

El Shaddai 3-35-07

Genesis 17:1

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

There are several profound single verses scattered throughout Genesis, verses that affect the way we see God, man, and the world we live in. In other words, for those of us who see the Bible as God's revelation of Himself to man, these revelations are essential to our comprehension of reality.

Some people base their understanding of the world on science. I don't think God wants us to deny what we observe with our own eyes, or be illogical in our thinking. At the same time, we must see science is ever changing. What was believed at one time as rock solid truth is later seen as complete error. It is my conviction that true science and the revelation of Scripture will never be in contradiction. (1 Timothy 6:20) Both are an effort to come to essential truths. Some would take current science as the measure of truth, but I take the unchanging word of God as my measure.

What does the opening verse of Genesis 17 tell us about who God is, who we are, and what God requires of us? First, let us look at the relationship of God and Abram. Abram's age is mentioned. That is in contrast with the meaning of LORD (YHWH, the eternal being). (Exodus 3:14) Our time on earth is limited. Abram lived at a time when the number of man's years was being reduced to what would eventually be 120. (Genesis 6:3) He would live to be 175. We think that is incredible, but beside the Eternal God, it is nothing!

Man has a tendency to think he won't die any time soon, maybe someday off in the distant future, but not soon. We see others die at a young age and think that would never happen to us. We attend our friends' funerals, but we avoid facing the reality that our time could be up at any day. What are you doing with the time you have? Are you living in the light of the fact that at any day you could die and face the eternal God and give an account for your life, or are you pretending it is off in the distant future? (Psalm 90:12) Even if it is as long as Abram's, it will still go by in a flash. It is still nothing compared to the Eternal One.

The previous chapter showed us that this man, Abram, was quite fallible. We've seen his fear and compromise in Egypt calling his wife his sister. We've seen him take this servant who was easily young enough to be his daughter for a wife, get her pregnant, and then allow her to be mistreated. Still, this man is the one God chose to be the father of faith. Couldn't God find a better man? (Psalm 14:3) Probably not! Don't think for a second that if you were there you'd have done better. We are all of like nature. We all sin and fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23) So we have another contrast. Not only is he a temporal being, but he is imperfect in contrast to God's perfect holiness.

Commented [notes1]: 20 Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge,
1 Tim 6:20 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: 14 God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'
Ex 3:14 (NIV)

Commented [notes3]: 3 Then the LORD said, "My Spirit will not contend with man forever, for he is mortal ; his days will be a hundred and twenty years."
Gen 6:3 (NIV)

Commented [notes4]: 12 Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.
Psalms 90:12 (NIV)

Commented [notes5]: 3 All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.
Psalms 14:3 (NIV)

Commented [notes6]: 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,
Romans 3:23 (NIV)

Nevertheless, God appeared to him. God had appeared to him several times before. We don't always know the form in which God appeared. I suspect it was the same Angel of the Lord manifestation that came to Hagar, but we aren't told. (Genesis 16:7) We know that no man can see God and live, so this must have been some manifestation like those we see throughout the Scriptures. (Exodus 33:20) Remember that Colossians 1:15 tells us the image of the invisible God is the Lord Jesus.

As we read through the story of Abram, we get a feeling that this was a frequent occurrence, but if we set it in a time line, it has been 13 years since he last heard from God. He has had six revelations by the age of 99, if they are all listed. I'm sure glad the Lord speaks to me more than that. Thank God we live in the age of the church in which the Holy Spirit has been poured out and the Word is in our hands. If God only spoke to your heart once in 10 years, do you think you would do as well as Abram? He had to go by faith on the last revelation, and that is a difficult thing to do.

In our lives, even though indwelt with the Holy Spirit, there are times when God does not speak, when the heavens seem as brass. Some have referred to it as the dark night of the soul. It is a time in which God strengthens our faith. You have to operate like Abram on the last thing God spoke to you and what He already revealed. We have plenty of instruction in God's word to keep us busy for the rest of our days. But Abram only had the story of creation, the flood, and Babel to go on. How would you do if your whole Bible was Genesis 1 through 11? So we shouldn't be too hard on Abram. We are accountable for what we know. (Luke 12:48) Abram will do a lot with what he has to go on.

When God did speak, He gave Abram another revelation of the character of God. Each time a name of God is revealed, we learn more of who He is. We've seen and experienced who man is, but what we need to know more of is the character of God. God told Abram, "I am God Almighty." The Hebrew is El Shaddai (shad – dah' – ee). There is still debate on what the term means. It is used mostly in Job, which tells us this is one of the older names for God. Some suggest it means "all powerful" as is translated here. Others think that it means the self-sufficient God. Still others believe that it is referring to God as the God of the mountains. I tend toward the all-powerful and self-sufficient God translations because this is the theme I see in Scripture.

