

## 1 El Shaddai

- Promises we can trust

## 2 Tonight's Text

- When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless. I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers." (Gen 17:1–2 NIV)
- Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. (Gen 17:3–6 NIV)

## 3 Tonight's Text

- "I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God." (Gen 17:7–8 NIV)
- God also said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her." (Gen 17:15–16 NIV)

## 4 Introduction

- Some things are considerably more lasting than others.
- One married couple realized when they celebrated their 10th anniversary that their marriage had lasted longer than almost everything involved with the actual wedding.
  - The bridal store had gone out of business.
  - The bakery went bankrupt.
  - The florist and the church janitor had both died.
  - And the pastor who performed the ceremony had left the ministry.

## 5 Introduction

- Some promises don't seem to last very long either.
- In fact, these days, even legal contracts (which are really just formal promises) can be broken if you have enough money to pay for a lawyer.

## 6 Introduction

- And how about guarantees?
  - We know a guy who had his house re-roofed by a reputable roofer.

- The job included a 10-year guarantee.
- About two years after the roof was installed, a leak developed.
- When the homeowner tried to contact the roofer to fix it, he found out that the man had retired and moved to Florida.
- The guarantee was worthless.

## 7 Promises are Important

- Nevertheless, promises are important.
- By their very nature, promises commit us to behaving in certain ways in the future.
- Since we can't know what the future will bring, we cannot tell now what keeping a promise will actually cost us.
- We can't know when it will become inconvenient to keep it.

## 8 Promises are Important

- Thus, as a society . . .
  - we build escape clauses into our contracts,
  - look for loopholes in our agreements,
  - insert weasel words into our guarantees, or
  - hold out for renegotiation.

## 9 Promises are Important

- Getting stuck in an old promise, we think, is only for those not nimble at sidestepping.
- Thus, we have . . .
  - manufacturers who refuse to honor their product warranties,
  - politicians who renege on their campaign promises,
  - corporations that shuck their pension obligations, and
  - ordinary people who make exceptions to their promises to one another.
- We live in a world where many promises just aren't taken that seriously.

## 10 The man of Psalm 15

- With this said, no wonder keeping a promise highly valued in heaven.
- Lord, who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live on your holy hill? He whose walk is blameless and who does what is righteous, . . . who keeps his oath (promises) even when it hurts, . . . (Psa 15:1–4 NIV)

## 11 The Promise

- Our text tonight, in Genesis 17, is about God making a promise to Abram.

- It's not the first time God did so with Abram, he had earlier issued His promise with that patriarch, recorded in Genesis 12.
- There, God promised the then 75-year-old Abram that he would be the father of a great nation.

## 12 **The Promise**

- That, of course, implied that Abram would have at least one child through whom descendants would come. God even promised to give land to Abram's "offspring" (12:7).
- But since then, Abram's wife, Sarai, who was well past childbearing years in any case, had produced no children.

## 13 **The Promise**

- In Genesis 15, Abram, now older and still childless, assumes -- as is the custom when a man dies childless -- that one of his slaves will be his heir.
- But God tells him “coming from your own body will be your heir” (Gen 15:4 NIV).
- But still no child is born to Abram and Sarai.

## 14 **The Promise**

- Eventually, at Sarai's suggestion, Abram fathers a son, Ishmael, by his wife's maid, Hagar.
- Abram assumes that it's through Ishmael that God's promise of descendants will be fulfilled.
- This is the context as chapter 17 opens.
- Abram is now 99 and Sarai is 89. Ishmael is 13.

## 15 **The Promise**

- God will bless Ishmael with descendants in his own right (v. 20), but God now tells Abram that he will have another son, born to Sarai, who shall be called Isaac.
- As a sign of this promise, God changes Abram's name to Abraham. Abram means “exalted father,” but Abraham means “father of a multitude.”
- God also changes Sarai's name to Sarah.

## 16 **The Promise-Maker**

- At the same time, God takes on a new name we well.
- Most Bible versions render this as “God Almighty,” but the actual Hebrew term is El Shaddai.
- The Bible first identifies God by the name Elohim; it appears in the very first verse of the Bible: “In the beginning God [Elohim] created the heavens and the earth.”
- That name appears more than 2,500 times in the Old Testament, translated into English simply as “God.”

