

Omnipotence

One of the more difficult traits of God to comprehend is His omnipotence. Omnipotence, however, has significant implications for our beliefs and faith. If we don't properly comprehend and apply this trait to our understanding of God and the Scriptures then our lack of understanding will cause us to err. This essay is the result of many years spent contemplating just what it means for God to be omnipotent. I hope to construct a logical and consistent view of God's omnipotence from the Scriptures.

The Evidence of God's Omnipotence

Word study for Almighty

According to Wiktionary¹ the definition of Almighty is:

“Unlimited in might; omnipotent; all-powerful; irresistible.”

This definition is pretty clear and unambiguous. There are at least 53 references to the word “Almighty” in scripture². All of them are in reference to God.

Of those 53 or so References, all of the prose occurrences that are not in books of poetry are in Genesis. The word is actually the hebrew word “Shaddai” (from: El Shaddai). This is commonly thought to be God's personal name due to its use as the name God uses to introduce himself to Abram in Gen 17:1. The word is derived from either shâdad (pronounced shaw-dad), a hebrew word which means “to be burly, powerful, destroyer”, or sadu meaning mountain. The word is literally translated Almighty in the English. Rabbinic theory suggests the word may be composed of the hebrew particles for “who” and “sufficient”³.

All of these possible etymological sources of the word speak of power and might. Taking a look at the two most likely sources in my mind – either extreme power or self-sufficiency – we can begin to get a sense of what the Name God uses to introduce Himself to Abram was intended to convey.

If the etymology is shâdad or powerful/destroyer then the intent of El Shaddai is to convey the scope of God's power. Perhaps the most interesting part of the etymology is the rabbinic theory of self sufficiency. What does it mean to be self sufficient? At its core it means in need of no outside assistance. If taken literally then God's name indicates He is reliant on nothing for his existence. His power is such that He exists simply because he is. “I am the Great I AM” (gen 3:14) Just that concept alone has implications. Such as,

1. If God is truly sufficient unto Himself and has no support
2. And the universe is His creation
3. Then it follows that He is sufficient for all His creation.

Sufficiency is a proxy/metaphor for power in this case. It carries a connotation of completeness or fullness with it which can be taken to mean that God is fully complete and that the power He has is complete. What does it mean to be truly complete unto one's self? If a being is self sufficient then that being could be considered to have the power to accomplish whatever it desires or needs to accomplish without outside intervention.

¹<http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/almighty>

²<http://www.youversion.com/search/bible?version=asv&q=almighty>

³<http://www.abarim-publications.com/Meaning/Shaddai.html>

Word study for Omnipotent from Rev 19:6

In the King James, Rev 19:6 says “Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth” Besides the Old Testament references to Almighty we also have the only occurrence of the word Omnipotent in Scripture. The word is *pantokratōr* which means, in the English, literally omnipotent. It is formed from the two roots *pas* and *kratos* which mean respectively “all, the whole, thoroughly” and “vigor, power, strength”. The first speaks of not just all but complete and thorough power. In one sense you could say that all of a small amount is still a small amount. But in this case all means all the power necessary to do any thing thoroughly. The power is not just all-inclusive but its scope is infinite.

The conclusion to be drawn is that God’s power is literally unlimited. Where the scriptures are concerned there can be little doubt that the God they describe is omnipotent.

The Form of God’s Omnipotence

Besides the references to Almighty in the Scriptures we also see specific passages concerning the practical aspects of the scope of God’s power.

Some statements of the scope of God’s power⁴

- Job 42:2 “Thou canst do everything”
- Jeremiah 32:17,27 “There is nothing too hard for thee”
- Matthew 19:26 “With God all things are possible”
- Luke 1:37 “with God nothing shall be impossible”

‘All things are possible.’, ‘Nothing shall be impossible.’, ‘Thou canst do everything.’, ‘Nothing is too hard for thee.’ if you look at these statements and ask yourself any question regarding whether any task is possible for God the answer to that question must be yes. Can God raise the dead? Yes. Can God fly? Yes. Can God travel back in time? Yes. Can God travel faster than light? Yes. No matter what the question is the answer must be yes, when couched in terms of the power required.