In our passage, Abram has been wondering how God would fulfill the promise to him to have an heir. He tried to use his wife's servant, but God is about to tell him that he lacked faith. The heir would come through Sarai. How could a 90-year-old woman have a baby? Only the power of an Almighty God could do that. He was soon to see just how powerful and all-sufficient God is. (Luke 1:37)

I wonder if we know God as El Shaddai? What situation are you facing or are you fearful of that El Shaddai cannot meet? Someone once said that most Christians' have a God who is way too small. In other words, we don't give God the credit for the greatness He possesses. Do we really believe He can do anything? Do we really

Commented [notes7]: 7 The angel of the LORD found Hagar near a spring in the desert; it was the spring that is beside the road to Shur.
Gen 16:7 (NIV)

Commented [notes8]: 20 But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live."
Ex 33:20 (NIV)

Commented [notes9]: 15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.
Col 1:15 (NIV)

Commented [notes10]: 48 But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.
Luke 12:48 (NIV)

Commented [notes11]: 37 For nothing is impossible with God."
Luke 1:37 (NIV)

believe He can alter space and time and matter and do whatever we pray if we pray according to His will? (1John 5:14) I don't think we do. If we did, we'd spend a lot more time in prayer. If your God is too small, you need a vision of the greatness of El Shaddai.

Commented [notes12]: 14 This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. 1 John 5:14 (NIV)

God knew what Abram's reaction would be when God would tell him that Sarah would be the mother of the child of promise. Can a 100-year-old man and a 90-year-old woman have a child? Only if El Shaddai is involved! Abram's vision of God was too small, even though he had already had some amazing revelations. (Hebrews 4:2) Can you see how your understanding of God's greatness affects your faith? God was stretching Abram's vision of God's greatness and power, just as he stretches our vision throughout our life. Much of what we go through is so that we will get a greater revelation of His greatness and thereby increase in faith for what He can do in and through us. (Numbers 14:11)

Commented [notes13]: 2 For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith. [Heb 4:2 (NIV)]

I wonder if Abram would have made that mistake with Hagar if he had a bigger God. If He had a vision for the greatness of El Shaddai, he could have believed for Sarai to one day be the mother of the promised heir. And I wonder if we have a greater vision for the greatness of God, what sins and detours along life's journey will we be kept from? Deliver us from the evil one! (Matthew 6:13) Get a vision for El Shaddai! Amen?

Commented [notes14]: 11 The LORD said to Moses, "How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the miraculous signs I have performed among them? Num 14:11 (NIV)

Now that God has revealed Himself in a greater way to Abram, look what He asked of Abram, *"walk before me and be blameless."* Now that takes a great God to enable Abram or you or me to live that command. It isn't a request. It was an order.

Commented [notes15]: 13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. [Matt 6:13 (NIV)]

The first part of that puzzled me for a long time. What does it mean to walk before God? Aren't we always walking before God? It took me time to pray and meditate on the passage before it hit me. It is really very simple. This expression "to walk" in both the Old and New Testament means to live moment by moment. Most of the ancient people's lives were spent walking. For our cultural mind set we could say, "Live moment by moment before me."

It reminds me of what I was told as I child, "Remember, Jesus is always watching you." That is deterrent to sin. Abram just came out of the sin of chapter 16 and God gave him a deterrent for the future. The first is that God is Almighty and completely sufficient for our every need. Secondly, it was to live with the constant awareness of His presence.

By God's grace, this has become pretty much of a constant in my life and I believe the same is true for most of you. When I start to get angry, I realize God's displeasure at my ingratitude. When I am tempted, I realize the One who is true satisfaction is observing my distraction with lesser things. I am constantly aware that I am living before God, moment by moment. I know this didn't just happen one day because I chose to think this way. It came about after years of living with God's word and striving to be sensitive to His Spirit. Please understand, I am not boasting about myself, but what El Shaddai will do in our lives when we are willing to desire what He desires. (Psalm 37:4)

Commented [notes16]: 4 Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart. Psalms 37:4 (NIV)

It is not by random order that God first declares Himself as El Shaddai and then orders Abram to walk before Him. First we see He is the One that can enable me to do anything He asks, then He asks. All glory to God! Without Him, we can do nothing! (John 15:5)

Commented [notes17]: 5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. John 15:5 (NIV)

This is something our culture is suffering from a lack of. We wonder why children are shooting each other in school, and why teachers are having physical relationships with children, and why our standards of education are declining. We have only to look back a generation or two when relativism began to dominate the educational system. We were taught that we don't stand in the presence of a holy God, but that we are gods, to pick and choose what is right for us.

When we took God out of our education system, we took away the basis for any form of morality. Anyone who thinks there can be any kind of morality without God is not thinking the issue through. We either see ourselves walking before a holy God, or only accountable to our own whims and desires. Now we have a generation of teachers that were raised on this false doctrine of no absolutes and we can't figure out why our children have such a hard time finding a moral basis for anything. The number of children in church dwindles as the educational system indoctrinates them with moral relativism.

