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GOD

Background

The Bible begins with the assertion that God created the heavens and the earth, which means that he created *everything*. We learn that he is pre-existent and uncreated. It is *the fool* and *the wicked* who deny his existence (Psalm 10:4, 14:1, 15:1).

We can deduce some truths about him from what he has made. For example, Paul states very clearly that since the creation of the world God's eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen. That he is who he is can be understood by all, because all of us can see what he has made (see Romans 1:18). That is precisely why mankind's thanklessness and moral depravity means that we are 'without excuse'. Beyond that fundamental truth which all mankind should see, there is God's self-revelation through the Scriptures he caused to be written (see Unit 42), and supremely in his incarnation in his Son, Jesus Christ.

Names by which God is revealed in Scripture

One way of discovering truths about God is through considering the names by which he is designated in the Bible. (See Note 1.)

ELOHIM = The all powerful one (plural). This is used 2,500 times in the Old Testament. (See Note 2 below.)

EL = The singular form of Elohim and indicates 'the strong one'. Cf. Genesis 16:13; 46:3, etc.

EL-ELYON = 'God Most High', the ultimate and supreme Being who is the Creator and rightful owner of all that exists (Genesis 14:18–22; cf. Luke 2:14).

EL-SHADDAI = 'God Almighty who is God All-Mercy.' 'Shaddai' derives from a word for 'mountain' and for 'breast', as well as from a verb meaning 'to be irresistibly strong' – thus combining the idea of immovable might with the notion of unshakeable tenderness (e.g. Genesis 17:1; 28:3–4; 49:25).

EL-OLAM = 'the Everlasting God' (Genesis 21:33).

YAHWEH (or 'Jehovah', 'Yah') = 'the ever-existent One', 'the One who was and is and is to come', the 'I AM' – usually represented as 'LORD' (in capitals) in English Bibles. This is God's covenant name and is used about 7,000 times in the Scriptures (e.g. Genesis 2:4; Exodus 3:14–15; Malachi 3:6; cf. also John 8:58; Hebrews 13:8).

JEHOVAH-ELOHIM (or 'LORD God') = 'the I AM who is Almighty' (e.g. Genesis 2:4).

JEHOVAH-JIREH = 'the LORD will see/provide' – the God who sees, cares and provides what is needed for deliverance (Genesis 22:13–14).

JEHOVAH-ROPHI = 'the LORD who is healer' (Exodus 15:26; cf. also Matthew 4:23, 9:35).

JEHOVAH-NISSI = 'the LORD is my banner', or 'the LORD is my Lifted-Up One' (Exodus 17:8–15; cf. also John 3:14–15).

JEHOVAH-SHALOM = 'the LORD is Peace' (Judges 6:24; cf. also Isaiah 9:6; Ephesians 2:14).

JEHOVAH-ROI = 'the LORD my Shepherd' (e.g. Psalm 23; cf. also John 10:11–15).

JEHOVAH-TSIDKENU = 'the LORD our Righteousness' (Jeremiah 23:6, 33:16; cf. also 1 Corinthians 1:30).

JEHOVAH-SHAMMAH = 'the LORD is there' (Ezekiel 48:35).

JEHOVAH-SEBAOTH = 'the Lord of hosts/armies' – the LORD who commands the angelic hosts and all the powers of heaven and earth. God is not called this until 1 Samuel 1:3, in the time of Israel's need, but it is his title frequently from then on (e.g. 80 times in Jeremiah and 14 times in two chapters of Haggai (1 Samuel 1:3; Psalm 24:10; 46:7, 11; Isaiah 6:1–5; 44:6; Malachi 3:16–17; Luke 2:13; Matthew 26:53; James 5:4).

The Bible reveals other attributes of God

Omnipresence = 'He cannot be avoided' (Psalm 139:7–10; Jeremiah 23:24; Acts 17:24–28).

Omnipotence = 'He cannot be overcome' (Job 42:2; Jeremiah 32:17; Psalm 33:6–9; Matthew 19:26; Nahum 1:3).

