

EL SHADDAI: GOD ALMIGHTY
Genesis 17:1- 6, 15- 20, text: Genesis 17:1
August 15, 2021

I. The Meaning of El-Shaddai

Genesis 17:1 (NIV) When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless.

A. The Hebrew name that is translated God Almighty is El-Shaddai.

B. Although at first we might think that since he's God he has to be almighty, as we reflect further the name raises some questions.

1. Since God is almighty, does that mean he can do anything?

2. That raises some foolish questions

a. Can God make a round square?

b. Can God make a rock so big he can't lift it?

c. Can God sin?

d. Can God cease to exist?

3. That also raises some not so foolish questions

a. For example, 2 Peter 3:9 says, "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."

b. If God desires that no one perish and he is almighty, why isn't everyone saved?

C. The problem here is that we cannot comprehend more than God intends to reveal to us.

Isaiah 55:8-9 (NIV) "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

1. God wouldn't be almighty if we were able to understand him at his level.

2. He has plans and purposes we know nothing about.

D. When God gives himself names like El-Shaddai, he is speaking to us in language we would understand for his particular purpose.

"If God were to speak to us in divine language, no one would be able to understand him, but ever since creation, he in condescending grace...speaks to us and manifests himself to us in human fashion." (Herman Bavincq The Doctrine of God, translated by William Hendricksen, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951, p. 86)

1. God cannot explain to our feeble minds fully who he is and why he does what he does.

2. But he patiently explains his truths in language will understand in order to communicate what he wants to reveal us.

3. And so, if we want to understand what God is revealing to Abram when he calls himself El Shaddai, we have to look at the context in which God made that revelation.

Questions:

- 1) What other questions does God being almighty raise for me? (especially, in light of what the Bible says about his being all-loving, all-knowing, and all-wise)**
- 2) What are some other things about God that are impossible for me to understand? What are some things God has done that have really troubled me? How is it helpful for me to realize that I only know what God had deemed important for me to know, and that I must trust him with what doesn't seem to make sense to me? How does trusting God completely give me peace?**
- 3) How can I know that what God has revealed about himself is true?**
- 4) Why is understanding the context of the names God is given in scripture so important? How can removing such names of God and truths about from the stories and contexts in which they were given lead to misunderstanding? What are some examples I can cite of times when this has happened?**

II. What God Intended to Reveal by Giving Himself The Name El-Shaddai

A. The Stories in Genesis 12- 16 gives us the context for understanding what God meant in calling himself El-Shaddai.

1. The story began way back in Genesis 12 when God came to Abram and promised that he would make a great nation from his descendants.

a. The problem was that Abram didn't have any children.

b. And then in chapter 15 God renewed that promise, insisting that he will give Abram a son.

c. At that time Abram responded that he didn't have children and that Eliezer of Damascus, his head servant was in line to inherit all of his possessions

Genesis 15:4-5 (NIV) Then the word of the LORD came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir." He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars--if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."

d. At that point Abraham trusted God,

Genesis 15:6 (NIV) Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

e. Nonetheless, Sarai remained barren.

2. But she had a plan to accomplish God's promise for him.

a. She had an Egyptian servant named Hagar,

Genesis 16:2 (NIV) so she said to Abram, "The LORD has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my maidservant; perhaps I can build a family through her." Abram agreed to what Sarai said.

b. Notice carefully what she said and how she tempted her husband.

i. She named the LORD as the problem—God may have promised to give you a child, but he's not dependable.

ii. So, I will help you achieve what God is unwilling or unable to do.

3. Sarai was a believer in the idea that God helps those who help themselves.

4. Like Peter who pulled out his sword to try to save Jesus from be arrested, she also thought that God's plan needed saving.

5. Such an attitude can have terrible consequences.

B. In this context God is telling Abram, I am El-Shaddai, the God who has the power to do what I promised I would do.

1. God waited another 13 years when he came to him with the words of our text.

Genesis 17:1 (NIV) When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless.

