

God, The Almighty

By Mark Jarvinen

I think you'll agree that we live in a tagline or slogan saturated world these days. Dollar Shave Club's tagline is simple and snappy – **"Shave Time!"** So is Tide Laundry Detergent's – **"Tide's In, Dirt's Out!"** – I also like Bounty paper towel's slogan, **"The Quicker Picker Upper."** What product is so good that cats ask for it by name? That would be "Meow Mix." Some even have a kind of spiritual ring to them. There's the slogan, which some quote as though it were biblical – **"God helps those, who help themselves."** God's all about a strong work ethic, but this slogan undermines dependence on God. God wants us to depend on Him, not ourselves, to meet our needs. **Proverbs 28:26** says, ***"He who trusts in himself is a fool,"*** Our spiritual slogans quickly become hollow and meaningless if they are not anchored in the truth of Scripture.

Today, we're looking at one of the names for God – **El Shaddai**. We will see God as El Shaddai precisely when we realize and admit that we're helpless without Him. When we acknowledge our emptiness, then we can begin to see that God is enough. He becomes our El Shaddai – The Almighty, All-Sufficient One.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

The first part of this compound name for God is **"EI,"** which means **"mighty and powerful."** A good example of this usage is found in **Psalm 68:35** –

“You, God (El), are awesome in your sanctuary; the God (El) of Israel gives power and strength to his people....”

That said, the derivation of the word **“Shaddai”** is less clear-cut. Most English versions of the Bible translate Shaddai as **“Almighty,”** but scholars suggest a range of additional possibilities, one of which is an alternative translation which derives from the Hebrew root **“shad,”** and connects to the nurturing relationship of a mother with a nursing child, and which occurs **24 times** as **“Shaddai”** in the OT, suggesting a meaning of **“One who nourishes, supplies, and satisfies.”** Combined with **“El”** the meaning then becomes **“The One mighty to nourish, satisfy, and supply.”**

Thus, if you combine this alternative for **“Shaddai”** and intensify it with the word **“El,”** you have a rendering for God as **“The One who mightily nourishes, satisfies and supplies His people as their All-Sufficient Sustainer and Source of abundant blessing.”** (Rev. L.S. Smallwood, *The Names and Attributes of God*, 2010).

The early church made sure this name was right out front in the **Apostle’s Creed**, in saying, **“I believe in God, the Father Almighty ...”** God is almighty and all powerful. **When we admit our insufficiency in ourselves, El Shaddai is sufficient to meet all our needs. When we are empty, by faith we learn that God is enough.**

SAY HELLO TO EL SHADDAI

Now let’s look at how three individuals in Scripture, met **El Shaddai** when they were at the end of their ropes. All three were

empty in some way before they discovered that God alone was enough.

1) Abraham Was Burdened (Genesis 17:1).

The name **El Shaddai** is used 48 times in the OT and the first instance is found in **Genesis 17:1** –

“When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, “I am God Almighty (El Shaddai); walk before me faithfully and be blameless.”

Abraham was burdened. God had made several promises to him – of land, descendants, and blessings – but nothing was happening. Abraham had tried to help the process along by fathering a son (**Ishmael**) with his wife’s servant, (**Hagar**) but this wasn’t what God had in mind. Now, 13 years later, at the age of **99**, Abraham had all but given up hope of having a son with his wife Sarah. But it was then, at the point of emptiness, of realizing his own insufficiency, that God revealed himself as **El Shaddai**. This is stated clearly in **Genesis 18:14** when God declares: ***“Is anything too hard for the LORD?”*** The question is rhetorical. Of course the answer is no. And so, **do you feel burdened today? Relying on your own self- efforts? Trying to control your own destiny?** Living by another empty slogan, such as the memorable lines from *Invictus*? You’ve heard them before – **“I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul.”** If this describes you in any way today, El Shaddai invites us to transfer our trust to Him.

2) Naomi was Bitter (Ruth 1:20-21)

Abraham was burdened, and Naomi was bitter. We read in **Ruth 1:1** that because there was a severe famine in Bethlehem, an Israelite named **Elimelech** took his wife, **Naomi**, and their two sons to live in

the country of Moab. Their two sons married Moabite women, one was named **Orpah**, and the other, **Ruth**. While living in Moab, Naomi's husband died and then about ten years later, both of her sons also died. As a result, all three women, **Naomi, Orpah, and Ruth, were all widows**, having no social status in that culture, and no means by which to survive economically.

Naomi tells her two daughters-in-law to leave and go back to the homes of their parents. **Orpah goes home, but Ruth decided to stay with Naomi.** Both of them make the long journey back to Bethlehem. When they arrive, some of the women recognize Naomi, who no doubt, with all she had been through, looked a little worse for wear. Naomi says in vv. 20-21 –

²⁰ “Don’t call me Naomi,” she told them. “Call me Mara, because the Almighty (Shaddai) has made my life very bitter. ²¹ I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The LORD has afflicted me; the Almighty (Shaddai) has brought misfortune upon me.”