Omniscience = 'He cannot be deceived' (Psalm 139:1–6; 1 John 3:20; Psalm 147:4–5; cf. also John 2:24–25).

Transcendence = 'He cannot be excelled' (Genesis 21:33; 2 Chronicles 6:18; 1 Timothy 1:17).

God is *good* – revealed in creation (Genesis 1:31) and in his being ‘gracious’ or ‘kind’ (Exodus 34:6–7; 2 Chronicles 30:9; Psalm 103:8–14; Mark 10:18).

God is *love* – (See 1 John 4:8–16.) The Greek word used for ‘love’ in this passage is ‘agape’ which has a very special meaning. It does not signify ‘eros’ love. Believers are reminded in this passage that something good and undeserved has been done for them in the death and resurrection of Jesus, saving them from the penalty of past sin; it does not mean that we are attractive to God or inherently lovable.

God is *holy* – (See Leviticus 19:2; Isaiah 6:3; cf. also John 8:46; Hebrews 4:15.) Holiness has at least two very important biblical dimensions: it speaks to us again of the ‘otherness’ or transcendence of God (and as we recall this we see the sinfulness of worshipping created things rather than the Creator himself), and it reminds us also that God is absolutely perfect. It is easy to see how this fits with the biblically revealed truth that he is perfectly *just* in all his ways and judgements. So he cannot tolerate sin. In justice, sin must be punished. That is not cruel. It is not unfair. This is just one of the reasons why we need to know, believe in and trust Jesus Christ and his sacrifice. Only his blood shed for us would open up the only way to the one holy and just God. We all need to receive his forgiveness for all our sins. So we need to come to Christ and trust in him alone to save us from the penalty for our sin. Otherwise our sins would lead to death and hell, and that would be entirely our own fault. If that seems to us to sound harsh, it is because our own sinful nature makes it hard for us to see what perfect holiness would look like. Can we imagine a world in which there is no injustice, no cruelty, no sin whatsoever? That is the sort of world God is determined to have! It is his (agape) love that has provided the way of salvation.

God is *Spirit* – (See John 4:24.) This great revelation is linked by Jesus to true *worship*. The Jews already knew that idolatry, the worship of created objects, was utterly wrong. We learn here that we need to be open to the work of the Holy Spirit, not least as we worship. That we must worship God ‘...*in truth*’ also reminds us that to worship we must be *in Christ* (who is *himself* the truth, as he told us). Hypocritical and merely outward ‘worship’ which is not genuine obviously has no value. The true worshipper must be walking in obedience to Christ having repented (turned away from) sin and must be *going on believing* in Jesus (which, as we have learnt, is about a personal relationship, not merely believing propositions *about* him).

In the centuries since the closure of the canon of Scripture, Christians have continued to think and talk about the nature of God, and such reflections have sometimes become philosophical and often very abstract. Thus there is a great deal that now passes for ‘theology’ which lacks authenticity precisely because it so often departs from God’s self-revelation.

Note 1

See also: *The Nature of God*, chapter 2 from the book *The Empty Promise of Godism*, also available as a downloadable PDF on the Glory to Glory website.

Note 2

ELOHIM – Hebrew nouns have a dual form for 2 and a plural form for 3 or more. In Genesis 1:1 *Elohim* is in this plural form (indicating that God is a Trinity of Being [cf. “*us*” in Genesis 1:26–27 & Isaiah 6:8]) and governs a verb in the singular (indicating that he is one God [cf. Deuteronomy 6:4, where “*one*” in the Hebrew indicates unity]). During the course of the Bible the unity of the Godhead in three persons (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) is progressively revealed, and it eventually becomes clear that (prior to his Incarnation) God the Son was seen as the divine Angel of the Lord who appears from time to time (e.g. Genesis 16:7, 10, 13; Exodus 23:20–21). ‘Elohim’ means ‘the all-powerful one’ and is used around 2,500 times in the Old Testament.