

Genesis 16-17

I. The meaning of El Shaddai

A. El = God

B. Shaddai generally means “almighty, all-powerful, omnipotent, sovereign”

1. Because he is almighty, he is free to do whatever he wants (Daniel 4:34-35)

2. Because he is almighty, he is ultimately in control of all that happens (Eph 1:11)

C. Shaddai seems to have a more specific meaning in it’s original use in Genesis

1. El Shaddai is always connected with God’s plan to bless and provide for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (see Genesis 17:1-2, 28:1-4, 35:11-12, 43:14, 48:3-4)

2. So in calling himself El-Shaddai, God is not only communicating his power but specifically his power and ability to bless his people and supply all they need

3. Possible roots of Shaddai

a. Sha (one who) + dai (suffices) = the one who is sufficient for us

b. Shad = breast

So, God as the all-powerful one who nourishes, supplies, and satisfies out of his fullness (Ps 81:10: “Open wide your mouth and I will fill it”)

D. So definition of El Shaddai: the all-powerful, all sufficient provider of our needs

E. God tends to put his people in situations out of their control so that he can demonstrate that he is powerful and sufficient to provide

II. Abraham and Sarah’s experience of El Shaddai

A. God makes this amazing promise to give Abraham and Sarah children

1. Gen 12:1-2

2. Gen 15:1-6

B. God is slow (by their timing) in fulfilling his promise, so they try to have a son through Hagar (Gen 16)

1. The essence of the decision (v. 1-4)

God is not acting/providing, so we need to take matters into our own hands and help God out

2. The effects of the decision (v. 4-6)

a. It works: they get a son

b. Utter disaster: broken relationships, jealousy, fighting, pride, etc

c. God graciously intervenes and restores relationship (v. 7-15)

C. God reveals himself as El Shaddai (ch. 17)

1. It’s as if God is saying, “now that you’ve tried it your own way, taken matters into your own hands, and seen what a disaster that is, let me tell you that I am El Shaddai: the all-powerful, all-sufficient provider”

2. Renames Abram: v. 5-6

3. Renames Sarai: v. 15-16

4. Abraham’s response: laughter (v. 17)

5. Sarah’s response: laughter (18: 10-15)

D. God provides a son: Isaac (21:1-6)

- III. God consistently works this way with his people throughout scripture
- A. He makes these outrageous, laughable promises and then puts his people in impossible situations that are out of their control, and then he shows that he really is the all-powerful, all-sufficient provider
 - B. Examples
 - 1. The Israelites in Egypt and then in the wilderness
 - 2. The disciples with Jesus at the feeding of the 5000
 - 3. Paul and Timothy in Asia (2 Corinthians 1: “We were under great pressure, far beyond our own ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.”)
- IV. How do we respond?
- A. Where can we rely on God to be our all-sufficient provider?
Where are we tempted to try to make life happen on our own? Where are we impatient and anxious and where are we tempted to try to control situations in our own power and wisdom rather than live faithfully and trust God to provide?
 - B. Where are we being called to gratitude for God’s provision?
 - 1. Where are we tempted to not be content with what God is already providing?
 - 2. “For most Christians the underlying problem isn’t that they don’t believe God loves them. It’s just that’s just not enough. They want more.”
 - 3. Adam and Eve’s sin was ingratitude—wanting even more than God’s already abundant provision
 - 4. Where do we need to learn the discipline of saying: “Thank you, God, for what you are already providing?”

Discussion Questions

1. Explain in your own words what God was trying to communicate about himself by calling himself El-Shaddai.
2. How would you articulate the appropriate relationship between relying on God to provide and yet still working hard and taking action steps in life?
3. What’s a situation you are currently in or a common scenario you find yourself in where you are tempted to take matters into your own hands rather than rely on God (much like Abram and Sarai did in Genesis 16)? What does that actually look like in your life?
4. Where do you struggle with ingratitude, and how would you like to more faithfully acknowledge and appreciate the ways God is currently providing for you?