2. God has all power, but, we don't understand what that even means.
 3. The Bible says right here that he calls himself El Shaddai because he wants to tell us that no matter how impossible our situation seems, he has the power to do whatever he promised us he would do.
- C. Shaddai is also used frequently in the book of Job, especially in Elihu's speeches (found in Job 32-37.)
1. Elihu, who speaks just before God himself speaks, was the only friend of Job, who was not discredited by God.
 2. And in his speeches Elihu points out that Shaddai is all powerful, and although he acts in ways we cannot understand, he will surely do all that he wills to do, and all he does is right.
- D. We as Christians should especially realize this.
1. Giving a child to an old barren woman through an elderly husband is nothing compared to salvation that we have received in Jesus Christ.
 2. The God who created this vast universe and a reality that we have such trouble understanding, sent his eternal Son to this tiny microscopic speck of a planet and he became one of us, so that he could suffer and die and rise again that we might have an eternal relationship with him.
 3. We would know nothing about him if hadn't revealed himself to us; we would run away from him if he hadn't sent his Son after us; and our sin-filled hearts would reject his salvation if his Spirit hadn't made our dead hearts alive.

Questions:

- 1) What promises has God given me that seem impossible for him to fulfill? How does trusting that he is El-Shaddai give me peace and hope in spite of that?
- 2) When have I tried to step out in front of God and accomplish his will for him? How did it turn out? What are some other examples in scripture of people who tried to do this? How did it work out for them? When there is a dispute among sincere Christians concerning God's will, can I be 100% sure that my understanding is correct? In light of that, why should I be careful about trying to force my understanding on them? Does all this mean that I should do nothing and just wait for God act? Why or why not? What are some things I can do?
- 3) When I am suffering, why it is important for me to understand that God is El-Shaddai?
- 4) Why is what El-Shaddai did for me in Christ greater than any other miracle in the Bible? How does what El-Shaddai did in Christ help me to trust that despite my circumstances he will always accomplish his will, that his will is always best, and that nothing will ever separate me from his love?

III. How We Must Respond to El-Shaddai

Genesis 17:1 (NIV) When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless.

- A. We must walk with God
1. Walking before God involves related things: first trusting him and then obeying him.
 2. We willingly obey those we trust.
 3. And we show our trust by our obedience.
- B. We must "be blameless"
1. The Hebrew words literally mean to be complete.
 2. The paraphrase translation of Eugene Peterson gives in The Message helps us understand the meaning here. "Live entirely before me, live it to the hilt."
- C. As the Holy Spirit did his work in Abram, who became Abraham, those two responses characterized his life
1. So we read in chapter 22 that when God called to sacrifice his son Isaac as a burnt offering on the top of Mount Moriah, he and Isaac traveled there.
 2. And in the words of Genesis 22:9, "When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.
 3. But El Shaddai, keeping his promise, sent an angel to stop him, and gave him a ram to sacrifice instead of Isaac.
- D. As Christians who read that, we are shocked at what God required of Abraham.
1. But should we not be more shocked by when we read John's words about God's Son in John 1: 29 "Look the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world."
 2. Let us respond to El-Shaddai in faith and obedience, giving him all he requires of us.

Questions:

- 1) How is my obedience to God related to my faith that he is El-Shaddai? Why if I truly believe that, must I obey him?
- 2) What does it mean that I must completely devote my life to El-Shaddai? In what areas of my life am I struggling to do so?
- 3) How was Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac related to his faith in El-Shaddai? (see Hebrews 11: 19)
- 4) How did God show that he is El-Shaddai (the Almighty God who always accomplishes what he purposes and promises) by sacrificing his Son? In light of this, what must be my response be, no matter what my circumstances? As I struggle to do so, what promise do I have from El-Shaddai? (see Philippians 2:12-13)

As the story of Abraham reminds us, El Shaddai is the Almighty God who always keeps his promises.

Let us respond in faith, obedience and dedication.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Hebrews 12:1-2 (NIV)