

Genesis 14:19-20

The Possessor of Heaven and Earth

¹⁹And he blessed him and said, “Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth;

²⁰and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!” And Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

This passage may not seem at first to be very scientific, but it certainly does reveal some of the attributes of the Creator. The context of these verses is as follows. The Kings of Sodom and Gomorrah and three other kings went to war with the King of Elam (Chedorlaomer) and three other kings. Chedorlaomer and his three allies defeated the armies of the Kings of Sodom and Gomorrah and took their possessions and Abraham’s nephew Lot and his family. When word reached Abram, he pursued Chedorlaomer and defeated him and his army and retrieved his nephew and all their possessions. Upon Abram’s return, the King of Sodom and Melchizedek, the King of Salem came out to meet him. Genesis 14:18 says that this Melchizedek was a “priest of the God Most High (Heb. *El Elyon*)”. There has been much speculation about who this man was. Some claim he is even a pre-incarnate Jesus Christ. This mostly comes from the NT witness given in Hebrews 7. This interpretation is convincing, but it is beyond the scope of this study to go into detail on his identity. For now, the description of “priest of God Most High” will suffice.

El Elyon is a special name for God that is used only 5 times in the OT (four uses in this pericope and in Ps. 78:35). In other instances *Elyon* is used alone to refer to God (as in Lam. 3:38), or it can be in combination with *Yahweh* (Ps. 47:2) or *Elohim* (Ps. 57:2). In Genesis 14, *El Elyon* is said to be possessor of heaven and earth (see also v. 22). This word possessor (Heb. *qana*) is used 77 times in the OT. Six of those occurrences, including these, carry the idea of “to create” (see also Gen. 4:1; Deut. 32:6; Ps. 74:2; 78:54; 139:13). In fact, the LXX, Latin Vulgate, GW, HCSB, Message, NET, NCV, NiRV, NIV, NLT, NRSV, RSV and TNIV all translate either “create” or “make” for *qana* here in Gen. 14:19. Since *qana* is the typical Hebrew word for describing and acquisition by purchase, context must be the guide in determining the best translation within the semantic range. *El Elyon* is clearly not purchasing the heavens and the earth, but He could rightly be called both Possessor and Creator.

In addition to blessing Abram, Melchizedek blesses *El Elyon* in verse 20 for delivering Abram’s enemies into his hand. It is then said that Abram gave Melchizedek and tenth of everything he had. This is significant in that he is tithing even before the command to tithe is given in the Law of Moses (Heb. 7:4-10). As Possessor of both heaven and earth, God owns everything in existence, so tithing is not as much giving to God as it is giving back to God. As such Genesis 14:19-20 is one of the first clear passages that giving should be done out of love with a cheerful heart (see also 2Cor. 9:7).