

GRACE BIBLE CHURCH
Robert R. McLaughlin Bible Ministries

The Tree of Life is a weekly teaching summary.
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“El Shadday” I Am the God of many breasts. Gen 17:1.

As we continue our study of Genesis, we have noted that between Gen 16:16 and Gen 17:1, there is 13 years of silence. We know that from comparing Gen 16:16 *And Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to him.*

In Gen 17:1 *Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram”*

It was 13 years before the Lord began to communicate divinely inspired commands to Abram and Sarai. For those 13 years while Ishmael is growing up, Hagar will be under the protection of Abram who recovers and advances all the way to supergrace. The Abram who emerges at the end proves that wonderful gracious principle found in the Word of God, we are to never let our failures keep us down.

As we enter into Gen 17, notice verse 1, *the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am God Almighty; Walk before Me, and be blameless.”*

This is a very unusual mandate because only a mature believer could fulfill it and therefore it tells us that something happened to Abram between Gen 16:16 and 17:1, we now see a supergrace believer in Abram.

Gen 17:1-6 Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am God Almighty; Walk before Me, and be blameless. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you, And I will multiply you exceedingly.” And Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying, “As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, And you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. “No longer shall your name be called Abram, But your name shall be Abraham; For I will make you the father of a multitude of nations. And I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come forth from you.”

Abram who is now Abraham is a better person because he learned from his failures and mistakes and had the courage to utilize the grace of God. He took responsibility for his own decisions and did not let guilt and condemnation keep him down. He realized that the issue was not why he did what he did, but that he did it. A lesson to all of us, the issue is not why we did what we did but that we did it.

Paul faced this dilemma and said Rom 7:15 *“For that which I am doing [practicing], I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate.”*

That’s why doctrine is so important, it helps us to recognize that we are not perfect and even though we fail like Abram and Sarai there is a way out, through the grace of God, rebound and recover.

However, before any believer can appreciate the divine solutions to the indwelling problems of the old sin nature and the magnificent grace of God, the believer must be brought to the end of himself. To realize how helpless and hopeless they are without Christ and also how the Lord has solved the sin problem as well as the entire sin nature. Not only has sin been forgiven but the effects of our sins as well, such as guilt, condemnation, self-righteousness, and legalistic tendencies.

Both Abram and Sarai wanted to do good, to bring forth the promise heir. But they tried to accomplish it through human power and not divine power. They tried to use human viewpoint and the works of the flesh to fulfill the plan of God and bring forth the promise of God. But, there are no human solutions in God's plan.

So thirteen years have elapsed between the chapters and during those years, Abram and Sarai have repented and recovered from their evil, they have advanced to supergrace. During the years, they have come to recognize the total helplessness of their situation and they have recognized that by man's efforts, man cannot solve his problems. They realized that only solution left was that they must adjust to the justice of God by means of spiritual growth. The question to many believers today is "how many years is it going to take them to learn this same lesson."

So, in Gen 17:1 the Lord or Jehovah appeared to Abram.

Jehovah, JHWH in the Hebrew, is the personal name of each member of the Trinity, in contrast to Elohim, which is the name of God from the standpoint of His attributes. Elohim is a plural name and refers to two or three members of the Trinity when it is used. Jehovah is a singular name and refers to a specific member of the Trinity.

When the word JHWH occurred in the Old Testament, the Jews substituted the noun ADONAI, because they considered JHWH such a sacred name that they wouldn't even pronounce it. Three persons are called JHWH: The Father, The Son and The Holy Spirit. Each one is separate and distinct therefore, JHWH is used for each one.

Since all the members of the Trinity are coequal and co-eternal, all members are called by the name JHWH.

The Father is called JHWH or Jehovah, Isa 64:8, ***But now, O Lord [JHWH], Thou art our Father, We are the clay, and Thou our potter; And all of us are the work of Thy hand.***

The Son is called Jehovah, Isa 45:21, ***“Declare and set forth {your case;} Indeed, let them consult together. Who has announced this from of old? Who has long since declared it? Is it not I, [JHWH] the Lord? And there is no other God besides Me, A righteous God and a Savior; There is none except Me.”***

This refers to Jesus Christ, look at Act 4:12 ***“And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven [Jesus Christ] that has been given among men, by which we must be saved.”***

The Holy Spirit is called JHWH, Isa 11:2, ***And the Spirit of the Lord [JHWH] the Spirit Jehovah will rest on Him, The spirit of wisdom and understanding, The spirit of counsel and strength, The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.***

The first part of Gen 17:1 should read *Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, Jehovah* [TLJC, who according to the Bible is the only visible manifestation of the Trinity or the only Jehovah] *appeared to Abram.*

In Gen 17:1 with the phrase “*I am God Almighty;*” we begin to note the revelation of Jehovah to a supergrace believer.