This does not take into account factors like self-limitation. The question of whether God **will** is entirely different and, though still an excellent question to address, is outside of the scope of this essay. We **can** conclude, however, that God’s power is never a limiting factor in the accomplishment of any task.

In a sense the scope of this power explains the other traits of God. If you were to ask: Can God know everything? The answer must be yes. This explains omniscience and is important to properly understanding that trait. The same can be said for omnipresence. Can God be everywhere at once? Yes.

God’s omnipotence is so far-reaching and its form is so effective that neglecting your understanding of it will result in deep misunderstandings about His nature.

The Implications of God’s Omnipotence

So what would be the implications of an omnipotent God? As a finite limited being, we can never fully understand this question. However, continued meditation on the subject can reveal a lot.

Unchanging and Self-Limited

A God who is both unlimited in power and capricious is a terrifying thought. For any stability in our world or personal peace of mind, a being of unlimited power must necessarily be self-limiting. Otherwise, chaos would be the result. Since our world is not chaotic but ordered it seems reasonable to assume that either there is no Omnipotent God **or** He is unchanging and self-limiting. If God was

⁴http://www.parentcompany.com/awareness_of_god/aog13.htm

predisposed to changing His mind then we might wake up to a different world each day. Indeed we might not wake up at all since God might change His mind about our very existence.

Uniqueness

When you have a being of unlimited power you can only have one. The very existence of another would have the effect of limiting both beings power. By definition there can be only one. Indeed the scriptures say exactly that:

Deuteronomy 6:4 "Hear, O Israel: Jehovah our God is one Jehovah"

If there were two beings of unlimited power then one could, by definition, oppose the activities of the other. Since that opposition constitutes a limitation on the other being that other being could not, by definition, be omnipotent. This proof by contradiction shows us that logically there can only ever be one omnipotent being.

Absolute Control

A being with unlimited power and complete knowledge has absolute control and absolute understanding of his actions. If we think about that for a moment other facts fall out from this simple concept.

Everything He does is intentional. As a result of His nature an omnipotent and omniscient being can't do something accidentally. This is because He is incapable of doing something the effects of which He is not aware of.

Therefore every result of His actions must be intended. Since God is Omnipotent and Omniscient every action's effects must be an intended effect.

Because of this everything He does is perfect since it accomplishes exactly what He wants it to. If everything He does is intentional and every result is intended then everything He does must, by definition, be perfect.

Conclusion

These things lead us further into an understanding of our own place in creation. If the above are true, as they must be if God is omnipotent, then all of creation is the perfect and intended result of God's perfect and intended actions in creating it. Every human being is exactly what God wanted when He started it all off with a word. When scriptures are looked at in light of what we know God must be like, controversies and questions concerning doctrine that look fuzzy when seen from a flawed human perspective begin to come into focus. The things that at one time seemed contradictory suddenly make sense. Of **course** we are all predestined. If God knew the results of His creative act and then still proceeded with the creation then yes some people were indeed created to be doomed to hell by their sin. Of **course** salvation is available to all people through a simple choice. We do have free will. Just because an omnipotent being created us knowing full well what the result of that act would be does not in any way mean we do not **freely** choose him. The only thing we had no choice in was our own existence. Everything we do with that existence is squarely on us. It just so happens that God knew what we would choose before we were even born, but that is incidental to the question of our free will and shouldn't be confused with proof that we don't have it.

In fact even those who never will choose Him were considered valuable enough in God's eyes that He gave them existence knowing that the consequence of His own creation would require that He sacrifice Himself for the sin we all would commit. Knowing that His sacrifice would be spurned by many and accepted by few, the value of every single person's choice was such that He chose to

create us all regardless. That is a depth of love only an omnipotent being could comprehend or put into action.

Further discussion

- What **will** God do?
 - How does his omnipotence relate to the question of salvation?
 - Omniscience
 - Omnipresence
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