

THE NATURE OF GOD



"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

- Isaiah 55:8-9

INTRODUCTION

God is holy. What this means is that He is not just bigger than us, better than us or different than us. He is completely other. He is far greater, far wiser, far more loving and far more compassionate than we could ever imagine. As the above scripture declares, God is infinitely higher in both what He does and what He thinks. God is not like our dads. He is not like the god our culture has imagined. He is holy, and He invites us to get to know Him. The purpose of this study is to take an overview of God's character attributes; to answer the question, "What is God like?"

- *What do you think God is like?*
- *What are some of His attributes?*
- *How does our culture describe God?*

GOD IS CREATOR OF ALL

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."
- Genesis 1:1

Without making this study a deep examination of science, let it simply be said that there is more evidence today supporting God being the Creator of the world than at any point in history.

For years, the atheist could claim that the universe is eternal and uncaused. Therefore, the universe is all there is, but discoveries in astronomy and astrophysics in the last century have made that view hard to defend. We now know that the universe is not eternal, but came into being at a specific point in time, the material world springing forth out of nothing, and the highly ordered universe out of an explosion of light and heat. A beginning point demands a Beginner.

Now, here's the mind-blowing question: How can something come into existence out of nothing?

There must have been some transcendent cause beyond the universe that brought the universe into existence. That something must:

- Transcend time and space**
- Be immaterial**
- Be changeless**
- Be enormously powerful**

Not to mention, since the universe contains personal beings like ourselves, this entity must also be at least as personal as we are. The scriptures call this entity God, whose name, Yahweh, testifies to His existence, meaning "I am"!



GOD IS LORD OVER ALL

The Old Testament is written in the Hebrew language, so unless you know Hebrew, it is easy to miss something crucial to what the Bible teaches. When the scripture says "LORD", it is referring to God by His name, Yahweh, or "I am"! When the scripture says "Lord", it is referring to God's role as the ruler of the universe. There are three attributes of Lordship that permeate the scripture and are the foundation of how God is to be known:

- **Lord means that God is in control of everything.**
- **Lord means that God is the authority to whom we will one day give account.**
- **Lord means that God is present in every place at every time.**

To clarify, God being in control means that He "...causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose..." (Romans 8:28). God doesn't cause all things, such as evil and sin, but He is involved in our lives; not some distant, aloof deity. God's authority means that what we do with our lives matters. The entire world will one day give account to God for what we've done, said and thought. God being omnipresent is not pantheism, where God is literally in every person, every flower or every animal. God, as Creator, is distinct from what He has created, and yet because He is in every place, He is always present to help.

- *How is this view of God, that He is in control, ever-present, and the One to whom we will one day give account, different from what you've known about God so far?*
- *How is this view different from what our culture teaches us about God?*
- *Which is more attractive to you?*

GOD HAS REVEALED HIMSELF

Referring to Jesus Christ, the scripture declares,

"And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature..."
- Hebrews 1:3

If you see Jesus as He is described in the gospels, you see God the Father. If Jesus is compassionate, God is compassionate. If Jesus is relational and welcoming, God is relational and welcoming. What this does is it brings God into much clearer focus. It's as if we look at the Old Testament and can only describe God in the general attributes we've already discussed. As Creator, God must be all-powerful and infinitely creative. As Lord, He must be in control, possessing all authority, ever-present and all-knowing. When we come to the New Testament, we see God's attributes revealed more clearly.



JESUS CHRIST REVEALS GOD THE FATHER

When we read the Old Testament, we are reading about a nation, Israel, which constantly was disobedient to God. Israel broke His covenant and became more like the world, rather than being a light in the world. As a result, there are references to God's wrath that most people today are less comfortable with. Jesus demonstrated wrath as well, yet in a way that still draws many people. Being a visible person, at least one that we can imagine as we read about Him in the gospels, Jesus' emotions, actions and words can be very powerful; very attractive to us. We see in Jesus a profound compassion for the broken, gentleness toward sinners, exuberant joy over His people, genuine grief for the state of the world, and a self-sacrificial love that is beyond comparison. George MacDonald said, "It cannot be that any creature should know Him as He is and NOT desire Him." And yet, don't miss this, these are the attributes that are found in God the Father, even in the Old Testament. **Jesus brings God into focus.**

- *What attribute of God is the most difficult for you?*
- *How did Jesus manifest that same attribute?*
- *How can Jesus clear up our thinking about God?*