The word "I" is the pronoun *ani* and should be translated either “I, even I am,” or “as for me, I am.”

The Word for *Almighty God* is actually two words, *el shadday*.

Few individuals seem to have the nerve to translate this as it is, and therefore we lose something, because we have a tremendous explanation in this particular phrase.

The Hebrew word *El* is used for God and His power, so almighty or omnipotent God is a good translation.

The word *Shadday* is a plural word from *shad*, which in the singular form refers to a woman's breast.

Therefore if we are going to translate it correctly we have to say something like this, “*I even I am omnipotent God of many breasts.*”

A translation like this demands some kind of an explanation.

The *shad* or the "many breasts" analogy is used for grace provision and for logistical grace. *Shad* is used because it is the woman's breast that feeds and nourishes the helpless baby.

We must understand that this is an anthropomorphism relating to logistical grace. An **anthropomorphism** ascribes to God human forms of the body which God does not actually possess, but is used to explain God's policy, God's manner of operating in terms of a human frame of reference such as the hands, ears etc.

Let's compare some scripture to get a better understanding of the translation.

In Gen 49:25, breasts are used for fruitfulness and that the children given by God's grace will be fed, well cared for, and will grow to maturity as they should.

In Exo 29:27, the breast of the sacrificed animal was to be used as a wave offering to indicate the believer's love and affection toward God.

In SOS 1:13, the breasts are used as a picture of the perfect love, sweetness and satisfaction that exists between the Lord and the children of God.

In Sol 4:5, breasts are used to remind us of the sufficiency, devotion and activity of the love of the children of God for the Lord Jesus Christ.

In Isa 60:16, breasts refer to God's people obtaining the best and richest treasures of their enemies. Their enemies would be made to give up their very living to Israel.

In Isa 66:11, breasts refer to the abundant blessings of God.

In Rev 15:6, breasts refer to loyalty, love and devotion.

These verses give us some idea as to what the Lord is saying to Abraham in Gen 17:1.

In this important phrase *El Shaddai*, God is seen as the Infinite Mother, pouring forth blessings from the Breasts above to the womb below. Remember that in Gen 1:27, when God created man, we read *And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.*

Gen 5:2 *“He created them male and female, and He blessed them and named them Man in the day when they were created.”*

The name *El shaddai*, the God of many breasts, clearly indicates that the righteous and loving God Jehovah cares for us as a mother cares for a newborn child. Everything we could possibly need, exactly when we need it, God IS!

Back in Gen 17:1-2 *“Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, Jehovah appeared to Abram and said; I am omnipotent God of many breasts. Walk before Me, and be blameless. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you, And I will multiply you exceedingly.”*

Notice the word “multiply” referring to blessing. Again we have the principle of blessing and multiplication. The phrase, *El Shaddai*, therefore, is used to connote blessing and prosperity.

The point is that the nursing relationship contains a symbolism that resonates throughout the Old and New Testaments.

A fruitful womb [analogous to being born-again] and abundant milk [feeding of divine blessing] symbolize the favor of the Lord and prosperity. Throughout the Bible the principle of El Shaddi, the many breasted God, is used to connote feeding the spiritual life.

Paul said in 1Co 3:1-2 *“And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to babes in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able,”*

In this passage, Paul explains that they must begin at the beginning. They must have the most basic knowledge and the basic doctrines of Christ before they move on to greater levels.

In Heb 5:12-14 *“For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.”*

In this passage, the writer uses breast milk to mean the basics of Christianity even though here he is admonishing those who are slow learners.

Peter said 1Pe 2:1-3 *“Therefore, putting aside all malice and all guile and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the graciousness of the Lord.”*

In Isa 49:15, the Lord uses breast feeding as a reminder of His love and compassion for His people, *“Can a woman forget her nursing child, And have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, but I will not forget you”*

As the human baby starts out as the most helpless of creatures and the mother helps to feed and nourish the child, the spiritual significance is that God helps the helpless. The many breasts then refer to the variety of blessings that God provides for the believer, who adjusts to the justice of God in time.

The adjustment to the justice of God through the daily function of perception, metabolization and application of Bible doctrine liberates divine justice to provide maximum blessing for a mature believer.

This is something that the average believer will never experience in time because the average believer is not consistent with his daily perception, metabolization and application of Bible doctrine.

So, Abram is now a mature believer and the maximum blessing is just around the corner. In thirteen years, Abram's spiritual momentum has turned him all the way from being involved in the whirlwind of evil, all of the way to supergrace, which is his present status. And the blessing of the justice of God was so fantastic that we are in for some great principles of spiritual common sense.