## 17 **The Promise-Maker**

- But here in Genesis 17, God is introduced as El Shaddai.

- This name for God appears far fewer times, and when it does, it's usually at moments of significant need for the people involved, such as in this case, where Abram is told he and Sarai are to have a son.

## 18 **The Promise-Maker**

- The El part of El Shaddai is the shortened form of Elohim and it means “God,” but the precise meaning of Shaddai is a little uncertain.
- Nevertheless, most Bible scholars translate it as “Almighty” as the root word “shadad” means to be strong.
- So when God uses the word, El Shaddai, He is calling Himself the God who is strong.
- Thus since He is strong, He can fulfill what He promises.

### **The Promise-Maker**

- It's also possibly derived from the Hebrew word shad, which is invariably used in Scripture for a woman's breast, the place where a child is cuddled and nursed.
- As applied to God, it perhaps conveys God's tender and nurturing nature, the way a mother cares for her child.
- Or, since God states this name in the context of announcing to Abram that he and Sarai will have a son, the term is perhaps referring to fertility and fruitfulness.

## 19 **The Promise-Maker**

- When God comes to Abram as El Shaddai, God comes for a specific purpose—to remind Abram that God keeps promises.
- God comes with comfort, but it's comfort with substance —a covenant.
- Abram and Sarai, now renamed Abraham and Sarah (as reminders of God as a promise-keeper), will be the progenitors of a great nation through a son who is yet to be born to them.
- God takes on a new name at the same time God renames Abram and Sarai, which signals a new beginning together, based on promise.

## 20 **Beneficiaries of the promise**

- This reality of a kept promise is vital to understanding anything about God at all.
- Kept promises are part of what define God's character.
- As the Scripture says, God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill? (Num 23:19 NIV)

## 21 **Beneficiaries of the promise**

- When Joshua was old and ready to die he made this statement about the faithfulness of God:
  - “Now I am about to go the way of all the earth. You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the LORD your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed.” (Josh 23:14 NIV)

- Solomon says the following as well:

- “Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel, who with his own hand has fulfilled what he promised with his own mouth to my father David.” (1 Kings 8:15 NIV)

## 22 **Beneficiaries of the promise**

- Samuel says of the Lord,
  - “He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a man, that he should change his mind.” (1 Sam 15:29 NIV)
- And in the book of Psalms it says.
  - Your arm is endued with power; your hand is strong, your right hand exalted. Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; love and faithfulness go before you. (Psa 89:13–14 NIV)

## 23 **Beneficiaries of the promise**

- And Jesus says,
  - “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.” (Luke 21:33 NIV)

## 24 **The God who makes a way**

- In Genesis 17, Abram responds to the news that he and Sarai are to have a son by falling on his face and “laughing” (v. 17).
- It’s not clear whether this is the laughter of delight or laughter at the ridiculousness of the notion that such will happen to two very old people.
- After all, common sense says that there’s no way babies are born in the geriatric ward.

## 25 **The God who makes a way**

- Let’s remember that the promised son was indeed born to Abraham and Sarah, and, at God’s instruction, they named him Isaac (v. 19), which means, “to laugh.”
- So then let us remember that God loves to do things beyond what we can think, hope or imagine.
- He wants to show us that since He is El Shaddai (God Almighty) there’s nothing too hard for him.

## 26 **The God who makes a way**

- God’s reminding us that He is the God of kept promises and that He makes a way where we can see none.
- So then, let us hold on to our faith and make straight paths for God’s grace to come to us.
- Like God commanded Abram, let us walk blamelessly before the Lord so that God’s covenant of love and His abundant grace can make us laugh too.

- For there is nothing too hard for the Lord, for He is El Shaddai, God Almighty!

## 27 **Conclusion**

- God keeps His promises because He is good and has the power to fulfill them.
- Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame. (Psa 34:5 NIV)
- So then, let us not look to our circumstances and pout, but to the God who has the power to make us laugh out loud.
- For He has the ability to fix our finances, heal our diseases, restore broken relationships, and encourage our souls with hope.
- He is El Shaddai—God Almighty!