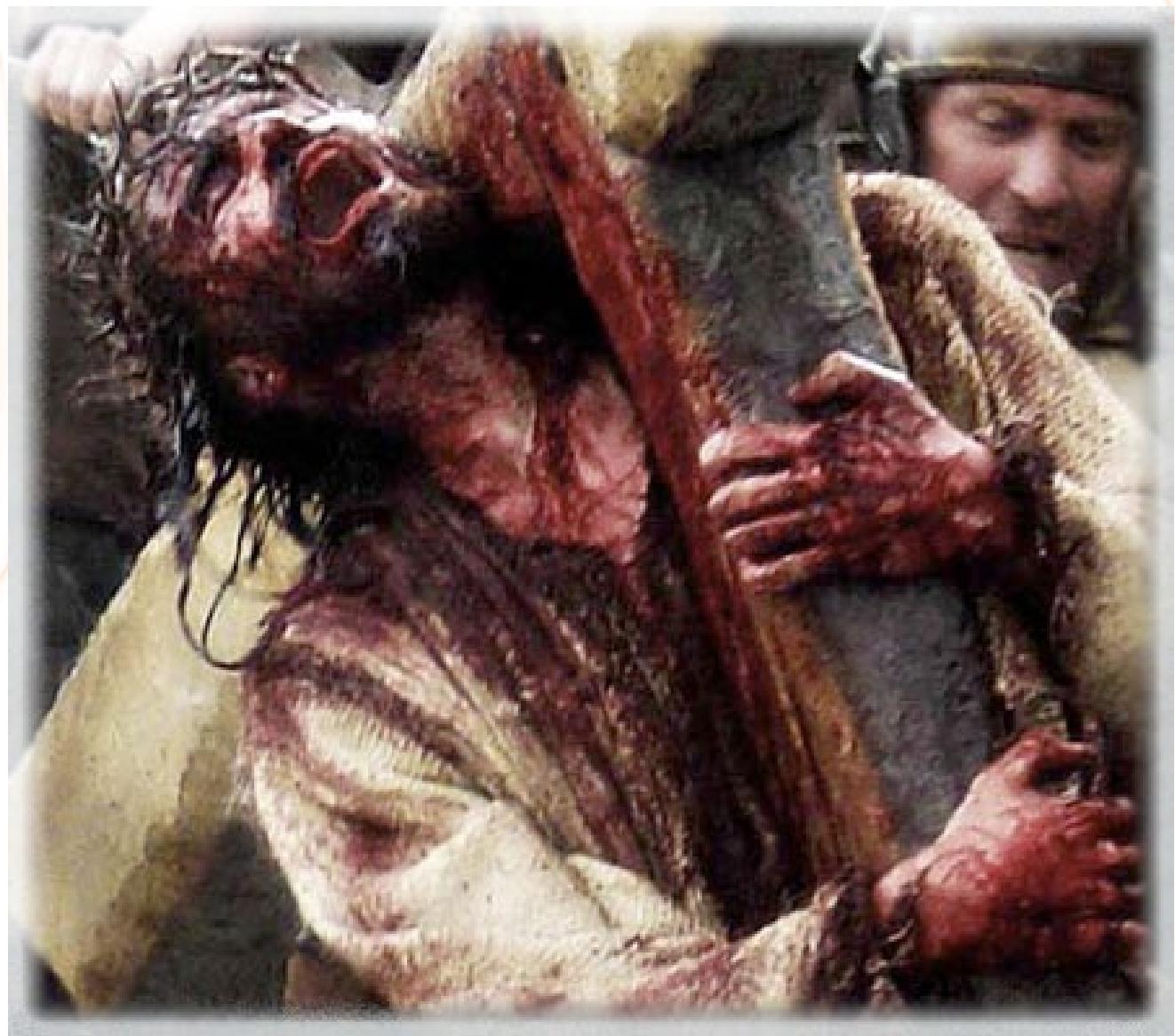
GOD HAS REVEALED HIMSELF IN SUCH A WAY THAT HE CAN BE KNOWN

We live in a time when saying anything absolute has gone out of style, to assert that God is most definitely this way or that. It is looked at as arrogant to say "I know," yet the scripture teaches that we can know

God, the infinite God, with certainty. We cannot know Him exhaustively, but He has revealed Himself such that He can be known. Because Jesus has revealed God, we can KNOW what God is like. For example, I know with certainty what the heart of God is toward people who've lived autonomously, apart from Him, as sinners.

*"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this:
While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."
- Romans 5:8*

We know that God loves us because He has declared it and because He has revealed it through the self-sacrifice of Jesus. Through Jesus, **God has revealed His mighty love for sinners like us.**



LET'S RETURN TO WHERE WE STARTED

The word holy means that God is not just bigger than us, better than us and different than us. He is completely other. When we say God loves the world, we are saying God loves but in a way that is infinitely greater than the way we love. It is like us, but unlike us at the same time. With that in mind, consider the following scripture and discuss what they reveal about God's attributes.

"This is what the LORD says: "Let not the wise boast of their wisdom or the strong boast of their strength or the rich boast of their riches, but let the one who boasts boast about this: that they have the understanding to know me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the LORD."

- Jeremiah 9:23-24

"The Lord your God is in your midst, a victorious warrior. He will exult over you with joy, He will be quiet in His love, He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy."

- Zephaniah 3:17

"Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth... and He was grieved in His heart."

- Genesis 6:5-6

"Ah Sovereign Lord, you have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too difficult for you!"

- Jeremiah 32:17

"Oh Lord, You have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue, you know it completely, oh Lord."

- Psalm 139:1-4

"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."

- Hebrews 13:8

"The Lord is good to all and His mercies are over all His works."

- Psalm 145:9

"The Lord is righteous in all His ways and kind in all His deeds."

- Psalm 145:17

"God is not a man, that He should lie...Has He said it, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?"
- Numbers 23:19

"Just as a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him."
- Psalm 103:13

- *Is it possible to KNOW what God is like, rather than merely having an opinion about what God is like?*
- *If so, how can we know what God is like?*

SUMMARY

As Isaiah declares, "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:9). God is infinitely higher than us, but He is not unknowable; precisely because He has revealed Himself in the scripture and specifically in the person of Jesus.