? Might he not change from a little bit evil to wholly evil? How could we ever trust a God who could change? How could we ever commit our lives and our future to him? We couldn't!
 - ♥ For you, which of the above facts were most informative? Surprising? Helpful? Discuss with your small group what you learned and what you appreciate about the *Eternal, Unchanging God*.
 - ♥ What would be the personal implications for you if God *plans* and *purposes* for the universe and eternity changed over time? What impact would it have on you if his *promises* changed over time?
 - ♥ How does seeing God's eternal, unchanging nature affect your perception of time and eternity and your place in it? Unlike God, you had a beginning. Will you have an end? **Hebrews 5:9; 2 Peter 1:10-11**
7. Fill in the chart below to learn about God's eternal qualities. After reading the reference, write what it is about God that is *eternal* and *unchanging* (his **person**, his **plans** and **purposes**, his **promises**, his **love**, his **kingdom**, etc.) and then consider and make note of what this truth means to you personally.

Reference	God's Eternal, Unchanging Quality	Personal Application
Psalms 135:13	your <u>name</u> and your <u>renown</u> or <u>fame</u> (being known and talked about)	Everything I am learning about your Names will always be true – I can depend and rely on who you are – always! There will always be people who know you – I never have to follow you alone; I can always learn from others
Psalms 145:13		
Psalms 33:11 Proverbs 19:21		
Psalms 100:5		
Deuteronomy 33:27a		
Isaiah 40:28-29		
Isaiah 26:4		
Numbers 23:19		
James 1:17 Hebrews 13:8		
Revelation 1:8		

- ♥ Which of the above qualities or traits about God is most meaningful to you? Why?
- ♥ Because God is eternal and unchanging, our relationship with him can be secure and reliable. Read **John 15:9-17**. What do you learn about friendship with God? How is it different than your other relationships? Do you have this kind of friendship with Jesus? If not, how could you?
- ♥ Write a prayer to thank and praise God for his **permanence, changelessness, reliability** and **security**.