The One who asks us to walk before Him is the One who spoke everything into existence. Almighty means all the power that exists is in His hands. Any power anywhere is simply borrowed from the all-powerful One. He speaks and His creation must obey. If says, "Walk before me," you know He can easily enable the willing heart to obey.

Commented [notes18]: 19 "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." Matt 4:19 (NIV)

He asks us all to live moment by moment before Him. Live knowing He sees your every thought and knows your every desire. This is expressed in the New Testament in Jesus' expression, "Follow me!" (Matthew 4:19) and "walk in the light". (John 3:21) You see, to follow Jesus is not only to live with the awareness that you are in His company, but that you are to live like Jesus. (1John 2:6) That expression covers both parts of God's command to Abram.

Commented [notes19]: 21 But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God." John 3:21 (NIV)

We see it in the expression of the Apostle Paul that we are to be a "living sacrifice" (Romans 12:1) "keeping in step with the Spirit". (Galatians 5:25) The altar is always before God. The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." (Psalm 14:1) It also the fool that refuses to consider the fact that El Shaddai observes all that he thinks, says, and does. To the rebel against God that is a frightening thought. To the one that loves God and desires to yield to His will, it is a comforting thought. It says that though we are like Hagar alone in the desert, He is with us. His correction to the fool is merely a pain to endure, but to the lover of God it is grace poured out on our life. (Psalm 141:5)

Commented [notes20]: 6 Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did. 1 John 2:6 (NIV)

Commented [notes21]: 1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship. Romans 12:1 (NIV)

Commented [notes22]: 25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Gal 5:25 (NIV)

Commented [notes23]: 1 The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good. Psalms 14:1 (NIV)

Will you decide today to walk before God, to live in the awareness of God's presence moment by moment? Repentance is to turn around the way we think, and this is a key component in that turn around. We no longer live as an independent, self-

Commented [notes24]: 5 Let a righteous man strike me--it is a kindness; let him rebuke me--it is oil on my head. My head will not refuse it. Yet my prayer is ever against the deeds of evildoers; Psalms 141:5 (NIV)

sufficient, master of my own direction, accountable to none. Now we walk in the presence of God Almighty. This is a revolution in the way we see our daily life.

We've come to the last part of God's command. "Be blameless!" To this point, Abram was anything but blameless. Peter wrote in the New Testament, "Be holy!" (1 Peter 1:16) How can God ask this of us? Don't the Scriptures declare that none are blameless? (Romans 3:10) Just because we won't doesn't mean God should not ask. Do you tell your children to behave? Should they? Will they? Is it right for you to command them to do what they will not do? Case closed.

Why do you ask them to behave? If you are a godly person, you are asking because it is good for them, good for others, and just because it is right. God asks us for the same reasons. It's good for us, good for others, and it is the right thing to do. He asks us out of love for us.

Man, however, acts like the spoiled child that says, "I want to act this way and I don't care what anyone thinks. I don't care how it affects others. I don't care what is right." And what does that man need? I bet your thinking, "A good spanking!" and that may be true. What he needs is a heart that cares or he won't change his behavior. That is why Jesus offers to circumcise our hearts, and that is the picture presented in the rest of the chapter.

Be blameless. How in this world are we supposed to do that? When God commands, He enables. Most of you understand that Jesus lived the blameless life for us and then credited it to us. He made it possible for us to be blameless in God's eyes. But His righteous life also made it possible for the Holy Spirit to be given to us to help us live out what has been credited to us. (Hebrews 10:14) The Spirit teaches us when we are out of line. He gently cautions us with a lack of peace when we are going the wrong direction. (Colossians 3:15) Conviction is His discipline when we go astray. (John 16:8) He reminds us of the words of Jesus that guide us to a path of righteousness. (John 14:26)

Sometimes by big steps and sometimes by small we move more and more in the direction of living a blameless life before the LORD. Sometimes we take a step back, but our general direction is forward when our life is lived in the conscious presence of the God Almighty.

About 4000 years after our text was spoken to an imperfect man, the same word comes to us today. "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless." El Shaddai is asking and El Shaddai will enable you by the power of His Spirit to walk before Him and be blameless. Will you choose to desire what He desires for you? Will you act on it? Will you see yourself living moment by moment in the presence of a Holy God who requires you by the power of His Spirit to be blameless?

Commented [notes25]: 16 for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy." [1 Peter 1:16 (NIV)]

Commented [notes26]: 10 As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; Romans 3:10 (NIV)

Commented [notes27]: 14 because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy. Heb 10:14 (NIV)

Commented [notes28]: 15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Col 3:15 (NIV)

Commented [notes29]: 8 When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: John 16:8 (NIV)

Commented [notes30]: 26 But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. John 14:26 (NIV)