Notice the contrast here between the meaning of the name “**Naomi**,” which means “**pleasant**,” and “**Mara**,” which means “**bitter**.” Here Naomi acknowledges that her problems come from the Lord, or are at least permitted by Him. Four times in these two verses she attributes her affliction to the Almighty (**Shaddai**). Circumstantially, **Naomi’s glass is definitely more than half empty.** God seems distant. When things aren’t going our way, we’d like to blame our enemies or Satan, but ultimately nothing happens to us that God, in some sense, doesn’t allow.

Perhaps you feel like Naomi today, embittered, disappointed by God. You've faced some bewildering losses in your life and you can't get any traction. You're tired and discouraged. Hope is gone. **If we read the entire book of Ruth, however, we discover that although Naomi was bitter in the moment, she got better when she realized in her emptiness that God was enough.** In spite of her circumstances she persevered and poured herself into Ruth. Later, in a matchmaking arrangement, she coached Ruth to make a marriage proposal to Boaz, who became her **"kinsman redeemer,"** charged with the responsibility to provide for her material needs. Boaz and Ruth marry and eventually have a son named Obed. **Just think, Naomi became a grandmother! In this way El Shaddai met her in her bitterness and made her better.** To top it off, **Obed later became the grandfather of King David – through whom came the Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ.** Although at one point Naomi was empty, ultimately she discovered that God was enough.

3. Job was Broken (Job 1:20-21).

Abraham was burdened and El Shaddai met him in his need. Naomi was bitter, but became better as she waited upon God for His plan to unfold. **In Job, we meet a broken man from whom everything was taken.**

In **Job 1:1** we learn that Job was first of all **righteous** – ***"This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil."*** In **vv. 2-3** we learn that he was also **rich**, with numerous sheep, camels, oxen, donkeys, and servants. In **v. 5** we learn that Job was **religious**, making it his regular custom to sacrifice a burnt offering for

each of his children. Job enjoyed the prosperity that worldly success afforded, but more importantly was righteous in the eyes of God. But then, **Satan received God's permission to put Job to the test. Things unraveled quickly.** First, his livestock were stolen and his servants were killed. Then a fire destroyed his sheep. Next, his camels were confiscated. Finally, his children were killed instantly when a strong wind collapsed the house in which they had been feasting. In the space of minutes things went from bad to unbearable. **Job lost everything dear to him.** As if this wasn't enough, **Job's health was later taken from him and he even lost the support of those who were supposedly his friends.**

How did Job respond? Look at **Job 1:20-21** –

***²⁰ At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship ²¹ and said:
“Naked I came from my mother's womb,
and naked I will depart.
The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away;
may the name of the LORD be praised.”***

Job's initial response at his losses was to weep. In anguish, he tore his robe and shaved his head. But then notice that **“he fell to the ground in worship.”** He acknowledged that the Lord had given and now had taken away, but either way, He was worthy of praise. **This is yet another example of someone who discovered first hand that in the midst of emptiness, El Shaddai was enough.**

Interestingly, of the 48 occurrences of El Shaddai in the OT, 31 of them are found in this book of Job. As the book unfolds, Job continues to blast away at God as he deals with bouts of brokenness.

But near the end, in **Job 42:3** – Job says, ***“Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know,”*** as if acknowledging that he really had no right to shoot his mouth off before God. His ordeal now over, Job says in **42:5-6** –

“My ears had heard you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.”

Praise the Lord that God is in the business of mending broken lives. It is the kindness of God that leads to repentance. **Here we learn that God will ultimately be enough when we don’t have enough.** When we feel totally inadequate, **El Shaddai is more than adequate.** In Job we learn that life can be unfair and that bad things do happen. However, we also learn that the real question is not why these things happen, but rather, when they do, will we remain loyal to God? As the book of Job concludes, **42:12** says, ***“The Lord blessed the latter part of Job’s life more than the first.”***

CONCLUSION

How does this message about El Shaddai speak to our hearts today as followers of Jesus Christ? After Job, the second highest number of references to El Shaddai or God Almighty is found in Revelation. Here’s just one example from **Revelation 19:15** –

¹⁵ Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. “He will rule them with an iron scepter.” He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty.

Here, the sword represents judgment. The iron scepter speaks of the strength of Christ’s rule over the nations at the end of the age. **King Jesus will right all wrongs on the day of reckoning as He brings down the fury of the wrath of God Almighty (El Shaddai) on the**

unbelieving world. This is not the picture of Jesus we're most comfortable with. But it means something comforting for Christians. **Even as the Son of God will judge the unbelieving world, He will also reward his followers. The Day of Judgment is a day of vindication for those who are in Christ.** How can that encourage us as we await the coming of Christ? As author Larry Crabb suggests, ***“The Book of Revelation helps us to keep believing in Jesus today, in those moments when the evidence makes it difficult.”*** (Quoted by Brian Bill, Sermon Central). As we wait for the coming of Christ, living today in this vale of tears, in times of pain and confusion, in the tension between the already and the not yet, remember and be encouraged by the fact that El Shaddai, God Almighty, is still our ***All-Sufficient Sustainer and Source of abundant blessing.” A-men.***